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Planning for Secret Disclosure : Applying Berger's Planning Theory to the Disclosure of Secrets

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PLANNING FOR SECRET DISCLOSURE: APPLYING BERGER'S PLANNING THEORY
HIERARCHY PRINCIPLE TO THE DISCLOSURE OF SECRETS

A Thesis submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Communication Studies

by
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Abstract

This research examined the strategies used for secret disclosure with Berger's Planning Theory's (1997) hierarchy principle, which orders plans according to complexity. Afifi and Steuber's (2009) Strategies for Sharing Secrets Scale categorizes secret disclosure strategies that vary in complexity. Based on Planning Theory's hierarchy principle, it was hypothesized that when a plan to disclose a secret is thwarted, individuals will move from a less complex disclosure strategy to a more complex disclosure strategy. Findings revealed correlations between strategy complexity and order of strategy choice were low; the null hypothesis was accepted.

Chapter One:

Introduction

The act of withholding or disclosing secret information is an activity that all people are familiar with, and most people have experienced the positive and/or negative consequences that follow the disclosure of secret information. Because the majority of people are familiar with the act of sharing a secret, it is no surprise that extensive research has been done in this area. Researchers tend to focus on what makes a person want to tell a secret (Afifi, W. & Caughlin, 2005; Afifi, T. & Olson, 2005; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009; Caughlin, Afifi, W., Carpenter-Theune, & Miller, 2005; Derlega, Winstead, & Folk-Barron, 2000; Landau, 2003; Morse, 2006; Stiles, 1987; Venetis, Greene, Bajerjee, & Bagdasarov, 2008; Vrij, Nunkoosing, Paterson, Oosterwegel, & Soukara, 2002) and the effects of secret disclosure (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008a; Afifi, T. & Steuber 2008b; Caughlin et al, 2005; Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Lane & Wegner, 1995; Petronio & Bantz, 1991; Vrij et al, 2002). Research has shed considerable light on these areas, but literature investigating strategies for disclosing secrets is scant.

An individual will often choose to disclose or conceal a secret based on the anticipated outcome. Disclosing secret information can affect both the individual keeping the secret and the relationship within which the secret is disclosed. First, secrets can negatively or positively affect individuals. In fact, many individuals choose to keep the secret hidden in order to avoid the negative effects that would follow disclosure. An individual may choose to withhold a secret in order to avoid the shame, rejection, ridicule, or other emotional pain that would follow disclosure (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008a). Individuals are invested in protecting the self, and if telling a secret brings the discloser harm, he or she often simply chooses not to share it. There are also positive effects for the individual disclosing secret information, particularly in situations where there is a positive response to the disclosure. Sharing a secret can help a person gain self-understanding

and build self-esteem (Afifi, W. & Caughlin, 2005). The rise in self-esteem is thought to be associated with a lessening of the extent to which the discloser perceives the information to be directly related to him or herself following the disclosure.

Secondly, secret disclosure can bring positive and negative effects for the relationship. Individuals may avoid disclosing secrets within a relationship to maintain the status quo of the relationship. Secret keepers want to avoid the negative effects of disclosing a secret, such as arguing or re-evaluating the relationship. When an individual keeps a secret from a relational partner, the results may be negative, such as lack of trust or lack of intimacy-- two feelings disclosure typically breeds. The individual who shares a secret with a relational partner may also gain positive benefits. Sharing secrets creates bonds and fosters relationships (Afifi, T. & Olson, 2005; Gunther & Luckmann, 1998; Vangelisti, et al, 2001).

While this research shows some of the advantages and disadvantages of secret disclosure, researchers are only beginning to examine factors related to strategic planning for secret disclosure. The primary goal of the present study is to examine the strategies used to reveal secrets using the concepts found in the hierarchy principle of Planning Theory (Berger, 1997).

Chapter Two:
Literature Review

Strategies used to disclose secret information have been the subject of recent research (Afifi, T. & Stueber, 2009; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008a; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008b; Afifi, W. & Caughlin, 2005; Vrij, et al, 2002). Some researchers have suggested that the strategies people use to disclose secrets can be classified into discrete categories (Afifi, T. & Stueber, 2009). However, it is not known whether the categories of disclosure strategies are hierarchically ordered. Looking at these categories within the context of Planning Theory, it would be expected that individuals arrange plans to meet social goals hierarchically (Berger, 1997), but this theory has yet to be applied to the situation of secret disclosure. Understanding how a person plans to accomplish the goal of secret disclosure is beneficial because by understanding how plans are constructed one can learn the best, most efficient way to plan, as well as which plans work and which ones fail. By understanding the evolution of the planning process, the progression of strategies selected can be altered to best suit the needs of the individual and provide guidance to achieve the intended goal. Secret disclosure affects individuals and relationships. A better understanding of the planning process for secret disclosure can reduce negative effects on the individual as well as enhance relationships. Some researchers have pushed for future research to combine the research done on secret sharing strategies with Planning Theory (Mumford, Schultz & Van Doorn, 2001; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009). This study aims to contribute to both secret disclosing and planning research. The study focuses on two goals: first, to seek evidence to support the claim that Planning Theory's hierarchy principle applies to secret sharing events, and second, to support the findings of previous research regarding strategies for revealing secrets.

Secret Information

What is secret information? Secrets are primarily defined by the degree to which an individual conceals and protects the information (Venetis, et al, 2008). Venetis, et al. (2008) state that a secret is "information that specific others cannot know in order to protect disclosing or receiving individuals from negative, stigmatizing, shameful, or otherwise hurtful information and consequences of the gained knowledge" (p. 4-5). Bok (1982) says that "anything can be a secret so long as it is kept intentionally hidden, set apart in the mind of its keeper as requiring concealment" (p. 5). Secrets are typically negative in nature and are purposefully hidden from others because of the anticipated consequences that may follow disclosure. Individuals exert more effort safeguarding secret information compared to private information (such as a birth date), because they are trying harder to conceal it (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). Secrets seek exclusivity and evade observability because of the risk that comes with the disclosure of the secret. Individuals want to avoid the negative repercussions that may follow a secret disclosure. According to Communication Privacy Management theory (Petronio, 2000), people are continuously monitoring boundaries, or mental permeable or impermeable walls, around private or secret information. Because of individuals' fear of these repercussions, the boundaries that allow access to the secret information are less flexible, and circumstances that allow for secret disclosure occur less frequently than the boundaries that surround private information.

There have been many attempts to further define and categorize secret information. A widely used typology for secrets was first developed by Vangelisti (1994), while studying forms of family secrets. Through her research, she was able to classify secrets into three categories: conventional, rule violations, and taboo secrets. Conventional secrets involve information that is

not necessarily wrong, but is deemed inappropriate for casual conversation, such as death or finances. Rule violations secrets involve information that is considered to break the common rule, such as drinking or cohabitation. Taboo secrets involve information that is stigmatized by society, such as incest or substance abuse.

Categorizing secrets by content is not the only method available. Altman and Taylor (1973) classified secrets according to four specific attributes: breadth, duration, depth, and valence. The breadth of the secret involves the gross amount of information within the secret. The duration of the secret refers to the amount of time spent withholding the secret from others. The depth of the secret involves the amount of intimacy connected to the secret. This attribute can be rather subjective, but most would agree "that 'Mother is white and passing for black' is much more personal than the fact that 'Mother dyes her hair'" (Brown-Smith, 1998, p. 26). The valence of the secret involves the negative or positive impact of the secret disclosure. Secret valence is also a subjective attribute because it is defined by the individual withholding the secret. The high levels of parsimony and openness of both Vangelisti's (1994) and Altman and Taylor's (1973) schemes has led to their utility and longevity.

Now that an understanding of what defines a secret has been established, we can look to the reasoning behind the need to conceal secrets in the first place. Vangelisti (1994) categorized the five most commonly cited reasons for concealing a secret: evaluation, maintenance, defense, communication problems, and privacy. First, withholding a secret for fear of evaluation involves the individual's perceptions that negative consequences might occur if the secret was revealed. People often avoid disclosing a secret because they fear the disapproval that may be received from others (Caughlin et al, 2005). A second common reason for keeping secrets is termed

maintenance. This maintenance category involves an individual's concern for maintaining the current relationship as status quo. The relationship of concern may be one that involves the secret keeping individual or it could concern two other parties (e.g., a third party may realize that revealing the secret may have an impact two other individuals). Third, individuals also keep secrets hidden out of defense. This involves the individual being concerned that revealing the secret will allow others to use the secret information against them. The fourth reason individuals may withhold secret information is the fear of a communication problem. This occurs when the individual anticipates a challenging disclosure interaction, or when the individual doubts his or her own ability to discuss the secret in a satisfying way. The fifth possible reason an individual may choose to conceal a secret is for reasons of privacy. This involves the belief that the secret information is not pertinent to others (Caughlin et al, 2005).

Although Vangelisti's (1994) scheme addresses the most common reasons cited for not disclosing secret information, research shows that there are two other important reasons that also merit our attention: power and psychological defense. Withholding secret information is a strategy that can be used to obtain, as well as maintain, power over others (Brown-Smith, 1998). Research suggests that this "...power is based on the assumption that something is gained from hiding information that could be valuable to others...this us-verses-them mentality strengthens the internal cohesion needed to keep the secret concealed" (Brown-Smith, 1998, p. 30). Therefore, an individual may keep the secret hidden in order to maintain the power structure within the relationship. A final reason that an individual may wish to keep secret information concealed is for psychological defense reasons. By not revealing the secret information, the individual has found a way to cope with the behavior, or information, that he or she regrets ever

happening. The act of not disclosing the information saves the individual from having to deal with the difficult feelings that may be psychologically or emotionally threatening (Brown-Smith, 1998).

However, all secrets are not kept hidden; most secrets are eventually revealed (Caughlin et al., 2005). Self disclosure often causes feelings of discomfort, but the rewards gained from disclosure make the revelation worthwhile (Petronio, 2000). In their research, Derlega, et al. (2000), describe three types of motivations for self disclosure: self-focused, other-focused, and relationship-focused. Self-focused disclosure is motivated by the tangible or psychological benefits to the disclosing individual, such as self-clarification, seeking emotional support, or catharsis. Other-focused disclosure is motivated by the secret information recipient's obligation or right to know the information. Relationship-focused disclosure is motivated by "the degree of connectedness between the discloser and the recipient" (Venetis, et al, 2008, p. 10), and includes the desire to maintain a close relationship or the desire to enhance the pre-existing relationship. Much research has supported the idea that disclosing secret information fosters bonds and maintains relationships (Petronio, 2000; Vangelisti, 1994). Situational factors may also be involved in motivating disclosures. Research has suggested that disclosure and anxiety are closely related. W.B. Stiles' Fever Model of Self-disclosure (Stiles, 1987; Stiles, Shuster & Hariigan, 1992) states that people tend to disclose more when they are experiencing feelings of psychological distress, such as anger, anxiety, depression, or fear. This higher level of disclosure helps to offer relief to the distress through catharsis and by promoting self-understanding.

With an understanding of why an individual discloses information, it is important that a brief overview of findings associated with the recipients of the disclosures is presented.

Individuals give time and thought to their decision and carefully consider to whom to reveal or to from whom to conceal secret information (Afifi, T. & Olson, 2005; Afifi, W. & Caughlin, 2005; Caughlin et al, 2005; Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001). Research has shown that individuals disclose information to targets whom they like, to targets who minimize the risk of disclosure, and to targets to whom they feel psychologically close (Venetis et al., 2008). Some research has examined the type of relationship the secret keeper has with the secret recipient. For example, this research has shown that undergraduate populations disclose to friends more often than to parents or family. This same study showed that friends were also disclosed to more frequently than dating partners (Vrij et al., 2002). Overall, the selection of recipients for disclosure is bound to vary because of the differing degrees of how sensitive the information is perceived by the secret keeper.

Once an individual has made the decision of what and to whom to disclose, the next step is the actual disclosure of the secret information. Research has shown a typical pattern for secret disclosure (Venetis et al., 2008; Rodriguez & Ryave, 1992). The pattern is as follows: (1) the secret keeper announces (or frames) the secret, (2) the recipient of the information rejects or agrees to honor the secret obligation/contract, (3) the secret keeper discloses the information to the recipient, and (4) the receiver of the information responds to the secret. Framing or announcing the secret often includes prior restraint phrases (Petronio & Bantz, 1991). A prior restraint phrase is a disclosure warning that lets the recipient know that the information about to be disclosed is considered secret, such as "don't tell anybody, but...", or "don't tell mom I told you this, but..." (Venetis, et al., 2008). However, this does not mean that announcing the secret must include a prior restraint phrase. The secret keeper may not specify that the recipient is to

maintain confidentiality, particularly if the relationship with the recipient has included secret disclosure before. The framing that includes a prior restraint phrase is called an explicit secret, but when the framing does not include a prior restraint phrase, it is termed an implicit secret (Rodriguez & Ryave, 1992). When the recipient of the secret information rejects or agrees to honor the secret contract, he or she may do so verbally or non-verbally, with something as simple as a head nod. The secret keeper may choose from a number of secret disclosure strategies (discussed hereafter) with which to reveal his or her secret. Regardless of the strategy chosen, after the secret information is disclosed, it is the responsibility of the recipient to respond verbally. The response could be anything from confirmation, to negation, to humor. The response is not only desired, but expected and necessary, for the disclosure to be complete (Venetis et al., 2008).

Prior to disclosing the secret, the individual must decide on and plan out a disclosure strategy. There are many factors that can influence this strategic decision, including the valence of the secret, the discloser's willingness to reveal, the discloser's level of communication efficacy, the relationship with the recipient, and the anticipated response from the recipient of the secret information (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008a; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008b; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009). The level of influence of these factors is dependent on the individual discloser and context surrounding the secret. The impact these factors have on the discloser influence the type of strategy chosen for disclosure. There are two types of strategies an individual can choose from for secret disclosure: a direct strategy or an indirect strategy (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009). Direct strategies are "verbal, interactive, and...provide the opportunity for immediate responses from the other person" (p. 156). Indirect strategies "do not involve directly telling the target respondent

the secret, rather...(they) are more 'passive' attempts at revealing the secret" (p. 156). These two types of strategies can best be used as group headings, because there are specific ways an individual can directly disclose a secret, as well as specific ways an individual can indirectly disclose a secret.

Direct disclosure can either be an *initiated* disclosure, or it can be a *response* disclosure (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009). First, an *initiated disclosure* takes place when an individual voluntarily discloses the secret information to another person. A common instance of this disclosure strategy is within the heat of an argument. However, initiated disclosure is not limited to that context. This type of disclosure can take place at anytime, so long as there is no request for information and the secret keeper prompts the disclosure. Secondly, an individual may directly disclose a secret is through a *response disclosure*. This occurs when the individual is asked about the secret, or when the topic of the secret, or a similar topic, is brought up and the individual reveals the secret. (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008a; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008b; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009) These direct strategies are simple and efficient.

Indirect disclosure may take place in eight different ways: *third person disclosure, humor, incremental disclosures, written forms of communication, passive avoidance, evidence, hypothetical scenario, or rehearsal* (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009). First, *third person disclosure* involves the individual telling an outside party (third person) the secret, and that person in turn telling the target recipient the secret information. This occurs often within families, such as a child wanting her mother to know the secret, but instead telling her sister the secret, and the sister telling the mother. Second, *humorous disclosure* is a strategy that involves joking about the secret, making sarcastic remarks about the secret, or attempting to downplay the severity of

the secret in a humorous way. A third way to indirectly disclose secret information is to do so in *incremental disclosures*. This strategy involves revealing only part of the secret in order to gauge the reaction of the recipient of the information. This strategy is extremely useful if the individual feels there is a great amount of risk involved with disclosing, because based on the recipient's reaction, the individual can decide whether or not to continue revealing the secret information. Fourth, an individual may choose to indirectly disclose secret information through *written disclosure* which includes letters, emails, text messages, instant messenger, or any other form of written communication. This strategy is best used if the individual wants to eliminate immediate feedback or leave the secret ambiguous. *Passive avoidance disclosure* is the fifth strategy one can use to indirectly disclose a secret. This occurs when the individual is neither actively hiding the secret, nor initiating any type of disclosure. It is said that he or she "has the attitude of 'if they find out, they find out'" (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009, p. 156). The sixth strategy, *evidence disclosure*, is also extremely passive and involves leaving evidence, or a paper trail for the recipient to find and follow, thus discovering the individual's secret. The seventh and eighth strategies, hypothetical scenario and rehearsal, are considered indirect disclosure strategies, but also involve preparation for disclosure along with the disclosure itself. The strategy of *hypothetical scenario* involves revealing another secret, or a similar secret that someone else has, to see how the recipient will react. The strategy of *rehearsal* involves "creating a script for the secret alone or with a third party" before revealing the secret (p. 156). These indirect disclosure strategies include more steps necessary to complete the plan and therefore appear more complex than the direct strategies. Since these strategies seem more complex, more planning is involved, and they are less efficient than direct strategies.

As previously summarized, there have been a number of investigations into the strategies that people use to disclose secrets. However, little is known about the arrangement of the strategies, or their contingency plans, used during planning for disclosure of secret information.

Planning Theory

Planning Theory explains the process that individuals go through when planning their communication behavior. Every day, people communicate with the intention of achieving some social goal, such as borrowing money, dining out, or disclosing secret information. Regardless of which social goal the person is trying to achieve, communication is central to the achievement. Understanding how a person plans to meet such goals is an important research aim because planning affects performance (Berger, 1997). By understanding how plans are constructed, one can learn the best, most efficient sequence of actions. By understanding the planning process, one can alter the process to best suit his or her needs and help guide the individual to achieve his or her goals.

Planning Theory relies on two general concepts: first, that humans as social actors form plans to meet social goals, and second, that humans act on these plans. Berger (1997) defines plans as, "hierarchical cognitive representations of goal-directed action sequences. Plans are not the action sequences themselves, but are mental representations of action sequences...[that] can be formulated at a number of different levels of abstraction" (p. 25). So, the term planning refers to the process used to devise the plan, as its end product. Planning is a complex process that may involve many steps and the use of several variables.

So, how do these plans originate? As Proposition 1 states, the first priority of the actor is to check the long term memory for a plan that is pre-existing. The actors first assess the

situation, then search for similarities between the current situation and plans they've used in the past in situations that resemble this current situation (Berger, 1988). This proposition rests on the widely accepted postulate that individuals expend as little energy as possible during information processing (Berger, 1997). It is much easier and less time consuming to use or adapt a pre-conceived plan than it is to create an entirely new one. These plans are often termed canned plans, or scripts, because they get used repeatedly. If a canned plan is not available, the individual is forced to create a new plan. This plan can be an adaptation of a previous plan, or it can be an entirely new plan. Most individuals tend to make contingency plans, particularly for their goals of higher importance. When planning, individuals typically plot out a detailed course of action. Individuals may also anticipate actions or situations that may disrupt the successful completion of their plan; this explains why many individuals plan for these contingencies (Berger, 1997).

Meta-goals also influence planning. Berger (1997) presents two meta-goals that are consistently present: efficiency and social appropriateness. These goals are termed meta-goals because they are not the central goal, but are goals that influence the superordinate and the subordinate goals. Individuals tend to develop the most efficient plan possible. They want to exert the least amount of energy possible, yet still achieve their goal. Individuals also want to appear socially appropriate during interaction. These meta-goals prevent the individual from creating an overly complex plan (Berger, 1997).

Planning Theory offers eleven propositions (Appendix A) that detail the process of planning strategic communication. The purpose of this research is to examine the validity of

Proposition 6 in the context of secret revelation. This proposition will presently be examined in more detail.

Responding to thwarted plans

Proposition 6: When people experience thwarting internal to the interaction, their first response is likely to involve low-level plan hierarchy alterations. Continued thwarting will tend to produce more abstract alterations to plan hierarchies. (Berger, 1997, p.35)

Often an individual will find that after they start to enact the plan, the plan cannot be carried out as anticipated. Throughout Planning Theory, this is referred to as plan thwarting. A plan can be thwarted by internal loci or external loci (Berger, 1997). Internal events that can thwart a plan are internal to the situation, such as an individual refusing to change his or her belief on a subject, or requesting a date with someone and being refused. External events that can thwart a plan are outside of the situation, such as a third-party's presence prohibiting an individual from speaking as planned, or a train passing by preventing the conversation partner from hearing what was said. Research suggests that when plans are thwarted, individuals do not abandon their plans and create an entirely new one, but instead take an accretive approach and "keep doing what usually works, but add some new things as well" (Berger, 1988, p.79).

This raises a question: what aspects of the plan are altered post-thwarting? A potential answer to this question is found within Planning Theory. The hierarchy principle states that when people initially fail to reach their social goal, they continue to try to attain them, first by altering lower level elements of message plan, and then by altering more abstract plan elements (Berger & diBattista, 1993). At times individuals are likely to experience multiple thwartings while attempting to carry out their plan. It is assumed that the social actor wants to continue pursuing the goal after multiple thwartings. When a goal is thwarted, this is viewed as a negative

consequence because the goal was not achieved by the plan (Berger, 1997). Afifi, T. and Steuber (2009) suggest that individuals are more likely to use an indirect strategy to reveal a secret if a negative consequence is gained from their revelation. This is consistent with the hierarchy principle because an indirect strategy is more complex than a direct strategy. When deciding to disclose a secret, the most efficient plan is a direct revelation. However, if there is perceived risk with this disclosure, the plan is thwarted and the individual must go to the next contingency plan. Derlega, et al. (2000), and Afifi, T. and Steuber (2009), found that greater degrees of risk predicted greater use of indirect strategies. Therefore, it follows that when the most efficient plan, direct disclosure, is thwarted by the risk of the disclosure, more complex contingency plans will be used that include indirect disclosure strategies. Risk is not the only way that secret disclosure can be thwarted. As previously stated, there are numerous internal and external loci that can interrupt the strategic plan formulated to meet a social goal. Take for example the individual that uses the direct strategy of blurting out a secret during the heat of an argument. It is possible that the recipient is oblivious to the disclosure because he or she is focused on his or her own thoughts about the argument, thus thwarting the discloser's plan. According to Planning Theory, once the goal has been thwarted, this individual would then proceed to change lower level aspects of his or her plan, such as repeating the disclosure or rephrasing it. If the disclosure is still unsuccessful, and the individual still has a desire to disclose the secret after the argument has ended, Planning Theory suggests that this individual would then proceed to make more abstract changes to their plan, such as switching from direct disclosure to indirect disclosure, or in some other way moving from a less complex to a more complex strategy.

Based on this information, the following hypothesis is proposed:

***H₁:** When an individual's attempt at disclosing a secret is thwarted, he or she will move from less complex strategies to more complex strategies, based on his or her own subjective understanding of complexity.*

In order to test this hypothesis, every time a secret disclosure is thwarted a new correlation will be calculated. To analyze these correlations the following hypotheses are proposed:

***H₂:** An individual's first disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

***H₃:** An individual's second disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

***H₄:** An individual's third disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

***H₅:** An individual's fourth disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

***H₆:** An individual's fifth disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

***H₇:** An individual's sixth disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

***H₈:** An individual's seventh disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

***H₉:** An individual's eighth disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

***H₁₀:** An individual's ninth disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

***H₁₁:** An individual's tenth disclosure strategy choice will co-vary positively with his or her subjective understanding of the complexity of selected strategy.*

Chapter Three:
Method

Participants

A survey (see Appendix C) was distributed to 300 students enrolled in communication studies courses at a mid-size regional university, of which 180 were returned. Of the 180 returned, 14 surveys (7%) were not completed correctly, leaving 166 (93%) usable surveys. The sample used for this study was a non-random convenience sample. Sixty-three of the surveys were completed by males; 103 of the surveys were completed by females. The mean age of the respondents was 20 years.

Procedures

The surveys were distributed in classrooms by instructors of the classes or by the researcher. The respondents were given three to five days to return the surveys, depending on the number of times per week the class met. If the class met three times per week, the respondents were reminded that the last day to return the survey would be the next meeting. If the class only met twice per week, they were not given a reminder. A notification was attached to the front of the survey advising the respondents that the research was completely anonymous and confidential. This also was disclosed orally to the respondents by the researcher.

The survey was designed for this study by the researcher. The *Strategies for Reveal Secrets Scale* (see Appendix B) (Afifi, T. & Stueber, 2009) was used but altered slightly to fit the purposes of this study. This scale in its original form was found to be both reliable and valid in previous research. Instructions for completion were included throughout the survey. The survey asked respondents to rank order at least five and up to ten strategies they would use when disclosing a personal secret. In addition, respondents were asked to rate each of the strategies for its degree of complexity. The first page of the survey contained a brief explanation of the study

and obtained the age and gender of each respondent. The second page of the survey included a single open-ended request that the respondent provide a description of a personal secret they were keeping at the time. A definition of a personal secret was provided at the top of the page as follows: "a 'personal secret' is information about yourself that is intentionally kept hidden. This information may be concealed in order to protect you or others." Respondents were asked to keep this secret and recipient in mind as they completed the survey, and they were told that once the survey was complete, they should tear and discard page 2 on which they recorded their secret. The third page of the survey included the modified *Strategies for Revealing Secrets Scale* (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009), which identifies ten secret disclosing strategies and provides a description of each strategy. Respondents were asked to identify which strategy they would use first and then to imagine that their initial plan failed. They were asked to identify which strategy they would use next. This step was repeated at least five times and up to ten times, creating respondent's subjective rankings of at least five of the strategies and the order in which each individual would use the strategies to reveal his or her secret. On the fifth page of the survey, respondents were asked to rate the strategies in order from least complex (1) to most complex (10). This page repeated the definitions and descriptions of secret disclosure strategies found on page 3. The final page of the survey reminded the respondents that their responses were to be anonymous, to discard page 2 of the survey, and to return the survey to their instructor as soon as possible.

Data Analysis

Once the surveys were collected, data analysis was conducted. First, ten bivariate correlations were used to assess the relationship between complexity rating and strategy choice ranking. It was hypothesized that these two variables would produce positive correlations. Second, the changes in strategy choice complexity were assessed by subtracting the complexity of strategy choice one from strategy choice two, and so on up to strategy choice five.

Chapter Four:

Results

To test hypotheses $H_2 - H_{11}$, bivariate, Spearman's Rho correlations comparing the variable strategy choice ranking and the variable complexity rating were calculated for hypotheses $H_2 - H_{11}$. Because the hypotheses were directional, one-tailed tests were used for analyses. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Correlations of Disclosure Strategy Choice and Strategy Choice Complexity Ratings

	Complexity rate SC1	Complexity rate SC2	Complexity rate SC3	Complexity rate SC4	Complexity rate SC5	Complexity rate SC6	Complexity rate SC7	Complexity rate SC8	Complexity rate SC9	Complexity rate SC10
Strategy Choice 1	H_2 0.157*									
Strategy Choice 2		H_3 0.160*								
Strategy Choice 3			H_4 0.251*							
Strategy Choice 4				H_5 0.242**						
Strategy Choice 5					H_6 0.041					
Strategy Choice 6						H_7 0.265**				
Strategy Choice 7							H_8 0.120			
Strategy Choice 8								H_9 0.149		
Strategy Choice 9									H_{10} 0.050	
Strategy Choice 10										H_{11} 0.340**

*SC = strategy choice; * = significant at a .05 level; ** = significant at a .01 level*

The results vary in support of the hypotheses. H_6 , H_8 , H_9 , and H_{10} produced non-significant results. However, in other strategy choice and complexity correlations there were significant results: H_2 , strategy disclosure choice 1 and complexity rate of strategy choice 1,

$r = 0.157, p = < 0.05$; H_3 , strategy disclosure choice 2 and complexity rate of strategy choice 2, $r = 0.160, p = < 0.05$; H_4 , strategy disclosure choice 3 and complexity rate of strategy choice 3, $r = 0.251, p = < 0.05$; H_5 , strategy disclosure choice 4 and complexity rate of strategy choice 4, $r = 0.242, p = < 0.01$; H_7 , strategy disclosure choice 6 and complexity rate of strategy choice 6, $r = 0.265, p = < 0.01$; H_{11} , strategy disclosure choice 10 and complexity rate of strategy choice 10, $r = 0.340, p = < 0.01$. If the expected hierarchical structure were true, the correlations would have been strong throughout. Instead, strategy rankings and complexity ratings revealed only low to moderate correlations, and some correlations between strategy ranking and complexity ratings were non-significant. In short, these correlations show that hypothesis, H_1 : *When an individual's attempt at disclosing a secret is thwarted, individuals will move from less complex strategies to more complex strategies, based on their own subjective understanding of complexity*, is not clearly supported.

To further explore the relationships between secret disclosure strategies rating and rankings, some descriptive statistics were calculated. This was done in an attempt to discover why the correlations found were not as hypothesized. First, to see if the sample shared an understanding of the complexity of each disclosure strategy the mean complexity rating for each disclosure strategy was found. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - Complexity rating means, changes in rating, and standard deviations

Strategy	Mean (<i>n</i> = 157)	Change in rating	Standard Deviation
1. Passive Avoidance Disclosure	3.83		2.81
2. Initiated Disclosure	4.4	0.57	3.27
3. Response Disclosure	4.53	0.13	2.77
4. Humorous Disclosure	4.65	0.12	2.52
5. Written Disclosure	5.66	1.01	2.59
6. Third Person Disclosure	5.67	0.01	2.75
7. Hypothetical Disclosure	5.93	0.26	2.14
8. Incremental Disclosure	5.96	0.03	2.50
9. Evidence Disclosure	7.1	1.05	2.72
10. Rehearsal Disclosure	7.22	0.12	2.43

These results do exhibit a hierarchical structure, however the differences in the ratings between each individual strategy are minute at times, and while larger at others. The hierarchical order of secret disclosure strategies, based on this group of respondent's (N=166) subjective understanding of complexity is as follows: passive avoidance disclosure, complexity rating 3.83; initiated disclosure, complexity rating 4.4 (+0.57); response disclosure, complexity rating 4.53 (+0.13); humorous disclosure, complexity rating 4.85 (+0.32); written disclosure, complexity rating 5.66 (+0.81); third person disclosure, complexity rating 5.67 (+0.01); hypothetical disclosure, complexity rating 5.93 (+0.26); incremental disclosure, complexity rating 5.96 (+0.03); evidence disclosure, complexity rating 7.1 (+1.14); and rehearsal disclosure, complexity rating 7.22 (+0.12).

This set of mean ratings appears to have three levels of complexity groupings: Group 1 means range from 3.83 to 4.65 and includes passive avoidance disclosure (M=3.83), initiated

disclosure (M=4.4), response disclosure (M=4.53), and humorous disclosure (M=4.85); Group 2 means range from 5.66 to 5.96 and includes written disclosure (M=5.66), third person disclosure (M=5.67), hypothetical disclosure (M=5.93), and incremental disclosure (M=5.96); Group 3 means range from 7.1 to 7.22 and include evidence disclosure (M=7.1), and rehearsal disclosure (M=7.22). These groupings show that although there are some minute differences between individual strategies, the entire group of strategies can be divided into three levels of complexity.

To check that the appearance of a hierarchical structure among the mean ratings of complexity for each strategy were true, the frequencies for the ratings of each strategy were calculated. The frequencies for each strategy's complexity ratings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - Frequencies of Complexity Ratings for Disclosure Strategies

Disclosure Strategy Type	CR 1	CR 2	CR 3	CR 4	CR 5	CR 6	CR 7	CR 8	CR 9	CR 10
Initiated	43; 25.9%	26; 15.6%	19; 11.4%	10; 6%	12; 7.2%	5; 3%	10; 6%	7; 4.2%	13; 7.8%	21; 12.6%
Response	19; 11.4%	28; 16.8%	27; 16.2%	27; 16.2%	10; 6%	10; 6%	10; 6%	11; 6.6%	18; 10.8%	6; 3.6%
Third Party	13; 7.8%	12; 7.2%	20; 12%	13; 7.8%	24; 14.4%	15; 9%	20; 12%	12; 7.2%	22; 13.2%	15; 9%
Humorous	16; 9.6%	23; 13.9%	22; 13.2%	29; 17.5%	19; 11.4%	21; 12.6%	11; 6.6%	11; 6.6%	6; 3.6%	8; 4.8%
Incremental	5; 3%	15; 9%	14; 8.4%	13; 7.8%	22; 13.2%	22; 13.2%	21; 12.6%	25; 15%	16; 9.6%	13; 7.8%
Written	10; 6%	17; 10.2%	11; 6.6%	20; 12%	18; 10.8%	21; 12.6%	21; 12.6%	22; 13.2%	15; 9%	11; 6.6%
Passive Avoidance	49; 29.5%	21; 12.6%	21; 12.6%	17; 10.2%	17; 10.2%	8; 4.8%	7; 4.2%	8; 4.8%	10; 6%	8; 4.8%
Evidence	4; 2.4%	12; 7.2%	9; 5.4%	10; 6%	8; 4.8%	20; 12%	14; 8.4%	21; 12.6%	24; 14.4%	44; 26.5%
Hypothetical Scenario	3; 1.8%	9; 5.4%	15; 9%	17; 10.2%	20; 12%	28; 16.8%	35; 21%	17; 10.2%	18; 10.8%	4; 2.4%
Rehearsal	4; 2.4%	4; 2.4%	8; 4.8%	8; 4.8%	16; 9.6%	17; 10.2%	18; 10.8%	31; 18.6%	24; 14.4%	36; 21.7%

CR = Complexity rating; Note, N=166

The results for complexity ratings are scattered. The highest percentage of agreement on disclosure strategy complexity level occurred on the disclosure strategies: passive avoidance disclosure-complexity rate 1, n=49 (29.5%); evidence disclosure-complexity rate 10, n=44 (26.5%); and initiated disclosure-complexity rate 1, n=43 (25.9%). In short, even at the height of agreement, less than 30% of respondents agreed on the complexity of any given secret disclosure strategy. These results show that the respondents were not consistent in rating the complexity of secret disclosing strategies, thus a shared understanding of complexity is not apparent.

To further investigate the results, the change in complexity rating and the direction of the change was calculated for the first five strategies selected. To find these descriptive statistics, the complexity rate number for selected strategies 1 through 5 were entered for each respondent. Then four new variables were formed that showed the direction and amount of change in complexity level for each respondent, as their disclosure attempts were thwarted. These variables are (a) direction/change amount from strategy choice 1 to 2; (b) direction/change amount from strategy choice 2 to 3; (c) direction/change amount from strategy choice 3 to 4; and (d) direction/change amount from strategy choice 4 to 5. The mean of each new variables is reported in Table 4.

Table 4 - Complexity rating Change and Direction between Strategy Choices

Strategy Change in Response to Thwartings	Mean Change in Complexity rating	Maximum Negative Change	Maximum Positive Change	Standard Deviation
SC 1 to SC 2	0.5663	-9	+9	3.832
SC 2 to SC 3	0.3675	-9	+9	3.979
SC 3 to SC 4	0.0120	-9	+9	3.801
SC 4 to SC 5	0.4699	-9	+9	3.752

SC=Strategy Choice; N=166

When posed with the situation of attempting to disclose a secret, but being thwarted mid-plan, respondents were expected to go from a less complex to a more complex strategy successively. As Table 4 exhibits, the changes in complexity were not as hypothesized. All changes in strategy choices ranged from -9 levels of complexity to +9 levels of complexity, based on each respondent's subjective understanding of complexity. The changes in complexity levels from one strategy to the next varied, with the highest level of change coming between disclosure strategy choice 1 and disclosure strategy choice 2. However, even the highest level of change does not agree with H₁, because approximately half of the respondents lessened in complexity, while the other half of respondents increased in complexity. This middle split between lessening and increasing complexity held true for disclosure strategy changes 2 to 3, 3 to 4, and 4 to 5 as well. These results do not support any of the hypotheses presented in this research, thus the null hypotheses are accepted.

Chapter Five:

Discussion

Conclusions

Previous research identified strategies people use to disclose secrets (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008a; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2008b; Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009; Vangelisti, 1994). This research attempted to further the knowledge of secret disclosure strategies by investigating how people cognitively plan to disclose secrets. Specifically, Planning Theory's hierarchy principle was examined in the context of personal secret disclosure. It was hypothesized that (H₁) when an individual's attempt at disclosing a secret is thwarted, he or she will move from less complex strategies to more complex strategies, based on his or her own subjective understanding of each strategy's complexity. Findings for the hypothesized relationship were weak and mixed, resulting in acceptance of the null hypothesis. In general, for hypotheses H₂ - H₁₁, the research produced wide-ranging results. A correlation of .10 is weak, or shows low to no correlation. A correlation of .10 to .29 is showing some variance, but not very much. A correlation of .3 shows that the variables are varying together about 10% of the time. At this level, correlations are seen as significant. H₂, H₃, H₄, H₅, H₇, and H₁₁ did produce significant results. However, H₆, H₈, H₉, and H₁₀ did not produce significant results. This shows that there is not a consistent hierarchical pattern to changing strategies after a plan to disclose a secret is thwarted. There are several possible reasons for this outcome.

These outcomes may have resulted because the hierarchy principle of Planning Theory (Berger, 1997) does not apply to the phenomenon of disclosing a personal secret. Planning Theory explains how people cognitively plan to attain social goals. A typical social goal, such as asking a friend out to dinner or sharing information about a day at work, does not carry the same amount of risk as disclosing a personal secret. Because Planning Theory and the hierarchy

principle address more typical communication encounters, it may be that the risk that comes with disclosing a secret influences differently the way one cognitively plans to attain that goal. In fact, Afifi, T. and Steuber (2009) point out many factors that influence a strategic decision for disclosing a secret, including valence of the secret, discloser's willingness to reveal the secret, discloser's level of communication efficacy, discloser's relationship with the recipient of the secret, and anticipated response from disclosure of the secret. It could be that these factors alter the typical planning procedure that takes place when trying to attain a social goal.

Another factor that may influence cognitive planning for disclosing a secret is that "planners with high levels of goal desire, who experience repeated thwarting of goal-directed actions, will manifest higher level alterations to their plans earlier in the goal failure-plan alteration sequence than will planners with lower levels of goal desire who experience repeated goal failure" (Berger, 1997, p. 93). Since this was a survey, and not a real-life situation, the respondents were asked to think of a current secret they were keeping and to imagine their goal of sharing this secret to be thwarted. This imagining may not have produced the same level of desire to disclose the secret as the respondents would have experienced if they had actually attempted to disclose and been unsuccessful. The level of desire influences the way a person cognitively plans to attain social goals, so this factor may have influenced the outcome of this research.

After analyzing the respondents' understanding of the complexity rate of each secret disclosure strategy, it was clear that there was not a shared understanding of complexity of the strategies. Allowing the respondents to base the amount of change in complexity of strategies on their own understanding of complexity made each survey subjective to the individual respondent.

In addition, several characteristics of the respondents may be a factor. First, with the mean age of respondents being 20 years, it is possible that they did not have the capacity to realistically assess the complexity of the strategies. According to Frazier and Esterly (1990), the less relationship experience a person has, the less realistic their future expectations will be. With the young mean age of this group of respondents, it is likely that their expectations for the complexity ratings are unrealistic, thus causing a disagreement on the complexity of the secret sharing strategies. Second, the respondents age and lack of experience may also be interpreted to mean that they have fewer previously developed plans to draw upon when formulating a new plan for disclosure after an initial plan was thwarted. Planning Theory states that "when persons derive plans to reach goals, their first priority is to access long-term memory to determine whether an already-formulated or canned plan is available for use" (Berger, 1997, p. 23). This sample's probable lack of experience in disclosing personal secrets may have influenced the number and sophistication of 'canned plans' the individuals had to refer to when planning during this survey. A lack of 'canned plans' could also have influenced the sample's understanding of the complexity of the secret sharing strategies, because the less experience one has in an area, the less realistic are their expectations (Frazier & Esterly, 1990). Finally, the sample's understanding of the complexity of secret disclosure strategies could exist simply because immature language users' understanding of the word complex may have differed from the scholarly definitions that underlie Planning Theory. In the survey a definition of complexity was provided: "Complexity is characterized by the level of complication or involvement of the arrangement of parts or units. Complexity also includes the amount of time and thought that would be generated in order to use a particular strategy. Something that is not complex is described as simple" (p.5). It could be

that hiding clues for others to find is perceived as being easier and therefore less complex than telling someone distressing information in a face to face encounter. This sample's understanding of the term 'complex' was not assessed, hence it is not known whether construct validity was an issue.

Overall, there are two ways this research affects the understanding and applications of Planning Theory and strategies for disclosing secret information. First, it is possible that Planning Theory's hierarchy principle does not apply to the phenomenon of disclosing personal secrets. Second, it is possible that other factors that were not included in this study influence cognitive planning for secret disclosure.

Limitations

The methodology used for this research presents several limitations. First, the sample used for this research was a non-random convenience sample. This sample consisted mainly of freshman and sophomores enrolled in introductory communication courses at a mid-size regional university. Because of the use of a convenience sample, the results are not generalizable.

Second, the survey used for this research was created for this study. The survey did include the Strategies for Revealing Secrets Scale (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009) that previous research has shown to be both valid and reliable. However, the way the scale was used in this research had not previously been tested. It should also be noted that 14 respondents were unable to complete the survey. This is possibly due to lack of understanding regarding the completion instructions or survey fatigue. Pretesting the survey for the purpose of examining its content validity in relation to the variables examined in this study should be completed prior to duplicating this study or prior to using it for any future research.

Proposition 2 of Planning Theory states, "As the desire to reach a social goal increases, the complexity with which plans are formulated also tends to increase" (Berger, 1997, p.31). Since this was a survey that asked respondents to imagine this situation, their level of desire to reach the goal was imagined and probably not as strong as it would have been in a real-life secret sharing situation. Since this was a survey, and not a real-life observation of secret disclosing, it is difficult to apply the results to authentic real-life secret sharing situations, just as it would be difficult for the respondents to imagine the desire to disclose transpiring exactly as they would in real life.

Proposition nine of Planning Theory states, "With repeated thwarting over time, resulting in the induction of higher levels of negative affect, plans will become progressively less complex" (Berger, 1997, p. 144). Since the respondents were asked to imagine their plan failing up to nine times, high levels of negative affect may have developed. As stated in Planning Theory (Berger, 1997), negative affect produces less complex strategies. The number of thwartings provided within the survey may have caused the respondents to experience negative affect, thus tainting the results of this research. In a replication of this study, I suggest using a measure of affect to see if it is affecting the strategic planning.

Future Research

Future research in the area of planning for secret disclosure should be undertaken. One interesting area of research would be to apply all the variables from Afifi, T. and Steuber's (2009) Revelation Risk Model (RRM) to planning for secret disclosure. This research could look at how each factor influences planning including the valence of the secret, the discloser's willingness to reveal the secret, the discloser's level of communication efficacy, the relationship

with the recipient of the disclosure, and the anticipated response from the recipient of the secret. It could be that the level of risk assessed within the secret plan influences the order of strategies planned to use for disclosure.

Another illuminating area of research would be to see if the factors found in Afifi, T. and Steuber's RRM (2009) apply to every plan for secret disclosure. It is possible that certain factors are taken into account only for the first strategy used for disclosure, but once thwarted the factors that influence the plan for the second, third or fourth disclosure could vary.

Finally, for future research conducted in the area of planning for secret disclosure, one could attempt an open ended format for new discoveries. It is possible that the amount of influence produced by various factors involved in disclosing a secret does not allow for the same type of planning that people use to attain social goals. In an open-ended format, researchers could piece together a new view of planning specifically for high-risk situations.

Concluding Remarks

This study contributes to both Planning Theory (Berger, 1997) research and secret disclosure research. Based on this research, it appears that people do not cognitively plan to disclose secrets the same way that people cognitively plan to reach other social goals. Thus a new question has been established for future researchers: How do people cognitively plan to disclose secret information?

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Appendices A - C

Appendix A

Propositions and Corollaries of Planning Theory (Berger, 1997)

Planning Theory Propositions & Corollaries

Proposition 1: When persons derive plans to reach goals, their first priority is to access long-term memory to determine whether an already-formulated or canned plan is available for use.

Corollary 1: when individuals fail to find canned plans in long-term memory, they will resort to formulating plans in working memory utilizing potentially relevant plans from a long-term store, from current information inputs, or both.

Proposition 2: As the desire to reach a social goal increases, the complexity with which plans are formulated also tends to increase.

Proposition 3: Increases in strategic domain knowledge tend to produce increases in the complexity of plans within that domain.

Corollary 1: Maximally complex action plans will be generated when high levels of both strategic domain knowledge and specific domain knowledge obtain. Low levels of strategic domain knowledge or high levels of strategic domain knowledge with low levels of specific domain knowledge produce plans with lower levels of complexity.

Proposition 4: Strength of desire and levels of strategic and specific domain knowledge interact to produce differences in plan complexity. High levels of desire and high levels of knowledge produce more complex plans. Low and high desire levels coupled with low knowledge levels should produce less complex plans.

Proposition 5: Increased concerns for the meta-goals of efficiency and social appropriateness tend to reduce the complexity of plans to reach social goals.

Proposition 6: When people experience thwarting internal to the interaction, their first response is likely to involve low-level plan hierarchy alterations. Continued thwarting will tend to produce more abstract alterations to plan hierarchies.

Corollary 1: Elevated levels of goal desire will propel planners to make more abstract alterations to plan hierarchies when their plans to reach social goals fail.

Corollary 2: Planners with high levels of goal desire, who experience repeated thwarting of goal-directed actions, will manifest higher level alterations to their plans earlier in the goal failure-plan alteration sequence than will planners with lower levels of goal desire who experience repeated goal failure.

Proposition 7: Attainment of a superordinate goal will produce positive affect. Interruption of a plan will result in the induction of negative affect.

Corollary 1: The intensity of affect experienced after goal attainment or interruption is positively related to the importance of the goal.

Corollary 2: Given the unavailability of contingency plans, the closer to the goal the interruption occurs, the more intense the negative affect will be. The presence of contingency plans will tend to dampen the intensity of negative affect experienced.

Corollary 3: The greater the investment of time and energy in the pursuit of a goal, the more intense the negative affect experienced will be when interruption occurs. Again, the presence of contingency plans will tend to dampen the intensity of negative affect.

Proposition 8: Repeated thwarting of plans will lead to the instantiation and enactment of progressively less socially appropriate plans.

Corollary 1: The importance of the goal determines the extent to which one will continue to deploy successively less socially appropriate plans in response to thwarting. The more important to goal, the more one will be willing to employ less socially appropriate plans.

Proposition 9: With repeated thwarting over time, resulting in the induction of higher levels of negative affect, plans will become progressively less complex.

Proposition 10: Under conditions of goal failure, individuals whose plans contain no alternative actions and those whose plans contain numerous action alternatives at the point of thwarting will manifest lower levels of action fluidity than those whose plans contain a small number of contingent plans.

Proposition 11: Increased access to planned actions will generally increase action fluidity levels in such a way that the curvilinear relationship between the number of alternatives and action fluidity will be maintained but displaced upward relative to the same function obtained under conditions of reduced action access.

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Appendix B

Strategies for Sharing Secrets Scale (Afifi, T. & Steuber, 2009)

Strategy

Description

Initiated disclosure:	Person initiates or voluntarily discloses the secret to the other person. Person may also simply blurt out the disclosure or reveal it in the heat of an argument.
Response disclosure:	If asked about the secret, the individual will tell the other person directly. If the topic comes up, the person discloses it. Or, if a similar topic comes up, the person reveals the secret.
Third person disclosure:	The individual tells a third person the secret, who, in turn, tells the target recipient the secret.
Humorous disclosure:	Joking about the secret in a non-threatening way, sarcastic remarks about the secret, or downplaying the secret in a humorous way.
Incremental disclosure:	Revealing bits and pieces of the secret to the person. Telling part of the secret, but not the entire secret to gauge the reaction of the recipient.
Written disclosure:	Revealing the secret in a written form of communication, (letters, text messages, instant messenger) which eliminates immediate feedback, and allows the discloser to leave the secret ambiguous.
Passive avoidance disclosure:	Not actively hiding the secret. Having the attitude that 'if they find out, they find out'.
Evidence disclosure:	Leaving out evidence for the person to find, or leaving a 'paper trail' for the person to discover the secret.
Hypothetical scenario disclosure:	Revealing a similar secret that someone else has to see how the person will react, or revealing another secret to see how the person will react.
Rehearsal disclosure:	Testing out the secret with a third party first, before revealing the secret to the target recipient. Creating a script for the secret alone or with a third party.

Afifi, T. & Steuber, K. (2009) The revelation risk model (RRM): Factors that predict the revelation of secrets and the strategies used to reveal them. *Communication Monographs*, 76(2), 144-176.

Appendix C

Planning for Secret Disclosure Survey

Questionnaire-Planning for secret disclosure

Thank you for choosing to participate in this research. This research is anonymous. Please do not write your name or any identifying information anywhere on this packet. Please take your time answering the questions and answer them as completely and honestly as possible. This survey will take about 30 minutes to complete. Thank you again for your participation.

Please respond to the following:

_____ AGE _____ FEMALE _____ MALE

Section One

Please answer the questions and keep your answers in mind while completing section one of the survey. **Upon completion of the survey, you may detach this page from the packet and throw it away. No one will see what you write on this page except for you, so please be as honest as possible.** You may be as direct or vague as you choose. You may use a code or shorthand (any method you prefer) to further preserve the secret. The information you write here will be for your use only. Again, no one else will see this.

Instructions:

Part 1: Briefly identify a personal secret that you are keeping right now.

*A 'personal secret' is information about yourself that is intentionally kept hidden. This information may be concealed in order to protect **you** or **others**.*

Part 2: Identify the person to whom you would like to disclose this secret information.

1. Description of secret:

2. Recipient of secret (the person to which you would like to disclose the secret):

For this part of the survey, consider the secret and recipient of the secret that you have described on the previous page.

Instructions: Please identify which strategy you would be most likely to use to disclose the secret to your previously identified target recipient. Mark it with the number '1' in the provided space.

	<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Description</u>
_____	Initiated disclosure:	Person initiates or voluntarily discloses the secret to the other person. Person may also simply blurt out the disclosure or reveal it in the heat of an argument.
_____	Response disclosure:	If asked about the secret, the individual will tell the other person directly. If the topic comes up, the person discloses it. Or, if a similar topic comes up, the person reveals the secret.
_____	Third person disclosure:	The individual tells a third person the secret, who, in turn, tells the target recipient the secret.
_____	Humorous disclosure:	Joking about the secret in a non-threatening way, sarcastic remarks about the secret, or downplaying the secret in a humorous way.
_____	Incremental disclosure:	Revealing bits and pieces of the secret to the person. Telling part of the secret, but not the entire secret to gauge the reaction of the recipient.
_____	Written disclosure:	Revealing the secret in a written form of communication, (letters, text messages) which eliminates immediate feedback, and allows the discloser to leave the secret ambiguous.
_____	Passive avoidance disclosure:	Not actively hiding the secret. Having the attitude that 'if they find out, they find out'.
_____	Evidence disclosure:	Leaving out evidence for the person to find, or leaving a 'paper trail' for the person to discover the secret.
_____	Hypothetical scenario disclosure:	Revealing a similar secret that someone else has to see how the person will react, or revealing another secret to see how the person will react.
_____	Rehearsal disclosure:	Testing out the secret with a third party first, before revealing the secret to the target recipient. Creating a script for the secret alone or with a third party.

Instructions: Now imagine that your attempt to disclose your secret failed. This could be because of some outside interruption (e.g.-someone walked into the room), or some internal interruption (ie-the recipient misunderstood what you said). Return to the previous page and decide which strategy you would use second. Please mark it with the number '2' in the provided space.

After completion, imagine that your second attempt to disclose your secret failed. Please identify which strategy you would use 3rd by marking it with a number '3' in the provided space.

Please continue to do this until you have identified **at least 5** strategies you would use and the order in which you would use them. You may identify **up to 10** strategies for disclosing your secret.

Section Two

You have now reached the second part of the survey. For this section, you **do not** have to think of the secret that you originally described on page 1 of this survey. This section is **not** about which strategies you would use to disclose your personal secret.

In section 2 of this survey, you consider the complexity of the secret disclosure strategies. Complexity is characterized by the level of complication or involvement of the arrangement of parts or units. Complexity also includes the amount of time and thought that would be generated in order to use a particular strategy. Something that is **not** complex is described as simple.

Please turn the page to find instructions and space to complete Section two of this survey.

Instructions: Please carefully examine the descriptions of the secret disclosure strategies identified below. In the space provided, rank the strategies by the order of complexity. **Rank 1 being the least complex, and rank 10 being the most complex.**

	<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Description</u>
_____	Initiated disclosure:	Person initiates or voluntarily discloses the secret to the other person. Person may also simply blurt out the disclosure or reveal it in the heat of an argument.
_____	Response disclosure:	If asked about the secret, the individual will tell the other person directly. If the topic comes up, the person discloses it. Or, if a similar topic comes up, the person reveals the secret.
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_____	Evidence disclosure:	Leaving out evidence for the person to find, or leaving a 'paper trail' for the person to discover the secret.
_____	Hypothetical scenario disclosure:	Revealing a similar secret that someone else has to see how the person will react, or revealing another secret to see how the person will react.
_____	Rehearsal disclosure:	Testing out the secret with a third party first, before revealing the secret to the target recipient. Creating a script for the secret alone or with a third party.

*Thank you for completing this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated.
Please return this survey to your instructor promptly.
Remember to **throw away pg 2 of this packet** (the page where you describe your secret), before returning it to your instructor.
Remember to keep the anonymous survey consent form on the front of the survey for your records.*