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Exploring How Divorce-Related Communication Affected Relationships Between Same-Sex Parents and Their Offspring

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Walden University

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Madonna Siao

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Exploring How Divorce-Related Communication Affected Relationships Between Same-Sex Parents and Their Offspring

by

Madonna Siao

MS, San Diego State University, 2005

BS, San Diego State University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Human Services

Walden University

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Abstract

Communication styles used during divorce-related conversations may negatively influence the quality of parent-child relationships. Researchers have not examined how communication styles used in divorce-related communications affect parent-offspring relationships in same-sex parented families. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to examine offspring perceptions of how divorce-related communication styles affected relationships between the children and their same-sex parents. The research question for this study addressed how the perceived communication styles of same-sex parents in divorce-related conversations influence the parent-offspring relationship. Principles from communication privacy management theory provided the conceptual framework. Two 21-year-old females whose same-sex parents dissolved their relationships participated in the study. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and a demographic questionnaire. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data. Findings indicated that same-sex parent-child relationships were negatively impacted when same-sex parents were ambiguous in their communication or triangulated their children by forcing them to send negative messages between their parents. Findings also indicated that same-sex parent-offspring relationships were positively impacted when same-sex parents effectively communicated with their offspring during divorce-related conversations. Findings may provide information to professionals and same-sex parents regarding the importance of communicating effectively with their offspring during divorce-related conversations.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my children, Zoe, Gavin, and Noah. You are my everything! I am honored to be your mommy and am thankful to God for all of you! Remember that your story is your own; you write every chapter, and every chapter can be changed! I look forward to being a part of your journey through life.

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To my friends and family, thank you for your never-ending support and encouragement. Thank you for encouraging me to stay home and finish writing, and for reminding me it was okay to skip every fun event, trip, or outing. Thank you for being friends. To my mom, you are my inspiration. I am who I am because of you, your strength, and your never-ending words of encouragement. I hope one day to be half the woman you are. Let's face it: No one can be as incredible as you. Last but not least, to my children, Zoe, Gavin, and Noah. Thank you for being the motivation I needed to finish this program. Everything I do, I do for all of you. I know I wasn't always able to be there for the fun stuff, but you always understood.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Researchers have found that the communication styles used in divorce-related conversations have impacted the quality and closeness of relationships between parents and their children (McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013). However, during my search I did not locate any literature that addressed whether parent-offspring relationships in same-sex parented families are similarly influenced. The current study addressed whether the communication styles same-sex parents used during divorce-related conversations influence relational closeness with their offspring. Findings from this study may provide insight regarding how divorce-related communication styles are used in same-sex parented families.

This chapter includes a background of the research topic, the research problem, the purpose of the study, and the research question. I also include the theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and limitations, and delimitations. I conclude the chapter with a description of the significance of the study and a summary.

Background

Researchers have revealed that the communication styles used during divorce-related conversations were related to the quality of parent-child relationships (DiVerniero, 2013; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013). When parents were direct in their communication about divorce and shared many details of the divorce, their children reported withdrawing from the conversation or isolating themselves to avoid discussing the topic (DiVerniero, 2013; McManus & Nussbaum,

2013). Children whose parents were ambiguous in their communication reported appreciating not knowing all of the details of their parents' divorce, and the children reported a decrease in the overall quality of the relational satisfaction with their parents (McManus & Nussbaum, 2013). Parents reported using ambiguity as a way to manage the information shared with their children (McManus & Nussbaum, 2013) while children reported a decrease in relational quality with their parents as a result of becoming aware of negative details and feeling compelled to take sides between their parents (Afifi, Granger, Joseph, Denes, & Aldeis, 2015; DiVernerio, 2013; Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016).

Researchers have indicated an association between parent-child relationships and communication styles used in divorce-related conversations (Afifi et al., 2015; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013). However, researchers have only examined this phenomenon within heterosexual-parented families. With same-sex marriages now legal in the United States (Tankard & Paluck, 2017), it is important to consider that same-sex marriages may also dissolve and may have the same psychological and relational consequences to their offspring (Gartrell, Bos, Peyser, Deck, & Rodas, 2011; Goldberg & Allen, 2013). The current study was conducted to improve understanding of whether divorce-related communication styles have a similar influence on relationships between same-sex parents and their children.

Problem Statement

Communication styles used in divorce-related conversations influence parent-child relationships (Afifi et al., 2015; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013). Parents use different communication styles in divorce-related

conversations with their children to manage the information they share (McManus & Nussbaum, 2013). Researchers have indicated that parents use a variety of communication styles to manage the information shared, which influence the parent-child relationship. Communication styles used in divorce-related conversations have the potential to negatively influence the quality of parent-child relationships (Afifi et al., 2015; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013).

Findings from the current study may contribute to the discipline because previous research on divorce-related communication between parents and children had only been done in heterosexual parent families (Afifi et al., 2015; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013). Because same-sex marriage is now legal throughout the United States (Tankard & Paluck, 2017), it is important to understand how divorce-related conversations impact the parent-offspring relationship in same-sex parent families (Gartrell et al., 2011; Goldberg & Allen, 2013). An improved understanding may provide professionals and same-sex parents with strategies to use during divorce-related conversations with their offspring.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore offspring perceptions of how the communication styles same-sex parents used in divorce-related conversations affected the parent-offspring relationship. Participants in this study included individuals over 18 years of age with same-sex parents who dissolved their committed relationships or legal marriages. The intent was to explore whether parent-offspring relationships in same-sex parented families were similarly influenced by communication styles used in heterosexual-parented families.

Research Question

How are parent-offspring relationships affected by the communication styles same-sex parents use in divorce-related conversations with their offspring?

Theoretical Foundation

Communication privacy management theory (CPM) was used to guide the study. The CPM is a theory based on rules and boundaries that give individuals control of the information they conceal and disclose (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Individuals take control over private information through rules and boundaries they define (Petronio, 1991, 2002). This allows the individual to manage when and if private information will be disclosed and to whom (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Controlling the disclosure of information is important because it influences the overall relationship and communication satisfaction between individuals (Hawk, Keijsers, Hale, & Meeus, 2009).

The rules and boundaries an individual defines must be understood by both parties so that the expectations of those boundaries are clear. If boundaries are unclear, control of personal information can be lost by the individual who owns the information (Petronio, 2013). Information originally considered private may unintendedly be shared (Petronio, 2013). When control is maintained, boundaries of private information are clear (Petronio, 2002, 2013). The control of boundaries is important between family interactions because the information shared between family members affects the overall quality of the relationship between family members (Petronio, 2002).

The CPM theory was best suited for this study because of its focus on the exchange of private information between individuals and how the exchange of information influences relationships between family members (see Petronio, 2013).

Using CPM as a framework to explore communication styles and their influence on the parent-child relationship may contribute to existing research on how divorce-related conversations may influence members of same-sex parented families.

Nature of the Study

A generic qualitative design was used to explore whether the communication styles used by same-sex parents to discuss divorce-related issues with their offspring influenced the quality of parent-child relationships. This generic qualitative design was best suited for this study due to its emphasis on the subjective psychological opinions and reflections of the participants (see Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). A phenomenological design was originally considered; however, due to its emphasis on the participants' lived experience, the phenomenological design was deemed inappropriate for this study (see Patton, 2015). A quantitative cross-sectional correlational approach was also considered; however, this design was inappropriate because the rich details of the participants' opinions and perceptions would not have been included in data collection and analysis (see Patton, 2015).

Data were gathered using semistructured interviews. Purposeful and snowball sampling were used to attempt to recruit 12 participants through Walden's participant pool. Participant inclusion criteria included individuals over 18 years of age whose same-sex parents dissolved their committed relationships or marriages during the participants' childhood. Microsoft Excel was used to organize data. Using a thematic inductive analysis, I synthesized patterns and themes as they emerged (see Percy et al., 2015). I interpreted the meanings of themes and patterns and explored their connection to the research question.

Definitions

Biological parent: The parent who is genetically related to the children (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

Divorce: The process of legal marriages being legally dissolved (Amato, 2014).

Divorce-related conversations: Conversations about divorce-related topics (McManus & Donovan, 2012). These topics may include but are not limited to divorce-related stressors such as those that lead to the divorce, who is at fault, changes in family dynamics, changes in finances, changes in home of residence, and custody (McManus & Donovan, 2012).

Psychological well-being: Individuals' perception of themselves and their lives (McManus & Donovan, 2012).

Relational closeness: The psychological and relational bonds children feel toward their parents (Golish, 2000).

Same-sex parents: Individuals of the same-sex (Merriam Webster, 2018). In the current study, this term referred to the child's nonbiological parent who was the same-sex partner of the child's biological parent.

Assumptions

Qualitative researchers assume that participants' reflections of a lived experience are accurately conveyed and experienced uniquely (Hathaway, 1995). Participants' reflections and interpretations of their realities may vary. The first assumption in this study was that the information participants shared would vary from that shared by other participants (see Hathaway, 1995; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). A second assumption was that participants would be honest in their responses to the interview questions (see Boblin,

Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). When participants were asked to provide information through private interviews, I assumed they would be more likely to share more information. Participants were asked to provide personal information on a topic that may have been sensitive to them; therefore, the information they chose to disclose may have been limited. A third assumption was that participants would be comfortable providing unbiased detailed information about the divorce of their parents and how it made them feel (see Sheparis, Young, & Daniels, 2010). Participants may have chosen to disclose only the information they were comfortable sharing and may have held back details they were not comfortable discussing.

The final assumption was that participants would recall the conversations as vividly as they experienced them (see Hathaway, 1995). Because participants were asked to recall information from their childhood, the information they shared may not have been accurately represented in their responses. The details of their conversations may have been forgotten or may have been influenced by the way the conversations made them feel or the quality of their current relationship with their parents.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations specify parameters of a research study (Rossman & Marshall, 1995). Parameters of the study included participants whose same-sex parents dissolved their marriages or committed relationships. The sample population also included individuals who live in the United States. Participants were adults at least 18 years of age whose parents dissolved their relationships during the participants' childhood. Purposeful and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit participants for data collection. The

findings of this study may not be transferable to same-sex parented families outside of the United States.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study was that participants were inclusive of a hard to reach population. The study included a sample of two participants. To address this limitation, I recruited participants using purposeful convenience and snowball sampling methods to widen the possibilities of recruiting as many eligible individuals as possible (see Patton, 2015). Although the sample size was small, a purposeful sampling method allowed for collection of data that were in-depth and information rich (see Patton, 2015).

A second limitation had to do with the information participants provided. Participants may not have been truthful in their responses to interview questions or may have provided limited information; therefore, findings may have reflected only limited information (see Patton, 2015). To address this limitation, I probed participants during the interview to give them the opportunity to elaborate or clarify any information they provided (see Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Probing provided participants the opportunity to provide explanations or clarifications of their answers and to prevent participants from straying off of the conversation topic (see Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

Significance

Findings from this study may provide insight into the influence of communication styles used in divorce-related conversations on same-sex parent-offspring relationships. Findings may have a social impact because previous studies related to divorce-related communications between parents and children had focused on heterosexual-parented

families (Afifi et al., 2015; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013). Whether and how divorce influences same-sex parented family members was important to understand so professionals may use the information to advocate for social change. The information gathered from this study may facilitate dialogue between professionals to identify ways to better manage and support the relationship between offspring and their same-sex parents as parents manage their divorce. Improved understanding of how the parent-child relationship may be impacted may provide parents with strategies to effectively communicate with their children. Professionals may also advocate for children who have same-sex parents by providing strategies same-sex parents may use to effectively communicate with one another and their children.

Summary

In this chapter I provided an overview of the study. I discussed the background information from the literature to support the topic of the study. I suggested the need for the study through the problem statement and purpose of the study. In discussing the need for the study, I identified the gap in current research. I attempted to fill this gap by exploring the influence of divorce-related communication styles on relationship between same-sex parents and their offspring.

This chapter briefly addressed the theoretical framework of the study and how the theory related to the research question. I explained how the study was conducted, including the method of participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Assumptions, delimitations, and the significance of the study were also presented. Chapter 2 provides a detailed review of the literature related to the research topic. also includes a more detailed discussion of the theoretical lens that guided the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore offspring perceptions of how the communication styles same-sex parents used in divorce-related conversations affected the parent-offspring relationship. Researchers found that communication styles used in divorce-related conversations had the potential to negatively affect the quality of the relationships between parent and child (Afifi et al., 2015; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013). Most of the research regarding the impact of divorce-related communication on relational closeness between parents and their children focused on heterosexual couples (Ledbetter & Beck, 2014; McLaren & Pederson, 2014; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2011b; McManus & Nussbaum, 2013). Given recent legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States (Tankard & Paluck, 2017), it is reasonable to expect that the outcomes associated with divorce-related communication styles for children of heterosexual couples could have the same implications for offspring of same-sex couples (Gartrell et al., 2011; Goldberg & Allen, 2013). During my literature review, I did not locate any studies that addressed the impact of divorce-related communication styles on parent-offspring relationships for same-sex couples.

In Chapter 2 I begin with the search strategy used to locate articles for this literature review. I give a detailed explanation of how communication privacy management (CPM) theory served as the theoretical foundation for this study. The section also provides an overview of the impact of divorce on children. Finally, I address the influence of communication styles on relational closeness between parent and child.

Literature Search Strategy

The primary databases I used to search for research related to this study included SocIndex, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, LGBT Life with Full Text, ERIC, Sage Premier, and ProQuest. I also used the Google Scholar search engine. Key word searches related to divorce-related conversations were limited to articles published between 2000 and 2017 when divorce-related communication became present in the literature. Key word searches not related to divorce-related conversations were limited to articles published between 2012 and 2017. The key search terms used in the literature search included *child, family, relational closeness, relational satisfaction, communication, discussion, conversation, same-sex, homosexual, gay, lesbian, LBGT, divorce, dissolution, divorce communication, same-sex marriage, ambiguous communication, equivocal communication, and communication privacy theory.*

Theoretical Foundation

Petronio's (2013) reconceptualized model of communication privacy management (CPM) theory was used to guide this study. The CPM is a rule-based theory that explains how individuals choose to take control of the private information they share with others. The major premise of CPM is that disclosure of personal information is managed through a structure of boundaries in which private information is managed and regulated (Petronio, 2002, 2013). Managing the rules of privacy is important because the information disclosed affects the way individuals manage their relationships. Managing the rules of privacy is also important because it influences overall relationship quality and satisfaction with communication satisfaction (Petronio, 1991, 2002, 2013). Figure 1 is a

visual representation of the elements of CPM theory as represented in the reconceptualized model (Petronio, 2013).

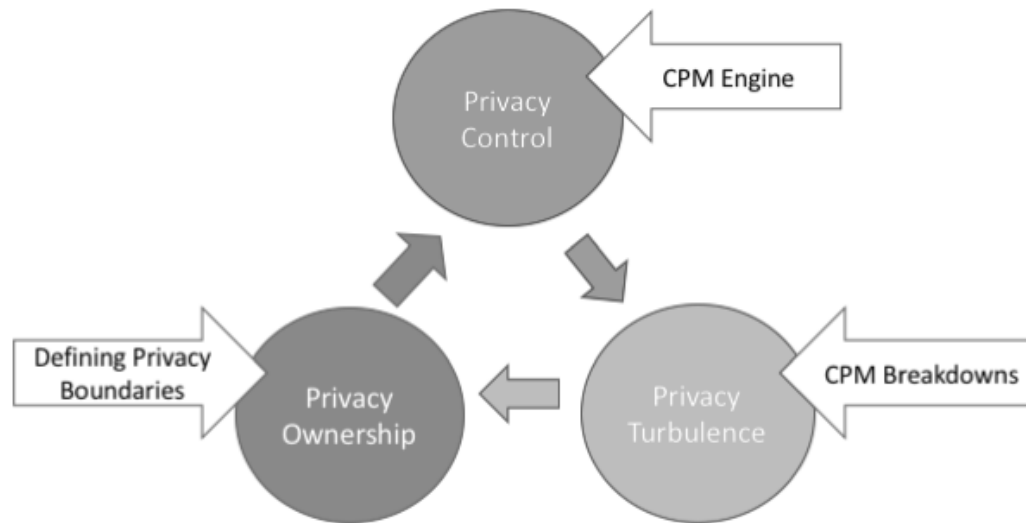


Figure 1. Communication privacy management model (adapted from the updated CPM elements figure in Petronio, 2013).

Boundaries

The three key elements of CPM are privacy ownership, privacy control, and privacy turbulence. The premise of privacy ownership is that an individual assumes sole ownership of private information (Petronio, 2002, 2013). Privacy ownership, defined as “boundaries of private information” (Petronio, 2013, p. 8), establishes the boundaries of private information and how that information is shared with others. Boundaries refer to the clearly defined lines of ownership and allow individuals to take control of the private information they share (Petronio, 2013). Individuals define the private information they own and establish how that information will be controlled, distributed, and protected. Original owners decide to whom and when to grant outsiders access to the same private

information. When access is granted, outsiders share the responsibility of maintaining and protecting the original owners' private information (Petronio, 2013). In a mutual relationship, private information is protected by the boundaries and rules outlined by the original owner.

The second element of CPM, privacy control, serves as the engine that regulates how private information is shared (Petronio, 2013). In this element original owners assert control over their private information by defining a set of rules that determine how private information is disclosed or concealed. These privacy rules are established and supported by an individual's needs, values and motivations (Petronio, 2013). Privacy control also predicts that co-owners successfully manage private information by negotiating rules regarding third party outsiders. Over time co-owners and original owners work together to redefine privacy boundaries. Co-owners are then allowed access to portions of private information (Petronio, 2013). Privacy boundaries are controlled by co-owners who understand when and what information they have the right to disclose to outsiders and what information must remain private.

The third element, privacy turbulence, refers to the disruption or invasion of boundaries that have been defined and regulated by co-owners in the first element, privacy ownership. Privacy turbulence occurs as a result of unclear or misunderstood rules and boundaries (Kennedy-Lightsey & Frisby, 2016). Turbulence may also occur as a result of the unpredictability of how those boundaries are regulated between co-owners, such as when the need to share or conceal private information conflicts with the needs or expectations of co-owners (Petronio, 2002, 2013). This can be a common occurrence between parents and young adults when boundary inconsistencies occur. Unclear

boundaries can weaken parent-adult offspring relationships and can continue to be negatively impactful as offspring emerge into adulthood. This negative impact on the parent-emerging adult relationship may be a result of conflicting perspectives of ownership of private ownership (Kennedy-Lightsey & Frisby, 2016). When turbulence occurs, trust, thoughts, feelings, and actions may change and negatively impact relationships (Kennedy-Lightsey & Frisby, 2016; Petronio, 2008).

Rules and boundaries of private information must be clearly defined and carefully managed so individuals control what information is shared with others (Petronio, 1991, 2002). The elements of CPM continue in a repetitive cycle in which private information can be carefully regulated by the original owner. Careful regulation of private information is important because it may decrease or prevent boundary breakdowns from occurring.

CPM and Research

Principles of CPM have been used to explain how families regulate private information and the impact sharing private information has on the relationships between family members (Afifi & Steuber, 2010; Bridge & Schrodt, 2013; Petronio, 2010). For instance, Afifi and Steuber (2010) use CPM to examine how relationships between family members are influenced by the disclosure of private information. Afifi and Steuber argued that when family members are comfortable disclosing information with one another, boundaries become increasingly permeable and less clear. This is especially true for family members who have been supportive and open-minded in previous disclosures and are expected to react the same way to future disclosures. When family members have reacted aggressively or negatively or have reprimanded others during

previous disclosures, members are anticipated to react the same way to future revelations of private information. Family members are less likely to share private information in fear of similar treatment in the future. When family members anticipate negative or aggressive reactions to the disclosure of private information, Afifi and Steuber argued that boundaries become impermeable and rigid. When family members conceal private information to protect themselves out of fear of rejection, shame, or discipline from a parent or from hurting other family members, Afifi and Steuber argued that parent-child relationships can be negatively impacted.

Using CPM to guide their study, Bridge and Schrodt (2013) argued that as privacy rules become a part of everyday behaviors, they become routinized. As these rules become more rigid, they become ingrained and develop into a stable pattern called privacy orientations (Bridge & Schrodt, 2016; Carmon, Miller, & Brasher, 2013). Privacy orientations serve as a predetermined set of rules as they become concrete and inflexible (Petronio, 2002). Orientations become permanent or trait-like and allow an individual to manage (conceal or disclose) private information without reevaluating the context or environment in which private information is shared. In their quantitative study, Bridge and Schrodt (2013) identified that privacy orientations develop through family communication expectations in which family members conform to the rules of the family. Expectations of how private information is shared within members of the family are stressed through what the family values. For instance, young adults from families in which privacy is valued are less likely to disclose personal information to one another and to individuals outside of their family groups. Young adults from families in which privacy is not valued are more likely to disclose personal information and are less likely

to value privacy in their disclosures between family members and acquaintances. Bridge and Schrodt supported Petronio's (2002) argument that privacy orientations emerge from the family communication environment and influences an individual's tendency to reveal or disclose private information in various relational contexts.

Kennedy-Lightsey and Frisby (2016) investigated the privacy-invasion behaviors of parents and its impact on the parent-child relationship. Kennedy-Lightsey and Frisby argued that as young adults emerge into adulthood, they desire a greater level of independence that may conflict with parents' need to be informed. Emerging adults feel the need to protect private information and may exclude their parents from being informed as a way to obtain and strengthen their independence (Kennedy-Lightsey & Frisby, 2016). As parents feel a loss of connectedness, they attempt to retain control over their emerging adults' private information and attempt for independence (Kennedy-Lightsey & Frisby, 2016). Using CPM to support their argument, Kennedy-Lightsey and Frisby stated that young adults invite their parents into limited boundaries of privacy ownership in which only limited amounts of information are shared with their parents. However, when parents feel the need to retain control, they may accidentally or purposefully gain access to private information emerging adults do not wish to disclose. As a result of differences in how privacy boundaries are defined, boundary turbulence occurs. Results of Kennedy-Lightsey and Frisby's study extended CPM theory by supporting Petronio's (1994) argument that boundaries are managed through rules that must be understood and maintained by original and co-owners. When those rules and boundaries are not maintained, boundaries breakdown and relationships are detrimentally

impacted. In Kennedy-Lightsey and Frisby's study, the relationship between parent and emerging adult was found to be negatively affected.

Rationale for CPM

Principles of CPM were appropriate for this study because they can be used to explain how people attempt to manage and control their private information and how relationships are affected when the disclosure of private information is not properly managed (see Petronio, 2002). Results of the current study may add to existing research by including same-sex parented families (see Breshears & DiVerniero, 2015; Lannutti, 2013). This study may also add to existing research by addressing how same-sex parented families are impacted by divorce-related conversations between same-sex parents and their offspring. CPM theory has been used to examine how divorce-related conversations impact the parent-child relationship in heterosexual-parented families (McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2011b, 2013).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

In the following sections, I provide a brief summary of how divorce impacts the adult offspring of divorcing parents and the relationships between parents and their adult offspring. I also provide a comprehensive review of communication styles parents have used during divorce-related conversations with their adult offspring. Finally, I discuss the influence of divorce-related communication on the parent-offspring relationship.

Impact of Divorce on Adult Offspring

Several researchers investigated how divorce affects young adults and families (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015/2016; Pantelis, Bonotis, & Kandri, 2015; Theun, Beivik, Wold, & Ulvester, 2015). Some researchers have indicated that the stressors of

divorce can negatively impact the overall emotional, behavioral, and psychosocial well-being of children and adult offspring (Al Gharaibeh, 2015; Perrin, Ehrenberg, & Hunter, 2013; Stallman & Ohan, 2016). Although children and adult offspring learn to work through their own stressors of divorce, they may also become victims of the stressors their parents experience, which may include adjustments to relationship outcomes, emotional separation, solo parenting, grief, anger, anxiety, social isolation, and shame (Amato, 2014; du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2016; Kalmijn, 2015; Sumner, 2013). Researchers have indicated that divorce can negatively (Amato, 2014; Gähler & Palmtag, 2015) and positively (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016; Frisby, Horan, & Booth-Butterfield, 2016) impact children and adult offspring.

Pantelis et al. (2015) found that adult offspring were able to positively adjust after the divorce of their parents. Using semistructured interviews, Pantelis et al. found that adult offspring positively adjusted as a result of support from mothers, peers, and therapists who provided constant and positive support during and after the divorce process. Support included opportunities for open communication to express their emotions (thoughts, feelings, and opinions). Pantelis et al. indicated that peers who also experienced parental divorce were helpful in understanding the experiences of adult offspring whose parents had divorced. Adult offspring also reported parents of their peers to be a positive support system because they supported them emotionally when their own parents were absent. Lastly, mothers were reported to positively impact postdivorce adjustment by fulfilling the role of mother and father in the absence of the offspring's father.

Du Plooy and van Rensburg (2015) also determined that offspring could experience positive postdivorce outcomes. Using semistructured interviews in their qualitative study, du Plooy and van Rensburg (2015) determined that the type of methods offspring used to cope with parental divorce was related to positive post-divorce adjustments. The researchers identified four coping strategies which included cognitive coping, communication coping, distraction or avoidance coping, and spiritual coping were commonly used after the divorce of their parents. Among the four coping strategies, effective communication was identified to influence the most positive outcomes for offspring of divorced parents. Effective communication with parents, caregivers, teachers or extended family members were determined to be the most useful coping strategy because children felt better supported (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). Adult-offspring indicated that the most important part of effective communication was not with whom adult-offspring were communicating with but the decision to express their emotions at all (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015).

In another qualitative study, du Plooy and van Rensburg (2016) examined 15 adult offspring between the ages of 20 to 39 and identified effective coping strategies for parents and their children to promote positive post-divorce outcomes. Participants argued that parents need to be aware of the information they share with their children. More specifically, parents need to maintain effective communication with one another and their children. Participants reported that although children need to be informed of their parents' divorce, the information parents share must be limited and appropriate to the child's age. Children also need to be reassured that the divorce is not their fault and should not be exposed to the verbal conflict between their parents. Lastly, participants

stressed the importance of obtaining counseling services for their children. Counseling services were identified as significant to effective coping, so children have an opportunity to discuss their concerns and anxieties to someone who is not involved with the family or their parents' divorce. The recommendations identified for children were concentrated to two strategies, engaging in self-distraction and effectively communicating in relationships (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2016). Self-distraction included focusing on personal interests, academics or sports as a way to concentrate on activities that interest them and not on the divorce. Effectively communicating with relationships between friends, family members and their counselors is important in strengthening relationships and assist in effectively coping.

Kalmijn (2015) focused on relationships with offspring and their fathers in their quantitative study of 1,978 Dutch adult offspring. Kalmijn (2015) posited that children experienced fewer negative outcomes from their parents' divorce when fathers maintained active involvement in child rearing during and after the divorce, maintained communication and saw their children regularly. Using a quantitative method, Kalmijn (2015) examined 1,978 Dutch respondents on how childhood circumstances impacted the post-divorce father-child relationship. Participants between the ages of 24 and 56 whose parents divorced during their childhood were asked to complete online surveys and reflect on their experiences during and after the divorce of their parents. Kalmijn (2015) determined that fathers who were less involved in child-rearing while married were less likely to maintain close relationships to their children during and after the divorce due to poor establishment in parent child relationships. Fathers under these situations had to rely on their ex-spouses to assist in maintaining positive relationships with their children.

Fathers who maintained active and close relationships with their children during marriage were less likely to lose contact with their children and experience other negative consequences of divorce. Kalmijn (2015) also determined that fathers and their adult offspring were more likely to maintain positive communication and contact when offspring were not exposed to high levels of conflict between their parents. Findings from this study and studies previously mentioned in this section are relevant to the present study because it supports the hypothesis that open communication between parents and their offspring are significant to maintaining positive post-divorce parent-offspring relationships.

Divorce-Related Conversations

The influence of divorce-related conversations on children's outcomes have been a topic of interest for many researchers (Cohen, Leighttritt, & Volpin, 2014; DiVerniero, 2013; McManus & Donovan, 2012). Recently, researchers have concentrated on the communication styles parents use in divorce-related conversations and how the communication style used influences outcomes for their offspring (McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2012, 2013). According to Petronio (1991, 2002, 2013) communication styles used can fluctuate from conversation to conversation depending on the intent or expectations of the message being conveyed in the conversation. Communication styles identified in current literature as most impactful in parent-offspring relationships during divorce-related conversations include ambiguous, triangulation and effective communication (McManus & Donovan 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013; Perrin, et al., 2013; Schrodt & Afifi, 2018).

Ambiguous communication. This style of communication serves multiple purposes including preserving unity, credibility, maintaining relationships, and providing opportunities for multiple interpretations (Kline, Simunich, & Weber, 2008; Petronio, 1991, 2002). Researchers have revealed that when parents are ambiguous during divorce-related conversations with their offspring, they disclose only the information they wish to share with their offspring (McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). McManus & Nussbaum (2011a) indicated that when adult offspring perceived their parents to be ambiguous in their communication style during divorce-related conversations, communication and relational satisfaction is affected. However, communication satisfaction by parents was not impacted by parental use of ambiguity in their conversations. Using a mixed-method design, the researchers recruited 39 parent and adult-offspring dyads. Participants were instructed to sit across from one another in a room, answer a prediscussion questionnaire. The prediscussion questionnaire included identifying divorce-related stressors (topics) to use during the second portion of the study and the Measures of Ambiguity Tolerance Scale (Norton, 1975) to measure ambiguity tolerance. After completion of the preconversation questionnaires the dyad was instructed to discuss one positive and one negatively valenced divorce topic of their agreed choice (identified from the prediscussion questionnaire completed). Topic valence, according to Petronio (2002), is defined as the tone of a conversation. Positively valenced topics are topics which are rewarding, pleasant, comfortable to discuss and enjoyable in comparison to negatively valenced topics which are more difficult to discuss, hurtful and inappropriate to the relationship between individuals in the conversation. Participants were given 10 minutes to discuss both topics and then separated to complete a

postdivorce task. The postdivorce task consisted of a questionnaire and video recall of the conversation parent and adult offspring just completed. McManus and Nussbaum (2011a) created a 26-item scale to identify four dimensions of ambiguity (content, source, receiver and context) and the Relationship Closeness Scale (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991) to measure parents and offspring satisfaction (affection, psychological closeness and comfort level) with their relationship after their discussion. The researchers indicated that communication and relational satisfaction between parents and their adult-offspring were negatively affected when adult offspring perceived their parents to be ambiguous in their communication. However, ambiguity had no influence on parental communication satisfaction. McManus & Nussbaum (2011a) argued that this difference may be attributed to parents being more concerned of their offsprings' reaction and maintaining limitations in the private information they disclosed. The negative impact on communication and relational satisfaction in adult offspring were attributed to an offsprings' desire to be more informed. However, results also indicated that although adult offspring wanted to be more informed they did not want detailed information and therefore welcomed low levels of ambiguity from their parents. Findings are relevant to the current study because it supports the argument that it is not what parents communicate but how they communicate during divorce-related conversations which influences parent and adult offspring relationships.

Using the same data collected from McManus and Nussbaum (2011a), McManus and Donovan (2012) examined how perceptions of communication competence and feeling caught (triangulation) moderated the effects of perceived ambiguity and on relational closeness between parents and their adult offspring. During their

preconversation questionnaire, dyads were asked to identify divorce-related stressors (topics) to be used in the second portion of the study. The dyads were also asked to complete Buchanan et al's. (1991) Feeling Caught Scale and Guerrero's (1994) Communication Competence scale as part of the preconversation questionnaire. Communication competence is defined as an individual who is able to meet their conversational goals and convey messages which are understood and appropriate for the recipient (Edwards & Bello, 2001). During the postconversation questionnaire, dyads were asked to complete the Perceived Ambiguity scale (McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a), Buchanan's Relational Closeness Scale and Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being scale were used to measure the offspring's psychological well-being. The researchers indicated that adult offspring's overall psychological well-being and relational closeness with their parents were impacted by perceived use ambiguity during divorce-related conversations. However, they also indicated that communication competence moderated both psychological well-being and relational closeness. McManus and Donovan (2012) argued that children gave multiple meanings to perceived ambiguity when parents were less communicatively competent. Multiple meanings may be a result of parents purposefully withholding information or providing inconsistent information during the conversation. However, when parents were communicatively competent but ineffective in meeting their communicative goals, relational closeness and psychological well-being were still negatively impacted. The researchers argued that this may be a result of a parents' inability to maintain control over the private information they disclose and appropriately articulate enough information for the offspring to understand the conversation. Results are relevant to the present study because they support the argument

that how parents communicate during divorce-related conversations influences the parent adult-offspring relationship.

Using the same data collected in 2011, McManus and Nussbaum (2013) indicated that ambiguous divorce-related communication impacts parents and their offspring differently. In their examination of the 39 parent adult offspring dyads, McManus and Nussbaum (2013) used two scales during the postdivorce questionnaire. The Ambiguity Scale (McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a) was used to measure perceived ambiguity during the discussion and an adapted version of the Marital Opinion Questionnaire (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986) was used to measure the relational satisfaction between parent and adult offspring. In their research, McManus and Nussbaum (2013) examined if ambiguity is utilized as a communication strategy to maintain permeability (as defined by CPM theory) and its effects on relational satisfaction between parents and their offspring. The researchers were also interested in identifying if ambiguity is used more frequently in positively or negatively valenced divorce topics. The authors indicated that both parents and their adult offspring report parents used a low level of ambiguity during both positively and negatively valenced topics. McManus and Nussbaum (2013) argued the use of this style of communication is important in managing the permeability rules they created to minimize the amount of private information that is disclosed during divorce-related conversations with their adult offspring. Ambiguity was argued as a way to also maintain control of the conversation allowing the parent to end the conversation when and if the conversation moves towards information the parent considers inappropriate or private. The parents reported no difference in the reported quality and satisfaction of the parent and adult offspring relationship as a result of ambiguity during their postdivorce

conversation. However, the adult offspring reported increased satisfaction in their communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction with their parents when parents were direct and detailed during both positively and negatively valenced topics. McManus and Nussbaum (2013) argued that the differences in outcomes for the children may have been related to the perceptions placed on the intent of the use of ambiguity during the conversation. Adult offspring may have interpreted the use of ambiguity by their parents as deceptive while parents identified their use of ambiguity as a way to maintain privacy and limit what and how much information is disclosed. Results of this study are important to the present study because of its consistency with CPM and it supports the argument that disclosing private or sensitive information occurs between family members or individuals with close relationships (McManus & Nussbaum, 2013; Petronio, 2002). Additionally, the researchers supported the argument that relational satisfaction between parents and their adult offspring may be more influenced by the way information is disclosed than by the topic discussed.

Triangulation. Triangulation refers to the style of communication whereby parents disclose or ask their children to relay inappropriate information to the other parent (Amato & Afifi, 2006, McManus & Donovan, 2012; Yarnoz & Garmendia, 2016). The consequence of triangulation is feeling-caught between parents and is common among offspring with divorced parents (McManus & Donovan, 2012; Perrin, Ehrenberg, & Hunter, 2013; Schrodts & Afifi, 2018). Researchers have indicated that when parents ask or demand their offspring to relay messages to the other parent, the offspring feel-caught between their parents (Afifi, et al., 2015; DiVerniero, 2013; McManus & Donovan, 2012). Feeling-caught refers to offspring who feel put in the middle of their

parents' conflict, forced to choose between parents, become an active participant in parental conflict when asked to play referee, relay messages or are the recipient of negative information about the other parent (McManus & Donovan, 2012; Perrin, et al., 2013; Schrodts & Afifi, 2007, 2018). Researchers indicated that offspring perceive triangulation as inappropriate and detrimental to the quality of their relationship with both parents (Perrin, et al., 2013; Schrodts & Afifi, 2018; Yarnoz & Garmendia, 2016).

Perrin et al. (2013) examined the impact of parentification and triangulation on the parent child relationship and overall adjustment and psychological individuation of adolescents. Perrin et al. (2013) compared data collected from 404 college participants from intact and divorced families. Data was collected using a combination of questionnaires participants were asked to complete. Scales for data collection included a combination of previously constructed triangulation and parentification scales. Collected data was used to identify levels of triangulation and parentification (child serves as the parents' advisor, decision maker and provides emotional support for parents) participants experienced. To measure psychological individuation researchers used the Psychological Connectedness subscale from the Multigenerational Interconnectedness Scale (Gavazzi & Sabatelli, 1987) and the Conflictual Independence subscale from the Psychological Separation Inventory (Hoffman, 1984). Perrin et al. (2013) concluded that triangulation negatively impacts an offspring's overall adjustment and healthy psychological individuation from their parents. The researchers indicated that triangulation negatively impacts an offspring's relationship with their parent(s) and negative psychological adjustment and well-being during young adulthood (Perrin et al., 2013).

In 2018, Schrodts and Afifi examined 170 family triads (mother, father and offspring) in their quantitative examination of how triangulation impacts the relationship between family members. Their purpose was to examine how relationships are impacted when a family member (parent, parent or child) discloses negative information to another family member (parent, parent or child) about the remaining member (parent, parent or child). Participants were asked to complete modified versions of Schrodts and Afifi's (2007) parental disclosures scale and Buchanan et al's. (1991) Feeling Caught scale. The researchers indicated that all members of the family were impacted by negative disclosures and felt caught between the family member disclosing the information and the family member the negative information is about. For instance, when a child disclosed negative feelings to either their mother or father, the parent receiving the information felt caught between the child and their other parent as a result of the information that was disclosed. This same outcome was evident across all communication exchanges. However, only the parent child relationship was indicated to be negatively influenced when a child is triangulated between their parents. Although parents were found to feel caught between the parent and child, the parent-parent relationship was not indicated to be negatively impacted by negative disclosures shared by the other parent. The researchers argued this may be due to a parents' need to share negative and positive information about the child. Schrodts and Afifi (2018) argued that parents sharing positive and negative information about the child is a sign of a healthy relationship or positive co-parenting. Findings are relevant to the current study because they support the argument that parent-adult offspring relationships may be impacted by communication styles used between family members.

Yarnoz-Yaben and Garmendia (2016) examined 964 Spanish emerging adults from intact and divorced families to determine the effect of parental divorce on emerging adults' overall subjective well-being (satisfaction with life). Data was collected using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) to assess participants subjective well-being which the researchers defined as overall satisfaction with life. Participants were also asked to identify their age at the time of parental divorce and if they were asked to carry messages between parents. Yarnoz-Yaben and Garmendia (2016) indicated triangulation (carrying-messages and feeling caught between parents) as the main predictor to negative affect on subjective well-being. The researchers indicated that subjective well-being may be negatively impacted as a result of emerging adults' inability to understand boundaries of communication and confusion over the need to remain loyal to one parent over another or who to blame. The researchers also argued that feeling caught between parents may continue into adulthood and impact the overall parent adult offspring relationship. These findings are relevant to the present study because they support the argument that how divorce-related topics are discussed are influential to the parent-offspring relationship and not the content of the conversation.

Effective communication. Effective communication is defined as reassuring children they are supported and loved, assuring children they are not the cause of the divorce, and limiting the amount of negative information parents discuss about the divorce (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). Effective communication also includes face-to-face interactions, developing and maintaining empathy and not leaving children caught between parental conflict or left to interpret ambiguous conversations (du Plooy &

van Rensburg, 2015, 2016; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013).

In their examination of 118 parent child dyads, Afifi et al. (2015) argued weakened relationships were a result of increased physiological responses (stress) and a decline in their ability to positively adjust after the conversation. Participants were asked to complete a pre-interaction survey, engage in a stressful discussion and then complete a post-interaction survey. Researchers used stressful conversations to evoke stress and anxiety during conversation topics that would naturally occur. Participants were asked to continue the conversation for a minimum of 20 minutes or until they no longer felt comfortable to discuss the conversation topic. Once conversations were completed, saliva was collected from each participant to measure cortisol and adrenocortical levels. Saliva was collected four times during the study (before the conversation, immediately after the conversation, 20 minutes after the conversation and 40 minutes after the conversation). The researchers used saliva to measure how participants reacted and recovered from the stress induced during the conversation. They indicated that when offspring perceived their parents to effectively communicate, offspring needed less time to recover from the conversation because parents were able to act as a buffer to the stress and anxiety associated with the conversation. Offspring whose parents who were unable to effectively communicate (were ambiguous when communicating or triangulated their children) had more difficulty in their ability to recover from the conversation (Afifi et al., 2015). Consequently, the quality of parent-offspring relationships weakened which was attributed to the offspring's inability to recover from conversations they interpreted as hostile and stressful (Afifi et al., 2015). Findings are relevant to the current study because

it supports the argument that perceived communication styles used during divorce-related conversations between parents and their offspring influence the parent-offspring relationship.

Communication and Parent-Child Relationship

Researchers have indicated that the way parents communicate in divorce-related conversations with their offspring affected parent-offspring relationships (McManus & Donovan 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2011b, 2013; Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016). The quality of parent adult-offspring relationships varied from secure to negative relational satisfaction (Afifi & McManus, 2010; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). Researchers suggest that the way parents communicated the details of their divorce directly impacted the child's ability to adjust and cope which also influenced the parent child relationship (Afifi, Huber, & Ohs, 2006; du Ploy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). Offspring have reported differences in the quality of their relationships with their parents which were affected by the communication styles their parents used during divorce-related conversations (McManus & Nussbaum, 2013). Relational quality between parents and their offspring increased when parents were effective in their communication during divorce conversations with their offspring (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). Conversely, relational quality declined when offspring felt triangulated between their parents' conflict, unsupported in their ability to express their thoughts and fears or left to interpret multiple meanings as a result of ambiguous divorce-related conversations with their parents (McManus & Donovan 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, b, 2013;).

If parents are able to effectively communicate with their offspring, offspring are able to positively cope with the divorce and still maintain a positive relationship with their parents (du Plooy & Van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). Although some parents may be ambiguous in their communication style, adult offspring felt satisfied with the conversations because their parents were effective in their communication which helped adult offspring feel informed. Offspring were more satisfied with the conversation and parent adult-offspring relationships did not suffer (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). When offspring engaged in effectively communicated divorce conversations offspring reported feeling supported and comfortable to discuss their fears and concerns with their parents (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). Offspring also reported feeling satisfied with the conversation and felt a stronger bond with their parents (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). Offspring whose parents effectively communicate are also able to quickly recover and cope from the divorce conversations they may interpret as highly stressful (Afifi et al., (2015). Overall, parent-offspring relationships are strengthened, as a result of the positive outcomes associated with effective communication (Afifi, et al., 2015; du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016; McManus & Donovan, 2012).

Weaknesses in parent-offspring relationships were indicated when parents' communication styles were ambiguous or when parents triangulated their offspring (Afifi, et al., 2015; du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). For instance, when parents used triangulation during divorce-related conversations or during conflicts between parents, offspring were less secure in their ability to discuss their own concerns and fears with their parents (Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016). Offspring instead reported

withdrawing from and avoiding their parents when they were used as mediators and messengers in their parents' conflicts (Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016). The researchers also indicated offspring had more difficulty in recovering from the divorce (Afifi et al., 2015). Fosco and Grych (2010) argued that adolescents may become accustomed to triangulation and involve themselves in their parents' conflict as a way to cope with the fears and anxieties they experience during the divorce process. As a result, relational quality between parents and their offspring deteriorates and may continue to deteriorate as offspring continue to take sides and oppose one parent over another (Fosco & Grych, 2010; Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016). Decreased relational quality may continue into adulthood as offspring pull away from conversations with their parents in fear of what parents may disclose (Fosco & Grych, 2010; Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016). As children are pulled in the middle of their parents' conflicts, they may become confused, question loyalties, and question where to place blame for the divorce of their parents (Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2015).

Offspring who are asked to relay messages between parents reported feeling caught between their parents (Perrin, et al., 2016). Offspring reported the same emotions when pulled into hostile conversations between their parents. Offspring indicated that being a part of hostile conversation with their parents left them confused, hurt and even felt an obligation to maintain loyalties towards one parent over the other (Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016). Disclosing information that is damaging to the credibility or reputation of the other parent is most detrimental to the quality of parent child relationships (Afifi, Afifi, Morse, & Hamrick, 2008; Afifi, et al., 2006; Afifi & McManus, 2010).

Summary and Conclusions

Researchers indicated that divorce-related conversations may negatively impact parent child relationships (du Plooy & van, Rensburg, 2015, 2016; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a; Mikucki-Enyart, Wilder, & Barber, 2017). However, children are able to cope and positively adjust after a divorce when parents provide opportunities for effective communication (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). While children reported the need to remain informed, they also argue that information about the divorce must be shared according to what the child is emotionally and developmentally able to interpret and understand (Mikucki-Enyart, et al., 2017).

Although the impact of divorce-related communication on parent child relationships have been previously examined, they have primarily focused on heterosexual parented families (Ledbetter & Beck, 2014; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2011b, 2013; McLaren & Pederson, 2014). The current study sought to examine the communication styles used in divorce-related conversations and its impact on relationships between same-sex parents and their offspring. Findings from the study hope to extend knowledge in the literature by examining a population not yet examined by previous researchers.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore offspring perceptions of how the communication styles same-sex parents used in divorce-related conversations affected the parent-offspring relationship. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design, rationale for the study, role of the researcher, and chosen research methodology. In addition, I provide a review of the research question, give details of the participant and recruitment criteria, and explain the data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter also provides a discussion of how the issue of trustworthiness was addressed. The final section contains a description of the ethical considerations and strategies used to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality.

Research Design and Rationale

This study was guided by the central research question: How do the perceived communication styles same-sex parents use in divorce-related conversations influence the parent-offspring relationship? I used a generic qualitative research method. Generic qualitative studies are conducted to investigate the “subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their [participants] experiences of things in their world” (Percy et al., 2015, p. 78). This method was selected because of its emphasis on the participants' subjective psychological opinions or reflections of their experiences (see Percy et al., 2015). Although other qualitative research methods were considered, they were not the best fit for the study. For instance, the phenomenological design was not appropriate because phenomenological studies focus on the lived experiences of individuals, not the psychological opinion or reflection of the individual's experience (see Patton, 2015;

Wajnor & Swanson, 2007). A generic qualitative design was more appropriate for this study because I was interested in exploring the participants' subjective perceptions of the phenomenon, not their lived experiences (see Patton; 2015; Percy et al., 2015).

A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was also considered for this study. However, that approach was not appropriate because the rich details of the participants' perceptions would not have been captured in the data collection or statistical analysis (see Patton, 2015). Gathering in-depth rich information is possible through broad, open-ended research questions in qualitative studies (see Patton, 2015). Therefore, a qualitative approach was more appropriate for fulfilling the purpose of this study.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, my role was to capture the subjective perceptions and opinions of the participants as they reflected on their previous experiences. My role as an observer and interviewer in this study was fulfilled during semistructured interviews. I fulfilled this role by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. As the researcher, I served as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis for this study (see Sheparis et al., 2010). I carefully managed any potential researcher bias. To minimize researcher bias, I did not have any personal connections or relationships (personal, supervisory, professional, or instructor) with participants in the study.

I also managed researcher bias by using bracketing. Bracketing is a process that involves identifying and putting aside personal interests, knowledge, assumptions, or preconceptions that may influence a researcher's collection or interpretation of the data (Fischer, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2010). As the primary instrument for the study, I used bracketing to recognize any personal biases I brought to the study so that I could put

them aside (see Fischer, 2009). Bracketing also keeps researchers accountable to a system of checking and rechecking their assumptions to ensure that data collected and analyzed are not a result of the researchers' biases but are an accurate reflection of the data (Fischer, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2010).

To achieve bracketing, I created and used a reflexive journal in which I listed any biases and preconceptions I had regarding the phenomenon of interest. I used the reflexive journal to reflect on my thoughts, feelings, and preconceptions I had at each stage of the study (see Tufford & Newman, 2010). Use of the reflexive journal began when I conducted and completed an extensive review of the literature on the research topic and continued to be used as new assumptions, preconceptions, and role conflicts emerged throughout the data collection and interpretation stages. Recognizing these feelings assisted me in focusing on the experiences and opinions of the participants (see Tufford & Newman, 2010). This also prevented my assumptions from influencing how data were collected and analyzed (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Recognizing preconceptions as they emerged was a reflexive process that kept me accountable and promoted objectivity in my collection and interpretation of the data (see Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Participants had to meet the inclusion criteria before being interviewed. Participants must have met the following criteria: (a) identified that one of their parents (biological or adopted) was in a same-sex relationship, (b) self-identified that they had participated in a divorce-related conversation with their parents about the dissolution of

the parents' legal marriage or termination of a long-term relationship between same-sex parents during their childhood (between the ages of 6 and 17 years), and (c) were over 18 years of age.

The participants were recruited using a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling. A purposeful sampling strategy was appropriate because it allowed for the recruitment of participants who shared the same experience or phenomenon (see Patton, 2015). This ensured that a selection of only participants who met the criteria of the study would be interviewed (see Robinson, 2014). A snowball sampling strategy was also used to recruit participants for the study. A snowball sampling strategy was useful because the targeted population was assumed to be a difficult population to recruit. This assumption existed because not all offspring of same-sex parented families identify the dynamics of their family for fear of the stigma, discrimination, and prejudice associated with a same-sex lifestyle (LaSala, 2013). A snowball sampling strategy also provided an opportunity to achieve a sufficient sample of participants who may initially have been hesitant or unwilling to participate in the study (see Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2015; Griffith, Morris, & Thakar, 2017). Snowball sampling is used to enlist participants of a study to recruit other potential participants, such as acquaintances, if those acquaintances meet the inclusion criteria (Griffith et al., 2017; Patton, 2015). The combined use of purposeful and snowball sampling strategies increased the effectiveness and efficiency of recruiting eligible participants for the study (see Patton, 2015).

Participants were recruited through Walden University's participant pool and through the use of public community boards in coffee shops throughout San Bernardino and San Diego counties. I created a flyer about the study that indicated the purpose of the

study and outlined the participation criteria for the study. The flyer also contained my contact information (e-mail address and phone number) so prospective participants could contact me to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Potential participants were asked the following screening questions on initial contact to ensure they met the study criteria:

1. Are you at least 18 years old?
2. Was one of your parents in a same-sex relationship (long-term committed or legally married)?
3. Has that relationship been dissolved?
4. Have you participated in at least one divorce-related conversation with your same-sex parents since the dissolution of their relationship?

Sample Size

Sample size in qualitative research is not limited to a specific number; instead it relies on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the study, resources available, and what the data will be used for (Patton, 2015). Data that are information rich can be obtained in a small sample (Patton, 2015). I concluded that a sample size of 12 would be sufficient to provide in-depth information for this study.

Saturation is the point in research when no new information or themes emerge from the data being analyzed (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2006). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), saturation varies from study to study because designs used in qualitative studies are not universal and the amount of rich in-depth information varies from participant to participant. When researchers use semistructured interviews, saturation occurs when no new themes emerge from the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). If

new themes continue to emerge as the data are analyzed, recruitment of participants continues, and the sample size increases until saturation occurs (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Instrumentation

The instruments I used for the study included a demographic form that I created (Appendix B) and a list of open-ended questions that I created and used during semistructured interviews with the participants (Appendix C). A recording device was used during semistructured interviews to record participants' responses and allow me to analyze the data after the interviews had been completed. The recording device was purchased for the study. The interview questions were open-ended and designed to elicit data to answer the research question. Participants were provided with sufficient time to provide in-depth information for each open-ended question. If participants were vague in their responses, I prompted them for additional information so that sufficient information was provided to answer the research question.

Procedures for Recruitment

Participants were initially recruited through the Walden participant pool. Participants were also recruited through the use of flyers posted in privately owned coffee homes and Starbucks stores throughout San Diego and San Bernardino counties. I contacted Starbucks and privately owned store managers throughout the cities of Rancho Cucamonga, Rancho Penasquitos, Mira Mesa, Kearney Mesa, Chino Hills, and Walnut. During the initial face-to face contact, I informed each store manager of the purpose of the study and my desire to recruit potential participants who are customers of their coffee stores. I asked each store manager for permission to recruit potential participants from their stores by posting flyers on the community boards of their coffee shops.

I did not post any flyers until I received approval from Walden University's institutional review board (IRB) to conduct the study. Once I received approval, I distributed and posted flyers at coffee stores where I received permission from store managers. The recruitment flyer announced the study, including the study's purpose, potential benefits, estimated duration, and information to contact me to participate.

Procedures for Participation

During the initial contact, I prescreened individuals who contacted me to participate to determine eligibility by asking screening questions (Appendix D). I provided individuals who were determined to have met the study criteria with detailed information about the study, which included the consent form and confidentiality. I went over potential interview dates and notified individuals that I would e-mail an introduction of the study (short description of the study) and an electronic copy of the consent form to individuals who agreed to participate in the semistructured interview. Informed consent was used to obtain agreement from participants so they would be informed of all possible risks in the study (see Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Prospective participants were asked to reply to the e-mail with the statement, "I consent," which indicated they were providing consent to participate in the study. Participants were also asked to indicate an interview time and the best number to reach them for the semistructured interview. Participants who replied to the e-mail with their consent to participate received a follow-up e-mail from me thanking them for choosing to participate in the study and confirming their interview time.

Procedures for Data Collection

Using semistructured interviews to gather data, I served as the primary instrument for the study. Participants were interviewed in one session lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were conducted over the phone and were audio recorded for data collection and analysis.

I contacted participants by phone at their scheduled time as confirmed by me through the initial e-mail. At the start of the interview, I went over confidentiality and informed consent one more time to ensure that the participant was aware of her right to withdraw from the interview at any time, and that the information she provided was solely for the purpose of the study. I informed participants that the semistructured interview would be audio recorded to ensure that I accurately obtained their responses. Participants were informed that they might be contacted for a follow-up interview if additional information was necessary or for further clarification of an initial response. Before the interviews began, I asked the participant to provide me with verbal consent to participate in the study. I began the interview with participants who responded by saying “yes.”

Once the interview began, I took handwritten notes of the participant’s responses. Notes included words that reminded me to probe the participant more on a topic or memory the participant brought up. Once all interview questions were asked, I debriefed the participant on the study and asked her if there was any other information she wanted to provide that I did not address in the interview. I thanked participants for volunteering their time to participate in the study and informed them that I would e-mail them a

summary of their responses to ensure accuracy in my interpretation, and a summary of the study's findings once they were completed.

Immediately after the interview ended, I transcribed the audio-recorded interview. I did not include participants' names on the transcript and identified each interview with a numerical code (i.e., A101) to maintain participants' privacy and confidentiality. I kept a separate record of codes that was attached to participants' names in case a participant contacted me to inform me that she no longer wanted to be included in the study and that data could be deleted.

Data Analysis

Upon the completion of each interview, I transcribed the audio recording into a Word document and validated the transcript for accuracy by comparing the transcript with the audio recording. I used thematic analysis to analyze the data (see Percy et al., 2015). Inductive analysis is a type of thematic analysis used to analyze data from semistructured interviews in qualitative research (Percy et al., 2015). Thematic analysis is useful in generic qualitative research because of its flexibility and compatibility with different qualitative designs. Data in an inductive analysis are independently analyzed, allowing the data to fit into categories or themes that emerge through the data. I completed the following steps as outlined by Percy et al. (2015):

Step 1: I familiarize myself with the data. I independently immersed myself with each participant's data by highlighting any statements or phrases that appeared meaningful.

Step 2: I reviewed the data for relevance to the research question. I reviewed statements that I highlighted and evaluated their relation to the research question.

Step 3: Statements that were highlighted and found not to be related to the research question were eliminated from data analysis. I noted these data in my reflexive journal as irrelevant to the research question but kept them in a separate Word document for possible future use.

Step 4: I coded the data into a simple alphabetical sequence (e.g., AA, BB, etc.) for easy identification.

Step 5: I clustered data that appeared related to one another into groups and described the group by a name or phrase that easily identified it.

Step 6: As patterns emerged during the data analysis, I clustered them into previously identified groups (see Step 5).

Step 7: I identified meaningful themes that emerged from the patterns I identified in Step 5. As meaningful themes emerged, I assigned a new descriptor to the theme, which was more abstract. The new descriptor was supported by the patterns identified in Step 5 and in the data originally transcribed.

Step 8: Once all of the data were analyzed, I arranged the themes (identified in Step 7) into columns using Microsoft Excel with their supporting patterns (identified in Step 5). I included words from the data that could be easily accessed to identify individual themes.

Step 9: I wrote a detailed abstract analysis of each theme that I identified in Step 7 to describe the meaning of each theme.

Step 10: I repeated steps 1-9 for each participant's data.

Step 11: I combined all of the data analyzed, which included patterns and themes that were similar among both participants.

Step 12: Using emerged patterns and themes, I formed a synthesis of all of the data collected.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The issue of trustworthiness is important to consider in qualitative research because the data collection and analysis can be influenced by the predispositions and biases of the researcher(s) (Cope, 2014; Patton, 2015). To ensure trustworthiness of data collection and analysis, I took steps to enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data. Details regarding the steps I took to achieve trustworthiness of the study are presented below.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the accuracy of the researchers' interpretation of the information provided by the participant (Cope, 2014). I addressed the credibility during my transcription of the data, data analysis and data interpretation. I emailed transcribed data to each participant to make sure that the data I collected accurately represented what the participant discussed in the interview. This process of member checking is defined as the process of asking participants to confirm that the information they provided has been accurately recorded and interpreted by the researcher (Buchbinder, 2010). Throughout the research process I also used a reflexive journal to establish credibility. In the reflexive journal I recorded my thoughts, feelings and any preconceived biases I had to determine how and if they would influence my findings. I also recorded the strategies I used to control any preconceived biases and feelings from influencing how I interpreted the data.

Triangulation was also used as a criterion to establish credibility. Triangulation is the examination of data through multiple sources to corroborate or complete the findings of the study with existing research (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). I triangulated my results in Chapter 5 to compare the findings of my study to existing literature and to the principles of communication privacy management theory. Triangulation supports the analysis and interpretation of the study by checking what has been documented through prior research and other sources (Sheparis et al., 2010).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the potential application of the findings from a study in other environments or to different situations (Cope, 2014). To establish transferability, I ensured that I provided rich descriptive information about the research method which included my role as a researcher, collection of the data and data analysis (Bitsch, 2005; Morrow, 2005). I achieved transferability by providing a detailed review of existing literature to establish the need for the study. I also provided a detailed description of the research process which included how data was collected and a step by step guide of how data was analyzed. A detailed description of the study results and summary was included to allow the findings to be compared to existing or future studies on this topic. Additionally, the use of a purposive sampling strategy enhanced transferability because it allowed for the recruitment of participants who share the same experience or phenomenon and ensures that a selection of only participants who meet the criteria of the study are interviewed (Patton, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Providing rich and detailed information would allow readers to examine the findings from the study to determine their transferability to similar populations (Cope, 2014).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the degree to which researchers could replicate a study and conclude similar findings (Cope, 2014; Patton, 2015; Sheparis et al., 2010). I used an audit trail to enhance the dependability of the study. I recorded in detail the processes of the study to enable future researchers the ability to repeat the study and obtain similar results (Shenton, 2004). A detailed recording of information on the research method included individual sections of the research design and how it was implemented, how the data was obtained and how I reflected on the effectiveness of the research method (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to how well the perceptions of participants are accurately represented in a study's findings (Cope, 2014). To establish confirmability, I used member checking to confirm that data I collected during interviews was a true reflection of the participants' experience and that I did not misrepresent the information they provided me during the interview. I emailed the participants a transcription of the information they provided during the interview and asked that they reply to the email confirming the interpretation of the information I gathered accurately reflected what they communicated during the interview.

I also used a reflexive journal at each stage of the research process to reflect on any biases, thoughts and feelings I may have had as the study continued. By recognizing these feelings as they arise I was able to immediately reflect on them which prevented me from allowing my thoughts, feelings and biases to influence how I collected and interpreted data (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Ethical Procedures

Prior to recruiting participants and collecting data, I obtained approval from Walden University's IRB. After IRB approval was obtained, a copy of the approval document was included in the appendix of the study. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and participants had the option to exit the study at any point after the interviews began. Participants were notified that their participation and any responses to the survey questions was voluntary and confidential. To address the issue of privacy and confidentiality of participants I ensured that a) private information of the participants were not shared with individuals other than myself; b) identifying information such as names and/or other identifying information were not shared with individuals other than myself; c) and the data analyzed for this study was not connected to any identifying information.

Participants were not provided with any incentive or coerced to participate. The targeted population was not considered part of a protected population however, individuals of some protected groups (pregnant woman, etc.) may have chosen to participate on their own. Although the study was designed with minimal risks to the psychological well-being of the participant, the topic of divorce and survey questions may be sensitive and personal in nature. For this reason, participants were informed through the consent form that they had the option to skip any questions they did not want to answer.

All data collected are kept on my personal computer and are password protected. I am the only authorized individual with access to this information. All data collected will be kept for a minimum of 5 years but may be kept longer if state or federal standards on

the destruction of data changes (“Retention of research standards and destruction of data,” 2018). Once the minimum of 5 years has elapsed or I have determined that data is no longer necessary to retain, the data will be destroyed using a commercial software designed to delete all data from my computer (“Retention of research standards and destruction of data,” 2018). I will keep a detailed record documenting the information (such as personal information, data collected, analysis, etc.) retained and when the data has been destroyed (“Retention of research standards and destruction of data,” 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore offspring perceptions of how the communication styles same-sex parents used in divorce-related conversations affected the parent-offspring relationship. In this chapter I provided a detailed description of the research method, sampling strategy, and inclusion criteria of participants. A description of how data was collected, including interview questions and how I analyzed the data has also been discussed. Methods I used to establish trustworthiness in the study have also been included in the chapter.

The following chapter include results of the data collected during semistructured interviews I conducted. Results included tables and charts which presented themes that emerged through the data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore offspring perceptions of how the communication styles their same-sex parents used in divorce-related conversations affected the parent-offspring relationship. This study addressed the following research question: How are parent-offspring relationships affected by the communication styles same-sex parents use in divorce-related conversations with their offspring? This chapter presents the setting and demographics of two participants who were interviewed to answer the research question. Participant demographics are described to highlight their relevance to the study. I provide a detailed description of the method I used to collect and analyze the data and how I addressed evidence of trustworthiness. I also provide a detailed summary of the results, including examples of responses to interview questions.

Setting

Participants were recruited through the Walden University participant pool, LinkedIn, and recruitment flyers in coffee homes and LGBT community centers throughout California. E-mail was used to communicate with individuals who wanted to participate in the study. There were no personal or organizational conditions that impacted participants or their experience at the time of the study. There were difficulties with recruiting participants. While discussing the study with store managers, members of the LGBT community, and LGBT community centers, I was told that the study was being conducted too soon. One LGBT member stated, “The study is 15 years too early.” The individual also stated, “The legalization of same-sex marriage across the nation doesn’t

translate into public acceptance or the disappearance of prejudice against the LGBT community.” He explained that some offspring of LGBT couples may be hesitant in identifying their membership in an LGBT family for fear of the discrimination they may experience. Other difficulties experienced during recruitment involved participant age and the relationship of potential participants’ parents. Several individuals wanted to participate in the study but were under 18 years of age. Individuals who identified as LGBT also identified wanting to participate in the study; however, these individuals did not qualify because one or both parents identified as heterosexual.

Demographics

The sample for this study included two 21-year-old female participants. Both participants engaged in at least one divorce-related conversation with at least one of her same-sex parents during their adolescence. Participants were labeled Participant 1 and Participant 2 to maintain confidentiality.

Participant 1 identified as a 21-year-old female Filipina. Participant 1’s parents identify as lesbian. Her mothers dissolved their committed relationship when she was 13. She currently lives in California and is single.

Participant 2 identified as a 21-year-old female. She identified as Black and Pacific Islander with gay parents. Her fathers dissolved their legal marriage when she was 14 or 15.

Data Collection

The data collection process began on June 28, 2018 after approval was granted from Walden University’s IRB. Information regarding the study was posted on Walden University’s participant pool on June 29, 2018. Flyers were posted on community boards

in coffee shops throughout San Bernardino and San Diego counties on June 29, 2018.

Recruitment was expanded to include community boards in coffee shops and LGBT community centers throughout California on August 1, 2018, after a change of approval was granted from Walden's IRB. Recruitment ended on September 13, 2018 upon completion of two participant interviews.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected from two participants who engaged in a divorce-related conversation with at least one of their same-sex parents during their adolescence (10-18 years). Participants volunteered to participate in the study and were not coerced or provided an incentive to participate. I conducted one semistructured interview with each participant, which lasted 30-45 minutes. The semistructured interviews were conducted over the phone. Participants were asked seven open-ended questions (see Appendix C) regarding conversations they had with at least one of their same-sex parents regarding the dissolution of their legal marriage. I audio recorded each interview using the App Voice Recorder and then immediately transcribed the data verbatim. I recorded the audio recording only after written and verbal consent was obtained from each participant.

Both participants received a written summary of their interviews via e-mail for transcript review. Both participants stated that the information listed in their summaries was accurate. Additional interviews were not necessary after I received verbal confirmation that the summaries were an accurate reflection of the responses provided in the interviews.

Variations in Data Collection Outlined in Chapter 3

Recruitment flyers (Appendix A) were distributed on community boards in coffee homes throughout Los Angeles, Marin, Orange, Sacramento, San Bernardino, and San Diego counties in California after obtaining approval from the Walden University IRB (approval number 06-28-18-0496510) and store managers. Recruitment flyers were also distributed via e-mail or were hand delivered to LGBT community centers throughout California and LGBT groups on social media, including Facebook and LinkedIn. The flyer was also distributed on personal social media accounts by individuals who posted the flyer on their personal accounts. This made the flyer available to other individuals throughout the United States. Potential participants were also recruited via Walden University's participant pool.

Potential participants contacted me through e-mail to indicate their interest in the study. The distribution of flyers varied from the original plan due to a lack of recruitment of potential participants. Originally, potential participants were recruited through the Walden University participant pool and through distribution of recruitment flyers to coffee homes throughout San Diego and San Bernardino counties in California. After one month with zero potential participants, I submitted a request for a change in procedure to Walden University's IRB to widen my recruitment area. The change in procedure was approved on July 30, 2018. After approval was granted, I expanded my recruitment area to counties throughout California. I distributed recruitment flyers via e-mail and in person to coffee homes and LGBT community centers throughout the state. Recruitment flyers were also shared on LGBT support groups on LinkedIn and Facebook.

Several potential participants contacted me but did not qualify to participate in the study. In total, 17 individuals contacted me with interest to participate in the study but did not qualify. There were 12 individuals who identified as LGBTQ with heterosexual parents who dissolved their committed relationships or legal marriages. This was discovered during the initial phase of recruitment. These individuals were thanked for their time and were not included in the study. There were six individuals who contacted me with interest to participate in the study but were not included due to age (under 18 years old). These individuals were thanked for their time and were not included in the study.

Although I anticipated participant recruitment to be difficult, I did not expect such a lengthy process. In Chapter 3, I noted that 12 participants would be sufficient to obtain data saturation and answer the research question. After 3 months of recruitment, I recruited two participants and decided that I would not extend recruitment any further because my committee approved the ending of participant recruitment. No other unusual circumstances were encountered while collecting data.

Data Analysis

I collected data from two 21-year-old young adults living in California. Both participants engaged in at least one divorce-related conversation with both of their same-sex parents. The data collected from both participants were analyzed after carefully reviewing the audio recorded interviews and transcripts to ensure that I understood the meaning of the content. Using inductive analysis, I examined the themes, patterns, and inferences as I reviewed the data (see Percy et al., 2015). I then coded the themes and patterns according to the four apriori themes presented in the literature regarding the

types of communication used in divorced-related communication. I coded the data in multiple stages. This process of coding included identifying and organizing repetitive statements or paragraphs that initially appeared meaningful (see Blair, 2015; Saldana, 2013). Open coding was used in the initial process, whereby the emergent themes were coded against the apriori themes. Some of the emergent themes identified in open coding included feeling caught, taking sides, confusion, parental support, and open communication.

After emergent themes were identified and coded, I transitioned to the second and third stages of coding in which I used axial and selective coding. In axial coding, I compared phrases according to their similarities and reduced them to smaller categories. For instance, phrases that related to feeling caught and taking sides were combined and organized into a reduced theme. Phrases related to parental support and open communication were combined and reduced into another theme. Phrases that were identified as irrelevant to the research question were stored in a separate file and excluded from further data analysis (see Percy et al., 2014). In selective coding, reduced themes were coded against the apriori themes connected to preexisting literature (see Saldana, 2013). The four apriori themes were ambiguity, triangulation, effective communication, and parent-child relationship. Data collected from both participants varied. Variations in the data were considered a result of the differences in the lived experiences of the participants.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I established trustworthiness of the findings from this study through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To establish credibility, I conducted

transcript review by e-mailing a copy of the transcribed interviews to each participant. The copy provided each participant the opportunity to confirm or deny the accuracy of my transcription of the data (see Buchbinder, 2010; Cope, 2014). Both participants confirmed that the transcripts were an accurate reflection of their responses during the interview.

Transferability was established by providing a detailed description of the research method used in the study. I also included a detailed description of how data were collected and analyzed. A thorough description of the results and summary of the study was also included to ensure that the study could be compared to future studies on this topic. These descriptions provided rich and detailed information to emerge from the data that could be transferred or applied to similar environments and populations (see Cope, 2014).

Dependability was established through an audit trail. I carefully recorded the research method used in the study and the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. Because of this careful recording of information, other researchers may replicate the study and obtain similar results with similar populations (see Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability was established through transcript review. To confirm the data collected, I e-mailed a copy of the transcribed semistructured interview to each participant in the study. Participants were able to read the transcript and verify that my recording of their statements accurately depicted what they wanted to convey during the interview. Neither participant added new information or stated that I misrepresented any information they provided. I offered a follow-up interview to both participants in case the transcript I e-mailed did not accurately reflect the information they conveyed during the

interview. A follow-up interview was not necessary after participants confirmed the transcript was accurate.

Results

The following section presents findings of the data analysis to answer the research question: How were parent-offspring relationships affected by the communication styles same-sex parents used in divorce-related conversations with their offspring? There were only two participants included in the sample, and each reported different experiences with divorce-related communications with their parents. Results revealed that Participant 1 experienced ineffective divorce-related communication with her parents, while Participant 2 experienced effective divorce-related communication with her parents. These themes were found to affect the quality of same-sex parent-offspring relationships. The main theme that emerged for Participant 1 regarding the communication with her parents was ineffective communication with apriori subthemes of ambiguity and triangulation.

Theme 1: Ineffective Communication

Responses from the first interview question were used to determine the communication style parents used with their offspring while discussing their divorce. Responses from the following interview prompts were used to determine the parents' communication style:

1. Thinking back to when you discussed your parents' divorce, explain to me how your parents discussed their divorce with you.
2. During these conversations were you able to express your concerns or ask questions about the divorce? Explain this to me.

Responses from Participant 1 revealed that the participant's parents were ineffective in communicating with her about their divorce. Data from the interview were coded to the literature-based apriori themes of ambiguity and triangulation.

Subtheme 1: Ambiguity. Based on responses to the first two interview questions, I identified ambiguity as the communication style most often used between Participant 1 and her same-sex parents when it came to divorce-related communication. During the interview, Participant 1 stated that she and her brother were called into the living room for the initial conversation with her mothers about the impending divorce. Participant 1 stated,

When they talked about the initial separation, they sat my brother and I down and discussed that the way the relationship was at that time, they weren't exactly happy. They explained that they might be needing some space later on. We didn't know yet if one of them would be moving out, but they basically discussed that some things would change.

When probed for more information, Participant 1 stated,

There wasn't any certainty. I was confused. I didn't understand what that meant for me, what that meant for us. I understood that whatever was gonna happen I had to be ready for it, but it didn't really prepare me.

When Participant 1 was asked if she felt comfortable expressing concerns or asking her parents for clarification about the divorce, she responded by stating,

Not always. It happened quickly. The family was under a lot of stress. It was confusing for all of us. There wasn't a lot of communication for us during this whole divorce. I didn't really feel like I could communicate my feelings, nor

could I ask any questions. I felt like if I were to ask any questions, I could ask, but they could never give me a solid answer. The answers they would give me weren't clear.

Subtheme 2: Triangulation. Further data analysis revealed triangulation as the second theme that emerged from Participant 1. When asked to describe how it felt when she would relay information between her same-sex parents, Participant 1 stated the following:

It put me in the middle. I was never really able to process my own thoughts to really understand the situation from my own perspective. I was constantly given both perspectives. It put me in a disadvantage. I wasn't able to heal or really process my own emotions. I felt like I had to process everyone else's emotions first.

When probed to explain what she meant by choosing a side, Participant 1 responded,

When you think about divorce, your initial reaction is, ok well if they do divorce, especially as a small child you have to live with one parent. So, at this point ok which parent would I live with kinda thing. During this time, you really feel like you have to choose a single solitary side. You have to choose one parent.

Choosing a side is something I didn't have control over.

When asked if she still felt caught between her parents after the divorce, Participant 1 stated,

Originally yes. Unfortunately, my parent's divorce lasted a long time. So, I felt like yes I had to pick a side. I was caught in the middle. I was the mediator. I had to relay information between them in many situations; so eventually I decided I

had to be my own person. I had to separate myself from the situation because choosing a side was too emotionally distressing.

When asked about her how she felt about her parents' ability to communicate during the conversation, Participant 1 stated,

I think at first they tried to communicate, but over time they stopped trying. I don't think that either one of them really knew how to communicate what was happening or if they did they didn't care anymore. Whether or not they were communicating with each other or with my brother or me, they said what they said, or they chose to not say anything at all. You could always tell what they meant though.

When probed to explain what she meant by being able to tell what they meant, Participant 1 stated,

I mean that their body language said a lot. When they held back details, they would roll their eyes or shrug their shoulders or say 'whatever'. I just knew it wasn't a good thing. The way they communicated was uncomfortable and frustrating.

The impact of the ineffective communication between Participant 1 and her parents regarding their divorce resulted in ambiguous communication and in Participant 1 experiencing uncertainty and confusion. The frequent triangulation also resulted in Participant 1 feeling that she needed to take the side of one parent. Participant 1 also experienced being uncomfortable communicating with her parents about the divorce. After the initial conversation with her mothers, Participant 1 expressed that she felt confused and uncertain about the meaning of the information her mothers shared with

her. She shared feeling uncertain and confused because she did not understand what was going to happen but knew she had to be ready for it. She stated, “Whatever was going to happen, the conversation didn’t prepare me for it.” Table 1 presents a summary of the responses from Participant 1 that were coded to those themes.

Table 1

Primary Themes of Research Question from Participant 1

Major theme	Apriori themes	Impact	Key words/phrases
Ineffective communication	Ambiguity	Confusion	Never gave me a solid answer We couldn’t communicate I couldn’t get a solid answer It was confusing for all of us I was confused I didn’t understand what that meant for me and what that meant for us There wasn’t a solid answer
	Triangulation	Forced to taking sides	They put me in the middle Everyone before me I felt like I had to pick a side I had to relay information between them I was there to comfort them and to mediate. I had to put everyone else before me. I would have to address how they were feeling first. I was there to comfort my family I was never really able to process my own thoughts to really understand the situation from my own perspective

Theme 2: Effective Communication

Results from the data analysis revealed that Participant 2 experienced a different communication style from her parents compared to Participant 1. The overall theme was effective communication from the parents. The theme of effective communication was identified in responses to the following interview question: During these conversations were you able to express your concerns or ask questions about the divorce? Explain this to me. When asked if she was able to express her concerns or ask questions, Participant 2 expressed,

I feel like there was openness. I didn't really have very many questions. At the moment I really was more in shock that it was happening but for the small amount of questions I had, they were very open and willing to answer them. After the shock wore off, I was able to still ask questions. They were still the same as when they first talked to me. They were very soft, very sensitive about the way they spoke and the words they used. I feel like they wanted me to know that it was no one's fault and that it wasn't one dad over the other. That it was a human experience, I guess. Each of them answered my questions in a way that like they didn't blame each other. It wasn't hostile at all.

When asked what it was like when she was asked to relay information between her fathers, Participant 2 stated,

I never had to do this. They really had a good line of communication between them. When I went to one parent or the other, they gave me the same answer so I think they came to a consensus of what I would ask and how they would respond.

When asked how she felt about her parents' ability to communicate, Participant 2 indicated feeling that her fathers had a good line of communication throughout the entire divorce process. Participant 2 indicated that she appreciated her fathers' ability to raise her together without sharing their negative experiences or opinions of one another. As a result of effective communication by her fathers, Participant 2 felt she was able to ask questions as needed. Participant 2 described her fathers' willingness to provide her the clarity she sought, which allowed her to understand why her fathers chose to end their relationship. Participant 2 also reported that she felt supported by both of her parents and maintained open communication with her fathers during and after the dissolution of their relationship. Table 2 presents a summary of the key words and phrases from Participant 2 that revealed the nature of the communication she had with her parents about their divorce.

Table 2

Primary Themes of Research Question from Participant 2

Apriori themes	Impact	Key words/phrases
Effective communication	Comfortable with communicating	I was comfortable and they broke it to me They wanted me to know it was no one's fault For the small amount of questions I had they were very open and willing to answer them Open to communicate

Parent-Offspring Relationship

The quality of the parent-offspring relationship was identified through the remaining interview questions. Answers to the following interview prompts revealed the nature of the relationship between participants and their parents: (a) Explain to me what your relationship with your parents were like after the conversation. (b) How would you describe your relationship with your parent(s) today? Results are presented separately for each participant because each had a different outcome.

Negative parent-child relationship. When asked the last interview questions, Participant 1 shared that as a result of her parents' use of ambiguity and being triangulated between her parents, the quality of her relationship with her mother's deteriorated. Participant 1 stated,

Originally it was stifled but now I would say the relationship is near none. I didn't feel like I could talk to them as often. I wouldn't go to them for advice as often.

Anytime I did speak with my parents it was casual, very cordial.

When asked to describe her relationship with her mom's today, Participant 1 responded,

It's better today. It's a lot better. But unfortunately, because of the divorce it dampened our relationship. Now I do feel like I can speak to them about more situations. I can ask them for advice, but I can't really say that it returned to what it was before they decided to split up. Time changed the relationship, I had time to heal and to forgive. The older I got the more I was able to forgive them.

When asked if there was anything about the conversations with her mother's she would have changed, Participant 1 indicated that a positive parent-offspring relationship could have been maintained if her parents did things differently during their divorce. She expressed wishing that her mothers were more positive and open in their communication with her. She stated,

I would change the fact that I was put in the middle. Now I know that that wasn't the way they wanted to communicate with me but that was a big part of the problem. I wasn't able to individualize my own feelings and that made me angry. I really wish that when they communicated the divorce it was just between the two of them. I wish that when they relayed information to me it wasn't emotionally based. I wish they could have offered me more solid answers.

Positive parent-offspring relationship. Unlike participant 1, the relationship between participant 2 and her fathers were positively affected by the divorced related communications they held with her. Participant 2 expressed that she was able to maintain a positive relationship with her parents after the initial divorce-related conversation.

When asked to describe her relationship with her parents after the initial conversation participant 1 stated,

Not much changed between me and my fathers, but I saw the relationship change between them. How they treated me didn't change. I saw their relationship shift, like they would sit in the living room together, but stopped sitting on the same couch. They weren't mad at each other, but you knew they needed their own space. They were never hostile in front of me. That's something I never had to deal with. I was thankful that they never brought their arguments to me. The things they disagreed on they disagreed on behind closed doors and I never had to deal with that. Even though they weren't together anymore they still took me places. The three of us as a family. They weren't cuddled up like they used to be, but it still felt like a family occasion, and I'm still very involved with the two of them.

When asked if there was anything about the conversations with her fathers she would have changed, Participant 2 stated,

I wouldn't have changed anything that happened. I feel like they did the best they could, and they were fair. They were fair to me and to each other which was really nice. I have a lot of friends who can't talk to their parents or really hate them because their divorce was so bad. I'm glad that isn't what happened to me and my dad's. I appreciate how they handled everything. I really feel like they made me a priority, no matter what they were going through. To this day I don't know if they ever really fought during or after their divorce and I'm thankful for that. I would hate to have lost one of them because they split up.

When asked to describe her present relationship with her father's Participant 2 responded by saying,

It's still the same as before the divorce. I think it stayed the same because of their dedication to me. There was no other way to do this without putting me first. The only option was what was best for me and not what was best for themselves. They already knew that they were being selfish for all the right reasons. To preserve themselves they had to find a way to preserve me too.

Participant 2's fathers were perceived to be effective in their communication when they provided information about their divorce that informed and supported their offspring. Participant 2 did not express feeling caught between her fathers. Instead she shared receiving consistency in the information her fathers provided which allowed her to understand the information she received. The assurance her fathers provided after each conversation reminded her that they were there to support her and provide clarity as she needed. After the initial divorce-related conversation with her fathers, participant 2 expressed feeling comfortable and understood the information her fathers provided. By being provided with the information necessary to understand what would happen next, participant 2 felt no need to ask for clarification but understood that she was welcome to ask for clarification when needed.

Table 3

Quality of Parent-Offspring Relationship

Apriori themes	Impact	Keywords/phrases
Quality of parent-offspring relationship	Positive parent-offspring relationship	They disagreed on things behind closed doors. I never had to deal with that I'm still very involved with the two of them They still took me places. The three of us as a family Still the same as before the divorce
	Negative parent-offspring relationship	The relationship got worse. It became more casual and cordial It was stifled The relationship was near none

Composite Summary of Results

The major findings of this study indicate that the communication styles used during divorce-related conversations in same-sex parented families impacted the parent-offspring relationship. Findings from this study indicated that same-sex parents use different communication styles during divorce-related conversations with their offspring. Ambiguity, triangulation, and effective communication were identified as three communication styles used during divorce-related conversations amongst same-sex parented families. This study also found that same-sex parent-offspring relationships can be influenced by the communication styles used during divorce-related conversations.

Summary

In this chapter I provided key findings from the current study. I discussed the apriori themes and included phrases from participant responses which connect to each

theme. The findings from the study support that communication styles used in divorce-related conversations positively and negatively impact the parent-offspring relationship.

In the following chapter I will discuss my interpretations of the findings from this study. I will discuss the limitations of the study and will discuss recommendations for further research. I will also discuss implications of the study and how they can influence social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore offspring perceptions of how the communication styles their same-sex parents used in divorce-related conversations with them affected the parent-offspring relationship. There were three major findings in this study. Results revealed that the communication style used by same-sex parents to communicate divorce-related conversations with their offspring were similar to the communication styles used by parents in heterosexual relationships. The findings were consistent with the literature, which identified the communication styles as ambiguous communication, effective communication, and triangulated communication. Findings also revealed that communication styles same-sex parents used during divorce-related conversations with their offspring positively and negatively impacted the same sex parent-offspring relationship.

Interpretation of the Findings

Findings from this study were consistent with what previous researchers had identified as the communication styles used in divorce-related communication (see McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a, 2013; Perrin et al., 2013; Schrodt & Afifi, 2018). These findings are discussed in greater detail in the next sections.

Ambiguous Communication

Findings from this study indicated offspring were left to independently interpret divorce-related conversations when their same-sex parents were ambiguous in their communication. One participant expressed also feeling lost and uncertain of the future and the future of the family because of the ineffective communication with her parents

about their divorce. Previous researchers revealed that when parents were ambiguous during divorce-related conversations, their offspring were left to analyze the meaning of the conversation independently (McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum 2011a). According to McManus and Donovan (2012), children may assign multiple meanings to ambiguous conversations as a result of parents withholding information. Inconsistency in the information provided may also contribute to the multiple meanings offspring assign to ambiguous divorce-related conversations. McManus and Nussbaum (2011a) reported that ambiguous conversations left offspring of same-sex parents confused. In the current study, Participant 1 had difficulty interpreting the ambiguous conversations between her same-sex parents. As a result, Participant 1 was uncertain as to whether her mothers were going to divorce, temporarily separate, or reunite. These findings were consistent with other studies that indicated perceived ambiguity in divorce-related conversations between heterosexual parents and their offspring.

Ambiguity also negatively impacted the satisfaction offspring had in their divorce-related conversations with their same-sex parents. McManus and Nussbaum (2011a) also found that communication satisfaction was negatively impacted when offspring perceived ambiguity in their parents' communication during divorce-related conversations. In the current study, as a result of ambiguous conversations with her parents, Participant 1 felt unable to seek clarification from her same-sex parents. Over time, this affected her ability to effectively communicate with them, which led to decreased communication between her parents and Participant 1. Findings from this study confirmed that the use of ambiguity in divorce-related conversations impacted

communication satisfaction between same-sex parents and their offspring similarly to offspring from heterosexual-parented families.

Findings from the current study indicated that same-sex parent-offspring relationships were negatively affected when offspring perceived that their same-sex parents were ambiguous during divorce-related conversations. The same-sex parent-offspring relationship declined as a result of the ambiguous divorce-related conversations parents engaged in with their offspring. According to McManus and Nusbaum (2011a), a decline in relational satisfaction between parent and child may be due to a child's desire to be more informed and a parent's desire to maintain and control private information. In the current study, relational satisfaction between Participant 1 and her same-sex parents was negatively affected as a result of Participant 1's inability to obtain clarification from her same-sex parents. Participant 1 was unable to obtain clarification after the initial and subsequent divorce-related conversations from her same-sex parents. Participant 1's inability to obtain clarification continued to negatively affect the parent-child relationship into Participant 1's adulthood. McManus and Nussbaum (2013) indicated that parent-child relationships may be negatively affected by ambiguous conversations because parents and children interpret the use of ambiguity in conversations differently. Parents may feel ambiguous conversations are necessary to control their private information, but children may interpret ambiguity as deceptive, which negatively influences the parent-child relationship (McManus & Nussbaum, 2013). McManus and Nussbaum also noted that parent-child relationships may be negatively impacted by the way parents communicate and not by the topics discussed. Similar to relationships in heterosexual-parented families, same-sex parent-child relationships can be negatively impacted by

ambiguous communication styles used during divorce-related conversations (McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a).

Triangulation

Triangulation occurs when offspring are asked to relay information between their parents, or when parents disclose details of the dissolution of their relationships with their offspring (Perrin et al., 2013; Schrodt & Afifi, 2018; Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016). Results from the current study revealed that offspring from same-sex parented families felt caught between their parents when asked to relay messages between their same-sex parents. These findings were consistent with previous studies that indicated children felt caught as a common consequence of triangulation among offspring of divorced parents (McManus & Donovan, 2012; Perrin et al., 2013; Schrodt & Afifi, 2018). According to Schrodt and Afifi (2018), when offspring are triangulated, they are caught between the parent disclosing the information and the other parent the negative information is about. By relaying messages between their same-sex parents, offspring in the current study reported being forced into their parents' conflict where they felt obligated to mediate and eventually choose a side between their same-sex parents. This finding was also reported by previous researchers who indicated triangulation forces children into an active role in parental conflict (Perrin et al., 2013; Schrodt & Afifi, 2018). Offspring from the current study also expressed feeling obligated to put their own emotions aside to comfort their same-sex parents. Putting their emotions aside placed the offspring at a disadvantage as they were unable to process or understand the changes happening in their family. This finding supported Perrin et al. (2013) who indicated that triangulation negatively impacts children's overall adjustment and healthy psychological individuation from their parents.

Findings from the current study supported and extended existing literature that revealed that triangulation detrimentally impacts the parent-child relationship (Perrin et al., 2013; Schrodt & Afifi, 2018; Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016). As revealed by Participant 1, the feeling of being caught between her mother's resulted in her being driven away from her mothers, which negatively impacted the overall quality of their relationship. Findings from the current study also supported previous findings that indicated that triangulation was an inappropriate communication strategy and was detrimental to the quality of the parent-offspring relationship (Perrin et al., 2013; Schrodt & Afifi, 2018; Yarnoz & Garmendia, 2016). The negative effect of feeling caught between parents could carry over into the offspring's adulthood and continue to negatively impact the quality of the parent-offspring relationship (Yarnoz & Garmendia, 2016). Although the relationship between Participant 1 and her mothers improved over the years, Participant 1 shared that her relationship with her mothers is still not what it used to be. Findings from this study suggest that the negative impact triangulation has on the same-sex parent-offspring relationship can continue beyond the initial divorce conversation and into the offspring's adulthood.

Effective Communication

Effective communication in divorce-related conversations includes face-to-face interactions, avoiding ambiguous messages, developing and maintaining empathy, and reassuring children that they are supported and are not the cause of divorce (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2013). Findings from the current study revealed that when same-sex parents effectively communicated with their offspring during divorce-related conversations, same-sex

parents were able to maintain a positive relationship with their offspring. Participant 2 expressed feeling comfortable with asking her parents questions and felt she could openly discuss her emotions without feeling caught between her fathers. Participant 2 felt supported when she was provided with opportunities to obtain clarification and to express her emotions.

Findings also revealed that when same-sex parents were effective in their communication during divorce-related conversations, offspring did not feel caught between the conflict of their parents. These findings supported previous researchers who revealed similar findings. Afifi et al. (2015) indicated that children whose parents were effective in their communication during divorce-related conversations were less likely to feel caught between their parents and needed less time to recover after the conversation. According to du Plooy and van Rensburg (2015, 2016), children whose parents were effective in their communication during divorce-conversations were able to discuss their fears and concerns with their parents and felt satisfied with the conversation. Findings from the current study supported and extended results from previous researchers by including same-sex parented families in the research discussion.

Findings from this study indicated that the same-sex parent-offspring relationship was positively affected when offspring perceived their parents to be effective in their communication during divorce-related conversations. Results from this study supported previous researchers who found that parent-offspring relationships were positively maintained when parents were effective in their communication during divorce-related conversations. According to du Plooy and van Rensburg (2015, 2016), children are able

to maintain positive relationships when their parents are effective in their communication during divorce-related conversations with their children.

Findings from the current study also indicated that same-sex parent-offspring relationships are positively maintained when offspring feel supported by their same-sex parents. Support included children's comfort in discussing their concerns and emotions with their same-sex parents, and the same-sex parents' willingness to provide clarification as needed by their offspring. Pantelis et al. (2015) found that children were able to positively adjust after the divorce of their parents when they were provided with opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions by their mothers, peers, or a psychologist. Afifi et al. (2015) also found that children whose parents were effective in their communication were more likely to feel supported and needed less time to recover from the conversation, which did not weaken the parent-child relationship. Du Plooy and van Rensburg (2015) found that effective communication was determined to be most useful because children had opportunities to express their emotions. Effective communication was determined to be the most useful coping strategy because children felt more supported (du Plooy & van Rensburg, 2015, 2016). Findings from the current study reveal that when same-sex parents effectively communicate with their offspring, the parent-offspring relationship is positively influenced and maintained. Findings from this study extended previous research on this topic by including same-sex parented families in the research discussion.

Communication Privacy Management Theory

The communication privacy management theory (CPM) was used to guide this study. The theory posits that relational closeness, relational satisfaction, and

communication satisfaction are affected by the directness of communication between individuals (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Findings from the current study indicated that the communication styles offspring perceived their same-sex parents using during divorce-related conversations had implications on the overall same-sex parent-offspring relationship. Principles of CPM theory were supported by several findings from this study.

Ambiguous communication and CPM. Parents' use of an ambiguous communication style may serve multiple purposes (Kline et al., 2008), which can vary depending on the information parents wish to disclose (Petronio, 1991, 2002). The use of ambiguity in divorce-related conversations by parents may be the result of a manifestation of the privacy rules they created; however, the overall message parents intended to convey may not have been received or similarly interpreted by their offspring (McManus & Nussbaum, 2013; Petronio, 2013). McManus and Nussbaum (2013) indicated that parents' use of ambiguity may be a result of permeability rules they created to protect private information they wanted to conceal. In the current study, although ambiguity was a strategy same-sex parents used to control the private information they shared, their offspring were left to interpret the information on their own (see McManus & Nussbaum, 2013; Petronio, 2013). According to McManus and Donovan (2012), the multiple meanings children assign to ambiguous conversations are the result of withheld or inconsistent information parents provide to their children. The results from previous studies supported findings from the current study, which indicated that offspring from same-sex parents also assign multiple meanings to ambiguous divorce-related conversations with their same-sex parents (see McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus &

Nussbaum, 2013). This was observed in Participant 1's perception that her parents were ineffective in their communication. Participant 1 was unsure whether the ambiguous conversations with her mothers meant that they would divorce, take some time apart, or reunite. As time progressed, Participant 1 concluded that seeking clarification from her mothers was not possible and communication with her same-sex parents progressively decreased.

Triangulation and CPM. The third element of CPM theory is referred to as privacy turbulence (Petronio, 2013). When privacy boundaries are unclear or when control over private information is lost, turbulence occurs and the relationship between individuals may weaken (McManus & Nussbaum, 2011a; Petronio, 2013). Relationships, Petronio (2013) argued, weaken as a result of changes in trust, thoughts, feelings and actions which negatively impact the parent-offspring relationship. This was evident when the offspring from this study was triangulated between her mothers. Participant 1 expressed feeling unsupported, obligated to mediate her mothers' conflict and choose between. Overtime these feelings and obligations influenced the offspring's decision to disconnect from her mothers and concentrate on herself so she could work through her own emotions.

Effective communication and CPM. Effective communication can be better explained through the CPM's premises of privacy ownership and control. In these elements, boundaries and rules are clearly defined between individuals (Petronio, 2013). Findings from this study revealed that when same-sex parents were perceived to effectively communicate during divorce conversations, their offspring understood the meaning of the conversations and quickly recovered from the conversation. If

clarification was necessary, offspring of same-sex parented families were comfortable to ask for more information. Same-sex parents who are effective in their communication were able to provide their offspring with the information necessary to understand what the conversation meant. Offspring were not left to interpret the meaning of the conversation on their own as they were when same-sex parents were ambiguous in their communication during divorce conversations. Same-sex parents controlled the amount of private information they disclosed about their divorce to their offspring. Findings from this study also revealed that offspring were comfortable sharing how their same-sex parents' divorce made them feel. When their same-sex parents were effective in their communication, offspring from this study revealed feeling supported and encouraged to openly discuss their emotions with their same-sex parents.

Parent-offspring relationship and CPM. Findings from this study confirmed how the principles of CPM could be used to explain how the communication style used by same-sex parents used during divorce-related conversations affect the relationship between same-sex parents and their offspring. Through the element of privacy control, parents maintained control of private information related to their divorce by creating rules and boundaries which allowed them to control the type and amount of private information that is shared with their offspring (McManus & Nussbaum, 2013; Petronio, 2013).

Results from the interview of Participant 2 showed that the participant's parents shared ownership of information about the divorce openly with the participant, and they relaxed the controls around what was shared about the divorce. Shared control allowed both parents to disclose divorce-related information to their offspring without damaging

the relationship, which resulted in positive parent-offspring relationships. Participant 2 shared that the open communication between she and her parents enabled her to maintain a positive relationship with both of her father's immediately and long after the initial divorce-related conversations occurred. The same-sex parent-offspring relationship was maintained because the participants' fathers provided the offspring with the support and clarification she needed.

The interview from Participant 1 indicated what happens when ownership of information about divorce is not shared and parents hold tight control over that information. According to CPM, turbulence occurs only when privacy and boundary rules established by same-sex parents are held to tightly (Petronio, 2013). Participant 1 revealed that the ambiguous communication during divorce-related conversations with her parents created uncertainty and resulted in her inability to trust that her mothers would provide clarification on the information they shared. The relationship between Participant 1 and her mothers began to deteriorate soon after the initial divorce-related conversation took place.

Privacy turbulence also occurred when Participant 1 was triangulated between her mothers. Over time Participant 1 found she could no longer communicate with her mothers and no longer wanted to be in their presence. The parent-offspring relationship was therefore weakened and negatively impacted as a result of being triangulated between her mothers. When same-sex parents together to create boundaries and rules regarding the amount and type of private information they share with their offspring privacy turbulence is less likely to occur.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was the small sample size of two, 21-year-old female participants. Both participants lived California and had different experiences in their divorce-related conversations with their same-sex parents. The information provided by both participants about their experiences may not necessarily be transferable to the experiences of offspring from other same-sex parented families.

A second limitation of the study had to do with the demographics of the participants. Both participants were 21 years of age and from California. Participants in the study may have different expectations or experiences than individuals from other generations or those who live in other states. Results from this study may not be transferable to individuals with similar experiences from other states.

The last limitation in this study had to do with the population being targeted. The legalization of same-sex marriage was recently passed in 2015, which may have contributed to the difficulty of identifying and recruiting potential participants. With the legalization of same-sex marriages being fairly recent, offspring of same-sex parented families may still have been reluctant to participate in the study. Hesitation to participate may have been contributed to any potential fears participants had with facing or experiencing any stigma or discrimination associated with identifying themselves as a member of a same-sex parented family.

Recommendations for Future Research

Data for this study was collected in the state of California from two female participants with different experiences. Future research on this topic should be conducted using a larger sample size from multiple states. A larger sample size covering multiple

states would provide data from multiple male and female participants possibly with different experiences.

Another recommendation would be to include minors in this study. During the recruitment phase, there were multiple individuals who were interested in participating but did not qualify because they were under 18 years of age. Including the experiences of minors is highly recommended because the experiences of minors may be more recent than adults who would need to recall their childhood/adolescent experiences.

Another recommendation would be to conduct the study using a quantitative methodology. Current literature on divorce-related conversations between parents and their offspring has been conducted using a quantitative method, however only heterosexual parented families have been included in those studies (McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum 2011b, 2013). Using survey tools used in previous studies on the topic may provide insight into whether or not there are correlations between communication styles used in divorce conversations and the quality of same-sex parent-offspring relationships.

Implications for Social Change

To date, the majority of research on divorce-related conversations between parents and their offspring have been conducted amongst heterosexual parented families (e.g., Afifi et al., 2015; McManus & Donovan, 2012; McManus & Nussbaum, 2012, 2013). It is important for human service professionals, community members and same-sex parents to understand how communication styles same-sex used during divorce conversations with their offspring influences the parent-offspring relationship. Findings from this study may be used to promote awareness among same-sex parents regarding

how communication styles used during divorce conversations impact the parent-offspring relationship.

The findings from this study may be used to inform human service professionals that similar to heterosexually parented families, the same-sex parent-offspring relationship is affected by communication styles same-sex parents used during divorce conversations with their offspring. Findings from the current study may be helpful for human service professionals who work with same-sex parented families. Human service professionals could use findings from the study to recommend how same-sex parents can support their offspring during divorce conversations and still maintain control over the information they wish to conceal or disclose with their offspring. Findings from the study can also be used by human service professionals to recommend one way same-sex parents can maintain positive parent-offspring relationships while managing the dissolution of their committed relationships. As an agent of social change, I intend to share the findings of this research by presenting the results of this study in conference workshops and by publishing this research in professional journals.

Conclusion

This study used a generic qualitative approach to explore offspring perceptions of how the communication styles same-sex parents used in divorce-related conversations affected the parent-offspring relationship. Results of the study indicate that communication styles same-sex parents use in divorce-related conversations with their offspring affects the same-sex parent-offspring relationship. When parents are ambiguous or triangulate their offspring, the same-sex parent-offspring relationship is negatively impacted. When parents effectively communicate, the same-sex parent-offspring

relationship is positively influenced. Findings from this study extends existing literature on this topic by including same-sex parented families which have not yet been explored in this topic. Findings from this study enhances social change by providing insight into how offspring from same-sex parented families perceive communication styles used by their same-sex parents during divorce-related conversations and how the same-sex parent-offspring relationship may be impacted. Findings from this study also suggest that it would be important to consider how best to support offspring as their same-sex parents dissolve their legal or committed unions.

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Appendix A: Participant Invitation Flyer

Research participants needed!!

You may qualify for this study if:

- You are at least 18 years of age
- Have at least one parent who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT)
- Your LGBT parents ended their committed relationship or legal marriage during your childhood.
- Participated in at least one conversation with at least one of your LGBT parents about their divorce or separation.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of perceived communication styles used in divorce-related conversations and its influence on parent-offspring relationships amongst LGBT parented families. The information you provide may be helpful in understanding how best to support the needs of the children or offspring of LGBT parented families of dissolved unions.

The information you provide in this study will be strictly confidential and only used for the purpose of the study. This research project is part of a dissertation study conducted by Madonna Siao, a Walden University doctoral candidate.

The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time and will be conducted over the phone.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Madonna Siao at

Madonna.siao@waldenu.edu

Appendix B: Demographic Information

1. Please state your gender _____
2. Please state your ethnicity. _____
3. What is your age? _____
4. How old you were when your parents dissolved their relationship? _____
5. What is the gender of your biological parent? _____
6. What is your parents' ethnicity? _____
7. What is your marital status? _____

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Thinking back to when you discussed your parents' divorce, explain to me how your parents discussed their divorce with you.
2. During these conversations were you able to express your concerns or ask questions about the divorce? Explain this to me.
3. Thinking back to when you discussed your parents' divorce, explain to me how your parents discussed their divorce with you.
4. During these conversations were you able to express your concerns or ask questions about the divorce? Explain this to me.
5. Explain to me how you felt when asked to relay information between your parents.
6. Where and how did these conversations take place? Explain how you felt in your parents' ability to communicate during the conversation?
7. Explain to me what your relationship with your parents were like after the conversation?
8. How would you describe your relationship with your parent(s) today?
9. If you could change anything about the way your parents communicated details of their divorce with you, what would you change?

Appendix D: Screening Questions

1. Are you at least 18 years old?
2. Were one of your parents in a same-sex relationship (long term committed or legally married)?
3. Has that relationship dissolved?
4. Have you participated in at least one divorce-related conversation with one of your parents during or after the divorce?