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The Role of Communication Accommodation in Mother-in-Law/ Daughter-in-Law Relationships

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The Role of Communication Accommodation in Mother-in-Law/Daughter-in-Law
Relationships

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Thesis submitted to the
Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts in
Communication Studies

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satisfaction, shared family identity, communication accommodation

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ABSTRACT

The Role of Communication Accommodation in Mother-in-Law/Daughter-in-Law Relationships

Erin C. Shelton

The goal of this thesis was to further the literature on mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships by directly employing Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) to examine relationships between categories of accommodation and relational quality in these relationships. Daughters-in-law ($N = 677$) were solicited via private Facebook groups to complete an online survey regarding accommodation (their own and their mothers-in-law's), their feelings of shared family identity, and their relationship satisfaction in their relationship with their mothers-in-law. Results demonstrated relationships between mothers-in-law's accommodation, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation of their daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity and relationship satisfaction. Additionally, relationships were present between daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity and relationship satisfaction and their accommodation (active and inactive), nonaccommodation, and reluctant accommodation of their mothers-in-law. These results confirm that CAT is directly applicable to mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships in that *both* women's accommodation coincides with daughters-in-law's perceptions of satisfaction and feeling like a family. Additional findings assert the importance of mediated communication, warrant further study of the nature of in-law dynamics, and invite researchers to reconsider the conceptualization of relationship satisfaction in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Scarlett. In becoming a mother, I have gained new and complex family relationships, while others have changed and grown. As I learn more about the complexities of motherhood and family, my interest in family communication continues to grow. Motherhood has motivated and challenged me throughout the completion of this thesis and my daughter continues to teach and inspire me every day.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables.....	vii
Chapter 1 – Literature Review.....	1-23
Introduction.....	1
Mother-in-Law/Daughter-in-Law Relationships.....	3
Communication Accommodation Theory.....	9
Accommodation.....	12
Nonaccommodation.....	13
Overaccommodation.....	14
Underaccommodation.....	15
Reluctant Accommodation.....	16
Rationale/Hypotheses.....	18
Chapter 2 – Method.....	24-35
Participants.....	24
Procedures.....	26
Instrumentation.....	27
Analysis.....	34
Chapter 3 – Results.....	36-45
Preliminary Analysis.....	36

Hypothesis Testing.....	40
Post-Hoc Analysis.....	43
Chapter 4 – Discussion.....	46-57
CAT Implications.....	46
In-law Relationships.....	48
Limitations and Future Directions.....	52
Conclusion.....	56
References.....	58-66
Appendices.....	67-99
Appendix A.....	67
Appendix B.....	68
Appendix C.....	69

List of Tables

Table 1.....	39
Table 2.....	41
Table 3.....	45

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In-law relationships, although not studied as frequently as family-of-origin relationships (Bengston, 2004; Soliz & Rittenour, 2012), have been paid increasing attention by family communication scholars (e.g., Fowler & Rittenour, 2017; Mikucki-Enyart, 2011; Mikucki-Enyart, Caughlin, & Rittenour, 2015; Prentice, 2008; Prentice, 2009; Rittenour, 2012; Rittenour & Kellas, 2015; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Serewicz, 2008; Serewicz & Canary, 2008; Serewicz, Hosmer, Ballard, & Griffin, 2008). In-law relationships are complex, nonvoluntary relationships characterized by a variety of positive and negative outcomes (Fischer, 1983). Because individuals are loyal to and identify with their families-of-origin (Adler, Denmark, & Ahmed, 1989; Fischer, 1983; Marx, Miller, & Huffmon, 2011), and because social scripts dictating norms for in-law relationships are sparse (Turner, Young, & Black, 2006), assimilation of in-laws can be difficult (Prentice, 2008; Prentice, 2009). Despite formal ties through the legal bonds of marriage, it is often challenging for individuals to feel as if their in-laws are a part of their family. Although research has shown that these nonvoluntary relationships can range from positive to problematic (Hess, 2000; Nuner, 2004; Serovich & Price, 1994), much of the in-law literature relates to the problems experienced in these relationships (e.g., Mikucki-Enyart, 2017; Turner, Young & Black, 2006). Several of these issues addressed by the literature surround the children of daughters-in-law (i.e., the grandchildren of mothers-in-law; e.g., Rittenour & Soliz, 2009).

Mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships are especially interesting to scholars due to their sometimes turbulent nature (Duvall, 1954; Fischer, 1983; Merrill, 2007).

Popular culture has long characterized mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships as troublesome. For instance, the 2005 movie *Monster-in-Law* portrays a relentless mother-in-law determined to destroy her biological son's marriage. Other negative portrayals of mothers-in-law include intense, controlling Gemma Teller from *Sons of Anarchy* and ever-critical Marie Barone from *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Additionally, modern journalists and bloggers publish popular culture articles with titles like *11 Mother-in-Law Stories That Are the Stuff of Nightmares* (Wong, 2015) and *15 Signs Your Mother-in-Law Hates You* (Donato, 2016).

The presumably troubled relationship between mothers- and daughters-in-law is not solely a popular culture cliché. Although many women characterize their relationships with their mothers-in-law as positive or neutral (Nuner, 2004), scholars have found that mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships are sometimes dissatisfying and conflict-ridden (e.g., Adler, Denmark, & Ahmed, 1989; Duvall, 1954; Fischer, 1983; Mikucki, 2008; Rittenour & Kellas, 2015). As the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship has garnered more academic consideration, scholars have begun to look more thoroughly at communication's role (e.g., Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988; Marx, Miller, & Huffmon, 2011; Nuner, 2004; Rittenour, 2012; Rittenour & Kellas, 2015; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). In this thesis, I aimed to further this research by examining the role of accommodation in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship, giving attention to issues of mothering/grandmothering by surveying daughters-in-law who are mothers themselves. Specifically, I investigated how perceptions of accommodation utilized by mothers-in-law influence daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity and relationship satisfaction and in turn, how those feelings influence daughters-in-law's own

accommodation.

Mother-in-Law/Daughter-in-Law Relationships

As noted by Soliz & Rittenour (2012), in-law and other nonvoluntary relationships often face unique challenges in overcoming differences to reach a place of cohesion. In-law relationships are not distinguished by bloodlines, history, or lifelong familiarity as relationships with members of one's family-of-origin often are. Instead, in-law relationships are a result of members of two separate families-of-origin choosing to get married. When two individuals enter a marital relationship, their respective families-of-origin then call each other "in-laws."

This difficult process of two families uniting is often explored by addressing shared family identity and relationship satisfaction among in-laws. Shared family identity is the feeling of having a shared in-group with one's family member(s) or individuals thinking of themselves as being part of the same family (Soliz & Harwood, 2006). Baxter, Braithwaite, and Nicholson (1999) asked stepfamily members about important turning points in the early development of their blended families and their responses illuminate the concept. When asked what 'feeling like a family' meant to them, participants used words such as support, caring, openness, comfort, and sharing to characterize their feelings of family identity. Participants reported several categories of events that resulted in a positive change in their 'feeling like a family' such as quality time, family crisis, prosocial actions, social network-related, and positive intrapsychic change. Comparatively, participants reported several categories of events that resulted in a negative change in their 'feeling like a family' such as conflict, unmet expectations, and negative intrapsychic change.

In existing literature, shared family identity has been primarily assessed in family relationships that have inherent intergroup dynamics, such as those between grandparents and grandchildren (e.g., Soliz & Harwood, 2003), stepparents and stepchildren (e.g., Speer, Giles, & Denes, 2013), and parents-in-law and children-in-law (e.g., Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Rittenour, 2012). As discussed by Soliz and Harwood (2006), group membership can be salient in family communication which can result in distance between family members. In contrast, when shared family identity is salient in family communication, distance is minimized. As in the stepfamily relationships examined by Baxter, Braithwaite, and Nicholson (1999), shared family identity can often be difficult to achieve in in-law relationships due to their involuntary nature. In mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, accommodative behaviors such as supportive communication are related to shared family identity (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Additionally, shared family identity has been linked to positive relational and caregiving intentions on the part of daughters-in-law.

A variable commonly correlated to, but distinct from, shared family identity is relationship satisfaction. It is defined as the degree to which one assesses their relationship positively, determined not only by the affect and actions of their relational partner, but also their perceptions of such things (Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998). Across communication research, relationship satisfaction has been closely related to variables such as commitment (Hendrick, 1988), and discussed in terms of idealistic perceptions of one's partner (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). In research regarding mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, qualitative data have revealed that perceptions daughters-in-law have of their mothers-in-law's actions are key in how

positively they regard them. For instance, some daughters-in-law see their mothers-in-law's inclusive behaviors as being supportive, while others regard them as interference (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Quantitative studies of in-law relationships have shown variables such as self-disclosure (Serewicz & Canary, 2008) and topic avoidance (Mikucki-Enyart, 2018) as being related to relationship satisfaction. In this thesis, both shared family identity and relationship satisfaction will be assessed, and their relationships with accommodation in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship examined.

In her triangular theory of the communication and relationships of in-laws, Serewicz (2008) describes in-law relationships as triads in which two individuals are held in a nonvoluntary relationship due to their mutual relationship with a third party. The third party is referred to as the linchpin (Duck, Foley, & Kirkpatrick, 2006), and the two other individuals that make up the in-law relationship are the linchpin's spouse and the linchpin's family-of-origin relative. The most commonly studied triad includes a man, his wife, and his mother, (e.g. Adler, Denmark, & Ahmed, 1989; Duvall, 1954; Fischer 1983; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988; Merrill, 2007; Mikucki, 2008; Nuner, 2004). One side of this triangle represents the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship, also targeted as most problematic.

According to Serewicz (2008), the nonvoluntary, in-law relationship constitutes the weakest side of the triangle. Floyd and Morr's (2003) research of the spouse/sibling/sibling-in-law triad demonstrates that the least amount of affection is communicated in the in-law dyad, as compared to the remaining two relationships of the triad. The mother-in-law/daughter-in-law literature also seems to reflect this notion, as

mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships are a source of problems and dissatisfaction for many women (Merrill, 2007). The literature has identified several phenomena as contributing to the problematic dynamics between these women. For instance, both mothers-in-law (Mikucki-Enyart, 2011) and daughters-in-law (Mikucki-Enyart, Caughlin, & Rittenour, 2015) experience uncertainty regarding many aspects of their relationship.

The uncertainty that exists in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is a result of several factors. There are few social scripts depicting how mothers- and daughters-in-law should interact, which results in varying standards (Rittenour, 2012) and ambiguous expectations (Turner, Young, & Black, 2006) among these women. Additionally, mothers-in-law have been subject to negative stereotypes (Adler, Denmark, & Ahmed, 1989), and the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is portrayed negatively in popular culture. In essence, mothers- and daughters-in-law have few guiding principles, social norms, or rules to dictate how they should interact to create and maintain healthy, satisfactory relationships. Daughters-in-law articulate their uncertainty about how to communicate with and gain approval from potentially meddling mothers-in-law who may negatively influence the triad (Mikucki-Enyart, Caughlin, & Rittenour, 2015).

Strewn throughout this research on the relationship between these women are daughters-in-law's references to their mothers-in-law's communication with and about their children (i.e., the mothers-in-law's grandchildren). In Rittenour and Soliz's (2009) study, daughters-in-law identified the grandparent-grandchild relationship (i.e., their children's relationship with their mother-in-law) as something that influences their

perception of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Mikucki-Enyart, Caughlin, and Rittenour (2015) discovered that children-in-law often feel uncertainty about unsolicited advice from parents-in-law regarding childrearing decisions and parents-in-law's influence and involvement in their role as grandparents. Similarly, parents-in-law have uncertainty surrounding their role as grandparents and communication with their children-in-law about parenting (Mikucki-Enyart, 2011). Therefore, in this thesis, I surveyed daughters-in-law who are mothers themselves to capture the nuances of parenting-related communication on the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship.

Regarding the many issues faced by mothers- and daughters-in-law, researchers have identified several communicative aspects that appear to be related to favorable outcomes in relationships between these women. For instance, accommodative behaviors such as affection (Floyd & Morr, 2003), supportive communication (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009), and positive self-disclosure (Serewicz & Canary, 2008; Serewicz, Hosmer, Ballard, & Griffin, 2008) have been linked to positive relational outcomes in in-law relationships. Additionally, several nonaccommodative behaviors such as negative parent-in-law disclosure (Serewicz & Canary, 2008) and topic avoidance (Mikucki-Enyart, 2011) have been linked to negative relational outcomes in in-law relationships.

It would be ideal for all three of the individuals that make up this relational triad to optimize positive communicative behaviors, particularly because both mothers- and daughters-in-law tend to reap benefits from this relationship. For instance, research indicates that discord in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is sometimes negatively associated with marital success in the spousal side of the in-law relational triad (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001), whereas closeness (Timmer & Veroff, 2000) and

satisfaction (Serewicz, Hosmer, Ballard, & Griffin, 2008) within mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships are indicators of marital satisfaction between daughters-in-law and their spouses. Extending to other parts of the family system, grandparent-grandchild relationships may also be affected by the quality of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships (Fingerman, 2004).

In addition to links between relational quality in in-law relationships and outcomes in other family relationships, children and children-in-law receive various types of support from parents-in-law, particularly during early marriage and a period about 25 years after marriage (Fowler & Rittenour, 2017). As time passes, children-in-law provide increasing resources and care for their parents-in-law. Although women tend to contact and provide care for their family-of-origin parents more so than their parents-in-law (Lee, Spitze, & Logan, 2003), Rittenour & Soliz (2009) found that daughters-in-law that had higher feelings of shared family identity had more positive relational intentions (i.e., plans to continue the relationship) regarding future contact and caregiving of their mothers-in-law. It is clear that positive in-law relationships benefit all involved, resulting in positive relational outcomes in both the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship and the child/child-in-law marital dyad.

In short, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships can be problematic. However, communication scholars have begun to pinpoint the communicative aspects of this relationship that can improve satisfaction and other relational outcomes (e.g., Floyd & Morr, 2003; Mikucki-Enyart, 2011; Mikucki-Enyart, Caughlin, & Rittenour, 2015; Prentice, 2008; Prentice, 2009; Rittenour, 2012; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Serewicz & Canary, 2008; Serewicz, Hosmer, Ballard, & Griffin, 2008). Marotz-Baden and Cowan's

(1987) findings indicate that a focus on the interaction and communication that occurs between mothers- and daughters-in-law, rather than on larger social and situational factors, is essential to research looking at relational outcomes in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. In this thesis, I have continued the communicative examination of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law dynamics by employing Communication Accommodation Theory to assess how these women use accommodation to increase, decrease, and maintain social distance in their relationship

Communication Accommodation Theory

Studied across family, intergroup, intercultural, health, and organizational contexts (Soliz & Giles, 2014), Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) addresses how individuals make adjustments to create, maintain, and decrease social distance in interactions with others (Giles, 1973; Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis, 1973). Initially, CAT focused on the accommodation of speech patterns (SAT; Giles, 1973), but has since been expanded to examine the *many* ways in which communicators accommodate one another, why they accommodate, and the outcomes of accommodation (Soliz & Giles, 2014).

Early core concepts of CAT include convergence, divergence, and maintenance, which describe the orientations and subsequent tactics used in interactions to alter or maintain social distance. Convergence refers to the adjustments individuals make to decrease social distance between themselves and an interaction partner (Giles, 1973), and is typically associated with positive outcomes such as heightened mutual understanding (Gudykunst, 1995), perceived attractiveness (Buller, LePoire, Aune, & Eloy, 1992), and self-esteem (Giles, McCann, Ota, & Noels, 2002). Divergence refers to the adjustments

individuals make to increase social distance between themselves and an interaction partner (Giles, 1973), often in attempt to set themselves apart from their interaction partner. Maintenance, characterized by the absence of communicative adjustments, occurs when individuals do not attempt to increase or decrease social distance between themselves and their interaction partner, but instead maintain the use of their original interaction style (Bourhis, 1979).

Since the early development of CAT, the theory has been further developed and applied to various realms of study that address both interpersonal and intergroup dynamics (Soliz & Giles, 2014). Several in-law researchers (e.g., Rittenour, 2012; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Speer, Giles, & Denes, 2013) have drawn from CAT to assess how certain mother-in-law behaviors perform accommodative and non-accommodative functions (i.e., in accordance with CAT axioms). In this proposed thesis, I will directly employ CAT by measuring categories of “CAT-based behaviors” (p. 109) identified by Soliz and Giles (2014) in their meta-analytic review of research that addresses this theory. In assessing these categories of accommodation among *both* involved parties, including accommodation, nonaccommodation (including over- and underaccommodation), and reluctant accommodation, I hope to create a further understanding of accommodation in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships as perceived by daughters-in-law who are mothers themselves. Further, I will explore how these women’s fluctuations in social distance influence important relational outcomes.

In this study, mother-in-law accommodation (i.e., daughters-in-law’s perceptions of their mothers-in-law’s accommodation of them) includes accommodation, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation, whereas daughter-in-law

accommodation (i.e., daughters-in-law's accommodation of their mothers-in-law) includes accommodation, reluctant accommodation, and nonaccommodation. The use of differing categories for mother-in-law and daughter-in-law accommodation is reflective of what is known from daughters-in-law's perspectives and CAT-based literature, thus justifying their links with my sample of daughters-in-law. In doing so, it is noted that these categories of accommodation, and not sender intentions (i.e., convergence or divergence), are employed because they are responsible for the link to relational quality. Also, we note that convergence does not always coincide with accommodation, nor divergence with nonaccommodation (Soliz & Giles, 2014). For instance, a mother-in-law may have a convergent orientation in communicating with her daughter-in-law, and thus intend to accommodate, but still be perceived as overaccommodative and therefore create social distance in her relationship with her daughter-in-law. Such a trend is plausible given that some daughters-in-law desire minimal inclusion from their mothers-in-law (Rittenour and Soliz, 2009).

To examine whether daughters-in-law feel accommodated by their mothers-in-law, I will employ measures of accommodation, overaccommodation, and underaccommodation. To examine daughters-in-law's subsequent plans to accommodate their mothers-in-law, I will employ self-report measures of accommodation, reluctant accommodation, and nonaccommodation. Again, many in-law scholars have addressed communication behaviors that perform in accommodative and non-accommodative ways, while not directly testing CAT. The next section overviews some of these findings that point to specific hypothesized trends in reference to the CAT-based categories of accommodation I employ in this thesis.

Accommodation

Accommodation is described as the use of messages that are “positive-oriented or conversationally-appropriate” (Soliz & Giles, 2014, p. 110). In general, past research has demonstrated a positive association between the use of behaviors perceived as accommodative (e.g., appropriate self-disclosure, supportive communication) and shared family identity among family members (e.g., Harwood, Raman, & Hewstone, 2006; Rittenour, 2012; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Soliz & Harwood, 2006). That is, convergence among family members enables the family unit to become more cohesive. When a decrease in social distance occurs as a result of accommodation, feelings of shared family identity begin to develop in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. The communication between mother- and daughter-in-law becomes less intergroup (“us” vs. “them”) and more interpersonal (“we”) in nature, and the women begin to feel as if their in-law, once a stranger, is now a family member. In Rittenour and Soliz’s (2009) study, daughters-in-law indicated the importance of accommodative mother-in-law behaviors such as ensuring daughters-in-law feel comfortable at family events, respecting diverse views, supporting the daughter-in-law’s marriage to her son, giving solicited and not unsolicited advice, and providing emotional support.

Self-disclosure often appears in the family literature as being potentially accommodative (e.g., Soliz & Harwood, 2006), and appropriate self-disclosure is associated with positive outcomes in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. For instance, self-disclosure from mothers-in-law indicating acceptance of daughters-in-law (e.g., recognition of daughter-in-law as a family member, feelings about having daughter-in-law in the family), is positively associated with shared family identity and in-law

satisfaction (Serewicz & Canary, 2008). However, research indicates that daughters-in-law are most interested in their mothers-in-law meeting their standards for disclosure (Rittenour, 2012) and not disclosing about negative things, such as family gossip (Serewicz & Canary, 2008). Therefore, only self-disclosure deemed “appropriate” by the receiver is perceived as accommodative and associated with positive relational outcomes.

Along with self-disclosure, supportive communication is often associated with positive outcomes in family relationships. In a study assessing grandparent-grandchild relationships, Soliz and Harwood (2006) found that personal communication, characterized by social support and self-disclosure, was positively related to shared family identity. Similarly, in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, supportive communication has been linked to shared family identity (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009).

Nonaccommodation

Nonaccommodation is characterized by messages that fail to meet the communicative needs of one’s conversational partner (Soliz & Giles, 2014). Nonaccommodation often emphasizes social distance between interaction partners and therefore are associated with perceptions of group salience (Soliz & Harwood, 2006) which, in the case of in-laws, often likens to family-of-origin and family-in-law distinctions. Research shows that nonaccommodative behaviors, such as interference, inappropriate self-disclosure, and exclusion from family activities, are negatively associated with shared family identity in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009).

Because, as previously mentioned, accommodation is something determined by receiver perceptions, nonaccommodation is commonly, but need not always be, the result

of divergent sender orientation. Overaccommodation, although not often perceived as accommodative by the receiver, occurs when individuals attempt to decrease social distance, but simply overlook their interaction partner's needs. Overaccommodative messages in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships may include high inclusivity (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009) and inappropriate self-disclosure (Rittenour, 2012; Serewicz & Canary, 2008). Though likely unintentionally so, mothers-in-law often upset their daughters-in-law when they do these things. Alternatively, underaccommodation is often perpetuated to intentionally create social distance. In mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, this may include making distinctions between family-of-origin and family-in-law members (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009), topic avoidance (Mikucki-Enyart, 2018), and sending hurtful messages (Rittenour and Kellas, 2015). Likely purposeful, these messages successfully increase social distance between the women.

Overaccommodation

Overaccommodation refers to messages that “‘overshoot’ the needs or desires of a conversational partner” by adjusting more than what is needed (Soliz & Giles, 2014, p. 110). From what we know about mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, it is primarily mothers-in-law who are perceived as being overaccommodative. For instance, in Rittenour and Soliz's (2009) study, daughters-in-law expressed feeling dissatisfied with some mother-in-law behaviors, including giving unwanted advice and assuming roles without consulting the daughter-in-law. Daughters-in-law reported mixed feelings about mother-in-law inclusive behaviors, with some daughters-in-law expressing a desire for minimal inclusion. However, daughters-in-law in Rittenour and Soliz's (2009) study primarily reported their own inclusive behaviors as being a positive – and never a

negative – factor in their relationship with their mothers-in-law, furthering the notion that accommodation can only be truly determined by the receiver.

Despite the aforementioned finding that self-disclosure is linked to positive outcomes in in-law relationships, self-disclosure may also be characterized as overaccommodative (Rittenour, 2012). Inappropriate self-disclosure – specifically slanderous disclosure about family members (e.g., gossip about family members, criticism of family members) – does not result in positive outcomes for in-laws (Serewicz & Canary, 2008).

Mikucki (2008) suggested a theoretical typology of mothers-in-law. The “jealous mother-in-law” dislikes her daughter-in-law for marrying her biological son and therefore taking time and resources away from the mother-son relationship. However, although the jealous mother-in-law dislikes her daughter-in-law, she is willing to go to great lengths to maintain her connection with her son. This “possessive dependency,” as Mikucki (2008) calls it, serves to illustrate why some mothers-in-law tend to overaccommodate.

Daughters-in-law have power in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship as the perceived gatekeeper to her mother-in-law’s biological child, as well as any grandchildren they may have (Nuner, 2004). Therefore, mothers-in-law may feel the need to overaccommodate, whereas daughters-in-law are not under the same pressure.

Underaccommodation

Underaccommodation refers to messages that fall short in attuning to others’ needs. Regarding mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, daughters-in-law in Rittenour and Soliz’s (2009) study discussed mother-in-law exclusive behaviors, including underaccommodative messages such as making distinctions between the

mother-in-law's family and the daughter-in-law. Topic avoidance can also be perceived as underaccommodative. For instance, Mikucki-Enyart (2018) found that in-law specific topic avoidance was negatively associated with both relationship satisfaction and family connection.

In Rittenour and Kellas (2015) study, daughters-in-law identified several types of hurtful messages they receive from their mothers-in-law. Some of the hurtful messages identified, including underinvolvement, personal attacks, and third-party messages, may be characterized as underaccommodative. Underinvolvement, as identified by daughters-in-law, was characterized by family membership messages and silence/involvement. Family membership messages communicate to daughters-in-law that they are not regarded as part of their mothers-in-law's family and are likely intended to increase social distance.

Reluctant Accommodation

Reluctant accommodation is defined by messages that are "based on norms of respect, obligation, and/or social hierarchies" (Soliz & Giles, 2014, p. 110). That is, reluctant accommodation occurs when an individual does not wish to be accommodative, but simultaneously feels as if they must accommodate their interaction partner. Although this type of accommodation has never been assessed in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, it is likely that daughters-in-law sometimes adjust their communication in order to accommodate their mothers-in-law and decrease social distance in their relationship.

One study, in which CAT was used as a lens to examine stepparent-stepchild relationships (which, like mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, are nonvoluntary

relationships in which two individuals are connected by their relationships to a third party), found that stepchildren's perceptions of their stepparents as being nonaccommodative (i.e., under- and overaccommodative) were associated with stepchildren's reluctant accommodation, including avoiding certain topics and certain ways of talking (Speer, Giles, & Denes, 2013). This is exemplary of the notion that individuals sometimes reluctantly accommodate family members even if they, themselves, are not being accommodated. Most of the studies to date regarding reluctant accommodation involve intergenerational relationships (e.g., Cai, Giles, & Noels, 1988; Giles, Ballard, & McCann, 2002; Giles, Ryan, & Anas, 2008), indicating that reluctant accommodation may often have to do with the notion of respect prevalent in intergenerational relationships (Harwood, McKee, & Lin, 2000). Regarding family relationships, Fowler and Soliz (2010) found that grandchildren's reluctant accommodation was positively associated with grandparents' painful self-disclosures and negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. A commonality of these studies is the focus on relationships that involve intergroup communication, characterized by social distance.

Given that literature on reluctant accommodation does not yet include an examination of reluctant accommodation in in-law relationships, this thesis aimed to test its lengths with daughter-in-law relationship satisfaction and feelings of shared family identity. Reluctant accommodation is operationalized via items such as "I don't always say what I think" and "I don't always act like myself." While accommodation is truly determined by the receiver (i.e., the mother-in-law), daughter in-law reports on their own reluctant convergence (i.e., reluctant accommodation) will give insight in to the ways

daughters-in-law come to make adjustments in an attempt to decrease social distance.

Rationale/Hypotheses

Scholars have identified a link between the use of accommodative behaviors by mothers-in-law and daughter-in-law feelings of shared family identity. Heightened shared family identity occurs in family relationships when group salience is low and the intergroup divide, apparent in the communication of individuals of different groups, dissipates (Soliz & Harwood, 2006). Family is an inherent in-group for many who are members of the same family-of-origin. However, when it comes to nonvoluntary family relationships, like mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, the same feelings of being “part of the family” often do not translate. Although these women are legally considered family, there are several factors that result in them not feeling part of the same family in-group. For instance, as aforementioned, individuals are generally loyal to and identify with their families-of-origin (Adler, Denmark, & Ahmed, 1989; Fischer, 1983; Marx, Miller, & Huffmon, 2011), and this preference deepens the divide in in-law relationships. Additionally, the assimilation process for in-laws, involving changes in conversational styles, conversational topics, and usage of jokes, can be difficult to maneuver for families attempting to accept new in-laws (Prentice, 2008). These things, along with the lack of social scripts for how mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships should function (Turner, Young, & Black, 2006), make achieving a shared family identity difficult.

However difficult to achieve, a shared family identity is important for mothers- and daughters- in law who wish to have satisfactory relationships, and the literature indicates that accommodative behaviors play a communicative role in achieving this

cohesion. For instance, one study, in which perceptions of self-disclosure and supportive communication were assessed, found that daughter-in-law feelings of shared family identity were high in relationships in which the mother-in-law was perceived as accommodative (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009).

Although it has been previously established that daughters-in-law perceive some mother-in-law behaviors as accommodative, and that those individual behaviors are associated with their feelings of shared family identity, I aim to directly employ CAT in order to examine how categories of accommodation (i.e., accommodation, overaccommodation, underaccommodation) influence daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity. The items used to measure these categories of accommodation will tap in to previously identified aspects of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship that have been perceived as (non)accommodative by these women. The following hypothesis aims to further the knowledge on the link between accommodation and feelings of shared family identity in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship.

H1a: There is a positive relationship between daughter-in-law perceptions of their mothers-in-law's accommodation and daughter-in-law feelings of shared family identity.

H1b: There is a negative relationship between daughter-in-law perceptions of their mothers-in-law's overaccommodation and daughter-in-law feelings of shared family identity.

H1c: There is a negative relationship between daughter-in-law perceptions of their mothers-in-law's underaccommodation and daughter-in-law feelings of shared family identity.

Rittenour and Soliz (2009) identified a strong, positive relationship between shared family identity and relationship satisfaction. Therefore, if a relationship exists between daughter-in-law perceptions of mother-in-law accommodation and daughter-in-law feelings of shared family identity as proposed in H1, a similar relationship likely exists with daughter-in-laws' feelings of relationship satisfaction. Similar to shared family identity, family communication scholars have found that relationship satisfaction in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is generally associated with communicative aspects of the relationship (Mikucki-Enyart, 2011; Rittenour & Kellas, 2015; Serewicz & Canary, 2008; Serewicz, Hosmer, Ballard, & Griffin, 2008). In Rittenour and Soliz's (2009) study, daughters-in-law identified several mother-in-law behaviors that they perceived as positive and negative, many of which can be characterized as accommodative (e.g., mother-in-law support) and nonaccommodative (e.g., mother-in-law interference). Therefore, as a direct test of CAT, the following hypothesis posits a relationship between the aforementioned categories of accommodation and relationship satisfaction.

H2a: There is a positive relationship between daughter-in-law perceptions of their mothers-in-law's accommodation and daughter-in-law relationship satisfaction.

H2b: There is a negative relationship between daughter-in-law perceptions of their mothers-in-law's overaccommodation and daughter-in-law relationship satisfaction.

H2c: There is a negative relationship between daughter-in-law perceptions of their mothers-in-law's underaccommodation and daughter-in-law relationship

satisfaction.

Past studies have identified shared family identity as a variable associated with a variety of positive relational and communicative outcomes in in-law and other family relationships. For instance, in a study examining grandparent-grandchild communication, Soliz and Harwood (2006) found that shared family identity was positively associated with grandchild perceptions of older adults. Shared family identity is also associated with in-law relationship satisfaction (Serewicz, Hosmer, Ballard, & Griffin, 2008) and daughters-in-laws' intentions to continue the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship and keep mothers-in-law connected to their grandchildren (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). It is clear that feelings of shared family identity occur when social distance between mother- and daughter-in law has decreased, and therefore shared family identity has been most often positioned as an outcome of accommodation in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. However, these collective findings indicate that the feelings of shared family identity hypothesized in the section above may be associated with daughters-in-law's own accommodation of their mothers-in-law. This relationship is proposed in the following hypothesis.

H3a: There is a positive relationship between daughter-in-law feelings of shared family identity and daughters-in-law accommodation of their mothers-in-law.

H3b: There is a negative relationship between daughter-in-law feelings of shared family identity and daughters-in-law reluctant accommodation of their mothers-in-law.

H3c: There is a negative relationship between daughter-in-law feelings of shared

family identity and daughters-in-law nonaccommodation of their mothers-in-law.

Feelings of relationship satisfaction, hypothesized in the section above, may also influence daughters-in-law's accommodation in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Like shared family identity, relationship satisfaction has most often been regarded as an outcome of accommodation in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship (i.e., Mikucki-Enyart, 2018; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Serewicz & Canary, 2008). However, relationship satisfaction is a positive relational characteristic, and it is likely that satisfied daughters-in-law are accommodative of their mothers-in-law. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4a: There is a positive relationship between daughter-in-law relationship satisfaction and daughters-in-law accommodation of their mothers-in-law.

H4b: There is a negative relationship between a daughter-in-law relationship satisfaction and daughters-in-law reluctant accommodation of their mothers-in-law.

H4c: There is a negative relationship between a daughter-in-law relationship satisfaction and daughters-in-law nonaccommodation of their mothers-in-law.

In surveying daughters-in-law for this proposed thesis, my goal was to further the existing knowledge about the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship, paying specific attention to relationships in which the daughters-in-law are mothers themselves. I aim to examine how daughters-in-law's perceptions of their mothers-in-law's accommodation of them are associated with their feelings of shared family identity and satisfaction, as well

as how daughters-in-law's shared family identity and satisfaction are associated with their plans to accommodate their mothers-in-law. In directly employing CAT via several categories of accommodation, the purpose of this proposed thesis is to give insight to how mothers- and daughters-in law negotiate social distance in their relationship using communication.

CHAPTER TWO

Method

After receiving approval from West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board, I recruited daughters-in-law via online solicitation. To qualify, these women had to be (1) at least 18 years old, (2) currently married, (3) have met/interacted with their spouse's living mother, and (4) have one or more children. Mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, as they have been defined throughout the literature and in this thesis (Serewicz, 2008), are a product of the marriage of the daughter-in-law to the linchpin (i.e., the mother-in-law's biological child), and therefore participants must be currently married to participate in this study. This conceptualization of in-law relationships leaves little room for ambiguity. Additionally, due to the nature of the variables assessed in this thesis, daughters-in-law must have met or interacted with their mothers-in-law to participate. Although daughters-in-law might form impressions prior to meeting their mothers-in-law via stereotypes (Adler, Denmark, & Ahmed, 1989) or family stories from the linchpin and other family members, this study assesses actual interactions between these women, which requires meeting. After providing informed consent, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire made up of several measures of their own and their mother-in-law's accommodation, shared family identity, and satisfaction.

Participants

A total of 1,132 daughters-in-law logged in to complete the survey. After removing those who did not complete the survey and/or who did not meet the criteria, 677 daughters-in-law responses were retained for analysis. 100% reported their gender as female. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 62 years old ($M = 32.29$, $SD = 6.31$), with

0.4% ($n = 3$) participants choosing not to report their age. The sample was 88.9% White/Caucasian ($n = 602$), 5.5% Hispanic or Latino ($n = 37$), 1.0% Black/African American ($n = 7$), 0.3% Native American ($n = 2$), 0.1% Middle Eastern ($n = 1$), 2.7% Asian or Pacific Islander ($n = 18$), and 1.5% of participants ($n = 10$) selected “Other” when asked about their ethnicity. Participant’s length of time married to their partner ranged from 1-41 years ($M = 6.81$, $SD = 5.33$) and length of time participants were in a romantic relationship with their partner before marriage ranged from 1-30 years ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 2.99$), with 0.3% ($n = 2$) of participants choosing not to answer how long they were in a romantic relationship prior to marriage. Participants all had between 1-9 children ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.08$), with 0.1% ($n = 1$) of participants choosing not to report their number of children.

Participants also reported their mothers-in-law (i.e., their husbands’ mothers) demographic information and information about their contact with their mother-in-law. Ages of the mothers-in-law reported on ranged from 37 to 86 years old ($M = 59.95$, $SD = 8.80$), with 0.6% ($n = 4$) of participants choosing not to report their mother-in-law’s age. 100% of participants reported “female” as their mother-in-law’s gender. Of the mothers-in-law reported on, 85.8% were White/Caucasian ($n = 581$), 5.8% were Hispanic or Latino ($n = 39$), 4.7% were Black/African American ($n = 32$), 0.6% were Native American ($n = 4$), 0.1% were Middle Eastern ($n = 1$), 1.8% were Asian or Pacific Islander ($n = 12$), and 1.2% of participants ($n = 8$) selected “Other” when asked about their mother-in-law’s ethnicity.

When asked about how far away from their mothers-in-law they lived, 4.0% of participants reported living in the same house as their mother-in-law ($n = 27$), 32.6%

lived in the same city or town as their mother-in-law ($n = 221$), 26.3% reported living within 50 miles of their mother-in-law ($n = 178$), 5.9% reported living 50-99 miles from their mother-in-law ($n = 40$), 13.7% reported living 100-499 miles from their mother-in-law ($n = 93$), and 17.4% reported living 500+ miles from their mother-in-law ($n = 118$).

When asked how often they see their mother-in-law face-to-face, 5.2% of participants answered every day ($n = 35$), 13.1% answered several times per week ($n = 89$), 19.4% answered once a week ($n = 131$), 21.6% answered once a month ($n = 146$), 26.7% answered several times per year ($n = 181$), 8.4% answered once a year ($n = 57$), 5.5% answered almost never ($n = 37$), and 0.1% opted not to answer the question ($n = 1$).

When asked how often they speak to their mother-in-law through mediated channels, 8.9% of participants answered every day ($n = 60$), 25.3% answered several times per week ($n = 171$), 20.7% answered once a week ($n = 140$), 18.3% answered once a month ($n = 124$), 11.4% answered several times per year ($n = 77$), 1.6% answered once a year ($n = 11$), and 13.9% answered almost never ($n = 94$).

Procedures

Following approval by the West Virginia University Institutional Review Board, participants were solicited online via private Facebook groups that the author is a member of, created by and for mothers to foster support, advice, and comradery among mothers. Mothers were solicited from a total of 26 groups, with titles such as “Mommy Talk,” “Mommy Tips 101,” “Fierce Mamas,” “The Average Mom,” and “The Mom Chronicles.” Prior to participation, participants were informed that their answers would remain anonymous, that they could choose not to participate in the survey, and that they could choose to stop at any time or choose not to answer any question should they choose

to participate. After providing informed consent by selecting “yes” to the question “Do you consent to taking this survey?” participants completed a 30-minute online questionnaire including measures of accommodation, shared family identity, and relationship satisfaction, as well as demographic questions.

Instrumentation

Demographics.

Initial survey questions asked participants about several demographic variables that are salient to the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Participants’ responses to these questions were included in the participants section of this chapter. First, participants answered questions about themselves, including their age, ethnicity, how long they have been married to their spouse, how long they were in a relationship before they married their spouse, and how many children they have. Group salience regarding age (e.g., Soliz & Harwood, 2006) and ethnicity (Soliz, Thorson, & Rittenour, 2009) have been shown to influence shared family identity, therefore making these questions appropriate. Questions regarding the length of the relationship between the participant and linchpin are also important, as past research suggests that the dynamic of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships changes as the relationship progresses. For instance, parents-in-law tend to provide more support for the child/child-in-law marital dyad during the early years of marriage, and as time goes on children/children-in-law become the providers of support. (Fowler & Rittenour, 2017). Additionally, participants were asked how many children they have, as parenthood/grandparenthood is something daughters-in-law have discussed as being influential in their relationships with their mothers-in-law (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009).

Next, participants were prompted to answer questions about their mother-in-law and their relationship with her, including their mother-in-law's age, mother-in-law's ethnicity, how far away they live from their mother-in-law, how often they see their mother-in-law, and how often they speak to their mother-in-law through mediated channels. Participants were asked how far they live from their mother-in-law because researchers have addressed geographic proximity's possible relationship with outcomes in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships (Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987). Additionally, frequency of contact is a relevant variable in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, as some daughters-in-law report a desire for minimal inclusion and perceive high inclusion negatively (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009).

Additional demographic questions asked for the gender of both the participant and her mother-in-law. While mother-in-law/daughter-in-law research has previously centered on relationships involving a son as the linchpin, I also wished to capture dynamics among other existent gendered pairings. In addition to the possibility of more diverse data regarding sex, I explored the potential role of gender – both the participant's and her mother-in-law's.

Relationship satisfaction.

To measure daughter-in-law relationship satisfaction, participants responded to Hendrick's (1988) Relationship Assessment Scale. The measure consists of seven items (e.g., "My mother-in-law meets my needs" and "In general, I am satisfied with my relationship with my mother-in-law") and was answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely dissatisfied*, 7 = *completely satisfied*), wherein higher scores indicate higher relationship satisfaction. Two of the seven items were reverse coded prior to analysis

(i.e., “I often wish I hadn’t gotten in to my relationship with my mother-in-law” and “There are many problems in my relationship with my mother-in-law”). Past uses of this measure have resulted in moderate to high reliabilities, including $\alpha = .87$ (Hendrick, 1988) and $\alpha = .88$ (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000). See Appendix C for the full Relationship Assessment Scale.

Shared family identity.

To measure daughter-in-law feelings of shared family identity, participants responded to Soliz and Harwood’s (2006) Shared Family Identity measure. The measure consists of six items (e.g., “I am proud to be in the same family as my mother in law” and “My mother-in-law is an important part of my family”) and was answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), wherein higher scores indicate higher feelings of shared family identity. Two of the six items were reverse coded prior to analysis (i.e., “My shared family membership with my mother-in-law is not that important to me” and “I feel as if my mother-in-law and I are members of separate groups”). Past uses of this measure have resulted in moderate to high reliabilities, including $\alpha = .93$ (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009) and $\alpha = .90-.96$ (Soliz & Harwood, 2006). See Appendix C for the full Shared Family Identity measure.

Mother-in-law accommodation.

To measure perceived mother-in-law accommodation, participants responded to a revised version of Speer, Giles, and Denes’s (2013) stepparent accommodation measure. In addition to the nine items adapted from the original measure (e.g., “My mother-in-law gives me useful advice”), one item from Soliz and Harwood’s (2003) grandparent accommodation measure was utilized. This measure was answered on a 7-point Likert

scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), wherein higher scores indicate that daughters-in-law perceive their mothers-in-law to be more accommodative. Speer, Giles, and Denes's (2013) original use of their measure resulted in a moderately high reliability ($\alpha = .94$). See Appendix C for the full mother-in-law accommodation measure.

Regarding the item I chose to adapt from Soliz & Harwood's (2003) grandparent accommodation measure – "My mother-in-law shows respect for me" was an appropriate addition to this measure of perceived mother-in-law accommodation because although respect does not always equate to value, the notion of respect is salient in intergenerational relationships, as exemplified by Harwood, McKee, and Lin (2000).

Mother-in-law overaccommodation.

To measure perceived mother-in-law overaccommodation, participants responded to Speer, Giles, and Denes's (2013) stepparent overaccommodation measure. The measure consists of four items (e.g., "My mother-in-law tries too hard to be my friend" and "My mother-in-law gives me unwanted advice") and was answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), wherein higher scores indicate that daughters-in-law perceive their mothers-in-law to be more overaccommodative. Speer, Giles, and Denes's (2013) original use of this measure resulted in an acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .78$). See Appendix C for the full mother-in-law overaccommodation measure.

Mother-in-law underaccommodation.

To measure perceived mother-in-law underaccommodation, participants responded to a revised version of Speer, Giles, and Denes's (2013) stepparent underaccommodation measure. In addition to the seven items adapted from the original

measure (e.g., “My mother-in-law treats me poorly compared to her own family members”), two items from Soliz and Harwood’s (2003) grandparent underaccommodation scale were utilized. This measure was answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), wherein higher scores indicate that daughters-in-law perceive their mothers-in-law to be more underaccommodative. One item (i.e., “My mother-in-law treats me like an equal”) was reverse coded prior to analysis. Speer, Giles, and Denes’s (2013) original use of their measure resulted in a moderately high reliability ($\alpha = .92$). See Appendix C for the full mother-in-law underaccommodation measure.

Regarding the items I chose to adapt from Soliz and Harwood’s (2003) grandparent underaccommodation scale – the first added item, “My mother-in-law is closed minded,” was an appropriate addition to this measure of perceived mother-in-law underaccommodation because young people often perceive older people as hostile and unaccepting (Harwood, McKee, & Lin, 2000). The second added item, “My mother-in-law complains about her life circumstances,” was an appropriate addition to this measure because scholars have found that although self-disclosure often has positive outcomes (e.g., Rittenour & Soliz, 2009), painful self-disclosure about negative topics (e.g., health problems) are viewed negatively by young adults in intergenerational communication (Bonnesen & Hummert, 2002). Older adults (in this case, mothers-in-law) who are closed minded and/or participate in painful self-disclosure when communicating with younger adults (in this case, daughters-in-law) are likely presumed unattuned to the needs of their conversational partner, which results in underaccommodation.

Daughter-in-law accommodation.

To measure daughter-in-law accommodation, participants responded to a revised version of Soliz and Harwood's (2003) grandchild accommodative involvement measure. In addition to the six items adapted from the original measure (e.g., "I share personal thoughts and feelings with my mother-in-law"), five additional items derived from the literature were added. This measure was answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), wherein higher scores indicate higher self-reported use of accommodative messages by daughters-in-law with their mothers-in-law. Three items (i.e., "I don't know what to say with my mother-in-law," "I look to end the conversation with my mother-in-law," and "I want to leave around my mother-in-law") were reverse coded prior to analysis. Soliz and Harwood's (2003) original use of their measure resulted in a moderate reliability ($\alpha = .82$). See Appendix C for the full daughter-in-law accommodation measure.

The five additional items derived from the literature that were added to this revised measure of daughter-in-law accommodation include "I am attentive with my mother-in-law," "I respect my mother-in-law," "I am open to my mother-in-law's input about important topics," "I am supportive of my mother-in-law," and "I comfort my mother-in-law when she is upset." These items mirror those utilized to measure perceived mother-in-law accommodation in this proposed thesis and reflect the body of existing literature on in-law communication. Supportive communication and other perceived accommodative messages have been linked to feelings of shared family identity in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Additionally, being open to input about important topics is particularly salient in the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Research indicates that some daughters-in-law are

dissatisfied when their mothers-in-law are too open (Rittenour, 2012) and that women typically look to their own mothers for advice on important things like parenting, rather than their mothers-in-law (Adler, Denmark, & Ahmed, 1989; Marx, Miller, & Huffmon, 2011). Therefore, daughters-in-law who offer their mothers-in-law opportunities to give input may be regarded as accommodative.

Daughter-in-law nonaccommodation.

To measure daughter-in-law nonaccommodation, participants responded to five items created based on the current literature regarding mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. This measure was answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), wherein higher scores indicate higher self-reported use of nonaccommodative messages by daughters-in-law with their mothers-in-law. See Appendix C for the full daughter-in-law accommodation measure.

The five items derived from the literature that comprise this measure of daughter-in-law nonaccommodation are “I avoid my mother-in-law completely,” “I tell my mother-in-law I don’t want her advice,” “I talk about topics I know my mother-in-law doesn’t enjoy,” “I use parenting tactics that are best for my child, even if I know my mother-in-law disapproves,” and “I show disdain for my mother-in-law.” Similar to the items created to measure daughter-in-law accommodation, these items reflect past findings. Just as being open to input from one’s mother-in-law was characterized as accommodative, nonaccommodative messages may include vocally asserting a disdain for one’s mother-in-law and/or her advice. Another item included in this measure refers to parenting tactics. Mikucki-Enyart, Caughlin, and Rittenour (2015) discovered that children-in-law often feel uncertainty about unsolicited advice from parents-in-law

regarding childrearing decisions and parents-in-law's influence and involvement in their role as grandparents. A nonaccommodative response to those things may include disregarding any comments regarding parenting from one's mother-in-law.

Daughter-in-law reluctant accommodation.

To measure daughter-in-law reluctant accommodation, participants responded to Soliz and Harwood's (2003) grandchild reluctant accommodation measure. The scale consists of five items (e.g., "I avoid certain ways of talking with my mother-in-law" and "I don't act like myself with my mother-in-law") and was answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), wherein higher scores indicate higher self-reported use of reluctant accommodative messages by daughters-in-law with their mothers-in-law. Soliz and Harwood's (2003) original use of this measure resulted in an acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .79$). See Appendix C for the full daughter-in-law reluctant accommodation measure.

Analysis

The preliminary analysis conducted on this data included exploratory factor analyses on the six adapted measures of accommodation used to measure mother-in-law and daughter-in-law accommodation. Because the measures were adapted from studies that used them in different contexts (i.e., grandparent-grandchild and stepfamily relationships), items from two measures were combined, and other items were derived from the literature, a factor analysis was necessary to determine whether each measure was truly unidimensional. Additional EFAs were conducted on the Shared Family Identity measure and Relational Assessment Scale for the sake of thoroughness and because these measures are rarely factor analyzed across the various contexts in which

they are used.

Following preliminary analysis, analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses suggested in this thesis. For H1-H4, Pearson correlations were used to test the hypothesized relationships.

After testing the four hypotheses, a post-hoc analysis was conducted on six items that were added at the suggestion of committee members during the author's thesis prospectus defense. Each item was answered on a 9-point Likert scale. Initially, EFAs were conducted to determine if there was an underlying factor structure of the six items. Subsequently, Pearson correlations were used to examine relationships between the factors extracted from the six items and the variables proposed in the H1-H4.

Finally, a post-hoc analysis was conducted on the demographic variables reported on by participants. Pearson correlations were used to determine what, if any, relationships the demographic variables have with the variables proposed in the H1-H4. In instances where demographic variables were shown to have moderate to high significant correlations with hypothesis variables, partial correlations were conducted to control for said demographic variables in the relationships hypothesized in H1-H4.

CHAPTER THREE

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis using principal-axis factor extraction with Promax rotation was conducted to determine the underlying factor structures of the measures of the variables hypothesized about in H1-H4. This includes measures of shared family identity, relationship satisfaction, mother-in-law accommodation, mother-in-law overaccommodation, mother-in-law underaccommodation, daughter-in-law accommodation, daughter-in-law nonaccommodation, and daughter-in-law reluctant accommodation. Any factor with an eigenvalue above 1.00 was retained. A second criteria was employed to determine which items loaded on to each factor – each item had to load on to one factor at .60 or higher and other factors at .40 or lower.

The Shared Family Identity measure used in this thesis was shown to be unidimensional. For this six-item measure, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .91 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(15) = 3895.54, p < .001$). The single factor identified had an eigenvalue of 4.67 and accounted for 77.83% of the variance. Additionally, the Shared Family Identity measure had a high reliability ($\alpha = .94, M = 5.10, SD = 1.70$). The Relationship Assessment Scale used in this thesis was also shown to be unidimensional. For this seven-item measure, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .92 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(21) = 4152.93, p < .001$). The single factor identified had an eigenvalue of 5.07 and accounted for 72.42% of the variance. Additionally, the Relational Assessment Scale had a high reliability ($\alpha = .94, M = 4.63, SD = 1.71$).

The three measures of mother-in-law accommodation used in this thesis were shown to be unidimensional, including mother-in-law accommodation, mother-in-law overaccommodation, and mother-in-law underaccommodation. For the 10-item mother-in-law accommodation measure, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .96 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 (45) = 7187.64, p < .001$). The single factor identified had an eigenvalue of 7.58 and accounted for 75.78% of the variance. Additionally, the mother-in-law accommodation measure had a high reliability ($\alpha = .96, M = 4.45, SD = 1.81$). For the four-item mother-in-law overaccommodation measure, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .66 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 (6) = 770.37, p < .001$). The single factor identified had an eigenvalue of 2.28 and accounted for 56.87% of the variance. Additionally, the mother-in-law overaccommodation measure had an adequate reliability ($\alpha = .75, M = 3.33, SD = 1.45$). For the nine-item mother-in-law underaccommodation measure, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .91 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 (36) = 4739.92, p < .001$). The single factor identified had an eigenvalue of 5.78 and accounted for 64.22% of the variance. Additionally, the mother-in-law underaccommodation measure had a high reliability ($\alpha = .93, M = 3.24, SD = 1.68$).

Two of the three measures of daughter-in-law accommodation were shown to be unidimensional, including daughter-in-law nonaccommodation and daughter-in-law reluctant accommodation. For the five-item daughter-in-law nonaccommodation measure, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .79 and Bartlett's

test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(10) = 960.82, p < .001$). The single factor identified had an eigenvalue of 2.69 and accounted for 53.86% of the variance. Additionally, the daughter-in-law nonaccommodation measure had an adequate reliability ($\alpha = .78, M = 2.93, SD = 1.16$). For the five-item daughter-in-law reluctant accommodation measure, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .90 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(10) = 2413.79, p < .001$). The single factor identified had an eigenvalue of 3.81 and accounted for 76.20% of the variance. Additionally, the daughter-in-law reluctant accommodation measure had a high reliability ($\alpha = .92, M = 4.42, SD = 1.82$).

One of the three measures of daughter-in-law accommodation used in this thesis was shown to have two dimensions. For the 11-item measure of daughter-in-law accommodation, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .94 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(55) = 5464.93, p < .001$). In the initial analysis, two factors were shown to have eigenvalues greater than 1.0, with the first factor accounting for 62.48% of the variance and the second factor accounting for 9.32% of the variance after rotation. However, item 1 (i.e., "I share personal thoughts and feelings with my mother-in-law") did not load on to either factor, and therefore a second round of analysis was completed. In the second analysis, item 1 was removed and two factors were specified, which resulted in the remaining 10 items loading on to the two factors. After rotation, the first factor accounted for 63.30% of the variance, and the second factor accounted for 10.09% of the variance. See table 1 for the factor loadings for this measure. The first factor was comprised of items 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 and was labeled "daughter-in-law active accommodation." This factor had a high reliability ($\alpha =$

.92, $M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.30$). The second factor was comprised of items 4, 5, and 6 and was labeled “daughter-in-law inactive accommodation.” This factor had a moderately high reliability ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.83$). These labels will be employed in the results when referring to daughter-in-law accommodation.

Table 1

Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis of Daughter-in-Law Accommodation Measure

Item	Factor Loading	
	1 DIL Active Accommodation	2 DIL Inactive Accommodation
I talk about topics my MIL enjoys	.65	.15
I compliment my MIL	.74	.10
I don't know what to say with my MIL	.06	.69
I look to end the conversation with my MIL	.01	.91
I want to leave around my MIL	-.02	.89
I am attentive with my MIL	.72	.10
I show respect for my MIL	.92	-.18
I am open to my MIL's input about important topics	.70	.17
I am supportive with my MIL	.81	.10
I comfort my MIL when she is upset	.75	.03

Note: All factor loadings $>.60$ are displayed in bold. DIL = daughter-in-law; MIL = mother-in-law

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 was fully supported. Analysis of H1a revealed a significant correlation of .87, indicating a positive relationship between mothers-in-law's accommodation of their daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity. Analysis of H1b revealed a significant correlation of -.46, indicating a negative relationship between mothers-in-law's overaccommodation of their daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity. Analysis of H1c revealed a significant correlation of -.79, indicating a negative relationship between mothers-in-law's underaccommodation of their daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity.

Hypothesis 2 was fully supported. Analysis of H2a revealed a significant correlation of .90, indicating a positive relationship between mothers-in-law's accommodation of their daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law's relationship satisfaction. Analysis of H2b revealed a significant correlation of -.55, indicating a negative relationship between mothers-in-law's overaccommodation of their daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law's relationship satisfaction. Analysis of H2c revealed a significant correlation of -.85, indicating a negative relationship between mothers-in-law's underaccommodation of their daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law's relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3 was fully supported. Analysis of H3a revealed two significant correlations of .78 and .75, indicating a positive relationship between daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity and their active and inactive accommodation of their mothers-in-law, respectively. Analysis of H3b revealed a significant correlation of -.59,

indicating a negative relationship between daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity and their reluctant accommodation of their mothers-in-law. Analysis of H3c revealed a significant correlation of $-.76$, indicating a negative relationship between daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity and their nonaccommodation of their mothers-in-law.

Hypothesis 4 was fully supported. Analysis of H4a revealed two significant correlations of .77 and .78, indicating a positive relationship between daughters-in-law's relationship satisfaction and their active and inactive accommodation of their mothers-in-law, respectively. Analysis of H4b revealed a significant correlation of -.69, indicating a negative relationship between daughters-in-law's relationship satisfaction and their reluctant accommodation of their mothers-in-law. Analysis of H4c revealed a significant correlation of -.77, indicating a negative relationship between daughters-in-law's relationship satisfaction and their nonaccommodation of their mothers-in-law.

Table 2

Correlations Between Hypothesis Variables, Post Hoc Variables, and Relevant

Demographic Variables

[illegible]

4. DIL Active Accom	.80*	-.43*	-.65*	—								
5. DIL Inactive Accom	.80*	-.51*	-.74*	.70*	—							
6. DIL Nonaccom	-.74*	.53*	.70*	-.74*	-.69*	—						
7. DIL Reluctant Accom	-.70*	.57*	.70*	-.53*	-.73*	.57*	—					
8. Shared Family Identity	.87*	-.46*	-.79*	.78*	.75*	-.76*	-.59*	—				
9. Relations hip Satisfacti on	.90*	-.55*	-.85*	.77*	.78*	-.77*	-.69*	.87*	—			
10. Triad Confiden ce	.83*	-.47*	-.77*	.70*	.72*	-.69*	-.60*	.82*	.83*	—		
11. Family- of-Origin Closenes s	-.07	.03	.05	-.03	-.03	.00	.10*	-.01	-.08†	.01	—	
12. Face- to-Face Contact	.35*	-.04	-.26*	.38*	.31*	-.28*	-.16*	.38*	.36*	.34*	-.11*	—
13. Mediated Comm	.63*	-.17*	-.50*	.60*	.55*	-.49*	-.39*	.61*	.60*	.57*	-.07	.56* —

Note: † $p < .05$. * $p < .01$. Accom = accommodation; Overaccom = overaccommodation; Underaccom = underaccommodation; Nonaccom = nonaccommodation; Comm = communication

Post Hoc Analysis

As performed in the preliminary analysis, EFAs were conducted on the six items added by the suggestion of committee members. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .82 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(15) = 1311.23, p < .001$). In the initial analysis, two factors were shown to have eigenvalues greater than 1.0, with the first factor accounting for 50.60% of the variance and the second factor accounting for 17.37% of the variance after rotation. However, several items did not load on to either factor. Item three (i.e., How close are you with your family-of-origin [e.g., your parents, siblings, grandparents]) had particularly low factor loadings on both factors, and therefore was removed in a second round of analysis. The second analysis revealed only one eigenvalue greater than 1.0, indicating that the underlying structure of the remaining five items is unidimensional. This single factor, which had an eigenvalue of 3.05 and accounted for 60.89% of the variance, was labeled "triad confidence" and had a moderately high reliability ($\alpha = .84, M = 6.62, SD = 1.98$). The single item removed for the second round of analysis was clearly conceptually different than the other five items and, as a stand-alone variable, was labeled "family-of-origin closeness."

Following the EFA on the six items recommended for addition by the committee, analyses were conducted to determine what, if any, relationships exist between triad confidence and family-of-origin closeness and the variables hypothesized about in this thesis. Correlations between these variables can be seen in Table 2. For family-of-origin closeness, only one small correlation was revealed, therefore the variable does not seem to be particularly relevant to the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. However,

significant moderate to high correlations were revealed between triad confidence and all of the variables hypothesized about in this thesis, including mother-in-law accommodation, mother-in-law overaccommodation, mother-in-law underaccommodation, daughter-in-law active accommodation, daughter-in-law inactive accommodation, daughter-in-law nonaccommodation, daughter-in-law reluctant accommodation, shared family identity, and relationship satisfaction.

Next, I examined demographics' correlations with the variables within the hypotheses and the aforementioned newly-created in-law items – triad confidence and family-of-origin closeness. For most of the demographic variables, the correlations with other variables were either insignificant or notably small (i.e., between $|.08|$ and $|.13|$). This was true for daughter-in-law age, daughter-in-law number of years married, daughter-in-law number of children, mother-in-law age, and geographical distance. However, two of the variables included – how often daughters-in-law see their mothers-in-law face-to-face and how often daughters-in-law communicate through mediated channels with their mothers-in-law – had several significant moderate to high correlations with other variables. These correlations are in Table 2.

Because triad closeness, frequency of face-to-face contact, and frequency of mediated communication each had significant moderate to high correlations with the variables included in the hypotheses, partial correlations were run to control for these variables. These correlations were lower than the initial Pearson correlations run in the hypothesis testing section of this chapter, however they were all still significant. See Table 3 for these correlations.

Table 3

Correlations Between Hypothesis Variables When Controlling for Triad Confidence, Face-to-Face Contact, and Mediated Communication

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. MIL Accom	—								
2. MIL Overaccom	-.26*	—							
3. MIL Underaccom	-.54*	.39*	—						
4. DIL Active Accom	.48*	-.24*	-.22*	—					
5. DIL Inactive Accom	.47*	-.32*	-.41*	.34*	—				
6. DIL Nonaccom	-.37*	.35*	.35*	-.48*	-.36*	—			
7. DIL Reluctant Accom	-.44*	.41*	.44*	-.18*	-.53*	.26*	—		
8. Shared Family Identity	.54*	-.21*	-.45*	.46*	.36*	-.43*	-.23*	—	
9. Relationship Satisfaction	.66*	-.37*	-.59*	.42*	.44*	-.46*	-.44*	.57*	—

*Note: * $p < .01$. Correlations that represent the relationships proposed in H1-H4 appear in bold. Accom = accommodation; Overaccom = overaccommodation; Underaccom = underaccommodation; Nonaccom = nonaccommodation*

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

The goal of this study was to assess the relationships that exist between accommodation of mothers- and daughters-in law and the latter's shared family identity and relationship satisfaction in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. Mothers who are daughters-in-law gave responses that supported links among categories of accommodation and daughters-in-law's perceptions of relational quality and between daughters-in-law's perceptions of relational quality and their accommodation of their mothers-in-law. In this discussion section, I will explore the implications of these findings on both the future study and application of CAT and on the study of in-law relationships. Additionally, limitations of this thesis and future research directions are discussed.

CAT Implications

The results of this thesis have several implications for CAT and future use of the theory in studying in-law relationships. The first implication is simply that CAT is applicable to mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. Valuable research in which scholars have used CAT as a framework to assess the relationships between individual communication variables and outcomes in in-law relationships (e.g., Rittenour & Soliz, 2009) led to this direct test of CAT in these relationships. The support of the hypotheses set out in this thesis demonstrates that the dynamics of in-law relationships are characterized by the core principles of CAT. That is, in testing categories of accommodation discussed by Soliz and Giles (2014), this thesis exhibits that CAT holds up in relationships between mothers- and daughters-in-law. Particularly, the first two supported hypotheses (i.e., H1 and H2) demonstrate how mothers-in-law's

accommodation of their daughters-in-law creates or minimizes social distance. When daughters-in-law perceived their mothers-in-law as being accommodative, they had increased feelings of shared family identity and relationship satisfaction, whereas when they perceived their mothers-in-law as being over- or underaccommodative, they had decreased feelings of shared family identity and relationship satisfaction.

A second implication comes with the support of the final two hypotheses (i.e., H3 and H4), which assess daughters-in-law's own accommodation of their mothers-in-law. Support of these hypotheses continues to demonstrate how the theoretical principles set out by CAT are apparent in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. However, results of these hypotheses also suggest that accommodation in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships may be quite reciprocal. Causation cannot be established through the methods used in this thesis, but the significant correlations found in this thesis and CAT theorizing lead me to question if when daughters-in-law feel accommodated by their mothers-in-law, their increased feelings of shared family identity and relational satisfaction lead them to make adjustments to their own communication to be more or less accommodative of their mothers-in-law. There have been several studies that link communicative aspects and both shared family identity and relationship satisfaction between these women (e.g., Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Serewicz & Canary, 2008). Additionally, Rittenour and Soliz (2009) saw a link between daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity and their intentions to provide future care for their mothers-in-law.

Finally, further study of the nature of accommodation among these women may allow scholars to better understand the negotiation of social distance between mothers-

and daughters-in-law, and potentially in many family relationships with similar intergroup dynamics. A CAT framework has been utilized efficiently by researchers to assess in-law relationships and resulting studies have led to many important conclusions about these relationships. However, direct tests of CAT in these relationships may continue to offer additional insight in to the dynamics between these women. Moving forward, the importance of accommodation between these women, and in other relationships with similar dynamics, can be recognized and further investigated in the literature by directly employing CAT. Further, scholarly work employing CAT is necessary to determine exactly how accommodation functions in these relationships and to explore the nature of these interactions.

In-Law Relationships

The results of this thesis contribute to the empirical knowledge on in-law relationships – specifically mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. Significant correlations supported all of the relationships hypothesized about in this thesis, confirming the notion that communication is key in negotiating the sometimes-problematic nature of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. This knowledge is important, as the literature indicates that outcomes in in-law relationships can influence the larger family system. For instance, both the spousal side of the in-law triad (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Timmer & Veroff, 2000; Serewicz, Hosmer, Ballard, & Griffin, 2008) and mothers-in-law's relationships with their grandchildren (Fingerman, 2004) can be negatively impacted by the relational quality of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Therefore, knowledge about how these women negotiate social distance in ways that influence feelings of shared family identity and satisfaction in their

relationships has meaningful implications. This thesis establishes several categories of accommodation as being important to the relational quality of these women and demonstrates which types of messages result in positive and negative outcomes. Furthermore, the results of this thesis add to the existing knowledge regarding the complex nature of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships by demonstrating that these accommodative messages, so important in the relationship between these women, are sometimes sent *reluctantly* by daughters-in-law, the last of which is certainly not indicative of positive affect.

Although results show the importance of accommodation in these relationships, the data also disconfirm the stereotypes surrounding mothers-in-law. It is true that there are problematic aspects of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships and that the dynamic between these women can be difficult to negotiate. However, while mothers-in-law were deemed somewhat overaccommodative and underaccommodative by daughters-in-law in this thesis, accommodation was moderately high. Similarly, daughters-in-law reported being moderately accommodative of their mothers-in-law, and only somewhat nonaccommodative or reluctantly accommodative. At least from the daughters-in-law's perspectives, they are more often adjusting for pleasure than because they feel they have to, and this is hopeful for in-law dynamics. The many challenging dynamics that characterize mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships do exist, as demonstrated by the literature and in this thesis. However, the nature of in-law relationships is more complex than is often portrayed by popular culture tropes that paint mothers-in-law as evil women. Results of this thesis are a reminder that in this – and likely other – relationships, one isn't simply "accommodative" or "nonaccommodative." Individuals across relationship

types likely use some of each of the types of accommodation assessed in this thesis.

In addition to the implications of the supported hypotheses, results of post-hoc analyses conducted for this thesis have implications regarding role of mediated communication in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. These analyses revealed strong correlations between frequency of mediated communication and daughters-in-law's feelings of shared family identity and relationship satisfaction. In fact, frequency of mediated communication appeared to be *more* strongly related to *all* of the variables hypothesized about in this thesis than was frequency of face-to-face contact. These results may be explained by the notion that face-to-face communication occurs as a formality in these relationships, often in group settings and with other family members present, whereas mediated communication commonly occurring between these women likely stems out of a conscious choice to interact as a dyad. These are only presumptions, however, that need to be further explored. The strong relationship frequency of mediated communication has with daughters-in-law's perceptions of being accommodated by their mothers-in-law, as well as their feelings of shared family identity and relationship satisfaction, is an important addition to this literature. These results suggest that the influence of mediated communication should be further explored among in-laws, particularly given its asynchronicity and lack of nonverbal communication, the latter of which is an important component of CAT that needs further attention within this relationship context.

A final study implication surrounds relationship satisfaction in in-law relationships. Exceptionally strong correlations were found between relationship satisfaction and daughters-in-law's perceptions of being accommodated by their mothers-

in-law. Although the correlations between these variables were lower after controlling for several variables in the post-hoc analysis, the appearance of initial correlations in the range of $|.85-.90|$ indicate that there may be some conceptual overlap between relationship satisfaction and accommodation in in-law relationships. While plethora of literature exists regarding the factors that contribute to relational satisfaction in romantic relationships, including support, affection, quality of alternatives, and shared division of household tasks (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), the conceptualization of satisfaction among family members has not been paid as much scholarly attention. Family relationships are involuntary and further, in-law relationships are a product of a relationship with someone else with whom both parties are deeply invested. Past studies have shown that behaviors that typically contribute to satisfaction in relationships, such as inclusivity and frequency of contact, receive mixed responses from daughters-in-law depending on how much of those things they desire or expect (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Therefore, relationship satisfaction may be different in in-law relationships than in romantic or even family-of-origin relationships, and there may be need for a reconceptualization of what makes in-laws happy about their relationships.

In surveying daughters-in-law who are mothers themselves, the results found here can be applied to in-law relationships that are influenced by the nuances of motherhood/grandmotherhood. Mothers- and daughters-in-law have reported communication surrounding their children/grandchildren as being a point of uncertainty and contention in their relationships (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Mikucki-Enyart, 2011; Mikucki-Enyart, Caughlin, & Rittenour, 2015). As discussed in chapter one of this thesis, the notion of daughters-in-law as being gatekeepers of their mothers-in-law's biological

child and grandchild(ren), explored in the literature (Nuner, 2004), may contribute to the added challenge faced when daughters-in-law are mothers themselves. However, as a gatekeeper of her mothers-in-law's child (i.e., her own spouse), daughters-in-law have limited influence, as the linchpin has had a lifelong family-of-origin relationship with their mother prior to marriage. The linchpin is often, to some extent, loyal to his own mother, and such loyalty is sometimes regarded negatively by daughters-in-law (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). However, no such prior loyalty exists in the grandparent/grandchild relationships, and therefore daughters-in-law's influence on her mothers-in-law's relationship with her grandchildren (i.e., the daughter-in-law's own children) is more all-encompassing. The choice to survey daughters-in-law who are mothers themselves ensures that the results discussed hold true regardless of these additional challenging dynamics.

Limitations and Future Directions

Though this thesis is not without limitations, the results add to the knowledge on in-law relationships regarding accommodation between mothers- and daughters-in-law, the influence of mediated communication, and the conceptualization of relationship satisfaction. In conclusion of this thesis, limitations and future research directions are discussed.

One limitation of the data collected for this thesis is the use of online solicitation in private Facebook groups, leading to a sample lacking in diversity. A large majority of the daughters-in-law who participated were white, with little representation from other ethnicities. Much of the literature on mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, including this thesis, has utilized online solicitation, which likely limits access to these

surveys to mostly white, middle- to upper-class women. In future studies of these relationships, it may be beneficial to utilize sampling methods that allow researchers to assess women from many diverse backgrounds. In doing so, determinations might be made about whether women in minority ethnic groups and from low-income families have similar experiences with their mothers-in-law.

Notably, mothers-in-law's ethnicities, reported by participating daughters-in-law, were slightly more diverse than the participants' own ethnicities. This presents a second limitation regarding ethnicity. That is, the disparity between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law ethnicity is meaningful in this context due to the intergroup nature of in-law relationships. These women are from different families-of-origin; therefore, group membership is already salient in their interactions. Being from different ethnic backgrounds may intensify the already-existing divide resulting from their differing group memberships. Open-ended data from daughters-in-law indicates that divergent values/cultural orientations can be problematic in their relationships with their mothers-in-law (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Therefore, some of the variance in reported shared family identity may be due to ethnic or cultural differences.

A third limitation of this thesis involves the options provided for answering questions about how often one engages in face-to-face contact and mediated communication with their mothers-in-law. Several participants asked the researcher why "several times per month" was not included in the response options. In the future, more this option should be made available, and perhaps more questions that may illuminate channel-specific factors that influence relational quality in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships.

A fourth limitation of this thesis was also recognized when the researcher received several comments from members of the Facebook groups from which participants were solicited. Many women who were not legally married asked why they were not allowed to report on their long-time partner's mother. These women oftentimes communicated that they view their partner's mother as their mother-in-law, despite not being legally bound. This creates a conflict because as aforementioned, requiring individuals to be married to participate in studies regarding in-law relationships leaves less room for ambiguity. However, it is important to note that families are increasingly diverse, and some lifelong couples simply choose not to get married. To accommodate these modern changes in family structure, it may be necessary to consider allowing participants to self-identify who their in-laws are.

A fifth limitation of this thesis has to do with the high correlations between the accommodation variables and satisfaction. As discussed in the previous section, it may be that there is a more appropriate variable to assess the quality of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. For instance, assessing liking as a measure of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relational quality may reveal additional or differing findings. Although liking has been shown to be conceptually different than relationship satisfaction in relationships among romantic partners, friends, and acquaintances, existing literature shows that behaviors that are typically factors in relationship satisfaction are subject to mixed perceptions in in-law relationships (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Veksler and Eden (2017) suggest that it is possible to like someone and still want to be distant from them, and the same appears to be true in in-law relationships. Therefore, the use of the Interpersonal Liking measure, or a new measure similarly focused on in-laws' logical

evaluations and attitudes towards, rather than their emotional sensations and behavioral intentions regarding the relationship should be considered.

In addition to using diverse sampling methods, paying special attention to the response options provided, including non-married participants, and assessing relational quality differently, there are a few other future directions this line of work might take. Namely, additional assessments of the nature of accommodation in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, attention to mediated communication between these women, and further study of how having children influences this relationship may further the knowledge on mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships.

Regarding the future study of accommodation in in-law relationships, the nature of accommodation between mothers- and daughters-in-law should be further explored. Although the associations found in this study cannot establish causality, this thesis and other existing literature imply that the accommodation that occurs between these women may function in a reciprocal fashion. Collection of dyadic data, interviews, and other methods should be used in future research to begin to examine this possibility and further investigate the unique dynamics of these relationships.

Regarding mediated communication, channel of communication should be paid closer empirical attention in future in-law research. Frequency of mediated communication should be controlled for in in-law studies and studied to examine the influence it has on in-laws' perceptions of being accommodated and negotiation of social distance. It may be valuable to see if mediated communication is still as salient among a sample that is not gathered using online solicitation. Mediated communication appearing as more meaningful than face-to-face contact in this thesis is perplexing, and the reason

why this disparity might exist should be addressed.

Finally, the influence of daughters-in-law's own status as mothers should be further investigated. Particularly, it may be beneficial to look at these relationships during the transition from the daughter-in-law having no children to having children. Past research has indicated that parenthood/grandparenthood is a point of contention for these women (Mikucki-Enyart, 2011; Mikucki-Enyart, Caughlin, & Rittenour, 2015; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Additionally, the results of this thesis show that accommodation is clearly important in the relationships among these women when parenthood/grandparenthood is also salient (i.e., when daughters-in-law are mothers themselves). Therefore, future research should assess what changes occur in these relationships with the arrival of daughters-in-law's first child, and whether it impacts these women's' accommodation of each other.

Conclusion

This thesis extends previous literature on mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships by directly employing CAT and demonstrating that the principles set out by the theory hold up in these relationships. Additionally, in testing daughters-in-law's perceptions of their mothers-in-law's accommodation alongside their own accommodation of their mothers-in-law, the complex nature of accommodation between these women was revealed. Unexpected findings regarding the role of mediated communication and the nature of relationship satisfaction in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships have additional implications for the future study of in-law relationships, adding to the existing knowledge and posing questions for future research to address. Overall, findings indicate the vast importance of accommodation between mothers- and

daughters-in-law and underline the necessity of future examinations of this complex relationship.

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Appendix A: Admin Permission Request Script

Hi!

I'm Erin and I'm a mom to a 15-month-old little girl and a master's student at West Virginia University. I've been a member of the [insert group name] group for a little while now and I wanted to ask permission to post a survey I'm doing to collect data for my thesis in the near future. My thesis is on mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships and I was hoping to ask the members of the group to take my survey since I know lots of ladies here are married and have relationships with their mothers-in-law. My goal is to look at the communicative aspects of these relationships and see what kind of communication results in positive and negative outcomes. This is not for monetary gain, only to further our understanding of how these relationships work. I would be happy to share the results of my study with the group after I complete the study, also. Let me know if this would be okay with you!

Thanks.

Appendix B: Facebook Group Recruitment Script

Hi ladies!

I am currently a master's student at West Virginia University and I'm conducting a study on communication in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships for my thesis. I'm in the data- gathering stage now, and since I know lots of the women in these groups have experience with these relationships, I thought I would ask you all to take my survey. The only requirements for this study are that participants must have at least one child, be married, have a living mother-in- law, and be at minimum 18 years old. I know that fits a lot of the ladies in this group, and the admin have been nice enough to allow me to post and see if you'd like to help me out with my study! It'd be a big help to me, and it would help to further our knowledge on how mother-in- law/daughter-in-law relationships work. If anyone has any questions, please feel free to message me here on Facebook or email me at ecshelton@mix.wvu.edu. Also, please share the link with any friends that meet the requirements for the study that you think would be interested in participating.

Thank you, mamas – I appreciate it!

Appendix C: Qualtrics Survey

[Start of Block: Cover Letter]

Dear Participant,

This letter is a request for you to take part in a research project to assess how accommodative behaviors influence outcomes in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. This project is being conducted by Erin Shelton, a master's student in WVU's Communication Studies Theory and Research program, with the supervision of Dr. Christine Rittenour, an Associate Professor in the Communication Studies Department of WVU's Eberly College of Arts and Sciences. In order to participate, you must have at least one child, have a living mother-in-law, and be at least 18 years old. The attached questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete, and your participation in this project is greatly appreciated.

Your involvement in this project is completely voluntary, and your answers will be kept anonymous. I will not ask any information that should lead back to your identity as a participant. You can choose to discontinue the survey at any time or choose to skip any question you do not wish to answer. You will not be penalized in any way should you choose to withdraw. West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board acknowledgement of this project is on file (#1903515846).

I hope that you will participate in this research project, as it could be beneficial in understanding the impact of accommodative behaviors in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. Should you have any questions about this letter or the research project, please feel free to contact Dr. Christine Rittenour at (304) 293-3905 or by e-mail at Christine.Rittenour@mail.wvu.edu or Erin Shelton at ecshelton@mix.wvu.edu

Thank you for your time and help with this project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christine Rittenour, WVU Associate Professor of Communication Studies,
Christine.Rittenour@mail.wvu.edu
Erin C. Shelton, WVU Communication Studies M.A. Student ,ecshelton@mix.wvu.edu

Do you consent to taking this survey?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

[Start of Block: Demographics (self)]

Please answer the following questions about yourself.

How old are you (in whole years)?

Please indicate your gender.

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Transgender male
- ☐ Transgender female
- ☐ Nonbinary
- ☐ Other _____

Please indicate your ethnicity.

- ☐ White/Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ Middle Eastern
- ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other _____

How long have you been married (in whole years)?

How long were you in a romantic relationship with your spouse before getting married (in whole years)?

Do you have one or more children?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How many children do you have?

[Start of Block: Demographics (MIL)]

Please answer the following questions about your mother-in-law.

How old is your mother-in-law (in whole years)?

Please indicate your mother-in-law's gender.

- ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Transgender male
 - ☐ Transgender female
 - ☐ Nonbinary
 - ☐ Other
-

Please indicate your mother-in-law's ethnicity.

- ☐ White/Caucasian
 - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
 - ☐ Black/African American
 - ☐ Native American
 - ☐ Middle Eastern
 - ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
 - ☐ Other
-

How far away from your mother-in-law do you live?

- ☐ We live in the same house
 - ☐ We live in the same city or town
 - ☐ We live within 50 miles of each other
 - ☐ We live 50-99 miles from each other
 - ☐ We live 100-499 miles from each other
 - ☐ We live 500+ miles from each other
-

How often do you see your mother-in-law face-to-face?

- ☐ Almost never
 - ☐ Once a year
 - ☐ Several times per year
 - ☐ Once a month
 - ☐ Once a week
 - ☐ Several times per week
 - ☐ Every day
-

How often do you speak to your mother-in-law through mediated channels (e.g., phone calls, texting, emails)?

- ☐ Almost never
- ☐ Once a year
- ☐ Several times per year
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Several times per week
- ☐ Every day

[Start of Block: Directions]

On the next pages of this survey, you will be answering questions regarding your relationship with your mother-in-law.

Click next to continue.

I love my
mother-in-
law

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

There are
many
problems in
my
relationship
with my
mother-in-
law

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

I feel as if
my mother-
in-law and I
are
members of
separate
groups

[Start of Block: Directions]

On the following pages, you will be answering questions about how your mother-in-law communicates with you.

Click next to continue.

Continue thinking about how your mother-in-law communicates with you. Using the following scale, please indicate to what extent you agree that your mother-in-law does each of the following things in her relationship with you.

[illegible]

[Start of Block: Directions]

Switching gears now, for the next few pages of this survey you will be answering questions about how you communicate with your mother-in-law.

Click next to continue.

Continue thinking about how you communicate with your mother-in-law. Using the following scale, please indicate to what extent you agree that you do each of the following things in your relationship with your mother-in-law.

[illegible]

[Start of Block: DIL Reluctant Accommodation]

Continue thinking about how you communicate with your mother-in-law. Using the following scale, please indicate to what extent you agree that you do each of the following things in your relationship with your mother-in-law.

[illegible]

[Start of Block: Directions]

The next page will show the final questions for this survey. For these questions, think about your relationships with your mother-in-law and your spouse.

Click next to continue.

[Start of Block: Future Research]

Please enter your email address below if you would like to be contacted about future research participation opportunities.