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Abstract

Forgiveness is a process culminating in relationship renegotiation and transformation following the offering and acceptance of amends. The culmination of the forgiveness process is facilitated by the acknowledgement of a transgression, as well as identifying the harmed person and the transgressor. However, responsibility for a transgression may not always be clear, potentially compelling a perceived transgressor to make amends for a transgression they did not commit. Situated within the context of a person accusing a friend of a transgression, a perceived transgressor reframing their role to that of a supportive friend is examined as a potential solution to this problem. Using the communication theory of identity (CTI) and message design logic (MDL) as guiding theories, identity gaps are examined as antecedents of communicative interaction by influencing changes in relational and interpersonal communication satisfaction, as well as ongoing negative affect and depressive symptoms. Additionally, different messages (expressive, conventional, and rhetorical) are analyzed to determine participant evaluations as to the helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness of these messages in reframing the perceived transgressor's role to a supportive friend. Results concern different identity gaps being involved in reductions of relational and interpersonal communication satisfaction and increases in ongoing negative affect, and rhetorical messages being evaluated as highly helpful, supportive, sensitive, appropriate, and effective. Theoretical and methodological implications for both CTI and MDL are discussed, as well as connections of the findings to gaslighting and possible future research on the negative aspects of forgiveness as a communication phenomenon.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Harper and Cameron are friends who often share their difficult work experiences with each other to help cope with workplace stress. This system works for the two friends, and their shared support has allowed them to strengthen their friendship over time. However, one evening, Harper was not able to respond to texts and calls from Cameron due to volunteer commitments, leaving Cameron to cope with an anxiety attack alone until Harper responded a few hours later. Cameron views Harper's lack of response to his numerous texts and calls, at such a crucial time as an anxiety attack, to be a relational transgression. Harper disagrees, however, as she responded as soon as she saw the texts and calls from Cameron. Harper, despite disagreeing that her lack of response is a relational transgression, still wants to seek Cameron's forgiveness, so she tries to figure out how to manage seeking forgiveness without accepting blame for a transgression she feels she did not commit.

The situation described above, as well as similar situations where a person called upon to apologize does not think an apology necessary, places the relational interactants in a context not adequately illuminated in the communication literature. This confrontation of a perceived transgressor (as Cameron does with Harper) would, potentially, initiate the process of forgiveness-seeking (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). In this context, the individual has been labeled as a transgressor or offender by one person or many others but does not deem that label to be appropriate, thus becoming a perceived transgressor. As the, the perceived transgressor has, at least in their perspective, been wrongfully accused of a transgression. Nevertheless, the circumstances may be such where, despite not thinking an apology is necessary, the perceived transgressor believes it is necessary to engage in forgiveness-seeking for reasons outside of their own lack of need to be forgiven. These reasons may involve a multitude of face and identity concerns, such as the concerns for how one views and exhibits their own identity (personal and

enacted identities as defined by the communication theory of identity, CTI), their identity and role in their relationship to the person accusing them (relational identity), or even how they are viewed within their community (communal identity) (Hecht, 1993). As such, the perceived transgressor ultimately decides to engage with the transgressor label, even though it may not adequately apply, and engages in the forgiveness process by seeking forgiveness. By engaging in forgiveness-seeking under these circumstances, the individual is approaching forgiveness as a performance, thus adding the concerns of face and identity needs into the forgiveness process.

The existing forgiveness communication literature provides a firm foundation for our understanding of the forgiveness process. However, what is still unclear is the nature and importance of performance in the forgiveness process in terms of fulfilling the necessary tasks such as relationship renegotiation and relationship transformation, which are listed as the final stages of the forgiveness process (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Kelley, Waldron, & Kloeber, 2019). This lack of knowledge is significant because of the question of whether the ends of the forgiveness process can be achieved without the perceived transgressor possessing a genuine desire to seek forgiveness. In other words, are transgressors granted forgiveness because of their genuine desire to be forgiven, or because they were convincing enough in their performance of forgiveness-seeking to those they sought forgiveness from? By forgiveness state, I am referring to the psychology literature noting the state of forgiveness as reducing unforgiveness, with unforgiveness including higher levels of cortisol and other hormonal changes (on the part of the transgressed) which may bring about ill-health (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Forgiveness is noted as one of multiple ways unforgiveness may be resolved, which can include comforting through social support (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). This brings about the title of this dissertation, which asks if the “right” words (by reference to magic words) are what might bring

about the presence of forgiveness within the relationship by virtue of supporting or comforting the transgressed (the person who feels they have been harmed through a transgression). Therefore, this dissertation serves to examine communicative acts as performance within the forgiveness process in both fulfilling the tasks of the process, as well as how these performances may impact individual identities and social roles.

As such, in this introductory chapter, I will discuss the relationship between forgiveness and performance, particularly in reference to forgiveness-seeking. First, I will discuss the forgiveness process and identify potential contexts where performance of forgiveness-seeking may be most applicable. Second, I will discuss the overall importance of this study and the need for this dissertation. Third, I will discuss the overarching theoretical perspectives that will be utilized in this dissertation. Finally, I will then provide a brief overview for the rest of the dissertation. Performance, when utilized for forgiveness-seeking, may serve to both protect identity, as well as serve the function of furthering the forgiveness process to completion, by allowing the transgressed to feel comforted.

The Forgiveness Process

To preface this conversation, it is important to review the forgiveness process. The forgiveness process is described as encompassing the seven tasks of (1) confronting the transgression (with the transgression being an offense determined through relational norms, with an extreme example being cheating on a romantic partner), (2) making sense of the transgression (determining the significance of the transgression to the relationship), (3) managing emotions, (4) seeking forgiveness, (5) granting forgiveness, (6) renegotiating the relationship, and (7) transforming the relationship (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Kelley et al., 2019). Confronting the transgression involves at least one relational actor finding out about the transgression, or having

the transgression revealed to at least one relational actor by a third party (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Making sense of the transgression involves determining the impact of the transgression, as well as the reasoning for why the transgression was committed (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Managing emotions involves working through the various emotions resulting from the transgression, as well as those stemming from detecting the transgression (Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Next, the tasks of seeking forgiveness and granting forgiveness involve different strategies the transgressor may use to request forgiveness and the transgressed may use to extend forgiveness depending on the context, severity, and other relevant details from the transgression (Waldron & Kelley, 2005; 2008; Kelley & Waldron, 2005). Renegotiating the relationship involves the establishment of new relational boundaries, norms, and values through relational talk to establish guidelines for future interaction between the relational partners (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Finally, transforming the relationship involves implementing the new boundaries, norms, and values, which may alter the nature of the relationship to be anything from reconciliation to dissolution, or somewhere in between (Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Performing Forgiveness-Seeking

As mentioned above, what has not been examined in significant depth in forgiveness communication is the relationship between the *performance of forgiveness* and the outcomes of the forgiveness process. What I mean by the performance of forgiveness is the aspect of prioritizing the management of role and identity performance (such as explained in the dramaturgical perspective; Goffman, 1959) within the various aspects of the forgiveness process whether one feels the *need to apologize* exists or not, which has not largely been addressed in the forgiveness literature (Waldron & Kelley, 2017). We know relational actors approach the

forgiveness context with different understandings of the nature of the transgression, the level of relational significance of the transgression, and different ideas about how to approach enacting the various aspects of the forgiveness process (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Kelley et al., 2019).

As these differences arise from individual and shared understandings of morality, which contribute to relational norms (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017), it is reasonable to conclude identity and relational roles must also be maintained in this specific interaction as these components contribute to both an individual and relational sense of identity (Hecht, 1993). This, then, brings up the questions of: Does the performance of forgiveness facilitate or prohibit the progression of the forgiveness process? Can forgiveness-seeking as role and identity performance fulfill the same needs as forgiveness-seeking from those who accept the transgressor label? To be clear, the perceived transgressor may still want to experience forgiveness in addition to their prioritizing of role and identity management. However, the key here is whether what could be considered an apology is necessary, or if the perceived transgressor using supportive or comforting words may be deemed a sufficient forgiveness-seeking message by the transgressed. My argument is that supportive or comforting words may indeed be considered an appropriate and effective forgiveness-seeking message by the transgressed.

These questions and ideas encompass a potential new direction for forgiveness communication research by examining the *performance* of forgiveness-seeking. Until now, questions of performance within the forgiveness process have largely been relegated to the wayside as there has been a greater focus on explicating the forgiveness process and examining how shared morality is developed (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017). It is my contention the performance of forgiveness, in general, is within the scope of forgiveness communication

research because some lay conceptualizations (non-scholarly definitions) of forgiveness may require a higher level of performance for the forgiveness process to continue. This means the performance of forgiveness may not always be the extreme of a transgressor engaging in the entire forgiveness process in a performative manner to simply prove their engagement in the process. Rather, performance may be involved in different tasks of the forgiveness process to suit the needs and desires of both the individual and the specific audience the individual may be engaging. In this way, a person engaging in performance recognizes the needs of the audience, the context, and their own needs and, thus, orients their performance and their messages to seek a desired outcome even if they do not personally feel the need to apologize for a transgression.

Applying this understanding to forgiveness, the performance of forgiveness may require a perceived transgressor to work through the forgiveness process in addition to the goal of achieving forgiveness for a perceived wrong. In this case, forgiveness may not be the primary goal, because there are other relevant primary goals, which could include examples such as relational repair or face and identity management; even though the perceived transgressor does not feel the need to apologize for their behavior, they realize their relational partner does feel the need for them to do so. I recognize my use of the word *performance* may conjure images of an uncaring person only concerned with their image, but the person I am discussing may also certainly be someone who, while they do not think apologizing or seeking-forgiveness is needed on their part, is concerned about causing emotional harm to someone who already believes themselves to have been harmed or causing harm to a relationship they value. In this latter case, the individual in question may then choose to engage in forgiveness-seeking (and the other steps in the forgiveness process) with a goal of comforting, relational repair, or face and image management in addition to seeking forgiveness. As such, it is important to analyze and

understand these other goals individuals (perceived transgressors) may have in the forgiveness process, and how they create messages that manage the multiple, and potentially competing goals of comforting, relational repair, face and identity management, and seeking forgiveness.

Rationale for this Dissertation

When the current state of the forgiveness communication literature is considered, it is clear that space exists for further examination of other factors (such as performance of roles and identity during the process) that may fulfill the same or similar role as the forgiveness strategies already examined in the forgiveness communication literature which assumes that the transgressor perceived a *need* to apologize for certain behaviors. The bulk of the forgiveness communication literature focuses on specific strategies used in both forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting (Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Merolla & Zhang, 2011), without examining the production of messages aimed at eliciting goals such as forgiveness, or other goals of relational maintenance or role and identity performance besides those driven by a felt need to apologize on behalf of the transgressor. Now, the forgiveness communication literature is still quite young when the small number of scholars directly researching forgiveness is taken into account. One of the earliest studies on forgiveness communication was Kelley's (1998) qualitative investigation of different types of forgiveness-granting strategies, indicating the forgiveness communication work is only within its third decade.

Thus, as the sub-area of forgiveness communication is small and relatively new, it does make sense that the main concern would be to conceptualize, operationalize, and examine the antecedent conditions involved in fostering forgiveness, as well as the communicative processes involved within the forgiveness process. However, the forgiveness communication literature is now in a position where the steps (tasks) of the forgiveness process have been identified and

refined (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Kelley et al., 2019), the different forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting strategies have been tested (Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2005; Merolla & Zhang, 2011), and the forgiveness process has been connected to different contexts, such as conflict communication (Merolla, 2017; Long, 2022). The extension of the forgiveness communication literature into these new domains points to the recognition that forgiveness should be examined in new contexts and in conjunction with different communication phenomena.

There is another aspect where there is a need to study performance in the forgiveness process. This is the understanding that, as individuals approach interactions with multiple goals (Caughlin, 2010; O'Keefe, 1988), communicators will often construct and convey messages to attend to not just a primary goal (such as gaining forgiveness), but to other, simultaneous goals as well. In the forgiveness context, individuals may have other, simultaneous goals in addition to seeking forgiveness or restoring or transforming a relationship. Key here is the other, simultaneous goal of engagement in the forgiveness process to maintain face or a desired social image, due to how ubiquitous role and identity performance is in human interaction (Goffman, 1959; 1967; Hecht, 1993). This consideration brings in different theoretical perspectives concerning social role and identity performance as useful in examining the forgiveness process. In this context, a perceived transgressor may utilize different communicative processes, such as using different messages to manage face, to address the potential need to engage in forgiveness-seeking even if they do not personally feel they have done something that requires forgiveness.

We know facework is utilized in many different situations to manage one's image and persona, and this work has been examined in a multitude of different contexts (Goffman, 1959; 1967). Additionally, in reference to goals, we know that individuals often engage in

communicative situations with both primary and secondary goals (Caughlin, 2010); and they design messages, based on their level of communication competence, to address these goals simultaneously (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987; Caughlin et al., 2008). In this case, as role and identity performance have a basis in social norms and expectations (Goffman, 1959), these norms and expectations can encourage perceived transgressors to seek forgiveness, even if they did not commit the transgression itself or perceive their behavior as a transgression. In our case, the perceived transgressor may feel some level of pressure to respond to the accusations against them by seeking forgiveness, even though they may not personally believe an apology is necessary.

In the situation where a perceived transgressor does not believe the transgression warrants a sincere apology, they may, nevertheless still apologize because they have the goal of restoring the relationship or managing their image. In these situations, the primary goal may be to maintain a certain identity or social image and could also include the necessity of maintaining an influential position within the relationship or the community. Research is needed, therefore, to understand how performance is integral in maintaining an identity or social image when engaging in the forgiveness process.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study also benefits from the connection to multiple different cross-disciplinary theoretical perspectives. In the order I am discussing them, these theoretical perspectives are the communication theory of identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993), multiple goals theory (MGT; Caughlin, 2010, and message design logics (MDL; O'Keefe, 1988). Some of these perspectives have accompanying literature that is important to discuss, so I will precede my discussion of CTI by

providing an overview of the dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959, 1967), and follow my discussion of MDL by elaborating relevant aspects of the comforting literature.

As a precursor discussion to CTI, I will, first, discuss the dramaturgical perspective, which describes and explains social acts as akin to the performance of actors/actresses in a play (Goffman, 1959; 1967). Utilizing this perspective, not only are a person's actions examined as performance, but also the remaining theatrical elements, such as the scene and context, props, and their relations with other actors/actresses are included in arriving at a full understanding of social interaction (Goffman, 1959; 1967). Even further, consideration must also be made to the role a person plays within any scene or context, because of the necessity of determining how identity itself is being performed in the social realm (Goffman, 1959; 1967). The nature of identity being social, and not solely belonging to the individual, is shown in the recognition that a person must fulfill a particular role for that person to have social recognition of said identity (Goffman, 1959; 1967; Hecht, 1993). Otherwise, there may be significant social (in communities disassociating from the individual), relational (the dissolution of relationships), and emotional (adverse mental health concerns, such as depression, from dissonance between frames of identity) consequences (Goffman, 1959; 1967; Hecht, 1993).

By including the dramaturgical perspective, as well as theories that built upon dramaturgy (CTI and MDL, which are both discussed below), in this dissertation, I am approaching social interaction from a perspective of performance. "Performance" relates to the study of forgiveness because relational actors may approach the forgiveness context with different understandings of the nature of the concern about the "offense," the level of significance of the "offense," and different ideas about how to approach enacting the various aspects of the forgiveness process (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Kelley et al., 2019). As humans are interdependent within the social

realm, communicative acts are necessary to co-construct who we are within our social groups, as well as how to engage with others when enacting our identities or roles (Goffman, 1959; 1967). Thus, in order to bolster one's identity, it is necessary to enact what is expected of that identity in the social realm (Goffman, 1963; Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021), and because our identities are co-constructed through various layers of identity (such as a personal layer of identity versus a relational layer; Hecht, 1993), individuals (in this case the perceived transgressor) must balance the multiple different identity layers and social expectations that could simultaneously require the perceived transgressor to apologize even though they personally do not feel the responsibility for a transgression.

Forgiveness communication research tells us that there is a general social expectation (at least in the United States) for perceived transgressors to seek forgiveness and for a harmed person to grant forgiveness (Goffman, 1967; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Additionally, there may be situations where performance is necessary to prevent dissonance between the degree the individual feels genuine remorse or forgiveness and the socially expected display of said remorse or forgiveness. This process could be performed in a dyadic interaction between relational partners or may be performed by relational partners for their larger familial or social community to effectively display the forgiveness process. Regardless, the current forgiveness literature lacks clear discussions on the relationship between forgiveness and performance as it relates to different layers of identity and messages used to address role and identity performance.

The first theory that I will utilize one of the studies of this dissertation is the communication theory of identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993). This theory posits four different layers of identity, situating these layers within the scope of identity being constructed through our social interaction with others (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). The four different layers of

identity are personal (how one perceives their identity), enacted (how individual identity is performed or displayed in the social realm), relational (how we define ourselves, and are defined by others, through our relationships with others), and communal (how individuals see themselves, and how others see them, in consideration of their larger group membership) (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Importantly, these different layers often occur simultaneously, making this theory dialectical, and indicating each of these different layers of identity are not developed in a vacuum, void of the influence of the others (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Where this theory is useful for this dissertation is the aspect of the different identity concerns individuals may have when navigating the forgiveness process. Analyzing the interaction of identity layers will help indicate how a perceived transgressor may be navigating the many different identity needs when performing forgiveness-seeking.

Both the dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959) and CTI (Hecht, 1993) provide an insight into the potential goals a perceived transgressor may have concerning role and identity performance while engaging in forgiveness-seeking. As mentioned earlier, the aspect of having multiple, simultaneous goals is common, and managing one's role and identity in the face of accusations is a reasonable goal to engage in the forgiveness process. As such, multiple goals theory (MGT; Caughlin, 2010) is an important theory to discuss, due to its focus on multiple, simultaneous goals in communication encounters. One of the foundational pieces of MGT came from the understanding provided by message design logics (MDL; O'Keefe, 1988), where individuals with greater levels of communication competence are able to design messages to meet multiple goals simultaneously and shape or reshape communicative reality. Specifically, for MGT, the theory indicates individuals often approach communicative situations with both primary and secondary goals in mind, and actively work to address these goals simultaneously in

both action and in message design (Caughlin, 2010). Utilizing a framework accepting of the existence and relevance of multiple goals that work simultaneously, and may conflict, allows for the ability to examine the differences in message production between different communicators (the perceived transgressors) as they address the competing goals of role and identity management, comforting, and forgiveness through their performances in the forgiveness process.

In terms of message design, MDL complements multiple goals theory (MGT) due to the recognition of three different message design logics, indicating how communicators become increasingly capable of managing multiple goals (O'Keefe, 1988; Caughlin, 2010). For MDL, the three design logics are expressive (messages convey thoughts and feelings), conventional (messages align with social appropriateness), and rhetorical (messages can shape and reshape social context) and are noted to increase in their sophistication (in terms of both balancing social expectations and multiple goals) communication moves from expressive through rhetorical (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). With rhetorical design logic, communicators are better able to engage in a level of complexity to accomplish multiple goals, thus aligning MDL with MGT (Caughlin, 2010). The ability to engage different goals simultaneously, and to produce messages attending to more complex social situations (such as the need to redefine a social situation through reframing, as can be the case with rhetorical messages; O'Keefe, 1988), is important for the perceived transgressor as they may need to balance competing and simultaneous goals related to relational maintenance and face and identity management when performing forgiveness-seeking.

Finally, a brief discussion of the comforting literature is in order as I have discussed comforting as one common goal when seeking forgiveness, whether one feels they have transgressed or not. The comforting literature discussed within supportive communication has

expounded on the necessary features comforting messages should have to be considered helpful, with major features concerning acknowledging the hurt the distressed person (in this case the person who places themselves in the role of someone who has been transgressed) is describing and discussing how to either address problems or reappraise emotions discussed by the distressed person (Burleson, 2003). Further, the literature also notes that comforting messages are often evaluated for their helpfulness in either problem solving or reappraising emotion, for their supportiveness in acknowledging concerns, and for their sensitivity in taking the needs of the transgressed into account (Goldsmith et al., 2000). As such, both of these aspects of the literature (the essential features of comforting messages and ways comforting messages are evaluated) provide a guide for the necessary elements a comforting message must have to effectively attend to the needs of the support interaction (Burleson, 2003; Goldsmith et al., 2000). Therefore, apology messages can be designed to attend to the goals of role and identity performance of the perceived transgressor, engage in forgiveness-seeking from the transgressed, and provide comfort to the transgressed. The combination of these elements provide insight into how messages can be constructed to attend to all of these goals simultaneously. The success of such an endeavor will be based on the level of communication competence the individual has, and how the kind of message designed may either help or harm the attainment of the perceived transgressor's goals (O'Keefe, 1988; Caughlin, 2010).

Overview of the Chapters and Conclusion of this Chapter

Now that I have described the need for this dissertation, discussed the different aspects of forgiveness as performance, and identified the theoretical perspectives to guide the studies, I will now briefly overview the remaining chapters of this dissertation. The second chapter, the literature review, will be where I discuss the three gaps in the literature I aim to address in this

study. These three gaps consist of the lack of research on role and identity performance, mainly through the need to examined layered identity in the forgiveness process, the lack of research on the presence of multiple goals in seeking forgiveness, and the lack of research on message production when seeking forgiveness. This, then, transitions into a discussion on relevant theoretical literature that can be utilized to address these gaps. This literature includes an overview of the dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959), but mainly concerns CTI (Hecht, 1993), MDL (O'Keefe, 1988), MGT (Caughlin, 2010). The comforting literature is also covered to discuss potential alternate goals, alongside forgiveness, during the task of forgiveness-seeking.

The remaining chapters of the dissertation will encompass the different studies that will be conducted, as well as my findings, interpretations, and my arguments as to the broader significance, applications, and social implications of the findings. The dissertation will consist of two different studies, both utilizing quantitative methods. The first study consisted of examining identity gaps, which is a concept derived from CTI (Hecht, 1993), and involves the experience of dissonance between any two or more of the different layers of identity (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Identity gaps have a multitude of different affective, psychological, and communicative outcomes, which influence how we engage our different identities, and likewise, how we interact with others in our identity performance (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Multiple identity gaps were examined against different outcome variables (interpersonal communication satisfaction, relational satisfaction, ongoing negative affect, and depressive symptoms) to determine which identity gaps were predictors of these many outcomes when a person is perceived as a transgressor, despite not having committed a transgression.

The second study addressed measuring comforting (conceptualized as a combination of message helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity) as a potential additional goal utilized by

perceived transgressors when performing forgiveness-seeking. This study tested messages engaging the three different levels of MDL (O'Keefe, 1988), with the messages incorporating goals of support/comforting and forgiveness-seeking, in the spirit of MGT (Caughlin, 2010). These forgiveness-seeking messages were then evaluated for their level of comforting using Goldsmith, McDermott, and Alexander's (2000) measure for evaluating comforting messages, as well as measures on message appropriateness and effectiveness.

The chapter following these studies will provide a further analysis of the two studies together, drawing not only on the theoretical significance, but also the social significance of the findings. Future directions will also be discussed in terms of expanding this research to other aspects of the forgiveness process, such as the task of forgiveness-granting. Therefore, overall, the dissertation will identify the gaps in forgiveness-seeking literature pertaining to role and identity performance and discuss literature that will be used to address these gaps, examine the experience of identity gaps when one is perceived to be a transgressor, evaluate messages designed to elicit comfort through performative forgiveness-seeking, and finally, interpret the findings in terms of their broader theoretical and social significance to forgiveness communication.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As the forgiveness literature has not adequately addressed the topic of performance of social roles and identity within the forgiveness process, there are three gaps in the literature that I would like to address in this dissertation: 1) the involvement of identity and role performance in the forgiveness process, 2) the need for further illumination of message production in the forgiveness process, and 3) the addition of approaches concerning multiple goals per each forgiveness interaction. To this end, this literature review will identify and address the literature gaps as they are divided between the two studies in this dissertation. As such, I will discuss the first literature gap, review research addressing the first gap, as well as provide the hypotheses and research questions for the first study (known as the identity gaps study). I will then move on to the second and third literature gaps, discuss literature that will help address these gaps, and provide the relevant hypotheses and two research questions for the second study (known as the message evaluation study). The first gap in the forgiveness literature, pertaining to performance in forgiveness-seeking, can be addressed through our understanding of identity and role performance through the communication theory of identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004). The second and third gaps in the forgiveness literature can be addressed through the related findings on message production in consideration of multiple goals through constructivism (Burleson, 2007; 2011; Caughlin, 2010; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). Therefore, the three forgiveness communication literature gaps identified in this literature review can be addressed through the unique combination of communication literature pertaining to performance, message production, and multiple goals.

Overview of the Forgiveness Communication Literature

Before a discussion of the three literature gaps are expounded upon, it is helpful to discuss foundation aspects of the forgiveness communication literature. The foundational aspects

deserving attention here are the forgiveness process, which serves as a guiding conceptual framework for communication research on forgiveness, as well as the different strategies used by interactants in forgiveness encounters to seek forgiveness and grant forgiveness. Thus, in this section, I will elaborate on the different steps (tasks) of the forgiveness communication process and will then discuss the myriad of strategies used by transgressors in seeking forgiveness and by harmed persons in granting forgiveness.

Forgiveness Communication Process

The forgiveness literature within communication studies largely draws from two areas, which are the works in forgiveness communication specifically and the forgiveness literature within psychology, with works from other disciplines, such as philosophy and religious studies, providing additional foundation (Kelley, Waldron, & Kloeber 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). The forgiveness process consists of seven tasks, with the word tasks emphasizing the need to complete each component throughout the forgiveness process for a state of forgiveness to occur within the relationship (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). First, *confronting the transgression* can be accomplished through the transgressor revealing their transgression, the harmed person determining they were transgressed against, or a third party revealing the transgression (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). For example, a romantic partner who has been unfaithful may tell their partner such.

Second, *managing emotions* indicates all participants will experience various emotions that must be engaged with and managed throughout the forgiveness process (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). For example, a romantic partner who has been transgressed against may have a heightened level of negative affect, which the forgiveness literature indicates must be addressed in some way (preferably in a positive manner) to be able to address concerns such as

granting forgiveness and relationship renegotiation. Third, *making sense of the offense* involves the partners determining the significance of the transgression, as well as the impact of that transgression on the relationship (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Examples may include the partners discussing how the transgression impacts their commitment to the relationship or how the transgression may impact their identity.

Fourth, *seeking forgiveness* involves the transgressor requesting forgiveness from the harmed person, whereas the fifth task of *granting forgiveness* involves the harmed person offering their forgiveness to the transgressor (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). This can involve a more direct and verbal request for forgiveness from the transgressor, followed by the harmed person telling the transgressor they are forgiven (Merolla, 2017; Merolla & Zhang, 2011). However, this could also involve indirect methods, with the transgressor extending their arms for a hug, for example, and the harmed person reciprocating the hug to indicate forgiveness has been granted (Merolla, 2017; Merolla & Zhang, 2011). Sixth, *relationship renegotiation* involves the partners working together in developing new relational norms, which not only includes the appropriateness of behaviors, but also what actions may need to be taken if the transgression occurs again (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). For example, if a partner has been unfaithful to their romantic partner, the relationship renegotiation task may involve a discussion of how the partners will remain faithful, and how to exhibit their faithfulness, as well as what actions or behaviors exhibit unfaithfulness and how to avoid those behaviors and actions (Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla, 2017). Finally, relationship transformation is implementing what was discussed in relationship renegotiation and can be anything from those in the relationship reconciling to the relationship being dissolved (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). For example, if romantic partners decide to reconcile, they will implement the

norms discussed in relationship negotiation by exhibiting behaviors of romantic faithfulness and avoiding behaviors of unfaithfulness in their relationship.

These steps can occur within the order specified, but some may occur simultaneously throughout the forgiveness process (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Overall, the seven tasks indicate the forgiveness process involves different communication aspects, such as the potential for support and comforting processes in managing emotions, determining the personal and relational significance of the transgression, the development or redevelopment of relational and communicative norms in the relationship renegotiation phase, as well as dialogue and influence occurring within many of the different process tasks (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). As noted earlier, the different parts of the forgiveness process are called *tasks* because of the emphasis of each step needing to be accomplished for the forgiveness process to be completed and the relational process of forgiveness being accomplished appropriately (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). No timeline is specified as to when each task should be accomplished, due to the recognition of different relational contexts requiring different timelines, but there is an emphasis on completion of the forgiveness process, as not completing the process means the relationship remains in a state of unforgiveness (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Forgiveness-Seeking and Forgiveness-Granting

As a major component of this dissertation will concern the messages used in forgiveness-seeking, it is appropriate to begin this section with a discussion on the complementary tasks of forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting. In this respect, the bulk of the literature on these two tasks include the identification and elaboration of different forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting strategies, which are exhibited through different verbal and nonverbal

behaviors described in the following paragraph (Kelley, 1998; Kelley et al., 2019; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; 2006; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2005, 2008), the development of the different tasks of the forgiveness communication process discussed above (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008), how forgiveness is exhibited and expressed in different types of relationships (such as between friends, family members, and romantic partners), the involvement of forgiveness in different communication processes, such as conflict, relational maintenance, and face negotiation, and the development of a theory concerning forgiveness within interpersonal relationships (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017).

The first emphasis in the forgiveness communication literature focused on identifying and elaborating on different forgiveness-granting strategies. Three strategies have been discussed across the literature, with these three forgiveness-granting strategies being direct, indirect, and conditional forgiveness (Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2006; Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). *Direct forgiveness* is characterized by explicit, verbal indications of forgiveness being granted, such as through statements from the harmed person clearly indicating a transgressor has been forgiven (Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2006; Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). *Indirect forgiveness* encompasses a range of messages or nonverbal indications of forgiveness being granted to the transgressor from the harmed person (Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2006; Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2006; 2008). Examples of an indirect strategy include increases in nonverbal displays of affection (such as physical touch and closeness) and the harmed person indicating the offense was minimal by using humor (Merolla & Zhang, 2011). Lastly, *conditional forgiveness* is characterized by the harmed person placing conditions upon the transgressor, which upon the completion of these conditions, the transgressor will be fully

forgiven (Kelley & Waldron, 2006; Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Importantly, the conditional forgiveness strategy may utilize aspects of either direct or indirect forgiveness, but the distinction here is the inclusion of conditions (Kelley & Waldron, 2006; Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Merolla, Zhang, McCullough, & Sun, 2017; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). For example, a harmed person using conditional forgiveness may begin by saying something to the effect of 'I will forgive you, but only if…,' with any conditions being placed upon the transgressor following the 'only if…' Nevertheless, research has indicated conditional forgiveness is most closely associated with negative relational outcomes, due to the concern a transgressor may have concerning their ability to complete the conditions and receive forgiveness. The remaining two forgiveness-granting strategies are better suited to furthering the forgiveness process through forgiveness-granting, with their use often depending on the context of the forgiveness situation (Merolla & Zhang, 2011). Both direct and indirect forgiveness have a weaker association with negative relational outcomes than conditional forgiveness (Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla et al., 2017; Merolla & Zhang, 2011). Further direct forgiveness has been found to have the greatest association with positive relational outcomes, with direct forgiveness often used in voluntary relationships (Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla et al., 2017; Merolla & Zhang, 2011). Simultaneously, indirect forgiveness is better suited to nonvoluntary relationships (Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla et al., 2017; Merolla & Zhang, 2011).

Despite the main focus on the three forgiveness-granting strategies of direct, indirect, and conditional, other strategies have appeared within the forgiveness literature. One of the earlier studies in forgiveness communication challenged the direct forgiveness strategy by parsing it into two strategies of *discussion* (the harmed person discussing forgiveness as being necessary)

and *explicit* (explicit statements of forgiveness being granted), with the authors noting further refinement was needed on whether the direct strategy should be parsed further (Waldron & Kelley, 2005). The same authors drew similar conclusions for the indirect strategy, parsing it into *minimization* (statements by the harmed person minimizing any harm caused) and *nonverbal display* (using increased physical touch and affection to indicate forgiveness), with the same conclusion being drawn by the authors of more research needing to further parse and explicate (Waldron & Kelley, 2005). Largely, however, further study continues to utilize the three-part typology of direct, indirect, and conditional forgiveness without further division (Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Merolla, 2014; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

A more recent study eschewed the direct and indirect labels, indicating three strategies in addition to conditional forgiveness, which are *deemphasizing* (such as minimization and humor), *engaging* (explicit, verbal indications with nonverbal cues), and *suppressing* (silence and no discussion between the harmed person and the transgressor) (Merolla et al., 2017). The reasoning for introducing different strategies was due to two major themes within the forgiveness literature. First, the forgiveness literature notes forgiveness granting strategies vary in their directness (noted in the study as a direct-indirect dimension), and the second concerning the association of strategies with the impact on relational outcomes (known as healing-threatening) (Merolla et al., 2017). As such, *deemphasizing* is healing and indirect, *suppressing* is indirect and threatening, *engaging* is direct and healing, and *conditional* is direct and threatening (Merolla et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the authors indicated more research was needed to further explicate these strategies in conjunction with earlier-identified strategies and did not indicate their four strategies should entirely supplant the earlier-identified 3-strategy typology (Merolla et al., 2017).

The forgiveness-seeking strategies, when compared to forgiveness-granting strategies, have experienced less flux in their identification and development of a taxonomy. The taxonomy of five forgiveness-seeking strategies has remained stable, with the five strategies being explicit acknowledgement, nonverbal assurance, compensation, explanation, and humor (Kelley et al., 2019; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). *Explicit acknowledgement* pertains to clear, verbal requests for forgiveness, often taking the form of the transgressor apologizing for the transgression and harm, and then asking if the harmed person will forgive them (Kelley et al., 2019; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). *Nonverbal assurance* consists of a transgressor using nonverbal communication, such as increasing affection toward the harmed person, to indicate their remorse for the transgression (Kelley et al., 2019; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Examples of *compensation* include giving gifts, performing favors, or even giving monetary compensation (Kelley et al., 2019; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Explanation consists of, as the name implies, the transgressor providing their reasoning for their actions, as well as an attempt to provide greater context to the transgression (Kelley et al., 2019; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Finally, *humor* consists of the transgressor utilizing humor to minimize the transgression or to indicate the ridiculousness of the transgression (Kelley et al., 2019; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Although, these strategies have remained relatively stable over time, a transgressor still has a range of multiple different strategies to utilize, depending on what they believe may be the best strategy to use (Kelley et al., 2019; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Identifying the Literature Gap on Identity Performance in Forgiveness-Seeking

Forgiveness, Face, and Culture

The first literature gap concerns a lack of forgiveness research focused on how identity is often layered, and how these identity layers may interact through role performance in a forgiveness encounter. Identity concerns how one sees themself and how others see them, with these differences manifesting into layers that overlap in social interaction (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Additionally, by role performance, I am referring to behavior and messages utilized by an interactant to portray themself, either in accordance with or to challenge, what is expected of the individual based on their relationship (Goffman, 1959). Logically, we could say that if a person is claimed to be a transgressor, there are social and relational expectations placed on the perceived transgressor, especially in consideration of their relationship to the harmed person (the transgressed). However, despite the lack of literature in forgiveness communication specifically connecting role performance and layered identity, performance itself has been a relatively recent development within the forgiveness literature.

The forgiveness communication research that has addressed role performance (in at least including relational and social roles in the study) has revolved around both face and culture (Merolla, Zhang, & Sun, 2012; Zhang, Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, & Zhang, 2019; Zhang, Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Zhang, 2015), and forgiveness as exhibited in voluntary versus nonvoluntary relationships (Antony & Sheldon, 2019; Carr & Wang, 2012; Guerrero & Bachman, 2010; Morse & Metts, 2011; Waldron et al., 2018). To clarify, voluntary relationships refer to association arising from mutually agreed interaction, such as friendships and dating and romantic relationships, whereas nonvoluntary often relies on cultural or legal associations, such as in families (Carr & Wang, 2012). Additionally, the discussion on this first literature gap is also

aided by a direct acknowledgement that the bulk of forgiveness research, as well as the leading theory within forgiveness communication, negotiated morality theory (NMT), does not focus on role and identity performance (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017).

As a theory, NMT concerns how contextually bound senses of morality develop within relationship contexts, based on the senses of morality each relational interactant brings into the relationship (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017). Accordingly, the relational partners will seek out the areas of agreement in their potentially different ethical and moral value systems, integrating them into the combined sense of ethics and morality as the relationship develops (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017). This combined moral code then helps determine what the relational partners will consider a transgression and may provide a guide for what can be done when a transgression occurs, including any acceptable strategies that may be used in seeking forgiveness and granting forgiveness (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017). Nevertheless, for NMT, the focus is on the negotiation of a relational sense of morality, not on communicative performance of the perceived transgression, even though they note the theory should not be construed as to prohibit the examination of performance within the forgiveness process (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017). The understanding that NMT leaves room for a performance perspective, opens the space to discuss the findings of different forgiveness studies utilizing NMT by considering role and identity performance as an unexplored explanatory mechanism, but ultimately leaves us with a gap remaining in the literature where an investigation specifically focused on role and identity performance would be beneficial.

As noted previously, the main way role and identity performance has been discussed in the forgiveness communication literature is in reference to face and culture (Merolla et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2015), as well as relationship type, which can include friends,

family, and romantic partners (Antony & Sheldon, 2019; Carr & Wang, 2012; Guerrero & Bachman, 2010; Morse & Metts, 2011; Waldron et al., 2018). *Face* concerns an individual's public persona, and facework is demonstrated through communicative behaviors, such as through our messages or actions (Goffman, 1959; Ting-Toomey, 2005, 2017). For face and culture, the main aspects examined have been the differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures in terms of forgiveness, much of which has been examined through face-negotiation theory (FNT; Ting-Toomey, 2005; 2017). An intriguing finding in the existing literature is the surprising prevalence of direct forgiveness among individuals from collectivistic cultures (Merolla et al., 2012). The reason this finding was surprising is that it was believed forgiveness-granting style in these cultures would be enacted in accordance with expectations of social harmony, based on cultural expectations, with those from collectivistic cultures expected to use the indirect strategy (Merolla et al., 2012). Overall, the remaining findings from this literature indicated empathy was a poor predictor of forgiveness for both cultures and apology is a key factor in precipitating forgiveness for both (Merolla et al., 2012). Thus, cultural expectations and practices related to face may influence how forgiveness is performed in interpersonal interaction.

Studies have utilized FNT to provide insight into the workings of face within the forgiveness process. Face, a concept originating in Chinese culture, concerns how an individual presents their persona in the social realm (Goffman, 1959, 1967; Ting-Toomey, 2005, 2017). Although face brings with it a multitude of concerns, what is important here are a focus on self face (your own face), other face (the face of other people), and communal face (the face of a group), and whether face is supported or threatened during the forgiveness-seeking process (Ting-Toomey, 2005; 2017). This work related specifically to FNT provides further confirmation

of the similar enactment and approach to apology and forgiveness across cultures, with apologies having a positive association with forgiveness across cultures (Zhang et al., 2015) and increased compassion being favorable for forgiveness occurring across individuals of both cultures examined (Zhang et al., 2019).

In terms of self-construal (a person's image of their self), participants from the United States and China tended to rate forgiveness as less favorable if they had an independent self-construal (a self-image constructed with little influence from others) and reported a greater focus on their own face concerns (Zhang et al., 2019). The opposite was the case for those with an interdependent self-construal (a self-image with greater influence from others) and a concern for the face concerns of others (Zhang et al., 2019). Similarly, individuals who experience face threat also tended to eschew forgiveness, lowering the possibility of reconciliation, due to an increase in anger concerning a transgression (Zhang et al., 2019).

Type of Relationship and Identity Performance in Forgiveness-Seeking Interactions

The last area of forgiveness literature that has focused on role and performance is the involvement of relationship type and different members (such as the transgressor or the harmed person/the transgressed) of our relationships in the forgiveness process. The research on the use of forgiveness-granting strategies provided evidence for a preference for indirect forgiveness used when the relationship in question is much more difficult to dissolve, such as a nonvoluntary relationship (Carr & Wang, 2012). For example, the researchers found harmed persons who were family members with a transgressor would use indirect strategies, such as minimizing the offense by telling the transgressor not to worry about their offense (Carr & Wang, 2012). By comparison, relationships of a greater voluntary nature (such as between friends or romantic partners), which experience greater levels of commitment and investment (than nonvoluntary relationships, such

as family relationships), tend to use more direct or explicit forgiveness-granting strategies (Guerrero & Bachman, 2010).

Just as interdependent self-construals combined with a face concern for others tends to increase direct expressions of forgiveness (Zhang et al., 2019), increased levels of relational commitment and satisfaction in dating couples allows for greater explicitness in granting forgiveness (Guerrero & Bachman, 2010). However, the forgiveness style in family relationships tends to include a preference for more indirect methods, sometimes out of a concern for direct methods leading to further family strife (Carr & Wang, 2012). Overall, this evidence establishes the pattern of voluntary relationships often utilizing direct forgiveness, whereas nonvoluntary relationships often utilize more indirect forgiveness (Carr & Wang, 2012; Guerrero & Bachman, 2010). Additionally, the conditional forgiveness strategy is often noted to be damaging across both types of relationships (Carr & Wang, 2012; Guerrero & Bachman, 2010; Morse & Metts, 2011). Many report engaging in forgiveness in these families because that is what should be done as family members (Carr & Wang, 2012), and it is what should be done to restore some form of order to the family, especially in complex situations such as relations with stepparents and stepchildren (Waldron et al., 2018). Additionally, the use of direct and indirect strategies often depended on the time that had elapsed following the specific transgression, with indirect being used more as more time elapsed, but there was still emphasis on directness with higher transgression severity (Waldron et al., 2018).

Overall, when culture, face, and relationship roles (such as parent, partner, sibling, friend, etc.) are brought in to play, we see that forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting are enacted in a multitude of ways, depending on cultural context, in accordance with different face needs, and through the relational roles we engage in within our many types of relationships. Given the

dearth of literature specifically combining forgiveness and role and identity performance with understandings of layered identity, it is clear there are many questions that remain to be explored as to the relationship between these elements. Nevertheless, across these studies, we have limitations and future directions that help illuminate this first gap in the literature, such as the recommendation of examining different layers of identity in relation to behaviors and messages used in the forgiveness process (Zhang et al., 2015).

To summarize, the first gap in the literature concerns the unaddressed involvement of identity and role performance as it pertains to layered identity and its myriad outcomes within the forgiveness process. As noted, and in consideration of the few studies mentioned above, the forgiveness literature and theorizing has largely left out the involvement of role and identity performance as relational partners negotiate their shared sense of morality (Waldron & Kelley, 2017). The small number of studies that have looked at forgiveness in different relationships, albeit examining forgiveness strategies and outcomes in relation to role, identity, and face (Antony & Sheldon, 2019; Carr & Wang, 2012; Waldron et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2019), have largely left out complexities such as examining face (what is done to demonstrate public persona; Goffman, 1959) and identity (how one sees themselves and how others see them; Hecht, 1993) in conjunction to each other (Zhang et al., 2015). Therefore, what remains unclear in the forgiveness literature in general is a lack of concern for role and identity performance in the major theory utilized in the forgiveness communication literature, the need to examine the different layers of identity in forgiveness contexts, as well as how these concerns may impact further interaction in seeking-forgiveness, such as the messages used by transgressors or perceived transgressors. This aspect of forgiveness-seeking messages connects the first gap with the remaining two by illustrating the need to examine the relationship between

role and identity performance and the production of messages that are aimed at different goals in the forgiveness process. However, the communication literature that helps address the first literature gap will be discussed before I move on to the remaining two literature gaps.

Addressing Layered Identity and Implications of Performance in the Forgiveness Process

Performance and Identity

As the involvement of performance within the forgiveness process is an important aspect of this dissertation, and an identified gap in the literature pertains to the involvement of role and identity performance in the forgiveness process, it is important to discuss literature that can help address this gap. The primary area of literature that provides the basis for research to address the gap comes from the communication theory of identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993), which arose from the performance and dramaturgy literature (Austin, 1962; Goffman, 1959, 1967). As CTI arose from the performance and dramaturgy literature, I will provide a brief overview of the performance and dramaturgy literature before expounding upon the CTI literature.

One of the major concepts within the literature on performance and dramaturgy is that of face, which was brought into social scientific research from Chinese culture, and concerns one's public persona (Goffman, 1959; 1967; Ting-Toomey, 2005; 2017). Additionally, the behaviors one utilizes to demonstrate face within an interaction are referred to as facework (Goffman, 1959, 1967; Ting-Toomey, 2005, 2017). Face is important because it pertains to efforts a person makes in demonstrating their identity, through the understanding that facework is a performance of one's preferred public persona (Goffman, 1959, 1967; Ting-Toomey, 2005, 2017). When this is related to forgiveness-seeking, face would be an individual's desired image they intend to portray, which could be that of a remorseful transgressor, if that same person agrees they are responsible for the transgression and wants to seek forgiveness. Further, the behaviors this

person uses to implement this image would be facework, and for someone accepting the label of the transgressor, they could produce a forgiveness-seeking message demonstrating their remorse to the harmed person or utilize any of the other forgiveness-seeking strategies, depending on the needs of the situation. As such, depending on these situational needs, a person may engage in frontstage behavior (tailoring performance to an intended audience), backstage behavior (dropping the tailored performance when they perceive the intended audience as not present), and teamwork (utilizing the help of others to help bolster face when performing before an intended audience) (Goffman, 1959). In a forgiveness encounter with a perceived transgressor performing for a friend who claims harm, this could be maintaining the role of a supportive person to the friend claiming harm (frontstage), discussing the difficulty of maintaining the role of a supportive person when interacting with a third party, such as another friend or a family member, and having that third person help bolster the role as a supportive person (teamwork) when interacting with the friend who claims harm.

However, Goffman (1959; 1967) is not the only scholar whose work has application to dramaturgy in regard to performance, as the work of Austin (1962) has also provided some basis for forgiveness communication research (Merolla, 2014). The potential contribution of Austin (1962) arises from his identification of the criteria for an effective "performance," which can be utilized to analyze utterances in conjunction with other important concepts in dramaturgy. As such, an effective performance is identified as having the necessary components of occurring within the right circumstances, having acts and language appropriate for the circumstances, having the performance be conducted properly, the performance is conducted completely, as well as the performer having the proper intentions and conducting themselves accordingly (Austin, 1962). Messages that align with these criteria then qualify as a performative utterance and are

also referred to as a performative sentence or a performative (Austin, 1962). Messages that do not align with these criteria are considered misfires (not bringing about the desired change in reality through error) or abuses (not bringing about the desired change in reality due to malice toward the performance itself), and do not bring about the desired state of reality (Austin, 1962; Merolla, 2014).

To further connect the works of Austin (1962) and Goffman (1959; 1967), both scholars focus on the role a person is playing (such as relational roles like partner, friend, etc. or social roles like community leader, minister, etc.) within a communicative encounter, as well as the fit of that performance to the circumstances, which are the specific needs of the context (such as forgiveness-seeking). Intriguingly, it must be noted that Austin (1962) and Goffman (1959; 1967) conducted their work independently and did not collaborate nor cite each other. Nevertheless, both scholars have inspired work in not only the forgiveness literature (Merolla, 2014; Merolla et al., 2017), but also in the areas of multiple goals in message production and in the comforting and support literature (Burleson, 2007; 2011; Caughlin, 2010; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987).

Communication Theory of Identity

Having developed from the performance literature, the communication theory of identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993) was devised to account for the multitude of communicative processes occurring as identity is enacted through interpersonal, group, family, and communal interactions. Here, identity is conceptualized as a product of social interaction, especially through the enactment of social roles and cultural and social expectations (Goffman, 1959; 1967; Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004). CTI indicates identity arises through different aspects of social interaction, with four relevant identity layers, rather than just one,

unitary identity (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004). These four identity layers are personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). The word "layer" is emphasized in the theory due to the performance of identity often being in flux, with different aspects emphasized in various contexts (Hecht & Phillips, 2021).

The *personal* layer concerns the process of how someone sees and identifies who they are, and relates to the second layer of *enacted*, which is how someone performs their identity in social settings or interactions (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). The enacted layer is conceptualized as separate from the personal layer, as our enacted identity presentation may, for various reasons, be different than how a person sees themselves through their personal identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). For example, if an aspect of personal identity may be considered uncouth or is stigmatized in public (such as being a gay man in certain areas of Oklahoma), a person may consider eschewing the enacted, public performance of that identity. Third, is the *relational* layer, which pertains to how your identity is developed and displayed in consideration of the identities of those you have relationships with (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Finally, the *communal* layer concerns how our identities are shaped based on the communities and groups we belong to (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Importantly, these identity layers exist simultaneously, and individuals often engage with multiple layers at any one time in their identity presentation (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021).

In the case of performance of identity during forgiveness-seeking, our perceived transgressor provides a good example of these four layers. In the situation of our transgressor, if being accused of an offense they did not commit, they will not see their personal identity as that of a transgressor in this situation. However, as the relational other (in this case a friend), has the role of the transgressed, the relational identity here is that the perception of the individual as a

transgressor is important to the relationship. Subsequently, the others in a group or community within which the two friends belong may also view the perceived transgressor as someone who has transgressed, even if falsely. Finally, circling back to the enacted layer, however the perceived transgressor believes they should act in this situation will then be an enacted identity, which may or may not be disparate with their personal frame. For an example of this enacted layer, if the perceived transgressor thinks it is appropriate to act as if they are indeed the transgressor in the situation and seek forgiveness for an offense they did not perceive themselves as committing, they will enact that identity, even though it is disparate with their personal identity. Another potential option is to enact an identity in closer coordination with their personal identity. In the case of this dissertation, an example is emphasizing an aspect of their personal identity, such as being a supportive person and, thus, try to shift the perception of being a transgressor to that of being a person supporting their friend (the transgressed).

The example above also leads into the crux concept of CTI, which is *identity gaps*. Identity gaps are important because they indicate how identity is, can, and should be performed, as well as providing an explanation for how performance of identity may influence communication, such as via the actions taken to fulfill a certain role or fit a desired identity (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Identity gaps occur when there is incongruence between the different frames of identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Hecht and his colleagues refer to this incongruence as dialectical tensions between the different identity layers (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004), and these dialectical tensions may lead to significant adverse communicative, relational, and emotional outcomes, such as influencing relational messages, the dissolution of relationships, and mental health concerns, such as depression, due to the negative affect and emotions resulting from

dissonance between the identity layers (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Paxman, 2021; Rubinsky, 2019; Wagner, Kunkle, & Compton, 2016). Further, due to the four layers of identity, there are different types of identity gaps. Key identity gaps for this study are the *personal-enacted* identity gap (dissonance between how the individual sees oneself and how they display their identity; Jung & Hecht, 2004), the *personal-relational* identity gap (dissonance of personal identity and the perception of how the relational other sees them; Jung & Hecht, 2004), and the *personal-communal* identity gap (dissonance between personal identity and one's perception of how the community sees them; Hecht & Phillips, 2021).

The three identity gaps discussed above can be applied to many different types of relationships, such as friend relationships, families, relational partners, and workplace relationships (with many more potential examples). However, as this dissertation examines identity gaps in friend relationships, it is helpful to discuss examples of these identity gaps within the context of a friend relationship. For this, it is also helpful to return to the example of Cameron and Harper, as discussed at the beginning of the introduction chapter, with Cameron accusing Harper of the transgression of not supporting Cameron what it was needed, and Harper disagreeing with the transgressor label. This example also adopts Harper's perspective on the context. First, the personal-enacted identity gap would involve the dissonance between how Harper sees herself as a supportive friend versus her actions of not quickly supporting Cameron when he had an anxiety attack. There may be minimal dissonance if Harper (as the perceived transgressor) is confident her enactment of support was in accordance with her self-perception of being a supportive friend, but that dissonance may increase if Harper begins to reevaluate or second guess her enactment of support, especially considering her provision of support was delayed (as noted in the example in the introduction chapter).

Second, for the personal-relational identity gap, Cameron's accusation of being unsupportive challenges Harper's personal identity of being a supportive friend, and the level to which the perceived transgressor (Harper) is portrayed by their friend (Cameron) as unsupportive may increase the dissonance between Harper's relational identity and her personal identity of being supportive. Finally, for the personal-communal identity gap, the dissonance between Harper's personal and communal identities may increase as Harper's actions (as the perceived transgressor) may be viewed by others as unsupportive or supportive (depending on how Cameron influences the opinions of others in a friend group), and the dissonance for Harper may increase as the two identity layers become more disparate. Therefore, as this example demonstrates, identity gaps are important because they indicate how identity is, can, and should be performed, as well as providing an explanation for how performance of identity may influence communication, such as via the actions taken to fulfill a certain role or fit a desired identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004).

Implications of Dissonant Identity Performance

Identity gaps have relationship with many different affective, psychological, and communicative outcomes (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Although not an exhaustive list, the concepts identity gaps have differing levels of influence or relation to include relational satisfaction (Rubinsky, 2019), relational intention (Phillips, Ledbetter, Soliz, & Bergquist, 2018), relational solidarity (Morgan, Soliz, Minniear, & Bergquist, 2020), communication satisfaction (Jung, 2011; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Ramsey, Knight, & Knight, 2019; Wood, 2022), communication apprehension (Jung, 2011; Wood, 2022), depressive symptoms (Jung, 2013, 2020), self-reported stress (Merrill & Afifi, 2017), jealousy (Rubinsky, 2019), and assertiveness (Jung, 2011). As this list makes clear, the study of the relationship between identity

gaps and a multiple of different affective, psychological, and communicative outcome variables has proliferated (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Taking the accumulated knowledge from this literature into account, the relevant outcome variables for the type of forgiveness encounter that will be examined can be identified from the combination of the performance, CTI, and forgiveness literatures. The relevant communicative outcome variables are interpersonal communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction, and the relevant psychological and affective outcomes are depressive symptoms and ongoing negative affect.

Depressive symptoms are associated with identity gaps, due to the understanding of self-discrepancy, which concerns our perception of how we view ourselves and how we are both perceived by others, and interact with others (Barnett, Moore, & Harp, 2017; Jung, 2020). This aligns with the conceptualization of multiple identity gaps, such as the personal-enacted identity gap (how we see ourselves and how we show our identity in interaction), the personal-relational identity gap (how we see ourselves and how the others in our relationships see us), and the enacted-relational identity gap (how we show our identity and how the others in our relationships see us) (Jung, 2013, 2020; Jung & Hecht, 2004). The reason depressive symptoms are associated with many identity gaps is because the dissonance (or discrepancy) between different aspects of our identities often leads to adverse affective states, such as stress and guilt, which manifest in and contribute to depression (Barnett, Moore, & Harp, 2017; Jung, 2020).

The manifesting of many different negative affective states also connects the CTI literature pertaining to depressive symptoms and identity gaps to the literature on ongoing negative affect in the forgiveness literature. Ongoing negative affect is conceptualized as the experiencing of many emotions indicative of distress (with sadness, anger, guilt, and hurt being common examples) over extended periods of time (Leary & Leder, 2009; Merolla, 2014).

Psychology research indicates that the experience of negative affect is a significant part of experiencing a lack of forgiveness, known as unforgiveness (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Unforgiveness is associated with negative health aspects, such as the increased production of the stress hormone of cortisol, which tends to adversely impact the immune system and cardiovascular system (Larkin, Goulet, & Cavanaugh, 2015; Toussaint, Worthington, & Williams, 2015; Worthington et al., 2007; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). It is the commonality between the multitude of symptoms experienced for both depressive symptoms and ongoing negative affect that provide the reason for why both concepts are suitable for inclusion in the identity gaps study. Just as unforgiveness often leads to sadness, anger, shame, and guilt (Toussaint et al., 2015; Worthington & Scherer, 2004), the dissonance between different identity layers gives rise to stress and guilt (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung, 2013, 2020), the manifestation of these symptoms in bringing about depression and ongoing negative affect point to the importance of including both concepts within the study.

Communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction enter the picture due to the evaluations interactants make concerning the desire to maintain, bolster, or dissolve relationships during the different tasks of the forgiveness process, such as relationship renegotiation and relationship transformation (Kelley, Waldron, & Kloeber, 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Relational satisfaction has been examined alongside ongoing negative affect in the forgiveness literature (Merolla, 2014), and has also been examined in studies using identity gaps (Rubinsky, 2019, 2022). With respect to identity gaps, a person's level of relational satisfaction is influenced by the dissonance between different layers of identity and is often adversely impacted if we perceive our interaction partners view us in a different way than we attempted to convey, or in a different way than we perceive ourselves (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Rubinsky, 2019, 2022).

Further, communication satisfaction may also be adversely impacted by our perceptions of how our interaction partners perceive us (Jung, 2011; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Our level of communication satisfaction with an interaction partner has influence on our willingness to engage in further interaction with that person (Jung, 2013; Ramsey et al., 2019), which can also have implications for how we engage in the forgiveness process, as the quality of an interaction is a factor in our assessments of whether to seek or grant forgiveness (Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla, 2014; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). As such, both relational satisfaction and communication satisfaction are important outcomes of identity gaps, which also are involved in the forgiveness process.

Overall, given the discussion above, questions of layered identity within performance have largely been unaddressed in the forgiveness literature as discussing performance has been a relatively recent development, and the few studies that have discussed performance and forgiveness (e.g., Zhang et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2019) did not examine the overlapping nature of identity, as defined in CTI, as facework was the priority. Additionally, although some of the forgiveness literature has examined the relationship between forgiveness and ONA (Merolla, 2014), identity gaps as a potential explanatory mechanism for the experience of ONA has not been addressed, and is further linked to identity gaps through the experience of depressive symptoms as an outcome of identity gaps (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung, 2020). Finally, as performances, along with much of human interaction, bring about a state of reality through social construction (shaping our sense of reality through language and interaction; Berger & Luckmann, 1966), it is essential to further understand the implications of performance in forgiveness episodes, due to these implications of performance potentially influencing further interactions (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004). As such, this leaves a need in the forgiveness

literature for a study on role and identity shaping performance in relation to the varied layers of identity during forgiveness episodes, as well as the implications of this performance in relation to both interpersonal communication and relational satisfaction, as well as ONA and depressive symptoms. To this end, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H1: The personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps are predictors of interpersonal communication satisfaction following encounters where one is perceived as a transgressor.

H2: The personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps are predictors of relational satisfaction following encounters where one is perceived as a transgressor.

H3: The personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps are predictors of ongoing negative affect following encounters where one is perceived as a transgressor.

H4: The personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps are predictors of depressive symptoms following encounters where one is perceived as a transgressor.

The identity gaps study also includes one research question. However, the research question relies on the concept of cognitive complexity, which is discussed in relation to the remaining two literature gaps. As such, I have included the reasoning behind this research question following the discussion of the hypotheses and research questions of the message evaluation study at the end of this literature review.

Identifying the Literature Gaps on Message Production and Multiple Goals

Message Production

In the case of some of the works mentioned above, the forgiveness-granting strategies were identified by utilizing messages gathered from various individuals through either interviews, survey responses, or requests for narratives (Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2005). Researchers coded the messages based on the combination of constructs such as relational consequences, relationship type, individual motivations, and information about the offense experienced (Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2005). The remaining studies above (concerning forgiveness-granting strategies) utilized messages identified in earlier forgiveness communication studies (Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla, 2014; Merolla et al., 2017). In sum, the forgiveness granting strategies were identified through messages gathered from retrospective accounts or were created for the researchers to then analyze in relation to criteria concerning the role of the individual, their motivation, the relationship, and any perceived relational consequences from the forgiveness-granting strategies.

Although this research has been effective in identifying the different strategies present in forgiveness-granting, what is lacking is an examination of the construction of messages in the forgiveness process. This concern is further illuminated in the original study in forgiveness communication, with the author noting no constraints were placed on how participants described or constructed their messages, which related to the study not being conducted from a message production standpoint (Kelley, 1998). Further studies, in focusing more on analyzing different messages for their themes in developing a taxonomy (Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2005), also indicate emphasis was not placed on the specifics of message production to elicit message outcomes. Thus, when taken together, it is clear that an

existing gap in the literature concerns the production of forgiveness-related messages within relational contexts.

Reviewing the literature on forgiveness-seeking, in the same fashion as the literature on forgiveness-granting, it is clear that forgiveness communication researchers examined the methods utilized by a transgressor to seek forgiveness, but did not address the specifics of the forgiveness-seeking or granting messages themselves, such as different message features and differences in message complexity, utilized to seek forgiveness. The study where the five forgiveness-seeking strategies originated utilized a survey method, with participants rating their agreement with descriptions of behaviors used in forgiveness requests (Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2005). The findings were then used to group these behaviors into five different forgiveness-seeking strategies (Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). As such, the focus of this research was to create a typology of the messages exhibited, rather than on the specifics of how individuals produced messages designed to achieve the desired forgiveness. Thus, in similar fashion to what I discussed above concerning forgiveness-granting messages, this gap in the literature opens the space for research on message production in the forgiveness process.

Multiple Goals

Closely related to the literature gap concerning message production is the aspect of messages in the forgiveness process being designed to pursue multiple goals simultaneously. This gap arises from the forgiveness literature as it is axiomatic that forgiveness is the outcome that should be achieved (and communicative goals should be oriented at forgiveness as the outcome) throughout the forgiveness process (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Nevertheless, the knowledge that messages are often produced with multiple goals in mind (Caughlin, 2010;

O'Keefe, 1988) brings up the question of what other goals individuals may have when entering the interpersonal interaction where forgiveness needs to be sought or granted. This follows the understanding that individuals aim to achieve specific communicative outcomes (such as support, comforting, and forgiveness in the case of this dissertation) by orienting their actions and behaviors (such as their messages) to align with their communicative goals, thus indicating goals precede outcomes by helping communicators orient their actions and behaviors to elicit specific outcomes (Caughlin, 2010; Dillard, 1997). Overall, this concern represents a key limitation arising from the current forgiveness literature.

A pathway for investigation of other goals, however, arises from the forgiveness literature by examining the task of the forgiveness process on managing emotions among the relational actors involved (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). As mentioned earlier, the managing emotions task involves contending with the negative emotional and affective states of the individuals involved in the forgiveness process (Waldron & Kelley, 2008), with emphasis on at least one of the individuals moving from a negative to positive affective state (Kelley & Waldron, 2006). Therefore, as managing emotions is considered an essential task within the overall forgiveness process (Waldron & Kelley, 2008), it follows that managing emotions is (and should be) considered another, simultaneous outcome of the forgiveness process, with respective communicative goals attended to managing emotions, as the primary outcome of forgiveness may not be effectively achieved without communicative goals relating to the management of emotions. As such, in noting primary and secondary goals, I am referring to the language of multiple goals theory (MGT; Caughlin, 2010), acknowledging more than one goal is commonly included in communication contexts by the individual interactants, and often prioritized as primary and secondary in message construction.

Discussions on emotion within the forgiveness literature arise in the form of discussion on the concept of ongoing negative affect (ONA), and as mentioned earlier, is conceptualized as the experience of many emotions indicative of distress (with sadness, anger, and hurt being common examples) over extended periods of time (Leary & Leder, 2009; Merolla, 2014). Further, as mentioned, the forgiveness literature in psychology indicates the negative outcomes of unforgiveness manifest when forgiveness is not achieved (Larkin, Goulet, & Cavanaugh, 2015; Toussaint, Worthington, & Williams, 2015; Worthington et al., 2007; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Related to the current communication literature on forgiveness, the bulk of this literature concerns the involvement of sincerity in the forgiveness process, noting that increased sincerity is associated with greater forgiveness experienced (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Ebesu Hubbard, Hendrickson, Fehrenbach & Sur, 2013; Merolla, 2014), with the forgiveness received related to reduced ONA on the part of the transgressor, harmed person, or both (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Merolla, 2014).

As indicated above, forgiveness is a major way to address the adverse experiences of unforgiveness, due to the connection between increased forgiveness and the decreased experience of negative affect (Toussaint et al., 2015; Worthington et al., 2007; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). However, the forgiveness literature in psychology is also clear that forgiveness granting is not the only way to address the negative effects of unforgiveness (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Specifically, relational actors may engage in different behaviors aimed at reducing this negative affect in the relational other through the exercise of support and comforting skills (Burleson, 2003). Combining the understandings of the forgiveness and comforting literatures allows us to focus on messages, drawing from our communicative goals,

attending to not only forgiveness, but also to a simultaneous outcome of supporting and comforting the person harmed by a transgression.

Thus, although the axiom of forgiveness communication is achieving forgiveness as a primary goal, the forgiveness communication literature contains clear discussion on a multitude of secondary goals in this forgiveness process such as the experience of support, comforting, and decreasing negative affect. Other potential outcomes are discussed in the literature, such as *relational maintenance*, or achieving *relational cohesion*, as well as *resolving conflict* have appeared as outcomes that often follow forgiveness or are directly achieved through forgiveness processes (Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla, 2017; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). As such, it is clear that the forgiveness literature leaves room for more desired outcomes related to the forgiveness process than simply forgiveness when constructing forgiveness messages. In fact, one of the future directions discussed in a recent forgiveness study is to focus on goals, other than forgiveness, that an interactant may have during the forgiveness process (Merolla, 2014). Further research has given limited attention to the presence of other goals within the forgiveness process, with this work being situated within the realm of applying forgiveness to conflict communication (Ebsu Hubbard et al., 2013; Long, 2022; Merolla, 2017; Merolla et al., 2017). However, this work is still focused more on the outcomes of the particular interactions, and how forgiveness may help facilitate those outcomes (Merolla, 2017), but it has not adequately addressed the production of messages to attend to specific interactional goals to achieve these outcomes. Therefore, this third gap in the literature is closely related to the second gap of not focusing on message production or design, but also indicates there is room for further research on the presence of multiple interactional goals in forgiveness interactions, and how messages can be constructed and utilized to elicit desired outcomes based on these goals.

To summarize, the second existing literature gap is the forgiveness literature has largely left concerns of message production unaddressed, due to focusing more on developing typologies of both forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting (Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2005), as well as identifying and analyzing outcomes of these strategies without concern over how these messages were produced (Kelley et al., 2019; Merolla, 2014; Merolla et al., 2017; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). The third gap concerns the largely unaddressed nature of multiple goals within the forgiveness process. The forgiveness communication literature has largely focused on forgiveness as the goal in the interpersonal interactions in question, with significantly less attention to other additional goals one may have to seek to bring about certain outcomes in the interaction. However, the primary theorists in the forgiveness literature are accepting and open to the involvement of other goals (Waldron & Kelley, 2017), despite not exploring them further.

Addressing the Message Design and Multiple Goals Literature Gaps

I will discuss the literature addressing the second and third gaps in a combined discussion, and I will identify the hypotheses for the second study toward the end of this discussion. As mentioned, these two gaps in the literature concern both the lack of research on message production within the forgiveness process, due to the prior chosen focus on categorizing different forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting strategies rather than a richer analysis of forgiveness-seeking messages, and the lack of literature on message production in light of multiple interaction goals. Here is where it is most appropriate to discuss the underlying philosophy of much of the literature that I will utilize to address these two gaps, which follows.

Constructivism

Constructivism provides the foundation upon which the relevant message production and multiple goals literature for this dissertation are built. Constructivism, drawing from many disciplines but arising specifically from the communication discipline (not to be confused with similarly named philosophies of other disciplines), provides an explanation for the significant variation in communicative competence and skill across populations, specifically in terms of message production and goal pursuit (Bodie & Jones, 2016; Burleson, 2007; 2011; Delia, 1977). As such, effective communicators can not only engage in their social environment, but also engage in social construction to a various extent based on their communication abilities (Bodie & Jones, 2016; Delia, 1977).

Four major competencies are delineated when discussing communication skill (Burleson, 2007). First, *linguistic competence* indicates communicators must be aware of language rules, such as the rules of grammar and linguistic codes, indicating the individual will be able to successfully utilize a language (Burleson, 2007; Delia, 1977). Second, *sociolinguistic competence* concerns knowing social norms and conventions to effectively participate in social interaction (Burleson, 2007; Delia, 1977). Third, *rhetorical (functional) competence* concerns the ability to both produce and effectively process messages within interaction (Burleson, 2007; Delia, 1977). Finally, *conversation management competence* concerns the ability to follow and understand various interactions, shift between topics, and effectively begin and end conversations (Burleson, 2007; Delia, 1977).

The varying level at which an individual can handle these competences is referred to as *cognitive complexit*y (Bodie & Jones, 2016). As such, increasing cognitive complexity allows for individuals to grow and maintain the four competencies, thus allowing for greater sophistication

in produced messages, and greater communication abilities (Bodie & Jones, 2016; Burleson, 2007; 2011; Delia, 1977). As a person's cognitive complexity increases, they will be able to handle a multitude of tasks simultaneously within their messages, which include the aspects relevant to this study, such as identity and impression management, and be skilled in shaping communication situations to reflect multiple competing needs (Burleson, 2007; 2011; Delia, 1977). Generally, cognitive complexity increases as individuals move from childhood into adulthood and throughout one's life, but it is also acknowledged that how each individual develops in cognitive complexity tends to vary (Bodie & Jones, 2016; Delia, 1977). Therefore, it stands to reason that those who have greater development in their cognitive abilities, and more experience with interpersonal and social interaction, will be better equipped to develop messages of the needed sophistication to contribute to shaping their social environment (Bodie & Jones, 2016; Burleson, 2007; 2011; Delia, 1977).

Goal Pursuit and Message Design

One part of the constructivist perspective is noting how individuals utilize messages to pursue their goals, which may include multiple simultaneous goals. Many studies on message production in communication have focused on messages that aimed at eliciting a single goal (often by breaking down variables into dichotomous distinctions of positive and negative behaviors), without examining the potential of secondary goals to influence the primary goal (Caughlin, 2010; Dillard, 1997). A key example of a measure making solely dichotomous distinctions, as related by Caughlin (2010), is the Marital Interaction Coding System (Heyman, Weiss, & Eddy, 1995), which relies on labeling behaviors as positive or negative in the grand scheme of marital interaction. Caughlin (2010) argues this distinction is too simplistic in consideration of the ample research describing relational interaction as complex and contextual,

thus showing the need for more research considering the presence of primary and secondary goals in relational interaction.

However, before further discussing multiple goals, it is necessary to discuss the different aspects of how messages are formed and modified in consideration of goals. Goals are defined through a three-part conceptualization, which indicate 1) goals precipitate communicative behavior, 2) provide an indication of social reality for the interactant, and 3) indicate human interaction is in flux (Dillard, 1997). As such, goals both cause communicative behavior, and messages designed in pursuit of goals may be modified in accordance with contextual and situational factors of the interaction (Dillard, 1997; Meyer, 1997). To this end, three cognitive structures are identified as involved in the modification (known as editing; Meyer, 1997) of messages during goal pursuit. These cognitive structures are related to the four competencies of cognitive complexity discussed earlier due to the necessity of individuals recognizing the contextual features of an interaction and using the multitude of concerns recognized in the interaction to effectively tailor messages (Burleson, 2007; 2011; Meyer, 1997). The first structure, *situation-action*, involves modifying behavior in relation to cognitive schema concerning changing situations (Meyer, 1997), and an example would involve the perceived transgressor recognizing what words or actions may not have been effective with their friend (the transgressed) in the past and keeping these experiences in mind when creating and editing their messages. Second, *action-consequence* concerns utilizing features of messages (linguistic and contextual features) to suit the communication context (Meyer, 1997), and an example would be the perceived transgressor recognizing specific word choices or phrasing may not be appropriate considering the circumstances of the encounter. Finally, *cognitive representations* concern how the goal may relate to self-image and identity of the pursuer (Meyer, 1997), and an example

would be the perceived transgressor recognizing the potential face threats within the communication encounter and working to protect their own face throughout the interaction.

Many studies within communication have not fully realized the potential heuristic nature of primary and secondary goals (Caughlin, 2010; Dillard, 1997). Multiple goals theory (MGT), building upon the larger works of constructivism, concerns the different types of goals individuals will hold, simultaneously, in an interaction, with these types being instrumental, identity, and relational (Caughlin, 2010; Clark & Delia, 1979). *Instrumental* goals concern the specific task at hand; *identity* goals concern impression management for both the person with the goals and the other interactants; and *relational* goals concern relational development, maintenance, or dissolution, depending on the desired outcome (Caughlin, 2010; Clark & Delia, 1979). This framework of three goal types is considered to be encompassing of goals in interpersonal interaction because of the inclusion of not only the specific goal of the communicative interaction, but also the recognition of communicative encounters also involving the need to manage impressions for both the individual actors, as well as the other interactants within the communicative context (Caughlin, 2010; Clark & Delia, 1979).

As such, MGT shares similarities with the commonly known goals-plans-action (GPA) model, due to the shared understanding of communication being purposeful, goals continuously shaping messages, and recognizing both primary and secondary goals (Caughlin & Wilson, 2021; Dillard, 1990; Dillard, 2015). However, MGT is utilized in this dissertation due to the focus on instrumental, identity, and relational goals, because these types of goals are relevant to the circumstances and contextual features of relational communication (Caughlin, 2010). MGT is itself an extension and modification of goals, plans, actions theory into the specific realm of relational communication, as was devised to go beyond the emphasis on primary and secondary

goals in interpersonal influence settings in GPA (Caughlin, 2010). Therefore, MGT is the preferable goal framework to utilize in this dissertation as it allows for an understanding of how the different types of goals identified can be leveraged in relational communication encounters (Caughlin, 2010; Caughlin & Wilson, 2021), which places this dissertation in further alignment with the recognition that the forgiveness process is in itself a relational process (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017).

Supportive Communication

Drawing the connections between the emphasis of multiple goals within relational encounters, and the recognition that the forgiveness process is a relational process, I now turn to the comforting literature, which is relevant due to three reasons. First, inclusion of the comforting literature comes from the understanding that reducing negative affect is an important aspect of the forgiveness process (Merolla, 2008, 2014), and can be accomplished through both the extension of forgiveness, but also through the process of comforting (Burleson, 2003; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Second, the comforting literature connects with the managing emotions task of the forgiveness process, indicating the emotions that arise resulting from a transgression need to be contended with throughout the forgiveness process itself (Kelley et al., 2016; Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Finally, given the intended context to study involves situations where a perceived transgressor needs to develop messages to contend with helping the transgressed, but does not want to apologize for something they did not do, it seems a logical choice that the perceived transgressor turns to comforting the transgressed, rather than expressing an insincere apology over a transgression they did not commit.

Importantly, the underlying theoretical assumptions of supportive communication research note support and comforting processes are intentional; goal-oriented; may differ in

quality; can be verbal, nonverbal, or both; and are processes all humans are capable of engaging in (Burleson, 2003). The reason the comforting literature is relevant to forgiveness is because both processes (forgiving and comforting) often result in a reduction in negative affect (Burleson, 2003; Kelley, Wolf, & Broberg, 2016; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Additionally, comforting is a logical goal for a transgressor in a forgiveness situation who, while not wanting to take responsibility for an offense, still may not want the relational other to experience the negative affect of feeling hurt. The forgiveness literature is clear on the impact of the negative affect experienced by all parties when transgressions occur, as well as forgiveness being one of multiple ways to resolve the negative affect of unforgiveness (Larkin et al., 2015; Toussaint et al., 2015; Worthington & Scherer, 2004); thus, it is necessary to examine comforting as another pathway for parties within the forgiveness process to resolve negative affect (Burleson, 2003; Jones & Bodie, 2014).

Most relevant here are the important features of comforting messages, as well as the variation in quality based on differences in the communication skill of the participants in the forgiveness interaction. Two classes of helpful comforting messages have been elaborated in the literature, one focused on noting hurt feelings are legitimate, and the other discussing the problems and concerns of the comforting situation (Burleson, 2003). Helpful messages which focus on legitimizing hurt feelings note the person's feelings are reasonable, understandable, and appropriate in the circumstances, show appreciation for the person speaking about their hurt, note the harmed person is not responsible for the hurt, and acknowledge the hurt person should be able to voice how they feel (Burleson, 2003; Jones & Bodie, 2014). Connecting this to what is discussed in the forgiveness literature, this would mean the transgressor would tailor their message to accept their behavior caused the hurt, note the harmed person's reactions to the hurt

are reasonable, allow and encourage the harmed person to speak about their hurt, and be appreciative the harmed person discussed the concern with the transgressor (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017).

Helpful comforting messages focused on problems and concerns illustrate the comforter is interested in listening, encourages expressing the hurt, uses open-ended questions for elaboration, discusses why the person may feel hurt, and restates what the hurt person says while encouraging elaboration (Burleson, 2003; Jones & Bodie, 2014). All of the noted components of these messages are aspects the comforter should attend to during the specific interaction (Burleson, 2003; Jones & Bodie, 2014). In terms of the forgiveness literature, this means the transgressor can tailor their forgiveness-seeking messages to engage in the same aspects of listening, discussing the harmed person's hurt, and focusing on elaborating the hurt for joint understanding of the concerns regarding the transgression (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017). Highly comforting messages are complex, require significant cognitive complexity, and, as such, are not as common as moderately helpful comforting messages (Bodie & Jones, 2016), which only legitimize feelings, but do not work to address those feelings in a constructive manner (Jones & Bodie, 2014). Ultimately, the goal of the most helpful comforting messages should also include working to help the hurt person reappraise their hurt feelings (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Jones & Bodie, 2014).

Overall, when comforting messages are evaluated, message quality is an important factor, as well as the hurt person perceiving that the message was helpful, supportive, and sensitive to their concerns (Burleson, 2003; Goldsmith, 2004; Goldsmith, McDermott, & Alexander, 2000). Thus, research on supportive communication should not simply focus on the quantity of supportive messages or available support but must also consider message quality (Burleson &

Goldsmith, 1998; Goldsmith, 2004). As such, a notable aspect of the support literature was concerned with the development of a scale for evaluating the quality of supportive messages, with factor loadings settling on the dimensions of helpfulness concerning problem solving (helpful, useful, knowledgeable, and generous), supportiveness concerning relational quality (supportive, reassuring, comforting, and encouraging), and sensitivity concerning emotions (sensitive, compassionate, considerate, and understanding) as the key factors of comforting messages (Goldsmith et al., 2000). Overall, the comforting literature notes the features of helpful messages, how these messages can be evaluated, explains an additional pathway in which to address the negative affect experienced by those in forgiveness interactions who have been harmed, and the success of the forgiveness-seeking messages by the perceived transgressor.

Message Design Logics

Another offshoot of the constructivist philosophy is the literature on message design logics (MDL; O'Keefe, 1988), which complements the discussions above on comforting and goals, because of the shared constructivist philosophy. The theoretical foundation of MDL indicates individuals have varying levels of skill in terms of constructing messages, and those with the ability to construct messages of higher sophistication are best equipped to attend to multiple goals and desired outcomes in their messages (Caughlin, 2010; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). In following the constructivist perspective, MDL is geared toward explaining why people may create different messages when pursuing the same goal, and why individuals will create different messages in different situations when pursuing the same or similar goals (Caughlin, 2010; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). As such, a message design logic concerns how communicative knowledge is arranged to constitute messages in pursuit of one or more communicative goals (O'Keefe, 1988).

Arising from this foundation are three different message design logics, which are expressive, conventional, and rhetorical (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). *Expressive* design logic concerns messages constructed to convey a person's feelings and thoughts on the subject at hand, thus placing a value on someone's raw thoughts and emotions (Caughlin et al., 2008; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). *Conventional* design logic aims to create messages that conform to social norms and conventions, which indicates message producers will seek to utilize the relational, situational, and social norms applicable to the specific message context to produce messages (Caughlin et al., 2008; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). Finally, *rhetorical* design logic allows for reframing of the communicative situation, as well as being capable of attending to multiple goals, thus facilitating potential shifts in social reality (Caughlin et al., 2008; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987).

The increased sophistication of each of these logics also indicates that an individual is capable of utilizing the logics below their current capabilities as well (O'Keefe, 1998; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). Stated differently, a person whose skills peak at conventional logic can also use expressive, and a person whose skills peak at rhetorical can also use conventional and expressive (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). This further indicates the abilities of individuals who have the needed level of cognitive complexity to handle the tasks inherent in sophisticated messages (Bodie & Jones, 2016; Delia, 1977; O'Keefe, 1988). Relating this to the forgiveness literature, many of the seven tasks of the forgiveness process require the ability to utilize sophisticated messages, such as when renegotiating the relationship and implementing relationship transformation (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017). Examples of these tasks include the ability to reconcile differing philosophies and values systems held by the relational interactants to devise a joint sense of morality (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; 2017), as well

as the ability to reframe concerns and imagine and implement new trajectories in a relationship (Kelley et al., 2019). As such, this literature emphasizes the importance of the ability to construct highly sophisticated messages to maximize the success of the forgiveness process.

Intriguingly, there are some similarities of the framework of MDL with the overarching framework of verbal person-centered (VPC) messages used in supportive communication, providing evidence of their shared constructivist foundation (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; O'Keefe, 1988). *Low person-centered* supportive messages do not attend to concerns through challenge, ignoring, or denial; *moderate person-centered* supportive messages show indications of recognizing hurt and emotions; and *high person-centered* supportive messages not only make the recognition of hurt and emotions clear, but also focus on reframing or appraisal, with some also focusing on solutions (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Jones & Bodie, 2014).

Given the shared foundation of MDL and VPC, the link between the varying levels is clear in that the lower levels of both frameworks (MDL and VPC) should be less capable of attending to the needs of the context, whereas the higher levels have the greatest capability of succeeding in attending to the needs of the context (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Jones & Bodie, 2014; O'Keefe, 1988). The alignment of the levels of MDL and VPC demonstrate the versatility of these frameworks, given that the origins of these frameworks were in a perspective geared to providing a generalized explanation of message production across populations (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Jones & Bodie, 2014; O'Keefe, 1988). As such, with the recognition of the versatility of MDL across different contexts, it stands to reason that the framework can be extended into new areas, such as the forgiveness process.

As messages of greater sophistication have greater capability of attending to the multitude of interaction needs and goals (Caughlin et al., 2008; O'Keefe, 1988), more

sophisticated messages have greater capability of meeting the multiple interaction goals of comforting and managing identity (between being viewed as a supporter versus a transgressor) within forgiveness episodes. Following this reasoning, the following hypotheses are advanced:

> **H5:** The rhetorical design logic message will be evaluated higher in helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness than the conventional and expressive messages.
>
> **H6:** The expressive design logic message will be evaluated lower in helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness than the conventional and rhetorical messages.

A final aspect worthy of examination concerns the involvement of cognitive complexity in the evaluation of different forgiveness-seeking messages constructed according to the three message design logics (expressive, conventional, and rhetorical; O'Keefe, 1998). As mentioned, constructivism indicates individuals with higher levels of cognitive complexity should be able to construct messages of higher levels of sophistication, with the rhetorical design logic of MDL being the example of the higher level of message sophistication (Burleson, 2007, 2011; O'Keefe, 1988). Logically, this also indicates that individuals possessing a higher level of cognitive complexity should also have a greater ability to recognize the differences in message construction between messages of varying levels of sophistication, as has been found in research on empathy and mindfulness (Youngvorst & Jones, 2017). As the quantitative study in this dissertation aims to bring the concept of cognitive complexity into the domain of forgiveness communication, it is, therefore, intriguing to examine the potential involvement of cognitive complexity on the evaluation of forgiveness-seeking messages. Cognitive complexity, however, cannot be manipulated in a single study, due to cognitive complexity developing over time through increased exposure to others and through the myriad of interactions within the social environment (Burleson, 2007, 2011; O'Keefe, 1988), so it is necessary to examine cognitive

complexity as a moderator. Therefore, in consideration of this reasoning, the following research questions are advanced:

> **RQ2:** Does individual cognitive complexity influence the evaluation of the messages across the dependent variables of helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness?
>
> **RQ3:** Does individual cognitive complexity influence the evaluation of message sophistication in accordance with the levels of message design logic?

One Research Question for the Identity Gaps Study

A final aspect to consider is the possibility of a relationship between cognitive complexity and identity gaps. The literature is unclear as to any link between identity gaps and cognitive complexity, because the two have not been connected to any significant degree in the literature of communication studies. Logically, it would make sense that cognitive complexity is not involved in the process of developing the four different layers of identity, because CTI discusses the four layers of identity as universal to humans (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). However, it is known that cognitive complexity is involved in both message production and message reception (Burleson, 2007, 2011; O'Keefe, 1988), and identity gaps are developed through the many different aspects of human communication (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004), which may include message reception. As those with higher levels of cognitive complexity have greater capability in reframing social context and social identity within the messages they produce (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987), is it also possible that higher levels of cognitive complexity may relate to reframing messages that are received (as asked through RQ1 and RQ2 of the message evaluation study)? As such, is it possible that individuals with greater cognitive complexity may reframe the messages they receive to

potentially bolster against the strength of an identity gap? In this way, could cognitive complexity serve as a moderator between identity gaps and the different affective, psychological, and communicative outcomes identified in the hypotheses to the identity gaps study? In light of this reasoning, the following research question is advance:

RQ1: Does cognitive complexity moderate the relationship between identity gaps and the dependent variables?

Having advanced multiple hypotheses and multiple research questions for both studies and given the nature of the different hypotheses and research questions, the examination of the whole will utilize two different quantitative studies. The next chapter will address the method for these two studies.

Chapter 3: Method

As discussed in the previous chapters, this dissertation will consist of two quantitative studies. There are two main goals across these studies, which are 1) to examine identity gaps as predictors of adverse health and relational outcomes, such as increases in ongoing negative affect (ONA; Merolla, 2014), depressive symptoms (Radloff, 1977), lowering of relational satisfaction (Johnson, 2001), and lowering of interpersonal communication satisfaction (Hecht, 1978), and 2) to test performative forgiveness-seeking messages designed based upon the theoretical perspectives of message design logics (MDL; O'Keefe, 1988). With these overall goals in mind, this chapter is divided into two different sections, with the first covering the identity gaps study, and the second covering the message evaluation study.

Method for the Identity Gaps Study (Study One)

Participants

The identity gaps study consisted of one survey sent to a sample of 270 adults who met the three inclusion criteria noted in the next paragraph. Of the sample, 44.8% identified as women, 50.7% identified as men, 2.6% identified as non-binary/third gender, 0.7% indicated other (open responses included "non-binary & woman"), and 1.1% preferred not to respond. The mean age was 36.07 years (SD = 11.25, range: 18-67). For race, 7% identified as Black or African American, 0.4% identified as American Indian and Alaska Native, 26% identified as Asian, 0.4% identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 73.3% identified as white, 4.8% indicated other (open responses included mestizo, mixed, or biracial, and Caribbean), and 1.5% of participants indicated they preferred not to respond (ethnicity for all participants was indicated as 11.9% Hispanic or Latino, and 84.8% not Hispanic or Latino, 1.5% indicating other, and 1.9% preferring not to respond). The participants for this study were sought out using the Prolific participant pool, and all participants resided in the United States. The larger representation of

those who identified as Asian is unclear but may have been a product of not using the demographically balanced sampling option provided by Prolific, because the requested sample size for this study was not large enough for this option to become available. “Chance is lumpy” (Abelson, 1995, p. 21). Nevertheless, using the Prolific participant pool was beneficial in accessing a sample that was more diverse than the typical college student sample, primarily due to capturing individuals of ages outside of the traditional college student age.

There were three inclusion criteria. First, participants needed to have experienced (and needed to be able to describe) a real situation where they had been accused of a transgression by a good friend. Second, the participant needed to have disagreed with the accusation of wrongdoing. Finally, the participant needed to have voiced their disagreement to their good friend. The three inclusion criteria were in place to make sure each participant was in the position of a perceived transgressor in an actual communication encounter, and that the participant had placed themselves in the position to engage in performative forgiveness by disagreeing with the accusation and voicing their disagreement. This meets the conceptualization of performative forgiveness because the person is disagreeing with the accusation while attempting to maintain their face within the relationship, regardless of how successful their attempts may be. The participants who met all three inclusion criteria through their responses to a short screening survey were then sent the full survey. Both the screening survey and the full survey were sent through Prolific platform.

Procedures

As mentioned, a short screening survey was sent out on the Prolific platform to recruit participants for this study. The screening survey was aimed at determining which participants met the inclusion criteria for the study, and the screening survey was closed after 1,000 participants submitted complete responses. The questions on the survey were: (1) “have you had

an encounter where a good friend accused you of having wronged them in some way," (2) "for the encounter where you were accused by your good friend, did you disagree with the accusation," and (3) "did you tell your friend you disagreed with the accusation?" The response choices to the first question were yes and no, and were yes, no, and not applicable to the second and third questions. The participants who answered yes to all three questions met the inclusion criteria, and were sent the full survey.

Participants received the link to the survey through their dashboard of their Prolific account, and upon clicking the link, the participants were first taken to the informed consent page of the survey. The informed consent statement included the potential harm of negative emotions arising from imagining a problematic communication encounter (to which the contact information for counseling resources through the Centers for Disease Control were provided), as well as the author's OU email address, and the contact information for the OU institutional review board (IRB). Only the participants that agreed to the informed consent statement were allowed to proceed with the survey, and for those who did not agree, the survey sent those participants to the final screen of the survey that directed them to close their browser.

Following agreement to the informed consent statement, the participants were then directed to a screen providing the overall instructions for the survey. Once they read these instructions, the participants proceeded to the next screen where they completed the cognitive complexity measure (Bagdasarov, 2009). Next, the participants were directed to describe a real situation where they were accused of a transgression by a good friend, but disagreed with the accusation and told their good friend such. Participants were asked to describe the situation in a provided text box. After this, the next screen informed participants they needed to keep the scenario in mind as they completed all of the measures that followed and answer all subsequent

questions in consideration of how they thought and felt in the week following the situation they described.

From this point, the participants proceeded to the three identity gap measures. The three identity gaps measured were the personal-enacted identity gap (Jung & Hecht, 2004), the personal-relational identity gap (Jung & Hecht, 2004), and the enacted-relational identity gap (Jung, 2011). These three measures were counterbalanced in their order using the randomization logic of Qualtrics to reduce ordering effects (Singleton & Straits, 2010). Following completion of the three identity gap measures, the participants then completed the measures for interpersonal communication satisfaction (Hecht, 1978), relational satisfaction (Johnson, 2001), ongoing negative affect (Merolla, 2008, 2014), and depressive symptoms (Radloff, 1977). These four measures were also counterbalanced in their order to reduce ordering effects (Singleton & Straits, 2010). Once the participants completed these measures, they were directed to the demographic questions, and then the survey was complete.

Measures

The primary measures for this study included the measures for the three independent variables of the personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps, and the measures for the dependent variables of interpersonal communication satisfaction (Hecht, 1978), relational satisfaction (Johnson, 2001), ongoing negative affect (ONA; Merolla, 2008, 2014), and depressive symptoms (Radloff, 1977). The moderating variable was measured using the Cognitive Complexity Instrument (CCI; Bagdasarov, 2009). I will discuss the independent variable measures first, followed by the dependent variable measures, and conclude with the cognitive complexity measure.

Identity gaps occur when there is dissonance between any two of the four different layers of identity, and frequently manifest in various adverse emotional and relational outcomes, such as depressive symptoms and reductions in interpersonal communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Three measures were created in past studies to measure the presence and intensity of identity gaps in interpersonal interactions, and the three identity gaps measured are the personal-relational, personal-enacted, and enacted-relational identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung, 2011). All three of the identity gap measures followed the same structure of using a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 equaling strongly disagree and 7 equaling strongly agree. The personal-relational (PR; Appendix C) identity gap measure included 11 items divided into two subscales, with the authors calling for a second-order solution for this measure, meaning the two factors are combined into one scale for purposes of analysis (Jung & Hecht, 2004). The first subscale of the PR measure consisted of 6 items, and is known as the differentiation factor because of the difference the participant notices between their personal and relational identities (Jung & Hecht, 2004). The second subscale (factor) is known as the preconception factor because of the participant's perception of how others see the participant's personal and relational identities (Jung & Hecht, 2004). The personal-enacted identity gap measure included 11 items on a single factor (Jung & Hecht, 2004), and the enacted-relational identity gap scale consisted of 6 items on a single factor (Jung, 2011). An example item from the differentiation factor of the personal-relational (PR; Appendix C) measure is "I am different from the way my communication partners see me"; and example item from the preconception factor of the PR measure is "When my communication partners talk about me, I often wonder if they talk about me or someone else"; an example from the personal-enacted (PE; Appendix D) measure is "I sometimes mislead my communication partners about who I really

am"; and an example item from the enacted-relational (ER; Appendix E) measure is "I am usually successful in conveying my intended images to my acquaintances" (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung, 2011).

The validity and reliability of all three measures were found to be acceptable in the original studies (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung, 2011). However, the track record of the enacted-relational identity gap measure has not been as smooth, with the measure being found reliable in some studies (Jung, 2011; Rubinsky, 2022), and unreliable in others (Rubinsky, 2019). The difference in findings appears to be influenced by the items that are reverse scored, with one study noting only two items being reverse scored (Rubinsky, 2022), and another noting 4 items being reverse scored (Rubinsky, 2019). In my review of the items, the version using two reverse scored items appears to be appropriate, due to the logical answer choices based on the wording of each of the statements. As such, I proceeded with my study using two reverse scored items on the enacted-relational identity gap measure. However, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted for each of the identity gaps measures to further validate these measures.

The full results of the CFAs are discussed in Chapter 4: Results. Overall, the CFAs resulted in all three identity gaps measures being modified. The PR measure was modified to a greater extent, when compared to the PE and ER measures. All items were retained in the *differentiation* factor of the PR measure, but items 3 and 4 were removed from the *preconception* factor, turning the 11-item PR measure into a 9-item measure. The CFA conducted for this study found improved model fit for the first order solution, so the first order solution was used in statistical analysis, meaning the preconception factor of the PR measure was treated as a separate measure from the differentiation factor of the PR measure. Reliability, measured using Cronbach's alpha, was $\alpha = 0.89$ for the *differentiation* factor, and $\alpha = 0.67$ for the preconception

factor (even though this means the *preconception* factor is less reliable than desired, this measure was still analyzed, and the results of this measure are included in Chapter 4: Results). The PE measure was modified from 11 items to consisting of 8 items, with items 1, 2, and 3 having been removed (Appendix D). The ER measure was modified from 6 items to 3 items, with items 1, 2, and 3 having been removed (Appendix E). The reliability of these measures, using Cronbach's alpha, indicates the PE measure was reliable ($\alpha = 0.87$), as well as the ER measure, ($\alpha = 0.79$).

The first dependent variable, which was interpersonal communication satisfaction (ICS; Appendix F), consisted of a 16-item measure using a 7-point Likert scale. As such, the anchors for the scale were 1 equals strongly disagree and 7 equals strongly agree. This measure was developed to be used in examining perceptions of interpersonal communication competence through both what communicators say, as well as other aspects of communicative interaction, such as human performance (Hecht, 1978). The ICS measure was found to be reliable in both the original study (Hecht, 1978), as well as in subsequent studies using the measure (Ramsey, Knight, & Knight, 2019; Wood, 2022). To validate the ICS measure, a CFA was conducted, resulting in a modified measure of 12 items (items 3, 6, 15, and 16 were removed). The full results of the CFA are discussed in Chapter 4: Results. The ICS measure was found to be reliable post-CFA (Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.94$).

The second dependent variable of relational satisfaction (RS; Appendix G) consisted of a 4-item measure, using a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 equaling strongly disagree and 7 equaling strongly agree. Two of the items are reverse coded. The choice of this measure of relational satisfaction is due to the use of this measure in conjunction with the ongoing negative affect measure in prior forgiveness research (Merolla, 2008). An example statement from this measure is "There is little I would change about this friendship to make me more satisfied." The RS

measure was found to be valid and reliable in the original study and subsequent study (Johnson, 2001; Merolla, 2008). To further validate the RS measure, a CFA was conducted, resulting in all four items being retained. The full results of the CFA are discussed in Chapter 4: Results. Following the CFA, the RS measure was found to be reliable (Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.91$).

Ongoing negative affect (ONA; Appendix H), as the third dependent variable, was measured using a 4-item measure, with a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 equaling strongly disagree and 7 equaling strongly agree. No items in this measure were reverse coded. Small modifications were made to this measure as the original measure only included statements about hurtful actions and did not include the possibility of hurtful words. The addition of language that could include hurtful words, in addition to actions, was deemed necessary as the scenario participants were asked to describe did not specify whether the transgression required word or action, because relational transgressions can involve words, actions, or both (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Thus, adding the language prevented the potential of confusion on the part of the participants. An example statement from one of the items is "I still feel anger about the things he/she did and/or said." This measure was used for its common use in forgiveness communication research, especially as it pertains to measuring the long-term emotional and affective impact of relational transgressions (Merolla, 2008, 2014). The ONA measure used in this study was the second development of this measure by Merolla. The original measure included seven items (Merolla, 2008), but following further study and a further confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), only four of the seven items were found to load properly onto the expected factor, and this modified measure was deemed reliable using Cronbach's alpha (Merolla, 2014). To further validate the ONA measure, a CFA was conducted in this study, resulting in all four items being retained. The full

results of the CFA are discussed in Chapter 4: Results. The ONA measure was also found to be reliable in this study, with Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.92$.

Depressive symptoms (DS: Appendix I), as the final dependent variable, was measured using the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D scale; Radloff, 1977), which is a measure of 20-items and a 4-point Likert-type scale. The anchors of this scale differed, with 1 equaling rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day), 2 equaling some or a little of the time (1-2 days), 3 equaling occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days), and 4 equaling most or all of the time (5-7 days). This measure was designed to be a relatively simple yet valid and reliable measure of depression to use in non-clinical research (Radloff, 1977), and the measure has subsequently been used to a great degree in research in psychology and other social sciences, such as communication (Dershem, Patsiorkovski, & O'Brien, 1996; Jung, 2013, 2020). Despite the answer choices lacking consistent intervals (which would point to an ordinal level of measurement; Singleton & Straits, 2010), this measure is treated as continuous, due to the necessity of summing the answer responses prior to statistical analysis (Dershem et al., 1996). The measure calls for sums between 0 and 60, which requires subtracting 1 from the answer value of each item, and then adding the twenty items. A value of 1 had to be subtracted from the answers for each item as the scale used in Qualtrics was a 1-to-4 scale, whereas the correct scale for the measure is a 0-to-3 scale. Following transformation of the answer items, the scores were summed for each participant, and were then used in the multiple regression analyses for this study.

To further validate the DS measure, a CFA was conducted, resulting in a modified measure of 16 items (items 2, 4, 8, and 15 were removed). This means the scoring of the measure had to be modified from a maximum value of 60 to a maximum value of 48 for this study.

Despite the modifications of this measure resulting in a different higher value than the original measure, the purpose of the scale was not changed, due to the higher values still representing increased levels of depressive symptoms. As the fundamental nature of measurement of this measure did not change, the measure was still deemed to be satisfactory in representing increases of depressive symptoms, so the modified measure was retained in this study. The full results of the CFA are discussed in Chapter 4: Results. The reliability of this measure through Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = 0.95$.

Finally, due to the utilization of constructivism in this dissertation, it was necessary to measure the *cognitive complexity* of the study participants (Burleson, 2007). As such, cognitive complexity was measured using the cognitive complexity instrument (CCI; Appendix B), which is a 21-item measure on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 equaling strongly disagree and 5 equaling strongly agree (Bagdasarov, 2009). The CCI is split into three dimensions of cognitive complexity (7 items for each dimension), with the dimensions being differentiation (ability to handle increasing amounts of information), abstractness (ability to contend with ambiguity), and integration (ability to synthesize information), with the results of each dimension contributing to an overall cognitive complexity score (Bagdasarov, 2009). An example of a *differentiation* item is, "When describing a person, I typically go beyond physical description" (Bagdasarov, 2009, p. 295). An example of an *abstractness* item is, "I like to come up with new ideas for how to solve some problems" (Bagdasarov, 2009, p. 295). Lastly, an example of an *integration* item is, "I spend a lot of time reflecting on how things are connected" (Bagdasarov, 2009, p. 296). Six of the items on the scale are reverse coded.

The previous development and testing of the CCI determined it is a valid and reliable measure of cognitive complexity that shares convergent validity with the role category

questionnaire (RCQ), which is a commonly used measure of cognitive complexity requiring coding of open-ended participant responses using multiple coders (Bagdasarov, 2009). Subsequent use of CCI has confirmed both the reliability and validity of CCI as a measure of cognitive complexity (Averbeck & Miller, 2014). A CFA was conducted to further validate the CCI measure.

As cognitive complexity is a multidimensional construct, and the CCI measure recognizes this fact through having three factors within the overall measure, the CFA for this study accounted for the three factors in the CFA model, which found good fit for all three factors following the removal of certain items. The items removed from the *differentiation* factor were items 1 and 7 (resulting in a factor of 5 items; Appendix B), items 2 and 6 were removed from the *abstractness* factor (resulting in a factor of 5 items; Appendix B), and item 3 was removed for the *integration* factor (resulting in a factor of 6 items; Appendix B). The removal of items modified the 21-item measure to a 16-item measure. Next, full model convergence was tested to create a second order solution (as the original formulation of the measure calls for). Despite the original formulation of the measure including a second order solution, the fit for this solution was inadequate when compared to the first order solution, so the first order solution was used for statistical analysis. The full results of the CFA are discussed in Chapter 4: Results. The reliability, measured via Cronbach's alpha, was $\alpha = 0.72$ for the *differentiation* factor, $\alpha = 0.85$ for the *abstractness* factor, and $\alpha = 0.84$ for the *integration* factor.

Method for the Message Evaluation Study (Study Two)

The message evaluation study consisted of both a pilot study to test the survey, as well as the full study aimed at testing hypotheses (H5 and H6) and addressing the two research questions concerning cognitive complexity (RQ1 and RQ2). The main goal of the pilot study was to make sure the participants were completing the manipulation check properly, and to see if the

manipulations were having the desired effect. A secondary goal of the pilot study was to make sure the participants were able to complete the entire study properly, including checking to make sure the Qualtrics logic utilized in the survey was functioning as required. Despite the different goals between the pilot study and full study, the procedures for administering the survey were the same across the two studies.

Major changes in survey content, however, occurred between the studies due to problems arising from the pilot survey. The CTI manipulation check (described in the measures section below) was deemed a failure, due to failing to achieve statistical significance in participant evaluations between some of the identity layers of the messages. Due to these concerns, it was decided to eliminate CTI as a theoretical framework for this study, with the full study solely focusing on MDL. Nevertheless, it was found that the three MDL messages designed using the relational identity layer had the largest effect size, when compared to the messages in the other identity layers from CTI, so the three relational messages were the three messages used in the redesigned MDL-only study (the three were chosen out of the original 12 messages manipulating both independent variables). As such, the full study included one expressive message, one conventional message, and one rhetorical message using the relational identity layer messages. The results of the pilot test and the full study are described in greater detail in Chapter 4: Results.

Participants

The sample for the pilot study was 75 adults. Of the sample, 52% identified as women and 48% identified as men. The mean age was 36.39 years (*SD* = 11.78, range: 19-66). For the full study, the sample was 287 adults. Of the sample, 36.6% identified as women, 59.2% identified as men, 0.7% identified as non-binary/third gender, and 2% preferred not to respond. The mean age was 34.18 years (*SD* = 11.83, range: 18-70). In terms of race, 7.9% identified as Black or African American, 0.4% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 12.1%

identified as Asian, 0.8% identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 5.7% identified as Latino, 71.7% identified as white, and 1.5% preferred to not respond.

The participants for the message evaluation study (both the pilot study and the full study) were drawn from the participant pool maintained by the company Prolific. The benefit of utilizing the Prolific participant pool was access to participants outside of the characteristics and demographics of a college student sample. The goal was to cast a metaphorical wide net in terms of the demographic characteristics of the participants, particularly when it comes to the age of the participants. The relevance of age is due to the understanding that individuals grow in their communication competence and, thus, their ability to utilize the different logics of message design as they grow in both their communication experience and their cognitive complexity, which has a relationship to a person's age despite cognitive complexity and age not being causally related (Delia, 1977; O'Keefe, 1988).

There were few inclusion criteria due to the nature of MDL, and its foundation in cognitive complexity being near-universal in its relevance across populations (Delia, 1977; O'Keefe, 1988). An age of 18 years or older, due to the cutoff for a participant being a legal adult was a criterion, and age was controlled when performing when examining cognitive complexity as a moderating variable. Age was controlled for because of the positive relationship between increasing age and increasing cognitive complexity (due to having greater experience communicating across different types of communicative situations; O'Keefe, 1988). As such, the inclusion criteria pertained to the limitations of format of the survey itself, and these were the need to have proficiency in reading and understanding the English language, the ability to utilize a computer to complete the survey, and the ability to agree to the informed consent statement individually and legally. The inclusion criteria were the same for both the pilot study and the full

study, and the participants and data from the pilot study were excluded from the full study. Finally, all participants resided in the United States.

Procedures

Links for the Qualtrics survey were dispersed through Prolific. This manner was the same for both the pilot study and the full study. Participants received the link to the survey through the dashboard of their Prolific account, and upon clicking the link, the participants were first taken to the informed consent page of the survey. The informed consent statement included the potential harm of negative emotions arising from imagining a problematic communication encounter (to which the contact information for counseling resources through the Centers for Disease Control were provided), as well as the author's university email address, and the contact information for the institutional review board (IRB) at the author's university. Only the participants that agreed to the informed consent statement were allowed to proceed with the survey, and for those who did not agree, the survey sent those participants to the final screen of the survey that directed them to close their browser.

Following agreement to the informed consent statement, the participants were then directed to a screen providing the overall instructions for the survey. Once they read these instructions, the participants proceeded to the next screen where they completed the cognitive complexity measure (Bagdasarov, 2009). Next, the participants were directed to describe a real situation where they were transgressed by a good friend. Participants were asked to describe the situation in a provided text box, including how they felt about the situation, and how severe they felt the transgression was. After this, the next screen informed participants they needed to keep the scenario in mind as they evaluated the messages that followed, and to pretend that their friend spoke these messages in response to being accused of a transgression by the participant.

From this point, each participant was given one of the three messages (all messages are shown in Appendix A), with the order of the messages counter-balanced using the randomization logic in Qualtrics. All participants completed the MDL manipulation check measure, and the measures for helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness (the 5 dependent variable measures). The order of the 5 dependent variable measures were also randomized through Qualtrics to address ordering effects (Singleton & Straits, 2010). They were asked to review the message and then proceeded to the next screen which displayed the message at the top and below displayed the relevant measures. This process was repeated for the two remaining messages. After the participant reviewed and evaluated all three messages, they were directed to the demographic questionnaire, collecting information on various demographic characteristics, which included race, ethnicity, sex, gender, and age. Following this, the participants were taken to the final screen once again informing them of counseling resources and the author's university email address.

All of the data from each item of the survey was retained by Qualtrics. Upon the completion of data collection, the author exported the data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to use in the analysis with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. No identifying information was collected (although, participants provided their Prolific identification (ID) number in the event the Prolific system did not record their participation. These ID numbers are proprietary information, and the author is not able to identify participants from these ID numbers).

Measures

The primary measures in this study concern the five dependent variables of helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness, as well as of cognitive complexity as a moderator. These primary measures were the three separate 4-item scales evaluating

helpfulness, *supportiveness*, and *sensitivity* developed by Goldsmith, McDermott, and Alexander (2000), the 4-item *appropriateness* scale developed by Caughlin et al. (2008), and a 9-item *effectiveness* scale modified specially for this study from Canary and Spitzberg's (1987) message effectiveness scale. All five dependent variable measures used a 5-point semantic differential scale. The cognitive complexity measure used a 5-point Likert scale.

For *helpfulness* (Appendix J), the adjective and paired antonyms are helpful to hurtful, useful to useless, knowledgeable to ignorant, and selfish to generous (Goldsmith et al., 2000). *Supportive* (Appendix K) consists of the pairings supportive to unsupportive, reassuring to upsetting, comforting to distressing, and encouraging to discouraging (Goldsmith et al., 2000). *Sensitive* (Appendix L) consists of insensitive to sensitive, heartless to compassionate, inconsiderate to considerate, and misunderstanding to understanding (Goldsmith et al., 2000). These adjectives and accompanying antonyms are placed on a five-point scale, with the antonym typically occupying the space of 1 and the adjective occupying the space of 5. However, several of these pairings are reverse scored to help in determining if participants are providing the measure adequate attention. Further, the suitability of these measures is clear due to the reliability and validity of the *helpfulness*, *supportiveness*, and *sensitivity* measures established in the analyses of messages designed using MDL in Caughlin et al. (2008).

The helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity measures were further validated in this study through CFAs. Three CFAs were needed per measure, due to each measure being completed three times by each participant (one time per message). All items for each of the three measures were retained according to the CFAs, so no modifications to these measures were necessary. The full CFA results are reported in Chapter 4: Results. All three measures were found to be reliable in this study by utilizing Cronbach's alpha. For *helpfulness*, the measure used with

the expressive message was α = 0.89, with the conventional message was α = 0.94, and with the rhetorical message was α = 0.91 (α = 0.95 for all three conditions combined). For *supportiveness*, the measure used with the expressive message was α = 0.93, with the conventional message was α = 0.93, and with the rhetorical message was α = 0.94 (α = 0.96 for all three conditions combined). For *sensitivity*, the measure used with the expressive message was α = 0.87, with the conventional message was α = 0.91, and with the rhetorical message was α = 0.94 (α = 0.94 for all three conditions combined).

As discussed in the literature review, constructivism as a theory indicates those who have greater cognitive complexity will be evaluated as having higher levels of communication competence (Burleson, 2007, 2011; Delia, 1977), and the communication literature is clear that communication competence involves an evaluation of the appropriateness and effectiveness of a message (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987; Cupach, Canary, & Spitzberg, 2010). As such, the dependent variables of message appropriateness and message effectiveness were measured in this study. For the dependent variable of appropriateness, the four items of the measure derived from Caughlin et al.'s (2008) examination of different messages, designed using MDL in reference to disclosures of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in interpersonal conversations were used. The four-item *appropriateness* scale created specifically for the Caughlin et al. (2008) study, and used in conjunction with the three Goldsmith et al. (2000) measures in that same study, was designed to measure the perceived appropriateness of messages attending to multiple goals, with these messages having been created using MDL (Caughlin et al., 2008). The *appropriateness* measure was determined to be a valid and reliable measure of perceived message appropriateness in this context (Caughlin et al., 2008).

This four-item *appropriateness* measure (Appendix M) is formatted in the same way as the Goldsmith et al. (2000) measures to have an adjective matched with its accompanying antonym and measured using a 5-point scale. As such, the adjectives and antonyms are appropriate to inappropriate, rude to decent, respectful to disrespectful, and proper to improper (Caughlin et al., 2008). The rude to decent item is reverse scored (Caughlin et al., 2008). This measure was also subjected to a CFA to further validate the measure. Following the CFA, all items were retained, so no modifications were made to the appropriateness measure. The full CFA results are included in Chapter 4: Results. In this study, the reliability of the *appropriateness* measure used with the expressive message was $\alpha = 0.92$, with the conventional message was $\alpha = 0.95$, and with the rhetorical message was $\alpha = 0.93$ ($\alpha = 0.96$ for all three conditions combined).

The dependent variable of *effectiveness* (Appendix N) was measured using a modified version of the effectiveness scale developed by Canary and Spitzberg (1987). The effectiveness scale developed by Canary and Spitzberg (1987) consists of 20-items using a 7-point Likert scale. However, as the other measures in this study utilize a 5-point semantic differential scale, the author modified the effectiveness scale to be structured in the same fashion as the other four measures in this study. As such, the author created a 9-item semantic differential scale for this study, modifying this measure from the Canary's & Spitzberg's (1987) measure. The nine items were then placed on a 1-to-5 scale to conform with the other four measures within this study.

The nine adjective and antonym pairs in the effectiveness scale used in this study were effective to ineffective, beneficial to detrimental, successful to unsuccessful, advantageous to disadvantageous, rewarding to unrewarding, profitable to unprofitable, assertive to unassertive, domineering to yielding, and controlling to deferential. As the other measures in the study utilize

reverse coding for multiple items, the same practice was utilized for the effectiveness measure. Four of the nine items in the effectiveness measure were reverse coded, and a random list generator indicated the reverse coded items as items 1, 2, 4, and 7 (Appendix N).

As the effectiveness measure was created specifically for this study, the measure also needed to be subjected to a CFA. The CFA was appropriate as all items were devised to be part of a single latent variable. However, as this measure was used three times (once for each of the three messages), this process involved three different CFAs. Following the CFAs, items 7, 8, and 9 were removed (Appendix N), resulting in the modified effectiveness measure consisting of 6 items. In this study, the reliability of the effectiveness measure used with the expressive message was $\alpha = 0.90$, with the conventional message was $\alpha = 0.94$, and with the rhetorical message was $\alpha = 0.92$ ($\alpha = 0.95$ for all three conditions combined).

Finally, as cognitive complexity was measured as a moderating variable in this study, the same CCI measure (Bagdasarov, 2009) used in the identity gaps study was used in this study. A more detailed explanation of the measure can be found in the discussion of this measure for the identity gaps study (see pp. 10 and 11 for more information about this measure and Appendix B for the measure). Further validation of the CCI measure in this study was accomplished through a CFA. As the measure consists of three dimensions (with 7 items per dimension), the CFA model consisted of three factors, and adequate fit was achieved for each factor, albeit with the removal of certain items. Items 5 and 7 were removed from the *differentiation* factor, items 5 and 6 were removed from the *abstractness* factor, and no items were removed from the *integration* factor (in all, the 21-item measure became a 17-item measure following the removal of items; see Appendix B). Further, the three factors converged for adequate fit in the full model, so the second order solution was favored over the first order solution for statistical analysis. The

reliability of the CCI measure (using Cronbach's alpha) for this study was $\alpha = 0.88$. Further details on the CFA for this measure is included in Chapter 4: Results.

Manipulation Checks

Original manipulation checks were devised due to the creation of messages derived from the unique combination of MDL and CTI. Until now, studies examining messages derived from MDL have utilized intercoder reliability to establish message fit to the three design logics of expressive, conventional, and rhetorical (e.g. Caughlin et al., 2008; Peterson & Albrecht, 1996), while studies examining the identity layers of CTI have typically utilized qualitative analysis (thematic analysis using multiple levels of coding and constant comparison have been common) to identity themes and differentiate the identity layers (e.g. Crowley & Miller, 2020; Wagner, Kunkel, & Compton, 2016). This study utilized scales to serve as manipulation checks to determine whether the participants (rather than outside coders) perceived the messages in the manner designed. As such, the first manipulation check (in Appendix O) measures the three different levels of MDL (expressive, conventional, and rhetorical; O'Keefe, 1988), whereas the second manipulation check (in Appendix P) measured the four identity layers of CTI (personal, enacted, relational, and communal; Hecht, 1993).

The MDL manipulation check (Appendix O) consisted of an 8-item measure using a 5-point semantic differential scale for each item. The adjectives and accompanying antonyms for this manipulation check were complex to simple, intricate to straightforward, understanding to judgmental, rational to irrational, absolving to blaming, validating to invalidating, affirming to denying, and acknowledging to rejecting. The adjectives were derived from the MDL codebook utilized by Caughlin et al. (2008), as well as the conceptualizations of the three levels of MDL by O'Keefe (1988). The scale for the MDL manipulation check was constructed to indicate

increasing message sophistication by an increase in the values on the scale (for example, *complex* is an adjective on the scale, and the scale indicates *complex* equals 5 and the antonym of *simple* equals 1). Many of the items on the scale are reverse coded, and these items were recoded prior to data analysis.

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to determine which items loaded onto the single factor using maximum likelihood estimation. The CFA was appropriate as all items were devised to be part of a single latent variable. However, as this measure was used three times (once for each of the three messages), this process involved three different CFAs. All three CFAs were in agreement concerning the specific items that should be removed, and all three demonstrated good model fit following removal of the items. The two items that were removed were items 1 and 2, which meant the modified measure consisted of items 3 through 8 of the original MDL manipulation check measure. The reliability of the MDL manipulation check measure used with the expressive message was $\alpha = 0.89$, with the conventional message was $\alpha = 0.90$, and with the rhetorical message was $\alpha = 0.91$ ($\alpha = 0.94$ for all three conditions combined).

The second manipulation check (Appendix P) concerned the four identity layers of CTI. This manipulation check was a 16-item measure, using a 7-item Likert scale, with 1 equaling strongly disagree and 7 equaling strongly agree. This 16-item measure was divided so four items pertained to each of the four identity layers. An example of an item for the personal layer was "the messages focused on the kind of person I should be," an example item for the enacted layer was "the messages focused on how I should express myself," an example item for the relational layer was "the messages focused on the relationship I should have between me and my friend" and an example item for the communal layer was "the messages focused on the group or community to which my friend and I belong." This manipulation check was deemed a failure

following the pilot test (see Appendix P). As such, the CTI manipulation check was not used in the full study, but the results for the pilot test are included in Chapter 4: Results.

Chapter 4: Results

The results for the studies are discussed in the same order as discussed in the method section, with the identity gaps study first, and the message evaluation study second.

Identity Gaps Study (Study One)

The hypotheses in the identity gaps study indicated the personal-relational (PR), personal-enacted (PE), and enacted-relational (ER) identity gaps would be predictors of interpersonal communication satisfaction (ICS), relational satisfaction (RS), ongoing negative affect (ONA), and depressive symptoms (DS). As the hypotheses discussed a single DV at a time, the results for the identity gaps study will be presented in the order of the hypotheses, followed by the research question.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted using LISREL version 12.4. The data were first cleaned by checking for missing values, recoding all reverse coded items, and analyzing bivariate correlations between all items on the respective measures to ensure all items had been properly recoded. Following data cleaning, the full dataset for study one that included all measures were put into LISREL to be analyzed together, with the first item of each measure acting as the metric marker. Model fit throughout this process was evaluated by maximum likelihood estimation and in accordance with the following guidelines: RMSEA ≤ 0.10, CFI ≥ 0.90, and SRMR ≤ 0.08 (Brown, 2015; Kenny, Kaniskan, & McCoach, 2015). Nevertheless, it is recognized that reasonable deviations from these guidelines may be part of the overall decision-making process of determining the suitability of each measure (Henne et al., 2011; Kenny et al., 2015).

The initial model for the identity gaps study achieved problematic fit. Although the values for RMSEA and SRMR surpassed the recommended thresholds (≤ 0.10 and ≤ 0.08,

respectively), the value for CFI did not (≥ 0.90). As such, items with standardized path coefficients below 0.50 were dropped, with a noticeable but still insufficient improvement in CFI for the full model (RMSEA and SRMR remained acceptable throughout this process). Complicating the process was the recognition that further removal of items in accordance with a higher standardized path coefficient threshold (e.g., 0.55 or 0.60) would compromise the factor structure of the three identity gaps and cognitive complexity measures. However, further improvements could be made to the dependent measures without compromising their factor structures. Thus, it was decided to subject the dependent measures to the higher standardized path coefficient threshold of 0.60, so all items in the dependent measures that fell below this new threshold were removed. This aligns with recommendations for CFAs (Brown, 2015).

Again, although the CFI value made a noticeable improvement, it was still below the recommended threshold of 0.90. As such, it was deemed necessary to covary items within the same factor that have similar wording. This part of the process resulted in three pairs of items being correlated. Once again, there was a noticeable yet insufficient improvement in CFI. Nevertheless, all reasonable options for improving model fit for the single factor measures had been exhausted by this time, so the CFA analyses process was considered complete for the single factor measures. Table 1 provides the goodness-of-fit statistics for three key parts of the CFA process. The first set is for the initial CFA analysis, the second set show the statistics following the removal of all items not exceeding the standardized path coefficient thresholds discussed above, and the third set shows the final model.

An additional note is two measures (the cognitive complexity and the personal-relational identity gaps measure) were originally designed with multiple factors, calling for a second order solution, so the two measures were further tested to see if the models would improve with second

order solutions. The second order models failed to converge with all attempts, so the decision was made to use the first order models with multiple subscales for both CC (three underlying subscales) and PR (two underlying subscales) in regression analyses for the identity gaps studies. As such, the CFA results in Table 1 show the final models.

Although previously explained in the measures section of Chapter 3: Method, it is helpful to reiterate here which items were removed from each of the measures, and which items were allowed to correlate. For the cognitive complexity measure, items 1 and 7 were removed from the differentiation factor, items 2 and 6 were removed from the abstraction factor, and item 3 was removed from the integration factor (Appendix B). For the personal-relational identity gap measure (Appendix C), no items were removed from the differentiation factor (PRDIFF), but items 3 and 4 were removed from the preconception factor (PREPRE). Items 1, 2, and 3 were removed from the personal-enacted identity gap measure, and the errors of items 10 and 11 were allowed to correlate due to similar wording (Appendix D). Items 1, 2, and 3 were removed from the enacted-relational identity gap measure (Appendix E). Items 3, 6, 15, and 16 of the interpersonal communication satisfaction measure were removed, and the errors of items 5 and 7 were allowed to correlate due to similar wording (Appendix F). No changes were made to either the relational satisfaction or ongoing negative affect measures (Appendix G and H, respectively). Finally, items 2, 4, 8, and 15 were removed from the depressive symptoms measure, and the errors of items 12 and 16 were allowed to correlate due to similar wording (Appendix I).

Tests of Hypotheses and Research Questions

Hierarchical multiple regressions were run to test each hypothesis and research question in this study. As there are four dependent variables (ICS, RS, ONA, and DS), the analyses required four regressions to be conducted, with each analysis requiring the use of three blocks for each regression. Block 1 consisted of age as the sole theoretically relevant demographic variable,

block 2 added the independent variable measures (PRDIFF, PRPRE, PE, and ER; all mean-centered), as well as CCDIFF, CCABST, and CCINT (all were mean-centered), and block 3 added all 12 interaction terms to test for moderation (PRDIFF * CCDIFF, PRDIFF * CCABST, PRDIFF * CCINT, PRPRE * CCDIFF, PRPRE * CCABST, PRPRE * CCINT, PE * CCDIFF, PE * CCABST, PE * CCINT, ER * CCDIFF, ER * CCABST, and ER * CCINT). Simple slopes analysis was also conducted for the only two significant interaction effects, and I discuss this further when discussing the research question.

The first hypothesis predicted the three identity gaps were significant predictors of ICS. The overall regression was significant, $F(20, 249) = 6.60$, $p < 0.001$, and $R^2 = 0.35$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.29$). For the IVs, the differentiation factor (the first of two subscales) of PR (PRDIFF) was a significant predictor, $\beta = -0.45$, $t(249) = -6.69$, $p < 0.001$, but the preconception factor (the second of two subscales) of PR (PRPRE) was not significant, $\beta = 0.04$, $t(249) = 0.68$, p = 0.50. Another significant predictor was PE, $\beta = -0.13$, $t(249) = -2.15$, $p = 0.03$, and the same was true for ER, $\beta = -0.18$, $t(249) = -2.55$, $p = 0.11$. As the results for PRDIFF, PE, and ER were significant, but not for PRPRE, the first hypothesis was only partially supported (see Table 2 for the full set of regression data, and Table 6 for the bivariate correlations).

The second hypothesis predicted the three identity gaps were significant predictors of RS. The overall regression was significant, $F(20, 249) = 4.09$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.22$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.20$). For the predictors, PRDIFF was a significant predictor, $\beta = -0.34$, $t(249) = -4.80$, $p < 0.001$, but PRPRE was not a significant predictor, $\beta = -0.04$, $t(249) = -0.67$, p = 0.51. Further, PE was not significant, $\beta = -0.09$, $t(249) = -1.47$, $p = 0.14$, nor was ER, $\beta = -0.12$, $t(249) = -1.60$, $p = 0.14$. As the results for PRDIFF were significant, but not for PREPRE, PE, nor ER, the second

hypothesis was only partially supported (see Table 3 for the full set of regression data, and Table 7 for the bivariate correlations).

The third hypothesis predicted the three identity gaps were significant predictors of ONA. The overall regression was significant, $F(20, 249) = 4.11$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.22$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.20$). For the predictors, PRDIFF was a significant predictor, $\beta = 0.23$, $t(249) = 3.23$, $p = 0.001$, but PRPRE was not, $\beta = 0.11$, $t(249) = 1.59$, $p = 0.11$. Also, PE was not significant, $\beta = 0.12$, $t(249) = 1.96$, $p = 0.05$, but ER was a significant predictor, $\beta = 0.20$, $t(249) = 2.67$, $p = 0.01$. As the results for PRDIFF and ER were significant, but not for PREPRE nor PE, the third hypothesis is only partially supported (see Table 4 for the full set of regression data, and Table 8 for the bivariate correlations).

The final hypothesis predicted the three identity gaps were significant predictors of DS. The overall regression was significant, $F(12, 249) = 3.21$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.13$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.09$). Unlike what was predicted in H4, none of the predictors were significant. PRDIFF was not a significant predictor, $\beta = 0.146$, $t(249) = 1.94$, $p = 0.05$, nor was PREPRE, $\beta = 0.09$, $t(249) = 1.23$, $p = 0.22$, neither was PE, $\beta = 0.08$, $t(249) = 1.17$, $p = 0.24$, nor was ER, $\beta = 0.14$, $t(249) = 1.72$, $p = 0.09$. As none of the hypothesized predictors were significant, the fourth hypothesis was not supported (see Table 5 for the full set of regression data, and Table 9 for the bivariate correlations).

The research question was advanced to examine if there were any interactions between the identity gaps and CC, as they pertain to each of the four dependent variables. The full results of the regressions can be seen in Tables 2 through 5 above. There were only two significant interactions across all the regressions, and both interactions occurred in the regression for DS. As discussed above, regression for DS was significant, $F(20, 249) = 2.50$, $p = 0.01$, and $R^2 = 0.13$

(adjusted $R^2 = 0.10$). The interaction between CCDIFF and ER was significant, $\beta = 0.40$, $t(249) = 2.50$, $p = 0.01$. The same was true for CCINT and ER, $\beta = -0.40$, $t(249) = -2.32$, $p = 0.02$. Analysis of slopes indicates a negative interaction for both CCDIFF and ER and CCINT and ER, both for the DV of DS. In other words, for both the differentiation and integration factors of CC, when the experience of the ER identity gaps is heightened, participants with higher CC reported heightened levels of depressive symptoms when compared to the participants with lower levels of CC. This is despite the beta value of the second interaction being negative, which would indicate the moderator reduced the strength of the interaction. Figures 1 and 2, respectively, provide a visual representation of this relationship.

Message Evaluation Study (Study Two)

Pilot Test

The original version of the message evaluation study included both the theoretical frameworks of message design logic (MDL) and the communication theory of identity (CTI). As such, messages were designed that combined the three levels of MDL with the four layers of identity in CTI, thus producing 12 messages that needed to be tested. A pilot test was conducted to make sure the manipulations were being properly processed by participants. Measures for the pilot test included the 8-item MDL manipulation check using a 5-point semantic differential scale, and the 16-item CTI manipulation check using a 7-point Likert scale. The sample for the pilot test was 74 participants.

Results of the pilot test indicated the MDL manipulation check worked properly in showing statistically significant differences between the three levels of MDL across all 4 identity layer conditions, but participants were not able to distinguish between the 4 identity layers, indicating a failure of the CTI manipulation check. The tests performed were repeated measures

analysis of variance (ANOVAs). The first ANOVA was run to determine significance between the three levels of MDL across all 4 identity layer conditions, with the nominal independent variable of MDL condition (expressive, conventional, and rhetorical) and the responses with the MDL manipulation check measure as the dependent variable. The second repeated measures ANOVA was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the identity layer conditions, with the nominal independent variable of identity layer condition (personal, enacted, relational, and communal) and the responses to the CTI manipulation check as the dependent variable.

The repeated measures ANOVA for the MDL manipulation check examined the differences between the expressive, conventional, and rhetorical message conditions, making no distinction between the same MDL message level in different identity layer conditions (all expressive message data grouped together, and the same for the conventional and theoretical messages, respectively). The results were: Expressive ($M = 1.93$; $SD = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$), conventional ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$), and rhetorical ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$) messages, $F(2, 72) = 115.57$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.61$. The pairwise comparisons indicated the difference between the expressive and conventional messages was significant, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-0.84, -0.52], as well as between expressive and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.71, -1.28], and the same between conventional and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.02, -0.61]. As such, for the MDL manipulation check, the three messages being significantly different from each other indicate the MDL manipulation check was successful.

The results of the CTI manipulation check were not as successful, with the CTI manipulation check being deemed a failure. There was no statistically significant difference between the means of the messages of the personal layer and all other layers ($M = 4.60$; $SD =$

1.10), $F(3, 70) = 2.23$, $p < 0.09$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.20], nor the enacted layer and all other layers ($M = 4.75$; $SD = 0.97$), $F(3, 70) = 2.06$, $p = 0.08$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.20], nor the relational layer and all other layers ($M = 5.07$; $SD = 1.04$), $F(3, 70) = 2.61$, $p = 0.058$, $\eta^2 = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.22]. However, the messages of the communal layer were significantly different than the messages of the other layers ($M = 3.41$; $SD = 1.85$), $F(3, 70) = 23.421$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.50$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.60].

As an additional test, a within subjects ANOVA was run for each of the CTI manipulation check measures to determine statistical significance between the four CTI layers examined with the measure (this measure consisted of one factor for each identity layer, so the measure had four factors in total). For the CTI manipulation check measure to work properly, the factor corresponding to the specific identity layer being examined had to have both the highest mean and be statistically significant from all other factors. For example, for the personal layer condition to be a success, the mean of the personal layer would have to have been the highest and had to be statistically significant from the responses for the enacted, relational, and communal layers.

For the personal layer condition, the results of the repeated measures ANOVA were the following: Personal (EMM = 4.70; SE = 0.23), enacted (EMM = 4.71; SE = 0.23), relational (EMM = 4.97; SE = 0.24), and communal (EMM = 2.53; SE = 0.32), $F(3, 16) = 10.291$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.66$. In terms of pairwise comparisons, the difference between the ratings for personal and enacted were not significant, $p = 0.96$, 95% CI [-0.51, 0.49], same with ratings for personal and relational, $p = 0.29$, 95% CI [-0.81, 0.26], but the differences in ratings for personal and communal were significant, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [1.26, 3.09]. As there were no statistically

significant pairwise comparisons between multiple layers, and the personal layer did not have the highest mean, the measure failed for message evaluations of the personal layer.

For the enacted layer condition, the results were the following: Personal (EMM = 5.07; SE = 0.22), enacted (EMM = 5.20; SE = 0.20), relational (EMM = 4.95; SE = 0.26), and communal (EMM = 2.90; SE = 0.36), $F(3, 16) = 8.43$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.61$. In terms of pairwise comparisons, the difference between enacted and personal is not significant, $p = 0.50$, 95% CI [-0.27, 0.54], and the same between enacted and relational, $p = 0.27$, 95% CI [-0.21, 0.71], but the difference between enacted and communal was significant, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [1.37, 3.23]. As there were no statistically significant different pairwise comparison between multiple layers, the manipulation check failed, even though the mean of enacted was in the predicted direction.

For the relational layer condition, the results were the following: Personal (EMM = 4.39, SE = 0.32), enacted (EMM = 4.65, SE = 0.29), relational (EMM = 5.63; SE = 0.19), and communal (EMM = 2.60; SE = 0.26), $F(3, 15) = 20.32$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.80$. In terms of pairwise comparisons, the difference between relational and personal was significant, $p = 0.005$, 95% CI [0.42, 2.05], as well as between relational and enacted, $p = 0.002$, 95% CI [0.39, 1.55], and the same for relational and communal, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [2.24, 3.82]. As all differences were significant, and the mean for relational was the highest, the measure was successful for the relational layer, even though the measure was not successful for the personal and enacted layers.

Finally, for the communal layer condition, the results were the following: Personal (EMM = 4.22; SE = 0.22), enacted (EMM = 4.40, SE = 0.21), relational (EMM = 4.74, SE = 0.24), and communal (EMM = 5.70, SE = 0.29), $F(3, 15) = 9.07$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.65$. In terms of pairwise comparisons, the difference between communal and personal was significant, $p < 0.001$,

95% CI [0.79, 2.16], as well as communal and enacted, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.79, 1.79], and the same for communal and relational, $p = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.26, 1.65]. As all differences were significant, and the mean for communal was the highest, the measure was successful for the communal layer, even though the measure was not successful for the personal and enacted layers. However, as the manipulation check measure needed to be successful for all layers, the measure could not be deemed sufficient for use in the final study.

Due to the results of the pilot test, the message evaluation study was reformulated to only include MDL as the theoretical framework. This meant the revised study would use 3 messages, rather than the 12 messages originally created. As all messages had already been pilot tested, and there were statistically significant differences across all messages in terms of MDL, the selection of messages for the revised study came down to which group of 3 messages (personal, enacted, relational, or communal group) possessed the largest effect size (if the first criterion of the expected order of means had been met, e.g., the correct category had the highest mean in comparison to the other three sets of messages) following pilot testing, because the greater effect size demonstrates the greatest difference between messages. Effect size was determined using eta-squared for the three personal messages ($\eta^2 = 0.459$), the three enacted messages ($\eta^2 = 0.212$), the three relational messages ($\eta^2 = 0.662$), and the three communal messages ($\eta^2 = 0.624$). As the relational messages possessed the greatest effect size, the three relational messages were statistically significant from each other, and the means aligned in the proper pattern according to MDL, the relational messages were chosen for the full message evaluation study.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Across the process of conducting all CFAs, the data set for the identity gaps study was run in full (as mentioned earlier), but the data set for the message evaluation study had to be split into four parts. There are two reasons for splitting the data set for the message evaluation study. First, the repeated measures design of this study meant the researcher would violate the principle of independence of observation if the researcher were to combine the data from all conditions into the same CFA. Second, as the cognitive complexity measure was not a repeated measure, because each participant only completed this measure once, the researcher decided to split the data for the cognitive complexity measure from the full data set as well. As such, all data from the dependent variables were split according to the study condition, with one CFA conducted for the dependent variables of the expressive message condition, the same for the conventional message condition, and the same for the rhetorical message condition, which created three separate data sets. The fourth data set consisted of all data for the cognitive complexity measure. Below, I will first discuss the CFA for the cognitive complexity measure (Appendix B) of the message evaluation study, and I will follow that by discussing the expressive, conventional, and rhetorical data sets, respectively, for the dependent variable measures of *helpfulness* (Appendix J), *supportiveness* (Appendix K), *sensitivity* (Appendix L), *appropriateness* (Appendix M), and *effectiveness* (Appendix N).

The CFAs for the cognitive complexity measure of the message evaluation study were completed next. The same procedure was followed for this data set as was for the identity gaps data set, with all items eliminated that failed to reach the 0.50 threshold for the standardized solution, followed by correlating items with similar wording that fall within the same factors. Finally, as the CC measure calls for a second order solution, a further CFA was conducted for

this second order solution, with convergence achieved. In all, items 5 and 7 were removed from the differentiation factor, items 5 and 6 were removed from the abstraction factor, and no items were removed from the integration factor (Appendix B). It should be noted that the items removed for this measure were different from the items removed for the same measure in the identity gaps study. Table 10 provides the CFA results for the original model, the model following the removal of all items below the 0.50 threshold (this was the final model for the first order solution), and the model for the second order solution.

In accordance with the rule of independence of observation, the data sets for the three separate conditions of the message evaluation study were run separately. The same procedures for removing items, correlating items, and evaluating second order solutions used for the other data sets were followed for these three data sets. However, consistency with the measures needed to be maintained across the three MDL conditions to ensure that the same variable was being measured across all three conditions. This meant the researcher had to make decisions about which items needed to be retained when the CFAs for the different conditions were not in agreement as to the specific items to be retained or removed from each measure. The process was aided by the conceptualization of both effectiveness and MDL being well-established and validated in previous studies (despite the fact that original measures for these concepts were created for this study), meaning all factor analyses performed in this study remained confirmatory in nature, rather than exploratory, because the factor analysis results could be examined against the existing literature for the concepts of effectiveness and MDL.

Both the MDL manipulation check and the effectiveness measure, as original measures for this study, were determined to be two factor measures after running the bivariate correlations and a reexamination of the separate items of these measures. As such, both measures were

examined to determine how well the items fit on each factor, with the MDL manipulation check measure examined first. In determining the two factors of the MDL measure, items 1 and 2 were determined to constitute factor one, whereas items 3 through 8 were determined to constitute the second factor (Appendix O).

Upon examining item fit, both items 1 and 2 were determined to have poor fit by not meeting the 0.50 threshold for item fit with the standardized solution, so both items 1 and 2 were dropped from the MDL measure. As such, this meant the MDL measure now became a single factor measure. Three CFAs were required for the MDL measure (one CFA for each messages condition; expressive, conventional, and rhetorical), and all three CFAs were in agreement that items 1 and 2 should be dropped from the MDL measure, with items 3 through 8 being retained (Appendix O).

The two factors of the effectiveness measure were examined next. For the effectiveness measure, items 1 through 6 were determined to be the first factor, whereas items 7 through 9 were determined to be the second factor (Appendix N). As the effectiveness measure remained a two-factor measure following the removal of underperforming items, convergence of these factors needed to be tested following the removal of the underperforming items (items under the 0.50 threshold for the standardized solutions). Nevertheless, following the CFAs run to test for the second order models, it was determined that the first order models provided better model fit, so the first order solutions were maintained. However, a further problematic situation arose where it was determined the second factor did not adequately contribute to the overall first order solution. This was determined by comparing the results of the first order solution with and without the items of the second factor of the effectiveness measure. As such, it was deemed reasonable to drop the second factor of the effectiveness measure to maintain consistency with

having dropped the first factor of the MDL measure, thus turning both the MDL and effectiveness measure back into the intended single-factor measures.

Another problem arose with the effectiveness measure in that there existed disagreement with the items dropped between the three CFAs (one for each message condition; expressive, conventional, and rhetorical). All three CFAs were also in agreement over dropping item 7 from the effectiveness measure, and items 8 and 9 were dropped as a result of dropping the second factor of the measure. Disagreement occurred between the CFAs in terms of item 6 of the effectiveness measure. The CFA for the expressive message condition indicated item 6 should be dropped, but the CFAs for the conventional and rhetorical message conditions indicated item 6 should be retained. As two of the three CFAs indicated item 6 should be retained, it was decided to retain item 6 for all three conditions.

Overall, tables 11, 12, and 13 contain the CFA results for each condition of the message evaluation study, and include all dependent variables within the study. Each table contains the original model, followed by the second order solution for the effectiveness measure, and then the models with the second factor of the effectiveness measure removed.

Test of the Message Design Logic Manipulation Check

Following the CFA of the MDL manipulation check measure, the revised measure was analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if participants rated the messages in the manner designed. A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was run to determine if there were significant difference between the three messages. The repeated measures ANOVA indicated the three messages meant to manipulate the three design logics (Appendix A for messages) were all significantly different across the expressive ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.80$, $p < 0.001$), conventional ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.01$, $p < 0.001$), and rhetorical ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.86$, $p < 0.001$) messages, $F(2, 285)$

= 364.822, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.74$. The pairwise comparisons indicated the difference between the expressive and conventional messages was significant, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.09, -0.85], as well as between expressive and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-2.10, -1.83], and between conventional and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.12, -0.87]. The results indicate the messages were significantly different and align with the theoretically scaffolded nature of the levels of MDL, with rhetorical being the highest, conventional in the middle, and expressive the lowest. As the MDL manipulation check worked properly, the tests of the hypotheses and research questions could be conducted.

Full Test of Hypotheses

The full message evaluation study included two hypotheses and two research questions. I will discuss the results for the hypotheses first. The hypotheses predicted the rhetorical message would be evaluated the highest on each measure across the dependent variables (DVs) of helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness (H1), whereas the expressive message would be evaluated lowest across the DVs (H2). By implication, the two hypotheses point to the conventional messages being evaluated as between the rhetorical and expressive messages across all DVs, as well as statistically significant differences between the messages across all DVs.

The repeated measures ANOVA indicated the three messages for the DV of helpfulness consisted of message means aligning in the expected pattern (expressive with the lowest mean, rhetorical the highest, and conventional in between), and all significantly different, across the expressive ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.86$, $p < 0.001$), conventional ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.10$, $p < 0.001$), and rhetorical ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.96$, $p < 0.001$) messages, $F(2, 285) = 364.822$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.719$. The pairwise comparisons indicated the difference between the expressive and

conventional messages was significant, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-0.92, -0.66], as well as between expressive and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.98, -1.71], and the same between conventional and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.20, -0.92]. As such, both the first and second hypotheses were supported in terms of helpfulness. See Table 14 for the means and standard deviations of all repeated measures ANOVAs for all dependent variables.

For supportiveness, the repeated measures ANOVA indicated the three messages for the DV of helpfulness consisted of message means aligning in the expected pattern (expressive with the lowest mean, rhetorical the highest, and conventional in between), and all significantly different, across the expressive ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 0.88$, $p < 0.001$), conventional ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.08$, $p < 0.001$), and rhetorical ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.01$, $p < 0.001$) messages, $F(2, 285) = 366.788$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.72$. The pairwise comparisons indicated the difference between the expressive and conventional messages was significant, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.09, -0.81], as well as between expressive and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-2.20, -1.90], and the same between conventional and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.25, -0.96]. As such, for the DV of supportiveness, both the first and second hypotheses were supported.

For sensitivity, the repeated measures ANOVA indicated the three messages for the DV of helpfulness consisted of message means aligning in the expected pattern (expressive with the lowest mean, rhetorical the highest, and conventional in between), and all significantly different from each other across the expressive ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 0.90$, $p < 0.001$), conventional ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.09$, $p < 0.001$), and rhetorical ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.98$, $p < 0.001$) messages, $F(2, 285) = 297.539$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.676$. The pairwise comparisons indicated the difference between the expressive and conventional messages was significant, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-0.95, -0.68], as well as between expressive and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-2.04, -1.74], and

between conventional and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.22, -0.93]. As such, for the DV of sensitivity, both the first and second hypotheses were supported.

For appropriateness, the repeated measures ANOVA indicated the three messages for the DV of helpfulness consisted of message means aligning in the expected pattern (expressive with the lowest mean, rhetorical the highest, and conventional in between), and all significantly different from each other across the expressive ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.93$, $p < 0.001$), conventional ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.18$, $p < 0.001$), and rhetorical ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.97$, $p < 0.001$) messages, $F(2, 285) = 367.312$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.72$. The pairwise comparisons indicated the difference between the expressive and conventional messages was significant, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.09, -0.80], as well as between expressive and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-2.17, -1.87], and the same between conventional and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.22, -0.93]. As such, for the DV of appropriateness, both the first and second hypotheses were supported.

For effectiveness, the repeated measures ANOVA indicated the three messages for the DV of helpfulness consisted of message means aligning in the expected pattern (expressive with the lowest mean, rhetorical the highest, and conventional in between), and all significantly different from each other across the expressive ($M = 1.91$, $SD = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$), conventional ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.03$, $p < 0.001$), and rhetorical ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.93$, $p < 0.001$) messages, $F(2, 285) = 275.777$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.659$. The pairwise comparisons indicated the difference between the expressive and conventional messages was significant, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-0.81, -0.57], as well as between expressive and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.77, -1.50], and the same between conventional and rhetorical, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-1.07, -0.82]. As such, for the DV of effectiveness, both the first and second hypotheses were supported. Further, as all messages across all conditions and DVs were significantly different, and because the means for all

messages aligned in the expected pattern, both hypothesis one and hypothesis two were fully supported for the full study.

Tests of the Research Questions

The research questions were aimed at examining cognitive complexity as a potential moderator for the ratings of the expressive, conventional, and rhetorical messages in relation to each DV (RQ2), as well as moderating the evaluation of message sophistication across the three levels of MDL (RQ3). To address both research questions, the PROCESS macro for SPSS, developed by Hayes (2022), was used. The PROCESS macro allows researchers to plug in the dependent variable, independent variables, and covariate, and also calculates the interaction term as part of the analysis process (Hayes, 2022; Igartua & Hayes, 2021). Given that only one DV can be run at a time, the statistical tests to answer RQ2 required running five separate tests, one for each of the 5 DVs. As such, to address RQ2, the author used the PROCESS macro, plugging in each of the DVs for the respective analysis (only one DV could be analyzed at any one time, so a separate analysis was conducted for helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness), plugging in the MDL condition variable for the IV (the variable included each level of MDL; expressive, conventional, and rhetorical), and plugged in CC as the moderator variable. The age of the participants was plugged in as a covariate. Age is considered a theoretically relevant covariate in relation to MDL and CC, due to the tendency of individuals developing increased levels of cognitive complexity as they grow older and experience more communicative encounters (O'Keefe, 1988). Finally, as part of the analysis for both RQs, simple slopes analysis was also included if a significant interaction was found. This involved graphing the values both one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean to find where the lines intersect for any of the significant interactions (Whisman & McClelland, 2005).

To address RQ2, the appropriate IV, DV, and covariate were plugged into the PROCESS macros. First, for helpfulness, $F(4, 853) = 135.49$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.39$, the interaction between the MDL conditions and CC were found to be significant, B = 0.328, $t(858) = 3.95$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.49], with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.64$). The simple slopes indicates the relationship between helpfulness and type of message is negative for both low and high cognitive complexity. However, the negative relationship is stronger for those with higher cognitive complexity, who rate the least complex message as less helpful than the lower cognitively complex individuals. That strong relationship means, those who are higher in cognitive complexity rate the expressive message as less helpful than those with lower cognitive complexity. The regression data for this specific test is shown in Table 15, and the interaction is shown in graph form in Figure 3 for the DV of helpfulness.

Second, for supportiveness, $F(4, 853) = 162.93$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.43$, the interaction between MDL conditions and CC was significant, B = 0.39, $t(853) = 4.69$, $p = < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.56], with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.75$). The simple slopes indicates the relationship between supportiveness and type of message is negative for both low and high cognitive complexity. However, the negative relationship is stronger for those with higher cognitive complexity, who rate the least complex message as less supportive than the lower cognitively complex individuals. That strong relationship means, those who are higher in cognitive complexity rate the expressive message as less supportive than those with lower cognitive complexity. The regression data for this specific test is shown in Table 16, and the interaction is shown in graph form in Figure 4 for the DV of supportiveness.

Third, for sensitivity, $F(4, 853) = 139.13$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.39$, the interaction between MDL conditions and CC was significant, B = 0.37, $t(853) = 4.37$, $p = < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.20,

0.53], with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.64$). The simple slopes indicates the relationship between sensitivity and type of message is negative for both low and high cognitive complexity. However, the negative relationship is stronger for those with higher cognitive complexity, who rate the least complex message as less sensitive than the lower cognitively complex individuals. That strong relationship means, those who are higher in cognitive complexity rate the expressive message as less sensitive than those with lower cognitive complexity. The regression data for this specific test is shown in Table 17, and the interaction is shown in graph form in Figure 5 for the DV of sensitivity.

Fourth, for appropriateness, $F(4, 853) = 141.91$, $p = < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.40$, the interaction between MDL conditions and CC was significant, B = 0.35, $t(853) = 4.02$, $p = < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.53], with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.67$). The simple slopes indicates the relationship between appropriateness and type of message is negative for both low and high cognitive complexity. However, the negative relationship is stronger for those with higher cognitive complexity, who rate the least complex message as less appropriate than the lower cognitively complex individuals. That strong relationship means, those who are higher in cognitive complexity rate the expressive message as less appropriate than those with lower cognitive complexity. The regression data for this specific test is shown in Table 18, and the interaction is shown in graph form in Figure 6 for the DV of appropriateness.

Finally, for effectiveness, $F(4, 853) = 122.51$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.36$, the interaction between MDL conditions and CC was significant, B = 0.31, $t(853) = 3.95$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.46], with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.56$). The simple slopes indicates the relationship between effectiveness and type of message is negative for both low and high cognitive complexity. However, the negative relationship is stronger for those with higher cognitive

complexity, who rate the least complex message as less effective than the lower cognitively complex individuals. That strong relationship means, those who are higher in cognitive complexity rate the expressive message as less effective than those with lower cognitive complexity. Overall, moderation analysis indicates that CC is a significant moderator for the DVs of helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness. The regression data for this specific test is shown in Table 19, and the interaction is shown in graph form in Figure 7 for the DV of effectiveness.

RQ3 was analyzed using the PROCESS macros and plugging in the appropriate IV, DV, and covariate. Only one run of the PROCESS macros was needed to address RQ3. Examining the responses on the MDL manipulation check measure (designated message evaluation in Figure 12), $F(4, 853) = 183.97$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.46$, the interaction between MDL condition and CC was significant, B = 0.34, $t(853) = 4.49$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.19, 0.49], with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.85$). The simple slopes indicates the relationship between the message ratings and type of message is negative for both low and high cognitive complexity, with expressive rated lowest and rhetorical rate highest (in terms of means). However, the negative relationship is stronger for those with higher cognitive complexity, who rate the expressive message as less sophisticated than the lower cognitively complex individuals. That strong relationship means, those who are higher in cognitive complexity rate the expressive message as less sophisticated than those with lower cognitive complexity. The regression data for this specific test is shown in Table 20, and the interaction is shown in graph form in Figure 8.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The studies of this dissertation were aimed at examining the influence of different identity gaps on different communicative outcomes (interpersonal communication satisfaction, relational satisfaction, ongoing negative affect, and depressive symptoms), as well as the reception of messages by a person claiming to have experienced relational harm in response to their accusations of wrongdoing on the part of their friend. For this final chapter, it will be helpful to first review the theories and major concepts engaged in the two studies of this dissertation, followed by reiterating the overall results of the two studies. This will be followed by a discussion of the theoretical and methodological implications of each study. A discussion of both studies put together will follow, and this chapter will then conclude with limitations, future directions, and a conclusion to the overall dissertation and its implications for social life.

Identity Gaps Study (Study One) Overall Discussion

The identity gaps study (Study One) used the communication theory of identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993), which posits identity as consisting of four different layers. These layers are personal (how we define ourselves), enacted (how we show, demonstrate, or perform our personal identity), relational (how we are seen in comparison to a relational other, or how we are perceived given who we maintain relationships with), and communal (how we are viewed given the groups we are within or associate with) (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). The four identity layers exist concurrently (hence the term layer being applied to the theory), with the potential for dissonance being experienced between any two or more layers (for dissonance, the author is referring to the identities in layers disagreeing or conflicting with each other, and the use of dissonance here should not be confused with the concept of cognitive dissonance. An example of this dissonance is if a person perceives themselves as a good friend, which would be a personal identity of being a good friend, but they are considered a bad friend by their friend

because of a perceived relational transgression. Being perceived as a bad friend through their relational identity is dissonant with being a good friend in one's person identity, thus making the identity gap salient) (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung, 2011).

Three commonly examined identity gaps are the personal-relational identity gap (dissonance between how we define ourselves and how we are perceived in relationships, or perceived in relation to other individuals), the personal-enacted identity gap (dissonance between how we define ourselves and how we demonstrate that identity in social life), and the enacted-relational identity gap (dissonance between how we demonstrate our personal identity and how we are perceived by relational partners or perceived because of specific persons we know) (Jung, 2011; Jung & Hecht, 2004). There are other potential identity gaps, including those that involve dissonance between the communal layer and any one of the other three layers, but the identity gaps chosen for examination in this study (personal-relational, personal-enacted, and enacted-relational) where chosen due to a focus on dyadic interactions in relationships, and because the three gaps chosen have accompanying measures repeatedly used in scholarship (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung, 2011; Rubinsky, 2019, Rubinsky, 2022). When this dissonance between two or more identity layers occurs, an identity gap results, which carry with them different outcomes, such as decreases in relational or communication satisfaction, as well as negative affect or depression (Hecht & Phillips, 2021).

The identity gaps study (Study One) advanced four hypotheses. First, the personal-relational (PR), personal-enacted (PE), and enacted-relational (ER) identity gaps were predictors of interpersonal communication satisfaction (ICS), with all three identity gaps having a negative relationship to ICS (as the identity gap increased, ICS decreased). Second, the PR, PE, and ER identity gaps were predictors of relational satisfaction (RS), with a negative relationship between

the identity gaps and RS (as the identity gaps increased, RS decreased). Third, that the PR, PE, and ER identity gaps were predictors of ongoing negative affect (ONA), with a positive relationship between the identity gaps and ONA (as the identity gaps increase, so did ONA). Finally, the PR, PE, and ER identity gaps were predictors of depressive symptoms (DS), with a positive relationship between the identity gaps and DS (as the identity gaps increase, so did DS).

Additionally, a research question was advanced concerning cognitive complexity (CC) moderating the relationships between the PR, PE, and ER identity gaps and the dependent variables of ICS, RS, ONA, and DS, respectively. The results indicated partial support for hypotheses one through three, and the fourth hypothesis was not supported. For the research question, different factors of CC moderated the relationship between the enacted-relational identity gap (ER) and depressive symptoms (DS). Specifically, the differentiation factor of CC (CCDIFF) and the integration factor of CC (CCINT) significantly moderated the relationship between ER and DS, where individuals with higher differentiation and integration (two of the three characteristics of CC) reported heightened experience of DS when ER was more salient. The abstraction factor of CC (CCABST) was not significant. The three factors of CC were examined separately because the results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated the measure had greater validity when each factor was treated as a separate measure, rather than the values of each measure summed to create a single, second-order measure. As such, the results of each factor of the CC measure are reported as separate measures for the identity gaps study (Study One).

Theoretical Implications of the Identity Gaps Study

Prior to this study, no link had been established between identity gaps and ongoing negative affect as operationalized within the forgiveness communication literature (the ongoing negative affect measure having been devised by Merolla, 2008; 2014). However, this finding

should not be considered surprising given what has already been mentioned concerning the known involvement of identity gaps in negative relational, emotional, and affective outcomes (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Examples of negative outcomes that have been studied before include depression, jealousy, and anger (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Rubinsky, 2019). However, no study using CTI or identity gaps had yet examined the generalized experience of negative affect (which includes a combination of factors, such as anger, sadness, and frustration; Merolla, 2008, 2014), unlike what has been commonly examined within the forgiveness communication literature. Therefore, using a measure of generalized negative affect in the present study further connects the measurement of identity gaps to the measurement of negative affect within the forgiveness communication literature. The significant results of the present study, as to ongoing negative affect, bring further alignment between the CTI and forgiveness communication literature as to relevant variables that are produced through interpersonal interaction and have subsequent influence on interpersonal and relational communication.

Considering the kind of communicative encounter examined in the identity gaps study, it would make sense that the personal-relational identity gap appears as the strongest of the identity gaps. In the scenarios the author specifically asked participants to describe a situation concerning a friend accusing the participant of a transgression, so an existing relationship is already being invoked within the context examined. This brings in the relational identity layer as relevant. In terms of personal identity, the claimed presence of a transgression may challenge how a person sees themselves, especially if they are the one being accused of said transgression. In this sense, the relational identity invoked at that time is that of a transgressor, which is due to the juxtaposition with their friend who is claiming the role of the transgressed. The relational identity layer is often based on how we believe we are perceived by others in comparison to our

communication partners (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021), so in the event one person is seen as the transgressed, it is reasonable to conclude in the potential forgiveness context that the other communication partner (in this case the research participant) believes they are perceived as a transgressor.

In the study context, the perceived transgressor's new relational role as a transgressor then may conflict with how the perceived transgressor sees themselves (for example, defining oneself as a good friend, whereas being accused of a transgression means one is perceived by the relational other as a bad friend), which, as the study context indicates, is not that of a transgressor. We know this because the study participants indicated (in the screening survey for the full survey, as well as described in the full study) they disagreed with the perception that they are the transgressor in that relationship. As such, this sets the stage for the personal-relational identity gap to be greater in intensity than the other possible identity gaps, due to the dissonance between the new-found relational identity and the perceived transgressor's personal identity.

As mentioned, the relationship between the personal-relational identity gap and interpersonal communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction has been established in prior studies (Jung, 2011; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Rubinsky, 2019), indicating the experience of the personal-relational identity gap results in lowered levels of relational and interpersonal communication satisfaction, due to the dissonance experienced between how one is viewed in the context of the relationship and in comparison to how they see their personal identity. Quite reasonably, in the study context of being accused by a friend of a transgression you did not commit, the perceived transgressor may not be too pleased by the turn of events in the relationship, leading them to lowered levels of relational satisfaction. One only needs to consult the items of the relational satisfaction measure used in this study to recognize that, perceiving the

relationship as rewarding, better than perceived alternatives, and lacking a desire for change in the relationship (Johnson, 2001), is threatened by the relational other incorrectly accusing one of a transgression.

Lowered levels of interpersonal communication satisfaction come into play potentially due to the questioning of whether the communication partner is adequately understanding the messages and impressions one intends to convey. Again, it may not be necessary to go further than the items of the interpersonal communication satisfaction measure to understand that satisfaction lies in perceptions that one is heard, that the communication partner understands the image one is trying to convey, and there is a perceived sense of reward in the interaction (Hecht, 1978), pointing to satisfaction being threatened if a person perceives these concerns are not adequately addressed. As such, differences in perceptions between an individual and their communication partner may, thus, indicate the presence of an identity gap, leading to lowered satisfaction with the relationship or with communication within the relationship (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). This study adds to the existing literature by indicating the presence of identity gaps in forgiveness episodes produces decreases in both relationship and interpersonal communication satisfaction, in accordance with the theoretical claim that identity gaps produce decreases in satisfaction across communicative contexts (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Similarly, the findings of decreases of relational and interpersonal communication satisfaction via more salient identity gaps also provide an explanatory mechanism with which these outcomes can be produced in forgiveness episodes.

When a transgression occurs (be it mutually recognized or not), the effect it has on the relationship may make the identity gap more salient to the individuals within the relationship. The forgiveness literature is clear concerning the adverse impacts transgressions in general have

on relationships, given that transgressions cause harm to individuals within relationships, requiring relationship renegotiation and transformation to occur (Kelley, Waldron, & Kloeber, 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Logically, the person will find their conception of their relational identity to be confronted in a negative way in light of an unexpected and perceived unwarranted accusation of a transgression, fostering the environment for an identity gap (in this case, a gap between the relational layer and another identity layer). Combined with one's perception of self being threatened, a person will, thus, be experiencing the personal-relational identity gap (as was experienced by the participants in this study, with respect to the communicative encounters they described, and based on the responses to the personal-relational identity gap measure). As such, the participants who experienced greater salience of the personal-relational identity gap experienced an increase in ongoing negative affect in the current study. Generally, experiencing a lack of forgiveness results in a multitude of negative affective outcomes (Merolla, 2008, 2014; Worthington & Scherer, 2004), such as ongoing negative affect, providing an explanation for why ongoing negative affect was heightened and predicted by the salience of the personal-relational identity gaps in the current study.

The personal-enacted identity layer also had a significant, negative relationship with interpersonal communication satisfaction, and the reasoning for the potential involvement of the personal identity layer is discussed above. But what to make of the enacted layer? The level of the personal-enacted identity gap can conceivably be heightened when someone perceives their face is threatened (Jung, 2013; Rubinsky, 2022), such as when someone is accused of a transgression they did not do. As discussed, face concerns a person's social persona (Goffman, 1959; Ting-Toomey, 2005, 2017), which aligns with the conceptualization of the enacted identity layer, due to the enacted identity layer concerning the presentation of personal identity (Hecht,

1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Experiencing face threat during a communicative encounter, such as being perceived as a transgressor, is certainly a context where a person's enacted identity may be threatened, thus presenting a threat to how one may be presenting themselves through their enacted identity. The enacted-relational identity gap did have a significant relationship with two DVs (a negative relationship with interpersonal communication satisfaction and a positive relationship with ongoing negative affect), providing further evidence for this expected relationship.

In this study (and in both studies), despite the perceived transgressor (the study participant) being accused of committing a transgression, the perceived transgressor knows they did not cause the harm they are accused of (the specific harms were chosen by the individual participant, and ranged from not showing enough care as a friend when the person claiming harm was in distress to stealing the friend's romantic partner), so it would be logical to conclude that their personal identity may not be threatened because they know they did not cause harm. If they view themselves as a good person and a good friend, they know they still are a good person and a good friend because they did not commit the transgression. The problem, however, arises when enacted or relational identity enters the situation, because the person knows how they enacted their identity is now threatened in this face threatening situation, and they know the relationship itself may be in danger, due to the relational transgression (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008), even though they did not actually engage in the negative behavior of which they are being accused. This presents a potential shift in how they view themselves within the relationship and in relation to the person accusing them (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021). With enacted or relational identity being uprooted, the dissonance of one of these identity layers with the personal layer provides a reasonable explanation for the decrease in both interpersonal

communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction, and the increase in ongoing negative affect.

As mentioned, identity gaps have many different communicative outcomes, such as decreases in relational and interpersonal communication satisfaction and increases in depressive symptoms (as theorized, depressive symptoms arise from identity gaps, which become salient through the construction of our identities via communication in interpersonal interaction; Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung, 2020), and we know the experience of different negative affective and psychological outcomes influence how we interact with others (Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004). Thus, it stands to reason that the negative communicative outcomes of identity gaps may influence the messages produced within a potential forgiveness encounter. It is because CTI scholarship indicates the experience of identity gaps influences subsequent communication (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021; Jung & Hecht, 2004) that it can be claimed that identity gaps offer a plausible explanatory mechanism for differences in messages (and the sophistication of said messages) used in the forgiveness communication process. Couple the understanding of identity gaps influencing subsequent communication, and the knowledge that the effectiveness of messages often depending on the level of message sophistication (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987), and the rationale appears concerning the need to study how the experience (or salience) of identity gaps may influence messages in forgiveness episodes, which subsequently influence the outcome of the forgiveness process.

A final theoretical implication of Study One is the involvement of cognitive complexity as a potential moderator between the three identity gaps (PE, PR, and ER) as independent variables and each dependent variable (ICS, RS, ONA, and DS). Considering all four regressions conducted, and the twelve possible interactions for each regression, only two significant

interactions were found, and these were both from the regression for the depressive symptoms dependent variable. These interactions were between the differentiation factor of the cognitive complexity instrument (CCDIFF) and the enacted-relational identity gap (ER; Figure 1) and between the integration factor of the cognitive complexity instrument (CCINT) and the enacted-relational identity gap (ER; Figure 2). For both significant interactions, those with higher levels of cognitive complexity experienced higher levels of depressive symptoms when the ER identity gap was more salient.

By comparison, those with lower levels of cognitive complexity, despite also experiencing heightened levels of depressive symptoms when the ER identity gap was more salient, did not have as drastic of an increase in depressive symptoms as those with higher levels of cognitive complexity. By contrast, when the experience of the ER identity gap was low, depressive symptoms were low for participants regardless of their level of cognitive complexity. Finally, the interaction for ER and CCINT appears to have been weaker than for ER and CCDIFF, in that the difference in high depressive symptoms between those high and low integration of cognitive complexity was much less drastic than the corresponding differences in levels of cognitive complexity for ER and CCDIFF. As such, the differentiation factor of cognitive complexity appears to heighten the experience of depressive symptoms for those who score high in differentiation of cognitive complexity, and integration of cognitive complexity appears to reduce this effect, while remaining statistically significant.

Overall, the significant interactions provide evidence for higher levels of cognitive complexity moderating the relationship between depressive symptoms and the ER identity gap to the extent that greater cognitive complexity heightens (even if the experience is lessened by the integration factor of cognitive complexity) one’s experience of depressive symptoms within the

specific context examined in the study (however, the main effect relationship between ER and DS was not significant). This is an intriguing finding considering those with higher levels of cognitive complexity should be better equipped to potentially reframe their own communication encounters (Delia, 1977, O'Keefe, 1988), and this reframing may help in buffering the experience of depressive symptoms. However, the opposite seems to be the case here, in that despite one's greater ability to reframe the communicative context, those who have this ability exhibit more indicators of depression when the ER identity gap is heightened. One possible explanation is religious coping (resilience stemming from believing a higher power controls reality; Hsieh & Kramer, 2021), where a person with greater cognitive complexity may be overly analytical to where distress is increased, with a person of lesser cognitive complexity not experiencing the same concerns. This is certainly an intriguing finding worthy of future study to better understand what is occurring.

However, despite two of the interactions being significant, it must be remembered that each of the four regressions had twelve possible interactions. As such, forty-six of the forty-eight total interactions were not significant. Logically, as each person experiences all four identity layers (Hecht, 1993; Hecht & Phillips, 2021), cognitive complexity may not be involved in the experience of these identity layers. Nevertheless, the reasoning for why cognitive complexity was tested as a moderator is the potential of a person with high cognitive complexity reframing the messages they are receiving from their friend, thus potentially bolstering against the negative potential outcomes of experiencing an identity gap. This prediction was devised due to the understanding that individuals higher in cognitive complexity are more capable of reframing messages to be in line with their communicative goals (O'Keefe, 1988). Nevertheless, with the larger amount of non-significant interactions, it is possible that any moderation between the

dependent variables and identity gaps is very limited, or the design of the study was ill-suited to effectively examine this research question. Intriguingly, however, the beta coefficients of the two significant interactions were large (0.40 for ER plus CCDIFF and -0.40 for ER plus CCINT; the negative value indicating a lessened effect; Abelson, 1995), so the strength of the significant interactions should be seen as intriguing enough for further examination.

Methodological Implications of the Identity Gaps Study

A methodological implication for CTI pertains to the operationalization and measurement of identity gaps. As discussed in the literature review, the success of the different identity gaps measures have been spotty in terms of passing confirmatory factor analysis, with one study even finding some measures lacking and ill-suited to further analysis (Rubinsky, 2019). In the current studies, as discussed in the method and results chapters (Chapter 3 and 4, respectively), multiple items from each measure were found to not reach the accepted thresholds using the standardized solutions, thus resulting in these items being dropped from the measures. For example, the enacted-relational identity gap measure, despite being a 6-item measure in its original formulation (Jung, 2011), became a 3-item measure following confirmatory factor analysis for the identity gaps study. Further, for the personal-relational identity gap measure, the second order solution called for by the original authors (Jung & Hecht, 2004) did not hold in the present confirmatory factor analysis, requiring the two factors of the measure (the differentiation factor and the preconception factor) to be treated as different measures when this identity gap was examined in the multiple regressions of the identity gaps study. The differentiation and preconception factors (of the personal-relational identity gap measure) were negatively correlated (-0.21) across the four regressions of the study, and the preconception factor never achieved a significant relationship with any dependent variable in this study (the differentiation

factor, however, had a significant positive relationship with ongoing negative affect and negative relationships with relational and interpersonal communication satisfaction). Overall, Conceptually, CTI and the accompanying concept of identity gaps is sound, as has been established throughout multiple decades of scholarship (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). However, the repeated concerns with the identity gaps measures in this study and in previous studies points to the need for potential reevaluation in the operationalization and measurement of identity gaps.

The problems encountered with the identity gaps measures also lead to questions of whether the variables (concepts) were effectively captured despite the items removed from each measure. The enacted-relational identity gap measure was the most concerning, given that half of the items were removed in the CFA (3 of the 6 items were removed). In the case of this measure, the items removed were redundant given the wording of the items that remained. For example, item 2 (which was removed and is a reverse coded item) indicates, “When I communicate with the acquaintances, I am usually successful in making them get to know me”, whereas item 5 (which was retained) indicates, “Although I try to show acquaintances what kind of person I am, they seem to see me not as I show”. Despite the differences in wording, given that item 2 was a reverse coded item, the two statements convey the same idea of one’s success in demonstrating their identity. Even with the redundance eliminated, the remaining items still capture difference between how one demonstrates their identity (enacted layer) and their identity with their friend relationship (relational layer). The same repetitiveness was the case for the personal-enacted measure, where the all items removed were reverse coded items that were redundant with other items when one reoriented them from their wording for the reverse coding, so the personal-enacted identity gap was still captured without this repetition.

For the personal-relational identity gap measure, items 3 and 4 of the preconception factor of the measure were removed. Intriguingly, the two items that were removed pertained to past interactions, whereas the three items that remained pertained to present interaction. For example, an item that was removed (item 3) indicates, “I feel that my communication partners do not realize that I have been changing and still portray me based on my past images”. Compare this to item 5 (which was retained), “When my communication partners talk about me, I often wonder if they talk about me or someone else”, and the temporal component becomes clear in item 3 including behavior or interaction in the past. It is possible the difference in results are due to having the participants think of a single event in the identity gaps study (Study One), and not interaction over time. Nevertheless, of the items retained, they were similar to item 5 in the sense that each item concerned a difference between how one is perceived in their friend relationship (relational layer) versus how they perceive themselves (personal layer) based on preconceived notions (as is covered by the preconception factor).

Finally, a methodological implication also arose from the results of the CFA on the cognitive complexity measure (the Cognitive Complexity Instrument; Bagdasarov, 2009). Item 7 in the differentiation factor of the cognitive complexity measure was not properly labeled as reverse coded in the publication from which the author of this study found the measure. This concern was revealed when running bivariate correlations prior to conducting the CFAs for this study. A careful reading of the item in question in comparison to the other items within the factor revealed the item should have been labeled as reverse coded in Bagdasarov (2009) but it was not. Whether Bagdasarov reverse coded this item correctly in their analysis is unknown. In study one and study two, this item was treated as a reverse coded item and recoded as such prior to running

the CFAs and subsequent statistical analysis (this modification is noted in Appendix B, where the CC measure can be found).

Attention should also be directed toward the differing treatment of the Cognitive Complexity Instrument (CCI; also referred to as the cognitive complexity measure) between the two studies of this dissertation. As mentioned in Chapter 4: Results, the cognitive complexity measure for the identity gaps study (Study One) was broken into its three factors (differentiation, abstraction, and integration) because the CFA did not warrant the use of the second order solution. The second order solution, which was called for in the study where the CCI originated (Bagdasarov, 2009), required the mean be taken of all items across the three factors to result in a single score for the whole measure (the second order solution). As the original study called for the second order solution, the second order solution was used when it was possible, so as the second order solution was deemed viable from the results of the CFA for the message evaluation study (Study Two), the decision was made to use the second order solution in the respective study. This meant both studies differed in their treatment of the CCI measure and require different understandings of how cognitive complexity is examined in each study.

As the message evaluation study (Study Two) used the second order solution, the results and discussion of this study simply refer to *cognitive complexity* whenever this measure is used, because all three factors of the measure (differentiation, abstraction, and integration) were combined to result in one value. No mention is made of the three factors within the measure, because the measure is being used as it was intended, which is the combined score. However, because the second order solution did not hold for the identity gaps study (Study One), the results were parsed in discussing the three factors of the CCI separately. The focus placed upon these separate factors, thus, meant that the factors of the measure are discussed as separate

variables. This was the case for the two significant interactions, with one interaction involving the differentiation factor and the other involving the integration factor. Nevertheless, as each factor (or we could refer to each factor as its own variable) was still a single component of the overall cognitive complexity measure, the results and discussion of these measures continued to refer to differentiation and integration as factors of cognitive complexity.

Despite these factors now being separate variables, the language of factor was still used to appropriately couch the discussion within the overall construct of cognitive complexity. Interpretation of these separate factors should only account for the specific aspects of differentiation and integration, however, and not cognitive complexity as a whole. Given that these interactions were examined as part of a research question, due to a lack of research pertaining to how identity gaps may interact with cognitive complexity (or simply its underlying factors), any results should be looked at in terms of intriguing possibilities for future studies to further assist in explaining these relationships. Perhaps a future study could examine not only the individual factors parsed out as separate variable, but also use the combined measure to understand the relationship between identity gaps, cognitive complexity as a whole, and the underlying factors of cognitive complexity.

Message Evaluation Study (Study Two) Overall Discussion

The message evaluation study (Study Two) engaged message design logic (MDL) as its guiding theory. As a theory, MDL indicates individuals construct messages based on both an understanding of the purpose of communication, as well as their goals for the communication encounter (O'Keefe, 1988). As an individual grows in their communicative competence over time and with greater experience interacting with others, an individual is increasingly capable of attending to multiple goals in the messages they produce (Caughlin, 2010; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). This ability to attend to multiple goals in messages extends from

a person's cognitive complexity, which pertains to a person's ability to entertain multiple different constructs simultaneously (differentiation), engage higher levels of abstract thinking (abstraction), and integrate information (integration) to produce messages to attend to different goals and communicative outcomes (Bagdasarov, 2009; Burleson, 2007; Delia, 1977). Those with higher levels of cognitive complexity are increasingly able to engage in high levels of differentiation, abstraction, and integration, thus producing increasingly sophisticated messages that attend to a wider range of communicative goals (Bagdasarov, 2009; Burleson, 2007; Delia, 1977; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987).

Three different design logics are posited by MDL, expressive, conventional, and rhetorical (O'Keefe, 1988). Expressive messages arise from the understanding that the purpose of communication is the expression of thoughts and feelings (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). Conventional messages attend to what is considered the socially appropriate response within the communication context, because those who use conventional messages tend to view the purpose of communication as this conveying of social appropriateness relevant to the communication context (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). Rhetorical messages allow communicators to attend to multiple goals within an interaction and allow for the ability to reshape or reframe the social context or one's social role within the context or within a relationship (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). The three message design logics increase in their complexity and sophistication from expressive to rhetorical, so the skills (and cognitive complexity) required to produce a rhetorical message rely on the ability to produce expressive and conventional messages, and the ability to produce a conventional message relies on one's prior ability to produce an expressive message (O'Keefe, 1988). Overall, MDL indicates that we produce messages to attend to what we perceive are the needs of a specific

interaction or our goals for that interaction, and our ability to produce messages of the different message design logic levels relies upon our levels of cognitive complexity and communicative competence (Bagdasarov, 2009; Burleson, 2007; Delia, 1977; O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987).

For the message evaluation study (Study Two), each participant completed the cognitive complexity instrument (unlike in Study One, the results of confirmatory factor analysis supported treating the three separate factors of the measure as one overall measure, so the author did so to maintain the original intent of the cognitive complexity instrument; Bagdasarov, 2009), followed by describing a scenario where they accused a friend of a transgression. After completing the description, the participant was shown three messages and told to imagine their friend spoke those messages after being accused of a transgression. The three messages aligned with the three levels of message design logic (one message per level) and concerned a reframing of the accused from a perceived transgressor to a supportive person and did not include an apology or indication of accepting responsibility for the transgression. The three messages were also randomized in their order when shown to the participants.

The message evaluation study (Study Two) advanced two hypotheses. First, of the three messages examined using message design logic (MDL), the rhetorical design logic message would be evaluated higher than the expressive and conventional messages in terms of helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness. In turn, the second hypothesis predicted the expressive message would be evaluated lower than the conventional and rhetorical messages in terms of helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness. Further, although not a hypothesis itself, the implication of the two hypotheses indicates the conventional message would be rated lower than the rhetorical message, but higher

than the expressive message, in terms of the same dependent variables. Two research questions were also advanced. First, CC would moderate the relationship between the different message design logics and the five dependent variables. Second, CC would moderate the evaluation of messages based on the level of MDL used for each message. Both hypotheses were fully supported. The results of the first research question indicated CC significantly moderated the evaluations of messages as helpful (Figure 3), supportive (Figure 4), sensitive (Figure 5), appropriate (Figure 6), and effective (Figure 7), in the participant with higher cognitive complexity could more starkly discern the helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, and appropriateness of each of the three messages in comparison to participants with lower cognitive complexity. Finally, the results for the second research question indicate CC moderates the evaluation of the sophistication (Figure 8) of the messages used in the study, with participants higher in cognitive complexity more starkly discerning the differences in sophistication between the expressive, conventional, and rhetorical messages than the participants lower in cognitive complexity.

Theoretical Implications of the Message Evaluation Study

The results for the message evaluation study provide an additional context in which message design logic's (MDL) boundaries have been extended, which is that of potential forgiveness encounters. This extension into a new context may not be surprising considering MDL is a theory that is supposed to apply universally to human communication (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). The statistically significant results for the message evaluation study, with significance found for the dependent variables of *helpfulness*, *supportiveness*, and *sensitivity* (with the independent variable being the different message design logics), indicate evidence for the possibility of comforting a harmed person without apologizing for the perceived transgression. This is because messages that are rated as high in helpfulness, supportiveness, and

sensitivity are more likely to comfort a distressed person (Goldsmith, McDermott, & Alexander, 2000), and the rhetorical message in study two met this requirement. Additionally, the significant results for appropriateness and effectiveness (with the independent variable of the different design logics) indicate the harmed person (the one making the accusation of wrongdoing) may also perceive the rhetorical message as appropriate and effective for the circumstances, because the message still conveyed some form of support, despite the speaker not accepting responsibility for a transgression (the rhetorical message was also rated higher in appropriateness and effectiveness than the expressive and conventional messages).

The significant results of these five dependent variables across the sample, across the three different types of messages, and in the expected order of rhetorical as rated highest and expressive rated lowest, indicate that by utilizing messages designed to attend to multiple goals, and to attend to reframing the role of the perceived transgressor, it is possible to provide some level of comfort to a person who accused the perceived transgressor, given that comforting messages are known to rate highly in terms of helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity (Goldsmith et al., 2000). The importance of this finding is this experience of comforting may then lead to the transgressed agreeing to forgive the perceived transgressor, due to the recognition that managing emotions is one of the seven tasks of the forgiveness process (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Understanding that emotions have an influence in how a transgression is appraise as meaningful to the relationship, as well as how emotion may influence how the transgressed perceives any forgiveness-seeking strategy (Waldron & Kelley, 2008), provides insight into the effectiveness of any message used during forgiveness-seeking. This study did not produce enough evidence to provide a clear conclusion for the messages clearly leading to forgiveness being granted (because the messages evaluated in this study were

hypothetical and type of transgression the participants thought of was not controlled), but the results firmly situate the MDL and support literature within the context of performing forgiveness-seeking. More discussion on the applications of the message evaluation study (Study Two) to forgiveness communication are discussed in the next section.

Discussing the specifics of the messages themselves, it is important to note the results occurred despite no apology ever being conveyed even though the participant is blaming the friend in their recalled scenario of a transgression. In fact, each message indicated the perceived transgressor did not view themselves responsible for the transgression claimed by the self-named transgressed (the study participant). For the expressive and conventional messages, the perceived transgressor made a direct statement indicating they had not committed the transgression ('I did not do it' for the expressive message, and 'I didn't do it' for the conventional message), while the rhetorical message indicated a disagreement as to responsibility for the transgression ('despite our differing views on my responsibility'), which served to deny responsibility in an indirect way. Further, the expressive message specifically attended to the use of blame, whereas the conventional and rhetorical messages did not, which is in accordance with MDL (Caughlin, Brashers, Ramey, Kosenko, Donovan-Kicken, & Bute, 2008; O'Keefe, 1988). Finally, it must be noted the rhetorical message indeed incorporated an attempt at reframing identity (a reframing from perceived transgressor to supportive friend, as situated within the context of Study Two), through the speaker offering to provide support given the distress experienced by the transgressed, and asking the transgressed what would be best to help them (the conventional message only made references to possibly offering support).

The reframing component of the rhetorical message in Study Two addresses multiple important components. First, the rhetorical message in Study Two attends to the nature of

rhetorical messages in being able to reframe the social context (O'Keefe, 1988). Second, the rhetorical message attends to the recognition from the support literature in that persons needing support should have a role in guiding how they are supported (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Jones & Bodie, 2014), with the rhetorical message in this study including a question on how to best help the transgressed. As such, both goals (reframing the social context and giving the harmed person agency) combined attend to the capability of rhetorical messages in attending to multiple goals (Caughlin, 2010; O'Keefe, 1988). These findings provide further evidence for the effectiveness and suitability of the rhetorical message over expressive and conventional messages, in finding this pattern held in this context, despite the lack of an indication of taking responsibility for the transgression in any of the messages used in this study.

Cognitive complexity also deserves attention here. A significant interaction between cognitive complexity and the level of MDL was found for each of the five dependent variables (helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness; Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, respectively), as well as the responses on the MDL manipulation check measure (the interaction for the MDL manipulation check measure carries greater methodological implication, so it is discussed in the next section). For all DVs, cognitive complexity significantly moderated the relationship between MDL and each dependent variable. As such, those with higher cognitive complexity had a greater ability to evaluate the expressive message as less helpful, supportive, sensitive, appropriate, and effective than participants with lower cognitive complexity. The difference in ability to discern the helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness of a message narrowed for the conventional message and narrowed even further for the rhetorical message.

This finding aligns with MDL as a theory in that individuals with greater communicative skill, due in large part to their increased level of cognitive complexity, are better able to discern the differences between expressive, conventional, and rhetorical messages in line with many different communication variables (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987), which include helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness (Caughlin et al., 2008). The same was the case in the present study (Study Two) for determining the differences in message sophistication, with individuals with greater cognitive complexity demonstrating better discernment between the different levels of message sophistication. The ability to discern messages sophistication does align with theory (O'Keefe, 1988), despite not having previously been tested using a participant response measure. Nevertheless, it is clear participants, regardless of their level of cognitive complexity, were able to evaluate the rhetorical message as highest, and the expressive message as lowest, across all five dependent variables and the manipulation check. This indicates that, despite cognitive complexity certainly helping individuals discern the differences between the three levels of MDL, individuals are generally able to determine differences in message sophistication in alignment with the expectations of MDL no matter their level of cognitive complexity.

Methodological Implications of the Message Evaluation Study

The primary methodological implication from this study is the development of the MDL manipulation check measure. No such measure existed prior to the one created for this study, and such a measure did not exist because prior studies used coding by trained raters to analyze for the markers of each MDL message type, with intercoder reliability being used to determine the accuracy of the raters (e.g., Caughlin et al., 2008). Intercoder reliability is an accepted practice in determining if messages created according to MDL (and many other theories) properly align with

the components of the theory (Hauser, Ellsworth, & Gonzalez, 2018) and have clearly worked for the studies using trained raters. Nevertheless, the question remained if study participants could themselves identify the differences message sophistication in line with the different levels of MDL. The literature indicates messages created in accordance with MDL can be evaluated on their differences in terms different communicative variables (e.g., Caughlin et al., 2008), but having participants evaluate messages specifically based on the level of message sophistication had yet to be examined. The question of whether participants could discern message sophistication was an intriguing question to address, due to the inability of some participants to recognize the differences in the sophistication of messages constructed in accordance with verbal person-centeredness (Youngvorst & Jones, 2017).

As discussed in the literature review, the framework for verbal person-centered messages arose from the same philosophical foundation as MDL, which is constructivism, so due to this shared foundation, the author found it reasonable to question if the participants would have difficulty discerning between the three types of messages designed using MDL. For the responses on this survey, however, it is clear that participants are able to recognize differences in messages constructed using MDL, so the MDL measure in this study can be utilized by the discipline in future studies (and would have helped in prior studies by supplanting measures requiring significant resources (time and effort) on the part of the researchers to code participants' written responses to writing prompts) utilizing MDL as a guiding framework for message design and construction.

Similarly, the significance of cognitive complexity as a moderator between the three MDL messages and the MDL manipulation check presents a methodological contribution. Although it is clear individuals can evaluate messages of greater sophistication as more helpful,

supportive, sensitive, appropriate, and effective than messages of lower sophistication (Caughlin et al., 2008; Goldsmith et al., 2000), it remained unclear if individuals could specifically discern differences in message sophistication when examining messages at differing levels of MDL. The responses to the MDL manipulation check measure in the present study showed participants can evaluate message sophistication specifically, and examining cognitive complexity as a moderator in relation to this measure showed that individuals with higher levels of cognitive complexity had a greater ability to discern between the different messages. The methodological implication is that messages can be evaluated through participant response measures, rather than through the process used up until this study, which was using trained coders to evaluate messages, as discussed above. Further this MDL manipulation check measure can be used in conjunction with measures of cognitive complexity (e.g., Bagdasarov, 2009) to understand the difference in message ratings based on an individual's level of cognitive complexity. Not having to train coders saves time and other resources for researchers, and using participant response measures allows researchers to better know if participants were able to discern the differences in sophistication of the messages used in a study.

Given the discussion on the generalizability of MDL in light of cultural differences, as well as the cognitive complexity being one component of what intercultural communication scholars have considered communication competence (cognition is considered one component in addition to other components; Kim, 2001), the question arises if the constructivist conceptualization of message sophistication holds as well. After all, different cultures may have different values as to what makes a message sophisticated, and valuing rhetorical messages as the most sophisticated has been shown to be more of a Western ideal (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). Providing partial support for this understanding are the results of the CFA for the MDL manipulation check measure in the

message evaluation study (Study Two). The two items that were removed from the measure during CFA were the adjectives and antonyms pertaining more directly to message sophistication (these items were simple versus complex and straightforward versus intricate). The six items that remained in this measure following CFA could possibly require culturally bound judgements to make a proper evaluation, it may be best to refer to this measure as measuring something other than message sophistication. Adjectives that remain in the measure are understanding, rational, absolving, validating, affirming, and acknowledging, and as the relevant codebook where these adjectives were originally drawn from emphasizes *directness* in reference to these adjectives (with expressive being more direct than other messages, Caughlin et al., 2008), it may be best to refer to this measure measuring message directness rather than message sophistication. Therefore, any further reference to the findings of this measure will discuss *message directness*.

Finally, a secondary methodological implication of this study was the development of the effectiveness measure with scales that correspond to the 5-point semantic differential scales used on the helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity (Goldsmith et al., 2000), as well as appropriateness (Caughlin et al., 2008) measures. Other effectiveness measures currently exist (e.g., Canary & Spitzberg, 1987), but the author determined an effectiveness measure with a matching set of response options to the helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, and appropriateness measures would reduce the potential for confusion on the part of the participants when completing all measures of the survey used in the message evaluation study. As such, the effectiveness measure with the 5-point semantic differential scale was devised, and its validity and reliability determined through CFAs in the message evaluation study. The success of this effectiveness measure indicates its suitability to be used alongside measures of comforting (helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity) and appropriateness in future studies examining MDL

or comforting. Individuals consider message effectiveness and appropriateness when evaluating the suitability of a message for the communicative context (Canary & Spitzberg, 1987), so an additional measure of effectiveness will be beneficial in designing surveys to evaluate various messages.

Putting the Studies Together

Taken together, both studies provide a theoretical contribution to the forgiveness communication literature. The forgiveness process is the major framework that describes the different aspects of one way of contending with a relational transgression; asking for forgiveness, forgiving someone, and addressing concerns with the relationship (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). The most relevant connections between the two studies of this dissertation and the forgiveness process concern the forgiveness process tasks of managing emotions (as identity gaps have implications for negative affect and communication in general) and seeking forgiveness (due to the fact that messages utilized in Study Two were designed to potentially elicit forgiveness).

As evaluating the different messages against multiple dependent variables involving comforting (as comforting messages are evaluated by receivers based on the *helpfulness*, *supportiveness*, and *sensitivity* of the message) was a key concern of the message evaluation study, it is logical to discuss the connection to the managing emotions task of the forgiveness process. Clearly, the rhetorical messages were evaluated higher across all dependent variables (*helpfulness*, *supportiveness*, *sensitivity*, *appropriateness*, and *effectiveness*), indicating that messages reframing the role of the perceived transgressor to that of a person wanting to offer support can be helpful in managing emotions during the forgiveness process, especially when there is a disagreement over responsibility for the transgression. The forgiveness literature is clear on the importance of managing emotions within the forgiveness process (which is why the

relevant task has such a name), because diminishing negative affect and feelings of distress allow the individuals involved to be better able to engage in sense-making to determine the impact of the transgression on the relationship, as well as subsequent strategies needed to seek and grant forgiveness (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Therefore, being able to construct a message that reframes one's role from a perceived transgressor to a supporter would certainly help address the *managing emotions* task of the forgiveness process, and the results of the message evaluation study indicate that producing this kind of reframing message could indeed be effective at comforting the transgressed (as messages deemed comforting are highly helpful, supportive, and sensitive; Goldsmith et al., 2000). However, the ability of a person to construct these messages within the relevant context may be challenged by the heightened experience of identity gaps, due to negative affect stemming from identity gaps having communicative implications (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). After all, expressive design logic is used when individuals do not have adequate cognitive resources, such as through the expression of thoughts and feelings (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987). As the experience of distress stemming from negative affect often prevents a person from engaging in communicative tasks requiring higher cognitive load (the cognitive load required to produce messages of higher sophistication; Burleson, 2007, 2011; Delia, 1977), the experience of negative affect may not foster the conditions necessary to use rhetorical messages to reframe the social context, because of the lack of cognitive resources available to produce increasingly sophisticated messages.

Following this reasoning, this finding on identity gaps (the increase in ongoing negative affect in relation to identity gaps) further upholds the importance of the managing emotions task of the forgiveness process, due to identity gaps being potential antecedents of negative affect and

depression (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). As such, the positive relationship between ongoing negative affect (as operationalized in the forgiveness literature) and identity gaps, as well as the understanding that distress stemming from negative affect hampers out ability to produce increasingly sophisticated messages, points to the potential of future study in examining the involvement of identity gaps in message production in forgiveness contexts.

Forgiveness-seeking (the second relevant task of the overall forgiveness process) is relevant not only because the identity gaps (Study One) and message evaluation (Study Two) studies have been situated within the context of forgiveness-seeking, but also because the theories utilized in the two studies of this dissertation point to the importance of messages, as well as potential antecedents that influence message production. As identity gaps are associated with a multitude of negative affective, psychological, and communicative outcomes, and the experience of these outcomes then influences our interpersonal interactions through differing assessments of both communication and relational satisfaction (Jung, 2011, 2013; Jung & Hecht, 2004, Rubinsky, 2019), a logical connection arises where the experience of identity gaps in the forgiveness context may then influence the messages the perceived transgressor will produce within the context. As mentioned earlier, the influence on the type of messages produced relates to the availability of cognitive resources to produce sophisticated messages, with distress stemming from negative affect often resulting in fewer cognitive resources available to produce sophisticated messages (Burleson, 2007, 2011; Delia, 1977). Any messages produced should align with one of the three levels of design logic, thus producing the different outcomes in terms of comforting (through helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity), appropriateness, and even effectiveness. The reception of these messages by the transgressed may then influence their decision of whether or not to forgive, and also influence the strength and continuation of the

relationship itself. Further research is needed on this potential chain of events. I will discuss recommendations for future work in the limitations and future directions section.

Challenges to MDL and New Directions for the Study of Forgiveness

Further theoretical implications arise from the literature challenging the conception of MDL as a generalizable theory of messages design, as well as the prosocial focus of the interpersonal, relational, and forgiveness communication literature. As to the first concern, the literature challenging the universality of MDL indicates the understanding of the scaffolded nature of the three design logics (expressive, conventional, and rhetorical) extending from least sophisticated to most sophisticated is rooted in the Western culture from which the early MDL literature advanced (Hart, 2002). Although MDL is based in the corpus of constructivist research that preceded it, which included ample studies on different types of messages, scholarship on communication competence has also challenged the primacy of cognitive complexity in message production and reception (Hart, 2002; Kim, 2001). For example, intercultural communication scholars have indicated not only differences in culture as a major influence on how messages are constructed and evaluated, but also the involvement of affect in both message production and reception (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021; Kim, 2001). Other factors that may influence how one evaluates communication competence are one's level of social support, how affectionate they may be, how one handles conflict, and one's responses to verbal aggression and violence within relationships (Afifi & Coveleski, 2015). Further, even within relational communication, there is the understanding that relationship type may be involved in evaluating conventional or rhetorical messages as "better" (Hullman, 2004). As such, cognitive complexity can be viewed as just one component of both producing and evaluating messages, and the fitness of MDL across cultures (and perhaps relationship types) may not be as generalizable as originally formulated.

One way to understand and examine different cultural ways of being and ways of knowing is accounting for the differences between magic consciousness, mythic connection, and perspectival thinking. Magic consciousness considers speech as instantaneously creating reality, so when something is uttered, it creates a state of being, without question (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). Mythic connection produces reality through associations with symbols, so we engage with reality through the symbols we invoke (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). Further, perspectival thinking is much more analytical, centering logic and reasoning in decision-making and the production of knowledge (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). Applying these cultural perspectives to this dissertation (and to MDL in a larger sense), the scaffolded nature of message sophistication is challenged as a predominantly perspectival understanding of what makes a "good" message (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). Knowing what constitutes a "good" message is often based on culture, and if one is socialized into a culture that values social convention over any other form of messages, for example, conventional messages would be considered more sophisticated than rhetorical messages (Hart, 2002). Some cultures may place greater value on messages expressing thoughts and feelings (expressive messages could then be centered by those engaging magic consciousness), with messages seeking to reframe the social context potentially being viewed as deceptive (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). As such, the scaffolded nature of MDL is challenged, as well as further complicated by the understanding that a perspectival person may use messages that reframe social context (rhetorical messages) to exploit or manipulate different audiences (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021).

Given the discussion on the generalizability of MDL in light of cultural differences, as well as the cognitive complexity being one component of what intercultural communication scholars have considered communication competence (cognition is considered one component in

addition to other components; Kim, 2001), the question arises if the constructivist conceptualization of message sophistication holds as well. After all, different cultures may have different values as to what makes a message sophisticated, and valuing rhetorical messages as the most sophisticated has been shown to be more of a Western ideal (Hsieh & Kramer, 2021). Providing partial support for this understanding are the results of the CFA for the MDL manipulation check measure in the message evaluation study (Study Two). The two items that were removed from the measure during CFA were the adjectives and antonyms pertaining more directly to message sophistication (these items were simple versus complex and straightforward versus intricate). The six items that remained in this measure following the CFA could possibly require culturally bound judgements to make a proper evaluation, it may be best to refer to this measure as measuring something other than message sophistication. Adjectives that remain in the measure are understanding, rational, absolving, validating, affirming, and acknowledging, and as the relevant codebook where these adjectives were originally drawn from emphasizes *directness* in reference to these adjectives (with expressive being more direct than other messages, Caughlin et al., 2008), it may be best to refer to this measure as measuring message directness rather than message sophistication. Therefore, any further reference to the findings of this measure will mention *message directness*. Further research with this measure will be illuminating.

In addition to the challenges of the generalizability of MDL, the prosocial focus of much of the CTI and forgiveness scholarship, and to a smaller extent the MDL literature, should also be discussed. The prosocial focus within interpersonal and relational communication has been discussed before, with the examination of the negative aspects of interpersonal and relational communication often being referred to as the dark side of communication (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1994). Although the earliest MDL literature examined messages in situations of providing help

or support (O'Keefe, 1988; O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987), the connections between different design logics and deceptive messages were examined soon after. Notably, expressive messages, with the accompanying message content of raw thoughts and feelings, have been evaluated by message recipients as more honest than conventional and rhetorical messages (Jacobs, Dawson, & Brashers, 1996; McCornack, 1992). Rhetorical messages, however, with the accompanying ability to reframe social context, can be used to deceive (Jacobs et al., 1996; McCornack, 1992). The ability to manipulate one's social context through rhetorical design logic (O'Keefe, 1998) makes room for the concerns of rhetorical messages being used to deceive and manipulate interaction partners. Nevertheless, the bulk of the MDL literature has remained focused on using messages for prosocial ends, such as repairing relationships (as discussed in this dissertation) and strengthening the relational bonds between couples and between groups of people (Adams, 2001).

The largely prosocial focus of the CTI and identity gaps literature emphasizes the understanding of identity gaps with the aim of reducing the negative aspects of identity gaps (Hecht & Phillips, 2021) or using identity gaps for positive ends within relationships (Brooks & Pitts, 2016). The CTI and identity gaps literature often discusses the negative consequences of identity gaps, but with the understanding that greater illumination of the concerns can be used to help those experiencing identity gaps (Jung, 2013, Rubinsky, 2019, 2022). What has largely been unaddressed, however, is the connection between identity gaps and deception or manipulation. Gaslighting, for example, has been gaining traction as an object of study in interpersonal and relational communication, and has implications for how scholars may look at identity gaps. Gaslighting attacks a person's understanding of reality through power differentials within relationships (Dunbar, 2015; Graves & Spencer, 2023). Specifically, gaslighting promotes self-

doubt in the victim, compelling them to question their ability to know, interpret, and make sense of their various interactions (Hailes & Goodman, 2023). As a communication phenomenon, gaslighting relies upon the scripts we enact within our relationships, exerting its power through social expectations relevant to the relationship (Graves & Spencer, 2023).

Although illuminating the phenomenon of gaslighting was not one of the goals of the study, an unexpected implication of the findings is unveiling ways in which individuals may be manipulated into a repeated pattern of apologizing for perceived transgressions the individual did not commit. For example, a transgressed person (or a person claiming to be transgressed) exhibits power over the perceived transgressor by the understanding that forgiveness cannot be granted until the perceived transgressor makes amends in an acceptable form to the transgressed. As such, the transgressed can use social and cultural pressures to compel compliance from the perceived transgressor (Waldron & Kelley, 2008, 2017). If in a gaslighting situation, the transgressed could heighten the perceived transgressor's self-doubt as to the perceived transgressor's responsibility for a claimed transgression. As such, identity gaps may be used by the transgressed (the person claiming harm) to potentially (and consistently) compel compliance from a perceived transgressor by emphasizing the gap between different identity layers. For example, the personal-relational identity gap may be used in gaslighting by the transgressed continually claiming their relational partner is a transgressor, regardless of the transgressor label being deserved. Being labeled and treated as a transgressor (at that point a relational identity) contrasted with one's knowledge of not having committed a transgression (a personal identity of being a "good" person) would make the identity gap more salient. Over time, this gap being emphasized could allow the perceived transgressor to question their own thoughts and actions, shifting one's understanding of reality, aligning with the conceptualization of gaslighting (Graves

& Spencer, 2023). Influencing a relational partner to question their own sense of reality and ability to makes sense of their interactions is what may foster further abuse and even physical violence between relational partners (Hailes & Goodman, 2023).

This unintended finding as to gaslighting leads to the third concern, which is the illumination of potential negative aspects (or the "dark side") of forgiveness as a communication phenomenon. The forgiveness communication literature largely exhibits a prosocial focus in examining how forgiveness can repair relationships and alleviate negative affect (Merolla, 2008, 2014; Kelley et al., 2019, Waldron & Kelley, 2008, 2017). The same prosocial focus exists in the forgiveness literature in psychology as well (McCullough, 2008, Toussaint et al., 2015). Nevertheless, that prosocial focus of much of the forgiveness literature is accompanied by the knowledge that forgiveness is not always a positive or happy phenomenon and can come with very difficult and distressing implications (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). The negative aspects of forgiveness, however, have not been examined as extensively as the positive aspects, and just as this dissertation contended that the forgiveness literature has advanced to where the study of performance within the forgiveness process is warranted, let this dissertation posit the forgiveness communication literature has advanced to where the examination of the negative aspects, or "dark side", of forgiveness is also warranted. How the need to examine the dark side of forgiveness may be shaped into future research is discussed in the future directions section of this chapter.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations are an aspect of all scholarly research, and the studies of the dissertation have a few notable limitations. A limitation for the message evaluation study (as originally formulated) is the failure of the communication theory of identity (CTI) manipulation check during pilot testing. As identity performance is a major aspect of this dissertation, the original

goal was to incorporate the four identity layers from CTI into the messages of the message evaluation study (Study Two). As such, three messages (expressive, conventional, and rhetorical) for each identity layer were devised, bringing the total number of messages to twelve (all twelve messages can be seen in Appendix A). The intent was to have participants randomly assigned into one of four identity layer conditions, so each participant would only see the three messages designed in accordance with a single identity layer. This original plan was dropped following the failure of the CTI manipulation check, which meant there was a lack of confidence in knowing if participants were thinking of the intended identity layer when answering the subsequent measures. However, the three relational messages ended up being the three messages with this same identity layer used in the message evaluation study, due to the larger effect sizes of the messages. Nevertheless, the message evaluation study (Study Two) should not be construed as a message effects study, due to not as strict of an adherence to the recommended designs of message effects studies (e.g. Jackson, 1992; Jackson, O'Keefe, Jacobs, & Brashers, 1989).

It is possible a future study could be performed utilizing all twelve messages devised for the original formulation of the message evaluation study, but any subsequent study on the topic would rely on the understanding that participants could identify a specific identity layer used to create a specific message. Whether individuals can identify a specific identity layer within a message is a question that has, to date, not been adequately examined. The ample presence of qualitative scholarship examining different identity layers and identity gaps could be used as evidence to claim some individuals can tease out specific identity layers from messages. However, scholars benefit from long periods of intense theoretical and methodological training that enhances their ability to complete such a task, whereas the average individual does not. As such, further study is needed as to whether individuals (those without higher levels of academic

training and scholarship) can identify specific identity layers in messages, and if they can, a revised CTI manipulation check would need to be used in a study examining the original twelve messages designed for the present study's pilot test. The CTI manipulation check in this study was devised for just that purpose, because no CTI manipulation check relying on participant responses existed but may need revision before it could be used again. It is unclear what revisions may need to be made, as the reasons for this failure were not thoroughly examined, but one problem may have been all of the messages, regardless of identity layer, were situated within the context of a friendship. Perhaps the participants thinking about friendship meant they were primed to think of a message through the lens of the relational layer. With further examination it is possible other concerns may be found. However, for the time being, the problems related to the CTI manipulation check remains a limitation, and further study would be beneficial to determine if a) participants can tease out a single identity layer from a message, and b) a valid and reliable CTI manipulation check could be produced.

In terms of a manipulation check for studies using CTI, a future direction grows out of the limitation of the failure of my CTI manipulation check. The value of messages designed using the different identity layers of CTI have been highlighted in the literature, namely with respect to designing health messages for health communication campaigns (Hecht & Choi, 2012). Designing messages targeted at specific layers of identity may certainly be an effective way to encourage a health-related action to be taken, based on the specific identity needs of any single identity layer (Hecht & Choi, 2012), and recent work has also indicated that identity gaps can be used to compel positive action in relationships, not just lead to negative outcomes through the dissonance of the identity layers (such as embracing cultural differences through recognizing the presence of identity gaps; Brooks & Pitts, 2016). Attending to specific identity layers through

message design, such as through attending to specific identity layers for health promotion purposes (Hecht & Choi, 2012), is an intriguing prospect, theoretically, and provides further practical application of the communication theory of identity to addressing real-world problems. However, the message design problems experienced in this study two may limit or provide future challenges for researchers who seek to engage certain identity layers through the designs of their messages.

A limitation for both studies may be not controlling for the factor of time since the transgression (in the case of the message evaluation study) and the time since the accusation of a transgression (in the case of the identity gaps study). Further, transgression severity was not measured in either study, because the primary goal of the message evaluation study (Study Two) was to determine if statistically significant differences between the messages could be found within the context of performing forgiveness-seeking, regardless of the severity of the transgression. Theoretically, there is no basis to think that the severity of a transgression should affect how a person evaluates messages using different levels of MDL (O'Keefe, 1988), but an increasing amount of time since a transgression may have, logically, had an impact on the participant's ability to remember some of the details of the communication encounter they were asked to describe in the message evaluation study (Study Two). However, transgression severity would be an intriguing variable to examine in a future study, due to the forgiveness literature often including transgression severity as a variable (Merolla, 2017; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Sheldon & Antony, 2019). Outcomes of the forgiveness process may be related to the severity of the transgression, with transgressions of increased severity presenting further difficulty for transgressors who wish to be forgiven, and transgression severity also influencing the potential effectiveness of forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting strategies. As such, the inclusion

of transgression severity in a future study on performance and forgiveness-seeking will further situate performative forgiveness-seeking within the realm of the forgiveness communication literature.

In addition to including transgression severity, another future direction concerns examining the three messages in the message evaluation study (Study Two) alongside a message including an apology and acceptance of a transgression. It is illuminating that the means of the rhetorical message for supportiveness, sensitivity, and appropriateness were at or just below the rating of 4 (3.92, 3.90, and 4.01, respectively) on the 1-to-5 scale. This still leaves significant room for higher ratings of any message along these variables, but this points to the relative agreement, across the sample, that the rhetorical messages indeed exhibited a noticeably higher level of supportiveness, sensitivity, and appropriateness given the context in which the messages were examined. This should not, however, be used to underemphasize the message evaluations for helpfulness and effectiveness, despite the rhetorical messages for these two dependent variables not being as close to a 4 on the 1-to-5 scale. As such, testing these messages alongside forgiveness-seeking messages that include acceptance of responsibility would be intriguing, and would provide a basis to effectively compare forgiveness-seeking messages that include an acknowledgement or acceptance of wrongdoing on the part of the transgressor. If a study like this is conducted in the future, the same study design could be utilized, except with the addition of the forgiveness-seeking messages of accepting responsibility for a transgression.

A final limitation, and accompanying future direction, is that the identity gaps study (Study One) did not subsequently provide the participants the opportunity to write the messages they actually delivered in the communicative encounter they described. Although this was not necessary to meet the goals of the identity gaps study, having participants provide the messages

they used in their actual encounters would aid in further understanding how the experience of identity gaps may influence the production of messages.

Drawing together limitations discussed above, such as the need to examine messages constructed by participants following being accused of a transgression, as well as how identity gaps may be involved in message production, a study could be designed where participants are called upon to recall a recent situation (to address the limitation of time since the accusation) where a good friend accused them of a transgression. This study would use the same inclusion criteria as the identity gaps study (Study One), requiring the participant to have disagreed with the transgression accusation, and told their friend of their disagreement. The same identity gaps measures could be used to determine the intensity of these different identity gaps. Following this, the participants would then be asked to write the message, as close to word for word as possible, they delivered to their friend in response to the accusation, which would include the disagreement over their responsibility for the transgression. Trained coders could then determine the level of MDL being engaged, and further analysis could be conducted to determine the relationship between the reported intensity of experiencing a specific identity gap and the level of MDL engaged by the participants in crafting their message in response to the accusation. Additional testing could be performed to see how participants in a separate study respond to these messages provided by the participants who disagreed with an accusation. The same dependent variables of comforting (helpfulness, supportiveness, and sensitivity) could be used to determine the level of comfort of these messages, as well as the appropriateness and effectiveness of these messages. This would provide a further link between the two studies in this dissertation and should potentially provide further support for the results of this dissertation.

In addition to what may stem directly from the limitations, there are other variables that can be examined in future studies as well. For both studies in this dissertation, participants were asked to think of an interaction with a good friend, but what constituted a good friend was left for the participant to decide. Future studies may benefit from specifying a type of friend based on the level of intimacy (casual, close, or best friends; Johnson et al., 2003), context (workplace, volunteering, church group, etc.), temporality (length of time a person has been a friend), and space (geographically close versus long-distance; Johnson, Haigh, Craig, & Becker, 2009). The type of relationship could also be varied, such as between romantic partners or family in addition to friends. Another possibility is the nature of the transgression, with possible examples being physical versus emotional harm to a friend, stealing from a friend, or not upholding commitments for a friend. Just as transgression severity has been shown to be a variable in how forgiveness is sought and granted (Morse & Metts, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2008), so too may be the case for the type of the transgression.

A final possibility for future research is the involvement of rumination, where rumination may result in a person saying or acting in a way that is counter to how they may feel as to the forgiveness episode. For example, the transgressed may decide to forgive the transgressor out of social or relational pressure, but ruminate over whether forgiveness should be granted. Rumination opens the possibility for examining forgiveness (be it from a prosocial or dark side perspective) through imagined interactions (interactions we have in our mind with our images of individuals we know, which may then affect our interpersonal interactions; Honeycut, 2003). The study of imagine interactions has revealed numerous dimensions of imagined interactions, which among these dimensions are rehearing our subsequent interpersonal interactions and feeling catharsis over what we wanted to say or do, but did not end up saying or doing, in our

interpersonal interactions (Honeycutt, 2003). For example, the perceived transgressor may rehearse how they may want to shift their role from a perceived transgressor to that of a supporter, and if that subsequent interpersonal interaction does not go as planned, the perceived transgressor may then use imagined interactions to experience catharsis by imagining what they wanted to say in response but were not able to. Overall, a future study examining rumination and the involvement of imagined interactions may be fruitful in not only understanding how we mentally prepare and mentally respond to interactions but may also reveal ways in which imagined interactions help shape forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting messages.

Examining the Dark Side of Forgiveness

Theoretical implications for the forgiveness communication literature were discussed above. These implications, therefore, raise an intriguing question: What would examining the dark side of forgiveness look like? Illuminating how identity gaps have been used to potentially gaslight, or otherwise compel compliance from transgressors and perceived transgressors, is a logical step considering what has been discussed above. After all, power differentials foster the relational environment that facilitates gaslighting (Graves & Spencer, 2023), and gaslighting is used as a form of coercive control within relationships (Hailes & Goodman, 2023), understanding how identity gaps may be involved in continually compelling offers and actions for amends or forgiveness may illuminate how the acts of seeking and granting forgiveness may be used unethically to allow perpetrators to continually commit intimate partner violence (IPV; as such, IPV in this context could run counter to how IPV is typically viewed by other social actors; see Guthrie & Kunkel, 2015 for how IPV is defined through discourse) or could be a tactic to prevent distancing that may be necessary in situations of family estrangement (see Scharp & Hall, 2017 for the importance of distancing in family estrangement). The identity gaps

study (Study One) already revealed that increased salience of identity gaps led to increases in ongoing negative affect and decreases of relational and interpersonal communication satisfaction when one is accused of a transgression they did not commit. Further illumination is needed to connect the increased salience in identity gaps and the accompanying adverse communicative outcomes to coercive control and intimate partner violence.

Another possibility is to further understand how perceived transgressors (or transgressors in general) may use rhetorical design logic to manipulate social reality to relieve themselves of responsibility and accountability when seeking forgiveness. Although MDL may not be as generalizable across different cultures (Hart, 2002; Hsieh & Kramer, 2021), the findings of the message evaluation study indicate a rhetorical message designed to not take responsibility for a transgression (through reframing one's role as a supporter) was evaluated as more helpful, supportive, sensitive, appropriate, and effective than both conventional and expressive messages also claiming a lack of responsibility. Clearly, a transgressor who wants to keep reoffending could use rhetorical design logic (or a message more suitable to a different cultural context) to evade responsibility and accountability, counter to the ethical obligations placed upon a transgressor in forgiveness contexts. Ultimately, what is considered ethical within a relationship is negotiated between the partners, and is subject to renegotiation (Waldron & Kelley, 2017), so what is considered ethical may differ from relationship to relationship and context to context. Nevertheless, a greater understanding of how messages may be designed and used for unethical purposes within forgiveness episodes may further illuminate how transgressors may manipulate the communication context to continue reoffending. The findings of both studies in this dissertation offer different directions that may be pursued to examine this dark side of forgiveness as a communication phenomenon. Just as the literature on conditional forgiveness

has helped demonstrate that forgiveness is not always positive (Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2008), and the forgiveness process itself indicates relationship transformation does not always equate to reconciliation (Waldron & Kelley, 2008), a greater focus on the dark side of forgiveness may allow scholars to further illuminate how forgiveness may be destructive by being used to unethical ends or to prevent the dissolution of destructive relationships.

Conclusion

Role and identity performance, as demonstrated through message production, when utilized for forgiveness-seeking, may serve to both address identity gaps, as well as serve the function of furthering the forgiveness process to completion, by allowing the transgressed to feel comforted. Regardless of the limitations and numerous future direction that could be pursued from these two studies, both contribute to the forgiveness communication literature by indicating how the experience of identity gaps contribute to different affective, psychological, and communicative outcomes, which may then influence the production of messages the perceived transgressor may use to reframe their role in the context from that of the perceived transgressor to a supporter. The results of the identity gaps study point to the personal-relational identity gap being a major predictor of the experience of ongoing negative affect in potential forgiveness encounters, as well as reductions in interpersonal communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction. The same study indicated the personal-enacted and enacted-relational identity gaps are involved to a smaller extent, but the whole pattern of results appears to indicate the interaction of the many layers of identity, in accordance with CTI, are at play within the forgiveness context, and provide further extension of CTI into the realm of forgiveness communication.

The message evaluation study (Study Two) clearly demonstrated the relationship between the different MDL message types of expressive, conventional, and rhetorical to the message

evaluation outcomes of helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness. This further demonstrates the suitability of MDL as theory and extends this theory to the realm of forgiveness communication. From the message evaluation study, it can be concluded that a message in response to an accusation of wrongdoing can still include content denying responsibility for the transgression and can still be evaluated by the person making the accusation as helpful, supportive, sensitive, appropriate, and effective. This shows that, at least in the context of a perceived transgressor wanting to provide comfort and support to the person accusing them, an apology may not be necessary to allow the person making the accusation to be comforted. This comfort may then be helpful in proceeding through the remaining tasks of the forgiveness process to be able to renegotiate and transform the relationship.

This is where it is appropriate to provide a word of caution as to taking the findings of the message evaluation study out of the context in which they were situated (although, clearly there are many intriguing possibilities when the findings are considered outside of context, as discussed in the above sections, especially in reference to the "dark side" of forgiveness). The context for the message evaluation study (Study Two) is quite specific, involving the perceived transgressor engaging in performative forgiveness-seeking because they care about the transgressed, and want to maintain the relationship while also bolstering their (the perceived transgressor's) own identity as someone who did not commit the accused transgression. As messages vary in their sophistication (or perhaps directness is best considering the modifications to the MDL manipulation check measure), certain messages will provide greater opportunity to accomplish these goals (e.g., rhetorical) than other types of messages (e.g., expressive and conventional) (Caughlin, 2010; O'Keefe, 1988). It must be remembered the messages for the message evaluation study are designed to attend to relationship repair and attempts at comforting

in the relationship, in accordance with the goals and tasks of forgiveness communication and the forgiveness process (Kelley et al., 2019; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). The messages, nor the study context, were designed to examine an unrepentant transgressor desiring to avoid accountability and responsibility for their actions, so the results of the message evaluation study should not be construed as providing an unrepentant transgressor a pathway to avoid the responsibility and accountability that accompany the forgiveness process. The genuine desire to repair relational damage is an essential part of successfully completing the forgiveness process, and attempts to avoid accountability and responsibility on the part of transgressors undermine the fundamental purpose and restorative nature of forgiveness.

Taken together, the two studies provide a multitude of further directions that should be pursued to further our knowledge of performance and forgiveness-seeking. Further connection of identity gaps to the specifics of message production would be beneficial to determine, specifically, how messages are produced in light of the experience of identity gaps. Further study should also examine the rhetorical message from this study alongside a forgiveness-seeking message containing an apology, in order to compare the evaluations of these messages for helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and effectiveness. The reason for this is because measuring a forgiveness-seeking message (such as an apology) using the same dependent variables of helpfulness, supportiveness, sensitivity, effectiveness, and appropriateness would provide a greater basis to compare forgiveness-seeking messages against performing forgiveness-seeking messages in eliciting forgiveness.

Finally, A practical implication of this dissertation is that individuals who find themselves in the position of the perceived transgressor have a clearer path for which they may be able to proceed through forgiveness-seeking and further the forgiveness process even if they feel they

have been wrongly accused of a transgression. For example, Harper from the hypothetical scenario on the first page of the introduction chapter may model her forgiveness-seeking message on the rhetorical message from this dissertation in her attempt to seek forgiveness from Cameron, any individual who finds themselves in a similar situation now has a model for their own messages to work through the forgiveness encounter with their interaction partner, and may be able to resolve the perceived transgression and repair their relationship through the process of forgiveness.

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Tables for the Identity Gaps Study (Study One) and Message Evaluation Study (Study Two)

Table 1.
CFA Model Fit Results for the Identity Gaps Study (Study One)

Model	x^2	*df*	p-value	RMSEA [90% CI]	CFI	SRMR
Original	8081.38	4130	< 0.001	0.06 [0.058; 0.062]	0.75	0.08
Items Removed	4371.98	2429	< 0.001	0.05 [0.052; 0.057]	0.85	0.06
Final	4061.61	2426	< 0.001	0.05 [0.047; 0.053]	0.87	0.06

Table 2. Regression Coefficients Predicting Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.532	.288		12.276	<.001	2.966	4.099		
	Age	-.008	.008	-.060	-.988	.324	-.023	.007	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)	3.580	.249		14.351	<.001	3.089	4.071		
	Age	-.009	.007	-.071	-1.336	.183	-.022	.004	.928	1.078
	CCDIFF (centered)	-.020	.176	-.008	-.116	.908	-.368	.327	.497	2.013
	CCABST (centered)	.057	.140	.032	.405	.686	-.219	.332	.418	2.390
	CCINT (centered)	.131	.223	.050	.587	.558	-.308	.569	.352	2.838
	PRDIFF (centered)	-.515	.075	-.453	-6.918	<.001	-.662	-.369	.609	1.641
	PRPRE (centered)	.048	.058	.048	.820	.413	-.067	.163	.748	1.337
	PE (centered)	-.178	.072	-.139	-2.474	.014	-.319	-.036	.829	1.207
	ER (centered)	-.196	.070	-.185	-2.803	.005	-.334	-.058	.601	1.663
3	(Constant)	3.566	.263		13.565	<.001	3.048	4.084		
	Age	-.008	.007	-.068	-1.230	.220	-.022	.005	.858	1.165
	CCDIFF (centered)	-.009	.189	-.004	-.048	.962	-.381	.363	.435	2.296
	CCABST (centered)	.074	.145	.042	.509	.611	-.211	.359	.394	2.540
	CCINT (centered)	.122	.239	.047	.511	.610	-.348	.592	.308	3.245
	PRDIFF (centered)	-.508	.076	-.446	-6.694	<.001	-.657	-.358	.591	1.691
	PRPRE (centered)	.041	.061	.042	.675	.500	-.079	.162	.682	1.466
	PE (centered)	-.161	.075	-.126	-2.153	.032	-.308	-.014	.768	1.302
	ER (centered)	-.188	.074	-.177	-2.549	.011	-.333	-.043	.545	1.835
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRDIFF (both centered)	-.248	.208	-.134	-1.191	.235	-.659	.162	.208	4.799
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE (both centered)	.092	.136	.059	.677	.499	-.176	.360	.341	2.934
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PE (both centered)	.013	.150	.009	.084	.933	-.282	.307	.237	4.222
	Interaction: CCDIFF * ER (both centered)	.138	.208	.093	.663	.508	-.272	.548	.133	7.528
	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF (both centered)	.103	.170	.074	.602	.548	-.233	.438	.174	5.736
	Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE (both centered)	.139	.128	.123	1.088	.278	-.112	.390	.206	4.863
	Interaction: CCABST * PE (both centered)	-.072	.148	-.056	-.484	.629	-.363	.220	.193	5.185
	Interaction: CCABST * ER (both centered)	-.245	.161	-.213	-1.520	.130	-.563	.073	.133	7.511
	Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF (both centered)	-.047	.240	-.025	-.195	.845	-.521	.427	.160	6.255
	Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE (both centered)	-.336	.174	-.220	-1.931	.055	-.679	.007	.202	4.953
	Interaction: CCINT * PE (both centered)	.222	.242	.136	.916	.360	-.255	.699	.119	8.407
	Interaction: CCINT * ER (both centered)	.237	.224	.162	1.058	.291	-.204	.679	.111	8.969

[a]. Dependent Variable: ICS

Table 3. Regression Coefficients Predicting Relational Satisfaction

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.920	.364		10.778	<.001	3.204	4.636		
	Age	-.004	.010	-.022	-.365	.716	-.022	.015	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)	3.938	.337		11.682	<.001	3.274	4.602		
	Age	-.004	.009	-.025	-.448	.655	-.022	.014	.928	1.078
	CCDIFF (centered)	.027	.238	.009	.115	.909	-.442	.497	.497	2.013
	CCABST (centered)	-.003	.189	-.002	-.018	.986	-.376	.369	.418	2.390
	CCINT (centered)	.047	.301	.014	.155	.877	-.546	.639	.352	2.838
	PRDIFF (centered)	-.476	.101	-.331	-4.731	<.001	-.675	-.278	.609	1.641
	PRPRE (centered)	-.049	.079	-.039	-.619	.537	-.204	.106	.748	1.337
	PE (centered)	-.148	.097	-.091	-1.520	.130	-.339	.044	.829	1.207
	ER (centered)	-.225	.095	-.168	-2.375	.018	-.411	-.038	.601	1.663
3	(Constant)	3.967	.356		11.141	<.001	3.265	4.668		
	Age	-.004	.009	-.027	-.454	.650	-.023	.014	.858	1.165
	CCDIFF (centered)	.128	.256	.042	.500	.617	-.376	.632	.435	2.296
	CCABST (centered)	.036	.196	.016	.182	.856	-.350	.422	.394	2.540
	CCINT (centered)	-.079	.323	-.024	-.245	.807	-.716	.558	.308	3.245
	PRDIFF (centered)	-.493	.103	-.343	-4.797	<.001	-.695	-.290	.591	1.691
	PRPRE (centered)	-.055	.083	-.044	-.666	.506	-.219	.108	.682	1.466
	PE (centered)	-.149	.101	-.092	-1.468	.143	-.348	.051	.768	1.302
	ER (centered)	-.160	.100	-.119	-1.604	.110	-.357	.037	.545	1.835
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRDIFF (both centered)	-.248	.282	-.106	-.877	.381	-.804	.308	.208	4.799
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE (both centered)	-.141	.184	-.072	-.763	.446	-.504	.222	.341	2.934
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PE (both centered)	-.061	.203	-.034	-.302	.763	-.461	.338	.237	4.222
	Interaction: CCDIFF * ER (both centered)	.078	.282	.042	.277	.782	-.478	.634	.133	7.528
	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF (both centered)	.123	.231	.070	.533	.594	-.332	.578	.174	5.736
	Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE (both centered)	.277	.173	.194	1.602	.110	-.064	.617	.206	4.863
	Interaction: CCABST * PE (both centered)	.103	.200	.064	.513	.608	-.292	.497	.193	5.185
	Interaction: CCABST * ER (both centered)	-.287	.218	-.198	-1.316	.189	-.718	.143	.133	7.511
	Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF (both centered)	-.035	.326	-.015	-.109	.914	-.677	.606	.160	6.255
	Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE (both centered)	-.426	.236	-.221	-1.804	.073	-.890	.039	.202	4.953
	Interaction: CCINT * PE (both centered)	.046	.328	.022	.140	.889	-.600	.692	.119	8.407
	Interaction: CCINT * ER (both centered)	.246	.304	.133	.810	.419	-.352	.844	.111	8.969

[a]. Dependent Variable: RS

Table 4. Regression Coefficients Predicting Ongoing Negative Affect

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.875	.370		10.469	<.001	3.146	4.604		
	Age	.010	.010	.063	1.027	.305	-.009	.029	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)	3.828	.343		11.152	<.001	3.152	4.504		
	Age	.011	.009	.071	1.247	.214	-.007	.029	.928	1.078
	CCDIFF (centered)	-.019	.243	-.006	-.078	.938	-.497	.459	.497	2.013
	CCABST (centered)	.119	.193	.052	.616	.538	-.260	.498	.418	2.390
	CCINT (centered)	-.224	.306	-.067	-.730	.466	-.827	.380	.352	2.838
	PRDIFF (centered)	.310	.103	.211	3.022	.003	.108	.512	.609	1.641
	PRPRE (centered)	.131	.080	.103	1.636	.103	-.027	.289	.748	1.337
	PE (centered)	.198	.099	.120	2.007	.046	.004	.393	.829	1.207
	ER (centered)	.321	.096	.235	3.337	<.001	.132	.511	.601	1.663
3	(Constant)	3.812	.363		10.509	<.001	3.098	4.527		
	Age	.011	.010	.070	1.177	.240	-.008	.030	.858	1.165
	CCDIFF (centered)	-.077	.261	-.024	-.293	.769	-.590	.437	.435	2.296
	CCABST (centered)	.024	.200	.010	.118	.906	-.370	.417	.394	2.540
	CCINT (centered)	-.067	.330	-.020	-.203	.839	-.716	.582	.308	3.245
	PRDIFF (centered)	.338	.105	.231	3.227	.001	.132	.544	.591	1.691
	PRPRE (centered)	.135	.085	.106	1.591	.113	-.032	.301	.682	1.466
	PE (centered)	.203	.103	.123	1.964	.051	-.001	.406	.768	1.302
	ER (centered)	.272	.102	.199	2.672	.008	.071	.472	.545	1.835
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRDIFF (both centered)	.041	.288	.017	.142	.887	-.526	.607	.208	4.799
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE (both centered)	.063	.188	.031	.335	.738	-.307	.433	.341	2.934
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PE (both centered)	-.223	.207	-.122	-1.081	.281	-.630	.183	.237	4.222
	Interaction: CCDIFF * ER (both centered)	.216	.288	.113	.751	.453	-.350	.782	.133	7.528
	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF (both centered)	.059	.235	.033	.252	.801	-.404	.523	.174	5.736
	Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE (both centered)	-.292	.176	-.201	-1.658	.099	-.638	.055	.206	4.863
	Interaction: CCABST * PE (both centered)	-.067	.204	-.041	-.328	.743	-.469	.335	.193	5.185
	Interaction: CCABST * ER (both centered)	.186	.223	.126	.836	.404	-.252	.624	.133	7.511
	Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF (both centered)	-.036	.332	-.015	-.109	.913	-.690	.617	.160	6.255
	Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE (both centered)	.345	.240	.175	1.435	.153	-.129	.818	.202	4.953
	Interaction: CCINT * PE (both centered)	.281	.334	.134	.843	.400	-.376	.939	.119	8.407
	Interaction: CCINT * ER (both centered)	-.440	.310	-.234	-1.422	.156	-1.050	.169	.111	8.969

[a]. Dependent Variable: ONA

Table 5. Regression Coefficients Predicting Depressive Symptoms

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	17.554	2.357		7.448	<.001	12.913	22.195		
	Age	-.095	.062	-.093	-1.527	.128	-.218	.028	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)	17.417	2.316		7.519	<.001	12.856	21.978		
	Age	-.091	.062	-.089	-1.487	.138	-.213	.030	.928	1.078
	CCDIFF (centered)	2.246	1.639	.112	1.371	.172	-.981	5.473	.497	2.013
	CCABST (centered)	-1.762	1.299	-.121	-1.356	.176	-4.319	.796	.418	2.390
	CCINT (centered)	.629	2.068	.030	.304	.761	-3.443	4.702	.352	2.838
	PRDIFF (centered)	1.144	.692	.122	1.654	.099	-.218	2.507	.609	1.641
	PRPRE (centered)	.748	.542	.092	1.381	.168	-.319	1.815	.748	1.337
	PE (centered)	.743	.667	.071	1.115	.266	-.570	2.056	.829	1.207
	ER (centered)	1.526	.650	.175	2.350	.020	.247	2.806	.601	1.663
3	(Constant)	17.962	2.438		7.369	<.001	13.161	22.763		
	Age	-.108	.064	-.105	-1.688	.093	-.234	.018	.858	1.165
	CCDIFF (centered)	1.361	1.753	.068	.776	.438	-2.092	4.813	.435	2.296
	CCABST (centered)	-2.304	1.341	-.158	-1.718	.087	-4.946	.338	.394	2.540
	CCINT (centered)	2.428	2.215	.114	1.096	.274	-1.935	6.790	.308	3.245
	PRDIFF (centered)	1.363	.703	.146	1.938	.054	-.022	2.748	.591	1.691
	PRPRE (centered)	.700	.568	.086	1.232	.219	-.419	1.820	.682	1.466
	PE (centered)	.809	.694	.077	1.167	.244	-.557	2.176	.768	1.302
	ER (centered)	1.175	.683	.135	1.720	.087	-.171	2.521	.545	1.835
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRDIFF (both centered)	-2.587	1.933	-.170	-1.338	.182	-6.395	1.220	.208	4.799
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE (both centered)	.541	1.262	.042	.429	.669	-1.945	3.027	.341	2.934
	Interaction: CCDIFF * PE (both centered)	-.148	1.388	-.013	-.107	.915	-2.882	2.585	.237	4.222
	Interaction: CCDIFF * ER (both centered)	4.822	1.932	.396	2.496	.013	1.017	8.627	.133	7.528
	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF (both centered)	-.605	1.581	-.053	-.383	.702	-3.718	2.508	.174	5.736
	Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE (both centered)	-1.046	1.182	-.113	-.885	.377	-3.375	1.283	.206	4.863
	Interaction: CCABST * PE (both centered)	-.300	1.371	-.029	-.219	.827	-3.000	2.400	.193	5.185
	Interaction: CCABST * ER (both centered)	.866	1.495	.092	.579	.563	-2.079	3.811	.133	7.511
	Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF (both centered)	2.085	2.230	.135	.935	.351	-2.307	6.477	.160	6.255
	Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE (both centered)	1.602	1.615	.128	.992	.322	-1.579	4.784	.202	4.953
	Interaction: CCINT * PE (both centered)	.706	2.245	.053	.314	.753	-3.716	5.127	.119	8.407
	Interaction: CCINT * ER (both centered)	-4.833	2.080	-.403	-2.324	.021	-8.930	-.737	.111	8.969

[a]. Dependent Variable: DS

Table 6. Bivariate Correlations for Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction

Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction	Age	PRDIFF	CCINT	PE	PRPRE	ER	CCDIFF	CCABST	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCABST * PE	Interaction: CCDIFF * ER	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE	Interaction: CCDIFF * PE	Interaction : CCABST * PRPRE	Interaction : CCINT * PRDIFF	Interaction : CCABST * ER	Interaction : CCINT * PE	Interaction : CCINT * ER
Age	1																			
PRDIFF	0.058	1																		
CCINT	0.009	0.061	1																	
PE	0.272	0.255	-0.038	1																
PRPRE	-0.117	-0.206	0.002	-0.164	1															
ER	-0.018	-0.492	-0.083	-0.111	-0.271	1														
CCDIFF	0.093	0.007	-0.415	0.079	-0.08	-0.001	1													
CCABST	0.064	-0.052	-0.575	0.155	-0.001	0.069	-0.159	1												
Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	0.043	0.075	0.084	0.002	-0.044	0.01	0.018	-0.062	1											
Interaction: CCABST * PE	-0.089	-0.041	-0.028	-0.021	0.081	0.007	0.062	-0.007	0.249	1										
Interaction: CCDIFF * ER	-0.098	0.068	0.148	-0.001	-0.088	-0.001	-0.176	-0.043	0.062	-0.105	1									
Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE	0.07	0.045	0.071	0.124	0.065	-0.154	-0.052	0.002	-0.075	0.067	-0.14	1								
Interaction: CCDIFF * PRDIFF	0.062	-0.056	-0.102	-0.007	0.05	0.039	0.016	0.01	-0.163	-0.003	-0.599	-0.062	1							
Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE	0.016	0.018	0.146	-0.048	0.003	-0.078	0.072	-0.111	0.169	0.203	-0.17	-0.212	0.201	1						
Interaction: CCDIFF * PE	-0.104	-0.023	-0.004	-0.056	0.101	0.057	-0.202	0.049	-0.079	-0.109	0.067	-0.239	0.258	0.042	1					
Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE	0.053	-0.014	-0.1	0.076	-0.152	0.149	0.009	0.145	-0.126	-0.222	0.235	-0.303	-0.137	-0.642	0.058	1				
Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF	-0.104	-0.014	-0.077	-0.006	0.007	-0.041	-0.097	0.091	-0.572	-0.158	0.394	0.106	-0.562	-0.342	-0.115	0.195	1			
Interaction: CCABST * ER	-0.063	-0.04	0.08	-0.068	0.147	-0.11	-0.046	-0.089	-0.574	-0.062	-0.206	0.21	0.113	0.121	-0.011	-0.33	0.255	1		
Interaction: CCINT * PE	0.046	0.058	-0.036	0.035	-0.072	-0.079	0.032	-0.028	-0.132	-0.677	0.107	-0.032	-0.212	-0.324	-0.475	0.163	0.236	0.009	1	
Interaction: CCINT * ER	0.103	-0.045	-0.164	-0.015	-0.063	0.063	0.183	0.07	0.288	0.016	-0.615	-0.101	0.368	-0.018	-0.044	0.056	-0.485	-0.52	0.07	1

Table 7. Bivariate Correlations for Relational Satisfaction

Relational Satisfaction	Age	PRDIFF	CCINT	PE	PRPRE	ER	CCDIFF	CCABST	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCABST * PE	Interaction: CCDIFF * ER	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE	Interaction: CCDIFF * PE	Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE	Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCABST * ER	Interaction: CCINT * PE	Interaction: CCINT * ER
Age	1																			
PRDIFF	0.058	1																		
CCINT	0.009	0.061	1																	
PE	0.272	0.255	-0.038	1																
PRPRE	-0.117	-0.206	0.002	-0.164	1															
ER	-0.018	-0.492	-0.083	-0.111	-0.271	1														
CCDIFF	0.093	0.007	-0.415	0.079	-0.08	-0.001	1													
CCABST	0.064	-0.052	-0.575	0.155	-0.001	0.069	-0.159	1												
Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	0.043	0.075	0.084	0.002	-0.044	0.01	0.018	-0.062	1											
Interaction: CCABST * PE	-0.089	-0.041	-0.028	-0.021	0.081	0.007	0.062	-0.007	0.249	1										
Interaction: CCDIFF * ER	-0.098	0.068	0.148	-0.001	-0.088	-0.001	-0.176	-0.043	0.062	-0.105	1									
Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE	0.07	0.045	0.071	0.124	0.065	-0.154	-0.052	0.002	-0.075	0.067	-0.14	1								
Interaction: CCDIFF * PRDIFF	0.062	-0.056	-0.102	-0.007	0.05	0.039	0.016	0.01	-0.163	-0.003	-0.599	-0.062	1							
Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE	0.016	0.018	0.146	-0.048	0.003	-0.078	0.072	-0.111	0.169	0.203	-0.17	-0.212	0.201	1						
Interaction: CCDIFF * PE	-0.104	-0.023	-0.004	-0.056	0.101	0.057	-0.202	0.049	-0.079	-0.109	0.067	-0.239	0.258	0.042	1					
Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE	0.053	-0.014	-0.1	0.076	-0.152	0.149	0.009	0.145	-0.126	-0.222	0.235	-0.303	-0.137	-0.642	0.058	1				
Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF	-0.104	-0.014	-0.077	-0.006	0.007	-0.041	-0.097	0.091	-0.572	-0.158	0.394	0.106	-0.562	-0.342	-0.115	0.195	1			
Interaction: CCABST * ER	-0.063	-0.04	0.08	-0.068	0.147	-0.11	-0.046	-0.089	-0.574	-0.062	-0.206	0.21	0.113	0.121	-0.011	-0.33	0.255	1		
Interaction: CCINT * PE	0.046	0.058	-0.036	0.035	-0.072	-0.079	0.032	-0.028	-0.132	-0.677	0.107	-0.032	-0.212	-0.324	-0.475	0.163	0.236	0.009	1	
Interaction: CCINT * ER	0.103	-0.045	-0.164	-0.015	-0.063	0.063	0.183	0.07	0.288	0.016	-0.615	-0.101	0.368	-0.018	-0.044	0.056	-0.485	-0.52	0.07	1

Table 8. Bivariate Correlations for Ongoing Negative Affect

Ongoing Negative Affect	Age	PRDIFF	CCINT	PE	PRPRE	ER	CCDIFF	CCABST	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCABST * PE	Interaction: CCDIFF * ER	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE	Interaction: CCDIFF * PE	Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE	Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCABST * ER	Interaction: CCINT * PE	Interaction: CCINT * ER
Age	1																			
PRDIFF	0.058	1																		
CCINT	0.009	0.061	1																	
PE	0.272	0.255	-0.038	1																
PRPRE	-0.117	-0.206	0.002	-0.164	1															
ER	-0.018	-0.492	-0.083	-0.111	-0.271	1														
CCDIFF	0.093	0.007	-0.415	0.079	-0.08	-0.001	1													
CCABST	0.064	-0.052	-0.575	0.155	-0.001	0.069	-0.159	1												
Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	0.043	0.075	0.084	0.002	-0.044	0.01	0.018	-0.062	1											
Interaction: CCABST * PE	-0.089	-0.041	-0.028	-0.021	0.081	0.007	0.062	-0.007	0.249	1										
Interaction: CCDIFF * ER	-0.098	0.068	0.148	-0.001	-0.088	-0.001	-0.176	-0.043	0.062	-0.105	1									
Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE	0.07	0.045	0.071	0.124	0.065	-0.154	-0.052	0.002	-0.075	0.067	-0.14	1								
Interaction: CCDIFF * PRDIFF	0.062	-0.056	-0.102	-0.007	0.05	0.039	0.016	0.01	-0.163	-0.003	-0.599	-0.062	1							
Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE	0.016	0.018	0.146	-0.048	0.003	-0.078	0.072	-0.111	0.169	0.203	-0.17	-0.212	0.201	1						
Interaction: CCDIFF * PE	-0.104	-0.023	-0.004	-0.056	0.101	0.057	-0.202	0.049	-0.079	-0.109	0.067	-0.239	0.258	0.042	1					
Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE	0.053	-0.014	-0.1	0.076	-0.152	0.149	0.009	0.145	-0.126	-0.222	0.235	-0.303	-0.137	-0.642	0.058	1				
Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF	-0.104	-0.014	-0.077	-0.006	0.007	-0.041	-0.097	0.091	-0.572	-0.158	0.394	0.106	-0.562	-0.342	-0.115	0.195	1			
Interaction: CCABST * ER	-0.063	-0.04	0.08	-0.068	0.147	-0.11	-0.046	-0.089	-0.574	-0.062	-0.206	0.21	0.113	0.121	-0.011	-0.33	0.255	1		
Interaction: CCINT * PE	0.046	0.058	-0.036	0.035	-0.072	-0.079	0.032	-0.028	-0.132	-0.677	0.107	-0.032	-0.212	-0.324	-0.475	0.163	0.236	0.009	1	
Interaction: CCINT * ER	0.103	-0.045	-0.164	-0.015	-0.063	0.063	0.183	0.07	0.288	0.016	-0.615	-0.101	0.368	-0.018	-0.044	0.056	-0.485	-0.52	0.07	1

Table 9. Bivariate Correlations for Depressive Symptoms

Depressive Symptoms	Age	PRDIFF	CCINT	PE	PRPRE	ER	CCDIFF	CCABST	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCABST * PE	Interaction: CCDIFF * ER	Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE	Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE	Interaction: CCDIFF * PE	Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE	Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF	Interaction: CCABST * ER	Interaction: CCINT * PE	Interaction: CCINT * ER
Age	1																			
PRDIFF	0.058	1																		
CCINT	0.009	0.061	1																	
PE	0.272	0.255	-0.038	1																
PRPRE	-0.117	-0.206	0.002	-0.164	1															
ER	-0.018	-0.492	-0.083	-0.111	-0.271	1														
CCDIFF	0.093	0.007	-0.415	0.079	-0.08	-0.001	1													
CCABST	0.064	-0.052	-0.575	0.155	-0.001	0.069	-0.159	1												
Interaction: CCABST * PRDIFF	0.043	0.075	0.084	0.002	-0.044	0.01	0.018	-0.062	1											
Interaction: CCABST * PE	-0.089	-0.041	-0.028	-0.021	0.081	0.007	0.062	-0.007	0.249	1										
Interaction: CCDIFF * ER	-0.098	0.068	0.148	-0.001	-0.088	-0.001	-0.176	-0.043	0.062	-0.105	1									
Interaction: CCDIFF * PRPRE	0.07	0.045	0.071	0.124	0.065	-0.154	-0.052	0.002	-0.075	0.067	-0.14	1								
Interaction: CCDIFF * PRDIFF	0.062	-0.056	-0.102	-0.007	0.05	0.039	0.016	0.01	-0.163	-0.003	-0.599	-0.062	1							
Interaction: CCINT * PRPRE	0.016	0.018	0.146	-0.048	0.003	-0.078	0.072	-0.111	0.169	0.203	-0.17	-0.212	0.201	1						
Interaction: CCDIFF * PE	-0.104	-0.023	-0.004	-0.056	0.101	0.057	-0.202	0.049	-0.079	-0.109	0.067	-0.239	0.258	0.042	1					
Interaction: CCABST * PRPRE	0.053	-0.014	-0.1	0.076	-0.152	0.149	0.009	0.145	-0.126	-0.222	0.235	-0.303	-0.137	-0.642	0.058	1				
Interaction: CCINT * PRDIFF	-0.104	-0.014	-0.077	-0.006	0.007	-0.041	-0.097	0.091	-0.572	-0.158	0.394	0.106	-0.562	-0.342	-0.115	0.195	1			
Interaction: CCABST * ER	-0.063	-0.04	0.08	-0.068	0.147	-0.11	-0.046	-0.089	-0.574	-0.062	-0.206	0.21	0.113	0.121	-0.011	-0.33	0.255	1		
Interaction: CCINT * PE	0.046	0.058	-0.036	0.035	-0.072	-0.079	0.032	-0.028	-0.132	-0.677	0.107	-0.032	-0.212	-0.324	-0.475	0.163	0.236	0.009	1	
Interaction: CCINT * ER	0.103	-0.045	-0.164	-0.015	-0.063	0.063	0.183	0.07	0.288	0.016	-0.615	-0.101	0.368	-0.018	-0.044	0.056	-0.485	-0.52	0.07	1

Table 10.

CFA Model Fit Results for Cognitive Complexity for the Message Evaluation Study (Study Two)

Model	x^2	df	p-value	RMSEA [90% CI]	CFI	SRMR
Original	448.1	186	< 0.001	0.07 [0.062, 0.079]	0.86	0.06
Final (First Order)	237.89	116	< 0.001	0.06 [0.05, 0.072]	0.92	0.05
Final (Second Order)	237.89	116	< 0.001	0.06 [0.05, 0.072]	0.92	0.05

Table 11.

CFA Model Fit Results for the Expressive Message Condition

Model	x^2	df	p-value	RMSEA [90% CI]	CFI	SRMR
Original	1202.11	480	< 0.001	0.07 [0.067, 0.078]	0.91	0.05
Second Order	752.2	361	< 0.001	0.06 [0.056, 0.068]	0.95	0.15
Final	685.85	309	< 0.001	0.06 [0.059, 0.072]	0.95	0.03

Note: The Final model fit excluded item 6 from the Effectiveness measure. This item was added to the measure once again for hypothesis testing to align with the results of the Conventional and Rhetorical conditions.

Table 12.

CFA Model Fit Results for the Conventional Message Condition

Model	x^2	df	p-value	RMSEA [90% CI]	CFI	SRMR
Original	1025.69	467	< 0.001	0.06 [0.059, 0.070]	0.94	0.04
Second Order	919.96	389	< 0.001	0.07 [0.063, 0.075]	0.95	0.08
Final	825.64	335	< 0.001	0.07 [0.065, 0.078]	0.95	0.03

Table 13.

CFA Model Fit Results for the Rhetorical Message Condition

Model	x^2	df	p-value	RMSEA [90% CI]	CFI	SRMR
Original	1020.66	467	< 0.001	0.06 [0.059, 0.070]	0.94	0.04
Second Order	934.47	389	< 0.001	0.07 [0.064, 0.076]	0.94	0.08
Final	838.35	335	< 0.001	0.07 [0.066, 0.079]	0.94	0.03

Table 14. Means and Standard Deviation for Message Conditions

	Expressive	**Conventional**	**Rhetorical**
Helpfulness	1.86 (0.86)	2.65 (1.10)	3.71 (0.96)
Supportiveness	1.87 (0.88)	2.82 (1.08)	3.92 (1.01)

Sensitivity	2.01 (0.90)	2.82 (1.09)	3.90 (0.98)
Appropriateness	2.00 (0.93)	2.94 (1.18)	4.01 (0.97)
Effectiveness	1.91 (0.78)	2.60 (1.03)	3.54 (0.93)
MDL Manipulation Check	1.89 (0.80)	2.85 (1.01)	3.85 (0.86)

Note: All values are significantly different, $p < 0.001$

Table 15. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for Moderation of Helpfulness

Model						
	B	SE	t	p-value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	2.7145	0.1016	26.7267	< 0.001	2.5152	2.9139
MDL Condition	0.924	0.0406	22.7631	< 0.001	0.8443	1.0036
Cognitive Complexity	-0.1933	0.0679	-2.8485	0.0045	-0.3265	-0.0601
Interaction	0.3277	0.083	3.9464	< 0.001	0.1647	0.4907
Age	0.0007	0.0028	0.2358	0.8136	-0.0049	0.0062

Table 16. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for Moderation of Supportiveness

Model						
	B	SE	t	p-value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	2.9193	0.1026	28.4617	< 0.001	2.718	3.1206
MDL Condition	1.0236	0.041	24.9715	< 0.001	0.9431	1.1041
Cognitive Complexity	-0.166	0.0685	-2.4217	0.0157	-0.3005	-0.0315
Interaction	0.3938	0.0839	4.6963	< 0.001	0.2292	0.5548
Age	-0.0016	0.0028	-0.5682	0.5701	-0.0072	0.004

Table 17. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for Moderation of Sensitivity

Model						
	B	SE	t	p-value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	2.9417	0.1026	28.6732	< 0.001	2.7404	3.1431
MDL Condition	0.9449	0.041	23.0464	< 0.001	0.8645	1.0254
Cognitive Complexity	-0.1712	0.0685	-2.4975	0.0127	-0.3057	-0.0367
Interaction	0.3664	0.0839	4.3676	< 0.001	0.2017	0.531
Age	-0.001	0.0028	-0.3518	0.7251	-0.0066	0.0046

Table 18. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for Moderation of Appropriateness

Model						
	B	SE	t	p-value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	3.0267	0.1075	28.1608	< 0.001	2.8158	3.2377
MDL Condition	1.0083	0.043	23.4744	< 0.001	0.924	1.0926
Cognitive Complexity	-0.0356	0.0718	-0.4961	0.62	-0.1766	0.1053
Interaction	0.353	0.0879	4.0171	< 0.001	0.1805	0.5255
Age	-0.0014	0.003	-0.484	0.6285	-0.0073	0.0044

Table 19. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for Moderation of Effectiveness

Model						
	B	SE	t	p-value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	2.7759	0.095	29.222	< 0.001	2.5895	2.9624
MDL Condition	0.8164	0.038	21.5059	< 0.001	0.7419	0.8909
Cognitive Complexity	-0.2117	0.0635	-3.3361	< 0.001	-0.3363	-0.0872
Interaction	0.3071	0.0777	3.9538	< 0.001	0.1546	0.4595
Age	-0.0027	0.0026	-1.0132	0.3113	-0.0078	0.0025

Table 20. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for Moderation of Message Evaluations

Model						
	B	SE	t	p-value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	2.86	0.0924	30.9391	< 0.001	2.6786	3.0414
MDL Condition	0.9831	0.0369	26.6116	< 0.001	0.9106	1.0556
Cognitive Complexity	-0.1694	0.0618	-2.742	0.0062	-0.2906	-0.0481
Interaction	0.3394	0.0756	4.4912	< 0.001	0.1911	0.4878
Age	0.0001	0.0026	0.0304	0.9757	-0.0049	0.0051

Figures for the Identity Gaps Study

Figure 1. Interaction between CCDIFF and ER for Depressive Symptoms

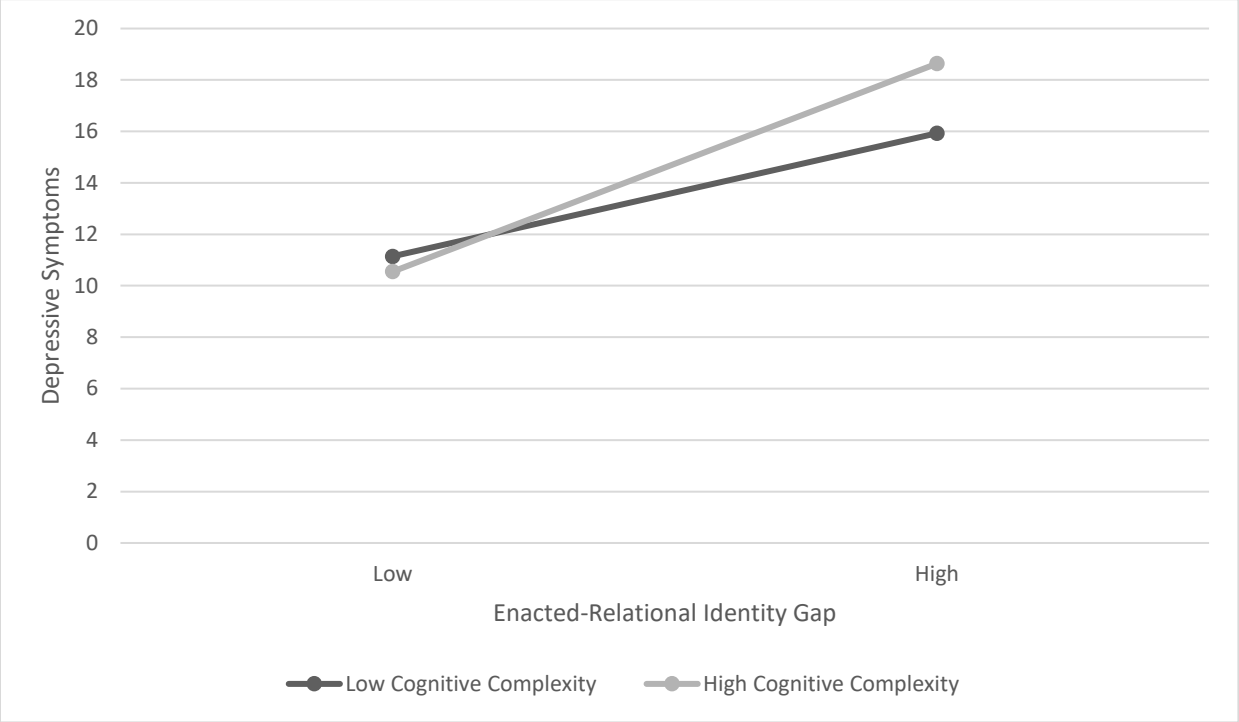
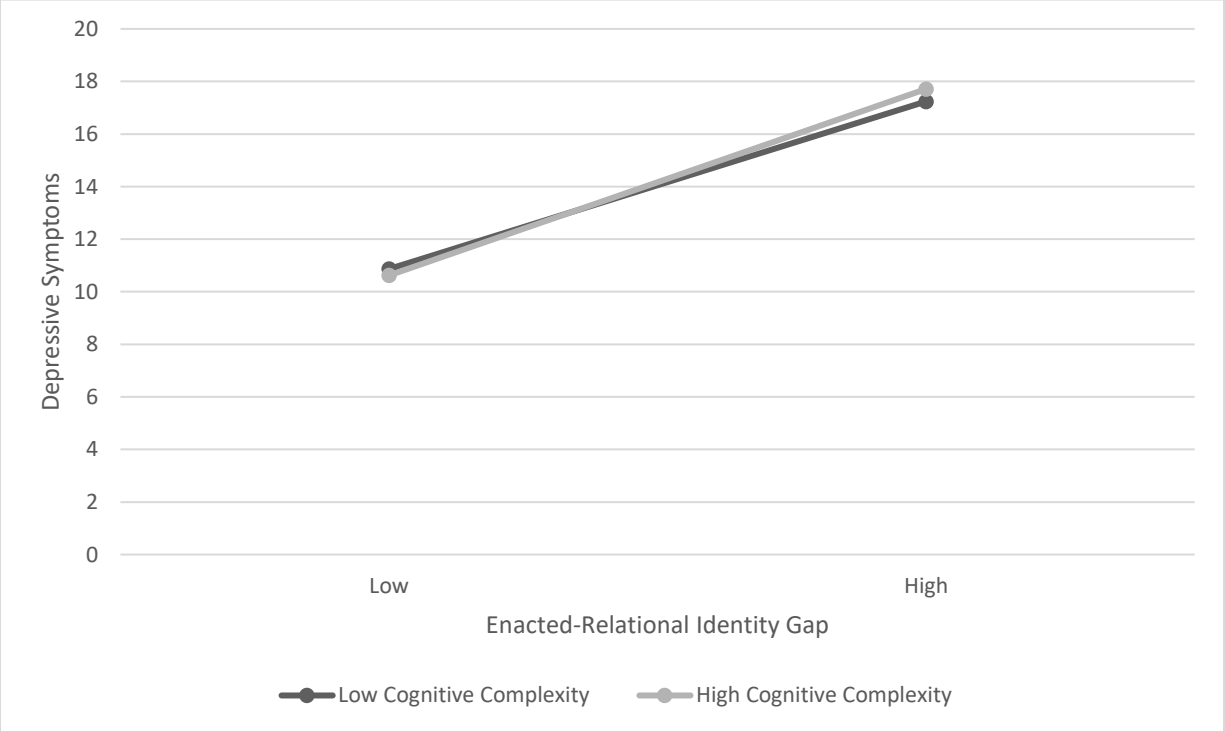
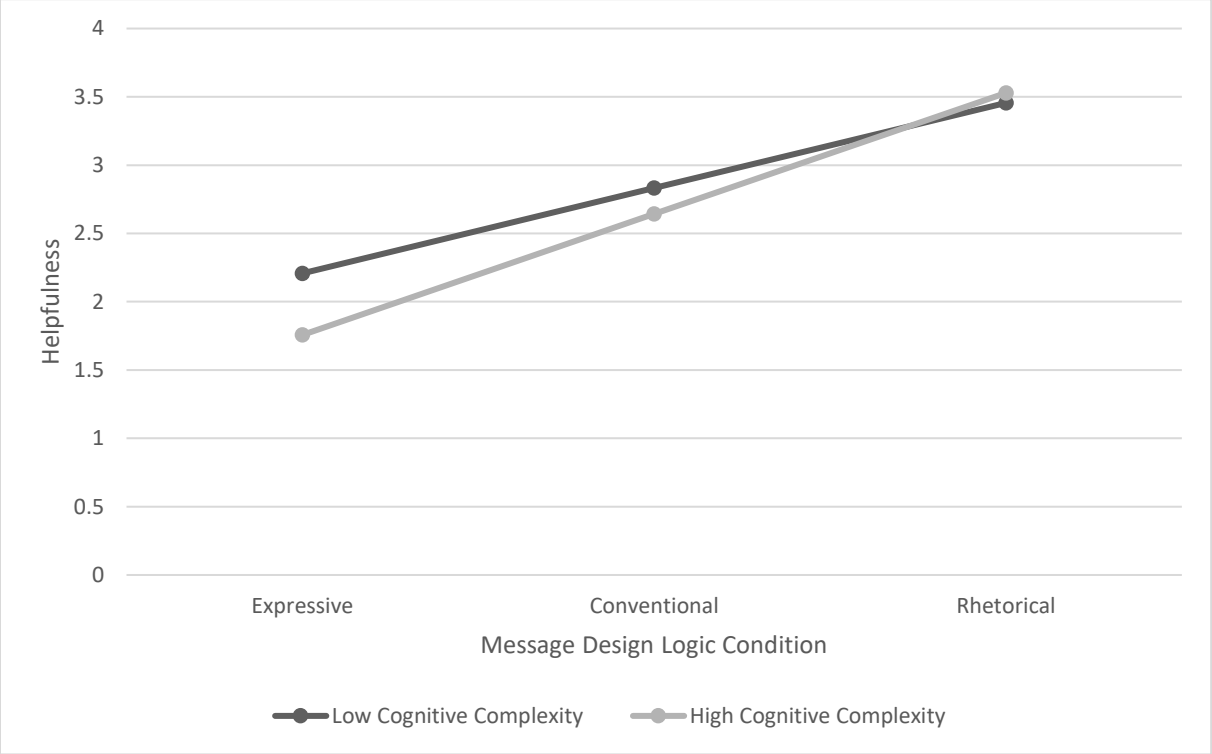


Figure 2. Interaction between CCINT and ER for Depressive Symptoms



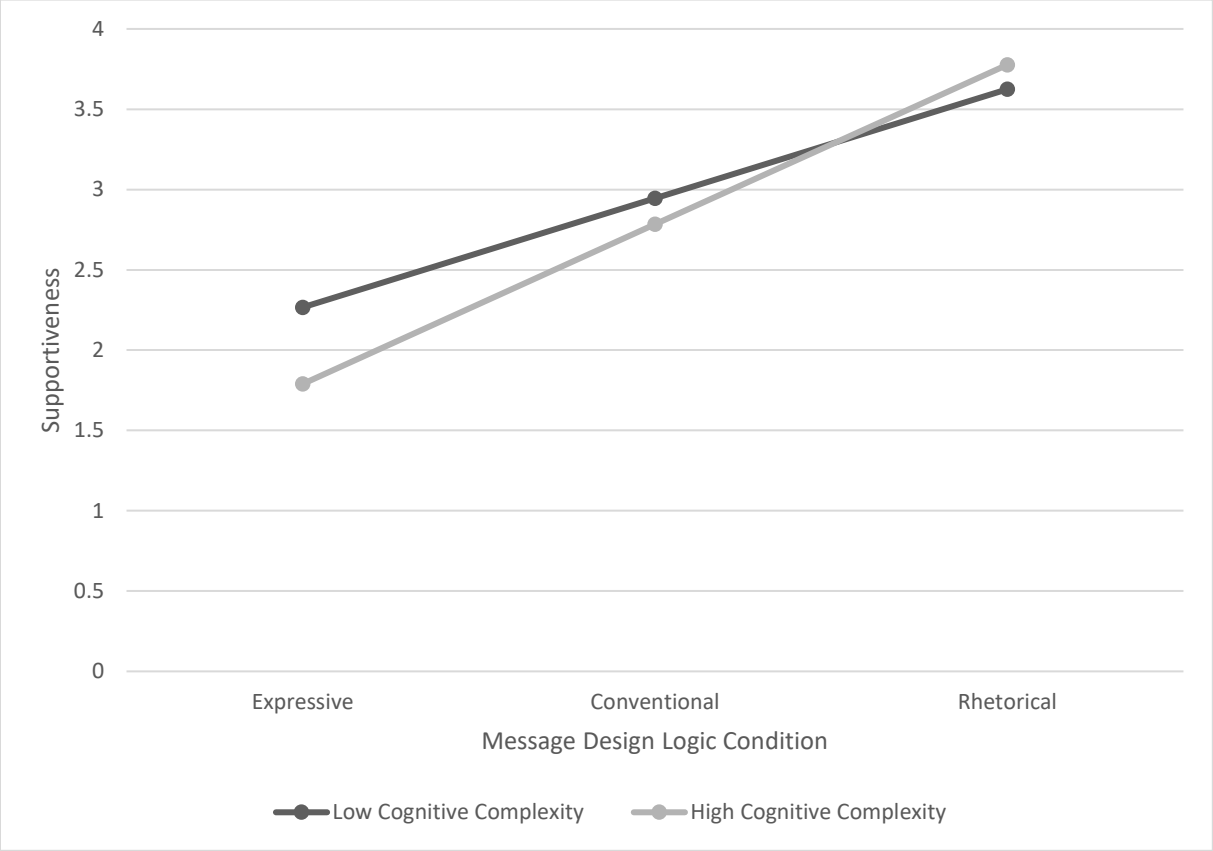
Figures for the Message Evaluation Study

Figure 3. Interaction between MDL Condition and Cognitive Complexity for Helpfulness



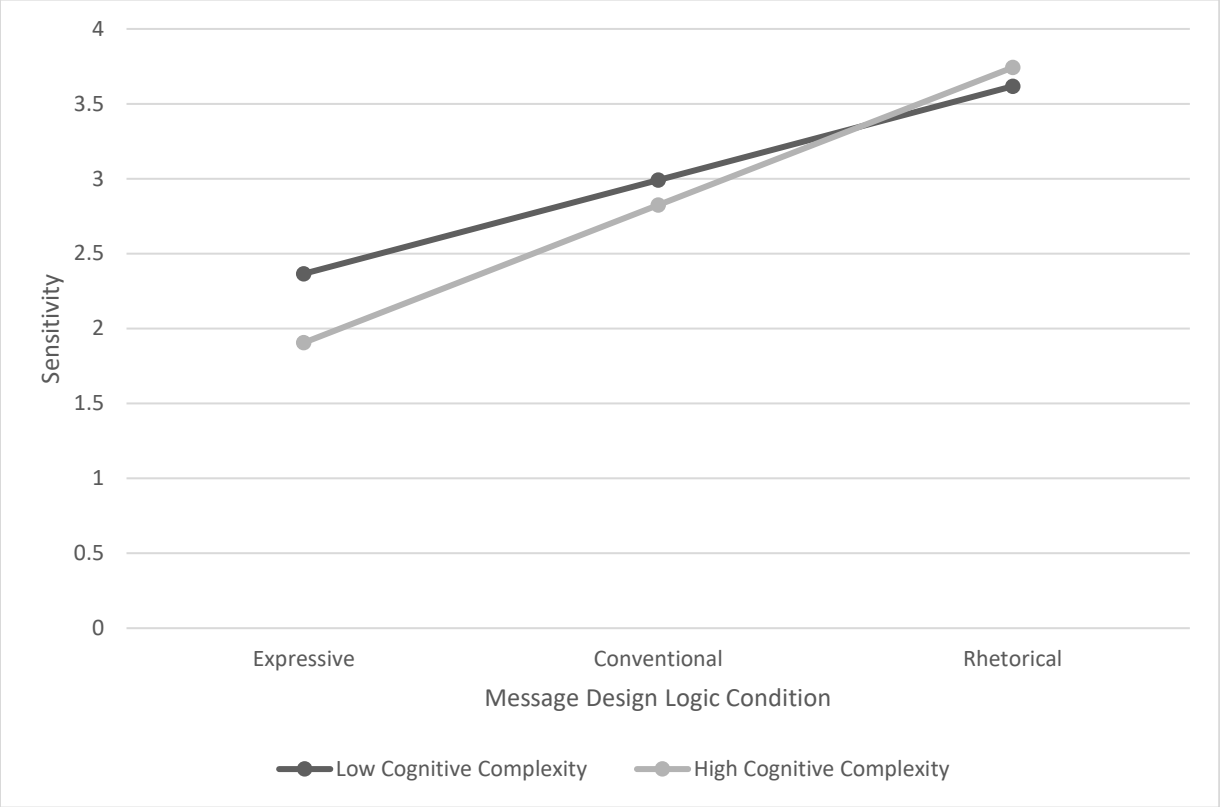
Note: Low cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation below the mean, and high cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation above the mean.

Figure 4. Interaction between MDL Condition and Cognitive Complexity for Supportiveness



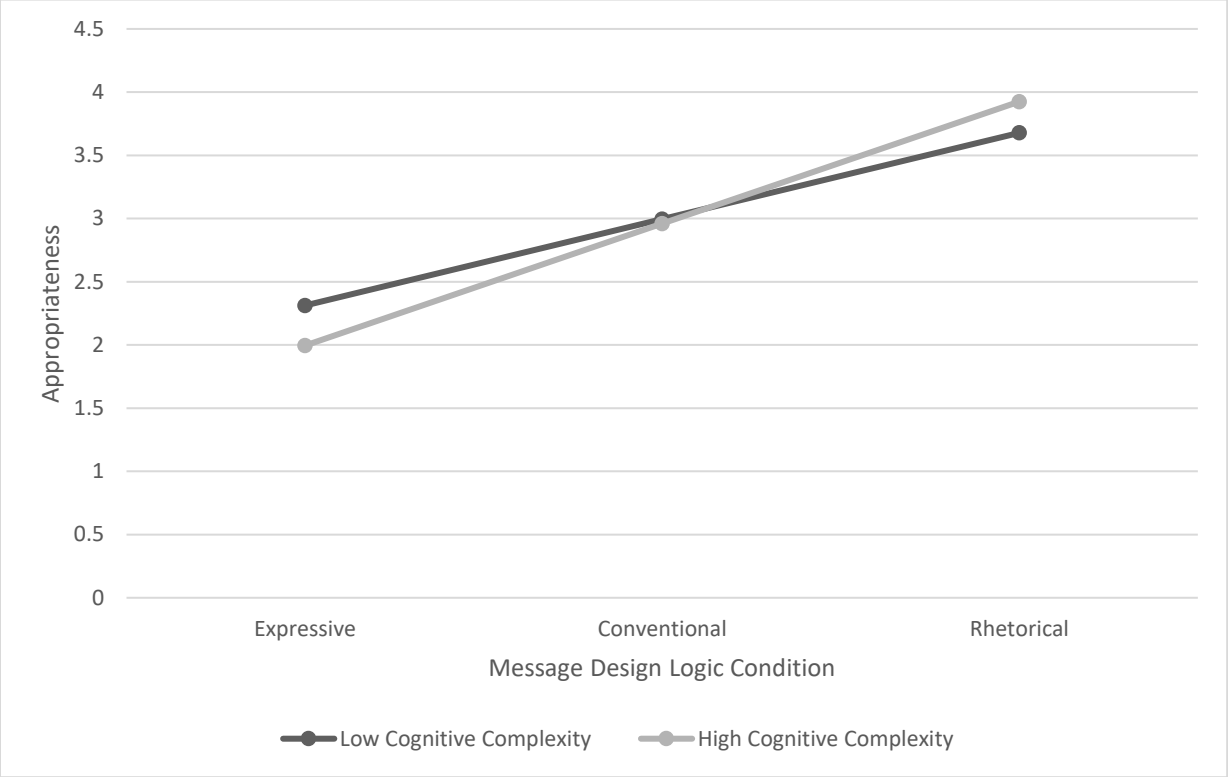
Note: Low cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation below the mean, and high cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation above the mean.

Figure 5. Interaction between MDL Condition and Cognitive Complexity for Sensitivity



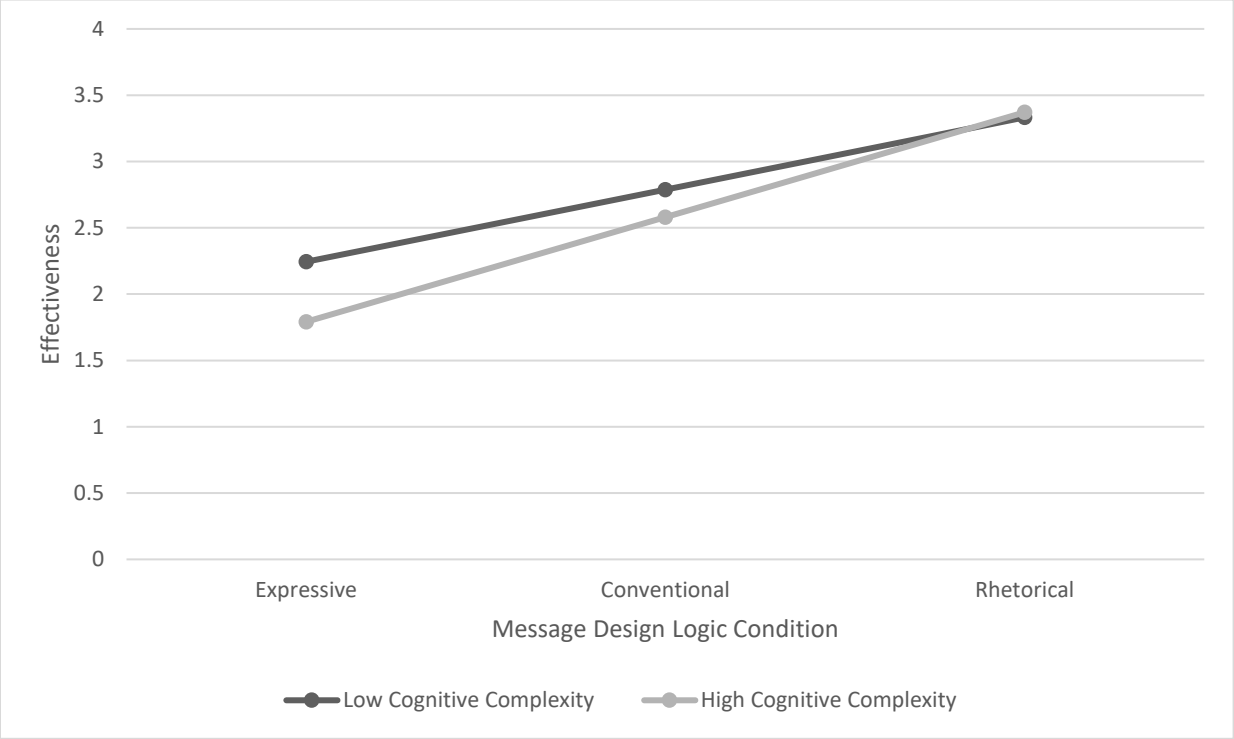
Note: Low cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation below the mean, and high cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation above the mean.

Figure 6. Interaction between MDL Condition and Cognitive Complexity for Appropriateness



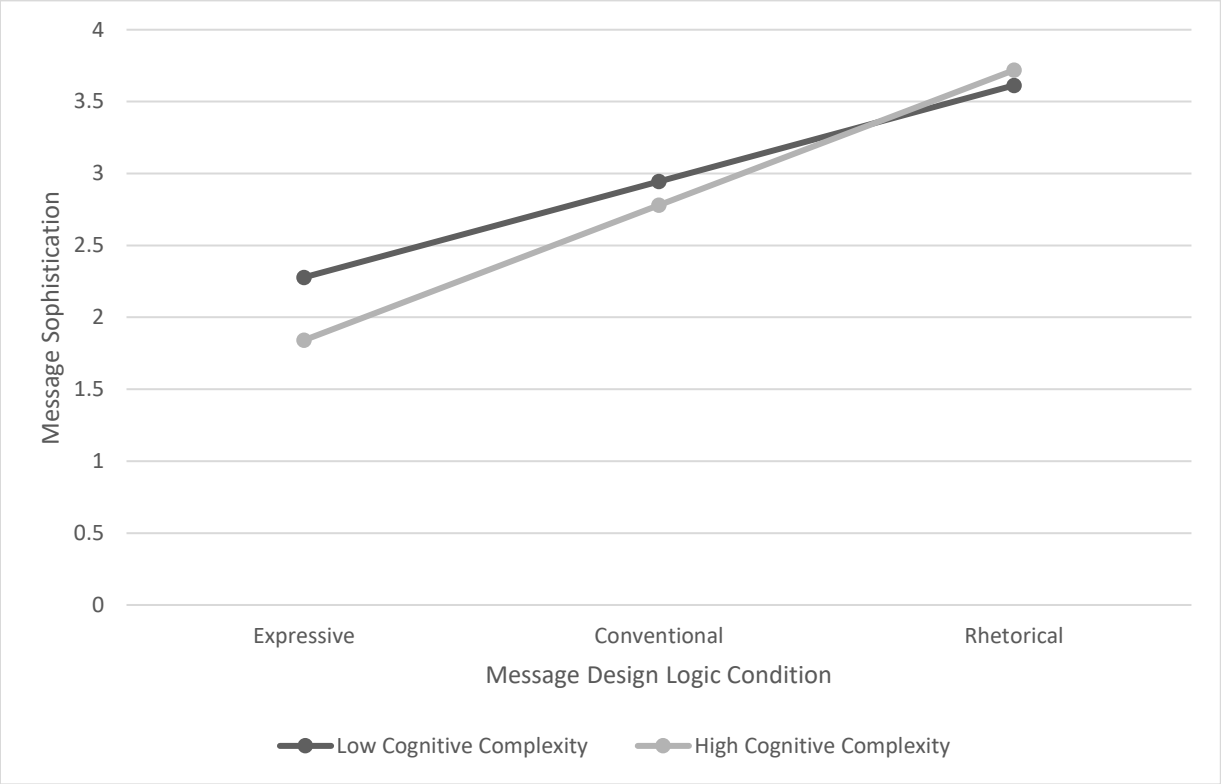
Note: Low cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation below the mean, and high cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation above the mean.

Figure 7. Interaction between MDL Condition and Cognitive Complexity for Effectiveness



Note: Low cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation below the mean, and high cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation above the mean.

Figure 8. Interaction between MDL Condition and Cognitive Complexity for Message Evaluation



Note: Low cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation below the mean, and high cognitive complexity is 1 standard deviation above the mean.

Appendix A: Messages

The messages below were created for the initial formulation of the message evaluation study. However, in accordance with the results of the pilot test, it was decided to exclude the communication theory of identity as a theoretical framework in the message evaluation study. As such, only the Relational messages below were used in the full study.

MESSAGES	Expressive	Conventional	Rhetorical
Personal	Why are you blaming me? I didn't do it! **You** are my friend, and I wouldn't hurt you! If I were in this situation, I would not accuse you of hurting me. It is not fair to hear that from **you**, and did you think of how I would feel being accused of something like that? I didn't see **you** as that type of person, and I don't want to think of you as that type of person. But the point is I did not do it as I would not hurt you, so I'll let you have the space to do what **you** need to feel better.	I see **you** are upset, and I want to help you feel better. I support you because you are my friend, and a good friend should support **you**. I didn't do what you think I did, but the past is in the past, so perhaps we should just leave it in the past. Friends shouldn't hold grudges against each other, as that is not fair to **you**, nor would it be to me. But I also don't want you to continue to feel bad. Time heals all wounds, so you will eventually overcome this hurt. But you shouldn't feel so distraught, so what do you want to do to make **you** feel better.	I see **you** are hurt and that makes sense considering what you have been through. You need to know I would not knowingly hurt **you**, as you are my good friend. I can't imagine life without you as my friend! **You** are who you really are, and I wouldn't do anything to harm that. That is why, despite our different views on my responsibility, I care about **you**, and want to support you in helping you feel better. Let's do what we need to for you to be your best self again. How can I help and support **you**?
Enacted	Why are you **showing** your bad side and blaming me? I like you, especially because you **show** your best self, so I am shocked you would blame me. I wouldn't show myself in this way if I was in your position. But I know you care about how you **show** who you are. I wouldn't	I see you are upset, and that is not good as you should **show** your best self. I want to be a good friend and help you **show** yourself again. I didn't do what you think I did, but the past is the past, so perhaps we should just leave it in the past. Friends shouldn't hold grudges, as that **shows** too much of a bad side.	You are **showing** you are upset, and I want to help you, so you can show your best self. I would not knowingly hurt you, as you are my good friend. I can't image life without you showing your best self. You **show** who you really are, and I wouldn't do anything to harm that. That is why,

	harm that, so I don't like being blamed for this. Now, I don't like seeing you so upset, so I'll give you space to do what is needing for you to **show** your best self once again.	But I also don't want you to keeping **showing** you are upset. Time heals all wounds, so you will show your best self soon enough. I don't want you to be distraught, so let's help you **show** your best self again.	despite our different views on my responsibility, I care about you **showing** your best self. Let's do what we need to for you to **show** your best self again. How can I help and support you?
Relational	Why are you blaming me, your **friend**? I like you, and I wouldn't hurt my friend! If I were in your situation, I would not accuse my **friend**. That is not fair to do to a friend, so why are you accusing me? I didn't see my **friend** as that type of person, and I don't want to think of my friend in that way. I wouldn't hurt our **relationship**. But the point is I did not do it as I wouldn't do that to a friend, so I'll give you the space as a **friend** to feel better.	I see you are upset, and I do not want my friend to be upset. I want to be a good friend and help you and our **relationship**. I didn't do it. I wouldn't hurt you, as I don't want to hurt my friend, but the past is the past, so perhaps we should just leave it in the past. **Friends** shouldn't hold grudges, and as that is not good for our relationship, so friends should not disagree and should support each other. Time heals all wounds, so our **relationship** will survive. I don't want my **friend** upset, so let's help you be your best self.	I see you are hurt, and that makes sense considering what you have been through, **friend**. You need to know I would not knowingly hurt a friend like that, as I care deeply about our **relationship**. I can't imagine life without our friendship. We have a great relationship, and I don't want to hurt our **relationship**. That is why despite our differing views on my responsibility, I care about you as my **friend**, and I support my friends. As **friends**, how can we help and support you?
Communal	Why are you embarrassing me in front of our friend **group** by blaming me? I didn't do it! I wouldn't blame you in front of our friend group! That wouldn't be fair to anyone in the **group**, so why are you blaming me? I didn't see you as someone to do that as I like you and our friend group. I	I see you are upset, and that is not good for our whole friend **group**. As we all say, we should help each other, so here I am. I didn't do it, and I wouldn't hurt you or embarrass the **group** like that, but the past is the past, so perhaps we should just leave it in the past. Friend groups should not hold grudges against each other, so to	I see you are hurt, and I think the **group** sees that too, but that makes sense considering what you have been through. You need to know I would not knowingly hurt you or the friend **group**, as I care deeply about you all. I can't imagine life without our friend group. We have a great group, and you are a good part of it. That is

	wouldn't do anything that would put you or the group in a bad light! I wouldn't hurt our **group** that way! But the point is I did not do it, so I'll give you the space to feel better, so you don't have to be negative with the **group**.	help the **group** we shouldn't hold any grudges and we should support each other for the group. Time heals all wounds, so our friend group will survive. But I don't want you or the **group** distraught, so let's do something for you to feel better.	why despite our differing views on my responsibility, I care about you and the **group**, and would not do anything to harm you or the group. I support our **group**, and so I want to support and help you feel better. How can I support you?

The table above shows the twelve messages created when combining both the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and Message Design Logics (MDL). The top row indicates the three different message logics of MDL, while the left column indicates the four identity frames of CTI. Each of the twelve messages are noted by the intersection of the logic and identity frame.

For each message, the message logic is considered to 'speak' to the respective identity frame. For example, the intersection of expressive message logic and the personal identity frame exhibits a message designed to speak to the personal frame using the expressive logic. The other messages follow this formula with their respective message logic and identity frame.

Finally, all messages were created to be similar in length, to prevent participants from thinking a longer message is why a message is more sophisticated.

Appendix B: Cognitive Complexity Instrument (CCI)

The CCI measure uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) to allow participants to respond to each of the 21 items. Additionally, the measure is divided into three dimensions, with 7 items noted for each of the three dimensions. All items are listed below, and appear according to the respective dimension (*italics indicate reverse coding*):

Differentiation:

1. *I usually don't waste my time thinking about little details*
2. When describing a person, I typically go beyond physical description
3. I often see details that others overlook
4. I like to read detailed descriptions of various things
5. In order to fully understand how a thing works, you need to know all the details about it
6. Small nuances may make all the difference
7. *When someone is telling a story I wish they would get straight to the point*

Abstractness:

1. I like to think about abstract issues
2. *I dislike all the riddles*
3. *I am not interested in thinking on an abstract level*
4. *I have difficulty understanding abstract ideas*
5. I like to come up with new ideas for how to solve some problems
6. *I like to keep things simple*
7. *I typically avoid philosophical discussions*

Integration

1. I spend a lot of time reflecting on how things are connected
2. I can typically link issues together

3. Before making a decision, I typically think about possible consequences
4. I often try to understand logical relations between events
5. Typically I can explain how one thing may lead to another
6. I can usually see different points of view
7. I can often bring a new perspective to a situation

Note 1: Following analysis of bivariate correlations in preparation for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), it was determined that item 7 of the differentiation factor should be treated as a reverse coded item. This item was recorded prior to running the CFAs and subsequent statistical analysis. The item is italicized in this appendix to indicate the treatment as reverse coded.

Note 2: For the Identity Gaps Study (Study One), items 1 and 7 of the differentiation factor, items 2 and 6 of the abstractness factor, and item 3 of the integration factor were all removed following confirmatory factor analysis. Convergence of the three factors was not achieved, so the factors were treated as three separate measures for statistical analysis in Study One.

Note 3: For the Message Evaluation Study, items 5 and 7 were removed from the differentiation factor, items 5 and 6 were removed from the abstraction factor, and no items were removed from the integration factor. The three factors converged into an overall model, so to maintain alignment with the original intent of CCI, the three factors were treated as one overall measure in statistical analysis for Study Two.

Appendix C: Personal-Relational (PR) Identity Gap Scale

The PR measure uses a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree (italics indicate reverse coding):

Difference:

1. *I feel that my communication partners see me as I see myself*
2. I am different from the way my communication partners see me
3. I *agree with how my communication partners describe me*
4. I feel that my communication partners have wrong images of me
5. *I feel that my communication partners have correct information about me*
6. *I feel that there is no difference between who I think I am and who my communication partners think I am*

Preconception:

1. I feel that my communication partners portray me not based on information provided by myself but information from other sources
2. I feel that my communication partners stereotype me
3. I feel that my communication partners do not realize that I have been changing and still portray me based on my past images
4. *I feel that my communication partners know who I used to be when they portray me*
5. When my communication partners talk about me, I often wonder if they talk about me or someone else

Note: Items 3 and 4 of the preconception factor were removed following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix D: Personal-Enacted (PE) Identity Gap Scale

The PE measure uses a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree (italics indicate reverse coding):

1. *When I communicate with my communication partners, they get to know "real me."*
2. *I feel that I can communicate with my communication partners in a way that is consistent with who I really am*
3. *I feel that I can be myself when communicating with my communication partners*
4. I express myself in a certain way that is not the real me when communicating with my communication partners
5. I do not reveal important aspects of myself in communication with my communication partners
6. When communicating with my communication partners, I often lose sense of who I am
7. I do not express the real me when I think it is different from my communication partners' expectation
8. I sometimes mislead my communication partners about who I really am
9. There is a difference between the real me and the impression I give my communication partners about me
10. *I speak truthfully to my communication partners about myself*
11. *I freely express the real me in communication with my communication partners*

Note: Items 1, 2, and 3 were removed following confirmatory factory analysis.

Appendix E: Enacted-Relational (ER) Identity Gap Scale

The ER measure uses a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree (italics indicate reverse coding):

1. I feel that acquaintances portray me not based on the information I provide, but, instead, based on information from other sources.
2. *When I communicate with the acquaintances, I am usually successful in making them get to know me.*
3. *I am usually successful in conveying my intended images to the acquaintances.*
4. I often wonder why the acquaintances have different images of me from what I tried to give them.
5. Although I try to show the acquaintances what kind of person I am, they seem **not** to see me as I show.
6. I feel there are differences between how I express myself in communication with the acquaintances and how they picture me.

Note: Items 1, 2, and 3 were removed following confirmatory factory analysis.

Appendix F: Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction (ICS) measure

The ICS measure uses a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree (italics indicate reverse coding):

1. The other person let me know that I was communicating effectively.
2. *Nothing was accomplished.*
3. I would like to have another conversation like this one.
4. The other person genuinely wanted to get to know me.
5. *I was very dissatisfied with the conversation.*
6. I felt that during the conversation I was able to present myself as I wanted the other person to view me.
7. I was very satisfied with the conversation
8. The other person expressed a lot of interest in what I had to say
9. *I did NOT enjoy the conversation.*
10. *The other person did NOT provide support for what they were saying.*
11. I felt that I could talk about anything with the other person
12. We each got to say what we wanted
13. I felt that we could laugh easily together
14. The conversation flowed smoothly
15. *The other person frequently said things which added little to the conversation.*
16. *We talked about something that I was NOT interested in.*

Note: Items 3, 6, 15, and 16 were removed following confirmatory factory analysis.

Appendix G: Relational Satisfaction (RS) measure

The RS measure uses a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree (italics indicate reverse coding):

1. I am generally satisfied with this friendship
2. *I am not satisfied with the relationship with this friend*
3. There is little I would change about this friendship to make me more satisfied
4. *This friendship does not bring me much satisfaction*

Note: All items were retained following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix H: Ongoing Negative Affect (ONA) measure

The ONA measure uses a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree (no items were reverse coded):

1. I still feel anger about the things he/she did and/or said
2. I still feel frustration about the things he/she did and/or said
3. I still feel bothered by the things he/she did and/or said
4. I still feel sadness by the things he/she did and/or said

Note: All items were retained following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix I: Depressive Symptoms (DS) measure

The items in the DS measure are evaluated on a scale of 0 to 3. The numeric values correspond as follows: 0 = Rarely or None of the Time (Less than 1 Day), 1 = Some or a Little of the Time (1-2 Days), 2 = Occasionally or a Moderate Amount of Time (3-4 Days), and 3 = Most or All of the Time (5-7 Days). The item scores are then summed to create a score raging from 0 to 60 (0 to 48 following the removal of items in confirmatory factor analysis in this study):

The measure, as devised, requires participants to respond to each item by recalling the frequency of each item during a 1 week period (items in italics are reverse coded):

1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me
2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor
3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends
4. *I felt that I was just as good as other people*
5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing
6. I felt depressed
7. I felt that everything I did was an effort
8. *I felt hopeful about the future*
9. I thought my life had been a failure
10. I felt fearful
11. My sleep was restless
12. *I was happy*
13. I talked less than usual
14. I felt lonely
15. People were unfriendly
16. *I enjoyed life*

17. I had crying spells
18. I felt sad
19. I felt that people dislike me
20. I could not get “going.”

Note: Items 2, 4, 8, and 15 were removed following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix J: Helpfulness measure

The helpfulness measure uses a 5-point semantic differential scale (italics indicate reverse coding):

1.	*Helpful*				*Hurtful*
1		2	3	4	5
2.	Useless				Useful
1		2	3	4	5
3.	Ignorant				Knowledgeable
1		2	3	4	5
4.	Selfish				Generous
1		2	3	4	5

Note: All items were retained following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix K: Supportiveness measure

The supportiveness measure uses a 5-point semantic differential scale (italics indicate reverse coding):

1.	*Supportive*				*Unsupportive*
1		2	3	4	5
2.	Upsetting				Reassuring
1		2	3	4	5
3.	*Comforting*				*Distressing*
1		2	3	4	5
4.	*Encouraging*				*Discouraging*
1		2	3	4	5

Note: All items were retained following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix L: Sensitivity measure

The sensitivity measure uses a 5-point semantic differential scale (italics indicate reverse coding):

1.	*Sensitive*				*Insensitive*
1	2	3	4	5	
2.	Heartless				Compassionate
1	2	3	4	5	
3.	*Considerate*				*Inconsiderate*
1	2	3	4	5	
4.	Misunderstanding				Understanding
1	2	3	4	5	

Note: All items were retained following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix M: Appropriateness measure

The appropriateness measure uses a 5-point semantic differential scale (italics indicate reverse coding):

1.	*Appropriate*				*Inappropriate*
1		2	3	4	5
2.	Rude				Decent
1		2	3	4	5
3.	*Respectful*				*Disrespectful*
1		2	3	4	5
4.	*Proper*				*Improper*
1		2	3	4	5

Note: All items were retained following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix N: Effectiveness measure

The effectiveness measure uses a 5-point semantic differential scale (italics indicate reverse coding):

1.	*Effective*				*Ineffective*
1	2	3	4	5	
2.	*Beneficial*				*Detrimental*
1	2	3	4	5	
3.	Unsuccessful				Successful
1	2	3	4	5	
4.	*Advantageous*				*Disadvantageous*
1	2	3	4	5	
5.	Unrewarding				Rewarding
1	2	3	4	5	
6.	Unprofitable				Profitable
1	2	3	4	5	
7.	*Assertive*				*Unassertive*
1	2	3	4	5	
8.	Yielding				Domineering
1	2	3	4	5	
9.	Deferential				Controlling
1	2	3	4	5	

Note: Items 7, 8, and 9 were removed following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix O: Message Design Logic (MDL) manipulation check measure

The MDL manipulation check measure uses a 5-point semantic differential scale (italics indicate reverse coding):

1.	Simple				Complex
	1	2	3	4	5
2.	*Intricate*				*Straightforward*
	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Judgmental				Understanding
	1	2	3	4	5
4.	*Rational*				*Irrational*
	1	2	3	4	5
5.	*Absolving*				*Blaming*
	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Invalidating				Validating
	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Denying				Affirming
	1	2	3	4	5
8.	*Acknowledging*				*Rejecting*
	1	2	3	4	5

Note: Items 1 and 2 were removed following confirmatory factor analysis.

Appendix P: Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) manipulation check measure

The CTI manipulation check measure was used during the pilot test described in the method and results chapters. However, due to poor results, the message evaluation study was modified to not use CTI as a theoretical framework, so this manipulation check measure was not used in the full study and was not validated using confirmatory factor analysis.

The CTI manipulation check measure uses a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 equaling Strongly Disagree, 4 equaling Neutral, and 7 equaling Strongly Agree. No items were reverse coded:

Personal

1. The messages focused on the kind of person I should be.
2. The messages focused on the kind of person I am.
3. The topic of the messages concerned who I should be.
4. The topic of the messages concerned who I am.

Enacted

1. The messages focused on how I should express myself.
2. The messages focused on how I currently express myself.
3. The topic of the messages concerned the way I should express myself.
4. The topic of the messages concerned the way I currently express myself.

Relational

1. The messages focused on the relationship I should have between me and my friend.
2. The messages focused on the relationship I have with my friend.
3. The topic of the messages concerned the relationship I should have with my friend.
4. The topic of the messages concerned the relationship I have with my friend.

Communal

1. The messages focused on the group or community to which my friend and I belong.
2. The messages focused on the group or community to which I belong.
3. The topic of the messages concerned the community to which my friend and I belong.
4. The topic of the messages concerned the community to which I belong.