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Christine E. Kunkle
West Virginia University

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Adolescents' Perceptions of Interparental Conflict and the Impact on their Aggressive
Communication Traits

Christine E. Kunkle

Thesis submitted to the
Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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in
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Scott A. Myers, Ph.D., Chair
Melanie Booth-Butterfield, Ph.D.
Keith Weber, Ed.D.

Department of Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents' Perceptions of Interparental Conflict and the Impact on their Aggressive Communication Traits

Christine E. Kunkle

This study examines the relationship between interparental conflict and adolescents' aggressive communication while utilizing tolerance for disagreement as a mediating variable. Participants were 159 high school students. Participants completed a modified version of the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992), the Argumentativeness Scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982), the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986), and the Revised Tolerance for Disagreement Scale (Teven, Martin, & Neupauer, 1998). No significant relationships were found between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to approach arguments, adolescents' tendencies to avoid arguments, and adolescents' verbal aggressiveness. When controlling for tolerance for disagreement, no significant relationships were found between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to approach arguments, adolescents' tendencies to avoid arguments, and adolescents' verbal aggressiveness. Post-hoc analyses revealed that adolescents living in intact homes reported lower levels of interparental conflict than adolescents living in non-intact homes. Reasons behind a lack of significant findings and implications for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Interparental conflict has a significant impact on adolescent children (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Emery, 1982; Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982; Nye, 1957). Researchers have examined the impact of interparental conflict on adolescents' distress (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985; Cummings, Pellegrini, Notarius, & Cummings, 1989), misbehaviors (Gottman & Katz, 1989; Nye, 1957), and relational satisfaction (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Emery, 1982). Yet, researchers have not examined whether perceived interparental conflict affects adolescents' aggressive communication (i.e. verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness) or whether adolescents' tolerance for disagreement acts as a mediating variable between interparental conflict and adolescents' aggressive communication. The purpose of this study, then, was to examine the relationship between interparental conflict and adolescents' aggressive communication while utilizing tolerance for disagreement as a mediating variable.

Interparental Conflict

Interparental conflict is defined as a disagreement between parents that is conveyed through behaviors, affect, and strategies (Buehler et al., 1998). This section focuses on four components of interparental conflict: its negative impact on children, the ways parents engage in conflict, adolescents' behavioral responses to conflict, and possible explanations for how interparental conflict negatively impacts adolescents. Although researchers have focused on the impact of divorce, habitation with only one parent, and open expressions of marital dissatisfaction on children, it is marital conflict that has the greatest negative impact on children (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Emery, 1982; Hetherington et al., 1982). This is not to say these

other factors do not impact children. For instance, it is common for children to experience sadness, express fear, and misbehave for months after their parents' separation (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1979; Kelly & Wallerstein, 1976), but the long-term effects of divorce alone are not significant (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979). Research indicates that the physical separation of family members does not affect children's happiness or their success in future friendships and romantic relationships if parents do not engage in conflict in front of the children (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Hess & Camara, 1979) and if parents work to keep the family relationships intact (Hess & Camara, 1979). In fact, children with divorced parents have less psychosomatic illness, engage in less deviant behavior, and adjust better than children living in unhappy, unbroken homes (Nye, 1957).

Not all family disagreements are harmful to children. Exposure to parents' disagreements can help children learn constructive ways to engage in problem solving and to cope with their emotions (Grych & Fincham, 1990). However, interparental conflict that is openly hostile and lasts for an extended period of time has a negative effect on the entire family (Emery, 1982). Moreover, interparental conflict has an effect on children throughout their lives. Children as young as one year are able to determine when a parent is angry and display signs of stress after witnessing angry behaviors between family members (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981). In later years, children whose parents experienced frequent conflict, problems, and instability in their marriage often experience less happiness and less stability in their own marriages (Amato & Booth, 2001).

Interparental conflict is often studied in terms of frequency, intensity, and the ways the conflict is managed (Buehler et al., 1998; Grych & Fincham, 1990). Conflict is occasional in some marriages, but is consistent in others and can range from calm discussions to physical

aggression and violence (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Buehler and Trotter (1990) identified four ways parents handle conflict: cooperative, avoidant, overt hostile, and covert hostile.

Cooperative communication involves partners working together toward a resolution, *avoidant* communication involves partners sidestepping the conflict, *overt hostile* communication involves partners directing negativity toward each other (Buehler et al., 1998), and *covert hostile* communication involves partners being passive-aggressive (Buehler & Trotter, 1990). Although interparental conflict is more frequently expressed through nonverbal communication (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977), verbal behaviors such as belligerence, screaming, insulting, and threatening are also used to manage conflict (Buehler et al., 1998).

Additionally, interparental conflict is centered in either instrumental discord or affiliative discord. Instrumental discord refers to disagreements about family finances, plans and interactions with friends and family members, goals and career decisions, and other non-relational issues and affiliative discord refers on the psychological closeness of the couple (Cookston et al., 2003). Of the two, affiliative discord is more harmful to children as they watch their parents attack the relationship and each other rather than confronting the issue at hand (Cookston et al., 2003). Couples who frequently experience affiliative discord are not supportive, are not affectionate, and are unable to discuss problems without getting into an argument (Cookston et al., 2003).

Not all children react to interparental conflict in the same way. Some children display signs of anger whereas other children avoid communicating with others. Children who have been exposed to an incident of adult conflict have a heightened sense of involvement and have a stronger reaction when witnessing another person's anger than children who have not witnessed adult conflict (Cummings et al., 1989). In a study of two-year olds, Cummings et al. (1985)

found that children who witnessed conflict between their parents or other adults exhibited overly-aggressive behavior with their peers over a brief period following the adult conflict. Adult children's exposure to marital discord is also associated with greater conflict in their own marital relationships later in life (Amato & Booth, 2001). Other children may avoid communication with their peers after witnessing conflict (Buhler et al., 1998). Children whose parents engage in frequent intense conflict, as well as those whose parents express dissatisfaction with their marriages, play and interact less with other children (Amato & Booth, 2001; Gottman & Katz, 1989). Because some children who witness interparental conflict may feel overwhelmed by their emotions and are in constant fear of conflict, they avoid interactions where conflict may occur (Gottman & Katz, 1989).

Long-term interparental conflict negatively affects children in three ways: modeling, poor parenting, and stress. Modeling occurs in several ways. Children may model their parents' hostile behaviors, solving conflicts in ways that may be more deviant. Even though some parents intentionally teach and explain prosocial behaviors to their children, children often model what they see instead of what they are told (Schwartz, 1979). Even if children do not believe their parents' conflict behaviors are effective, children may assume that these behaviors are acceptable and/or excusable (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Conversely, Schwartz (1979) contended witnessing interparental conflict may cause children to reject using either parent as a model.

Another explanation pinpoints poor parenting as the cause of the negative impact on children. Interparental conflicts about child-rearing philosophies create inconsistent discipline that confuses children (Block, Block, & Morrison, 1981; Grych & Fincham, 1990). For example, Gottman and Katz (1989) found that parents who suffer distress in their marriage have a cold, unresponsive, angry parenting style that is not structured and consistent. Mothers who frequently

engage in conflict are less warm than mothers who engage in less conflict (Kline, Johnston, & Tschann, 2001). In a study of young adults and their parents, Amato and Booth (2001) found that although parents' marital discord acted as a mediator in the quality of the parent-adult relationship, there was not a direct correlation between the quality of the parent-adult relationship and the adult child's marital discord. Although Amato and Booth's findings suggest that the parent-adult relationship does not negatively affect children's marriages, the parent-adult relationship is a buffer against the negative effects of interparental conflict (Amato & Booth, 2001; Hess & Camara, 1979).

Stress is a third explanation for how children are negatively affected by interparental conflict. Witnessing interparental conflict causes a strain that permeates into most aspects of the child's life (Gottman & Katz, 1989). Stress occurs when parents persuade children to take a position in the conflict, ask children to act as messengers between the parents, or use children as a conduit to relay negative messages about the other parent (Buehler et al., 1998). Parents who use children as a bargaining tool during interparental conflict add an even greater strain on the child (Buhler et al., 1998). Because some children feel responsible for the interparental conflict, they purposely misbehave (Davies & Cummings, 1994) or create their own problems in an attempt to keep interparental conflict from occurring (Emery, 1982).

Interparental conflict is shown to have a range of negative effects on children's communication patterns with their peers. Because so many children display signs of anger after witnessing adult conflict, this study incorporates argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in conjunction with interparental conflict.

Aggressive Communication

Aggressive communication is defined by Infante (1987) as communicative behavior that

uses symbolic force to dominate, damage, defeat, or destroy the locus of attack. There are four traits that demonstrate aggressive communication. These traits work with environmental factors, such as penalties for aggressive behaviors and alcohol consumption, to energize message behavior (Infante, 1987). The two destructive traits are hostility and verbal aggressiveness and the two constructive traits are assertiveness and argumentativeness. Aggressiveness is a subset of the global trait of hostility, meaning that while all acts of verbal aggressiveness are hostile, not all hostile behaviors involve verbal aggressiveness. The same is true of argumentativeness which is a subset of assertiveness. All acts of argumentativeness are assertive, but not all assertive behaviors involve argumentativeness (Infante, 1987).

Verbal aggressiveness is defined as the “exchange of messages between two people where at least one person in the dyad attacks the self-concept of the other person in order to hurt the person psychologically” (Infante & Wigley, 1986, p. 67). Whether a message is verbally aggressive is determined by the recipient of the message (Infante, 1988). The recipient of these messages may experience embarrassment, inadequacy, humiliation, hopelessness, despair, and depression (Infante & Wigley, 1986). Infante, Sabourin, Rudd, and Shannon (1990) identified 10 types of verbally aggressive messages: character attack, competence attack, background attack, physical appearance attack, malediction, teasing, ridicule, threats, swearing, and nonverbal emblems.

Individuals high in verbal aggressiveness use more frequent verbally aggressive messages than individuals who are low in verbal aggressiveness (Infante, Riddle, Horvath, & Tumlin, 1992). Individuals high in verbal aggressiveness are also perceived as assertive, argumentative, and hostile (Infante & Wigley, 1986) and are not responsive to other individuals’ needs (Martin & Anderson, 1996). Although most individuals perceive verbally aggressive behavior as

negative or destructive, individuals high in verbal aggressiveness consider their verbally aggressive behavior as justifiable (Martin, Anderson, & Horvath, 1996) and harmless (Infante et al., 1992). The family also influences children's trait verbal aggressiveness, with positive correlations between authoritarian parenting style and children's verbal aggressiveness and negative correlations between authoritative parenting style and children's verbal aggressiveness (Bayer & Cegala, 1992; Carlo et al., 1999).

Whereas verbal aggressiveness involves attacking another individual's self-concept, argumentativeness involves attacking another individual's position (Infante & Rancer, 1996). Argumentativeness is the predisposition "to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues" (Infante & Rancer, 1982, p. 72). Argumentativeness exists along two dimensions: approach and avoidance. The approach dimension involves favorable excitement toward engaging in arguments whereas the avoidance dimension involves strong inhibitions associated with arguments. Individuals who are high in argumentativeness are high argument approach/low argument avoidance whereas individuals who are low in argumentativeness are low argument approach/high argument avoidance.

Individuals who are high in argumentativeness like the challenge of a good debate. These individuals are confident in their arguing abilities (Infante & Rancer, 1982). Conversely, individuals who are low in argumentativeness lack confidence in their arguing abilities; try to avoid arguments whenever possible; and feel anxiety before, during, and after engaging in arguments (Infante & Rancer, 1982). In addition to differences in arguing ability, individuals high in argumentativeness believe that arguing produces functional and pragmatic outcomes that enhance self-concept whereas individuals low in argumentativeness believe that arguing is pointless and has the potential to damage the self-concept (Rancer, Kosberg, & Baukus, 1992).

Despite the belief that there are some negative consequences of this trait, argumentativeness has not been shown to cause any negative effects on interpersonal relationships (Infante, 1982).

In some family situations, verbal aggressiveness acts as a catalyst to physical violence (Infante et al., 1989; Sabourin, Infante, & Rudd, 1993). Although the presence of verbal aggressiveness does not insure violence will occur, most violent acts in the home are preceded by verbal aggressiveness. In a comparison study of violent and nonviolent couples, violent couples used significantly more verbally aggressive attacks than nonviolent couples (Infante et al., 1990). Verbal aggressiveness can also continue as the relationship ends. Sutter and Martin (1998) found that partners who are both high in verbal aggressiveness use more verbally aggressive messages when terminating the relationship.

Roberto and Finucane (1997) found argumentativeness and aggressiveness were closely correlated in adolescent populations. Roberto and Finucane suggested that adolescents' scores on these measures are closely related because children do not have the same arguing abilities as adults. Arguing ability develops with age as children learn how to construct language effectively, understand other individuals' perspectives, and become more adept at anticipating others' responses (Delia & Clark, 1977). Children and adults can both increase their level of argumentativeness with the proper motivation and training (Infante, 1971; Infante & Rancer, 1996). As a first step to help increase individuals' levels of argumentativeness, Rancer et al. (1992) recommended efforts to change the popular opinion that argumentativeness is a negative rather than a positive communication trait.

Family relationships can potentially suffer the most from the effects of verbally aggressive behavior (Martin et al., 1996). Because family members spend such a large amount of time together, parents' aggressive communication has a large impact on the family structure.

Verbal aggressiveness is negatively correlated with siblings' relational satisfaction levels (Martin, Anderson, Burant, & Weber; 1997; Teven, Martin, & Neupauer, 1998) and marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1979). Booth-Butterfield and Sidelinger (1997) obtained a negative correlation between children's perceptions of parents' verbal aggressiveness and open family communication. In another study, fathers' verbal aggressiveness was positively correlated with social inappropriateness and ineffective parenting techniques (Beatty, Burant, Dobos, & Rudd, 1996). Sons have reported fathers' verbal aggressiveness with accuracy, resulting in a positive correlation between fathers' verbal aggressiveness and use of sarcasm and criticism with their sons (Beatty, Zelle, Dobos, & Rudd, 1994). In addition, parents' verbal aggressiveness is positively correlated with expressions of anger towards children and overreaction to children's misbehaviors (Rudd, Vogl-Bauer, Dobos, Beatty, & Valencic, 1998).

Carlo et al. (1999) obtained a positive correlation between parenting style (i.e. authoritarian, authoritative) and children's level of verbal aggressiveness. Authoritarian parents (i.e., stress obedience over expression) were high in verbal aggressiveness and low in argumentativeness whereas authoritative parents (i.e., use reasoning and encourage children to express themselves) were low in verbal aggressiveness and high in argumentativeness (Carlo et al., 1999). In Grades K-6, children high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness had parents who were encouraging and responsive to their children's communication whereas children low in argumentativeness and high in verbal aggressiveness had parents who were discouraging and were unresponsive towards their children's communication (Bayer & Cegala, 1992). These results indicate that children develop better communication skills when they are encouraged by their parents to be open and expressive.

Investigating whether aggressive communication is similar among family members,

Martin and Anderson (1997) examined the similarities between parents' and children's levels of argumentativeness, assertiveness, and verbal aggressiveness. Mothers who were argumentative and verbally aggressive had daughters who were also argumentative and verbally aggressive. No relationship existed between mothers' and daughters' assertiveness. Mothers' argumentativeness was positively related to sons' argumentativeness and mothers who were high in assertiveness but low in verbal aggressiveness had sons who were also high in assertiveness but low in verbal aggressiveness. There were no similarities between fathers and their children. The strong link between mother and child trait behaviors may be the result of the mother filling the primary parent role in the home, and one possible explanation for children's aggressive behaviors is due to modeling.

Within the marital dyad, verbal aggressiveness is positively correlated with depression for both husbands and wives (Segrin & Fitzpatrick, 1992), which can then create a stressful environment for children. In a family where there is frequent interparental conflict, it is possible parents have less time and energy to focus on their children, thus impeding their children's development of communication skills.

Rationale

The purpose of this study is to examine how interparental conflict is related to children's aggressive communication. Previous research shows that children who witness frequent interparental conflict have a harder time adjusting and display more deviant behaviors than other children, including those children who come from broken homes where the parents are civil to one another (Nye, 1957). Witnessing frequent interparental conflict is associated with a fear of communicating, causing some children to avoid any interaction where they believe conflict may occur (Gottman & Katz, 1989) or when children watch their parents use hostile and belittling

language with each other, they may assume that verbal aggressiveness is an acceptable way of dealing with disagreements or may simply lack a good role model to teach them the effective ways of handling conflict (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Individuals who lack sufficient arguing skills often resort to verbal aggressiveness as a means of handling conflict (Infante, 1988), responding with overly-aggressive behavior when interacting with their peers (Cummings et al., 1985). Based on previous research, it is expected that adolescents whose parents engage in frequent interparental conflict will have a more difficult time developing their communication skills, particularly verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness. To investigate this idea, the following hypotheses are posed:

- H1: A negative correlation will exist between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to approach arguments.
- H2: A positive correlation will exist between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to avoid arguments.
- H3: A positive correlation will exist between interparental conflict and adolescents' verbal aggressiveness.

It is possible, however, that adolescents' tolerance for disagreement may affect the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and their own aggressive communication. Tolerance for disagreement is defined as an individual's threshold for interpersonal conflict (McCroskey & Wheelless, 1976). An important distinction separates disagreement from conflict. Disagreement is characterized as involving differences in opinions whereas conflict involves competition, suspicion, distrust, and hostility (Knutson, McCroskey, Knutson, & Hurt, 1979) with affect serving as the discriminating factor between disagreement and conflict. As affect decreases, the disagreement transgresses into conflict (Knutson et al., 1979). Knutson et al.

(1979) proposed that individuals with high tolerance for disagreement engage in more constructive problem-solving strategies in disagreements that could potentially become conflicts. Conversely, Knutson and colleagues proposed that individuals with a low tolerance for disagreement engage in and initiate more discussions that involve high negative affect, which would have a greater probability of transgressing from disagreements to dysfunctional conflicts.

Though scantily studied, tolerance for disagreement is negatively correlated with communication apprehension and positively correlated with communication flexibility and cognitive flexibility (Martin, Anderson, & Thweatt, 1998). Teven, McCroskey, and Richmond (1998) found that tolerance for disagreement failed to correlate with touch avoidance. McCroskey (1980) found that employee tolerance for disagreement was positively correlated with employee satisfaction.

Because individuals with a high tolerance for disagreement are relatively resistant to conflict whereas individuals with a low tolerance for disagreement are prone to engage in conflict (McCroskey, 1992), it is possible tolerance for disagreement mediates the relationship between interparental conflict and adolescents' aggressive communication. To explore the notion, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: When controlling for tolerance for disagreement, what relationship will exist between interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to approach arguments?

RQ2: When controlling for tolerance for disagreement, what relationship will exist between interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to avoid arguments?

RQ3: When controlling for tolerance for disagreement, what relationship will exist between interparental conflict and adolescents' verbal aggressiveness?

CHAPTER 2

Method

Participants

Participants were students in grades 10-12 enrolled in three History ($n = 50$), one Sociology ($n = 9$), three Psychology ($n = 48$), three Economics/Government ($n = 31$), and four English ($n = 21$) classes at a high school in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania. There was a response rate of 64%, with 159 participants out of a possible sample of 250. High school students were used in this study because they are old enough to accurately assess their parents' communication while currently living in the family environment (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990).

Participants were between the ages of 14 and 18 ($M = 16.30$, $SD = 1.67$). Two participants did not report their age. Sixty-one (38.85%) were male and 96 (61.15%) were females. Two participants did not report their gender. One-hundred and twenty-one participants reported currently living with their mother and father, 10 participants reported currently living with their mother and stepfather, 2 participants reported currently living with their father and stepmother, 4 participants reported currently living with their father, and 19 reported living with their mother. 3 participants did not report with whom they live. Participants' reported time spent living in their specified families ranged from less than a year to 13.84 years ($SD = 4.89$). Nine participants did not complete all sections of the questionnaire because they did not spend a significant amount of their lives in a two-parent household, resulting in a sample size of 150 participants.

Procedures and Instruments

Data collection occurred over three days in May, 2004. On the first day, the primary researcher gave each student the following items in an unsealed envelope: a cover letter

explaining the purpose of the study (see Appendix A), a parent consent form (see Appendix B), a student assent form (see Appendix C), and the student questionnaire. Students who chose to participate had two days to complete the materials. Students who chose to participate placed the parent consent form, student assent form, and the questionnaire into an envelope, sealed the envelope, and placed the envelope in a drop box provided in each classroom. On the third day, the primary researcher retrieved the materials from the drop boxes. After collection, the consent forms and the questionnaires were kept separate to ensure participant confidentiality.

The participant questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part asked participants to indicate their age, their sex, with whom they were currently living, and how long they had lived with those individuals. These questions were included for potential use in post-hoc analyses. The second part included the following scales: (a) a modified version of the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992), (b) the Argumentativeness Scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982), (c) the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986), and (d) the Revised Tolerance for Disagreement Scale (Teven et al., 1998). To avoid order effects, the scales were varied in their order.

The *Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale* (see Appendix D) is a 49-item, nine-dimensional instrument that measures children's views of interparental conflict in terms of frequency, intensity, resolution, content, perceived threat, coping efficacy, self-blame, triangulation, and stability. Due to concerns raised by Kline, Wood, and Moore (2003), two items were omitted from the original scale (e.g., parents breaking and throwing things, parents shoving). Kline et al. (2003) found these items had a low variance and comparatively lower item-to-total variance than the other 47 items. On this scale, participants identified the parent(s) with whom they currently live and rated statements about interparental conflict on a 5-point Likert

scale ranging from *almost never true* (1) to *almost always true* (5). (The original instrument asked participants to rate each statement using one of the following three categories: *true*, *sort of true*, and *false*.) Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .80 to .89 have been obtained for the original 49-item scale (Bickham & Fiese, 1997; Ulu & Fisiloglu, 2002). In this study, a reliability coefficient of .95 ($M = 2.10$, $SD = .63$) was obtained for the 47-item scale.

The *Argumentativeness Scale* (see Appendix E) is a 20-item, two-dimensional instrument that measures participants' predispositions to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues. Ten items measure an individual's tendency to approach arguments (ARGap) and 10 items measure an individual's tendency to avoid arguments (ARGav). All statements are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *almost never true* (1) to *almost always true* (5). Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .80 to .88 for ARGap and from .77 to .84 for ARGav have been obtained (Bayer & Cegala, 1992; Rancer, Baukus, & Amato, 1986; Rancer, Baukus, & Infante, 1985). In this study, a reliability coefficient of .89 ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .78$) was obtained for the ARGap scale and a reliability coefficient of .86 ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .76$) was obtained for the ARGav scale.

The *Verbal Aggressiveness Scale* (see Appendix F) is a 20-item, one-dimensional instrument that measures an individual's tendencies to attack the self-concept of others. Statements are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *almost never true* (1) to *almost always true* (5). Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .79 to .91 have been obtained for the scale (Beatty et al., 1994; Booth-Butterfield & Sidelinger, 1997; Rudd et al., 1998). In this study, a reliability coefficient of .89 ($M = 2.60$, $SD = .67$) was obtained for the scale.

The *Revised Tolerance for Disagreement Scale* (see Appendix G) is a 15-item, one-dimensional instrument that measures an individual's tolerance for disagreement. Due to

concerns raised by Teven et al. (1998), five items were omitted from the 20-item scale (e.g. doesn't take long for me to get into disagreement, disagreements about issues and ideas lead to better good decisions, I am not afraid to tell others they are wrong, people who disagree bother me, disagreements make me nervous). Teven et al. (1998) found these items to have a low reliability. Statements are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Previous reliability coefficients ranging from .82 to .90 have been obtained for the original 20-item scale (Martin et al., 1998; Richmond & McCroskey, 1980; Teven et al., 1998). In this study, a reliability coefficient of .86 ($M = 3.10$, $SD = .65$) was obtained for the 15-item scale.

Data Analysis

The three hypotheses were examined using Pearson Product-Moment correlations. The three research questions were answered using partial correlation analyses, with the Tolerance for Disagreement Scale score used as the controlling variable.

CHAPTER 3

Results

Before addressing the hypotheses and research questions, Pearson Product-Moment correlations were calculated among interparental conflict, argumentativeness (i.e., approach and avoidance dimensions), verbal aggressiveness, and tolerance for disagreement (see Table 1).

The first hypothesis predicted that adolescents' perceived interparental conflict would be negatively correlated with adolescents' tendencies to approach arguments. The hypothesis was not supported. Results of a Pearson Product-Moment correlation indicated an insignificant relationship exists between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to approach arguments, $r(148) = -.05, p = .53$.

The second hypothesis predicted that adolescents' perceived interparental conflict would be positively correlated with adolescents' tendencies to avoid arguments. The hypothesis was not supported. Results of a Pearson Product-Moment correlation indicated an insignificant relationship exists between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to avoid arguments, $r(148) = .06, p = .42$.

The third hypothesis predicted that adolescents' perceived interparental conflict would be positively correlated with adolescents' verbal aggressiveness. The hypothesis was not supported. Results of a Pearson Product-Moment correlation indicated an insignificant relationship exists between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' verbal aggressiveness, $r(148) = .12, p = .19$.

The first research question asked if, when controlling for tolerance for disagreement, a relationship existed between interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to approach arguments. Results of a partial correlation analysis revealed that no such relationship exists, r

(131) = .001, $p = .99$.

The second research question asked if, when controlling for tolerance for disagreement, a relationship existed between interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to avoid arguments. Results of a partial correlation analysis revealed that no such relationship exists, $r(130) = -.03$, $p = .74$.

The third research question asked if, when controlling for tolerance for disagreement, a relationship existed between interparental conflict and adolescents' verbal aggressiveness. Results of a partial correlation analysis revealed that no such relationship exists, $r(126) = .09$, $p = .34$.

Several post-hoc analyses were conducted. In the first post-hoc analysis, participants were divided into two groups based on with whom they lived. Participants who reported they lived with both their mother and father were placed in an "intact" group ($n = 118$) whereas participants who reported they lived with a mother and stepfather, a father and stepmother, mother only, or father only were placed in a "non-intact" group ($n = 30$). These two groups were compared to examine whether adolescents from intact families differed from adolescents in non-intact families in perceived interparental conflict. Results of a t-test indicated a significant difference between the two groups, $t(146) = .018$, $p < .05$, with the intact group reporting significantly less perceived interparental conflict ($M = 1.98$, $SD = .55$) than the non-intact group ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .82$).

In a second post-hoc analysis, the Pearson Product-Moment correlations were recalculated for the intact (see Table 2) and non-intact groups (see Table 3). For the intact group, a significant positive relationship existed between perceived interparental conflict and verbal aggressiveness, $r(116) = .19$, $p < .05$ but no significant relationship existed between perceived

interparental conflict and argumentativeness approach, $r(116) = .06$, $p = .51$, argumentativeness avoidance, $r(116) = .03$, $p = .71$, and tolerance for disagreement, $r(116) = -.04$, $p = .64$. For the non-intact group, there was no significant relationship between perceived interparental conflict and argumentativeness approach, $r(28) = -.24$, $p = .19$, argumentativeness avoidance, $r(28) = .04$, $p = .85$, verbal aggressiveness, $r(28) = .05$, $p = .79$, and tolerance for disagreement, $r(28) = -.16$, $p = .40$.

The third post-hoc analysis applied the subscales of the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict scale. Pearson Product-Moment correlations calculated the relationship between scores on each subscale and each of the following: argumentativeness approach, argumentativeness avoidance, verbal aggressiveness, and tolerance for disagreement (See Table 4).

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' aggressive communication, exploring tolerance for disagreement as a mediating variable. No significant relationships were found between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to approach arguments, adolescents' tendencies to avoid arguments, and adolescents' verbal aggressiveness. When controlling for tolerance for disagreement, no significant relationships were found between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' tendencies to approach arguments, adolescents' tendencies to avoid arguments, and adolescents' verbal aggressiveness.

There are three possible explanations as to why the hypotheses were not supported. The first explanation incorporates participants' responses on perceived interparental conflict. Significant correlations between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' aggressive communication traits may not have emerged due to participants' low reports of perceived interparental conflict. In this study, a mean of 2.1 ($SD = .63$) was obtained for the Children's Perception of Interparental Scale. The low mean may be attributed to procedural problems. Based on guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board, parent consent forms included warnings and descriptions that may have hindered some participants and/or their parents from wanting to take part in the study. The Institutional Review Board also required participants to complete all of the materials in their home. Although participants were instructed to complete the survey without help or influence from other family members, it is possible that participants felt uncomfortable reporting high levels of perceived interparental conflict while completing the survey at home. In addition, students whose parents engaged in frequent, hostile conflict may

have avoided participation altogether.

The second explanation for lack of significant findings centers on the participants' ages. Although previous research supports the idea that high levels of interparental conflict negatively affect children's levels of social adjustment, this research has been primarily conducted using children between the ages of 2-12 rather than adolescents between the ages of 14-18 as in this study (Cookston et al., 2003; Cummings et al., 1985; Gottman & Katz, 1989; Grych & Fincham, 1990). It is possible that although interparental conflict affects children, there is a lessened effect as children reach adolescence. This possibility coincides with Amato's (1986) findings that self-esteem and interparental conflict are more highly correlated for 8–9 year old females than for 15–16 year old females. In addition, as children enter their teenage years, their actions are less influenced by their families and more influenced by their peers, suggesting that parents' lack of good communication may have less of an impact on adolescents' traits than communication between peers (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Mounts & Steinberg, 1995).

A third explanation rests on parents' communication traits. Although parents' perceived communication with each other was assessed to some degree via the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale, parents' reports of their own behaviors were not measured in this study. Adolescents' aggressive communication traits are similar to their parents, including levels of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness (Martin & Anderson, 1997). The majority of participants in this study may come from homes where the parent(s) display functional communication traits on a daily basis which, according to Booth-Butterfield and Sidelinger (1997), would have a positive impact on the children's communication traits. Although relational partners with high levels of interparental conflict could engage in aggressive communication, it is possible that parents with this kind of relationship may only be displaying these negative

behaviors within that specific relationship. In such a scenario, it is speculated that adolescents would be able to develop the positive communication traits from observing parents' everyday interactions with other people (e.g., neighbors, friends, co-workers). Perhaps parents' communication traits impact adolescents' communication traits whereas interparental conflict impacts adolescents' communication in their own romantic relationships. This notion is consistent with previous findings which show a positive correlation between parents' and children's communication traits and a positive correlation between interparental conflict and children's adult romantic relationships (Amato & Booth, 2001; Weber & Patterson, 1997).

Results of a post-hoc analysis revealed a significant difference between the levels of interparental conflict for adolescents living in intact versus non-intact homes, with adolescents from non-intact families reporting higher levels of perceived interparental conflict. There is speculation that high levels of conflict and emotional abuse are equally common in intact and non-intact homes and that divorce can have a positive effect on the family structure when it aids in decreasing parents' conflict levels (Amato & Booth, 2001; Grych & Fincham, 2001). Divorce is not a problem by itself, but it can often trigger or heighten pre-divorce conflict (Amato & Booth, 2001; Kulka & Weingarten, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) conducted a longitudinal study of children and parents of divorce. In interviews that were conducted 10 years after their parents' divorce, participants reported the traumatic events of their parents' separation with great accuracy and reported ongoing feelings of loneliness and sadness. These negative outcomes were greatest for participants whose parents engaged in frequent, hostile conflict (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Johnston, Kline, and Tschann (1989) found that even when parents were not fighting, divorce which resulted in children spending equal time with each of their parents corresponded with negative communication traits such as verbal

aggression in children. Although the clearest indicator of children's adjustment is parents' behaviors towards each other, regardless of whether they are divorced or separated (Amato & Booth, 2001; Porter & O'Leary, 1980), children from intact families demonstrate better social adjustment overall than children from divorced families (Booth & Amato, 2001; Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, Perry, Nastasi, & Lightel, 1986).

One limitation of this study was the sample type. Students attended a school where the majority of the students are Caucasian and middle class. The diversity as well as the type of family structure were not well representative of all American adolescents. In addition to having lesser levels of interparental conflict, the majority of families who participated may have had a higher level of involvement than families who chose not to participate. In other words, parents who signed consent forms may be more interested in what their child does at school than parents who chose not to participate, further narrowing the diversity of the sample.

To account for some of these limitations, future research should ensure an adequate distribution between low versus high levels of interparental conflict and intact versus non-intact families. Researchers should survey members of support groups that focus on problems of divorce, conflict, and abuse in the family. To assess the role of family communication in the relationships between interparental conflict and aggressive communication, McLeod and Chaffee's (1972) family communication patterns should be integrated. These patterns might demonstrate how parents encourage or discourage their children from speaking openly about their thoughts. Additional research on the relationships between family communication patterns and conflict management strategies could also be incorporated (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). Longitudinal studies could address the impact of interparental conflict on children throughout their lifespan. By incorporating these suggestions, researchers could more thoroughly examine

the relationships between interparental conflict and children's aggressive communication.

In conclusion, these findings suggest that interparental conflict is not related to adolescents' aggressive communication (i.e., argumentativeness approach, argumentativeness avoidance, verbal aggressiveness) nor is tolerance for disagreement a mediating variable between interparental conflict and adolescents' aggressive communication. Results suggest that although interparental conflict is linked to a number of other negative outcomes in children, interparental conflict has little to no known effects on adolescents' communication traits.

TABLE 1

Correlation Matrix Among All Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Interparental Conflict	-	-.05	.07	.12	-.09
2. Argumentativeness (Approach)		-	-.65*	.29*	.68*
3. Argumentativeness (Avoidance)			-	-.37*	-.66*
4. Verbal Aggressiveness				-	.24*
5. Tolerance for Disagreement					-

Note. * $p < .05$.

TABLE 2

Correlations for Intact Group

	Interparental Conflict
1. Argumentativeness (Approach)	.06
2. Argumentativeness (Avoidance)	.03
3. Verbal Aggressiveness	.09*
4. Tolerance for Disagreement	-.09

Note. * $p < .05$.

TABLE 3

Correlations for Non-intact Group

	Interparental Conflict
1. Argumentativeness (Approach)	-.24
2. Argumentativeness (Avoidance)	.04
3. Verbal Aggressiveness	.05
4. Tolerance for Disagreement	-.16

Note. * $p < .05$.

TABLE 4

Correlations for Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Subscales

	Argumentativeness Approach	Argumentativeness Avoidance	Verbal Aggressiveness	Tolerance for Disagreement
1. Frequency	-0.01	-0.023	0.04	0.03
2. Intensity	-0.11	0.02	0.05	-0.04
3. Resolution	-0.08	0.03	0.07	-0.03
4. Content	0.13	-0.06	.26*	-0.01
5. Perceived Threat	-0.13	.25*	-0.03	.18*
6. Coping Efficacy	-0.1	.17*	0.14	-0.12
7. Self-Blame	0.02	-0.03	.25*	-0.08
8. Triangulation	0.06	0.08	0.01	-0.14
9. Stability	-0.05	-0.03	<.01	-0.03

Note. * $p < .05$.

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Appendix A:

March 22, 2004

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about the effects of perceived interparental conflict on adolescents' argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, and family communication patterns. This research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of a Master's Degree in Communication Studies at West Virginia University.

Please complete the following questionnaire in reference to the adults with whom you live. Please read each statement carefully and respond by supplying the answer that best represents your level of agreement with the statement. If you are unable to answer a question, leave the blank empty. There is neither a right nor a wrong answer to any statement.

Do not place any marks of identification anywhere on this questionnaire. All questionnaires will be kept anonymous. Participation in this study is voluntary – your class standing, your class grades, and your membership on an athletic team or student organization cannot be affected by either your refusal to participate in, or withdraw from participation in, this study. You can stop at any point without fear of penalty. There are no risks associated with participation in this study. This questionnaire takes about 20 minutes to complete. Completing and returning this questionnaire indicates that you have agreed to participate in this study. Completed questionnaires, consent forms, and assent forms should be placed into a sealed envelope and deposited in a box located in the classroom.

If you would like more information about this research project, please feel free to contact us at either (304) 293-3905 or ckunkle@mix.wvu.edu. This study has been approved by West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Christine E. Kunkle
M.A. Student

Scott A. Myers, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor

Appendix B:

**PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT AND
INFORMATION FORM****Adolescents' Perceptions of Interparental
Conflict and the Impact on their Aggressive
Communication Traits****Introduction**

My son/daughter, _____, has been invited to participate in this research study which has been explained to me by Christine E. Kunkle. This research is being conducted by Christine Kunkle, B.A. and Scott Myers, PhD. to fulfill the requirements for a Master's thesis in Communication Studies in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University.

Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the effects of perceived interparental conflict on adolescents' argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, and family communication patterns. WVU researchers hope to enroll approximately 200 people in this study.

Description of Procedures

This study will be conducted at Cedar Cliff High School. This study involves four written questionnaires and will take approximately 20 minutes for my child to complete.

My child will be asked to complete four questionnaires. The first questionnaire assesses the participant's perceived level of conflict between the adults living at home with the participant. The second questionnaire assesses the participant's level of argumentativeness. The third questionnaire assesses the participant's level of verbal aggressiveness. The fourth questionnaire assesses the participant's family communication patterns. These four questionnaires take approximately 20 minutes to complete. I have been told that I may see the questionnaire before signing this consent and that my child does not have to answer all the questions if he/she decides to participate. Completed questionnaires, consent forms, and assent forms should be placed in the provided enveloped, sealed, and deposited in the designated box located in the classroom. Approximately 200 subjects are expected to participate in this study.

Submission date _____

Page 1 of 3

initials_____
date

Adolescents' Perceptions of Interparental Conflict and the Impact on their Aggressive Communication Traits

Risks and Discomforts

There may be feelings of distress from taking these questionnaires. Your child is encouraged to consult their high school guidance counselor for help with these issues.

Alternatives

I understand that I do not have to sign this consent form and that my child does not have to participate in this study.

Benefits

I understand that this study is not expected to be of direct benefit to me or my child, but the knowledge gained may be of benefit to others.

Contact Persons

For more information about this research, I can contact Christine E. Kunkle, at 304-293-3905 (ckunkle@mix.wvu.edu), or her advisor, Dr. Scott A. Myers at 304-293-3905 (smyers@mail.wvu.edu). For information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at 304-293-7073.

Confidentiality

I understand that any information about my child obtained as a result of my participation in this research will be kept as confidential as legally possible. I understand that our research records, just like hospital records, may be subpoenaed by court order or may be inspected by the study sponsor or federal regulatory authorities without my additional consent. In any publications that result from this research, neither my name, my child's name, nor any information from which we might be identified will be published.

Submission date _____

Page 2 of 3

initials

date

Adolescents' Perceptions of Interparental Conflict and the Impact on their Aggressive Communication Traits

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that I may withdraw my child from this study at any time and that such refusal to participate will not affect his/her class grade or class standing. Refusal to participate or withdrawal will involve no penalty or loss of benefits for my child or me, nor will it affect my child's class standing. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and I have received answers concerning areas I did not understand.

Upon signing this form, I will receive a copy.

I willingly consent to my child's participation in this research.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Time

Signature of Investigator or Co-Investigator

Date

Time

Submission date _____

Page 3 of 3

Appendix C:

STUDENT ASSENT FORM**Adolescents' Perceptions of Interparental Conflict and the Impact on their Aggressive Communication Traits****Introduction**

I, _____, have been invited to participate in this research study which has been explained to me by Christine E. Kunkle. This research is being conducted by Christine Kunkle, B.A. and Scott Myers, PhD. to fulfill the requirements for a master's thesis in Communication Studies in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University.

Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the effects of perceived interparental conflict on adolescents' argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, and family communication patterns. WVU researchers hope to enroll approximately 200 people in this study.

Description of Procedures

This study involves four written questionnaires and will take approximately 20 minutes for me to complete.

I have been told to complete four questionnaires. The first questionnaire assesses the participant's perceived level of conflict between the adults living at home with the participant. The second questionnaire assesses the participant's level of argumentativeness. The third questionnaire assesses the participant's level of verbal aggressiveness. The fourth questionnaire assesses the participant's family communication patterns. These four questionnaires take approximately 20 minutes to complete. I have been told that I may see the questionnaire before signing this consent and that I do not have to answer all the questions if I decide to participate. Completed questionnaires, consent forms, and assent forms should be placed in the provided envelope, sealed, and deposited in the designated box located in the classroom. Approximately 200 subjects are expected to participate in this study.

Submission date _____

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Risks and Discomforts

There may be feelings of distress from taking these questionnaires. Your child is encouraged to consult their high school guidance counselor for help with these issues.

Alternatives

I understand that I do not have to participate in this study.

Benefits

I understand that this study is not expected to be of direct benefit to me, but the knowledge gained may be of benefit to others.

Contact Persons

For more information about this research, I can contact Christine E. Kunkle, at 304-293-3905 (ckunkle@mix.wvu.edu), or her advisor, Dr. Scott A. Myers at 304-293-3905 (smyers@mail.wvu.edu). For information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at 304-293-7073.

Confidentiality

I understand that any information about me obtained as a result of my participation in this research will be kept as confidential as legally possible. I understand that my research records, just like hospital records, may be subpoenaed by court order or may be inspected by the study sponsor or federal regulatory authorities without my additional consent. In any publications that result from this research, neither my name nor any information from which I might be identified will be published.

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Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent to participate in this study at any time and that such refusal to participate will not affect my class grade or class standing. Refusal to participate or withdrawal will involve no penalty to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and I have received answers concerning areas I did not understand. In the event new information becomes available that may affect my willingness to continue to participate in the study, this information will be given to me so I may make an informed decision about my participation.

Upon signing this form, I will receive a copy.

I willingly consent to participate in this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

Time

Signature of Investigator or Co-Investigator

Date

Time

Submission date _____

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Appendix D:

Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992)

1. Who do you live with? _____

2. How long have you lived in your family unit? _____

In every family there are times when the parents don't get along. What kinds of feelings do you have when the adults living in your home have arguments or disagreements?

If the statement is **almost never true**, write a **1** in the blank.

If the statement is **rarely true**, write a **2** in the blank.

If the statement is **occasionally true**, write a **3** in the blank.

If the statement is **often true**, write a **4** in the blank.

If the statement is **almost always true**, write a **5** in the blank.

- ___ 1. I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing.
- ___ 2. When my parents have an argument they usually work it out.
- ___ 3. My parents often get into arguments about things I do at school.
- ___ 4. My parents get really mad when they argue.
- ___ 5. When my parents argue I can do something to make myself feel better.
- ___ 6. I get scared when my parents argue.
- ___ 7. I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue.
- ___ 8. I'm not to blame when my parents have arguments.
- ___ 9. They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot.
- ___ 10. Even after my parents stop arguing they stay mad at each other.
- ___ 11. My parents have arguments because they are not happy together.
- ___ 12. When my parents have a disagreement they discuss it quietly.
- ___ 13. I don't know what to do when my parents have arguments.
- ___ 14. My parents are often mean to each other even when I'm around.
- ___ 15. When my parents argue I worry about what will happen to me.
- ___ 16. I don't feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement.
- ___ 17. It's usually my fault when my parents argue.
- ___ 18. I often see my parents arguing.
- ___ 19. When my parents disagree about something, they usually come up with a solution.
- ___ 20. My parents' arguments are usually about something I did.
- ___ 21. The reasons my parents argue never change.
- ___ 22. When my parents have an argument they say mean things to each other.
- ___ 23. When my parents argue or disagree I can usually help make things better.
- ___ 24. When my parents argue I'm afraid that something bad will happen.
- ___ 25. My mom wants me to be on her side when she and my dad argue.
- ___ 26. Even if they don't say it, I know I'm to blame when my parents argue.
- ___ 27. My parents hardly ever argue.
- ___ 28. When my parents argue they usually make up right away.
- ___ 29. My parents usually argue or disagree because of things that I do.

- ___30. My parents argue because they don't really love each other.
- ___31. When my parents have an argument they yell a lot.
- ___32. When my parents argue there's nothing I can do to stop them.
- ___33. When my parents argue I worry that one of them will get hurt.
- ___34. I feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement.
- ___35. My parents often nag and complain about each other around the house.
- ___36. My parents hardly ever yell when they have a disagreement.
- ___37. My parents often get into arguments when I do something wrong.
- ___38. After my parents stop arguing, they are friendly toward each other.
- ___39. When my parents argue I'm afraid that they will yell at me too.
- ___40. My parents blame me when they have arguments.
- ___41. My dad wants me to be on his side when he and my mom argue.
- ___42. When my parents argue or disagree there's nothing I can do to make myself feel better.
- ___43. When my parents argue I worry that they might get divorced.
- ___44. My parents still act mean after they have had an argument.
- ___45. My parents have arguments because they don't know how to get along.
- ___46. Usually it's not my fault when my parents have arguments.
- ___47. When my parents argue they don't listen to anything I say.

(Note. The following items were reverse coded: 1, 2, 5, 8, 12, 16, 19, 23, 27, 28, 36, and 38.)

Appendix E:

Argumentativeness Scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982)

This questionnaire contains statements about *arguing controversial issues*. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally by placing the appropriate number in the blank to the left of the statement.

If the statement is **almost never true**, write a **1** in the blank.

If the statement is **rarely true**, write a **2** in the blank.

If the statement is **occasionally true**, write a **3** in the blank.

If the statement is **often true**, write a **4** in the blank.

If the statement is **almost always true**, write a **5** in the blank.

- ___ 1. While in an argument, I worry that the person I am arguing with will form a negative impression of me.
- ___ 2. Arguing over controversial issues improves my intelligence.
- ___ 3. I enjoy avoiding arguments.
- ___ 4. I am energetic and enthusiastic when I argue.
- ___ 5. Once I finish an argument I promise myself that I will not get into another.
- ___ 6. Arguing with a person creates more problems for me than it solves.
- ___ 7. I have a pleasant, good feeling when I win a point in an argument.
- ___ 8. When I finish arguing with someone I feel nervous and upset.
- ___ 9. I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue.
- ___ 10. I get an unpleasant feeling when I realize I am about to get into an argument.
- ___ 11. I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue.
- ___ 12. I am happy when I keep an argument from happening.
- ___ 13. I do not like to miss the opportunity to argue a controversial issue.
- ___ 14. I prefer being with people who rarely disagree with me.
- ___ 15. I consider an argument an exciting intellectual challenge.
- ___ 16. I find myself unable to think of effective points during an argument.
- ___ 17. I feel refreshed and satisfied after an argument on a controversial issue.
- ___ 18. I have the ability to do well in an argument.
- ___ 19. I try to avoid getting in arguments.
- ___ 20. I feel excitement when I expect that a conversation I am in is leading to an argument.

(Note. To compute tendency to approach argumentative situations (ARGap), scores on items 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 20 were summed. To compute tendency to avoid argumentative situations (ARGav), scores on items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 19 were summed.)

Appendix F:

Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986)

This survey is concerned with how we try to get people to comply with our wishes. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally when you try to influence other persons. Use the following scale:

If the statement is **almost never true**, write a **1** in the blank.

If the statement is **rarely true**, write a **2** in the blank.

If the statement is **occasionally true**, write a **3** in the blank.

If the statement is **often true**, write a **4** in the blank.

If the statement is **almost always true**, write a **5** in the blank.

- ___ 1. I am extremely careful to avoid attacking individuals' intelligence when I attack their ideas.
- ___ 2. When individuals are very stubborn, I use insults to soften the stubbornness.
- ___ 3. I try very hard to avoid having other people feel bad about themselves when I try to influence them.
- ___ 4. When people refuse to do a task I know is important, without good reason, I tell them they are unreasonable.
- ___ 5. When others do things I regard as stupid, I try to be extremely gentle with them.
- ___ 6. If individuals I am trying to influence really deserve it, I attack their character.
- ___ 7. When people behave in ways that are in very poor taste, I insult them in order to shock them into proper behavior.
- ___ 8. I try to make people feel good about themselves even when their ideas are stupid.
- ___ 9. When people simply will not budge on a matter of importance I lose my temper and say rather strong things to them.
- ___ 10. When people criticize my shortcomings, I take it in good humor and do not try to get back at them.
- ___ 11. When individuals insult me, I get a lot of pleasure out of really telling them off.
- ___ 12. When I dislike individuals greatly, I try not to show it in what I saw or how I say it.
- ___ 13. I like poking fun at people who do things which are very stupid in order to stimulate their intelligence.
- ___ 14. When I attack persons' ideas, I try not to damage their self-concept.
- ___ 15. When I try to influence people, I make a great effort not to offend them.
- ___ 16. When people do things which are mean or cruel, I attack their character in order to help correct their behavior.
- ___ 17. I refuse to participate in arguments when they involve personal attacks.
- ___ 18. When nothing seems to work in trying to influence others, I yell and scream in order to get some movement from them.
- ___ 19. When I am not able to refute others' positions, I try to make them feel defensive in order to weaken their positions.
- ___ 20. When an argument shifts to personal attacks, I try very hard to change the subject.

(Note. The following items were reverse coded: 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, and 20.)

Appendix G:

Revised Tolerance for Disagreement Scale (Teven, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1998)

This questionnaire involves people's feelings and orientations. Hence, there are no right or wrong answers. Indicate your reaction to each item. All responses are to reflect the degree to which you believe the item applies to you. Please use the following system to indicate the degree to which you agree the item describes you.

If you **strongly disagree** with the statement, write a **1** in the blank.

If you **disagree** with the statement, write a **2** in the blank.

If you **neither agree nor disagree** with the statement, write a **3** in the blank.

If you **agree** with the statement, write a **4** in the blank.

If you **strongly agree** with the statement, write a **5** in the blank.

- ___ 1. It is more fun to be involved in a discussion where there is a lot of disagreement.
- ___ 2. I enjoy talking to people with points of view different than mine.
- ___ 3. I don't like to be in situations where people are in disagreement.
- ___ 4. I prefer being in groups where everyone's beliefs are the same as mine.
- ___ 5. Disagreements are generally helpful.
- ___ 6. I prefer to change the topic of discussion when disagreement occurs.
- ___ 7. I tend to create disagreements in conversation because it serves a useful purpose.
- ___ 8. I enjoy arguing with other people about things on which we disagree.
- ___ 9. I would prefer to work independently rather than to work with other people and have disagreements.
- ___ 10. I would prefer joining a group where no disagreements occur.
- ___ 11. I don't like to disagree with other people.
- ___ 12. Given a choice, I would leave a conversation rather than continue a disagreement.
- ___ 13. I avoid talking with people who I think will disagree with me.
- ___ 14. I enjoy disagreeing with others.
- ___ 15. Disagreement stimulates a conversation and causes me to communicate more.

(Note. The following items were reverse coded: 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.)