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**AMBIGUITY IN PARENTS' DIVORCE-RELATED DISCLOSURES:  
EFFECTS OF SUPPORT EXPECTATIONS AND STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY  
ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING, RELATIONAL QUALITY, AND  
COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship has suggested that characteristics of parents' disclosures may offer unique insight into explaining the effects of divorce disclosures. And, while Communication Privacy Management theory posits that the strategy used to reveal private information may influence how the dyad renegotiates their privacy rules and privacy boundaries during periods of change, attention has not been given to specific strategies. Thus, the goals of this dissertation were to develop a context specific, self-report measure of strategic ambiguity, to extend CPM by developing strategic ambiguity as an indirect disclosure strategy, and to shed light on how strategic ambiguity may affect the parent and emerging adult children when discussing divorce-related issues.

Two studies were undertaken to achieve these three goals. The first study developed a measure of strategic ambiguity. Participants recalled a recent conversation with a parent about a problem at home and answered the 40 proposed items for the scale. Confirmatory factor analysis and reliability analysis were conducted to identify the best set of items to assess strategic ambiguity. The second study required parent-child dyads visit a communication lab to complete a series of questionnaires and discuss two divorce-related topics. Correlation, regression, and repeated measures analysis of variance analyses were conducted to test a series of hypotheses and a research question regarding the role of strategic ambiguity in parents' divorce-related disclosures.

Results for the two studies indicated that strategic ambiguity could be reliably and validly measured. Additionally, strategic ambiguity consistently predicted emerging adult children's adjustment outcomes. Tolerance for ambiguity was found to moderate the effects of strategic ambiguity for parents' relational quality and communication

satisfaction. However for offspring, tolerance for ambiguity had direct, rather than moderation, effects on adjustment. Parents' use and offspring's perceptions of strategic ambiguity did not differ from one another. Relational quality for parents and children was the most consistent postdivorce adjustment factor predicted by strategic ambiguity.

The results of Studies 1 and 2 are discussed with respect to how they helped contribute to achieving the methodological, theoretical, and empirical goals of the dissertation. The construction and testing of the strategic ambiguity measure provides a methodological advancement over prior means of examining disclosure. The inclusion of strategic ambiguity offers a useful explanatory tool for examining the effects of private disclosures on relational quality. Finally, strategic ambiguity has been shown to help explain the some of the effects of parent-to-child disclosures, although it did not aid in explaining the discrepant past findings regarding psychological well-being. Limitations and future direction are also discussed.

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## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Parents' divorce-related disclosures to their offspring provide parents the benefits of social support (Leslie & Grady, 1988; Richmond & Christensen, 2000) and disclosure (Pennebaker, 1990). The valence of parents' disclosures has helped to explain the divergent effects of parents' disclosures on children's postdivorce adjustment (T. D. Afifi, McManus, Hutchinson, & Baker, 2007; S. S. Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, Lee, & Escalante, 2004). Offspring reported that they did not desire to know all the information parents disclose to them (T. D. Afifi, 2003). However, without possessing some information, children perceived their parents as uncaring (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002) or untrustworthy (Thomas, Booth-Butterfield, Booth-Butterfield, 1995). In other words, the degree of strategic ambiguity, or the amount of detail, concreteness, and specificity in parents' disclosures, rather than the negativity of the disclosure that may explain the differential effects of that disclosure to the offspring.

Communication Privacy Management theory (CPM, Petronio, 1991; 2002) maintains that privacy boundaries, or the relational rules that define what and how relational partners share personal, intimate information with one another, are altered when life changes occur to meet the needs of the new situation (Petronio, 2002). In addition to maintaining or altering privacy boundaries, disclosure may be a coping strategy for managing divorce-related stress (T. D. Afifi, Hutchison, & Krouse, 2006; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Pennebaker, 1990; Petronio, 2002). Indeed, parents' and children's adjustment following divorce are interdependent and may be influenced by their communication encounters (T. D. Afifi, Huber, & Ohs, 2006; T. D.

Afifi et al., 2007). Family members generally benefit from social support following divorce (Holloway & Machida, 1991; Richmond & Christensen, 2000), and having expectations for social support within a family can help maintain family cohesion and manage stress (T. D. Afifi & Nussbaum, 2006).

The support family members receive through parental disclosures influence postdivorce adjustment. Parents cope effectively when they are able to express stressful experiences to their children (N. B. Miller, Smerglia, Gaudet, & Kitson, 1998; Nakonezny, Rodgers, & Nussbaum, 2003). Offspring may need some divorce-related information to minimize uncertainty (Thomas et al., 1995; Westberg, Nelson, & Piercy, 2002). Too much information, however, may be detrimental to offspring's postdivorce adjustment (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991; Cartwright & Seymour, 2002; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). For parents, assessing the adequacy of the information they reveal may be difficult. Parents' and children's perceptions of the divorce-related disclosures often differ (T. D. Afifi, 2003; Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, & Sturgess, 2001; Sandler, Wolchik & Braver, 1985). The effects of parents' divorce-related disclosures for offspring may be compounded by developmental transitions during emerging adulthood. In addition to divorce-related stress with which offspring in their late teens and twenties must cope, identity formations and renegotiations of autonomy from family become a major aspects of offsprings' lives (Arnett, 2000). While revealing private, stressful information may be beneficial for parents, emerging adult offspring may have a different experience with the disclosure.

The role of disclosure strategies in the divorce coping process is unknown. Recent scholarship has suggested that characteristics of parents' disclosures may offer unique

insight into explaining the effects of divorce-related disclosures (e.g., T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). Communication Privacy Management theory posits that the strategy used to reveal private information may influence how the dyad renegotiates their privacy rules and privacy boundaries during periods of change (Petronio, 2002). Indirect disclosure strategies may influence the renegotiation of privacy boundaries between parents and their children during the transitional periods families endure. Strategic ambiguity is an indirect disclosure strategy in which the message lacks of clarity and detail (Bavelas, 1983; Eisenberg, 1984). Parents may purposefully disclose ambiguously to conform to or alter relational expectations while meeting the child's information needs (Eisenberg; Petronio, 2002; Putnam & Sorenson, 1982).

The degree of strategic ambiguity in parents' disclosures may mediate how support expectations influence adjustment outcomes for both divorced parents and their emerging adult children. Parents' support expectations may influence the degree of specificity and directness parents decide to include in divorce-related information revealed to their offspring. Additionally, the child's support expectations may influence how ambiguous they perceive their parents' disclosures. Research regarding offsprings' adjustment to divorce have had discrepant findings. While some of this may be explained by the diversity in developmental periods among offspring included, findings may also be due to the children's desire to not possess certain family- and divorce-related information (T. D. Afifi & Schrodt, 2003b). Thus, the degree of strategic ambiguity in the divorce-related disclosures may influence parents' and emerging adult children's psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction.

Given the potential role of strategic ambiguity and the existing literature on information regulation in postdivorce families, this dissertation will contribute to the communication field in three primary ways: methodologically, theoretically, and empirically. The first goal is to develop a context specific, self-report measure of strategic ambiguity that can capture both an individual's intentional use of ambiguity as well as the confidant's perceptions of strategic ambiguity within a conversation. Second, this dissertation seeks to extend CPM by refining the disclosure strategies for managing privacy boundaries; specifically, strategic ambiguity will be conceptualized as an indirect strategy that individuals may use to disclose private information to relational partners. Third, by examining strategically ambiguous disclosures within the context of parent-to-emerging adult child divorce-related disclosures, this dissertation seeks to shed light on how the disclosure strategy employed may affect the distressed discloser and the confidant, as well as add to the empirical research on the effects of disclosure on postdivorce family adjustment. These three goals are each discussed below.

The first goal of this dissertation is to develop a self-report measure of strategic ambiguity that captures all four dimensions of the construct. Such a measure would offer a unique methodological advance over prior strategies for studying disclosure. Current scholarship regarding the disclosure process and its effects are based whether participants did or did not disclose private information. However, research on information regulation (e.g., Bradac, 2001; Brashers, 2001), for instance secret keeping (e.g., Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997) and divorce-related disclosure (e.g., S. S. Koerner et al., 2004; Thomas et al., 1995), suggests that individuals do not always fully reveal information. Further, as Eisenberg (1984, 1990) and Bavelas (e.g., 1983; 1998) argued, strategic ambiguity is a

relational characteristic, making ambiguity dependent on the interaction and the relational partners' history. Existing measure of strategic ambiguity are unable to capture the full breadth of the construct and the relational context of the interaction. Thus, the ability to assess to what degree information is revealed and whether the disclosure met relational expectations may provide more refined insight into how disclosure impacts relationships, which a reliable and valid measure of strategic ambiguity may provide.

This dissertation seeks to extend Communication Privacy Management theory (Petronio, 1991, 2002) by developing strategic ambiguity as an indirect disclosure strategy an individual may use to reveal private information and manage privacy boundaries. The theory posits that indirect disclosures influence how a confidant will respond to a disclosure as well as how satisfying the interaction might be (Petronio, 2002). Ideally, an indirect reply should be provided in response to an indirect disclosure to maintain privacy boundaries even though this may be unsatisfying for both the discloser and confidant (Petronio, 2002). However, it is also possible for the confidant to offer an explicit response, although this may be equally dissatisfying because it may not meet the discloser's expectations for the response (Petronio, 2002). Unfortunately, beyond articulating that direct and indirect disclosures may take many forms, CPM does not elaborate on how indirect disclosures may be formulated or how different indirect disclosures strategies may have different effects for relational partners. Thus, strategic ambiguity will be developed and tested as one potential indirect disclosure strategy.

The third goal of this dissertation is to further contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the role of disclosure in parents' and children's postdivorce adjustment. Steinberg (2001) maintained that it may not be what a parent does or does not do that

impacts offspring, but rather it may be more important *how* a parent manages a situation. Supporting this contention, S. S. Koerner's (S. S. Koerner, Jacobs, & Raymond, 2000; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004; S. S. Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, & Raymond, 2002) and T. D. Afifi's (T. D. Afifi, Huber, & Ohs, 2006; T. D. Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; T. D. Afifi et al., 2007) work suggest that what and how parents disclose divorce-related information might be particularly relevant to understanding adjustment outcomes. For instance, the negativity of the topics on which parents disclose induces worry, anxiety, and stress for children (e.g., S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). However, there is still a great amount of variability in these self-reports. Therefore, it might be more than just the valence of topics on which the parents disclose. As T. D. Afifi suggests, it may be the perspective of the person providing the report (2003), or other characteristics of the disclosure itself (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007). This dissertation will examine whether the degree of strategic ambiguity employed by parents and the children's perceived degree of ambiguity influences psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction.

To achieve these goals, the existing theory and research must first be reviewed. First, Communication Privacy Management theory, the theoretical framework on which this dissertation rests, will be reviewed. Within the discussion of CPM, strategic ambiguity will be explicated and integrated into the theory as an indirect disclosure strategy for managing privacy boundaries and the existing investigation tools employed to study the construct will be examined. To offer a practical and socially relevant context in which to explore the potential utility of strategically ambiguous disclosures, social support expectations and parent-to-child disclosures will be examined in postdivorce

families with regard to how these families cope with divorce-related stress. Finally, social support and disclosure will be discussed within a lifespan communication perspective to emphasize the importance of examining the effects of parent's divorce-related disclosures for emerging young adult children. After reviewing prior research, the rationale for this dissertation and hypotheses to be tested in Studies 1 and 2 will be presented.

### Communication Privacy Management

Communication Privacy Management theory (Petronio, 1991, 2002) offers a framework for understanding how individuals manage privacy for oneself and within relationships. The theory focuses on private information, or information typically not accessible or known by others, such as personal beliefs, opinions, or thoughts that might be revealed when an individual desires to develop a close relationship with another person or needs assistance with a problem (Petronio, 2002). Through its dyadic, interactional approach, CPM acknowledges that all individuals involved in a conversation have an integral role regarding the exchange of private information (Petronio, 2002). Thus, CPM allows for consideration of the discloser, confidant, and their relationship. The theory rests on five premises that detail the privacy management processes employed during interaction by the discloser and confidant (Petronio, 2002). To understand parent-child privacy management, the theoretical premises of CPM will be discussed, followed by an examination of disclosure strategies as they might be used to alter privacy boundaries and obtain social support.

#### *Theoretical Premises*

Communication Privacy Management theory rests on five premises. First, disclosures are characterized by private information (Petronio, 2002). Second, individuals

experience tension between maintaining privacy and openness (Petronio). Third, individuals “own” private information (Petronio). Fourth, boundaries help maintain ownership of private information (Petronio). Fifth, boundaries are shaped by a rule management process that informs privacy management (Petronio).

The first two premises maintain that the content of disclosures between relational partners is private, and privacy-openness is a functional dialectical tension (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Disclosure entails revealing personal, private information about oneself or other individuals that is unknown by others (Petronio, 2002). Revealing private information to a relational partner aids in the development of an intimate relationship (Petronio, 2002; Petronio, Ellemers, Giles, & Gallois, 1998). However, by disclosing, the personal information becomes less private and more public. According to CPM, privacy and openness represent polar opposites with distinct features functioning in incompatible ways with one another (Petronio, 2002). In other words, openness and privacy cannot co-exist (Petronio, 2002). Disclosing personal information is meaningful because it represents surrendering some personal privacy (Petronio, 2002). Individuals decide whether to be open or remain private by considering the benefits of disclosing in comparison to the benefits of remaining private and, thus, maintaining ownership and control over the information (Petronio, 2002).

Private information is something that the individual “owns” and, therefore, perceives s/he has the right to control to whom, when, and how it is revealed (Petronio, 2002). By revealing private information, an individual loses some control over that private information and becomes more vulnerable (Petronio, 1991, 2002). It is the sense of ownership that can make a person feel violated when others become privy to personal

information s/he did not share him/herself (Petronio, 2002). Private information becomes “co-owned” and collectively managed when revealed because more than one person is responsible for controlling it (Petronio, 2002). Regardless of the recipient’s willingness to possess the information, disclosing makes the recipient a co-owner of the private information (Petronio, 2002). Co-ownership is similar to ownership but entails shared responsibility by both individuals for maintaining privacy (Petronio, 2002). The dyad coordinates how to manage access others have to the information (Petronio, 2002). Ownership, and thus access to private information, is delineated by privacy boundaries.

Individuals maintain privacy and ownership by establishing boundaries, which make private information unavailable to others (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Through the creation and use of metaphorical boundaries, one’s private information is protected from becoming public knowledge (Petronio, 2002). Disclosing private information links two individuals into a shared, or collective, privacy boundary where their individual, personal boundaries overlap at the point of the disclosed information (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Private information is inaccessible to others unless the boundary is opened, or made permeable. The more permeable the boundary is, the more private information may be revealed and the less control one has over it (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Less permeable boundaries indicate greater control exercised over information and less information is revealed (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Although permeability varies across topics, relationships, and the lifespan, boundary permeability creates a sense of privacy (Petronio, 1991, 2002; Petronio et al., 1998).

To manage the permeability of boundaries, individuals create a guide, or a rule management system, to assist with disclosure decisions (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Rules

provide the expectations and procedures for maintaining privacy and coordinating privacy boundaries with others. In other words, privacy rules indicate individuals' patterned behaviors for disclosing (Petronio, 2002). Rules help determine whether revealing or concealing private information would be beneficial in a given interaction and relationship at that time (Petronio, 2002). Three rule management processes guide privacy within relationships (Petronio, 2002): rule foundations, boundary coordination, and boundary turbulence.

Rule foundations refer to the idea that the guidelines for managing private information are based on several factors, which may be altered over time (Petronio, 2002). Petronio identified five potential criteria on which privacy rules are developed. First, because cultures vary in how they value personal privacy, cultural and social norms indicate appropriate privacy management behaviors by influencing to whom and to what extent an individual is expected to disclose (Georges, 1995; Pennebaker, 1990; Petronio). Second, gender may influence the rules used to define privacy boundaries. Masculine and feminine individuals may have different rules for how and what to disclose to same sex and opposite sex relational partners (Petronio). One's motivations for regulating privacy may influence disclosure (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Petronio). For instance, an individual might disclose in order to gain knowledge about him/herself (Derlega, 1984; Derlega & Grzelak; J. B. Miller & Stubblefield, 1993), alter the behaviors of one's partner (Derlega & Grzelak; Dolgin, 1996), or promote relational development (Derlega et al., 1993). Contextual characteristics, such as the social environment, physical setting, recency of a traumatic event, or changes in life circumstances, may influence private disclosures, a fourth factor influencing privacy rules (Pennebaker; Petronio). Finally, the

level of vulnerability (or risk) compared to the anticipated advantage (or reward) of revealing or denying access also influences privacy rules (Petronio; see also L. C. Miller & Berg, 1984). In other words, the more detrimental repercussions for revealing are perceived, the more rules s/he will have for protecting that information, and the more risky revealing will be. Based on cultural and gender norms, personal motivations, contextual characteristics, and perceived risk-benefit ratio, one will develop rules for when and how to disclose to a relational partner.

Privacy rules are acquired through a variety of forces yet may change depending on individual and relational needs (Petronio, 2002). Initially, rules are learned through interaction and socialization during childhood and adolescent development (Petronio; Smollar & Youniss, 1989). For instance, parents begin teaching their children at young ages how to regulate private information and may explicitly state how to use and protect the information (Petronio). Rules also may be acquired or altered through the disclosure itself or the information's association with other similar information (Petronio).

Generally, privacy rules are relatively routinized and stable over time once they are learned; however, relational partners may negotiate new rules or revise old rules to guide their collective boundary (Petronio). For example, traumatic or life events may trigger alterations in relational privacy. In other words, privacy boundaries and the rules that guide them may need to be altered to accurately reflect the relationship, the context, or the information itself (Petronio). Therefore, rules are flexible enough to permit changes of individual's and collective boundaries when needed (Petronio).

The second rule management process is collective boundary operations. Disclosure creates a collective boundary making the information co-owned (Petronio,

2002). When in a collective boundary, the individuals mutually negotiate the development, use, and regulation of boundary rules to manage the information, as well as the rights and privileges each has regarding the information (Petronio). This coordination makes both individuals responsible for controlling the private information according to the privacy rules (Petronio). The collective boundary must be clearly delineated to both individuals to help specify rules for access and protection of information (Petronio). Further, rules guiding the shared boundary may be changed over time to meet privacy needs (Petronio). The collective boundary, while created by revealing information, is also influenced by the confidant's role in the disclosive interaction.

The coordination process partially depends on how willing and capable the confidant is to possess the private information (Petronio, 2002). The more recipients solicit and anticipate disclosures, the more prepared they are for managing and assisting with the private information (Petronio). However, when one does not desire or expect revealing of private information, privacy boundaries become involuntarily and suddenly linked. The recipient may be unprepared for the information, unequipped to respond appropriately and adequately to the confidant, or have difficulty coordinating privacy rules with the discloser, potentially making co-ownership stressful for the recipient. According to CPM, the degree of strain confidants experience is influenced by four factors, including: (1) appraisal of the situation, (2) emotional ability, (3) availability of resources, and (4) amount of information revealed (Petronio). Because individuals may have varying expectations for support, the recipient may appraise the situation differently than the discloser (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Additionally, the recipient may not be emotionally able to provide the support the discloser desires, which can cause the

confidant to feel inadequate or disappointed (Petronio, 2002). Further, the confidant may not have the personal resources to provide the discloser the desired support, which may increase distress, frustration, and anger for both the individuals (Petronio, 2002). Finally, when too much information is revealed by the discloser, the recipient may experience an increase in stress even though it allows the discloser to obtain catharsis through disclosing (Coyne, Ellard, & Smith, 1990; Pennebaker, 1990; Petronio, 2002). Thus, the coordination process depends, in part, on the recipients' ability to respond appropriately to the disclosure as well as a willingness to be a confidant.

Even when the confidant is willing and able, boundary coordination does not always occur as anticipated, and when “bumps”, or boundary turbulence, in the management process are experienced, privacy rules must be revisited (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Boundary turbulence is the third rule of the privacy management process and arises when rules are not followed or unanticipated changes are made to rules (Petronio, 1991, 2002). A variety of factors may lead to boundary turbulence. An individual may intentionally violate privacy rules (Petronio, 2002). Unintentional misuse or application of the wrong rule also may create turbulence. Additionally, if the dyad does not explicitly identify and define boundary rules, uncertainty about who co-owns information or the privacy rules may create “fuzzy boundaries” (Petronio, 2002). Turbulence may occur due to differences in how individuals value privacy and the degree of flexibility one has regarding rule changes (Petronio, 2002). An individual may inappropriately disclose information by treating a public setting as though it is private (Petronio, 2002). Finally, privacy dilemmas might arise when the co-owner is confronted with a situation in which maintaining the privacy boundary could cause harm but violating the boundary may be

equally problematic; both choices are unsatisfying (Petronio, 2002). To resolve boundary turbulence, new information may be incorporated into the rule system, self-corrections of the violation may occur, or rules may be revised to fit needs or accommodate new situations (Petronio, 2002). Though they may experience difficulties, through rule management processes, partners are able to manage privacy and openness.

As a whole, CPM maintains that individuals control their privacy through their decisions to reveal information to a partner, and they make these decisions based on an established, though malleable, set of rules. However, once private information is revealed, less control can be exercised over that information, decreasing an individual's privacy. While CPM argues that information can be disclosed through a variety of strategies, depending on the needs of the interactants, the specific strategies and their effects have not been thoroughly investigated in various family situations and deserve further development.

#### *Strategic Ambiguity as a Privacy Management Strategy*

As CPM maintains, private information can be revealed using one of two general categories of strategies: direct or indirect disclosure (Petronio, 1991, 2002). When direct strategies are used, the information and purpose for disclosing is clearly expressed. Additionally, the response demands and privacy rules are transparent or explicitly stated in conjunction with the message. Therefore, not only is the information explicit and detailed, direct disclosures leave the confidant with few options for response due to the overtness of the expectations, including the anticipated response and the rules used to protect the information (Petronio, 1991; 2002). Thus, direct strategies present detailed information regarding the private content, the intentions for disclosure, and the privacy

rules, which provide high certainty for the recipient regarding the response to offer as well as how to manage the content (Petronio 1991, 2002). Direct, complete disclosure is one important way in which information is exchanged between relational partners (Sillars, Weisberg, Burggraf, & Zietlow, 1990).

Private information may also be revealed via indirect disclosures (L. C. Miller & Berg, 1984; Petronio, 2002; Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Ros-Mendoza, 1996). Indirect disclosure strategies provide little to no indication of the rules to be used in managing the private information or how the recipient should respond to the disclosure (Petronio, 2002). The statements tend to lack detail regarding the explicit meaning the confidant should give to the message (Petronio, 2002). Yet, the statements do provide a greater opportunity for the recipient to determine and control the response (Petronio, 2002). Because the expectations are not clearly communicated, more leeway exists for how the confidant responds, treats, and protects the information (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Thus, indirect disclosures allow for the possibilities that the recipient may interpret the message in a manner unintended by the discloser yet provides the recipient the opportunity to determine how to respond to and manage the private information (Petronio, 1991, 2002). It may also reduce the confidant's uncertainty about the state of the relationship while not providing too much undesired information (Berger, 1997; Brashers, 2001).

#### *Conceptualization of Strategic Ambiguity*

Strategic ambiguity is an indirect message strategy. A strategically ambiguous disclosure is one in which the sender intentionally creates and presents a vague, incomplete statement that lacks specificity in either the content or source of the message, the intended receiver of the message, or is unrelated to the context in which it is stated. It

refers to the degree to which a message is intentionally or deliberately encoded to have multiple meanings (Eisenberg, 1984; Holtgraves, 1998; Putnam & Sorenson, 1982). This ambiguous message may have several possible meanings, making it difficult for the confidant to determine the meaning of the message or intent of the speaker (Eisenberg, 1984; Putnam & Sorenson, 1982). Such a message provides some privacy protection to the speaker, but leaves the recipient with questions about how to treat and respond to the message (Petronio, 2002). At the most basic level, it is a mixed message and allows the recipient the freedom to provide a mixed response (Petronio, 1991, 2002).

When discussing sensitive or stressful topics, an individual may intentionally use an indirect message containing incomplete information (Berger, 1997; Petronio, 2002; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997). By purposefully using vague and imprecise, or strategically ambiguous, messages, one can manage multiple personal and relational goals while acknowledging situational constraints of the relationship and context (Berger; Eisenberg, 1984; Putnam & Sorenson, 1982). For instance, a parent may desire to disclose to his/her child about family finances in order to teach the child about adult issues but may not want the child to know exactly how financially strained the family is in fear that it might create unnecessary distress for the child. A strategically ambiguous disclosure regarding the family budget, such as “Things would be much tighter if we did not stick to our budget” would allow the parent to discuss financial matters without providing details.

When confronted with an ambiguous message the receiver will likely have difficulty determining the intended meaning (Eisenberg, 1984; Eylon & Allison, 2002; Putnam & Sorenson, 1982), which could impact the relationship (Berger, 1997; Brashers,

2001; Petronio, 1991, 2002). Upon receiving the parent's ambiguous message about the family's budget, the child must determine whether the parent is trying to teach him/her what to consider with budgeting, to say that the child will not receive money to go out with friends that weekend, or to tell the child they may not have enough money to cover all their expenses that month. Each possible interpretation may influence how the child perceives the parent, the relationship, as well as the child's psychological well-being. Therefore, the recipient of such an ambiguous message must be careful to assess the possible meanings in order to protect personal privacy boundaries and the relationship (Petronio, 1991). As such, ambiguous messages provide a means to manage multiple, conflicting personal and relational goals, even if the message does not reduce the uncertainty for the receiver (Bavelas, 1983; Berger; Eisenberg; Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983; Petronio, 2002). This can be accomplished by varying the specificity of the message in one of four dimensions: Content, Source, Receiver, or Context (Bavelas; Eisenberg; Putnam & Sorenson).

Content ambiguity concerns the clarity and specificity of the ideas within the message (Bavelas, 1983; Bavelas & Smith, 1982; Eisenberg, 1984). Language and word choice, nonverbal characteristics, and structure of a message combine to help create ambiguous content (Bavelas, 1983, 1998; Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullet, 1990; Bavelas & Chovil, 2000; Hamilton & Mineo, 1998; Putnam & Sorenson, 1982). Complicating matters, some ideas are inherently ambiguous because they lack a tangible referent that directly reflects ideas, such as beliefs and attitudes (Sillars & Scott, 1983; Sillars et al., 1990). Nonverbal cues may also contribute to the multiple meanings of a message (Bavelas & Chovil, 2000; Burgoon & White, 1997; Sillars, Pike, Jones, &

Murphy, 1984). When verbal and nonverbal messages do not match, creating ambiguity, expectancy violations may occur, and the recipient must interpret the messages and its valence (Burgoon, Newton, Walther, & Baesler, 1989). In a study investigating delegates at a Canadian political convention, Bavelas (Bavelas, Black, Bryson, & Mullett, 1988) found that those whose beliefs about their candidate were supported by the polls spoke energetically, succinctly, directly, and fluidly. However, those who had uncertainty about their candidate's success were dispassionate, wordy, hesitant, and expressed less certainty in his/her beliefs. Overall, those whose candidate was behind in the polls were perceived to be more ambiguous when questioned about the likelihood of winning (Bavelas et al., 1988). Depending on how ideas are expressed, message content can create ambiguity.

Source ambiguity, the second dimension, refers to the speaker's imprecision regarding the ownership of the idea or position expressed (Bavelas, 1983; Bavelas & Smith, 1982; Eisenberg, 1984; Hamilton & Mineo, 1998). The type and amount of information available about the origination of the message influences how clearly known the sender of the message is (Rains & Scott, 2007): The less the origination is discernable, the more ambiguity exists. Generally, communication in an interpersonal, face-to-face context will have less source ambiguity than other contexts due to the high degree of interactivity and interdependence of interactants (Rains & Scott; Tanaka & Bell, 1996). Yet, Bavelas and her colleagues (1988) found that when one is in doubt of his/her own beliefs, s/he is less likely to indicate ownership of the statements. For instance, statements by political delegates whose candidate was behind in the polls did not indicate whose ideas s/he was stating; on the other hand, the leading candidate's delegates clearly used "I..." statements demonstrating that the ideas and beliefs the

delegate revealed were their own (Bavelas et al., 1988). The speaker may not clearly articulate his/her ownership of ideas when uncertain of future events. This may create difficulty for the receiver when attempting to ascertain the meaning and, therefore, may influence evaluations of the speaker and message.

Receiver ambiguity refers to the degree of imprecision regarding the intended recipient of the message (Bavelas, 1983; Bavelas & Smith, 1982; Hamilton & Mineo, 1998). The sender may not clearly articulate who the intended recipient is or may verbally state one name while nonverbally direct the message toward someone else. Similar to source ambiguity, receiver ambiguity likely occurs infrequently and to a lesser extent in interpersonal contexts (Tanaka & Bell, 1996). However, when receiver ambiguity is used, it may have negative effects. For instance, when developing a new nursing care coordinator position, “University Hospital” management intentionally defined the role vaguely to allow the nurse hired to develop the role as the department needed (K. Miller, Joseph, & Apker, 2000). However, because many organizational stakeholders became unintended recipients of the ambiguously described position, many care coordinators reported being given unrelated work assignments by organizational members who did not know or care how the nurse defined the care coordinator position for the department (K. Miller et al.). This eventually led to high levels of stress, extensive extra work for the nurse, and decreased job satisfaction (K. Miller et al.). A lack of clarity regarding the intended recipient, as this illustration shows, could have negative effects on organizational goals or for a relationship, especially if the intended recipient him/herself is unaware of the message or an unintended recipient receives the information.

The context in which the message is stated might create ambiguity. Statements that are unconnected to the preceding sequence of statements (Bavelas, 1983; Bavelas & Smith, 1982), or the general circumstances in which the message occurs may create or contribute to a vague message (Hamilton & Mineo, 1998). When the meaning of the message is unclear due to the lack of apparent connection to the conversation in which it is stated, the receiver typically assigns meaning to the message with respect to the preceding statements. In hypothetical scenarios of a potentially physically dangerous situation, the message stated by the participant's "spouse" regarding general safety in the depicted scene was interpreted by participants as controlling rather than as a safety warning (Edwards, 1998). Conversational dilemmas, such as avoidance-avoidance situations, may also give rise to use of ambiguity. Avoidance-avoidance dilemmas occur when a conversation prohibits a direct response but necessitates a reply (Bavelas, 1983; Tanaka & Bell, 1996). An individual typically has two options when faced with such a dilemma: S/he can provide a truthful answer but risk hurting the other person or their relationship, or provide an untruthful response to protect the feelings of the other person but potentially hurt the relationship (Chovil, 1994). Strategic ambiguity offers a third option: it provides a desirable yet not untruthful response. Thus, when employing strategic context ambiguity, one may offer an honest reply while protecting the relationship.

The situation in which the ambiguity occurs also may influence interpretation (Hamilton & Mineo, 1998). Ambiguous messages were perceived as more controlling when from an opposite-sex speaker than when from a same-sex sender (Edwards, 1998). Cultural factors may also influence the use of ambiguity during communicative

interactions (Holtgraves, 1998; Sillars & Scott, 1983; Tanaka & Bell, 1996). Indeed, openness and specificity in communication were found to vary by culture (Gudykunst et al., 1996). In formal work groups, when the task was familiar or had a well defined outcome, nonambiguous information was perceived as more valuable, but successful performance on a well-defined task necessitated some ambiguous information (Eylon & Allison, 2002). In other words, a balance of ambiguous and nonambiguous information is needed for success. Further, discrepancies exist in the meaning attributed to ambiguous messages and the actions taken regarding ambiguous messages were based on one's role within an organization (Putnam & Sorenson, 1982). One's status in the organization's hierarchy (e.g., one's authority and job security) can influence members' interpretation of ambiguous messages (Markham, 1996). As this shows, the context, or placement in conversation or relational history, can contribute to the strategic ambiguity of a message.

Recipients manage ambiguity by imposing meaning to reduce, maintain, or increase ambiguity (Putnam & Sorenson, 1982). The meaning assigned to an ambiguous message by the recipient influences the effects of the message, which partially depends upon the recipients' ability to detect the message's vagueness and its underlying intentions (Williams & Goss, 1975). Inconsistent interpretations between the sender and recipient can effect goal achievement (Eisenberg, 1990) and potentially relational quality (Berger, 1997; Brashers, 2001; Eisenberg, 1984; 1990; Petronio, 1991, 2002). For individuals and groups, success and effectiveness depend upon shared goals and values but not necessarily agreeing on the exact meaning of a message. Eisenberg (1990) notes that "Ambiguity makes the particular generally available, and in doing so makes room for epiphany." (p. 145). In other words, a vague message might provide a group something to

work toward together while permitting individuality within the group. Therefore, lacking an agreed upon meaning for a message may not deter from goal achievement. Although it has a negative connotation in much of the interpersonal literature due to its association with deception (Burgoon & Buller, 1994; Hamilton & Mineo, 1998), strategic ambiguity is not an inherently negative act, nor is it necessarily a mark of poor communication skills (Burgoon & Buller, 1994; Petronio et al., 1998). Rather, indirect messages, such as strategically ambiguous disclosures, could be a sign of competence, avoidance, or protection (Bradac, 2001; Petronio, 2002).

As illustrated, altering the degree of clarity and specificity along one or more of four dimensions creates a strategically ambiguous message (Bavelas & Smith, 1982; Eisenberg, 1984; Putnam & Sorenson, 1982), and the effects it has depends upon interpretation of the message (Eisenberg, 1990; Putnam & Sorenson, 1982; Williams & Goss, 1975). Organizations undergoing change have used ambiguity intentionally to the benefit and detriment of the organization and employees (Leitch & Davenport, 2002; Markham 1996). Thus, it is not unreasonable to speculate that strategic ambiguity may be a successful strategy for managing relationships, privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2002; Petronio et al., 1998), and uncertainty (Bradac, 2001; Brashers, 2001) within families attempting to cope with significant change.

#### *Measurement of Strategic Ambiguity*

Although strategic ambiguity has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct concerning the degree of intentional vagueness within an individual's communication, measurement of strategic ambiguity has not been refined to capture its full breadth. Current measures investigate strategic ambiguity by manipulating messages

in hypothetical scenarios, identifying and thematically coding messages created by others, or employing a single item measure to assess perceptions of a multi-dimensional construct. Each method has been shown to be somewhat valid and has offered insight into the phenomenon. However, no current measure effectively captures strategic ambiguity in a dyadic context from the perspective of the dyad members. To understand these issues, existing strategic ambiguity investigation methods will be examined.

Strategic ambiguity frequently is addressed via hypothetical scenarios. The scenarios are constructed by altering the degree of clarity and specificity (high versus low) in a message. Typically, the message is read or watched by participants. Participants then rate the message or speaker on a variety of factors, such as support and control (Edwards, 1998). For instance, Edwards and Bello (2001) manipulated ambiguity, face concern and ego involvement on two levels (high versus low) in hypothetical speech situations to which participants were required to give a critique of the speaker. Their goal was to investigate how ambiguity, face concern, and ego involvement influenced perceptions of speech quality, honesty, politeness, and speaker's communication competence. Tanaka and Bell (1996) took a different approach by presenting participants with written scenarios consisting of either an avoidance-avoidance conflict or no conflict involving a high status difference or same status individual. Each participant was asked to write a response to the hypothetical dilemma then rate the degree of honesty and concern of self and other in that response. Trained coders then rated the degree of ambiguity in the written responses. Overall, these studies found that ambiguity is used to protect oneself or the one's partner (Tanaka & Bell; Edwards & Bello; Bavelas, 1982), lending

support to Eisenberg's (1984; 1990) contention that strategic ambiguity can be used to protect or develop relationships and identity.

Although they have offered evidence for the utility of strategic ambiguity in interpersonal communication, methods involving hypothetical scenarios have a few shortcomings. First, paralinguistic cues, kinesics, and facial expressions cannot be incorporated into written scenarios, yet all influence how a recipient interprets an ambiguous message (Burgoon & White, 1997; Hamilton & Mineo, 1998; Sillars et al., 1984). Additionally, the results are based on hypothetical situations or imagined communication episodes. Such conditions might help individuals prepare for future conversational dilemmas (Berkos, Allen, Kearney, & Plax, 2001) but cannot offer insight into what actually occurs when confronted with an ambiguous message or when employing strategic ambiguity as an interaction unfolds. Finally, scenarios may not illustrate typical circumstances for the participants. Even though the manipulation checks validated the treatment conditions created by each scenario, manipulation checks do not evidence the "realism" of the scenario or the importance of the scenario for the participants. Thus, the findings lack ecological validity. This is especially important given that relational history and knowledge of the partner may influence use or evaluations of the strategic ambiguity (Burgoon & White, 1997; Petronio, 2002), which cannot be considered in many of these scenario studies.

To overcome ecological validity issues, a handful of studies have conducted thematic or content analyses of organizational messages. These case studies identified messages within a single organization. Researchers then evaluated the degree of ambiguity in those messages and interviewed members of the organization regarding the

various messages. Overall, the findings offer support to Eisenberg's (1984) claim that ambiguous messages can have both beneficial and maladaptive outcomes depending on the sharedness of goals and willingness to engage in the creation and re-creation of these messages (see e.g., Leitch & Davenport, 2002; Markham, 1996). Additionally, these analyses have provided valuable insight into the functions and effects that management's ambiguous messages can have on the organization (see, e.g., Contractor & Ehrlich, 1993; K. Miller et al., 2000). Because ambiguous messages place the onus of interpretation on the recipient (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006) in some instances, many organizational stakeholders did not decode the messages as "ambiguous" in any way (Markham). The individual's behaviors and organizational outcomes were attributed to the employees' failure to interpret messages as ambiguous (Markham). Alternatively, Markham may not have had the extensive relational and organizational history that the organizational stakeholders had, which likely influenced the decoding of the messages as unambiguous. Taken as a whole, thematic and content analyses of messages have illustrated that perceptions about strategically ambiguous messages vary among individuals, and the conclusions drawn explaining organizational outcomes may dependent upon researcher selection and interpretation of messages.

A few studies have requested participants to report their own perceptions of a speaker's strategic ambiguity. In these cases, a single-item measure was used to capture the varying degrees of clarity. After watching or reading a speech, Williams and Goss (1975) had participants rate the degree of ambiguity in the message with a single item, 7-point scale ranging from "very vague" to "very specific". In a study investigating the role of ambiguous information in a group problem solving discussion, Eylon and Allison

(2002) had participants rate the ambiguity in instructions and each piece of information they were presented on a single item scale ranging from “not at all ambiguous” to “extremely ambiguous”. Similar to the hypothetical scenario studies, both studies (Williams & Goss; Eylon & Allison) manipulated the degree of specificity in the messages presented to examine how it affected various outcome measures. Studies such as these evidence that individuals are perceptive to varying degrees of clarity in communication.

Any single-item, global measure, however, possesses a number of weaknesses. Specifically, a single-item instrument has large measurement error and low reliability over time, poor ability to distinguish between individuals, creating crude groupings, and may capture “considerable uniqueness or specificity” and therefore cannot assess all of the variability within a construct making it difficult to obtain strong, consistent relationships with other concepts (Churchill, 1979; Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Rushton, Brainerd, & Pressley, 1983). With strategic ambiguity, a single item cannot assess in what manner the communication was ambiguous. It is possible, for example, that source ambiguity was influencing the outcomes more than the other domains of strategic ambiguity. Source ambiguity is unusual in interpersonal communication (Rains & Scott, 2007; Tanaka & Bell, 1996) yet might be the influencing factor in some instances when the participant does not know the speaker or the origination of the information presented. Unfortunately, the single item does not allow parsing out what aspect of the ambiguous message was influencing assessments of credibility (Williams & Goss, 1975) or decision making (Eylon & Allison, 2002). Therefore, multiple items are necessary to obtain a more complete assessment, especially when the construct is multidimensional.

To better address the issue of dimensionality, Bavelas and her colleagues (e.g., Bavelas & Smith, 1982; Bavelas et al., 1988) offered four questions as a measure of strategic ambiguity. First, “How clear is the message, in terms of what is being said?” focused on content ambiguity. Second, source ambiguity was framed as “To what extent is the message the speaker’s own opinion?”. Receiver ambiguity was regarded as: “To what extent is the message addressed to the other person?”. Finally, “To what extent is this a direct answer to the question?” was asked to assess context ambiguity. They had trained coders rate the degree of ambiguity in observational studies. Other scholars using this approach find that strategic ambiguity typically occurred in the content and context dimensions rather than the sender and receiver dimensions of clarity (Tanaka & Bell, 1996; Hamilton & Mineo, 1998). This supports Rains and Craig’s (2007) suggestion that in interpersonal interactions the sender is less likely to be anonymous.

While these four items are more comprehensive regarding the dimensions of ambiguity, they remain to be single-item measures of each underlying factor. Further, all four approaches make the assumption that the message was intended to be unclear and have multiple meanings; however, this may not be accurate. The speaker might believe the message was precise and direct but the receiver perceives the message to have multiple meanings or vice versa. Although current means of investigating strategic ambiguity have offered valuable insights, they may not fully capture the variability within the construct as it exists in dyadic interactions. A valid and reliable measure would not only assist in obtaining better estimates, but offer a more complete picture of the role of strategic ambiguity in the disclosure process. Therefore, a more comprehensive, self-

report measure of strategic ambiguity that can be used by both the sender and receiver to assess actual and perceived strategic ambiguity is needed.

With a more complete self-report measure of strategic ambiguity, examining its role and contributions to privacy management can be better explored. Personal, private disclosures are a contributing factor to relational closeness and intimacy (Derlega et al. 1993), and they can be a means for obtaining needed support and coping assistance (Petronio, 2002). However disclosing too much, too frequently, or at the incorrect time may damage, rather than aid, individuals and the relationship (Petronio, 2002). Therefore, the strategy used to reveal private information to a partner may influence relational maintenance and individual adjustment. To better understand the impact of strategically ambiguous disclosures, examining the disclosure strategy in a context in which relational privacy boundaries are shifting and the individuals are in need of coping assistance might be fruitful. Therefore, a look at parent-to-young adult child divorce-related disclosures is offered.

### Social Support and Disclosure in Postdivorce Families

#### *Social Support*

Social support can be a valuable resource following divorce (Holloway & Machida, 1991; Leslie & Grady, 1988). Although the benefits are dependent on the coping strategies used, social support can provide emotional, informational, and tangible aid, which are significant contributors to positive psychological health (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000; Holahan & Moos, 1986; Thoits, 1986), especially for women following divorce (Richmond & Christensen, 2000). When confronted with negative life events, individuals reported using both active and avoidant coping strategies (Holohan &

Moos, 1987). Over time, however, when family support is available, active coping strategies are used more than avoidant strategies (Holohan & Moos, 1987). Having others to turn to for assistance, such as for food and household help, advice, and bolstering self-esteem, can minimize the negative effects of stress (Pennebaker, 1990). Indeed, following divorce, women who reported perceiving social support were in better physical and mental health when compared to men who reported perceiving social support (Richmond & Christensen). Unfortunately, many parents experienced a deterioration of effective social support following divorce (Ladd & Zvonkovic, 1995; Mayseless, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2004; O'Connor, Hawkins, Dunn, Thorpe, & Golding, 1998). Custodial mothers who perceived weakened social support reported a decline in physical and mental health (Leslie & Grady). While obtaining support may, at times, be difficult, social support is generally beneficial for divorced parents.

A lack of social support from friends and family may cause parents to seek support from their young adult children (Greeff & Van der Merwe, 2004; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004; Maysless et al., 2004). Expectations for support and solidarity among family members aids individual coping efforts and helps the family stay together while managing the stress (T. D. Afifi & Nussbaum, 2006; McCubbin & Patterson). An absence of such norms or a failure to act on them can lead to strain within the family, making coping more difficult, especially when coping alone (T. D. Afifi & Nussbaum). In the context of divorce-related stress, parents did request support from offspring (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). Social support from adult children decreased divorced parents' perceptions of stressor severity and increased parents' belief that they could cope with the divorce (Nakonezny et al., 2003). Thus, disclosing private, stressful

information to a child can be a means for obtaining support needed to cope with divorce-related stress (Derlega et al., 1993; Petronio, 2002).

For offspring, the availability and provision of support from parents after divorce may not be as beneficial. Divorced parents tend to be less able to provide support and assistance following divorce (Umberson, 1992). While support may benefit parent's psychological health, adolescents reported greater depressive symptoms when they felt the need to care for or nurture their divorced parent (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996). However, requests for coping assistance from parents do not appear to impact relational quality for the child (T. D. Afifi, Coho, & McManus, 2008; Arditti, 1999; S. S. Koerner et al., 2002). Indeed, some young adult offspring enjoyed the closer more peer-like relationships with their parents that developed after the divorce (Arditti; Golish, 2003).

If the parent-child relationship has been characterized by communal support provision in the past, then parent and child likely will anticipate assistance from the one another with divorce-related stressors. Individuals develop general schemas for family relationships and specific relational schemas for specified relationships (Fitzpatrick & Richie, 1994; A. F. Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). When in need of social support, individuals likely have expectations for the support others will provide (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Petronio, 2002). These expectations influence what and how individuals disclose to confidants (Pennebaker, 1990) and provide interaction guidelines for both the discloser and confidant to help obtain the most beneficial outcomes (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Social support expectations from a specific relational partner reflect unique experiences within that relationship (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991). Further,

expectations for a partner during supportive exchanges are partially due to the support recipient and support provider and relational characteristics in shaping evaluations of the exchange (Collins & Feeney). For instance, those who expected their partners to write a supportive note rated the note to be more supportive compared to those who did not expect support from their partner (Collins & Feeney). Thus, relational history may help specify from whom the parent will seek support and what behaviors can be anticipated for support interactions (Pecchioni, Wright, & Nussbaum, 2005). Previous supportive interactions, schemas for the parent-child relationship, and idiosyncratic relationship characteristics all inform parents regarding what support to expect from offspring (A. F. Koerner & Fitzpatrick; Petronio; Pierce et al.; Reis et al.).

Expectations influence how social support is experienced (Sarason & Sarason, 2006). For parents, expectations for support from other friends and family likely influence the support s/he expects to receive from his/her child. For emerging adult children, the support s/he expects to receive from his/her parent likely influences the support s/he anticipates providing the parent, especially given the communal nature of coping in families. While the support they expect may influence from whom and how they seek support, psychological well-being, relational quality and satisfaction with communication in interaction are likely affected by how they communicate about the divorce-related issues.

#### *Parent-To-Child Divorce-Related Disclosures*

Communicative coping strategies focus on verbal and nonverbal exchanges among individuals that may facilitate or hinder a person or family in overcoming a stressor (T. D. Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; Burlinson, 1985; Hobfoll, Schroder, &

Malek, 2002). As a component of social support and communal coping, disclosure is one communicative coping strategy available to help manage stress as a family (Derlega et al., 1993; Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998; Petronio, 2002). For parents, disclosing divorce-related information to the child can fulfill multiple support functions, such as obtaining advice and assistance solving problems, venting feelings, and changing the child's behaviors (Dolgin, 1996). For emerging adults, parents' disclosures may help provide understanding and decreased uncertainty. Overall, disclosing thoughts and feelings aids in maintaining a cohesive family (Olson et al., 1983) and continues to be important following divorce (Greeff & Van der Mewre, 2004).

Disclosures provide an opportunity for a parent and child to co-own information and jointly take responsibility for the stressors the parent, child, or family is facing (Lyons et al., 1998; Petronio, 2002). Both divorced and nondivorced healthy functioning families experience openness in their communication with one another (Golish, 2003; Olson et al., 1983; Petronio, 2002). Yet, they also have boundaries defining what and how much information should be revealed to various family members (Golish; Petronio). Indeed, healthy-functioning postdivorce families have clear boundaries defining what and how much information they share with one another (Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, Soukup, & Turman, 2001; Golish). Interestingly, healthy functioning postdivorce families report greater openness compared to struggling postdivorce families (Braithwaite et al.; Golish). However, many families fail to reestablish appropriate privacy rules and boundaries with their children following divorce (T. D. Afifi & Keith, 2004). Shared responsibility for divorce-related information may not always be desired (T. D. Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; Lyons et al.). Many adolescents and young adult children report avoiding

discussions regarding their family because they do not desire to possess the information (T. D. Afifi & Schrodt, 2003a). Parent-to-child divorce-related disclosures may not guarantee healthy family functioning (Mayseless et al., 2004; Olson et al.) and could lead to increased distress (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; Coyne et al., 1990; Petronio). Thus, disclosures have an important effect on parents' and offsprings' postdivorce adjustment, specifically their psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction.

Disclosing about stress likely influences parents' and children's psychological well-being differently. When an individual experiences stress, expression of that distress has consistently been linked to increased psychological well-being (e.g., Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Pennebaker & Sussman, 1988). Disclosing about divorce-related stressors predicted improved psychological well-being for adults (Richmond, & Christensen, 2000). Discussing stressors influences how individuals understood and assessed the stressor over time (Mendolia & Kleck, 1993). On the other hand, not expressing distress about the event can lead to inhibition and depression (Pennebaker, 1990). While revealing stressors and working together to resolve them can be beneficial for the parent, some parents do realize that too much information may make coping more difficult for the child (T. D. Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006).

Psychological well-being of emerging adult children is likely negatively effected by parent's stressful divorce-related disclosures. Through their disclosures, parents may transmit their distress and grief to children (T. D. Afifi & Keith, 2004; Larson & Gillman, 1999). This may be especially true for offspring who become their parent's primary support provider, who reported greater anxiety, worry, distress, and depression symptoms

(Glenwick & Mowrey, 1986; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004; Wallerstein, 1985). Often, the recipients of stress-related disclosures, especially those who frequently are the confidant for the disclosures may become distressed (Coyne et al., 1990; Pennebaker, 1990). Parents' disclosures regarding custody issues, negativity toward their former spouse, parenting problems, and financial and child support concerns have been linked to adolescents' psychological well-being (S. S. Koerner et al., 2002). Requesting excessive assistance from a child or exposure to divorce-related information may have a negative effect on an emerging adult child's psychological well-being. The parent-child relationship may also be affected by excessive reliance on the child as a disclosure recipient (Coyne, Wortman, & Lehman, 1988; Pennebaker, 1990).

Disclosure can alter the nature of a relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Pennebaker, 1990; Petronio, 2002), and therefore, parent's divorce-related disclosures may influence parent-child relational quality. S. S. Koerner, Jacobs, and Raymond (2000) maintained that communication about meaningful family issues after divorce may strengthen the relational bond between parents and children while concurrently meeting support needs. Indeed, when parents revealed divorce-related information, adolescent and adult children described having a closer relationship with one another (Arditti, 1999; Golish, 2003; Westberg et al., 2002). Further, openness and communal problem-solving about divorce-related stress have been associated with resilience in post-divorce families (Golish, 2003; Greeff & Van der Mewre, 2004; Nakonezny et al., 2003). Together, this indicates that parent's disclosures generally benefit the postdivorce parent-child relationship.

Relational quality may not always benefit from parent's disclosures. Parent-to-child disclosures may have no effect or detrimental effects on relational quality (T. D. Afifi & Keith, 2004; S. S. Koerner, et al. 2002). Koerner and her colleagues found that for adolescent offspring, possessing certain divorce and family information does not necessarily increase relational closeness with mothers. Both adolescents and young adults reported receiving too much information from mothers about a variety of divorce-related issues, including the child's father, finances, and personal concerns (T. D. Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). Offspring reported avoiding discussions regarding the state of their family with their biological parent or step-parent more than those of first marriage families (T. D. Afifi & Schrodt, 2003b). In other words, co-owning this information may lead to less relational closeness and lower satisfaction.

Little is known about how disclosing divorce-related information influences parents' and children's communication satisfaction. Offspring's perception of parents' communication, generally, is lower for those in divorced families than nondivorced families (T. D. Afifi & Schrodt, 2003a). When they believe their parents to be withholding information about the divorce, adolescents and young adults felt their parents were "uncaring" or "disinterested" in them (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002). Further, they felt deceived by parents when not adequately informed about the divorce, which decreased the child's communication satisfaction with their parents (Thomas et al., 1995). Thus, disclosing divorce-related information is likely related to communication satisfaction for the parent and child.

The effects of parents' divorce-related disclosures may be influenced by the valence of the disclosures. Many postdivorce parent-to-child disclosures pertain to

sensitive divorce-related issues (T. D. Afifi, 2003; S. S. Koerner et al., 2002). Sensitivity and inappropriateness, operationalized as “negativity”, of divorce-related disclosures (e.g., T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; S. S. Koerner et al., 2000) have negatively affected the adolescent children but have had no effect on the parent. For instance, only a small portion of mothers did *not* talk about financial concerns with their daughters following divorce (S. S. Koerner et al., 2000). Negatively valenced disclosures decreased children’s psychological well-being (T. D. Afifi, Coho, & McManus, 2008), anxiety, and worry (S. S. Koerner et al., 2004), and increased psychological distress (S. S. Koerner et al., 2002). Further, the more inappropriate parents felt their divorce-related disclosures to be, and the more inappropriate offspring perceived parents’ disclosures to be, the more symptoms of poor mental health and psychological well-being both parents and children experienced (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007). However, negative disclosures predicted closer and more satisfying relationships with the parent (T. D. Afifi et al. 2008; Arditti, 1999; S. S. Koerner et al., 2000).

Although mounting evidence indicates that the effects of divorce-related disclosures for offspring appear to be related to the valence of the information, one cannot yet discount the possibility that any discussion of divorce-related issues, negatively or positively valenced, may have these same effects on well-being, relational quality, and potentially parent and child communication satisfaction with these conversations. Positively valenced disclosures generally are associated with beneficial outcomes (Gilbert, 1976). Indeed, psychological well-being (Marlo & Wagner, 1999) and relational quality (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006) were predicted by positively valenced disclosures. While divorce-related disclosures and topic valence help explain

some adjustment effects, the discrepancies among findings suggest that other characteristics of disclosures may offer additional insight into adjustment.

### *Strategically Ambiguous Divorce-Related Disclosures*

In addition to the valence of parent's disclosures to their offspring, the degree of strategic ambiguity in the information disclosed may influence parents' and emerging adult children's adjustment. Families, divorced and nondivorced, typically have relatively open privacy boundaries with one another, yet privacy rules do exist governing what and how much information should be revealed to various family members (Golish, 2003; Petronio, 2002). When a parent reveals certain private information, s/he may anticipate how the information may influence the other family member (Petronio, 2002). Under certain situational, individual, and relational circumstances, a parent may decide not to reveal or only provide a portion of the information via a strategically ambiguous disclosure instead of clearly, explicitly disclosing all the details (Burgoon & White, 1997; Petronio; Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001). As Petronio (1991; 2002) explains, the use of any communication strategy has implications on boundary management, long term health, and relational quality. Strategic ambiguity may assist families in healthy functioning as it can aid organizational success (Eisenberg, 1990).

By creating a vague message that can have multiple interpretations, a parent may be able to accommodate to his/her child's informational needs (Berger, 1997; Petronio, 2002) while seeking support and upholding the privacy rules and expectations of the relationship (Petronio). For instance, in family interactions, ambiguous messages and the inherent uncertainty of the message's meaning might be preferred in some situations and be beneficial for relationship (W. A. Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Hamilton & Mineo, 1998).

Vagueness may reduce prior uncertainty about the situation while not over burdening one's partner with undesirable or too much information (Berger; Brashers, 2001). The various interpretations may permit the parent to reveal sensitive information and gain the benefits of disclosure while meeting previously established privacy rules for the relationship. Ambiguity also could protect the parent and child from directly confronting the problem disclosed (Eisenberg, 1990). Therefore, it is possible that parents may purposefully use a vague message with multiple interpretations to cope with divorce-related issues, and simultaneously meet, but not exceed, the child's information needs regarding the divorce. As such, their use of strategic ambiguity might be related to psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction.

Strategically ambiguous messages might be a distinguishing characteristic of healthy functioning post-divorce families. The differences between healthy and struggling families may be explained by the content of parent-to-child disclosures (T. D. Afifi et al. 2007; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). In addition to avoiding discussions of family issues (T. D. Afifi & Schrodt, 2003b), adolescents and young adults reported receiving too much information from mothers about the child's father, finances, and personal concerns (T. D. Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). Co-owning this information does not necessarily make children feel closer to their mothers (S. S. Koerner et al., 2002). Offspring may prefer to remain uncertain or uninformed on some issues rather than possessing all information and understanding the details (T. D. Afifi, 2003). For instance, when they did know details about why the divorce occurred (e.g., relational transgressions), offspring preferred to know no more information than they already possessed and permitted the parent to continue withholding information (T.

D. Afifi). On the other hand, they loss trust, perceived their parents as uncaring if parents did not disclose divorce-related information, and became less satisfied with the communication in the parent-child relationship (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002; Thomas et al., 1995). Together, evidence suggests that offspring desire to be informed but not necessarily co-own explicit, detailed information. Thus, offspring who perceive ambiguity in their parent's disclosures may report better relational quality and communication satisfaction with their parent, and possibly better psychological well-being, compared to those who perceive their parents to disclose unambiguous divorce-related information. Overall, purposefully vague messages may be a beneficial strategy when discussing sensitive, private information for both parents and children. Ambiguous messages provide the parent the opportunity to express thoughts and opinions on divorce-related issues and present the child with some information without providing so much detail that might drive them to avoid discussion of the topics altogether.

In addition to the degree of ambiguity in a message, an individual's tolerance for ambiguity may influence how parent and offspring disclose and respond to divorce-related disclosures, maintain or alter established privacy rules, and coordinate privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2002). In the face of undesirable information, some individuals generally preferred to not have all the information (W. A. Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Brashers, 2001). Individuals with a lower tolerance for ambiguity need clear, complete, and specific information and will experience distress when offered ambiguous messages compared to those with higher tolerance for ambiguity (Norton, 1975). Indeed, T. D. Afifi and Keith (2004) found through in-depth interviews and constant comparative analysis that family members vary in their willingness to tolerate ambiguity regarding the

state of their postdivorce family. Further, their willingness for ambiguity influenced how they managed the stress associated with the divorce: Those with higher tolerance perceived stressors as more manageable and expressed less grief (T. D. Afifi & Keith). This individual characteristic may influence how private information is revealed to a relational partner (W. A. Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). As such, parents with high tolerance for ambiguity may have less permeable privacy boundaries with their child, and therefore disclose using more ambiguity. Ambiguity intolerant offspring will likely experience psychological discomfort when they perceive parent's messages as vague, incomplete, inconsistent, or when they are uncertain of the meaning of the message (Norton). Further, ambiguous messages may influence how the offspring perceives his/her parent and the relationship (Norton). Offspring who have low ambiguity tolerance will be less accepting of parents' strategically ambiguous divorce-related disclosures. An individual's tolerance for ambiguity should influence how strategically ambiguous disclosures effect psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction.

#### *Disclosure and (Mis)perception*

While strategically ambiguous disclosure is an intentional strategy that a parent might employ when revealing divorce-related information, the child's perceptions of the disclosure may not align with the parent's communication. Relational partners often have differing perceptions of their communication with one another. In global reports of avoidance, parent's perceptions of young adult children's avoidance was moderately associated with the child's self-report of avoidance, and offspring's perceptions of parent's avoidance was moderately correlated with parent's self-reported avoidance (Caughlin & Golish, 2002). When rating a single conversation, parent-child agreement

about the discussion typically ranges between low to moderate (Richie & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Sillars, Koerner, & Fitzpatrick, 2005). In one example of conversational misperception between parent and adult children, Fingerman (1998) found mothers perceived their adult daughter to have more positive affect at the end of a conflict interaction than daughters reported experiencing. Overall, mothers underestimated their daughters' negative behaviors and overestimated positive behaviors during conflict (Fingerman). Further, understanding of specific ideas and thoughts at specific moments within conversation is unlikely: Parent's and offspring's moment-to-moment understanding of one another tends to be low (Sillars et al., 2005). Thus, parents and children likely end interactions with different perceptions of their conversation.

When confronted with stress, the differences in perception may be exacerbated. A mother's perceptions of her adolescent's coping with life events were only mildly similar to the adolescent's reports of his/her own coping (Glyshaw, Cohen, & Towbes, 1989). Differing perceptions of conversations may occur when discussing divorce-related issues as well. For instance, when recalling recent conversations about divorce stressors, adolescents perceived the parent's disclosures as more inappropriate than parent's perceived them (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007). Further, parents may be unaware of how children understand their divorce-related communication (Dunn et al., 2001; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). In addition to parent's disclosures being inappropriate, offspring and parents may have different perceptions regarding whether certain information should be revealed. Parents disclosures about custody issues, child support, and loyalty are issues offspring reported should remain private (T. D. Afifi, 2003). When discussing divorce-related issues, parents' and offsprings' perceptions of the conversation are likely

very different, and may be more different when asked about their perceptions of the conversation at specific moments during the discussion.

### *Lifespan Influence on Disclosure and Social Support*

A lifespan perspective focuses on a developmental process of communication: where it develops, why it develops, and how it can be altered for optimal living (Pecchioni et al., 2005). Across the life span, family stressors change, intensify, and transform (T. D. Afifi & Nussbaum, 2006). Indeed, one of the most significant family stressors are marital transitions. Divorce, one marital transition, impacts all family members (T. D. Afifi & Nussbaum). However, emerging adult offspring might endure additional strain as they manage divorce-related stress and parental disclosures due to identity explorations and a desire for autonomy, which are most prevalent in the late teens and twenties (Arnett, 2000). As CPM maintains, when confronted with developmental and traumatic or life changes, such as divorce, privacy boundaries are altered (Petronio, 2002). Petronio explains that significant increases in stress trigger an alteration of privacy boundaries with some family members to permit greater disclosure. By modifying boundary permeability and changing privacy rules, family members are better able to cope with family stressors (Petronio).

Privacy boundaries can only be altered through communication. As Nussbaum (2007) asserted, “Without exception... no individual can possibly adapt, maintain, or obtain the necessary requisites of a quality life throughout the life span without competent communication” (p. 3). However, individuals who are physically, cognitively, or psychologically different from one another confront a communicative challenge, especially when experiencing different life events or when they have different life

experiences and histories (Williams & Nussbaum, 2001). To maintain healthy psychological well-being, relational quality, and satisfactory communication, parents and children alter their relational privacy boundaries throughout their lives to meet one another's developmental needs (Petronio, 2002). When coping with divorce-related stress, their support expectations and privacy boundaries likely vary based on where in the lifespan the parent and child are.

Family is an important source of social support across the life span, and the support individuals need changes as they mature and experience different stressors (Baltes, 1987; Pecchioni et al., 2005). Older and younger individuals differ in their desire for and reaction to social support (Segrin, 2003). Segrin found that individual's who were later in the lifespan were less benefited psychologically by familial support compared to adults earlier in the life span. Yet, Dunham (1995) reported that support from adult offspring protected older adults from depression. The coping strategies, and more specifically, the support strategies, used may vary across the life span, however. Generally, when confronted with stress, such as personal health or family issues, or household maintenance, middle aged adults employed active, interpersonal, and problem-solving coping strategies; whereas, older adults preferred to use more passive, emotion-focused strategies (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987). Following divorce, older adults, mothers in particular, benefited from the emotional support of adult offspring reporting higher relational quality than those who did not receive effective emotional support from the adult child (Nakonezny et al., 2003). The type of support that is desired and most beneficial likely varies for adults as they mature, including when coping with divorce-related stress.

Offspring are highly reliant on family for support. However, as they mature and transition through emerging adulthood, children obtain more resources, and support from family members may become less valued (Arnett, 2000; Pecchioni et al., 2005). However, children remained reliant on parents for social support and tangible assistance as they were launched into adulthood (Silverstein & Bengston, 1997). Further, middle aged mothers provided more support to their emerging adult offspring than they received from those offspring (Levitt, Guacci, & Weber, 1992). Divorced parents, however, may be less able to provide support and assistance to offspring (Umberson, 1992). Rather, parents may request their child's assistance, which may create increased distress if the child is attempting to establish his/her own autonomy and identity separate from the family. Emerging and young adult as well as adolescent offspring reported that relational quality with their divorced parent was not negatively affected by parents' requests for coping assistance and sensitive divorce-related disclosures (Arditti, 1999; S. S. Koerner et al., 2002). However, adolescents who perceived that they needed to care for or nurture their divorced parent reported elevated depressive symptoms (Buchanan et al., 1996). The support needs of the parent and developmental needs of the child postdivorce influence may the effectiveness of support for adjustment.

Parent-child privacy boundaries are altered throughout their lifespan (Petronio, 2002), and may become more permeable after divorce (Golish, 2003). The impact that divorce-related disclosures have on offspring is likely influenced by developmental differences between adolescents and emerging adults (Petronio, 2002; Youniss & Smoller, 1985). Although they have small or nonexistent privacy boundaries with parents early in life, as children become more independent, they gain a clear understanding of

what privacy is and learn how to manage privacy boundaries by forming expectations for privacy and boundary coordination and actively controlling personal information as they mature through adolescence (Petronio). During adolescence, they learn how to coordinate privacy boundaries and manage the responsibilities involved in maintaining privacy boundaries during adolescence (Petronio), and at which time, they seek to redefine their privacy boundaries with parents (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Petronio, 2002). As they emerge into adulthood, offspring attempt to establish their autonomy (Arnett, 2000), and likely have adult-like privacy boundaries, which are more rigid and less permeable than during childhood and adolescence (Petronio). The developmental changes in parent-child privacy boundaries likely influence what parents discuss with emerging adult children, what offspring identify as appropriate, and the effects of those disclosures for offspring.

Generally, parents disclose to offspring when the relationship is characterized by highly permeable privacy boundaries (J. B. Miller & Stubblefield, 1993). Fingerman (1998) posited that as daughters and mothers mature, they desire a relationship in which they are free to express emotions with one another while tolerating and accepting the need to regulate those emotions. Though they often worked to avoid discussing hurtful topics with one another, mothers and adult daughters valued open communication and cooperation with one another (Fingerman). Divorced parents disclose to offspring about sensitive, divorce-related issues, such as financial issues, parenting challenges, the former spouse/father (T. D. Afifi, 2003; S. S. Koerner et al., 2002). Although disclosing about divorce-related stressors aids psychological well-being of parents (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Richmond, & Christensen, 2000), the effects of a parent's disclosures on offspring may be dependent upon where in the lifespan the child is at the time of the disclosures.

Parents' disclosures may have different effects on offsprings' psychological well-being and relational quality. Adolescents reported heightened worry and anxiety when parents disclosed about sensitive divorce-related stressors (S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). In his meta-analysis examining the effects of divorce for children, Amato (2001) found that psychological well-being had larger effect sizes for adolescents than young children in elementary school. However, adolescents did not report higher levels of depression when parents disclosed about divorce-related issues (Buchanan et al., 1996). Parent-child relational quality, however, may not be negatively affected by the sensitive disclosures across the lifespan. Adolescent offspring reported close relationships with custodial parents even in the presence of frequent and sensitive divorce-related disclosures (T. D. Afifi et al., 2008; S. S. Koerner et al., 2002). For adolescents, divorce-related disclosures negatively affect psychological well-being but not relational quality.

Although parents tend to be available to provide offspring support during emerging adulthood, they may be less able to provide support following divorce. In fact, when managing divorce-related stress, parents may be reliant on their offspring for coping assistance. Although parents' disclosures have been shown to effect adolescents' psychological well-being negatively but have a potential negative effect on relational quality, the impact of support and disclosure for emerging adults remains unclear. Due to the differences in developmental goals, parents' requests for support assistance and disclosures may have different effects for emerging adults than for adolescents.

#### Summary of Literature Review

As CPM argues, parents and children maintain privacy boundaries with one another that are revised as they develop and experience life changes, and privacy rules

are developed and altered as necessary to guide what, when, and how parents disclose (Petronio, 2002). When disclosing, parents' private information becomes co-owned, regardless of how willing and capable the child is of possessing and maintaining the relationship's privacy boundaries and following established privacy rules (Petronio). To minimize turbulence that may arise, parents have the option to employ indirect disclosures strategies. A strategically ambiguous disclosure, may help revise privacy rules as well as decrease the potential for boundary turbulence because the strategy the disclosure is vague with the details incomplete. This strategy may help a parent meet his/her communicative goals (e.g., expression, support seeking) while meeting the child's information needs and upholding established privacy boundaries.

Social support aids family members' ability to cope with divorce. Expectations for support influence what assistance they can anticipate from specific relational partners (Collins & Feeney, 2004). They also may affect what and how individuals disclose to confidants (Pennebaker, 1990) and provide guidelines for the encounter to help attain beneficial outcomes for both interactants (Reis et al., 2006). Although some offspring appreciate and enjoy providing parents the support (Arditti, 1999; S. S. Koerner, 2004), not all confidants are able or capable of providing the expected support (Petronio, 2002).

Disclosing private information can be a means of seeking social support (Petronio, 2002). Parents' and children's psychological well-being, relational quality, and, to a smaller extent, communication satisfaction, have been predicted by parents' divorce-related disclosures, although these results have been somewhat discrepant. Generally, parents' psychological well-being was improved through by disclosing stressors to others (Mendolia & Kleck, 1993; Richmond & Christensen, 2000). Offspring

reported greater psychological distress, worry, anxiety when parents disclosed about divorce issues (e.g., S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). Communication regarding meaningful family issues may strengthen the relational bond for divorced parents with their offspring (S. S. Koerner et al., 2000). For their offspring, some scholarship has illustrated potential beneficial effects for emerging adult children on relational quality (Arditti, 1999), and other research has illustrated that the disclosures do not necessarily created greater feelings of relational closeness with parents (e.g., S. S. Koerner et al., 2004).

Communication satisfaction following divorce-related disclosures is relatively unknown; however, when offspring perceive that parents have withheld information, they are less satisfied with parent's communication (Thomas et al., 1995). Further, the valence of the disclosure has been argued to effect child's adjustment (e.g., T. D. Afifi et al., 2007).

While negative divorce-related disclosures may influence parents' and children's adjustment following divorce, the direction of those effects remain unresolved.

The communication strategy employed when disclosing has implications for long term health and relational quality (Petronio, 2002). Thus, the discrepant findings regarding the effects of divorce-related disclosures on postdivorce adjustment might clarified by examining the degree of strategic ambiguity within the disclosures. Under certain circumstances, an individual may choose to reveal only a part of private information, rather than directly reveal all the details (Petronio; Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001). Similar to how strategic ambiguity may influence organizational success (Eisenberg, 1990), it may function as a strategy for managing postdivorce family adjustment because it provides the ability to reveal private information and seek support while meeting the recipient's needs and uphold privacy rules and relational expectations

(Berger, 1997; Brashers, 2001; Petronio). However, as CPM suggests, one's tolerance for ambiguity may influence the effects of an indirect disclosure (Petronio). Individuals with a low tolerance for ambiguity may actually be negatively effected by ambiguous disclosures where as the benefits of ambiguity may be amplified for those who are tolerant of strategic ambiguity (Norton, 1975).

Inconsistencies regarding the effects of parents' divorce-related disclosures are further complicated by parents' and children's differing perceptions of their conversations. Moderate correlations have been found between parents' and children's self-reported general disclosure and avoidance behaviors (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007, Caughlin & Golish, 2002). Their global assessments of a single interaction tend to be moderately correlated, as well (Richie & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Sillars et al., 2005). However, their momentary perceptual similarity tends to be low (Sillars et al.). Additionally, parent-child perceptual similarity may be low when managing stress (Glyshaw et al., 1989). Thus, parents' and children's similarity in perceptions of strategically ambiguous disclosures might follow similar patterns.

Across the lifespan, family stressors change, intensify, and transform, with divorce being one of the most significant stressors (T. D. Afifi & Nussbaum, 2006). Divorced parents disclose sensitive, negative divorce-related information to their offspring (Golish, 2003; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). The impact of the disclosures likely is influenced by developmental differences between adolescents and emerging adults (Youniss & Smoller, 1985). While they mature, children obtain more support resources, likely changing their expectations for support from family (Pecchioni et al., 2005). Additionally, emerging adult children are seeking to establish their own identity and

sense of autonomy (Arditti, 2000). However, they remain reliant on parents for support and assistance (Silverstein & Bengston, 1997). Therefore, emerging adult children may be affected differently than adolescents by parents' divorce-related disclosures.

Although the existing literature provides useful insight into how postdivorce families cope with divorce-related stress and manage privacy with one another, a number of unanswered questions remain regarding CPM and privacy management when enduring traumatic change, the characteristics and functions of indirect disclosure strategies, such as strategic ambiguity, in managing privacy boundaries, and how strategic ambiguity influences postdivorce adjustment. Exploring strategic ambiguity as a strategy for parents' divorce-related disclosures may present valuable insight into privacy management and the disclosure process as well as practical help to families regarding how to discuss divorce-related issues in a manner that will offer the assistance the individuals need while not overburdening confidants. Therefore, the next section provides the rationale and hypotheses for the two studies designed to investigate strategically ambiguous parent-to-emerging adult child divorce-related disclosures.

#### Rationale and Statement of Hypotheses

The goal of this dissertation is to examine the role of strategically ambiguous disclosures in the coping process following divorce. Communication Privacy Management theory (Petronio, 1991; 2002) maintains that as life circumstances change, individuals alter the rules guiding the management of private information with relational partners. By disclosing private information, thereby increasing the permeability of privacy boundaries, parents and children co-own intimate information (Petronio, 2002). These disclosures, regardless of the child's anticipation and readiness for the information,

create a collective boundary and compels the child to provide a response to the disclosure (Petronio, 2002). The parent's desired response from the child may be indicated through the directness of the parent's disclosure (Petronio, 2002) as well as the relational expectations for support created through past interactions (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Reis et al., 2000; Pierce et al., 1991). Parents' likely have expectations for support from young adult offspring, especially if they perceive a lack of support from other friends and family (Ladd & Zvonkovic, 1995; O'Connor et al., 1998). Thus, parents who expect little support from friends and family may expect more support from offspring, and children's expected support from parents should be related to the support they expect to receive from their parent. Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 are offered:

H1: A parent's expected support from friends and family will be negatively related to the support offspring are expected to provide.

H2: Emerging adult children's expectations for support from parent will be related the support s/he provides to the parent.

One's support expectations likely influence the disclosure of divorce-related issues. When a parent expects to receive support from his/her child, more detailed, specific information may be included in order to present all the relevant information necessary for the child to provide the desired support. As CPM maintains, direct disclosure strategies indicate to the confidant the desired response and privacy rules protecting that private information (Petronio, 2002). Indirect disclosure strategies, such as strategic ambiguity, are useful when an individual is unsure of how his/her relational partner will react to the information (Petronio, 2002; Petronio et al., 1996). Therefore, parents may use strategic ambiguity when support is not expected from the child.

Alternatively, parents may disclose ambiguously, even when they do expect support from their offspring. Parents are sometimes, but infrequently, aware that having too detailed or too much information may be detrimental to their child's postdivorce adjustment (T. D. Afifi, 2003) and may choose to intentionally not reveal all aspects of the issue being discussed for the benefit of the child. Therefore, it is hypothesized that support expectations will predict strategic ambiguity:

H3: The support a parent expects from (a) emerging adult children and (b) friends and family will predict strategic ambiguity in parent's disclosures.

H4: The support an emerging adult child (a) provides the parent and (b) expects the parent to provide will predict strategic ambiguity the child perceives in parents' disclosures.

During discussion of divorce-related issues, parents may disclose more private information to their children than they did prior to the divorce (Arditti, 1999; Golish, 2003; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004), indicating an alteration of privacy boundaries. These disclosures may be beneficial for parents (Nakonezny et al., 2003). The discrepant findings for the effects on offspring suggest that the characteristics of the disclosures may explain postdivorce adjustment above and beyond whether divorce-related information is co-owned. Many offspring stated that parents reveal more information they wanted to possess (T. D. Afifi, 2003); however, others are satisfied with the information parents provide (Arditti, 1999). Therefore, it may be that the directness and explicitness of information parents reveal influences children's adjustment outcomes. Thus, hypotheses 5 and 6 are presented:

H5: The degree of strategic ambiguity parents report in their disclosures will predict parents' (a) psychological well-being, (b) relational quality, and (c) communication satisfaction.

H6: The degree of strategic ambiguity emerging adult children perceive in parents' disclosures will predict children's (a) psychological well-being, (b) relational quality, and (c) communication satisfaction.

In addition to predicting parents' and children's psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction, strategic ambiguity should mediate the relationship between support expectations and adjustment outcomes. Social support is related to psychological well-being and successful coping (Holloway & Machida, 1991; Leslie & Grady, 1988; Richmond & Christensen, 2000). Further, expectations provide guidelines for the interaction to help the dyad obtain the most beneficial outcomes (Reis et al., 2000) by potentially influencing what and how individuals disclose to confidants (Pennebaker, 1990). Thus, it is hypothesized that strategic ambiguity will mediate the support expectation – adjustment relationship:

H7: For parents, the degree of strategic ambiguity used during their conversation will mediate the relationship between expected support and (a) psychological well-being, (b) relational quality, and (c) communication satisfaction.

H8: For emerging adult children, the degree of strategic ambiguity the child perceives in the parent's disclosures will mediate the relationship between expected support and (a) psychological well-being, (b) relational quality, and (c) communication satisfaction.

Parents' and offspring's tolerance for ambiguity may influence how strategic ambiguity influences their well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction. Individuals with a lower tolerance for ambiguity need clear, complete, and specific information and will experience distress when offered ambiguous messages compared to those with higher tolerance for ambiguity (Norton, 1975). Ambiguity intolerant individuals will likely experience psychological discomfort when using or confronted with a vague, incomplete message (Norton). However, those who are tolerant of ambiguity will be more accepting of the vague divorce-related disclosures. Thus, tolerance for ambiguity is hypothesized as a moderator for strategic ambiguity.

H9: A parent's tolerance for ambiguity will moderate the relationship between use of strategic ambiguity and their (a) psychological well-being, (b) relational quality, and (c) communication satisfaction such that those with greater tolerance for ambiguity will report lower adjustment outcomes following the use of strategic ambiguity than those with lower tolerance for ambiguity.

H10: An emerging adult child's tolerance for ambiguity will moderate the relationship between his/her perceptions of strategic ambiguity and their (a) psychological well-being, (b) relational quality, and (c) communication satisfaction such that those with greater tolerance for ambiguity will report lower adjustment outcomes following the perception of strategic ambiguity than those with lower tolerance for ambiguity.

Increasingly, evidence suggests that the valence of parent's disclosures negatively influence children's psychological well-being (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004) yet may increase relational quality (T. D. Afifi, Coho, & McManus, 2008;

Arditti, 1999). However, these conclusions rest on testing only negative, sensitive, or inappropriate disclosures (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). Discussion of divorce-related topics, positively or negatively valenced, may have these effects due to the dramatic changes the divorce created in the family. Thus, parent-child discussions of positive and negative divorce-related topics must be examined before accepting that negative disclosures affect these outcomes:

H11: The parent's report of (a) psychological well-being, (b) relational quality, and (c) communication satisfaction will be lower following a discussion of divorce-related stressors than a discussion of their happiest memories after divorce.

H12: The emerging adult child's report of (a) psychological well-being, (b) relational quality, and (c) communication satisfaction will be lower following a discussion of divorce-related stressors than a discussion of their happiest memories after divorce.

Although strategic ambiguity and topic valence may impact parent and child outcomes, their perceptions of the conversation likely differ (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; Sandler et al., 1985). Parents and children often have greatly different understandings and perceptions of what unfolds during a conversation (Sillars et al., 2005), although their perceptions and understandings of one another are often moderately related at the end of a single conversation (Richie & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Sillars et al., 2005). These differences may be magnified when discussing stressful topics (Glyshaw et al., 1989). Thus, it is hypothesized that

H13: Parents will report greater use of strategic ambiguity than emerging adult children will perceive (a) minute by minute during conversation, and (b) globally after the end of the conversation.

H14: Parent and emerging adult children's reports of strategic ambiguity will be more similar in their global reports of strategic ambiguity than at each minute within the conversation.

While similarity in parents' and children's momentary perceptions may differ more than their global perceptions of the conversation following the discussion, it remains unclear why this occurs. It is possible that meaning for the ideas expressed are decoded and more detail is provided over the course of a conversation. In other words, the confidant's understanding of the discloser's information may better align with what the discloser intends later in a conversation than early in the conversation. Thus, a final research question is posed:

RQ1: Do the parent's report and child's perceptions of strategic ambiguity become more similar over the course of their conversation?

After first developing a measure for context specific strategic ambiguity in Study 1, Study 2 will test these 14 hypotheses and research question. Chapter 2 will over view the methods used for each study. Chapter 3 will present the results for each study. The last chapter will offer an overview and discuss the major findings, and address the limitations and implications for the findings for the three major goals of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Two studies were conducted to test the 14 hypotheses and one research question. Study one was a questionnaire study designed to develop a comprehensive self-report measure of strategic ambiguity needed to test hypotheses three through ten, 13b, and 14. In Study 2, a lab interaction study was conducted to examine parents' use of and young adults' perceptions of strategic ambiguity in divorce-related disclosures.

### Study 1

Prior to testing the hypotheses regarding strategically ambiguous divorce-related disclosures, it was necessary to develop an instrument that reliably and validly measures the underlying construct (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). Existing measures have illustrated strategic ambiguity's use in interpersonal contexts (e.g., Tanaka & Bell, 1996); however, they primarily rely on manipulating messages (e.g., Edwards, 1998) or consist of single-item assessments (Williams & Goss, 1975). Although current means of investigating strategic ambiguity have offered valuable insights, they may not fully capture the variability of strategically ambiguous disclosures as it exists in dyadic interactions. A valid and reliable measure will assist in obtaining better estimates and offer a more complete picture of the role of strategic ambiguity in interpersonal communication. Study 1 builds upon Bavelas and her colleagues' (e.g., Bavelas, 1983; Bavelas et al., 1988) work by taking the initial step in developing a more comprehensive, self-report measure of strategic ambiguity that can be completed by both the sender and receiver to assess actual and perceived strategic ambiguity.

### *Participants*

Undergraduate college students were recruited from communication courses to participate in a survey study. The study was announced by the researcher in various upper and lower division communication courses. A follow-up email reminder was sent to the course instructors to either forward to students or verbally remind in class. All students received extra credit for participating. The sample consisted of 25 males and 36 females.

### *Procedures*

Participants contacted the researcher via email to schedule an appointment to complete the questionnaire, and an email reminder was sent to each person the afternoon prior to the appointment. Two to 15 students reported to a classroom to complete the survey at each appointment time. Upon arrival, participants signed in and received a copy of the consent form to read and sign, and then questionnaires were distributed.

Participants were first directed to “Think back to your most recent conversation with your parent in which the two of you were talking about a problem at home. (This conversation may have been in-person or over the phone.)”. After indicating whether the conversation was with their mother ( $n = 43$ ) or father ( $n = 18$ ), participants were then asked to write a brief summary of the conversation. Next, 40 items assessed how ambiguous the parent was perceived to be during the conversation. Finally, participants were asked to review the statements and indicate any that were difficult to understand, and provide written feedback about the items. Upon completion, each person was provided a copy of the consent form. The questionnaire took about 15 minutes to complete.

### *Strategic Ambiguity Item Development*

Items for each of the four dimensions of strategic ambiguity were developed based on the explication of the construct presented to ensure that all aspects of each dimension were incorporated into the measure. During this initial step, multiple items were created for each dimension of the construct to capture the breadth of each factor. Items that appeared redundant with others were included in this initial test. Because the goal at this stage was to obtain a set of items that could be interpreted in the same way by multiple individuals, the similarity among items helps identify the subset that will be the most consistently interpreted by participants yet capture the variability in the underlying factor (Churchill, 1979; Viswanathan, 2005). Forty items captured one of the four underlying factors of ambiguity. Ten items assessed Content Ambiguity (e.g., “The meaning was vague”). Source Ambiguity consisted of 12 items (e.g., “My parent was unclear about whether s/he agreed with the statements s/he made”). Seven items captured Receiver Ambiguity (e.g., “My parent was clearly talking to me”). Finally, 11 items assessed Context Ambiguity (e.g., “My parent’s statements made sense with what we were discussing”). The item response scale consisted of a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from “1” strongly disagree to “7”, strongly agree.

### *Analysis*

The items were created based on existing literature regarding each dimension and each item was hypothesized to load on to a specified dimension; therefore, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted on the items for each domain (Byrne, 2005; Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). LISREL 8.54 was used. Because of the small sample size, each factor, with its respective items, was analyzed independent of the others even though this

approach eliminated the possibility of potential cross-loading of items. Preliminary analyses were run first for each domain to assess univariate and multivariate normality. Maximum likelihood estimation was used. Due to violations of normality, the asymptotic covariance matrix and Satorra-Bentler  $\chi^2$  statistic was used.

Each CFA was evaluated based on overall model fit criteria and factor loadings for each item. Overall model fit was assessed using multiple indices:  $\chi^2/df$ , RMSEA < 0.10, Model CAIC less than Independence CAIC and Saturated CAIC, CFI  $\geq$  0.95, and SRMR < .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005). Because the goal is to identify a parsimonious set of items that adequately captured the entire domain of strategic ambiguity, items were eliminated based on low, nonsignificant inter-item correlations, the parameters, errors,  $R^2$ , and written comments provided by participants. Items were dropped one at a time to assess model change.

## Study 2

### *Participants*

Forty parent-emerging adult child dyads participated in Study 2. Of the parents to participate, 31 (77.5%) were female, 9 (22.5%) were male. Parent's mean age was 48.2 years old ( $SD = 5.04$ , range = 37 – 60). The length of time since the divorce at the time the dyad participated in the study was 10.13 years ( $SD = 5.12$  years), and 52.5% ( $n = 21$ ) of the parents had received counseling after the divorce (16 reported not having received counseling, and 3 did not respond). The majority of parents were Caucasian ( $n = 38$ , 95%), one parent was Latina (2.5%), and one parent did not report ethnicity. The educational background of parents was varied, with all participants having received at least a high school diploma: 25.0% ( $n = 10$ ) had a high school diploma, 25.0% ( $n = 10$ )

completed some college, 37.5% ( $n = 15$ ) had a college degree, and 12.5% ( $n = 5$ ) had an advanced degree (e.g., MA, Ph.D.). The median income of the families was between \$60,001 and \$75,000 per year. Immediately following the divorce, on average, parents rated their subjective income as slightly worse than when married; however, at the time of their participation in the study, they rated their subjective income was slightly better than when married, on average. Eleven parents (27.5%) were in a dating relationship at the time of their participation, 17 (42.5%) were remarried, and the remaining parents who participated ( $n = 12$ , 30.0%) were neither dating or remarried. Using a single item ranging from “very strong” (1) to “really struggling” (7), parents indicated they felt their family was strong ( $M = 1.92$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ).

Of the emerging adult children who participated, 28 (70.0%) were female, 12 (30.0%) were male. The offsprings’ mean age was 20.20 years old ( $SD = 1.98$ , range = 18-29). Forty percent ( $n = 16$ ) had received counseling after the divorce (the remaining 24 reported not having received counseling). The majority of children were Caucasian ( $n = 39$ , 97.5%), the remaining was Latino ( $n = 1$ , 2.5%). The large majority of the participants were currently enrolled in college: 2.5% ( $n = 1$ ) had not received a high school diploma, 92.5% ( $n = 37$ ) had completed some college, 5.0% ( $n = 2$ ) had a college degree, and none of the participants held an advanced degree (e.g., MA, Ph.D.). Overall, they saw the other parent (the one who did not participate in the study) about once a month, but this ranged from not seeing the other parent at all to seeing the other parent 3 or more times per week. Offspring generally felt their family was strong ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) according to their ratings on a single-item scale ranging from “very strong” (1) to “really struggling” (7).

To qualify for the study, the parent-emerging adult child dyads had to meet three criteria. First, parents must have separated from his/her spouse (i.e., the child's biological or adoptive parent). Second, the child had to be at least 18 years old. Finally, both the parent and the child had to be able to attend a one hour lab session together at the PSU, University Park campus.

Participants were recruited via multiple methods. First, students enrolled in a basic communication course with a research participation requirement were recruited ( $n = 36$ ). Students were assigned to the study based on their responses to three screening questions (one reflecting each of the three qualifying criteria for participation) they complete at the beginning of the semester. Students whose own family of origin did not meet study requirements were assigned to a different research study to fulfill the course requirement. Second, the researcher recruited students enrolled in other communication courses ( $n = 1$ ) and one sociology course ( $n = 1$ ). At the discretion of the instructor, extra credit or course credit was offered students who qualified and were willing to participate with his/her parent. For those whose own family of origin did not qualify for participation, students could earn extra credit by completing an alternative study or written assignment. During classroom recruitment, a flyer, which included the researcher's contact information and a description of the study, was given to all students. Third, flyers describing the study and the researcher's contact information were posted around PSU University Park in permitted areas ( $n = 0$ ) and around State College in libraries and grocery stores ( $n = 0$ ). Fourth, electronic postings were made. The study was advertised on statecollege.com ( $n = 0$ ) in PennState Newswire ( $n = 2$ ). These announcements provided the same information included on the flyer but had the potential

to reach a larger audience and individuals outside of the university community. Fifth, dyads were recruited through snowball methods with the parent-child pairs who completed the study ( $n = 0$ ). After completing the study, the parent and child were provided a copy of the study's flyer, which they could offer to other individuals they knew who would be interested in the study. The researcher requested that they not share any specific information about the study or what they did while participating in the study, only to provide the flyer to someone they know. The network sampling procedures employed have been found to obtain a large and varied sample (Granovetter, 1979). Participants not earning course credit or extra credit for their participation (e.g., parents of the students recruited) were compensated for their time with \$5.00 in Berkeley Creamery certificates.

Because of the multiple recruiting methods employed, qualified parent-child dyads scheduled appointments for their lab interaction in one of two ways. Participants recruited through the basic course research participation requirement contacted their parent to determine a time that would be convenient for the dyad to visit the communication lab. Students then logged into the basic course research participation system and signed-up for a one hour appointment. For parent-emerging adult dyads recruited outside of the basic communication course, one member of the interested dyad emailed the researcher to schedule an appointment for participation. Before finalizing the appointment time, the researcher verified that the dyad met the study qualification criteria via their responses to the same three screening questions completed by the basic communication course students. A reminder email was sent to each dyad the evening before the pair's scheduled appointment. During recruitment, initial contact, scheduling,

and lab session, participants were informed of the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation in this study verbally and through informed consent.

### *Procedures*

Parent-emerging adult child dyads visited an interaction lab equipped with two couches, a coffee table, table and chairs. Four cameras are fixed to the ceiling, one in each of the four corners of the room. The dyads completed a four part study, including a (1) pre-interaction questionnaire, (2) discussion, (3) post-interaction questionnaire, and (4) video recall procedure.

Upon arriving, the dyad was greeted by the researcher and directed to sit across from one another at a table in the lab. After providing informed consent, participants completed the pre-interaction questionnaire, individually, without discussing their responses with one another, which took about 15 minutes to complete. Next, the parent and emerging adult child moved to a couch in a different part of the lab to discuss two topics listed in their pre-interaction questionnaire. The dyads were randomly assigned to discuss either the divorce-related stressor or happy memory first: 17 dyads discussed the stressor first and happy memory second; 23 dyads discussed the happy memory first and the stressor second. Using lists created in the pre-interaction questionnaire, the researcher guided the dyad through deciding on a topic to discuss. If the parent and child listed the same topic, that was the topic to be discussed. If they shared more than one topic, they could choose from among the shared topics. If no topic occurred on both lists, they chose from among any of the topics. This was done for each of the two discussions just prior to initiating the conversation of each topic. The dyad was directed to discuss each topic just as they would at home, in as much detail as they were comfortable and until they feel

they have exhausted the topic; the only difference was that they were directed to say they were done when they no longer wanted to discuss the topic. If the dyad had not ended the conversation after ten minutes, the researcher entered the lab to end the discussion. This process was followed for both topics. Conversations were video and audio recorded.

After the dyad completed the second conversation, the researcher reentered the lab to begin the post-interaction tasks. The parent and child were separated to complete the post-interaction questionnaire and video recall procedure. The parent was randomly assigned to complete either the questionnaire or video recall first, and the child completed the other task first. For 22 dyads, the parent completed the video recall procedures first and post-interaction questionnaire second, with the child completing the tasks in the opposite order; for the remaining 18 dyads, the parent completed the post-interaction questionnaire first followed by the video recall procedure second, with the child completing the video recall first and post-interaction questionnaire second. Once both were complete with the first task, they switched to complete the second post-interaction task. The questionnaire focused on the individual's perceptions of each discussion, as a whole, and was completed while sitting at the table in the lab. To learn parents' and children's thoughts during the stressor conversation, a video prompted series of questions were completed. This video recall procedure took place in a second room where the recording equipment was stored. During this task, the participant watched the stressor conversation in one minute segments and reported their thoughts and feelings about the parent's communication as throughout each portion of the discussion. At the end of each one minute, the researcher stopped the video, and the participant answered a brief series of questions asking about his/her thoughts during that one minute of conversation. Once

the participant completed those items, the researcher then re-started the video for the next one minute segment. The process continued until either the participants were heard in the recording stating that they were done or until ten minutes of conversation was watched. The participants were informed of where in the conversation the video was at the half-way point in the conversation and when only one minute of the conversation was remaining to allow the participant to gauge how far into the task they were. When the participants had completed the post-interaction questionnaire and video recall procedure, the participants were switched to complete the other post-interaction task. Each post-interaction task took between 12 and 15 minutes to complete; thus, the post-interaction procedures took no more than 30 minutes.

After completing all four tasks, the parent and child rejoined each other in the lab. The researcher informed the participants that their participation in the study was complete. They were debriefed and provided the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Finally, participants were provided a copy of the informed consent forms, a flyer about the study, and were compensated for their time.

### *Measures*

Participants completed measures at three time points. The pre-interaction questionnaire requested parent and child to individually brainstorm divorce-related stressors and happy memories, gathered demographic information and global family health, and assessed social support expectations and tolerance for ambiguity. Following the stressor and happy memory conversations, which were prompted by the topics listed in the pre-interaction questionnaire, the post-interaction questionnaire was a global self-report of the participant's perceptions about each conversation, and parent-child

relational quality, psychological well-being, and communication satisfaction after each conversation. The video recall procedures asked participants about their thoughts and feelings as each minute of the divorce-related stressor conversation progressed. The pre-interaction and video recall questionnaires included additional scales not used in Study 2.

#### *Pre-Interaction Questionnaire*

*Brainstorming topics.* Following a similar procedure used in conflict interaction studies (see T. D. Afifi, Coho, McManus, & Steuber, 2008), participants listed four divorce-related stressors and four happy memories that the two had previously discussed. The pair were told that they would see each other's lists, and it would be used to identify discussions topics later in the study. If there was a topic they did not feel comfortable discussing at the time, they did not have to write it on their list. Individually, parents and children listed topics for each category. On average, parents listed 3.25 of stressors and 3.45 happy memories; children listed 3.28 stressors and 3.28 happy memories. Finances/money, issues with the former spouse/noncustodial parent, and splitting time/custody were the most frequently listed divorce-related stressors for both parents and children. The most frequently listed happy memories by both parent and child were traveling/vacations, shared time/activities, and accomplishments. On a 5 point scale, participants rated how "stressful" the divorce-related stressors were ( $M_{\text{parent}} = 3.49$ ,  $SD_{\text{parent}} = 1.02$ ;  $M_{\text{child}} = 3.35$ ,  $SD_{\text{child}} = 0.82$ ) and how "joyful" the happy memories were ( $M_{\text{parent}} = 4.57$ ,  $SD_{\text{parent}} = 0.40$ ;  $M_{\text{child}} = 4.57$ ,  $SD_{\text{child}} = 0.40$ ). Higher number reflected greater stressfulness and happiness, respectively.

*Demographic information.* Background information about the family was obtained from each participant. Parents provided personal information, including: age,

sex, race/ethnicity, occupation, educational status, income before and after separation, subjective rating of financial standing immediately following the divorce and at the time of participation. The parent also provided information pertaining to the family and the divorce, including: number of children, date of separation, length of marriage, who has custody and type of custody arrangements, time spent with other parent, length of visits, counseling received before and since the separation, whether the parent is currently dating and/or cohabiting, current relational status, and global measure of family strength. Children provided information about him/herself, including: age, sex, educational status, race, number of siblings, how often they speak with or see their noncustodial parent, and a measure of family strength.

*Expectations for support.* To measure expectations for support, a slightly modified version of the Recipient Support Perception Scale (Trees, 2000) was completed twice by each participant. Parents completed it once in reference to his/her expectations for support from friends and extended family and a second time in reference to the support the child was expected to provide the parent. The child completed the measures once regarding the support they provide the parent and once regarding the support they receive from the parent. The scale captures subjective judgments of supportiveness of others toward the respondent (Trees). Eighteen items assessed three domains of support: nurturant support, informational support, and tangible aid/network support (see Table 1 for  $M$ ,  $SD$ , and  $\alpha$ ). Nine items asked participants about their expectations for nurturant support (e.g., “My parent expresses confidence in my ability to deal with the divorce”, “My mom makes me feel cared for”), which has an established Cronbach reliability of .87. Informational support was measured via five items (e.g., “My mother provided me

with a useful perspective on the problem”, “My mother gave me useful advice about what to do”), which has previously been shown to have a reliability of .89. Tangible aid/network support was assessed with four items (e.g., “My mother offered to do something to help me solve the problem”, “My mother reminded me that other people care about me”), which had an established reliability of .76. A 7-point Likert-type response scale was used with higher numbers representing more expected supportiveness.

*Table 1*  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for Recipient Support Perceptions Scale

Report	Support type	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Parent expectations from friends, family	Nurturant	1.98	0.83	.811
	Information	3.53	1.41	.948
	Tangible	2.83	1.12	.805
Parent expectations from child	Nurturant	6.12	0.64	.922
	Information	3.96	1.46	.942
	Tangible	3.56	1.30	.835
Child expectations to provide parent	Nurturant	5.86	0.69	.750
	Information	4.46	1.26	.908
	Tangible	4.59	1.00	.689
Child expectations from parent	Nurturant	6.12	0.64	.658
	Information	5.17	1.41	.934
	Tangible	5.33	1.30	.846

*Ambiguity tolerance.* To assess how tolerant of ambiguity participants were, generally, the Measures of Ambiguity Tolerance scale (MAT-50, Norton, 1975) was used. The original scale consisted of 61 items, which has an overall established reliability

of .88 (Norton, 1975). Because the focus of this investigation is on parent-child relationships and divorce-related disclosures, three of the eight subscales were used. For the child report, the full five item interpersonal communication subscale (e.g., “I tend to be very frank with people”, “I really dislike it when a person does not give straight answers about himself”) was used to assess their tolerance for ambiguity in conversation with others ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ,  $\alpha = .691$ ). For the parent’s report, however, one of the five items (“I prefer telling people what I think of them even if it hurts them, rather than keeping it to myself”) was removed from the scale during analyses because it had a large, negative effect on reliability ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ,  $\alpha = .708$ ). The nine item problem-solving subscale (e.g., “Once I start a task, I don’t like to start another task until I finish the first one”, “In a decision-making situation in which there is not enough information to process the problem, I feel very uncomfortable”) captured the participants’ desire for detail in problem-solving situations ( $M_{\text{parent}} = 4.03$ ,  $SD_{\text{parent}} = 0.91$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{parent}} = .793$ ;  $M_{\text{child}} = 3.73$ ,  $SD_{\text{child}} = 0.89$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{child}} = .725$ ). Finally, the nine item social subscale (e.g., “I seem to enjoy parties the most when I know most of the people there”, “I get pretty anxious when I’m in a social situation involving me which I have little control”) was used to measure participants’ tolerance of ambiguity in social contexts ( $M_{\text{parent}} = 3.21$ ,  $SD_{\text{parent}} = 0.79$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{parent}} = .722$ ;  $M_{\text{child}} = 2.99$ ,  $SD_{\text{child}} = 0.79$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{child}} = .673$ ). Participants recorded their responses to each item on a 7-point likert-type scale ranging from “very strongly agree” to “very strongly disagree”.

#### *Post-Interaction Questionnaire*

The post-interaction questionnaire consisted of two sections. In section one, participants were directed to focus first on the first conversation they had, and as they

completed section two, they were directed to focus on the second conversation they had. Thus, each scale was completed twice: once for the stressor conversation and once for the happy memory discussion. To encourage participants' to focus solely on one topic at a time, each section began by requesting the participant to write down the specific topic that was discussed. In the directions for each scale, it was reiterated that responses to each question should be about "the first topic" or "the second topic". Additionally, the order of the scales was altered between topics one and two.

*Used/perceived strategic ambiguity.* The 27-item strategic ambiguity scale developed in Study 1 was employed to assess the parent's self-report of his/her use of strategic ambiguity and the child's perceptions of parent's strategic ambiguity. For the parent version of the scale, items were modified to reflect the parent's own actions (e.g., "I intentionally tried to make the meaning vague", "I purposefully was unclear about whether I agreed with the statements I made"). The scale was completed twice, once for the stressor conversation and once for the happy memory conversation, by both the parent and child. Seven items measured content ambiguity. Source ambiguity consisted of nine items. Receiver ambiguity was assessed with five items. Finally, to measure context ambiguity respondents completed six items. However, one item ("I was trying to avoid giving my child a direct response") showed low internal consistency with the other five items across three of the four sets of responses, and therefore, was removed from the scale for all reports. A 7-point Likert-type scale was used to assess agreement with each item ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7).

For Study 2, the four dimensions of the strategic ambiguity scale was averaged and used for analyses. By combining the dimensions and assessing the overall construct,

the threat of type I error could be reduced by limiting the number of models tested. Additionally, although CPM maintains that the directness of a message can influence individuals and relationships, it does not suggest that the various aspects of indirect message may have differential effects. Further, CPM's contention that message directness has affects on individuals and relationships, it has not yet been tested. Hence, it could not be hypothesized which dimension may better predict psychological well-being, relational quality, or communication satisfaction. Therefore, before testing the individual dimensions, determining whether the strategic ambiguity is used by and perceived by family members during discussions of divorce-related issues is necessary. Table 2 presents the parent and child means, standard deviations, and reliabilities for each subscale and the full scale for both topics of conversation.

*Table 2*  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for Strategic Ambiguity

Topic	Dyad member	Subscale	Subscale			Full scale		
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Stressor	Parent's self-report of strategic ambiguity	Content	1.88	1.06	.842	2.00	0.46	.930
		Source	1.96	1.11	.884			
		Receiver	1.79	1.12	.795			
		Context	1.80	0.90	.782			
	Child's perception of parent's strategic ambiguity	Content	2.44	1.03	.791	1.81	0.41	.837
		Source	2.04	0.87	.851			
		Receiver	1.61	0.87	.926			
		Context	1.61	0.86	.924			
Happy memory	Parent's self-report of strategic ambiguity	Content	1.64	0.81	.415	1.81	0.57	.954
		Source	1.71	0.73	.804			
		Receiver	1.60	0.65	.624			
		Context	1.66	0.85	.803			
	Child's perception of parent's strategic ambiguity	Content	2.12	0.82	.669	1.64	0.62	.868
		Source	1.83	0.72	.806			
		Receiver	1.57	0.74	.640			
		Context	1.55	0.67	.739			

*Post-Conversation psychological well-being.* A global measure of psychological well-being assessed participants' feelings about themselves and life immediately following each conversation. Ryff's (1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) *Psychological Well-being* scale contains 18 items (see Table 3 for *M*, *SD*, and  $\alpha$ ) pertaining to self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (e.g., "I feel like I am in control of my life," "I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships," "I like my personality"). Parents and children were asked to complete the items based on how they felt "after your first conversation" and "after your second conversation" in order to have participants focus on their immediate post-conversation responses. The subscales of the 18 item version of this scale have been shown to have low reliability, ranging between .33 and .56 (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). They argue that this is due to the small number of items that capture the conceptual breadth of each psychological well-being factor rather than poor internal consistency among the items. This might be possible given the reliabilities obtained for the overall scale in the current study. Items were assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 7 = "Strongly agree").

*Table 3*  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for Post-Conversation Psychological Well-Being

Topic	Dyad member	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Stressor	Parent	5.67	0.72	.869
	Child	5.69	0.54	.758
Happy memory	Parent	5.66	0.68	.834
	Child	5.68	0.54	.757

*Post-conversation relational quality.* Relational quality was operationalized as relational closeness and relational satisfaction. Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch's (1991) *Closeness* scale measured participants' feelings of closeness with one another. Originally developed to assess adolescent's closeness with their divorced parents, the reliability ranged from .89 to .90 for mothers and fathers, respectively, as the referent for the items (Buchanan et al.). Ten items assessed the respondent's affection, psychological closeness, comfort level, and time spent with the other participant (e.g., "How openly did you talk with your child/mother?", "How careful did you feel you had to be about what you said to your child/mother?"). Similar to post-conversation psychological well-being, participants were requested to respond to the questions according to how they felt about the relationship immediately following each conversation. On a 7-point Likert-type scale, participants recorded their responses with higher numbers indicated greater closeness.

*Relational satisfaction* following each conversation was assessed via an adapted version of the Marital Opinion Questionnaire (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986). The scale was adjusted to reflect the parent (or child) as the referent instead of a marital partner (Vangelisti, 1992). This adaptation has been used in previous studies of parent-child relationships and had good reliability ranging from .92 to .97 (e.g., Afifi & Schrodt, 2003b; Koenig Kellas, 2005). The scale consists of ten 7-point semantic differential items (e.g., "miserable-enjoyable"). An eleventh item provides a global assessment of relational satisfaction ranging from "completely dissatisfied" (1) to "completely satisfied" (7). Means, standard deviations, and reliabilities are reported in Table 4.

*Table 4*  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for Post-Conversation Relational Quality

Topic	Dyad member	Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Stressor	Parent	Relational closeness	5.69	0.77	.728
		Relational satisfaction	5.82	0.99	.937
	Child	Relational closeness	5.88	0.89	.868
		Relational satisfaction	5.17	1.14	.937
Happy memory	Parent	Relational closeness	5.80	0.66	.652
		Relational satisfaction	6.37	0.66	.945
	Child	Relational closeness	6.00	0.87	.877
		Relational satisfaction	5.96	0.82	.933

*Post-conversation communication satisfaction.* Parent's and offspring's satisfaction with communication during the each conversation was measured with Hecht's Communication Satisfaction Scale (1978). As with the other two dependent variable measures, participants were asked to focus on the "first" and "second" conversations in turn when completing this scale to encourage them to provide their immediate reactions to the two post-divorce lab discussions. The 19 items (e.g., "The other person let me know that I was communicating effectively", "The other person expressed a lot of interest in what I had to say") were assessed with a 7-point likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". Hecht found the measure to have a reliability of .97 when administered immediately after an interaction. When recalling conversations with divorced parents, Thomas, Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) obtained a reliability of .96. Table 5 provides the means, standard deviations, and reliability for each dyad member and topic in the current study.

*Table 5*  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for Post-Conversation Communication Satisfaction

Topic	Dyad member	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Stressor	Parent	5.85	0.62	.850
	Child	5.66	0.78	.892
Happy memory	Parent	5.97	0.59	.882
	Child	6.04	0.74	.911

#### *Video Recall Strategic Ambiguity*

Bavelas's (1983; Bavelas & Smith, 1982; Bavelas et al., 1990) 4-item strategic ambiguity scale was used to obtain a rapid response assessment of strategic ambiguity during each minute of the parent-child stressor conversation. One item reflects one of the four dimensions of the construct. Items were slightly modified to reflect the parent's self-report or child's perceptions of parent's use of strategic ambiguity (e.g., "My message was clear, in terms of what was said" and "Your parent's message was clear, in terms of what was said"). Each item was responded to on a 5-point Likert type scale with lower numbers reflecting greater ambiguity. Items were reverse coded to correspond to responses on the strategic ambiguity scale used to assess the overall conversation. Intercoder reliability has ranged from .88 to .99 with this scale (Bavelas & Smith, 1982). The items were completed after each minute of the stressor conversation. Means, standard deviations, and reliability for both parent and child are reflected in Table 6.

*Table 6*  
Sample Size, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability for Video Recall Strategic Ambiguity

Minute	Dyad member	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
1	Parent	38	1.94	0.81	.820
	Child	38	2.04	0.83	.816
2	Parent	36	1.90	0.77	.755
	Child	36	1.80	0.81	.795
3	Parent	35	1.66	0.52	.777
	Child	35	1.86	0.87	.886
4	Parent	32	1.66	0.65	.849
	Child	32	1.92	0.85	.872
5	Parent	28	1.77	0.73	.910
	Child	28	1.77	0.80	.894
6	Parent	24	1.68	0.59	.822
	Child	24	1.91	0.97	.866
7	Parent	22	1.41	0.52	.966
	Child	22	1.91	0.66	.842
8	Parent	17	1.59	0.58	.807
	Child	18	1.92	0.69	.757
9	Parent	14	1.77	0.83	.914
	Child	14	1.95	0.97	.904
10	Parent	12	1.38	0.42	.882
	Child	13	1.81	0.75	.919

### *Analysis*

To analyze the data collected through the lab study, simple linear regression, hierarchical regression, and repeated measures ANOVA were utilized using SPSS 16. First, the data were checked for accuracy of data entry problems and missing data, data was checked against the original questionnaire and revised as necessary. Examination of missing data determined if missing cases are at random. When data was missing at

random, than listwise deletion methods were used. In one case, the parent did not complete the psychological well-being scales, and therefore that parent was dropped from analyses involving psychological well-being. Video recall procedures were not conducted for two dyads, creating a second instance of systematic missing data. For one dyad, an equipment failure was experienced; the interactions were not recorded and video recall responses could not be obtained. For the second dyad, the video for the dyad was recorded; however, the video recall procedure was not completed by the dyad members due to being locked out of the equipment control room. Because the dyad could end their conversation at any time, the video recall procedures did evidence systematic missing data reflecting the length of the dyad's conversation. Preliminary data analysis ensured that the data meet the basic assumptions of regression and ANOVA.

For all statistical tests, alpha was set at .05. Thus, if  $p \leq .05$ , the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. If  $p > .05$ , the null hypotheses was accepted. Given the sample size and an alpha of .05, observed power was between .08 and .50 for  $R^2$  less than .15. For  $R^2$  between .15 and .30, observed power ranged from .62 to .87. When  $R^2$  was greater than .30, observed power exceeded .93.

A 2 (conversation order) X 2 (video recall order) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to test for effects of the conversation order and post-interaction questionnaire – video recall order on the dependent variables (psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction) for both parent and emerging adult child. The General Linear Model in SPSS was used. The conversation order (stressor first, happy memory second or happy memory first, stressor second) was entered as the within-subjects factor and the video recall order was entered as the between-subjects factor.

Substantive analyses consisted of two correlational analyses (H1 and H2), eight regression analyses (H3 through H10), a paired t-test analysis (H11 and H12), and a repeated measures ANOVA (H13, H14, and RQ). To test hypothesis one, that parents' expectations for support from friends and family is negatively related to their support expectations from their child, parents' nurturant, informational, and tangible support expectations from friends and family were correlated with their nurturant, informational, and tangible support expectations from their offspring. The same procedure was used to test hypothesis two regarding the emerging adult child's expected support received from and provided to the parent.

Regression analyses were utilized to test the next eight hypotheses. The influence of expectations for social support on parents' use of strategic ambiguity (H3) and children's perceptions of ambiguity (H4) were tested with simple linear regression. Parents' expectations for support from the child (H3a) and from friends and family (H3b) were entered into a single model with parents' reported use of strategic ambiguity as the dependent variable. This model was tested twice, once for reported strategic ambiguity in the stressor conversation and once for reported strategic ambiguity in the happy memory conversation. Hypothesis four was tested in the same manner with the child's expectations for providing support to the parent (H4a) and expectations for support receipt from the parent regressed on the child's report of perceived strategic ambiguity for both the stressor and happy memory topics.

Due to the effects of topic order on parents' and children's relational quality and children's communication satisfaction, H5a, H5c, and H6a, were analyzed slightly differently than H5b, H6b, and H6c. Simple linear regression was used to test whether

strategic ambiguity predicted parents' and children's psychological well-being (H5a and H6a respectively), and parents' communication satisfaction (H5c). Parents' reported use of strategic ambiguity was regressed on parent's psychological well-being (H5a) and communication satisfaction (H5c). Similarly, children's perceptions of parent's strategic ambiguity was regressed on their psychological well-being (H6a). Each model was tested twice, once to test the hypothesized relationship for their responses regarding their stressor conversation, and once for their responses about the happy memory conversation.

Hierarchical regression analyses were used to test whether strategic ambiguity predicted parents' and children's relational quality (H5b and H6b respectively) and children's communication satisfaction (H6c) because preliminary analyses indicated conversational order influenced parent and child's relational quality reports as well as the child's communication satisfaction. To control for ordering effects, conversational order was covaried by entering it into the first block of the hierarchical regression, and parents' strategic ambiguity was entered into the second block of the regression model with parents' relational quality as the dependent variable (H5b). The same procedure was used to test H6b and H6c. Each of the three hypotheses was tested regarding strategic ambiguity and adjustment outcomes in the stressor and happy memory conversations.

Hierarchical regression models tested whether strategic ambiguity mediated the support – adjustment relationships (H7 and H8). Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) recommendations for assessing mediation effects via regression, a four step procedure was used. First, the effects of support on the strategic ambiguity were assessed (see H3 and H4). Because the support parents expected from offspring (H3a) and from friends and extended family (H3b) nor young adult children's expectations for providing parents

support (H4a) did not predict any of the three dependent variables, the meditational hypotheses were not tested (H7 and part of H8). Young adult children's expectations for social support from parents did predict their perceptions of parent's strategic ambiguity use, so the meditational hypothesis was tested (H8).

A total of six hierarchical regression models tested the meditational hypothesis: one for each of the dependent variables following the stressor conversation, and one for each of the dependent variables pertaining to the happy memory topic. Conversation order was controlled for by entering it as an independent variable in the first block when relational quality and communication satisfaction were tested. In the second block (first block for the model testing psychological well-being), expectations for social support from the parent was entered, and perceived strategic ambiguity was entered last into the next block. Evidence of potential mediation existed if the model showed that (1) support expectations predicted the dependent variable, (2) perceived strategic ambiguity predicted the dependent variable while controlling for support, and (3) the magnitude of the unstandardized regression coefficient for social support was greater than the coefficient magnitude for strategic ambiguity. If all three conditions were true, then the Sobel test was used to test if the indirect effect of support through strategic ambiguity on each dependent variable was significant. As with the previous four hypotheses this procedure was followed to test the hypothesis for both conversation topics.

Three hierarchical regression models were fit to test the moderating effects of tolerance for ambiguity (H9 and H10), one for each dependent variable. First, the independent variables (conversation order, parents' self-reported use of strategic ambiguity, child's perceptions of strategic ambiguity, and tolerance for ambiguity) were

centered around the mean. The interaction term (Strategic Ambiguity X Tolerance for Ambiguity) was created using the centered variables. The models consisted of two blocks when testing parents' and children's psychological well-being (H9a and H10a) and parents' communication satisfaction (H9c) with strategic ambiguity and tolerance for ambiguity as the independent variables in the first block and the interaction term as the independent variable in the second block. For H9b, H10b, and H10c, conversation order was controlled by entering it as an independent variable in the first block with the hypothesized variables entered in the second and third blocks of the model. If the interaction term was significant, the hypothesis was supported. As with the preceding hypotheses, the moderation effect was tested for the stressor and happy memory topic.

A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to compare each of the adjustment outcomes following the negatively valenced divorce-related stressor conversation and the positively valenced happy memory conversation for both the parents' reports (H11) and children's reports (H12). The participants' reports on the adjustment variable following the stressor topic was entered first and their report following the happy memory topic was entered second. For example, to test H12a, children's psychological well-being after the stressor conversation was entered first followed by the children's report of psychological well-being after the happy memory conversation. A significant result indicated that the mean difference between the two scores was significantly different from zero, and a significant negative coefficient suggested that the adjustment outcome was greater following the happy memory conversation than to the stressor conversation.

An 8 (strategic ambiguity observation time) X 2 (dyad member) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to examine parent's reported use of strategic

ambiguity and young adult child's perceptions of his/her parent's ambiguity following their discussion of the divorce-related stressor at the minute and overall assessment times (H13), the similarity between parents' and children's strategic ambiguity reports (H14), and whether their reports would become more similar over the course of their conversation (RQ). The video recall reports of strategic ambiguity and the overall strategic ambiguity scale for the divorce-related stressor conversation were transformed into z-scores to obtain a standardized metric to compare responses. The dyad's stressor conversation was considered the subject with each participant's ratings of strategic ambiguity and dyad member as within subject variables. Not all forty dyads could be included because only twelve of the 40 dyads talked for the entire ten minutes. Half of the dyads ( $n = 22$ ) talked for seven or more minutes, thus those 22 dyad were examined to test hypothesis 13, 14, and research question 1.

## CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

### Study 1

The intent of Study 1 was to take the initial steps necessary for developing a valid and reliable measure of strategic ambiguity. Analyses consisted of two primary steps. Because the underlying latent structure and the items created for each dimension were based on prior scholarship, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to establish initial construct validity. Because of sample size, a CFA was conducted for each of the four underlying factors of perceived strategic ambiguity: Content, Sender, Receiver, and Context Ambiguity. Items were removed one at a time based on nonsignificant inter-item correlations (see Table 7), high errors, low structure coefficients (i.e., factor loadings), and face validity threats as indicated via written comments about individual items by participants. A second order CFA was conducted using the revised subscales to examine the overall scale contributions to the assessment of strategic ambiguity. Second, reliabilities were calculated for each revised scale.

*Table 7*  
Inter-item Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of the 40-item Perceived Strategic Ambiguity Scale

Item	Content Ambiguity										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Content Ambiguity	2	.477**	1.000								
	3	.272*	.532**	1.000							
	4	.626**	.602**	.515**	1.000						
	5	.241 <sup>+</sup>	.482**	.945**	.471**	1.000					
	6	.495	.399**	.296*	.522**	.296*	1.000				
	7	.532**	.452**	.317*	.567**	.343**	.635**	1.000			
	8	.393**	.393**	.187	.425**	.204	.572**	.440**	1.000		
	9	.464**	.315*	.310*	.472**	.346**	.603**	.417**	.533**	1.000	
	10	.389**	.487**	.323*	.451**	.314*	.254 <sup>+</sup>	.361**	.332*	.191	1.000
	Source Ambiguity	1	.444**	.225 <sup>+</sup>	.371**	.653**	.351**	.452**	.437**	.147	.415**
2		.499**	.320*	.400**	.599**	.373**	.501**	.294*	.447**	.518**	.341*
3		.181	.181	.124	.371**	.108	.193	.147	.503**	.228 <sup>+</sup>	.256 <sup>+</sup>
4		.435**	.135	.284*	.411**	.253 <sup>+</sup>	.402**	.233	.364**	.299*	.141
5		.513**	.342**	.282*	.538*	.240 <sup>+</sup>	.389**	.317*	.418*	.217	.494**
6		.251 <sup>+</sup>	.312*	.192	.365**	.175	.159	.161	.261 <sup>+</sup>	.110	.178
7		-.055	.022	-.177	-.177	-.192	-.042	.007	.158	-.108	.057
8		.173	.003	-.020	.097	-.018	-.024	-.099	.210	.146	.292*
9		.184	.260 <sup>+</sup>	.138	.357**	.113	.256 <sup>+</sup>	.022	.430**	.295*	.292*
10		.319*	.183	.250 <sup>+</sup>	.309*	.199	.258 <sup>+</sup>	.182	.354**	.247 <sup>+</sup>	.324*
11		.456**	.415**	.177	.458**	.116	.354**	.257 <sup>+</sup>	.618**	.538**	.389**
12		.367**	.493**	.149	.449**	.092	.341**	.111	.463**	.301*	.469*
Receiver Ambiguity	1	.445**	.206	.101	.499**	.108**	.195	.314*	.357**	.304*	.455**
	2	.312*	.202	.108	.347**	.124	.134	.165	.418**	.369**	.214
	3	.026	-.011	.272*	.199	.296*	.261 <sup>+</sup>	.168	.352**	.374**	.021
	4	-.041	.058	.362**	.109	.342**	.043	.061	.101	.212	.031
	5	.188	.129	.200	.331*	.153	.244 <sup>+</sup>	.137	.188	.316*	.105
	6	.170	.205	.154	.286*	.142	.117	.130	.213	.226 <sup>+</sup>	.159
	7	.315*	.257 <sup>+</sup>	.232 <sup>+</sup>	.353**	.144	.226 <sup>+</sup>	.123	.261 <sup>+</sup>	.353**	.337*
Context Ambiguity	1	.484**	.530**	.296*	.499**	.296*	.391**	.271*	.510**	.476**	.400**
	2	.307*	.306*	.249 <sup>+</sup>	.431**	.294*	.478**	.194	.551**	.576**	.434**
	3	.498**	.492**	.285*	.613**	.291*	.691**	.392**	.592**	.482**	.464**
	4	.396**	.190	.287*	.467**	.272*	.509**	.282*	.368**	.531**	.230 <sup>+</sup>
	5	.616**	.423**	.343**	.652**	.347*	.608**	.417**	.559**	.687**	.422**
	6	.566**	.536**	.393**	.580**	.384**	.639**	.468**	.543**	.649**	.296*
	7	.519**	.388**	.253 <sup>+</sup>	.507**	.254 <sup>+</sup>	.498**	.500**	.492**	.544**	.183
	8	.465**	.488**	.393**	.553**	.413**	.596**	.514**	.431**	.587**	.185
	9	.512**	.194	.126	.481**	.094	.513**	.358**	.446**	.636**	.262 <sup>+</sup>
	10	.271*	.203	.362**	.349**	.334*	.361**	.366**	.307*	.477**	.163
	11	.370**	.474**	.425**	.565**	.429**	.311*	.372**	.276*	.432**	.396**
<i>M</i>	2.62	3.58	3.67	3.20	3.63	3.17	3.13	2.73	3.07	2.93	
<i>SD</i>	1.51	1.86	1.82	1.55	1.79	1.97	1.55	1.89	1.92	1.45	
<i>n</i>	61	61	61	61	60	61	61	61	61	61	

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 7 (cont.)

Inter-item Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of the 40-item Perceived Strategic Ambiguity Scale

Item	Source Ambiguity												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Source Ambiguity	2	.540**	1.000										
	3	.265*	.415**	1.000									
	4	.493**	.555**	.309*	1.000								
	5	.258 <sup>+</sup>	.361**	.196	.453**	1.000							
	6	.131	.155	.316*	.227 <sup>+</sup>	.075	1.000						
	7	-.210	.086	.143	-.177	-.034	.221	1.000					
	8	.113	.340*	.353**	.423**	.169	.289*	-.022	1.000				
	9	.064	.193	.394**	.253 <sup>+</sup>	.410**	.481**	.082	.356**	1.000			
	10	.157	.382**	.248 <sup>+</sup>	.266*	.194	.301*	.013	.378*	.336*	1.000		
	11	.126	.497**	.466**	.408**	.398**	.353**	-.039	.448**	.627**	.542**	1.000	
	12	.135	.382**	.312*	.255 <sup>+</sup>	.529**	.370**	.205	.177	.658**	.369**	.609**	1.000
	Receiver Ambiguity	1	.414**	.361**	.302*	.247 <sup>+</sup>	.476**	.094	.011	.286*	.314*	.370**	.364**
2		.336*	.255 <sup>+</sup>	.267*	.200	.255 <sup>+</sup>	.149	.009	.171	.313*	.248 <sup>+</sup>	.323*	.268*
3		.411**	.333*	.180	.325*	.138	-.130	.032	.095	.045	.179	.049	-.042
4		.208	.137	.011	.168	.042	-.114	.018	-.062	-.157	.101	-.007	-.142
5		.387**	.296*	.071	.255 <sup>+</sup>	.222	-.060	.015	.041	-.026	.004	-.013	.090
6		.288*	.261 <sup>+</sup>	.278*	.271*	.198	-.054	-.020	.214	.114	.065	.178	.077
7		.250 <sup>+</sup>	.253 <sup>+</sup>	.176	.252 <sup>+</sup>	.474**	.063	.087	.123	.199	.164	.244 <sup>+</sup>	.345**
Context Ambiguity	1	.173	.437**	.204	.209	.577**	.200	.040	.104	.408**	.229 <sup>+</sup>	.484**	.549**
	2	.246 <sup>+</sup>	.553**	.196	.349**	.314*	.188	.082	.271*	.381**	.421**	.520**	.497**
	3	.340*	.651**	.382**	.462**	.555*	.267*	.101	.212	.468**	.362**	.580**	.593**
	4	.433*	.584**	.278*	.565**	.386**	.076	.034	.179	.296*	.295*	.392**	.357**
	5	.481**	.686**	.435**	.542**	.570**	.278*	-.052	.359**	.433**	.384**	.670**	.559**
	6	.464**	.654**	.305*	.426**	.333*	.237 <sup>+</sup>	.020	.267*	.266*	.309*	.555**	.433**
	7	.388**	.574**	.253 <sup>+</sup>	.396**	.277*	.123	-.013	.147	.139	.266*	.487**	.294*
	8	.511**	.598**	.199	.385**	.275*	.136	.032	.092	.187	.200	.388**	.354**
	9	.466**	.469**	.258 <sup>+</sup>	.379**	.318*	.213	.014	.172	.271*	.394**	.496**	.411**
	10	.244 <sup>+</sup>	.561**	.014	.281*	.207	.021	.195	-.062	.077	.174	.244 <sup>+</sup>	.151
	11	.320*	.410**	.251 <sup>+</sup>	.214	.457**	.200	-.064	.117	.406**	.165	.383**	.322*
	<i>M</i>	2.95	2.40	2.78	2.30	2.55	2.85	5.50	2.77	2.57	2.73	2.28	2.72
	<i>SD</i>	1.59	1.52	1.32	1.52	1.50	1.59	1.76	1.86	1.42	1.53	1.30	1.45
	<i>n</i>	61	61	61	61	61	61	61	61	61	60	61	61

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 7 (cont.)

Inter-item Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of the 40-item Perceived Strategic Ambiguity Scale

	Item	Receiver Ambiguity						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Receiver Ambiguity	2	.719**	1.000					
	3	.453**	.600**	1.000				
	4	.108	.423**	.550**	1.000			
	5	.321*	.473**	.574**	.328*	1.000		
	6	.530**	.618**	.545**	.308*	.782**	1.000	
	7	.340*	.539**	.384**	.479**	.615**	.435**	1.000
	1	.419**	.521**	.211	.126	.479**	.423**	.603**
Context Ambiguity	2	.283*	.230 <sup>+</sup>	.167	.103	.285*	.259 <sup>+</sup>	.266*
	3	.470**	.377**	.293*	.146	.265*	.323*	.354**
	4	.434**	.208	.243 <sup>+</sup>	.057	.418**	.423**	.263*
	5	.577**	.463**	.356**	.149	.347**	.409**	.470**
	6	.420**	.497**	.381**	.262 <sup>+</sup>	.462**	.558**	.391**
	7	.430**	.517**	.376**	.236 <sup>+</sup>	.476**	.539**	.367**
	8	.291*	.367**	.387**	.216	.412**	.341*	.344**
	9	.416**	.394**	.219	.070	.397**	.329*	.503**
	10	.125	.215	.355**	.344**	.349**	.300*	.354**
	11	.498**	.514**	.355**	.227 <sup>+</sup>	.317*	.487**	.477**
	<i>M</i>	1.83	1.58	1.73	1.55	1.77	1.70	2.22
<i>SD</i>	1.15	0.83	1.23	1.20	1.31	1.17	1.35	
<i>n</i>	61	61	61	61	61	60	61	

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ 

Table 7 (cont.)

Inter-item Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of the 40-item Perceived Strategic Ambiguity Scale

	Item	Context Ambiguity										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Context Ambiguity	2	.414**	1.000									
	3	.613**	.623**	1.000								
	4	.299*	.690**	.525**	1.000							
	5	.649**	.617**	.803**	.616**	1.000						
	6	.571**	.596**	.714**	.588**	.816**	1.000					
	7	.541**	.521**	.638**	.508**	.741**	.804**	1.000				
	8	.500**	.526**	.639**	.465**	.679**	.752**	.816**	1.000			
	9	.395**	.664**	.474**	.691**	.678**	.634**	.579**	.436**	1.000		
	10	.318*	.527**	.391**	.481**	.432**	.560**	.559**	.510**	.481**	1.000	
	11	.566**	.316*	.542**	.338*	.654**	.559**	.500**	.472**	.409**	.379**	1.000
	<i>M</i>	2.22	2.86	2.54	2.88	2.36	1.98	2.24	2.17	2.86	3.61	2.81
<i>SD</i>	1.20	1.62	1.56	1.66	1.35	1.31	1.38	1.02	1.88	1.99	1.35	
<i>n</i>	61	60	61	60	61	61	61	61	61	61	61	

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

### *Factor analysis*

The ten items designed to assess content strategic ambiguity were considered first. The initial model did not fit model criteria ( $SB\chi^2/df = 3.31, p < .01, RMSEA = 0.20, Model CAIC = 217.65, CFI = 0.82, SRMR = 0.12$ ); parameter estimates, error variances, and  $R^2$  values all fell within acceptable ranges. Four items were removed one at a time to improve overall model fit: “There were multiple meanings for what my parent said”, “My parent’s message was ambiguous”, “My parent’s message was very clear, just in terms of what s/he said”, and “My parent’s message had multiple meanings”. Participants reported that the second and fourth items removed were difficult to understand; for instance, a few did not know what “ambiguous” meant.

The deletion of each item improved the overall model fit statistics. Fit statistics showed an excellent fit ( $SB\chi^2/df = 1.06, p > .05, RMSEA = 0.031, Model CAIC = 70.63, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = 0.057$ ) of the final model including six items (“The meaning was vague”, “My parent’s statements had only one possible meaning”, “My parent seemed to contradict him/herself when we talked”, “My parent seemed evasive in our conversation”, “My parent tried to change the subject during our conversation”, and “My parent tried to avoid to my questions”). Table 8 presents the final parameter estimates, standard errors and explained variance.

Source ambiguity was then assessed. The initial twelve item model demonstrated inadequate overall fit ( $SB\chi^2/df = 1.69 p < .01, RMSEA = 0.11, Model CAIC = 213.73, CFI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.10$ ). Examination of the parameter estimates, error variances, and  $R^2$  values revealed that multiple items were likely contributing to the inadequate fit. Inter-item correlations showed that “My parent made it clear that s/he was stating someone

else's opinion", "My parent was ambiguous about whose ideas s/he was stating", "My parent took ownership of the ideas s/he shared", and "My parent was not clear about who was responsible for the ideas s/he expressed" had few significant correlations with other strategic ambiguity source items. For each of the four problematic items, one or two participants indicated they had difficulty understanding the statement. Parameters and error values were the lowest for first two items, as well; and thus, they were dropped from the model first and were followed by the third and fourth.

After removing these items, the overall fit statistics showed strong improvement. The remaining eight items meet overall model fit criteria ( $SB\chi^2/df = 1.45, p = .090$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.087$ ,  $Model\ CAIC = 110.41$ ,  $CFI = 0.96$ ,  $SRMR = 0.074$ ). Further, the parameter and error estimates showed good fit (see Table 8). The final model included the following eight items: "My parent was vague about whether s/he was expressing his/her own opinions", "My parent clearly articulated whose position s/he expressed", "My parent was unclear about whether s/he agreed with the statements s/he made", "My parent said "I believe...", "I think...", and "I feel..." to show that the ideas were his/her own", "My parent was clear about his/her own position", "My parent was vague about what his/her own thoughts were", "My parent was honest about his/her thoughts and feelings", and "My parent very clearly states his/her own thoughts".

Items intended to measure receiver ambiguity were modeled in the same manner. The seven items showed questionable model fit ( $SB\chi^2 (14) = 1.88, p < .05$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.12$ ,  $Model\ CAIC = 97.69$ ,  $CFI = 0.96$ ,  $SRMR = 0.086$ ). Examination of the parameters, errors, and  $R^2$  values indicated that all items contributed; however, item four ("My parent was talking but not to me") had a large error variance. Additionally, of the participants

who provided written feedback, a few reported that they had difficulty with the receiver strategic ambiguity items because they had the conversation on the phone. By removing the problematic item, the overall model fit estimates improved yet some improvement could be made. Two items, “My parent was vague about who s/he was talking to” and “My parent clearly addressed this message to me” were both loading similarly in the model, but inter-item correlations indicated that the second of the two items more strongly and significantly correlated with the other four items. Therefore, “My parent was vague about who s/he was talking to” was dropped.

Five items created the final receiver ambiguity subscale: “My parent was clearly talking to me”, “My parent sounded like s/he might be talking to someone else”, “My parent sounded like s/he was talking to me, but look as though s/he was talking to someone else”, “My parent was looking at me, but s/he did not sound like s/he was talking to me”, and “My parent clearly addressed this message to me”. The overall fit statistics indicated a well fit model ( $SB\chi^2/df = 1.25$ ,  $p = .27$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.069$ ,  $Model\ CAIC = 57.36$ ,  $CFI = 0.99$ ,  $SRMR = 0.064$ ; see Table 8).

Finally, context ambiguity items were examined. All items were correlated with one another, and the confirmatory factor analyses indicated adequate fit of the overall model ( $SB\chi^2/df = 1.84$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.12$ ,  $Model\ CAIC = 124.81$ ,  $CFI = 0.96$ ,  $SRMR = 0.074$ ) and individual item parameters meet acceptable criteria. To see if it was possible to improve the  $SB\chi^2/df$  and  $RMSEA$ , items with the smallest parameter estimates, largest error terms, and smallest  $R^2$  values were considered for removal. Thus, five items were considered (“My parent’s statements sometimes left me guessing about how to respond”, “My parent’s statement was clearly a direct response to the previous

statement”, “My parent’s statements directly addressed the topic”, “My parent answered questions I asked”, “My parent’s statements sometimes did not seem connected with the preceding ideas”, and” It seemed like my parent sometimes was trying to avoid giving me a direct response”). Two items (“My parent’s statements sometimes did not seem connected with the preceding ideas” and “My parent’s statement was clearly a direct response to the previous statement”), were difficult to understand according to one participant. Little improvement in model fit was observed as the first four items were dropped. However, the model fit on all four fit indices were greatly improved when the last two items were eliminated.

The six item model was retained for context ambiguity (see Table 8). Items included “My parent’s statements made sense with what we were discussing”, “Overall, my parent’s ideas fit together, making him/her easy to understand”, “My parent’s responses were “way” off from the statement or question that came before it”, “My parent’s statements sometimes did not seem connected with what we were talking about”, “My parent’s statements fit into the discussion we where having”, and “It seemed like my parent sometimes was trying to avoid giving me a direct response”. The model was a good fit ( $SB\chi^2/df = 1.68, p > .05, RMSEA = 0.11, Model CAIC = 39.16, CFI = 0.98, SRMR = 0.047$ ).

Table 8

Revised Perceived Strategic Ambiguity Scale Standardized and Unstandardized Factor Loadings, Standard Errors, Error Variance, Standard Error of Error Variance, and Variance Explained

Item	$\beta$	$b$	$se$ of $b$	Error variance	$se$ of error variance	$R^2$
Content subscale						
1	0.64	0.97	0.15	1.34	0.31	0.41
2	0.65	1.05	0.24	2.37	0.51	0.32
3	0.43	0.78	0.22	2.71	0.37	0.18
6	0.81	1.59	0.19	1.33	0.41	0.66
7	0.68	1.05	0.18	1.29	0.30	0.46
8	0.58	1.09	0.24	2.37	0.46	0.33
9	0.69	1.33	0.19	1.92	0.42	0.48
Source subscale						
2	0.54	0.83	0.25	1.63	0.43	0.29
3	0.51	0.67	0.18	1.31	0.35	0.26
5	0.50	0.76	0.21	1.68	0.35	0.25
8	0.48	0.90	0.31	2.67	0.65	0.23
9	0.74	1.05	0.17	0.92	0.44	0.54
10	0.57	0.87	0.20	1.58	0.48	0.32
11	0.83	1.08	0.17	0.53	0.18	0.69
12	0.72	1.05	0.18	1.01	0.34	0.52
Receiver subscale						
2	0.72	0.60	0.12	0.33	0.08	0.52
3	0.70	0.86	0.22	0.78	0.27	0.49
5	0.88	1.14	0.22	0.40	0.30	0.77
6	0.87	1.02	0.17	0.33	0.12	0.76
7	0.67	0.91	0.18	1.00	0.27	0.45
Context subscale						
3	0.79	1.23	0.20	0.91	0.24	0.62
5	0.88	1.19	0.18	0.40	0.09	0.78
6	0.93	1.21	0.19	0.23	0.06	0.86
7	0.89	1.23	0.18	0.40	0.19	0.79
8	0.82	0.84	0.11	0.34	0.10	0.68
9	0.66	1.24	0.24	1.99	0.41	0.44

A second order CFA was conducted using the subscales of each of the four dimensions created (see Table 9 for subscale correlations). The model fit adequately ( $SB\chi^2(2) = 4.09$ ,  $p = .13$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.13$ ,  $Model\ CAIC = 20.09$ ,  $CFI = 0.97$ ,  $SRMR =$

0.049, Table 10). Although the RMSEA falls below the established criteria, the index is less effective with small sample sizes, and CFI and SRMR are regarded as better indexes for model fit with sample sizes less than 200 (Hu & Bentler, 1998). Parameter estimates suggested that each dimension was loading well onto the second order factor. Somewhat perplexing were the error variances for both source and receiver ambiguity: their values were equal to their respective parameter estimate.

*Table 9*

Correlations Among Revised Perceived Strategic Ambiguity Subscales

Subscale	Content	Source	Receiver	Context
Source	.5787	1		
Receiver	.3829	.3107	1	
Context	.7492	.5995	.6090	1

*Table 10*

Second Order Standardized and Unstandardized Factor Loadings, Standard Errors, Error Variance, Standard Error of Error Variance, and Variance Explained for Subscales of the Revised Perceived Strategic Ambiguity Scale

Subscale	$\beta$	$b$	$se$ of $b$	Error variance	$se$ of error variance	$R^2$
Content	0.76	0.94	0.11	0.65	0.13	.58
Source	0.61	0.61	0.14	0.63	0.10	.37
Receiver	0.61	0.59	0.14	0.59	0.12	.37
Context	0.99	1.30	0.17	0.04	0.02	.98

### *Reliability*

The next step in these analyses was to examine the reliability of the remaining items for each subscale of strategic ambiguity (see Appendix A for final versions of scale). Cronbach alpha was calculated for each subscale based on the best fitting items for each domain identified via CFA. The content strategic ambiguity domain consisted of

six items ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). The items had a reliability of .817. Based on the remaining eight items, source ambiguity ( $M = 2.62$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ), had a Cronbach alpha .792. Receiver ambiguity subscale ( $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) had an alpha of .872 with the final five items. Finally, the six items constituting context ambiguity ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) demonstrated an alpha of .915. Thus, for each subscale, there appears to be a substantial proportion of variance that is attributable to a single, underlying factor.

Because Study 2 employs the averaged scale for analyses, rather than the four individual dimensions, the full scale was also considered in this first study. For the scale, as a whole, the 27 items appear to be relatively consistent. The Cronbach alpha was .934. The mean was 2.52 on the 7-point scale and had a standard deviation of 0.52.

## Study 2

### *Preliminary Analyses*

Given the nature of dyadic data, the interdependence of parents' and emerging adult children's reports of strategic ambiguity, psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction after each conversation was assessed. Parents' and children's preconversation questionnaire responses are included in this matrix. Partial correlations, controlling for conversation order, were calculated and are presented in Tables 11 through 13.

After controlling for conversational order, there were a few indications of interdependence between parents' and emerging adult children's post-interaction reports. Parents' reported use of strategic ambiguity and emerging adult children's perceptions' of their parents' strategic ambiguity were not correlated in either conversation ( $r_{\text{stressor}} = .026$ ,  $p > .05$ ;  $r_{\text{happy}} = .263$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Following the divorce related stressor conversation,

parents' and children's psychological well-being ( $r = .269, p > 0.05$ ) and communication satisfaction were unrelated ( $r = .304, p > .05$ ). However, their relational quality was related ( $r = .442, p < .05$ ). Following their happy memory conversation, parents' and children's psychological well-being were unrelated ( $r = .200, p > .05$ ); however, their relational quality ( $r = 0.426, p < 0.01$ ) and communication satisfaction ( $r = 0.587, p < 0.01$ ) were correlated. Theoretically, parents' and children's reports should be interdependent, and empirically, there were indications that these dyads' outcomes were related indicating a potential system level phenomenon. Due to the small sample size, substantive analyses were unable to incorporate interdependence in to the analyses.

*Table 11*

Parent's Report Intercorrelations of Support Expectations, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Post-Stressor and Post-Happy Memory Conversations Strategic Ambiguity Used, Relational Quality, and Communication Satisfaction Controlling for Conversational Order

	Pre-interaction questionnaire		Post-interaction: Stressor				Post-interaction: Happy memory				
	1. Expectations for support from friends, family	2. Expectations for support from child	3. Tolerance for ambiguity	4. Strategic ambiguity used	5. Psychological well-being	6. Relational quality	7. Communication satisfaction	8. Strategic ambiguity used	9. Psychological well-being	10. Relational quality	11. Communication satisfaction
2.	.430**	1.000									
3.	-.035	.041	1.000								
4.	.005	-.191	.096	1.000							
5.	-.413**	-.109	.305	.141	1.000						
6.	-.120	.019	.318	-.111	.472**	1.000					
7.	-.240	.085	.134	-.222	.499**	.742**	1.000				
8.	.019	-.175	-.212	.400*	-.355*	-.537**	-.572**	1.000			
9.	-.381*	-.079	.138	.204	.786**	.302	.405*	-.206	1.000		
10.	-.175	.007	.251	-.004	.595**	.663**	.495**	-.373*	.414**	1.000	
11.	-.390*	-.042	.182	-.221	.556**	.645**	.642**	-.587**	.370*	.791**	1.000

Note: +  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 12

Emerging Adult Child Report Intercorrelations of Support Expectations, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Post-Stressor and Post-Happy Memory Conversations Strategic Ambiguity Perceived, Relational Quality, and Communication Satisfaction Controlling for Conversational Order

	Pre-interaction questionnaire		Post-interaction: Stressor				Post-interaction: Happy memory				
	1. Expectations for support provision to parent	2. Expectations for support receipt from parent	3. Tolerance for ambiguity	4. Strategic ambiguity perceived	5. Psychological well-being	6. Relational quality	7. Communication satisfaction	8. Strategic ambiguity perceived	9. Psychological well-being	10. Relational quality	11. Communication satisfaction
2.	.632**	1.000									
3.	.173	.081	1.000								
4.	-.178	-.388*	.056	1.000							
5.	.314	.443**	.271	-.532**	1.000						
6.	.190	.429**	.181	-.720**	.650**	1.000					
7.	.268	.471**	.234	-.718**	.635**	.741**	1.000				
8.	-.275	-.453**	-.066	.668**	-.514**	-.630**	-.794**	1.000			
9.	.250	.348*	.241	-.334*	.802**	.487**	.523**	-.456**	1.000		
10.	.278	.497**	.184	-.461**	.546**	.595**	.704**	-.761**	.578**	1.000	
11.	.302	.533**	.193	-.635**	.723**	.711**	.814**	-.807**	.568**	.830**	1.000

Note: +  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 13

Intercorrelations of Parents' by Emerging Adult Children's Reports of Support Expectations, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Post-Stressor and Post-Happy Memory Conversations Strategic Ambiguity, Relational Quality, and Communication Satisfaction Controlling for Conversational Order

			Child report											
			Pre-interaction questionnaire			Post-interaction: Stressor			Post-interaction: Happy memory					
			Expectations for support provision to parent	Expectations for support receipt from parent	Tolerance for ambiguity	Strategic ambiguity perceived	Psychological well-being	Relational quality	Communication satisfaction	Strategic ambiguity perceived	Psychological well-being	Relational quality	Communication satisfaction	
Parent report	Pre-interaction	Expectations for support from friends, family	.143	-.157	.037	.080	-.307	-.111	-.186	.036	-.317	-.141	-.173	
		Expectations for support from child	-.193	-.141	-.246	-.058	-.161	-.131	-.169	-.049	-.212	-.009	-.110	
		Tolerance for ambiguity	.000	-.167	-.024	-.190	-.005	.157	.140	-.222	-.119	.114	.060	
	Post-interaction: Stressor	Strategic ambiguity used	.016	-.084	.378*	.026	.103	.078	.029	-.012	.074	-.057	-.083	
		Psychological well-being	-.132	.101	.074	.033	.269	.156	.068	-.089	.104	.091	.128	
		Relational quality	.231	.289	.099	-.090	.338*	.442**	.251	-.193	.191	.341*	.348*	
	Post-interaction: Happy memory	Communication satisfaction	.023	.243	.068	-.116	.331*	.384*	.304	-.292	.199	.410*	.471*	
		Strategic ambiguity used	-.117	-.169	-.134	.158	-.364*	-.324*	-.309	.297	-.122	-.344*	-.492**	
		Psychological well-being	-.159	.027	.058	.097	.107	.103	-.049	-.207	.200	.046	.029	
		Relational quality	-.085	.200	.177	-.191	.449**	.480**	.327*	-.171	.338*	.426*	.419*	
			Communication satisfaction	-.067	.226	.175	-.113	.486**	.425**	.433**	-.178	.408*	.600*	.587*

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

The repeated measures ANOVA testing order effects of topic and post-interaction task identified three main effects (see Table 14). A main effect for conversation order was found for parents' relational quality ( $F(1, 38) = 9.612, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.202$ ). Parents in the second condition, discussing happy memories first followed by stressors, rated relational quality higher ( $M = 6.102, SE = 0.095$ ) higher than when they discussed stressors first and happy memories second ( $M = 5.773, SE = 0.133$ ). For offspring, relational quality was also greater in the second condition ( $M = 5.955, SE = 0.122$ ) than the first condition ( $M = 5.515, SE = 0.145$ ),  $F(1, 38) = 18.799, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.331$ . Additionally, a main effect was found for conversation order on children's communication satisfaction with children reporting greater communication satisfaction when discussing happy memories first and stressors second ( $M = 6.027, SE = 0.177$ ) than the first condition's topic order ( $M = 5.637, SE = 0.118$ ),  $F(1, 38) = 31.951, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.457$ . No conversation order by post-interaction task order interaction effects or main effects for post-interaction task order were found. Therefore, conversation order was controlled when testing parent and child relational quality and child communication satisfaction in hypotheses five through ten.

Table 14

Repeated Measures ANOVA for Effects of Topic Order and Post-interaction Task Order for Parent's and Emerging Adult Children's Psychological Well-being, Relational Quality, and Communication Satisfaction

	F	H df	Error df	Partial $\eta^2$	Observed Power
<b>Parent's psychological well-being</b>					
Conversation order (C)	0.000	1	37	.000	.050
Video recall order (V)	1.572	1	37	.041	.231
C x V	0.264	1	37	.007	.079
<b>Child's psychological well-being</b>					
Conversation order (C)	0.017	1	38	.000	.052
Video recall order (V)	0.250	1	38	.007	.078
C x V	0.851	1	38	.022	.147
<b>Parent's relational quality</b>					
Conversation order (C)	9.612**	1	38	.202	.856
Video recall order (V)	3.023 <sup>+</sup>	1	38	.074	.396
C x V	0.000	1	38	.000	.050
<b>Child's relational quality</b>					
Conversation order (C)	18.799**	1	38	.331	.988
Video recall order (V)	1.290	1	38	.033	.198
C x V	2.057	1	38	0.51	.287
<b>Parent's communication satisfaction</b>					
Conversation order (C)	2.223	1	38	.055	.307
Video recall order (V)	0.376	1	38	.010	.092
C x V	3.990 <sup>+</sup>	1	38	.095	.495
<b>Child's communication satisfaction</b>					
Conversation order (C)	31.951**	1	38	.457	1.00
Video recall order (V)	3.643 <sup>+</sup>	1	38	.087	.460
C x V	1.491	1	38	.038	.222

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

*Substantive Analyses*

*Social Support Expectations*

Correlations were calculated to test hypotheses 1 and 2 using the three subscales of the Recipient's Support Perceptions Scale. Hypothesis one was not supported (Table 15). Parents' expectations for informational and tangible support from extended family and friends were moderately, but positively, associated with the informational and tangible support expect from their children. Expectations for nurturant support from one's child were negatively, although not significantly, associated with all three types of support from friends and extended family members. Expectations for nurturant support from friends and family were unassociated with support expected from offspring.

*Table 15*

Parent's Support Expectations from Family and Friends Correlated with Parent's Support Expectations From Emerging Adult Children

		Support expected from friends, family			Support expected from child		
		Nurturant	Information	Tangible	Nurturant	Information	Tangible
Support expected from friends, family	Nurturant	1.000					
	Information	.372*	1.000				
	Tangible	.480**	.603**	1.000			
Support expected from child	Nurturant	-.083	-.127	-.181	1.000		
	Information	.128	.597**	.361*	-.373*	1.000	
	Tangible	.011	.425**	.426**	-.256	.755**	1.000

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Hypothesis two was supported (see Table 16). The nurturant, informational and tangible support a child expects from his/her parent were positively associated with the support the child expects to provide his/her parent. The nurturant support emerging adult children expected their parent to provide was correlated with all three types of support the child expected to receive from the parent ( $r_{\text{nurturant}} = 0.568, p < 0.01$ ;  $r_{\text{information}} = 0.355, p < 0.05$ ;  $r_{\text{tangible}} = 0.556, p < 0.01$ ). The informational support offspring expected parents to provide was associated with all three types of support anticipated from the parent ( $r_{\text{nurturant}} = 0.334, p < 0.05$ ;  $r_{\text{information}} = 0.477, p < 0.01$ ;  $r_{\text{tangible}} = 0.365, p < 0.05$ ). Finally, the tangible support offspring expected they would provide their parents regarding divorce-related stressors was positively associated with the support they expected their parent to provide for divorce-related stress ( $r_{\text{nurturant}} = 0.431, p < 0.01$ ;  $r_{\text{information}} = 0.397, p < 0.05$ ;  $r_{\text{tangible}} = 0.576, p < 0.01$ ).

*Table 16*

Emerging Adult Children's Support Expectations from Parents Correlated with Support Expectations for Providing Support to Parents

		Support child expects to provide parent			Support child expects from parent		
		Nurturant	Information	Tangible	Nurturant	Information	Tangible
Support child expects to provide parent	Nurturant	1.000					
	Information	.185	1.000				
	Tangible	.638**	.386*	1.000			
Support child expects from parent	Nurturant	.568**	.334*	.431**	1.000		
	Information	.366*	.477**	.397*	.559**	1.000	
	Tangible	.556**	.365*	.576**	.587**	.856**	1.000

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

### Strategic Ambiguity

Neither hypothesis 3a or 3b were supported (see Table 17). Parents' expectations for support from emerging adult children (H3a) did not predict the strategic ambiguity parents used in their discussion of the divorce-related stressor. Nor did it predict parents' use of strategic ambiguity used when discussing happy memories. Parents expectations for support from friends and extended family (H3b) did not predict strategic ambiguity used when discussing a stressor or happy memory. Overall, parent's expectations for support did not predict their use of strategic ambiguity for either topic.

Table 17

Parent's Regression Scores for Prediction of Strategic Ambiguity by Expectations for Support

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial $r^2$	Adj. $R^2$
Stressor							.009
Expectations for support from friends, family	2.78	0.92	0.053	0.176	0.052	0.49	
Expectations for support from child	4.58	0.83	-0.293	0.195	-0.262	-.240	
Happy memory							-.032
Expectations for support from friends, family	2.78	0.92	0.020	0.107	0.034	.031	
Expectations for support from child	4.58	0.83	-0.103	0.118	-0.155	-.142	

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p \leq .10$ , \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

For hypothesis 4, a single regression assessed the child's overall expectations for social support provide to parents (H4a) and received from parents (H4b) for both conversation topics. Perceptions of strategic ambiguity in the stressor ( $b = 0.124$ ,  $se = .190$ ,  $p < .05$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.144$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.106$ ) and happy memory topics ( $b = 0.038$ ,

$se = 0.129, p < .05, \text{adjusted } R^2 = 0.209, r_{\text{partial}} = 0.048$ ) were not predicted by the social support emerging adult children expected to provide parents (H4a).

Hypothesis 4b was supported. The support an emerging adult child expected to receive from his/her parent did predict perceptions of parent's strategic ambiguity in both conversations ( $b = -.376, se = .144, p < .05, \text{adjusted } R^2 = 0.144, r_{\text{partial}} = -0.395$ ). The less support offspring expected to receive from his/her parent, the more strategic ambiguity they perceived in their discussion of a stressor. The same pattern was observed following the happy memory conversation ( $b = -0.281, se = 0.097, p < .05, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .209, r_{\text{partial}} = -0.429$ ).

Hypotheses 5 and 6 suggested that strategic ambiguity would predict (a) psychological well-being, (b) relational quality, and (c) communication satisfaction. Results for hypothesis 5 were mixed. Hypothesis 5a was not supported. Parents' use of strategic ambiguity did not predict their psychological well-being for either conversation. For H5b, when controlling for conversation order, parents' use of strategic ambiguity did not predict relational quality after the stressor conversation. Following the happy memory discussion, parents' use of strategic ambiguity did predict lower relational quality ( $b = -0.419, se = 0.169, p < 0.05, \text{adjusted } R^2 = 0.111, r_{\text{partial}} = -0.377$ ). Results for parent's communication satisfaction (H5c) mirrored those for relational quality. Strategic ambiguity did not predict parents' communication satisfaction after the stressor conversation. Use of strategic ambiguity did predict communication satisfaction after the happy memory conversation ( $b = -0.624, se = 0.142, p < 0.05, R^2 = 0.336, r_{\text{partial}} = -0.580$ ). The more strategically ambiguous parents were when discussing happy memories, the less satisfied they were with parent-child relational quality and communication within that interaction. For parents, use of strategic ambiguity in

negatively valenced divorce-related discussions did not predict the adjustment outcomes; however, when discussing positively valenced topics with their children, strategic ambiguity did have a significant, negative effect on assessments of relational quality and communication satisfaction.

Perceptions of strategic ambiguity had a more consistent effect on the outcome variables for emerging adult children (H6). Hypothesis 6a was supported for both the stressor ( $b = -0.309$ ,  $se = 0.103$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $R^2 = 0.191$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.437$ ) and happy memory conversations ( $b = -0.400$ ,  $se = 0.151$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $R^2 = 0.155$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.349$ ). Greater perceived strategic ambiguity predicted lower child psychological well-being after each conversation. Offsprings' perceptions of parents' strategic ambiguity predicted relational quality (H6b), after controlling for conversation order. The more ambiguity children perceived parents to use when discussing stressors, the lower they rated their relational quality at the end of the conversation ( $b = -0.928$ ,  $se = 0.122$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.609$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.782$ ). Similarly, offspring reported lower relational quality after discussing happy memories with their parent if they perceived the parent to be strategically ambiguous ( $b = -1.198$ ,  $se = 0.140$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.684$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.815$ ). Perceptions of parents' strategic ambiguity in negative and positive divorce-related topics influenced children's relational quality. Emerging adults' communication satisfaction also was predicted by perceptions of parents' strategic ambiguity (H6c) after controlling for conversational order. Following their stressor conversation, the more strategically ambiguous parents were perceived to be, the lower offspring's communication satisfaction ( $b = -0.787$ ,  $se = 0.110$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; adjusted  $R^2 = 0.568$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.762$ ). Results evidence a similar pattern for communication satisfaction after the happy memory conversation ( $b = -1.178$ ,  $se = 0.131$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; adjusted  $R^2 = 0.691$ ,

$r_{\text{partial}} = -0.762$ ). Overall, hypothesis five was supported: Perceptions of parents' strategic ambiguity decreased offsprings' psychological well-being, relational quality and communication satisfaction after divorce-related conversations.

Hypothesis 7, that parents' use of strategic ambiguity would mediate the relationship between social support expectations and their the three adjustment outcomes, was not tested. Parents' use of strategic ambiguity was not predicted by the support parents expected from their emergent adult offspring (see H3). Further, regression models illustrated that parents' expectations of support from offspring did not predict any of the dependent variables.

Hypothesis 8 was not supported (see Table 18). Hypothesis 4b evidenced a relationship for both topics between the support emergent adults expected their parents to provide and perceived strategic ambiguity supporting step one in the meditational process. Expected social support from parents predicted psychological well-being following the stressor topic ( $b = 0.222$ ,  $se = 0.078$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.154$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = 0.419$ ), and perceived strategic ambiguity predicted psychological well-being ( $b = -0.224$ ,  $se = 0.110$ ,  $p = .05$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.218$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.316$ ). The Sobel test ( $p = 0.052$ ) indicated a near significant mediation effect for hypothesis 8a. The mediation hypothesis was not tested for children's well-being after the happy memory topic because perceptions of strategic ambiguity during this conversation did not predict children's psychological well-being after the discussion.

*Table 18*  
 Child Hierarchical Regression Scores for Mediation of Perceived Strategic Ambiguity in  
 Expected Support – Psychological Well-being Relationship

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial <i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	Adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Stressor</b>											
Block 1										.154	
Support expected from parent	5.54	1.01	0.222	0.078	0.419*				.419		
Block 2										.218	.083*
Support expected from parent						0.151	0.083	0.285 <sup>+</sup>	.288		
Perceived strategic ambiguity	1.92	0.76				-0.224	0.110	-0.317*	-.316		
<b>Happy memory</b>											
Block 1										.111	
Support expected from parent	5.54	1.01	0.196	0.081	0.365*						
Block 2										.150	.060
Support expected from parent						0.121	0.091	0.225	.212		
Perceived strategic ambiguity	1.77	0.53				-0.286	0.173	-0.282	-.263		

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Controlling for conversational order, a hierarchical regression evidenced the support – relational quality relationship (see Table 19) following the stressor conversation ( $b = 0.385$ ,  $se = 0.135$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.177$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = 0.425$ ), and perceived strategic ambiguity predicted relational quality ( $b = -0.863$ ,  $se = 0.131$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.675$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.739$ ). Because the coefficient for perceived strategic ambiguity was much larger than the expected support received coefficient, the significance of this potential mediation was not calculated (H8b). For the happy memory topic, after controlling for the order of conversations, a hierarchical regression supported the support – relational quality relationship ( $b = 0.362$ ,  $se = 0.110$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.273$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = 0.477$ ), and strategic ambiguity predicted relational quality ( $b = -1.107$ ,  $se = 0.156$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.689$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.764$ ). As with the stressor topic, the coefficient for perceived strategic ambiguity was larger than the support coefficient, thus the significance of this mediation was not assessed (H8b).

Results for H8c mirrored those for H8b (see Table 20). For the stressor conversation, expected support was related to communication satisfaction ( $b = 0.375$ ,  $se = 0.113$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.203$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = 0.476$ ), when controlling for conversational order. Perceptions of strategic ambiguity predicted communication satisfaction when controlling for support expectations and conversational order ( $b = -0.702$ ,  $se = 0.116$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.595$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.711$ ). For the happy memory conversation, expected support was related to communication satisfaction ( $b = 0.395$ ,  $se = 0.102$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.301$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = 0.536$ ), and communication satisfaction was predicted by perceptions of strategic ambiguity ( $b = -1.047$ ,  $se = 0.141$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.716$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = -0.778$ ). However, the significance of this potential indirect effect was not tested due to coefficient magnitudes.

*Table 19*  
 Child Hierarchical Regression Scores for Mediation of Perceived Strategic Ambiguity in  
 Expected Support – Relational Quality Relationship

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial <i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	Adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Stressor</b>														
Block 1													.021	
Conversation order	0.58	0.50	-0.389	0.286	-0.215								-.215	
Block 2													.177	.172**
Conversation order						-0.186	0.272	-0.103					-.112	
Support expected from parent	5.54	1.01				0.385	0.135	0.430**					.425	
Block 3													.615	.426**
Conversation order									-0.074	0.187	-0.041		-.066	
Support expected from parent									0.126	0.100	0.141		.206	
Perceived strategic ambiguity	1.92	0.76							-0.863	0.131	-0.723*		-.739	
<b>Happy memory</b>														
Block 1													.084	
Conversation order	0.58	0.50	-0.513	0.240	-0.327**								-.327	
Block 2													.273	.203**
Conversation order						-0.322	0.222	-0.205					-.232	
Support expected from parent	5.54	1.01				0.362	0.110	0.467**					.477	
Block 3													.689	.403**
Conversation order									-0.068	0.149	-0.044		-.076	
Support expected from parent									0.104	0.080	0.134		0.210	
Perceived strategic ambiguity	1.77	0.53							-1.107	0.156	-0.754**		-.764	

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

*Table 20*  
 Child Hierarchical Regression Scores for Mediation of Perceived Strategic Ambiguity in  
 Expected Support – Communication Satisfaction Relationship

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial <i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	Adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Stressor</b>														
Block 1														-.004
Conversation order	0.58	0.50	-0.231	0.249	-0.149							-.149		
Block 2													.203	.222**
Conversation order						-0.033	0.230	-0.021				-.024		
Support expected from parent	5.54	1.01				0.375	0.114	0.488**				.476		
Block 3													.595	.382**
Conversation order									0.058	0.165	0.037	.058		
Support expected from parent									0.165	0.088	0.214 <sup>+</sup>	.296		
Perceived strategic ambiguity	1.92	0.76							-0.702	0.116	-0.685**	-0.711		
<b>Happy memory</b>														
Block 1														.045
Conversation order	0.58	0.50	-0.391	0.233	-0.263 <sup>+</sup>							-.263		
Block 2													.301	.268**
Conversation order						-0.183	0.206	-0.123				-.144		
Support expected from parent	5.54	1.01				0.395	0.102	0.536*				.536		
Block 3													.716	.401**
Conversation order									0.057	0.135	0.038	0.070		
Support expected from parent									0.150	0.073	0.204*	0.325		
Perceived strategic ambiguity	1.77	0.53							-1.047	0.141	-0.752**	-0.778		

Note: <sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Overall, hypotheses 7 and 8 were not supported. Parent and emerging adult child psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction, following both divorce-related topics was influenced by expected support from parents and by strategic ambiguity within the conversation. However, perceptions of strategic ambiguity did not function as a mediator in the present study.

Because the effects of strategic ambiguity might be explained by one's tolerance for ambiguity, hypotheses 9 and 10 were offered. Moderating effects on parents' psychological well-being were not supported (H9a, see Table 21). Parents' tolerance for ambiguity did not moderate the effects of strategic ambiguity on psychological well-being after discussing a stressor. Similarly, tolerance for ambiguity did not moderate the effects of strategic ambiguity during discussion of a happy memory. Parent's tolerance for ambiguity did moderate the effect of strategic ambiguity on relational quality when discussing a stressor ( $b = 0.546, se = 0.185, p < 0.05, \text{adjusted } R^2 = 0.230, r_{\text{partial}} = 0.445$ ). Parents who were less tolerant of ambiguity rated relational quality lower ( $b_{\text{tolerance} - 1\text{sd}} = -0.479, se = 0.185, p < 0.05$ ) than those who were more tolerant of strategic ambiguity ( $b_{\text{tolerance} + 1\text{sd}} = 0.201, se = 0.185, p > 0.05$ ) (see Figure 1). However, with regard to the happy memory, ambiguity tolerance did not mediate the strategic ambiguity – relational quality relationship (see Table 22). For communication satisfaction (H9c, see Table 23), parents' tolerance for ambiguity followed the same pattern as relational quality. Communication satisfaction after the stressor topic (but not the happy memory) was moderated by tolerance for ambiguity ( $b = 0.375, se = 0.138, p < 0.05, \text{adjusted } R^2 = 0.193, r_{\text{partial}} = 0.412$ ) (see Figure 2). More specifically, parents with lower levels of ambiguity tolerance were more likely to report less communication satisfaction when

employing strategic ambiguity ( $b_{\text{tolerance} - 1\text{sd}} = -0.437, se = 0.185, p < 0.05$ ), than parents with greater levels of ambiguity tolerance ( $b_{\text{tolerance} + 1\text{sd}} = 0.029, se = 0.185, p > 0.05$ ).

*Table 21*  
 Hierarchical Regression Scores for the Moderation of Tolerance for Ambiguity in Parents' Use of Strategic Ambiguity Regressed on Parents' Psychological Well-being

Stressor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial $r^2$	Adj. $R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Block 1										.036	
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.94	0.038	0.123	0.049				.051		
Tolerance for ambiguity	0.00	0.63	0.328	0.184	0.285 <sup>+</sup>				.285		
Block 2										.040	.042
Strategic ambiguity						-0.040	0.143	-0.052	-.048		
Tolerance for ambiguity						0.330	0.184	0.287	.290		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	0.06	0.76				0.188	0.176	0.198	.178		
Happy memory											
Block 1										.010	
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.55	-0.262	0.201	-0.212				-.210		
Tolerance for ambiguity	0.00	0.62	0.098	0.177	0.090				.091		
Block 2										-.014	.003
Strategic ambiguity						-0.283	0.211	-0.229	-.218		
Tolerance for ambiguity						0.074	0.192	0.068	.063		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	-0.07	0.29				-0.148	0.405	-0.064	-.061		

*Note:* Means of all covariates and independent variables are centered on the mean

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

*Table 22*  
 Hierarchical Regression Scores for the Moderation of Tolerance for Ambiguity in Parents' Use of Strategic Ambiguity Regressed on Parents' Relational Quality

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial $r^2$	Adj. $R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Stressor</b>														
Block 1														
Conversation order	0.00	0.50	0.240	0.271	0.142							.142		
Block 2													.066	.118 <sup>+</sup>
Conversation order						0.189	0.275	0.112				.496		
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.93				-0.139	0.149	-0.152				.153		
Tolerance for ambiguity	.0000	.6224				0.443	0.212	0.326*				.330		
Block 3													.230	.171**
Conversation order									0.088	0.252	0.052	.059		
Strategic ambiguity									-0.380	0.158	-0.417*	-.377		
Tolerance for ambiguity									0.448	0.192	0.330*	.367		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	0.06	0.75							0.546	0.185	0.485*	.445		
<b>Happy memory</b>														
Block 1														
Conversation order	.00	0.50	-0.160	0.197	-0.130							-.130		
Block 2													.120	.170*
Conversation order						-0.183	0.185	-0.149				-.163		
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.55				-0.379	0.172	-0.340*				-.345		
Tolerance for ambiguity	0.00	0.62				.0176	0.151	0.178				.190		
Block 3													.115	.081
Conversation order									-0.145	0.191	-0.118	-.115		
Strategic ambiguity									-0.419	0.178	-0.376*	-.370		
Tolerance for ambiguity									0.126	0.162	0.127	.130		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	-0.07	0.29							-0.313	0.350	-0.150	-.149		

*Note:* Means of all covariates and independent variables are centered on the mean

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

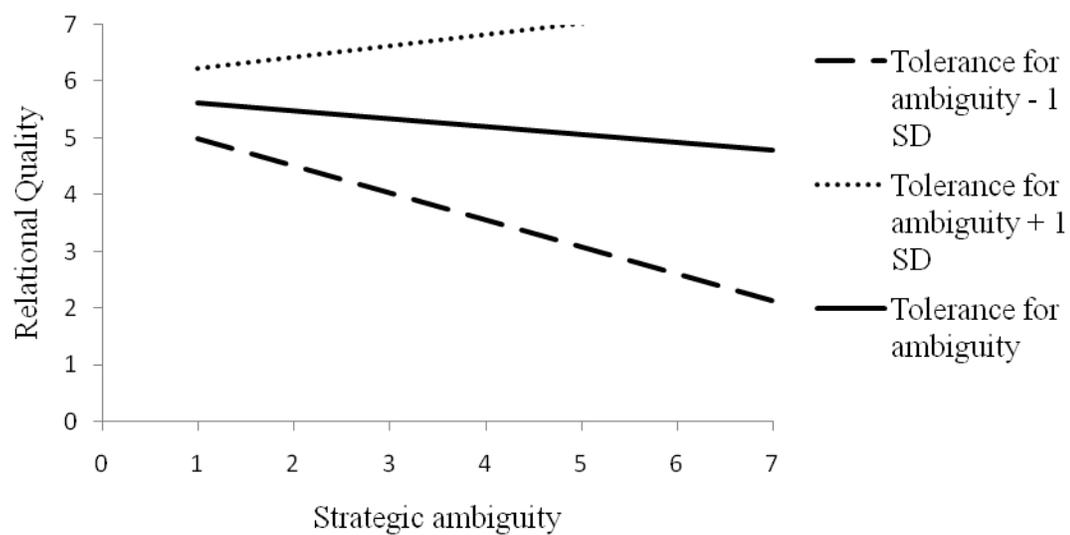


Figure 1. Parent relational quality by strategic ambiguity for tolerance for ambiguity after stressor conversation

*Table 23*  
 Hierarchical Regression Scores for the Moderation of Tolerance for Ambiguity in Parents' Use of Strategic Ambiguity Regressed on Parents' Communication Satisfaction

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial $r^2$	Adj. $R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Stressor											
Block 1										.055	
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.93	-0.204	0.105	-0.304 <sup>+</sup>				.304		
Tolerance for ambiguity	0.00	0.62	0.140	0.156	0.140				.146		
Block 2										.193	.152**
Strategic ambiguity						-0.359	0.112	-0.535**	.469		
Tolerance for ambiguity						0.145	0.145	0.145	.164		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	0.06	0.75				0.375	0.138	0.453**	.412		
Happy memory											
Block 1										.304	
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.55	0.058	0.130	0.061				.073		
Tolerance for ambiguity	0.00	0.62	-0.611	0.147	0.568**				-.565		
Block 2										.305	.019
Strategic ambiguity						0.008	0.138	0.008	.009		
Tolerance for ambiguity						-0.653	0.152	-0.607	-.582		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	-0.07	0.29				-0.302	0.292	-0.150	-.170		

*Note:* Means of all covariates and independent variables are centered on the mean

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$

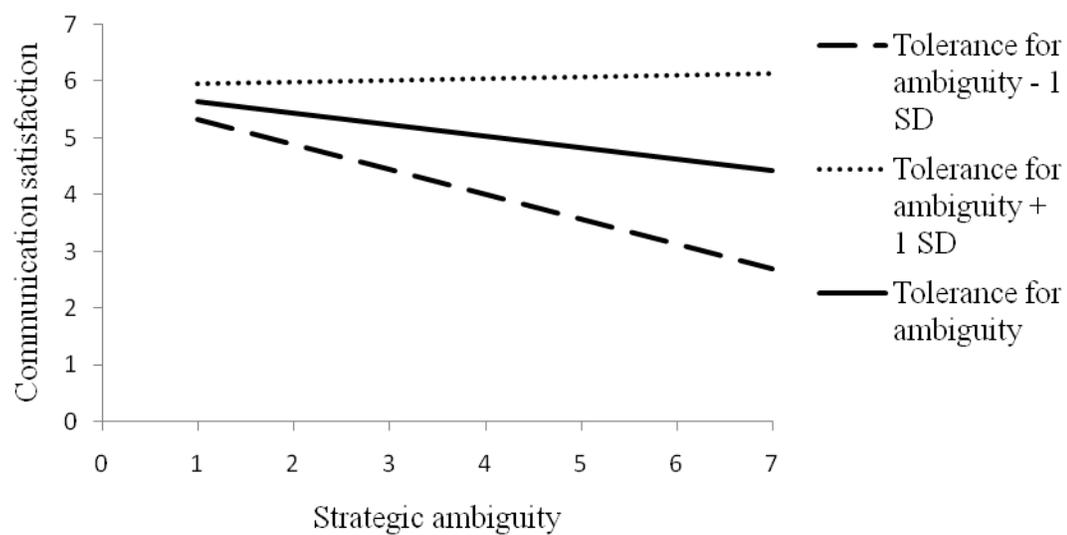


Figure 2. Parent communication satisfaction by strategic ambiguity for tolerance for ambiguity after stressor conversation

Hypotheses 10 was tested in the same manner as H9 with conversation order entered into the first block of the regression for relational quality and communication satisfaction. Emerging adult child's tolerance for ambiguity did not moderate the perceived strategic ambiguity – psychological well-being relationship (H10a, see Table 24) when discussing a stressor nor when discussing a happy memory. Tolerance for ambiguity did have a main effect on psychological well-being following the stressor conversation ( $b = 0.261$ ,  $se = 0.123$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.222$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = 0.331$ ): the more tolerant of ambiguity the child was, the better his/her psychological well-being. Hypothesis H10b (see Table 25) was partially supported. Tolerance for ambiguity did not moderate the perceived strategic ambiguity – relational quality relationship during the stressor conversation. When discussing a happy memory, the child's tolerance for ambiguity moderated the relationship between perceived strategic ambiguity and relational quality ( $b = 0.735$ ,  $se = 0.309$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.722$ ,  $r_{\text{partial}} = 0.373$ , see Fig 3). More specifically, emerging adult offspring who were less tolerant of ambiguity reported lower relational quality the more they perceived the parent to use strategic ambiguity when discussing happy memories ( $b_{\text{tolerance} - 1\text{sd}} = -1.636$ ,  $se = 0.309$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). A similar pattern was found for emerging adults who were tolerant of ambiguity ( $b_{\text{tolerance} + 1\text{sd}} = -0.738$ ,  $se = 0.309$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). For H10c (see Table 26), offsprings' tolerance for ambiguity did not moderate the effects of perceived parental strategic ambiguity on communication satisfaction for the stressor topic or for the happy memory topic.

*Table 24*  
 Hierarchical Regression Scores for the Moderation of Tolerance for Ambiguity in Emerging Adult Children's Perceptions of Strategic Ambiguity Regressed on Their Psychological Well-being

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial $r^2$	Adj. $R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Stressor											
Block 1										.241	
Strategic ambiguity	0000	0.76	-0.320	0.097	-0.453				-.478		
Tolerance for ambiguity	0.01	0.62	0.297	0.117	0.346*				.384		
Block 2										.222	.002
Strategic ambiguity						-0.319	0.099	-0.451	-.475		
Tolerance for ambiguity						0.287	0.142	0.336	.318		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	0.02	0.27				-0.040	0.332	-0.020	-.020		
Happy memory											
Block 1										.151	
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.54	-0.397	0.150	-0.392*				-.400		
Tolerance for ambiguity	-0.01	0.61	0.175	0.131	0.198				.198		
Block 2										.138	.010
Strategic ambiguity						-0.395	0.151	-0.390	.400		
Tolerance for ambiguity						0.230	0.154	0.259	.241		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	0.00	0.25				0.255	0.376	0.118	.112		

*Note:* Means of all covariates and independent variables are centered on the mean

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

*Table 25*  
 Hierarchical Regression Scores for the Moderation of Tolerance for Ambiguity in  
 Emerging Adult Children's Perceptions of Strategic Ambiguity Regressed on Their  
 Relational Quality

Stressor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial <i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	Adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Block 1													.021	
Conversation order	0.00	0.50	-0.389	0.286	-0.215							-.215		
Block 2													.639	.621**
Conversation order						-0.172	0.179	-0.095				-.158		
Strategic ambiguity	.0000	.7580				-0.939	0.117	-0.786 <sup>+</sup>				-.771		
Tolerance for ambiguity	-0.01	0.61				0.291	0.144	0.196*				.319		
Block 3													.629	.000
Conversation order									-0.172	0.182	-0.095	-.158		
Strategic ambiguity									-0.938	0.119	-0.786	-.800		
Tolerance for ambiguity									0.285	0.171	0.193	.271		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	0.03	0.28							-0.025	0.379	-0.007	-.011		
Happy memory														
Block 1													.084	
Conversation order	0.00	0.50	-0.513	0.240	-0.327							-.327		
Block 2													.686	.604**
Conversation order						-0.119	0.151	-0.076				-.130		
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.53				-1.187	0.140	-0.808**				-.817		
Tolerance for ambiguity	-0.01	0.61				0.135	0.117	0.105				.189		
Block 3													.722	.040*
Conversation order									-0.135	0.142	-0.086	-.159		
Strategic ambiguity									-1.176	0.132	-0.801**	-.834		
Tolerance for ambiguity									0.294	0.129	0.229*	.360		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	-0.00	0.25							0.735	0.309	0.235*	.373		

*Note:* Means of all covariates and independent variables are centered on the mean

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

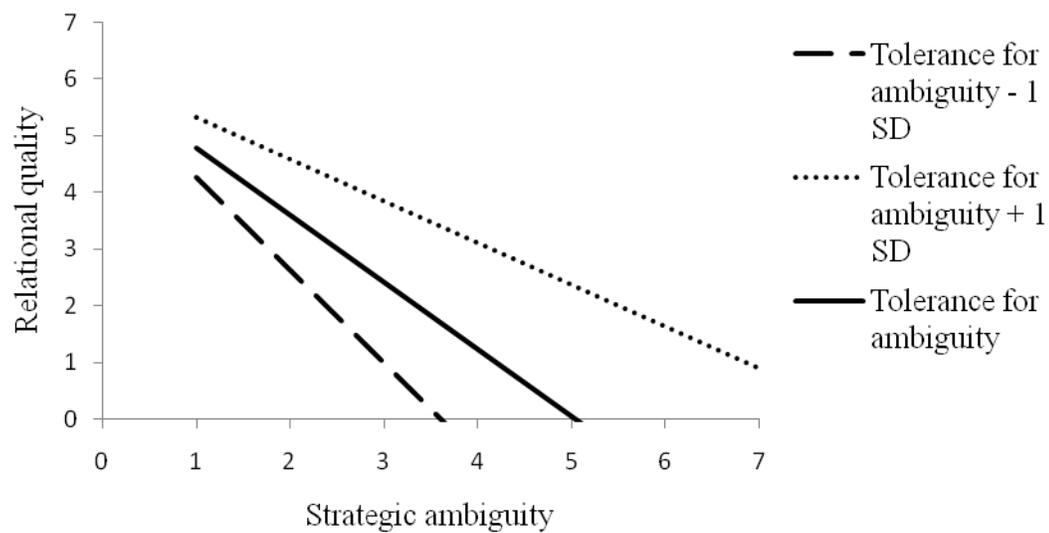


Figure 3. Child relational quality by strategic ambiguity for tolerance for ambiguity in happy memory conversation

*Table 26*  
 Hierarchical Regression Scores for the Moderation of Tolerance for Ambiguity in  
 Emerging Adult Children's Perceptions of Strategic Ambiguity Regressed on Their  
 Communication Satisfaction

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	$\beta$	Partial <i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	Adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Stressor</b>														
Block 1														-.004
Conversation order	0.00	0.50	-.231	.249	-.149							-.149		
Block 2													.625	.623**
Conversation order						-0.060	0.157	-0.039				-.064		
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.76				-0.799	0.103	-0.779*				-.792		
Tolerance for ambiguity	-0.01	0.61				0.325	0.126	0.256**				.395		
Block 3													.634	.018
Conversation order									-0.075	0.155	-0.048	-.081		
Strategic ambiguity									-0.789	0.101	-0.770	-.796		
Tolerance for ambiguity									0.220	0.146	0.173	.247		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	0.03	0.28							-0.446	0.323	0.158	-.227		
<b>Happy memory</b>														
Block 1														.045
Conversation order	0.00	0.55	-0.391	0.233	-0.263							-.263		
Block 2													.701	.654**
Conversation order						-0.009	0.140	-0.006				-.011		
Strategic ambiguity	0.00	0.53				-1.166	0.130	-0.837**				-.832		
Tolerance for ambiguity	-0.01	0.61				0.159	0.130	0.130				.237		
Block 3													.705	.011
Conversation order									-0.017	0.139	-0.012	-.021		
Strategic ambiguity									-1.160	0.129	-0.833*	-.836		
Tolerance for ambiguity									0.239	0.126	0.196	.306		
Strategic ambiguity X Tolerance for ambiguity	0.00	0.25							0.372	0.303	0.125	.204		

*Note:* Means of all covariates and independent variables are centered on the mean

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

### *Topic valence*

Paired *t*-tests showed that the effects of topic valence on parents' adjustment outcomes were partially supported (H11). Parents' relational quality was predicted by topic valence ( $t = -3.158, p < 0.05$ ) suggesting relational quality has a strong, positive association with conversation valence. However, there were no differences in parents' reports of psychological well-being or communication satisfaction for the two different topics. The consistency of the differences between the stressor and happy memory topics, illustrated in the paired correlations, indicate a strong positive relationship between conversation topic valence and psychological well-being ( $r = 0.772, p < 0.001$ ), relational quality ( $r = 0.633, p < 0.001$ ), and communication satisfaction ( $r = 0.577, p < 0.001$ ).

The results for emerging adult children mirror those found for parents (H12). Children reported greater relational quality following the happy memory discussion than the stressor conversation ( $t = -4.442, p < 0.05$ ). As the paired samples correlations demonstrate, the differences in child's report of psychological well-being ( $r = 0.789, p < 0.001$ ), relational quality ( $r = 0.716, p < 0.001$ ), and communication satisfaction ( $r = 0.399, p < 0.01$ ) following the divorce-related stressor conversation and happy memory conversation were quite consistent, indicating a strong, positive relationship between offsprings' reports of relational quality and conversation valence.

Hypothesis 13, that parents would report greater use of strategic ambiguity than emerging adult children would perceive (a) in each minute of the conversation, and (b) globally after the end of the conversation, was not supported (see Table 27). Parents' use of strategic ambiguity was not different from children's perception of strategic at any minute within the conversation nor when assessing the conversation as a whole.

The final hypothesis predicted that parents' and emerging adult children's global reports of strategic ambiguity would be more similar than their reports at each minute in the stressor conversation. Hypothesis fourteen was not supported (see Table 27). Parents' use and children's perceptions of strategic ambiguity did not differ as a function of time. In other words, children's perceptions of parents' ambiguity at each minute within the conversation and their overall perceptions of strategic ambiguity did not differ significantly from parents' reports at each point in the stressor conversation.

Research question 1 asked whether similarity between parents' use of strategic ambiguity and emerging adult children's perceptions would become more similar over the course of the conversation. Results of the repeated measures ANOVA show that while there were no significant differences between parents' ambiguity and children's perceptions at the end of the conversation, there was no change of increasing similarity over the course of the conversation (see Table 27).

*Table 27*

Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for Parents' Use of Strategic Ambiguity Compared to Emerging Adult Children's Perceptions of Parents' Strategic Ambiguity

Source	F	Wilks' $\lambda$	Hypothesis df	Error df	Partial $\eta^2$	Observed Power
Observation (O)	.159	0.931	7.000	15.000	.069	.079
Dyad member (M)	.615	0.972	1.000	21.000	.028	.116
O x M	.440	0.830	7.000	15.000	.170	.141

*Note:* <sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The goals of this dissertation were to develop a self-report measure of strategic ambiguity that could assess both the discloser's intentional use of ambiguity and the confidant's perceptions of strategic ambiguity, extend CPM by developing strategic ambiguity as an indirect disclosure strategy that may be used to disclose private information to a relational partner, and shed light on how strategically ambiguous disclosures may affect a parent and his/her emerging adult child as they cope with divorce-related stress and postdivorce family adjustment. To achieve these goals two studies were conducted. The first was a questionnaire study designed as an initial test for a measure of strategic ambiguity developed base on a conceptual explication and theoretical development. The second study, a lab interaction study, examined strategic ambiguity in parent-to-child divorce-related disclosures. The results to these two studies will be reviewed and the implications will be discussed, followed by the limitations of this dissertation as well as the future directions.

### Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to develop a reliable and valid instrument to assess strategic ambiguity that could capture the phenomenon from the perspective of the confidant in order to situate the construct within the context of the relationship. Following an explication of the strategic ambiguity and an examination of existing methods of investigating strategic ambiguity, 40 items were developed based on the extant literature (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Hunter & Gerbing, 1982; Kerlinger, 1986). By developing the measure from existing strategic ambiguity literature and research, the measure possesses face validity. An initial test of the measure contributed to partially reaching the first goal of this dissertation by identifying 27 items that could assess a

person's perceptions of a relational partner's strategic ambiguity along the four distinct dimensions. The scale presented offers improvements over previous measures and can add appreciably to current research on information regulation by offering a reliable, face valid, and systematic way to examine disclosure beyond the disclose – not disclose dichotomy.

The proposed 27-item scale offers an alternative to previous approaches of investigating strategic ambiguity. These previous methods have relied on manipulating strategic ambiguity through hypothetical scenarios, coding selected messages for degrees of ambiguity, or use of single item, global measures of ambiguity. Recognizing the limitations of these previous approaches, Bavelas (e.g., Bavelas & Smith, 1982; Bavelas et al., 1988) created a measure that captured all four dimensions of strategic ambiguity. Multiple limitations have haunted this 4-item instrument. First, similar to the content and thematic analysis approaches used (e.g., Contractor & Ehrlich, 1993; Markham, 1996), Bavelas' approach relied on a third party's interpretation of a speaker's message. However, this diminishes the role that relational history plays in constructing and decoding ambiguous messages within an interaction. Second, while Bavelas' approach assessed four dimensions of strategic ambiguity, it consists of a single measure for each factor making it susceptible to considerable measurement error. Additionally, there have been inconsistent correlations among dimensions over administrations using Bavelas' technique. Across studies, inter-item correlations varied depending on the situation studied and methods used (e.g., Tanaka & Bell, 1996). These discrepancies might be attributable to the single items that form each dimension.

By creating and testing a scale created to overcome these limitations, the first goal of this dissertation was partially achieved. The first limitation was addressed by creating

a scale designed for interactants' self-reports reports. Messages that might be ambiguous to a third party coder may not be ambiguous to the intended recipient who is able to place the statement within the larger context of the parent-child relationship. A self-report measure better captures participants' experiences within interactions allowing relational history to influence understanding and decoding of the discloser's messages. Additionally, the disclosures remain situated and interpreted within the conversation and relationship in which they occur. Thus, greater ecological validity is possible with this measure compared to previous methods of investigating strategic ambiguity. By obtaining participants' own reports, the relational context and history are implicit in their understanding and decoding of the messages.

The second limitation, measurement inconsistency inherent in single item measures, was addressed by developing multiple items for each of the four underlying factors of strategic ambiguity based on the theoretical conceptualization of the construct. Multiple items created to capture the breadth of each dimension minimizes difficulties with measurement error and poor reliability across studies over time and aids in identifying more refined distinctions among individuals (Churchill, 1979; Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). As a whole, the instrument captures a wider breadth of strategic ambiguity with the same consistency as Bavelas' technique (e.g., Bavelas & Smith, 1982; Bavelas et al., 1988). Thus, the strategic ambiguity scale presented here affords greater reliability across data collection methods.

The improvements this scale offers over previous approaches to strategic ambiguity offers the opportunity for a closer examination of strategic ambiguity in family and interpersonal communication. As hypothesized, strategic ambiguity may be a useful disclosure strategy for families managing stressors. Issues surrounding divorce are often

stressful, and revealing them to others can help decrease perceived stress severity (Kahn, Achter, & Shambaugh, 2001) and aid physical and mental health (Leslie & Grady, 1988; Pennebaker, 1990). Parents often confide in their children about divorce stressors (e.g., T. D. Afifi, 2003; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). However, the effects of parents' disclosures on offspring are mixed (Arditti, 1999; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991; Golish, 2003; Koerner et al.). The inconsistent findings about the effects of disclosure have lead Afifi and her colleagues to suggest that characteristics of the disclosures, rather than the disclosures themselves, influence relational quality and individual well-being (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007). In other words, healthy functioning postdivorce families, while engaging in open communication (Golish, 2003), may not reveal all details about the stressors in order to protect other family members, their relationship, or maintain one's identity (Eisenberg, 1984). Therefore, the current scale will provide insights into the information regulation processes of stressed families, which is tested in Study 2.

Because individuals likely design unique messages for a specific recipient (Burgoon & White, 1997), the strategic ambiguity measure may aid in further refining knowledge regarding other information regulation processes as well. This may be especially true when the speaker is unsure about how the individual will react to private information (Petronio, 2002; Petronio et al., 1996). In these instances, strategic ambiguity might be a strategy employed. For instance, if family members are selective to whom they disclose secrets (T. D. Afifi, Olson, & Armstrong, 2005; Vangelisti et al., 2001), their disclosures may also be vague or incomplete when interacting to fellow family members. Typically, however, studies have operationalized secrecy disclosures as dichotomous: reveal or conceal (e.g., W. A. Afifi & Caughlin, 2006; Caughlin, Afifi, Carpenter-Theune, & Miller, 2005; Lane & Wegner, 1995). In approaching secret

disclosure as a behavior that may vary in terms of the degree and specificity of the information revealed, a more complete understanding of secrecy and its psychological (Lane & Wegner) and relational consequences (T. D. Afifi et al.; Caughlin et al.) may be delineated.

Although the scale developed in Study 1 offers improvements over previous methods for investigating strategic ambiguity, further research is necessary to establish the validity of the scale. The items for each of the four dimensions were created based on existing research. Thus, the content of the scale reflect the conceptualization of strategic ambiguity. Criterion validity, including predictive, convergent, and discriminant validity all are required in order to assess the quality of the proposed measure. For instance, determining whether the strategic ambiguity measure created in Study 1 can distinguish between truthful and untruthful messages is necessary in order to distinguish the measure from measures of equivocal deception. Thus, while the measure has demonstrated reliability, the validity of the measure must be examined further.

Overall, the findings of this initial study within the dissertation offers promising directions for future research on strategic ambiguity. Although further testing is warranted to ensure the integrity of the proposed measure, the initial test illustrates that improvements were made over previous techniques. Study 1 demonstrated that individuals do perceive and can reliably report the varying degrees of ambiguity in their conversations with relational partners. Not only will an accumulation of future research incorporating strategic ambiguity assist in further demonstrating the validity of the measure, considering the use and perception of strategic ambiguity in communication also could offer useful insight into how disclosure and avoidance occur and influence

relational quality. To begin in this direction and investigate the effects of disclosure strategies on postdivorce adjustment, Study 2 was conducted.

### Study 2

Based on the five suppositions of Communication Privacy Management theory (Petronio, 1991, 2002), the purpose of Study 2 was to examine how social support expectations and strategic ambiguity in parent-to-emerging adult child divorce-related disclosures influence parent's and child's psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction. The 14 hypotheses and one research question were tested by having parent-child dyads complete a series of questions about themselves and their relationship with one another, discuss a divorce-related stressor and happy memory within a controlled lab setting, and complete two series of questions regarding the conversations. Study 2 has implications for (1) the validity and reliability of the strategic ambiguity measure developed in Study 1, (2) the inclusion of strategic ambiguity as an indirect disclosure strategy within CPM, and (3) existing knowledge regarding the effects of parents' divorce-related disclosures. The results of Study 2 will be reviewed, with exemplars from the lab interactions to illustrate the use of ambiguity within the conversations. The implications of the results also will be discussed.

#### *Social Support Expectations*

Prior research indicated that divorced parents perceive themselves to have little available social support (Ladd & Zvonkovic, 1995; O'Connor et al., 198). Further, they may rely on their children for coping assistance (Greeff & Van der Merwe, 2004; Koerner et al., 2004) even though they were less able to provide support to their offspring following divorce (Umberson, 1992). This led to the first hypothesis that the less support parents expected from friends and family, the more support they would expect from their

emerging adult children. Because family members provide each other with support and coping assistance, and support experiences in the past influence expectations for support in future interactions from specific relational partners (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Pierce et al., 1991) offsprings' expectations for support from parents are likely related to the support they provide to parents. Therefore, it was hypothesized that if offspring expected receiving support from their parent regarding divorce-related issues, they would also expect to provide parents with support (H2).

Results from the analyses of the first two hypotheses regarding support expectations associations were mixed. Contrary to the negative relationship hypothesized among parents' support expectations, parents' informational and tangible support expectations from friends and family were positively associated with their expectations for informational and tangible support from their child (H1). Parents' nurturant support expectations from friends and family were unrelated to their support expectations from their children. Results showed that emerging adult children's expectations for support received and provided to the parent were highly associated to one another (H2). As hypothesized, the nurturant, informational, and tangible support emerging adult children anticipated providing their parent regarding divorce-related stress was positively correlated with all three types of support they expected to receive from their parents. From the perspective of both the parent and emerging adult child, both feel as though they can rely on one another for support regarding divorce-related stressors.

Contrary to the contention that divorced parents were unable to provide support to their offspring (Umberson 1992), offspring in Study 2 anticipated receiving support from parents regarding divorce-related stressors similar to the support they expected to provide, even as they were launched into adulthood. Extending prior research (Silverstein

& Bengston, 1997), emerging adult children remain reliant on their divorced parents for support and tangible assistance regarding the divorce. Indeed, their stressor conversations substantiate this finding. Several of the dyads attempted to resolve stressors, such as regarding finances and money, the other parent, and splitting/sharing time. For instance, one mother-daughter pair (Dyad 25) discussed their difficulty in asking the father for money. The mother tried to help her daughter resolve the stressor:

Mother: Why is it so stressful for you?

Daughter: Because, I just. I don't know. I'm afraid that if I talk to him about it, then he'll stop talking to me. And sometimes, I don't think that you really don't understand how important my relationship with him is.

M: Oh, I do understand how important your relationship is with him. I. Would you prefer that I talk to him about money?

D: No, because I don't think that it would do any good. I think it would just stay the same as it is now.

M: So, you would rather that just drop it.

D: No, because I feel like it should be taken care of by just. I just don't think I can take care of it.

M: Well, and I don't know. Well, I told you. I know how he's going to react if I approach him about money.

D: Yeah.

M: And, you are afraid. Why are you afraid?

D: 'Cause I don't know how he'll react. 'Cause I haven't had to talk to him about it before.

M: What's the worst that going to happen?

D: That he'll get mad.

M: And then what?

D: He won't talk to me any more... I don't want to be disappointed if he doesn't want to help me 'cause I feel like he should.

M: We had no agreement for that when we divorce. We had no agreement for that. And that was my fault, but I just wanted out. So, I didn't push for that.

D: Yeah

M: So, that's my fault. I'm, I'm sorry about that.

Throughout this conversation, the mother was able to provide her daughter emotional and informational support. Even though parents and children discussed shared stressors and both revealed private information, their conversations provided assistance and support for the child as well as the parent, suggesting that they not only expect support but also are able to obtain the support they anticipate. The support expectations parents and children had for one another may effect how parents disclose to their child obtain desired support.

#### *Strategic Ambiguity*

Given the discrepant findings regarding the effects of parents' divorce-related disclosures (e.g., Arditti, 1999; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004), the characteristics of parents' disclosures may have more of an effect than the co-ownership of divorce-related information on adjustment (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007). This dissertation suggested that one of the disclosure characteristics that might explain these discrepancies is the degree of strategic ambiguity within parents' divorce-related disclosures. To consider this possible explanation, a discussion of hypotheses 3 through 8 are offered followed by exemplars from the parent-child conversations to help illustrate strategic ambiguity within in the parent-child divorce-related stressor conversations.

*Social Support Expectations – Strategic Ambiguity – Adjustment Relationships*

In addition to expectations for support influencing from whom support is sought and what types of support are anticipated (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Fitzpatrick & Richie, 1994), the discloser's ability to anticipate the recipient's response and expectations affects the directness of disclosure (Petronio, 2002; Petronio et al., 1996). Therefore, it was hypothesized that support expectations regarding divorce-related issues would predict the strategic ambiguity parents used in divorce-related conversations (H3) as well as the ambiguity children perceived in their parent's disclosures (H4).

Parents' expectations for support from the child (H3a) or friends and family (H3b) did not predict their use of strategic ambiguity for either the stressor or happy memory conversation. Contrary to what was anticipated, parents did not intentionally vary the degree of ambiguity according to the support they anticipated receiving from the child and used very little ambiguity overall in both conversations. When disclosing about divorce-related stressors, it is possible that support expectations may influence *who* parents turn to for coping assistance (Ladd & Zvonkovic, 1995; O'Connor et al., 1998) but not *how* they disclose about the stressors. Supporting this possibility, while perceived available support predicted parents' postdivorce psychological well-being, it did not influence the appropriateness of parents' disclosures to their adolescent offspring (T. D. Afifi et al., 2007). A different set of expectations may guide how parents disclose private information to their emerging adult offspring. Parents' expectations for confidant's behaviors, rather than the schema for the parent-child relationship, may influence the strategy parents employ to disclose private information.

While support expectations were unrelated to parents' intentional use of ambiguity, emerging adult children's perceptions of a parent's strategic ambiguity were

predicted by the support they anticipated from their parent (H4b) but not the support they expected to provide (H4a). The more support offspring expected from their parent, the less ambiguity they perceived parents to utilize while discussing divorce-related topics. In addition to the types of support that were expected to be exchanged (Collins & Feeney, 2004), children's schemas for parents' support provision might include how information should be disclosed. The schemas emerging adults have for parents' support provision provide support expectation guidelines (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Reis et al., 2000). Thus, it makes sense that support schemas could include the expectation that supportive communication should be unambiguous. If parent and child typically talk openly, revealing detailed, sensitive information to one another, their expectations for support from one another will likely reflect previous conversations, given that schemas are shaped by past experiences (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Pierce et al., 1991). The support expected predicted strategic ambiguity for children but not parents. However, strategically ambiguous disclosures may affect parents' and children's adjustment.

Parents disclose divorce-related issues to their offspring (Golish, 2003; Koerner et al., 2004), and they typically benefit from disclosing stress to others (Mendolia & Kleck, 1993; Miller et al., 1998; Nakonezny et al., 2003). The effects of disclosures on offspring have been varied with some offspring describing beneficial adjustment outcomes (e.g., Arditti, 1999; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004), and others reporting more difficulties (Golish, 2003; Maysel et al., 2004). The strategy parents utilize to reveal divorce-related information, one characteristic of disclosures, may help explain the divergent effects on children's adjustment (e.g., T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). Thus, it was posited that parents' use of strategic ambiguity would predict parents' postdivorce

adjustment (H5), and emerging adult children's perception of the strategic ambiguity within parents' disclosures would predict children's postdivorce adjustment (H6).

Support for the direct effects of strategic ambiguity were much stronger for emerging adult children than for parents. For parents, the direct effect of strategic ambiguity on adjustment outcomes was limited with evidence only for its negative effects on relational quality and communication satisfaction following the discussion of a happy memory (H5). The direct effect of children's perceptions of strategic ambiguity consistently, negatively predicted all three outcomes for both conversation topics (H6). Although offspring may not want to co-own as much detailed divorce-related information as their parents reveal (T. D. Afifi, 2003), suspecting that information is withheld may be detrimental for the child and their relationship. When parents are perceived to be concealing information about the divorce, adolescents were unsatisfied with the parent, feeling their parent was uncaring and disinterested in the child (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002) and untruthful (Thomas et al., 1995). These perceptions may continue through the transition into adulthood. Indeed, across studies, adolescents and emerging adults, alike, reported greater relational closeness with their divorced parents, partially because of the increased private information parents shared (e.g., T. D. Afifi et al., 2008; Arditti, 1999; S. S. Koerner et al., 2000). Thus, for these emerging adult offspring, open, permeable privacy boundaries in which disclosures are unambiguous benefit relational quality, as CPM argues.

Emerging adults may experience greater psychological well-being following parents' unambiguous divorce-related disclosures compared to adolescents. For adolescents in postdivorce families, negatively valenced disclosures have predicted increased anxiety, worry (S. S. Koerner et al., 2004) and poor psychological well-being

(T. D. Afifi et al., 2007). Although the effects of family structure was not considered, adult children from families with open, unrestricted communication, regardless of topic, reported better mental health than those whose families were more traditional and restrictive in their communication with one another (Schrodt & Ledbetter, 2007). Thus, as children mature into adulthood and gain more social support, relational, and communication skills, they may be better able to manage parents' private, stressful disclosures. Overall, strategic ambiguity has inconsistent effects for parents; however, for emerging adult offspring, perceptions of strategic ambiguity in parents' divorce-related disclosures have a moderate and consistent negative effect for postdivorce adjustment.

Social support has been linked to successful coping (Holloway & Machida, 1991; Richmond & Christensen, 2000), and relational expectations provide guidelines for interactions that help the relational partners obtain the most beneficial outcomes for their interaction (Reis et al., 2000). Thus, this dissertation hypothesized that strategic ambiguity would mediate the relationship between parents' social support expectations and postdivorce adjustment (H7) and the relationship between emerging adult children's social support expectations and postdivorce adjustment (H8).

In all but one case, the mediational hypotheses could not be fully tested. Parents' social support expectations were not related to strategic ambiguity; therefore, the mediational hypotheses could not be tested. Emerging adult children's expectations for support from the parent predicted perceived strategic ambiguity (H4b). Additionally, social support expectations and perceived strategic ambiguity predicted psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction. However, the mediational effects of strategic ambiguity could not be tested for relational quality and communication satisfaction following either conversation topic due to the relative

magnitudes of the regression coefficients. The mediation of strategic ambiguity approached significance ( $p = .052$ ) for the expected received support – psychological well-being relationship following discussion of a stressor.

*Strategic Ambiguity Exemplars within Divorce-Related Stressor Conversations*

The conversations between parents and children helped substantiate the premise that strategic ambiguity is a disclosure strategy employed by parents during their conversations. In addition, these conversations indicated how and what dimensions of strategic ambiguity may occur within parents' disclosures. Supporting prior research contending that sender and receiver ambiguity are least common in face-to-face interactions (Rains & Scott, 2007; Tanaka & Bell, 1996), content and context strategic ambiguity were the most recognizable dimensions of strategic ambiguity within the parent-child conversations. Source ambiguity was evident when parents were attempting to minimize ambiguity. Receiver ambiguity in these dyadic, face-to-face interactions was observable through the nonverbal cues parents employed during conversations.

Content ambiguity, or the use of language and corresponding nonverbal cues to alter the specificity of ideas within a message, was utilized by parents in the stressor conversations. In one mother-daughter discussion about money, the mother was talking about how, even though her daughter had some financial advantages, sacrifices were made to make ends meet:

We don't have the income that we used to have. So, the lifestyle changed a little bit. Moving from our, which I saw you had down, which I didn't even have down, but. The move from the really nice, the nice house that we built as a family, pretty much, and had the way we wanted it. Yah, we had to take a step back. But, for the better? You know for the family. (Dyad 4)

Although this mother presented ideas so that her daughter had a basic idea of what the losses were, she did not specify or quantify the financial loss. Other than selling the house, no explanations for how their lifestyle changed was offered. In addition to language choices, the mother employed nonverbal cues to create an ambiguous message. Throughout her account, the mother was hesitant and spoke slowly. Hesitancy and repetitiveness were present as one father recounted his former wife's behaviors in his home to his son:

It always bothered me to have her enter the house because it always generated problems down the way. Other than that, it wasn't an issue for her just to come into the house, and, you know, drop you kids off and be there with you as you were coming over to the house. It was never a big deal. But, it became a big deal, in the beginning. Not so much now, but in the beginning. 'Cause of that, the demands that came afterwards. She became jealous. And that was an issue. (Dyad 19).

Another way parents employed content ambiguity was via the structure of how the ideas were revealed. Many parents asked questions to prompt the child to state their suspicions rather than reveal the information themselves. In one conversation, after establishing that the daughter did not speak much with her father since the parents' divorce, the mother asked a number of questions (Dyad 16). With each question, the mother waited for her daughter's response before indicating she was aware of the former spouse's behaviors of which the child spoke. The mother never explicitly revealed the behaviors herself yet ensured her daughter knew the information. For instance, one of the reasons the daughter was upset with her father was because she thought he cheated on her mother:

Mother: Was she there right away?

Daughter: I was sorta like suspicious that he had her on the side for a while.

M: Yeah, I think he did because he always said he liked Laura, and if we weren't together.

D: And I just remember meeting her before I even found out that you guys were separated.

M: Really?

D: Like taking me, him taking me in to introduce me to her.

M: Was he still living at home?

D: Mhm. I think I was 10 or 11 years old. It was right before he moved out.

M: Well, the real move out or the fake move out?

D: The fake move out. When he said he was house sitting.

M: Oh, that summer. And he took you into meet Laura?

D: Mhm.

M: Well, I knew he liked her. So that really upset you?

The mother's initial statements to her daughter were vague consisting primarily of questions that led the child to state information. The mother's comments following her daughter's statements provided confirmation but no additional detail or explicit verification to the daughter's suspicions. The mother used questions to have the information co-owned although she never explicitly disclosed her former spouse's behaviors herself.

These dyads illustrate how parents displayed content ambiguity when discussing divorce-related stressors. The lack of specificity regarding events, hesitancy in discussing the events, repetitiveness, the way information was revealed are all indicators of content

strategic ambiguity (Bavelas, 1983; Bavelas & Chovil, 2000). However, content ambiguity was not the only dimension of strategic ambiguity that parents exercised within these conversations.

While some parents employed ambiguity in the content of their disclosures, other parents implemented both content and context ambiguity. Context ambiguity arises when the information disclosed is disconnected from the preceding idea or the circumstances in which the statement is presented. As one father-daughter dyad discussed religion (Dyad 22), content and context ambiguity emerged. The father attributed his daughter's atheism to the divorce and his absence in her life for many years. During their conversation, he employed content ambiguity through hesitancy, having difficulty verbalizing his thoughts and pausing for long periods of time. He stated that "It wasn't right what had happened". The next minute and a half of the discussion the topic changed to recount when the divorce happened, how old the child and the father's work at the time of the divorce. While this was about the divorce, it was disconnected from the previous statement and from how he viewed religion as a divorce-related stressor. After a long pause, the father continued, stating: "I mean the whole thing about getting the divorce, it's not right. You know what I mean?" His daughter picked up on his lack of clarity in content; after the second statement of "it's not right" and the tag question, she asked what he meant by "right". The father, again, employed context ambiguity by shifting the focus of the conversation to her high school physics teacher's inappropriate support of her decision to not believe in God. The sudden topic shifts created a disconnection between two ideas constituting context ambiguity (Bavelas, 1983). As this example illustrates, parents employed strategic ambiguity along multiple dimensions. While some parents were employing strategic ambiguity, others were attempting to minimize ambiguity.

Rather than intentionally disclosing ambiguously, some parents attempted to reduce ambiguity along all four dimensions. For instance, one mother, while discussing interparental conflict and her son's triangulation between herself and his father, used both verbal and nonverbal cues to ensure a clear, specific, detailed message was decoded by the child minimizing content ambiguity (Dyad 32). During the discussion, the mother was careful in her word choice and clarified ownership of ideas:

Mother: But, if you remember, alcohol was a big thing at that time, so (pause) you could have. It got violent at times. You had to run. But, but I think the more that *I* separated from, or avoided that sit-, confrontation in front of you children, I think, that's a plus, don't you think?

Son: Yeah, definitely

M: Then the fighting went away because your father wasn't getting the attention that he was seeking because I didn't (Pause), you know, go along with it all the time. I think. Did you notice that?

S: Yeah

M: The more I avoided the confrontation

S: The less it happened

M: The less it happened

S: Yeah, I remember. I have like vague memories of fighting and stuff

M: Yeah. I tried not to do it, but he did it.

S: Well

M: He provoked it.

S: Right

M: So. But, but the more we ignored it. And, I told you children to ignore it if he, if he started with you guys, remember he started, he start picking, saying bad things about me. You know. And, I told you to just hang up. I told you not to be disrespectful but just hang up and limit yourself from it and he would just stop.

To minimize content ambiguity, this mother would stop mid-word in some cases to choose a more specific word to describe the event or situation. Additionally, she clarified when she was stating her own thoughts or recalling her behaviors by using statements such as “I think” and “I avoided” to reduce sender ambiguity. Throughout the conversation, the mother and son were oriented toward each other so that they could clearly see and talk to each other face-to-face reducing receiver ambiguity. They rarely broke eye contact with one another, and the son was always the one to shift his visual focus for brief moments. These nonverbal cues helped the mother direct her messages clearly to the son as the receiver without explicitly stating his name during their talk. Periodically, to avoid context ambiguity, this mother checked with her son to ensure that what she was saying made sense with her earlier statements. However, her hesitancy at times could be interpreted potentially as instances of content ambiguity.

While these cases demonstrate that parents’ strategic ambiguity may be able to be identified within their disclosures, as the explication of strategic ambiguity indicates, relational history helps disclosers and confidants interpret the ambiguity within the disclosure. This helps underscore the importance of obtaining the reports of the interaction partners when studying strategic ambiguity. While some cues that may be characteristic of strategic ambiguity, they are also indicators of other constructs. For instance, hesitancy may also be a sign of nervousness or a general dislike or difficulty

about discussing certain topics. Further, certain details may be excluded in a conversation because they have been discussed in a previous conversation. Therefore, while ambiguity may exist for a third party overhearing the conversation, the message may not be ambiguous for the intended recipient because s/he already owns that information. While strategic ambiguity helps explain some of the adjustment factors, the parents' and tolerance for ambiguity also helps explain their relational quality.

#### *Tolerance for Ambiguity*

Because one's tolerance for ambiguity may help explain the effects of strategic ambiguity (Norton, 1975; Petronio, 2002), it was hypothesized that parents' adjustment outcomes following their strategically ambiguous disclosures would be influenced by their tolerance for ambiguity (H9). Additionally, the effects of emerging adult children's perception that their parent was ambiguous would be moderated by their own tolerance for ambiguity (H10). Results for these hypotheses varied between parents' and children.

For parents, tolerance for ambiguity did moderate the effects of strategic ambiguity on relational quality (H9b) and communication satisfaction (H9c) during the stressor conversation but not the happy memory discussion. In both cases, when the parent used more strategic ambiguity, those who were less tolerant of ambiguity reported lower relational quality after the conversation than those who were more tolerant. Further, parents' communication satisfaction was unaffected by the amount of strategic ambiguity they employed when they were more tolerant of ambiguity compared to those who were less tolerant. This lends support to CPM's contention that those who are more tolerant of ambiguity may be more likely to utilize indirect disclosure strategies and not experience negative effects (Petronio, 2002), at least when discussing stressful topics.

The results for emerging adult children varied by topic. For offspring, moderation effects were found only for relational quality (H10b) after the happy memory conversation. Offspring's relational quality was less impacted by perceptions of strategic ambiguity when offspring had greater levels of tolerance for ambiguity. Following discussion of a stressor, tolerance for ambiguity did not moderate the effects of perceived strategic ambiguity; however, main effects of tolerance for ambiguity were found for all three of the child's adjustment outcomes.

The main effects indicate that the more tolerant these emerging adults were of ambiguity they experienced better postdivorce adjustment. Although tolerance for ambiguity may not explain how they manage parent's disclosures, it may influence how they manage divorce-related stress more broadly. Some individuals may not want details when the information is deemed undesirable (W. A. Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Brashers, 2001). Therefore, they may have developed strategies to avoid obtaining such information. However, when they become co-owners of parents' private, divorce-related information, regardless of the degree of strategic ambiguity employed, it makes adjustment more difficult. Those who are more tolerant of ambiguity may cope better under these circumstances. Greater tolerance for ambiguity has been associated with coping and how individuals manage their knowledge about the state of their postdivorce family (T. D. Afifi & Keith, 2004).

Emerging adult offspring who are not tolerant of ambiguity may desire to know the divorce-related information and to be his/her parent's confidant. Thus, it becomes important for parents to be aware of their child's need to co-own divorce-related information when they reveal private information. However, this may be difficult given it has been argued that parents may be unaware of exactly what information they are

revealing to offspring (Afifi, 2003). Generally, the use of strategic ambiguity when one or both relational partners does not have a high tolerance for ambiguity may have negative effects for relational quality and communication satisfaction, especially when discussing negative topics. However, the effects of topic valence will be further explored.

### *Topic Valence*

It has been assumed that offspring are effected by parents' divorce-related disclosures because of the negativity of the information parents' revealed (e.g., T. D. Afifi et al., 2007; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). Positive disclosures may improve psychological well-being and relational closeness (e.g., Gable et al., 2006; Marlo & Wagner, 1999). Thus, it was hypothesized that psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction would be greater for both parent (H11) and emerging adult child (H12) after discussing a positively valenced divorce-related topic (happy memory) than a negatively valenced divorce-related topic (stressor).

The effects of topic valence on postdivorce adjustment were the same for parent and emerging adult offspring. Relational quality was greater following their discussion of a happy memory than a stressor. As with dating couples, positive disclosures may have a unique role in maintaining relationships (Gable et al., 2006). However, no differences were found for psychological well-being and communication satisfaction after the stressor conversation compared to the happy memory conversation for either parent or child. Thus, the previous effects on psychological well-being that have been attributed to the negativity of parents' disclosures (e.g., Afifi et al., 2008; Koerner et al., 2004) may be due to other aspects of the disclosure or family context. Afifi and her colleagues (2007) and Koerner and her colleagues (2004) asked parents and adolescents to report on disclosures over a period of time rather than examining a single interaction. For the

offspring included in their studies, it may be that prolonged exposure to multiple negative conversations are what predict poor psychological well-being. As the current study examined only one negative conversation and one positive conversation, the effects of topic valence may not be observed after a single interaction. Alternatively, the difference in the effects on psychological well-being may be explained by developmental differences of the offspring across the studies. Emerging adult offspring may be more capable of managing their parents' divorce-related disclosures compared to adolescents included in many previous studies (e.g., Afifi et al., 2007; Koerner et al., 2004).

#### *(Mis)Perception*

Parents and their offspring often have differing perceptions of their communication with one another. Although their global impression of various communication behaviors and of a specific conversation as a whole typically are moderately correlated with one another (Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Richie & Fitzpatrick, 1990), momentary perceptual similarity tends to be low (Sillars et al., 2005). Further, when discussing divorce-related issues, parents and children tend to have differing perceptions of their communication (Dunn et al., 2001; Afifi et al., 2007). Thus, it was hypothesized that parents would report using more strategic ambiguity than children would perceive (H13). Further, perceptual similarity might be better achieved over the course of a conversation. Thus, it was hypothesized that parents' and children's perceptions should be more similar in their global reports of the conversation than their momentary reports (H14), and the final research question asked whether perceptual similarity increases over the course of the conversation.

No differences between parents and emerging adult offsprings' perceptions were revealed. After discussing the divorce-related stressor, parents' global reports of strategic

ambiguity were no different than emerging adult children's perceptions (H13a). Reports of strategic ambiguity after each minute in the divorce-related stressor conversation indicated that children's perceptions were similar to parent's self-report (H13b). Although parents' and children's reports were not significantly different from one another in their global reports, their reports of strategic ambiguity were no more similar when reported globally after the conversation than when reported after each minute of their conversation (H14). Finally, parents' and children's momentary reports did not become increasingly similar over the course of their conversation (RQ). Parents and emerging adult children had similar perceptions regarding the ambiguity within parents' communication while discussing divorce-related stressors.

These findings contradict prior research suggesting that parents and children have different perceptions about their communication (Afifi et al., 2007; Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Sillars et al., 2005). The current study focused on the emerging adult children's perception's of parents' use of one specific communication strategy: strategic ambiguity. Young adult children's perceptions of parents' avoidance was moderately correlated with parent's own report of avoidance (Caughlin & Golish). It may be that offsprings' perceptual accuracy may be more inaccurate when asked to assess communication at a general behavioral level as compared to a specific behavior. Narrowing the focus to a single discussion or behavior and assessing behavior and perceptions immediately following the discussion may make the task more manageable for parents and children. However, Sillars and his colleagues (2005) used a similar procedure to those used in the current study to examine how well parents and their adolescent child understand each other during and immediately after a conversation about common areas of disagreement in families. Their findings indicated that, while parents and children moderately

understood each other at a global level, they had little understanding at a momentary level. The parents' reports of ambiguity and young adult children's perceptions of parents' ambiguity were not significantly different at the global level, similar to the results of Sillars et al.'s study. The dyad's momentary similarity in the current study may be reflective of how the conversations were prompted. The current study asked the dyad to discuss a topic they had discussed previously, and therefore, all the information regarding the stressor may have been revealed, and the child was aware that the parent was not being ambiguous.

The results of Study 2 suggest that strategic ambiguity may be influential in how parents and emerging adult children cope with postdivorce stress for many years following divorce. While the results do not support the contention that strategic ambiguity mediates the relationship between social support and adjustment, perceived ambiguity does negatively effect offspring's psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction, regardless of valance of the divorce-related conversation topic. For parents, the results are more complex. Social support expectations do not influence how they disclose divorce-related information. Yet, they are less satisfied with the quality of the parent-child relationship and their communication following discussion of positively valenced topics when they employ more ambiguity. Further, when discussing negatively valenced topics, parents who are ambiguous and tolerant of ambiguity are more satisfied with their relationship quality and communication than parents who are intolerant of ambiguity and disclose ambiguously. Finally, parents' reports of ambiguity and children's perceptions of parent's ambiguity are similar and relatively unchanging over the course of conversation.

## Overall Summary

Across the two studies, a number of consistent findings can be identified. First, strategic ambiguity can be reliably measured and possesses some validity. Although it was not a strong predictor for parents' psychological well-being, relational quality, or communication satisfaction, strategic ambiguity consistently predicted emerging adult children's adjustment outcomes. However, mediational effects of strategic ambiguity in the relationship between support expectations and adjustment outcomes were not found. Tolerance for ambiguity was found to moderate the effects of strategic ambiguity for parents' relational quality and communication satisfaction. For emerging adult children, tolerance for ambiguity had more consistent direct, rather than moderation, effects on adjustment than moderating effects. Parents' use and offspring's perceptions of strategic ambiguity did not differ from one another. Finally, consistent with hypotheses 11 and 12, which indicated that relational quality was impacted by topic valence, relational quality for parents and children was the most consistent postdivorce adjustment factor predicted by strategic ambiguity.

## Implications

Two studies were designed for this dissertation to contribute to existing scholarship at the theoretical, methodological, and empirical levels. First, the dissertation created a self-report measure of strategic ambiguity that can assess the construct from the perspective of both participants within the communicative interaction. Second, by examining disclosures as a phenomenon that can vary with respect to its completeness and degree of detail, Communication Privacy Management theory is extended with the inclusion of strategic ambiguity as a disclosure strategy for managing the renegotiation of privacy boundaries following life changing events. Third, the results are socially relevant,

extending current knowledge on the effects of parents' divorce-related disclosures on parents' and emerging adult children's postdivorce adjustment. The results from Studies 1 and 2 are discussed based on how they help achieve these three goals.

Studies one and two offer a unique approach to examining disclosures through the creation of a self-report strategic ambiguity measure. The measure for strategic ambiguity has been developed and tested with two samples indicating that individuals are perceptive to variations in specificity and detail within conversations with their relational partners. Study 2 shows that the use and perception of strategic ambiguity has implications for relational quality of family members. In Study 1, participants who recalled telephone conversations noted that the receiver strategic ambiguity items were particularly difficult to answer given the medium of the conversation. However, this was not noted by participants in Study 2. Although receiver ambiguity was, on average, very low in Study 2, it might be that face-to-face communication permits greater opportunity for managing and perceiving the receiver dimension of strategic ambiguity than mediated interpersonal communication.

The strategic ambiguity measure needs to be tested further. The scale would benefit from cross-validation with a larger sample. Confirmatory factor analysis is typically considered a "large sample" procedure with samples less than 200 deemed a small sample (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Tanaka, 1987). Due to the small sample, random error is likely affecting the parameter estimates. Additionally, the reliability in Study 2 of the parents' content strategic ambiguity during the happy memory conversation was low, calling into question the validity of the findings; however, all other dimensions and observations were sufficiently reliable. A variety of factors could explain this issue. It is possible that the measure is less sensitive to vagueness in positively

valenced communication. Alternatively, because the small samples on which the measure has been developed, it is possible that the current items are not adequately capturing the underlying construct. Additional testing of the instrument is necessary to determine the adequacy of these items and to determine what is contributing to the poor reliability in this observation.

Communication Privacy Management maintains that disclosures can occur through a variety of strategies (Petronio, 2002). Depending on the needs of the discloser and confidant, information may be revealed through either direct or indirect approaches (Petronio). However, little attention has been given to the strategies employed when disclosing. Thus, to begin filling this void, strategic ambiguity was developed within this dissertation as one potential indirect disclosure strategy. Strategically ambiguous disclosures were argued to be an intentionally vague, imprecise, incomplete statement of private information that lacked detail in either the content or source of the message, the intended receiver, or that was unrelated to the conversation in which the statement was presented. Although parents' reported use and children's perceptions of strategic ambiguity were low in both their global (means ranging from 1.55 to 2.44 on a 7-point scale) and momentary (means ranging from 1.38 to 2.04 on a 5-point scale) reports, the ambiguity present in these conversations did have a consistent effect on relational quality. This provides support for extending CPM with the addition of strategic ambiguity as an indirect disclosure strategy and provides additional insight into how postdivorce families manage their privacy boundaries through parent-to-child divorce related disclosures.

Incorporating and examining specific disclosure strategies may help explain the process through which parents' disclosures impact relational quality. Disclosure has long been associated with increased intimacy and relational closeness (e.g., Altman & Taylor,

1973; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979). The development of strategic ambiguity as a disclosure strategy provides a way to examine how intimacy, and more specifically privacy, may be managed and altered over time. Disclosure is seldom a decision between disclosing and remaining private. Revealing some, but not all information, may allow a parent to obtain the support and assistance desired while not overburdening the child. Additionally, it may provide parents and children with a way to “test out” to what extent they each would like to discuss the topic before disclosing extensively and detrimentally when offspring indicate that they are willing and capable of co-owning the information. In other words, strategically ambiguous disclosures may offer a way to identify appropriate postdivorce privacy boundaries for parent-child relationships, which are may be critical to postdivorce family functioning (Braithwaite et al., 2001, Golish, 2003). Results regarding the effects of perceived ambiguity on adjustment outcomes show that emerging adult children benefit from permeable boundaries.

Interestingly, parents’ report of their own use of strategic ambiguity did not predict their adjustment outcomes. The lack of support for the effects of parents’ divorce-related, stressful disclosures may be explained by a number of other explanations. First, parents may not be aware to of the extent to which they disclose to their offspring (Afifi, 2003). Thus, if parents are being ambiguous, it may not be strategic. In other words, parents may not be completely mindful of their communication with their offspring. Alternatively, the parent’s motivation for the disclosure, and whether they reach this goal, may influence adjustment outcomes. For instance, a parent may disclose in order to obtain catharsis (e.g., Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Dolgin, 1996), to educate the child on adult issues (Koerner, Jacobs, & Raymond, 2000), or possibly to gain compliance (Petronio, 1991, 2002; Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988) or control (Derlega & Grzelak,

1979; Dolgin, 1996; Graham et al., 1993). If the goal is achieved, regardless of the specificity and directness of the information used to achieve that goal, the parent may be more satisfied with the interaction and with the relationship.

A third possible explanation is that the child's response may have more of an effect on parents' adjustment than the role of one's disclosure strategy. Communication Privacy Management argues that boundary coordination is influenced by the match between parent's disclosure and the response received (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Similar to the role partners' social skills match one another can influence their relational satisfaction (e.g., Burleson & Samter, 1994; Burleson & Samter, 1996), the degree to which the directness of a disclosure response matches the directness of the disclosure may influence perceptions of the relationship and communication satisfaction. Overall, the degree of strategic ambiguity in parents' disclosures may not, alone, explain parents' psychological well-being, relational quality, or communication satisfaction; other factors might help explain this relationship. While strategic ambiguity has some implications for CPM, interesting practical implications for postdivorce families are also offered by the results of this dissertation's results.

The results of this dissertation extend research on communication in divorced families. CPM maintains that disclosures will be ambiguous when the support seeker is uncertain of how the confidant will respond to the disclosure. For divorced families, this phenomenon might be more prevalent early in the parent-child post-divorce relationship. For Study 2's sample, the divorce occurred, on average, 10 years prior to the dyad's participation in the study. At this point, they may have already altered their privacy boundaries and revised the rules regulating disclosure. Examining families during separation and within the first few years following divorce might offer a better indicator

of how these boundaries are revised and the role of strategic ambiguity, or other indirect disclosure strategy, in the alteration of privacy boundaries.

While boundary renegotiation may occur within the first few years following divorce, as the family adjusts and develops, the most significant stressors they contend with may remain the same. The three most frequently listed divorce-related stressors both parents and emerging adult offspring listed (finances/money, issues with the former spouse/noncustodial parent, and splitting time/custody) may be persistent stressors that are not resolved in the years after divorce. Parents with young adolescents who had been divorced an average of 3.5 years, reported experiencing these same three stressors (Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006). While families may be able to overcome some stressors, others appear to remain as the family develops over time.

Evidence from Study 2 indicates that how parents disclose to offspring influences how the offspring cope. Emerging adults might benefit from more explicit, detailed disclosures from parents. Supporting prior research, from the emerging adult child's perspective, receiving divorce-related information increases relational quality (Arditti, 1999), and the perception that parents are not revealing all information can have a negative effect on the parent-child relationship (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002; Thomas et al., 1995). Children's reports of relational quality was negatively impacted by parents' strategic ambiguity when discussing divorce-related stressors. While these results examined offspring confronting different developmental challenges, strategic ambiguity may help explain differences in adolescents' reports of parent-child relational quality following parents' divorce-related disclosures (e.g., T. D. Afifi, Coho, & McManus, 2008; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004).

Preliminary analyses indicated that the order in which the divorce-related topics are discussed may influence relational quality for both parents and emerging adult children and communication for offspring. Dyads who discussed the positively valenced topic first reported greater relational quality after both conversations compared to dyads who discussed the negatively valenced topic first. This suggests that when parents have negative information to reveal, the pair may benefit from a type of primacy effect on their conversations: Discussing a positively valenced topic prior to the negative disclosure may help minimize the effects of the negative, distressing information.

Overall, this dissertation offers unique insight and tools for future research. The construction and testing of the strategic ambiguity measure provides a methodological advancement over prior means of examining disclosure. The inclusion of strategic ambiguity offers a useful explanatory tool for examining the effects of private disclosures on relational quality. Finally, strategic ambiguity has been shown to help explain some of the effects of parent-to-child disclosures, although it does not aid in explaining the discrepant past findings regarding psychological well-being. These results, however, must be interpreted within the limitations of this dissertation.

#### Limitations

Although this dissertation provides insight into how parents disclose to their children and the effects of those disclosures for both parent and child, the results of both studies must be couched within several limitations. First, the samples for both studies were homogenous, small, and potentially possess a selection bias. Second, the number of statistical tests raises concerns for type I error. Third, the selection of conversation topics limits the possibility for disclosure in Study 2. Fourth, the post-test only design of Study 2 limits the conclusions that can be made regarding strategic ambiguity.

The homogeneity and size of the samples for both Studies 1 and 2 as well as a selection bias raise concerns about the generalizability of the findings. The samples used were not diverse. For instance, all but one dyad in Study 2 were Caucasian, most were from central Pennsylvania, and were relatively well educated, with half the parents having at least a college degree and nearly all emerging adults pursuing a college degree, and financially stable. The sample does not reflect the variability among divorced families, and therefore these results may not be found in a more representative sample. Additionally, the sample sizes were quite small for both studies, which might have contributed to many of the insignificant findings as power to find differences was low. This likely contributed to difficulties testing the hypothesized mediation effects of strategic ambiguity and momentary assessments of strategic ambiguity in the video recall procedures. Significance tests for mediation necessitate a large sample (Barron & Kenny, 1986); thus, the forty dyads included in these analyses are insufficient to adequately test these two hypotheses. Social support expectations may operate through strategic ambiguity; however, the current test does not have enough power to adequately test the hypotheses.

Further, participants in Study 2 may have self-selected into the research. It is possible that the parent-emerging adult child dyads who participated in this study had an open relationship and thus typically have porous privacy boundaries with one another. If their relationship is characterized by open boundaries, they may not employ ambiguity frequently. The description of the study provided to all participants explained that the study was about communication in divorced families, and they would be asked to complete a questionnaire, have a discussion with one another, and report on their

thoughts about their conversations. It is possible that due to the study's description, only dyads who have open privacy boundaries choose to participate.

A second limitation is associated with the large number of statistical tests that were computed without adjusting alpha for family-wise error. This may have led to obtaining significant results by chance, increasing type I error. Thus, all significant results must be interpreted with a reasonable level of skepticism.

A third limitation is the manner in which the topics were selected as conversation prompts. For ethical reasons, the participants were requested to identify topics on which they have discussed previously to be used for conversation prompts, and they were permitted to leave out topics they did not want to discuss with one another in the lab setting. This was done to protect the participants from discussing highly troubling topics that might create undue stress or induce conflict. However, it is possible that the topics selected for discussion had already been resolved and were minimally distressing compared to other topics; therefore, the conversations may not have entailed parents revealing new, private information that was previously unknown to the child. Indeed, some dyads commented as their conversation started or during debriefing that they had resolved the stressor or had discussed it many times before even though it still existed. On the other hand, some parents mentioned that while the stressor had been discussed previously, new aspects of the issue were revealed, and they felt good about having had the discussion with their child. Thus, while the conversations likely involved revealing of some new information, some of what was discussed might have been addressed in conversation prior to their interactions in Study 2.

The fourth limitation concerns the post-test only design of Study 2. Because parents' and children's adjustment variables were only assessed after discussing the

stressor and happy memory topic, it cannot be concluded that strategic ambiguity within these discussions explains the parent and child's post-interaction psychological well-being, relational quality, and communication satisfaction. While the post-conversation directions requested the participants to respond to the items based on how they felt after each conversation, because there was no pre-conversation control for these variables, the topics and strategies employed during discussion may not fully explain these effects. It is possible that the two conversations had no effect on their evaluations. Although a number of factors limit the generalizability of this dissertation's results, the findings suggest multiple opportunities for future research.

#### Future Directions

Although Studies 1 and 2 build upon and contribute to existing scholarship, future research can provide additional insight and help explain some of the effects. Further refinement and testing of the strategic ambiguity measure is necessary. Second, curvilinear relationships between strategically ambiguous disclosures and outcomes ought to be considered. Additionally, further investigation into what prompts parents' divorce-related disclosures might aid in explaining the differences in how the disclosures affect parents and children. Untangle how, why, and under what circumstances perceptions between parents and child's perceptions vary. Fourth, examining offspring's divorce-related disclosures to their parents might help explain parents' adjustment and further test CPM.

Although the proposed scale for strategic ambiguity improves upon previous measures and can contribute to research on information regulation, future research is needed to more fully assess the validity of the scale. Construct validity needs to be further addressed. An examination of the initial items created for context strategic ambiguity

shows that there was a poor fit among items asking about specific speech turns and items assessing overall context ambiguity. This might suggest that these two aspects of context ambiguity are separate dimensions or the individual statements. Alternatively, because parents and adolescents have poor momentary understanding but are better able to report on the conversation as a whole (Sillars et al., 2005), the poor fit might be due to an inability to remember such detailed aspects of a conversation making context strategic ambiguity difficult to accurately assess. Indeed, participants in Study 1 were asked to recall a conversation that might have occurred as many as two months prior, they may not have been able to accurately remember specific statements in the conversation over a prolonged period of time. Measuring strategic ambiguity immediately following the conversation might minimize recall bias and provide a more consistent assessment of these items.

In addition to ensuring construct validity, convergent and discriminate validity need to be addressed. The distinction between strategic ambiguity and deceptive equivocation must be considered. Equivocal deception or brief, vague, or noncommittal statements intended to create mixed messages that shape the recipient's understanding in a way that the sender knows is false, is one form of deception (Buller & Burgoon, 1994) and could be considered an instance of strategic ambiguity due to the meaning attributed by the receiver (Chovil, 1994; Hamilton & Mineo, 1998). Indeed, White and Burgoon (2001) argue that deceptive communication is the ultimate occasion for strategic adaptation of a message. Compared to unambiguous criticism, individuals' viewed vague, nonspecific criticism as polite yet dishonest (Edwards & Bello, 2001). In interpersonal conflict situations, individuals evaluated ambiguous messages as more dishonest than ambiguous messages in non-conflict situations (Tanaka & Bell, 1996). When assigned to

lie during a mock interview, participants and research assistance both reported the participant as employing ambiguity (Burgoon & Buller, 1994). Thus, strategic ambiguity may share some characteristics with equivocal deception.

Others have argued, however, that strategically ambiguous messages and deceitful statements are distinct strategies (e.g., Bavelas, 1983). Accordingly, Bavelas (Bavelas, 1998; Bavelas et al., 1990) makes the distinction between what is said (i.e., truthfulness) and how the message is presented (i.e., clarity and directness). In other words, ambiguity can vary in degree of honesty. While lay observers did notice a difference in structure and delivery between ambiguous and clear messages, they also noted a distinction between equivocal, deceitful messages and strategically ambiguous messages: Ambiguous messages provided all relevant, truthful information where as deceptive messages did not present all essential, truthful information (Bavelas et al., 1990). Although both deception and strategic ambiguity are dependent upon perceptions, the distinction between deception and strategic ambiguity offered here emphasizes message substance, language, and delivery. Future research must address whether the only distinction between the two construct lies in the sender's intent or if there are manifest characteristics that may

Curvilinear associations between strategically ambiguous disclosures and adjustment outcomes ought to be considered. Prior research has shown that offspring receive too much information from their parents about divorce-related issues (T. D. Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; S. S. Koerner et al., 2004). However, children who perceive their parents to be withholding information or to be deceptive about the divorce were less satisfied with the parent-child relationship and communication (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002; Thomas et al., 1995). Thus, it is possible that too much or too little detail in divorce-related information is detrimental yet there is a middle ground that might be

most effective in maintaining individual and family health, relational quality, and communication satisfaction.

To understand the disclosure process and what sets it in motion, the parent's motivation for revealing divorce-related information to offspring must be explored. Disclosure strategies employed and the valence of those disclosures may be influenced by what motivates a parent to reveal the information to the offspring. Disclosure for cathartic purposes may be more about obtaining relief for oneself and if that is achieved, the parent may not be concerned about what or how they disclose. If disclosing to alter the child's behavior or beliefs, or to maintain a certain identity, the information revealed may be different. If the parent is disclosing to teach the child or to provide support for the child, the parent may reveal information in a different manner and to a different degree of detail. In the first two cases, satisfaction with the interaction may be affected more by goal achievement rather than the degree of ambiguity in the disclosures. However, in the third case, goal achievement and disclosure strategy together may influence satisfaction.

Future research should untangle how and why and under what circumstances perceptions between parents and child's perceptions vary. While no differences between parents' and offsprings' perceptions were found in this study, it is unclear why this occurred when other studies have consistently found differences in perception. It is possible that because parents are focused on managing the stressors and unable to attend to their offspring's needs early in postdivorce family adjustment, parents may be unable to discern when they are disclosing too much (Afifi, 2003; Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, 1985) or unaware of the meaning their offsprings' attribute to the divorce-related disclosures (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002; Koerner et al., 2004). In other words, parents may disclose much detailed information about the divorce to the child, but because of the

parents' attention to managing stress, they are too taxed cognitively to decode the child's nonverbal cues indicating discomfort with the discussion. However, over time, parents have begun to manage some stress and are better able to mindfully disclose.

Alternatively, parents may be unaware that their disclosures are distressing due to the lack of feedback from the child (Afifi, 2003; Cartwright & Seymour, 2002) due to children avoiding discussions regarding the state of their family with parents (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003a; Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Another potential explanation is that family members may disagree about what and how much information should be revealed (Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Petronio, 2002). This disagreement could lead to boundary turbulence potentially negatively effecting relational quality, which may explain the similarity between parents' and offsprings' perceptions in Study 2. Negotiating or revising privacy boundaries is not easy or satisfying (Petronio, 2002), and determining what is appropriate or necessary in the disclosure is partially determined by the recipient of the disclosure (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989, 1990; Jones & Burleson, 1997). This suggests that the child must request and be provided specific information for the disclosures to be satisfying, or the parent and child must be close and know each other well in order to for the parent know what and how much detail to provide in divorce-related disclosures.

To understand postdivorce coping and adjustment, future research ought to look at offsprings' communication with parents in addition to parents' disclosures. Support expectations and strategic ambiguity did not predict parents' outcomes in the present study. Further, the support the offspring anticipated the parent to provide regarding divorce-related issues predicted the child's adjustment and their perceptions of ambiguity. Thus, the child's disclosures may also influence adjustment following

divorce. During debriefing some parents commented that the child revealed new information, worries, concerns, and thoughts to them; these conversations changed the way they thought about the stressor and looked forward to talking about it more with their child at another time. For instance, one dyad discussed finances and money as a stressor, and the child asked questions about the families' financial situation and his college tuition funds because it was an increasing problem for the child. The parent was surprised that the child wanted to know about those issues because she had tried over the years to not reveal financial information to her son to avoid stressing him, when, unbeknownst to her, *not* co-owning the information was stressful. Thus, as CPM maintains, examining children's disclosures may aid in explaining parents' adjustment.

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Appendix

Final Version of Strategic Ambiguity Scale

*Instructions:* Based on the **first** conversation you had with your parent, respond to the following questions based on how vague you feel *your parent* was with you, generally, during your discussion. For each statement, please circle the one number that best represents what you think of *your parent's* communication: **1 = “Strongly disagree”, 2 = “Disagree”, 3 = “Slightly disagree”, 4 = “Neutral”, 5 = “Slightly agree”, 6 = “Agree”, and 7 = “Strongly agree”.**

In terms of what <b>MY PARENT</b> said...	Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree		
1. The meaning was vague.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
2. My parent's statements had only one possible meaning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
3. My parent's message had multiple meanings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
4. My parent seemed to contradict him/herself when we talked.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
5. My parent seemed evasive in our conversation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
6. My parent tried to change the subject during our conversation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
7. My parent tried to avoid to my questions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
8. My parent was vague about whether s/he was expressing his/her own opinions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
9. My parent clearly articulated whose position s/he expressed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
10. My parent was not clear about who was responsible for the ideas s/he expressed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
11. My parent was unclear about whether s/he agreed with the statements s/he made.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
12. My parent said “I believe...”, “I think...”, and “I feel...” to show that the ideas were his/her own.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
13. My parent was clear about his/her own position.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
14. My parent was vague about what his/her own thoughts were.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
15. My parent was honest about his/her thoughts and feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
16. My parent very clearly states his/her own thoughts.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
17. My parent was clearly talking to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
18. My parent sounded like s/he might be talking to someone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
19. My parent sounded like s/he was talking to me, but look as though s/he was talking to someone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		

In terms of what <b>MY PARENT</b> said...	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>		<b>Neutral</b>			<b>Strongly Agree</b>	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. My parent was looking at me, but s/he did not sound like s/he was talking to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My parent clearly addressed this message to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. My parent's statements made sense with what we were discussing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Overall, my parent's ideas fit together, making him/her easy to understand.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. My parent's responses were "way" off from the statement or question that came before it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. My parent's statements sometimes did not seem connected with what we were talking about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. My parent's statements fit into the discussion we were having.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. It seemed like my parent sometimes was trying to avoid giving me a direct response.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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### Education

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication, The Pennsylvania State University, Fall 2008  
Master of Arts in Communication, University of Cincinnati, Summer 2004  
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### Publications

- Afifi, T. D., McManus, T., Hutchinson, S., & Baker, B. (2007). Inappropriate parental divorce disclosures, the factors that prompt them, and their impact on parents' and adolescents' well-being. *Communication Monographs*, 74, 78-102.
- Afifi, T. D., & McManus, T. (2006). Communal coping dilemmas in post-divorce families: Introducing meaning back into coping. In R. Daily and B. LePoire (Eds.), *Applied interpersonal communication matters: Family, health, and community relations* (pp. 67-89), New York: Peter Lang.
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### Teaching

#### Course instructor

- **Effective Speech** – Fall 2002 through Summer 2008 (University of Cincinnati; Penn State)
- **Communication Theory** – Summer 2007(Penn State)
- **Effective Group Communication** – Summer 2005, Spring 2006 (Penn State)
- **Persuasive Speaking** – Fall 2003 through Spring 2004 (University of Cincinnati)
- **Professional Speaking** – Winter 2004, Spring 2004 (University of Cincinnati)

#### Teaching assistantships and internships

- **Communication Research Methods** – Spring 2008 (Penn State)
- **Communication Theory** – Spring 2007, Spring 2008 (Penn State)
- **Family Communication** – Fall 2006 (Penn State)
- **Interpersonal Communication** – Spring 2006 (Penn State)
- **Careers in Communication** – Fall 2003 (University of Cincinnati)

### Honors

- Sparks Fellowship, Fall 2007
- Top 4 Student Organizational Communication paper, NCA Convention 2006
- Research Assistant, Fall 2004 to Spring 2006
- Top 4 Graduate Student Debut Paper, CSCA Convention 2004