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# Roommate Conflicit: An Actions Approach to Conflict through Text-Messaging

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**ROOMMATE CONFLCIT:  
AN ACTIONS APPROACH TO CONFLICT THROUGH TEXT-MESSAGING**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts, Communication

By

Shaley Moore

May 2016

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**ROOMMATE CONFLICT: AN ACTIONS APPROACH TO CONFLICT  
THROUGH TEXT-MESSAGING**

Department of Communication

Missouri State University, May 2016

Master of Arts, Communication

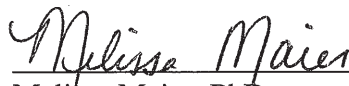
Shaley Moore

**ABSTRACT**

Research demonstrates that roommate conflict can lead to lasting physical, mental, and behavioral problems including anxiety, depression, or academic burnout (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2005). This research explores roommate conflict through Dillard's (1990) Goals-Plans-Action (GPA) model, specifically examining conflict management through text messages. Additionally, this research examines the goals, tactic plans, and action behaviors roommates use in conflict. Understanding how roommates manage conflict through text-messaging provides insight into the role that computer mediated communication (CMC) plays in interpersonal conflict and how roommates achieve personal goals through CMC. Qualitative data were collected through eight one-on-one interviews guided by participant text messages revealed that identity goals were at the forefront of roommate conflict through text messaging. Additionally, roommates who engage in conflict via text engage in the GPA process in very specific and unique ways. Roommates in conflict also choose texting as their method of communication to best achieve and manage their goals. This study contributes to the existing GPA, roommate conflict, and interpersonal CMC research.

**KEYWORDS:** goals-plans-action theory, roommates, interpersonal conflict, computer mediated communication, text-messaging

This abstract is approved as to form and content



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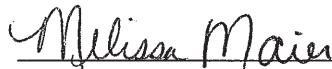
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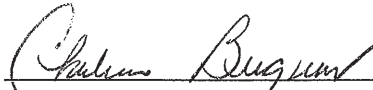
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## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Interpersonal conflict is present in a variety of relationships spanning romantic relationships, friendships, relationships with co-workers, classmates, and even roommates. Roommate conflict is a unique context of interpersonal relationships. A roommate relationship can be complex. Roommates come in the form of friends, classmates, co-workers, or can be randomly assigned without previously knowing each other. With these relationships, problems can arise, such as dividing household labor, negotiating visiting hours for guests, and even making decisions as simple as where to put the furniture (Lepore, 1992; Waldo, 1989). There are many contributors to roommate conflict. These points of conflict can create physical, mental, and even social problems for the individuals in the relationship (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2005). The added stress and tension between roommates can manifest into negative living situations especially in the lives of young adults (Dusselier et al., 2005). Not only does the relationship between roommates suffer, but the individuals within the relationship also experience problems such as anxiety and depression when conflict is not properly discussed or resolved (Waldo, 1989). How roommates address conflict can contribute to how the interaction unfolds. More often, roommates chose to enact conflict with one another via CMC (Moore, 2010). While research on roommate conflict has addressed FTF conflict, it has not explored how conflict is enacted via Computer Mediated Communication (CMC).



Technology and communicating via CMC plays a role in interpersonal conflict. CMC has been examined through personal dyadic relationships that are predominantly online or long distance, (Bartek, 2014; Wright & Webb, 2011). Researchers have found that even FTF relationships tend to enact conflict via CMC (Campbell, 2005). More so, young adults are having difficult conversations via text message (Campbell, 2005). Little research has been done to examine how conflict is enacted via CMC in relationships that primarily take place in a FTF setting.

When issues arise in an interpersonal relationship an influence attempt can be made by an individual in the relationship. During these influence attempts individuals will discover their goals in the relationship or situation, create plans on how to reach those goals, and put their plans into action. This process is known as Goals Plans Actions (GPA) theory (Dillard, 1990), a theory that uncovers the process of influence attempts in interpersonal relationships. Historically, this theory has been studied in interpersonal FTF settings, (Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1989) but this theory can be applied in various interpersonal relationships through different communication channels. While research on GPA has focused on the role that goals play in an interaction (Schrader & Dillard, 1998), and on how plans are created and formed (Keck & Samp, 2007; Lakey & Canary, 2002) research has not examined the role of actions in GPA, especially related to conflict.

This research will focus on gaining a better understanding of roommate conflict via CMC through examining the actions in GPA during these interactions. Specifically, this research will explore roommate relationships and how GPA is enacted through the communication channel of text messaging. Exploring how goals are uncovered and change, how interactions between individuals in conflict impact this process, and the

outcomes of GPA in a conflict interaction between roommates will be uncovered. Conflict between roommates leads to negative short term and long term effects such as burnout, depression, and substance abuse (Dusselier et al., 2005). Additionally, conflict between roommates occurs more and more through CMC channels than FTF interactions (Campbell, 2005). Understanding the conflict process that roommates go through can assist in productively managing conflict and avoid the negative effects of roommate conflict. Additionally, CMC allows for a unique opportunity to study real conflict and conflict messages because these messages are recorded and can be recalled. This research also aids in the understanding of the process of influence attempts communicated via text messaging and provides a retrospective understanding of the actions piece of GPA. This research is important because it aids in the understanding of how roommate conflict is changing with the presence of technology, and how conflict via CMC impacts the conflict process. This chapter provides an overview and a foundation of the variables at work in conflict interactions between roommates and as recognizes gaps in the research of interpersonal conflict, CMC, and GPA theory. The following chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of roommate conflict and the relational and individual outcomes and consequences of roommate conflict, and overviews CMC and conflict in interpersonal relationships. GPA theory will then be discussed in detail, including an explanation of how conflict is understood through the lens of this theory. Chapter three will give a detailed account of the methods of this study including the justification, participants, data collection and analysis of the data. The remaining chapters will discuss the results and implications of this research and provide ideas for future research in this area of study.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Conflict within roommate relationships can occur via CMC (Moore, 2010). It is important to understand interactions within roommate conflict so that the interpersonal and intrapersonal goals of interactants can be determined and addressed. Interpersonal conflict has recently been studied through CMC (Bartek, 2014). Casual conversation, informative messages, and even conflict between individuals often takes place through digital conversation (Campbell, 2005; Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). Influence attempts often transpire into conflict situations because of conflicting goals in an interaction (Canary, Cunningham, & Cody, 1988). Understanding how conflict and GPA work together is essential to analyzing the cognitive process and motivations of individuals in a conflict interaction. GPA theory can provide additional understanding for conflict via CMC in interpersonal relationships. The next section outlines roommate conflict and the role of CMC in conflict. Then, the literature explores the tenets and applications of GPA theory. An overview of how GPA theory and conflict has been studied is discussed.

#### **Roommate Conflict**

One type of interpersonal relationship that many individuals engage in at some point in their lives are roommate relationships. The relationships between roommates is unique. Roommate relationships can be voluntary or involuntary, and these relationships are made up of varying levels of social compatibility (Waldo, 1989). Roommates who live with one another on a voluntary basis choose the person or persons they will live

with. Other roommates end up living together involuntarily, for example, through college dorm assignment. Relationships that are forced, such as assigned roommates, often experience more conflict than other interpersonal relationships (Ocana & Hindman, 2004). Some roommates have a past history with one another, and they may be friends or acquaintances before they decide to live together. Other individuals may not meet one another until they move in together. These relationships, like other types of interpersonal relationships, are not without conflict. In a roommate relationship, decisions are made, living situations need to be arranged, and household labor is divided.

Roommates are faced with social as well as situational challenges throughout their relationship (Sillars, 1980). For example roommates may encounter a social challenge if they do not have any shared interests, whereas situational challenges may arise when deciding to get a pet for the household. Lepore (1992) reports that disagreements, rejection, offensive actions, and multiple demands may cause social negativity. In a roommate relationship, these factors are especially apparent. Decisions such as taking out the trash, paying rent, sharing food, and furnishing the living space can all lead to negative social interactions. Roommate relationships have been studied from a social incompatibility standpoint and explored through communication breakdown and conflict reporting that personality differences and poor communication lead to an increase in roommate conflict (Sillars, 1980; & Waldo, 1989). Roommate relationships face unique challenges and trials that may create interpersonal conflict between individuals.

There are various interpersonal issues that can cause roommate conflict. Sillars (1980) found that roommate conflict is often associated with incompatibility between

roommates. If roommates are unfamiliar with one another, they may experience uncertainty, which may decrease liking in the relationship (Ocana & Hindman, 2004). When individuals feel they are socially incompatible with someone, they may feel as though their differences cannot be resolved. However, what may appear to be a personality difference between roommates, can be ineffective communication between individuals (Sillars, 1980). A pattern of poor communication can take a toll on roommate relationships. However, effective roommate relationships start with open and clear communication (Waldo, 1989). Instead of avoiding communication and conflict, roommates should face their problems and have open discussions about their issues. Confronting conflict in a roommate relationship is one of the most important communication skills for creating a harmonious relationship among roommates (Waldo, 1989). Initially, roommates may feel as though their problems come from social incompatibility, and neglecting these issues can create more conflict. It is important for roommates to have conversations about problems that arise in their relationship. If these problems are not addressed, it can lead to both interpersonal and intrapersonal issues.

When roommate conflict is not handled appropriately, stress increases. Many individuals who live with a roommate are young adults who attend college. During this time, individuals are faced with changes and many stressful situations. “Stress is a part of student’s existence and can impact how students cope with the demands of college life” (Dusselier et al., 2005, p. 15). Student stress can come from factors such as balancing school, work, activities, and relationships.

Conflict between roommates can also increase stress in a student’s life. Lepore (1992) found that social negativity is positively correlated with psychological distress.

Specifically roommate conflict causes psychological distress to increase (Lepore, 1992). Stress is at an all-time high in a college student's life, and during this stage of life, college students are also more likely to have a roommate. Dusselier et al. (2005) found that conflict between roommates was a significant factor of stress. Additionally, Ocana and Hindman (2004) report that roommates that are assigned to live together experience additional stress. Negative social interactions between roommates can increase an individual's stress levels. If roommate conflict is not resolved, stress levels of students will increase.

Stress has an impact on an individual's physical, mental, and behavioral health (Dusselier et al., 2005). Prolonged stress can have short and long term effects. Short term effects include frequent headaches, fatigue, anxiety, and reduced ability and desire to complete schoolwork. Long term stress effects include depression, alcohol abuse, as well as academic and professional burnout (Dusselier et al., 2005). When stress is not handled appropriately it can have a lasting impact on a person's well-being.

Young adults in particular are interesting in their approach to engaging in conflict. For instance, if a roommate is addressing a conflict, it is likely that they see the other roommate as the source of the conflict itself (Ocana & Hindman, 2004). In terms of roommate conflict interactions, Ocana and Hindman (2004) note that roommates may be more susceptible to less appropriate approaches to conflict. However, in roommate situations, when the actor feels as though they could accurately predict the target's response, they were more likely to use integrative tactics in their influence attempts. Conflict is also often carried out through CMC instead of FTF communication (Campbell, 2005; Ishii, 2010; Moore, 2010).

Negative relationships with college roommates can prevent positive emotional adjustment and negatively impact student success in school (Waldo, 1989). Therefore, it is important for students to address their problems. Roommate conflict is a high predictor of stress in a college student's life, the consequences are high if these conflicts are not resolved. Addressing roommate conflict is important in decreasing stress levels and avoiding any negative long-term effects of stress. How roommates address their conflict is also significant because different conflict approaches can impact the outcome of the conflict situation. However, little research has been done on how roommates engage in conflict interactions and their process for managing conflict.

## **CMC**

CMC is communication between individuals through technology (Wright & Webb, 2011). Many individuals use CMC as a way to quickly and conveniently communicate with others (Ishii, 2010). CMC continues to advance and gain momentum as a primary means of communication. Different than FTF communication, CMC is often text-based and considered a less rich type of communication (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004). Additionally, researchers have studied how individuals who engage in conflict via CMC as opposed to FTF are more likely to self-disclose (Ramirez & Borneck, 2009). Various studies have explored this phenomenon in terms of the advantages and drawbacks of these channels of communication as well as the types of conversations that are being carried out through these communicative means (Barteck, 2014; Campbell, 2005; Ramirez & Borneck, 2009; & Wright & Webb, 2011). The following section explores CMC and conflict.

**Applications of CMC.** Individuals enact their relationships with others online and offline (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). Wright and Webb (2011) argue that the study of relational maintenance has mainly focused on FTF interaction and has not considered CMC as a channel of maintenance. However, in a world of ongoing technological advancements, cell phones, tablets, laptops, and smartwatches provide additional avenues of communication in interpersonal relationships. These tools of communication influence how individuals interact and react when encountering online messages. Interpersonal relationships are often maintained through a variety of channels including instant messaging, social networking sites, email, and telephones (Ishii, 2005; Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). CMC has changed everyday interaction and communication between individuals in an interpersonal relationship. It is not necessary, or even preferred to have a conversation in a FTF setting if the same message can be delivered via CMC (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). CMC provides more flexibility in communication and has an influence on the way relationships are carried out (Wright & Webb, 2011). CMC is important to everyday communication.

There are many benefits of communicating via CMC. “The advent of computer-mediated communication has been an external force that has transformed how friendships are conducted” (Wright & Webb, 2011, p. 228). CMC is a convenient, easy tool for students to use with their busy schedules. For example, students can easily send text messages to their friends in between classes to find out when they are meeting for lunch, or they can send a group message via social media (such as Facebook Messenger) to a group of individuals in their class to see when everyone is studying. CMC can make relationships more flexible (Wright & Webb, 2011). Individuals do not feel the



immediate pressure of responding to an IM, a text message, or an email and can respond on their own time. CMC also allows individuals to share videos, pictures, and web links with one another, enabling them to connect in a variety of ways that a FTF setting would not allow. It is apparent that CMC has many benefits for developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, especially for college age students. The convenience and flexibility allow individuals to connect with their peers and friends in unique ways.

CMC plays an important role in maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Connecting with peers is one of the most important functions of mobile phones for young people (Campbell, 2005). There are numerous apps and resources associated with smart phones, and many of these functions are used to stay in touch with others. Text messaging, various social media sites, email, and file sharing allow individuals to connect. Cell phones play a significant role in relational maintenance and development as well as communication between individuals.

**Conflict via CMC.** The same device that helps connect individuals may become a barrier to hide behind in difficult communication situations. Campbell (2005) suggests that "...many young people choose to text rather than to talk about awkward or emotionally difficult situations..." (p. 4). Mobile phones can also serve a negative role in relationships (Campbell, 2005). For example, individuals may use their mobile phone as a way to bully others, send abrasive or aggressive messages, and may often be used as a tool to ignore others by refusing to respond to communication attempts. Engaging in conflict has benefits such as greater flexibility in terms of message response time and a less emotionally uncomfortable environment. However, there are drawbacks to engaging in conflict via CMC such as a lack of communication richness. Nonverbal

communication is nonexistent or limited in many CMC contexts, tone may not be easily conveyed, and messages are generally short, limiting the amount of characters an individual has when communicating a message. The age of an individual may influence their likelihood to use CMC as a mode of communication.

Young adults may feel more comfortable using CMC as a medium of solving conflict. According to Bartek (2014) "...millennials are much more accustomed to using CMC as a tool with which to resolve conflict or engage in negotiation" (p. 22). This is due to the fact that when having a conversation through CMC channels, individuals can interact at their convenience (Ishii, 2010). There is not immediate pressure to respond or react to an emotionally charged, conflict based message from the other party. Text based CMC allows individuals more control in how a message is constructed and allows for a chance to modify the text effectiveness (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009).

Communicating about a conflict via text has its benefits, allowing parties in conflict to analyze and craft messages in a less threatening environment. The goals of the individuals in conflict may also be more obtainable in a CMC channel. Ramirez & Broneck (2009) argue that "This preference for utilizing the Internet over other forms of communication for relationship maintenance may be driven by related goals such as impression-management concerns" (p. 295). When communicating via computer-mediated channels, an individual can think about how the other person will respond while crafting their message, unlike FTF settings where response times are often immediate. Communicating via text messaging lessens the uncertainty that comes with having difficult conversations in FTF settings. Specifically, cellphones and online modes of communication may make it easier for individuals to avoid awkward FTF conversations

about problems (Moore, 2010). Wright and Webb (2011) found that instant messaging, which is quite similar to text messaging, allows individuals to share personal information that they would not disclose in FTF situations. These self-disclosures may include an individual's blunt opinion on an issue or another individual, or controversial or argumentative statements that the individual would not be willing to share in a FTF setting. There are many reasons that individuals communicate via CMC, specifically through text messaging. Understanding how and why individuals choose to engage in conflict through text messaging is important because how messages are constructed and understood through this channel is often different than how a similar conflict may unfold in a FTF setting.

Although engaging in conflict through text-messaging has some significant benefits, using this mode of communication when handling conflict, especially with college-aged students, can create problems. Moore (2010) reports that college roommates do not have the necessary skills or determination to confront their conflicts with one another. If conflicts are not being addressed, maintaining a healthy roommate relationship can be difficult. Roommates who are angry with one another are more likely to text one another than have a FTF conversation about their problems (Moore, 2010). Text messaging provides individuals with some benefits when handling their conflicts, but there are often aspects of conflict that are lost when communicating via text. It is much more difficult to convey tone and emotion through text messages, therefore interpreting messages becomes difficult (Zornoza, Ripoll, & Peiri, 2002). Because no immediate response is required in a conversation through text messaging, one party may not respond to the conflict. It is important to understand that text messaging plays a role in roommate

conflict, but it may not always be the most beneficial or accurate way to handle a conflict situation. When conflict is managed successfully, interpersonal relationship generally thrive and improve (Ishii, 2010).

**Further Applications of CMC and Conflict.** Understanding conflict in the context of CMC channels is important in personal relationships; however, a majority of research in this area has been done in professional settings. Conflict resolution and CMC is considered a new academic area of study (Bartek, 2014). There are many different types of issues associated with managing conflict via CMC as opposed to FTF settings. One area of difference that Bartek (2014) discusses is the idea of flaming. Flaming, or interactions that are belligerent and argumentative, is unique to text-based CMC. Examples of this behavior include swearing, belittling group members, or aggressive messages. This type of behavior is more prevalent in CMC group settings than FTF group settings (Martins et al., 2004). Flaming can take place in CMC settings because of the weak nature of CMC as a communication medium (Bartek, 2014). This element of CMC and conflict has mostly been studied in group settings. When flaming occurs in online groups, communication breakdown is often an outcome. When aggressive communication is being used in a group through computer-mediated means, group performance and group cohesion suffers (Bartek, 2014). According to Bartek (2014) flaming is most likely to occur when expected norms are violated. This type of behavior may also be found in dyadic interpersonal relationships.

Social norms in online settings are often not as important as FTF settings, leading to abrasive, argumentative communication interactions. The use of social norms are reduced and profane behavior increases in CMC because communication richness is

lessened (Hobman, Bordia, Irmer, & Change, 2002). Facial expression, tone, and emotion are not easily identified or communicated in an in a CMC interaction. This can lead to misinterpreted messages and confusion. The types of technology that online interactions have access to vary in media richness (Martins, et al., 2004). For example, video conference is considered a richer online communication tool than email since nonverbal messages and message tone are more easily conveyed and communicators can see and talk to one another in real time. “Text-based CMC in particular inhibits numerous channels of communication from being properly conveyed” (Bartek, 2014, p. 8). These types of communication channels can include instant messaging, text-messaging, or email. Bartek (2014) found that the richest method of communication should be used when a difficult conversation takes place. One-way text-based communication has increased its richness is through the use of emoticons. In order to more accurately communicate feelings and emotion, individuals sometimes use emoticons in CMC interactions (Bartek, 2014). Emoticons allow for a form of nonverbal messages to be incorporated in a text-based conversation, increasing the richness of the communication channel. CMC leads to a lower expectancy of social norms, and consists of a variety of different channels that vary in richness.

Much of the research surrounding conflict in CMC has been done in group settings. Joint understanding of conflict in online settings is essential in handling conflict through CMC channels. In a group setting, participants successfully discuss and negotiate their conflicts when there are low levels of ambiguity (Bartek, 2014). Martins et al. (2004) argues that in online groups, if ambiguity is present, more time is needed to reach decisions. Aspects of online group interaction through CMC can also be applied to dyadic

interpersonal relationships. Communication is often times slower in online interactions, therefore, taking time to work through conflict it is important for online interactions. Hobman et al. (2002) found that when CMC groups are given enough time to exchange messages, they succeed and develop similarly to FTF groups. Therefore, it can be argued that group goals and group performance in CMC groups is no less effective than FTF groups, if online groups have additional completion time for the same task. When teams have a strong group identity, they are less likely to have cognitive conflict (Bartek, 2014). This suggests that if CMC groups are given time for relational development between members and time for setting goals, they will experience less conflict than an online groups immediately move into problem solving. Other scholars argue that FTF groups manage conflict more effectively than CMC groups (Zornoza et al., 2002). Therefore, if FTF group settings are more effective a managing conflict, it can be argued that conflict in interpersonal relationships benefit more from FTF communication than CMC. CMC communication is lacking in message richness, therefore meaning and understanding suffers. The functions and past research of CMC aids in the understanding of conflict in online interactions within interpersonal relationships.

### **Goals Plans Action Theory**

GPA “is a theory that connects goals to actions via plans, and in so doing, attempts to illuminate the process of strategic message production” (Dillard & Schrader, 1998, p. 302). GPA is a model for understanding influence attempts by an actor towards a target in order to reach the actor’s goals. Conflict interactions are made up of specific goals (Canary et al., 1998; Hindman, 2007; & Sillars et al., 2000). Therefore it is

important to understand the foundation of the GPA process so that it can be used as a framework to understand conflict. Dillard, Segrin, and Hardin (1998) argue that part of an individual's social existence consists of trying to influence others toward goal attainment. Situations such as trying to influence a friend on where to eat lunch to attempting to convince a supervisor to grant a raise are all examples of influence attempts.

Hullett (2004) outlines the six stages of GPA. First, during the goal assessment stage primary and secondary goals are realized. In the second stage, actor decides either to engage their target in an influence attempt or ignore their goals. If an actor decides to carry out the influence attempt, tactic plans are developed and the actor decides which tactic plan they will use. Next, the preferred tactic plan is implemented. Finally, the target's response to the actor's influence attempt effects the actor's subsequent goals and plans in the interaction. These stages occur in sequence and the results of one stage directly impacts the following stages. Additionally, this is a fluid process allowing for an actor to retreat back to any one of the stages in the process at any given time.

GPA ends with a purposeful action behavior (Dillard, 1990). Seibold, Cantrill, and Myers (1985) found that individuals who have a conscious understanding of their behavior, do not necessarily have complete awareness of the overall process of message production (as cited by Dillard, 1990). However, in an influence attempt actors (or the individual enacting the influence attempt) must decide how to confront the problems to obtain the desired outcomes while weighing the potential drawbacks of the influence attempts (Dillard e al., 1989).

GPA is a theory that has been studied and applied to interpersonal relationships. Actors engage in influence attempts to achieve their goals. The process of realizing goals,

planning the influence attempts, and carrying out plans encompasses the GPA process. The following sections will outline the process of goals, plans, and actions and the role that each of these variables have on an influence attempt.

**Goals.** Dillard (1990) argues that influence attempts are goal-driven. Goals initiate planning which then allows for the implementation of action (Schrader & Dillard, 1998). Therefore, goals are the starting point of the GPA process. According to Dillard (1990) "...awareness of an influential goal is needed before compliance-seeking behaviors can be construed as action" (p. 42). Thus, it can be argued that an influence attempt cannot be planned or carried out until such goals are realized. Goals can be understood as something that an individual can achieve or maintain, as well as something that an individual is committed to maintaining or achieving. Dillard et al. (1998) defines goals as reaching or maintaining a desired state of affairs. Generally, an individual does not experience one goal at a time. An actor can have multiple goals at any given time, each holding a different priority or importance (Dillard, 1990). Messages that help accomplish one goal may interfere with achieving another goal, especially since goals tend to change throughout and interaction (Wilson, Greene, & Dillard, 2000). For example, an actor may want their roommate's significant other to stop staying the night at their apartment, however, they may also not want to create tension in their relationship. The various goals of an actor will ultimately influence if and how they decide to enact an influence attempt.

Primary Goals. Understanding the role of goals in influence attempts is important because goals shape the subsequent activity in the GPA process (Schrader & Dillard, 1998). There are two types of goals according to GPA theory primary goals, and



secondary goals. Primary goals, also known as influence goals, are generally at the forefront of an influence attempt (Dillard, 1990). “Awareness of an influence (primary) goal occurs when the actor perceives some discrepancy or potential discrepancy between the current state of affairs and the desired state of affairs” (Dillard, 1990, p. 45). Primary goals are realized when an individual feels as though what they want to occur and what is actually occurring are disproportionate. These goals give an influence interaction meaning and is the reason that an interaction takes place (Dillard & Schrader, 1998).

Schrader & Dillard (1998) attest that motivation for the plan and action phases of GPA is directly influenced by primary goals. Generally, these goals are aimed at altering the behaviors of another individual (Dillard et al., 1989). For instance, an example of a primary goal between roommates would be one roommate wanting the other roommate to start cleaning the living space more often. The importance of the individual’s preferred state of affairs contributes to how important a primary goal is for an individual (Dillard, 1990). The most common reasons individuals attempt to influence others is outlined by Dillard, Anderson, and Knobloch (2002) which include to gain assistance (e. g. Could you help me with the dishes?), give advice (e.g. You should stop staying up so late on school nights), share activity (e.g. Let’s go to the grocery store together), change orientation (e.g. There is a better way to study for your test), change the relationship (e.g. We should get to know one another as friends before we become roommates), obtain permission (e.g. Is it alright with you if I invites some friends over to the house tonight?), and enforce rights and obligations (You promised to pay your part of the rent on time, so where is it?). Primary goals vary in strength based on the actor’s attraction to the target (or the person whose behavior the actor wants to change) and how important their goals

are (Dillard et al., 1989). For example, an actor really wants their roommate to start cleaning the apartment and they are not particularly attracted to their roommate as a person or friend, their goal to get their roommate to clean the apartment may be stronger than if they thought their roommate was a friendly, fun person. Additionally, when a primary goal reaches a certain level of importance to an actor, the GPA sequence is enacted (Dillard, 1990). If a goal is not deemed very important, an actor may avoid to engage in an influence attempt, however, if an actor decides a goal is important, they are more likely to engage in an influence attempt. An equally important aspect of goals in GPA theory is secondary goals. Dillard et al., (1989) states that "...awareness of primary goals stimulates the consideration of secondary goals" (p. 21).

Secondary Goals. Schrader and Dillard (1998) argue that there is a causal relationship between primary goals and secondary goals. Once primary goals are established, the actor considers or realizes secondary goals. These goals consider the relationship between the actor and the target as well as the perception of the actor in the interpersonal relationship.

There are four types of secondary goals according to this theory. For example, identity goals are a form of secondary goals. Dillard (1990) describes these goals best when discussing the idea that "They derive from one's moral standards, principles for living, and personal preferences concerning one's own conduct" (p. 46) (e.g. I want my roommate to see that I am a caring and patient person). Another type of secondary goal is interaction goals. These goals deal with impression and conversation management and managing face with the target, while also creating messages that are appropriate (e.g. I don't want my roommate to yell at me or call me names). Resource goals are also a type

of secondary goal that can be broken into three different assets. Relational assets concern themselves with personal gratification that comes out of the relationship an actor has with the target. Examples of this type of secondary goals include positive attention, situation, and support (Dillard et al., 1989) (e.g. My roommate said that I was fun to live with, so that means I am a fun person). Material assets are tangible objects to which an actor has an attachment to (e.g. My furniture is really important to me because I have worked hard to pay for it). Finally, physical assets are aspects of an actor's health that can be tied to the influence attempt (e.g I am less stressed now that my roommate has agreed to turn down their music after 11pm). The last type of secondary goal is arousal management goals. Schrader and Dillard (1998) describe these goals as "...efforts to manage the anxiety or challenges associated with the influence attempt" (p. 279). For example an individual may feel stress associated with addressing an issue with their roommate because they do not want to seem like a rude person, however, to manage this stress they convince themselves that they are generally a nice person and the influence attempt will not change their roommates perception of them.

Secondary goals may include not damaging the relationship between the actor and the target or wanting to maintain face within the influence interaction. Schrader and Dillard (1998) understand secondary goals as an element of influence interactions that helps develop as well as restrain the construction of messages. An individual may want to obtain compliance from a target, which is a primary goal. However, the individual's relationship with the target may be important and they may not want to cause relational damage. This relational goal is secondary. If a secondary goal is more important than the primary, the actor may decide against the influence attempt.

Secondary goals, according to Dillard et al. (1989) often arise out of reoccurring motivations in an actor's life, they are rooted in an individual's psychological concerns, and neglect logical concerns, and arise out of common concerns for and individual (Dillard et al., 1989; Dillard, 1990; Schrader & Dillard, 1998)..If the actor is motivated to maintain a positive relationship with their boss, or an actor wants to be viewed as a friendly individual, their secondary goals will reflect these motivations.

Understanding primary and secondary goals and the roles they play in GPA is essential to understand the reasoning behind an influence attempt. It is also important to note that various primary goals work with various types of secondary goals (Schrader & Dillard, 1998). An actor must weigh primary and secondary goals before engaging in an influence attempt. The presence of a particular primary goal may influence the presence of a secondary goal and vice versa. Primary goals encourage individuals to engage in GPA and influence behaviors. However, secondary goals generally deter individuals from engaging. Goals are constantly shifting throughout interactions therefore the actor's decision to engage or disengage may also shift. When these two opposing forces come together, an actor may decide against engaging in an influence attempt with the target. If the target is engaging in the influence attempt and their secondary goals become more important than their primary goals, then the actor is likely to abandon or disengage from the influence strategy (Dillard, 1990). Weighing primary and secondary goals allows the actor to decide if their goals are important enough to engage in an influence attempt.

According to GPA theory, goals play an essential role in establishing if an influence attempt will take place and what the motivations are behind the influence attempt. Goals are broken down into primary goals, or motivations to change a target's

behaviors so that an actor can maintain or change their desired state of affairs which leads to secondary goals that center on the relational and intrapersonal goals of the individual. These goals work with, as well as against, one another. If primary goals are deemed more important, an influence attempt on a target is more direct. If secondary goals are interpreted by the actor as more important, the influence attempt will be more indirect, or may be abandoned all together. Ultimately, goals initiate and give meaning to action (Dillard, 1990).

**Plans.** Primary and secondary goals work together in the actor's decision to engage in an influence attempt (Hullett, 2004). If an actor's primary goals are important enough and they have outweighed the cost of secondary goals, the next step in the GPA process is developing plans. Dillard (1990) defines the process of planning as creating a plan, or multiple plans, to achieve a goal, evaluating these plans on their effectiveness, and ultimately deciding which plan to enact in the influence attempt. The plans stage is often where the details of the influence attempt are developed and solidified. During this stage of the process, the goals of the influence attempt are still at work. Schrader and Dillard (1998) argue that the more goals one has the more complex the plan is to achieve these goals. Depending on the goals of the actor, the planning stage can be cognitively complex.

Plans, or tactic plans as they are sometimes referred to, are made up of the verbal and nonverbal actions that an actor uses in hopes of changing a targets behaviors. Tactic plans will vary in each instance (Dillard, 1990). A tactic plan is direct attempt to change behaviors and showcase the primary goals of the target. Additionally, these plans also determine what positive and negative outcomes may come about for the individual and

the target if compliance or non-compliance takes place. Plans are also logical in the fact that reasoning and evidence are used in the creation of strategies. The more complex the goal structure, the more difficult it is for an individual to process and create messages in the influence interaction (Schrader & Dillard, 1998). If an actor is trying to achieve multiple goals, or goals that are more difficult to reach in an influence attempt, the planning process will be more detailed.

The actor has a sense of control for the outcomes of an influence interaction when well-developed plans are established (Dillard, 1990). In order for the actor to have this sense of control, plans need to be well-prepared. Plans consist of the elements and the sequence of elements an actor must go through in order to meet their goal(s) (Dillard, 1990). The actor must decide what they will say, how they will say it, as well as what nonverbal messages they will use in order to gain a sense of control in the interaction. In order to develop these well-thought-out plans, Berger and Jordan (1992) report that individuals first recall their long-term memory in order to find similar influence instances to create a plan. It is more likely for a planner of an influence attempt “to access previous episodes as a guide to current behavior than to use rules or create an entirely new plan” (Berger & Jordan, 1992, p. 131). If an actor has attempted a similar influence attempt previously, they are most likely to create a plan based off their past attempt. If they were successful in their past influence attempt and were able to gain compliance from their target, they may craft a very similar plan for their current attempt. On the other hand, if they were unsuccessful in their influence of a past target, they may develop a very different plan for their present influence interaction.

Overall, plans are fairly consistent across individuals; if they use a specific tactic in one situation, it is likely they will use a similar plan for future attempts. “The number of tactic plans ... generated in any influence attempt is a joint function of the importance of the influence goal and the size of the actor’s repertoire” (Dillard, 1990, p. 49). If the goal(s) of the actor are of high importance and they have a history of carrying out influence attempts, they will most likely develop a variety of plans. Individuals will often imagine their interactions between themselves and the target when developing plans for future influence attempts (Berger & Jordan, 1992). Individuals in conflict predict the target’s reactions to the actor’s intended actions and develop plans that are in agreement with their conflict partners predicted response (Sillars, 1980). Recalling past experiences in similar influence attempts while also imagining how a target will respond helps the target develop well-thought-out plans for an influence attempt.

Not all plans are well developed. According to Dillard (1990), plans may be horizontally or vertically incomplete. A horizontally incomplete plan occurs when an actor is missing possibilities in how a target will respond. It is possible that an actor does not have the necessary information to predict target response based on their lack of experience in a particular compliance gaining attempt or their distant relationship with a target. Vertically incomplete plans exist when an individual does not have a specific idea or plan of exactly what they will say in an interaction, however, the actor does have a loose understanding of how they will approach the situation (Dillard, 1990). Plans that are vertically incomplete can occur when the actor does not have sufficient time to develop a well-thought-out plan, or when their goals are of low importance, therefore their attempt to gain compliance is low risk. Berger and Jordan (1992) state that “...when

a person lacks knowledge concerning relevant action sequences for goal achievement, they may resort to salient conceptual categories concerned with person or role knowledge, rather than event knowledge, to aid them in their planning (p. 134).

Therefore, if an actor does not have experience making a particular influence attempt, they will rely on their experience and relationship with the target in order to create the most effective plan to gain compliance.

When actors repeatedly attempt to achieve the same or similar goals, they are able to construct a fairly detailed plan for an interaction. However, no two influence attempts are the same. Individuals who have never attempted to reach a specific goal, and do not have the past experience to help them plan their interaction, are generally able to construct some sort of plan (Berger & Jordan, 1992). The frequency of a influence interaction concerning similar goals along with the similarity of past situations with the current situation are both factors in how familiar an influence attempt is for an actor. Dillard (1990) argues that "...it is assumed that actors typically approach social influence situations armed with only a general idea about how the interaction will proceed" (p. 44). One cannot fully prepare for or predict the influence interaction. Most of the planning for an influence attempt is made prior to the interaction itself, however, plans can also occur during the influence attempt, as targets respond and as goals change (Berger & Jordan, 1992).

**Action.** Once a plan has been developed, the action sequence takes place. Actions consist of putting plans into motion (Dillard, 1990). It is important to understand that "...action is not a term that encompasses all form of behavior, but rather, only those behaviors that are purposeful behavior" (Dillard & Schrader, 1998, p. 300). Action takes



place when influence attempts are made and plans are being carried out. An actor runs the greatest risk during this stage of GPA and there are two kinds of issues associated with this stage of the theory, according to Dillard (1990). One problem that an actor may run into is not having the necessary materials to carry out or complete the plan. If a plan is well-developed, but the actor does not have the skill or the knowledge to carry out the plan, the influence attempt will be unsuccessful. Additionally, the cognitive effort that is derived out of a complex or detailed plan can become too overwhelming for an actor and enable them from successfully carrying out the influence attempt (Dillard, 1990). Although plans may be well-developed, there are issues that can occur when an actor carries out these plans.

According to Wilson et al. (2000), there are time constraints associated with action. Action happens quickly and actors do not have a lot of time to process their target's response and adjust their plan as needed. Although plans are generally made in advance, as the influence attempt takes place spontaneous messages conversational shifts can occur, causing the actor to improvise. Furthermore, when multiple goals are present in an interaction, one goal may displace a goal whose plan has already been set into motion (Dillard, 1990). The goal an actor originally set out to achieve may lose importance when a new primary or secondary goal is realized. Because of this, an actor may change plans or abandon the influence attempt all together. If an actor realizes that the action of a plan is not producing the intended results that will ultimately help them to reach their goal, then the action sequence is generally stopped (Dillard, 1990). What happens in the action phase is generally difficult to predict and the processing time during

this stage is limited. When new goals are realized or the importance of a goal shifts, action may stop until the actor can create a new plan.

There are three outcomes of action according to Dillard (1990). First, compliance occurs when the target of the influence tactic agrees to the actor's request and the interaction ends. This is the preferred outcome for actors because their attempt was successful. Another outcome of action is resistance. Resistance occurs with the target refuses, avoids, negotiates, or seeks additional information from the actor regarding their demands (Dillard, 1990). When this happens, the interaction continues until compliance is achieved or the actor decides to exit the influence strategy. The realization of new goals may also take place when resistance occurs, placing the actor in the beginning of the GPA process. Exit is another outcome of action. Compliance is gained or the actor decides to abandon the influence strategy when exit occurs (Dillard, 1990). Action consists of various outcomes, and the results of action cannot always be accurately predicted by the actor. How the target responds to the influence attempt as well as the realization and understanding of goals for the actor can impact the action phase of GPA.

### **Critiques of GPA Theory**

Research surrounding GPA provides insight on influence attempts through communication behaviors. However, there have been critiques on the validity as well as the focus of this theory. Shepard (1992) argues that GPA theory "...may be an explanation for a given interaction, but it is not the explanation for any interaction" (p. 210). This criticism claims that GPA attempts to give a full picture explanation of communication interaction, when in fact, it only accounts for part of the communication

process. GPA has been targeted as a theory that attempts to categorize all behavior as influence tactics and relies on a masculine definition of communication (Shepard, 1992). Dillard and Schrader (1998) respond to this claim by arguing that GPA theory does not attempt to define all communication behavior, but only provides an explanation for behavior that is derived from goals and plans. Although GPA has been critiqued as a theory that oversimplifies communication behavior, Dillard and Schrader (1998) provide assurance that this theory is one that attempts only to understand goal-driven instances.

GPA has also been critiqued for relying too much on compliance gaining strategies to define interpersonal interaction (Shepard, 1992). GPA situates goals as the starting point for influence interactions. However, it has been suggested that goals can be at the end of an interaction, not just at the beginning (Shepard, 1992). Again Dillard and Schrader (1998) respond to this critique stating that “No one theory, and certainly no one study, does everything” (p. 301). There is a possibility that goals can be present at the end of an interaction, and do not work exclusively as the starting point for influence interactions. GPA accounts for unsuccessful influence by providing the possibility of not being able to obtain goals in an influence interaction (Dillard & Schrader, 1998). Additionally, the GPA process is continuous and goals are continually reevaluated (Schrader & Dillard, 1998). The simplicity of this theory has been critiqued and the role of goals has been questioned, however, the purpose of this theory and the role of each part of the GPA sequence has been further established and defined.

Other researchers in the field who have studied and evaluated GPA also have concerns and recognize discrepancies in the study of this theory. Keck and Samp (2007) recognize that there is a lack of research regarding how goals change throughout an

influence attempt. Additionally, Canary, Cunningham, and Cody (1988) report that there is little knowledge about what goals are being addressed during conflict influence interactions. Even Dillard (1990) critiques his own theory. He understands action to be the most problematic variable in GPA because it is so ambiguous. Dillard and Schrader (1998) help to alleviate the ambiguity associated with action by arguing that action within the framework of GPA does not encompass all communication behaviors, but only addresses purposeful behaviors that are aimed at achieving specific goals.

### **GPA and Conflict**

GPA theory is a model for understanding influence attempts in interpersonal relationships. Conflict interactions can be understood and examined through the lens of GPA. Much of the research surrounding GPA and conflict has focused on the use of goals and plans (Keck & Samp, 2007; Lakey & Canary, 2002; & Ocana & Hindman, 2007). Research on how conflict between individuals in an interpersonal relationship understand and take part in the GPA process is addressed in the following section. According to Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, and Dunn (2000) “Divergent perspectives and thoughts on conflict are played out in dyadic communication (p. 480). Meaning, that there are often different goals at play in a conflict interaction between two individuals. Conflict is an unavoidable variable in most interpersonal relationships. Understanding how interpersonal relationships use GPA in conflict interactions is important in order to understand the development of goals and the process that individuals go through in conflict situations. Influence attempts are a complex process and understanding how

conflict is enacted through the framework of GPA will provide further insight to how individuals manage and communicate their goals in an interaction.

**Goals.** Much of the research surrounding conflict and GPA has been goal-focused. Communication centering on incompatible goals is considered conflict and when individual's appear to have gals that are incompatible, conflict will occur (Canary et al., 1988; Canary, 2003(as cited by Keck & Samp, 2007)). It can be argued that when goals are present in an influence interaction, conflict can occur. Keck and Samp (2007) report that in accordance with goals, conflict has dynamic, universal, and planned properties. Understanding how conflict and goals work together in an interaction is essential in uncovering the motivation behind a conflict interaction. In fact, Lakey and Canary (2002) argue that goal assessment should be a top priority during conflict interactions. When the goals in an interaction are understood, the behaviors of that interaction can be better accounted for and conflict can be addressed appropriately.

Understanding the goals of the individual as well as the goals of other interactants provides insight in a conflict interaction. Each individual brings their own set of goals and ideas to an interaction. The goals of both the actor and the target are of equal importance when influence interaction is classified as a conflict. Individuals in conflict not only have to account for their personal goals, but they must also face opposing goals or obstacles from their conflict partner (Keck & Samp, 2007; Lakey & Canary, 2002). When individuals in conflict are able to understand one another's goals and work together to achieve both participants' goals, there is less incompatibility and difficulty in obtaining goals. The planning process of influence interactions can also benefit when an actor accounts for the targets goals. Incompatible goals can be realized and more

effective tactics can be utilized in the interaction. "...people are expected to work to develop an awareness of and sensitivity to both their own and their partners' goals, rather than concentrating only on their own goals or assuming their partners' goals are similar to their own" (Lakey & Canary, 2002, p. 219). In order for conflict to be productive, each participant must first realize their own goals in an interaction, while also assessing the goals of their conflict partner.

Generally, in conflict interactions, primary or instrumental goals are the focus (Keck & Samp, 2007). However, goals can shift to relational or identity goals as the interaction unfolds. This shift from primary to secondary goals is often dependent on how the target responds to the initial influence attempt. If the target requests more information from the actor, the primary goals of the actor is still the focus of the interaction. On the other hand, if the target responds to the influence attempt by attacking the integrity of the actor, the actor's goals may shift to protect their secondary goals. Lakey and Canary (2002) report that individuals may be more sensitive to specific relational, identity, and instrumental goals in conflict situations. These sensitivities may be related to their past experience addressing a certain goal or their relationship with the target. There are often many goals at work, each holding a different level of importance, with individuals in the interaction having various levels of commitment to their influence goals (Lakey & Canary, 2002). It is important to understand goal types in a conflict to comprehend how types of goals influence behavior in a conflict interaction (Canary et al., 1988). Different goals in an interaction, may elicit different approaches to influence attempts.

Goals in conflict are dynamic and ever changing. Although the goal of conflict is to find a solution to a problem, goals of the individuals can become more self-centered in

their pursuits (Keck & Samp, 2007). Just as primary goals can change to secondary goals, for instance when a goal to influence a target's behavior becomes less important than maintaining a positive relationship between individuals, secondary goals can shift to more primary goals in an influence interaction when the desire to reach relational goals has to come about via a specific behavioral change. "Goals can be egoistic or altruistic, self-serving or philanthropic" (Dillard & Schrader, 1998, p. 301). The dynamic nature of goals impacts the dynamic nature of conflict. In a conflict situation, goals can be proactive or reactive (Canary et al., 1988). Proactive goals elicit change in a behavior or a social environment that an individual finds disagreeable. For example, an actor may ask their roommate not to have guests over past 11p.m. on weeknights. Reactive goals are made up of situations or problems that arise in which an actor must change their behavior in response to the issue. If a target accuses the actor of being an inconsiderate slob, the actor will have a reactive goal to protect their identity. Lakey and Canary (2002) report that when individuals pay attention to their partners' goals, the effectiveness of conflict increases and individuals are more likely to achieve their own goals in the situation. If an actor is sensitive to the target's goals while also attempting to reach their own goals, conflict can be more productive.

Goals are at the core of understanding conflict and the communication behaviors that make up conflict interactions. Incompatible goals are generally at the core of conflict, however, if individuals can understand not only their goals but the goals of their partner, more productive outcomes may result. Goals can shift from primary to secondary and secondary to primary as the interaction unfolds, and each individual may be trying to achieve multiple goals throughout the conflict interaction. During a conflict interaction

goals are understood as proactive or reactive to the situational and relational aspects of the interaction. Studies have shown that if individuals in a conflict interaction are sensitive to both their own goals and the goals of their conflict partner, goal achievement and productive conflict is more likely to occur. An understanding of how conflict goals work in an influence interaction serves as a basis for understanding how GPA and conflict works in interpersonal interactions.

There are often multiple sources related to interpersonal problems (Sillars et al., 2000). These multiple demands may lead to various potentially competing goals for each individual in the relationship and further complicate the influence interaction. Volkema and Bergmann (2001) suggest that there are multiple behavior changes that need to be addressed in a conflict interaction. The more goals an individual has, the more complex the interaction, and the more cognitively challenging an influence interaction can become. Canary et al. (1988) argues that understanding the incompatibility of goals is vital in any interpersonal relationship. Goals are at the core of an influence interaction, and goals become increasingly important when individuals are experiencing conflict. Goals are ever-changing in interpersonal relationships, especially when faced with a conflict situation.

**Plans.** Shifts in goals impact the plans of individuals in a conflict situation. When enacting an influence attempt the actor is more likely to be self-focused (Ocana & Hindman, 2007). Actors are more primary goal-oriented initially; however, their goals may shift to a more relational or secondary goal focus as the conflict unfolds. Therefore, plans are adapted and changed throughout the conflict interaction. The approach and tactics used in a conflict situation are subject to change as the conflict develops (Ocana &



Hindman, 2007; Volkema & Bergmann, 2001). A moment-by-moment understanding of the thought processes of individuals in conflict is essential in understanding the cause of the conflict interaction (Sillars et al., 2000). Sillars et al. (2000) goes on to argue that in interpersonal conflict, it is important to understand what each individual is thinking throughout the interaction in order to best interpret how the conflict partners vary in their understanding of the conflict. These thoughts are often geared towards adapting and creating a plan as the interaction unfolds. As goals change in an interaction, plans are created and adapted, and actions are carried out based on those changes. The ever changing goals of individuals in interpersonal relationships effect how conflict unfolds. Understanding the thought processes of each individual can provide clarity.

Two approaches to conflict in influence attempts include integrative tactics and distributive tactics (Keck & Samp, 2007; Sillars, 1980). Distributive tactics are straight forward encouraging discussion of the conflict and provide a negative of the relational partners whereas integrative tactics, which also promote conversation about the conflict are focused on the positive evaluation of the relational partners (Sillars, 1980). Support and cooperation are enacted within integrative tactics, while distributive tactics are used when an individual ignores their partner's goals and competitively attempts to achieve their own goals in an interaction. Primary goals tend to use more distributive tactics, while secondary goals use more integrative tactics. Distributive tactics are used to reach individual goal, not the goals of the relationship (Sillars, 1980). If an individual feels as though their conflict partner will be cooperative, they will be more inclined to use integrative tactics. Additionally, if individuals in conflict are sensitive to their partner's goals, they are more likely to express empathy and use more supportive or cooperative

messages (Lakey & Canary, 2002). How actors and targets respond to and interact with one another determines what tactics will be used in an influence attempt. If one partner uses distributive tactics, the other will also use distributive tactics. However, if a partner is relational-focused and uses integrative tactics, the other partner is likely to respond in a similar manner. If an actor views themselves as sensitive to their partners' goals, they are more likely to use integrative tactics in their conflict approach (Keck & Samp, 2007; Lakey & Canary, 2002). The tactics used in conflict interactions in an attempt to influence a relational partner is based within the goals of the individuals, the interactions of the participants, and the sensitivity the actor has towards the target as well as their relationship with that individual.

According to Ocana and Hindman (2004) if there is a high level of uncertainty and anxiety in conflict, actors are more likely to use uncooperative behaviors. Distributive tactics may be implemented when an actor feels as though they cannot accurately predict how the target will respond or if they are particularly nervous about conflict interactions. Sex may also play a role in how conflict is addressed in interpersonal relationship. Females are more likely to use distributive behaviors when addressing routine goals (Canary et al., 1988). This could be due to the idea that females are more comfortable addressing issues that they have had to approach in the past, whereas males tend to avoid or neglect issues (Canary et al., 1988). There are many external and internal factors that contribute to how individuals behave in an influence attempt.

Understanding and empathizing play a role in constructive conflict. However, conflict is cognitively complex, which can have a negative effect on how each participant

in the conflict understands the actions of the other individual. Additionally, responses in conflict are often automatic, leaving little time for interpretation of a partner's actions (Sillars et al., 2000). As goals change as a result of a partner's response to influence attempts in an interaction, there is little time for creating new plans and enacting well-thought-out actions. When plans are not well-developed and individuals react without planning, conflict can escalate. Although goals can escalate conflict, they can also deescalate conflict and lead to more productive outcomes. Secondary goals play an important role in interpersonal relationships. An influence interaction through the means of conflict may be avoided if the actor does not want to cause relational outcomes that are negative (Ocana & Hindman, 2004). Integrative tactics are also viewed in interpersonal relationships as more appropriate and effective, and conflict interactions are resolved in a more timely and satisfying manner for both individuals in an interaction (Ocana & Hindman, 2004). Canary et al. (1998) also found that when individuals are addressing relational goals in conflict, participants are more likely to use integrative tactics. Due to the complexity of conflict, the individual's unique perspective of the conflict, and arguably the sex of the interactants, conflict can escalate. There is often a limited amount of time for actors and targets to understand their goals, create plans for their interaction, and carry out those plans. Researchers have found that when secondary goals have a high level of importance, conflict is more easily resolved and goals of both participants are more likely to be reached (Keck & Samp, 2007; Lakey & Canary, 2002).

Although actors may think that they understand the goals of the target through their interpretations of their responses, there can be discrepancies in how each individual is interpreting the others actions. Each individual in an interaction has their own

understanding of the conflict. Because each individual in a conflict has different background knowledge and past experience, the way they act and react in a conflict is specific and unique (Sillars, et al., 2000). When individuals are creating plans for their interaction, they rely on past conflicts and goals in order to create a well-developed and hopefully persuasive plan.

**Gaps in Conflict and GPA Research.** Interpersonal relationships are susceptible to influence attempts that could be categorized as conflict situations. There are often many different goals at work in conflict interactions, and understanding the thought process of individuals in conflict can lead to a greater understanding of goals, plans and actions in these types of conversations. Individuals may approach and respond to conflict in specific ways due to various internal and external variables such as sex, past experience, and goal importance. Some of these factors can increase conflict while others help to resolve conflict. Goals, plans, and actions are important to understanding conflict interactions within interpersonal relationships. Although research exploring goals and plans in conflict situations has been explored, the actions piece of this theory has been neglected. Little research has been conducted on the role of actions in conflict.

### **Research Questions**

The information provided in this literature review leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: What goals do roommates have in conflict interactions?

RQ2: How do participants talk about moving through the GPA process?

RQ2A: How do roommates weigh their goals?

RQ2B: What tactics do roommates use to achieve their goals?

RQ2C: How do the goals of roommates shift throughout a conflict interaction?

RQ3: Why do roommates choose texting as the communication channel for conflict interactions?

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **METHODS**

The following section examines the qualitative methods used to assess the proposed research questions for the current study. First, this section presents a justification and rationale for the research, describes participants and context, and explains data analysis procedures. The results and implications of this study are discussed in the subsequent chapters.

#### **Method Overview**

In order to understand the complex process of conflict in roommate relationships, this study employs qualitative methods to achieve an in-depth understanding of how roommates enact conflict through text messaging. A rich understanding of how participants work through the GPA process can be best understood through examining how goals are realized, how plans are created, and how actions are used in an interaction. This understanding can best be achieved through in-depth interviews. This method of study helps bring clarity to an individual's conflict process. Interviews allow for participants to provide meaning and justification for their interactions (Tracy, 2013). Interviews were semi-structured in order to provide direction for the participants, while also allowing some flexibility for additional discussion and control for interviewees (Tracy, 2013). The design of this study allowed participants to reflect back on their interactions with their roommate and elaborate on how and why they decided to send specific messages during the course of the conflict. This study also allowed participants

to explain their interaction goals and planning processes in the interaction that led them to their specific actions. The structure of interviews was adapted from Sillars et al. (2000). The interviewing process was retrospective and guided by text messages between roommates which allowed participants to reflect on the conflict interaction and specific tactics used during the process.

### **Justification and Rationale**

Many scholars recognize the impact roommate relationships have on individuals' physical, mental, and social health (Dusselier et al., 2000; Lepore, 1992; Waldo, 1989). Conflict occurs in these relationships, and with the advancement and prominence of technology, many of these interactions occur through CMC channels (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). Campbell (2005) reports that young adults, the age group most likely to live with a roommate who is not a significant other, prefer to use text messaging for difficult conversations with one another. Roommate communication, particularly conflict, is often conducted through mobile phones via text message.

Dillard (1990) argues that in an influence attempt, individuals consider their goals, create and select plans for reaching those goals, and carry out their plans through a series of actions. Canary et al. (1988), Hindman (2007), and Sillars et al. (2000) recognize the role of GPA in conflict. Specifically, conflict and GPA has been primarily studied with a focus on goals and plans (Keck & Samp, 2007; Lakey & Canary, 2002). Little research has examined actions in conflict interactions. Dillard (1990) agrees that action is a somewhat problematic variable of this theory because actions can only be categorized as purposeful behaviors that are used to achieve a specific goal. In FTF

interactions, it can be difficult to uncover what actions can be classified as behaviors enacted to achieve an individual's specific goals. Actions in FTF settings occur quickly and there are often multiple actions taking place in an interaction. This can make it difficult to recall each action sequence and the plans and goals behind actions. Conversely, text messaging allows for more time to create and form messages and messages are archived and can be easily recalled.

Studying conflict interactions via text message provides a unique way to uncover the actions of the actor. Conflict messages that are sent via text are easily accessible, therefore recall of the specific messages in an interaction is not an issue. Text messages are often more direct and message-centered, but also allow individuals to share information that they might not feel comfortable sharing in a FTF interaction (Wright & Webb, 2011). Text messages themselves can be classified as actions according to GPA theory because interactants are putting their plans into action to reach their goal (Dillard, 1990). This study examines actions in conflict interactions between roommates via text message through the framework of GPA by exploring how roommates engage in and work through the process of GPA when in conflict interactions.

## **Participants**

A total of eight FTF, in-depth, qualitative interviews were conducted with four interviewees identifying as primarily initiators in the interaction and four interviewees primarily identifying as targets in the interaction. However, in a conflict interaction all parties develop conflict goals, therefore participants act as both initiators and targets throughout the interaction. Seven of the participants identified as female and one



participant identified as male. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 22 ( $M = 20.75$ ). Two of the eight participants lived on-campus with roommates they were involuntarily assigned while six of the participants lived off campus with roommates with whom they voluntarily decided to live. Seven participants lived with additional roommates or suitemates. Seven participants lived with roommates of the same sex. At the time of the study, one participant lived with his/her roommates for less than six months, four participants lived with their roommates for approximately six months to one year, two participants lived with their roommates for one to three years, and one participant lived with their roommate(s) for three or more years.

First, participants had to meet several eligibility criteria. Eligible participants included individuals who currently lived with a roommate or had lived with a roommate in the past year. This requirement aided recall and explanation of roommate conflict interactions. Individuals who lived with a significant other did not qualify for this study since those individuals may share funds and have a romantic interpersonal relationship with one another which may further complicate the GPA process (Sillars et al., 2000). Second, participants had to be emerging adults, individuals ages 18 to 25 to be interviewed for this study. Campbell (2005) reports that those in the emerging adulthood age range are more likely to use technology as a means of communication, making this age group ideal for studying conflict via texting. Additionally, participants for this study must have engaged in conflict with their roommate through text messaging and still have access to the messages from the conflict interaction to aid GPA process recall. The researcher recruited participants by speaking to classes and residence halls of first and

second-year students at a large Mid-Western University. Additional recruitment was conducted through snowball sampling.

## **Procedures**

During the course of the interview, participants were asked to access their text messages with their roommate. Additionally, participants were asked to read through the text message interaction. After each message was read by the participant, the interviewer asked specific questions about participant goals and planning processes and participant emotions during each specific interaction. Additional follow-up questions explored what participants hoped to achieve through their actions, their planning process for sending a particular message, and the goals that they were attempting to achieve through each message sent. Participants were also asked to explain their interpretation of their roommate's messages within the interaction. This method allowed participants to simulate the conflict and encouraged recall while reconstructing thoughts that occurred at the time of the conversation. Finally, participants described how their goals and tactic plans shifted as a result of their roommates' action messages, reported the conflict outcome, and remarked whether they felt the influence interaction was successful.

Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes and to ensure privacy each interview was conducted in a private office or conference room. Participation was voluntarily and participants were given a small incentive for their involvement. IRB approval (IRB-FY2016-134, January 19, 2016) was received (Appendix A) and informed consent was explained and signed (Appendix B) by participants before interviews took place to ensure that participants were taking part in the research willingly and were aware of the risks

and benefits of the study. With permission from the interviewees, interviews were audio recorded for transcribing purposes. The interview protocol was semi-structured (Appendix C). At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked to fill out a demographic survey (Appendix D). This survey inquired about age, sex, race, education, and job status of both the participant and roommate as well as the length of time they had lived with their roommate. All interviews were transcribed and, in the interest of participant privacy, each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym. Transcription resulted in 132 pages of text.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was read holistically and multiple readings were completed in order for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the data. Multiple readings of the data allow for themes to emerge (Richards, 2009). During the second and third reading of the transcripts, specific phrases and responses were pulled from the text. These key pieces of datum were read again and categorized into separate themes and eventually categorized into sub-themes. A comparison method was used to categorize data (Richards, 2009). Each unit of data was treated as an individual category and compared to the following data unit. If the two units of data were similar, they were placed in the same category; if they were determined to be different, a new category was created. This process continued until all data units were categorized appropriately. Individual labels were then assigned to each theme and sub-theme. This process allowed for a greater understanding of participants and aided in the discussion portion of this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **RESULTS**

Three themes emerged regarding GPA and roommate conflict via text-message. The first theme was the role that goals played in the conflict interactions between roommates, identity goals were the focus for most participants. Participants also identified arousal management and relational resource goals as secondary goals in their interactions. A second theme revealed participant experience with the process of GPA during a conflict interaction, specifically how participants weighed goals, the consistency of goals, specific and consistent tactic plans that roommates used throughout their conflict interaction and the reasons participants decided to exit the interaction. A final theme explored texting as a channel of communication in conflict interactions. Subthemes focus on primary goals, secondary goals and planning, and concerns participants had about this communication method.

#### **Role of Goals in the Interaction**

Primary and secondary goals play an important role in the GPA process. The presence of primary goals encouraged participants to engage in the interaction with their roommates. Overall, participants wanted their roommates to change how they understood the participant's identity as a person as well as their role as a roommate. These primary goals can be best understood as identity goals through change orientation goals. Participants wanted to change how their roommates communicated with the participant (i.e., I want my roommate to value my input to an issue that impacts the entire

household), how they viewed a particular situation or interaction between the participant and their roommate (i.e., I don't want my roommate to think I did something to be mean or malicious), or how they understood the participant as an individual and the responsibilities of their role as roommates (i.e., I want my roommate to understand that I am not responsible for making sure she remembers her keys to the room).

Additionally, although secondary goals generally deter individuals from taking part in the interaction, this study revealed that identity goals, typically categorized as secondary goals, emerged as primary goals in the conflict interactions, reinforcing participants' decisions to engage in the conflict interaction. Specifically, identity goals were the catalyst for the conflict and manifested in two ways: participants wanted their roommates to see them in a more positive or favorable way and participants also wanted their roommates to change their perception of the roommate role.

**Primary Goals.** In a conflict interaction, individuals feel disconnect between their actual situation and their ideal situation. In order to adjust the situation to their desired state of affairs individuals must analyze their goals in an interaction. The primary goals of an individual motivate interaction engagement. This study revealed that the primary goals of participants in an interaction were change orientation goals, or goals that attempt a change in target approach or understanding. Specifically, participants wanted to change their roommates' orientations toward their own identity which can be categorized as identity goals. Identity goals, which are typically characterized as secondary goals, emerged as a catalyst for the interaction, and therefore are categorized as primary goals in this study. While secondary goals generally counter an individual's decision to engage in a conflict, the secondary identity goals present for participants reinforced their desire to

engage in the interaction. Participants wanted their roommates to change their perception of the roommate role and the roommate relationship. Participants worked to accomplish these goals through exchanging text-messages with their roommates. Participants also identified their secondary goals which worked against their willingness to engage in the interaction. Primarily, participants identified their secondary goals as arousal management and relational resource goals which will be outlined later in this chapter.

Overall, participants wanted their roommate to either see them in a more favorable way or change how they defined their role as a roommate. Many participants worked to change how their roommates viewed them. Participants either wanted their roommates to see them as less of a villain in the situation, or participants wanted to change how their roommates identified their role as a roommate in the relationship.

I Am Not A Villain. Some participants felt as though their roommate identified them as an uncaring person or malicious. When asked about the goals of the interaction, one participant, Nicole, stated that “I wanted her to know that I was not the villain in this situation. I was actually trying to help, even though she took it across as me being the villain”. John also felt as though his roommate had the wrong impression when his roommate felt that he had purposely left him behind, he said "He was more upset that I left without him...I would be upset if I got left behind. I would never leave without him...I got very upset at the assumption that he didn't trust me, that I wouldn't bring him because I always bring him". John further explains how important his identity goals were in this interaction by reiterating that “I am upset that he doesn't have that trust. I'm not going to leave him behind”. Both Nicole and John felt as though their roommate had a

negative view of them and their overall goal was to convince their roommate to change their understanding.

Other participants also felt that their roommates had the wrong negative impression of them because their roommates felt as if the participants were blaming them for a specific incident. In these instance participants felt that their identity was being threatened in the interaction because they were being viewed as malicious or uncaring because their roommates interpreted their actions in an accusatory way. Both Caitlin and Abby wanted to expresses that they were not trying to blame their roommates in the interaction and worked to change their roommate's perception of their actions. During an argument about the noise level in the house, Caitlin wanted her roommate to realize "I wasn't trying to attack him back. I wasn't trying to necessarily be like, 'I'm not going to be quiet because you're not or because you woke me up the other day.' That wasn't really my goal so I wanted him to understand that". Abby also wanted her roommates to realize that she was not trying to be malicious whenever she asked her roommates to chip in to buy a new microwave stating that "...since they had deemed the borrowed one (microwave) broken, it needed to be replaced, because it was borrowed as a favor. I wasn't trying to blame it on any one". Later, when asked about her goals, Abby continued to reiterate that "...no one purposefully broke it. I'm not trying to blame it on anyone. My point is just that it needs to be replaced....I'm not targeting anybody". Much like Nicole and John, Caitlin and Abby felt as though their roommates had a negative impression of them and their goals in the interaction was to manage their identity with their roommates.

Although a many participants wanted to change their roommate's understanding of who they were as a person, other participants wanted to change their roommates understanding of their role as a roommate.

Roommate Roles. Some participants were interested in changing their roommate's expectation of roommate roles in the household. Participants and their roommates often disagreed on how roommates share responsibility in the household. One participant, Mollie, discussed how she and her roommate had differing views on what Mollie's role was as a roommate. In Mollie's interaction with her roommate she wanted her roommate to see the situation differently so that the responsibility of taking care of her roommate's cat would not be part of her role as a roommate. Because her roommate did not have the same interpretation of the situation, Mollie's wanted her roommate to know "... this isn't something that I should have to be burdened with. It's not something you get to put on me. I'm not up for this. I did feel like she was taking advantage of me and I wasn't okay with that". Through Mollie's interaction with her roommate, Mollie is attempting to get her roommate to change her view of the situation so that Mollie does not have to be considered responsible for the well-being of her roommate's cat.

Melanie also wanted her roommate to understand that her role as a roommate is not one in which she is responsible for her roommate's actions. When Melanie's roommate forgot her keys and needed into their residence hall room, Melanie wanted to change how her roommate viewed her role, stating that she wanted her roommate to know "...it's not my responsibility, like I can't make it back to let you in". In doing this Melanie hoped that her roommate would change how she viewed Melanie's role as a roommate. Melanie felt that her roommate put too much responsibility on her when she



said “she is not responsible enough to remember her own keys and as her roommate like I get it, I’ll be there if she need a bandaid or if I’m there I’ll unlock the door but it’s not my responsibility to make sure she has her keys, it’s not my responsibility to make sure that she is locking the door”. Although Melanie recognizes that as a roommate she can help her roommate out with certain needs and requests, she felt like her roommate had gone too far in expectations of what a roommate relationship should look like.

Overall, the identity goals of the participants centered on how participants were being perceived by their roommates. Participants hoped that their roommates would stop identify them as the villain in the interaction and also change how their roommates understood their roommate roles in the relationship.

**Secondary Goals.** Secondary goals work as a counterforce in an individual’s decision to engage in the interaction. Participants identified two types of primary goals in roommate conflict interactions through texts: arousal management goals and relational resource goals. Many participants identified arousal management goals as important. For example, Aria explained her apprehension with the conflict situation when she said “I didn’t exactly know how I should respond because I didn’t want the confrontation”. In this statement Arias uncertainty and apprehension are apparent. Because Aria did not want to confront her roommate she would have to plan the interaction in a way that would make the interaction less uncomfortable. Abby also expressed her concern for the interaction through identifying her arousal management goal stating “...it was pretty awkward...I didn’t want this to come up again”. Due to the past interactions with her roommates, Abby did not want to take part in another uncomfortable interaction, therefore she too had to consider how she would plan the interaction in order to decrease

her level of discomfort in the interaction. Some participants recognized that if they engaged in the situation, it may cause them to feel uncomfortable.

Additionally participants referenced relational resource goals by identifying that interaction with their roommate may have a negative impact on their relationship. Participants were concerned that engaging in the conflict interaction could risk the relationship. Jen expressed that there was a concern for her relationship with her roommate when Jen told her roommate “I’m sorry, I’m not trying to upset you. I am just trying to look out for you...” Jen clearly wanted her roommate to understand that Jen cares which implies that their relationship is an important factor in the interaction. Jen goes on to say that she wanted her roommate to “View me as a valuable friend” which is something she considered throughout the interaction. Nicole also expressed her concern for the relationship with her roommate if she continued to engage in the interaction stating “If I come at it again with her spite tone, me being like head on head, that would just be really difficult for our roommate relationship”. Both Jen and Nicole considered and identified their relational resource goals in the interaction in which they reflected on whether or not they should engage or continue to engage in the influence interaction.

Participants wanted to achieve their identity goals in each interaction. Overall, participants wanted to change how their roommate viewed them as a person, specifically, they did not want to be viewed as a villain and participants also wanted to change how their roommates perceived their roommate role. Participants also considered their secondary goals of arousal management and relational resource goals which worked as a counterforce in their willingness to engage.

## **Process of GPA in Roommate Interactions**

Participants worked through the GPA process in a very specific way. Before deciding to engage in the influence attempt with their roommate or deciding to further engage with their roommate, participants often weighed their primary and secondary goals, revealing that the primary goals continuously outweighed the secondary goals. This allowed participants to engage in the interactions. Although participants would weigh their goals throughout their interaction, they did not experience a shift in goals during the interaction. Many participants came up with specific tactic plans and messages to send in the interaction with their roommate in hopes of best accomplishing their identity goals. Finally, although participants continued to reinforce their goals in the interaction, some individuals eventually exited the interaction after several failed attempts to reach their goals.

**Weighing goals.** In the GPA process interactants decide whether to engage in the influence attempt by weighing their primary and secondary goals. When primary goals outweigh secondary goals, participants interact. When secondary goals outweigh, participants first determine if there is a suitable plan to meet the goals, otherwise they do not interact. Throughout their attempts to reach their identity goals, participants weighed primary goals against secondary goals to decide whether or not to engage in the influence attempt. Arousal management goals and relational resource goals were the most prevalent secondary goals of the participants, but were ultimately outweighed by their identity goals.

Some participants experienced apprehension in their interaction with their roommates. When Aria's roommate engaged the conflict situation she reported that "I

didn't exactly know how I should respond, because I didn't want the confrontation but the same time I was kind of in my feelings about how she approached me with the situation". Here Aria is weighing her arousal management goal of not wanting to be in a conflict situation against her goal to address how her roommate makes her feel. Aria's apprehension to engage in the confrontation represents her arousal management goal while her reaction to how she was approached about the situation work as motivation for her to interact. Caitlin stated that when she was in conflict with her roommate that she "...didn't express how angry I was because I didn't want it to be an argument, but I was very annoyed when he texted me this because he keeps me up every single night yelling". Caitlin's desire to not get into an argument with her roommate worked against her desire to engage in the interaction, while her annoyance with how her roommate interacts with her reinforces her desire to engage in the interaction. Again, arousal management goals are being weighed against the other interaction goals in the situation in order to determine if and how Caitlin would respond.

In some cases, arousal management may have been a goal at the start of the interaction, but lost importance as the interaction progressed. In Abby's situation, after attempting to influence her roommate to quiet down her guests she eventually proclaimed that "I was really frustrated with being courteous about it at that point", Abby's initial arousal management goals lost importance throughout the interaction and her primary goal heavily outweighed her secondary goals throughout the remainder of the interaction. This supported Abby's decision to engage in the interaction. Nicole felt the need to engage after weighing her arousal management goals against her identity goals stating that "I was trying to help her emotions but also help our situation, so it wouldn't be like

continually awkward”. Nicole felt that if she did not confront the situation that it would cause a more uncomfortable encounter than if she decided to engage. In this case, Nicole’s arousal management goal worked as a catalyst for the interaction rather than a counterforce.

Relational resource goals also were a part of participants’ process when it came to weighing goals. In Nicole’s case, she stated in regards to her relationship with her roommate that “I’m trying to make her living experience good as well as I’m trying to make mine good,” indicating that she wants to have a positive relationship with her roommate. Nicole’s statement about her relational resource goals as stated earlier also reveals how she weighed her goals in this interaction when she said “I am trying to find this peace with her. If I come at it again with her spite tone, me being like head on head, that would just be really difficult for our roommate relationship”. Again, Nicole’s relationship with her roommate was important, therefore her relational resource goal of having a good relationship with her roommate worked with her identity goal in the interaction.

In some cases, a lack of relational resource goals influenced some participants’ decision to engage in the interaction. Melanie stated that “I didn’t really care if I was coming off as bitchy at this point she knew, we are not the best of friends, she had to figure it out”. Because she does not see her roommate as a friend, the desire to have that type of a relationship is not important for Melanie. Therefore, she was more willing to engage in the conflict interaction because she did not see her relationship with her roommate as an important goal.

In many cases, participants weighed their secondary goals to decide to engage in the conflict interaction in which they considered their arousal management and relational resource goals against their identity goals. However in some instances the presence of these secondary goals helped to motivate participants' primary identity goals. Participants ultimately felt as though their primary goals outweighed their secondary goals and chose to engage in the interaction. The decision to engage in the interaction revealed the importance of identity goals in conflict interactions between roommates.

**Goal consistency.** GPA posits that throughout an interaction, individuals constantly reevaluate their goals and goals can shift and change throughout the interaction. Considering this, participants were asked to assess their goals throughout the conflict interaction. In each interaction, the goals of the participants were very consistent and there was almost no shift in goals for any of the participants, contrary to the general process of GPA. The initial identity goals of the participants remained, regardless of their roommates' actions.

The consistency of the participant's goals can be seen through their reiteration of their messages and their desire for their roommate(s) to see the situation from their point of view. Abby felt that her roommates were not understanding her after several attempts to change their orientation to the problem of agreeing to replace the microwave. When asked about her goals later on in the interaction, Abby replied "I wanted to establish, yeah the black microwave works, but the red one doesn't. It's borrowed. It needs to be replaced. We need to replace what we as a group have broken.... They still weren't understanding what I was saying". When asked about her goal with another message in the interaction, Abby still expressed her same goals "Again, I just don't think everyone

understood the concept of if someone does you a favor and you break something, you replace it. I don't think everyone was getting that". When participants felt that they were not being heard or understood, they stood by their initial goals and continued to try and reinforce them.

Other participants also expressed a consistency in their identity goals in their interactions with their roommates and continued to reinforce these goals for the good of their relationship. For example, when Nicole was asked about her goals with a particular text message that she sent to her roommate she stated that "I wanted her, again, to know what I was coming at, not just trying to embarrass her because she was talking to a guy. From her mind, if she did that to someone else, that's what it would be like. I could see where she was coming from on that, but I needed to reiterate as my point as much as I can". Nicole continued to strive to reach her identity goals with her roommate, which is illustrated through her explanation of continuing to express her intentions of the situation to her roommate.

Some participants felt so strongly about their goals that they did not consider changing or shifting their goals in their interaction. When asked about her roommate's intentions in the interaction, Melanie reported that "I think she was trying to be consistent, trying to get me to come back, but when I was just kind of putting my foot down in a sense". Although Melanie felt her roommate was persistent in her own goals, Melanie stuck by her own goals in the interaction.

Participants stood by their initial identity goals in their interactions, despite the actions of their roommates. Some participants chose to reinforce their goals because they felt as though their roommates were not understanding their position in the conflict. Other

participants wanted to improve their relationship with their roommates through their initial goals and continue to reiterate this point throughout their interaction. And finally some participants felt so strongly about their initial goals that they refused to abandon them, regardless of the actions of their roommates.

**Tactic plans and action strategies.** In the GPA process interactants continuously reevaluate their plans and actions throughout the interaction. However, much like the consistency of participant goals, the tactic plans and action strategies did not vary greatly throughout the interactions. Although participants wanted to ensure the success of their goals, their attempts to change their roommates' orientations towards their situations and their identity did not vary greatly from message to message.

Many participants carefully crafted their messages to ensure that their roommate would best understand the participant's message and that the participant's roommate would change their orientation to the situation. Participants also hoped to achieve their identity goals in the interaction by carefully crafting their messages to their roommates. Melanie described why she crafted one of her messages in a specific way when she stated that "I was annoyed, it's (Melanie's text-message) pretty short pretty mean looking, but I was just super annoyed". Because Melanie was annoyed with her roommate, Melanie responded in specific way, with a short straight forward message, in hopes that her roommate would understand how she was feeling. Aria expressed a similar tactic in response to her roommate when she reported that "... I was upset and I had been upset so I was a little snarky in my text messages in responding back to her". Again, Aria crafted her message with the hope that the structure of the message would convey Aria's feelings about the situation to her roommate. When Mollie wanted her roommate to understand



that she didn't want to watch her roommate's cat, she also constructed her message in a very specific way "I didn't want to watch the cat, but at this point I wasn't going to be super bitchy about it. "Hey, this is not something I want to do. Please don't make me do it. In fact, I'm not going to let you make me do it. I would really like it if you could take her somewhere". Although Mollie did not want to come across as rude she wanted to ensure that her message clearly demonstrated her position on the issue. Participants worked to craft specific messages to reach their goals and to get their thoughts across to their roommates.

Many participants continued to reiterate similar messages throughout their interaction with their roommate, regardless of how their roommate responded to previous messages. When asked about how she crafted a message to her roommate, Aria stated that "...this is me more umm I guess breaking down again that I'm not taken into consideration and that she doesn't always wash the dishes or say that she takes out the trash when um not more than I do, it's not like she does more than me". Melanie also chose to respond in very similar ways to her roommate reporting that the intention of her message was to "...reinforce like even though all of this stuff happened to you, I still have class". Melanie's continuation to attempt to reinforce the same message shows the consistency of her tactics.

In some instances, the participant's roommates attempted to exit the interaction, however participants continued to reinforce their identity goals through similar tactics. Nicole continued to use the same tactic plan in her attempt to change her roommate's orientation to the situation. After several messages to her roommate Nicole said that "She was trying to cut off the conversation. 'I'm done talking about emotions.' I then after that

replied saying, 'No, I'm not done, because I want you to know that I'm not trying to offend you.' Still again trying to cover my bases". Despite Nicole's roommate's attempt to end the conversation, Nicole continued to try and get her roommate to understand that she did not want to offend her. Another participant, Jen, felt that her roommate was lying to her and continued to attempt to get her roommate to confess. Jen said that in her initial messages to her roommate that "I wanted to ask her, give her the opportunity to tell me kind of because we know that she has been lying... I feel like I gave her the opportunity to be like, 'Hey, yeah. I already know'. Jen continued to discuss her tactics later on in the interaction reporting "Then I said 'Are you okay,' just because some time had passed... and I'm like 'text me back'. When asked about her plan for this message, Jen reported that she sent it "...because I knew she was going to lie to me and I feel like it was just a way to get the conversation going again. I just want her to admit, yeah, he cheated on me". Again, Jen's plan was for her roommate to confess to her, regardless of her attempt to exit the conversation. Overall, participants were very consistent in their plans and their messages to their roommates which reinforced the consistency of their goals in the interaction.

**Exiting.** One way the GPA process ends in an interaction is when one or more of the parties decide to exit the situation. Eventually, some participants did decided to exit the interaction, but only after several failed attempts of changing their roommates' orientation. Some participants felt as if their roommate was not receptive of their attempts to reconcile with their roommate. Other participants felt like they were being attacked by their roommates and wanted to end the conversation. Additionally, participants felt that

their roommate was trying to change the topic of the conversation so they decided to stop the conflict interaction.

Nicole worked to come to an understanding with her roommate, however, when Nicole's roommate refused to discuss their problems, Nicole stated:

I am trying to do everything I can to make her life easier, because I know she is struggling being away from her parents, being away from her friends. I wanted to make that easier. Me trying to do this again, make this easier, she says, 'Just leave it alone.' I'm like, 'Fine. I'm done. I'm not going to try to make your life easier when I already do all this other stuff.'

Due to the fact that her roommate continued to try and end the conversation, Nicole eventually decided to end the interaction without meeting her goals. Abby also chose to exit the conversation with her roommates when at the end of the interaction she said "At that point, everyone was ganging up on me. I didn't think it was going to get anywhere constructive or productive... so I just said, 'Among other things, I'm not going to deal with this petty microwave incident. Forget about it'". When Abby felt like her attempts to change the orientation of her roommates continued to fail, she decided that she should exit the conversation.

When Jen's roommate continued to try and change the topic of the conversation, Jen eventually responded with "OK". She reported that she sent that message because "I was stuck with it. I didn't care anymore because she's just going to send stuff like that..." Ultimately, sending this message allowed her to exit the conversation and her influence attempt with her roommate ended. Caitlin also became frustrated with the responses with her roommates and decided to exit the interaction stating that "...this conversation, to me, was kind of frustrating me and it was kind of pointless. No matter what the outcome was, one of us was not going to be happy and I realized that."

Overall, participants were very consistent in their tactic plans and messages to change the orientation of their roommate. Although many of the participants' roommates continued to resist the influence attempts, participants' plans and actions did not deviate. Only after multiple attempts to change the orientation of their roommates did participants decide to exit the interaction. The goals, plans, and actions of the participants remained consistent in all conflict interactions.

### **Texting in Roommate Interactions**

Texting in itself was used as a strategy in the conflict interactions. When asked about their reasoning behind texting their roommates instead of having a FTF interaction, many participants felt as though texting was the best channel of communication to help them achieve their primary goals as well as help them plan their messages to manage their secondary goals. On the other hand, some participants also realized and reported the concerns to texting in a conflict interaction with their roommate.

**Why participants chose to text.** Many participants viewed texting as the best way to enact their influence interaction with their roommate. Participants felt that through the communication channel of a text message they were more likely to be successful in their conflict interactions. Additionally, participants agreed that through texting they were able to better plan their messages so that they could meet their primary goals while their arousal management concerns were also addressed.

Overall, many participants felt as though their roommates may be more willing to engage in the interaction if they confronted their roommate via text. Participants discussed that if their roommate was more likely to engage in the interaction via text,

than participants would have a better chance to share their thoughts and feelings on their situation with their roommate, and in doing so participants would be more likely to achieve their identity goals. Nicole said she chose this method of communication because “She doesn't like to confront anything. Me confronting her over text was letting her know, ‘Hey, I'm serious. We gotta talk about this’.” Caitlin also felt as though her roommate would be more likely to engage in the interaction if it was enacted via text:

The reason why we text about things is because I consider myself to be pretty good at dealing with conflict... Will is the complete opposite. He's terrible at dealing with conflict... Any time you bring up anything in person to him, he shuts down and he won't talk or he just gets defensive. That's kind of why we result in texting.

Participants chose to text their roommates rather than have a FTF conversation so that their roommate was more likely to participate in the interaction. John notes that generally in a FTF conflict with his roommate “He'll walk away, he'll shut the door. I know if he gets a text he will probably read it”. To John, texting allowed his roommate, who would normally avoid the conflict in a FTF setting, to at least see his message in an attempt to get him to understand his point of view. Nicole also discusses that through texting her roommate is more willing to share information and communicate:

...it just happened immediately... When she started replying that, I wanted to keep replying texts, because she is a very closed person and I knew if we tried to talk face to face, it would be kind of difficult. I figured I'd maybe get more out of her this way, because usually people are way more open on media rather than face to face where you can get offended.

Because Nicole had previous interactions with her roommate in the past, where talking FTF proved to be unsuccessful, Nicole found that texting was a way to carry on the conversation and allow her and her roommate to continue to the interaction in a more productive way. Texting allowed participants to feel like they were more likely to achieve

their goals in the conflict than if they had tried to have the same conversation with their roommate in a FTF setting.

Participants also viewed texting as a way to plan to achieve their secondary arousal management goals in the interaction when these goals were also viewed as important to participants. Nicole said that “Over the text, I did get my point across, and so she knew what was happening, and I'm happy I did it immediately so she knew I cared.” Texting allowed her to quickly and efficiently carry out her influence attempt and texting was an element of her tactic plan to make sure her roommate knew she cared. John also used texting as part of his interaction plan to ensure that his roommate would be exposed to his message stating that “He can shout over me, face to face. We can leave, he can get physical...Usually, if you get a text, you're going to read it no matter what”. John was also taking into consideration his arousal management goals in his decision to text so that he did not end up in a shouting match or a physical altercation with his roommate.

The arousal management goals of the participant's roommates were also a factor in their decision to text. Jen chose to text her roommate so that her roommate would not be as uncomfortable discussing the situation stating that “She would rather somebody tell her over text so that she can deal with her issues I guess... She would not know what to say if somebody told her in person”. There is also evidence in John's situation that his roommate was trying to ease the tension level in the conversation with his use of GIF's. John reported that his roommate “...sends a lot of GIFs. Less confrontational... You can see how much humor can be put, like put a GIF into it. It's almost like he's expecting it...because it's entertaining...conflict has never been so amusing.” The use of GIFs in

the conversation helped to lighten the mood thereby creating a less uncomfortable interaction environment and allowing John to meet his arousal management goal.

Texting was used as the method of communication in conflict interactions to increase the success of the participant's goals. This method of communication also helped participants to plan their influence attempt and meet their arousal management goals and the arousal management goals of their roommates. Although participants saw the benefits of texting they also recognized the drawbacks to using this channel of communication in their interactions.

**Concerns about texting.** Many participants realized the loss of context and the absence of nonverbals that occurred in their conflict interactions through texting. Participants felt as if they were unable to clearly get their goals across in the interaction. Additionally, participants were frustrated that their roommates could exit the interaction very easily. Nicole said that when she approached her roommate about the problem FTF after their initial text message exchange that "I think when I came at her with this more calm voice, rather than over the text, you have no emotions, you have no facial expressions. When I came at her like trying to peace, be a peace maker in the situation, she saw that...". Nicole was able to better convey her goals in the FTF interaction than over text message with her roommate. Melanie also felt a loss of understanding in her messages with her roommate because "...you can't convey tone in a text message". John reports that when he and his roommate have a conflict "We try not to do it over text, because of loss of context with each other". Caitlin agreed that discussing issues FTF can be a more effective method for communicating stating that "We have to talk to each other face-to-face. That has been my goal this entire time, to get them to realize that. I think

finally after all this miscommunication happened, I think they finally both realized that”. And although Nicole recognized the benefits of using text messaging as a channel of a communication she came to the understanding that it may not always fix the situation when she said “Once you realize that you can't completely solve a problem over texts with no facial expression, no emotion, and you realize you do have to have some interaction with the person, then you'll have peace”. Participants felt as though there were some missing communication elements when they used texting as a method for their influence attempt which may have created barriers to participants achieving their goals in the interaction.

Additionally, participants realized that although texting may allow for more open communication, their roommates are able to exit the conversation fairly easily. Caitlin explained that “Then there's also this message that he didn't even reply to. Neither of them did... I replied to this hoping that they would reply...but they didn't”. Her roommates ended the conversation and the conflict interaction ended before Caitlin could achieve her interaction goals. Abby also attempted to reach her goals with her roommate but eventually reported that “She never responded, and that was that”. Much like the participants that decided to exit the conflict interaction after several failed attempts to meet their interaction goals, participants found that it was just as easy for their roommates to exit the interaction without a resolution to the situation.

Conflict interactions between roommates that occur via text are unique in a variety of ways. Identity goals seem to be at the forefront of these interactions with participants attempting to change the way their roommates perceive their identity as an individual as well as a roommate. Weighing primary and secondary goals was also a



factor in these interactions with the presence of specific secondary goals strengthening the identity goals of the participants, while the absence of goals also worked to reinforce identity goals of other participants. Additionally, participant's goals remained the same throughout the interaction and they created specific messages to help to achieve those goals. The tactics of the participants in their attempts to reach their goals remained consistent throughout the course of the interactions and many participants decided only to exit the interaction after several failed attempts of change orientation. Participants also identified how texting about their conflict situation helped to ensure the success of their primary goals as well helped them to plan and meet the secondary goals of both themselves and their roommates. However, participants also came to the conclusion that when texting about these types of interactions, there is often a loss of context and it can be more difficult to come to a resolution when communicating via text-message.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study examined conflict and text-messaging through GPA theory. Roommates identify identity goals as their primary goals for engaging in conflict interactions. When roommates weigh their primary and secondary goals, they almost always decide to engage in the conflict interaction despite the resistance they feel with their secondary goals. Roommates who engage in conflict through texting create tactic plans and continue to repeat the same action over and over without readjusting goals or plans. Not only are roommate tactics consistent, the goals of roommates in conflict via text-messaging are persistent and generally not reevaluated at any point in the conflict. Roommates choose texting as a channel for conflict because they feel as though they can better achieve their primary goals while also managing their secondary arousal management goals in the interaction. The results of this study reveal an important understanding of GPA and text messaging in roommate conflict interactions. First, this chapter will discuss how these findings relate to current research. A discussion on primary and secondary goals in roommate conflict will be addressed, as well as the process of GPA in roommate conflict interactions, and how texting is used in these interactions in relation to research on GPA and conflict. Next, this chapter will address both the theoretical and practical implications from this study. Finally, the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research is discussed.

This study yields several major findings. First, data analysis revealed the types of goals roommates have in conflict interactions. Interestingly, identity goals, which are

generally identified as secondary goals (Dillard, 1990), were identified as primary goals by nearly all of the participants and were the driving force in the interactions. Trost and Yoshimura (2006) argue that at times secondary goals can also work to reinforce primary goals which was the case in these interactions. Overall, participants were concerned with how their roommate viewed them and how their roommate understood their role as a roommate. Hocker and Wilmot (2014) argue that identity issues and relational issues are almost always at the center of conflicts. In some cases, identity goals were under the surface of the interaction and were only revealed after discussing the overall goals of the interaction with participants. For instance, Melanie wanted her roommate to start remembering her keys; however, when Melanie revealed her overall goal in the interaction, Melanie reported that she wanted her roommate to stop putting responsibility on Melanie for her roommate's actions. This supports the idea that identity goals are often core of the conflict but may be disguised as topic goals (Hocker & Wilmot, 2014).

Identity goals drove the interaction and manifested in change orientation goals in all of the participants' interactions. Ultimately, participants hoped to change how their roommate understood and approached their specific situation with the underlying goal that they would also change their understanding of the participant's identity. Dillard (1990) suggests that primary and secondary goals can come to the surface when an individual has a specific motive in the interaction. This may explain the use of change orientation goals with the presence of identity goals in these interactions. The identity goals of the participants in this study were so important that instead of working as a counterforce for the interaction, identity goals drove the interaction.

Weighing goals was an important step in the GPA process for participants. According to Wilson et al. (2000) messages that attempt to achieve one goal may in fact interfere with the success of another. Participants discussed their secondary arousal management goals and relational resource goals. Dillard (1990) posits that secondary goals work as a counter force to an interaction. The presence of arousal management goals and relational resources goals worked as a counterforce to participant identity goals. Participants wanted to avoid putting and their roommates in an uncomfortable situation and wanted to preserve their relationship in the interaction which interfered with their desire to address their identity goals in the interaction.

This study also revealed that there were some missing goals in roommate conflict interactions. Although roommates identified secondary goals of arousal management and relational resource, they did not identify any material or physical asset goals or interaction goals. Additionally, secondary goals often come to the forefront due to reoccurring motivations in an individual's life (Dillard et al., 1989). Therefore it is possible that arousal management and relational resources goals were the only secondary goals present in these interactions because concerns for how comfortable participants were interacting with their roommate as well as the importance of the relationship between participants and their roommates came up in the past. There were also many primary goals that did not come up in these interactions including goals to gain assistance, obtain permission, and enforce rights and obligations. Multiple primary goals can be at work in an interaction according to Dillard (1990). However, this study revealed that identity goals were the only primary goals present in roommate conflict interactions.

Another important finding in this research suggests that roommates who engage in conflict via text-message work through the GPA process in a unique way. How participants weighed goals, the tactics that they used in their interactions, and participants consistent and persistent goals and tactics revealed interesting aspects of roommate conflict via text-message.

Although many participants experienced multiple secondary goals, such as arousal management goals and relational resource goals, their identity goals, outweighed secondary goals. In every instance participants primary goals outweighed their secondary goals which allowed for the conflict interaction to take place. Dillard (1990) argues that secondary and primary goals are opposing forces and when the two collide, an individual may decide to abandon the interaction all together. Participants acknowledged and considered their secondary goals but their identity goals were so important that they went forward with the conflict interaction.

This study also uncovered how roommates created and carried out tactic plans in a conflict interaction. According to the theory, multiple plans are developed and considered before an individual decides which plan to enact (Dillard, 1999). Additionally, individuals in will often rely on the previous interactions or imagine their interaction with the person they are conversing with during the development in their plans (Berger & Jordan, 1992). However, participants in this study showed little awareness for their planning process in their conflict interaction, despite the fact that this method of communication allows for more planning time (Ishii, 2010; Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). This lack of recall or cognition of planning might also be due to the retrospective nature

of this study. Participants may not have been able to recall the various plans they considered during their conflict with their roommate because too much time had passed.

Overall, participants were very consistent with their tactics throughout their conflict interactions. Participants constantly reiterated or rephrased their messages during the duration of the conflict with their roommate. Plans can continue to develop and change throughout an interaction according to Berger and Jordan (1992). However, in this study plans were repetitive and unwavering. Participants overall were very consistent in their attempt to change their roommates orientation to the situation and to their identity. Only when a participant's roommate attempted to exit the interaction did participants hint at reevaluating their tactics; however, they ultimately ended up sending very similar messages regardless of the actions of their roommates.

The goals of participants in this study also stayed consistent throughout the conflict interactions. Schrader and Dillard (1998) describe GPA as an ongoing process where individuals constantly reevaluate their goals. Through this process, goals are likely to change in an interaction due to the response of the other party (Schrader & Dillard, 1998). Surprisingly, contrary to this previous research, the response of the targets did not seem to alter the initial goals in the interaction, and the majority of the participants never reevaluated their interaction goals. Their initial goals at the start of the interaction remained in-tact. This may be due to the lack of other awareness in their interactions. According to Lakey and Canary (2002) individuals use distributive tactics to ignore the goals of the other party in the interaction entirely to achieve their own goals. This dismissal of the roommates' goals in the interaction may have impacted the participants' willingness to reevaluate their own goals in the conflict.

Finally, results from this study uncovered why roommates decide to use texting as the communication channel for conflict interactions. Generally, participants viewed texting as a means to reach their goals. Overall, participants felt as though they would be better able to achieve their conflict goals through texting because it allowed for more open discussion and honesty. This supports the research of Wright and Webb (2011) that argues that individuals are more likely to share personal information via CMC than in FTF settings. Participants felt that using texting as the channel of communication in these interactions would allow them to be more about the problem as well as allow for their roommate to be more honest about the issue.

Participants also used texting as a mode of communication in conflict interactions to decrease the arousal management goals of themselves as well as their roommates. Many participants were worried that engaging in the conflict would be uncomfortable, especially if they were to talk to their roommate in a FTF situation. Therefore, participants reported that they felt as if texting would allow themselves and their roommate to be more comfortable would allow for a less intense conflict situation. This further supports Campbell's (2005) argument that individuals may use mobile phones as a barrier in emotionally difficult situations and that young people in particular are more likely to text about difficult situations than discuss problems FTF.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This investigation revealed numerous implications of the GPA process in roommate conflict via text message. First, the types of goals in these interactions were revealed as primarily identity goals. This aligns with previous research which reports that

identity goals are generally at the core of conflict and often overlap or reinforce other conflict goals (Hocker & Wilmot, 2014). Additionally, although Dillard (1990) argues that goals are constantly reevaluated during an interaction this investigation supports the idea that interactants may not reevaluate their goals during a conflict interaction. In some contexts, an individual's goals may be so important that they are consistent in what they want to achieve in an interaction. This consistency may also be due to a lack of other awareness (Lahey & Canary, 2002) or the goals of the other parties in an interaction.

Additionally this study reveals how roommates in conflict via text-message work through the GPA process. Results from this investigation supports past research on secondary goals and their ability to work as a counterforce in the conflict interaction (Dillard, 1990), however, secondary goals never outweighed the primary goals in roommate conflict interactions. Contrary to past research (Dillard, 1990), participants did not spend a lot of time planning or were unable to recall their planning process in the interaction and continued to use similar tactic plans throughout the conflict interaction. Because planning is so instantaneous and automatic in an interaction (Dillard, 1990), individuals may not be aware of their planning process or may not go through the steps of creating multiple plans based on previous situations and interactions.

The consistency in the plans and goals of participants may also be due to their age. According to Pecchioni, Wright, and Nussbaum (2015), young adults, or individuals who are considered emerging adults, tend to be more controlling in their conflicts. Although this age group is aware that they should be more cooperative in their conflict interaction, they have yet to master how to engage in collaborative conflict and continue to be controlling in conflict interactions (Pecchioni et al., 2015). Therefore, participant's



desires to continue to enact the same plans in their interactions, and their lack of goal reevaluation may be due in part, to their age. Participants' consistency throughout the interaction may have helped them feel more in control during the conflict interaction.

The lack of planning revealed in this study also has theoretical implications in the study of CMC and conflict. Although CMC allows for longer response time which allows for more planning to take place (Ishii, 2010; Ramirez & Broneck, 2009), individuals may view texting as a more instantaneous form of communication and may not utilize the asynchronicity in the interaction to plan effective messages. However, texting was selected as the channel of communication to help participants achieve their goals in hopes of increasing open communication and decreasing awkward or uncomfortable feelings in the conflict interaction. This supports Wright and Webb's (2011) argument that CMC allows for individuals to have a more open and honest conversation while also allowing for a barrier for uncomfortable situations.

Practical implications of this study centers on the lack of knowledge in the planning process. Participants in this investigation did not create new plans in their interaction, and struggled or failed at achieving their goals. If individuals decide to text in a conflict interaction it may be useful for them to recognize how their roommate is responding to their messages and adapt their plans to achieving their goals before crafting their next message. Roommates may also find it beneficial to recognize their roommate's goals in the interaction and then reevaluating their goals before continuing to engage in the conflict. This may help roommates realize how their goals are similar as well as take into consideration the competing goals in the interaction which may help them develop more thoughtful and effective plans.

When conflict is carried out through text-messaging roommates should also recognize that although texting can help to open communication up in an interaction, it may not be the most effective way to solve a conflict. This study uncovered that although texting was helpful in allowing for information to be freely shared, it was very hard to come to a resolution to the conflict due to the lack of understanding and context in the message exchanges through texting. Most participants either exited the conflict interaction with their roommate without reaching their goals or had to have a FTF interaction to resolve the conflict. Therefore, texting may be an ideal communication channel at the start of a conflict interaction, but a FTF setting may be helpful later on in the interaction for resolution purposes.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

One limitation of this study was the sex demographics of the participants with all but one participant identifying as female. In future studies, both males and females should be studied to see if there are sex differences in the GPA process regarding roommate conflict. All but one participant lived in same-sex households, therefore another consideration for future research may be to analyze cross-sex households and identify differences in roommate goals in conflict.

Another limitation present in this study was the retrospective approach. Although this approach was beneficial in many ways, participants had a difficult time recalling all of their goals in the interaction as well as their planning process throughout the conflict. The length of time that had passed after the conflict took place may have had an impact on how much information participants could recall about the interaction. Future research

in this area should attempt to study conflict through text-messaging in real time so researchers can get a greater understanding of the planning process and goals of the participants in a conflict interaction.

A final limitation of this study is the lack of dyadic analysis. Participants only represented one party in the conflict. This led to a lack of understanding of all of the goals in the interaction and how participant's roommates were impacted or influenced by the messages of the participants. In future studies researchers should consider interviewing all parties in the conflict interaction to get a greater understanding of how GPA is utilized in this type of interaction.

This research examines the ongoing process of GPA theory in roommate conflicts via text messaging. While this study examines a niche group of individuals there are important theoretical and practical implications for both GPA theory as well as roommate conflict as a result of this study. Findings suggest that identity goals are most prominent in roommate conflict. These goals were so important in roommate conflict that goals were often not reevaluated in conflict interactions. Furthermore, these results reveal that there is a lack of planning or a lack of planning cognition in these interactions, despite the fact that this channel of communication allows for more cognitive planning time. The use of text-messaging as a channel also proved to be an important aspect of roommate conflict and GPA. Text-messaging was used as a means to reach participants goals in a conflict interaction and although there was a loss of context accompanied with this channel of communication, it helped participants manage arousal management goals while also allowing for more open communication among roommates. Identifying how GPA is used in roommate conflict interactions via text-messaging helps expand

understanding regarding the importance of roommate relationships as well as the influence technology has on conflict and roommate goals.

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## APPENDICIES

### **Appendix A: Missouri State University IRB Approval**

To:

Melissa Maier

Communications

Date: Jan 19, 2016 12:31 PM PST

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption

Study #: IRB-FY2016-134

Study Title: Roommate Conflict: An Actions Approach to Conflict through Text-Messaging

This submission has been reviewed by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was determined to be exempt from further review.

Investigator's Responsibilities:

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented. Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:

PI: Melissa Maier

Co-PI:

Primary Contact: Shaley Moore

Other Investigators: Shaley Moore



## **Appendix B: Informed Consent**

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

**Missouri State University**

**College of Arts and Letters**

**Roommate Conflict: An Actions Approach to Conflict through Text-Messaging**

**Melissa Maier, Ph.D. and Shaley Moore**

#### **Introduction**

You have been asked to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the study and the procedures involved. The investigator will also explain the project to you in detail. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, be sure to ask the investigator. If you have more questions later, Melissa Maier, the person mainly responsible for this study, will answer them for you. You may contact the investigator(s) at:

Dr. Melissa Maier

Shaley Moore

Phone: 417-836-4423

Phone: 417-439-2646

Email: [MelissaMaier@missouristate.edu](mailto:MelissaMaier@missouristate.edu)

Email: [Shaley14@live.missouristate.edu](mailto:Shaley14@live.missouristate.edu)

You will need to sign this form giving us your permission to be involved in the study. Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation.

#### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the conflict process between roommates when conflict is occurring through text-messaging. Specifically, the process of how roommates set goals, create plans of influence, and enact those plans through text messaging is the focus of this study.

#### **Description of Procedures**

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will last about 45 minutes to one hour. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions regarding your relationship with your roommate, your conflict interactions with your roommate that occurred over text-messaging, as well as questions relating to your goals and plans in the conflict interaction and how your actions impacted these elements. At the end of the interview, you will be given a survey asking you to provide demographic information (i.e. age, sex, and race). Interviews will be audio taped, and the

interviews will take place in a private quiet setting agreed upon by the investigator and participant. Total time expected for the interview is anywhere between 45 minutes to one hour.

**What are the risks?**

There are no known risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

**What are the benefits?**

You may not benefit directly from this study. However, the information from this study will help researchers to better understand roommate conflict from a new perspective. Your participation will also help researchers understand the process of setting goals, creating plans, and enacting those plans in a conflict interaction via text-messaging.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

The results of this study are confidential and only the investigators will have access to the information which will be kept in a locked facility at the University. Your name or personal identifying information will not be used in any published reports of this research. All information gathered during this study will be destroyed two years after the completion of the project.

**Consent to Participate**

If you want to participate in this study, Roommate Conflict: An Actions Approach to Conflict through Text-Messaging, you will be asked to sign below:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from this study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

I will begin by introducing myself, and work to build rapport by asking informal questions, making connections with interviewees. I will also hand out informed consent forms and ask the interviewee if they have any questions and ask them to sign the informed consent form.

1. Tell me about your relationship with your roommate?
  - a. How did you decide to live together? Where you assigned or did you voluntarily decide to live together?
  - b. How long have you lived with one another?
  - c. Do you live with any other roommates?
2. Tell me about the conflict situation that you and your roommate went through?
  - a. How did this conflict start?
    - i. Did it start via text or FTF?
    - ii. Did you ever discuss this conflict in a FTF setting?
    - iii. Who initiated the conflict interaction through text messaging?
  - b. What did the conflict address?
3. What were your initial goals in this conflict interaction?
  - a. What do you think were the goals of your roommate?
4. Let's look at a specific text message, imagine you are reading this message from your roommate for the first time.
  - a. What are you thinking and feeling as you read this message?
  - b. How did you interpret this message from your roommate?
    - i. What did this message mean to you?
  - c. After reading this message, what was your initial reaction?
5. Now let's look at your response to your roommate's message.
  - a. What did you want to achieve by responding in this way?
  - b. Why did you choose to respond this way?
  - c. Why did you use specific phrases, words, grammar and emoticons in this particular message?

Questions 4 and 5 will be repeated for various messages within the conflict interaction.

6. What was the ultimate outcome of this conflict situation?
  - a. Where you satisfied with the outcome?
7. How did this conflict impact your relationship with your roommate?
8. Is there anything you wish to tell me that we have not already discussed?

A survey collecting demographic information will be distributed at the conclusion of the interview. Interviewees will be thanks for their time and participation in this study.

## Appendix D: Demographic Survey

Please answer the following questions as best possible.

1. What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What sex do you identify as?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Other
3. What is your race?
  - a. African American
  - b. Asian/Pacific islander
  - c. Caucasian
  - d. Hispanic/Latino
  - e. Native American
  - f. Other
4. What is your current standing as a student?
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
5. Are you employed?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
6. How long have you lived with your roommate?
  - a. Less than six months
  - b. 6 months – 1 year
  - c. 1 – 3 years
  - d. 3+ years
7. What is the age of your roommate? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What sex does your roommate identify as?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Other
9. What is your roommates current standing as a student
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior

d. Senior

10. Is your roommate employed?

a. Yes

b. No