UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

A MODEL OF ADULT FRIENDSHIP CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By ELLIE WEAVER
Norman, Oklahoma
2025

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A MODEL OF ADULT FRIENDSHIP CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the past versions of myself who overcame, endured, and continued moving forward.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Ioana Cionea, whose support, thoughtful mentorship, and guidance have been foundational to my growth as a person and a scholar. Thank you for believing in my ideas and encouraging me to pursue them with confidence, clarity, and a dash of healthy skepticism. I am so incredibly thankful for your advocacy, generosity, and the countless hours you invested in me, my graduate school experience, my career, and this dissertation.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to my dissertation committee members: Dr. John Banas, Dr. Stephen Ellis, and Dr. Amy Janan Johnson. Your time, expertise, and thoughtful feedback have been invaluable throughout this process. I am especially grateful for your guidance and encouragement. It has been an honor to learn from each of you, and I sincerely appreciate your support throughout this journey.

Thank you so much to the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences for financially supporting this dissertation. Their generous contribution via a research fellowship provided the resources and stability necessary to complete this dissertation. I am deeply grateful for their investment in my academic and professional development.

Also thank you to amazing educators like Greg Solomon and Professor Betty La France who saw my potential and encouraged me to pursue my passion. Solomon, thanks for believing in me even when I was ten and insisted on adding the Fresh Prince of Belair theme song to my speech. Your consistent support, patience, and guidance converted yet another Communication nerd. Please know that your impact on my life and academic journey has been profound, and I carry your belief in me with deep appreciation and respect, even though you prefer Diet Coke.

Professor La France, your mentorship and patience during office hours were instrumental

in building my confidence as a communication student and my decision to pursue a Ph.D. Your belief in my potential, thoughtful guidance, and consistent support at NIU gave me confidence to take this path. Your leadership as a professor instilled so many lessons about interpersonal relationships, teaching norms, and being an assertive presence in the classroom. Communication nerds definitely need to stick together!

To my parents, thank you for instilling in me the values of hard work, perseverance, and curiosity. Your encouragement and belief in my abilities have always been a guiding light. To Connor, thank you for your patience, humor, and willingness to let me vent. Your presence has been a source of strength and comfort, reminding me to find balance and perspective. To Ted, Heather, Brylee, Steph, Jeremy, Nicole, and Layla thank you for being your amazing selves and encouraging me every step of the way. I love you guys!

To my brilliant friends that helped me survive graduate school – Caleb, Julie, and Brittney, I am so grateful for your comradery, insight, and kindness throughout my time at OU. Thank you for the study sessions (with plenty of laughter), offering your feedback and support, celebrating successes, and countless shared looks that made this entire experience richer. These friendships have been one of the most meaningful parts of my time here, and I feel incredibly lucky to know such thoughtful, driven, and generous scholars.

To Karley who has helped me grow and process this entire experience (and more). Your encouragement, enthusiasm, and confidence in my abilities have been invaluable throughout this journey. Seeing you each week has often been the breath of fresh air needed to keep the process going. I appreciate you more than words can express. You deserve all the corgi hugs in the world!

Thank you so much Savannah and Ashley for your continued support throughout this dissertation process. It has been a long journey, but the two of you have made it so much easier. Each step of the way, I felt supported and excited about this project, because you were just as excited about it. Thank you for always asking questions about the dissertation, asking how life with the dissertation was going, and encouraging me to draw my proposed model on napkins while we were in the middle of dinner at the most overstimulating restaurant we have ever been to. I appreciate you so much, you beautiful humans.

To my favorite administrative assistants/teaching assistants, Luke, Boomer, Brody, and Mia – thank you for attending countless Zoom meetings, listening to me practice lectures and presentations, and for being the best group of lap dogs I have ever met. Your many hours of hugs, pets, reminders to take a break, and abundant opportunities to get some fresh air continue to be some of the best glimmers throughout the day.

Last and certainly not least - to my husband, TJ, thank you is not enough to encompass all the support and love you have given as I navigated this process. You have been a steady presence of love, hugs, and encouragement, and your confidence in me gave me confidence in myself. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue my goals, for listening to me rant, giving me advice, for joining me on this journey, and for being the human version of home anywhere we go. I love you so much. Also, sorry not sorry for all the social science/research methods you learned along the way. My heart leaps every time you tell someone that correlation does not indicate causation.

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Abstract

Friendship is one of the most frequently listed forms of love (i.e., understood as affection and intimacy in interpersonal relationships; Fehr & Russell, 1991). However, increased time spent together, and more personal disclosure allows the opportunity for conflict to occur within the friendship (Fehr, 1996). Conflict in adult friendships has not received as much attention as other interpersonal types of conflicts (e.g., romantic conflict). Following past work on interpersonal conflicts and serial arguments (Bevan et al., 2008; Cionea et al., 2019a; Hample & Cionea, 2012), this dissertation examined a model of adult friendship conflict management in which the goals friends reported pursuing, the tactics they used (i.e., integrative, distributive, and avoidance tactics), and the outcomes (i.e., perceived resolvability, rumination, and change in relational satisfaction) they reported from the conflict were connected in a structural equation model (SEM).

Using a cross-sectional survey approach, a pilot study (N = 2,118) was first conducted to identify individuals that had engaged in a friendship conflict in the past six months. The main study (N = 625) then tested the proposed SEM, following a confirmatory factor analysis. Results revealed acceptable model fit and provided support for several of the proposed hypotheses. Integrative tactics were positively predicted by the goal of mutual understanding and negatively predicted by the goals to change the other person and dominance in the conflict. Distributive tactics were positively predicted by the goals to change the other person and hurt other to benefit self and negatively predicted by the goal of mutual understanding. Avoidance tactics were positively predicted of the goals of hurt other to benefit self and relational termination and negatively predicted by the goals to change the other person and negative relational expressiveness. Perceived resolvability as well as increased relational satisfaction were

positively predicted by the use of integrative tactics and negatively predicted by distributive and avoidance tactics. Rumination was positively predicted by integrative and distributive tactics, whereas change in relational satisfaction was positively predicted by integrative tactics and negatively predicted by distributive and avoidance tactics.

Taken together, these results offer insight into friends' use of conflict goals, tactics, and outcomes, offering promising support for a process model of conflict management in adults' friendship. Such a model can help differentiate adult friendship conflicts from young adult friendship conflict, romantic conflicts, and family relationships.

Keywords: friendship, conflict management, structural equation model

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Friendship plays a pivotal role in an individual's life. Fehr (1996) contends that friendship is more important than any other type of interpersonal relationship because of how valued this former relationship is (Perlman et al., 2015). Parker and Minkin (2023) noted that 61% of U.S. adults said that having close friends was extremely or very important to live a fulfilling life. This emphasis on close friends exceeded the number of individuals who said the same about being married (23%), having children (26%), or having much money (24%). No matter the culture or background, humans are social creatures that value, prioritize, and depend upon friendships (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Lu et al., 2021). Thus, these findings illustrate the importance of friendships outside of marriage, family, and work in individuals' lives. Despite this importance, though, as intimacy increases among friends, so does the probability of engaging in a conflict (Fehr, 1996). In a friendship, a conflict represents a struggle or incompatibility between the two friends who are interdependent. In addition, at least one friend perceives there is a lack of consensus or interference(s) with securing the resources they need to achieve their personal or relational goals. This definition will be explained further in the literature review.

Conflicts can arise for a variety of reasons. For example, friends tend to view one another as equals in the relationship (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). If one friend does not share this assumption or suddenly changes, viewing their friend as a non-equal, a conflict may emerge between them. Friendship conflicts can have significant effects on the relationship, such as relational termination or decreased closeness. As friends do not have legal ties to one another, as is the case for romantic relationships or familial relationships, it is sometimes easier to terminate the friendship rather than directly confront the conflict (Canary et al., 1995). So, conflict in

friendships may be managed in several distinct ways compared to how it is managed in romantic and familial relationships. Due to the voluntary nature of friendships, relational termination or distancing oneself from the friend may be management strategies more often adopted than in romantic relationships or families where such options are not as feasible. Thus, it is important to examine the management of conflict in friendships.

Although most literature focuses on young adults and their conflicts with friends, this dissertation focused on conflict management in adult friendships. This type of conflict occurs, yet there is little research on this topic, as adult friendship conflicts are neither as typical nor as commonly studied compared to other types of conflict (e.g., romantic relationship conflicts; Canary et al., 1995). Nevertheless, such an examination is important because friendships are relationships held in high importance as one of the most cherished interpersonal relationships (Parker & Minkin, 2023), indicating that friends are an essential interpersonal relationship for adults. However, as intimacy increases, so does the probability of conflict (Fehr, 1996) as conflict is integral to adults' relationships with friends (Canary et al., 1995). The distinction between friendships and marriage, family, and business partners is that friends are not legally and/or religiously bound and can walk away from the relationship (Canary et al., 1995). Thus, if the friendship becomes overwhelming, individuals often choose to leave or neglect the friendship (A. Johnson et al., 2003). With this caveat, there is a lack of research on friendship conflict, specifically related to the effective management of friendship conflict situations and their subsequent outcomes.

The goal of this dissertation, then, is to provide an empirical examination of conflict management in adult friendships. To this end, the dissertation identifies several key predictors that are believed to affect how friends manage a situation of conflict. Furthermore, the

dissertation models friends' conflict management processes, including the goals friends reporting pursuing and the tactics they report relying on to pursue such goals. In addition, the outcomes that such goals and tactics combinations adopted for the management of a conflict have on personal and relational outcomes, such as an individuals' perceived resolvability of the conflict, rumination due to the conflict, and their satisfaction with how they managed the conflict, are examined. This overall focus enhances knowledge about adult friendship conflicts by developing a process model of such conflicts. This is a new theoretical and empirical contribution that is expected to add valuable information to the literature given the need for more information about adult friendship conflicts. Furthermore, results from this study can aid in the development of process management strategies with a focus on predictive relationships between goals, tactics, and outcomes in the specific case of friendship conflict. On an applied level, individuals may find results from this investigation useful for learning how to engage in conflict with their friends more effectively and for reducing the negative consequences such situations may have on their relationships.

Human behavior is goal driven (Berger, 1997); so, as a conflict emerges, individuals articulate (more or less consciously) their goals for its management. Thus, the goals individuals pursue in their friendship conflicts are examined in this dissertation. Conflict goals are "any mental representation of a desired state that an individual possess at any point in a conflict process which the individual believes can be achieved through conflict behavior (actions which can influence the conflict process [i.e., tactics] and outcomes)" (Dunaetz, 2010, p. 2). There are various typologies of conflict goals, such as individualistic, cooperative, and competitive goals (Deutsch, 1994; Walton & McKersie, 1965) or constructive and destructive goals (Deutsch, 1994). Furthermore, the argumentation literature has also identified several types of goals. For

instance, several argument goals have been studied extensively in the serial argument literature based on Bevan's (2004) classification. Her list includes *positive relational expressiveness*, which captures an interest in expressing positive feelings about the other person and a desire to continue the relationship. *Mutual understanding/resolution* expresses an interest in negotiating or compromising with the other person. *Negative expressiveness* occurs when an individual communicates negative sentiments, such as frustration. *Relational progression/continuation* occurs when an individual is gathering information to determine whether to remain in the relationship. *Changing the other* occurs when one individual wish to change another person's behavior or habits. *Dominance/control* demonstrates a desire to gain control over the issue and/or other arguer. *Hurt other to benefit self* involves deliberately hurting or making the other person mad for self-gain or revenge. *Relational termination* measures an individual's interest in ending the relationship. Bevan's classification is utilized throughout the dissertation.

Goals are usually pursued in interaction through conflict tactics or strategies. Strategies utilize a general approach to achieve a goal (i.e., conflict styles; Canary et al., 1995), whereas tactics utilize specific messages to enact a strategy (i.e., integrative, avoidance, or distributive tactics; Putnam, 2006). Friends' goals for the conflict interaction are conceptualized to influence the tactics they use in the process of managing the conflict. Three tactics have been often utilized in conflict management literature: integrative tactics (which capture cooperative efforts and the desire for a mutually satisfactory outcome), distributive tactics (which capture competitive means of conflict resolution, such as insults, dominance, or threats), and avoidance tactics (which attempt to minimize or avoid any discussion of conflict; Canary & Cupach, 1988; Cody et al., 1981) . Furthermore, these tactics have been studied frequently in relation to goals and outcomes in multiple serial argument studies (Bevan et al., 2014). Thus, these three tactics are

examined in the current dissertation as well to model the conflict management process in friendships.

Conflict tactics are also instrumental in the study of conflict outcomes, or the consequences of conflict on relationships. How one manages a conflict affects the consequences of that conflict on the individual and their relationship with the other person involved in the conflict. Within conflict and serial argument literature, several outcomes have been explored frequently. They include perceived resolvability (e.g., Cionea & A. Johnson, 2022), satisfaction with how the conflict was managed (e.g., Cionea & A. Johnson, 2022; Cupach, 1980, 1982), effects on relational development (e.g., A. Johnson et al., 2003; A. Johnson et al., 2009), relational deterioration (e.g., A. Johnson et al., 2003; Cupach & Canary, 1988; Weinstock & Bond, 2000), and increased intimacy between friends (e.g., Canary & Cupach, 1988; Fehr, 1996; Weinstock & Bond, 2000). Furthermore, serial arguments literature has linked goals and tactics to outcomes such as rumination (e.g., Bevan et al., 2014; K. Johnson & Roloff, 1998), resolvability (e.g., Cionea et al., 2019a; K. Johnson & Roloff, 2000), and change in relational satisfaction (e.g., Cionea et al., 2019a). In this dissertation, three outcomes of conflict are explored as knowledge about their effects has multiple practical implications for friendship communication: perceived resolvability, rumination, and change in relational satisfaction.

Resolvability refers to feelings (or lack thereof) that pertain to whether friends perceive they can find a solution to their conflict. Such perceptions of resolvability are often heightened when integrative tactics are used and decrease when using distributive and avoidance tactics (Bevan et al., 2014; Cionea et al., 2019). Rumination refers to worrying about conflict. When friends have incompatible goals, they may ruminate about the conflict (Bevan et al., 2008). Friends also tend to ruminate more when avoidance or distributive tactics are enacted and less

when integrative tactics are enacted (Bevan et al., 2008). Finally, friendship conflicts can have a noted impact on friends' relational satisfaction in the aftermath of a conflict discussion. Avoidance and distributive tactics can lead to decreased closeness via a change in relational satisfaction because of the argument, whereas integrative tactics may lead to increased closeness (Cionea et al., 2019a; Cionea et al., 2019b; Forsythe & Ledbetter, 2015). Thus, the outcomes selected for this dissertation have been demonstrated to have significant associations with goals and tactics in conflict management or serial arguments. Therefore, they are expected to capture important consequences of friendship conflict and its management, too.

This dissertation investigates the management of friendship conflicts. In doing so, the dissertation relies on two theoretical frameworks: the goals-plans-action model (Dillard, 1990), which helps model friends' goals and tactics, and multiple goals theory (Caughlin, 2011), which helps explain how friends pursue their goals in a conflict. Furthermore, the serial argument process model tested in the serial arguments literature provides the modeling template for examining conflict management in friendships. Specifically, a model of friendship conflict management is developed, focused on mapping how friends approach conflicts via their conflict goals (i.e., the desired end states/goals of a conflict), the conflict tactics they rely on to do so (i.e., strategies individuals use to reach their desired end state), and the outcomes of friends' conflict (i.e., resolvability, rumination, and change in relational satisfaction).

The proposed model is important for several reasons. First, adult friendships and adult friendship conflicts are an understudied area of literature. This study may offer helpful insight into the study of friendships and friendship conflicts, an understudied area. Furthermore, this study can help delineate friendship conflicts from other relationships (e.g., romantic relationships

and family relationships) and their conflicts by highlighting features that characterize such conflict, which expands the literature on this topic.

Second, given that no legal mechanism binds individuals to the relationship, as in a marriage, there may be an implicit assumption that friends do not and should not engage in conflicts (Samter & Cupach, 1998). However, this is not the case. Just because these conflicts are infrequent does not mean they do not occur or are not important enough to study. Friendship conflicts can have lasting and potentially detrimental effects. The relatively low frequency of these communicative events (compared to romantic conflict) does not negate that these conflicts are distinct from romantic and roommate conflicts. Results from this study can help researchers better understand friendships and their conflicts as a distinct category of relational conflict, which adds new knowledge to interpersonal communication research. Thus, overall, this study helps researchers better understand friendships and their conflicts as a distinct area of conflict.

Third, examining the relationships between the variables proposed for study in this dissertation could help interpersonal communication researchers predict friendship conflict behaviors and outcomes better. This study allows for the articulation and testing of a structural equation model for the management of friendship conflicts. The model can function as a valuable explanatory mechanism for other scholars as they continue to amass further findings regarding friendship conflict. The model can help predict how goals affect the behaviors and outcomes of friendship conflicts. Results can aid in documenting the patterns of significant relationships between goals and tactics and tactics and outcomes. Furthermore, modeling the conflict management process in friendships may help researchers develop theoretical models to examine such conflicts further.

Fourth, this study extends communication theories (e.g., multiple goals theory, Caughlin, 2011) and the GPA model (Dillard, 1990) into friendship conflicts by demonstrating how individuals use goals in their friendship conflicts, thus increasing these theories' heuristic value and utility. This dissertation may also promote the use of multiple goals theory in friendship conflict research and assist researchers to develop other theoretical lenses for future studies.

Finally, the study has practical and societal implications. This project may help identify the necessary processes and patterns to permit successful mediation of friendship conflicts. With a better understanding of friendship conflicts, mediators could help individuals reach constructive solutions. For instance, understanding friendship conflict may help a variety of professionals including counselors, ombudspersons, and third-party mediators. For instance, Gartner (2014) noted the importance of mediator strategies and outcomes for effective third-party mediation. This project may help identify the necessary processes and patterns to permit successful mediation of friendship conflicts. With a better understanding of friendship conflicts, mediators could help individuals reach constructive solutions. In addition, findings can help friends who want to understand how they engage in conflict in more depth or can help elucidate why friends choose to avoid conflict altogether sometimes. Understanding such relationships further may help professionals identify tools for effectively engaging in friendship conflict management. Friendship literature has been a massive source of help for me, and I can only imagine the impact it may have on another pair of friends.

In sum, the first chapter introduced the overall goals for this dissertation. The second chapter will review relevant literature on friendship, friendship conflicts goals, conflict tactics, conflict outcomes, the theoretical perspectives that guide this study, and will introduce the study's hypotheses. Chapter three will describe the method for the proposed pre-screen eligibility

study, explaining the participants, procedures, measures, measures, and results. Chapter four will describe the method of the proposed main study, explaining the participants, procedures, measures, and analyses conducted as well as the results and what they reveal about the study's proposed hypotheses. Finally, chapter five will discuss the study's results in relation to previous research and theory, noting implications and directions for future research related to this topic.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Friendship

Friendships are a core aspect of life; in some ways, they may be even more important than any other type of interpersonal relationship (Fehr, 1996). Friendship is one of the most frequently listed forms of love (understood as affection and intimacy in interpersonal relationships; Fehr & Russell, 1991). When asked to list types of love in interpersonal relationships, participants in Fehr and Russell's (1991) study most frequently listed friendship (51 times), followed by sexual love (25 times) and parental love (23 times). This result indicates that friendship is distinct from marriage, family, and coworker relationships as well as one of the most common types of love people experience, with 98% of teenagers (Anderson & Jiang, 2018) and 61% of adults (Parker & Minkin, 2023) having at least one close friendship. With so many individuals prioritizing and experiencing this type of relationship, friendship is integral to people's lives.

Friendships are meaningful because of the amount of time friends spend together, the ubiquitous nature of the relationship, and the value individuals assign to the relationship (Perlman et al., 2015). This implies that people treasure friendships and view them as meaningful relationships. First, individuals spend a considerable amount of time with their friends. For instance, in 2021, Americans spent ten hours a week with their friends (Ward, 2022). Depending on how close or intimate the friendship is, friends were found to socialize in person weekly or even daily (Gallant, 2023). This variation in socializing is because friendship closeness varies. The closer an individual feels to their friend, the more time they want to spend together (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Second, friendship is a universal phenomenon, as some form of friendship is present in nearly all cultures and countries (Cohen, 1966). Anyone within any culture can

experience friendship. Although members of different cultures may express diverse needs and follow different norms within their friendships, friendships still help to enrich health and well-being across various settings (Lu et al., 2021).

Third, people value their friendships and place high importance on them, which was strongly associated with better health, greater happiness, and higher levels of subjective well-being (Lu et al., 2021). Thus, prioritizing friendships can have positive effects on people's lives. The following section will define friendship and offer further details about friendships' classifications and functions.

Conceptualizing Friendship

Fehr (1996) noted that "everyone knows what friendship is – until asked to define it. Then, it seems, no one knows" (p. 5). Thus, friendships may be difficult to describe as a friendship crosses into other life contexts such as work, school, family, and more (Wrzus et al., 2017). Friendships can also take many forms and span many life events, making it difficult for researchers to conceptualize this phenomenon (Perlman et al., 2015). In an attempt to define a friendship for this dissertation, the following section will propose a clear conceptualization of a friendship for the present research.

Many definitions of friendship are present within the communication literature. Fehr's (1996) book compared several definitions of the term. One of the first definitions provided came from Hays (1984), who stated: "Friendship: voluntary interdependence between two persons over time, which is intended to facilitate socio-emotional goals of the participants and may involve varying types and degrees of companionship, intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance" (p. 395). This definition is helpful in making a distinction between friendship and other

relationships, such as family or colleagues. It emphasizes the role of goals in relationships, and that closeness affects the friendship, especially for how friends pursue their goals.

Synthesizing definitions from Fehr's (1996) book, for this dissertation, I define a friendship as an interpersonal relationship between two individuals who develop a voluntary, interdependent connection based on pursuing their goals, having equal power, mutual attraction, and varying levels of companionship, intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance. This definition emphasizes the role of two individuals in an interpersonal relationship bound by its voluntary nature and their reliance upon one another to achieve their goals and maintain the friendship. This definition also notes the meaningful and potentially intimate relationship friends can develop. However, to clarify, for the purpose of this dissertation, friends do not have any other type of relationships, such as being friends and coworkers or romantic partners at the same time. The next section defines friendship conflict and provides characteristics of friendship conflicts.

Friendship Conflict

As intimacy increases in a relationship, there are also more opportunities for conflict as individuals spend more time together and share more personal information. As personal disclosure increases, so does the likelihood that one friend may disagree with another (Fehr, 1996). Such disagreements create an opportunity for conflict within the friendship. Friendship conflicts are distinct from conflict in romantic and family relationships as friendships are not bound by social norms or the structures often applied to other interpersonal relationships (A. Johnson et al., 2003). Instead, friendships are bound by mutually negotiated norms within the friendship. Given that there is not a legal mechanism binding individuals to the relationship, as in a marriage, there may be an implicit assumption that friends do not and should not engage in conflicts (Samter & Cupach, 1998). This assumption, however, is not necessarily correct. Friends

do engage in conflict, even though they may do so less frequently than romantic partners or family members (Canary et al., 1995). Furthermore, friendship conflicts can have intense and reverberating ramifications on a friendship, such as decreased closeness, increased stress and rumination, and a perception that the conflict cannot and will not be resolved (Santucci et al., 2022).

The literature uses a variety of definitions for conflict. Hocker and Wilmot (2017) argued that conflict was an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and [potential] interference from the other party in achieving their goals. This definition encourages a competitive view of conflict in that an individual may reach their goals at the expense of the other individual. Conflict, though, is more than competition.

Mortensen (1974) defined conflict as "[an] expressed struggle over incompatible interests in the distribution of limited resources" (p. 93). This definition is concerned with a struggle over limited resources. However, this definition adds something new: the idea that incompatible interests are related to how resources are distributed. Hocker and Wilmot's (2017) definition noted interference from the other party in achieving one's goals. However, this definition by Mortensen (1974) notes that the struggle is due to the distribution of resources, as opposed to the broad idea of goal achievement. This dissertation wishes to emphasize the role of goals in friendship conflict episodes.

In another definition, Putnam and Poole (1987) explained that conflict was “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals” (p. 55). This definition highlights that opposing goals can interfere with relationships; thus, friends can both

strive toward achieving their goals and it is not solely a competition for resources. This definition specifies Mortensen's (1974) idea of a struggle and expands upon Hocker and Wilmot's (2017) ideas about goals in interpersonal conflicts. It aids in generating an apt definition for the dissertation.

For this dissertation, the following definition is used: A friendship conflict is a struggle or incompatibility between two interdependent individuals (i.e., friends) in which at least one individual perceives there is a lack of consensus or interference(s) with securing resources needed to achieve their personal or relational goals. This definition emphasizes the role of two individuals in a friendship and the idea that at least one of those two individuals perceives a threat to personal or relational goal achievement. This definition deemphasizes the role of competition in conflict, and it highlights how friends can affect goal achievement in a variety of ways. This definition is helpful for the dissertation as it emphasizes individual conflict goals and outcomes.

Scholars have often investigated conflict episodically (i.e., how individuals or couples manage conflict in a particular, punctuated encounter), relationally (i.e., how distressed couples manage conflict differently than non-distressed couples), or developmentally (i.e., how the management of conflict, in general, changes over time; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). This dissertation examines friendship conflicts episodically—that is, conflict is examined via an individual episode of conflict between friends, and within the context of friendships. By analyzing the conflict episode this dissertation focuses on the predictive relationships between friendship conflict goals and tactics as well as conflict tactics and outcomes.

Adult friendship conflict literature is fairly limited as there is more of an emphasis on children and adolescents' friendship conflicts. Canary et al. (1995) proposed six reasons why

friendship conflicts are less widely studied than romantic or roommate conflicts. First, there is a norm that adult romantic and family relationships are supposedly more important than friendships. However, adult friends still depend on their friendships during this life phase, even though not as much as young adult friends do. Second, conflict is not as salient to adult friendships as time and distance often separate adult friends. Given the limited time available for friendships during adulthood, friends are often willing to overlook conflict with enough time and space between interactions (Canary et al., 1995). However, if an issue is particularly pertinent to the relationship, avoidance may not be the best idea. Third, Canary et al. (1995) note that conflict is integral to adults' relationships with friends, even in benign forms. Thus, adults encounter struggles that vary in intensity and that need to be addressed somehow. The resolution of a conflict is only as effective as its management. Fourth, friendships can be fragile. Since friends are not legally and/or religiously bound like individuals in a marriage, kin, or business partners are, they can walk away from the friendship (Canary et al., 1995). Thus, exit or neglect may often be the cause of ending a friendship (A. Johnson et al., 2003). Fifth, the frequency of conflicts in friendships is relatively low (Canary et al., 1995). This indicates that conflict is perceived to be a negative and rare event, so, when it occurs, it becomes especially important (Fehr, 1996). Finally, the age of adults may affect conflict issues as well as conflict frequency and amount (Canary et al., 1995). Young adults may cope with conflicts differently than older adults (Rawlins, 1992).

This dissertation focuses on adult friendship conflicts. Despite adult friendships' juxtaposition in the context of an individual's career, family, and romantic relationships (Rawlins, 1992), adult friendships are still prioritized. Even though individuals may have limited time for interaction, conflict is inevitable in these relationships. Without the legal and/or

religious ties that bound individuals to marriage, business, or family, friends may choose to avoid the conflict and distance themselves from a friend, leading to the end of the friendship. Given that these conflicts are rare, they are perceived to be especially negative, affecting how/if individuals choose to engage in adult friendship conflicts.

Conflict Contexts

There are subtle nuances of interpersonal conflict that manifest themselves in the contexts in which conflict occurs that can help understand conflicts further. Canary et al. (1995) noted that definitions of conflict vary in the episodic (i.e., bound to one or more interactions) and behavioral frames of reference (i.e., schemas), particularly within a distinct type of interaction or episode. The episodic (non-episodic vs. episodic) and behavioral frame of reference (specific vs. non-specific) dimensions of conflict demonstrate that conflict has a recognizable beginning and end, which is initiated by disagreement and/or negative affect (Canary et al., 1995). However, not all conflicts have such distinct beginning and end points, leading to repetitive or serial conflicts.

An area of research that has received increased attention is serial arguments, which helps illustrate characteristics of repetitive disagreements/conflicts. Conflicts and arguments are similar yet distinct forms of interaction. For instance, an argument may presuppose a conflict, and a conflict may entail an argument with the other person, but not necessarily. In other words, there is some overlap in the nature and behaviors associated with argument and conflict, but also a distinction between the two. For the purposes of this dissertation, the distinction is inconsequential, as the researcher believes core ideas from the serial argument literature are applicable to conflict behaviors, too.

Furthermore, O'Keefe's (1977) distinction between argument$_1$ and argument$_2$ is also helpful for discerning conflicts from arguments. Arguments$_1$ are utterances or communicative acts such as promises, commands, apologies, or orders (O'Keefe, 1977). In other words, an argument$_1$ is what is being said by one party and such statements can be recognized in conflict exchanges from people's descriptors of what happened between the two friends. Arguments$_2$ are a type of interaction that takes place between two individuals. Debates, quarrels, and discussions are examples of arguments$_2$. This type of argument focuses on the interaction between two individuals (O'Keefe). In this respect, a conflict is different from an argument$_2$ as conflicts capture a different type of interaction.

Similarly, serial arguments are recurring disagreements with the same person about the same topic that have occurred at least twice (Cionea & Hample, 2015; K. Johnson & Roloff, 1998). Due to the recurring nature of serial arguments, they are distinct from nonserial arguments (i.e., disagreements that occur once, with the same person, about a given topic). Bevan et al. (2014) noted that individuals have difficulty distinguishing between serial and nonserial arguments. In fact, the authors posit that serial arguments may be the more typical form of conflict in romantic relationships in comparison to nonserial arguments. Thus, there is a certain level of similarity between how individuals behave in various forms of disagreements and conflicts.

Although serial arguments are not analyzed in this dissertation, this literature about adults engaging in serial arguments is helpful in the study of adult friendship conflicts. The dissertation adopts serial argument goals for the study of conflict friendship goals as this classification has revealed valuable information about interpersonal arguments previously. Therefore, it is believed it can allow for better understanding of the nuances of conflict in friendships, too. Furthermore,

given the existence of a developing line of research that has examined goals, tactics, and outcomes in serial arguments, the serial argument process model (Bevan, 2008; Bevan et al., 2014; Cionea et al., 2019a; Cionea et al., 2019b) advanced in this literature is used as a guide for the management of conflict in friendships. The researcher believes friendship conflicts demonstrate at least some similar characteristics with serial arguments and, hence, the latter can provide a basis for theorizing a possible model of friendship conflict management.

Characteristics of Conflict

To examine conflict, though, one of the first things that must be acknowledged is that conflict exists. Duck (1994) argued that friendships are sustained via talking in ordinary, everyday interactions as these interactions allow for further opportunities to develop intimacy. As intimacy grows in a friendship, it is reasonable to assume that friends will have fights and get annoyed with one another (Fehr, 1996).

There are four characteristics of friendship conflict. Each of these characteristics aids in differentiating friendship conflicts from conflicts in other interpersonal relationships. *Goal interference* relates to an incompatibility between opposing goals or a scarcity of resources leading toward competition for goal achievement. Thus, goal interference is often the cause of conflict. For example, two friends may be interested in the same potential romantic partner. In this case, they depend on one another for advice about romantic partnerships but cannot rely on one another's advice as both are vying for the same goal (hence, goal interference). Their *interdependence* in sharing dating advice implies they require one another to meet their goal (i.e., dating a potential romantic partner).

Interdependence exists in friendships when individuals need their friends to reach their goals (McCorkle & Reese, 2018). Without their friend present, an individual may be unable to

meet their socio-emotional needs for intimacy, companionship, and affection. Conflict may arise as their interdependence does not align with what individuals need to achieve their goals (Putnam, 2006). For example, Bies et al. (1988) focused on how conflict develops from goal interferences, specifically when requests for goal achievement are denied. By demonstrating how interaction patterns serve as a stimulus for conflict episodes, the authors found that the reasoning for a decision is as essential as the decision itself. Interdependence emphasizes the role that goals play in friendship conflicts.

Expectations about individual friends and friendship develop over time as the two people negotiate their friendship and how they want to discuss the relationship (Perlman et al., 2015). Conflicts may arise when friends do not effectively communicate their friendship expectations and/or how they see them enacted within or outside the relationship. Conflict can be stressful to engage in, so, if friends are not close, they may choose to end the friendship rather than engage in conflict.

Flexibility, via self-disclosure, helps the dyad acknowledge situational demands, individual needs, and goals (Delia, 1980). For example, Becker et al. (2009) noted that friendship closeness (i.e., best, close, and casual friendships) was related to commitment to the friendship. The authors determined that closeness and commitment affect the turning points within the relationship. Thus, friendship conflict does not always indicate relational dissolution or negative outcomes. There may be factors that allow for positive outcomes of friendship conflicts, if both friends are willing to be flexible.

This section detailed friendship conflict and described the characteristics of friendship conflict. A friendship conflict is a struggle or incompatibility between two interdependent individuals (i.e., friends) in which at least one individual perceives there is a lack of consensus or

interference(s) with securing resources needed to achieve their personal or relational goals. Friendship conflict is analyzed in this dissertation from an episodic/specific conflict perspective (i.e., one singular conflict and the behaviors and conversations about the conflict within the episode). A singular episode of conflict focuses on the discussion, conversation, quarrel, or fight friends have about their different goals or interests. Based on the characteristics of conflict, conflict is a singular event that occurs rather than a state. Rather than focus on what is uttered in a conflict episode, this dissertation focuses on the type of interaction taking place between two friends. With an understanding of friendship and friendship conflict in this study, it is helpful to explore the role of goals in these contexts.

Theoretical Frameworks

In a conflict, the goals individuals pursue and the behaviors they enact via conflict tactics can influence how a conflict affects the friendship (i.e., the conflict's outcomes). To examine these processes, this dissertation utilizes two theoretical perspectives: Dillard's (1990) goals-plans-action (GPA) model and the multiple goals theory of personal relationships (MGT; Caughlin, 2010). In this perspective, behavior is purposeful, and individuals make choices about the messages they create, with some degree of self-awareness. These three assumptions of the GPA suggest that information about an individual's goals can reveal a lot about their behavior in a particular situation (Dillard, 2015) and their self-interests (Dillard & Schrader, 1998). Furthermore, MGT suggests that, in a conflict, individuals are likely to pursue multiple goals. Thus, information about friends' goals (acknowledging that they may pursue more than one at the same time) is combined with the tactics they report using to study how they manage conflicts in their friendships. Both theoretical perspectives are detailed, topically, in what follows.

The GPA Model

The GPA model (Dillard, 1990) views message production as a three-step sequence: goals, plans, and actions. Goals motivate what a person plans to say in an interaction as goals represent future states of affairs that an individual is committed to achieving or maintaining in that interaction (Dillard, 1997). From there, individuals utilize their knowledge about these situations and the relationship with the other person to plan how to achieve their goals (Caughlin & Wilson, 2022). These plans are motivated by the goals via knowledge individuals use to achieve their goals. They then utilize planning to devise the last step, action. Actions are the (non)verbal behaviors individuals use to pursue goals (Dillard et al., 1989). However, actions depend on the initial step—goals, which will be detailed further next.

GPA – Primary Goals

According to the GPA model, within any given conflict episode, each person first formulates and prioritizes some goals over other goals. These goals can range from self-serving/egotistical ones (i.e., meet a goal for one's own personal gain) to altruistic/philanthropic ones (i.e., meet a goal for the benefit of the other person), depending on the person, the situation, and the relationship between interactants (Dillard & Schrader, 1998). Dillard (1997) distinguished between primary goals and secondary goals. Primary goals initiate the process of message production by providing the objectives that motivate a person to speak. Secondary goals shape and constrain how an individual pursues their primary goals.

By motivating the GPA sequence, primary goals provide meaning (Dillard & Schrader, 1998) and allow an individual to sort the interaction into meaningful units (e.g., beginning and ending). This helps an individual make sense of another person's behavior. Thus, an individual's primary goals shape the interaction and provide context for the interaction (Dillard, 2015).

Primary goals help an individual determine which aspects of the situation are (and are not) perceived. Primary goals help distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information and determine which perceptions, memories, and thoughts become more salient. For example, a primary goal for restoring a relationship would be one friend reaching out to another asking to talk about the drama that emerged between them at a party last Friday night. This is a primary goal for the first friend as it constitutes the motivating factor for the friend to initiate the conversation.

Previous GPA research (Dillard, 2015; Dillard et al., 1989; Dillard et al., 2002) refers to primary goals as influence goals because primary goals begin the GPA process and, subsequently, guide the course of the entire GPA process and how an individual chooses to enact the process. In turn, these goals help express an individual's desire to enact behavioral change from their target (Dillard et al., 1989). Goals will not always trigger a desire for behavioral change in the other person. However, influence goals are determined by the attractiveness of goals, and which goal(s) individuals want to use in a given context (Sillars, 1980).

Primary goals initiate the GPA process. Based on one friend’s desire for change in the other, influence goals help determine what is essential in the influence process and how an individual would like to enact these goals. However, primary goals are not the only motivating factor in the GPA. Each interaction has a primary goal, and most interactions have one or more secondary goals. With the desire to achieve their primary goal comes the consideration of one or more secondary goals. As individuals initiate a conversation, there may be secondary goals, which function to shape, and typically constrain, the behaviors of the target (Dillard et al., 1989). Secondary goals in an interaction shape the behavior an individual uses to meet their primary

goals. Secondary goals arise as an individual pursues a primary goal (Schrader & Dillard, 1998).

GPA – Secondary Goals

Dillard et al. (1989) noted five secondary goals, which may not be applicable to every situation due to the relationship between parties or the context of the situation. These goals are identity goals, conversation management goals, relational resource goals, personal resources goals, and affect management goals. The presence of such secondary goals indicates that individuals try to achieve multiple goals simultaneously. For example, if a conflict existed between two friends, they may consider how a discussion would affect both of their public images (e.g., "it was really embarrassing when you did that"), moral standards (e.g., "you were wrong to do that"), the friendship (e.g., "I don't want to lose our friendship"), and comfortability (e.g., "You really hurt my feelings last night;" Dillard, 2015). Goals initiate and guide the GPA process. As an individual prioritizes their goals, their subsequent plans and actions are influenced by their primary and secondary goals. Primary goals, often called influence goals, may have different motivations such as gaining assistance, giving advice, sharing activity, changing orientation, changing the relationship, obtaining permission, and enforcing rights and obligations. Secondary goals help shape and constrain the primary goals by allowing the pursuit of multiple goals in the same situation.

Secondary goals emphasize that individuals hold multiple goals they must prioritize within an interaction. Whichever goal the individual chooses to initiate the conflict may guide the behaviors within the friendship conflict and, subsequently, affect the outcomes of the conflict. The differentiation between primary and secondary goals is not the focus of this dissertation. However, it is helpful to understand the role of goals in any interaction. Both primary and secondary goals demonstrate that individuals have varied motivations in a given

context, and each of these motivations can influence individuals' behavior in the situation. Goals are an essential step in the GPA model that guide the rest of the interaction.

Multiple Goals Theory

Acknowledging that multiple goals exist within an interaction, this dissertation applies Caughlin's (2010) multiple goals theory (MGT) to understand the role of friends' conflict goals in an adult friendship conflict and how those goals affect the subsequent tactics friends use to manage such a conflict. This theory recognizes that people typically pursue more than one interaction goal at a time (Caughlin, 2010). For instance, Caughlin and Vangelisti (2006) noted that individuals may have a primary goal (e.g., to conceal a secret) and use a secondary goal to enact the primary goal (e.g., change the subject to conceal the secret). MGT focuses on how distinct goals within an interaction and the subsequent perceptions of how accessible and achievable those goals are affect how a communication context (e.g., conflict) is approached or avoided. Although individuals simultaneously pursue many goals, their primary goals define the interaction (e.g., persuade partner). However, their secondary goals may guide how/if the individual chooses to persuade their partner.

MGT holds three assumptions: that communication is purposeful, that individuals pursue multiple goals simultaneously, and that communication goals can conflict with one another (Caughlin, 2010). First, similar to the GPA, MGT assumes that communication is purposeful (Caughlin, 2010). In that, MGT assumes that communication is a means to an end (i.e., a means to accomplish your goals). Specifically, MGT assumes that individuals communicate to pursue interaction goals, therefore assuming that communication is inherently strategic and purposeful (Caughlin & Wilson, 2022). Either way, an individual's goals are derived from inferences about

the other person's cognitions and conventionally understood social practices (O'Keefe, 1989, 1992).

Individuals vary in their skills and conscious awareness of compliance-seeking goals (Wilson, 2002). MGT includes relational partners' goals, messages during the interaction, perceptions of own and partner's goals, and subjective evaluations of conversations (Caughlin, 2010). In this model, individuals' goals in a relationship are interdependent. As individuals are not always aware of their communication goals, there is not a consistent relationship between an individual's perception of their goals and their actual goals.

Second, MGT assumes that individuals pursue multiple goals simultaneously (Caughlin, 2010). This notion was reinforced in the GPA model as individuals pursue primary goals and secondary goals within a given context. The nature of these goals depends on the context of communication, situational demands, and whether both individuals agree on the goals being pursued (Caughlin, 2010). MGT notes a multi-faceted association among messages and perceptions of goals (Caughlin, 2010). Individuals' beliefs about the other's conversation goals are influenced by what the other person says during the conversation. This is not the only influence as other's goals are related to one's own goals (Caughlin & Scott, 2010). Individuals can also make inferences about the other person's goals by assessing their own behavior.

Third, MGT assumes that communication goals can conflict with each other. Delia (1980) noted that the nature of the relationship and intended relational trajectory are affected by the extent to which the other person meets their partner's expectations, shares them, and is involved in meeting those expectations. This means that individuals must be flexible and willing to deal with alternative relational trajectories (e.g., if one partner wishes to escalate from a friendship to a romantic relationship but the other partner does not).

However, flexibility in expectations does not mean that individuals must immediately adhere to their partner's alternative. Negotiations in interpersonal conflict allow an individual to make sense of their perceptions, especially in reference to specific aspects of the conflict at hand. Via self-disclosure, the dyad can acknowledge the situational demands as well as the personal needs and goals of the individual (Delia, 1980). For example, McCarthy and Duck (1976) analyzed friendships of different lengths to discern whether negotiated agreement bolsters as much as disagreement. They found that similarity becomes less attractive and dissimilarity more attractive at times of development and flux in relationships. This notion is reinforced in MGT as individuals make inferences about goals in particular encounters (e.g., conflicts with friends). Over time, individuals form perceptions about types of goals that should be used in these situations (i.e., what they perceive a friendship conflict should look like). For example, an individual may choose to yell and be competitive in a friendship conflict, whereas another friend may choose to approach the conflict directly and calmly, because that individual perceives directness and a calm discussion to be more beneficial. These perceptions then affect how satisfied people are with their relationship and relational communication (Caughlin & Wilson, 2022).

MGT also notes several means through which individuals can make subjective evaluations of their conversations. Beliefs about conversation goals have a direct influence on people's evaluations of conversations (Caughlin, 2010). Also, beliefs about goals moderate connections between message behaviors and evaluations of conversations. An individual's interpretation of another's communication behaviors affects the impact of a friend's messages. Goals, and the presence of multiple goals, guide an interaction. In the GPA model, goals initiate the process, with secondary goals being used to pursue primary goals. This indicates that goals

guide the actions taken in an interaction and it aligns with the MGT assumption that communication is purposeful, indicating that individuals consciously and voluntarily utilize their goals to make a noted difference. With the knowledge that individuals pursue multiple goals simultaneously, goals may conflict with one another (Caughlin, 2010). MGT helps acknowledge that individuals are not always aware oof their own goals and the other person's goals throughout the interaction. This often requires individuals to utilize their prior experiences in similar situations and act accordingly. While these evaluations are not always accurate due to individuals' subjective experience, they are helpful in obtaining more information about the context.

Conflict Goals

Goals can be helpful in friendship interactions. However, an individual's desired end states may vary with time, the friendship, and the context of the conflict. This emphasizes the need to understand the role of goals in a friendship conflict. Conflict goals are "any mental representation of a desired state that an individual possesses at any point in a time conflict process which the individual believes can be achieved through behavior" (Dunaetz, 2010, p. 2). This definition indicates that goals can influence actions, which can influence the conflict process and its outcomes, similar to what is evidenced in the GPA model and MGT. As a conflict develops, individuals may shift their goals depending on the importance, difficulty, specificity, temporal range, level of consciousness, and complexity (Dunaetz, 2010).

Given the role that goals and conflict goals fulfill, this dissertation utilizes serial arguments goals to articulate a model of friendship conflict management. Under the theoretical umbrella of the GPA model (Dillard, 1990), the serial argument literature has proposed relationships for how goals relate to tactics and outcomes in interpersonal conflicts. Like conflict

goals, serial argument goals guide interactions. Although there are a broad range of conflict goals (e.g., positively vs. negatively valenced goals; Cionea et al., 2019a), Bevan (2007) explicated seven serial argument goals that have been examined in multiple studies and have demonstrated good reliability for measuring the desired end states that individuals wish to pursue via a serial argument. Therefore, these serial argument goals are examined in adult friendship conflicts in this dissertation as well. The following section details serial arguments goals and how they have been studied in conjunction with tactics and outcomes.

Serial Arguments Goals

Serial argument process models have examined serial argument goals (Bevan et al., 2008; Cionea et al., 2019a) under the theoretical umbrella of the GPA model (Dillard, 1990). Within a serial argument, individuals first form goals for each of the argument episodes, and then they use tactics to fulfill their goals. Several models then include perceived outcomes or consequences of utilizing such goals-tactics combinations. For example, Hample and Cionea (2012) examined serial arguments in inter-ethnic relationships. The authors connected serial argument goals with distributive, integrative, and demand/withdraw tactics, which, they argued, led to changes in relational satisfaction, the argument's level of civility, and the perceived resolvability of the serial argument.

Given the scarce research on adult conflict friendship management, this dissertation relies on literature and findings from the serial arguments literature that has examined process models (Bevan et al., 2008; Bevan et al., 2014; Cionea et al., 2019a; Cionea et al., 2019b) to articulate a model of friendship conflict management. The serial arguments process models have proposed relationships for how goals, tactics, and outcomes of serial arguments relate to each other, and are helpful for developing such a model for friendship conflicts as well.

As previously noted, the first component of the GPA framework is goals. Bevan (2004) as well as Bevan et al. (2008) conceptualized and validated seven goals of serial arguments. These goals include positive relational expressiveness, mutual understanding/resolution, negative expressiveness, changing the other, dominance/control, hurt other to benefit self, and relational termination.

Positive relational expressiveness captures an interest in expressing positive feelings about the other person and a desire to continue the relationship (Bevan, 2004, 2008). *Relational progression/continuation* is meant to assess an individual's gathering of information to determine whether to continue the relationship with the other person. Bevan et al. (2008) combined these two goals into one, called *positive relational expressiveness*, which demonstrates a desire to continue the relationship while expressing positive feelings about the other person. For example, friends may share with one another qualities they admire and share reasons they enjoy the friendship.

Mutual understanding/resolution expresses an interest in understanding the other party or compromising with them (Bevan, 2004, 2008). This goal, in friendships, would help a friend better understand the other friend's point-of-view in the conflict. Friends may express this goal by sympathizing with their friend and trying to make sense of the conflict from both sides. For example, a friend may ask another what they are trying to accomplish via the conflict or what are their interests.

Negative expressiveness captures an individual's attempt to communicate negative sentiments, such as frustration (Bevan, 2004, 2008). This goal is the opposite of positive relational expressiveness. Rather than striving for prosocial goals, negative expressiveness

captures the expression of negative feelings about the other person. For instance, friends may tell each other how frustrated they are with the other friend's behavior.

Changing the other expresses an individual's wish to change another person's behavior or habits (Bevan, 2004, 2008). Bevan (2004) noted that changing the other is likely a destructive goal for the individual and the relationship between them. Although it is helpful for individuals to grow and change throughout a friendship, forced change is likely not perceived as a cooperative goal amongst friends.

Dominance/control demonstrates a desire to gain control over the issue and/or other person (Bevan, 2004, 2008). This goal was another that Bevan (2004) noted as a destructive goal. Among friends, pursuing such a goal goes against the egalitarian nature of friendships. As friends have equal power within the friendship, trying to control the other person implies a power difference between the two individuals. This power difference is not beneficial in friendships as friends that perceive unequal power tend to terminate the relationship (Becker et al., 2009). A friend may want to dominate a friendship conflict by commanding the other to do their bidding or abide by their rules, rather than the mutually negotiated norms within the friendship. This type of goal tends to be more prevalent in romantic or familial relationships (Bevan, 2010) than friendships.

Hurt other to benefit self involves deliberately hurting or making the other person mad for self-gain or revenge. This was another goal that Bevan (2010) noted to be destructive in relationships. A few friendship characteristics involve companionship and affection for one another (Fehr, 1996). However, the hurt other to benefit self goal prioritizes the individual and deemphasizes that affection friends have for one another. Without those characteristics of friendship, friends may choose to terminate their relationship.

Relational termination measures an individual's interest in ending the relationship. This goal would be pursued when two friends wish to end their friendship. Friends can express a desire for relational termination in a few ways. Some friends may choose to cease all contact with their friend and not provide an explanation (i.e., ghosting; Yap et al., 2021). Others may choose to directly end the relationship with the other person. Either way, a conflict would need to be significant for an individual to voluntarily choose to terminate a relationship into which they have invested time and effort.

This dissertation is interested in how individuals pursue their goals and what predicts the tactics individuals will pursue to accomplish their goals. In other words, goals can influence tactics according to the GPA process (Dillard, 2015; Dillard et al., 1989; Dillard et al., 2002). Given that friendships are interdependent relationships, it is beneficial for friends to help one another meet their goals. Recall that friends may experience conflict when individual goals are impeded by relational interdependence (Putnam, 2006). If a friend challenges goal achievement, that can affect an individual's goals for mitigating the issue, indicating that goals set the tone and direction for the tactics and outcomes of a conflict.

Plans in GPA

Goals motivate an individual's plans, or "the mental representations of messages and message sequences that are intended to enable goal attainment" (Dillard, 2015, p. 65). Planning is the process of recalling and/or creating plans, including the mental effort of what to say (Caughlin & Wilson, 2022). Planning involves not only knowing what is needed to achieve an individual's primary goal but also how to enact that knowledge to then meet the primary goal. As primary goals increase in importance and secondary goals conflict with those primary goals, individuals must be more deliberate about their pursuit of the primary goal (Dillard et al., 1989).

Planning allows the individual to devise a means of confronting their friend, including how they intend to approach the issue and what they intend to say to their friend. For example, an individual may plan to approach a friend about a conflict one-on-one rather than approaching the friend in front of the entire friend group. The individual knows that the friend will be less defensive about the issue one-on-one rather than in a group setting, so the individual makes sure they meet their primary goal within that context. When multiple plans are available, the speaker must assess how much each plan satisfies their primary and secondary goals (Dillard, 2015). Once an individual has decided which plan satisfies their goals, they must enact that plan via behaviors (i.e., conflict tactics; Sillars, 1980).

In the GPA, plans are a step in the planning process (Caughlin & Wilson, 2022; Dillard, 1990, 2015). With knowledge of how to enact their goals (i.e., plans), individuals can recall that knowledge and implement it in a given situation (i.e., planning) to meet their goals. If an individual recalls multiple plans, they must assess how much each plan satisfies both the primary and secondary goals (Dillard, 2015) and decide which plan is most appropriate to enact.
In this dissertation, plans/planning are represented via the tactics an individual uses in a friendship conflict. While plans include the knowledge of how to achieve one's goal (Caughlin & Wilson, 2022), tactics are the specific behaviors an individual enacts to achieve their goal (Sillars, 1980). To capture the goals, behaviors, and outcomes of friendship conflict effectively, analyses must include the specific behavior necessary to achieve an individual's goals related to the friendship conflict outcomes. Conflict management determines the outcome of the friendship conflict.

Conflict Management

Putnam (2006) noted that conflict is often enacted in social interactions as strategies and tactics. Strategies are general approaches to achieving an interaction goal (Canary et al., 1995). Tactics are the specific messages through which one enacts these strategic moves (Putnam, 2006). Similar to plans, strategies and tactics involve enacting a goal. Plans simply encompass the knowledge needed to enact a plan. Within the plans step of the GPA, individuals create a mental model of how the individuals intend to achieve their goals. Strategies and tactics are behaviors that build upon plans by adding an action step. Thus, strategies and tactics imply the individual has the knowledge to enact their goal and, so, they enact that knowledge via behavior in the form of strategies or tactics. Depending on how they are applied, strategies and tactics have multiple roles within a conflict situation. This section will explore conflict strategies and tactics and highlight how/why conflict tactics are analyzed in the dissertation.

Conflict Strategies

Strategies for conflict management are often demonstrated via distinctive conflict categories. For example, Blake and Mouton (1964) noted that conflict styles exist at the intersection of assertiveness (i.e., an individual's concern for personal goal achievement) and cooperativeness (i.e., an individual's concern for the other person’s goal achievement). However, based on this idea, it is unclear how much (if at all) an individual’s actions within the conflict matter. So, viewing them in conjunction with Kilmann and Thomas's MODE (i.e., Management of Differences; 1977) can be helpful. This instrument utilizes an individual's behavior in a conflict situation to understand if the two individuals' concerns and behaviors are incompatible (Thomas & Kilmann, 1977). Like Blake and Mouton's (1964) conflict styles, the MODE

instrument (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977) describes an individual's behavior based on assertiveness (i.e., concern for self) and cooperativeness (i.e., concern for others).

Furthermore, strategies are general approaches to conflict compared to tactics. Strategies do not provide specific actions but rather a macro perspective on managing a conflict. Tactics are more specific than strategies as they entail utilizing specific actions for conflict management. Kilmann and Thomas's MODE (1977) demonstrates how strategies can be employed to manage conflict. The five conflict management strategies (i.e., collaborating, compromising, competing, accommodating, and avoiding) highlight the role of self and others and how different interests can affect conflict management. However, to explore the specific actions taken by adult friends in a conflict, conflict strategies are ineffective, general approaches. Conflict tactics provide more specific approaches to conflict that have noted significant relationships to conflict goals and conflict outcomes. Thus, this dissertation focuses on conflict tactics in adult friendship conflicts.

Conflict Tactics

A common classification states that three types of conflict tactics can be employed: distributive tactics, integrative tactics, and avoidant tactics (Bevan et al., 2007; Sillars, 1980). Serial arguments literature has also examined these three tactics repeatedly. In multiple studies, these tactics were significantly related to serial argument goals (Bevan et al., 2008, 2014; Cionea, 2019a; Hample et al., 2012). For example, Cionea et al. (2019a) found that the pursuit of positively-valenced serial argument goals (i.e., positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding) was positively and significantly related to the use of integrative tactics. The pursuit of negatively-valenced serial argument goals (e.g., change other and dominance) was positively and significantly related to the use of distributive tactics. Hample et al. (2012) found similar results.

Integrative tactics are direct and cooperative messages often expressed in a positive or neutral tone (Cupach et al., 2010). These tactics often demonstrate an agreeable and active approach to conflict as individuals express a desire for a mutually satisfactory outcome (e.g., growth and maintenance) via prosocial messages. Cupach et al. (2010) note five key qualities of integrative tactics: seeking and disclosing information, making supportive comments, and listening in a supportive manner, mutually defining the problem, seeking areas of commonality and agreement, and negotiating fair solutions. These qualities do not indicate that individuals who utilize integrative tactics wish to compromise. Instead, the purpose of integrative tactics is to identify shared goals and promote the interests of both parties (Canary & Cupach, 1988).

Serial Arguments and Integrative Tactics

Bevan (2010) noted that serial argument goals may be positively- or negatively-valenced. Positively-valenced goals include positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding, whereas negatively-valenced goals include negative expressiveness, changing the other, dominance, hurting the other to benefit the self, and relational termination. Previous serial argument studies (Bevan, 2004; Hample & Cionea, 2012) have demonstrated that positively-valenced goals such as positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding tend to be positively related to integrative tactics. Negatively-valenced goals such as negative expressiveness, changing the other, dominance, hurt other to benefit self, and relational termination tend to be negatively related to the use of integrative tactics.

Based on the literature, this dissertation proposes a positive relationship between integrative tactics and positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding. Integrative tactics utilize positive or neutral tones to express the desire for a mutually satisfactory outcome, such as continuing the friendship or gaining a mutual understanding on an important issue. Both

positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding meet Cupach et al.'s (2010) five key qualities of integrative tactics as the goals strive for a collaborative resolution to the conflict.

On the contrary, this dissertation proposes a negative relationship between negative expressiveness, changing the other, dominance, hurt other to benefit self, and relational termination. Each of these five goals does not imply a positive or neutral tone. Instead, they are competitive or combative, which does not emphasize a mutually beneficial outcome like integrative tactics. These negatively-valenced goals tend to entail the use of more competitive tactics, such as distributive tactics.

With this information in mind, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Integrative tactics will be positively predicted by (a) positive relational expressiveness and (b) mutual understanding, and negatively predicted by (c) negative expressiveness, (d) change other, (e) dominance, (f) hurt other to benefit self, and (g) relational termination.

Distributive tactics are direct and competitive means of conflict resolution, often involving threats, insults, sarcasm, and shouting (Canary & Cupach, 1988). Distributive tactics stem from the attitude that an individual can only "win" the conflict at the expense of the other person (Cupach et al., 2010). With an emphasis on themselves and their own interests, individuals do not consider how a particular message may affect the other person(s) in the conflict (Cupach et al., 2010). Canary and Cupach (1988) noted that using distributive tactics indicates an emotional involvement in conflict as such tactics are more negatively charged and salient than integrative or avoidance tactics. Distributive tactics tend to work against other people (Canary et al., 2010).

In serial arguments, distributive tactics are indicative of individualistic goals (Hample & Richards, 2015) and involve attempts to assert one's own requests strongly (Ohbuchi & Tedeschi, 1997). These tactics are viewed as competitive, aggressive, and potentially destructive to a relationship (Bevan et al., 2007) as the individual is prioritized above the relationship (Bevan et al., 2008). Individuals using negatively-valenced goals (e.g., negative expressiveness, dominance, change the other person) often tend to use more distributive tactics (Hample & Cionea, 2012; Hample & Krueger, 2011; Hample et al., 2012). These negatively-valenced serial arguments goals include negative expressiveness, dominance/control, a desire to change the other person, and hurt other to benefit self (Bevan et al., 2008; 2014). It is uncommon for serial argument goals that are positively-valenced (e.g., positive expressiveness and mutual understanding) to be pursued via distributive tactics (Hample & Cionea, 2012). However, it can occur. Individuals who use a competing conflict style can use more distributive tactics, as Cionea and A. Johnson (2022) have reported. However, in general, if an individual sets out to dominate a conflict, control how it works out, note a desire to win/come out ahead, they tend to use distributive tactics (Cionea & A. Johnson, 2022).

Based on the conflict, serial arguments, and friendship literature, I predict that distributive tactics are negatively predicted by positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding. Within each of these goals, the individual attempts to prioritize the dyad and the relationship rather than self-interests, which characterize distributive tactics. Positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding are not prioritized in distributive conflicts. Instead, individuals using distributive tactics tend to embrace competitive and individualistic goals such as negative expressiveness, a desire for dominance/control, a desire to change the other person,

hurt other to benefit self, and relational termination. These negatively-valenced goals allow the individual to strive for personal gain, with little concern for the other person.

Based on this information, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Distributive tactics will be negatively predicted by (a) positive relational expressiveness (b) mutual understanding, and positively predicted by (c) negative expressiveness, (d) change other, (e) dominance, (f) hurt other to benefit self, and (g) relational termination.

Avoidance tactics are attempts to minimize explicit discussions of conflict that may deny the presence of the conflict or shift the focus of the conversation. In essence, the individual wishes to keep the tensions buried. In doing so, they attempt to minimize, eschew, or deny any discussion of the conflict or shift the focus of the conversation (Cupach & Canary, 1988). Avoidance tactics may also entail communication about conflicts in an indirect or ambiguous manner (Cupach & Canary, 1988). That may be because an individual does not feel they could confront the other party or prevent the potential negative effects of such a confrontation. Avoidance can be categorized as agreeable or disagreeable, depending on the context and the way in which it is performed. For example, Canary et al. (1995) noted four avoidance tactics: (1) withholding a complaint when confrontation is deemed too costly, (2) making irrelevant remarks to divert the interaction from conflict to a non-threatening topic, (3) verbally denying that there is a conflict, and (4) withdrawing from the interaction. Cloven and Roloff (1991) added a fifth: not voicing a complaint for fear of retaliation.

Avoidance tactics in serial arguments include a shift of argument topic, focus on abstract terms, denial of disagreement, and attempts to bypass the confrontation (Canary et al., 1988). These tactics have been analyzed sporadically due to weak or null relationships with goal and

outcome variables in Bevan et al. (2007). In some instances (e.g., Hample & Cionea, 2012) avoidance tactics were omitted; instead, the demand/withdraw pattern was included. However, as this dissertation study analyzes single episodes of friendship conflict, demand/withdraw patterns would not be appropriate as those patterns represent tactics in multiple episodes of conflict. Rather, other serial argument studies analyzing avoidance tactics (e.g., Bevan et al., 2007, 2008; Cionea et al., 2017) have found significant relationships between an individual's goals and the tactics applied in serial arguments. The relationship between avoidance tactics and an individual's goals depends upon the valence of an individual's goals and the relational context.

For example, avoidance is perceived as a manipulation tool when an individual pursues negatively-valenced goals such as negative expressiveness, control/dominance, change the target, and hurt other to benefit self (Bevan et al., 2007; Cionea et al., 2019a). Bevan et al. (2007) explained that, if an individual wanted control/dominance and to hurt their partner and benefit themselves, they may rely on topical or physical avoidance to manipulate the partner and/or the serial argument. Also, if the individual wanted to hurt their partner or express negative emotions, avoidance may be used to inflict psychological distress. Bevan et al. (2008) explained that, in a negative situation, such as a serial argument episode, negative goals are related to the use of avoidance tactics.

Based on this information, this dissertation posits that avoidance tactics are negatively predicted by positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding. Positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding imply a desire to have an explicit and direct conversation about the conflict so that tensions are not minimized or denied. Avoidance does not make sense as these positively-valenced goals emphasize the positive aspects of the friendship and express that desire for understanding. Without an opportunity to discuss the conflict directly,

positively-valenced goals cannot be enacted. On the contrary, this dissertation proposes that avoidance tactics are positively predicted by negative expressiveness, a desire for dominance/control, a desire to change the other person, hurt other to benefit self, and relational termination. Each of these negatively-valenced goals are conducive to the lack of discussion as friends try to increase the power distance, minimize, eschew, or deny any discussion of the conflict or shift the focus of the conversation (Cupach & Canary, 1988).

With this information, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Avoidance tactics will be negatively predicted by (a) positive relational expressiveness and (b) mutual understanding, and positively predicted by (c) negative expressiveness, (d) change other, (e) dominance, (f) hurt other to benefit self, and (g) relational termination.

In sum, this section detailed the theoretical perspectives used in the conceptualization of a model of conflict management in friendships in the current dissertation. The GPA (Dillard, 1990) and MGT (Caughlin, 2010) note that communication is purposeful via primary and secondary goals. In the presence of multiple goals in an interaction, tactics then inform how goals are enacted, and the subsequent outcomes of those goals. Tactics are employed to enact strategies. This section noted three tactics: integrative, distributive, and avoidance. Integrative tactics are prosocial messages aimed at a mutually satisfactory outcome. Distributive tactics are competitive and often lead to severe and direct effects on the relationship. Avoidance tactics minimize the discussion of conflict to circumvent the conflict altogether.

When conflicts inevitably arise within friendships, friends' goals for the relationship and the tactics used within the friendship conflict (Bevan et al., 2007) will influence the outcomes such conflicts have. If they enter the friendship conflict with positive goals, they are more likely

to use integrative tactics, which would then produce positive outcomes. However, if an individual enters the friendship conflict with negative goals, they are more likely to use distributive or avoidance tactics, which will likely produce negative outcomes.

Outcomes of Friendship Conflict

Actions in the GPA Model

The last step of the GPA model includes actions (i.e., messages uttered to realize a goal; Dillard, 2015). Within the MGT perspective, actions are observable (non)verbal behaviors used to pursue multiple goals (Caughlin & Wilson, 2022). An individual's verbal and nonverbal communication demonstrates how they intend to achieve their goals. Actions vary based on message directness, quantity of reasons offered, and whether they stress positive or negative consequences of complying in relation to how an individual prioritizes their goals (Dillard et al., 1989). Four dimensions of message tactics are particularly important while planning an action: explicitness, dominance, argument, and control over outcomes (Dillard et al.).

Actions are not the primary focus of this dissertation as they focus on the messages themselves (e.g., utterances) used to enact a goal in a given situation. Instead, the focus in the dissertation is the subsequent relational outcomes of those utterances, rather than the utterances themselves. This focus on perceived outcomes is more feasible to capture in a cross-sectional survey. Therefore, in this dissertation, goals are connected to friendship conflict outcomes via tactics. This approach follows the process models proposed in previous serial argument studies that have relied on the GPA as a framework. Actions were not examined in those studies, either; instead, the models proposed included various outcomes that were theorized to occur due to how individuals formed and pursued their goals via tactics—that is, the goals and plans components

of the GPA. Examining outcomes allows identifying and evaluating the perceived consequences that engaging in friendship conflicts has on such relationships.

Outcomes in the Dissertation

Outcomes, in this dissertation, pertain to the subsequent relational outcomes in reaction to the tactics utilized in a conflict. The serial arguments literature (e.g., Bevan et al., 2008, 2014; Cionea et al., 2017) notes that an individual's goals can influence whether an outcome is deemed positively- or negatively-valenced. If an individual pairs a positively-valenced goal with a positive tactic, this combination is more likely to yield positive outcomes (Bevan et al., 2008, 2014). Similarly, for negatively-valenced goals paired with a negative tactic, more negative outcomes are likely to occur. In this dissertation, three outcomes of conflict tactics are explored as knowledge about these effects can have multiple practical implications on friendship communication: perceived resolvability, rumination, and change in relational satisfaction. Each of these outcomes has been examined extensively in the conflict literature, and serial arguments literature, focusing on the outcomes of the conflict rather than the actions. Each outcome has demonstrated relevance for the understanding of conflict literature, and the statistical analyses have indicated that these are effective factors for measuring friendship conflicts.

Perceived Resolvability

Feelings (or lack thereof) of *resolvability* pertain to whether a conflict can be resolved (K. Johnson & Roloff, 2000). A positive start, via constructive goals, coupled with positive tactics, yields positive outcomes, perpetuating a constructive tone for the argument (Cionea et al., 2019a). If both partners want to keep the conflict positive and constructive, they are more likely to do so if they use integrative tactics.

Resolvability and Serial Arguments. Resolvability has been studied in relation to serial arguments and the tactics that predict it. Perceived resolvability is typically positively associated with positive serial argument goals (i.e., positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding) and conflict strategies and inversely related to negative serial argument goals (i.e., negative expressiveness, change other, dominance, hurt other to benefit self, and relational termination) and conflict strategies across contexts (Bevan et al., 2007, 2008; Hample & Allen, 2012; Hample & Krueger, 2011). Previous serial arguments literature has noted a positive relationship between the use of integrative tactics and perceived resolvability of an issue (Bevan et al., 2008; Hample et al., 2012; Hample & Richards, 2015). Commonly, serial argument goals, such as positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding, predict integrative tactics, which then predict increased resolvability. In other words, the more integrative tactics are used, the more individuals perceive their conflict as resolvable. This may be due to the nature of integrative tactics—by sharing messages and goals for mutually beneficial outcomes, partners feel the conflicts are more resolvable.

Distributive tactics tend to predict resolvability negatively (Hample & Allen, 2012; Hample et al., 2012). Reliance on destructive approaches such as distributive tactics diminished perceived resolvability (Cionea et al., 2017). Hample and Richards (2015) noted that the use of distributive tactics leads to decreased perceptions of resolvability. K. Johnson and Roloff (1998) confirmed this notion that perceived resolvability is lower when complaining and criticism (both parts of distributive tactics) are higher. Partners that relied on negatively-valenced goals (e.g., change other and hurt other to benefit self) and distributive tactics reported their serial arguments to be less resolvable than those using positively valenced goals and integrative tactics (Cionea et al., 2019a). With a foundation based on competition and individualistic goals and behaviors,

resolvability can be more difficult. This belief could be attributed to the tactics being enacted forcefully or aggressively. As both partners work toward a more destructive and negatively-valenced ending, it may be more difficult to perceive the conflict as resolved. This outcome can be exacerbated if one or both friends decide to avoid the conflict.

Connections between avoidance and perceived resolvability have been rarely examined in the context of serial arguments. Avoidance could have constructive effects (i.e., a positive relationship with relational satisfaction) if partners believe their relationship is not hurt by avoiding talking about an issue (Cionea et al., 2019a). More likely, however, is that avoidance could negatively affect the perceived resolvability of the issue. At the core of a serial argument rests an unresolved issue that has already been brought up several times, which means it is unlikely to disappear. Avoidance may render the issue to be perceived as less resolvable (Cionea et al., 2019a). K. Johnson and Roloff (1998) noted that avoidance or withdrawal may decrease an individual's perceived resolvability. When an individual's goals are more negatively-valenced, they are more likely to avoid a conflict because they do not want to experience destructive outcomes (e.g., lack of resolvability). For example, Cionea et al. (2019a) found that, when dominance was a primary goal, individuals tended to use avoidance tactics. Dominance is also overly aggressive and can lead to destructive outcomes, such as a lack of resolvability (Carr et al., 2012). Individuals are also likely to avoid so they do not hurt their partner's feelings during the conflict. Even though the two individuals are in conflict, they are still in an interpersonal relationship that likely prioritizes support and not hurting one another's feelings. However, without this ability to share opinions and ideas, the relationship cannot experience that resolvability (Fehr, 1996).

Resolvability and Friendship Conflicts. Based on the information provided, this dissertation predicts that individuals who use integrative tactics perceive increased resolvability in their friendship conflicts. Given the prosocial nature of integrative tactics, it makes sense that friends would like to reach some sort of resolution to their conflict. After all, they have determined a mutual attraction to one another and put time into developing their friendship. This notion is supported by Deutsch's (1994) conclusion that constructive conflict behaviors tend to move toward positive outcomes (e.g., increase resolvability). A positive start (i.e., integrative tactics) will indicate a positive outcome (i.e., increased perceived resolvability). If both friends approach the conflict in a productive manner, it may increase the perceived resolvability of the conflict.

On the contrary, the literature indicates that individuals using distributive tactics will perceive less resolvability in their conflicts. Distributive tactics tend to be destructive behaviors (Deutsch, 1994). As these behaviors become more destructive, friends may only be able to see negative outcomes (e.g., decreased perceived resolvability). In this conflict resolution process, winning is the goal and only the best player can win (Deutsch, 1994). A distributive approach indicates that one friend wants to claim victory over the argument or their friend, even though friendships are egalitarian relationships. If both friends do not approach the conflict in a productive manner, perceived resolvability may decrease.

This dissertation predicts that avoidance produces decreased resolvability in adult friendship conflict. Cionea et al. (2019a) noted that avoidance may cause individuals to perceive decreased resolvability. Friends prioritize support and being mindful of the other's feelings. However, without this ability to share opinions and ideas, the relationship cannot experience that resolvability (Fehr, 1996). Friends may not perceive resolvability without first confronting the

conflict. Without discussing a conflict, there is no mutually beneficial outcome for the friends. Without mutually beneficial outcomes, friends avoid any potential discomfort associated with resolving the conflict (e.g., unwanted emotions). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Perceived resolvability will be positively predicted by (a) integrative tactics and negatively predicted by (b) distributive tactics and (c) avoidance tactics.

Rumination

Rumination refers to individuals' worry or obsession about a conflict, particularly when those behaviors are noticeable and bothersome to an individual (Gold & Wegner, 1995). Rumination can be triggered by frequent conflicts, incongruent goals (K. Johnson & Roloff, 1998), distressing events, choosing not to share information with others, and attempting to not think about the issue (Gold & Wenger, 1995). Scott and McIntosh (1999) noted rumination may be affected by the inability to achieve an individual's goals and may lead to negative affect, which is undesirable for both parties in a conflict. As unaccomplished goals are unpleasant and unwanted states, individuals may try to alleviate this discomfort (Bevan et al., 2008; Scott & McIntosh, 1999). Given that conflict is a consistent form of communication and given the lack of agreement between the two parties about their goals, worry about the future of the friendship and if the friends are compatible can occur. This situation reinforces the notion that rumination is a consequence of argumentative goal incompatibility (Bevan et al., 2008).

Rumination and Serial Arguments. Serial arguments literature has examined the relationship between integrative tactics and rumination, often finding a negative association between the two (Bevan et al., 2008; Cloven & Roloff, 1991). In other words, the use of integrative tactics decreased the likelihood of rumination, which was previously found in other

studies, too (Cloven & Roloff, 1991). Engaging in nonserial arguments (i.e., one episode of an argument) decreases perceptions of rumination. Bevan et al. (2014) found that romantic partners in serial arguments ruminated more than those engaged in nonserial arguments. Nonserial arguments are initiated, enacted, and concluded in one interaction, which may explain why individuals tend to ruminate about these conflicts less than about serial arguments.

There tends to be a positive association between distributive tactics and rumination (Bevan et al., 2014; Cloven & Roloff, 1991). The more distributive tactics are used in a serial argument, the more likely the other person is to ruminate about the conflict. This result may be due to the competitive nature (Deutsch, 1994) of distributive conflict. The competitive nature of such a conflict reinforces a "win-lose" mentality and does not seek a means of positively enacting personal goals. Instead, competitive actions like distributive tactics may lead to negatively-valenced outcomes such as increased rumination.

Serial arguments literature has not found a significant connection between the use of avoidance tactics and rumination (Bevan et al., 2008; Cloven & Roloff, 1991; Miller et al., 2007). This lack of significant findings may be due to the mediating role of context in avoidance tactics, such as the type of conflict (i.e., serial argument versus nonserial argument). Perhaps other variables increase the connection between avoidance tactics and rumination. However, Bevan et al. (2008) and Miller et al. (2007) noted that sensemaking may result from negative conflict communication such as distributive or avoidance tactics.

Rumination and Friendship Conflict. Rumination occurs when an individual thinks about a conflict to the point that it becomes bothersome for them. Often, rumination is related to the inability to achieve an individual's goals (Scott & McIntosh, 1999). This inability creates discomfort (and subsequent conflict) that individuals may try to alleviate in their friendships.

Given the interdependent nature of adult friends, the amount of rumination may be affected by the tactics preceding it. Interestingly, Bevan et al. (2014) found that the voluntary nature of interpersonal relationships may impact rumination outcomes. As friends have a voluntary relationship with presumed equal power, rumination may be less common in friendship conflicts, especially as friends do not have to actively compete for power.

Based on this information, this dissertation proposes that integrative tactics negatively predict rumination. As a serial argument continues, the more individuals tend to ruminate (Bevan et al., 2008). Given the egalitarian nature of friendships, though, friends usually feel empowered to express a desire for mutually beneficial outcomes openly. Although it can be intimidating to discuss information directly, friends share information to build closeness, which implies the use of cooperative approaches and integrative tactics as well. As friends utilize integrative tactics, they will ruminate less.

In contrast to integrative tactics, this dissertation predicts a positive relationship between distributive tactics and increased rumination. Distributive tactics imply a destructive approach to conflict (Deutsch, 1994). Excessive worrying can certainly be destructive for a friendship, especially when competition occurs (Cloven & Roloff, 1991). As distributive tactics view the conflict as a competition for the individual to win, it would make sense that the aggressive and destructive tactics would be conducive to increased worry about the conflict, especially to the point that it is bothersome. As these competitive tactics continue, individuals will ruminate more about their friendship conflicts.

Similar to distributive tactics, this dissertation predicts that the use of avoidance tactics is related to increased rumination. Avoidance tactics are often perceived as negative as they do not help resolve the conflict, therefore increasing rumination. Without any resolution or closure

surrounding the conflict, friends are more likely to worry about/ruminate about the conflict. The uncertainty of the conflict, and lack of decision can be stressful for friends. This outcome may be due to the voluntary nature of friendships (Bevan et al., 2014) as friends are not bound to the relationship by money or family. If one friend does not want to confront another, they can exit or terminate the friendship. Other interpersonal relationships (e.g., romantic relationships and familial relationships) tend to have financial ties (e.g., shared finances) and/or legal ties (e.g., legally married) motivating them more to continue the relationship. However, this dissertation argues that friends build their relationship on shared interests and interactions. Without this shared interest and activity, friends may experience growing concerns about the nature of avoidance and uncertainty about continuing the friendship. This uncertainty can have negative effects on friendships. Therefore, it is predicted that avoidance is inherently negative and increases excessive worry about the friendship conflict, leading to the following hypothesis:

H5: Rumination about the conflict will be negatively predicted by (a) integrative tactics and positively predicted by (b) distributive tactics and (c) avoidance tactics.

Change in Relational Satisfaction

Assessing change in relational satisfaction after a conflict examines the extent to which an individual's perception of the relationship has been damaged or improved after engaging in the conflict. Since conflict is unavoidable in close relationships like friendships (Fehr, 1996), it is helpful to analyze how the conflict tactics friends use influence or change levels of relational satisfaction due to a friendship conflict. Conflict can shape a relationship, in that it is shaped by the tactics used in the conflict and their perceived outcomes.

Changes in Relational Satisfaction and Serial Arguments. Serial arguments literature has examined the relationship between tactics and change in relational satisfaction. Overall,

findings indicate that integrative tactics are related to increased relational satisfaction, whereas distributive tactics are related to decreased relational satisfaction (Cionea et al., 2019a; Hample & Richards, 2015). With the assumption that positively-valenced goals trigger more integrative approaches, the cooperative nature of integrative tactics would logically increase a friend's satisfaction with the relationship in the aftermath of a conflict episode. This increase in relational satisfaction may be triggered by the prosocial nature of integrative tactics as well as an individual's use of integrative tactics for a mutually beneficial outcome. This idea has been reinforced in serial arguments literature (Hample & Cionea, 2012; Hample et al., 2012) in which integrative tactics related positively to a change in relational satisfaction. Partners who relied on integrative tactics also reported that they perceived the serial argument made their relationship with the other person better or improved their opinion of their partner (Cionea et al., 2017). As individuals used more integrative tactics, they also saw an increase in their relational satisfaction (Cionea et al., 2019a; Hample & Richards, 2015).

The more individuals rely on distributive tactics, though, the more likely they are to harm their relationship with their partner (Cionea et al., 2017). The pursuit of negative goals via negative tactics leads to negative outcomes (Cionea et al., 2019a). Gottman (1982) warned that negativity can have negative long-term effects on a romantic relationship, with destructive strategies being associated negatively with satisfaction (Cionea et al., 2019b; Cupach, 1982).

The relationship between avoidance and changes in relational satisfaction is not commonly studied in serial arguments literature. Due to the ambiguous nature of avoidance, it does not always yield a significant relationship with any changes in relational satisfaction (Cionea et al., 2017). The effects of avoidance tactics on relational satisfaction can vary. For example, in Cionea et al. (2017), the authors noted that avoidance can be constructive if partners

believe that their relationship is not hurt by avoiding a discussion about the issue. However, it is more likely that avoidance could negatively affect relational satisfaction due to its relationship with other negative outcomes such as decreased perceived resolvability, increased rumination, and increased stress about the conflict. Thus, the relationship between avoidance tactics and change in relational satisfaction after serial arguments is unclear.

Change in Relational Satisfaction and Friendship Conflict. Changes in relational satisfaction, either positive or negative, are bound to happen in close relationships such as friendships. The outcome helps assess how much, if at all, an episode of conflict affects an individual's perception about the quality of their friendship. Based on the tactics and serial arguments literature, this dissertation predicts that integrative tactics will precede increased relational satisfaction. This hypothesis has been supported in previous serial arguments literature (Cionea et al., 2019a; Hample & Richards, 2015) and the cooperative nature of integrative tactics logically indicate a friend's increased satisfaction in the relationship, often improving perceptions of the relationship (Cionea et al., 2017).

On the contrary, this dissertation contends that the use of distributive tactics predicts lower perceptions of relational satisfaction (i.e., decrease in relational satisfaction). Distributive tactics are competitive, self-interested strategies that result in a less welcoming relational climate (Cionea et al., 2019a) and that affect relational satisfaction negatively (Cionea et al., 2017). Given the voluntary nature of friendships and the norm of a reciprocal relationship, competitive self-interests only hinder more opportunities for happiness in a friendship. Normatively, friendships are built on mutual effort. If those efforts are competitive and destructive, they inhibit that mutuality.

Finally, this dissertation contends that the use of avoidance tactics predicts a decrease in relational satisfaction. Previous research on the demand-withdraw pattern (Caughlin & Scott, 2010) has demonstrated that withdrawing or choosing not to engage in an argument decreases relational satisfaction. Conflict is healthy in friendships. By avoiding it, friends are only hurting their friendship and building resentment. With this information in mind, the following hypothesis is posed:

H6: Change in relational satisfaction after the conflict will be positively predicted by (a) integrative tactics and negatively predicted by (b) distributive and (c) avoidance tactics.

As previously noted, an individual's conflict goals have been found to have a direct effect on conflict behaviors which, in turn, have a direct effect on conflict outcomes. Thus, a direct relationship is expected between conflict goals and conflict tactics as well as conflict tactics and conflict goals. As also previously noted in this dissertation, past studies have illustrated the role of conflict goals, tactics, and outcomes in friendship conflicts. One example is the relationship between positive relational expressiveness and integrative tactics. For instance, past studies have revealed that an individual's pursuit of positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding goals is positively related to the use of integrative tactics (Bevan et al., 2007; Bevan et al., 2008; Cionea et al., 2019b). Specifically, individuals who strive for positively-valenced goals such as positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding tend to use integrative tactics to express their prosocial and mutually beneficial goals. On the contrary, individuals who strive for negatively-valenced goals such as negative expressiveness, change other, dominance, hurt other to benefit self, and relational termination have been found to rely less on integrative tactics, as these goals clash with the prosocial and mutually beneficial nature of integrative tactics.

Another example of the role of friendship conflict goals, tactics, and outcomes is the relationship between positive relational expressiveness and distributive tactics. For instance, past studies have revealed that an individual's use of positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding goals is negatively related to distributive tactics (Bevan et al., 2007; Bevan et al., 2008; Cionea et al., 2019b). Specifically, individuals with positively-valenced goals do not tend to use distributive tactics, as their goals and these tactics do not align. In contrast, individuals who strive to pursue negatively-valenced goals have been found to rely more on distributive tactics, as these goals encourage the individualistic and competitive nature of distributive tactics. A third and final example of the role of friendship conflict goals, tactics, and outcomes is the relationship between positive relational expressiveness and avoidance tactics. For instance, past studies have revealed that an individual's pursuit of positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding goals is negatively related to avoidance tactics (Bevan et al., 2007; Bevan et al., 2008; Cionea et al., 2019b). Specifically, individuals with positively-valenced goals do not tend to use avoidance tactics, as such goals and tactics do not align. Individuals who strive to accomplish negatively-valenced goals, though, tend to rely more on avoidance tactics, as these goals encourage the individualistic nature of avoidance tactics.

Furthermore, each of the three conflict tactics (integrative tactics, distributive tactics, and avoidance tactics) have been found to predict perceived resolvability, rumination, and change in relational satisfaction. In fact, several studies have found that conflict tactics predict these outcomes to varying degrees. For example, integrative tactics have positively predicted resolvability and relational satisfaction after a conflict. However, integrative tactics have negatively predicted rumination. Another example demonstrates that distributive tactics have negatively predicted resolvability and relational satisfaction after a conflict while positively

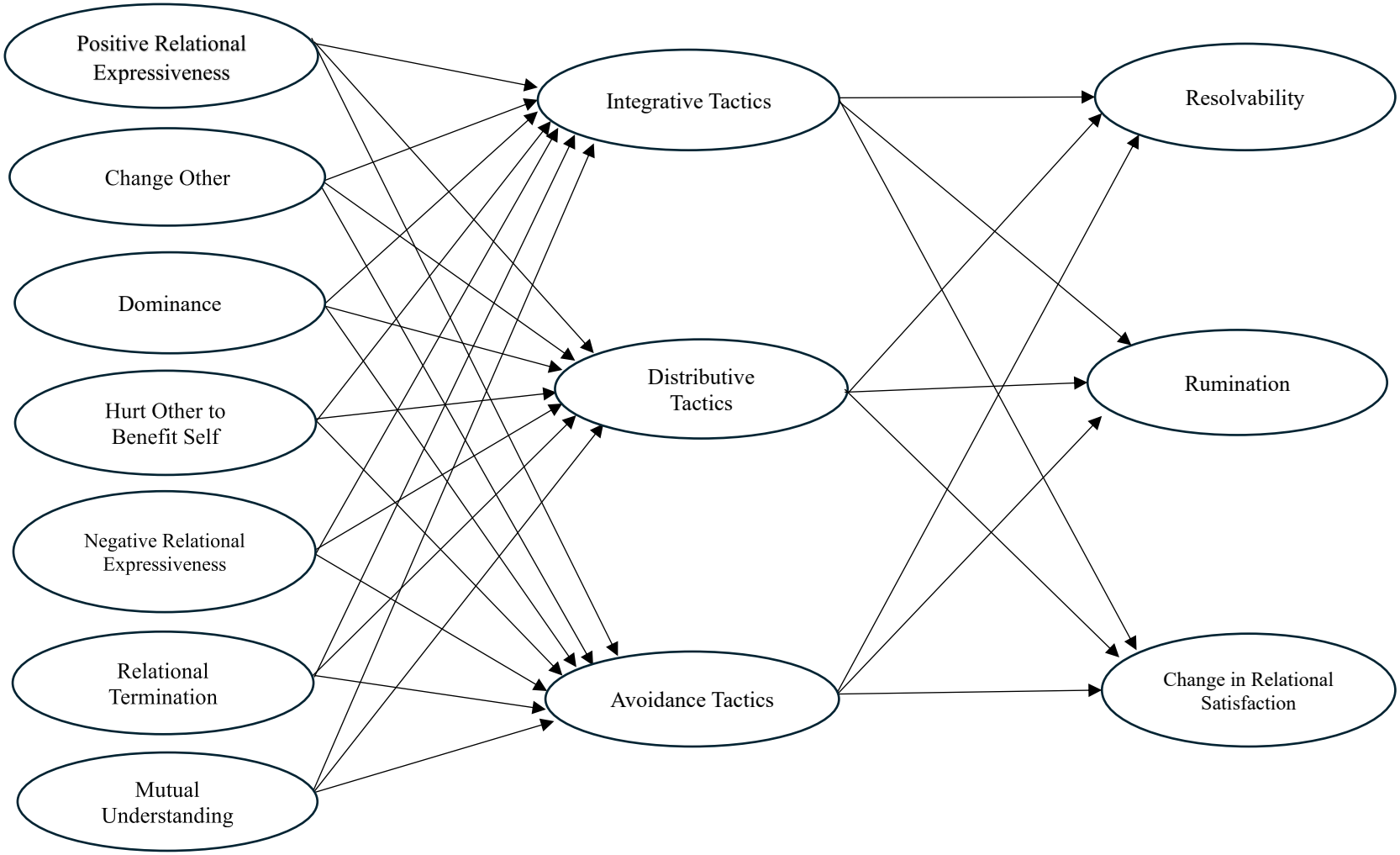
predicting rumination. Finally, avoidance tactics have demonstrated similar outcomes as distributive tactics with avoidance tactics negatively predicting resolvability and relational satisfaction after a conflict while positively predicting rumination. Thus, the existing literature demonstrates the predictive relationship between conflict goals, conflict tactics, and conflict outcomes.

With these predictions in mind, a structural equation model (SEM) is proposed in the current dissertation. Similar to the process models based on the GPA framework from the serial arguments literature discussed throughout this proposal, conflict management processes are analyzed via SEM. This dissertation follows this structure and proposed model of conflict management using the same structure of goals, tactics, and outcomes. to test conflict management in adult friendships (see Figure 1).

This study proposes that conflict tactics function as a mediator between conflict goals as antecedents and resolvability, rumination, and change in relationship as outcomes. The direct relationships detailed above are tested all at once via the SEM proposed. Rather than a series of regressions, SEM is advantageous as it provides a more objective and theory-driven approach to modeling that attempts to minimize bias, random error, and variance caused by extraneous variables. Additionally, utilizing a series of regressions would only provide a series of smaller tests of those same model components allowing more opportunities for bias, random error, and construct-irrelevant variance in the analysis (Tomarken & Waller, 2005). The next section details the method for the pre-screen study and then the following chapter details the main study.

Figure 1

Proposed Model of Adult Friendship Conflict Management



CHAPTER 3: PILOT STUDY ELIGIBILITY METHOD

The purpose of the pilot study was to pre-screen participants and select individuals who qualified for the main study. There were no pre-set pre-screen settings on Prolific that allowed the researcher to filter whether an individual had recently engaged in a friendship conflict. But this information was needed to filter individuals for participation in the main study. Thus, the overall goal of the pre-screen pilot study was to identify eligible participants for the main study. This section will detail the method and results for the pilot study.

Participants

Participants were recruited via a crowd-sourcing platform, Prolific. Power analysis for the proposed model indicated that a final sample size of 511 individuals in the main study would be required for analyses, so the researcher recruited 2,118 participants to account for potentially invalid responses, ensure the model had adequate power for analysis, and maintained room for individuals not to be eligible for the main study. The eligibility criteria for Prolific were that individuals (a) had completed at least 500 tasks on Prolific previously, (b) had at least a 99% approval rating (see Machette, 2022), and (c) were United States residents. Participants were expected to range in age, ethnicity, and gender.

Procedures and Design

Participants first read a description of the study on Prolific. The recruitment message informed them about the purpose of the study, which was to respond to a series of questions regarding their individual friendships and, if applicable, a conflict within that friendship. Interested participants were able to access the online survey hosted on Qualtrics directly from Prolific. Participants were first provided with consent information and asked to provide their

Prolific ID. Next, participants were presented with definitions of a *friend* (i.e., "someone with whom you've developed a relationship voluntarily. The two of you enjoy spending time together, sharing things, and helping each other out. Depending on how close you are, you may see each other sometimes or quite a lot. You may also spend time and effort maintaining this friendship, depending on how close you are to the other person."), *conflict* (i.e., "A **conflict** exists when two people hold opposing ideas, values, etc., or when they have different goals or interests, and they see the other party as standing in their way to accomplish these goals."), and *conflict episode* (i.e., "An **episode of conflict** occurs when the two people engage in a discussion, conversation, quarrel, or fight about their different goals or interests."). Participants were asked to think of individuals who were a friend only, not a coworker, family member, or romantic partner in addition to being a friend. Based on these definitions, participants were asked if they had had a conflict with a friend in the past six months.

If no was selected, the participant was disqualified from the main study. If yes was selected, display logic on Qualtrics then asked if, based on the definition of a conflict episode, the individual had engaged in a conflict episode with a friend in the past six months. If the participant answered no to the question about a conflict episode, they were also not eligible for the main study. If the participant answered yes to both questions, they were eligible for the main study. Display logic on Qualtrics then provided the conflict episode definition again and asked participants to think about the conflict episode they had with a particular friend. If the conflict had occurred previously, they were encouraged to think about the most recent episode.

Next, participants were asked (via an open-ended question) to describe what happened during the conflict episode. Following their open-ended description of the conflict episode, participants were asked (via close-ended questions) how many times the participant had engaged

in this conflict with their friend, and who started the specific conflict episode. Finally, participants were asked how long (in months) they had been friends with the other person, whether they were still friends with them, and their friendship closeness (best friends, close friends, and casual friends; Rose & Serafica, 1986).

The pilot study took participants between 41 seconds and up to 26 minutes (M = 5.10 mins, SD = 3.88 minutes, Mdn = 3.96 minutes to complete. All consenting participants who submitted the study on Prolific were compensated $0.75. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Oklahoma prior to any data collection activities.

Measures

Length of friendship. Participants' length of friendship were measured using an open-response item asking how long the two individuals had been friends, in months.

Conflict frequency. Participants' perceptions of how frequently they engaged in the conflict with their friend was measured using a one-item measure. This item consisted of a multiple-choice question with the following answer options: "How many times before have you engaged in this conflict with your friend?," with three possible answer choices: 1) "Never this is the first time this conflict episode occurred," 2) "We've discussed this conflict once before," and 3) "We've discussed this conflict two or more times."

Conflict initiation. Participants' perceptions of who initiated the conflict was measured with one item, a multiple-choice question: "Who started this specific conflict episode?" Answer choices will include 1) "I started it," 2) "My friend started it," 3) "It wasn't clear who started it," and 4) "It was started in some other way." Skip logic on Qualtrics displayed the question about conflict initiation if the participant indicated the conflict had occurred more than once.

Perceived friendship closeness. Participants' perceived closeness with their friend was evaluated using a one-item multiple choice question. Participants were provided with definitions of each closeness category (based on definitions by Rose & Serafica, 1986) and asked to select which category best describes their closeness with their friend. Answer choices included: 1) "casual friends (i.e., you're friendly and help each other out but this is mainly because you see each other a lot. There isn't necessarily a deep connection or affection, and the bond between you emerges when you're spending time together)," 2) "close friends (i.e., you have a deeper connection because you spend time together and have really gotten to know each other. Friends in these relationships appreciate the support and effort it takes to keep the bond between them strong)," and 3) "best friends (i.e., your closest pals. You talk a lot, spend time together in person, swap gifts, and message each other regularly. You feel close to them and trust them. You both put in a lot of effort to keep the friendship going strong)." All measures for the pilot study are available in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

After compiling the data, the researcher began cleaning the 2,118 responses to the pilot study. Of those 2,118 responses, 879 participants reported they had not had a conflict with a friend within the past six months, so they were removed from the data, and thus were not eligible for the main study. An additional 35 responses were removed due to incompleteness (i.e., more than one response missed).

The remaining 1,204 descriptions of the conflict episode were then examined by the researcher to determine whether participants engaged in a conflict as defined for the current study (i.e., "A **conflict** exists when two people hold opposing ideas, values, etc., or when they have different goals or interests, and they see the other party as standing in their way to

accomplish these goals."). With an understanding of the conflict definition, the researcher familiarized herself with the open-ended data by reading and re-reading the data and making notes of any initial ideas. This included the description of what happened during the conflict episode. The researcher followed Owen's (1984) criteria for identifying themes in participants descriptions, focusing on the recurrence of meaning and the repetition of key words (related to the definition of conflict). As the researcher read and re-read the open-ended descriptions of conflict episodes, descriptions that aligned with the definition of conflict (e.g., different goals and ideas were described to clash with their friend's or a perceived incompatibility in goals existed) were deemed eligible for the main study.

The final sample deemed eligible for the main study consisted of 1,059 participants. These participants' length of friendships ranged from one month to 74.5 years (M = 9.71 years, SD = 10.39 years). Closeness varied between friends with 193 respondents indicating a casual friendship (18.2%), 565 indicating a close friendship (53.4%), and 301 indicating a best friendship (28.4%).

When asked how frequently the individual had engaged in this conflict with their friend, 507 individuals (47.9%) indicated that they had never engaged in this conflict with this friend before, 298 individuals (28.1%) indicated that they had engaged in this conflict with this friend once before, and 254 individuals (24.0%) indicated that they had engaged in this conflict with this friend two or more times before.

When asked to identify who started the conflict, 202 individuals (19.1%) indicated that they started the conflict, 512 individuals (48.3%) indicated that their friend started the conflict, 277 individuals (26.2%) said it was not clear who started the conflict, and 68 individuals (6.4%) respondents that another individual started the conflict. Examples of other individuals who

started the conflict included, “It was started in response to listening and watching the discussion about it that was had by influencers online and expressing our opinions in reaction and disagreeing,” and “We were watching a program about higher education and that started our conversation.”

Most participants (n = 927) indicated that they were still friends with the other person with whom they had the conflict. The remaining 132 participants (12.5%) indicated that they were not friends with that person anymore.

In sum, the pilot study allowed the researcher to identify eligible participants for the main study based on set criteria for conflict among friends. Based on pilot study results, the researcher proceeded to collect responses for the main study from eligible participants.

CHAPTER 4: MAIN STUDY METHOD

To accomplish the dissertation's goals of testing a structural equation model of adult friendship conflicts, the researcher relied on a cross-sectional survey and recruited a diverse adult sample from the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. The following sections detail the participants, procedures, measures, and analyses for the main study.

Participants

Given the study's intent to conduct confirmatory factor analysis and subsequent structural equation model, a power analysis was conducted using an a-priori sample size calculator for structural equation models (Soper, 2025). The analysis was used to determine the appropriate size for detecting moderate effects (η_p^2 = .10; Cohen, 1992) with α set at .05 and power set at .80. The suggested sample from the power analysis size was 511. A larger sample was recruited from Prolific to account for potentially invalid responses (e.g., participants who do not finish the study or failed attention verification questions).

A total of 629 participants consented to participate in the study. Responses from three participants were eliminated due to missing data (i.e., failure to respond to more than 70% of questions). One participant missed more than two attention verification questions, so their response was dropped from the main study analyses. The remaining 625 participants' responses were used for analyses. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 75 years (*M* = 41.06 years, *SD* = 12.20 years). Their friends' ages ranged from 19 to 84 years (*M* = 40.34 years, *SD* = 12.74 years). Participants' average friendship length was 10.30 years (*SD* = 5.58 years). Participants' occupations included many forms of management, teaching, working in healthcare, or retired. Participants' friends' occupations included teaching, retirement, engineering, and unemployed. Further detailed demographics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics (N = 625)

Variables		*N*	(%)
Sex			
	Male	323	51.8%
	Female	293	47%
	Non-binary/third gender	5	0.8%
	Prefer not to answer	4	0.64%
Ethnicity			
	American Indian or Alaska Native	5	0.8%
	Asian	39	6.3%
	Black or African American	100	16%
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	2	0.3%
	Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx	41	6.6%
	White	424	67.9%
	A combination of some of the above	9	1.4%
	Other	3	0.5%
	Prefer not to answer	2	0.3%
Education			
	High school degree or less	64	10.3%
	Some college	96	15.4%
	2-year college degree	48	7.7%
	4-year college degree	263	42.1%
	Professional degree	21	3.3%
	Graduate degree (e.g., MA or PhD)	132	21.2%
	Prefer not to answer	1	0.2%
US State			
	Alabama	7	1.1%
	Alaska	2	0.3%
	Arizona	16	2.6%
	Arkansas	3	0.6%
	California	64	10.2%
	Colorado	4	0.8%
	Connecticut	8	1.3%
	Delaware	5	0.8%
	District of Columbia	1	0.2%
	Florida	51	8.2%
	Georgia	26	4.2%
	Hawaii	2	0.3%
	Idaho	1	0.2%
	Illinois	23	3.7%
	Indiana	8	1.3%

	Iowa	4	0.6%
	Kansas	4	0.6%
	Kentucky	7	1.1%
	Louisiana	6	1.4%
	Maine	3	0.5%
	Maryland	8	1.3%
	Massachusetts	9	1.4%
	Michigan	17	2.7%
	Minnesota	7	1.1%
	Mississippi	9	1.4%
	Missouri	11	1.8%
	Montana	0	0%
	Nebraska	5	0.8%
	Nevada	5	0.8%
	New Hampshire	4	0.6%
	New Jersey	17	2.7%
	New Mexico	2	0.3%
	New York	42	6.7%
	North Carolina	27	4.3%
	North Dakota	2	0.3%
	Ohio	25	4.0%
	Oklahoma	7	1.1%
	Oregon	9	1.4%
	Pennsylvania	36	10.4%
	Puerto Rico	0	0%
	Rhode Island	2	0.3%
	South Carolina	7	1.1%
	South Dakota	1	0.2%
	Tennessee	9	1.4%
	Texas	65	10.4%
	Utah	6	1.0%
	Vermont	0	0%
	Virginia	18	2.9%
	Washington	12	1.9%
	West Virgina	9	1.4%
	Wisconsin	9	1.4%
	Wyoming	0	0%
Friendship Closeness			
	Casual friends	91	14.5%
	Close friends	358	57.4%
	Best friends	176	28.2%
Friend’s Sex			

	Male	325	52.1%
	Female	295	47.3%
	Non-binary/third gender	2	0.3%
	Prefer not to answer	3	0.5%
Friend's Ethnicity			
	American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.2%
	Asian	38	6.1%
	Black or African American	90	14.4%
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	3	0.5%
	Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx	47	7.5%
	White	427	68.4%
	A combination of some of the above	13	2.1%
	Other	5	0.8%
	Prefer not to answer	1	0.2%
Friend's Education			
	High school degree or less	107	17.1%
	Some college	79	12.7%
	2-year college degree	44	7.1%
	4-year college degree	241	38.6%
	Professional degree	43	6.9%
	Graduate degree (e.g., MA or PhD)	92	14.7%
	Prefer not to answer	1	0.2%
	Do not know	18	2.8%
Friend's US State			
	Alabama	10	1.6%
	Alaska	1	0.2%
	Arizona	17	2.7%
	Arkansas	1	0.2%
	California	79	12.6%
	Colorado	8	1.3%
	Connecticut	4	0.6%
	Delaware	3	0.5%
	District of Columbia	2	0.3%
	Florida	48	7.7%
	Georgia	25	4.0%
	Hawaii	1	0.2%
	Idaho	2	0.3%
	Illinois	25	4.0%
	Indiana	6	1.0%
	Iowa	3	0.5%
	Kansas	3	0.5%
	Kentucky	10	1.6%

Louisiana	7	1.1%
Maine	2	0.3%
Maryland	8	1.3%
Massachusetts	8	1.3%
Michigan	22	3.5%
Minnesota	5	0.8%
Mississippi	9	1.4%
Missouri	10	1.6%
Montana	0	0%
Nebraska	4	0.6%
Nevada	5	0.8%
New Hampshire	4	0.6%
New Jersey	14	2.2%
New Mexico	2	0.3%
New York	52	8.3%
North Carolina	23	3.7%
North Dakota	2	0.3%
Ohio	23	3.7%
Oklahoma	8	1.3%
Oregon	9	1.4%
Pennsylvania	36	5.8%
Puerto Rico	1	0.2%
Rhode Island	1	0.2%
South Carolina	11	1.8%
South Dakota	1	0.2%
Tennessee	9	1.4%
Texas	59	9.4%
Utah	4	0.6%
Vermont	1	0.2%
Virginia	14	1.4%
Washington	9	1.0%
West Virgina	6	1.0%
Wisconsin	7	1.1%
Wyoming	1	0.2%

Procedures

Participants for the main study were recruited via Prolific from those who were deemed eligible following the pre-screen survey. The survey began with consent information, then participants were asked to read and familiarize themselves with the definitions of *friendship* and

conflict. Participants were then asked to provide open-ended descriptions of their conflict with their friend. Next, participants responded to scale items that measured their goals for the conflict episode, the individual's behaviors enacted in the conflict episode, and the subsequent outcomes of the conflict episode (i.e., rumination, resolvability, and change in relational satisfaction), five attention verification questions included throughout the survey, and demographic questions about self and friend. Responses from participants who did not complete the study or failed more than two attention verification questions were eliminated.

The study took, on average, approximately 15 minutes to complete *(M* = 14.68 minutes, *SD* = 9.72 minutes). Respondents were paid $3.00 for their participation provided they passed all but two attention verification questions (per Prolific compensation policies). The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Oklahoma prior to any data collection activities.

Measures

Covariates

Several variables were measured so that they could be controlled for during analyses, if needed, given previous studies that have demonstrated their influence on serial argument processes (Cionea et al., 2019b; Hample & Kruger, 2011; A. Johnson, 2019b). All covariates were adapted to friendships. Specifically, the following variables were measured: demographics for participants and their friends as well as the length of their friendship and friendship type.

Conflict Goals

Conflict goals were measured using an adapted scale from the serial argument goals developed by Bevan et al. (2008) and Bevan (2014). The items were reworded to measure the goals individuals perceived as important during their conflict episode with their friend. Twenty-

two items from the scale were utilized, with three of the four items from positive relational expressiveness goals not included due to error. A seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *not at all important* to 7 = *extremely important* was used. Higher scores on each sub-scale indicated higher importance accorded to pursuing that specific goal.

Positive relational expressiveness was meant to be assessed with four items (e.g., "To show liking or love for the other person."). Cronbach's alpha reliability for positive relational expressiveness has been good, α = 0.88 (Bevan et al., 2008) and α = 0.85 (Bevan et al., 2007). However, due to an error on the researcher's behalf, only one item from this sub-scale was measured. Therefore, this goal was not included in the main study's data analyses. *Mutual understanding* (e.g., "To negotiate with my friend."), *negative expressiveness* (e.g., "To express frustration."), *changing one's friend* (e.g., "To change my friend's habits."), *dominance* (e.g., "To feel some control over the situation."), and *relational termination* (e.g., "To end the friendship with my friend.") were measured with three items each. Cronbach's alpha reliability for these goals has been mostly good: mutual understanding α = 0.71 (Bevan et al., 2008) and α = 0.81 (Bevan et al., 2007); negative expressiveness α = 0.77 (Cionea et al., 2019b) and α = 0.78 (Bevan et al., 2007); changing one's partner α = 0.83 (Cionea et al., 2019b) and α = 0.86 (Bevan et al., 2007); dominance α = 0.70 (Bevan et al., 2008) and α = 0.78 (Bevan et al., 2007); and relational termination (α = 0.86, Bevan et al., 2007; α = 0.76; Cionea et al., 2019b). Finally, *hurt other to benefit self* was measured with seven items (e.g., "To make my friend feel angry."). Cronbach's alpha reliability for hurt other to benefit self has been excellent, α = 0.90 (Cionea et al., 2019b) and α = 0.92 (Bevan et al., 2007). For the current study, reliability ranged from poor to good, depending on the subscale (e.g., dominance goals PCR = 0.59 and hurt other to benefit self PCR = 0.91). Reliabilities scores for all conflict goals in this study are included in Table 4.

Conflict Tactics

Similar to Cionea et al.'s (2019a) approach, conflict tactics used in the episode of friendship conflict participants described were measured using 32 items adapted from Bevan and Sparks (2014). All items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree.* Higher scores indicated higher use of these tactics during the conflict episode. Three sub-scales were used: integrative tactics, distributive tactics, and avoidance tactics. *Integrative tactics* were measured using 12 items (e.g., "I calmly discussed the situation."). Cronbach's alpha reliability for integrative tactics has been good, $\alpha = 0.87$ (Bevan et al., 2014). *Distributive tactics* were measured using 14 items (e.g., "I assertively stated my position."). Cronbach's alpha reliability for distributive tactics has been good, $\alpha = 0.84$ (Bevan et al., 2014). *Avoidance tactics* were measured with six items (e.g., "I avoided my friend."). Cronbach's alpha reliability for avoidance tactics has been low sometimes, $\alpha = 0.69$ (Bevan et al., 2014) but has been good in other studies (e.g., Bevan et al., 2007 reported $\alpha = 0.88$ and Vanderbilt & Solomon, 2021 indicated $\alpha = 0.87$). Reliabilities for conflict tactics for the present study were good and are included in Table 4.

Resolvability

Resolvability was measured using six items from K. Johnson and Roloff's (1998) work on serial arguments, reworded for the conflict episode participants described. A Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* was used. Higher scores indicated higher perceived resolvability of the conflict between friends. Items include, "I didn't think we would ever agree on the issue that sparked the conflict" (reverse-coded) or "I thought that a productive solution for the conflict could occur." Previous alpha reliability scores for the original measures indicate very good reliability. For example, K. Johnson and Roloff (2000) reported $\alpha =$

0.88, and A. Johnson et al. (2011) reported α = 0.93. The reliability score for resolvability in the current study was also good (PCR = 0.84, see Table 4).

Rumination

Rumination was measured using Cloven and Roloff's (1991) five item scale, slightly edited to ask participants to rate how much they continued to think about the friendship conflict after it occurred. A Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a great deal* was used. Higher scores indicated higher rumination. Example items include: "How often did you worry about the conflict?" and "How much time did you spend reflecting on the conflict?". Previous reliability has been excellent, α = 0.93 as reported by Cloven and Roloff (1991). The reliability score for rumination in the current study was very good (PCR = 0.88, see Table 4).

Change in Relational Satisfaction

Change in relational satisfaction was measured using items from Cionea et al. (2019b). A Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* was used. Higher scores indicated the friendship became better, meaning positive changes in friendship satisfaction. Example items include, "My friendship with my friend is more positive due to this conflict." Previous reliability scores have been good: Cionea and A. Johnson (2022) reported α = 0.82 and Cionea et al. (2019b) reported α = 0.86. The reliability score for change in relational satisfaction in the current study was also very good (PCR = 0.88, see Table 4).

Attention Verification Questions

To ensure participants were focused whilst completing the study, six attention verification questions were included in the survey, interspersed with each scale items, and presented in randomized order. Participants were asked to provide a specific answer, such as "Please select 'Highly disagree' as your answer for this statement."

Demographic Information for Self and Friend

Participants were also asked to indicate demographic information relevant for the main study. Similar to the pilot study, participants were asked to indicate their age (open-ended question), gender (multiple-choice question), and racial/ethnic background (multiple-choice question), education (multiple-choice question), occupation (open-ended question), and state of residence (multiple-choice question). Participants were also asked to indicate how long in months they had been friends with the other person (open-ended question), their perceived closeness with their friend (multiple-choice question), their friend's age, in years (open-ended question), their friend's biological sex (multiple-choice question), their friend's ethnicity (multiple choice question), the friend's highest level of completed education (multiple choice question), their friend's state of residence (multiple choice question), and the friend's occupation (open-ended question). The list of all demographic questions for the main study is included in Appendix B.

Analysis

Data Examination and Cleaning

Prior to analyses, data were examined and cleaned. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded. Missing data were evaluated visually by the researcher to check whether data were missing at random or followed some missingness pattern. Given that less than one percent of scores were missing across all continuous variables, without any discernible patterns, data were determined to be missing at random. Of all 42,500 scores, 117 missing values (0.28%) were replaced using the series mean (D. Johnson & Young, 2011). The positive relational expressiveness goal was dropped from analysis as three of the four items were accidentally not

measured in the main study. Next, data was examined for outliers (i.e., values > |3| standard deviation scores from mean; Osborne, 2013). No outliers were found.

The researcher then examined the data for normality in its distribution (i.e., skewness < |1|; Osborne, 2013). Descriptive statistics in SPSS revealed that 16 items were severely skewed, either positively or negatively. This deviation from normality indicated that data transformations were necessary to decrease each item's skewness and kurtosis. Following Fink's (2009) suggested formula for the single-bend family of transformations, the equation used to transform the data was: $Y^* = (Y + k)^{\lambda}$. Table 2 provides a detailed description of skewness and kurtosis values pre- and post-transformations. Negatively skewed data were transformed using a power transformation in which the negatively skewed scores were raised to the second power. Positively skewed data were transformed using a log10 transformation. These transformations decreased the skewness but did not render the data completely normal, as skewness values greater than 1 and less than 2 remained for several variables. However, the researcher stopped the transformation process to avoid over-transforming the data.

Table 2

Skewness and Kurtosis Values Pre- and Post-Transformations. Values of k and λ in the Transformation Equation $Y^* = (Y + k)^{\lambda}$

Variable	Pre-Transformation				Post-Transformation			
	Skewness		Kurtosis		Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	*S.E.*	Statistic	*S.E.*	Statistic	*S.E.*	Statistic	*S.E.*
HURT1	2.290	.098	5.229	.195	1.716	.098	2.398	.19
HURT2	2.410	.098	5.927	.195	1.764	.098	2.801	.195
HURT3	2.638	.098	7.240	.195	2.090	.098	3.999	.195
HURT4	2.274	.098	4.926	.195	1.745	.098	2.423	.195
HURT5	2.420	.098	5.797	.195	1.829	.098	2.919	.195
HURT6	1.419	.098	1.097	.195	.630	.098	-.858	.195
RELTERM2	1.281	.098	.634	.195	.508	.098	-1.027	.195
AVOID3	1.392	.098	1.023	.195	.975	.098	-.082	.195
AVOID4	1.043	.098	-.007	.195	.674	.098	-.755	.195
AVOID7	1.539	.098	1.810	.195	1.035	.098	.269	.195

INTEG1	-1.388	.098	1.601	.195	-.579	.098	-.280	.195
DISTRIB1	2.567	.098	6.788	.195	1.936	.098	3.462	.195
DISTRIB2	-1.224	.098	.900	.195	-.531	.098	-.534	.195
DISTRIB3	1.727	.098	1.817	.195	1.396	.098	.695	.195
DISTRIB7	1.405	.098	.911	.195	1.040	.098	-.109	.195
DISTRIB11	1.897	.098	3.041	.195	1.413	.098	1.175	.195

Note: $k = 0$, λ = second power for negatively skewed items and log10 for positively skewed items.
MUT = mutual understanding, NEGEXP = negative relational expressiveness, CHANGE = change other, DOM = dominance, HURT = hurt other to benefit self, RELTERM = relational termination, INTEG = integrative tactics, DISTRIB = distributive tactics, AVOID = avoidance tactics, RESOLVE = resolvability, RUMIN = rumination, RELSAT = changes in relational satisfaction

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Next, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for all continuous scales to ensure each scale possessed validity and factor consistency (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). Data were uploaded to LISREL 12 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2022) and the CFA model was run by using the raw data as input, maximum likelihood as the estimation method, making the metric assumption (i.e., first indicator in each scale set to one), and allowing the latent factors to covary by default.

CFA model fit was evaluated using the following standards: the chi-square statistic, which, ideally, should be non-significant, the RMSEA, which should be ≤ .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993), the CFI, which should be ≥ .90 (Bentler, 1990; Marsh & Hau, 1996), and the SRMR, which should be ≤ .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Hu and Bentler (1999) recommend a CFI ≥ .95 and an RMSEA ≤ .08. However, these guidelines are rather stringent. Given this was one of the first studies to adapt all scales to friendship conflict, the researcher employed more liberal guidelines from the literature. The initial model (see Table 3 below for fit indices) showed poor fit. To improve model fit, possible areas of strain on the model were examined (Brown, 2015), including standardized path coefficients from each latent factor to its indicators. Standardized path coefficients were reviewed to ensure scores were at or above 0.65. The researcher utilized this criterion (standardized coefficients ≥ 0.65) to ensure each sub-scale could have at least two items retained in the CFA. Albeit recommended in the literature (Brown, 2015), standardized

coefficients ≥ 0.70 would have been too strict of a criterion, causing the researcher to remove more items and, possibly, decreasing model fit (Brown, 2015). Standardized coefficients ≥ 0.65 also indicate moderately strong construct validity and help avoid weak indicators. Upon initial review, five items did not meet this criterion. To mitigate this issue, the researcher iteratively removed the lowest standardized path coefficient indicator on each scale with a score below 0.65. Overall, nine items were removed over three iterations of the CFA (see Table 3 for exact items).

In an additional effort to improve model fit, the researcher examined the possibility of permitting covariances between the errors of items within the same scale that were worded similarly or shared some wording similarity (Brown, 2015). In total, six pairs of error covariances were permitted. For example, items one and six on the avoidance tactics scale were "I tried to change the subject" (avoidance1) and "I changed the topic of discussion" (avoidance6). Due to the similar wording within the items, the errors were allowed to covary (see Table 3 for all items whose errors were allowed to covary). After these modifications, the CFA model fit was adequate, meeting several of the model fit guidelines used as assessment criteria for the model (see Table 3 for fit indices). For example, an indication of good model fit for CFI is a score at or above 0.90 (Betler, 1990; Marsh & Hau, 1996), which the CFA model met. Other criteria also exhibited good model fit as both the RMSEA and SRMR met the threshold values recommended in some of the literature [i.e., RMSEA ≤ 0.08 (Brown & Cudek, 1993) and SRMR ≤ 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999)]. Additionally, with each model, the chi square statistic decreased.

Table 3
Confirmatory Factor Analyses Results

Model	χ^2	*df*	*p*	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
Initial model	8,228.66	2,348	0.000	0.063	0.77	0.09
Intermediate model[1]	3,858.67	1,158	0.000	0.061	0.853	0.07

Revised model[2]	2,954.43	1,152	0.000	0.050	0.90	0.07

Note: $N = 625$

[1]Revised model without item 3 on the hurt other to benefit self goal, item 5 on the avoidance scale, items 2, 6, and 10 from the integrative tactics scale, items 8, 12, and 13 on the distributive tactics scale, and item 4 on the change in relational satisfaction scale.

[2]Error covariances were permitted for avoidance scale items 1 and 6, integrative scale items 1 and 11, distributive scale items 5 and 10, rumination items 3 and 4, resolvability scale items 1 and 2, and change in relational satisfaction scale items 1 and 5.

For analysis, principal components were extracted. The researcher conducted a principal component analysis (PCA) in SPSS for each scale, using the items retained post-CFA, to create composite variables based on the observed measurement items (I. Cionea, personal communication, May 30, 2025). As some data were transformed using two separate transformations (e.g., log10 and raised to the second power; Fink, 2009), the data now had different metrics and thus could not be simply averaged to create composite variables. Therefore, the researcher utilized PCA as a data reduction method by combining all the items in a scale, via the linear transformation that PCA permits, into their PCA composites. These regression principal component scores were saved as variables and used further for subsequent analyses (Dunteman, 1989).

Reliability scores are included in Table 4. Given the study's data transformations, traditional measures of internal consistency (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) would not have made sense. Instead, PC reliabilities (Serlin & Kaiser, 1976) for observed PCA composites and Hancock's coefficient *H* (Hancock & Mueller, 2001) for the latent factors were calculated. PC reliabilities were calculated using the formula (N/N-1)*(E-1/E), where *E* is the eigenvalue of the first principal component and *N* is the number of items retained in the scale (see Cionea et al., 2018; Serlin & Kaiser, 1976). PC reliabilities were good, except for dominance, which was weak. Coefficient *H* reliabilities were calculated using the standardized loadings (λ) of indicators of a latent factor. The formula for *H* represents the proportion of variance in the construct explained

by its own indicators. Scores range from 0 to 1, with values over .70 being considered acceptable (Hancock & Mueller, 2001). Overall, *H* scores were good, except the value for dominance.

Table 4
Reliability Scores for Continuous Study Variables

	Coefficient *H*	PC reliability
Negative Expressiveness	.79	.78
Mutual Understanding	.79	.78
Dominance	.59	.59
Relational Termination	.89	.89
Change Other	.83	.80
Hurt Other to Benefit Self	.91	.91
Avoidance Tactics	.84	.85
Integrative Tactics	.83	.89
Distributive Tactics	.81	.87
Rumination	.90	.88
Resolvability	.85	.84
Change in Relational Satisfaction	.91	.88

Covariate Analysis

Before testing the dissertation's hypotheses, a covariate analysis was performed to examine whether demographic variables, friendship characteristics, and conflict characteristics needed to be controlled for during the main hypotheses analyses. To do so, bivariate correlational analyses were performed to examine the relationship between the continuous variables (i.e., goals, tactics, outcomes) and the continuous demographics and friendship characteristics (i.e., participants' age and the length of their friendship). Two variables had significant but weak relationships (a) the participant's age and the goal to change the other person ($r = .09$, $p = .03$) and (b) the participant's friend's age and the use of avoidance tactics ($r = .10$, $p = .01$; see Table 5). These were deemed to be inconsequential, weak relationships, so neither were used as covariates in subsequent study analyses.

Next, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to examine whether the nominal demographics (i.e., participant's sex, ethnicity, education, and state of residence, and

the friend's sex, ethnicity, education, and state of residence) and friendship characteristics (i.e., closeness level) yielded any differences on the study's continuous variables. None of the multivariate tests were significant.

Table 5
Bivariate Correlations for Demographic Variables and Observed, Continuous Study Variables

	Age	Length of Friendship	Friend's age
1. Negative Expressiveness	.03	-.05	.03
2. Mutual Understanding	.00	-.05	.04
3. Dominance	.04	.03	.03
4. Relational Termination	.05	-.01	.03
5. Change Other	.09*	.05	.03
6. Hurt Other to Benefit Self	.03	.00	.05
7. Avoidance Tactics	.07	.02	.08
8. Integrative Tactics	-.02	.03	.04
9. Distributive Tactics	.07	-.02	.10*
10. Rumination	-.01	-.04	-.01
11. Resolvability	-.04	.04	.07
12. Change in Relational Satisfaction	-.06	-.02	.02

Note: * $p < .05$.

Hypothesis Testing

The researcher tested the study's hypotheses using a structural equation model (SEM), which was conducted in LISREL 12 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2022) based on the final CFA solution and the same assumptions as the ones for the CFA. Using the standardized and unstandardized solutions, gamma and beta path coefficients connecting the latent factors (see Table 6) were examined to determine whether the hypotheses were supported or not. To evaluate the relationships of interest, *p* -values less than .05 for paths between the latent factors indicated significant relationships (Brown, 2015). Figure 2 includes the revised model with significant paths only. All coefficient reported below are standardized ones.

H1 posed that the (b) mutual understanding goal would positively predict the use of integrative tactics. H1b was supported as mutual understanding significantly and positively

predicted the use of integrative tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = .76, $p \leq .001$). H1 also posed that (c) negative expressiveness, (d) change other, (e) dominance, (f) hurt other to benefit self, and (g) relational termination would negatively predict integrative tactics. H1c was not supported as negative expressiveness was not significantly related to integrative tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = -.03, p = .63). H1d was supported as change the other person was significantly and negatively related to integrative tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = -.11, $p \leq .01$). H1e was supported as dominance was significantly and negatively associated with integrative tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = -.27 $p < .001$). H1f was not supported as hurt other to benefit self was not significantly related to integrative tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = .04, p = .46). H1g was also not supported as relational termination was not significant related to integrative tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = -.05, p = .21). Thus, H1 was partially supported.

H2 posed that the (b) mutual understanding goal would be negatively predictive of distributive tactics. H2b was supported as mutual understanding significantly and negatively predicted the use of distributive tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = -.09, $p \leq .01$). H2 also posed that (c) negative expressiveness, (d) change other, (e) dominance, (f) hurt other to benefit self, and (g) relational termination would positively predict distributive tactics. H2c was not supported as negative relational expressiveness goals did not significantly predict the use of distributive tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = .05, p = .38). H2d was supported as change other was significantly and positively predictive of distributive tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = .19, $p \leq .001$). H2e was not supported as the dominance goal did not significantly predict distributive tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = .13, p = .09). H2f was supported as the hurt other to benefit the self goal positively and significantly predicted the use of distributive tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized}$ = .64, $p \leq .001$). H2g was not supported as the goal of

relational termination did not significantly predict the use of distributive tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized} = .01$, $p = .87$). Thus, H2 was partially supported.

H3 posed that the (b) mutual understanding goal would be negatively predictive of avoidance tactics. H3b was not supported as mutual understanding did not significantly predict the use of avoidance tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized} = .09$, $p = .08$). H3 also posed that (c) negative expressiveness, (d) change other, (e) dominance, (f) hurt other to benefit self, and (g) relational termination would positively predict avoidance tactics. H3c was supported as negative relational expressiveness goals significantly and negatively predicted the use of avoidance tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized} = -.17$, $p \leq .05$). H3d was supported as the change other goal significantly predict the use of avoidance tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized} = -.12$, $p \leq .05$). H3e was not supported as the dominance goal did not significantly predict the use of avoidance tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized} = -.15$, $p = .17$). H3f was supported as the goal to hurt other to benefit self was significantly and positively related to the use of avoidance tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized} = .65$, $p < .001$). H3g was supported as the goal of relational termination significantly and positively predicted the use of avoidance tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized} = .12$, $p \leq 0.01$). Thus, H3 was partially supported.

H4 posed that the increased resolvability of a friendship conflict would be positively predicted by (a) integrative tactics and negatively predicted by (b) distributive tactics and (c) avoidance tactics. H4a was supported as the use of integrative tactics positively and significantly predicted increased resolvability ($\beta_{Standardized} = .29$, $p \leq .001$). H4b was supported as the use of distributive tactics negatively and significantly predicted increased resolvability ($\beta_{Standardized} = -.21$, $p \leq .001$). H4c was also supported as the use of avoidance tactics negatively and significantly predicted increased resolvability ($\beta_{Standardized} = -.18$, $p \leq .001$). H4 was supported.

H5 posed that rumination about a friendship conflict would be negatively predicted by (a) integrative tactics and positively predicted by (b) distributive tactics and (c) avoidance tactics. H5a was not supported as originally posited as increased use of integrative tactics significantly yet positively predicted an increase in rumination, so in the opposite direction than predicted ($\beta_{Standardized} = .23$, $p \leq .001$). H5b was supported as increased use of distributive tactics significantly and positively predicted an increase in rumination ($\beta_{Standardized} = .35$, $p \leq .001$). H5c was not supported as proposed as increased use of avoidance tactics significantly predicted a decrease in rumination, not an increase, as hypothesized ($\beta_{Standardized} = -.13$, $p \leq .01$). Thus, overall, H5 relationships were significant but not as posited; hence, H5 was partially supported.

H6 posed that change in relational satisfaction after a friendship conflict would be positively predicted by (a) integrative tactics and negatively predicted by (b) distributive tactics and (c) avoidance tactics. H6a was supported as change in relational satisfaction after a conflict was significantly and positively predicted by an increased use of integrative tactics ($\beta_{Standardized} = .46$, $p \leq .001$). H6b was also supported as a change in relational satisfaction after a friendship conflict was significantly and negatively predicted by using distributive tactics ($\beta_{Standardized} = -.11$, $p \leq .01$). Finally, H6c was supported as change in relational satisfaction after a friendship conflict was significantly and negatively predicted by the use of avoidance tactics ($\beta_{Standardized} = -.15$, $p \leq .001$). Therefore, H6 was supported.

Table 6

Standardized Gamma and Beta Path Coefficients Connecting Latent Factors

	γ	β
MUT → INTEG	.76**	
NEGEXP → INTEG	-.03	
CHANGE → INTEG	-.11*	
DOM → INTEG	-.27**	
HURT → INTEG	.04	
RELTERM → INTEG	-.05	
MUT → DISTRIB	-.09*	

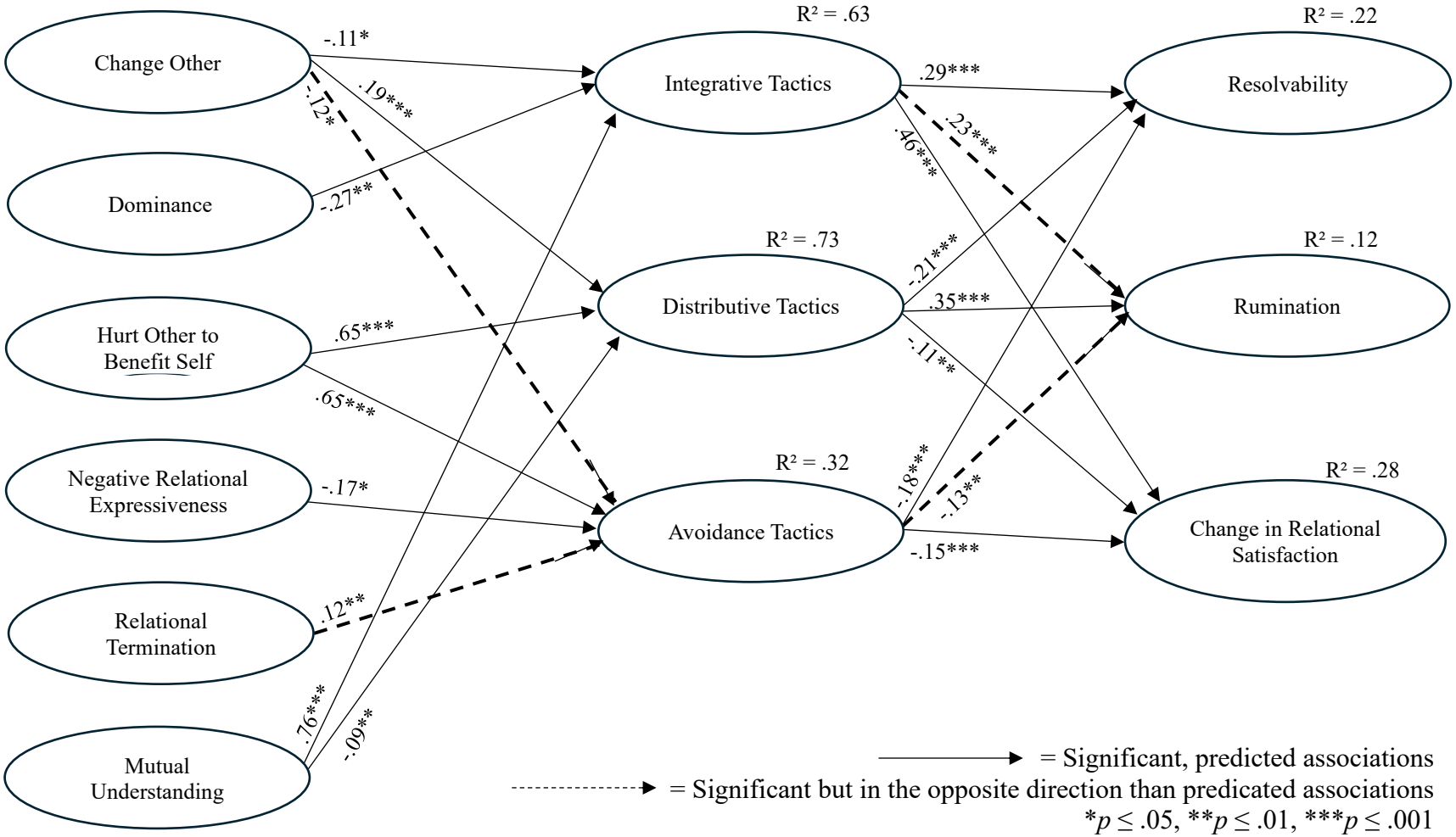
NEGEXP → DISTRIB	.05	
CHANGE → DISTRIB	.19***	
DOM → DISTRIB	.13	
HURT → DISTRIB	.65***	
RELTERM → DISTRIB	.01	
MUT → AVOID	.09	
NEGEXP → AVOID	-.17*	
CHANGE → AVOID	-.12*	
DOM → AVOID	-.15	
HURT → AVOID	.65***	
RELTERM → AVOID	.12**	
INTEG → RESOLVE		.29***
DISTRIB → RESOLVE		-.21***
AVOID → RESOLVE		-.18***
INTEG → RUMIN		.23***
DISTRIB → RUMIN		.35***
AVOID → RUMIN		-.13**
INTEG → RELSAT		.46***
DISTRIB → RELSAT		-.11*
AVOID → RELSAT		-.15***

Note: MUT = mutual understanding, NEGEXP = negative relational expressiveness, CHANGE = change other, DOM = dominance, HURT = hurt other to benefit self, RELTERM = relational termination, INTEG = integrative tactics, DISTRIB = distributive tactics, AVOID = avoidance tactics, RESOLVE = resolvability, RUMIN = rumination, RELSAT = changes in relational satisfaction

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

Figure 2

A Model of Friendship Conflict



CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study aimed to extend our understanding of adult friendship conflicts by examining episodes of such conflicts. Specifically, the study focused on the direct relationships between goals, tactics, and outcomes in adult friendship conflicts. To examine these associations, the study tested a structural equation model connecting these panels of variables. Results from this process model of direct relationships indicate that an individual's goals (and their positive or negative valence) influence the conflict tactics selected and then these conflict tactics influence the outcomes. For example, if an individual pairs a positively-valenced goal with a positive tactic, this combination is more likely to yield positive outcomes, similar to findings in previous literature (Bevan et al., 2008, 2014). Similarly, for negatively-valenced goals paired with a negative tactic, outcomes are more likely to be negative, also consistent with previous research that has highlighted the destructive effects of such a negative pattern for approaching conflicts (Cionea et al., 2019b; Hample et al., 2012).

Relationship conflict goals and tactics have been examined extensively in serial arguments literature. For example, several studies have revealed that conflict goals are predictive of conflict tactics (Bevan et al., 2004, 2008). Previous serial argument studies (Bevan, 2004; Hample & Cionea, 2012) have demonstrated that positively-valenced goals, such as positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding, tend to be positively related to integrative tactics. Negatively-valenced goals, such as negative expressiveness, changing the other, dominance, hurt other to benefit self, and relational termination, tend to be negatively related to the use of integrative tactics. Individuals pursuing negatively-valenced goals (e.g., negative expressiveness, dominance, change the other person) often tend to use more distributive tactics

(Hample & Cionea, 2012; Hample & Krueger, 2011; Hample et al., 2012). Positive relational expressiveness and mutual understanding are prioritized in integrative conflicts.

As such, this dissertation relied on past studies about serial arguments and conflict goals to guide the posited relationships between each of the seven serial argument conflict goals and the three conflict tactics. This study's findings revealed that several goals (i.e., mutual understanding, changing the other person, and dominance) predicted the use of integrative tactics ($R^2 = .63$) in a friendship conflict episode. For example, the mutual understanding goal was positively predictive of integrative tactics ($\gamma_{Standardized} = .76$, $p \leq .01$). In other words, if they intend to seek mutual understanding, friends are more likely to use cooperative, helpful tactics during their conflict episode.

Additionally, integrative tactics were negatively predicted by the goal changing the other person ($\gamma_{Standardized} = -.11$, $p \leq .01$) and the goal of dominance ($\gamma_{Standardized} = -.27$, $p \leq .01$). These results indicate that the more an individual wishes to change their friend or dominate their friend or the conflict episode, the less likely they are to use integrative tactics. Integrative tactics are collaborative and mutually beneficial behaviors, whereas these goals focus on the individual and the individual benefit of the conflict. If a friend wanted to pursue either of these goals, integrative tactics may not be the most effective tactic to achieve their goals as the nature of these goals and integrative tactics do not align. The goals embrace individualistic interests, rather than the collaboration required for integrative tactics. These findings align relationships previously found in serial arguments literature (e.g., Bevan, 2010; Hample & Cionea, 2012).

Additionally, this study's findings revealed that several goals (i.e., changing the other person, hurt other to benefit self, and mutual understanding) were predictive of distributive tactics usage ($R^2 = .73$) in a friendship conflict episode. This particularly large percentage of

explained variance in distributive tactics indicates that these three goals are good, strong predictors of the use of distributive tactics. Additionally, this $R^2 = .73$ is larger than the reported R^2 in several previous serial arguments studies. For example, previous R^2 scores have been $R^2 = .57$ (Hample et al., 2012), $R^2 = .49$ (Hample & Cionea, 2012), and $R^2 = .66$ (Hample & Krueger, 2011). The present study's R^2 score for distributive tactics suggests that these predictors (i.e., the goals) are accurately capturing a good portion of what influences the use of distributive tactics in adult friendship conflicts.

In addition, in the present study, the goal of changing the other person ($\gamma_{Standardized} = .19$, $p \leq .01$) was positively predictive of distributive tactics. This indicates that if a friend wanted to change the other's behavior, distributive tactics tended to be pursued. Similarly, hurt other to benefit self ($\gamma_{Standardized} = .65$, $p \leq .001$) positively predicted the use of distributive tactics in adult friendship conflicts. Hurt other to benefit self has a strong, well-documented relationship with distributive tactics in the literature (Bevan, 2010; Cionea & Hample, 2015) and the present study is reflective of this pattern. These results indicate that the individualistic nature of both changing the other person and the desire to hurt other to benefit self goal is conducive to the individual-focused, self-interested, competitive nature of distributive tactics. These goals and the subsequent use of distributive tactics in conflict communicate aggression, and this pairing has the potential to damage a friendship irreversibly (see Bevan et al., 2007).

Negatively-valenced goals had stronger relationships (i.e., larger standardized path coefficients) with distributive tactics and avoidance tactics than integrative tactics. This result indicates the negatively-valenced goals align well with the competitive, individualistic nature of distributive tactics. In a friendship conflict, if friends want to hurt the other to benefit the self or change the other person enacting distributive tactics may be helpful to achieve these goals.

Additionally, the predictive relationship between conflict tactics and conflict goals alludes to the negativity pattern highlighted in previous serial arguments literature (e.g., Cionea & Hample, 2015). The negativity pattern highlights the associations between negative goals and negative tactics which then reduce perceptions of resolvability and decrease relational satisfaction (Cionea & Hample, 2015).

Finally, avoidance tactics ($R^2 = .32$) were predicted positively by the goals of relational termination ($\gamma_{Standardized} = .12$, $p \leq .01$) and hurt other to benefit self ($\gamma_{Standardized} = .65$, $p \leq .001$). Relationships between relational termination and avoidance tactics have varied. Some studies (e.g., Cionea et al., 2019b) did not find a significant relationship between the two variables, whereas other studies (e.g., Cionea et al., 2019a) indicated significant relationships. The difference in these results may be due to the mediating role of communication context between relational termination and avoidance tactics. For example, whether an argument is public or private may influence whether a friend utilizes avoidance tactics in a friendship conflict. Personal topics are issues related directly to the relationship between arguers (e.g., hurt feelings). Most serial arguments are related to this topic (Hample & Cionea, 2012). Public topics are issues outside of the arguers' relationship (e.g., politics). Conflicts regarding public topics tend to be more civil (Hample & Cionea, 2012). Whether the topic is personal, or public depends upon who argues about each topic, the arguer's level of involvement, and the stakes of the argument (A. Johnson, 2002, 2009).

The results for hurt other to benefit self align with the previous literature about avoidance tactics in serial arguments. For example, Bevan et al. (2007) found a positive predictive relationship between hurt other to benefit self and avoidance tactics, but the path coefficient in the current study was much lower in Bevan et al.'s study (i.e., $\beta = .18$, $p \leq .05$). If

the individual wanted to hurt their friend or express negative emotions, avoidance may be used to inflict psychological distress. This distress may already be present, as conflicts are stressful (Cohen et al., 1983; Reznik et al., 2010; Vannucci et al., 2018) and individuals are more likely to experience stress when they are in a conflict (Cohen et al., 1983). Cohen et al. (1983) noted that friends tend to get more stressed about conflicts than family or romantic partners do, especially when conflicts are repeated, like in serial arguments. Without a conversation about the conflict, friends will be stressed about the conflict and how the conflict may harm the friendship (Friedman, 2000).

In addition, avoidance tactics were negatively predicted by the goals of negative relational expressiveness ($\gamma_{Standardized} = -.17$, $p \leq .05$) and change other ($\gamma_{Standardized} = -.12$, $p \leq .05$). These results indicate that, as individuals' goals of expressing negative feelings and desire to change other become more important, the likelihood of using avoidance tactics decreases. The present results do not align with previous literature about avoidance tactics and serial arguments. Previous research has indicated that the relationship between avoidance tactics and an individual's goals depends upon the valence of an individual's goals and the relational context (Bevan, 2004, 2010; Worley & Samp, 2016). For example, Canary et al. (1988) noted that avoidance tactics in conflicts may be used to shift the argument topic, focus on abstract terms, denial of disagreement, and attempts to bypass the confrontation. Avoidance tactics were not limited to positively- or negatively-valenced goals, indicating that other factors may be indicative of avoidance.

In addition to analyzing the relationships between conflict goals and conflict tactics, this dissertation also analyzed the relationships between conflict tactics (i.e., integrative, distributive, and avoidance tactics) and three conflict outcomes (i.e., resolvability, rumination, and changes in

relational satisfaction). The results indicated that specific tactics are more likely to lead to specific outcomes, as previously noted in the serial argument literature (e.g., Bevan et al., 2008, 2014; Cionea et al., 2017).

Perceived resolvability was positively predicted by integrative tactics ($\beta_{Standardized} = .29$, $p \leq .01$), and negatively by the use of distributive tactics ($\beta_{Standardized} = -.18$, $p \leq .01$) and avoidance tactics ($\beta_{Standardized} = -.21$, $p \leq .01$) $R^2 = .22$. The proportion of explained variance in resolvability suggests that conflict management tactics, together, can have a moderate explanatory power of perceptions of resolvability. This result aligns with previous research (Bevan et al., 2008; Hample et al., 2012; Hample & Richards, 2015) that has reported a positive relationship between integrative tactics and resolvability. The use of positive, constructive goals, coupled with positive tactics (i.e., prosocial integrative tactics) yields a positive outcome (i.e., increased resolvability), perpetuating a constructive tone for the conflict (Cionea et al., 2019a). Thus, tactics have direct effects on the outcomes of friendship conflict management. Commonly, positively-valenced goals (e.g., mutual understanding) predict integrative tactics, which then predict increased resolvability. This relationship may be due to the constructive and cooperative nature of integrative tactics. Constructive conflicts work towards positive outcomes using bargaining that seeks to find innovative solutions that creatively and maximally meet the needs of both members of the dyad (Deutsch, 1994). Cooperative conflict shifts the focus of the problem to the obstacle the dyad wishes to overcome in hopes that the goals of both individuals will be met if a creative solution is applied to the problem (Deutsch, 1994). With a desire to shift the focus of the problem, bargain with the other person, and find a creative solution, friends are more likely to perceive a conflict to be resolvable.

Additionally, perceived resolvability was negatively predicted by the use of distributive tactics ($\beta_{Standardized} = -.18$, $p \leq .01$) and avoidance tactics ($\beta_{Standardized} = -.21$, $p \leq .01$). This indicates that the more friends avoid conflict or utilize competitive, individualistic, distributive tactics, the less they feel the conflict can be resolved. If individuals wish to keep the conflict positive and constructive, they are less likely to use avoidance or distributive tactics. These conclusions align with previous serial argument research about resolvability and distributive tactics (Hample & Allen, 2012; Hample et al., 2012). Distributive tactics tend to be enacted forcefully and aggressively as individuals strive for negatively-valenced goals. Using competition, individualistic goals and behaviors, distributive tactics tend to decrease perceived resolvability (Cionea et al., 2019a). The results for avoidance tactics and resolvability also align with the previous literature. When an individual's goals are more negatively-valenced, the person is more likely to avoid a conflict because they do not want to experience destructive outcomes (e.g., lack of resolvability). For example, in the present study, the use of avoidance tactics negatively predicted resolvability, indicating that avoidance does not eliminate the conflict. In fact, it makes it seem less resolvable. Friendships are interpersonal relationships that prioritize support and being mindful of one another's' feelings (Fehr, 1996). Friends often share opinions and ideas with one another to develop expectations regarding communication (e.g., conflicts) in the friendship (Perlman et al., 2015). However, if an individual chooses avoidance over integrative or distributive tactics, resolvability cannot occur (Fehr, 1996). Unlike marriages or familial relationships, this lack of resolvability may be attributed to the absence of legal or institutionalized ties in friendships. Without these legally binding connections, friendships must be flexible particularly during personal and relational changes (e.g., conflicts).

Rumination (R^2 = .12) was positively predicted by the use of integrative tactics ($\beta_{Standardized}$ = .23, $p \leq .01$) and distributive tactics ($\beta_{Standardized}$ = .35, $p \leq .01$) but negatively predicted by the use of avoidance tactics ($\beta_{Standardized}$ = -.13, $p \leq .01$). Interestingly, integrative, and distributive tactics were positive predictors of increased rumination. As rumination involves incessant worrying about a conflict to the point that it becomes psychologically distressing (Gold & Wegner, 1995), it makes sense that both of these tactics would be predictors of increased rumination. If an individual uses the prosocial integrative tactics, they may spend a lot of time thinking about the conflict and how to approach it. Similarly, if the individual is considering relying on a distributive tactic, they may ruminate on how distressing and competitive the conflict has become. Perhaps this can be attributed to the role of goal incompatibility and/or inability to accomplish goals in friendship conflicts. Unaccomplished goals are unwanted discomforts individuals want to alleviate (Bevan et al., 2008; Scott & McIntosh, 1999). Given that conflict is a consistent form of communication and given the lack of agreement between the two parties about their goals, worrying about the future of the friendship and if the friends are compatible can occur. For example, Putnam and Folger (1988) focused on how conflict develops from goal interferences; specifically, when requests for goal achievement were denied. This situation reinforces the notion that rumination is a consequence of argumentative goal incompatibility (Bevan et al., 2008).

An increase in relational satisfaction following the conflict episode (R^2 = .28) was predicted by the use of integrative tactics ($\beta_{Standardized}$ = .46, $p \leq .01$), whereas a decrease in relational satisfaction was predicted by the use of distributive tactics ($\beta_{Standardized}$ = -.11, $p \leq .01$) and the use of avoidance tactics ($\beta_{Standardized}$ = -.15, $p \leq .01$). Overall, the present findings indicate agreement with previous serial arguments literature that found integrative tactics are related to

increased relational satisfaction, whereas distributive tactics are related to decreased relational satisfaction (Cionea et al., 2019a; Hample & Richards, 2015). Changes in relational satisfaction being positively predicted by integrative tactics is not surprising. The prosocial and amicable nature of integrative tactics is indicative of an individual's increased relational satisfaction. This idea has been reinforced in serial arguments literature (Hample & Cionea, 2012; Hample et al., 2012) in which integrative tactics related positively to a change in relational satisfaction. Partners who relied on integrative tactics also reported that they perceived the serial argument made their relationship with the other person better or improved their opinion of their partner (Cionea et al., 2017). As individuals used more integrative tactics, they also saw an increase in their relational satisfaction (Cionea et al., 2019a; Hample & Richards, 2015).

However, the opposite is also true. By using competitive, negative, distributive tactics, individuals may become less satisfied in their friendships as such behaviors do not align with characteristics of increased relational satisfaction. The more individuals rely on distributive tactics, the more likely they are to harm their relationship with their partner (Cionea et al., 2017). The pursuit of negative goals via negative tactics leads to negative outcomes (Cionea et al., 2019a). Gottman (1982) warned that negativity can have negative long-term effects on a romantic relationship, with destructive strategies being associated negatively with satisfaction (Cionea et al., 2019b; Cupach, 1982). This outcome is also reasonable for the relationship between friendship satisfaction and avoidance tactics because, without confronting the conflict/other person, the individual has a lot of room to compete and strategize their attacks about the conflict and/or friendship.

Furthermore, mutual understanding expresses a desire for collaborative understanding. This goal was positively predictive of the use of cooperative and prosocial integrative tactics,

whereas individualistic and competitive goals like relational termination and hurt other to benefit self were positively predictive of distributive tactics. Positively- and negatively-valenced goals were predictive of avoidance tactics. This indicated that goals may not be the only factor influencing the use of avoidance tactics. For example, Cionea et al. (2019a) indicated that when individuals prioritize expressing positive feelings in their friendships, the individuals tend to avoid in their serial argument by changing the subject and preventing the serial argument from escalating. This pattern of avoidance may be predicted by relational considerations (Cionea et al., 2017), such as saving face (Cionea et al., 2019a). Perhaps more context is needed into the use of avoidance tactics and their relationship to conflict goals.

Theoretical Implications

The current study relied on key assumptions of two social science theories, the GPA model (Dillard, 1990) and multiple goals theory (Caughlin, 2011). As such, the findings of this dissertation have several theoretical implications. First, concerning the GPA model, this study revealed that goals influenced tactics which, in turn, influenced outcomes. Such findings support notions of the GPA model, which explains that goals influence tactics and tactics influence actions (Dillard, 1990). As a result, this study demonstrates the heuristic value of this theory, as extended into adult friendship conflicts. Thus, this study indicates that the GPA model is applicable to adult friendships and their conflict management, thus expanding GPA's application to another type of interpersonal conflict than previously studied.

Additionally, based on the lens of MGT, this study revealed the role of friends' conflict goals and how those goals affect the subsequent tactics friends use to manage such a conflict. In MGT, the nature of conflict goals depends on the context of communication, situational demands, and whether both individuals agree on the goals being pursued (Caughlin, 2010). In the

present study, one friend's perceptions of goal incompatibility increased situational demands, influencing their choice to engage in avoidance tactics or not. Over time, individuals form perceptions about types of goals that should be used in these situations (i.e., what they perceive a friendship conflict should look like). In forming these mental models, individuals take note of conflict contexts and typical conflict behaviors, subsequently influencing their conflict behaviors. For example, an individual may choose to yell and be competitive in a friendship conflict, whereas another friend may choose to approach the conflict directly and calmly, because that individual perceives directness and a calm discussion to be more beneficial. These perceptions then affect how satisfied people are with their relationship and relational communication (Caughlin & Wilson, 2022).

Similarly, the serial argument literature provided the modeling template for examining conflict management via the process model that had been tested previously in the case of serial arguments. This study used that process model and tested it in the case of adult friendships to examine their conflict management process. The present study noted similar patterns between goals, tactics, and outcomes as previous serial arguments studies (Bevan, 2008; Bevan et al., 2014; Cionea et al., 2019a; Cionea et al., 2019b). Thus, the process model can be extended to various types of conflicts, beyond serial arguments.

Furthermore, the findings of this study provided more insight into characteristics of adult friendship conflicts, an often-under-studied area of research. In the past, there has been limited literature on adult friendships, let alone their conflicts. There was also a lack of diverse methodologies when studying friendship conflict. Such lacunae may be because adult friendships span a wide breadth of adulthood, thus making it difficult to distinguish between young adult and adult friendships. Often, adult friendships are grouped together with young adult friendship

samples. However, adult friendships are distinct from young adult friendships. For example, Rawlins (1992) noted that young adults have more extensive social networks and use their friendships to explore potential careers and lifestyle alternatives, whereas adults have less extensive social networks, and the center of interpersonal gravity shifts away from friendships toward the family unit. Thus, it does not make sense to consider that all adult friendships are the same as young adult ones. Instead, characteristics and expectations throughout life span development should aid in differentiating friendships at various ages and analyzing them as distinct groups.

Similarly, findings from this study provided more information to aid in the distinction between friendships and other types of interpersonal relationships such as roommates, romantic relationships, and family relationships. Often researchers will utilize broad conflict definitions of each interpersonal relationship to allow the lines between interpersonal relationships to blur. For example, Rubin (1985) used broad definitions of each relationship (i.e., friends and romantic partnerships) to generalize her findings about qualities that characterize romantic relationships. However, these interpersonal relationships are distinct and should be studied as such. Romantic partners and family members usually have some legal and/or religious commitment to one another, whereas friends do not have any of those commitments. Due to friendships' voluntary nature and lack of legal and/or religious commitment, friends have more flexibility in their conflict goals and tactics. They are not obligated to take a specific course of action, only the one that they perceive to be more effective in that moment. In future studies, researchers may compare how individuals in these relationships differ in their conflicts from other interpersonal conflicts to help further delineate these relationships. This study highlighted pairs of goals and

tactics friends may utilize in a conflict episode. Future studies may compare how these pairs of goals and tactics are utilized in other types of interpersonal conflicts.

Additionally, this dissertation demonstrated the predictive relationships between conflict goals and conflict behaviors and how those conflict behaviors further affect friendship outcomes. Using a structural equation model for the management of friendship conflicts, this study noted that conflict goals were predictive of conflict tactics, and that conflict tactics were predictive of conflict outcomes. Such models may be helpful for the development of theoretical models to examine adult friendship conflicts further. Models could be developed to compare conflict management between different types of interpersonal relationships (e.g., roommates, friendships, romantic relationships, family relationships) and assess the distinct conflict characteristics of each relationship.

Finally, researchers could explore the contexts in which avoidance tactics are utilized. While this dissertation demonstrated some significant relationships between goals and avoidance tactics, the researcher acknowledges that the patterns of relationships between goals and avoidance tactics are sporadic in the literature. In exploring the contexts in which friends choose to avoid conflicts with one another, future researchers may be able to ascertain the predictive patterns of avoidance tactics better, including any possible mediating relationships and/or indirect relationships.

In summary, the findings of this study contribute to the theoretical knowledge of GPA and MGT and their applicability to serial argument models, adult friendships, and adult friendship conflicts. As such, the findings of this dissertation offer the opportunity to extend the application of communication theory to understanding adult friendship conflicts.

Practical and Societal Implications

This study's findings also have significant implications for conflict experts and third-party mediators as well as lay people in adult friendships. These findings highlight the predictive role of conflict goals and conflict tactics in adult friendship conflict management. The results indicate that, when an individual pursues a specific goal, that goal is likely to be paired with a specific tactic. For example, the goal of mutual understanding was positively predictive of the use of integrative tactics. In other words, if an individual perceived a positively-valenced goal to be important, they were more likely to pursue that goal in a more prosocial, integrative way. For example, if two friends had a conflict and were both wanting to reach a mutual understanding about the topic, the individuals would cooperate to achieve this understanding. Additionally, if someone wanted to end their friendship through the conflict at hand, they may choose to use a distributive tactic. Since the individual wants to terminate the friendship, they may engage in competitive, individualistic behaviors (i.e., distributive tactics) to decrease their friend's relational satisfaction. The individual may not view the conflict as resolvable (hence the goal to terminate the friendship), especially given their lack of concern about their actions and how it will affect their friendship.

Taken together, these findings may assist conflict experts and third-party mediators in identifying the necessary processes and patterns related to adult friendship conflicts to permit the successful mediation of friendship conflicts. For example, if an individual indicates that they want to change the other person's behaviors in a conflict, individuals may use distributive tactics to achieve this goal. In turn, practitioners may warn the individual that taking such a competitive approach to the conflict can be predictive of excessive worry, feelings of decreased resolvability, and decreased relational satisfaction.

Collectively, findings from this study offer practical implications for conflict experts and third-party mediators. First, the findings highlight the predictive relationships between conflict goals and conflict tactics as well as conflict tactics and conflict outcomes. These predictive relationships may be helpful knowledge as third-party mediators or conflict professionals advise individuals on friendship conflicts. Second, the results of this study further our understanding of the process and patterns related to adult friendship conflicts. With the ability to recognize these patterns, practitioners may find that focusing on an individual's goals and tactics could offer a unique approach to coping with the outcomes.

Limitations

The results of this study offered valuable insight into adult friendship conflict management, specifically the relationships between conflict goals and conflict tactics as well as conflict tactics and conflict outcomes. However, several limitations should be noted. First, the researcher accidentally removed two of the total three items meant to measure the positive relational expressiveness goals in the creation of the study survey. Second, the reliability scores for the dominance goal was quite low. Third, the study relied on participants' recall of their most recent conflict. Fourth, data from the study were skewed, which triggered the need for transformations. Fifth, the SEM model had to be modified to improve model fit but, even with modifications, good model fit was not fully achieved.

As previously noted, there are seven serial argument goals in the typology proposed by Bevan and colleagues (i.e., positive relational expressiveness, mutual understanding, negative relational expressiveness, change other, dominance, hurt other to benefit self; Bevan et al., 2007). However, although all seven goals were included in the study's hypotheses, only six of those goals were analyzed in the main study analyses. The researcher made an error and did not

include two of the three items for the goal of positive relational expressiveness in the survey. Given it was measured with only one item, the goal was dropped entirely from analyses and hypotheses about positive relational expressiveness could not be tested. Therefore, it may be possible that individuals could have pursued more positively-valenced goals than mutual understanding (e.g., relational continuation) in their friendship conflicts.

Second, one of the goals revealed poor reliability. Although Cronbach's alpha was not calculated, it was helpful to calculate Hancock's *H* for the latent factors and PC reliability for the observed aggregate components. PC reliabilities and Hancock's *H* scores were within close range of one another (i.e., ±.01 to .06 difference). For example, the reliabilities for perceived resolvability varied from Cronbach's alpha reliabilities in previous serial arguments literature [e.g., PCR = 0.84 in present study and α = 0.88 (K. Johnson & Roloff, 2000) and α = 0.93 (A. Johnson et al., 2011)]. The reliability for dominance demonstrated poor consistency (PCR = 0.59, *H* = 0.59). Despite its poor consistency, the dominance goal was retained because of its use in numerous studies indicating acceptable latent factor reliability. Additionally, dropping the dominance goal would have limited comparisons with other studies in the literature.

Another limitation of this dissertation was that participants were asked to recall a friendship conflict episode that occurred within the past six months. This is a large period of time for participants to scale accurately their specific goals and actions taken in their friendship conflict. Although individuals tend to remember information about themselves more accurately than information about others (Tourangeau et al., 2000), this range of time is still quite large, opening the possibility that individuals misremembered the conflict episode. To mitigate this issue in the present study, the researcher asked additional open-ended descriptions of the friendship conflict to ascertain whether participants had engaged in a conflict episode.

Participant descriptions noting “we had a small fight and got over it” or “we had a debate about politics” were not accepted as conflict episodes, and such participants were not permitted to complete the main study. Rather, descriptions noting “My friend owes me money and is convinced she paid it back when she never did.” and “My son and I were exposed to a virus circulating among the family of a good friend who invited us to dinner at their house. My friend later told me *after* my son and I became ill. He knew and invited us anyway.” were deemed eligible and participants cleared to participate in the main study. Therefore, rather than measure a friendship conflict within the past six months, future studies may want to analyze more recent conflict episodes.

The fourth limitation of this study was that data were skewed. Without normal data, a structural equation model cannot be tested (Brown, 2015). Thus, data had to be transformed to improve normality. In correcting for this skew, it made the data more complicated to interpret, specifically, means and standard deviations, which were not reported given the aggregate variables were calculated based on principal components. Nevertheless, the single bend transformations of the skewed variables standardized the data to allow the researcher to test the hypotheses (Fink, 2009). Without these transformations, data analysis would not have been able to proceed correctly.

The final limitation of this study pertains to the SEM model fit. The initial SEM model did not fit well. Based on the LISREL modification indices and theoretical justification (i.e., similarly worded or reverse-coded items; Brown, 2015), the researcher allowed the errors of items from the same scale to covary to improve model fit. For example, the errors of items “I tried to change the subject” and “I changed the topic” from the avoidance scale were permitted to covary. Additionally, the errors of two items on the change in relational satisfaction scale were

permitted to covary: “My relationship with my friend is more positive due to this conflict” and “My relationship with my friend became better due to this conflict.” Despite transformations and modifications, model fit was not sufficient for SEM based on the guidelines adopted in the current study. Nevertheless, there are recommendations in the literature as well as published studies with models that do not fit acceptably. For example, Carlson and Muliak (1993) indicated that a CFI < 0.90 is acceptable. Therefore, the researcher proceeded to test the hypothesis based on the SEM model fit, but caution should be exercised about the overall findings. It is not recommended to utilize relaxed model fit standards in a CFA and SEM as the relaxed standards allow for more opportunities to misspecify the model (Brown, 2015). Future research should try to replicate the proposed friendship model tested in this dissertation to solidify findings across multiple samples.

Directions for Future Research

Considering this dissertation and its limitations, there are four specific suggestions for directions for future research. The first is to study the impact of gender rather than sex in adult conflict management. The second direction encourages researchers to explore how the type of conflict influences conflict management. The third direction emphasizes analyzing both friends’ experiences in the friendship conflict. The fourth direction suggests exploring the possible mediating role of conflict tactics in the relationships between conflict goals and conflict outcomes. Below is an overview of each of these directions for future research.

First, findings from this study, along with a synthesis of the literature on adult friendships, highlight that there are not sex differences between men’s and women’s friendships. For example, friendships can be classified as same- and opposite-sex friendships (Fehr, 1996). In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a trend of comparing sex differences between men's and women's

friendships. Men's friendships were believed to be based on the utility and activities they shared, whereas women's friendships were based on frequent emotional connections (Rawlins, 1992). However, Dindia and Allen (1992) noted that sex attitudes, sex role identities, and sex role norms have changed over the years. Hence, men and women interact with their friends more similarly than previously posited. Thus, the long-assumed differences between men's and women's interpersonal behavior are not reflected in the empirical research (Canary et al., 1995).

Instead of studying sex, this researcher recommends analyzing a sample's gender. Gender captures the "social, psychological, and cultural differentiations between men and women" (Canary et al., 1995, p. 6). Gender reflects socially constructed notions of men and women and the degree to which an individual's self-concept is linked to psychological dimensions of understanding men and women as social, goal-directed beings (Canary et al., 1995). Thus, gender is constructed in the activities (i.e., social interactions) between friends and other interpersonal relationships. Social constructivism allows social scientists, such as communication scholars, to make sense of others' experiences via assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning (Amineh & Asl, 2015). By focusing on the knowledge and understanding of the world that is jointly developed by individuals (Amineh & Asl, 2015), social constructivism (i.e., studying gender rather than sex) would permit social scientists to understand the complex experiences of various gender individuals in conflict as they have experienced it, rather than based on analyzing and comparing relational and dyad composition based on dichotomous sex. In analyzing the conflict contexts in friendships of individuals with different gender identities, gender may be a significant covariate or mediator of conflict management behaviors.

Second, future researchers may benefit from exploring the influence of the type of conflict on friendship conflict management. The descriptions of conflict episodes in the present

study varied from political debates to physical fights to conflicts about money, time, and shared activities. Conflict or argument topics utilize the context of the conflict episode to focus on what the conflict or argument is about. Argument topics and conflict topics are similar, but also distinct. An argument may entail a conflict, and a conflict may be an argument, but not necessarily. For the purposes of this dissertation, this distinction between argument and conflict topics was considered inconsequential, meaning argumentation research pertaining to topics was believed to be applicable to conflict topics, despite the differences that exist between an argument and a conflict. By focusing on a conflict's topic, researchers may be able to distinguish the behaviors and consequences of those behaviors within a conflict (A. Johnson et al., 2009).

One such classification is the one proposed by A. Johnson (2002, 2009, 2011) in which she distinguished between personal-issue topics and public-issues topics. Personal topics are issues related directly to the relationship between arguers (e.g., hurt feelings). These types of topics affect the arguers, their level of involvement, and the stakes of the argument (A. Johnson, 2002, 2009, 2011). Many of the conflict episodes described in the main study involved personal-issue topics. Public topics are issues outside of the arguers' relationship (e.g., politics). Public topics are perceived to be more enjoyable than personal issue topics because they tend to fulfill the functions of routine, everyday talk, and exchanging knowledge (A. Johnson, 2002). Since public issue arguments do not hold as much weight in a relationship, they are perceived to have more enjoyable outcomes than personal issue topics. For example, Cionea and Hample (2015) explained that, in serial arguments, individuals tended to be more civil as public-issue topics were used as a form of debate or discussion rather than an argument. Therefore, individuals tend to be less demanding in their public-issue arguments than personal-issue arguments. In turn, expressing negativity and changing the other person are not prioritized in these arguments.

Instead, the tactics that individuals use in public-issue arguments depend on the goals for engaging in such arguments (Cionea & Hample, 2015).

Depending on conflict type/topic, individuals may choose to pursue specific goals to promote individual needs within personal relationships and/or negotiate conflicts. Friends know that these disputes are real and emotional, which may result in psychologically or physically hurting one another (Canary et al., 1995). By understanding the relationship an individual has with the other person and the perceived costs of conflict, the structure of how these differences are discussed is based upon the level of struggle within a given conflict (Cionea et al., 2016), ranging from mild to extreme. As conflicts differ across processes, relationships, communication, interventions, and outcomes, an interaction becomes a conflict once the conversation turns negative and personal (Putnam, 2006). The struggle varies based on the type of conflict. Kelter (1987) notes that such a struggle exists on a spectrum ranging from one (mild difference) to six (fight or war). Thus, conflict topics may be a fruitful additional variable to examine to understand further the nature, unfolding, and management of adult conflict friendships.

Third, future researchers could utilize and compare the perceived goals, tactics, and outcomes dyadically in friendship conflicts. Many theoretical concepts intrinsically involve two people (e.g., friendship, conflicts, communication, influence). However, much of the theoretical knowledge has been based on individuals in isolation, rather than both members of a friendship (Kenny et al., 2006). Relationally, conflict is unavoidable. Often, conflict management is how individuals, rather than dyads, respond to conflict and collaborate on conflict resolution. In addition, conflicts can shape how a relationship develops. A conflict can help the relationship, or it can lead to its dissolution. Thus, conflict can be viewed from the following perspectives: the situations in which it takes place, its effects on a relationship, and the growth (or deterioration) of

a relationship/friendship. Fundamental to all conflicts are the series of actions and reactions, moves and countermoves, planning of communication strategies, perceptions, and interpretations of messages that directly affect substantive outcomes (Putnam & Folger, 1988). These conflict characteristics include the specific contexts and activities between relational partners. Although social norms and roles may guide the relationship, the potential implications of a relationship are produced via communication and negotiation between partners (Delia, 1980). This means that for an interpersonal conflict to occur, both individuals must be emotionally and/or relationally invested in the outcome of their conflict (Johnson et al., 2024). The researcher recommends analyzing both friends' perceptions of a given conflict episode to examine the contexts in which friendship conflicts take place, additional outcomes of friendship, and how conflict affects the growth or deterioration of friendships. These perspectives may aid in delineating friendship conflicts from other types of interpersonal conflicts.

Finally, perhaps future research can explore conflict tactics' mediating role between goals and outcomes to determine the contexts in which individuals choose to avoid and confront (integrative or distributive approach) a situation. The present study examined the direct relationships between goals and tactics and tactics and outcomes. However, it would also be fruitful to analyze the indirect relationships between goals and outcomes in the conflict management process. Specifically, better understanding the contexts in which individuals utilize avoidance tactics in their conflict management needs further knowledge. In serial arguments literature, avoidance tactics have not been as prevalent due to the weak or null relationships with outcome variables (e.g., Bevan et al., 2007). However, the relationship between avoidance tactics and an individual's goals depends upon the valence of an individual's goals and the relational

context. This context may provide the necessary mediating factor to better understand avoidance tactics in adult friendship conflict management.

Conclusion

The dissertation aimed to provide an empirical examination of conflict management in adult friendships. Using a structural equation model, this study tested the predictive relationships between friendship conflict goals and tactics as well as tactics and outcomes.

Results revealed how conflict goals may influence conflict tactics, which subsequently influence conflict outcomes. Positively-valenced goals (i.e., mutual understanding) were more likely to influence integrative tactics (rather than distributive or avoidance tactics), whereas negatively-valenced goals (i.e., hurt other to benefit self and relational termination) were more likely to influence distributive tactics. Individuals' use of avoidance tactics was predicted by both positively- and negatively-valenced goals. Increased resolvability as well as increased relational satisfaction were positively predicted by the use of integrative tactics and negatively predicted by distributive and avoidance tactics. Increased rumination was positively predicted by integrative and distributive tactics, indicating that rumination may be distressing in both situations.

Given that conflict is inevitable in friendships, the present study delineated this type of interpersonal conflict from other types of interpersonal conflict and modeled the relationships between conflict goals, conflict tactics, and conflict outcomes. An abundance of future research could be conducted to model further associations and differentiate the characteristics that make friendships and their conflicts unique from other interpersonal relationships.

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Appendix A: Measures for Pre-Screen Study

[Consent information presented to participants first]

What is your Prolific ID? (open-ended response)

Now please read the following definitions and answer the questions below.

A **friend** is someone with whom you've developed a relationship voluntarily. The two of you enjoy spending time together, sharing things, and helping each other out. Depending on how close you are, you may see each other sometimes or quite a lot. You may also spend time and effort maintaining this friendship, depending on how close you are to the other person.

For the purposes of this study, please think about individuals who are a friend only, not a coworker, family member, or romantic partner in addition to being a friend.

A **conflict** exists when two people hold opposing ideas, values, etc., or when they have different goals or interests, and they see the other party as standing in their way to accomplish these goals.

An **episode of conflict** occurs when the two people engage in a discussion, conversation, quarrel, or fight about their different goals or interests.

Based on the definitions provided, have you ***had a conflict*** with a friend in the past six (6) months? (Yes/No – close-ended response)

- If no is selected, participant is disqualified from the main study. They will still be paid for their time participating in the pre-screen study.
- If yes is selected, display logic on Qualtrics will then show participants the following questions:
  - Based on the definitions provided, have you ***had a conflict episode*** with a friend in the past six (6) months?
    - If they answer yes to both questions, they will answer further questions (detailed below).
    - If they answer no to this question, they will still be paid for their time participating in the pre-screen. They will not be eligible for the main study.

The following questions will be displayed via display logic on Qualtrics if participants answer "yes" to both previous questions (conflict ***and*** conflict episode):

As a reminder, a conflict episode occurs when the two people engage in a discussion, conversation, quarrel, or fight about their different goals or interests.

Now think about the conflict episode you've had in your conflict with this particular friend. If this conflict has occurred before, think about the most recent episode.

Please describe what happened during the conflict episode. (open-ended response)

How many times before have you engaged in this conflict with your friend? (close-ended response)

i. Never, this is the first time this conflict episode occurred
ii. We've discussed this conflict once before
iii. We've discussed this conflict two or more times before

Who started this specific conflict episode? (close-ended response)

i. I started it.
ii. My friend started it.
iii. It wasn't clear who started it.
iv. It was started in some other way (Please specify how below)
    i. [Shown to participants if they choose option iv. above): You noted that the conflict episode was started in another way. Please describe how it was started below.

Now please think about your friendship with this friend and answer the questions below.

How long (in months) have you been friends with this person? (open-ended response)

Are you still friends with this person? (Yes/No - close-ended response)

How would you describe your friendship with this person? Please select the answer that matches best from the options below (close-ended response)

i. Casual friends: you're friendly and help each other out but this is mainly because you see each other a lot. There isn't necessarily a deep connection or affection, and the bond between you emerges when you're spending time together.

ii. Close friends: you have a deeper connection because you spend time together and have really gotten to know each other. Friends in these relationships appreciate the support and effort it takes to keep the bond between them strong.

iii. Best friends are your closest pals. You talk a lot, spend time together in person, swap gifts, and message each other regularly. You feel close to them and trust them. You both put in a lot of effort to keep the friendship going strong.

Appendix B: Measures for Main Study

[Consent information presented to participants first]

According to the responses you provided in the pre-screen survey conducted by the researcher a few days ago, you have engaged in a conflict with a friend in the past six months. Please think about this conflict for the rest of the questions in the study. If you did not engage in such a conflict, please return the submission at this time.

A few reminders before you get started...

A **conflict** exists when two people hold opposing ideas, values, etc., or when they have different goals or interests, and they see the other party as standing in their way to accomplish these goals.

An **episode of conflict** occurs when the two people engage in a discussion, conversation, quarrel, or fight about their different goals or interests.

A **friend** is someone with whom you've developed a relationship voluntarily. The two of you enjoy spending time together, sharing things, and helping each other out. Depending on how close you are, you may see each other sometimes or quite a lot. You may also spend time and effort maintaining this friendship, depending on how close you are to the other person.

For the purposes of this study, **please think about individuals who are a friend only, not a coworker, family member, or romantic partner in addition to being a friend.**

Now think about the episode of conflict you've had with this particular friend. If this conflict has occurred before, think about the most recent episode.

Please describe what happened during the conflict/conflict episode. (open-ended response)

Now think about what you tried to accomplish during the conflict episode that you had with your friend. Rate how important the statements on the left were for you during that episode.

Goals for Conflict – Bevan et al. (2007)
Answer scale: Likert type ranging from 1 = not at all important to 7 = extremely important

1. To express frustration (Negative expressiveness).
2. To release frustration (Negative expressiveness).
3. To show that I am exasperated. (Negative expressiveness)
4. To negotiate with my friend. (Mutual understanding)
5. To reach a mutual agreement. (Mutual understanding)
6. To compromise – meet in the middle with my friend. (Mutual understanding)
7. To keep from giving into my friend. (Dominate)
8. To not be the loser of the conflict. (Dominate)
9. To feel some control of the situation. (Dominate)
10. To end the friendship with this person. (Relational termination)

11. To terminate the relationship. (Relational termination)
12. To avoid talking about our friendship (Relational termination).
13. To change my friend's behavior. (Change Other)
14. To change my friend's habits. (Change Other)
15. To make my friend be a better person. (Change Other)
16. To let my friend know that I care about him or her. (Positive relational expressiveness)
17. To protect the friendship I have with this person (Positive relational expressiveness) [Accidentally omitted]
18. To keep the friendship going (Positive relational expressiveness) [Accidentally omitted]
19. To put my friend down. (Hurt other to benefit self)
19. To make my friend feel angry (Hurt other to benefit self).
21. To get revenge. (Hurt other to benefit self)
22. To make my friend feel insecure. (Hurt other to benefit self)
23. To make my friend jealous (Hurt other to benefit self)
24. To feel better than my friend. (Hurt other to benefit self)

Now please think about how you tried to accomplish the goals you just indicated. Rate how much you agree with the statements on the left about the tactics you used during the episode.

Bevan and Sparks's (2014) Conflict Tactics
Answer scale: Likert-type ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree

Avoidance
1. I tried to change the subject.
2. I avoided my friend.
3. I made excuses.
4. I avoided the issue.
5. I tried to postpone the issue as long as possible.
6. I changed the topic of discussion.
7. I ignored the issue.

Integrative
8. I listened to my friend's point-of-view.
9. I compromised with my friend.
10. I showed concern about my friend's feelings and thoughts.
11. I tried to find out what my friend is feeling.
12. I tried to say nice to things to my friend.
13. I tried to compromise.
14. I expressed trust in my friend.
15. I was sympathetic to his/her position.
16. I suggested a new way of looking at things.
17. I accepted my fair share of responsibility for the conflict.
18. I tried to understand my friend.
19. I calmly discussed the situation.

Distributive
20. I threatened my friend.
21. I assertively stated my position.

22. I called my friend names.
23. I brought up things that happened a long time ago.
24. I criticized an aspect of my friend's personality.
25. I tried to make my friend feel guilty.
26. I insulted my friend.
27. I blamed my friend for causing the conflict.
28. I yelled/shouted at my friend.
29. I criticized my friend's behavior.
30. I tried to intimidate my friend.
31. I blamed the conflict on my friend's personality.
32. I had to have the last word.

Now please think of the conflict episode and how you felt about it after it happened.

Cloven and Roloff's (1991) Rumination Measure

A. How much did you worry about the conflict?
   1. Did not worry at all.
   2. Did not worry.
   3. Worried slightly
   4. Worried moderately
   5. Worried somewhat
   6. Worried a lot.
   7. Worried a great deal.

B. How much did thoughts of the conflict interfere with your daily activities?
   1. Did not interfere at all.
   2. Did not interfere.
   3. Interfered slightly.
   4. Interfered moderately.
   5. Interfered somewhat.
   6. Interfered a lot.
   7. Interfered a great deal.

C. How much effort did you put into mentally evaluating this conflict?
   1. Did not put any effort at all into it.
   2. Did not put any effort into it.
   3. Put little effort into it.
   4. Put a moderate amount of effort into it.
   5. Put some effort into it.
   6. Put a lot of effort into it.
   7. Put a great deal of effort into it.

D. How much time did you spend reflecting on the conflict?
   1. Did not spend any time at all.
   2. Did not spend any time.

3. Spent little time.
4. Spent a moderate amount of time.
5. Spent some time.
6. Spent a lot of time.
7. Spent a great deal of time.

E. How much did you think about this conflict?
   1. Never thought about it
   2. Thought about it very infrequently.
   3. Thought about it infrequently.
   4. Thought about it sometimes.
   5. Thought about it often.
   6. Thought about it very often.
   7. Thought about it all the time.

In what follows, indicate how you felt about the conflict episode with your friend and its effect on your friendship after it happened.

In what follows, indicate how you feel about the conflict with your friend and its effect on your relationship with your friend at this moment.

K. Johnson and Roloff's (1998) Resolvability Measure
Answer choice: Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree

1. I didn't think we would ever agree on this issue. *
2. I didn't see much change that it would be resolved. *
3. I thought it would go on forever. *
4. I thought that a productive solution could occur.
5. I thought that it would just get worse and worse. *
6. I believed that the conflict would be resolved in the future.

* Indicates items that must be reverse coded

Please follow the same instructions from above. Indicate how you felt about the conflict episode with your friend and its effect on your friendship after it happened.

Cionea et al.'s (2019b) Change in Relational Satisfaction Measure
Answer choice: Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree

1. My relationship with my friend was more positive due to this conflict.
2. My relationship with my friend was less welcoming due to this conflict.*
3. It was harder to be with my friend due to this conflict.*
4. I gained respect for my friend due to this conflict.
5. My relationship with my friend became better due to this conflict.
6. My relationship with my friend was ruined due to this conflict.*
7. I lost respect for my friend due to this conflict.*

8. This conflict has made our friendship more distant*
9. This conflict has made our friendship stronger.
10. This conflict has made our friendship happier.

* Indicates items that must be reverse coded

Next, the following questions ask you for some basic information about yourself and your friend so the researcher can describe the sample while reporting the data.

What is your age (in years)? (open-ended response)

What is your biological sex? (close-ended response)
1. Male
2. Female
3. Non-binary/third gender
4. Other (please specify) _____
5. Prefer not to answer

Which racial/ethnic background do you mostly identify with? (close-ended response)
1. American Indian or Alaska Native
2. Asian
3. Black or African American
4. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
5. Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx
6. White
7. A combination of some of the above
8. Other (Please specify) _____
9. Prefer not to answer

What is the highest level of education you have completed? (close-ended response)
1. High school degree or less
2. Some college
3. 2 year college degree
4. 4 year college degree
5. Professional degree
6. Graduate degree (e.g., MA or PhD)
7. Other (Please specify) _____
8. Prefer not to answer

In which state do you **live?** (drop-down selection of all U.S. states)

What is your occupation? (open-ended response)

Finally, please think about your friendship with this friend and answer the questions below.

How long (in months) have you been friends with this person? (open-ended response)

How would you describe your friendship with this person? Please selected the answer that matches best from the options below

ii. Casual friends: you're friendly and help each other out but this is mainly because you see each other a lot. There isn't necessarily a deep connection or affection, and the bond between you emerges when you're spending time together.

iii. Close friends: you have a deeper connection because you spend time together and have really gotten to know each other. Friends in these relationships appreciate the support and effort it takes to keep the bond between them strong.

iv. Best friends are your closest pals. You talk a lot, spend time together in person, swap gifts, and message each other regularly. You feel close to them and trust them. You both put in a lot of effort to keep the friendship going strong.

What is your friend's age (in years)? (open-ended response)

What is your friend's biological sex? (close-ended response)

1. Male
2. Female
3. Non-binary/third gender
4. Other (please specify) _____
5. Do not know
6. Prefer not to say

Which racial/ethnic background does your friend mostly identify with? (close-ended response)

1. American Indian or Alaska Native
2. Asian
3. Black or African American
4. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
5. Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx
6. White
7. A combination of some of the above
8. Other (Please specify) _____
9. Do not know
10. Prefer not to answer

What is your friend's highest level of completed education? (close-ended response)

1. High school degree or less
2. Some college
3. Two-year college degree
4. Four-year college degree
5. Professional degree
6. Graduate degree (e.g., MA or PhD)
7. Other (Please specify) _____
8. Do not know

9. Prefer not to answer

In which state does your friend **live?** (drop-down selection of all U.S. states)

What is your friend's occupation? (open-ended response)