

COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP CIRCUMSTANCES THAT DRIVE THE
PROVISION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT: AN EXTENSION OF COMMUNICATION PRIVACY
MANAGEMENT THEORY

by

ERIN BASINGER

(Under the Direction of Kirsten M. Weber)

ABSTRACT

Research on social support touts the numerous benefits it offers distressed individuals. Although research has made relevant contributions to understanding the reasons social support alleviates distress, current bodies of research inadequately address the circumstances that encourage individuals to engage in support. Therefore, the goal of this thesis was to document the communication and relationship qualities that drive support provision. I turned to communication privacy management theory as a framework for understanding factors that motivate supportive exchanges. The results of the study supported my predictions that co-ownership, boundary permeability, clarity about support rules, and support rule turbulence underlie supportive exchanges. These findings are meaningful because they clarify communication and relationship circumstances that encourage the provision of social support in close relationships. In addition, they have implications for communication privacy management theory and for the study of social support.

INDEX WORDS: distress, social support, communication privacy management theory

COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP CIRCUMSTANCES THAT DRIVE THE
PROVISION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT: AN EXTENSION OF COMMUNICATION PRIVACY
MANAGEMENT THEORY

by

ERIN BASINGER

B.A., Samford University, 2008

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2011

© 2011

Erin Basinger

All Rights Reserved

COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP CIRCUMSTANCES THAT DRIVE THE
PROVISION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT: AN EXTENSION OF COMMUNICATION PRIVACY
MANAGEMENT THEORY

by

ERIN BASINGER

Major Professor: Kirsten M. Weber

Committee: Jennifer Monahan
Lijiang Shen

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people deserve my sincerest gratitude for making this thesis and my graduate education a success. First, I would like to extend my deepest and most sincere thanks to my adviser, Kirsten Weber, who has invested in me both academically and personally. Your tireless work on this thesis was invaluable, and I am more than grateful for your hours of reading, writing, meeting, and editing. Beyond that, you have been a source of support, advice, care, and encouragement as I have navigated through the past two years. Your investment in me has made me a better scholar, but more importantly, you have made me a better person.

Thank you also to my committee members, Jennifer Monahan and Lijiang Shen. Jen, you were the first to tell me that I could find success in academia, and you have continued to encourage me throughout my tenure at Georgia. In large part, I have you to thank for my confidence in my endeavors. LJ, as a professor and a committee member, you have pushed me to think critically, and your contributions have made this a better project and me a better student. Thank you both.

My time at Georgia would have been exponentially less fulfilling without my fellow graduate students. I am beyond thankful to have shared this journey with every one of you.

To my grandparents, Jim and Ruth Basinger and Janet King, you have been my biggest fans since day one. Thank you for your constant encouragement, prayer, and support.

Finally, I want to extend something much deeper than “thank you” to my parents. You have been, by far, my biggest supporters. I owe so much of who I am to you, and I love and am so thankful for you both!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	6
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSAL OF HYPOTHESES	23
4 METHODS	40
5 RESULTS	44
6 DISCUSSION	65
REFERENCES	91
FOOTNOTES	107
APPENDICES	
A DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	109
B DESCRIPTION OF THE SUPPORT SITUATION	110
C SEVERITY OF DISTRESS	112
D CO-OWNERSHIP OF THE DISTRESSING EVENT	113
E BOUNDARY PERMEABILITY	114
F CLARITY ABOUT SUPPORT RULES	115
G SUPPORT RULE TURBULENCE	116

H PROVIDING INSTRUMENTAL, INFORMATIONAL, EMOTIONAL, ESTEEM,
AND NETWORK SUPPORT..... 117

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Skewness and Kurtosis Values of Independent and Dependent Variable Measures.....	55
Table 2: Bivariate Correlations Among Independent Variables.....	56
Table 3: Bivariate Correlations Among Dependent Variables	57
Table 4: Bivariate Correlations Among Independent and Dependent Variables.....	58
Table 5: Means of Each Support Type in the <i>Did Offer Support</i> and the <i>Did Not Offer Support</i> Survey Conditions.....	59
Table 6: Results for Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Co-ownership of a Distressing Event	60
Table 7: Results for Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Boundary Permeability	61
Table 8: Results for Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Clarity about Support Rules.....	62
Table 9: Results for Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Support Rule Turbulence	63
Table 10: Results from Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Co-ownership, Boundary Permeability, Clarity about Support Rules, and Support Rule Turbulence	64
Table 11: Initiation of Communication by the Support Provider and by the Distressed Other	90

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, over 10 percent of the adult population in the United States experienced severe psychological distress (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2007). This translates to approximately 24.3 million adults who suffered from clinical levels of distress. Of consequence, distress is associated with acute physiological and psychological discomfort (e.g., Benight et al., 1997; Caetano & Weisner, 1995; Hudson, Lee, Miramontes, & Portillo, 2001). For example, distressed individuals may experience negative physical outcomes of distress such as fatigue (Tchekmedyan, Kallich, McDermott, Fayers, & Erder, 2003) or disease progression (Ironson et al., 1994). Psychological consequences may include depression and anxiety (Kitson & Sussman, 1982), interpersonal sensitivity, hostility, and thoughts of suicide (Caetano & Weisner, 1995). Because distress has consequential physical and psychological outcomes, scholars have begun to document measures to attenuate the effects of distress. This thesis follows in that tradition.

Social scientific research on social support touts the numerous benefits it offers individuals in distress (Hobfoll & Stokes, 1988). When distressed individuals receive social support, their symptoms are significantly reduced (Ross & Mirowsky, 1989; Thoits, 1984), including decreased anxiety and depression (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981; Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). In addition, support recipients report better psychological well-being (Walen & Lachman, 2000), increased self-esteem, and improved quality of life (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). Moreover, social support counters the effects of isolation and loneliness, which often

accompany distress, by offering companionship (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). Perhaps because social support provides one with opportunities for social integration (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984), recipients of social support report feelings of love, interest, compassion, and commitment (Burleson, 1994). This body of work suggests that distressed individuals who receive social support experience numerous intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits.

Given the implications of social support on distressed individuals, scholars have focused on identifying particular types of support to serve the needs of those individuals, including instrumental support, informational support, and emotional support¹ (House & Kahn, 1985). Instrumental support includes direct resolution of tangible problems (e.g., provision of financial assistance, help with childcare; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Support that resolves tangible problems reduces distress by creating time for the distressed individual to engage in relaxing or therapeutic behaviors (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996). Informational support equips the distressed individual with information to help him or her understand or cope with difficult circumstances (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996; House & Kahn, 1985). By increasing perceptions of control, informational support decreases distress (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996). Emotional support offers expressions of care, empathy, comfort, and encouragement (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996; Thoits, 1984; Thoits, 1995). This type of support reduces distress by restoring self-esteem, assuring individuals that they are loved and cared for, and strengthening interpersonal relationships (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Helgeson & Cohen, 1996). Taken together, research on social support has documented the types of support and the underlying mechanisms that alleviate distress.

Although research has made relevant contributions to understanding the reasons social support alleviates distress, current bodies of research on social support inadequately address *why* social network members come to offer such support. Scholarship that addresses helping and

prosocial behaviors offers some insight into the provision of support; however, this body of work reveals that individual differences exist (e.g., empathy), which may help people to determine the appropriateness of offering support (Eisenberg et al., 1993; Stiff et al., 1981). Other work has found that cognitive complexity may influence whether a person is able to provide social support (Burlison, 1985). Although the helping behaviors literature and the social support literature reveal the benefits of assisting persons in distress *in general*, research identifying specific communication and relationship circumstances that encourage an individual to provide support is less clear (Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990; Lindorff, 2005). Thus, existing research leaves many questions about the provision of social support unanswered.

In short, past research has identified the types and benefits of social support, but relatively little is known about the motivations behind providing supportive exchanges. The goal of this thesis, then, was to document how social context shapes attempts at social support. Specifically, the thesis details the communication and relationship qualities that influence gestures of support.

Conceptualizing the Provision of Social Support

To begin answering some of the questions about the influences that encourage social support, this thesis turns to communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 1991, 2000, 2002) as a framework for understanding factors that motivate individuals to provide support. The theory details specific communication circumstances and relationship qualities that motivate communication exchanges, including times when social support would be offered. Therefore, communication privacy management theory provides a useful framework for understanding how people come to engage in supportive exchanges.

The general premise of the theory is that individuals who have successfully negotiated boundaries with their relationship partner are more in tune with the communicative expectations for that relationship. In this thesis, I argue that the theory's assumptions about negotiating boundaries around private information generalize to negotiating the conditions associated with providing support. Using this reasoning, I deduced hypotheses about the salience of shared boundaries, the flexibility of communication boundaries, the clarity about support rules, and the presence of boundary turbulence in relation to the provision of social support.

To test the proposed hypotheses, data was collected from 241 undergraduate students from a large southern university. Participants completed a cross-sectional online survey comprised of measures designed to test the proposed hypotheses. The data from the surveys was analyzed using hierarchical regression analyses.

The hypotheses advanced in this thesis predicted that co-ownership about the distressing event, boundary permeability, and clarity about support rules would be positively associated with the provision of social support. In addition, I hypothesized that support rule turbulence would share a negative association with the provision of social support. The results of the study indicated that co-ownership about the distressing event, boundary permeability, and clarity about support rules were positively associated with the provision of social support. In addition, support rule turbulence shared a negative association with the provision of social support. These findings were consistent with the predicted associations. Further analyses suggested that boundary permeability and clarity about support rules were the most significant predictors of the provision of social support following a distressing event.

This thesis makes contributions to communication privacy management theory and to the social support literature. To date, tests of communication privacy management theory have

focused on how network members negotiate boundaries surrounding private information. The current thesis expands the scope of communication privacy management theory by examining how boundaries surrounding instances of social support are negotiated. Additionally, this thesis contributes to existing bodies of literature about social support. In particular, research offers extensive research about how social support is *received*. This thesis makes a unique contribution to extant literature by examining communication circumstances and relationship qualities that encourage individuals to *offer* social support.

By applying assumptions of communication privacy management theory to social support, this thesis clarifies how communication circumstances and interpersonal relationships contribute to exchanges in which social support is offered. In the next chapter, I review research on distress and social support. In chapter three, I detail the assumptions of communication privacy management theory. I also propose hypotheses about providing social support, which are based on the assumptions of the theory. Following, chapter four describes the study designed to test associations between providing social support and variables taken from communication privacy management theory. In chapter five, I detail the results of the study. Finally, in chapter six I discuss implications of the study more generally, and note limitations and future directions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned previously, slightly over 10% of the adult population in the United States reported facing severe distress in 2007 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2007). Not surprisingly, individuals experiencing distress are likely to indicate the presence of depression, stress, anxiety (Ahluwalia, Mack, & Mokdad, 2004), unhealthy eating habits, (Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001), smoking and problematic drinking behaviors (Kitson & Sussman, 1982), and sleep disturbances and loss of interest (Logue, Hansen, & Struening, 1974). While distress is associated with significant negative outcomes, the effects can be reduced in several ways, one of which is social support (e.g., Humphreys, Lee, Neylan, & Marmar, 2001). Social support has been associated with better health outcomes (Kaplan, Cassel, & Gore, 1977) and decreased feelings of distress (Ross & Mirowsky, 1989), and is argued to be an essential coping mechanism (Humphreys et al., 2001). Because the aim of this thesis is to clarify the communication and relationship characteristics that promote or inhibit relational partners from providing social support, this chapter opens by detailing literature on distress as a backdrop for these interactions. The latter sections of this chapter detail social support as a mechanism for helping distressed individuals.

Conceptualizing Distress

Critical events may vary in significance, but they can include experiences such as getting married, facing an illness, having a child, switching jobs, coping with the death of a loved one, or enduring a relational transgression. Common to all of these events is the experience of benefits

alongside the occurrence of disappointments. For example, a job change may include a promotion and a pay raise; however, that same job change may involve moving a family to a different city. Perhaps because distress occurs in association with moments of change, researchers have conceptualized distressed individuals as being in a state of imbalance (Mitchell & Lagory, 2002). Often, it is the case that these individuals lack the resources needed to restore balance to their lives (Mitchell & Lagory, 2002). Given the many circumstances that could induce distress, I open this section by focusing on potential causes, then I describe factors that exacerbate distress, and I end with a review of outcomes of distress.

Causes of Distress

Because critical events cover a broad spectrum of circumstances, they also range from mundane to life altering. Some critical events have definitive beginning and ending points and may have relatively little lasting impact on someone's life, whereas others are chronic and may affect him or her daily. To differentiate them, critical events can be subcategorized into life events, chronic strains, and daily hassles (Thoits, 1995). This categorization reveals that the impact of critical events varies in duration and in intensity. Importantly, all three types of critical events have the potential to cause distress. Each is discussed in turn below.

Life events consist of incidents that occur at one point in time and have a significant impact on the individual who experiences them. Some examples of life events include the dissolution of romantic relationships (Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Simpson, 1987), historical events (e.g., surviving a hurricane; Logue et al., 1979), and exposure to violence (Farrell & Bruce, 1997). Although life events occur at one point in time, they have both immediate and long-term impacts. Moreover, severity of distress may depend on the magnitude, intensity, duration, unpredictability, and novelty of the event (Logue et al., 1974). Life events often require

long periods of recovery to restore balance to physical, psychological, emotional, social, or financial well-being.

Chronic strains describe consequential circumstances that last for longer durations of time than life events. These are “relatively enduring conflicts, problems, and threats that people face on a daily basis” (Mitchell & Lagory, 2002, p. 202). For example, facing a chronic or terminal illness (Mitchell & Lagory, 2002), encountering occupational stress (Firth-Cozens, 1987), and taking on the role of family caregiver (Cameron, Franche, Cheung, & Stewart, 2002) are all chronic strains. Chronic strains are unique because they are ever-present realities in individuals’ everyday lives. These types of strains interfere with individuals’ lifestyles and prevent them from participating in valued activities that might diminish the negative effects of distress (Cameron et al., 2002). Although the effects of life events may be comparable to those of chronic strains, the key difference is that the circumstances of chronic strains are more enduring.

Daily hassles include everyday stresses that are dealt with during daily activities (Thoits, 1995). They are small-scale events that require minor behavioral adjustments or limited coping mechanisms. Some examples of daily hassles include traffic jams (Thoits, 1995), arguments with children (Serido, Almeida, & Wethington, 2004), and worry about grades (Lay & Nguyen, 1998). Although the effects of daily hassles are generally less severe than those of life events or chronic strains, and they are for shorter durations of time, daily hassles still have the potential to cause distress. Daily hassles occur more frequently than either life stress or chronic strains, and they may subsequently offer an explanation for many negative health outcomes (Serido et al., 2004). Daily hassles have the potential to cause significant distress because they are so frequently encountered.

Research on stressful circumstances suggests that individuals experience distress throughout their lives and in association with a variety of conditions. Whether a person encounters life events, chronic strains, or daily hassles, the psychological effects can be severe. In particular, evidence suggests that distress can occur in association with each of these experiences (Thoits, 1995). The following subsection describes the internal and external factors that influence how distress is experienced.

Factors that Exacerbate Distress

The experience of distress can be influenced by a variety of factors. For example, individual characteristics, including gender, age, and education level, can modify the experience of distress. Other influences are intrapersonal, like personality characteristics, self-esteem, and coping responses. Interpersonal influences, such as closeness or peer acceptance, can also play a role in altering the distress experience. To have a fuller understanding of how distress is manifested, each influence is discussed in the following sections.

Individual characteristics influence the experience of distress by affecting the frequency with which distress symptoms surface and how severe the symptoms are. Age and distress generally have an inverse relationship; as individuals get older, the effects of distress are significantly reduced (Mirowsky & Ross, 1992; Turner, Wheaton, & Lloyd, 1995). Race has been found to interact with socioeconomic status such that at low levels of socioeconomic status, psychological distress is higher for African-Americans than it is for Caucasians (Kessler & Neighbors, 1986; Ulbrich, Warheit, & Zimmerman, 1989). Education level and distress are negatively associated; as education level increases, psychological distress decreases (Mirowsky & Ross, 1992). Across these findings, research suggests that individual level influences have significant effects on the presence and severity of distress such that people in dominant groups or

groups with power (i.e., high socioeconomic status, educated, and white) and those with more life experience (i.e., older) report less distress.

The most notable intrapersonal characteristics that influence distress are proximal factors, dispositional characteristics, and internal sources of coping. Proximal factors refer to the cognitive and behavioral responses that occur following the presence of a stressor (Epping-Jordan et al., 1999). For example, individuals with more intrusive thoughts experience more emotional distress (Epping-Jordan et al., 1999). In contrast with proximal factors, which are stressor-specific (Epping-Jordan et al., 1999), dispositional characteristics refer to an individual's background variables or personality traits (Epping-Jordan et al., 1999). In particular, optimism has been linked with distress such that individuals with less dispositional optimism experience more distress (Epping-Jordan et al., 1999). Internal sources of coping refer to those responses that help the individual to alleviate his or her own distress (Lin & Ensel, 1989; Mitchell & Lagory, 2002). Examples of internal coping techniques include high self-esteem, social competence, internal locus of control, and mastery (i.e., the belief that one is capable of addressing personal adversity; Lin & Ensel, 1989; Mitchell & Lagory, 2002; Thoits, 1995). Therefore, when intrapersonal resources allow for effective coping, then distress is decreased.

In contrast with intrapersonal influences, relational influences reflect the interpersonal nature of relationships that shapes the experience of distress. For example, individuals who were married experienced significantly less distress than individuals who were not married (Logue et al., 1979). Moreover, when the dissolution of a romantic relationship did occur, individuals reported less distress to the extent that they believed they could easily find a suitable relational alternative (Simpson, 1987). Also, research on friendships indicates that peer acceptance and

emotional distress were negatively related (Wentzel & McNamara, 1999). Individuals who have close relationships experience lower levels of distress.

To understand distress more generally, it is useful to recognize that a variety of factors exacerbate or reduce the distress experience. All three categorizations of factors – individual characteristics, intrapersonal, and interpersonal – have significant effects on the distress experience. Individuals who have power, developed coping techniques, and close relationships experience significantly less distress than individuals without those qualities or social connections. To build on this understanding of distress, the next section addresses outcomes of distress.

Outcomes of Distress

Research indicates that distress can produce negative physical, psychological, behavioral, and social outcomes (e.g., Benight et al., 1997; Caetano & Weisner, 1995; Firth-Cozens, 1987; Hudson et al., 2001; Knobf, 1986; Storksen, Roysamb, Holmen, & Tambs, 2006). For example, individuals can experience poor physical health or a deterioration of the body in response to distress (Benight et al., 1997; Hudson et al., 2001; Knobf, 1986). Mental health can also suffer, producing imbalances with psychological or emotional well-being (Ahluwalia et al., 2004; Firth Cozens, 1987). Behavior can become unhealthy or destructive as individuals exercise less control over their responses to distress (e.g., Ahluwalia et al., 2004; Logue et al., 1974; Tice et al., 2001). Additionally, individuals may face negative effects of distress on their social lives due to relational damage (Mirowsky & Ross, 1986). Below, each of these problematic outcomes of distress is discussed in turn.

Individuals who experience distress may encounter negative physical outcomes, including accelerated disease progression (Ironson et al., 1994), physical deterioration, and

decreased physiological functioning (Benight et al., 1997). Side effects of diseases such as insomnia, fatigue, change in appetite, and nausea are also increased (Knobf, 1986). Moreover, research suggests that distress has a negative impact on the immune system because it decreases sleep quality (Cruess et al., 2003). Fatigue, specifically, is positively correlated with depression and anxiety levels (Tchekmedyian et al., 2003). Individuals often experience negative physiological effects of distress that disrupt the quality of their lives.

Distress may also have psychological or emotional effects, such as depression (Ahluwalia et al., 2004; Storksen et al., 2006) and loss of interest or ambition (Logue et al., 1974). In particular, negative effects of distress can include stress and anxiety (Ahluwalia et al., 2004; Storksen et al., 2006). Additionally, distress is often characterized by mental disorders such as somatization, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism (Caetano & Weisner, 1995). Taken together, these findings magnify the effects of distress on mental disorders or emotional instability.

Distress can impair the motivation or ability to control one's impulses (Tice et al., 2001), which can encourage individuals to procrastinate (Tice et al., 2001) or to seek immediate gratification by engaging in problematic behaviors. This process may explain why individuals in distress are more likely to use unhealthy coping strategies than individuals who are not in distress (Logue et al., 1979). Coping strategies of distressed individuals include increased rates of unhealthy eating habits, using tobacco, and engaging in problematic drinking behaviors (Caetano & Weisner, 1995; Firth-Cozens, 1987), and using drugs, such as sedatives, to get relief from stress (Ahluwalia et al., 2004; Logue et al., 1974; Tice et al., 2001). These findings suggest that distressed individuals frequently engage in self-destructive behaviors.

Distress may impact a person's social interactions, which can affect the quality of his or her relationships. Social manifestations of distress are often characterized by alienation, authoritarianism, or inequity (Mirowsky & Ross, 1986). Mirowsky and Ross (1986) define alienation as any type of relational detachment or separation of people in a relationship. For example, distressed individuals may be excluded from their social systems, which can have additional negative mental health effects (Aneshensel, 1992). By contrast, Mirowsky and Ross (1986) define authoritarian relationships as being characterized by inflexibility, suspicion, and mistrust. Last, in their view, inequity is characterized by general unfairness or injustice in relationships. Perhaps because distress can be manifested in relationships in such diverse ways, distressed individuals often experience family tensions (Logue et al., 1974). More generally, these findings indicate that distress is associated with relational instability.

Thus far, this chapter has reviewed the causes of distress, the factors that intensify distress, and the outcomes of distress. Social scientists and medical practitioners alike suggest that attempts to alleviate the harmful outcomes of distress are beneficial (Kaplan et al., 1977). One communication process well suited to combat experiences of distress is social support. Specifically, research consistently indicates that social support attenuates problems that occur alongside the experience of distress (Kaplan et al., 1977). For example, those who have healthy support networks report lower levels of stress and higher quality of life (Burlinson, 1994). Additionally, the presence of social support improves ratings of health status (Humphreys et al., 2001). Because the support network plays a critical role in the distress experience, the following section turns to social support as a mechanism for alleviating the problems associated with distress.

Conceptualizing Social Support

Social support has been studied extensively as a mechanism for lessening the problematic outcomes of distress. Commonly defined as “aid from significant others that is intended to meet the emotional or material needs of the individual” (Thoits, 1985, p. 458), social support serves the function of extending what individuals can achieve alone by providing additional resources to them (Hobfoll & Stokes, 1988). Scholars have found that receiving social support is a critical component of physical and mental health (Kaplan et al., 1977). In the following section, I detail social support as an instrument for alleviating distress. Then, I review the association between personal relationships and social support. Finally, I end with a discussion of the effects social support has on distress specifically.

Types of Social Support

As mentioned previously, research focuses on three primary types of assistance: instrumental support, informational support, and emotional support (Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1987; House & Kahn, 1985; Thoits, 1985). House (1981) first distinguished between these types of support, which have become standards for studying supportive exchanges. The following paragraphs detail each in turn.

Instrumental support is the provision of tangible support aimed at solving some problem (Adams, King, & King, 1996). This kind of support eases stress by direct resolution of tangible problems (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Instrumental support includes activities such as doing household tasks, helping with childrearing, providing financial assistance or other material resources, or fulfilling job-related obligations (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1984). The resources provided by instrumental support are linked with the distressed individual’s specific needs (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Helgeson & Cohen, 1996). In addition, instrumental support

further reduces stress by providing increased time for activities like relaxation and entertainment (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Instrumental support provides tangible goods or services that distressed individuals may not be able to obtain for themselves.

Informational support provides distressed individuals with information used to guide or advise them in their stressful circumstances (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996). This kind of support helps individuals to define, understand, or cope with problematic events by offering advice, appraisal support, cognitive guidance, and personal feedback (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House & Kahn, 1985). Informational support increases perceptions of control because it decreases confusion about the causes, courses, or outcomes of stressful circumstances (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996). Informational support also helps to counter a perceived lack of control by helping to appraise a critical event as benign or by suggesting appropriate coping responses (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Informational support meets a distressed individual's needs by offering guidance or advice to help the individual cope with stressful circumstances.

Emotional support, the most frequently studied type of support, refers to the provision of verbal and nonverbal expressions of caring and concern (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996). Distressed individuals experience emotional support when they believe that significant others are available to provide expressions of love, empathy, sympathy, group belonging, reassurance, comfort, encouragement, and esteem (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996; Thoits, 1984; Thoits, 1995). Burleson (1994) identified support that uses comforting strategies and that validate others' affective reactions as "person-centered." Emotional support helps to restore self-esteem and reduce feelings of personal inadequacy by assuring distressed individuals that they are cared for despite their circumstances (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Helgeson & Cohen, 1996). This kind of support encourages distressed individuals to express their feelings about their situation. Emotional

support can reduce stress and strengthen interpersonal relationships; these relationships help people attach purpose or meaning to the onset of disease or other distressing experiences (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996). Emotional support allows distressed individuals to feel that they are loved and cared for, which provides benefits for individuals during distressing experiences.

Because each type of support meets a different need, a person in distress may benefit from receiving multiple support attempts. Instrumental support meets tangible needs; informational support equips one with knowledge, and emotional support expresses concern and the sentiment that the distressed person is cared for. All of these types of support function to alleviate harmful effects of distress.

Mapping Personal Relationships onto Social Support

Research demonstrates that the state and nature of a person's social network affects the way that she or he experiences social support. For example, individuals with larger social networks may experience less distress than those with smaller social networks (Humphreys et al., 2001). Moreover, because social support is based in interpersonal relationships, the quality of those relationships plays a role in determining how social support affects distress. In particular, individuals with more intimate relationships report experiencing less distress and indicate feeling more supported (Ross & Mirowsky, 1989; Thoits, 1984). In the following paragraphs, I discuss how the structure of networks and the quality of relationships shape social support.

The structure of one's network offers relevant descriptive information about one's social network. The organization of network ties is referred to as structural support. These network structures include the number of relationships, the frequency of contact with network members, and the density (strong versus weak ties) of relationships (Thoits, 1995). In other words, structural support addresses quantitative aspects of social support like density, complexity, size,

symmetry, reciprocity, geographic proximity or dispersion, homogeneity of network members, and accessibility (Berkman, 1984). Research has found that the number of sources of social support is negatively associated with reports of distress (Humphreys et al., 2001). Whereas structural support offers a quantitative understanding of network organization, research concerning the qualitative aspects of the network further clarifies the association between social support and distress.

Research often highlights that it is the quality of relationships (i.e., intimacy), as opposed to the quantity of relationships, that is a better predictor of reducing distress (Lowenthal & Haven, 1968; Thoits, 1995). This may be because qualitative aspects of network associations, such as intimacy, offer individuals positive outcomes like companionship (Thoits, 1995). For example, the benefits of intimacy are apparent when married individuals are compared with their unmarried counterparts; specifically, research indicates that because of the presence of an intimate relationship, individuals who are married report higher levels of perceived social support than unmarried people (Ross & Mirowsky, 1989; Thoits, 1984). Similarly, the presence of a confidant with whom relational depth exists is positively associated with satisfaction and the receipt of social support (Stokes, 1983). Taken together, these findings indicate that individuals with greater depth in their relationships perceive more social support than those with less relational depth.

Social support networks are helpful when a person is confronted with troublesome circumstances because they can help reduce feelings of distress. The structure of support networks offers an understanding of what social networks look like and how they are organized. In contrast, the quality of relationships helps us understand when social support is likely to

reduce distress; often, individuals with more intimate relationships experience less distress. I turn now to a discussion of the impact that social support has on distressing experiences.

Outcomes of Social Support on Distress

Expressions of social support are relationally significant because they signal care, commitment, interest, compassion, and love (Burlison, 1994). Not surprisingly then, social support relieves emotional hurt and improves quality of life (Burlison, 1994). Outcomes of social support include psychological benefits such as positive morale, reports of better psychological well-being, reduced stress (Walen & Lachman, 2000), and decreased anxiety and fear (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). Additionally, social support functions to improve one's self-concept by providing increased self-esteem, improved self-confidence, a sense of personal strength and efficacy, and a sense of social integration (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). Social support also meets needs for companionship, which alleviates the negative effects of isolation and loneliness (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). Above and beyond these more general benefits of social support, the following paragraphs detail the effects of social support on distress specifically.

Social support can function to deter distress from the outset, decreasing the likelihood that external stressors will materialize (Ensel & Lin, 1991). In particular, social support makes it less likely that individuals will assign stressful meaning to events (Ensel & Lin, 1991). Social support functions to prevent distress by helping to preserve psychological and social equilibrium that, if disrupted, has the potential to lead to distress (Ensel & Lin, 1991). Unless social support resources are present and able to suppress the deleterious effects of distress, those outcomes will be more poignant (Lin & Ensel, 1989). Social support, therefore, can deter distress by preventing individuals from assigning negative meaning to their circumstances and by preserving balance.

Research suggests that social support contributes to psychological well-being. In particular, social support buffers the effects of distress such that when support is present, psychological dysfunction is low (Frese, 1999; Thoits, 1984). By contrast, unsupportive responses from the social network are associated with psychological distress (Ingram, Betz, Mindes, Schmitt, & Smith, 2001). More specifically, unsupportive interactions are positively associated with depression (Ingram, Jones, Fass, Neidig, & Song, 1999). These findings suggest that social support, in countering the effects of distress, helps to maintain psychological health.

Support from network members also affects the health outcomes experienced by individuals in distress. Distress has a negative impact on health that is not present when social support exists (Lin & Ensel, 1989). For example, sources of support and ratings of health status are inversely correlated with measures of distress; individuals who perceive more sources of support report higher health status and less distress (Humphreys et al., 2001). Moreover, the quality of social relationships has been negatively related to morbidity and mortality (Uchino, 2006; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). In particular, receiving social support has been linked with better cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune function (Uchino, 2006; Uchino et al., 1996). As a set, the findings discussed in this section indicate that distressed individuals experience positive psychological and physiological outcomes from receiving social support.

Predicting the Provision of Social Support

Scholarship in the area of social support points to numerous benefits of supportive exchanges. For example, people who receive social support can expect outcomes like reduced anxiety, increased confidence, feelings of purpose, and enhanced companionship (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). A more general, albeit basic, deduction from this literature is that network members are electing to offer social support. Perhaps because this is taken for granted, little is

known about what decisions individuals make about engaging in supportive behaviors. How do people make the decision to provide social support? Why do people make those supportive connections? What prompts people to offer a specific type (e.g. emotional, instrumental, informational) of social support?

Existing research offers a few potential explanations for the motivations that underlie expressions of social support. One such explanation is reciprocity norms, which suggest that people offer social support because they feel obligated to return benefits that they receive from others (Horwitz, 1994; Uehara, 1995). According to this rationalization, both receiving and giving of social support are positively associated with satisfaction (Stevens, 1992). An alternative, but similar, explanation has been offered by social exchange scholars; specifically, these researchers suggest that people offer social support to maintain equitable relationships. According to this line of reasoning, relational maintenance behaviors (i.e. social support) are likely to yield reciprocal acts from a partner so as to uphold equality in relationships (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994). Although each of these theories provides an explanation for why social support may be provided, these theories focus on the *climate* of relationships as a way to understand these interactions.

In addition to identifying relationship climates that drive social support, other scholars have considered individual difference variables that may encourage one to offer social support. Most prominently, scholars of this tradition have explored the role of empathy. Empathy is an emotional response to another person's condition or affective state (Fabes, Eisenberg, Karbon, Troyer, & Switzer, 1994). Empathy is a multidimensional construct that includes helping behaviors as well as other prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 1993; Stiff et al., 1981). People with a high capacity for empathy are able to engage in perspective taking (i.e., the cognitive

ability to adopt another person's viewpoint), emotional contagion (i.e., the affective response of experiencing emotions parallel to someone else), and empathic concern (i.e., a sympathetic response; Stiff et al., 1981). Empathy is positively associated with altruistic tendencies (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Stiff et al., 1981). In particular, empathetic individuals are not motivated by rewards when they engage in prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Stiff et al., 1981). Moreover, individuals who are more empathic are more likely to offer social support to a distressed other (Trobst, Collins, & Embree, 1994). Again, however, this body of work positions empathy as an *individual difference* variable that encourages supportive behaviors.

To complement the work that has been done on relationship climates (i.e., reciprocity and equality) and individual characteristics (i.e., empathy), the goal of this thesis was to document some of the communication and relationship characteristics that prompt the provision of social support. I chose communication privacy management theory as a theoretical framework for predicting these communication and relationship qualities. Communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2000, 2002) describes communication characteristics that govern the exchange of private information. At its core, the theory describes processes that prompt communication (i.e., the revealing or concealing of private information). This thesis aims to discover processes that drive a different kind of communication, the provision of social support. Fundamentally, communication privacy management theory and this thesis share a goal of understanding what prompts communication. As such, I predicted that the same processes may underlie both forms of communication. Therefore, communication privacy management theory offers an appropriate framework for studying the provision of social support.

The next chapter of this thesis uses the assumptions of communication privacy management theory to identify specific communication characteristics and relationship

circumstances that might motivate people to engage in supportive exchanges. Specifically, I argue that the considerations one makes about sharing private information parallel the considerations one makes when considering supporting a relational partner. That is to say, people have relational rules that guide their private information in the same way that they have rules that guide supportive exchanges. Thus, I turn now to a discussion of communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 1991, 2000, 2002).

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSAL OF HYPOTHESES

Petronio (1991, 2000, 2002) developed communication privacy management theory based on the notion that individuals create boundaries within relationships to regulate the flow of private information. At the heart of the theory is how private information is treated in relationships. More generally, communication privacy management theory provides an understanding of how network members come to interact with one another. Although Petronio focuses on private information specifically, the theory suggests a general framework for understanding when network members engage one another. In particular, communication privacy management theory provides a way to understand how experiences are shared between members of social networks. Therefore, communication privacy management theory offers a backdrop for understanding the conditions under which network members should provide social support to individuals in distress. In the following chapter, I review the main assumptions of the theory and propose hypotheses about communication characteristics and relationship qualities that contribute to support exchanges.

Communication Privacy Management Theory

When people reveal private information about themselves they make decisions about how much or how little to reveal. Those decisions are often based on the risk involved in revealing such information. Petronio (1991, 2000) proposes that communication boundaries can help to manage the vulnerability associated with revealing private information. In particular,

communication privacy management theory is a rule-based management system that describes the decisions individuals make about revealing or concealing private information.

At the heart of communication privacy management theory is the assumption that people open themselves up to vulnerability by sharing information with others. When self-disclosing, the intimacy or depth of information can vary; moreover, some disclosures will include sharing information that individuals consider “private.” For example, people may consider disclosing personal inadequacies, their sexual life (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977), or their relational state (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998) as private. Sharing private information is risky because offering information to others gives them the power to hurt the sharer. Moreover, self-disclosure about traumatic experiences can cause harm to a person’s physical and mental health (Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Ros-Mendoza, 1996). Disclosing private information, then, is a risky endeavor.

Petronio’s solution to the risk of sharing private information is for individuals to use communication boundaries. Specifically, Petronio (2000) uses the boundary metaphor to “identify the border around private information” (p. 38). She suggests that people assert ownership over their private information in much the same way they would assert ownership over a tangible object. People exercise rights over that information by sharing it with or withholding it from members of their social networks. Therefore, asserting rights over their private information, via communication boundaries, allows individuals to dictate who has access to that information and offers protection from possible risks of sharing that information.

According to Petronio (2000, 2002), when people share private information, the recipients of that information necessarily become co-owners of that information. Therefore, the act of sharing information changes the nature of privacy management from an individual task to

a collective one (Petronio, 2007). People successfully co-own information to the extent that they follow the rules that they have either adopted or negotiated together.

To summarize then, communication privacy management theory suggests that self-disclosure involves risk, especially when the information revealed is private. Petronio proposes that communication boundaries are the mechanism used to manage this risk. By controlling their boundaries, people are able to regulate the risk associated with private information and maintain a sense of control. Individuals may choose not to share private information, making them the sole owners of that information. Maintaining sole ownership over one's information allows the ability to control how it is managed. However, individuals may share their private information with others. If they do, the recipients become co-owners of the information, and the co-owners decide together how it should be regulated. The following sections detail the processes that govern the exchange of private information.

Boundary Rule Regulation: Forming and Coordinating Rules for Shared Boundaries

Rules for shared boundaries are formed and coordinated when negotiating the management of private information. Specifically, individuals form and implement rules that govern how they should manage private information (Petronio, 2000, 2002). Such rules dictate when, with whom, where, and how private information should be shared or withheld (Petronio, 2007). When information is shared, boundary rules between social network members are based on individual and social factors and can impact the relationship between the owners in significant ways. Therefore, boundary formation and boundary coordination describe how individuals negotiate and maintain the rules around private information that is shared among network members.

Forming rules for shared boundaries. Individuals regulate how they will share private information by forming boundary rules for their relationships. *Boundary rule formation* focuses on the process of rule development. Rules about private information may be driven by a person's culture, their reasons for seeking information, the context within which information is being exchanged, or the risk-benefit ratio of revealing information (Petronio, 2002). For example, the U.S. has less stringent expectations about maintaining privacy than Germany or Great Britain (Benn & Gaus, 1983; Spiro, 1971). Individuals also have different motivations for revealing or concealing information, which may include their level of loneliness (Jones, Freeman, & Goswick, 1981), liking of and attraction to the recipient (Collins & Miller, 1994), or norms of reciprocity (Jourard, 1971). Context can also be a determinant of boundary rule formation; for example, individuals may be more likely to share or reveal information in the context of traumatic life events than out of that context (Petronio, 2002). Also, when people perceive that they will receive greater benefits than costs from revealing private information, they are motivated to form fluid boundaries (Petronio, 2002). These findings indicate that individuals attain and integrate boundary rules for a variety of reasons.

Topic avoidance is one kind of privacy rule that individuals may form in their social networks to protect their private information and to maintain equilibrium in their close relationships (Petronio, 2000). Discussions of certain topics can be destructive to some relationships (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985), so individuals avoid topics for self-protection and to maintain positive self-presentation (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Afifi & Guerrero, 1998). Findings indicate that topic avoidance has a profound impact on friendship closeness such that topic avoidance and the degree of intimacy in a friendship are negatively associated (Afifi & Guerrero,

1998). Topic avoidance is one type of privacy rule; specifically, it can be used as a mechanism to protect relationship partners or, if circumvented, to foster intimacy.

To summarize, boundary rules are formed based on variables like gender, context, and culture. The formation of such rules dictates how people treat their private information and the private information that they co-own with others in their social networks.

Coordinating rules for shared boundaries. During *boundary rule coordination*, individuals who are privy to private information negotiate rules and build in sanctions to govern revealing and concealing information. Moreover, boundary rule coordination operations mark the intersection of personal regulation and collective coordination patterns. Petronio (2002) theorizes that there are three primary boundary coordination operations: boundary linkages, boundary permeability, and boundary ownership. Each process serves a separate function, but together, these three processes are used to coordinate boundaries.

Boundary linkages refer to the process whereby boundaries change from being personal to being collective and vice versa. Thus, individuals become “linked” to each other when private information is shared. Boundary linkages may happen through two different, but related, processes: transformation and appropriation (Petronio, 2002). When one person shares private information with a confidant, the personal boundary that originally existed around the information *transforms* into a collective boundary (Petronio, 2002). In contrast, when someone enters a group with an existing collective boundary (e.g., marries into a family) that person is *appropriated* into the existing boundaries (Petronio, 2002). Boundary linkages contribute to the management of boundary coordination by describing the conversion of one boundary type to another.

Whereas boundary linkages provide insight into who is linked to, or knows about, shared information, *boundary permeability* describes the process of regulating access to and protection of the depth of private information (Petronio, 2002). In other words, boundary permeability refers to the weakness or rigidity of the boundaries around private information and controls how much information the “linked” people get to know. For example, if an individual shares a piece of private information with her sister and with her mother, all three of them are linked to the information. That is, the linkage includes all three individuals. Whereas boundary linkage describes who knows about the private information, boundary permeability determines the amount of information each person is privy to. In the example above, the individual may have more fluid boundaries with her mother than with her sister, so boundary permeability determines that the mother will have access to more information than the sister. In particular, permeability describes the depth and breadth of private information that is shared. Individuals use privacy protection rules to determine how permeable the boundaries will be. Boundary permeability, then, aids individuals in determining how weak or strong their privacy boundaries will be with members of their social networks.

The final boundary coordination operation, *boundary ownership*, clarifies (a) who legitimately owns private information and (b) who has control over it (Petronio, 2002). Recall the example of the individual who shared her private information with her mother and her sister. Where boundary linkages describe who knows about the private information (i.e., the individual, her mother, and her sister), and boundary permeability determines how much information each individual has access to (e.g., the mother has access to more information than the sister), boundary ownership clarifies who can assert control over the information. For example, ownership determines who helps to give meaning to the private information and who has rights

to regulate the private information. In particular, if the mother co-owns the information with her daughter, then she can help the daughter assign meaning to the private information and can weigh in on who else knows the private information. As this example demonstrates, boundary ownership clarifies who gives meaning to the private information and who controls the private information.

People regulate and maintain the boundaries around their private information to protect themselves and their relationships. For social network members that co-own private information, boundary rules can make the process of erecting privacy boundaries less uncertain. On the other hand, boundary coordination helps individuals to understand and maintain boundaries that are comfortable for them. When those boundaries are disturbed, boundary turbulence results. The following sections will clarify the process of boundary turbulence.

Management of Boundary Rule Turbulence

Boundary rule turbulence refers to a disruption in a person's previously established rule management system (i.e., boundary rules, boundary linkages, boundary permeability, boundary ownership) and occurs when privacy rules are violated (Petronio, 2002). When the individuals who are privy to private information cannot follow the rules that maintain the permeability, ownership, and linkages to that information, the efforts to coordinate boundaries fail, and turbulence ensues. Given the complex processes that individuals go through to establish and coordinate their boundaries, a violation of those boundaries can be quite problematic. Petronio outlines six different types of boundary turbulence: intentional rule violations, boundary rule mistakes, fuzzy boundaries, dissimilar boundary orientations, boundary definition predicaments, and privacy dilemmas. These types of turbulence are not mutually exclusive; an individual may violate more than one at the same time, or one type of turbulence may lead to another type

(Petronio, 2002). When boundary turbulence occurs, individuals often find it difficult to manage private information effectively because the rules by which they managed that information have been broken (Petronio, 2002). Moreover, boundary rule violations can lead to relational problems between the co-owners of the private information (Petronio, 2002). In the following paragraphs, each type of boundary turbulence is discussed.

The first type, *intentional rule violations*, occurs when individuals violate boundary rules by deliberately revealing private information. They violate rules that they have agreed on by breaking rules of boundary regulation. Examples of intentional rule violations include betrayal, spying, and confidentiality dilemmas (Petronio, 2002). Families may experience this kind of turbulence when they listen in on each other's conversations (Petronio & Caughlin, 2006). This is problematic because it breaks established boundary rules. When individuals share private information and negotiate rules about that information, they assume that the recipients of that information can be trusted. Intentional rule violations cause relational problems because they are a result of breaking that trust. Another example of intentional rule violations occurs in romantic relationships when a person betrays his or her partner by sharing private information with a third party (Caughlin, Scott, Miller, & Hefner, 2009). At their core, intentional rule violations reflect a disregard for boundary ownership because they violate the borders that were set for the boundaries around private information. In particular, people who were not intended to own the private information gain access to it. The intentional revelation of private information can lead to relational instability because individuals deliberately disrespect the boundary rules around their co-owned information.

Second, *boundary rule mistakes* happen when individuals unintentionally apply boundary rules that are at odds with co-owners' rules. This could happen because of a misunderstanding of

the boundary rules or because of an error in judgment; in either case, it is an unintentional violation. Informal health advocates (i.e., friends or family members who accompany a patient during a doctor's visit) may experience this kind of boundary turbulence (Petronio, Sargent, Andea, Reganis, & Cichoki, 2004). For example, if an older man brings his adult son to a doctor's appointment, the doctor could discuss the man's terminal illness with him in front of the son, assuming that because the son is at the appointment, he knows about the illness. If the father never intended that the son know about his condition, then they have experienced boundary turbulence as a result of boundary rule mistakes. Boundary rule mistakes are relationally problematic because they can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings (Petronio, 2002). Another situation in which an unintentional rule violation could occur would be between parents and adolescents, because parents and adolescents re-negotiate their boundaries when the evolution of their relationship requires that they change (Hawk, Hale, & Meeus, 2008). Because the rules may oscillate, a parent or a child could unintentionally violate a privacy rule. Turbulence occurs because there is confusion about the application of boundary rules in a given relationship.

Third, *fuzzy boundaries* refer to instances when people are unclear about who owns private information, which leads to confusion about who has the right to determine rules. For example, fuzzy boundaries can occur when individuals are creating boundaries around private information that they share on the Internet. When individuals create blogs, they can only control certain privacy elements of that information; consequently, some people may be able to access private information they were never intended to (Child, Pearson, & Petronio, 2009). Therefore individuals may feel ownership over private information that is not theirs. This can be problematic because those people may also feel that they can determine the boundary rules around information that is not theirs. Moreover, fuzzy boundaries can lead to relational problems

because they can make partners feel deceived. For example, fuzzy boundaries may be experienced in romantic relationships where one partner views her private information as personal, and the other partner views all private information between them as shared. If the former fails to share private information because she views it as her own, the other partner may feel lied to, believing that they shared all of their personal information with each other. This type of boundary turbulence occurs because individuals experience confusion over boundary ownership. Individuals are either exposed to information that they do not have rights to, or they are denied access to information that they feel is rightfully theirs.

Fourth, *dissimilar boundary* orientation refers to how flexible or rigid individuals generally believe boundaries to be (i.e., boundary permeability). If co-owners of information have different orientations to private information, they may treat the boundaries differently in terms of boundary permeability. Individuals' treatment of boundary orientations comes from concretized rules (Petronio, 2002). Petronio (2004) proposes that culture is one determinant of privacy boundaries and suggests that individuals from different cultures may have varying boundary orientations. Therefore, families that are formed through international or transracial adoptions may face this kind of boundary turbulence as parents teach their children how culture treats boundary rules (Galvin, 2003). Moreover, dissimilar boundary orientations may make it difficult to negotiate privacy rules in a new dyadic boundary. For example, if a woman grew up in a family with permeable boundaries and married a man who had grown up with rigid boundaries, the two may experience turbulence in negotiating appropriate privacy rules in their relationship. Different boundary orientations in relationships can cause confusion about how private information ought to be treated and whether it should be addressed.

Fifth, boundary turbulence is likely when dissimilar definitions of the borders around information are present. Whereas dissimilar boundary orientation addresses views on boundary permeability in general, *dissimilar border definition* has to do with norms negotiated in specific relationships and around specific pieces of private information. This could occur when people (a) treat public space as private by inappropriately disclosing information or (b) when people are forced into the public domain (e.g. celebrities; Petronio, 2002). E-communication also has potential for this kind of boundary turbulence. For example, employees and employers may define differently what information is private in the workplace. Employers may feel they have the right to conduct surveillance of their employees' activities, but employees may disagree (Allen, Coopman, Hart, & Walker, 2007). Relationships in e-commerce between retailers and their subscribers can become turbulent when retailers sell subscribers' private information because they view that information as public, but the subscribers view it as private (Metzger, 2007). Dissimilar boundary definitions can lead to confusion about how individuals should manage the private information that they own or co-own.

Finally, *privacy dilemmas* may cause boundary definition predicaments. These confused boundary lines force individuals to be co-owners of information when they may not want to (i.e., individuals become linked to information that they did not want a linkage to). As a result, these dilemmas decrease individuals' control over their private information. A perception of decreased control leads individuals to experience turbulence (Petronio, 2002). For example, divulging private information to reluctant recipients results in this kind of turbulence. Often, secrecy can help individuals to maintain personal boundaries and avoid negative feedback from reluctant confidants (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). In fact, topic avoidance helps to maintain cohesion in interpersonal relationships under some circumstances (Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Dailey &

Palomares, 2004). Privacy dilemmas create reluctant confidants, an outcome that may be prevented by upholding appropriate boundaries or engaging in topic avoidance.

Thus far in this chapter, I have reviewed the assumptions of communication privacy management theory. Of relevance, the theory offers relationship qualities and communication characteristics that predict interactive exchanges between relational partners, such as co-owning private information, clarity about boundary rules, boundary permeability, and boundary turbulence. To the extent that people structure their boundaries around providing support in ways that are similar to how people structure boundaries around private information, then communication privacy management theory is relevant to support exchanges. In the next section of this chapter I offer hypotheses derived from communication privacy management theory, which make predictions about the communication and relationship circumstances that give rise to exchanges of social support.

Using Communication Privacy Management Theory to Predict Supportive Exchanges

Recall that distress has negative effects on both mental and physical health (Caetano & Weisner, 1995; Firth-Cozens, 1987; Huston et al., 2001; Storksen et al., 2006); however, a number of individual and relational factors can reduce the effects of the distress experience (Mirowsky & Ross, 1992; Epping-Jordan et al., 1999; Lin & Ensel, 1989; Mitchell & Lagory, 2002). One especially significant relational variable that alleviates distress is the presence of social support (Ross & Mirowsky, 1989; Thoits, 1984). In offering social support, an individual's social network has the opportunity to provide informational, instrumental, and emotional support. Each type of support has specific benefits, like providing identity support, enhancing self-esteem, and increasing physiological benefits (Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1987; House & Kahn, 1985; Thoits, 1985). Although research is conclusive that social support is

beneficial for distressed individuals, little is known about the communication characteristics and relationship qualities that encourage network members to offer support to distressed others. To that end, this thesis uses the assumptions of communication privacy management theory to clarify communication and relationship circumstances under which social network members are likely to engage in social support. Following, I propose hypotheses derived from the aforementioned bodies of research.

Co-ownership and Offering Social Support

As stated previously, individuals construct boundaries around private information in order to protect themselves from the risks associated with sharing that information (Petronio, 2000). According to Petronio (2000, 2002), when people share private information it is through boundary linkages that recipients of that information necessarily become co-owners. Because of the risks associated with sharing private information, people are justifiably hesitant to reveal personal information to just anyone. In fact, Petronio (2002) suggests that a partner's willingness to co-own and share mutual responsibility for protecting and managing collective boundaries is desired when private information is exchanged. At the heart of co-ownership, then, are network members' understandings that they co-own private information.

A receiver's connection to and co-ownership of private information reflects the control afforded to that person. For example, this control may vary from a person merely being privy to another's private information (e.g., revealing one's HIV status; Stein et al., 1998) to a receiver taking joint ownership of that information (e.g., co-constructing the meaning of a person's HIV status). If we extend this logic to instances of social support, the co-ownership of a distressing event should afford the same variability in control to the supporter. If a person is merely informed that a distressing event occurred (i.e., low co-ownership), then social support should be

minimized. However, if a person is called upon to help the distressed individual co-construct the meaning of the distressing event (i.e., high co-ownership), then the opportunities for engaging in support should be maximized. In other words, network members will engage in social support to the extent that they feel ownership over the distressing experience. Stated formally:

H1: Increased co-ownership about a distressing experience is positively associated with providing social support.

Boundary Permeability and Offering Social Support

In addition to co-owning or co-constructing private information, Petronio (2000) suggests that the information flow between two communicators can vary in its fluidity. Boundary permeability characterizes the relative (in)flexibility of shared boundaries (Petronio, 2000), and reflects how much information people get to know. Specifically, permeability describes the depth and breadth of private information that is shared. Individuals use privacy protection rules to regulate how permeable the boundaries will be. For example, topic avoidance may be used to decrease the flow of information (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Petronio, 2002). Boundary permeability, then, provides individuals with tools for regulating the flow of private information.

When boundary permeability increases, the boundaries around an individual's private information become more flexible. Conversely, as permeability decreases, the boundaries become more rigid (Petronio, 2002). There is some evidence to suggest that social support may be associated with more flexible communication exchanges in the same way that private information is associated with boundary permeability. Specifically, some empirical evidence has found that social support occurs more frequently in relationships characterized by openness (Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990). Moreover, individuals with more flexible communication patterns also experience more supportive exchanges (Davies, Cummings, & Winter, 2004;

Parker, Hill, & Goodnow, 1989). Given the parallel between exchanges of private information and exchanges of supportive communication, I predict the following:

H2: Increased boundary permeability about a distressing event is positively associated with providing social support.

Clarity about Support Rules and Offering Social Support

People successfully co-own information to the extent that they follow the rules that they have either adopted or negotiated with the sender of that information. Specifically, individuals form and implement rules that govern how they should manage private information (Petronio, 2000, 2002). Such rules dictate when, with whom, where, and how private information should be shared or withheld (Petronio, 2007). When information is co-owned, boundary rules between social network members are based on individual and social factors, and can impact the relationship between the co-owners in significant ways. Petronio (2002) nominates boundary rule formation and boundary rule coordination as mechanisms that individuals use to negotiate and maintain the rules around their co-owned private information.

In much the same way that Petronio (2000) theorizes that rules help co-owners of information to know when and how to discuss private information, rules about communication more generally help people to understand when and how they should be communicating. For example, regulative rules about communication help people to know when, how, where, and with whom to interact (Cherry, 1973). By contrast, constitutive rules help people understand how to interpret specific types of communication (Cherry, 1973). More broadly, when people engage in communication exchanges, they need to know the appropriate or expected ways to interact with each other (Schall, 1983). One result of understanding communication rules is that interactions may be perceived as more effective (Argyle & Henderson, 1984). Empirical research supports

this claim; in particular, Baxter, Dun, and Sahistein (2001) found that young adults learned rules for relating to others through direct sanctions about acceptable or problematic behavior (i.e., communication positively reinforcing behavior or communication punishing behavior). To the extent that clarity about communication rules extends to the provision of social support, I made the following prediction about rules and providing social support. Stated formally:

H3: Increased clarity about support rules is positively associated with providing social support.

Support Rule Turbulence and Offering Social Support

Boundary rule turbulence refers to a disruption in a boundary rule management system and occurs when privacy rules are violated (Petronio, 2002). Some types of boundary turbulence reflect a deliberate violation of boundary rules, while others reflect an unintentional violation (Petronio, 2002). When co-owners of information do not follow the rules that maintain their permeability or ownership, the efforts to coordinate boundaries fail, and turbulence ensues. Specifically, boundary rule violations can lead to a myriad of relational problems between the co-owners of private information (Petronio, 2002). For example, Afifi (2003) found that as a result of turbulent exchanges, stepfamily members often displayed avoidant or aggressive behaviors to disassociate themselves from other family members. Given the complex processes that individuals go through to establish and coordinate their boundaries, a violation of those boundaries can be problematic (Petronio, 2002).

In much the same way that boundary turbulence negatively impacts the exchange of private information, some research exists to suggest that violations to support rules can be problematic as well. For example, Dunkel-Schetter and Wortman (1982) found that providing the wrong type of support to cancer patients was perceived as ineffective. More specifically, patients

perceived emotional support to be beneficial, whereas they perceived instrumental support and esteem support to be unhelpful. Moreover, Jung (1997) proposed that failure to provide support in an appropriate way produced negative reactions from the receiver. Given the aforementioned findings, the fourth hypothesis predicts a negative association between violations of support rules and offering social support. Thus, I pose the following hypothesis:

H4: Increased support rule turbulence is negatively associated with providing social support.

This chapter opened with a discussion of the assumptions about communication privacy management theory, including how one discloses private information, establishes and coordinates boundary rules, and faces boundary rule turbulence. Following the logic of communication privacy management theory and the research reviewed in chapter 2, I proposed hypotheses about communication variables and relationship characteristics that encourage individuals to provide social support. In the next chapter, I describe a study to test the hypotheses I advanced in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

The hypotheses advanced in the previous chapter were tested using a cross-sectional research design. Specifically, participants were asked to complete an online survey. To begin, participants responded to demographic questions, then they were asked to describe a situation in which they provided (or did not provide) social support, and to end, participants completed measures that asked them to reflect on the support situation. This research design allowed me to examine communication and relationship variables that encourage individuals to provide support.

Participants

Data was collected over the course of one month from 241 undergraduate students from a wide variety of majors enrolled in basic courses in the Department of Communication Studies at a large southern university. One hundred and forty-six (60.6%) of the participants were female, and 95 were male (39.4%). A majority of participants indicated that they were White ($n = 180$, 74.7%), whereas 10.4% were Asian ($n = 25$), 7.9% were Black ($n = 19$), 2.5% were Hispanic ($n = 6$), 0.4% were Native American ($n = 1$), and 3.3% indicated other ($n = 8$). The participants' mean age was 19.83 years ($SD = 1.64$) with a range of 18-31 years.² Students were offered course credit or extra credit in exchange for their participation in the study.³

Procedure

Students signed up to participate in the study in one of two ways. Some students signed up on the department's research bulletin board, and other students signed up through the

department's research website. After signing up to participate, students were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (offered support; did not offer support). Then, they received a link via email to the online survey condition they were assigned to. The questionnaire took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation in the study.

The survey began by prompting research participants to answer a number of demographic questions (see Appendix A). They were then asked to recall a situation in which they provided (or did not provide) support to a close friend, romantic partner, or family member, and were prompted to answer several open-ended questions that solicited information about their relationship to the person and an explanation of the distressing situation (see Appendix B). Next, participants answered questions about their perception of how distressed the other person was about the situation (see Appendix C). Finally, participants completed measures that assessed co-ownership, clarity about support rules, boundary permeability, support rule turbulence, and the magnitude of social support they provided.

Measures

A variety of closed-ended Likert-type scales were used to operationalize the communication and relationship variables in the study. Face validity, internal consistency, and parallelism were assessed on all of the multi-item scales. To create variables representing co-ownership of the distressing event, clarity about support rules, boundary permeability over the distressing event, support rule turbulence, and provision of social support, the responses to individual scale items were averaged. Measures for each of these variables will be discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Co-owning the Distressing Event

Co-ownership of the distressing event was measured using a modified version of Child, Pearson, and Petronio's (2009) blogging boundary ownership scale (see Appendix D). The scale consisted of six Likert-style items measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .88$, $M = 2.28$, $SD = .84$). The scale was modified to reflect co-ownership of a distressing event, and was reverse coded (when appropriate) so that higher mean scores indicated more co-ownership.

Boundary Permeability Over the Distressing Event

Boundary permeability regarding the distressing event was measured using a modified version of Child, Pearson, and Petronio's (2009) blogging boundary permeability scale (see Appendix E). The scale consisted of six Likert-style items measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .91$, $M = 3.19$, $SD = .99$) and was modified to reflect communication following the distressing episode. Higher scores on this scale indicated permeable communication boundaries around the distressing event, whereas lower scores indicated rigid boundaries.

Clarity about Support Rules

Clarity about rules was measured using a modified version of VanLear's (1981) perceived openness/closedness scale (see Appendix F). The scale was modified to measure if rules about social support were discussed openly to assess the level of clarity about support rules specifically. The scale included ten Likert-type items measured on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .94$, $M = 3.56$, $SD = .88$). Higher scores on this scale indicated more clarity about rules.

Support Rule Turbulence

A scale was created to measure support rule turbulence (see Appendix G). The scale followed a similar format as Knobloch's relational interference scale (Knobloch, 2008b). Specifically, the scale was a 12-item Likert-type measure that assessed experiences of rule violations; participants with higher scores experienced more turbulence. Participants responded to a four-point scale (1 = *never or not at all*, 4 = *all of the time*; $\alpha = .89$, $M = 1.71$, $SD = .52$).

Providing Social Support

Provision of social support was measured using Xu and Burleson's (2001) social support scale, which assessed five distinct types of social support (see Appendix H). Specifically, participants indicated the extent to which they engaged in instrumental, informational, emotional, esteem, and network support behaviors following the distressing event on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*). Each of the sub-scales indicated good reliability (instrumental, five items, $\alpha = .75$, $M = 3.36$, $SD = .93$; informational, five items, $\alpha = .85$, $M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.02$; emotional, six items, $\alpha = .68$, $M = 3.85$, $SD = .74$; esteem, five items, $\alpha = .79$, $M = 3.84$, $SD = .87$; network, five items, $\alpha = .85$, $M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.08$).

To summarize, the support variables provided the dependent variables to test the proposed hypotheses. Co-owning information, boundary permeability, clarity about support rules, and support rule turbulence served as the independent variables for Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. In the next chapter, I report my results.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The data were analyzed on two levels to evaluate the proposed hypotheses. To begin, I report the results of several preliminary analyses, including assumptions of normality, outliers, zero-order associations, and survey condition development. Then, I report the results of the substantive analyses, which were explored using hierarchical regression analyses (Aiken & West, 1996; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003; Kutner, Nachtsheim, Neter, & Li, 2005). Using an alpha-level of $p < .05_{\text{two-tailed}}$, a sample of 241 respondents yielded power equal to .95 to detect a moderate bivariate correlation (i.e., $r = .30$; Cohen, 1988).

Preliminary Analyses

Several preliminary analyses were conducted to explore characteristics of the data. In particular, four issues were examined: assumptions of normality, outliers, zero-order associations among the variables, and development of the survey conditions. The following sections detail findings associated with each of these preliminary analyses.

Assumption of Normality

To evaluate assumptions of normality, I analyzed skewness and kurtosis values (see Table 1). Because skewness values reflect how (a)symmetrical a distribution of data is and kurtosis reflects how narrow or wide a distribution is, they are a particularly helpful evaluation tools. Boundary turbulence was positively skewed ($t = 7.42, p < .001$), which indicates that participants perceived little turbulence in their supportive exchanges. Additionally, the scale for boundary turbulence was leptokurtic ($t = 4.47, p < .05$), which means that the distribution of the data peaked around the mean. In addition, informational support ($t = -1.41, p < .001$), and

network support ($t = -2.48, p < .001$) were platokurtic, which suggests that for those types of support, the data was more widely distributed than normal. These analyses shed light on the distributions of the variables of interest and qualify the interpretation of the results due to deviations from normality.

Outliers

Outliers are problematic to the extent that they distort the normality of the data. I examined box plots for substantive variables to identify unusual data points that are positioned away from the general distribution of data. Examination of these charts revealed that scores were within an appropriate range; hence, no scores were dropped from my analyses.

Zero-order Associations

Exploring zero-order associations among variables can reveal patterns of possible suppression or overlap among variables. To consider those elements of the data, I examined the bivariate relationships among variables of interest. Although these associations do not account for the effects of condition on the dependent variables, they do shed light on general patterns of association in the data. Therefore, and as a starting point, I computed correlations among the independent variables in the study. Then I examined correlations among dependent variables. Finally, I conducted bivariate correlations among the independent and dependent variables.

The bivariate associations among co-ownership of the distressing event, boundary permeability, clarity about support rules, and support rule turbulence were explored first (see Table 2). The zero-order associations were consistent with theorizing that suggests that these concepts are related, yet distinct from one another (Petronio, 2002). Co-ownership was positively correlated with boundary permeability and clarity about support rules, and negatively correlated with support rule turbulence. Similarly, boundary permeability shared a strong positive

association with clarity about support rules, and a negative association with support rule turbulence. Finally, clarity about support rules was found to have a negative association with support rule turbulence.

Next, bivariate associations among the five distinct types of social support were explored (see Table 3). Consistent with previous research, measures for each type of social support (informational, emotional, esteem, instrumental, network) were positively correlated with one another (Xu & Burleson, 2001). The types of support shared moderate to high correlations with one another, ranging from 0.44 ($p < .001$) to 0.74 ($p < .001$), but were not in jeopardy of violating assumptions of multicollinearity (Farrar & Glauber, 1967)

Finally, the correlations among the independent and dependent variables were reviewed in order to gain initial insight into the hypothesized associations (see Table 4). Consistent with the first hypothesis, which predicted a positive association between co-ownership of the distressing event and the provision of social support, bivariate correlations between co-ownership and all five types of social support were significant and positive. As predicted in Hypothesis two, bivariate correlations between boundary permeability and all five types of social support were significant and positive. The third hypothesis predicted a significant positive association between clarity about support rules and the provision of social support, which was supported at the bivariate level. Finally, as predicted in the fourth hypothesis, bivariate correlations between support rule turbulence and the five types of social support shared a significant negative relationship. The aforementioned preliminary analyses laid a foundation for the hierarchical multiple regressions performed to test our hypotheses more formally.

Survey Condition Development

I elected to create two survey conditions with the goal of mitigating the potential of restricted range in the dependent variables. I believe this posed a threat because research indicates that participants are susceptible to a positivity bias (Paulhus, 1984), and I reasoned that, if given the choice, participants in the study would describe a situation in which they *had* provided support (as opposed to a situation in which they neglected to provide support). Following this reasoning, I concluded that if participants in the sample were *only* reporting on situations in which they *did* provide support, I would observe restricted range in the dependent variables. To overcome this bias, participants were asked to complete one of two forms of the questionnaire. Forty-nine percent of participants ($n = 118$) were randomly assigned to recall an instance in which they did provide support to a distressed other. In the alternative form, 51.0% of participants ($n = 123$) were asked to recall a time in which they were unable or unwilling to provide support.

Preliminary analyses showed that the two groups were demographically similar to each other. Chi-square tests revealed that the conditions did not differ significantly in the sex of the participant ($N = 241$; $\chi^2(1) = 0.86, p = .35$) or the participant's relationship with the person to whom they did or did not offer support ($N = 240$; $\chi^2(9) = 14.88, p = .09$). Additionally, the mean age for both conditions was just under 20 years old. Moreover, an independent samples t-test revealed that participants viewed the other person's event as being highly distressing in both the *offered support* ($M = 4.46, SD = .73$) and *did not offer support* ($M = 4.49, SD = .62$) conditions, $t(238) = -.46, p = .65$. Taken together, these tests point to the demographic similarities among the participants in both conditions.

To test if condition (offered support; did not offer support) differentially influenced the amount of support participants provided, I analyzed the association between condition and the dependent variables tested in the current study. A one-way analysis of variance indicated that participants in the *offered support* condition reported significantly more informational ($F(1, 234) = 7.47, p = .01$), esteem ($F(1, 235) = 4.05, p = .01$), instrumental ($F(1, 235) = 3.93, p = .05$), and emotional ($F(1, 235) = 7.25, p = .01$) support than participants in the *did not offer support* condition (Table 5). By contrast, participants did not significantly differ in the amount of network support they provided ($F(1, 235) = .31, p = .58$; Table 5). Participants in both the *did support* condition ($M = 2.80$) and the *did not support* condition ($M = 2.80$) reported relatively low levels of this type of support. I reasoned that this may have occurred because this type of support is viewed as connecting distressed persons to other network members that can offer him or her a particular type of support. Therefore, it is feasible that participants in the *did support* condition and the *did not support* condition may have abdicated their role as supporter to other individuals in a given social network, but neither group of participants viewed this as “providing” support. More generally, the results of the ANOVA test suggest participants in the *did support* condition provided relatively more support than participants in the *did not support* condition; in other words, by including both conditions in the substantive analyses the range in the dependent variables was increased.

Although collapsing the conditions in this study enhanced variability in the dependent variable, there are limitations inherent to assigning participants to different conditions, even if random assignment is used. I elected to retain survey condition as a covariate in my analyses to account for differences in the dependent variable that may have been due to differences in the two groups because of their assignment to one of the two support conditions. Moreover, retaining

survey condition as a covariate allowed me to test if my independent variables influenced my dependent variables above and beyond any effect assignment to condition had. Thus, condition was used as a covariate in all substantive analyses.

Substantive Analyses

As mentioned, to test the proposed hypotheses, a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted. This type of analysis was appropriate for the proposed hypotheses because I was able to account for the associations among the independent and dependent variables above and beyond any influence the support condition participants were assigned to had. Recall, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions; either they were asked to recall a situation in which they *did* offer support to a distressed other, or they were asked to report on a situation in which they *did not* offer support. Preliminary analyses revealed that differences in these conditions existed; therefore, condition was used as a covariate for all of the regressions.

To test the predicted associations, two sets of substantive analyses were conducted. In the primary analyses, each independent variable was tested in a separate regression to evaluate the association between the independent variable and each support type. In the secondary analyses, all four independent variables were tested in the same model to assess their associations with the types of social support above and beyond the other independent variables. Each set of analyses will be described in the following sections.

Primary Analyses

Initial tests of the hypotheses employed a series of three step hierarchical regressions. On the first step of the regression model, condition was entered as the covariate (offered support = 0; did not offer support = 1). On step two of the model, the independent variable for each hypothesis was entered; each predictor was entered in a separate model. On step three, the

interaction term between the independent variable and condition was entered. I constructed the same basic model for the five different outcome variables: informational support, emotional support, esteem support, instrumental support, and network support.⁴ With the exception of two analyses, the interaction terms were not significant. Therefore, to maintain a more parsimonious model, the results reported herein reflect models that included only the first two of the aforementioned steps. When applicable, I note deviations from the two-step model. The following sections detail the results of the regressions used to test each hypothesis.

Co-owning a Distressing Event and Providing Social Support. Hypothesis one predicted that co-ownership of the distressing event is positively associated with the provision of social support (Table 6). Consistent with Hypothesis one, co-ownership displayed a positive association with informational, $\beta = .38$, $t(1, 233) = 6.14$, $p < .001$, emotional, $\beta = .43$, $t(1, 233) = 7.10$, $p < .001$, esteem, $\beta = .42$, $t(1, 233) = 6.90$, $p < .001$, instrumental,⁵ $\beta = .29$, $t(1, 233) = 4.44$, $p < .001$, and network support, $\beta = .19$, $t(1, 233) = 2.87$, $p < .01$. These results suggest that the more co-ownership the participant experienced with the distressed person, the more likely he or she was to offer social support. Therefore, Hypothesis one was supported.

Boundary Permeability over a Distressing Event and Providing Social Support. Hypothesis two predicted that boundary permeability is positively associated with the provision of social support (Table 7). Results of the hierarchical regressions reveal that, as predicted, boundary permeability displayed a positive association with informational, $\beta = .54$, $t(1, 233) = 9.67$, $p < .001$, emotional, $\beta = .48$, $t(1, 233) = 8.30$, $p < .001$, esteem, $\beta = .52$, $t(1, 233) = 8.93$, $p < .001$, instrumental, $\beta = .46$, $t(1, 233) = 7.72$, $p < .001$, and network, $\beta = .33$, $t(1, 233) = 5.12$, $p < .001$ support. These findings indicate that as boundary permeability about a distressing event

increased (i.e., became more flexible), provision of social support also increased. Therefore, Hypothesis two was supported.

Clarity about Support Rules and Providing Social Support. Hypothesis three predicted that clarity about support rules is positively associated with the provision of social support (Table 8). Consistent with the predicted associations, clarity about support rules displayed a positive association with informational, $\beta = .53, t(1, 232) = 9.45, p < .001$, emotional,⁶ $\beta = .53, t(1, 232) = 9.51, p < .001$, esteem, $\beta = .55, t(1, 232) = 9.96, p < .001$, instrumental, $\beta = .43, t(1, 232) = 7.23, p < .001$, and network support, $\beta = .38, t(1, 232) = 6.19, p < .001$. These results demonstrate that the more clear the participant and the other person were about support rules following the distressing event, the more likely the participant was to offer that person social support. Therefore, Hypothesis three was supported.

Support Rule Turbulence and Providing Social Support. Hypothesis four predicted that support rule turbulence is negatively associated with the provision of social support, such that as turbulence increases, provision of social support decreases (Table 9). Consistent with my predictions, support rule turbulence was negatively associated with informational, $\beta = -.24, t(1, 233) = -3.8, p < .001$, emotional, $\beta = -.39, t(1, 233) = -6.45, p < .001$, esteem, $\beta = -.36, t(1, 233) = -5.77, p < .001$, instrumental, $\beta = -.29, t(1, 233) = -4.58, p < .001$, and network support, $\beta = -.20, t(1, 233) = -3.11, p < .01$. In other words, these findings suggest that when support rule turbulence is high, the provision of social support is low. Therefore, hypothesis four was supported.

Secondary Analyses

The second set of substantive analyses was conducted to lend additional insight into the associations between the concepts in communication privacy management theory and the

provision of social support. On the first step of the regression model, condition was entered as the covariate (offered support = 0; did not offer support = 1). On step two of the model all four independent variables were entered. This allowed me to determine which independent variable(s) predicted the provision of social support above and beyond the influence of the other independent variables.⁷ I constructed the same basic model for the five different outcome variables: information support, emotional support, esteem support, instrumental support, and network support.

In this set of analyses, all five types of social support were significantly associated with boundary permeability and clarity about support rules (Table 10). Associations between each independent variable and the types of social support will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Co-owning a Distressing Event and Providing Social Support. In contrast with the primary analyses, the associations between co-ownership and the provision of informational, $\beta = -.09, t(5, 229) = -1.10, p = .27$, emotional, $\beta = .05, t(5, 230) = .56, p = .57$, esteem, $\beta = -.01, t(5, 230) = -.15, p = .89$, and instrumental support, $\beta = -.16, t(5, 230) = -1.85, p = .07$ were non-significant in secondary analyses. Co-ownership was significantly negatively associated with network support, $\beta = -.19, t(5, 230) = -2.12, p < .05$; however, this was not in the predicted direction. Therefore, Hypothesis one was not supported in this set of analyses.

Boundary Permeability over a Distressing Event and Providing Social Support. Results of the regressions revealed that, as predicted, boundary permeability displayed a positive association with informational, $\beta = .38, t(5, 229) = 9.67, p < .001$, emotional, $\beta = .21, t(5, 230) = 2.65, p < .01$, esteem, $\beta = .27, t(5, 230) = 3.36, p = .001$, instrumental, $\beta = .38, t(5, 230) = 4.39, p < .001$, and network support, $\beta = .22, t(5, 230) = 2.44, p < .05$. These findings indicate

that as boundary permeability about a distressing event increased (i.e., became more flexible), provision of social support also increased. Therefore, like in the primary analyses, Hypothesis two was supported.

Clarity about Support Rules and Providing Social Support. Consistent with the predicted associations, clarity about support rules displayed a positive association with informational, $\beta = .40, t(5, 229) = 4.97, p < .001$, emotional, $\beta = .31, t(5, 230) = 3.73, p < .001$, esteem, $\beta = .37, t(5, 230) = 4.50, p < .001$, instrumental, $\beta = .26, t(5, 230) = 2.95, p < .01$, and network support, $\beta = .37, t(5, 230) = 4.01, p < .001$. These results demonstrate that the clearer the participant and the distressed person were about support rules following the distressing event, the more likely the participant was to offer the distressed person social support. Therefore, Hypothesis three was supported in both sets of analyses.

Support Rule Turbulence and Providing Social Support. The associations between support rule turbulence and all five types of social support were non-significant (informational, $\beta = .11, t(5, 229) = 1.57, p = .12$; emotional, $\beta = -.11, t(5, 230) = -1.61, p = .11$; esteem, $\beta = -.04, t(5, 230) = -.60, p = .55$; instrumental, $\beta = -.06, t(5, 230) = -.89, p = .38$; network, $\beta = .02, t(5, 230) = .24, p = .81$). Therefore, unlike in primary analyses, hypothesis four was not supported in this set of analyses.

Conclusion

The current chapter evaluated the data collected to test the proposed hypotheses. The results of the investigation affirmed that the associations were consistent with my predictions. In addition, these analyses indicate that although all four concepts are significantly associated with the provision of support, boundary permeability and clarity about support rules

are most salient when all four predictors are evaluated in the same model. In the following chapter, I discuss the implications of these findings.

Table 1

Skewness and Kurtosis Values of Independent and Dependent Variable Measures

	Skewness ^a	Kurtosis ^a
<u>Independent Measures</u>		
Coowning the Event	0.17 (0.16)	-0.93 (0.31)
Boundary Permeability	-0.11 (0.16)	-0.39 (0.31)
Openness about Rules	-0.20 (0.16)	-0.35 (0.32)
Boundary Turbulence	1.17 (0.16)	1.41 (0.32)
<u>Dependent Measures</u>		
Informational Support	-0.24 (0.16)	1.45 (0.32)
Emotional Support	-0.41 (0.16)	-0.02 (0.32)
Esteem Support	-0.80 (0.16)	0.27 (0.32)
Instrumental Support	-0.29 (0.16)	-0.23 (0.32)
Network Support	0.06 (0.16)	-0.78 (0.32)

^a The value in parentheses indicates standard error for the statistic.

Table 2

Correlations Among Independent Variables

	Co-owning the Event	Boundary Permeability	Clarity about Rules
Co-owning the Event	—		
Boundary Permeability	.70***	—	
Clarity about Rules	.64***	.66***	—
Support Rule Turbulence	-.49***	-.43***	-.60***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3

Correlations Among Dependent Variables

	Informational Support	Emotional Support	Esteem Support	Instrumental Support
Informational Support	—			
Emotional Support	.67***	—		
Esteem Support	.67***	.74***	—	
Instrumental Support	.68***	.62***	.63***	—
Network Support	.62***	.44***	.50***	.58***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4

Correlations Among Independent and Dependent Variables

	Co-owning the Event	Boundary Permeability	Clarity about Rules	Support Rule Turbulence
Informational Support	.40***	.55***	.54***	-.27***
Emotional Support	.45***	.50***	.55***	-.41***
Esteem Support	.43***	.52***	.56***	-.37***
Instrumental Support	.31***	.47***	.45***	-.31***
Network Support	.17***	.30***	.36***	-.19***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 5

Means of Each Support Type in the Did Offer Support and the Did Not Offer Support Survey Conditions

Survey Condition:	Did Offer Support	Did Not Offer Support
<u>Support Type:</u>		
Informational	3.36 (0.95)	3.01 (1.06)
Emotional	3.98 (0.64)	3.72 (0.81)
Esteem	3.95 (0.80)	3.73 (0.92)
Instrumental	3.48 (0.82)	3.24 (1.01)
Network	2.80 (1.09)	2.88 (1.08)

Note. Number in parentheses represents the standard deviation.

Table 6

Results for Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Co-ownership of a Distressing Event

Support Type	Informational	Emotional	Esteem	Instrumental	Network
<u>Covariate: R²Δ</u>	.03	.03	.02	.02	.00
Support Condition β	-.18**	-.18**	-.14*	-.14*	.04
<u>Independent Variables</u>					
Co-ownership					
R ²	.17	.21	.19	.10	.04
R ² Δ	.14	.17	.17	.08	.03
Adjusted R ²	.16	.20	.18	.09	.03

Note. Due to missing data, $N = 236$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 7

Results for Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Boundary Permeability

Support Type	Informational	Emotional	Esteem	Instrumental	Network
<u>Covariate: R²Δ</u>	.03	.03	.02	.02	.00
Support Condition β	-.18**	-.18**	-.14*	-.14*	.04
<u>Independent Variables</u>					
Co-ownership					
R ²	.31	.25	.27	.22	.10
R ² Δ	.28	.22	.25	.20	.10
Adjusted R ²	.30	.25	.26	.21	.10

Note. Due to missing data, $N = 236$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 8

Results for Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Clarity about Support Rules

Support Type	Informational	Emotional	Esteem	Instrumental	Network
<u>Covariate: R²Δ</u>	.03	.03	.02	.02	.00
Support Condition β	-.18**	-.18**	-.14*	-.14*	.03
<u>Independent Variables</u>					
Co-ownership					
R ²	.30	.30	.31	.20	.14
R ² Δ	.27	.27	.29	.18	.14
Adjusted R ²	.30	.30	.30	.19	.14

Note. Due to missing data, $N = 235$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 9

Results for Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Support Rule Turbulence

Support Type	Informational	Emotional	Esteem	Instrumental	Network
<u>Covariate: R²Δ</u>	.03	.03	.02	.02	.00
Support Condition β	-.18**	-.18**	-.14*	-.14*	.04
<u>Independent Variables</u>					
Co-ownership					
R ²	.09	.18	.14	.10	.04
R ² Δ	.06	.15	.12	.08	.04
Adjusted R ²	.08	.17	.13	.09	.03

Note. Due to missing data, $N = 236$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 10

Results for Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Types of Social Support from Co-ownership, Boundary Permeability, Clarity about Support Rules, and Support Rule Turbulence

Support Type	Informational	Emotional	Esteem	Instrumental	Network
<u>Covariate: R²Δ</u>	.03	.03	.02	.02	.00
Support Condition β	-.18**	-.17**	-.13*	-.13*	.03
<u>Independent Variables β</u>					
Co-ownership	-.09	.05	-.01	-.16	-.19*
Permeability	.38***	.21**	.27**	.38***	.22*
Clarity about Rules	.40***	.31***	.37***	.26**	.37***
Support Turbulence	.11	-.11	-.04	-.06	.02
R ² Δ	.34**	.32***	.33***	.25***	.17***
Model Adjusted R ²	.36	.33	.34	.25	.15

Note. Due to missing data, $N = 236$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

This thesis opened by arguing that distress is significantly associated with negative physical and psychological outcomes (e.g., Benight et al., 1997; Caetano & Weisner, 1995; Hudson, Lee, Miramontes, & Portillo, 2001). Research documents how social support combats some of the problematic effects of distress (e.g., Hobfoll & Stokes, 1988); however, little research offers insight into the processes that encourage the provision of supportive behaviors (Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990). To gain insight into the communication and relationship circumstances that may motivate the exchanges of support, I turned to communication privacy management theory. Communication privacy management theory explains how people govern their private information by creating and managing boundaries around that information. More generally, the theory highlights the communication and relationship circumstances that prompt others to engage in communication, which makes it an appropriate framework for evaluating the characteristics that may encourage individuals to offer social support. Specifically, communication privacy management theory nominates co-ownership (H1), boundary permeability (H2), clarity about rules (H3), and turbulence because of violations to rules (H4) as characteristics that influence whether and how individuals offer support to friends, family members, or romantic partners. The results of the study supported my prediction that the tenets of communication privacy management theory shed light on processes that underlie supportive exchanges following a distressing event. In the following sections, I examine the communication and relationship circumstances that are at play when network members offer support. Then, I

discuss the implications of those findings for communication privacy management theory and for social support literature. Finally, I present limitations of the study and directions for future research.

Applying Communication Privacy Management Theory to Socially Supportive Communication

This study predicted that concepts detailed in communication privacy management theory could be applied not only to the sharing of private information, but also to the provision of supportive behaviors. The extension of the theory's assumptions is corroborated with research on social support, which suggests similarities between the processes that underlie the sharing of private information and those that govern supportive exchanges. In particular, this thesis drew connections between four concepts from communication privacy management theory to the provision of social support, which allowed me to investigate the role that those processes play in providing support. More specifically, I hypothesized that co-ownership of the distressing event, boundary permeability about a distressing event, and clarity about support rules would be positively associated with the provision of social support, and that support rule turbulence would be negatively associated with the provision of social support. The results of the study supported these predictions, indicating that co-ownership, boundary permeability, clarity about support rules, and support rule turbulence all significantly predict the provision of social support. Furthermore, the results suggest that boundary permeability and clarity about support rules are the most salient predictors of supportive exchanges. Each association will be discussed in the following sections.

Co-ownership Predicting the Provision of Social Support

Results of the study supported hypothesis one, which predicted that co-ownership of a distressing event shares a positive association with the provision of social support. However, the association between providing support and co-ownership did not remain significant when it was measured for its influence above and beyond boundary permeability, clarity about support rules, and boundary turbulence. Interpreting these results in light of Petronio's conceptualization of co-ownership of private information may help to explain this finding. Petronio (2002) asserts that people may consider their private information something that they own and control. One way they control that information is by revealing (or concealing) it, thus (not) allowing others to become co-owners of the information. Petronio (2000, 2002) nominates co-owners who are willing to take mutual responsibility for protecting collective boundaries as ideal candidates for receiving private information. Moreover, the control afforded to receivers of private information reflects their (lack of) involvement in the co-construction of that private information. For example, a receiver may merely be exposed to a piece of private information, or that person may be invited by the sender to help control the private information, including what that private information means. Thus, co-owners can simply be exposed to private information, or they may have the opportunity to give meaning to the private information. Extending the theory's line of reasoning to the present study would suggest that individuals express ownership over their distressing experiences in the same way that they express ownership over private information. Moreover, distressed persons allow (or prohibit) members of their social networks to experience the distressing event alongside them.

Research on the principle of intersubjectivity sheds light on social support as a co-constructed experience. Similar to co-ownership, intersubjectivity refers to the idea that people

create meaning through their interactions with one another (Parker et al., 2004). In fact, Hoybe, Johansen, & Tjornhoj-Thomsen (2005) conceptualize support as an intersubjective process. Hoybe and colleagues found evidence for this claim by observing online support groups for individuals coping with breast cancer. Specifically, they found that as conversations of support unfolded, the actions of one support group member helped to create subsequent actions of other group members. In other words, the interplay between group members elevated these dialogues and allowed for the co-creation of meaning.

A second body of literature that emphasizes the need to study co-construction in sophisticated ways is constructivism theory. Constructivism theory suggests that an individual's reality must be understood as an interplay of interactions with others as they coordinate shared meaning (Delia, 1977). At the heart of constructivism, then, is the notion that individuals help each other to contextualize and frame their realities, including the management of private information or the exchange of social support. For example, Burlison (1982) found that individuals who took another person's feelings and perspective into account produced supportive messages of higher quality. In other words, more personalized messages were constructed by recognizing the role of the other person in the interaction. Thus, both the principle of intersubjectivity and constructivism theory emphasize the central role of the other in constructing meaning.

Although these bodies of literature, as well as the primary analyses in this study, lend support for co-ownership being relevant during supportive exchanges, the secondary analyses in this study indicated that the influence of co-ownership was not significant above and beyond the other variables in the study. Taken together, these findings suggest that co-ownership was a meaningful construct for participants in their provision of social support, but it was not as salient

as boundary permeability or clarity about support rules. Following, I propose two reasons I may have found this pattern among the data.

First, the measures of co-ownership and boundary permeability in this thesis were modified from Child, Pearson, and Petronio's (2009) application of communication privacy management theory to blogging boundaries. Although Child et al.'s confirmatory factor analysis suggested that the scales measured separate constructs, a closer examination of the items in the study reveals some conceptual overlap (see Appendices D, E). For example, a sample item from the co-ownership scale is "The other person limited what he or she discussed with me about the distressing event," and a sample item from the boundary permeability scale is "The information that the other person gave me about the distressing event was long and detailed." Both of these items reflect the exchange of information following a distressing event, and although information exchange is part of co-ownership, it does not sufficiently address the essence of that construct. Bivariate correlations suggested that these two scales were not multicollinear; however, an examination of items like these indicates that there was some measurement overlap. Beyond the statistical complications that may accompany similarity among scale items, this overlap suggests that co-ownership is not being sufficiently described by the items. Recall that co-ownership reflects individuals' control over private information and their freedom to regulate and assign meaning to that information (Petronio, 2000, 2002). Therefore, future measures of co-ownership should contain a more accurate reflection of that idea. Sample items could include "The other person wanted me to help him/her process the event," "The other person and I assigned meaning to the event together," or "I helped the other person to understand his/her distress."

Second, co-ownership, as well as the principle of intersubjectivity and constructivism theory, emphasizes the central role of the other in meaning making. As such, I wonder if I failed

to find support for co-ownership predicting social support because documenting the perceptions of the support provider *alongside* perceptions of the distressed person may provide a more accurate understanding of co-ownership. In other words, the perspective of the support provider is not more relevant, nor is that of the support receiver. Rather, it is the combination of their voices that allows for a meaningful understanding of co-ownership of an event. Thus, studying co-ownership may require scholars to document experiences of both the provider and the receiver of the support.

To explore this notion further, I ran two separate logistic regressions with the aim of better understanding co-ownership of a distressing event at the intersection of the provider and the receiver. Specifically, participants answered two questions; one question asked if the participant initiated communication with the distressed person (0 = Yes, 1 = No), and the other question asked if the distressed person initiated communication with the participant (0 = Yes, 1 = No). Using co-ownership, boundary permeability, support rule clarity, and support rule turbulence to predict each single-item measure revealed that support providers and support receivers may be experiencing these interactions in very different ways. When participants reported that they had initiated communication with the distressed person, co-ownership, support rule clarity, and support rule turbulence were marginally significant predictors ($p < .10$). However, when participants reported that the distressed person initiated communication with them, co-ownership, boundary permeability, and support rule clarity were significant predictors ($p < .05$). These findings suggest that co-ownership may be tied to bids from the distressed person to the (potential) support provider. My goal of documenting support from the perspective of the support provider may have precluded me from clarifying nuances of the co-ownership process from the perspective of the receiver. Thus, although the secondary analyses in this study

did not implicate co-ownership as a significant predictor of social support, these logistic regressions, along with literature on principle of intersubjectivity and constructivism theory, emphasize the critical roles that both interactants play in constructing meaning, and point to areas of research to pull from for future tests of the co-ownership of supportive exchanges.

Boundary Permeability Predicting the Provision of Social Support

Results of the study supported the prediction that boundary permeability about a distressing event is positively associated with the provision of social support. Recall that boundary permeability refers to the flexibility of the borders around private information (Petronio, 2002). When information is exchanged freely, the boundaries are fluid, and when information flow is restricted, the boundaries are rigid (Petronio, 2002). Whereas communication privacy management theory focuses on the exchange of specific pieces of private information, this study expanded the conceptualization of communication boundaries to encompass all of the information related to a distressing event (which may or may not include private information). Specifically, I reasoned that if individuals related to each other through an open exchange of information surrounding the event, they would be more likely to provide social support.

Support for extending the theory in this way can be substantiated by research on family system boundaries. Specifically, families can be categorized along a continuum of cohesion based on the fluidity of their boundaries. For example, families with high cohesion have fluid boundaries, (Davies, Cummings, & Winter, 2004; Jacobvitz, Hazen, Curran, & Hitchens, 2004), whereas families with low cohesion have rigid boundaries (Davies, et al., 2004; Parker et al., 1989; Volk, Edwards, Lewis, & Sprenkle, 1989). Importantly, Parker, Hill, and Goodnow (1989) argue that support is sacrificed in families when the boundaries are too rigid because each family member functions independent of the other members. On the other hand, when boundaries are

flexible, family members can access important relationship resources, including support (Davies et al., 2004). The results of this study echo the sentiments of family literature; when individuals have flexible communication boundaries, they also have access to the resources that foster supportive exchanges during distressing circumstances.

Clarity about Support Rules Predicting the Provision of Social Support

As with boundary permeability, results of the study supported the hypothesis that clarity about support rules is positively related to the provision of social support. Petronio's (2000, 2002) conceptualization of rules suggests that when people share private information, boundary rules determine the way that information is handled. In this study, Petronio's conceptualization of rules was extended to refer to the sanctions governing supportive interactions. In particular, individuals know how to handle private information appropriately to the extent that they understand and can follow boundary rules. Similar to Petronio's arguments that boundary rules regulate the exchange of private information, I predicted that rules about social support govern whether and how supportive exchanges take place. I reasoned that if the support provider had clarity about support rules, he or she was more likely to behave in supportive ways. More specifically, the more individuals understood how the other person wanted or needed to be supported, the more likely they were to behave in those supportive ways. Conversely, when they were unsure about the other person's support preferences, they were less likely to engage in supportive exchanges. Consistent with those predictions, the results of this study suggest that when people are clear about how a distressed friend, family member, or romantic partner would like to be supported, they are more likely to provide social support.

Situating these findings within the larger body of research about rules reinforces the function of such rules in close relationships. Recall that rules help individuals to regulate and

interpret their own behavior and the behavior of others (Cherry, 1973; Schall 1983). Moreover, rules exist at different levels of communication. For example, cultures are governed by rules (Schall, 1983), as are organizational settings (Kramer & Hess, 2002), and Petronio (2000, 2002) posits that interpersonal relationships are also subject to rules in the management of private information. In all of these contexts, rules play an integral role in informing interactants of appropriate behaviors and in helping them to explain and predict the behavior of others (Schall, 1983). Relatedly, Kramer and Hess (2002) found that knowing communication rules in an organizational setting was critical for developing relationships. Consistent with that reasoning, the findings of this thesis suggest that awareness of (i.e., clarity about) support rules aids individuals in deciding whether or how to provide social support to a distressed other. Thus, the rules that govern supportive exchanges, like the rules that govern relationships more generally, clarify expected and appropriate ways to behave.

Support Rule Turbulence Predicting the Provision of Social Support

The primary analyses in the study were consistent with the prediction that support rule turbulence is negatively associated with the provision of social support. Communication privacy management theory asserts that boundaries around private information may become turbulent if owners are unsure of private information about how to manage mutually owned private information (Petronio, 2002). In particular, boundary turbulence occurs when rule management systems are disrupted (Afifi, 2004), and can negatively affect interpersonal relationships (Afifi, 2004; Petronio, 2002). For example, stepfamily members who experienced turbulence in managing private information became avoidant and disassociated themselves from other family members (Afifi, 2003). Taken together then, these findings suggest that individuals who

experience turbulent exchanges regarding their private information also experience problematic relational outcomes.

Extending Petronio's reasoning about boundary turbulence regarding private information to the predictions in the current study highlights potential problematic outcomes of misguided supportive exchanges. One body of scholarship that lends supports to this finding is research following from the relational turbulence model (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001), which has found that relational turbulence is associated with avoidant behaviors. Specifically, scholars using that theory have found that perceptions of turbulence led to decreased supportiveness from friends and family (Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006). Additional research from Edwards (2006) found that support behaviors were suspended during moments in which relationships experienced turbulence. Taken together, these findings support the idea that turbulence in relationships can result in problematic relational outcomes, including minimized support.

Although the primary analyses and these bodies of literature supported hypothesis four, when support rule turbulence was analyzed in the same model as the other independent variables, it was not a significant predictor of the provision of social support. I propose that there are two possible explanations for this finding. First, perhaps the findings in this thesis ran contrary to previous research because of the relative infrequency with which support rule turbulence was reported ($M = 1.70$; $SD = 0.52$). The restricted range of this particular variable may have precluded me from detecting, statistically, associations between this variable and the support variables. Research in the future should be sensitive to the possibility that support rule turbulence may not occur with frequency.

Second, the conceptual overlap between clarity about support rules and support rule turbulence may have affected the outcomes of this study. Recall that clarity about support rules

reflects individuals' awareness and understanding of the ways the other person wants or needs to be supported. Support rule turbulence, on the other hand, refers to whether those rules are followed during supportive exchanges. These two variables may overlap in relevant ways. In particular, both concepts deal explicitly with the treatment of rules in the relationship, and although the results suggest that rules are meaningful for support providers, it is their knowledge of those rules, and not whether or not the rules are followed, that is most salient. Therefore, when clarity about support rules and support rule turbulence were analyzed together, clarity emerged as a more significant predictor of providing support. Second, clarity about support rules and support rule turbulence may have an interaction effect with one another. That is, clarity about a support rule may create turbulence, or the reverse may happen. For example, someone may offer support in the wrong way (e.g., giving money when the person prefers affection or information), and through the ensuing turbulence, he or she may learn (i.e., receive clarity about) a support rule. Thus, I speculate that I may not have found statistically significant associations between support rule turbulence and the provision of social support because of the overlap between support turbulence and clarity about support rules.

In sum, the predicted associations between co-ownership, boundary permeability, clarity about support rules, and support rule turbulence with the provision of social support were supported. Furthermore, the results of the study indicated that boundary permeability and clarity about support rules were significant predictors of support when all four concepts were analyzed together. These findings are meaningful because they indicate that boundary permeability and clarity about support rules are two processes that may encourage individuals to engage in social support in close relationships. In other words, when network members are making decisions about whether to offer social support, they are more likely to consider the communication

boundaries and their understanding about support rules than co-ownership or support rule turbulence. In the following sections I discuss implications the current study has for communication privacy management theory and for the study of social support.

Implications for Communication Privacy Management Theory

Throughout this thesis I argued that communication privacy management theory offers insight into communication and relationship circumstances that prompt communicative exchanges. Although tests of the theory, to date, find that it is the presence (or absence) of those communication or relational characteristics that encourage people to reveal or conceal their private information, I extended the theory to the provision of support.

Applying the concepts in communication privacy management theory to distressing experiences revealed that scholars could, in fact, make sense of support behaviors through the lens of communication privacy management theory. Based on these findings, we can infer that individuals in close relationships engage in supportive behaviors more when they co-own distressing experiences, have permeable boundaries about distressing experiences, understand how the other person would like to be supported, and experience little turbulence regarding support behaviors. Of consequence, each of these concepts emphasizes the notion that people understand their experiences through interaction with others. Specifically, co-ownership affords individuals the opportunity to co-construct life experiences; boundary permeability allows the free exchange of information; clarity about rules instructs individuals on how they should to connect with one another, and the absence of boundary turbulence lends itself to smooth communication exchanges. Each of these concepts illustrates how people create connections through supportive exchanges.

The successful application of these concepts to the provision of social support has another, more general implication for communication privacy management theory. The results of this study point to the generalizability of the concepts detailed in the theory. Although co-ownership, boundary permeability, clarity about rules, and turbulence are meaningful processes for understanding the exchange of private information, this thesis suggests that those same concepts are meaningful for other communication contexts as well. In this thesis, I found that social support exchanges represent one such framework; however, co-ownership, permeability, clarity about rules, and turbulence could also apply across other communication processes. For example, these concepts may be useful when applied to relational dialectics theory. Dialectical theories emphasize tensions people experience between contradicting desires that shape their relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Petronio's conceptualization of privacy in relationships suggests that individuals desire both the protection offered by privacy and the connection resulting from disclosure (Petronio, 2000). Similarly, Baxter (1988) suggests that individuals desire both openness and closedness in their close relationships. Just as the processes detailed in this thesis were useful for understanding supportive exchanges, they may also help to more fully understand the nuances of the openness/closedness dialectic. Thus, the tenets that Petronio (2000, 2002) chose for explaining private information may be useful for understanding our communication patterns more generally.

The current project paralleled the experience of managing private information with the provision of social support. Of consequence, engaging in support may be the product of a dialectical tension between supporting and withholding support. Because the processes that help individuals to manage the tension between providing and withholding support may be the same

as the processes that govern the tension between privacy and disclosure, research in the future should consider other circumstances that underlie these dialectical tensions.

Implications for Social Support Research

Recall that although a large body of literature exists that explores social support, little is known about the influences that motivate individuals to engage in supportive behaviors. In fact, Dunkel-Schetter and Skokan (1990) issued a call for research that focuses specifically on clarifying the processes governing the *provision* of social support. Despite their appeal, few have begun to explore supportive exchanges from the perspective of the provider. The current study answers Dunkel-Schetter and Skokan's call by investigating the communication and relationship circumstances that encourage the provision of social support. The following paragraphs situate the findings of this study within existing research about social support.

The current project adds to research on support activation behaviors. Sensitive interaction systems theory posits processes that underlie the activation of support behaviors (Barbee & Cunningham, 1995). In its most basic form, the theory suggests that (distressed) people engage in direct or indirect support seeking behaviors (i.e., support activation behaviors), which lead supporters to provide different kinds of support (Barbee & Cunningham, 1995). This study adds to existing literature on sensitive interaction systems theory by examining the *response* to activation behaviors from the provider's perspective.

Activation behaviors include any direct or indirect strategies that signal the need or desire for support (Barbee et al., 1993). Direct strategies may include asking for help or showing clear distress, and indirect strategies may include sulking, crying, talking about a concern, or complaining about a problem (Barbee et al., 1993). The current investigation suggests that boundary permeability and clarity about support rules could be classified as activation behaviors

because they reflect the essential qualities of these strategies. To the extent that these concepts from communication privacy management theory can be considered activation behaviors, the results of the current study suggest that people do, in fact, provide support in response to activation behaviors from a distressed other. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature about sensitive interaction systems theory in two ways. First, it offers two possibilities (i.e., boundary permeability and clarity about support rules) for how support activation behaviors manifest in supportive interactions. Second, it examines the behavioral responses (i.e., supportive behaviors) of social network members who, in response to activation behaviors, choose to provide (or to not provide) social support.

In sum, by studying social support from the viewpoint of the provider rather than the receiver, this study adds a unique voice to social support literature. Existing research offers a thorough exploration of individuals' support-seeking behaviors; however, without insight into how the social network responds to those behaviors, it is difficult to fully understand the support process. By adding the provider's perspective, this study offers more robust insight into the intersubjective nature of social support.

Implications for Research on Experiences of Distress

Recall that distress has significant negative physical, psychological, behavioral, and social impacts (e.g., Benight et al., 1997; Caetano & Weisner, 1995; Firth-Cozens, 1987; Hudson et al., 2001; Knopf, 1986; Storksen et al., 2006), and that measures to decrease those outcomes are advantageous (Kaplan et al., 1977). Research consistently highlights social support as one mechanism for reducing the negative effects of distress (e.g., Burleson, 1994, Humphreys et al., 2001). Although social support is helpful during distressing circumstances, it is not always offered (Horwitz, Tessler, Fisher, & Gamache, 1992). For example, individuals may not offer

support because they feel unsure of what to say to a distressed other, or they may misunderstand what kind of support that person needs (Horwitz et al., 1992). Therefore, although personal relationships are supposed to be sources of support, they may not always offer the expected supportive interactions. Framing the findings from this thesis within the distress literature offers an applied context for understanding the practical implications of identifying the circumstances that underlie when support is *not* extended.

When distressed individuals are not connected with the members of their social networks, they may become caught in a cycle of distress. This occurs because distress and isolation often mutually reinforce one another (Mirowsky & Ross, 1986). In particular, distressed individuals often alienate themselves from their social networks (Mirowsky & Ross, 1986), and feelings of isolation or loneliness are linked with a perceived lack of social support (Sarason & Sarason, 1985). In other words, individuals who perceive that they do not have access to support during distressing circumstances may experience further distress.

Conversely, individuals who have healthy support networks have less distress and better health (Burlison, 1994; Humphreys et al., 2001). Moreover, research demonstrates that individuals who perceive that they are supported are more likely to engage in support activation behaviors (Coyne & Downey, 1991; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Ross & Mirowsky, 1989). Therefore, individuals who feel supported in the midst of their distress are more able to cope with their circumstances because of their supportive exchanges.

The results of this study provide support for this claim. The individuals who provided support were the ones who were connected to the distressed other. In particular, the support provider and the distressed other experienced connection by having a free exchange of information and being clear about support rules. Therefore, individuals who felt connected to

their distressed friends, family members, or romantic partners helped them to cope with their distress by offering social support.

In sum, distress is problematic because of its negative outcomes. In fact, the social isolation that can stem from distress has the potential to cause additional distress. Importantly, when individuals feel like they cannot access social support, they do not engage in support seeking behaviors. The results of this study suggest that those individuals who are isolated may not connect with their social networks through the processes suggested by communication privacy management theory. Because they are disconnected from their social networks, they do not receive social support, which may further reinforce their distress.

General Implications

In addition to the contributions this thesis makes to each of the theories and bodies of literature discussed in the previous sections, there are broader implications that can be taken away from this study. First, my results have methodological implications for social scientific research on social support. Second, this thesis brought together disparate bodies of literature to reveal new insights into the communication process, which emphasizes the value of synthesizing research. Each of these implications will be discussed below, in turn.

Methodological Implications

As mentioned, the results of this thesis have some methodological implications for social scientific research on social support. In particular, researchers need to balance the problems associated with the positivity bias with the drawbacks associated with steps that can be taken to mitigate that problem. My solution to the positivity bias, and thus the potential of restricted range in my dependent variable, was to create two support conditions. In one condition participants

reflected on a time when they *did* provide support to a distressed other, and in the other condition participants discussed a time when they *did not* engage in supportive exchanges.

Ultimately, creating these two conditions did enhance variability in the dependent variable. More generally, this methodological choice illuminated several considerations that social scientists should weigh carefully. As mentioned in the methods section, the participants in the *did not support* condition engaged in significantly less support than did the participants in the *did support* condition. Notable, however, was my finding that participants in the *did not support* condition did report engaging in some level of support with the distressed person. Following, I discuss three related concerns regarding this finding.

First, this data suggests that a positivity bias likely exists in the measurement of supportive exchanges. Evidence for this can be deduced from the finding that participants who were asked to report on a time when they did not offer support indicated that they had in fact offered some support. One can reason that participants may have reported in that way was to maintain the image that they were the type of people who reached out to distressed friends, family members, or romantic partners.

Second, this discrepancy in the data suggests that research participants did not strictly adhere to the survey directions. In the condition under question, participants were explicitly asked to recall a time when they did *not* offer support. Theoretically, then, the mean score for social support for those participants should have been (near) zero. This stands in contrast to the reported behaviors of participants in this condition that indicated they did, in fact, provide some support. Although I took care to create the two conditions and the wording used to explain directions to my participants, this discrepancy has broader implications for the assumptions that social scientists make about what our participants are willing or able to do. One solution could be

to include an involvement scale that would simply ask participants if they took seriously the task at hand. This would allow future scholarship to calibrate if participants are attempting to adhere to study directions.

Third, these results warrant a discussion in the field about the value of measuring social support as a *continuous* construct as opposed to measuring it as a *binary* one. Participants may not have reported a time in which they provided zero support because to them those times do not exist. In the eyes of participants, to provide *zero* support and to *not* provide support may be two different things; the latter may reflect an aberration from normal behavior as opposed to the binary end point of *did not provide* support.

To begin to examine this last point, I conducted several additional analyses on the data from my thesis. As mentioned previously, participants were asked to answer a question regarding if they initiated communication with the distressed person and to answer a separate question regarding if the distressed person initiated communication with them. Although the initiation of communication is not support *per se*, these questions do shed light on patterns of exchange more generally.

Somewhat surprisingly, only fifteen people in the study reported not initiating communication with the distressed person *and* not receiving communication initiated by the distressed person (Table 11). Fifty-five participants reported initiating communication with the distressed person but not receiving communication initiated by the distressed person. Slightly fewer ($n = 41$) people in the study reported not initiating communication with the distressed person but receiving communication initiated by the distressed person. And, 127 people reported both initiating communication with the distressed person and receiving communication initiated by the distressed person. Although not a perfect measure of the extent to which participants

engaged in supportive behavior, these patterns suggest that people do vary in the degree to which they initiate communication. Moreover, these findings reveal that it is far more likely that people engage in some communication rather than completely abstain from communication. Future research should continue to explore the implications of studying support as a continuous construct as well as a binary construct.

The preceding discussion offers a number of methodological implications that follow from my thesis. In particular, my results provide preliminary insights into possible conceptualizations of social support, but they also point to the need for further examination of social support as a measurable construct.

Implications for Theorizing about Communication

This thesis points to the benefits of extending theories beyond their given scope conditions to discover communication processes that transcend context. Communication privacy management theory was proposed as a theory to explain how people manage private information in their relationships (Petronio, 1991, 2000, 2002). Although Petronio's theory makes a unique contribution by clarifying the processes inherent to managing privacy boundaries, it is also relevant to recognize that those processes may parallel other, similar communication exchanges. Toward that end, this thesis extended those processes to draw parallels between the experience of private information and the experience of social support. Although these two experiences (private information and support) are unique from each other, at the heart of both is the idea the individuals may choose to connect (or not connect) with others. Based on their choices, people construct their experiences alongside or absent from others. By identifying the processes that transcend contexts, this study highlights the connections that underlie seemingly different communication experiences.

Not only did this thesis extend communication privacy management theory beyond its scope, it also synthesized the theory with social support research, which reveals insights into both bodies of literature. Communication privacy management theory and social support both have tremendous heuristic value and, as such, have produced large bodies of literature (e.g., Afifi, 2003; Caughlin et al., 2009; Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1987; House & Kahn, 1985; Petronio & Caughlin, 2006; Thoits, 1985). Both bodies of research make contributions to communication scholarship, and bringing them together reveals new ways of studying both and of understanding communication. For example, individuals are motivated to communicate with one another in the presence or absence of specific communication and relationship circumstances. By paralleling the management of private information and the exchange of social support, we see that individuals begin to create shared meaning when they are motivated to communicate with each other, either through the revealing of private information or the provision of social support. Therefore, in much the same way that the production of shared meaning constructs a new reality between interactants, bringing bodies of literature together into the same context produces a new, previously unexplored understanding of communication processes that cannot be revealed by considering them in isolation from one another.

In sum, the findings presented here have broad implications beyond those for each body of literature used to test the hypotheses in this study. Specifically, this thesis highlights the value of extending theories beyond their scope conditions, and stresses the importance of bringing bodies of literature together to reveal new insights about communication processes. In the following section, I will discuss some of the strengths and limitations of this thesis.

Strengths and Limitations

The conclusions reached by this investigation are constrained by a number of strengths and limitations. As discussed in previous sections, the strengths of the study include its contributions to literature on health and well-being of people, the intersection of two large bodies of research, the extension of communication privacy management theory, its examination of social support from the perspective of the support provider, and the consideration of antecedent conditions to providing support that had not been considered in previous research. Although this study found support for several of its hypotheses and makes unique contributions to communication scholarship, like all research endeavors, there are limitations to the study. The following sections will address the limitations of the study and will provide directions for future research.

First, some aspects of this research investigation restrict its generalizability. Although people reported on a distressing event that a loved one experienced, the study was limited by its cross-sectional research design. Cross-sectional research takes place at one point in time, rather than over time. Specifically, the data in this thesis captured individuals' supportive responses to one distressing event at one moment in time. As such, it did not account for the changing nature of relationships or the communication circumstances that preceded the distressing event.

The cross-sectional research design of this study precludes me from making conclusions concerning causality between the circumstances articulated by communication privacy management theory and the provision of support. Although based on the theory, I would postulate that the processes embedded in communication privacy management theory led to the provision of social support, it is possible that provision of support shaped co-ownership of the distressing event, for example. To better understand the causal nature of these concepts,

participants in this study responded to items that assessed their co-ownership, boundary permeability, clarity about support rules, and support rule turbulence *before* the distressing event, to establish a baseline of the four concepts. Theoretically, those items could have helped to clarify some of the issue of causality; however, the results of the baseline items were inconsistent, making it difficult to analyze the meaning of those results. Therefore, future research could test the assumptions of this study using a longitudinal design with the goal of accounting for individuals' communication and relationship circumstances before and after the distressing event. This type of test would more fully tease out the causal nature among the concepts posited by communication privacy management theory and the provision of social support.

In addition to its cross-sectional design, the results of the study may be subject to recall bias, which refers to individuals' (in)ability to remember their past accurately (Berney & Blane, 1997). When individuals reflect on events that happened in the distant past, it is difficult to accurately recall the details associated with those events. The events that participants recalled took place an average of 15.35 months ago ($SD = 27.12$), and most reported on events that had happened within six months (50.4%) to a year (71.9%). Therefore, recall biases may have been minimized to some extent. Other research also suggests that this bias may have been reduced given that emotion-laden events, such as distressing situations, are usually remembered with more accuracy because of their importance (Reisberg & Heuer, 2004). To more fully overcome recall biases, however, future research may consider the use of a diary-study design in which participants are called upon to describe events in the more recent past and at more frequent intervals of time.

Although this study added to both the communication privacy management theory literature and the scholarship on social support by marrying those two programs of research, there are limitations to using communication privacy management theory as a framework for understanding social support. First, several of the fundamental concepts in the theory (e.g., boundary coordination, boundary permeability, co-ownership) are similar to one another, which required me to carefully consider the nuances of each component of the theory. As discussed previously, some of the independent variables may have experienced some conceptual overlap as well. For example, co-ownership contains some elements of boundary permeability, because for two individuals to co-construct an event, they must exchange some information. In addition, clarity about support rules and support rule turbulence both reflect the central role of rules in navigating supportive exchanges. These points of intersection may have contributed to the statistical non-significance of co-ownership and support rule turbulence when all four independent variables were analyzed in conjunction with one another. However, beyond that, they point to a relevant critique of communication privacy management theory. Although the tenets of the theory may be conceptually different, in practice, they cannot be experienced apart from one another. For example, in order for two individuals to be co-own information (or a distressing experience), they necessarily have to be linked to it. When applied specifically to this thesis, co-ownership and social support may be intricately connected with one another; if two people co-own an event (i.e., they co-construct the meaning of that event), the provider is more than likely necessarily providing support by being part of the co-ownership process. Future research should continue to parse out the theoretical and operational differences between these concepts.

Perhaps one reason these points of intersection have persisted is that to date, most tests of communication privacy management theory have measured the tenets of the theory qualitatively, and quantifications of its assumptions are limited (see Child et al., 2009). When the concepts are represented qualitatively, one may be more able to recognize the nuanced differences between them. However, successfully quantifying those concepts offers a different lens through which to understand their role in communication. Although it is a strength of this thesis that I measured the concepts quantitatively, future research should continue to tease out optimal ways to measure the assumptions of communication privacy management theory quantitatively.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to consider the communication and relational circumstances that may encourage the provision of social support following a distressing event. Communication privacy management theory provided a useful framework for assessing supportive exchanges from the perspective of the support provider. As predicted, co-ownership, boundary permeability, clarity about support rules, and support rule turbulence were significantly associated with the provision of social support. These findings have implications for communication privacy management theory and for the study of social support. Specifically, the results of the study indicate that when people co-construct their distress, have permeable communication boundaries, are clear about rules, and experience little turbulence, not only do they exchange private information (as communication privacy management theory suggests), but they also provide social support. Moreover, this study complements existing social support literature by studying the perspective of the support *provider*, rather than the support receiver. Thus, I am encouraged by the findings of this study and for the implications they hold for studying supportive exchanges in close relationships.

Table 11

Initiation of Communication by the Support Provider and by the Distressed Other

		<u>Distressed Other Initiated Communication</u>	
		Yes	No
<u>Support Provider Initiated Communication</u>			
Yes		127	55
No		41	15

Note. Numbers represent the total *N* for each cell.

REFERENCES

- Adams, G. A., King, L. A., & King, D. W. (1996). Relationships of job and family involvement, family social support, and work-family conflict with job and life satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81*(4), 411-420.
- Afifi, T. D. (2003). 'Feeling caught' in stepfamilies: Managing boundary turbulence through appropriate communication privacy rules. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 20*(6), 729-755.
- Afifi, W. A. & Guerrero, L. K. (1998). Some things are better left unsaid II: Topic avoidance in friendships. *Communication Quarterly, 46*(3), 231-249.
- Ahluwalia, I. B., Mack, K. A., & Mokdad, A. (2004). Mental and physical distress and high-risk behaviors among reproductive-age women. *Obstetrics & Gynecology, 104*(3), 477-483.
- Aiken, L. S. & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Allen, M. W., Coopman, S. J., Hart, J. L., & Walker, K. L. (2007). Workplace surveillance and managing privacy boundaries. *Management Communication Quarterly, 21*(2), 172-200.
- Aneshensel, C. S. (1992). Social stress: Theory and research. *Annual Review of Sociology, 18*, 15-38.
- Argyle, M. & Henderson, M. (1984). The rules of friendship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 1*(2), 211-237.

- Barbee, A. P., & Cunningham, M. R. (1995). An experimental approach to social support communications: Interactive coping in close relationships. In B. R. Burleson (Ed.), *Communication yearbook 18* (pp. 381-413). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Barbee, A. P., Cunningham, M. R., Winstead, B. A., Derlega, V. J., Gulley, M. R., Yankeelov, P. A., & Druen, P. B. (1993). Effects of gender role expectations on the social support process. *Journal of Social Issues, 49*(3), 175-190.
- Baxter, L. A. (1988). A dialectical perspective on communication strategies in relationship development. In S. W. Duck (Ed.), *A Handbook of Personal Relationships* (pp. 257-273). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Baxter, L. A., Dun, T., & Sahistein, E. (2001). Rules for relating communicated among social network members. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 18*(2), 173-199.
- Baxter, L. A. & Montgomery, B. M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Baxter, L. A. & Wilmot, W. W. (1985). Taboo topics in close relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 2*(3), 253-269.
- Benight, C. C., Antoni, M. H., Kilbourn, K., Ironson, G., Kumar, M. A., Fletcher, M. A., Redwine, L., Baum, A., & Schneiderman, N. (1997). Coping self-efficacy buffers psychological and physiological disturbances in HIV-infected men following a natural disaster. *Health Psychology, 16*(3), 248-255.
- Benn, S. I. & Gaus, G. F. (1983). The public and the private: Concepts and action. In S. I. Benn & G. F. Gaus (Eds.), *Public and private in social life*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Berkman, L. F. (1984). Assessing the physical health effects of social networks and social support. *Annual Review of Public Health, 5*, 413-432.

- Berney, L. R. & Blane, D. B. (1997). Collecting retrospective data: Accuracy of recall after 50 years judged against historical records. *Social Science & Medicine*, *45*(10), 1519-1525.
- Burleson, B. R. (1982). The development of comforting communication skills in childhood and adolescence. *Child Development*, *53*, 1578-1588.
- Burleson, B. R. (1985). The production of comforting messages: Social-cognitive foundations. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *4*, 253-273.
- Burleson, B. R. (1994). Comforting messages: Significance, approaches, and effects. In B. R. Burleson, T. L. Albrecht, & I. G. Sarason (Eds.), *Communication of social support: Messages, interactions, relationships, and community* (pp. 3-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Caetano, R. & Weisner, C. (1995). The association between DSM-III-R alcohol dependence, psychological distress, and drug use. *Addiction*, *90*, 351-359.
- Cameron, J. I., Franche, R., Cheung, A. M., & Stewart, D. E. (2002). Lifestyle interference and emotional distress in family caregivers of advanced cancer patients. *Cancer*, *94*(2), 521-527.
- Caughlin, J. P. & Golish, T. D. (2002). An analysis of the association between topic avoidance and dissatisfaction: Comparing perceptual and interpersonal explanations. *Communication Monographs*, *69*(4), 275-295.
- Caughlin, J. P., Scott, A. M., Miller, L. E., & Hefner, V. (2009). Putative secrets: When information is supposedly a secret. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationship*, *26*(5), 713-743.

- Child, J. T., Pearson, J. C., & Petronio, S. (2009). Blogging, communication, and privacy management: Development of the blogging privacy management measure. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, *60*(10), 2079-2094.
- Cherry, C. (1973). Regulative rules and constitutive rules. *Philosophical Quarterly*, *23*(93), 301-315.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2003). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences* (3rd ed.). Hillsdale: Erlbaum.
- Cohen, S. & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *98*(2), 310-357.
- Collins, N. L. & Miller L. C. (1994). The disclosure-liking link: From meta-analysis toward a dynamic reconceptualization. *Psychological Bulletin*, *116*, 457-475.
- Coyne, J. C. & Downey, G. (1991). Social factors and psychopathology: Stress, social support, and coping processes. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *42*, 401-425.
- Cruess, D. G., Antoni, M. H., Gonzalez, J., Fletcher, M. A., Klimas, N., Duran, R., Ironson, G., & Schneiderman, N. (2003). Sleep disturbance mediates the association between psychological distress and immune status among HIV-positive men and women on combination antiretroviral therapy. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, *54*(3), 185-189.
- Dailey, R. M. & Palomares, N. A. (2004). Strategic topic avoidance: An investigation of topic avoidance frequency, strategies used, and relational correlates. *Communication Monographs*, *71*(4), 471-496.

- Davies, P. T., Cummings, E. M., & Winter, M. A. (2004). Pathways between profiles of family functioning, child security in the interparental subsystem, and child psychological problems. *Development and Psychopathology, 16*, 525-550.
- Delia, J. (1977). Constructivism and the study of human communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 63(1)*, 66-81.
- Derlega, V. J. & Chaikin, A. L. (1977). Privacy and self-disclosure in social relationships. *Journal of Social Issues, 33(3)*, 102-115.
- Dirks, S. E. & Metts, S. (2010). An investigation of the support process: Decision, enactment, and outcome. *Communication Studies, 61(4)*, 391-411.
- Dunkel-Schetter, C., Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1987). Correlates of social support receipt. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53(1)*, 71-80.
- Dunkel-Schetter, C. & Skokan, L. A. (1990). Determinants of social support provision in personal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 7*, 437-450.
- Dunkel-Schetter, C. & Wortman, C. B. (1982). The interpersonal dynamics of cancer: Problems in social relationships and their impact on the patient. In H. S. Friedman & M. R. DiMatteo (Eds.), *Interpersonal issues in health care* (pp. 69-100). New York: Academic Press.
- Edwards, L. V. (2006). Perceived social support and HIV/AIDS medication adherence among African American women. *Qualitative Health Research, 16(5)*, 679-691.
- Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A., Carlo, G., Speer, A. L., Switzer, G., Karbon, M., & Troyer, D. (1993). The relations of empathy-related emotions and maternal practices to children's comforting behavior. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 55*, 131-150.

- Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A., Karbon, M., Murphy, B. C., Carlo, G., & Wosinski, M. (1996). Relations of school children's comforting behavior to empathy-related reactions and shyness. *Social Development, 5*(3), 330-351.
- Ensel, W. M. & Lin, N. (1991). The life stress paradigm and psychological distress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 32*(4), 321-341.
- Epping-Jordan, J. E., Compas, B. E., Osowiecki, D. M., Oppedisano, G., Gerhardt, C., Primo, K., & Krag, D. N. (1999). Psychological adjustment in breast cancer: processes of emotional distress. *Health Psychology, 18*(4), 315-326.
- Fabes, R. A., Eisenberg, N., Karbon, M., Troyer, D., & Switzer, G. (1994). The relational of children's emotion regulation to their vicarious emotional responses and comforting behaviors. *Child Development, 65*, 1678-1693.
- Farrar, D. E. & Glauber, R. R. (1967). Multicollinearity in regression analysis: The problem revisited. *The Review of Economics and Statistics, 49*(1), 92-107.
- Farrell, A. D. & Bruce, S. E. (1997). Impact of exposure to community violence on violent behavior and emotional distress among urban adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 26*(1), 2-14.
- Firth-Cozens, J. (1987). Emotional distress in junior house officers. *British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition), 295*(6597), 533-536.
- Frese, M. (1999). Social support as a moderator of the relationship between work stressors and psychological dysfunctioning: A longitudinal study with objective measures. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 4*(3), 179-192.
- Galvin, K. (2003). International and transracial adoption: A communication research agenda. *Journal of Family Communication, 3*(4), 237-253.

- Guerrero, L. K. & Afifi, W. A. (1995). Some things are better left unsaid: Topic avoidance in family relationships. *Communication Quarterly*, 43(3), 276-296.
- Hawk, S. T., Hale III, W. W., & Meeus, W. (2008). Adolescents' perceptions of privacy invasion in reaction to parental solicitation and control. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 28(4), 583-608.
- Helgeson, V. S. & Cohen, S. (1996). Social support and adjustment to cancer: Reconciling descriptive, correlational, and intervention research. *Health Psychology*, 15(2), 135-148.
- Hobfoll, S. E. & Stokes, J. P. (1988). The process and mechanics of social support. In S. W. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships*, (pp. 497-517). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Horwitz, A. V. (1994). Predictors of adult sibling social support for the seriously mentally ill: An exploratory study. *Journal of Family Issues*, 15(2), 272-289.
- Horwitz, A. V., Tessler, R. C., Fisher, G. A., & Gamache, G. M. (1992). The role of adult siblings in providing social support to the severely mentally ill. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 54(1), 233-241.
- House (1981). *Work stress and social support*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- House, J. S. & Kahn, R. L. (1985). Measures and concepts of social support. In S. Cohen & S. L. Syme (Eds.), *Social support and health* (pp. 83-108). New York: Academic Press.
- Hoybye, M. T., Johansen, C., Tjornhoj-Thomsen, T. (2005). Online interaction: Effects of storytelling in an internet breast cancer support group. *Psycho-oncology*, 14(3), 211-220.
- Hudson, A. L., Lee, K. A., Miramontes, H., & Portillo, C. J. (2001). Social interactions, perceived support, and level of distress in HIV-positive women. *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, 12(4), 68-76.

- Humphreys, J., Lee, K., Neylan, T., & Marmar, C. (2001). Psychological and physical distress of sheltered battered women. *Health Care for Women International, 22*, 401-414.
- Huston, T. L., Caughlin, J. P., Houts, R. M., Smith, S. E., & George, L. J. (2001). The connubial crucible: Newlywed years as predictors of marital delight, distress, and divorce. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80*(2), 237-252.
- Ingram, K. M., Betz, N. E., Mindes, E. J., Schmitt, M. M., & Smith, N. G. (2001). Unsupportive responses from others concerning a stressful life event: Development of the unsupportive social interactions inventory. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 20*(2), 173-207.
- Ingram, K. M., Jones, D. A., Fass, R. J., Neidig, J. L. & Song, Y. S. (1999). Social support and unsupportive social interactions: Their association with depression among people living with HIV. *AIDS Care, 11*(3), 313-329.
- Ironson, G., Friedman, A., Klimas, N., Antoni, M., Fletcher, M. A., LaPerriere, A., Simoneau, J., & Schneiderman, N. (1994). Distress, denial, and low adherence to behavioral interventions predict faster disease progression in gay men infected with human immunodeficiency virus. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 1*(1), 90-105.
- Jacobson, D. E. (1986). Types and timing of social support. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 27*(3), 250-264.
- Jacobvitz, D., Hazen, N., Curran, M., & Hitchens, K. (2004). Observations of early triadic family interactions: Boundary disturbances in the family predict symptoms of depression, anxiety, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in middle childhood. *Development and Psychopathology, 16*, 577-592.
- Jones, W. H., Freemon, J. E., & Goswick, R. A. (1972). Timing of self-disclosure and its effects on personal attraction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 24*, 358-365.

- Jourard, S. M. (1971). *The transparent self*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Jung, J. (1997). Balance and source of social support in relation to well-being. *The Journal of General Psychology, 124*(1), 77-90.
- Kaplan, B. H., Cassel, J. C., & Gore, S. (1977). Social support and health. *Medical Care, 15*(5), 47-58.
- Kelly, A. E. & McKillop, K. J. (1996). Consequences of revealing personal secrets. *Psychological Bulletin, 120*(3), 450-465.
- Kessler, R. C. & Neighbors, H. W. (1986). A new perspective on the relationships among race, social class, and psychological distress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 27*(2), 107-115.
- King, K. B., Reis, H. T., Porter, L. A., & Norsen, L. H. (1993). Support and long-term recovery from coronary surgery: Effects on patients and spouses. *Health Psychology, 12*(1), 56-63.
- Kitson, G. C. & Sussman, M. B. (1982). Marital complaints, demographic characteristics, and symptoms of mental distress in divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 44*(1), 87-101.
- Knobf, M. T. (1986). Physical and psychologic distress associated with adjuvant chemotherapy in women with breast cancer. *Journal of Clinical Oncology, 4*(5), 678-684.
- Knobloch, L. K. (2008). Extending the emotion-in-relationships model to conversation. *Communication Research, 35*, 822-848.
- Knobloch, L. K. & Donovan-Kicken, E. (2006). Perceived involvement of network members in courtships: A test of the relational turbulence model. *Personal Relationships, 13*(3), 281-302.
- Kramer, M. W. & Hess, J. A. (2002). Communication rules for the display of emotions in organizational settings. *Management Communication Quarterly, 16*(1), 66-80.

- Kutner M. H., Nachtsheim C. J., Neter J., & William L. (2005). *Applied linear statistical models* (5th ed.). Irwin, CA: McGraw-Hill.
- Lay, C. & Nguyen, T. (1998). The role acculturation-related and acculturation non-specific daily hassles: Vietnamese-Canadian students and psychological distress. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 30*(3), 172-181.
- Lin, N. & Ensel, W. M. (1989). Life stress and health: Stressors and resources. *American Sociological Review, 54*(3), 382-399.
- Lindorff, M. (2005). Determinants of received social support: Who gives what to managers?. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 22*(3), 323-337.
- Logue, J. N., Hansen, H., & Struening, E. (1979). Emotional and physical distress following Hurricane Agnes in Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania. *Public Health Reports, 94*(6), 495-502.
- Lowenthal, M. F. & Haven, C. (1968). Interaction and adaptation: Intimacy as a critical variable. *American Sociological Review, 33*(1), 20-30.
- Metzger, M. J. (2007). Communication privacy management in electronic commerce. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12*(2), 335-361.
- Mirowsky, J. & Ross, C. E. (1986). Social patterns of distress. *Annual Review of Sociology, 12*, 23-45.
- Mirowsky, J. & Ross, C. E. (1992). Age and depression. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 33*(3), 187-205.
- Mitchell, C. U. & LaGory, M. (2002). Social capital and mental distress in an impoverished community. *City & Community, 1*(2), 199-222.

- Parker, P. Arthur, M. B., & Inkson, K. (2004). Career communities: A preliminary exploration of member-defined career support structures. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 25*(4), 489-514.
- Parker, T., Hill, J. W., & Goodnow, J. (1989). The impact of special-needs children on their parents' perceptions of family structural interaction patterns. *Family Therapy, 16*(3), 259-270.
- Paulhus, D. L. (1984). Two-component models of socially desirable responding. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 46*(3), 598-609.
- Pearlin, L. I. & Schooler, C. (1978). The structure of coping. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 19*, 2-21.
- Petronio, S. (1991). Communication boundary management: A theoretical model of managing disclosure of private information between marital couples. *Communication theory, 1*, 311-335.
- Petronio, S. (2000). The boundaries of privacy: Praxis of everyday life. In S. Petronio (Ed.), *Balancing the secrets of private disclosures*, (pp. 37-50). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Petronio, S. (2002). *Boundaries of privacy: Dialectics of disclosure*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Petronio, S. (2004). Road to developing communication privacy management theory: Narrative in progress, please stand by. *The Journal of Family Communication, 48*(3&4), 193-207.
- Petronio, S. (2007). Translational research endeavors and the practices of communication privacy management. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 25*(3), 218-222.

- Petronio & Caughlin (2006). Communication privacy management theory: Understanding families. In D. O. Braithwaite & L. A. Baxter (Eds.), *Engaging theories in family communication: multiple perspectives*, (pp. 35-49). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Petronio, S., Reeder, H. M., Hecht, M. L., Ros-Mendoza, T. M. (1996). Disclosure of sexual abuse by children and adolescents. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 24, 181-199.
- Petronio, S., Sargent, J., Andea, L., Reganis, P., & Cichocki, D. (2004). Family and friends as healthcare advocates: Dilemmas of confidentiality and privacy. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 21(1), 33-52.
- Reisberg, D. & Heuer, F. (2004). Memory for emotional events. In D. Reisberg & P. Hertel (Eds.), *Memory and emotion* (pp. 3-41). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ross, C. E. & Mirowsky, J. (1989). Explaining the social patterns of depression: Control and problem solving – or support and talking. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 30, 206-219.
- Rusbult, C. E., Drigotas, S. M., & Verette, J. (1994). The investment model: An interdependence analysis of commitment processes and relationship maintenance phenomena. In D. J. Canary & L. Stafford (Eds.) *Communication and relational maintenance* (pp. 115-139). New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Sarason, B. R., Pierce, G. R., & Sarason, I. G. (1990). Social support: the sense of acceptance and the role of relationships. In B. R. Sarason, I. G. Sarason, & G. R. Pierce (eds.), *Social Support: An interactional view* (pp. 97-128). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Sarason, I. G. & Sarason, B. R. (1985). *Social Support: Theory, research, and applications*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

- Schaefer, C., Coyne, J. C., & Lazarus, R. S. (1981). The health-related functions of social support. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 4*(4), 381-406.
- Schall, M. S. (1983). A communication-rules approach to organizational culture. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 28*, 557-581.
- Serido, J., Almeida, D. M., & Wethington, E. (2004). Chronic stressors and daily hassles: Unique and interactive relationships with psychological distress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 45*(1), 17-33.
- Sherbourne, C. D. & Stewart, A. L. (1991). The MOS social support survey. *Social Science & Medicine, 32*(6), 705-714.
- Shumaker, S. A. & Brownell, A. (1984). Toward a theory of social support: Closing conceptual gaps. *Journal of Social Issues, 40*(4), 11-36.
- Simpson, J. A. (1987). The dissolution of romantic relationships: Factors involved in relationship stability and emotional distress. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53*(4), 683-692.
- Solomon, D. H. & Knobloch, L. K. (2001). Relationship uncertainty, partner interference, and intimacy within dating relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 18*(6), 804-820.
- Spiro, H. (1971). Privacy in comparative perspective. In J. R. Pennock & J. W. Chapman (Eds.), *Privacy* (pp. 121-148). New York: Atherton Press.
- Stein, M. D., Freedberg, K. A., Sullivan, L. M., Savetsky, J., Levenson, S. M., Hingson, R., & Samet, J. H. (1998). Sexual ethics: Disclosure of HIV-positive status to partners. *Archives of Internal Medicine, 158*, 253-257.

- Stevens, E. E. (1992). Reciprocity in social support: An advantage for the aging family. *Families in Society*, 73, 533-541.
- Stiff, J. B., Dillard, J. P., Somera, L., Kim, H., & Sleight, C. (1988). Empathy, communication, and prosocial behavior. *Communication Monographs*, 55, 198-213.
- Stokes, J. P. (1983). Predicting satisfaction with social support from social network structure. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 11(2), 141-152.
- Storksén, I., Roysamb, E., Holmen, T. L., & Tambs, K. (2006). Adolescent adjustment and well-being: Effects of parental divorce and distress. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 47, 75-84.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (2008). *The NSDUH report: Serious psychological distress and receipt of mental health services*. Rockville, MD.
- Tchekmedyan, N. S., Kallich, J., McDermott, A., Fayers, P., & Erder, M. H. (2003). The relationship between psychologic distress and cancer-related fatigue. *Cancer*, 98(1), 198-203.
- Thoits, P. A. (1984). Explaining distributions of psychological vulnerability: Lack of social support in the face of life stress. *Social Forces*, 63(2), 453-481.
- Thoits, P. A. (1985). Social support and psychological well-being: Theoretical possibilities. In I. G. Sarason & B. R. Sarason (Eds.), *Social support: Theory, research, and application* (pp. 51-72). Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Thoits, P. A. (1995). Stress, coping, and social support processes: Where are we? What next?. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 35, 53-79.

- Tice, D. M., Bratslavsky, E., & Baumeister, R. F. (2001). Emotional distress regulation takes precedence over impulse control: If you feel bad, do it!. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80*(1), 53-67.
- Trobst, K. K., Collins, R. L., & Embree, J. M. (1994). The role of emotion in social support provision: Gender, empathy, and expressions of distress. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 11*(1), 45-62.
- Turner, R. J., Wheaton, B., & Lloyd, D. A. (1995). The epidemiology of social stress. *American Sociological Review, 60*, 104-125.
- Uchino, B. N. (2006). Social support and health: A review of physiological process potentially underlying links to disease outcomes. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 29*(4), 377-387.
- Uchino, B. N., Cacioppo, J. T., & Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K. (1996). The relationship between social support and physiological processes: A review with emphasis on underlying mechanisms and implications for health. *Psychological Bulletin, 119*(3), 488-531.
- Uehara, E. E. (1995). Reciprocity reconsidered: Gouldner's "Moral Norm of Reciprocity" and social support. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 12*(4), 483-502.
- University of Georgia Career Center. (2008). *UGA profile*. Retrieved from <http://www.career.uga.edu/employers/ugaprofile.html>
- Ulbrich, P. M., Warheit, G. J., & Zimmerman, R. S. (1989). Race, socioeconomic status, and psychological distress: An examination of differential vulnerability. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 30*(1), 131-146.
- VanLear, C. A. (1991). Testing a cyclical model of communicative openness in relationship development: Two longitudinal studies. *Communication Monographs, 58*(4), 337-361.

- Volk, R. J., Edwards, D. W., Lewis, R. A., & Sprenkle, D. H., (1989). Family systems of adolescent substance abusers. *Family Relations*, 38, 266-272.
- Walen, H. R. & Lachman, M. E. (2000). Social support and strain from partner, family, and friends: Costs and benefits for men and women in adulthood. *Journal of social & Personal Relationships*, 17(1), 5-30.
- Weber, K. M. & Solomon, D. H. (2008). Locating relationship and communication issues among stressors associated with breast cancer. *Health Communication*, 23, 548-449.
- Wentzel, K. R. & McNamara, C. C. (1999). Interpersonal relationships, emotional distress, and prosocial behavior in middle school. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 19(1), 114-125.
- Xu, Y. & Burleson, B. R. (2001). Effects of sex, culture, and support type on perceptions of spousal social support: An assessment of the “support gap” hypothesis in early marriage. *Human Communication Research*, 27(4), 535-566.
- Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., Gordon, K. F. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52(1), 30-41.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Scholars have identified other types of support (e.g. network, esteem); however, these types of support can be more broadly categorized as instrumental, informational, or emotional support. Esteem support, for example, involves feedback about one's self worth, and it can be classified as a more specific type of emotional support. Network support describes the process of connecting the support recipient with other people who will offer them comfort, esteem, or companionship, and can be classified as a type of instrumental support (King, Reis, Porter, & Norsen, 1993).

² These demographics are reflective of the local student population (The University of Georgia Career Center, 2008).

³ Students were given the option to participate in this study, to participate in another research study, or to complete a comparable writing assignment to receive credit.

⁴ Although the support subscales are correlated with one another, previous research has established the five types of support as distinct constructs (House & Kahn, 1985; Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991; Xu & Burleson, 2001). Sherbourne and Stewart (1991) found high discriminant validity between the types of support in the measure. Additionally, a series of confirmatory factor analyses found that model fit was better when the support subscales were evaluated separately as opposed to combined to create a higher-order support variable (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991). Moreover, scholars have found that the support types are differently associated with a number of outcome variables. For example, Jacobson (1986) found that some types of support were more useful in evaluating different stressful situations than other types of support

(e.g., crisis, transition). Taken together, these results suggest that the support types are conceptually distinct; thus, I chose to evaluate each type of support independently.

⁵ When co-ownership predicted instrumental support, the interaction between support condition and co-ownership of the distressing event was significant, $\beta = .67$, $t(1, 233) = 2.37$, $p < .05$. This can be interpreted to suggest that there is a stronger positive association between co-ownership and instrumental support for participants in the *did not offer support* condition, and a weaker positive association between co-ownership and instrumental support for participants in the *did offer support* condition.

⁶ When clarity about support rules predicted emotional support, the interaction between support condition and clarity about support rules was significant, $\beta = .48$, $t(1, 231) = 2.07$, $p < .05$. Therefore, there is a stronger positive association between clarity about support rules and emotional support for participants in the *did not offer support* condition, and a weaker positive association between clarity about support rules and emotional support for participants in the *did offer support* condition.

⁷ Interaction terms between the survey condition and the independent variables were also evaluated for secondary analyses. The interaction terms were not consistently significant; therefore, they were not included in the final analyses to maintain a more parsimonious model. Notably, when emotional support was the dependent variable, the interactions between survey condition and boundary permeability ($\beta = -.59$, $t(9, 226) = -2.24$, $p < .05$) and survey condition and clarity about support rules ($\beta = .99$, $t(9, 226) = 2.90$, $p < .01$) were significant. In addition, when instrumental support was the dependent variable, the interaction between survey condition and coownership was significant ($\beta = 1.07$, $t(9, 226) = 2.86$, $p < .01$).

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your sex? Male Female

2. How old are you? years

3. What year in school are you?
 Freshman
 Sophomore
 Junior
 Senior
 Other: _____

4. What is your major? [text box]

5. What is your race or ethnicity? Please check all that apply.
 Asian
 Black or African American
 Hispanic or Latino
 Native American or Alaska Native
 Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 White or Caucasian
 Other: _____

6. What is your preferred religion?
 Atheism
 Buddhism
 Christianity
 Hinduism
 Islam
 Judaism
 No religious affiliation
 Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX B

DESCRIPTION OF THE SUPPORT SITUATION

Please think about the most recent time that a close friend, romantic partner, or family member experienced a stressful or traumatic event AND you responded to that situation by offering him or her some kind of support. Please take your time to reflect on this person, the situation they were in, and how you responded to the situation.

In this section, you will answer questions about that close friend, relational partner, or family member, about the situation that he or she was in, and about your response to the situation.

Please type a description of the stressful or traumatic event that your friend, family member, or romantic partner experienced. Please use as many words as you feel are necessary in order to accurately describe that event.

[text box]

How long ago did that stressful event occur?

Months
 Years

How old was the person when the stressful event occurred? _____

What is the sex of this person?

Female
 Male

Please select the term that best describes your relationship with that person?

Romantic partner
 Casual dating partner
 Spouse
 Sister
 Brother
 Mother
 Father
 Casual friend
 Close friend
 Classmate
 Other (please specify) _____

Have you ever been in a similarly distressing situation? _____ Yes _____ No

Now we'd like you to describe your response to that person following the stressful or traumatic event. Keep in mind that sometimes even though we would like to help our friends, romantic partners, and family members when they are distressed, we are unable to do so. Please reflect on your response to the stressful or traumatic event and think about how you really reacted to your partner.

Following the stressful or traumatic event, did you try to talk to your partner about the event?
 Yes No

Please explain to us why you talked with this person about this event. Please use as many words as you feel are necessary to describe your actions.

[text box]

Please explain to us why you did not speak with this person about this event. Please use as many words as you feel are necessary to describe your actions.

[text box]

Did this person communicate with you about the distressing event?
 Yes No

When communicating with you about the distressing event, what did this person tell you specifically? Please check all that apply.

This person communicated...

- When the event happened
- The location of the event
- Details about the event
- Complications or issues related to the event
- Outcomes of the event
- How he or she felt about the event
- What he or she thought about the event
- Who was involved with the event
- Why the event was traumatic or distressing to him or her

APPENDIX C

SEVERITY OF DISTRESS

Some events are more stressful or traumatic than others. Please help us understand how stressful this event was for this person by responding to the items below.

Use the following scale to answer the next questions:

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1. This event was distressing to this person.
2. This event was a serious occurrence in his or her life.
3. The event was stressful for him or her
4. This event was very difficult for him or her to cope with.
5. This event was very emotional for him or her.

APPENDIX D

CO-OWNERSHIP OF THE DISTRESSING EVENT

We would like you to think about the communication you had with the other person about the traumatic or stressful event. The following questions ask you to reflect on the types of exchanges that you may have had with this person following that event.

Use the following scale to answer the questions about your communication:

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1. I was slow to talk with the other person about the distressing event.
2. The other person limited what he or she discussed with me about the distressing event.
3. The other person was slow to talk to me about the distressing event.
4. To minimize my understanding of his or her distressing event the other person used shorthand (e.g., pseudonyms or limited details) when discussing the event with me.
5. I limited what I discussed about the distressing event with the other person.
6. I did not tell the other person about certain issues related to the distressing event.
7. The other person expressed regret that he or she had shared some information about the distressing event with me.
8. I expressed regret that I had shared some information about the distressing event with the other person.
9. The other person did not tell me about certain issues related to the distressing event.
10. To minimize his or her understanding of the distressing event, I used shorthand (e.g., pseudonyms or limited details) when discussing the event with the other person.

APPENDIX E

BOUNDARY PERMEABILITY

Continue thinking about the other person and the traumatic or stressful event he or she experienced. The following questions ask you about particular types of communication you may have had with him or her following that event.

Use the following scale to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements concerning your communication with the other person after the distressing event occurred:

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1. When the other person faced the distressing event, he or she felt comfortable talking to me about it.
2. The information that the other person gave me about the distressing event was long and detailed.
3. The other person told me intimate, personal things about the distressing event without hesitation.
4. The other person updated me frequently about the distressing event.
5. When the other person faced the distressing event, I felt comfortable talking to him or her about it.
6. I gave the other person long and detailed information about the distressing event.
7. I told the other person intimate, personal things about the distressing event without hesitation.
8. I updated the other person frequently about the distressing event.

APPENDIX F

CLARITY ABOUT SUPPORT RULES

Continue thinking about the person who faced the stressful or traumatic event. Please take a few minutes to reflect on conversations you had with your partner about how to provide support as he or she faced the traumatic event. We would like you to answer some questions about those conversations and the feedback he or she gave you about how to offer him or her support.

Use the following scale to answer the questions about the discussions you had with the other person about how to support him or her following the stressful or traumatic event:

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1. After the distressing event, I could discuss my beliefs about offering support with the other person without feeling restrained or embarrassed.
2. I found it easy to talk with the other person about how I should support him or her after the event.
3. I am very satisfied with how the other person and I talked about how I should support him or her after the event.
4. The other person was a good listener during discussions we had about how I should offer him or her support after the distressing event.
5. It was very easy for me to express all my true feelings about offering support to the other person after that event.
6. When I asked questions about how I should offer support to the other person, I got honest answers from him or her.
7. The other person discussed his or her beliefs with me about how he or she would like to be supported without feeling restrained or embarrassed.
8. The other person found it easy to talk with me about how I should support him or her after the stressful event.
9. The other person was very satisfied with how we talked about how I should be offering support to him/her after the event.
10. I was a good listener when the other person and I talked about how I should support him or her.
11. It was very easy for the other person to express his or her true feelings about how I should offer him or her support after the distressing event.
12. When the other person asked questions about the way I offered support, he or she got honest answers from me.

APPENDIX G

SUPPORT RULE TURBULENCE

Please think about the other person and the stressful or traumatic event he or she went through.

Using the following scale, mark the answer that best indicates your response to each item:

1	2	3	4
Never or not at all	Occasionally	Frequently	All of the time

Following the stressful or traumatic event, how often did the other person...

1. Make it easy for you to provide support?
2. Make you think the amount of support you were providing him or her was inadequate?
3. Make you think you gave him or her support in the wrong place?
4. Interfere with your ability to offer him or her support?
5. Make you feel like you gave him or her support at the wrong time?
6. Help you achieve your support goals?
7. Make you feel like you were providing the wrong amount of support?
8. Make you think you needed to provide him or her with a different type of support?
9. Make you feel like you offered the right kind of support to him or her?
10. Make it difficult for you to communicate support to him or her?
11. Make you feel like you offered him or her support in front of the wrong person?
12. Make you feel like you were providing him or her with the wrong type of support?

APPENDIX H

PROVIDING INSTRUMENTAL, INFORMATIONAL, EMOTIONAL, ESTEEM, AND
NETWORK SUPPORT

Continue to think about the actions that you engaged in when after this person experienced the stressful or traumatic event that you described. The next set of questions asks you to think about possible behaviors that you may have engaged in.

Use the following scale to indicate the extent to which you engaged in these behaviors after the other person experienced the stressful or traumatic event that you described.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all

Very much

1. I told him/her that s/he is still a good person even when s/he has a problem.
2. I comforted the other person when she or he was upset by showing some physical affection (e.g., hugs, hand-holding, shoulder patting, etc.).
3. I expressed understanding of the situation and disclosed a similar situation that I have experienced before.
4. I expressed willingness to help the other person when s/he was in need of it.
5. I promised to keep problems that I discussed with him or her in confidence.
6. I asserted that he or she will have a better future than most people will.
7. I helped the other person do the things he or she needed to do.
8. I provided the other person with hope or confidence.
9. I analyzed the situation with the other person and told him or her about available choices and options.
10. I gave the other person reasons why s/he should or should not do something.
11. I gave advice about what to do.
12. I expressed sorrow or regret for the other person's situation.
13. I connected the other person with people to confide in.
14. I offered to lend the other person something (e.g., money).
15. I expressed agreement with the other person's perspective on various situations.
16. I taught the other person how to do something s/he did not know how to do.
17. I reminded the other person of the availability of friends who shared similar interests or experiences with him or her.
18. I assured the other person that s/he is a worthwhile person.
19. I helped him or her to find people who could assist him or her with things.
20. I took the other person to a place he or she needed to go.
21. I offered to provide the other person with access to new friends.

22. I joined the other person in some activity to alleviate stress.
23. I connected the person with other people whom s/he could turn to for help.
24. I offered attentive comments when the other person spoke.
25. I expressed esteem or respect for a competency or personal quality of the other person.
26. I provided detailed information about the situation or about skills needed to deal with the situation.