Relational Maintenance Behaviors between College Freshmen and Their Parents via Instant Messaging

A Master's Thesis

Presented in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree Master of Arts in the Graduate

School of Liberty University

By

Jason Earl Leverett, B.S.

Liberty University

2007

Thesis Committee

Dr. Faith Mullen, Thesis Chair

Dr. William Mullen, First Reader

Dr. Clifford Kelly, Second Reader

Abstract

The present project provides insight concerning possible relational maintenance behaviors (RMB) college freshmen may initiate when communicating with a parent via Instant Messaging (IM). In addressing this topic, the researcher divided the present project into three studies. Study 1 addressed possible RMB within the college freshmen-parent relationship. Study 2 investigated if college freshmen correspond with at least one parent via IM. And Study 3 investigated which RMB from Study 1 were most common in college freshmen-parent interactions via IM. The researcher observed seven RMB in Study 1: openness, assurance, social networks, positivity, shared tasks, advice seeking and worry avoidance. In Study 2, nearly 27% of the college freshmen surveyed testified that they communicate with at least one parent via IM. Finally, in Study 3, social networks ranked the most common RMB while shared tasks and openness ranked the least common RMB practiced via IM. These results suggest that the college freshmen-parent relationship is unique, and that IM can be used to help maintain those relationships.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee Dr. Faith Mullen, Dr. William Mullen, and Dr. Clifford Kelly. During my thesis project, all three committee members were more than generous with their time and encouragement. I valued their insight, and will always consider it a privilege to have worked with such prestigious scholars.

I would like to thank Liberty University's Graduate Writing Center. I greatly appreciated their generosity and guidance, as I repeatedly edited and re-edited my thesis project. I pray God will continue to bless their ministry.

Also, I would like to thank my family and friends for all of their love and support. The present project proved to be challenging and very time consuming; and it was truly their love and support that encouraged me to finish. Any successes or honor achieved by this present project must be shared with them, for they surely deserve many praises.

Finally, I must offer my gratitude to my Loving and Caring Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the foundation upon which I stand. All that I do is for Him. To know Christ and know Him more abundantly is my greatest desire. Christ lives and is worthy of all praise. To Him, be all the honor and glory and power.

Running head: RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE IN COLLEGE FRESHMEN RELATIONSHIPS

Relational Maintenance Behaviors between College Freshmen and Their Parents via Instant Messaging

Jason Leverett

Liberty University

Table of Contents

I. Chapter I- Introduction……01

II. Chapter II- Literature Review…….05

A. Relational Maintenance Behavior……05

B. Transition Affects Relationships.……..15

C. Technology and Interpersonal Relationships.……...…18

III. Chapter III- Methodology…….…….…....31

A. Study 1……..…..31

B. Study 2……..…..33

C. Study 3…….……..34

IV. Chapter IV- Results……...…….38

A. Study 1…….……..38

B. Study 2…….……..44

C. Study 3…….……..47

V. Chapter V- Discussion…….……53

A. Study 1……..…..53

B. Study 2……..…..58

C. Study 3……...59

D. Comparison between all Three Studies..……...…....70

E. Limitations and Recommendations for future research.…..…...72

F. Failed attempt at Study 3...…..…….…….75

G. Recommendations for future research……...79

H. Conclusion…….81

VI. Appendixes.…….83

A. Appendix A....……...83

B. Appendix B……...84

C. Appendix C……...88

D. Appendix D.……..89

E. Appendix E.……...90

F. Appendix F.……...91

G. Appendix G.……..92

H. Appendix H.……..93

I. Appendix I ……....94

VII. Reference…….95

Chapter I- Introduction

The advances of computer technology contribute many benefits to the world and those who live in it. Some of these technological benefits can be identified by gratifications sought and gratifications obtained from using the internet. Kaye (as cited in Hwang, 2005) presented several incentives/benefits that often entice people to use the Internet, such as: entertainment, escape (passing time), information seeking, and social interaction. Some scholars even suggest that people look to the Internet for relationship sake. James (as cited in Hwang, 2005) suggests that people use Internet services to satisfy their need to maintain relationships and/or social interaction. The researcher of the present project believes, that if people can take full advantage of the Internet to maintain relationships, then communication scholars should report on the nature of such attempts.

The researcher involved in the present project intends to identify common behaviors used by people who seek to maintain their relationships through computer technology. Because the field of technology and interpersonal communications is too broad to explore as a whole, the researcher narrowed down the field of research to a specific group of interactants. Second, the researcher not only narrowed down the selection of interactants, but also chose a specific means of communication. Different forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) may have different effects on relational maintenance behaviors (RMB).

The researcher of the present project will present previous studies, which have explored the various aspects of RMB, the importance of addressing the College Freshmen-Parent relationship, and the reason why Instant Messaging (IM) is an appropriate CMC tool to use in the present study. Following this literature review, the

researcher will present the methodology, results, and discussion concerning three studies the researcher designed and conducted in order to explore RMB initiated by college freshmen that communicate with at least one parent via IM. A brief explanation of the three studies will be useful in explaining the overall project.

The first study addressed the possible RMB practiced between college freshmen and their parents. In order to accomplish this task, the researcher conducted a small focus group discussion geared toward discussing the college freshmen-parent relationship. The focus group consisted of college freshmen, and was relatively small in size. The discussion was recorded and analyzed based on common RMB mentioned during the focus group conversation. Once the discussion was transcribed, the researcher cross-referenced the behaviors mentioned in the focus group discussion with Stafford and Canary's (1991) RMB typology. To accommodate any additional RMB not found in Stafford and Canary's (1991) typology, an additional category entitled "other" was added to the cross-reference analysis. Any RMB that did not match Stafford and Canary's (1991) typology was identified and incorporated into a new RMB typology, specifically concerning the college freshmen-parent relationship. Study 1 was conducted as an exploratory analysis concerning the possible RMB that may emerge in college freshmen-parent relationships. The common behaviors that emerged in the college freshmen-parent relationship from Study 1 were used in collecting data for Study 3.

The second study explored how many college freshmen use IM to communicate with at least one parent. In order to accomplish this task, the researcher designed a simple survey, inquiring if college freshmen correspond with at least one parent via IM. The survey also inquired if the taker was a male college freshman or a female college

freshman. These two questions, i.e. Do you communicate with at least one parent via IM? and Are you a male, or are you a female?, provided the researcher with adequate information concerning whether college freshmen correspond with at least on parent via IM, as well as which biological sex is more likely to do so. The IM survey was distributed among several undergraduate speech classes at an accredited east coast university. Study 2, much like Study 1, was conducted as an exploratory analysis. Results from Study 2 is not considered sufficient for stereotyping the whole college freshmen population, but was used as pilot study, illustrating that there was an ample supply of participants available for conducting Study 3.

The third study addressed the RMB college-freshmen initiate when communicating with a least one parent via IM. In order to accomplish this task, the researcher organized a simple survey. The survey asked participants yes or no questions concerning each of the common RMB that emerge from the focus group in Study 1. The researcher then collected the surveys and calculated the responses. Calculations were based on how common certain RMB are among college freshmen, male college freshmen, and female college freshmen. Because calculations were based on the percentage of common responses, the researcher referred to the calculated responses as "the percentage of commonality." RMB were ranked in order from most common RMB initiated by college freshmen that correspond with at least one parent via IM to the least common RMB initiated by college freshmen that correspond with at least one parent via IM. That is to say, Study 3 explored how common RMB discovered in Study 1 were among college freshmen that communicate with at least one parent via IM.

Over the last twenty years, several studies have explored the field of RMB. Previous studies have addressed many variables that may affect RMB use such as: geographic dispersion, voluntary and involuntary relationships, uncertainty, biological sex differences, etc. However, little attention has been given to RMB and interpersonal technology such as: IM, email, etc. This is especially true concerning the college freshmen-parent relationship. The researcher of the present project believes exploring the common RMB used by college freshmen that communicate with at least one parent via IM is beneficial to parents who strive to understand the relationship they share with their young college student. The researcher also believes the present project may provide communication scholars with insight on the RMB practiced between college freshmen and their parents, and will hopefully lay a firm foundation for further study concerning RMB and computer technology. Therefore, based on the need to explore RMB and interpersonal technology between college freshmen and their parents, the researcher of the present project intends to answer the following questions.

Q1- What Type of Relational Maintenance Behaviors emerge in college freshman-parent relationships?

Q2- Do college freshmen interact with at least one parent via IM?

Q3- What RMB from Study 1 will be the most common RMB initiated by college freshmen while interacting with at least one parent via IM?

Q4- What RMB from Study 1 will be the least common RMB initiated by college freshmen while interacting with at least one parent via IM?

Chapter II- Literature Review

Relational Maintenance Behaviors (RMB)

In the early 1980's, scholars started investigating the area of relational maintenance behaviors (RMB). RMB most often refers actions people do "to deep a relationship in a specified state or condition" (Dindia & Canary, 1993, p. 164). Scholars who have conducted studies on RMB have produced and presented a variety of typologies. Several typologies described in the present literature review will illustrate that people use different typologies to maintain different relationships. Previous research also shows that even if the typology is the same, the frequencies of certain RMB vary depending on the relationship type. Little research (mostly dealing with email) has been conducted to explore the RMB used in college freshmen-parent relationships. The researcher of the present project wishes to discover what behaviors freshmen use in maintaining relationships with their parents, if college freshmen use IM to correspond with at least one parent, and which RMB college freshmen commonly initiated when corresponding with at least one parent via IM.

Dindia (as cited in Canary, House, Stafford & Wallace, 1993) presented one of the earliest RMB typologies. Dindia's typology consists of three categories: romantic, prosocial, and antisocial. Romantic behaviors are the behaviors that communicate affection, fun, and spontaneity. Prosocial behaviors lead people to cooperatively discuss

their relationship. Finally, antisocial behaviors are behaviors that incorporate coercion to manage the relationship. The researcher believes Dindia's view can easily be compared to Stafford and Canary's typology (1991).

Stafford and Canary (1991) present a scale of five strategies (also known as behaviors), which have helped and continue to help scholars study the area of relational maintenance. These five behaviors that Stafford and Canary (1991) present include positivity, openness, assurance, social networks, and sharing tasks. These behaviors provide a broad starting point for scholarly conversation and work, especially concerning voluntary relationships.

Myers and Weber (2004) deliver a sufficient explanation of these five behaviors. Meyers and Weber elucidate that positivity involves interacting with the partner in a cheerful, optimistic, and uncritical manner. Openness includes directly discussing the nature of the relationship and disclosing ones desires for the relationship. Assurances are messages that stress an individual's continuation in the relationship. Social networks involve both relational partners interacting with or relying on common affiliations and relationships. Sharing tasks requires partners to perform responsibilities specific to the relationship. (Myers & Weber, 2004)

Stafford and Canary's (1991) typology has been tested over the years and several scholars (Aylor & Dainton, 2004; Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Canary

Stafford, 1994; Canary, Stafford, Hause & Wallace, 1993; Canary & Stafford, 1992; etc) have evaluated its credibility to explain RMB. Canary et al. (1992) conducted an inductive study on RMB among different relationship types. Canary et al. illustrate that RMB's depend on relationship types. In efforts to prove their point, Canary et al. evaluated relationships between lovers, relatives, friends, and others. From their research, five new behaviors developed: joint activities, cards/letters/calls, avoidance, antisocial, and humor. Canary et al. also provide further evidence that behaviors vary depending on the relationship type. The researcher of the present project would like to point out, if relationship types affect relational behaviors, then studying a relationship type that has been somewhat neglected, such as the freshmen-parent relationship, is a worthy venture.

In 2000, Stafford, Dainton, and Haas added advice and conflict management to Stafford and Canary's (1991) original typology. These two additions emerge from a test evaluating how biological sex and gender roles affect RMB and relational characteristics such as (commitment, liking, and satisfaction). After re-evaluating Stafford and Canary's (1991) typology, Stafford et al. (2000) observed that sometimes openness takes on characteristics similar to advice, and that positivity sometimes resembles characteristics similar to conflict management. Stafford et al. (2000) suggest, "openness split into two factors, one that is conceptually similar to the previous category of openness and taps self-disclosure, and the other factor, new to this investigation, is advice

giving" (p. 314). According to her report, Stafford implies that "advice" is a characteristic of openness that deserves its own identity.

The idea behind the Stafford et al. (2000) description of "conflict management" evolves from positivity. Stafford et al. suggest, "Positivity also split into two factors. One retained the essence of the original positivity factor; the other emerged as a new factor labeled conflict management" (p. 314). Again, according to their report, Stafford et al. implies that "conflict management" is a characteristic of positivity that deserves its own identity. Stafford et al. reveal that relationship types affect the RMB used to maintain the relationship.

The previous typologies are just some of the approaches that have been taken to describe RMB; however, few of these previous typologies are consistently used. Dindia's (1989) typology is now rare because it does not include behaviors from Stafford et al. (1991) original typology: social networks and shared tasks. And although Canary et al. (1993) added five additional behaviors to their original five, all ten behaviors are rarely included in other studies. The researcher believes the omission of these additional behaviors may be linked to the different types of relationships that are commonly evaluated, be it voluntary or involuntary. Either way, the researcher of the present project would like to point out, since relationship types affect RMB, it would be of interest and

of need to evaluate relationships that seem to be neglected in the RMB field, specifically the college freshmen-parent relationship.

The previous studies suggest that relationship types affect RMB. Therefore, in order to clarify which RMB are likely to occur in various relationships, a clear understanding on relationship-types and the variables that might affect those relationships would seem necessary. Several variables that may affect relationships were not specifically mentioned or addressed in Stafford and Canary's (1991) original study. One such variable involves the element of geographical dispersion among those involved in the relationship.

In 2001, Johnson suggests how geographic dispersion may affect the RMB used within friendships. Johnson's article states that previous research assumes the more behaviors practiced, the greater the satisfaction will be for those in the relationship. The long distance relationship (LDR) would seem to make some RMB difficult, if not impossible to practice. Johnson's study explains that long distance relationships (LDR) aren't always less satisfying than geographically close relationships (GCR). In other words, Johnson discovered that there was no significant difference concerning the perception of satisfaction or closeness. Johnson's view on LDR compared to GCR adds depth and a new perspective to the field of RMB.

The researcher of the present study would like to point out two important perspectives from Johnson's study. First, the successful practice of RMB is not necessarily dependent on geographical dispersion. That is, successful attempts to maintain relationships can occur despite geographical dispersion amongst those interacting in the relationship. Second, satisfaction gained from RMB is not dependent solely on quantity, but is also possibly influenced by the quality of RMB used by interactants to maintain the relationship.

Friendships are not the only type of relationships that undergo the long distance variable. In 2002, Dainton and Aylor evaluated the affects of long distance in romantic LDR, including the communication channels participants often used to maintain their special romantic relationships. In their study, Dainton et al. discovered that the telephone and the use of the Internet could play an important role in RMB. Dainton et al. states, "Telephone use was positively associated with relational commitment and satisfaction, and Internet use was positively associated with trust" (p. 118). Dainton et al. also suggest that relationships with some face-to-face (FtF) interaction as opposed to those relationships with no FtF interaction experienced greater satisfaction and commitment. Those involved in LDR with little FtF interaction also experienced a greater use of certain RMB, particularly positivity, assurances, and shared tasks. In short, Dainton et al. research provides further evidence supporting the idea that certain variables, such as the

element of LDR, may affect or influence the frequency of different RMB in different relationship types. It also illustrates that relationships can be maintained via CMC despite geographical dispersion.

In a similar study, Kim et al. (2005) studied RMB between spouses during military deployment. Kim et al. used Stafford and Canary's (1991) original typology to evaluate their research. Along with the original five behaviors, a new category referred to as small talk, which is typically updating the partner on minor daily events or superficial chatting, emerged. Kim et al. also noticed that some RMB tend to mutate in order to adapt to new situations. They suggest, "The findings also indicated possible mutation of sharing tasks and social networking due to the constraints [that come from] of the deployment situation" (p. 2). In the article, Kim et al. explains that RMB mutation takes place in the form of discussion instead of accomplishing the task via FtF encounters.

The previously mentioned relationship types—LDR and GCR—involve voluntary relationships. The researcher of the present project believes there are some situations where the relationships status of those in the relationship might be uncertain and/or unclear. Some scholars have explored how uncertainty may affect the use of RMB.

In 2005, Guerrero and Chavez published an article concerning RMB in cross-sex friendships characterized by different types of romantic intent. According to their article,

uncertainty can affect RMB. Guerrero & Chavez discovered that individuals experiencing uncertainty reported less relationship talk (assurance) with their cross-sex friends. The researcher of the present project suspects that although the freshmen-parent relationship is not romantic, uncertainty will most likely develop due to the changes that occur in the college freshmen's life and location. These changes, as well as the presence of uncertainty, may affect the college freshmen's incentives toward using certain RMB, especially assurance and openness.

Afifi and Burgoon (as cited in Guerrero & Chavez, 2005) suggest that people might avoid discussing the state of the relationship, fearing the possible outcome such talk might provoke, specifically the fear of rejection or other possible negative relational ramification. The researcher believes it is necessary to realize that levels of uncertainty are not limited to voluntary relationships. The presence of uncertainty can occur in any relationship that experiences some sort of transition or change, such as freshmen who leave home and enter college.

Information concerning the affects of uncertainty in relationships, lead the researcher of the present study into exploring previous research conducted in another relationship type, the family. The researcher of this present study suggests that if uncertainty can occur in voluntary relationships, then it could also occur in involuntary relationships, such as the family. If uncertainty occurs in family settings, then family

settings would also possess a need for RMB. Two attempts have been made to address RMB in sibling relationships.

In 2001 Myers and members of a Communication 200 course announced four significant findings concerning RMB within the sibling relationship. First, "[the sharing] task relational maintenance is used the most frequently and openness relational maintenance is used the least frequently" (p. 26). Second, "The five relational maintenance behaviors are positively correlated with sibling liking" (p. 26). Third, "Sibling liking is predicted by positivity, networks, and tasks relational maintenance behaviors" (p. 26). And finally, "female siblings use relational maintenance behaviors at a higher rate than male siblings" (p. 19). The frequency of certain RMB in the sibling relationship differs than the frequency of certain RMB in a voluntary relationship. RMB in voluntary relationships tend to frequently use openness, positivity, and social networks, whereas siblings shy away from the use of openness, but regularly use positivity and social networks RMB.

According to Aylor and Dainton (2004) certain genders tend to practice certain RMB more regularly. Concerning gender difference research in the realm of RMB, Aylor and Dainton refers to Canary and Stafford (1992) stating, "women have been found to use openness, tasks, and networks more than men do" (p. 691). Aylor and Dainton also show how this information reflects Ragsdale's (1996) work. Aylor and Dainton

report Ragdale's analysis, "greater use of positivity, openness, assurance, networks, and tasks [were practiced] by women than by men" (p. 691). Although Ragdale's research illustrates that different genders do participate in different RMB, it fails to illustrate if this occurs across different relationship types such as freshmen-parent relationships.

In 2004, Scott Myers and Keith D. Webber published an article creating a new typology for studying RMB; confirmation, humor, social support, family visits, escape, and verbal aggression. Since most of Myers and Webber's behaviors (apart from verbal aggression) can be linked to the Stafford and Canary (1991) original five behaviors, this particular find is not extremely useful to the present study. However, the research presented by Myers and Webber encourages the researcher to explore the RMB that may occur within the college freshmen-parent relationship. Pipher (as cited in Myers & Webber, 2004) states, "Siblings are the people who have known us the longest, know the most about us, and share the most life events with us" (p. 343). Myers and Webber conclude their article by stating; "Because the sibling relationship remains relatively intact over the life span, examining the specific behaviors used by siblings to maintain their relationships may yield a more comprehensive picture of the role communication plays in the sibling relationship" (p. 343). Myers and Webber's statement adds validity to the purpose of studying RMB between college-freshmen and their parents, which is also a long-term relationship.

Once again, the present project aims to understand the RMB used by college freshmen, especially concerning the RMB that emerge when corresponding with at least one parent via IM. The researcher of the present project believes the changes, *e.g.* leaving home, moving to college, embracing independence, etc., that occur in the college freshmen's life may affect the college freshmen's use of certain RMB. Therefore, the researcher believes in order to understand the use of certain RMB in the college freshmen's life, clarification on the affects of the college freshmen's transition into the college environment needs to be established. The following section of this literature review provides information describing the college freshmen's transition into the college environment, as well as possible perspectives college freshmen may have concerning the transition from home to the college life.

Transition Affects Relationships

Several studies have been conducted to clarify the affects of transition from home to college life for first year college students. Johnson, Staton, and Jorgenson-Earp (1995) conducted a project to evaluate the affects transition had on college students. Johnson et al. suggests with the transition from high school to college, many changes are bound to take place. The researcher of this present study suggests that the transition from home to away for college would not just affect the college student's life, but also the freshmen-parent relationship.

According to Johnson et al. (1995), one major change a new college student faces is associated with ecology. Bronfenvrenner (as cited in Johnson et al. 1995) describes ecology as:

> The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life span, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded (p. 338).

In short, ecology is the study of life processes and transitions. The transition from high school to college can affect a student's perspectives because it affects the student's environment. The idea of ecology is a vital perspective to consider when evaluating freshmen-parent RMB.

Staton (as cited in Johnson et al. 1995) suggests when young persons leave familiar high school environments and arrive to participate in the college life, a transition occurs, which affects the student, the family system, the peer group network, and other various systems. The change experienced in a young one's life may cause uncertainty in the relationship status, *e.g.* between college student and parent. The researcher of the present project believes the transition/change in the student's life will affect the relationship the student has with his or her parent, which in turn may affect the RMB.

Transition not only affects relationship status, but it also affects communication. Johnson et al. (1995) states:

> The different relationships among the ecological levels [Microsystems (immediate settings like: home, school, etc.), Mesosystem (interactions among family, school, friendship group, etc.), Exosystem (social structures like: neighborhood, government agencies, etc.), and Macrosystem (larger cultural patterns like: educational, economic, etc.).] imply that different kinds of communication skills will be needed by these students (p. 350).

The presence of these different environments not only creates the need to study different communication techniques, but also strengthens the validity to study college freshmen-parent RMB.

Jorgensen-Earp and Staton (1993) conducted research on freshmen and their interpretation of their transition from the familiarity of home to the new unfamiliarity of college. To accomplish this, Jorgensen-Earp et al. collected narratives focusing on metaphors describing the college student's transition into the college environment. Both positive and negative perspectives were divided into four categories/themes: status, control, engagement, and satisfaction. Each category illustrates that college freshmen experience a change in perspective concerning life and responsibility once they engage in the new academic world.

College freshmen experience various challenges while transitioning into college. Besides simply getting acquainted with a new environment, college freshmen must slowly transition into a different relational role: dependence to autonomy. Although a large number of freshmen start to experience more autonomy with their transition into college, it can be assumed that these students will still desire to stay connected with what is familiar, such as the family. The researcher believes the struggle between autonomy and dependence will likely affect the types of RMB college freshmen initiate in their relationships with their parents, particularly assurance and openness.

The previous research illustrates that change occurs in the life of an upcoming college student. As stated in the previous articles, changes in the student's life affect relationships, identity, and communication methods. However, with today's technology, college freshmen have access to methods that enable them to maintain relationships, despite the challenges of distance, time, and change. The next section of the literature review will address the issue of technology and its role in maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Technology and Interpersonal Relationships

In 2004, Wright evaluated RMB and perceptions of partners within exclusively internet-based (EIB) and primarily internet-based (PIB) relationships. Wright describes EIB as "Relationships that are developed without any face-to-face interaction or interaction through traditional media, such as the telephone, letters, etc." (p. 239). Wright's research supports the idea that relationships can be created and/or maintained

via the internet. However, college freshmen-parent relationships are most likely to reflect PIB relationships.

Wright (2004) describes PIB as, "acquaintances, friends, and family members who find it more convenient to communicate via the Internet, or people who may have initially met on-line but who now communicate by other means" (pp. 239-240). Studies on PIB provide evidence that people are capable of maintaining relationships online; however, Wright suggests more research is needed concerning PIB and RMB. Wright states, "They [PIB] are relatively understudied since most relational maintenance studies has focused on face-to-face interaction" (p. 240). The researcher of the present study will supply more information to the field of PIB and RMB by addressing the RMB used in college freshmen-parent relationships via IM.

According to Wright (2004), Patrick O'Sullivan (2000) suggests that people might prefer computer-mediated communication (CMC) as opposed to face-to-face interaction (FtF). Wright states:

> O'Sullivan (2000) found that people often prefer the constrictions of mediated channels (such as email) over face-to-face interaction since these limitations are often seen as advantageous in situations where parallel face-to-face interactions might potentially threaten positive impressions (due to disconfirming information communicated through nonverbal codes) (p. 243).

In other words, O'Sullivan (as cited in Wright, 2004) implies that the ability to monitor ones messages more efficiently through using virtual tools (such as email, IM, etc.) may appear more appealing than having to participate in uncensored FtF interaction. The ability to manipulate and monitor one's cues may prove valuable to those who tried to hide information, which he or she may fear will be leaked out through nonverbal cues. Reasons for withholding information could be numerous; however, the cause can usually be linked to the desire to present a positive self-identity.

Wright (2004) addresses and warns how a desire to maintain a positive self-identity may encourage online interaction. Wright paraphrases Van Horn et al. (1997) by stating:

> People in long-distance relationships typically choose to interact with each other at times when they feel like communicating, when they are on their best behavior, and they may avoid sensitive topics due to feeling uncomfortable about discussing such issues when they cannot be with their partner in a face-to-face context (avoiding potentially negative topics), and this can lead to idealized perceptions of one's relational partner (p. 249).

Online interaction provides the ability to perceive others and display self in idealized ways, neglecting to acknowledge any specific flaws that might emerge through FtF

interaction. The idealized perception is one of four concerns, which appears when relational development takes place by CMC.

McQuillen (2003) offers four insightful characteristics, which might affect the way people interpret messages and/or maintain relationships via online. These four characteristics are idealized perceptions, selective self-perception, reduced cues, and asynchronous benefits. Each one of these characteristics are defined and explained in McQuillen's article.

In order to clarify the meaning behind "idealized perception," McQuillen paraphrases Walther and Tidwell (1996). Walther & Tidwell (as cited in McQuillen) suggest that users of CMC may judge their communicative partners on limited information. Forming impressions based on the limited information one receives while communicating online can be dangerously misleading, because it encourages the recipient to ignore or overlook the communicator's faults. Communicating online provides the recipient with limited evidence, and encourages the recipient to create what Walther calls the "perfect person." The receiver who wants to see the communicator in a certain positive light predominantly practices this form of communication. The second concern, selective self-perception, strengthens McQuillen's first concern.

In relation to the second concern, McQuillen (2003) states, "In the process, selective self-perception or preferred self-presentation, each participant can impression

manage by presenting only that information believed to be favorable about self" (p. 620) Usually when one longs to build or maintain a relationship, he or she wants the other to think the best of them. The desire to be viewed as "wonderful" and "perfect" encourages the communicator to manipulate and edit the messages that are presented during the process of communication.

The third concern deals with reduced cues. The first two points are usually based on the idea that certain cues are reduced while CMC is taking place. McQuillen (2003) suggests, "Because one's physical being is absent; the receiver must rely solely on the verbal behavior [text] that is exchanged during conversation" (p. 620). Verbal behavior is easier to manipulate because it is not woven with the nonverbal signals that would be given in FtF conversation. McQuillen's third concern provides communicators with manipulative environments, permitting communicators the ability to submit and omit certain messages at his or her leisure. Omitting certain messages are not always possible during FtF encounters.

Although there seems to be a lack of cues available via online, the researcher believes some nonverbal cues will always exist, such as chronologic cues and paralanguage. The purpose of the present project is not to elaborate on or be sidetracked by nonverbal research; however, briefly mentioning that nonverbal messages can be exchanged online may suffice.

Ramirez and Broneck (2003) point to emoticons as a possible solution to remedy the problem of reduced cues. Ramirez & Broneck suggested:

> IM also has the ability to provide a richer interaction environment than that typically found in chat rooms [or other forms of CMC]… Most IM programs add features that allow individuals to augment their typed messages with, for example, different fonts and colors as well as graphical 'emoticons' (or emotes), usually in the form of smiley faces selected from a pre-existing 'palette.' These features are designed to provide some level of context and meaning beyond the information provided by writing (p. 5).

Thus, Ramirez and Broneck suggest that a degree of nonverbal communication, which exceeds most text only mediated channels, are available when interaction is practiced via IM. Even though people can use emoticons to express feelings and other nonverbal expressions, the researcher believes the fact remains that many nonverbal cues are still unavailable on IM, such as proximics, gestures, gazing, etc.

McQuillen's (2003) fourth and final concern considers time as an important element in deciphering messages. Asynchronous benefits, according to McQuillen, provide communicators with longer periods of time to plan and edit what is shared. McQuillen compares relationship development via CMC to relationships developed at a costume party, using these four concerns to strength his point. His comparison is helpful

because it provides a wonderful metaphor to clarify the dangers of being misled in CMC interactions. The researcher of the present study would like to point to McQuillen's four concerns, because he believes it may reflect reasons why college freshmen use IM. College freshmen may want to prevent certain messages from leaking out during interactions with their parents.

These previous articles (McQuillen, 2003; Van Horn et al., 1997; O'Sullivan, 2000; Wright, 2004) present helpful information concerning technology and interpersonal relationships. CMC has been proven to extend and possibly help develop certain relationships, be it EIB or PIB relationships. Unfortunately, information on CMC is rather broad and varies across different mediated channels. The researcher simply want to point out, if mediated channels affect communication, then clearly it might also affect RMB. In light of this information and with efforts to remain efficient and specific, the researcher of the present study would like to narrow its evaluation to the specific CMC of IM. A few studies have previously looked at IM as a tool to practice RMB, but little is known about the affects of IM interaction in the freshmen-parent relationships. The next section of the literature review reviews previous research conducted with IM.

In 2005, Hwang conducted research concerning predictors of IM use. According to various sources of research gathered by Hwang, IM is a growing phenomenon. The International Data Corp. (IDC) predicted the number of global IM users would reach over

500 million by 2005. They also predicted that the number of business and corporate users would grow to over 200 million while individuals would increase to over 300 million. Because these numbers keep rising, Hwang sought to answer the question "What motivates people to use IM?" Hwang's research provides some possible answers by looking at two specific theories: uses and gratifications (which is divided by gratifications sought and gratifications obtained) and social presence.

Hwang (2005) refers to Bracken and Lombard (2001), in order to clarify what he means by the terms uses and gratification and how he hopes to compare it to his research. Hwang quotes, "[Uses and gratification studies] investigate the extent to which people attempt to use media to fulfill these needs [gratifications sought] and the extent to which those attempts are successful [gratifications obtained]" (p. 3). For instance, one may believe that IM can help sustain or maintain relationships. If maintaining a relationship is a gratifying experience, then the communicator will be motivated to use IM for the purpose of hopefully having that goal fulfilled. This represents gratification sought. Gratification obtained would occur if the relationships were actually maintained (goal was actually met), which would motivate the user to keep using IM.

Hwang (2005) discovered that gratifications obtained did not indirectly affect the use of IM; however, it did affect gratifications sought. And although gratifications obtained did not directly affect IM, gratifications sought did affect IM use. Therefore

gratifications obtained directly affected gratifications sought, which directly affected IM use. Hwang's research leads the researcher of the present study to speculate that if freshman seek to maintain relationships with their parents through IM and these goals are fulfilled, then freshmen will continue to use IM for this purpose.

Hwang (2005) discovered five reason/goals that encourage people to use IM. These goals—gratifications sought—are as follows: social utility, interpersonal utility, convenience, entertainment/relaxation, and information. Hwang's research suggests that some of these goals are actually obtained by simply using IM. His research gives further evidence that IM can be used to maintain relationships.

Hwang (2005) also evaluated how the issue of long distance affects IM use by introducing and evaluating the theory of social presence experienced by communicator who IM. Social presence, according to Hwang suggests that, "users are aware of the 'existence of the others' and that 'they are there,' therefore they feel 'togetherness' in a virtual space or mediated environment" (p. 8). Failure to actively acknowledge the medium leads to a greater feeling of social presence. Hwang mirrors the thoughts of Lombard et al. (2000) by stating, "Because individuals fail to 'perceive or acknowledge the existence of a medium' in a mediated communication environment, and feel the medium is invisible, as if 'the medium were not there,' such perceptions of non-mediation enable individuals to feel 'socially present' even though they are not in the

same place in the physical world" (p. 8). The idea of social presence is extremely helpful in clarifying what can motivate one to use IM (such as freshmen adjusting to new environments).

Evaluating IM as an avenue for maintaining relationships is not a new idea. In 2003, Ramirez and Broneck presented this idea to the International Communication Association during the 2003 Annual Meeting in San Diego. Ramirez and Broneck suggest, "IM users were younger, had used the Internet for a longer period of time, and spent more time on-line per session than their counterparts" (p. 23). Ramirez and Broneck's address also gives further evidence that RMB can occur via IM. Ramirez and Broneck's research encourages the researcher of the present project to explore IM use in college freshmen relationships, especially college freshmen-parent relationships.

Ramirez and Broneck (2003) provide insight concerning why studying IM and RMB is a worthy study. Ramirez and Broneck state:

> It should be noted that investigation of on-line tools [such as IM] provide unique research opportunities for relational scholars, not only because of their increasing popularity and widespread availability, but also because they offer a prospect for examining important relational processes as they occur in everyday life (p. 3).

Because IM users tend to use IM frequently, it is of value to see how this CMC affects the RMB initiated by freshmen toward their parents.

Ramirez and Broneck (2003) use Nardi, Whittaker, and Bradner (2003) to support their suggestion that IM helps build and sustain relationships. Nardi et al. specifically address IM use and people located in the workplace. Participants in the Nardi et al. study, according to Ramirez and Broneck's interpretation, "cited IM as a means of introducing levity and intimacy into the workday through brief interaction with family and friends" (p. 10). As pointed out by Ramirez and Broneck, Nardi et al. illustrate that younger generations are not the only people whom have access to IM, but older adults have the ability and opportunity to use such tools to maintain relationships.

Ramirez and Broneck's (2003) study also presented a look at gender differences in IM use. Ramirez and Broneck's findings reflect with previous research, suggesting that females tend to be more sensitive toward relationships. Ramirez and Broneck's research illustrates, "Interactions with males were rated equally by both sexes in terms of communication quality, but females rated interactions conducted with female partners significantly higher. Males and females rated interactions with opposite sex partners as more valuable and change-producing than with same-sex ones" (p. 26). The researcher believes Ramirez and Broneck's report on gender differences experienced in the virtual realm may prove to be of worthy note in evaluating the RMB and frequency of certain RMB initiated by freshmen-parent relationship.

The researcher of the present study suggests one reason why scholars might have over looked RMB via IM in the freshmen-parent relationship is possibly because relatively young users statistically practice CMC more often than adults. In other words, it is likely that parents do not correspond with the younger generation via IM, because they are "technologically handicapped." However, Gradis (2003) presented research suggesting older people (seniors) are able to use email as a method to maintaining relationships.

Gradis (2003) mentions that some of the reasons why seniors and CMC have been overlooked in previous years are due to a few variables. For instance, some may suggest that computers are not generally designed to meet the needs of seniors. Fonts are usually relatively small, websites are designed for younger audiences, and technological assistance might appear difficult to acquire. However, all of these variables can be manipulated and changed, which in turn, Gradis proved that email could be available to the older generations for maintaining relationships. The researcher of the present study believes adults will be just as able and capable to use IM as seniors are able and capable to use email. Therefore, the researcher believes it can be argued that if "seniors" are capable of using email, then parents should be capable of learning how to use IM to communicate back with their college aged child.

All of the previous studies mentioned concerning RMB, relationships and change, and interpersonal technology lead the researcher of the present project to three specific needs that must be addressed. What types of RMB emerge in college freshmen-parent relationships? Do college freshmen interact with their parents via IM? And finally, if any RBM emerge in IM within the college freshmen-parent relationship, which RMB seem to be the most and least common? The researcher of the present project will produce and evaluate three separate studies to answer these four specific questions.

Q1- What Type of Relational Maintenance Behaviors emerge in college freshman-parent relationships?

Q2- Do college freshmen interact with at least one parent via IM?

Q3- What RMB from Study 1 will be the most common RMB initiated by college freshmen while interacting with at least one parent via IM?

Q4- What RMB from Study 1 will be the least common RMB initiated by college freshmen while interacting with at least one parent via IM?

Chapter III- Methodology

Study 1

Participants

College freshmen from three different speech classes at an accredited east coast university were offered an opportunity to participate in a small focus group discussion concerning interpersonal communication. Volunteer's age, culture, and gender varied; therefore, the results for Study 1 emerged from a very diverse group. The researcher believes the diversity added depth to the final analysis, as well as insight for future studies. Although several variables were overlooked, such as exact age, culture, and gender, the researcher insisted on three requirements. Participants were required to be a first year undergraduate student, have at least one parent they communicated with throughout their college stay, and be willing to participate in a discussion concerning the college freshmen-parent relationship.

Out of the three speech classes, ten college students showed interest in the study, and provided the researcher with emails to contact them. Two days after receiving the email address, the researcher contacted the volunteers via email, and informed the students of the time and location the focus group would take place. Students were asked to RSVP, so the researcher would be prepared to organize the session according to the group size.

Four out of the ten students sent RSVP's. However, although the researcher only received four RSVP's, eight volunteers came for the meeting. The researcher believes

the sample size was sufficient for conducting an exploratory analysis concerning possible RMB that emerge within the college freshmen-parent relationship.

One participant, out of the eight, failed to meet the academic status requirement, thus his remarks were withheld from the report. The remaining participants consisted of three females (two Caucasians, and one Hispanic) and four males (three Caucasian, and one Hispanic). The age of each participant was not collected for this particular project, because all of the participants were first year undergraduate students. That is to say, the researcher believes all students to be relatively the same age, because one of the requirements insisted volunteers must be college freshmen.

Data Collection

Several incentives were offered to encourage participants to volunteer. The researcher offered a free pass out of a weekly meeting, which students are required to attend three days a week. The researcher also informed possible participants that free snacks and drinks would be available to eat and drink during the focus group meeting. And finally, the researcher respected the college student's time and informed the possible participants that the meeting would only last approximately one hour.

The researcher arrived early on the day the focus group was to be held. Donuts, cookies, and drinks were laid out for participants to enjoy while contributing to the focus group. A small circle was formed so students would feel at ease to communicate and participate. A video camera was placed in the corner approximately fifteen to twenty feet away, in an effort to record the data and lower any anxiety, which participants might feel if such a device was closer to the group. Thus, all data was collected in a non-hostile

environment via videotape. The researcher also collected data via note taking during the focus group session. All participants agreed to the method of recording, and showed no nonverbal signs of discomfort. Data from the video recording was later transcribed and analyzed by the researcher.

Locating Common RMB

Once the discussion was transcribed, the researcher cross-referenced behaviors mentioned in the focus group discussion with the five RMB from Stafford and Canary's (1991) RMB typology. To accommodate any additional RMB not found in Stafford and Canary's (1991) typology, an addition category entitled "other" was added to the cross-reference analysis. Any RMB that did not resemble RMB from Stafford and Canary (1991) typology was placed into a new category, labeled and incorporated into a new developed RMB typology, specifically concerning the college freshmen-parent relationship. In other words, researchers looked for common RMB, which emerged from the focus group conversation. The researcher used Stafford and Canary (1991) typology as a foundational starting point, and allowed the possibility for other RMB to emerge from the conversation. The common RMB that appeared in the small focus group discussion were recorded and incorporated into the third study.

Study 2

Participants

College freshmen from several speech classes at an accredited east coast university were offered an opportunity to participate in a small survey concerning interpersonal technology. All participants were required to be a first year college student. The volunteer's specific age, culture, and gender varied; therefore, the results for Study 2

could have emerged from a very diverse group. The student's proximity to home was also overlooked. In other words, the researcher did not clarify if students lived with their parents or if they had left the home. Geographic dispersion was overlooked, because the researcher believed omitting geographic dispersion would not hinder the final results.

Data Collection

The researcher developed a simple questionnaire (Appendix A), which inquired if college freshmen correspond with at least one parent via IM. The survey also inquired if the respondent was a male college freshman or a female college freshman. These two questions, i.e. Do you communicate with at least one parent via IM? and Are you a male, or are you a female?, provided the researcher with adequate information concerning whether college freshmen correspond with at least on parent via IM, as well as which biological sex was more likely to do so. All surveys remained anonymous.

Study 2, much like Study 1, was conducted as an exploratory analysis. Results from Study 2 cannot be considered sufficient for stereotyping the whole college freshmen population, but can be used as pilot study, illustrating that there is an ample supply of participants available for conducting Study 3.

Study 3

Participants

Similar to Study 2, volunteer's specific age, culture, and gender varied. Specific demographics, other than gender, were not investigated; therefore, the results for Study 3 could have emerged from a very demographically diverse group. The student's proximity to home was also overlooked. In other words, the researcher did not clarify if students lived with their parents or if they had left their home. Similar to Study 2, geographic

dispersion was overlooked because the researcher believed omitting geographic dispersion would not hinder the final results.

The researcher gathered participants from three large speech communication classes/lectures. The speech lectures were part of an undergraduate program from an accredited University located on the east coast. Each lecture consisted of eight different class sections, and each class consisted of approximately twenty college students. Thus, the researcher had the potential to encounter approximately four hundred and eighty college students with the fourteen-question survey. The researcher discovered that because some students were absent when the survey was handed out; the researcher was able to collect three hundred and sixty-nine surveys. Also, all participants gathered for Study 3 were gathered from the same University used for Study 1 and for Study 2.

The researcher was only interested in college freshmen participants, even though the researcher collected three hundred and sixty-nine surveys. Before distributing the surveys, the researcher feared omitting non-freshmen students from taking the survey might distract possible college freshmen participants from taking the survey seriously. Therefore, the researcher waited until all surveys were turned in before segregating the surveys between non-freshmen and freshmen takers.

Out of the three hundred and sixty-nine surveys, one hundred and eighty eight surveys were completed by college freshmen students and therefore met the requirements set by the researcher for Study 3; meaning, nearly fifty percent of the surveys that the researcher collected were useable. This number exceeded the researcher's expectation, and provided an adequate amount of information for an exploratory data analysis. All remaining surveys that did not meet the freshmen requirement were discarded.

Data Collection

The researcher of the present study, under the professor's guidance and request, allowed the professor leading the lectures to announce the instructions for the survey. Both the professor and the researcher believed student's sincerity in honestly answering the survey would increase if students believed the professor was assigning the survey. Students were informed that the survey was instrumental and necessary for a graduate thesis project. The professor's insightful suggestion toward presenting the survey at the end of class proved helpful and effective.

Survey Design

The researcher organized a fourteen-question survey (Appendix B), consisting of yes and no questions concerning the seven RMB discovered in Study 1. The researcher constructed the survey, after several hours of carefully considering specific words to assure clarity, and then consulted a fellow colleague to verify that the survey was clear. After receiving insightful suggestion by the colleague, the researcher adjusted the survey. A definition sheet was also offered to help provide clarity concerning the terms used to describe the seven RMB used in the survey (Appendix B).

Based on the results of Study 2, the researcher foresaw the high probability that nearly 20-30% of those surveyed would actually qualify for Study 3, that is college freshmen whom communicate with one or more parents via IM. The researcher feared the remaining students who did not qualify to participate in Study 3 could very easily distract those who did qualify, making it difficult for the researcher to collect authentic answers from the participants who qualified. To remedy this concern, the researcher

organized the survey to explore both IM and Email interactions between college students and at least one parent. The researcher believed opening up the survey to a broader audience would ensure a greater probability of students taking the survey seriously.

Chapter IV- Results

Study 1

The first study addressed the possible RMB practiced between college freshmen and their parents. In order to accomplish this task, the researcher conducted a small focus group discussion geared toward discussing the college freshmen-parent relationship. The following information addresses the results from the first study.

Openness and Worry Avoidance

When students were presented the question, "What do you guys (everyone) usually talk about?" a variety of topics surfaced. The first topic students (the females) mentioned involved characteristics of openness. One female, "We talk about pretty much everything, me and my mom. My dad again, it's good, it's just not…my dad is very factual." Both genders involved in the focus group discussion stated that they talked to their parents about everything. This latter proved to be an exaggeration, for both genders.

According to the focus group discussion, openness about the student-parent relationship is rare, and when it does occur, it has the possibility of being extremely "intense." One male explained why he believed it could be so extreme or intense. He states, "I probably discussed my relationship with my dad, like our relationship together, like twice. And usually it's really, really emotional…the same thing with my mom. Like whenever we discuss our relationship it's probably like one of the times that we have gotten closest out of anything we have ever done." For him, this behavior was extremely effective in strengthening the relationship. However, he admitted to rarely using this style of communication, due to the intensity of such conversations. Although the researcher believes college freshmen practice openness, such occurrences are rare.

One male mentioned that he found it challenging to openly discuss his relationship to his parents, due to all the life changes he was currently experiencing. In short, he suggested the challenges of leaving home and getting acquainted with a new environment, as well as trying to adapt to the challenges of becoming a young independent adult, made it difficult to openly discuss his relationship with his parents. The young man's comment suggests that openness and assurance may be uncommonly practiced within the college freshmen-parent relationship.

Also concerning openness, the researcher noticed that students tended vaguely describe certain situations, which were occurring in their lives. That is to say, students would withhold details concerning the situation, if students thought those details may cause their parent to worry. Nearly all students claimed to be cautious when discussing dramatic or even non-dramatic situations with parents. Therefore, based on the evidence gathered from Study 1, a new RMB emerged from the "other" category and was labeled "worry avoidance". In short, worry avoidance occurs when a person carefully avoids descriptions/topics that may cause the other person in the dyadic relationship to worry.

The researcher noticed that worry avoidance appeared to be common between both genders. One male explained a brief story concerning a time when he sprained his ankle. He needed to be open and self-disclose his circumstance with his mother, but in doing so he did not want to worry her. Therefore, he simply avoided explaining the severity of the situation. He states:

> For example... Like a month ago or so, I sprained my ankle pretty bad. And like, you know, I told my mom, because I had to get insurance and everything and stuff, but I really downplayed it…I like said "it's not a big deal, it doesn't really

hurt…you know. I have to go to the doctor, but it is not a big deal at all."

Because then she starts freaking out as soon as she hears I've sprained my ankle.

Another male agreed with the necessity of being cautious and stated, "You got to be careful what you say, because my mom is like…worries so much. She is like always right here, like nagging and nagging trying to make sure that everything is going perfect." Reflecting thoughts from the young male, one female stated that her mother was a worrier. Based on testimonies offered with in the focus group, the researcher believes worry avoidance is a valid and recognizable RMB; which earns a position in the college freshmen-parent RMB typology.

Social Networks

Possibly one of the most dominant RMB initiated by college freshmen involved the discussion of social networks. The college freshmen in the small focus group stated that they carry on conversations or inquiry information regarding family members. One female states, "Not only do I want to be open, but you want to hear from them to, so what are you going to ask them about? How's the family? How's my little brother? How's this going? How's that going?" Another female stated, in reference to conversations with her mom, "I ask her questions about the family." Male college freshmen mirrored the same behavior. One of the males stated, "when I ask my parents it usually has to do with how are you doing, how are my brothers, or my aunts and uncles and stuff." Based on testimonies given by college freshmen during the small group session, the researcher believes social networks appear consistent, and should remain in the RMB typology practiced within the college freshmen-parent relationship.

Positivity

Although positivity was hardly discussed in the focus group discussion, it did appear briefly during the topic of openness. One male in particular mentioned his supportive relationship with his mother. Even though he never mentioned anything in particular, in a few words he described how sometimes his mother relies on him. He states, "Like with my mom's relationship it's always been, like she relies a lot on me for a lot of things. So it's like, I'm somebody that she relies on, for like even maybe emotional support, sometimes." The researcher of the present project views his testimony as a description of positivity. The only other time positivity appeared in this research was when participants agreed to using it; however, during that time they did not give any examples. Despite its rare occurrence in Study 1, the researcher believes positivity should be considered for future study and should remain in the RMB typology used in college freshmen-parent relationships.

Assurance

College freshmen manage the challenges of change and assurance by incorporating short, possibly intimate expressions: such as "I love you" and "talk to you soon." These statements reflect that the relationship is still intact, flourishing and has a future. Although little evidence is presented on the occurrence of assurance, the researcher is confident that college freshmen regularly offer statements of assurance.

The researcher of the present project also realizes that the challenges presented by change and assurance are not limited to long distance relationships (LDR). The young lady, who currently lives with her parents, suggested that she too found it difficult to communicate with her parents about their relationship. Assurance was difficult to

incorporate because she rarely ever sees her parents. Not only does she rarely ever see them, but she is also constantly faced with the challenge of breaking out of the dependent child role and becoming a young adult. Her testimony shows that the challenge of change and assurance does not only affect those involved in LDR, but also affects those in GCR.

Shared Tasks/Advice Seeking

Sharing tasks usually implies working together in the same geographic region. Therefore, geographic dispersion often creates challenges for college students, because most of them live far away from home. However, due to today's technology, student's discussed situations where they have been successful with the sharing tasks RMB. For instance, one female described how she and her mother work together on paper work needed for school enrollment. She states:

> Face-to-face we do a lot of things together, and then even up here. Like we do a lot of things through the phone, through the email, through the fax machine…Like FASFA and all that stuff I need her information and she needs me or whatever. And we talk a lot, like when my ink is low and I can't read this, so we talk a lot between faxes.

Her testimony provides evidence that task can be shared, even in long-distant relationships.

Several freshmen involved in the focus group admitted to working with parents to help siblings in distress. Although this form of sharing tasks was mentioned, it was difficult for the researcher to clarify who initiated this particular kind of task. Based on the testimonies from the focus group, the researcher observes that the parents, not the

freshmen, usually initiated sibling care. For instance, one male states, “She [his mother] will always call me about my little brother, she’s like, ‘Oh, your brother is struggling with this. Call him. He’ll listen to you more. Or there’s a Christian concert going on where your sister lives so like try to convince her to go, because she won’t, she won’t listen to me.” According to this testimony, parents may initiate shared tasks when sibling care or other relatives are involved. Despite who may initiate the task, the researcher believes college freshmen occasionally participate with their parents to accomplish certain tasks, be it FtF or via discussion.

In previous studies, sharing tasks usually refers to two people working together to accomplish certain, sometimes-routine tasks. In the present study, sharing tasks split into two entities, one that is conceptually similar to the previous category of sharing tasks and the other, similar to requesting advice. As shown in the literature review, advice has appeared in earlier studies. However, in earlier studies, advice was linked to openness, not sharing tasks. A new perspective concerning advice needs to be considered.

In the present study, advice was linked with sharing tasks because college freshmen admitted to seeking advice from their parents. The continuous action of seeking advice helps college freshmen maintain the “parent-child” role relationship. Because college freshmen would usually ask advice on what they should do—how to complete an action or a task—advice seeking fell under the category of sharing tasks, and not necessarily to openness. One male referred to a time when he and his praise team were having some difficulties. In order to solve the problems with his band, he consulted his mother. He states,

> I'm in a praise and worship band and we do praise and worship on Sunday mornings. We as a team were having some trouble, you know just having some problems. And, I brought it to my mom. And, just through life experiences she was able to help me out and give examples…. you know and I brought it to the table with the praise team, and we really worked it out…I mean getting my mom in there, to help me out those three weeks, that we were doing that, just really, I knew she really felt like she was a real big part of my life. And, I knew, I mean, I felt like she was too. We got closer when we got more involved.

The young student not only sought help/advice, but according to his testimony, his mother actually participated in accomplishing the task. Thus, in this one particular situation, advice seeking led to shared tasks.

Another male also described the respect that he has for his father. His respect towards his father encourages him to ask his father for advice. He trusts his father's wisdom. He states, "I just ask him questions about like what's going on in life…not really small talk, we get pretty deep…where like I respect him and his wisdom as a father." Advice is seen here through reflection of conversation. The young man hears about his father's life and receives advice on how to live his own life. Based on testimonies offered with in the focus group, the researcher believes advice seeking is a valid and recognizable RMB in the college freshmen-parent RMB typology.

Study 2

The second study explored how many college freshmen use IM to communicate with at least one parent. In order to accomplish this task, the researcher designed a

simple survey (Appendix A), inquiring if college freshmen correspond with at least one parent via IM. The following information addresses the results from Study 2.

Percentages of College Freshmen that IM parents

The researcher calculated all of the results by adding the surveys with a common answer and dividing those surveys by the sum of the whole. For instance, one hundred and fifty eight surveys were collected from five speech classes. Therefore, the one hundred and fifty-eight surveys represented the sum of the whole. Forty-three college freshmen, out of the one hundred and fifty eight who took the survey, stated that they communicate with at least one parent via IM. The researcher took the number calculated from the surveys with a common answer, that is the forty-three participants, and then divided that number by the sum of the whole, that is one hundred and fifty eight participants. Thus, the researcher calculated that nearly twenty-seven percent of the participants in Study 2 correspond with at least one parent via IM. In other words, based on calculations from Study 2, nearly one in every four college freshmen communicate with at least one parent via IM. The researcher believes this percentage is a significant number, and provides future research with an ample sample of possible participants for Study 3. Graph 1 (Appendix C) illustrates results for college freshmen that communicate with at least one parent via IM.

The researcher for the present project was also interested in biological sex differences in IM use. In order to calculate the differences between the biological sex differences in IM use, the researcher separated the sexes into two complete different groups: one group consisting of all the males who participated in the survey and one group consisting of all the females who participated in the survey. The researcher then

calculated the results by adding the common answers among one group, i.e. the all male group or the all female group, and then dividing that number by the sum total of all the members from that specific group. For instance, eighty-three males participated in the survey. Twenty-four males, out of the eighty-three males that took the survey, testified that they communicate with at least one parent via IM. The researcher took the number calculated from the surveys with a common answer, that is twenty-four participants, and then divided that number by the eighty-three participants, which was the sum of the whole male group. Thus, the researcher calculated that nearly twenty-nine percent of the males from the male group in Study 2 correspond with at least one parent via IM. Graph 2 (Appendix D) illustrates the results for males in the male group that communicate with at least one parent via IM. The researcher calculated the female results from the female group in the same way.

Seventy-five females participated in the survey. Nineteen females, out of the seventy-five females that took the survey, testified that they communicate with at least one parent via IM. The researcher took the number calculated from the surveys with a common answer, that is the nineteen participants, and then divided that number by the seventy-five participants, which was the sum of the whole female group. Thus, the researcher calculated that nearly twenty-five percent of the females from the female group in Study 2 correspond with at least one parent via IM. Graph 3 (Appendix E) illustrates results for females in the female group that communicate with at least one parent via IM.

The researcher believes the difference between the males in the male group and the females in the female group is insignificant. Twenty-nine percent of the males in the

male group stated that they communicate with at least one parent via IM, while twenty-five percent of the females in the female group stated the same. In other words, the difference in percentage for IM use between the males in the male group and the females in the female group was only four percent. Graph 4 (Appendix F) illustrates a comparison between males in the male group and females in the female group.

Study 3

The third study addressed the RMB, discovered in Study 1, which college-freshmen may initiate when communicating with a least one parent via IM. In order to accomplish this task, the researcher organized a simple survey. The survey asked participants yes or no questions concerning each of the common RMB that emerge from the focus group in Study 1. The following information addresses the results from Study 3.

The researcher collected three hundred and sixty-nine surveys from three hundred and sixty-nine participants. Out of the three hundred and sixty-nine participants, one hundred and eighty-eight reported that they were college freshmen. The remaining surveys, which fell outside of the college freshmen status requirement, were eliminated from the final analysis.

The researcher used the same method from Study 2 to calculate the results from Study 3. Thus, the researcher calculated all of the results by adding the surveys with a common answer and dividing those surveys by the sum of the whole. For instance, out of the one hundred and eighty-eight freshmen that participated, forty-eight freshmen expressed initiating at least one of the seven RMB (offered on the survey) when communicating with at least one parent via IM. Therefore, the researcher divided the

number of students that expressed initiating at least one of the seven RMB when communicating with at least one parent via IM (a total of forty-eight) by the sum of the whole (a total of one hundred and eighty eight). That is to say, out of all the college freshmen that participated in the survey, twenty-six percent reported that they communicate with at least one parent via IM. This method of calculating results was used in calculating how common each of the seven RMB were among college freshmen, how common each of the seven RMB were among the male college freshmen, and how common they were among the female college freshmen tested in the group.

College Freshmen who Participated in Study 3 Survey

The most common RMB, among the forty-eight college freshmen that communicate with a parent via IM, related to social networks. Seventy-five percent (a total of thirty-six) testified to inquiring about social networks when communicating with at least one parent via IM. The second most common RMB was a tie between two RMB: positivity and advice seeking. Sixty-three percent (a total of thirty) testified to seeking advice from at least one parent when engaged in IM chat; and sixty-three percent (a total of thirty) reported incorporating positive/encouraging statements while communicating with a parent via IM.

Worry avoidance followed close behind advice seeking and positivity. Fifty percent (a total of twenty-five) out of the forty-eight participants who partook in the survey, suggested that they withhold details concerning dramatic situations for the purpose of protecting parents from worrying. Forty-seven percent (a total of twenty-three) testified to using assurance. The remaining two RMB tied for the least common RMB practiced among college freshmen that interact with a parent via IM. The least

common RMB were openness and shared tasks. The researcher believes the percentage for openness and shared tasks was still relatively high. Thirty-five percent (a total of seventeen) testified to using openness and shared tasks when communicating with at least one parent via IM.

Therefore, the RMB practiced by the college freshmen in Study 3 can be listed from the most common to the least common RMB as follows: social networks (75%); advice seeking and positivity (63%); worry avoidance (53%); assurance (47%); and openness and shared tasks (35%). Graph 5 (Appendix G) displays the results from the college freshmen surveys collected by the researcher who conducted Study 3.

Male College Freshmen who participated in Study 3 Survey

As previously stated, the Study 3 survey asked yes or no questions concerning the seven RMB collected by college freshmen in Study 1. The researcher not only hoped to discover which RMB were most common among college freshmen, but also hoped to discover the most common RMB practiced by males and females. Therefore, in accordance with the goals set by the researcher for Study 3, the researcher evaluated the common occurrence (not the frequency) of openness, assurance, positivity, shared tasks, social networks, worry avoidance, and advice seeking among the male college freshmen (from the all male group) that participated in Study 3 and reported communicating with at least one parent via IM.

Ninety-eight participants, of the one hundred and eighty-eight college students that qualified for Study 3, were male. All of the males that participated in Study 3 were categorized into one group, and separated from all of the females in the female group. Twenty-two percent of the males (a total of twenty-two) expressed initiating at least one

of the seven RMB (offered on the survey) when communicating with at least one parent via IM. The following results concerning common RMB initiated by male college freshmen stem from these twenty-two participants.

The most common RMB, used by male college freshmen that communicate with a parent via IM, related to social networks. Sixty-three percent of the males (a total of fourteen) testified to inquiring about social networks when communicating with parents via IM. The second most common RMB that emerged in conversations over IM in the male population involved advice seeking. Fifty-nine percent of the males (a total of thirteen) testified to seeking advice from at least one parent when engaged on IM chat. Worry avoidance followed close behind advice seeking. Fifty percent of the males (a total of eleven) suggested that they withhold details concerning dramatic situations for the purpose of protecting parents from worrying.

Thirty-six percent of the males (a total of eight) testified to using the positivity RMB. The remaining three RMB all tied for the least common RMB practiced in male college freshmen interaction with a parent via IM. The least common RMB were assurance, openness, and shared tasks. The researcher believes the percentage for assurance, openness, and shared tasks was still relatively high. Thirty-one percent of the males (a total of seven) testified to using assurance, openness, and shared tasks when communicating with at least one parent via IM.

Therefore, the RMB practiced by the male college freshmen in Study 3 can be listed from the most common to the least common RMB as follows: social networks (63%); advice seeking (59%); worry avoidance (50%); positivity (36%); and assurance,

openness and shared tasks (31%). Graph 6 (Appendix H) displays the results from the male college freshmen surveys.

Female College Freshmen who Participated in Study 3 Survey

As previously stated, the Study 3 survey asked yes or no questions concerning the seven RMB collected by college freshmen in Study 1. The researcher not only hoped to discover which RMB were most common among college freshmen, but also hoped to discover the most common RMB practiced by males and females. Therefore, in accordance with the goals set by the researcher for Study 3, the researcher evaluated the common occurrence (not the frequency) of openness, assurance, positivity, shared tasks, social networks, worry avoidance, and advice seeking among the female college freshmen (from the all female group) that participated in Study 3 and reported communicating with at least one parent via IM.

Ninety participants, of the one hundred and eighty-eight college students that qualified for Study 3, were female. All of the females that participated in Study 3 were categorized into one group, and separated from all of the males in the male group. Twenty-nine percent of the females (a total of twenty six) expressed initiating at least one of the seven RMB (offered on the survey) when communicating with at least one parent via IM. The following results concerning common RMB initiated by female college freshmen stem from these twenty-six participants.

The most common RMB, used by female college freshmen that communicate with a parent via IM, related to social networks and positivity. That is to say, social networks and positivity tied as the most common RMB used by female college freshmen when interacting with at least one parent via IM. Eighty-four percent of the females (a

total of twenty-two) testified to inquiring about social networks when communicating with parents via IM. Eighty-four percent of the females (a total of twenty-two) acknowledged using positivity when engaging in IM chats with at least one parent. The second most common RMB that emerged in conversations over IM in the female population involved advice seeking. Sixty-five percent of the females (a total of seventeen) testified to seeking advice from at least one parent when engaged on IM chat. Assurance followed close behind advice seeking. Sixty-one percent of the females (a total of sixteen) testified to offering assurance when communicating via IM.

Fifty-three percent of the females (a total of fourteen) suggested that they withhold details concerning dramatic situations for the purpose of protecting parents from worrying. The remaining two RMB tied for the least common RMB practiced in female college freshmen interaction with a parent via IM. The least common RMB were openness and shared tasks. The researcher believes the percentage for openness and shared tasks was still relatively high. Thirty-eight percent of the females (a total of ten) testified to using openness and shared tasks when communicating with at least one parent via IM.

Therefore, the RMB practiced by the female college freshmen in Study 3 can be listed from the most common to the least common RMB as follows: social networks and positivity (84%); advice seeking (65%); assurance (61%); worry avoidance (53%); and openness and shared tasks (38%). Graph 7 (Appendix I) displays the results from the female college freshmen surveys.

Chapter V- Discussion

Study 1

Worry Avoidance

The present study introduced a new behavior to the RMB field: worry avoidance. Worry avoidance, which is carefully avoiding descriptions/topics that may cause the other person in the dyadic relationship to worry, has not been identified in prior research. From the present study, worry avoidance appears to be a common RMB in the college freshman-parent relationship. The researcher speculates that college freshmen practice worry avoidance to reduce uncertainty in the parent's life. When a college freshman enters into the college environment, change is bound to take place. Change in the college freshman's life and relationships usually occur away from the home and out of reach of the protective parent's care. The researcher believes college freshmen are aware of these changes in environment and role identity, as well as the possible stress/anxiety it may cause in the parent's life. Typically, college freshmen hope to avoid causing parents any additional worry and will most likely take steps to reduce it. Therefore, the researcher of the present study suggests worry avoidance is a common RMB practiced within the college freshmen-parent relationship.

Advice Seeking

The researcher believes the advice seeking relates to shared tasks more than it relates to openness, at least in the college freshmen-parent relationship, on advice adds depth to the RMB field. As shown in the literature review, advice has appeared in earlier studies (Stafford et al. 2000). However, in earlier studies, advice was linked to openness, not shared tasks.

In the present study, advice was linked with shared tasks because college freshmen admitted to seeking advice from their parents when needing to solve problems or when needing to make difficult decisions. The continuous action of seeking advice helps college freshmen maintain the "parent-child" role relationship. That is to say, stereotypically, college freshmen are often dependent on their parents prior to their exodus from home. This dependence gives the parent the role of a guardian and protector. In order to maintain this aspect of the relationship, young freshmen may seek advice from their parents as they try to solve temporary dilemmas. The college freshman's act of seeking advice re-assures the parent that the relationship is still normal and healthy.

Shared tasks

The researcher believes it is important to acknowledge the manner in which advice seeking and shared tasks emerges in the LDR college freshmen-parent relationship. In the focus group discussion, one young lady stated that she recently called/faxed her mother concerning school enrollment. For her, accomplishing the task FtF with her mother was impossible. Her mother was miles and miles away. The young lady had to alter the way she normally—FtF—accomplishes shared tasks, in order to adapt to the LDR.

The young lady's testimony from the present project supports Kim et al. (2005), which suggests that sharing tasks can be accomplished by a small change in the behavior. Instead of working on the shared task, together in the same location, Kim et al. suggests the behavior "mutates" and is practiced in the form of discussion. People do not work on

the task in the same physical field, but work on it together by exchanging words and ideas. The young lady's testimony mirrors Kim et al. researcher and results.

Positivity

Positivity is important in maintaining relationships. In one example given, the young male suggested that he was often emotionally supportive to his mother during times his mother felt stressed and exhausted. The use of positivity strengthened his relationship with his mother, by establishing a source of encouragement. Stereotypically, once the child leaves for college, parents will experience what is known as the "empty nest syndrome." The empty nest syndrome leaves a parent somewhat lonely (Johnston, 2002). During this time, when the child leaves for college, the parent may doubt his or her parenting skills. The researcher suspects that college freshmen may use positivity to balance a parent's natural inclination to doubt/worry during this time. In other words, positivity may be a behavior used to remedy worry if and when it occurs within the parent.

Assurance

The researcher is slow to suggest that in-depth conversations involving assurance commonly occur within the college freshmen-parent relationship. Assurance is more likely to be subtle and stated in the form of "I love you" comments. Conversations reaching beyond these re-assuring comments may be difficult to initiate because college freshmen are still trying to adjust to college life. During the first year of college, college freshmen spend some time trying to identify their role in life, and how to adapt to college life (Johnson, 1995). Therefore, assurance might occur less frequently during this time because the freshman is trying to change and possibly even identify who he or she is, as a

young adult. The researcher believes this puzzling and perplexing time in the college freshman's life may encourage freshmen to withdraw from conversations on assurance. In order to offer assurance without initiating long conversations, the researcher suspects that college freshmen may practice assurance through little phrase like "I love you," or "You're always there for me! Thank-you!" These statements can re-assure the parent the relationship is still intact and prospering.

Openness

College freshmen experience two changes in their life once they arrive at college. They experience a change in the environment around them (Johnson et al., 1995), and they experience a change in role identity. The idea of leaving home and being independent may create hurdles in maintaining relationships with parents back home. Therefore, college freshmen are presented with a mammoth need to continually re-assure parents that the relationship is still intact, especially for parents struggling with the empty nest syndrome. According to the present project, although the need to assure parents the relationship is still intact exists, college freshmen are faced with a unique dilemma. They must maintain their relationship with their parent, and at the same time try to adjust with all the changes that occur with becoming a young independent adult. That is to say, college freshmen must find a way to illustrate relational consistency and at the same time establish some form of autonomy.

As expressed in the openness section, one male mentioned that he found it challenging to incorporate words communicating assurance (and/or openness) to his parents, because he was experiencing so many changes in life. He suggested the challenges of leaving home and getting acquainted with a new environment, as well as

trying to adapt to the challenges of becoming a young independent adult, made it difficult to openly discuss his relationship with his parents. . The researcher believes Guerrero et al. (2005) provides an adequate explanation to why assurance may be difficult within the college freshmen-parent relationship. Guerrero et al. suggest that the presence of uncertainty may limit the amount of conversation concerning relationship status. The researcher believes college freshmen may find it challenging to clarify the relationship, when they are unsure of their role/identity in life.

Social Networks

The most common behavior mentioned in the focus group meeting involved social networks. The researcher believes social networks surfaced in conversation because (stereotypically) college freshmen care about their friends, family, and other close relationships. College freshmen may feel responsible to maintain a connection with their parents because of shared relations with other family members, or because talking about shared relationships helps maintain the college freshmen parent relationship.

The researcher of the present project believes social networks occurred for two reasons. First, college freshmen may want to discuss the shared relationships they have with their parents, concerning the college student's environment. Therefore, college freshmen may feel a desire to describe situations involving roommates, dating relationships, and other various relationships with people the parents may also know. That is to say, college freshmen may feel relationally closer to parents when discussing the social networks in the college student's environment.

And second, the researcher believes college freshmen desire to hear how their parents are doing, as well as brothers, sisters, grandparents, and other family members.

One female states, “Not only do I want to be open, but you want to hear from them to, so what are you going to ask them about? How’s the family? How’s my little brother? How’s this going? How’s that going?” Another female stated, in reference to conversations with her mom, “I ask her questions about the family.” Male college freshmen mirrored the same behavior. One of the males stated, “when I ask my parents it usually has to do with how are you doing, how are my brothers, or my aunts and uncles and stuff.” Based on testimonies given by college freshmen during the small group session, the researcher believes social networks appear consistent in conversation, and should remain in the RMB typology practiced within the college freshmen-parent relationship.

Study 2

The researcher believes the results from Study 2 illustrate that a significant number of college freshmen communicate with their parents via IM. Results from Study 2 suggest that at least one in every four college freshmen, which participated in Study 3, correspond with at least one parent via IM. The researcher believes these statistics represent a conservative number.

When collecting participants for Study 2, the researcher overlooked the possible element of geographical dispersion. That is to say, the researcher did not take into account whether the relationships between the college freshmen and parents were GCR or LDR. The researcher believes college freshmen’s geographic location, that is GCR verses LDR may affect incentives for using IM, concerning correspondence with at least one parent. Dyads in GCR relationships are more likely to shy away from CMC, because FtF may prove to be more efficient. Had the researcher eliminated all GCR from Study 2, the

researcher believes a greater percentage of students would have testified to using IM. The absence of geographic clarification thus leads the researcher to believe results for Study 2 are conservative.

The researcher was unable to gain enough information from Study 2 to establish possible reasons why results were so similar between the males in the male group and the females in the female group. The researcher suspects that further analysis in IM use and RMB may provide necessary insight explaining possible incentives that males and females might have toward using IM. In Study 3, the researcher hoped to establish a clearer understanding in the biological sex differences in IM use.

Study 3

Results for Study 3 illustrate that college freshmen do engage in several RMB when interacting with at least one parent via IM. Also, according to the results, females are more likely to engage in any of the seven RMB then males. That is to say, when females were separated into one group and males were separated into another group, RMB as a whole was more common amongst the females than amongst the males. The researcher believes these results reflect part of Myers et al. (2004) research concerning the differences between male and female siblings use of RMB. According to Myers et al. research, female siblings use RMB at a higher rate than male siblings. Although Myers et al. evaluated the frequency of RMB among siblings, and the present study calculated the commonality of RMB in college freshmen-parent relationships, the researcher believes a comparison can be made.

Myers et al. (2004) suggested that the RMB frequency practiced by males and females may differ because females desire more than males to exhibit affection,

admiration, and intimacy. The researcher suspects the common use of RMB among the females is higher than the common use among males because of females may have stronger desires to exhibit more affection, more admiration, and more intimacy than males. In order to support this observation, the researcher would like to point to the difference in ranking order of the RMB, based on common use of each RMB, between the females in the female group and the males in the male group. The following ranking order from most common RMB practiced by females (and males) to the least common RMB practiced by females (and males), may provide sufficient evidence for the implication that females are relationship oriented and males are task oriented.

Female Results Discussion

Social networks and positivity.

Social networks and positivity tied for the most common RMB practiced by female college freshmen that communicate with at least one parent via IM. The researcher believes social networks ranked the most common RMB because female college freshmen may feel homesick (Relf & Gates, 2002) once they arrive at college. Female students who feel homesick will most likely be curious about the relationships and activities taking place back at home while they are away. However, the researcher believes the most likely reason social networks rated high, concerning commonality, was due to female freshmen trying to cope with transition into the college life.

When female college freshmen leave home to go away to college, they will most likely experience uncertainty concerning the status of certain and close relationships back at home. Uncertainty may develop with the challenge of trying to keep in contact with previous relationships at home, or from the lack of hearing from certain relationships,

such as relationships back home. Either way, the female freshmen will probably feel a need to keep in contact with loved ones back home. A female's desire to keep in contact with certain relationships back home would explain discussions with parents concerning social networks.

Females (stereotypically) are encouraging and empathetic towards relationships in general (Toussaint, 2005). Therefore, the researcher believes one possible reason why positivity tied social networks for the most common RMB practiced among the female group could be linked to how females communicate within those particular social networks. For instance, in talking about someone in the social network, *e.g.* brother, friend, neighbor, etc., the female freshmen may feel a need to be encouraging or uplifting—positivity—optimistically pointing out the good to over compensate the painful feelings of distance. The efforts female college freshmen make into designing positive conversations may re-assure them that the relationships are all right, despite the fact that they are no longer at home.

Another possible reason why positivity ranked so high for females emerges out of McQuillen's (2003) study on CMC. McQuillen suggests that CMC creates the opportunity to present self in a positive and more attractive light. The ability to appear nice, affectionate, "perfect," etc. might entice female freshmen to wrap their words via IM with encouragement, praise, and positivity. Optimism, as oppose to pessimism, is stereotypically more attractive. Therefore, according to McQuillens concerning the idealized perception, the researcher believes female college freshmen that value appearance, will most likely practice positivity when communicating with a parent via IM.

Advice seeking.

Sixty-five percent of the females from the female group testified to seeking advice from parents when interacting with a parent via IM. That is to say, advice seeking ranked as the second most common RMB among female college freshmen. The researcher believes the transition into a new environment creates uncertainty for both the female college freshman and the parent involved in the college freshmen-parent relationship. As female college freshmen enter into the new college environment, they will most likely seek information that will better equip them to handle the challenges that come with the transition into a new environment. Since parents (stereotypically) play the role of "advisors for life," it makes sense that female college freshmen would seek advice from their parents on the issues of life, especially as they experience the transition from the home to college. The researcher acknowledges that the previous nature of the college freshmen-parent relationship, as well as the personality of the college freshmen, may affect the present explanation concerning advice seeking.

Assurance.

The researcher believes it is interesting how similar the percentages, from the female group, were between advice seeking and assurance. As previously stated, sixty-five percent of the females from the female group testified to seeking advice. Yet, sixty-one percent of the females from the female group testified to practicing assurance. The researcher suspects this may illustrate possible incentives females have toward seeking advice. If seeking advice reassures the parent that the relationship is the same, despite the distance and challenges with change, than it is possible that females may see advice seeking as a form of assurance. This may reflect Belle, Burr, and Cooney (1987) study

concerning attribution of responsibility, that is to say the perspective on who is capable and responsible to solve the problem/dilemma. If the parent has always played the roll of provider/problem solver, then female freshmen may seek advice simply as a means of initiating assurance.

In Study 1, the researcher stated that he believed advice seeking emerges out of the shared task RMB. The researcher still holds this claim; however, the researcher does not desire to be limited to it. Because of the similarities between the two percentages of advise seeking and assurance (according to Study 3), the researcher believes he may need to add/offer a new perspective to the origination of advice seeking. That is to say, advice seeking may be used to help reinforce assurance, instead of just being another way to accomplish a task (as seen in shared tasks).

Therefore, it is possible that advice seeking may reflect two totally different RMB. That is to say, two people may have two entirely different approaches to seeking advice. For instance, one may seek advice to re-assure the parent that the relationship is the same as before the element of distance and change arrived. The other person, on the other hand, may seek advice because they believe the act of doing something together may bring them closer together. The first perspective seeks the advice to maintain/re-assure the relationship (other person in mind; assurance approach), whereas the other person chooses that particular relationship for advice (self/both in mind; shared task approach) because he/she wants to maintain in contact and do some kind of task with that person, which will in turn re-assure both people in the relationship that the relationship is still healthy. The researcher believes the previous explanation between the two advice

seeking approaches may explain the differences between males, i.e. shared task perspective, and females, i.e. assurance perspective.

Worry avoidance.

Nearly half of the females from the female group suggested that they practice worry avoidance when communicating with a parent via IM. The common use of worry avoidance encourages the researcher because it re-emphasizes the need to introduce worry avoidance into the RMB field of study. The researcher believes female college freshmen, as a whole, probably understand how difficult it is for parents to be so far away from their young college student. Parents (stereotypically) have a strong desire to protect their children. Yet when children move away from home, a parent's desire to protect their young one proves more challenging to fulfill. The desire to protect one's child mixed with the realization of being miles and miles away, will no doubt encourage parents to worry about their young college student's well being. Female college freshmen, that understand parents struggle with worry, will most likely make efforts to reduce the parent's stress concerning the well being of their child, as well as avoid any messages that will cause their parents any additional worry.

Openness and shared tasks.

The two least common RMB among females in the female group were openness and shared tasks. Due to various changes occurring in the female college freshmen's life, conversations dealing specifically with openness may be difficult for female college freshmen to initiate. It is possible females believe the sensitivity necessary to self disclose feelings about the status of the relationship may require a more personal method of expression, *e.g*. FtF, telephone, etc. Females will most likely choose a communication

medium that will offer more communication cues than IM. Other forms of communication may also appear to be more useful for other RMB, such as shared tasks.

Johnson's (2001) research concerning LDR and shared tasks prove accurate in the present study. One female participant, from Study 3, stated that she and her parents work on schoolwork together. She offered, "editing English work" as an example for shared tasks she practices with her parents. This female student's example re-emphasizes the possibility of sharing tasks via IM, despite geographical dispersion. The researcher believes there may be at least two explanations why shared tasks fell among the least common RMB practiced via IM.

First, IM has various limitations. Most specifically, IM is purely a text medium. Therefore, users are limited to discussion and/or textual work. Limitations set by IM may reduce the incentive to use IM as a medium for shared tasks. A second reason may deal with autonomy. As college freshmen enter into the college lifestyle, they may feel a specific desire to be more independent, as opposed to when they lived at home. That is to say, college freshmen will most likely be required to act more independently than they did when they were at home (Zirkel, 1992). Therefore, a female college freshman may try to handle more situations on her own, as opposed to when she lived at home, under the "roof" of her parents.

Male Results Discussion

Social networks.

Results for the males in the male group were slightly different. Like the females in the female group, social networks ranked as the most common RMB among the males in the male group. The researcher believes the same explanations given for the females in

the female group, such as homesickness, uncertainty, responsibility, common interests, may apply to the males in the male group. However, unlike the females, positivity did not tie social networks as the most common RMB initiated by the males in the male group. Positivity actually ranked as the fourth most common RMB initiated by the males in the male group that communicate with a parent via IM.

The researcher agrees with Wood (as cited in Stafford et at. 2000) who suggests that males might be more task minded than females, and females might be more relational minded than males. For males, discussing social networks is a task that needs to be done. Males may view social networks as a responsibility necessary to maintain relationships, either with the parent corresponding via IM, or with the members in whom the male and parent discuss. Had positivity appeared to be more common amongst the males in the male group, the researcher would have had different conclusions.

Advice seeking.

Advice seeking ranked as the second most common behavior initiated by males from the male group. The researcher believes this also gives sufficient evidence to suggest that males are task driven even in relationships. There was only four percent difference between social networks (63%) and advice seeking (59%) for the males in the male group. However, for the females in the female group, the difference between social networks (84%) and advice seeking (65%) was nearly five times greater than it was for the males. The researcher believes the difference between the male and female group's results imply that females are more relation driven than males concerning social networks.

Worry avoidance.

The third most common RMB among the males in the male group was worry avoidance. Fifty percent claimed to practice worry avoidance. Once again, the common use of worry avoidance encourages the researcher, because the high percentage of commonality re-emphasizes the need to introduce worry avoidance into the RMB field of study. Male college freshmen, as a whole, probably understand how difficult it is for parents to be so far away from their young college freshmen child. Parents (stereotypically) have a strong desire to protect their children. Yet when children move away from home, a parent's desire to protect their young one proves more challenging. The desire to protect one's child mixed with the realization of being miles and miles away, will no doubt encourage parents to worry about their young college student's well being. The male college freshmen who understand parents struggle with worry may make efforts to reduce the parent's stress concerning the well being of their child, as well as avoid any messages that will cause their parents any additional worry.

The researcher would like to consider another possible explanation. Based on the student's testimony from Study 1, the researcher suspects that college freshmen may have ulterior motives for practicing worry avoidance. College freshman may practice worry avoidance hoping to eliminate parental nagging (Caughlin, 2004), which possibly develops from the variable of geographical dispersion. One student from Study 1 stated, "You got to be careful what you say, because my mom is like…worries so much. She is like always right here, like nagging and nagging trying to make sure that everything is going perfect." From this testimony, the researcher suspects college freshmen practice

worry avoidance in order to prevent nagging (which will most likely have negative relational consequences) and sustain the relationship.

Geographical dispersion creates many challenges for relationships. For instance, geographical dispersion limits parents to conversation only, and prevents any presence of physical nonverbal expression, such as finger waving, "the look," etc. Parents may strive to verbally encourage their children to "do this" or "do that;" which in turn, may take the appearance of nagging. The researcher believes college freshmen dislike feeling "nagged" by their parents. Thus, college students avoid topics/descriptions that may cause such conversations, in order to avoid nagging.

Positivity.

The fourth most common RMB among male college freshmen was positivity. The researcher believes the same reasons given to explain a female's use of positivity, such as females being empathetic, optimistic, etc., may also be offered for some males as well. However, the researcher believes the most likely reason males practice positivity is not due to feelings of unity and compassion, but possibly due to image, as described in McQuillen (2003). Males (stereotypically) are concerned with being admired and respected. The ability to appear "perfect" (as suggested by McQuillen, 2003) creates an opportunity and incentive for males to practice positivity via IM when interacting with a parent.

Assurance, openness, and shared tasks.

The least common RMB initiated by males in the male group were assurance, openness, and shared task. Only thirty one percent of the males from the male group admitted to practicing these behaviors when interacting with a parent via IM. The

researcher believes the low percentages for openness and assurance provide evidence suggesting that males are not as concerned as females in expressing feelings or discussing the nature of the college-parent relationship. The suggestion that males lack a desire to express detailed feelings concerning the relationship, could also explain why positivity did not rank as high in the male group as it did in the female group. Conversations entwined with assurance and openness may be too intense and too in depth for males to practice via IM. Males may believe other mediums are more appropriate to discuss assurance and openness, as opposed to IM.

The researcher was surprised by the low percentage offered for shared tasks within the male group. Only thirty-one percent of the males in the male group testified to sharing tasks with a parent via IM. An explanation for this finding could relate to the explanation given for the females in the female group. Males, like female college students, may be seeking ways to step out from underneath their parents guidance, and may strive to do some things/tasks on their own. In other words, the researcher believes male college freshmen may possibly wish to behave independently when conducting tasks. Sigmon, Stanton, and Snyder (1995) mirror this conclusion by suggesting that men typically take active roles in problem solving, without necessarily seeking aid from others. Thus, the researcher believes Sigmon, Stanton, and Snyder's study reflects the results found in the present study.

The researcher of the present project does not believe a males desire to act independently robs him of opportunities to seek advice, nor does he believe seeking advice robs the male college freshmen of opportunities for working independently. Although the presence of advice seeking and shared tasks may affect the use of either

RMB, the researcher believes either behavior is not dependent on the other. That is to say, the researcher believes advice seeking is not dependent on shared tasks, and shared tasks is not dependent on advice seeking. Advice seeking and shared tasks are two independent RMB that may influence each other, but are not dependent on each other.

Comparison between All Three Studies

The researcher from Study 1 briefly looked at how frequently college freshmen mentioned certain behaviors. The researcher deducted from his observation that college freshmen probably rarely engage in assurance and openness. One particular male in Study 1 stated he rarely talked to his dad about their relationship. He referred to conversations about their relationship as "intense." The researcher believes discussions filled with assurance and openness may generate intensity, because those in the relationship probably care deeper about the relationship than expected. Study 3 reaffirmed that assurance and openness are not as commonly practiced amongst males, but it did not provide any reasons why.

In Study 3, the researcher realized assurance and openness were the least common RMB initiated by males in the male group. However, results for females were slightly different. The females in the female group practiced assurance nearly twice as much as openness. Researchers believe females probably are more willing to comfort their parent with gentle words of assurance than openly discussing how they feel about the relationship. This may explain why assurance ranked so common in the female group while openness did not rank as common within the female group.

In Study 2, the researcher hoped to identify if college freshmen communicate with at least one parent via IM. Study 2 and Study 3 had very similar results. Study 2

suggested twenty-seven percent of the college freshmen surveyed correspond via IM with at least one parent on a regular basis, while twenty-six percent of the college freshmen in Study 3 testified to practicing at least one RMB, while interacting with at least one parent via IM. The difference between Study 2 and Study 3 is just one percent.

Study 2 also addresses the difference between biological sexes and IM use. Study 2 illustrated little differences between the two sexes. According to Study 2, twenty-nine percent (29%) of the males from the male group claimed to correspond with at least one parent via IM; while, twenty-five percent (25%) of the females in the female group claimed to correspond with at least one parent via IM. However, in Study 3, twenty-two percent (22%) of the males in the male group communicate with at least one parent via IM; while, twenty-nine percent (29%) of the females in the female group claimed to communicate with at least one parent via IM. Either way, both studies suggest that nearly one in every four college freshmen communicate with at least one parent via IM, despite whether they are male or female.

After further analysis of Study 3, researchers discovered that the two most common RMB practiced among females resembled “relational sensitive behaviors”, such as social networks and positivity; while, the two most common behaviors among the males related to “task minded behaviors”, such as social networks and advice seeking. The researcher believes social networks can be used for both relational sensitive behaviors and task minded behaviors; therefore, the distinguishing RMB used to suggest possible incentives for certain RMB use would be positivity and advice seeking. Thus, the researcher believes these results suggest that males may view RMB as a responsibility necessary to maintain a relationship; while females practice RMB to fulfill a relationship.

The ranking order from most common RMB practiced by females to the least common RMB practiced by females, may provide sufficient evidence for the implication that males see RMB as task oriented and females see RMB as relational oriented.

In light of the present study, several significant discoveries can be summarized. All three studies suggest that college freshmen desire to maintain relationships with their parents. Study 2 and Study 3 verify a significant number of college freshmen (22%-29%) use IM to correspond with their parents. Study 1 and Study 3 suggest assurance and openness may be difficult for college freshmen to initiate, because of the intensity that emerges from carrying out such an action. However, Study 1 also suggests that when college freshmen initiate assurance and openness the relationship is strengthened. And finally, Study 1 and Study 3 re-emphasize the importance of adding worry avoidance to the RMB field, as a possible RMB. Although these discoveries are beneficial to the communication field, several limitations in the present study must be acknowledged.

Limitations & Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of Study 1 involved gathering information concerning the relational maintenance behaviors college freshman use to maintain relationships with their parents. In Study 2, the researcher hoped to identify if college freshmen interact with at least one parent via IM. Finally, Study 3 addressed, which RMB college freshmen commonly initiate when interacting with at least one parent via IM. Being a college freshman was the only common requirement participants in all three studies were required to fulfill. However, in Study 1 and Study 3, participants were required to communicate with at least one parent. Many variables may have affected the previous results. Thus, it is necessary for the researcher to present the variables that possibly affected the present project, as

well as the possible variables that may affect future studies concerning RMB and college freshmen-parent relationships.

Limitations

Age Limitations

Although it can be assumed that first year college students range between ages eighteen and twenty-one, this is not always the case. Many adults, after working several years in business, homemaker, etc., enroll in college to earn a college degree. It can be insightfully assumed that relationships between relatively young college students, ranging from ages eighteen to twenty-four years old, will be drastically different in comparison to relatively older college students, ranging from ages twenty-four years old and older, and their parents. The age variable may have influenced present results for the present project.

Culture Limitation

The researcher did not consider each student's cultural background or the affects such differences may have had on the present project. Although all three studies were extracted from an accredited east coast university in the United States, it cannot be assumed that all participants share a common cultural background. Students from all over the world enroll in United State's universities. The vast variety of intercultural students creates an interesting pool of students to pull from for research. Since culture affects relational perspectives, the researcher feels responsible to address, cultural differences may have affected the present results for Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3 of the present project.

Number of Participants Limitation

The number of participants varied for all three studies. In Study 1, the researcher conducted a small focus group to explore possible RMB that may emerge in college freshmen-parent relationships. The small focus group consisted of seven freshmen. Although seven is a sufficient number for an exploratory study, the researcher believes other RMB behaviors may have evolved in the discussion had the number of participants been greater.

Study 2 and Study 3 both consisted of nearly two hundred college freshmen. The researcher does not aim to establish that the present results are sufficient to establish a universal stereotype for college freshmen interacting with at least one parent. The researcher only hopes to offer evidence pointing to possible RBM that may occur in the college freshmen-parent relationship. The researcher believes the number of participants for all three studies were appropriate for accomplishing the task at hand. However, it is possible that the number of participants for the present project may have affected the final results.

Biological Sex/Gender Limitation

A fourth limitation to the present project, involves gender differences. Modern studies are starting to look past biological sex differences, and are starting to explore the differences between masculine and feminine genders (Stafford, Dainton, & Haas, 2000). For instance, males can be feminine and females can be masculine. These personalities traits/gender, such as masculine and feminine, despite the biological sex differences, could easily affect the interpretation of Study 2 and Study 3. The researcher of the present project limited themselves to only exploring the differences between the

biological sexes—male and female. The results for the present project may have varied, had the researcher explored the gender differences among all of the participants.

Methodology Limitation

Finally, the methodologies used to collect the data for all three studies also created certain limitations. One focus group and two mass surveys were used to collect their data. Participants, data collection, and the results of the data all depended on the method used to conduct the research. The researcher believes similar results would emerge, if future scholars choose to use other methods to extract information concerning college freshmen-parent relationships and RMB, specifically if these inquiries explore RMB practiced via CMC.

Failed Attempt at Study 3

Not every attempt in conducting Study 3 was successful. The researcher originally planned a six-step process, designed to gather IM written between college freshmen and their parents. The following information lays out the steps the researcher had hoped to take and the methodology the researcher had originally planned to achieve. These steps may be useful for future studies in the field of RMB practiced via CMC.

The first step involved locating college freshmen that communicate with at least one parent via IM. The researcher attempted locating these college freshmen by handing out a brief survey. The survey focuses on two main questions: “Do you IM at least one parent?” and “What is your email address?”(Appendix A). Surveys were distributed among eight different speech classes at an accredited east coast university, and then recollected so the researcher could locate possible participants. The first step was

successful. Out of the two hundred surveys, the researcher collect fifty surveys with an adequate supply of participants meeting the Study 3 requirements.

Step two involved contacting the possible participants and requesting that they attend one of two meetings. Each meeting would brief the students on the researcher's project, as well as answer any questions participants might have concerning the project, confidentiality, methodology, etc. The researcher contacted possible participants via email and informed them of the two possible times meetings could be attended. No one came to either meeting. Thus, step two was unsuccessful.

In step three, the researcher intended to instruct college freshmen to save as many IM messages, shared between themselves and their parent, as possible, during a three-week period. Saving the IM message would be the most challenging step, because college freshmen are commonly overwhelmed with various responsibilities, *e.g.* adjusting to college life, making friends, attending parties, conducting studies, etc. Step three had to be accomplished in order to complete the original plan for Study 3.

IM messages were to be copied and saved by college freshmen for three weeks for two reasons. First, the researcher needed IM samples to analyze. And second, in order to fulfill all requirements set by the Institute Research Board (IRB), the researcher could not collect IM messages until all participants (including parents) authorized the researcher permission to analyze the IM messages. The researcher faced a specific challenge (concerning the second reason) requesting parent's permission, because parents might alter certain RMB if forewarned the details of the present project. The only way the researcher could collect IM between parents and college freshmen without risking parents altering any RMB would be to trust the college freshmen participants to copy, save, and

hold IM between their parents and themselves for three weeks. After the three weeks pass, the researcher would be able to present the project and purpose of the project to the possible participating parents without fear of each parent altering his or her behavior. Step four would consist of gaining the approval from the possible participating parents.

The researcher believed if parents have the technological "know-how" in IM use, then parents would possibly also obtain skills in using email. In step four, the researcher intended to compose a brief email fully describing the project, the studies validity, and reasons why step three was necessary in forming the methodology. Also, in the email, the researcher would assure the possible participating parents that all participants, meaning the participating college freshmen and participating parents, would remain anonymous. The researcher acknowledges that IM is personal and therefore should be kept private. Step five provides an explanation for how the researcher planned to ensure confidentiality, and at the same time how the researcher planned to decipher which participants use RMB in IM between college freshmen and their parents.

In step five, the researcher intended to collect all IM saved by the participating college freshmen. IM would be collected via email. Upon receiving the data, the researcher would immediately reassign Greek alphabet letters to each participating member, *e.g.* alpha1, alpha 2, beta 1, beta 2, etc., in place of each person's real or "sign-name." Each Greek alphabet letter would permanently replace the participants name throughout the remainder of the study. The researcher intended to destroy all links to any and all participants within the first twenty-four hours to ensure complete participant confidentiality.

The sixth and final step would involve coding and decoding the IM. Step six would possibly prove to be the most challenging for the researcher, for a new coding system would have to be developed. The researcher decided to use the new college freshmen-parent RMB typology, which was developed in Study 1, as well as adding an eighth category, which the researcher labeled as "other", to guide him through the decoding phase of step six. Therefore, the researcher would look to eight particular categories/RMB: positivity, openness, assurance, social networks, shared tasks, advice seeking, worry avoidance, and "other." From these eight categories, the researcher would read through all IM and identify which behaviors seem to appear the least and which behaviors appear the most. The researcher hoped the results from Study 3 would strengthen evidence presented in Study 1, concerning worry avoidance and advice seeking.

Results from all six steps would be gathered and presented to illustrate the necessity for more research concerning technology and the presence of interpersonal communication, specifically RMB. The researcher had hoped results would create strong evidence defending the presence of RMB via the CMC of IM. The researcher also hoped the results from Study 3 would offer parents a clearer understanding concerning communication practices within the college freshmen-parent relationship.

As stated before, the original attempt for Study 3 failed. The researcher of the present project wishes to encourage future researcher to attempt the original methodology for Study 3. The researcher believes the original approach would provide an interesting perspective concerning RMB in the CMC field, as well as create a stronger defense

supporting certain RMB practiced via IM, specifically with the college freshmen-parent relationship.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of the present project was to gather information concerning the RMB freshman use to maintain relationships with their parents, particularly via the use of IM. Although the researcher made attempts to narrow down the variables used to explore RMB within the college freshmen-parent relationship, several variables need to be considered in future research.

Parent's Biological Sex/Gender

Future studies should consider the parents biological sex/gender in the college freshmen-parent relationship. That is to say, the parent's biological sex/gender will play a significant role in the RMB initiated by their college freshmen child. Therefore, the present project leaves room to question, " How does the biological sex/gender of the parent and child, *e.g.* between son-father, son-mother, daughter-father, and daughter-mother, play a part in RMB practices?" Future research should consider concentrating specifically on the effects of biological sex/gender and freshmen's RMB directed toward parents.

Also concerning the college freshmen-parent relationship, the researcher believes the parent's parenting style may affect RMB. Trice (2006) conducted a study on first semester college students' email to parents concerning the frequency and content of the emails in relation to different parenting styles. According to Trice, parenting styles, such as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, do affect communication in the college

freshmen-parent relationship. Future studies should address the parenting style variable in relation to IM use.

Studying RMB duration would also benefit the RMB field. Two possible approaches could be taken concerning this suggestion. First, future studies could evaluate how long certain behaviors last in conversation. For instance, "How long do dyads usually practice openness before changing subjects?" The first perspective on RMB duration would greatly benefit Burgoon's theory on Expectancy Violation theory.

A second perspective concerning duration involves the use of RMB throughout the life of a relationship. The researcher believes relationships are constantly fluctuating due to inside and outside influences. As far as scholars know, the affects of change in RMB use throughout the lifespan of a relationship would provide an element of depth to the field of RMB that has not been addressed in previous research.

The present project explores common RMB practiced by college freshmen that communicate with at least one parent via IM. However, the present study only explores the college freshmen-parent relationship. The researcher suspects that the college student-parent relationship fluctuates drastically throughout the college student's academic career, and therefore other years may differ concerning RMB use. Future studies should explore the differences in RMB use in comparison to academic status.

In Study 1, the researcher discovered two new perspectives on RMB, that is advice seeking and worry avoidance. However in Study 3 and after further contemplation on the RMB initiated by college freshmen in college freshmen-parent relationships, the researcher may have discovered a third RMB, which emerged from social networks. People often initiate conversations concerning common interests, *e.g.*

sports, hobbies, etc. It is possible discussing common interest can help maintain relationships. After all, people gravitate toward the things/issues they enjoy. Future studies should explore the role and presence of common interests in the field of RMB. Other possible RMB may involve: humor, small talk, and affiliations (such as politics, religion, etc.).

Finally in dealing specifically with RMB, future studies should consider exploring cultural background differences, age, family size, birth order of child, RMB toward parents in relation to RMB practiced toward other mentors, *e.g*. teachers, legal guardians, ministers, etc., and the methodologies used to gather such information. Such variables may provide interesting insight into the field of RMB.

The researcher of the present project also wishes to address some suggestions for future research in the area of RMB and technology. The present project specifically explored RMB practiced via IM. If the researcher had opened the study to a broader range of CMC methods, than the results may have varied. Future studies should consider the new types of technology, which are continually gaining popularity in today's society. For instance, the researcher could explore "Avartar", "Webcam", and "Skype." Both "Avartar" and "Webcam" provide non-verbal cues that may affect RMB use. Many of these variables remain unstudied. In presenting the previous variables, the researcher of the present project simply wants to encourage future studies to identify answers to questions that need to be addressed.

Conclusion

The present study provides insight concerning possible relational maintenance behaviors (RMB) college freshmen may initiate when communicating with a parent via

IM. In addressing this topic, the researcher divided the present study into three studies. Study 1 addressed possible RMB within the college freshmen-parent relationship. Study 2 addressed if college freshmen correspond with at least one parent via IM. And Study 3 addressed which RMB from Study 1 were most common in college freshmen-parent interactions via IM. The researcher observed seven RMB in Study 1: openness, assurance, social networks, positivity, shared tasks, advice seeking and worry avoidance. Nearly 27% of the college freshmen surveyed in Study 2, communicate with at least one parent via IM. Finally, in Study 3, social networks ranked the most common RMB while shared tasks and openness ranked the least common RMB practiced via IM.

The present project is beneficial for many reasons. First, the present project provides evidence that worry avoidance occurs within relationships and should be considered as an additional RMB for RMB typologies. Second, evidence is presented to strongly suggest that both college freshmen and parents use IM to maintain relationships. Third, illustrating common RMB initiated by college freshmen provides insight for parents and scholars concerning college freshmen's attempts to maintain relationships. Fourth, results from Study 3 provide evidence suggesting that males and females may use different behaviors when attempting to maintain relationships. Finally, the present project is an exploratory analysis, and therefore creates a need for further research in the field of RMB and CMC.

Appendix A

Communication Survey

1. Do you communicate with at least one parent via Instant Messaging (on the computer)? Yes No

2. If yes, how frequently during the week do you communicate with a parent via Instant Messaging?
    a. 1-2 times a week _____
    b. 3-4 times a week _____
    c. 5-7 times a week _____
    d. More than 7 times a week _____

3. Are you male or female? Male Female

4. What is your email address? (Please write clearly and legibility)

    _____

    Thank you for your help and participation! You Rock!

Appendix B

Relational Maintenance Behaviors

1. **Openness-** includes directly discussing the nature of the relationship and disclosing ones desires for the relationship
   Example- "I wish we could spend more time together. You need to call me more often."

2. **Assurances-** are messages that stress an individual's continuation in the relationship.
   Example- "I will always be here for you. We will have plenty of time to catch up when I get back home."

3. **Positivity-** involves interacting with the partner in a cheerful, optimistic, and uncritical manner.
   Example- "I know you're doing great. You are so talented and hardworking."

4. **Sharing Tasks-** requires partners to perform responsibilities specific to the relationship.
   Example**- "**Can you help me with my taxes this year? I can put in a good word for you with …"

5. **Social Networks-** involve both relational partners interacting with or relying on common affiliations and relationships.
   Example- "How's the family (brother, sister, other parent, etc.). doing? How's the church?"

6. **Advice Seeking-** involves asking/seeking advice for certain situations or problems.
   Example- "I am really aggravated with (any topic...money, grades, relationships, etc.). What can I do to resolve this problem? Any suggestions?"

7. **Worry Avoidance-** involves "watering-down" (skipping details or not fully describing) situations or stories so others will not get worried. Sometimes it may even involve avoiding topics (unhealthy relationships, illness, grades, etc.)..
   Examples- Someone who is struggling with grades (even failing) might state, "My grades are fine. I mean they're not perfect, but I'm actually doing pretty good."

Instant Messaging Survey

Use the key, which explains the seven relational maintenance behaviors, to answer the following questions.

1. Do you discuss the nature of your relationship with your parent while communicating with your parent during IM chats? (Openness)
   Yes No
   Please give an example

2. Do you assure your parent about the existence and continuation of your relationship him/her during IM chats? (Assurance)
   Yes No
   Please give an example

3. Do you positively encourage each other during IM chats? (Positivity)
   Yes No
   Please give an example

4. Do you work on projects with your parent during IM chats? (Shared Task)
   Yes No
   Please give an example
5. Do you discuss shared relationships (family, church, friends, etc.). with your parent during IM chats? (Social Networks)
   Yes No
   Please give an example

6. Do you seek advice from your parents during IM chats? (Advice Seeking)
   Yes No
   Please give an example

7. Do you water-down troublesome events in your life during IM chats, so your parent does not worry? (Worry Avoidance)
   Yes No
   Please give an example

On a scale of one (being the greatest) to seven (being the least), please rate these behaviors based on how often they occur in your IM chats with your parent.

Openness	___	Assurance	___
Positivity	___	Sharing Tasks	___
Social Networks	___	Advice Seeking	___
Worry Avoidance	___		

E-mailing Survey

Use the key, which explains the seven relational maintenance behaviors, to answer the following questions.

8. Do you discuss the nature of your relationship with your parent while communicating with your parent via E-mail? (Openness)
   Yes No
   Please give an example

9. Do you assure your parent about the existence and continuation of your relationship him/her via E-mail? (Assurance)
   Yes No
   Please give an example

10. Do you positively encourage each your parent through E-mail? (Positivity)
    Yes No
    Please give an example

11. Do you work on projects with your parent via E-mail? (Shared Task)
    Yes No
    Please give an example

12. Do you discuss shared relationships (family, church, friends, etc.). with your parent through E-mail? (Social Networks)
    Yes No
    Please give an example

13. Do you seek advice from your parents through E-mail? (Advice Seeking)
    Yes No
    Please give an example

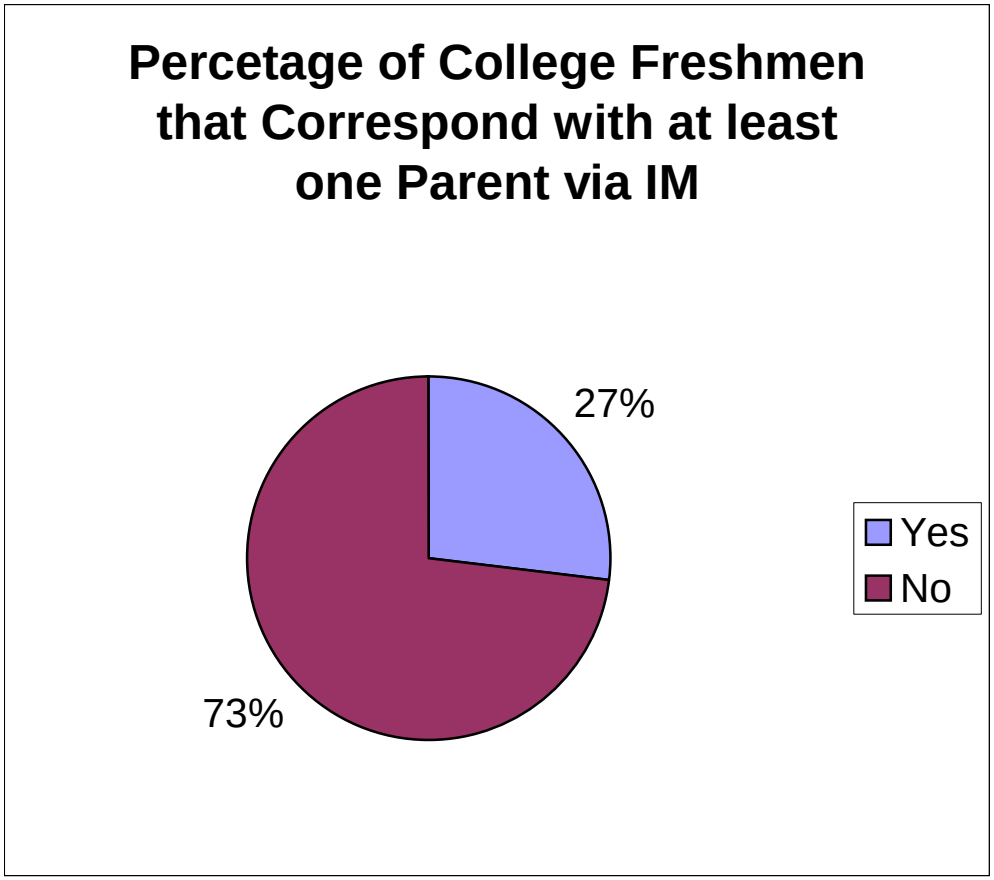
14. In E-mails to your parent, do you water-down troublesome events in your life, so your parent will not worry? (Worry Avoidance)
    Yes No
    Please give an example

On a scale of one (being the greatest) to seven (being the least), please rate these behaviors based on how often they occur in your IM chats with your parent.

Openness	___	Assurance	___
Positivity	___	Sharing Tasks	___
Social Networks	___	Advice Seeking	___
Worry Avoidance	___		

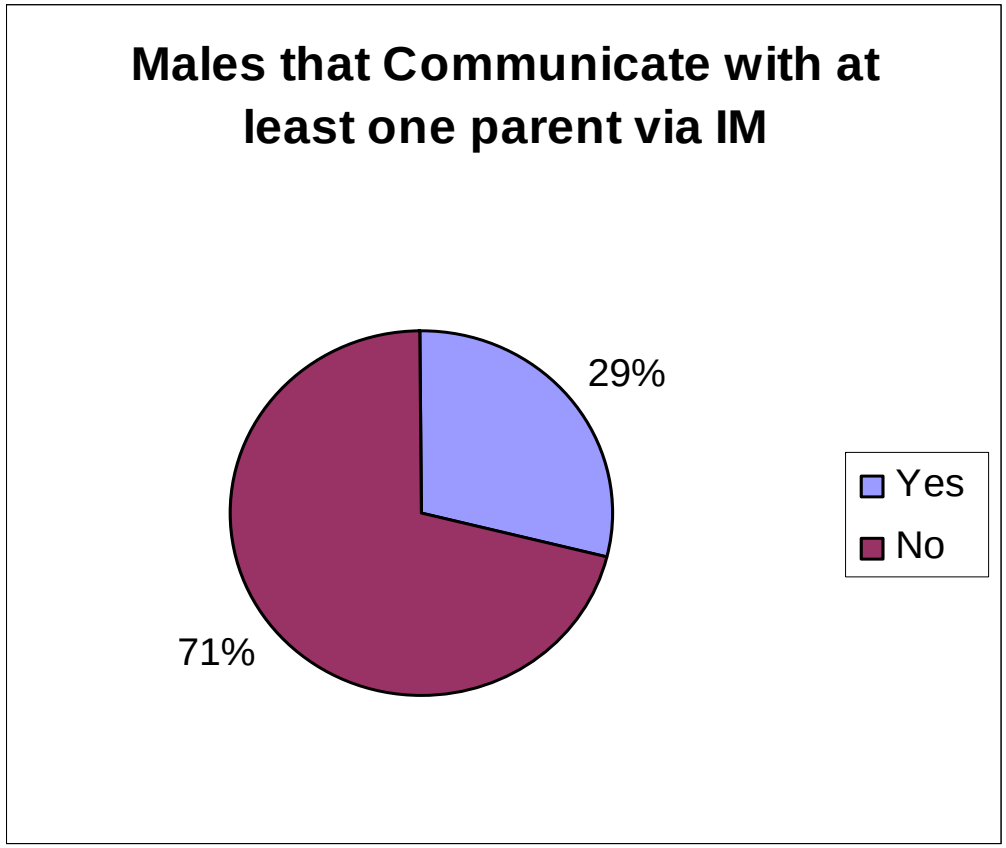
Appendix C

Graph 1



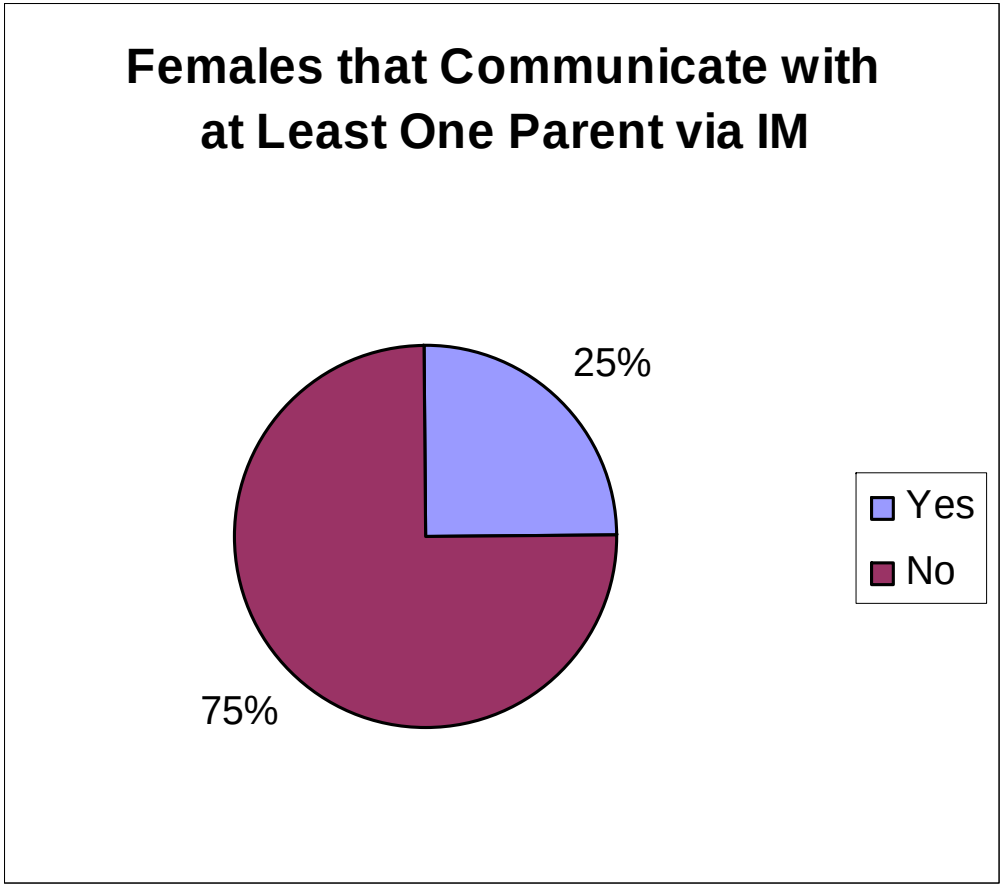
Appendix D

Graph 2



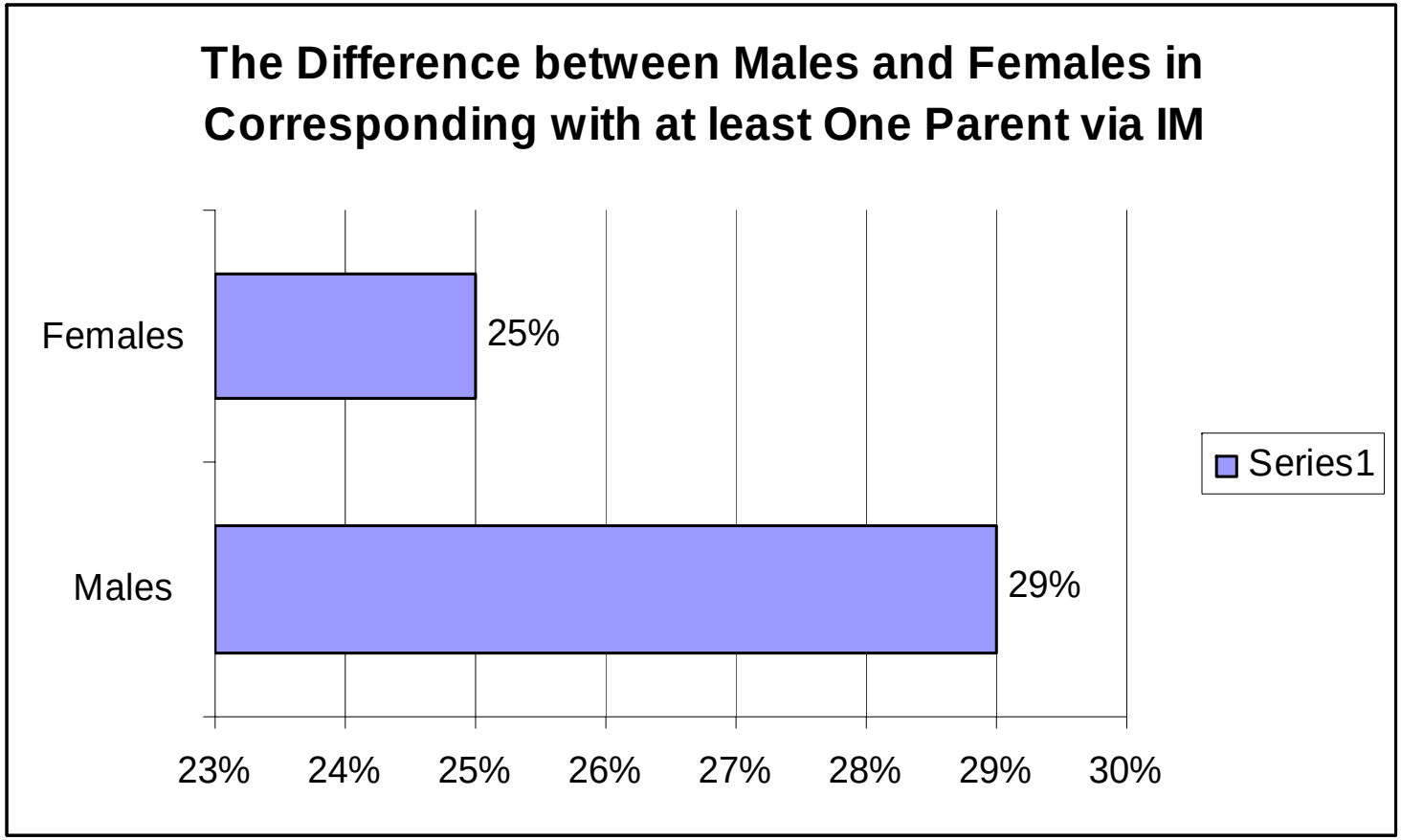
Appendix E

Graph 3



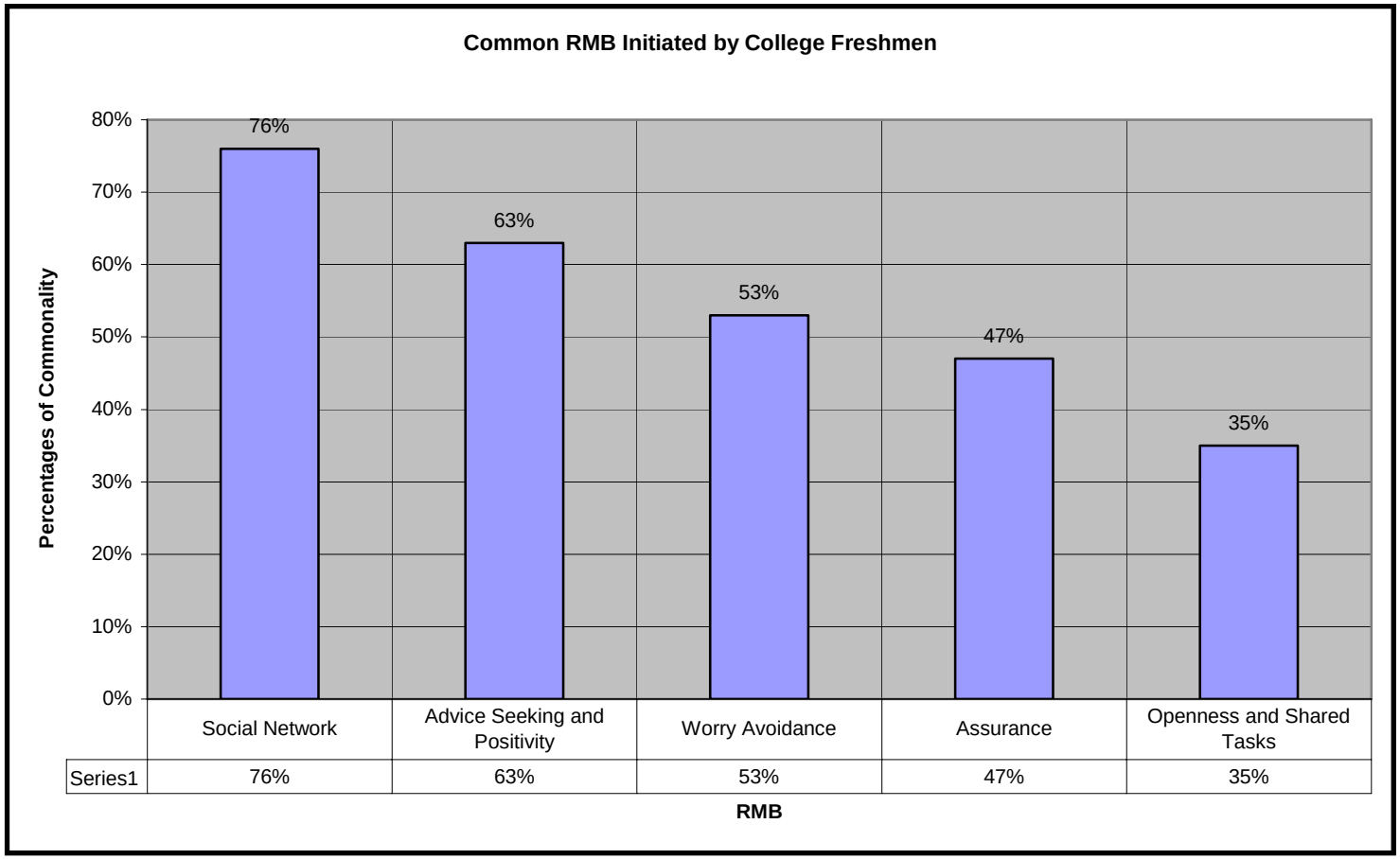
Appendix F

Graph 4



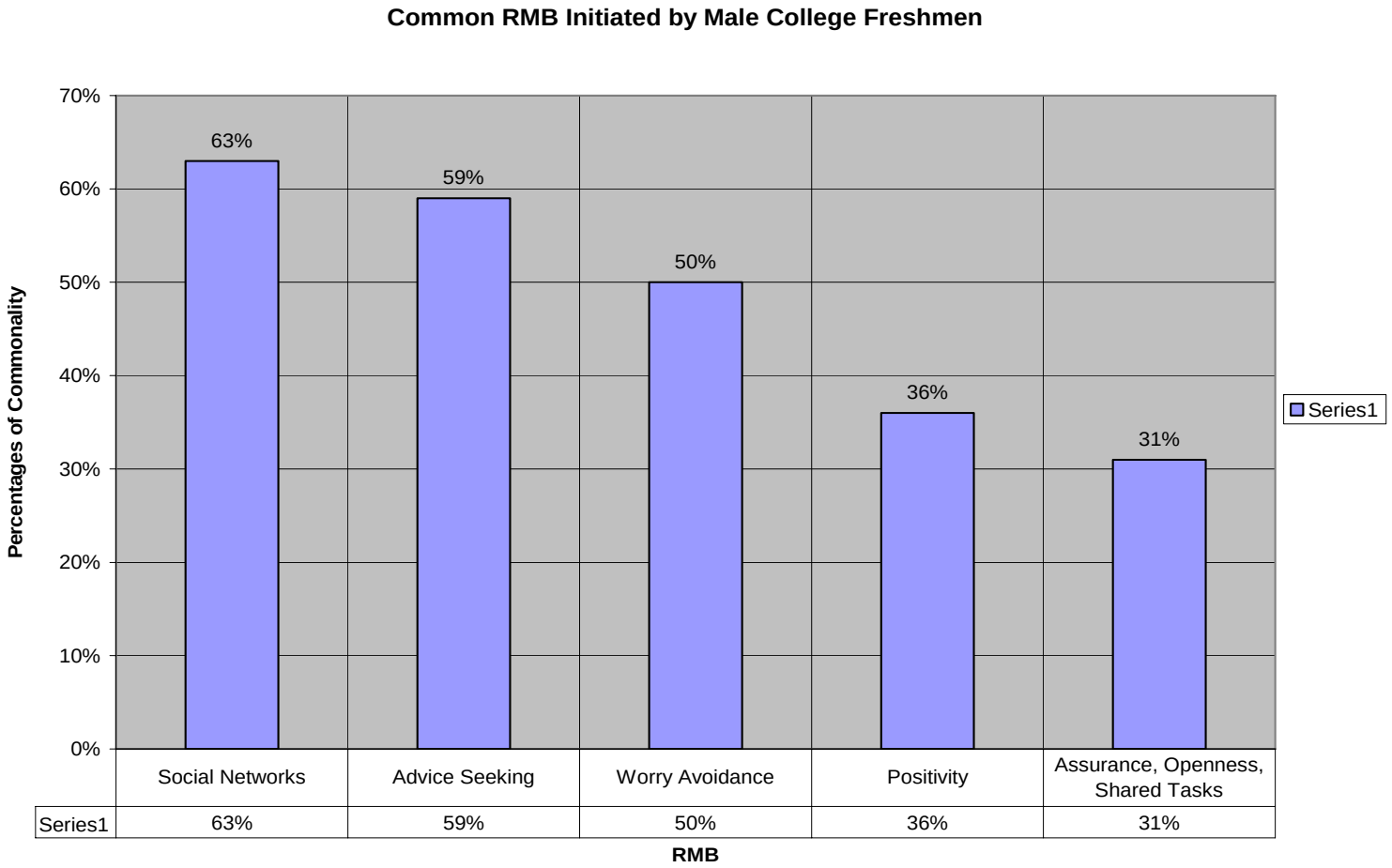
Appendix G

Graph 5



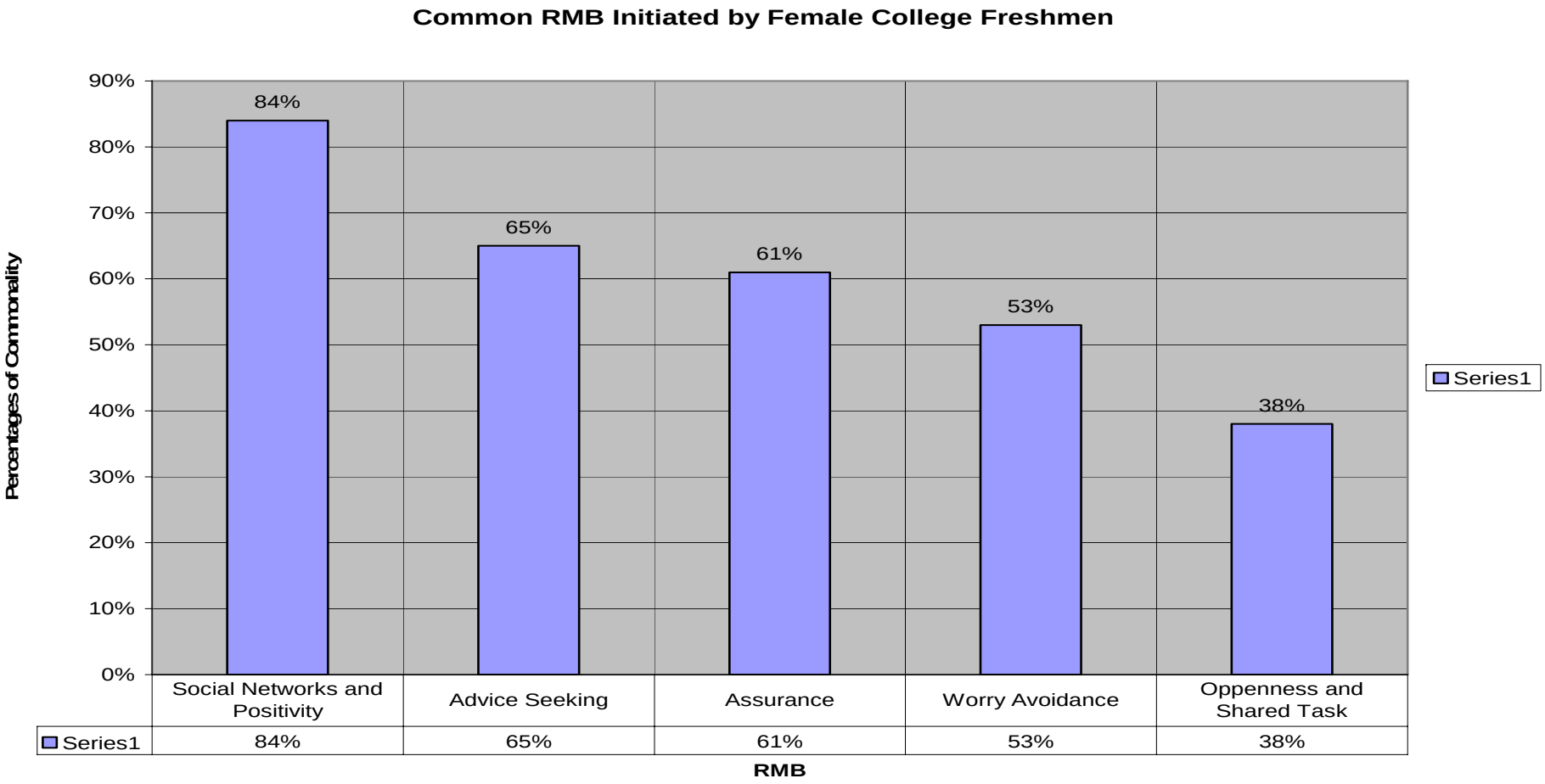
Appendix H

Graph 6



Appendix I

Graph 7



References

Aylor, B., & Dainton, M. (2004). Biological sex and psychological gender as predictors of routine and strategic relational maintenance. *Sex Roles*. *50*. 689-697.

Belle, D., Burr, R., & Cooney, J. Boys and girls as social support theorists. *Sex Roles.* 17, 657-665.

Canary, D. J. & Stafford L. (1992) Relational maintenance strategies and equity in marriage. *Communication MonoAppendixs,* 59, 244-267.

Canary, D. J., L. Stafford, K. S. Hause, & L. A. Wallace. (1993). An inductive analysis of relational maintenance strategies: A comparison among lovers, relatives, friends, and others. *Communication Research Reports,* 10, 5-14.

Canary, D. J., & Stafford, L. (1994). Maintaining relationships through strategic and routine interaction. In D.J. Canary and L. Stafford (Eds)., *Communication and Relational Maintenance* (pp. 1-22). New York: Academic Press

Caughlin, J. P. & Malis, R. (2004). Demand/Withdraw communication between parents and adolescents as a correlate of relational satisfaction. *Communication Reports*. 17.

Dainton, M., & Aylor, B. (2002). Patterns of communication channel use in the maintenance of long-distance relationships. *Communication Research Reports,* 19, 118-129.

Dindia, K. & Canary, D. J. (1993). Defintions and theoretical perspectives on maintaing relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 4, 163-173.*

Gradis, M. (2003). Seniors and friendship formation online. *Conference Papers—International Communication Association: 2003 Annual Meeting*. San Diego, CA. 1-24.

Guerrero, L. K. & Chavez, A. M. (2005). Relational maintenance in cross-sex friendships characterized by different types of romantic intent: An exploratory study. *Western Journal of Communication*, 69, 339-358.

Hwang, H. (2005). Predictors of Instant Messaging: Gratifications sought, gratifications obtained, and social presence. *Conference Papers—International Communication Association; 2005 Annual Meeting*, New York, NY, 1-34.

Johnson, A. J. (2001) Examining the maintenance of friendships: Are there differences between geographically close and long-distance friendships? *Communication Quarterly*, 49, 424-435.

Johnson, G. M., Staton, A. Q., & Jorgensen-Earp, C. R. (1995). An ecological perspective on the transistion of new university freshmen. *Communication Education*, 44. 336-352.

Johnston, A. (2002). Mother, interrupted. *Maclean's*. 115, 60.

Jorgensen-Earp, C. R. & A. Q. Staton. (1993). Student metaphors for the college freshman experience. *Communication Education*. 42. 123-141.

Kim, I., Kawamura, A., Jerney-Davis, M., Kim, R., Raphael, D., & Lau, J. (2005) Relational maintenance during deployment: Communication between spouses. *Conference Papers—International Communication Association Annual Meeting 2005*. New York, NY. 1-21

McQuillen, J. S. (2003) The influence of technology on the Initiation of interpersonal relationships. *Education,* 123. 616-623.

Myers, S. A., & Webber, K. D.. (2004). Preliminary development of a measure of sibling relational maintenance behaviors: Scale development and initial findings. *Communication Quarterly,* 52, 334-346.

Myers, S. A., & Members of COM 200. (2001). Relative maintenance behaviors in the sibling relationship. *Communication Quarterly*, 49, 19-34.

O'Sullivan, P. B. (2000). What you don't know won't hurt me: Impression management functions of communication channels in relationships. *Human Communication Research*. 26. 403-431.

Ramirez, A. & Broneck, K. (2003). Instant messaging as relational maintenance and everyday communication. *Conference Papers—International Communication Association: 2003 Annual Meeting*. San Diego, CA. 1-41.

Relf, T. & Gates, T. (2002). Starters' odours… *Farmers Weekly*, 137, 86.

Sigmon, S. T., Stanton, A. L., & Snyder, C. R. (1995). Gender differences in coping: A further test of socialization and role constraint theories. *Sex Roles.* 33, 565-587.

Stafford, L., Dainton, M., & Haas S. (2000). Measuring routine and strategic relational maintenance: Scale revision, sex versus gender roles, and the prediction of relational characteristics. *Communication MonoAppendixs*, 67, 306-323.

Stafford, L. & Canary, D. J. (1991). Maintenance strategies and romantic relationship type, gender, and relational characteristics. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 8, 217-242.

Toussaint, L. & Webb, J. R. (2005). Gender differences in the relationship between empathy and forgiveness. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 6. 673-685.

Van Horn, K. R., Arnone, A., Nesbitt, K., Diselets, L., Sears, T., Giffin, M., & Brudi, R. (1997). Physical distance and interpersonal characteristics in college students' romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*. 4. 15-24.

Wright, K. (2004). On-Line relational maintenance strategies and perceptions of partners within exclusively internet-based and primarily internet-based relationships. *Communication Studies*, 55, 239-253.

Zirkel, S. (1992). Developing independence in a life transition: Investing the self in the concerns of the day. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*. 62. 506-521