Relational Aftermath: Accounts of Marital Dissolution to Social Network Members.

Linda Malone Pledger

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

The most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
Relational aftermath: Accounts of marital dissolution to social network members

Pledger, Linda Malone, Ph.D.
The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1990
Relational Aftermath:
Accounts of Marital Dissolution to Social Network Members

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in
The Department of Speech Communication, Theatre, and
Communication Disorders

by
Linda Malone Pledger
B.A., University of New Orleans, 1973
M.A., University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 1984
May 1990
Acknowledgments

I have many people to thank for my experiences of the last few years. For her inspiration, patience, and dedication, I want to thank my major professor, my mentor and my friend, Dr. Renee Edwards. She gave me the confidence to do empirical research and gave me a glimpse of what it means to be a scholar in the field.

I am forever indebted to Rachel Caillouet, who traveled every step of the way with me, always knowing the right thing to say and do. She shared with me much laughter and many tears, great joys and mindless fears. My gratitude also goes to my parents for instilling in me a lifelong desire for education and for always believing I could accomplish my dreams.

I owe many years of servitude to my chair and my colleagues at UALR, who lightened my work load and always offered me emotional support. I especially thank Dr. Mike Hemphill, who so willingly gave his time, his expertise, and his friendship in working through the statistical portions of this work and in offering invaluable advice throughout the process.

My love and thanks go to Kathryn, who understood immediately.

Last but always first, I wish to dedicate this work to Buddy, Kelly, and Matt, who made more sacrifices than
love when I needed them most (and probably deserved them least!), and who deserve this honor more than I. When they might have withered, they blossomed, and for this I will always be grateful.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.................................................ii

List of Tables...................................................vi

Abstract....................................................................vii

Chapter I: Review of Literature Pertaining to
Relationship Dissolution, Social Networks,
Impression Management, and Failure Management........1
  Relationship Dissolution..........................................2
  Social Networks...................................................8
  Impression Management..........................................13
  Failure Management...............................................19
  Summary..........................................................22

Chapter II: Hypotheses Concerning the Relationship
Between Accounts and Social Networks, Gender, and
Expectation of Approval..........................................24
  Hypothesis 1......................................................28
  Hypothesis 2....................................................32
  Hypothesis 3....................................................34
  Hypothesis 4....................................................36
  Hypothesis 5....................................................36
  Summary................................................................36

Chapter III: Methods and Procedures for Account
Analysis....................................................................37
  Survey Instrument...............................................37
  Sample....................................................................39
  Variables..........................................................42
  Data Coding........................................................43
  Data Analysis.......................................................44
  Additional Analyses..............................................46
  Pilot Study........................................................47

Chapter IV: Results of Analyses of Relationships
Between Accounts and Social Networks, Gender, and
Expectation of Approval..........................................49
  Results of Hypotheses Testing.................................49
  Results of Content Analysis.......................................58
  Results of Additional Analyses.................................63

Chapter V: Interpreting the Findings Concerning
Interpersonal Failure Management and Suggestions
for Future Research..............................................75
List of Tables

1. Log-linear Analysis of Account by Social Network, Sex, and Expectation of Approval .................. 50
2. Crosstabulations of Account by Social Network .......... 52
3. Crosstabulations of Account by Expectation of Approval .................................................. 54
4. Means and Standard Deviations for Males and Females for Total Accounts .................. 56
5. Crosstabulations of Account by Sex ............... 57
6. Crosstabulations of Types of Excuses Used by Males and Females ..................................... 61
7. Crosstabulations of Sex of the Respondent by Sex of the Social Network Member ............. 64
8. Crosstabulations of Social Network by Sex of Social Network Member ................................ 65
9. Crosstabulations of Sex by Initiator of Divorce ....... 66
10. Crosstabulations of Account by Initiator of Divorce ..................................................... 67
11. Analysis of Variance of Total Accounts by Type of Accounts .................................. 69
12. Analysis of Variance of Type of Account Offered to Family ............................................. 70
13. Analysis of Variance of Type of Account Offered to Friends ............................................. 71
14. Analysis of Variance of Type of Account Offered to Acquaintances ...................................... 72
15. Analysis of Variance of Account by Social Network ..................................................... 73
Abstract

Relationship dissolution is a complex process that involves more than the act of termination. The process affects and is affected by an individual's communication with members of the social network. The attributions made by the individual to account for the dissolution constitute an attempt at failure management.

This study was undertaken to determine how the strategies used to manage the failure event of divorce vary according to social network groups, gender, and expectation of approval. One hundred eleven divorced individuals completed questionnaires soliciting recollection of accounts made to family, friends, and acquaintances regarding their divorce.

Findings include 1) excuses were used more often than other types of accounts (this supports earlier research in accounting), 2) excuses were used slightly more often with family, justifications substantially more often with friends, and silence and interactive accounts substantially more often with acquaintances, 3) there were no gender differences in type of account used or in the number of accounts used, 4) males selected males with whom to interact, and females selected females, 5) females initiated the divorce (as reported by both sexes), 6) families and friends were offered higher
numbers of accounts than acquaintances.

Content analysis revealed five types of excuses: abuse, unfaithfulness, refusal to change or get help, personality flaws and abrupt termination by other. T-tests revealed that females predominantly used the first three types and males predominantly used the last two.

This study has examined reports of the actual accounts communicated to members of different social networks regarding divorce and has revealed differences with respect to these social networks. It has begun the task of developing a typology of interpersonal relationship failure management strategies and has established a connection between type of communication strategy selected and target audience.
Relational Aftermath:
Accounts of Marital Dissolution to Social Network Members

Chapter I
Review of Literature Pertaining to
Relationship Dissolution, Social Networks,
Impression Management, and Failure Management

According to the most recent United States Department of Health and Human Services Report (1988), there were 1,158,000 divorces and 2,367,000 marriages in the United States in the twelve months prior to June 1988. This placed the divorce rate at 4.7 per thousand, as opposed to a marriage rate of 9.7 per thousand. In other words, for every 2.04 marriages, there is one divorce. These figures have changed dramatically since 1970, when there was one divorce for every five marriages. The increasing predominance of divorce has necessitated an examination of the process of relationship dissolution and its effects upon the partners involved.

Until recently, communication theorists examining interpersonal relationship development have concentrated largely on initial interaction and the stages of relationship growth (e.g., see Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Miller & Parks, 1982). In the
past decade, communication theorists as well as psychologists, social psychologists and sociologists have recognized and responded to a call for further study regarding the stages and processes of relationship disengagement (e.g., Baxter, 1979, 1982, 1984, 1985; Baxter & Philpott, 1982; Cody, 1982; Duck, 1981, 1982; Kolevzon & Gottlieb, 1984; Newcomb & Bentler, 1981; Schriber, Larwood & Peterson, 1985; Spanier & Casto, 1979; Stephen, 1987; Zeiss, Zeiss & Johnson, 1980). A review of this body of research reveals the recent advances in understanding relationship deterioration and dissolution and the need for further research regarding the communication between individuals who have experienced relationship dissolution and members of their social network. This study examines the failure management strategies that individuals offer to their social network members regarding the dissolution of their marriage.

Relationship Dissolution

Traditionally, relationship deterioration has been seen as simply the relationship growth process in reverse (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Davis, 1973; Knapp, 1984). Knapp maintains that as relationships develop, communication behavior moves along a continuum represented by the following bi-polar pairs: stylized--unique, narrow--broad, difficult--efficient, rigid--flexible, awkward--
smooth, public—personal, hesitant—spontaneous, and judgment suspended—judgment given. As relationships deteriorate, communication behavior shifts back to the left-most adjective of the pair. However, current research questions the validity of this approach (Ayres, 1982; Baxter, 1983; Duck, 1982). Baxter (1983) reports that a global reversal does not occur across communication behavior dimensions. For example, relational growth requires that both parties act together, while relationship dissolution can occur as a result of a unilateral decision. Also relational growth is characterized by increased information acquisition, but relationship deterioration does not necessarily entail decreased information acquisition. In addition, flexibility of communication and uniqueness of communication do not show a reversal in dissolution (Baxter, 1983). Finally, Ayres (1982) reports that individuals do not suspend their overt judgment of the other in deteriorating relationships. Relationship dissolution, therefore, does not appear to be merely a reversal of the growth process.

Both Wood (1982) and Knapp (1984) have developed similar models of relational stages which include several stages of growth and dissolution. Knapp's (1984) stages include initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, bonding, differentiating, circumscribing,
stagnating, avoiding, terminating. Wood's (1982) stages are individual, invitational, explorational, intensifying, revising, bonding, navigating, differentiating, disintegrating, stagnating, terminating, and individual. The major differences between the two models are Wood's individual stages at the beginning and end. Knapp envisions the final stage of relationship development as termination, when the relationship ceases to exist. Wood, however, recognizes an additional stage, the individual state.

As a result of the existence of the relationship and its resulting culture, a person does not return to the same pre-relationship individual state but is actually a different individual at a new stage. During this post-termination stage, an individual must readjust to the lifestyle of a single person and deal with any social network effects of the relationship dissolution (Wood, 1982). Edwards, Honeycutt, and Zagacki (1988) suggest that imagined interactions during this "11th" interaction stage may allow individuals to reexamine the relationship and their role in it. Imagined interactions between themselves and the ex-partner may help them to become better prepared to deal with the ex-partner in the future and also to practice for conversations with others regarding the relationship termination. These
conversations and the relational accounting are the main focus of the current study.

The addition of the final individual stage illuminates a problem several researchers (e.g., Duck, 1982; Edwards & Saunders, 1981; Salts, 1979) have recognized in regard to this area of inquiry. Although dissolution is often seen as an event, it is in reality a process which can occur over a period of time and follow several trajectories. Research examining dissolution has focused on strategies that are used to dissolve a relationship (Banks, Altendorf, Greene & Cody, 1987; Baxter, 1979, 1982; Baxter & Philpott, 1982; Cody, 1982; Knapp, 1984; Wilmot, Carbaugh & Baxter, 1985). Cody (1983) found support for a five-factor typology of relationship termination strategies: behavioral de-escalation, de-escalation, positive tone, negative identity management, and justification.

Knapp (1984) suggests that termination strategies are characterized by increased physical and psychological distance, and by disassociation (increased concern for self and decreased concern for other). Using Knapp's suggestion of two basic features to examine Cody's typology of disengagement strategies, Baxter (1982) reports four primary types of termination actions: withdrawal/avoidance, manipulatory strategies, positive tone strategies, and open confrontation strategies. She
further collapses these strategies into two basic dimensions: directness-indirectness (open confrontation and withdrawal/avoidance) and other-self orientation (positive tone and manipulation). Although this information is crucial to understanding the communication that occurs during relationship dissolution, it is only one step in examining the process or patterns that occur.

Rather than a straightforward series of dissolution steps that ultimately culminates in disengagement, the dissolution process can follow several different trajectories. Baxter (1984) devised a flow chart of disengagement, in which she found that the process of dissolution varies according to six features: 1) whether the realization of problems was gradual or sudden, 2) whether the decision to terminate was unilateral or bilateral, 3) whether the methods of termination were direct or indirect, 4) whether the negotiation period was lengthy or short, 5) whether or not there were attempts at reconciliation, and 6) whether the relationship endured or continued in an altered form.

Baxter's model describes communication that occurs during the intrapsychic and dyadic phases of dissolution. Duck (1982) delineates four phases of dissolution: 1) the intrapsychic phase, when one member of the dyad is internally evaluating the relationship and attempting to make decisions about the continuation of the
relationship, 2) the dyadic phase, when one member confronts the other with redefining or dissolving the relationship, 3) the social phase, when individuals publicly acknowledge the problems of the relationship and attempt to obtain public sanction for the pending dissolution, and 4) the grave-dressing phase, when attempts are made to create a personally acceptable story for the termination for themselves and others. These phases often overlap as the dissolution process unfolds. Most of the research conducted on dissolution has centered on the dyadic phase because relationships are initiated, maintained, and dissolved by the two parties involved. How one communicates to a partner about the desire or decision to terminate is related to the types of relational problems (Cody, 1982; Hill, Rubin & Peplau, 1976; Levinger, 1976), the attempts to repair, the reasons impeding the dissolution (Cupach & Metts, 1983), future expectations for the relationship (Banks, et al., 1987), whether the decision was unilateral or bilateral (Baxter, 1984; Wilmot, Carbaugh, & Baxter, 1985), level of intimacy (Cody, 1982; Lee, 1984) and felt anger (Cody, 1982).

Examining dissolution as a purely dyadic or intrapsychic/dyadic experience, however, ignores the effects of the social environment within which the disengagement process unfolds. Relationships do not
evolve or dissolve within a vacuum; every relationship is embedded in a social network consisting of family, friends, and acquaintances (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Johnson (1982) maintains that "even the seemingly most individual and psychological aspects of relationship dissolution, such as changes in cognition, are supremely social in character" (p. 73). Therefore, an examination of interactions with social network members would contribute to the understanding of the process of dissolution recovery. This study focuses on Duck's social and grave-dressing phases, when individuals acknowledge to others and attempt to create an acceptable story for the dissolution.

Social Networks

An individual's social network is comprised of those with whom one has some form of social bond and with whom one interacts (Adams, 1967). Membership varies according to the amount of freedom of choice and interaction, from more constrained contexts such as kin or co-workers, to more voluntary contexts such as friends (Jackson, Fischer, & Jones, 1977). Fischer (1984) acknowledges the constraints apparent in kin ties: "Kinship is, and always has been, the crucial distinction people make among social relations...While friends can be chosen and abandoned, relatives are imposed, presumably, forever. What we can expect from relatives involves far more
commitment, trust and sacrifice than is the case for non-relatives" (p. 80). Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986), however, recognize that individuals today have the choice to reduce the traditional kin ties that bind.

Two decades ago, Litwak and Szelenyi (1969) recognized that technological advances were changing the form of an individual's primary group structures. Due to increased mobility, a weakened centralized authority system with the kinship structure, and a weaker kinship control of occupation (i.e., fewer sons and daughters going into family business or following in parental occupational footsteps), the traditionally strong primary kinship system must maintain its viability through means other than face-to-face contact. Friendships and relationships that have developed because of regular face-to-face contact (e.g., co-workers) often provide supplemental resources to compensate for changing family ties (Litwak & Szelenyi, 1969). Apparently, the functions that different social network groups serve, while no less important than in the past, are changing.

Duck (1982) posits that a major weakness in previous research regarding dissolution is the apparent disregard of the importance of communication with the social network, "e.g., when individuals create accounts of their relationship dissolution in order to satisfy relatives or to justify themselves publicly" (p. 9). Network members
play a role in the termination process as they act as barrier forces inhibiting dissolution, supporting forces encouraging dissolution, or "sounding boards" with whom an individual clarifies his/her position (Levinger, 1965). Johnson (1982) argues that "the prospect of dealing with these individuals' reactions to dissolution can be a major structural commitment either contributing to the maintenance of a relationship long after personal commitment has seriously declined, or requiring some form of interpersonal work to make the dissolution socially bearable" (p. 57).

These networks also continue to be a part of the process during the individual stage, as one experiences the gravedressing aspects of the relationship. Rands (1980), in her study of social networks of divorced men and women, reports that after separation, contact increases with the closest members of the social network even though total contact declines because of the loss of the spousal relationship. Also, Raschke (1977) reports that the amount and type of social interaction is correlated with postdivorce adjustment, i.e., the more social involvement, the lower the stress.

Further support for the importance of the social network in the adjustment process of the recently divorced emanates from an in-depth study of fifty postseparation case study interviews by Spanier and Casto
(1979). Individuals who reported little or no support from family and friends had more trouble adjusting to the separation. Those who felt they received little or no support reported that their family and/or friends disapproved of divorce in general or of this divorce in particular. Kitson, Moir, and Mason (1982) also found that disapproval by family members resulted in a decrease in support. In addition, Spanier and Casto (1979) reported that those who isolated themselves from friends or family had a very difficult time adjusting. Finally, a recent study of the adjustment of divorcing women and their daughters (Isaacs and Leon, 1986) suggests that the adjustment of the mother is facilitated by a great deal of approval, as well as financial and emotional support, from her family. Therefore, communication with the members of the social network becomes increasingly important in the aftermath of relationship dissolution.

Patterns of social interaction differ for males and females; although overall social participation increases more for males (Raschke, 1977), females report increased contact with relatives (Albrecht, 1980). Even though Spanier and Casto (1979) were unable to assess whether increased social interaction improved adjustment or better adjustment led to greater social interaction, it is apparent that social network contact is important for both males and females during the postdissolution
period. Therefore, the interpretation of the dissolution to the network members must be managed in such a way that the individual and the members of the social network can adjust to the dissolution and maintain old ties or establish new ones.

Social context differs for marital and non-marital relationships, such that accounting to the social network becomes more important to the former. Hill, Rubin and Peplau (1976) surveyed 231 unmarried couples in an attempt to examine the process of premarital breakup, in part to "provide an interesting comparison against which to view marital disruption" (p. 164). The couples completed an initial two page questionnaire and followup questionnaires six months, one year, and two years later. Four-fifths of the original couples completed the two year study. The researchers maintain that "breakup before marriage takes place in a very different social context from that of divorce. The ending of a dating relationship is relatively unaffected by factors that play central roles in divorces--for example, changes in residence, economic arrangements, child custody, legal battles, and stigmatization by kin and community" (p. 148).

In their comparison of marital and non-marital dissolution, Cupach and Metts (1986) conclude that "the structural and affective enmeshment of marital couples
lend to their disengagement accounts a characteristic complexity that has no equivalent in the accounts of couples who dissolved their relationships prior to marriage." (p. 331). They found that marital and non-marital relationships differ in several key aspects, including the importance placed on various problems and the patterns of attribution.

Impression Management

Individuals attempt to explain to others and to themselves why relationships have ended. In this attempt to organize and interpret events, an individual makes attributions as to the reasons events happen. Heider (1958) maintained that people act as naive psychologists in developing theories about people's behaviors. When social events are involved, the question of causation becomes especially important. Heider theorized that people attribute causes either to internal or external forces, and these attributions affect how the individual then explains the event. Attribution research has determined that the types of attributions individuals make can have an effect on their emotional and psychological well-being (Valins & Nesbitt, 1972).

Individuals offer to others accounts of the dissolution in part to reestablish a self-identity that has been threatened by the dissolution (Harvey, Weber, Galvin, Huszti, & Garnich, 1986; Schneider, 1969;
Schneider & Turkat, 1975). As McCall (1982) explains the social management of bond dissolution, "Reintegration of self depends on reintegration of self with others; self, network, and its constituent relationships may all need to be altered or redefined...The central process in coping with a spoiled relationship thus would seem to be the negotiation of shared answers, that is, the collective evolution of accounts" (p. 220). An account is "a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to valuative inquiry...a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior" (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p.46). Weiss (1975) suggests the importance of causes assigned to the dissolution of a relationship:

The account is of major psychological importance to the separated, not only because it settles the issue of who was responsible for what, but also because it imposes on the confused marital events that preceded the separation a plot structure with a beginning, middle, and end and so organizes the events into a conceptually manageable unity. Once understood in this way, the events can be dealt with (Weiss, 1975, p. 15).

Buttny (1985) maintains that there are three necessary conditions which constitute account episodes: 1) a failure event must occur, 2) a response is needed from the individual, and 3) an account requests an evaluation from the other. Buttny (1985) defines accounts as either excuses and justifications, while refusals or admission of guilt are alternatives to
accounts. However, other researchers use a broader definition of account to include other types as well as excuses and justifications. For example, Newman and Langer (1981), in a study of post-divorce attributions, found that individuals who make interactive attributions, "those explanations which point to features of the dyadic unit itself" (p. 225), are happier, have a higher opinion of themselves and are more socially skilled than those who blame themselves or their ex-spouses for the dissolution. They suggest that individuals may prolong their period of adaptation to divorce by the way they think about or explain the divorce to others.

Sixty-six divorced females, when asked to explain why they had divorced, gave person attributions (in every case referring to the ex-spouse's characteristics) and/or interactive attributions. The predominant person attributions were spouse's emotional immaturity, psychological problems, selfishness, and gambling or drinking. The main interactive attributions were incompatibility, changing values or lifestyles, lack of love and/or communication, and financial problems. Questionnaires concerning contentedness and self-esteem revealed that those who made person attributions were more unhappy, more socially inactive, less optimistic, lacking in confidence, more socially unskilled, and less likely to be successful than those who made interactive
attributions. A six month followup study supported a significant main effect for attribution. The researchers suggest that "Making person attributions may be easier because they use less complex information and because they are encouraged by the structure of our language. Nevertheless, they may be harmful to their user in the long run, whereas interactive attributions may promote increased awareness and mitigate the feelings of worthlessness and resentment which accompany the endings of many intimate relationships" (Newman & Langer, 1981, p. 231).

Not only do individuals attempt to understand the behavior of themselves and others, they also attempt to manage the attributions others make about them. The attributions one makes about the causes of relationship dissolution affect the "definition of the situation" for the larger social network in which one is involved. Through impression management, individuals attempt to control the responses others have toward them. Goffman (1967) defines this as face, "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p.5).

Jones and Pittman (1982) suggest that individuals use tactics such as ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication to accomplish self-presentational goals. Harvey, Weber, Yarkin, and Stewart
(1982) propose that each of these tactics can be found in accounting, which serves a persuasive function and is structured according to the audience and the conversational goal. For example, an account might take one form in speaking to a confidante with whom one can speak freely and openly in a cathartic discussion, and quite another in speaking with a new acquaintance or co-worker when self-presentational goals might be of paramount importance. Schlenker (1980) suggests that one constructs and projects different faces for different people. Just as an individual presents one face to a friend and another to an enemy, he/she may establish one set of explanations for the failure of the relationship to parents and another set to close friends. For example, in order to save face with a parent who might be tempted to say, "I told you so," one might relate an interactive account of the breakup, avoiding individual blame by focusing on the relationship. The same termination, explained to close friends, might rely more heavily on excuse in order to strengthen support and sympathy and to achieve self-validation. The particular faces result from the nature of the relationship, the individual's self-concept, and the goals of the interaction (Schlenker, 1980).

Goffman (1967) argues that individuals indulge in face-saving techniques when they experience spoiled
identities. Face-maintenance is a necessary part of social interaction; in order to maintain face, one often attempts to explain out-of-face behaviors in a socially acceptable way (Schlenker, 1980). The finding that ex-partners vary so greatly in their accounts of relational dissolution (Baxter, 1986; Fletcher, 1983; Hill et al., 1976) lends support to Goffman's (1955) assertion that the line between accurate self-presentation and self-misrepresentation is very fine and that individuals often convince themselves that their projected identities are real. Duck (1982) suggests that individuals often engage in misattribution in order to counteract potential self-threatening experiences in the dissolution process.

Researchers examining cognition and motivation in the attribution process lend support to this assertion (Bradley, 1978; Harvey, Wells, & Alvarez, 1978; Weary & Arkin, 1979). For example, Harvey et al. (1976) propose that "through an almost obsessive need to organize and reorganize the numerous relationship components, a sense of completion, at least at the cognitive level, is achieved" (p. 200). They suggest that the self-presentation function may not be a conscious one in the formation of accounts and that individuals may be making an honest attempt to explain the event. However, when faced with a predicament, (any situation that could
result in damage to one's identity), impression management activities often follow. Schlenker (1980) describes these activities as retreating (avoiding the predicament) and remedial behavior (accounts and apologies). McLaughlin, Cody, and O'Hair (1983) have examined these impression management behaviors in relation to failure management techniques.

Failure Management

Relationship termination is, in a broad sense, a type of failure, and the ways in which the participants explain or account for the termination constitute failure management. When offering an account of a failure, the individual attempts to manage the threatening implications of the failure (Blatz, 1972; Blumstein, 1974; Shields, 1979). Goffman (1971) maintains that individuals engage in "remedial work...changing the meaning that otherwise might be given to an act, transforming what could be seen as offensive into what can be seen as acceptable" (p. 109). Elaborating on earlier research (Schonbach, 1980; Scott & Lyman, 1968) distinguishing between excuses and justifications, McLaughlin, Cody and O'Hair (1983) examined five types of failure management strategies: excuse, justification, concession, refusal, and silence.

When using the strategy of excuse, the individual denies responsibility for the failure ("My ex-husband was
having an affair"). Excuses take many forms, such as citing some form of impairment or disability ("She was emotionally ill"), citing a series of misfortunes showing that overwhelming circumstances were at fault ("He was in the Air Force and put in for an overseas tour where he couldn't take me"), diffusing the responsibility ("Our marriage was a maneuver she engineered partially to prove to her first husband that she, too, could marry younger than herself"), or appealing to the participation of other people in the failure event ("He had an affair with a woman at work"). According to impression management theory (Schlenker, 1980), the severity of a predicament is determined by the undesirability of the event and the actor's apparent responsibility. Therefore, when the actor anticipates that the divorce event might cause disapproval, or that reduced responsibility will help save face, excuses might be used.

When using justification, the individual admits responsibility but declares his/her right to act in such a way ("Staying in the marriage would have negatively affected my work, my relationships with my friends, my self-esteem"). Other forms of justification include appealing to higher goals ("It was the best thing for the children"), or comparing it to similar offenses of others ("None of my friends were married; they were free and I was not"). When using concession, the individual
acknowledges guilt and offers apologies ("I fell in love with someone else and had an affair"). Justification and concession both accept responsibility for the failure; however, when using justification, the individual redefines the situation in such a way as to justify his/her action, whereas when using concession, the individual accepts responsibility and apologizes for the failure.

Refusal is the strategy of denying that the event was indeed a failure ("There was really no marriage to begin with, so a divorce was just ending something that had died a long time ago"). Intuitively, this strategy would be expected to be used infrequently because of the nature of divorce as a relationship failure. Finally, silence, or the avoidance of any reference to the failure ("I didn't explain at all because I didn't think she had a right to know"), can be used as a failure management strategy (McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983). These researchers suggest that silence might be used when an explanation might make matters worse or when embarrassment causes one to resist discussion about the divorce.

In addition to the above typology, an interactive account must be added. Previous research regarding failure management has examined unilateral failures, where an individual or unit has been held accountable for
a failure. However, a body of literature examining relational communication theory (see Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967) supports the idea that relational problems often do not lie within the individual but within the relational communication established by the dyad. Interactive attributions are those accounts which focus on the dyadic unit, or the "relational culture" (Wood, 1982) which has been established. Research has indicated a link between focus of account (person vs. relationship) and post-divorce adjustment (Newman & Langer, 1981). Therefore, in the instance of relationship failure, the responsibility can rest on interactive factors ("We could not communicate," "We fell out of love," "We married too young") rather than individual factors. Newman and Langer (1981) suggest that "individuals may actively promote or exaggerate their own feelings of self-recrimination and their difficulties adapting to divorce by the manner in which they think about or explain their divorces" (p. 224).

Summary

Divorce has become an increasing occurrence over the last decades, necessitating a closer examination of the process of relationship dissolution. The stages of relationship dissolution have been delineated by several theorists, resulting in several typologies of relationship termination strategies. Research has dealt with the
communication which occurs during the intrapsychic and
dyadic phases of dissolution, without much attempt to
examine the process during the social and grave-dressing
phases.

Research has supported the idea that an
individual's social network members play a significant
role in the divorce process. Interaction with and
approval from these members have proven to be factors in
the adaptation process following a divorce. Studies have
also found gender differences in the divorce process.
The attributions made by an individual to account for
the dissolution constitute an attempt at failure
management.

An examination of failure management strategies has
produced a typology of strategies that can be adapted to
examine the failure of a marriage. This study was
undertaken to determine how the strategies used to manage
the failure event vary according to social network
groups, gender, and expectation of approval. The
following chapter examines the specific hypotheses
advanced regarding the above aspects of dissolution
communication.
Chapter II
Hypotheses Concerning the Relationship Between Accounts and Social Network, Gender, and Expectation of Approval

This chapter will provide the rationale for each of the hypotheses in this study. The hypotheses will concern the types of accounts made about marital dissolution and their relationship to the various social network members to whom the accounts are made, the expectation of approval or disapproval of the social network member, and the sex of the individual offering the account.

The first hypothesis concerns the type of accounting made in the failure management context of divorce. Employing the adapted McLaughlin, Cody and O'Hair (1983) strategies as a preliminary basis, this study examines marital dissolution from a failure management perspective. Newman and Langer (1981) argue that those who report interactive attributions (specifically regarding the couple's interpersonal/communication patterns) are more well-adjusted than those who report individual attributions. Fletcher (1983b), in a study examining sex differences in marital dissolution
attributions, found that when controlling for self-esteem and sex, those who make self-attributions are better adjusted to the separation than those who make other-attributions. However, most studies (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1986; Fletcher, 1983a; Harvey, Wells & Alvarez, 1978; Kitson & Sussman, 1982) indicate the predominance of person attributions rather than interactive attributions. While many studies report attributions which can be classified as interactive (e.g., Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Hill et al., 1976; Levinger, 1966; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Stephen, 1987), only Stephen (1987) reports a larger percentage of interactive attributions.

Although Newman and Langer (1981) found no significant difference in the attributions given over time, Stephen (1987) proposed that the increased length of time elapsed (two years) was associated with increased frequencies of interpersonal attributions.

Research has produced conflicting results regarding attribution of responsibility to self or to ex-spouse. The "responsibility bias" has been reported by several researchers (Hill et al., 1976; Ross & Sicoly, 1979; Schriber, Larwood & Peterson, 1985; Thompson & Kelley, 1981). A "responsibility bias" is the tendency to assign responsibility to self more often than to another for both positive and negative outcomes. For example, Schriber et al. (1985) found that individuals, when told
to assume that they either were or would be married, attributed more blame to themselves than to their partners when answering the question "How likely is it that any difficulties with the marriage are (would be) your fault?" Ross and Sicoly (1979) and Thompson and Kelley (1981) report a "responsibility bias" regarding various activities, both positive and negative, in satisfactory or ongoing relationships; Schriber et al.'s (1985) study is the only instance of a "responsibility bias" being found in divorced individuals.

In contrast to the above studies, a "responsibility bias" has not been found in a large body of research involving marital dissolution. Newman and Langer (1981) report that in every case where a person attribution (rather than an interactive attribution) was made, it referred to the negative attributes of the ex-partner rather than the self. Harvey, Wells and Alvarez (1978) also found that individuals who were separated placed the greater blame for marital difficulties on the ex-partner. In Cupach and Metts' (1986) comparison of marital and non-marital relationship dissolution, responsibility again was assigned to the ex-partner more often than to the self, with the marital group assigning more responsibility to the ex-partner than the non-marital group. Kitson and Sussman (1982) interviewed 209 divorced people and found that 71% of them laid most of
the blame for the divorce on their ex-spouse. Finally, in Fletcher's (1983) analysis of verbal explanations for marital separation, he found that the ex-spouse was given significantly more causal responsibility than the self.

Tedeschi and Reiss (1981) offer a plausible explanation for conflicting results regarding responsibility bias. They maintain that impression management may be the deciding factor. Individuals attempt to present themselves in the most favorable light. When evidence is overwhelming that the individual is responsible for the failure, there may be more negative consequences associated with denying responsibility or placing responsibility on others. In the case of a divorce, overwhelming contradictory evidence may not be present in post-divorce attribution situations. Individuals may be freer to "recall" information supporting their account without fear of reproach. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that individuals making attributions about relationship failure will offer accounts which will assign responsibility to the other more often than to the self.

Excuses attribute responsibility to the other. In offering an excuse, an individual denies responsibility for the termination while possibly scapegoating or blaming the other. Justifications attribute responsibility for initiating or following through with a
divorce to self, while still not accepting responsibility for the destruction of the marriage. Concession, by definition, is used by those who accept responsibility for the failure and make apologies. Neither silence nor refusal place responsibility on the other. Interactive attributions place responsibility on the dyadic relationship while not attributing blame to either individual. Because more research suggests that divorced persons blame their ex-spouses for their divorce:

\[ H_1: \text{When giving accounts for marital dissolution, individuals will use excuses more often than justification, concession, refusal, silence, or interactive accounts.} \]

According to Duck (1982), adjustment to divorce is a problem for the social network as well as for the dyad. The second hypothesis concerns accounts given to three identifiable groups of the social network: family members, close friends, and co-workers or acquaintances. A particular social identity, or face, is established through marriage and is accompanied by certain norms and expectations. A divorce alters this social identity and potentially can become a threat to personal identity (Duck & Lea, 1983), often resulting in out-of-face behavior. As mentioned earlier, individuals project different faces for different people; therefore, their
accounts for divorce should vary also. The network approach often suffers from the problem of ambiguity in the conceptualization and operationalization of network (Noble, 1973; Whitten & Wolfe, 1973). In the study of social networks, the criteria for division of groups has varied considerably. For example, divisions have been made according to 1) kin and non-kin (Anspach, 1976; Gerstel, 1988; Isaacs & Leon, 1987); 2) social—friends, neighbors, and kin, and organized—work, government, school (Barnes, 1969; Bott, 1971); and 3) friendship, kinship and the marketplace (O'Connell, 1984).

Boissevain (1974) maintains that social relationships all lie on a continuum from personal relationships to quasi-groups, factions, interactional groups, corporate groups, and finally to society itself. The criteria for determining the division into groups must depend on the parameters one chooses to examine (e.g., duration of relationship, intimacy, frequency of interaction).

The three network groups selected for this study—family, friends and co-workers, are three major groups with which an individual must share at least the fact of a divorce if not the details. Although no studies have been found which examine how dissolution accounts differ according to the social network member to whom the account is offered, McLaughlin, Cody and O'Hair (1983) found that contextual elements are related to accounting
behavior. For example, in high intimate situations with low instrumental goal orientation, individuals use justification significantly more often. Therefore, the level of intimacy may be related to the selection of account type when attempting to explain the causes of relationship termination. Also, the need to explain to a co-worker or boss might evoke a different account, or an abbreviated version, as opposed to the desire to tell a friend or the need to make a parent understand. The first interaction might produce a socially acceptable accounting, the second an expectation of empathy, and the third an attempt for sympathy.

Numerous studies examining the effects of social support have reported the positive effects of network variables on coping with life change events (Erickson, 1975; Feger, 1981; Gottlieb, 1985; Homel & Goodman, 1987; Leslie, 1985; Miller, 1970; Mitchell, 1974; Morgan, 1986; Walker, MacBride & Bachin, 1977). Wilcox (1981) found that the effect of stress on psychological distress is buffered by the number of supporters and the demonstration of supportive behaviors. In a study of pregnant adolescents, Barrera (1981) found that total network size was also a factor in the effect of stress on depression.

Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, and Mullan (1981) found that social support in general helped buffer the
effect of job loss on self-esteem, but other studies have focused on specific support groups and their relative effect on stress situations such as job loss. For instance, Linn and McGranahan (1980) observed that the effects of unemployment on happiness is buffered by talking with close friends. LaRocca, House, and French (1980), however, found that coworker support seemed to buffer more strongly than support from family when dealing with job stress. Several researchers (Anspach, 1976; Colletta, 1979; Gerstel, 1988) report that following a divorce individuals turn to family members in search of instrumental and material support (e.g., babysitting, financial aid).

It is apparent that different groups serve different functions of support, information and feedback (Caplan, 1974). Tolsdorf (1976) defines these functions in the following way: support is an action or behavior that helps the individual to meet goals or to deal with a situation; advice is information or guidance as to how to accomplish a task or goal, and feedback is evaluative comment as to how well one is performing. Although it is reasonable to expect that different accounts will therefore be communicated to each group, no research to date has explored the nature of these differences. Consequently, a nondirectional hypothesis is proposed:
H2: Individuals will present different accounts to different members of the social network.

While the social network is often viewed as a positive support system for individuals, this is not always the case. The members of a social network often make demands and perpetuate conflict in stressful situations (Ridley & Avery, 1979). Thompson and Spanier (1983) found that only half of the women and 35% of the men in their survey of divorced people indicated that their parent's initial reaction was approval. Similarly, in Goode's (1956) sample of divorced mothers, almost one-third of both the husband's and the wife's parents expressed disapproval of the dissolution. Spanier and Thompson (1984) found that individuals whose friends and siblings were less approving of the divorce were more lonely and less accepting of the termination. Men who experienced more distress after separation perceived their friends and siblings as more disapproving, while men who experienced relief after separation perceived their friends and siblings as more approving (Spanier & Thompson, 1984). However, no definite causal relationship has been established between perceptions of approval or disapproval and such feelings as distress and loneliness.

As noted earlier, divorce is a case of relationship failure. Therefore, it would be expected that some
members of the social network would disapprove of the divorce. The expectation of disapproval or negative sanctioning might therefore lead to different accounts. McLaughlin, Cody, and O'Hair (1983) report that the character of the reproach is an excellent indicator of selection of strategy. Individuals use more mitigating strategies (e.g., excuses) in the face of mitigating reproaches and more aggravating strategies (e.g., justifications) in the face of aggravating reproaches. Mitigating reproaches are those that are less threatening to the speaker's face, and aggravating reproaches are those that are more threatening to the speaker's face. The type of reproach, either received or anticipated, determines in part the selection of strategy. Therefore, the expectation of approval would also be expected to influence the strategy selection. McLaughlin, Cody and O'Hair (1983) posit that silence is highly aggravating in response to an overt reproach. In the face of expectation of disapproval (an aggravating reproach), the use of silence would be a plausible choice. While the mitigating strategy of excuse would be expected to be used in the face of expectation of approval (i.e., no aggravating reproach expected or perceived), the use of silence would be expected in the face of expectation of disapproval. No studies to date have examined anticipation of approval and selection of interactive
account strategy. Therefore, it is expected that:

H3: Individuals will offer more excuses when anticipating approval and more silence when anticipating disapproval.

Numerous studies indicate a gender difference in attributions regarding relationship termination (Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Cupach & Metts, 1986; Fletcher, 1983; Harvey, Wells, & Alvarez, 1978; Kitson & Sussman, 1982). Males and females differ significantly in assessing blame, emphasizing certain problems, and in dealing with the divorce and its aftermath (Albrecht, 1980; Bloom & Caldwell, 1981; Chiriboga, Roberts & Stein, 1978; Thompson & Spanier, 1983). Studies involving social network relationships, social participation, and social support also reveal gender differences in help-seeking behavior from friends, family and doctors (Chiriboga, Coho, Stein, & Roberts, 1979) and postdivorce social participation (Raschke, 1977). Men experience more of an increase in their overall social participation than women, and women seek out emotional help from more members of the social network more often.

Gender studies regarding relationship dissolution reveal that females make more dissolution attributions than males (Baxter, 1986; Fletcher, 1983; Lloyd & Cate, 1985), females cite more interactive differences (e.g., intelligence, interests, ideas about marriage) as well as
a desire for more independence than males (Baxter, 1986), females initiate separation more often than males (Hill et al., 1976; Kolevzon & Gottlieb, 1984; Thompson & Spanier, 1983; Zeiss, Zeiss, & Johnson, 1980), and females adjust better after a divorce than males (Zeiss et al., 1980). These results suggest that females, in their role as initiators of the dissolution, have more time to prepare for the termination, prepare a more thorough explanation of the divorce, and accept more responsibility for the dissolution.

Baxter (1986) suggests that because women tend to monitor relationships more closely than males, they are able to explain in greater detail the causes and steps toward dissolution. She also posits, "An alternative explanation of the greater number of reasons provided by females is their self-presentational need to maintain their image as relationship-oriented individuals. One's perceived commitment to relationships in general might be jeopardized in initiating a break-up unless the disengagement is clearly justified" (pp. 302-303). Lloyd and Cate (1985) found that males give more circumstantial and fewer individual reasons for negative turning points in a marriage. In addition, males whose partners initiated the break-up give fewer individual attributions and more circumstantial attributions than females whose partners initiated the split. Adding this
to the knowledge that women emphasize different problems than men in general, it is expected that:

H4: In accounting for the dissolution of a marriage, women will offer more accounts than men.

H5: Men will offer more excuses for marital dissolution, and women will offer more justifications and interactive accounts.

Summary

An examination of the literature regarding failure management, social networks, and gender differences in relationship dissolution, has resulted in the following hypotheses:

H1: When offering accounts for marital dissolution, individuals will offer excuses more often than justifications, concessions, refusals, silence or interactive accounts.

H2: Individuals will present different accounts to different members of the social network groups.

H3: Individuals will offer more excuses when anticipating approval and more silence when anticipating disapproval.

H4: In accounting for the dissolution of a marriage, women will offer more accounts than men.

H5: Men will offer more excuses for marital dissolution, and women will offer more justifications and interactive accounts.
Chapter 3
Methods and Procedures for Account Analysis

The preceding hypotheses were tested using a questionnaire to gather data regarding relationship dissolution from a sample of recently divorced individuals. The data were examined using content analysis as well as data analysis procedures including log-linear analysis, crosstabulations, chi square tests, and repeated measures analysis of variance.

Survey Instrument

Data relating to the hypotheses were collected by means of a questionnaire requesting recollection of reasons for dissolution and conversations with members of the social network (see Appendix A). Biographical information was elicited first, including sex, age, length of marriage, time elapsed since divorce, and information regarding remarriage of both subject and ex-spouse. The remainder of the first page requested the reasons for the separation; this material was included primarily to encourage the respondents to reflect upon the reasons for the divorce. This exercise was designed to enable subjects to recall more easily the accounts requested in the latter part of the survey. Harvey et al. (1978) found that individuals revise and reevaluate
what went wrong long after relationship termination. They attempt to attribute blame and alter evaluation of their ex-spouse during this grave-dressing period. Newman and Langer (1981), however, found no significant differences in the attributions given over time. Although subjects reported "new insights" into the dissolution, the researchers found that they were basically minor variations on the same themes.

The remainder of the questionnaire dealt with recalling the specific accounts subjects used in explaining the divorce to a close friend, family member, and acquaintance. One page was allotted for recounting conversations with each of the social network members. Respondents were asked to recall what they told each person about the separation. Information was elicited regarding relationship with social network member, sex of the social network member, expectation of approval or disapproval by social network member, and finally explanation used to social network member for the breakup of the marriage.

The questionnaire was preceded by a cover letter (see Appendix B) thanking the respondent and briefly explaining that the information collected by the survey was to be used to examine the communication individuals have with members of their social network. Two forms of the cover letter were used, one for respondents
participating for student extra credit, and one for respondents contacted through a snowball procedure (see section below entitled Sample for further explanation of the snowball procedure).

The page order of the survey (except for the first page) was rotated to control for a possible fatigue factor which might affect the later questions.

Sample

Research involving attributions made about marital dissolution have employed a variety of ranges of time elapsed since dissolution. The samples used in previous research range from less than ten months (Harvey & Alvarez, reported in Harvey, Wells, & Alvarez, 1978; Kitson & Sussman, 1982), less than eighteen months (Fletcher, 1983), less than three years (Newman & Langer, 1981), to "ever divorced" (Cupach & Metts, 1986). These studies have revealed that several aspects of attributional activity do not change with time. In all studies, women produced a significantly greater number and variety of attributions. Also, respondents in all studies assigned responsibility significantly more often to the ex-spouse than to themselves. Newman and Langer (1981) found no differences in content between the attributions given by those who were divorced less than one year and those who were divorced between one and three years. Studies involving use of social network
members in social support roles also employ a wide range in the length of separation: less than eight months (Chiriboga, Coho, Stein, & Roberts, 1979), less than one year (Daniels-Mohring & Berger, 1984), less than twenty months (Isaacs & Leon, 1986), within two years (Cleek & Pearson, 1985) and "ever divorced" (Albrecht, 1980). However, because the current study relied on recall of actual conversations with social network members, the sample was limited to those individuals who have been divorced for one year or less.

The method of sampling was similar to the snowball sample suggested by McCall and Simmons (1969). This method was selected over other methods in order to garner as varied a sample as possible. Approaching groups designed for singles (e.g., Parents Without Partners, church singles groups, recovery groups) was ruled out because of the possibility of bias involved. Using a sample of this type would have limited the generalizability to those who sought out support in groups. The snowball sample reaches coworkers, students, family, friends, neighbors, etc., a sample of varying socioeconomic status, education, and job status.

Students attending day, evening and summer courses in speech communication at an urban university were solicited to participate themselves if recently divorced or to solicit acquaintances to participate. Students were
given extra credit for collecting one or two responses and were also asked to suggest others who might be willing to participate if needed. Respondents were asked to return the surveys through the participating student; other potential respondents were contacted by phone, mailed questionnaires and asked to return them by mail. In this way, the sample "snowballed" as each subject suggested other possible subjects. Included in the cover letter to the student-solicited respondents was a request for first name and phone number in order to verify by phone that they met the requirements of the study.

Sample size was determined using Cohen's (1969) sample size table for analysis of variance as an estimate. With a significance level of .05, power .80, medium effect size .10, and 28 degrees of freedom (computed using the logit model), suggested sample size was 91.

One hundred forty seven individuals responded to the survey, producing 111 usable surveys. Twenty-eight respondents returned incomplete questionnaires; seven respondents had been divorced for more than one year; and one respondent's divorce was not final, resulting in 36 unusable questionnaires. Of the 111 usable responses, 34 (30.6%) were males and 77 (69.4%) were females. Ages ranged from 19 years old to 51 years old, with the average age of 32.6 years old. Mean length of marriage
was 8.7 years, with a range of three months to twenty-nine years. Eighteen respondents had subsequently remarried, and twenty-five respondents had been married more than once. Each respondent reported conversations with three social network members, resulting in 333 data points.

Variables

The account category was identified as the dependent variable upon which to examine the effects of the independent variables social network member, gender and expectation of approval. Elaborating on McLaughlin, Cody, and O'Hair's (1983) commonly used typology of failure management account strategies, the original account categories were: excuse, justification, silence, refusal, concession, and interactive. Upon examination of the types of accounts used in all aspects of the study, it was revealed that two of the six types were virtually nonexistent in this study. Off 333 accounts, none was coded as concession and only two were coded as refusals. No respondents took full responsibility for the divorce, eliminating that category from the list of accounts. The four refusals were recoded as silence, since in essence these four accounts could be interpreted as refusals to account (i.e., remaining silent) rather than refusal to acknowledge that the failure occurred. Therefore, the account strategies fell into four
categories: excuses, justification, silence and interactive, with an average number of 2.25 per social network member.

The independent variable of social network was divided into three types. Each respondent was asked to recall a conversation with 1) a close family member (other than children), 2) the friend they were closest to at the time of the divorce, and 3) a co-worker or casual acquaintance (not someone considered a close friend).

The independent variable of expectation of approval was determined by asking, "Before you explained, did you feel this person would approve of the divorce?" The final independent variable used to examine type of account was sex of the respondent.

Data Coding

Two coders were trained to code account strategies. Interrater reliability was measured using Scott's pi, a conservative test that takes into account probabilities of occurrence. These reliabilities were checked at the beginning using 25 subjects (75 data points) and again at the end of coding. Initial interrater reliability was .86, broken down as follows: excuses, .92; justifications, .84; silence, .78; and interactive, .87. Points of disagreement were targeted and analyzed. Final reliability was .89: excuses, .92; justifications, .87; silence, .87, and interactive, .91.
The accounts were coded for overall account type as well as numbers of accounts. Coders recognized early that the accounts followed singular themes rather than a variety of account types. For instance, one respondent reported to her mother "I told her that my ex didn't love me or my son. He was manipulative and obsessive about me. He wouldn't allow me to have friends, work outside the home, or continue my education (excuse)." Another respondent reported to coworker, "We could not tell each other what we felt. We were too young to be married, and we had nothing in common (interactive)." When there were multiple accounts, they tended to be of the same type; therefore, the conversations were analyzed to locate the predominant account type. When counting numbers of accounts, each word, phrase, statement or series of statements was identified as one unit if it referenced a single account (e.g., the statement "She was unfaithful to me, lied all the time, and spent all our money" was coded as three excuses.

Data Analysis

The account data were analyzed using crosstabulations and a logit log-linear model. Log-linear analysis affords an opportunity to examine the relationships among several categorical variables, each of which may have more than two attributes. This method is similar to a chi-square test in that it cross-
tabulates data and examines differences between observed and expected frequencies. In log-linear analysis, however, the natural logs of the cell frequencies are used rather than the actual counts, and the effects of the variables on each other, using more than two variables, can be estimated. By taking natural logarithms, the equations can be transformed into linear equations, making them more analogous to ordinary regression.

General log-linear models make no distinction between dependent and independent variables, treating all as "response" variables. The criterion analyzed is the log of the odds (i.e., logit) of the expected cell frequencies for the dependent variable. The logit model designates a dependent variable and examines the interactions among all independent variables as well as all the lesser included marginals. Interpretation of the parameters in a logit model is similar to that of additive coefficients of ordinary regression (negative values indicate that the independent variable or interaction decreases the odds, and positive values indicate an increase). In this study, a four-variable cross tabulation of the data examined types of dissolution accounts as a function of social network member, gender of subject and subject's expectation of approval or disapproval.
Single sample chi square tests were used to test hypothesis 1, that excuses would be used more often than the other account types. Based on the log-linear analysis, two-way crosstabulations were performed upon each of the independent variables and the dependent variable in order to test hypotheses 2, 3 and 5. Hypothesis 4 was tested by performing a t-test on the number of accounts given by males and females.

Additional Analyses

In addition to the above tests, several other analyses were performed. The first was a repeated measures analysis of variance to examine the numbers of accounts by social network. The ANOVA in this case is a simple generalization of the paired t-test using three measurements rather than two. A simple one-way analysis of variance was inappropriate because the same subject was measured for each social network group.

Second, a content analysis of the accounts (see Appendix C for a complete list) revealed that the category of "excuses" were by far the most predominant type used. Therefore, the category of excuses was further analyzed. A coding scheme was developed by the investigator inductively based on the responses of the subjects. The excuses fell into five categories: abuse leading to the divorce, reluctance by the partner to get help for a problem, infidelity, personality flaws, and
abrupt termination by partner. Again, two coders were trained to code the types of excuses. Interrater reliability was measured using Scott's pi. The reliabilities were: excuses, .93; refusal, .86; infidelity, .94, personality, .78, and abrupt termination, .87. For each subject, the number of excuses in each category was determined. T-tests were performed to compare males and females in the types of excuses used.

Pilot Study

A pilot study (N=10) was conducted to examine the clarity, length, and usable data of the survey. Respondents reported a completion time of 20-30 minutes, with one questionnaire only partially completed.

One page was allotted for questions regarding each social network member. The page order of the survey (except for the first page) was rotated to control for a possible fatigue factor which might affect the later questions. An average of five accounts was offered on the first question requesting general reasons for the separation (one respondent did not complete this section; other answers ranged from three to ten accounts). The subsequent pages elicited an average of 2.15, 2.82, and 1.55 accounts, suggesting a slight decline in the accounts given on the last page,
regardless of the order. Therefore, the system of rotation remained in the survey.

Examples of all basic types of accounts were found in the pilot study:

EXCUSE: "My ex-husband was heavily involved with drugs."

JUSTIFICATION: "Staying in the marriage would have negatively affected my work, my relationships with my friends, my self-esteem."

CONCESSION: "I expressed my guilt and sense of failure to him."

REFUSAL: "Our marriage died years ago and the time has come for the funeral."

SILENCE: "We ended up not talking much about the divorce."

INTERACTIVE: "We could not communicate anymore."
Chapter 4
Results of Analyses of Relationships
Between Accounts and Social Network,
Gender, and Expectation of Approval

The results of the preceding analyses is divided into three sections. First, the log-linear and other statistical procedures used to examine the hypotheses are reported. Next are the results of the content analysis revealing the types of excuses used. Finally, the results of the other analyses, including the repeated measures analyses of variance and other additional test results, are reported.

Results of Hypotheses Testing

A log-linear analysis was performed on the four-factor contingency table (accounts by social network by sex by expectation of approval. A saturated model was first considered to determine if there were a four-way interaction among these factors. Table 1 indicates that there was not a four-way interaction, nor any three way interactions. There were, however, two two-way interactions that were significant at the .05 level of probability. Of primary importance to this study is the interaction between social network and account type.
Table 1
Log-linear Analysis of Account by Social Network (SN) Sex, and Expectation of Approval (App)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SN*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.87</td>
<td>.0144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.9849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN by Sex</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.9772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>App*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.39</td>
<td>.0386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN by App</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>.4105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex by App</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.7258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN by Sex by App</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>.9534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05
(likelihood-ratio chi square or $L^2 = 15.87$, d.f. = 6, $p < .02$). Expectations of approval also exerted a significant effect on account type ($L^2 = 8.39$, d.f. = 3, $p < .04$). Since there were no significant interactions between social network and expectation of approval, or any other variables, crosstabulations were performed to determine the differences in account type due to these variables.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that excuses would be used more often than other types of accounts. Crosstabulations confirmed that excuse was the most predominant strategy used, accounting for 53.2% of all accounts. Excuses were followed by interactive accounts (26.4%), justifications (13.5%), and silence (6.9%). One way chi square tests confirmed that excuses were used more often than justifications ($\chi^2 = 39.24$, d.f. = 1, $p < .001$), silence ($\chi^2 = 59.29$, d.f. = 1, $p < .001$), or interactive accounts ($\chi^2 = 14.95$, d.f. = 1, $p < .001$). Therefore, hypothesis 1, that individuals will offer excuses more often than other accounts, was supported.

Crosstabulations were used to test hypotheses 2 and 3. Crosstabulations of account by social network (see Table 2) indicate that accounts do differ according to the social network member ($L^2 = 14.63$, d.f. = 6, $p < .02$), thus confirming hypothesis 2. While excuses were used slightly more often with family than with friends or
Table 2
Crosstabulations of Account by Social Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Friend</th>
<th>Acquaintance</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Pct</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Pct</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot Pct</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Pct</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Pct</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot Pct</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Pct</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Pct</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot Pct</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Pct</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Pct</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot Pct</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Pct</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Pct</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot Pct</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$L^2 = 14.63$, d.f. = 6, $p = .02$
acquaintances and justifications were used more often with friends than with family or acquaintances, silence and interactive accounts were used substantially more often with acquaintances than with family or friends. In fact, almost as many acquaintances received interactive accounts (N = 40, 12% of total accounts and 45.5% of all interactive accounts) as excuses (N = 49, 14.7% of total accounts and 27.7% of all excuses). Therefore, although excuse was still the predominant account used, when interactive accounts were used, 45.5% of the time they were used with acquaintances. Similarly, silence was used more than twice as often with acquaintances as with family or friends (family, 21.7%; friends, 26.1%; acquaintances, 52.2%).

Crosstabulations of account by expectation of approval (see Table 3) did not support hypothesis 3 that individuals will offer more excuses when expecting approval and more silence when expecting disapproval. Regardless of account used, the majority of respondents expected approval. Approval was anticipated in 71.9% of the interactions. In interacting with those from whom approval was expected, the respondents used excuses most often (56.4%), then in order interactive (25.9%), justifications (15.0%), and silence (2.7%). When expecting disapproval, the subjects again used excuses most often (46.5%), followed by interactive (29.1%),
Table 3
Crosstabulations of Account by Expectation of Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account</th>
<th>Expectation of Approval</th>
<th>Row Pct</th>
<th>Col Pct</th>
<th>Tot Pct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>Not Approve</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Count</strong></td>
<td><strong>124</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>164</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Row Pct</strong></td>
<td><strong>75.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>24.4%</strong></td>
<td><strong>53.6%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excuse</strong></td>
<td><strong>56.4%</strong></td>
<td><strong>46.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>53.6%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Justification</strong></td>
<td><strong>40.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>14.4%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Column</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Justification</strong></td>
<td><strong>75.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>14.4%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Silence</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>14.4%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Column</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Silence</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.6%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive</strong></td>
<td><strong>37.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>62.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.2%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.2%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Silence</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>82</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive</strong></td>
<td><strong>69.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>30.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.8%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Column</strong></td>
<td><strong>220</strong></td>
<td><strong>86</strong></td>
<td><strong>306</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>71.9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>28.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ L^2 = 9.77, \text{ d.f.} = 3, p = .02 \]
justifications (12.8%), and silence (11.6%). When excuses, justifications, or interactive accounts were used, a large majority of respondents expected approval (excuses, 75.6%; justifications, 75.0%; interactive, 69.5%). However, when silence was used, 62.5% expected disapproval.

T-tests examining accounts by sex failed to confirm hypothesis 4, that females will offer more accounts than males when offering explanations of marital dissolution. Table 4 shows that there is no difference between males and females with regard to total numbers of accounts offered (m: $\bar{x} = 6.65$, s.d. = 3.190; f: $\bar{x} = 6.82$, s.d. = 3.05; $t (1,106) = 1.05$, ns).

Table 5 reveals crosstabulations of account by sex, indicating no significant differences between the type of account males use and the type females use, thus not lending support to hypothesis 5. Again, both males and females predominantly use excuses (59.8% of males, 50.2% of females). Although both use more excuses than any other type of account, males do show a slightly higher percentage of use of excuses than females use more interactive, justification, and silence than males. None, however, was significant, thus not supporting hypothesis 5, that men will offer more excuses and women will offer more justification and interactive accounts.
### Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations (SD) for Males and Females for Total Accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>6.82</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$t (1,106) = 1.05$, ns
Table 5
Crosstabulations of Account by Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Pct</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 = 3.16, \ d.f. = 3, \ ns$
Results of Content Analysis

Crosstabulations revealed that excuse was by far the most commonly used account, accounting for 53.2% of all accounts. In examining the specific excuses, several recurring themes surfaced. Three recurring behavioral excuses are worthy of note: abuse, unfaithfulness, and refusal to change or get help.

The problem of abuse appears to be an overriding one in placing blame for the breakup. Alcohol, drug abuse, and physical and mental abuse appeared often in the accounts. For example, one respondent stated, "He drank alcohol excessively at times and ridiculed me because I do not drink." Another reported, "My husband became addicted to alcohol and that brought on a lot of problems. His personality changed, of course, and he was very abusive verbally when he drank."

Along with alcohol abuse, physical and mental abuse were also mentioned often in the accounts. One respondent described her situation, "He was physically and mentally abusive to our children, especially our daughter. When he was mad at me, he took it out on the children." Another woman explained, "After an episode of physical abuse by my ex-spouse which my friend and my 5 year old son witnessed, I explained that I realized that I would live in fear of my husband for the remainder of our marriage if I did not get away from him. I also
explained to her that I never know what kind of behavior to expect from him because he was so unpredictable...".

In addition to claims of abuse, assertions of the unfaithfulness of the spouse were prevalent. One respondent described it: "He was cheating on me and I found out. He bought his girlfriend something for Valentine's Day and didn't get me anything, and the bill came to my house...". Another reported, "He ran the streets constantly. He let himself be caught with girlfriends constantly. I found out he was living with another woman. He allowed his girlfriends to come over."

Another behavior prevalent in the excuses was the refusal of the other to get help or to change: "I had tried to convince him to get help but he refused, then one night he came home and told me he wanted to run around with his buddies and marriage didn't fit into his lifestyle." Another person said, "He refused to admit to a problem which also meant that he refused to get help."

While the above excuses center around specific unacceptable behavior on the part of the other (abuse, infidelity, refusal to get help), other excuses were less specific. Two themes emerged from these excuses, one of personality flaws and one of abrupt termination by other. One theme was that of personality flaws accounting for the termination; for example, "She had low to none self esteem. She felt she could do nothing on her own and she
had to prove to herself she could." Still another exhusband accounted in this way, "She's a cross, smothering bitch so sure that her own methods of doing things are right that there is no room for anyone else's ideas..." Others referred to the ex-spouse's midlife crisis and lack of respect for marriage.

A second theme emerged that accounted for the termination by referring to the abrupt departure of the other. Often, however, these accounts did not include insight or explanation at all. The respondent merely recounted the act of ex-spouse packing and leaving or throwing the respondent out. These excuses lacked insight into why the divorce had happened; they were less specific than those that used behavioral excuses of abuse or unfaithfulness. The final two types of excuses appeared to be offered more often by males than by females, while the earlier three behavioral excuses appeared to be most often offered by females. Therefore, an examination of sex differences among these types of excuses was warranted.

Excuses were divided into five categories (abuse, infidelity, refusal to get help, personality flaws, and abrupt termination by other). While not all excuses fit into these five categories, there were sufficient numbers of each to examine the sex differences between categories (see Table 6). Abuse was primarily an excuse used by
### Table 6
Comparison of Types of Excuses Used by Males and Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excuse</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t (1,108)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.619</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.645</td>
<td>2.66*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.781</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>1.086</td>
<td>1.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.171</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td>3.42*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>1.280</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>5.58*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrupt Termination by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>1.108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>4.34*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.000  
**p<.04
females rather than males (f: \( \bar{x} = 1.04, s.d. = 1.645 \);
m: \( \bar{x} = .15, s.d. = .619 \); \( t (1,108) = 2.55, p < .000 \)), as did infidelity (f: \( \bar{x} = .58, s.d. = 1.086 \); m: \( \bar{x} = .24, \
\text{s.d.} = .781 \); \( t (1,108) = 1.39, p < .04 \)) and refusal (f: \( \bar{x} = .24, s.d. = .586 \); m: \( \bar{x} = .03, s.d.= .171 \);
\( t (1,108) = 3.42, p < .000 \)). The final two excuse types were predominantly used by males. Personality flaws (f: \( \bar{x} = .03, s.d. = .229 \); m: \( \bar{x} = .62, s.d. = 1.280 \);
\( t (1,108) = 5.58, p < .000 \)) and abrupt terminations by other (f: \( \bar{x} = .04, s.d. = .255 \); m: \( \bar{x} = .50, s.d. = 1.108 \);
\( t (1,108) = 4.34, p < .000 \)) both proved to be used significantly more by males than females.

While a distant second, interactive accounts comprised 26.4% of all accounts in this study. The interactive accounts focused on the marriage or the couple but not on the individual. One account explained, "I just explained that we had discussed it for some time, and that it wasn't a sudden decision. Also that it was a mutual decision and for the best. We had too much time apart because of work and school. We had differences in families, religion and work." Another interactive account offered: "The main reason is we simply grew further apart and fell out of love with each other. I think we were both too young and had some running around to do."
Results of Additional Analyses

Further investigation into the effects of gender on account produced crosstabulations examining the sex of the social network member in relation to the sex of the respondent (see Table 7). Results of this test indicated that males select males with whom to interact, and females choose females. Males interacted with males 60.8% of the time, and females chose females 83.9% of the time ($L^2 = 64.5$, d.f. = 1, $p < .000$). A crosstabulation of social network by sex of the social network member revealed that, while family members were predominantly female (82.4%), acquaintances were as likely to be male as female (female, 58.3%; male, 41.7%; $L^2 = 15.40$, d.f. = 2, $p < .000$), indicating that when females did choose men with whom to interact, those men were acquaintances rather than family or close friend (see Table 8). Sex of the social network member did not affect the type of account chosen.

As in previous studies, females overwhelmingly reported that they initiated the divorce (81.5%), while only 30.8% of males said that they were the initiators (see Table 9). Over 80% of the respondents who used justification or silence report that they initiated the divorce (see Table 10), while less than two-thirds who used excuses or interactive accounts reported that they initiated the separation ($L^2 = 9.59$, d.f. = 3, $p = .02$).
Table 7
Crosstabulations of Sex of the Respondent by Sex of the Social Network Member

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN Sex</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>188</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>83.9%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Row Pct</th>
<th>Col Pct</th>
<th>Tot Pct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$L^2 = 64.50$, d.f. = 1, $p < .000$
### Table 8
Crosstabulations of Social Network by Sex of the Social Network Member

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Row Pct</th>
<th>Col Pct</th>
<th>Social Network</th>
<th>Tot Pct</th>
<th>Row Pct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>228</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>326</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2 = 15.40, \text{ d.f. = 2, } p < .000 \]
Table 9
Crosstabulations of Sex by Initiator of Divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Row Pct</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Pct</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot Pct</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiator</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$L^2 = 63.30$, d.f. = 1, p < .000
Table 10
Crosstabulations of Account by Initiator of Divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiator</th>
<th>Excuse</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Silence</th>
<th>Interactive</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$L^2 = 9.59$, d.f. = 3, $p = .02$
Finally, repeated measures ANOVAs were performed in order to determine the relationship between numbers of accounts offered and the social network member. Rather than looking at predominant account type, these analyses examined numbers of accounts by type in each response. Table 11 reveals the mean, standard deviation, N, and confidence level for the total number of accounts by type. Table 12 reveals the means, standard deviation, N, and confidence level for number of accounts given to family. Table 13 reports the same information to friends, and Table 14 to acquaintances. Upon examination of the confidence levels of these ANOVAs, it appears that in numbers of accounts, individuals used significantly more excuses overall than interactive accounts, significantly more interactive accounts than justifications, and significantly more justifications than silence. By social network group, families and friends were offered substantially higher numbers of accounts than acquaintances. No differences in the number of accounts offered to family and friends were found (see Table 15).

When accounting to friends, individuals used significantly more excuses than interactive accounts, more interactive accounts than justifications, and more justifications than silence. With family, the results were similar, but with acquaintances there were no
Table 11
Analysis of Variance of Total Accounts
by Type of Account

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Account</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>95% Conf. interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>38.17 to 4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1.38 to 2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.47 to 1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.10 to .32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hotellings = 1.98, F (3,105) = 69.27, p < .000
Table 12
Analysis of Variance of Type of Account
Offered to Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Account</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>95% Conf. interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1.24 to 1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.36 to .77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.16 to .42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.01 to .10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Hotellings = 1.63, F (3,105) = 57.17, p < .000*
Table 13
Analysis of Variance of Type of Account
Offered to Friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Account</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>95% Conf. interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1.16 to 1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.49 to 0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.21 to 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.01 to 0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hotellings = 1.82, F (3,105) = 63.85, p < .000
Table 14
Analysis of Variance of Type of Account
Offered to Acquaintances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Account</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>95% Conf. interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.68 to 1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.48 to .85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.04 to .18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>.04 to .16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hotellings = .83, F (3,105) = 28.91, p < .000
Table 15
Analysis of Variance of Account
by Social Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Network</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>95% Conf. Inter.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>2.16 to 2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>2.34 to 2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintances</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1.59 to 1.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hotellings = .54, F (2,106) = 29.39, p < .000
significant differences between numbers of justifications and silence offered.

The results of these analyses will be discussed in the following chapter, and suggestions will be made for future areas of exploration.
Chapter 5
Interpreting the Findings
Concerning Interpersonal Failure Management
and Suggestions for Future Research

Accounting enables an individual "to make retrospective sense out of what may have been quite beyond understanding when it was happening" (Harvey et al., 1985, p. 5). Therefore, accounting plays a significant role in helping an individual come to terms with the failure of a relationship and reconstruct a sense of identity. This study has attempted to examine the variables of social network, gender and expectation of approval upon the selection of accounts deemed appropriate to explain a failure of the magnitude of a divorce.

Elaborating upon McLaughlin, Cody, and O'Hair's (1983) typology of strategies used to manage failure, an initial list of six potential strategies was identified to examine relationship failures. Upon examination of the data collected, two strategies (concession and refusal) were found to be virtually nonexistent as choices for account-making in the context of divorce. The absence of concession appears at first to refute the argument for a "responsibility bias" offered by several
researchers (e.g., Hill et al., 1976; Ross & Sicoly, 1979; Scriber, Larwood & Peterson, 1985; Thompson & Kelley, 1981). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the arguments against the existence of a responsibility bias have been as prevalent as the arguments for one (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1986; Harvey, Wells, & Alvarez, 1978; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Newman & Langer, 1981).

While this study seems to support the idea of a bias in the opposite direction (other responsibility), it is more likely that these results support Tedeschi and Reiss' (1981) explanation of the effects of impression management attempts. When evidence is overwhelming regarding responsibility, when the outcome is positive, or when the problem is minimal, a responsibility bias may indeed appear. However, when evidence determining responsibility is not available and when the failure is of greater magnitude, it appears likely that an individual will place blame on the other or upon the relationship rather than upon the self.

The absence of refusal accounts is attributed to the fact that denial of the occurrence of the divorce is highly improbable, given the relationships to the social networks in this study. The denial that the divorce is a failure is also highly unlikely. While divorce is more socially acceptable and more common now than ever, a divorce is undeniably a failure of a relationship.
Therefore, while individuals may refuse to discuss the divorce (i.e., remain silent), they do not usually have the option to deny that the divorce occurred.

Hypothesis 1, that individuals will offer excuses more often than any other account type, was strongly supported. The reliance on excuses as a predominant method of accounting in other contexts has been substantiated in previous research. McLaughlin et al. (1983) found that excuse was by far the most widely used strategy of failure management and agreed with Jones and Nisbett (1972) that individuals may merely resist attributing their failures to their own bad intentions or behavior. This overwhelming need to remove responsibility from oneself presumably enables one to enhance or protect his or her self-esteem at a time when the divorce has negatively affected it. Impression management theory suggests that the severity of a situation is determined by the undesirability of an event and the actor's apparent responsibility (Schlenker, 1980). Therefore, excuses allow one to reduce the severity by reducing one's responsibility.

Because excuses comprised 53.2% of all accounting in this study, the types of excuses used warranted closer examination. Excuses may be the easiest way to explain a failure, as Newman and Langer (1981) contend, because they use less complex information and are much easier to
articulate. It is often easier to focus blame on an unacceptable behavior (e.g., infidelity) of the other, thereby concisely and unmistakably accounting for the dissolution while preserving self-presentational goals. Unacceptable behavior appeared to center around abuse (including physical and mental abuse as well as abuse of alcohol and drugs), infidelity, and refusal to acknowledge a problem and/or to get help.

There were, however, excuses which did not center around specific unacceptable behavior but instead mentioned personality or character flaws of the other or abrupt unexplained decisions made on the part of the other to terminate the marriage. These excuses, although blaming the other for the breakup, did not offer clearly articulated reasons for the breakup. This type of excuse was most often offered by males rather than females. These examples support the suggestion by Baxter (1986) that males perhaps do not monitor relationships as closely as females and therefore are not as able to give concrete specifics. In addition, the predominance of these types of excuses being offered by males may relate to the fact that females initiate divorce significantly more often. Personality flaws and abrupt termination by other may be the victim's way of explaining the divorce. This area needs further research to determine if in fact there is a different attribution process taking place for
the victim.

Nevertheless, these nonspecific excuses place the blame on the other even when not clearly defining the infraction. Therefore, excuses appear to be either specific and behaviorally oriented or nonspecific and vague.

There appeared to be less bitterness, name-calling, and anger in the interactive accounts, supporting Newman and Langer's (1981) research reporting that individuals who make interactive attributions are happier, have a higher opinion of themselves and are more socially skilled than those who blame themselves or their ex-spouses for the divorce. However, Newman and Langer were not requesting recalled accounting to an individual, but rather explanations to a researcher. Therefore, an equally plausible explanation for the lack of bitterness and anger in the recalled accounts may reside in the finding in this study that significantly more interactive accounts were used with acquaintances than with other social network members.

Interactive accounts may be the most polite form of accounting and may often serve as a nonintimate way of explaining the divorce (e.g., "I told her that things just didn't work out, and that we felt divorce was the solution. I would not go into detail with this person," "I told her we were incompatible from the start mainly
because my wife was ten years older than I was. I gave her the vaguest, non self-revealing details, without speaking negatively of either of us"). To avoid disclosing personal and revealing details about one's private life, one may use a more ambiguous and less threatening account, thereby avoiding the possibility of negative sanctioning on the part of the acquaintance. As suggested in chapter two, the need to present a socially acceptable accounting to an acquaintance or co-worker might prompt a more neutral, less emotional, response.

Hypothesis 2 was a nondirectional hypothesis, predicting that individuals will present different accounts to different members of the social network groups. Both interactive accounts and silence were used more often with acquaintances than with family or close friends. Schlenker (1980) suggests that when faced with a situation that could result in damage to one's identity, impression management techniques are used to deal with the predicament. He maintains that individuals retreat or perform remedial behavior. Remedial work allows one to find an acceptable, less threatening way to explain events (Goffman, 1971), as one might do with acquaintances. Silence, for instance, is a retreating behavior often used to preclude any further attempt to prolong the conversation. Interactive accounting can also qualify as behavior contributing to a polite
withdrawal from disclosure.

Newman and Langer (1981) found that those who made interactive rather than individual attributions were more socially skilled; one element of social adeptness is being able to deal with potentially face-threatening situations in a socially acceptable way. Therefore, the use of interactive attributions, while possibly emanating from happier, more well-adjusted individuals, may merely result from an ability to politely extricate oneself from a disagreeable situation.

Silence, then, would also be a retreating behavior, perhaps not as gracious as the interactive approach, but nevertheless potentially as successful with casual acquaintances. Family and friends, however, might not "let you off the hook" quite so easily, and a more personal accounting than interactive or silence may be expected. Excuses were used slightly more often with family than with friends or acquaintances, suggesting that in a situation in which an account is obligatory, excuses may be used to save face and shift blame to the other.

Justifications were used more often with friends than with family or acquaintances, supporting McLaughlin et al.'s (1983) findings that in high intimate situations (in this case, closest friend), with low instrumental goal orientation, individuals use justification
significantly more often. This finding and the discovery that justifications and silence are used more frequently with casual acquaintances than with family or friends suggests that the level of intimacy is related to the selection of account type when attempting to explain the causes of relationship dissolution. Previous research has indicated that intimacy is a major determinant in selecting a strategy for dealing with interpersonal persuasion and conflict (Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979; Miller et al., 1977). The high intimacy of the close friend relationship and the low intimacy of the casual acquaintance relationship appears to play a role in the selection of appropriate account type. Future research should determine whether level of intimacy is a significant factor in selection of appropriate account.

Partial support was found for hypothesis 3, that individuals will offer more silence when anticipating disapproval and more excuses when anticipating approval. While over half the respondents who expected approval chose excuse for their accounting, almost half those who expected disapproval selected excuse also. However, an inspection of the cells revealed that while a greater percentage of individuals who use excuses, justifications and interactive accounting expect approval more often, a greater percentage of those who use silence expect disapproval from the other. It may be that when
faced with disapproval, silence offers the least face-threatening alternative. Rather than take the risk of exacerbating the expected disapproval, individuals may opt for silence rather than explanations.

The failure to confirm hypothesis 4, sex differences in the number of accounts used, contradicts much of the previous research (e.g., Baxter, 1986; Fletcher, 1983a; Lloyd & Cates, 1985), stating that females give more thorough explanations for relational dissolution than males. This study also failed to confirm hypothesis 5, that females will offer more justifications and interactive accounts and males will offer more excuses. The fact that the findings were not significant may be due to the difference in public accounting and private feelings. Past research has consistently found significant sex differences in reasons given in response to research questions; the lack of significant findings in this study may be due to the difference in information solicited. While other research has been directed at revealing private reasons for marital dissolution, this study examined the public accounting of the dissolution. Communication norms may prohibit revealing private reasons in favor of socially acceptable accounting behavior. The nonsignificant results suggest that even though males and females may differ in private feelings they may not differ in public accounting to others.
Additional analyses uncovered several interesting findings. As might be expected, individuals seek same-sex partners with whom to communicate. When asked to select one person from each network group and recall a conversation with that person, males selected males and females selected females. Both groups selected female family members, most often selecting their mother. Perhaps mothers expect an accounting more than other family members, or it may be that accounting is made more often to mothers in their role as gatekeepers of the emotional and relational information of the family.

When females chose males with whom to interact, those males were more often acquaintances than close friends or family. It may be that when selecting a "coworker or acquaintance," females more often thought of a male boss or coworker, possibly having already placed a female at work in the "close friend" category.

Analyses using numbers of accounts rather than predominant type of account offered additional support for hypothesis 1, that excuse was the most prevalent account type used. Interactive accounting was the second most prevalent account, possibly due to the idea that interactive accounting may be the most socially acceptable and most polite form of accounting. Fewer silences were offered than any other account, silence being a strategy that may not work with family and
friends who expect to be informed. Family and friends were in fact offered more accounts than acquaintances, lending support to the idea that multiple accounts that serve to explain the event are expected with more intimate social network members.

The conclusions of this study are based on self-report and recall. The problem of recall cannot be overcome by the usual suggestions of inducing failure in a laboratory setting and recording their accounts. Therefore, the problem was addressed by limiting the time frame of divorce of the participants. The time frame chosen for this study (i.e., divorced one year or less) was motivated by the fact that subjects were being asked to recall specific conversations with members of their social network. However, as family counselors often maintain, the grief period associated with divorce is approximately two years as compared to one year for death (Transitions, 1981).

The subjects in this study were most likely still involved in the grief process and may not have completed the final stages of grief or resolved Duck's final stage of relationship dissolution, the grave-dressing phase. With more time and distance separating the subjects from the event, a different perspective might emerge which would change the emphasis from excuse to another, possibly more interactive, account (Peterson, 1980).
However, in expanding the time limit to include those divorced longer than one year, conversational recall would have continued to deteriorate. While this study primarily was designed to examine possible differences in accounting to different social networks, further longitudinal research comparing early accounting to later accounting might reveal a wider range of account choices.

Relying on conversational memory would limit this approach, however, due to the effects of long term and short term memory loss. Recent research by Stafford, Burggraf and Yost (1988) reports that both married and stranger participants recall about 10% of their conversations in a short term memory condition and even less in a long term condition. However, two considerations must be made when comparing the relevance of this study to the current one. In the Stafford et al. study, the conversation topics were non-salient (e.g., planting flower beds, gossip about acquaintances), unlike the more personal and salient topic of divorce. According to the widely-used and highly rated Social Readjustment Rating Scale (1967), divorce is second only to death of spouse in stress-producing events in one's life. Therefore, it would be expected that divorce would be a more salient topic than those used in the previous study and might prompt more significant recall.

Also, the married partners in Stafford, Burggraf and
Yost's (1988) study were significantly more likely to remember themes from their conversations over a longer period than were strangers. Since all social network members in the current study were of either casual or close acquaintance with the subject, it would further appear that recall of highlights and themes would be greater than in the Stafford et al. (1988) study. While this study does indicate that short term and long term conversational memory is poor, further investigation using salient topics might produce more long term conversation recall.

In examining accounts following divorce, future investigations should examine the connection between level of intimacy and choice of strategy. In examining the type of account used by social network group, there exists an implied connection between level of intimacy and choice of strategy. Since this study offers evidence supporting the differences in accounting made to various social networks, a logical step is to examine perceived level of intimacy in relation to accounting behavior. It appears that the differences in the high intimacy of a close friend and the low intimacy of a casual acquaintance results in different account strategies; therefore, this factor needs to be examined more closely to determine the role that the level of intimacy plays in strategy selection.
Another area warranting attention is the variety of types of excuses offered in accounting for divorce. It appears that individuals rely most heavily on excuse to manage their failures and accomplish their self-presentational goals. Whether they rely on specific behavioral excuses or more vague responses appears at least in part to be a result of their sex. Males tend to be less exact when making excuses for divorce, while females tend to blame specific behaviors. This finding supports Cleek and Parsons (1985) that factor analyses of 18 perceived causes of divorce determined that problems need to be examined separately for each sex. Both males and females identified an abuse factor involving emotional, alcohol and physical abuse for women and alcohol and physical abuse for men. Drug abuse was a separate factor for males but not for females. Factors that influence these communication choices, as well as the response received by the other in these interactions, have yet to be determined.

Social network appears to be a factor in determining the communication strategy used in managing failure events. Future research needs to investigate the part social networks play in other interpersonal events, such as relationship formation and relational conflict. Questions to address concern why and when besides failure events do individuals create different stories for
different social networks, what communication goals are being met by the different account strategies, and what results are accomplished by taking different strategies in different social contexts.

This study has addressed the importance of the social network in account selection when faced with a failure event. While other studies have addressed the issue of failure management, this study has made a unique contribution to the literature concerning interpersonal failure management. It has examined reports of the actual accounts communicated to members of different social networks regarding divorce and has revealed differences with respect to these social networks. This study has begun the task of developing a typology of interpersonal failure management strategies and has established a connection between type of communication strategy selected and target audience.
Bibliography


a developmental theory of interpersonal communication.  

**Human Communication Research, 1**, 99-112.  
**Communication Monographs, 52**, 57-77.


Harvey, J. H., Weber, A. L., Yarkin, K. L., & Stewart, B.


Communication Research, 9, 208-224.


and Social Psychology, 37, 322-336.


and cultural anthropology. Chicago: Rand McNally.


Appendix A

Questionnaire

The following questionnaire concerns the things we tell other people about our divorce. The first part requests some general information about you:

Sex:  _M _F  Age:____

Length of marriage:_________ How long since divorce?___
How long were you separated prior to the divorce?________
Who originally wanted the separation? _myself _spouse _both
Have you remarried? _yes _no
Has your ex-spouse remarried? _yes _no
Have you been divorced more than once? _yes _no
If so, how many times? ______

The remainder of this questionnaire involves the reasons you and your ex-spouse divorced. Although some of the questions appear to be very similar, please consider each question separately.

In your own words, and as honestly as you can, discuss the reasons you and your ex-spouse separated. Then, go back and assign each reason a number in order of importance ("1" being the main reason you separated) until each reason is numbered.

Reasons:
There are many people to whom one has to explain or tell about a divorce. First, recall a co-worker or casual acquaintance (not someone you consider a close friend) whom you have told about the separation. Describe your relationship with this person (co-worker, boss, neighbor, etc.) and how long you have known this person. Then explain as accurately as possible, what you told this person about your separation.

Relationship:______________ Sex: ___M ___F

How long have you known this person?

___since before I got married
___met him/her while I was married
___since my divorce

Before you explained, did you feel this person would approve of the divorce? ___yes ___no

What reasons did you give to this person for the breakup of your marriage?

(larger space provided on actual questionnaire)

Following are a few items asking you about your conversations with this person. Please read each item carefully and answer it as honestly as possible.

1=very strong agreement 5=disagreement
2=strong agreement 6=strong disagreement
3=neither agree nor disagree 7=very strong disagree

1. I told this person because I felt he/she wanted to know.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I told this person because I needed to talk to someone
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I told this person because I felt I had to.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I told this person because I see him/her as a friend.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I felt this person was satisfied with my explanation.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I told this person in order to help me sort out my feelings.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I told this person because I wanted him/her to know.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I felt this person agreed with my decision after we talked.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Next, remember how you have described the separation to the friend you were closest to at the time of the divorce.

Sex: ___M ___F

Before you explained, did you feel this person would approve of the divorce? ___yes ___no
What reasons did you give to this person for the breakup of your marriage?

Following are a few items asking you about your conversations with this person. Please read each item carefully and answer it as honestly as possible.

1=very strong agreement   5=disagreement
2=strong agreement        6=strong disagreement
3=neither agree nor disagree 7=very strong disagree

1. I told this person because I felt he/she wanted to know.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. I told this person because I needed to talk to someone
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. I told this person because I felt I had to.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I told this person because I see him/her as a friend.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I felt this person was satisfied with my explanation.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I told this person in order to help me sort out my feelings.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. I told this person because I wanted him/her to know.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. I felt this person agreed with my decision after we talked.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Finally, recall the conversations you have had with a close family member (other than children) and write down as accurately as possible how you explained the separation.

Relationship to you: __mother __father __sister __brother
__other (explain:________________)

Before you explained, did you feel this person would approve of the divorce? __yes __no

What reasons did you give to this person for the breakup of your marriage?

Following are a few items asking you about your conversations with this person. Please read each item carefully and answer it as honestly as possible.

1=very strong agreement 5=disagreement
2=strong agreement 6=strong disagreement
3=neither agree nor disagree 7=very strong disagree

1. I told this person because I felt he/she wanted to know.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

2. I told this person because I needed to talk to someone
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

3. I told this person because I felt I had to.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

4. I told this person because I see him/her as a friend.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

5. I felt this person was satisfied with my explanation.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

6. I told this person in order to help me sort out my feelings.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

7. I told this person because I wanted him/her to know.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

8. I felt this person agreed with my decision after we talked.
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Appendix B

Cover Letter for Questionnaire

Dear Respondent:

Thank you for agreeing to complete the attached questionnaire. The information collected by this survey will be used to examine the communication individuals have with members of their social network. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential; however, due to research requirements, your first name and phone number must accompany this questionnaire. Please put this information on the outside of the sealed envelope. Immediately upon receipt, your name will be separated from your completed questionnaire and will be used to contact you to confirm that only divorced people participated in this survey.

Again, thank you for your help. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the phone number below.

Sincerely,

Linda Pledger
771 2747
Appendix C
Accounts

1. EXCUSES

He refused to put any work, or play, into making our marriage work. He wouldn't allow me to have friends, work outside the home, or continue my education. He didn't love me, or my son. We were merely objects to him—just two more things he owned. He was manipulative and obsessive about me. He constantly called me degrading names, and never failed to tell me how absolutely worthless I was.

He treated me like a child with very little intelligence. He was selfish but couldn't see it.

She's a cross, smothering bitch so sure that her own methods of doing things are right that there is no room for anyone else's ideas. She's too hard and unforgiving of people's faults, and often projects her own faults onto me.

I explained that he changed after we married. He went wild and didn't want to settle down and work at being
married.

I told her my husband had a drug problem, I had tried to convince him to get help but he refused, then one night he came home and told me he wanted to run around with his buddies and marriage didn't fit into his lifestyle.

She gave me very little sex, no affection, no understanding, and she was too immature.

My ex-spouse was extremely jealous. He was always suspicious of my contact with males of any age, including my son and my son's friends. He was an unaggressive lover.

He was a liar. He was physically and mentally abusive to our children, especially our daughter. When he was mad at me, he took it out on the children.

My husband would not better hisself (sic) and he was not going to keep me from bettering myself.

Her stupidness and lack of education.

Her constant spending of her money only on clothes/cosmetics on herself. Her selfish attitude
toward me and my relatives as she was an orphan.

My wife mistreated me; she did not respect the marriage or me.

He was cheating on me and I found out. He bought his girlfriend something for Valentine's Day and didn't get me anything, and the bill came to my house. He was not good in bed.

He was never at home. He gambled all the time and drank too much.

I explained to my friend that my husband didn't want me around anymore.

Hello Mother, I have some bad news for you. My wife took her children and left.

She left with her children.

Wife had to prove to herself she could make it on her own. She wasn't happy and didn't want to live the rest of her life that way.

Wife going through midwife crisis.
She had low to none self esteem. She felt she could do nothing on her own and she had to prove to herself she could. She wanted to have some world fun.

My husband had kidnapped my children.

My spouse drank excessively and used drugs.

I told my closest brother that he was sleeping with other women.

I told him only that he was a drunk.

I explained my feeling of deprivation and neglect and that he had refused to get help to stop his drinking.

I explained to her that even though I loved him, it was no longer safe to live with him. His drinking was definitely an illness, but that until he wanted to help himself, we had no chance at a life together with our children.

He had been a poor father for months, wouldn't support his family, was a chronic liar.

The main reason was that she packed and left and would
My husband was an alcoholic.

My husband was unfaithful.

My husband wanted out so he could pursue a career in Hollywood without the accompanying hardships of a wife and child.

His affair with another woman, his irresponsibility toward family.

David had been unfaithful for years.

I said my husband was sick and that made it impossible for us to live together.

He had a girlfriend and defended her to death over me. He wouldn't accept the responsibility of his half of the marriage.

Ex-husband had affairs, kept us in financial turmoil, was physically abusive, and never was home.

I told her that he was unfaithful and that I could never
trust him again and that what he did was unforgivable.

Told him she was being unfaithful.

He ran around, never spent time with me and our child. He drank alcohol excessively at times and ridiculed me because I do not drink. He was thrown in jail with another woman two days after I had a miscarriage (and he was drinking at the time).

That my husband was abusive to me and my child. He refused to take his medications and try to get help. My husband ran around with other women.

My husband had left me, had been going out to stay all night for a long time, and had me in an emotional mess because I was pregnant and very hurt and alone.

I found out there was another person he was seeing.

He was an alcoholic. We had gone to AA but after the first time he wouldn't go back.

I explained that she was a game player, that she had moved in and out again 3 times, that she insisted I see a Christian counselor to exorcise the "evil spirit" from my
That my husband had a drinking problem and a guilt complex about his children from a previous marriage.

He would not stop drinking. He would not put me first above his children from a previous marriage.

My father was aware of my husband's drinking problem. I told him I had no other option than to divorce him because he wouldn't stop no matter what.

Told her I could not deal with his personal problems any longer. His temper was always out of control.

Physical abuse. I was restricted from going anywhere. I was restricted from having friendships with either male or female—he was very jealous. He didn't like interaction with my family.

He was jealous of my mother and sister. He couldn't stand for me to give anybody attention except for him.

He beat me up a couple of times.
He became very distant. Showed no affection. Held no conversation. Never did anything for me. Took me for granted. Never wanted to just be with me.

My husband became addicted to alcohol and that brought on a lot of problems. His personality changed, of course, and he was very abusive verbally when he drank. He refused to admit to a problem which also meant that he refused to get help. He also had extra-marital affairs over the years and he seemed to sincerely believe this is okay, for him.

He ran the streets constantly. He let himself be caught with girlfriends constantly. I found out he was living with another woman. He allowed his girlfriends to come over.

He had separated himself from family and friends, was extremely difficult to be with and had become very demanding of our daughter.

I told my mother that my husband had sometimes gone for days without touching me (one time 6 weeks) and frequently would not talk to me.

After an episode of physical abuse by my ex-spouse which
my friend and my 5-year-old son witnessed, I explained that I realized that I would live in fear of my husband for the remainder of our marriage if I did not get away from him. I also explained to her that I never know what kind of behavior to expect from him because he was so unpredictable. I told her that I knew that one of the reasons for his outbursts was that he felt threatened by my friends and co-workers. The outbursts were his means of "getting control" over me.

The relationship had become all give on my part and take on his. Material things were what counted to him. Second came himself. There was no room for someone unless they contributed to his ideas.

We had many arguments where he hurt me physically and mentally. He was extremely jealous and accused me of adultery, with no reason. He was using drugs and drinking.

He quit going to marriage counseling and wouldn't consider that both of us needed to reevaluate ourselves and make changes.

He won't accept any responsibility.
She was too immature.

She got to where she was more irresponsible each month.

I told her that my husband had been having an affair, that he had repeatedly lied to me and that I could never trust him again. He treated me badly, would not talk to me, was not a good father and refused to see a marriage counselor.

Alcohol, constant verbal abuse, constant criticism, lying and deceit.

Mom, I can't handle him any more. He talks out of both sides of his mouth.

I told her that he was not affectionate and would even ridicule me for wanting to kiss or to cuddle on the couch. He would talk down to me for going to school. He wanted me to make love to someone while he watched.

I told my mother that Angie threw my clothes outside and told me to get out of her house.

X was sarcastic, critical, and demeaning of others, especially anyone that was more fortunate than her.
She was older than me, and was too possessive of me. She was ugly and I didn't realize it until I got older. She was a bitch, and still is.

She didn't love me; she had a boyfriend; she takes drugs.

That he didn't take time for me unless he needed something.

There wasn't anything I could do to make him happy. My husband committed adultery, which ended with an outside child being conceived. My husband was angry 75% of the time.

My wife wanted it.

He was cheating on me. He had him a lady friend since we've been married (10 years). Do you think he love me all those years? Do you think he wanted me for a wife? NO. He used to beat me all the time for no reason.

That my husband had committed adultery and lied to me, and that he refused to be honest. He promised that he would stop seeing her but continued to do so.
2. JUSTIFICATION

I felt it was the best decision I had made in a long time. I did not like doing that to my children, but some things must be done.

I felt as though I was missing out because all my friends were going out on dates and I couldn't do the things they did.

My desire to have a life that was less stressful and when I could develop a better feeling of self-worth.

That I was not happy in the marriage relationship.

I finally told my sister that I could not continue the relationship especially because I feared for my safety and that of my children.

To have peace in my life, my children were suffering, too, and it helped to have a more normal family life.

Things had gone from bad to worse and I couldn't take it any longer. I'd made a mistake; I wasn't happy and it was getting worse.

I felt like I was drowning in my marriage.
I will not go through this again; I cannot live with him anymore.

I was going to further my education and make something of myself.

Mainly that when I was with him I actually would get nauseated. I didn't want to even be in same room with him.

It wasn't working out and I could be happier without her. I told them that I had tried as hard as I possibly could.

I finally couldn't take the verbal abuse any longer.

Because my father physically abused my mother during my childhood and were never divorce, I experienced dread and guilt when I told my mother of my decision. I explained that I could never be honest with my husband if I feared him and the love that I had felt for him a one time had been replaced by pleasing him out of that fear. I also told her that I could not bear the thought of my son's witnessing any other outbursts by his father.

I needed a chance to be on my own and find happiness.
I was not happy in the relationship with this person.

I just explained that we were getting a divorce and that it would be better for our daughter if we did.

Separation was my way to find peace of mind, for myself and for the children. I was fed up with the indignities and the irrational behavior. I could no longer and should no longer live life walking on egg shells.

I told my mom my life was unbearable and I was getting out before I went insane myself.

I told her I had finally had enough, and it was time to start living my life for myself, to do what was best for me.

I no respect or love left for the man. By the end I was fighting for my survival. I had absolutely no self-esteem.

I cannot continue to live under this strain. For his own sake he needs to seek help and maybe this will force him to because I've done all I know to do and must accept the fact that I cannot make him happy if he chooses not to be.
Told him I was 46 and did not want to grow old alone but sure did not want to grow old with her.

3. SILENCE

I didn't feel it was really any of her business and she had no right to ask me why I was getting a divorce. She should have waited for me to tell her if I wanted her to know.

Didn't give any reasons--I did not feel that an explanation was necessary. I just told him that my husband and I were getting a divorce and I asked for his help in finding work.

I did not explain it to any of my family.

We really didn't talk about it much. My mother didn't understand my situation completely.

I was too embarrassed to tell her the whole story.

I never really explained to my family.

She never asked for details. We've become friends, but I have never had a reason to offer "whip".
I really didn't explain to anyone about it.

I never told anyone about our problems.

I refused to see any of my friends for the fact when I had, my x was with me and had embarrassed me so much I didn't want to explain anything anymore. I told them they had their own problems and they really didn't need to get tied up in my problems.

I didn't tell anyone except family members.

It wasn't any of their business. I didn't then and don't now talk about it.

I live in small town USA, so I kept quiet and didn't do much explaining. I never have given much reasons. I didn't give any reasons.

I did not go into details, I just told him that I was having bad problems in my marriage and it was affecting my job.

She didn't know I had been married before, so I didn't say anything to her about it.
6. INTERACTIVE

I was in the army and stationed in Germany for two years; the marriage couldn't survive the separation.

We grew apart.

I told her that we were just separating for financial reasons.

We could not tell each other what we felt. We were too young to get married.

I told her we were incompatible from the start mainly because my wife was ten years older than I was. I gave her the vaguest, non self-revealing details, without speaking negatively of either of us.

We were both very unhappy. Our finances were getting worse.

I told Tammy that we had our differences.

We got married when we were too young. We didn't agree about anything and we had very little in common.
I just explained that we had discussed it for some time, and that it wasn't a sudden decision. Also that it was a mutual decision and for the best. We had too much time apart because of work and school. We had differences in families, religion, and work.

I told her that things just didn't work out, and that we felt divorce was the solution. I would not go into detail with this person.

We both had different beliefs in child rearing. We both had different beliefs as to what married couples should and should not do by their selves. We both had friends the other literally hated.

We no longer loved each other; we couldn't live with each other.

Our values, likes, dislikes, and motivation weren't compatible.

I told her we had nothing in common, different lifestyles, and different pastimes.

My husband and I had nothing in common.
I told her that the marriage just wasn't working out.

We dated each other too long before we married.

The main reason was lack of communication.

We didn't agree on important matters.

We don't communicate. We argue constantly.

We just fell out of love. We lacked communication. We didn't respect each others goals.

I simply said we had grown apart. That was the only reason I gave. I also mentioned that we had married at only 18 years of age and we were just too young.

We grew apart; we had different goals in life.

We realized that we married too young. We were very immature and had different interests.

No love shared between us.

There was no way to resolve the problems within the marriage. My concept of a marriage differed greatly with
his.

There was a general distance between us and unwillingness to seek help from professionals.

There was a lot of pressure of two careers and a child to raise. There was a lack of time for each other.

The main reason is we simply grew further apart and fell out of love with each others. I think we were both too young and had some running around to do.

We fought constantly. We had a difference of opinion in handling children and managing money.

We fought a lot, didn't have much in common. We seemed to have wanted different things out of life. Deep down I feel that continuing to live in our small hometown and with both of us being young--we fought and we both would run to parents to cry on their shoulder. Sometimes I wonder if we would have moved away--we both worked out of town--that things would have been better. I think it's amazing we stayed together for as long as we did.

We married to young and for the wrong reasons.
We would be better off apart.

We had decided we could no longer live together. We were both dissatisfied and felt it was better to call it quits.

We had a difference in background and a difference in education. When I changed my career and life goals, our goals and lifestyles were no longer the same.

That we have done nothing but grow apart and when you can't work together or as a pair you are failing to communicate and nothing gets better when you can't relate.

The main reason to Debbie was that we were drifting apart.

We realized we no longer loved each other. The romance was gone.

It was mostly due to money and also the family business dictating to our marriage and family.

I told her the reason we got a divorce was because we got married at a young age, we had financial problems, and we
were ready for a change.

We had a communication problem; we were never close to each other. We also had a problem sexually. A lesser problem was one of money.

Because of the lack of communication between us.

The divorce was the product of an escalating reactive cycle.

The arguments that were a part of our relationship, and the financial troubles we were having.

We had a difference in lifestyles.

We were incompatible, we had a lack of communication, lack of time together, and different ideas/goals for lives.

We both weren't happy. We both needed to grow up.

We were too young to get married. We were very unhappy. We should have never gotten married to begin with.

Because of religion.
We stopped putting effort into the marriage. Our lives had gone in different directions.

Incompatibility; difference in life's goals and expectations of spouse.

Note

1Only unique accounts are included in this Appendix. If a respondent indicated that the same account was told to more than one target, the account was listed only once.
Vita

Linda Malone Pledger was born in Russellville, Arkansas on September 17, 1949. From the age of eight, she lived in Little Rock, Arkansas, until she left for Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana in September, 1967. She married Norman Pledger in August, 1969, and moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, where she received her BA at Louisiana State University in New Orleans (now University of New Orleans). She received her MA in Interpersonal and Organizational Communication from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in May, 1984, and began work on her PhD at Louisiana State University in August, 1985.

She and her husband and two children live in North Little Rock, Arkansas, where Linda is employed at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.
Candidate: Linda Malone Pledger

Major Field: Speech

Title of Dissertation: Relational Aftermath: Accounts of Marital Dissolution to Social Network Members

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:
December 13, 1989