

# Effects of Parental Divorce on Uncertainty Following Initial Communication with a Potential Romantic Partner

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EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON UNCERTAINTY  
FOLLOWING INITIAL COMMUNICATION WITH  
A POTENTIAL ROMANTIC PARTNER

by

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ABSTRACT  
EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON UNCERTAINTY  
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Julia A. Hansch

Marquette University, 2010

Decades of research have supported Berger and Calabrese's (1975) Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT), which posits that reducing uncertainty is a chief goal of initial communication between strangers. This study extends the scope of URT, focusing on initial communication between strangers who see themselves as potential romantic partners. Further, this study specifically examines the potential influence of a well-researched external factor that has been found to negatively affect the way people communicate and behave within romantic relationships: parental divorce. Although many studies have assessed the impact of parental divorce on communication in developed relationships, there is little research examining its impact on initial communication, specifically, uncertainty levels, between potential romantic partners. This study provides an initial examination of this question.

A review of existing research suggests that the presence of parental divorce may result in increased negative communication patterns and distrust toward potential romantic partners, and that these effects are more pronounced the younger the child is when divorce occurs. These findings guided the hypothesis that individuals with divorced parents would express higher levels of uncertainty than those whose parents are not divorced. A second hypothesis predicted that the younger individuals were when their parents divorced, the higher their level of uncertainty would be. A research question asks whether current number of friends and similarity to a potential partner will affect uncertainty levels.

To test these hypotheses and answer this question, a convenience sample of university students filled out a survey, which contained a hypothetical conversation that could have taken place between the participant and a potential romantic partner. Then, respondents completed the CL7 confidence scale (Clatterbuck, 1979) and answered a series of demographic questions, including whether their parents divorced, and if so, at what age the divorce occurred. A multiple regression analysis of the data indicated that neither parental divorce nor age at which divorce occurred influenced respondents' level of uncertainty. Other findings demonstrated statistically significant relationships in the non-divorced parents data subset between respondents' perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner, ethnicity and sex and respondents' level of certainty. Potential explanations for these findings and theoretical implications are discussed.

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### **Review of Literature**

Since its development by Berger and Calabrese in 1975, Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) has become a highly influential communication theory that has received much support, some criticism and has been expanded in multiple directions. URT originally asserted that reducing uncertainty is a chief goal of the initial communication between strangers. This study, however, seeks to extend the reach of URT to encompass initial communication between two potential romantic partners, rather than random strangers. Research suggests that many factors affect one's level of uncertainty in initial communication, including expectations, social identities and perceived similarity to the stranger one is about to meet (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). This study investigates the potential influence of an external factor that has been found to affect millions of people in many ways, including how they communicate: parental divorce.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009), the 2008 divorce rate in the United States was 3.5 per 1,000 people. Considering the 2008 U.S. population was approximately 304 million people (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009), a 3.5 divorce rate translates to more than 1 million divorces that occurred in the United States that year. This large number has warranted significant research on this topic, much of which has indicated short- and long-term negative impacts on children from divorced parents (e.g., Amato, 1996; Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Gabardi and Rosén, 1991; Sorosky, 1977; Southworth & Schwarz, 1987; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2008).

Such research has suggested that communication behavior may be affected by parental divorce, as individuals with divorced parents seem to more often engage in

dysfunctional interpersonal communication within their own romantic relationships than do those whose parents are not divorced (Amato, 2000; Amato, 1996; Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Sanders, Halford & Behrens, 1999). Some research has demonstrated long-term psychological effects of parental divorce, including increased distrust toward future partners and negative expectations about relationship commitment (e.g., Gabardi and Rosén, 1991; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000). Such findings may also offer implications regarding how such issues might affect communication, although research has not addressed this topic specifically. Research also indicates that the negative effects of parental divorce are more pronounced the younger the child is when the divorce occurs (Amato, 1996; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000).

Although many studies have assessed the impact of parental divorce on the communication in developed, committed relationships, there is little research examining its impact on initial communication, specifically, uncertainty levels between potential romantic partners. Further, much research related to URT concentrates on either initial communication between strangers or communication within developed relationships, with little research focusing on potential romantic partners. Using URT, this study seeks to begin filling these gaps in the research to potentially offer a more precise explanation of how parental divorce affects the earliest stage of a romantic relationship – initial communication between potential partners.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Developed in 1975, URT suggests that strangers' chief goal in initial dyadic communication is to reduce uncertainty about one another, and thus, each person strives

to gain as much knowledge as possible in order to do so. This is the case because in URT, uncertainty is conceptualized as negative. Berger and Bradac (1982) describe the negative effects of uncertainty in an interpersonal context by stating that it “lowers our ability to exercise control in the situation and decreases the probabilities that we will obtain our goals in the interaction” (p. 14). Regardless of the interaction goals, Berger and Bradac (1982) point out that “most persons prefer an amiable, relaxed, and conflict-free interaction to one which is unfriendly, saturated with tension, and conflict-ridden. In order to achieve these kinds of interactions, it is imperative that uncertainty be reduced” (p. 7). Thus, because people prefer to reduce uncertainty when first meeting someone, as this uncertainty makes them feel uncomfortable, they strive to gain knowledge about that person because it helps puts them at ease in the situation. The knowledge one gains will enable one to better predict (and later evaluate) the other’s communication behavior. The theory suggests that such predictive knowledge will also assist the individual in determining his or her own future communication behavior within the dyad (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This process demonstrates how the acquisition of knowledge assists one in reducing uncertainty, as described by URT.

URT categorizes relationships into three stages: entry phase, personal phase and exit phase (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The entry phase is the focal stage of the theory, as it is the phase featuring the highest level of information seeking with the goal of reducing uncertainty about the other. Of the three phases, the entry phase includes the most question-asking behavior between the members of the dyad, to assist in achieving that goal (Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman & Miller, 1976). Communication in this phase is generally guided by social norms of appropriate behavior and includes questions about

neutral topics, such as demographic information (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). Berger and Bradac (1982) assert that this type of non-controversial information exchange is pervasive during initial dyadic communication, and refer to it as “initial interaction rituals” (p. 7).

The next phase, the personal phase, is characterized by the exchange of more intimate information than was exchanged during the entry phase (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This phase is less dominated by questions about each other’s background, and instead focuses on sharing information about their values and personal problems. During this phase, individuals continue to reduce their level of uncertainty toward the other and feel more intimate (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Successful relationships perpetually exist in this phase.

However, relationships are often unsuccessful. The final phase is the exit phase, during which both parties discuss the end of the relationship. This phase may consist of multiple interactions during which the partners discuss and make decisions regarding plans for future interactions (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Berger and Calabrese (1975) assert that the decision to divorce is a possible product of the exit stage.

Berger and Calabrese (1975) note that the duration of each stage varies depending on the people involved and the circumstances surrounding the initial communication. The theory asserts that as uncertainty toward the other member of the dyad is reduced during initial communication, both members feel more comfortable in the conversation because each can better predict the other’s responses as well as their own. As this occurs, both people are more likely to share more intimate information about themselves and move into the personal phase of the relationship. As the information exchanged becomes more

intimate, the level of attraction felt toward the other increases. The increased level of attraction can propel the relationship into a lasting relationship, or, if this does not occur, could lead to the exit stage of the relationship (Berger and Calabrese, 1975).

**URT's axioms and theorems.**

Berger and Calabrese (1975) presented URT as an axiomatic theory containing seven axioms, which represent “assumed causal relationships” (p. 110). From these axioms, they deduced 21 theorems by combining every possible pair-wise comparison of the seven axioms, which collectively explain how reducing uncertainty through communication is a necessary step to building a successful, lasting relationship. Table 1 presents these axioms and theorems.

Table 1

*Uncertainty Reduction Theory Original Axioms and Theorems*

Axiom/Theorem	Description
Axiom 1	Given the high level of uncertainty present at the onset of the entry phase, as the amount of verbal communication between strangers increases, the level of uncertainty for each interactant in the relationship will decrease. As uncertainty is further reduced, the amount of verbal communication will increase.
Axiom 2	As nonverbal affiliative expressiveness increases, uncertainty levels will decrease in an initial interaction situation. In addition, decreases in uncertainty level will cause increases in nonverbal affiliative expressiveness.
Axiom 3	High levels of uncertainty cause increases in information seeking behavior. As uncertainty levels decline, information seeking behavior decreases.
Axiom 4	High levels of uncertainty in a relationship cause decreases in the intimacy level of communication content. Low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of intimacy.
Axiom 5	High levels of uncertainty produce high rates of reciprocity. Low levels of uncertainty produce low reciprocity rates.
Axiom 6	Similarities between persons reduce uncertainty, while dissimilarities produce increases in uncertainty.
Axiom 7	Increases in uncertainty level produce decreases in liking; decreases in uncertainty level produce increases in liking.
Theorem 1	Amount of verbal communication and nonverbal affiliative expressiveness are positively related.

Table 1

*Uncertainty Reduction Theory Original Axioms and Theorems (continued)*

Axiom/Theorem	Description
Theorem 2	Amount of communication and intimacy level of communication are positively related.
Theorem 3	Amount of communication and information seeking behavior are inversely related.
Theorem 4	Amount of communication and reciprocity rate are inversely related.
Theorem 5	Amount of communication and liking are positively related.
Theorem 6	Amount of communication and similarity are positively related.
Theorem 7	Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and intimacy level of communication content are positively related.
Theorem 8	Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and information seeking are inversely related.
Theorem 9	Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and reciprocity rate are inversely related.
Theorem 10	Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and liking are positively related.
Theorem 11	Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness and similarity are positively related.
Theorem 12	Intimacy level of communication content and information seeking are inversely related.
Theorem 13	Intimacy level of communication content and reciprocity rate are inversely related.
Theorem 14	Intimacy level of communication content and liking are positively related.

Table 1

*Uncertainty Reduction Theory Original Axioms and Theorems (continued)*

Axiom/Theorem	Description
Theorem 15	Intimacy level of communication content and similarity are positively related.
Theorem 16	Information seeking and reciprocity rate are positively related.
Theorem 17	Information seeking and liking are negatively related.
Theorem 18	Information seeking and similarity are negatively related.
Theorem 19	Reciprocity rate and liking are negatively related.
Theorem 20	Reciprocity rate and similarity are negatively related.
Theorem 21	Similarity and liking are positively related.

*Note.* From "Some Explorations in Initial Interaction and Beyond: Toward a Developmental Theory of Interpersonal Communication," by C. R. Berger & R. J. Calabrese, 1975, *Human Communication Research*, 1, 99-112.

Several of these axioms and theorems are directly related to this study, while others do not apply in this context. This study asked respondents a series of questions regarding their uncertainty level after reading a hypothetical conversation with a potential romantic partner. Because respondents did not participate in an actual conversation, there were many aspects of URT that could not be evaluated during this study. For example, there was no way to evaluate the impact of nonverbal affiliative expressiveness (described in Axiom 2 and Theorems 1 and 7-11), because no actual conversation took place. Further, because respondents read a prepared conversation rather than engaging in a dialogue of their own, there was no way to evaluate respondents' reciprocity (described in Axiom 5 and Theorems 4, 15, 19 and 20), amount of communication exchanged (described in Axiom 1 and Theorems 1-6) or information seeking behavior (described in Axiom 3 and Theorems 12, 16-18).

However, several of URT's axioms and theorems directly apply to this study and could be evaluated in this context. These include Axiom 7, which states, "increases in uncertainty level produce decreases in liking; decreases in uncertainty level produce increases in liking" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 107). This axiom captures URT's underlying premise regarding how relationships move from the entry phase (which this study is evaluating) to the personal phase of a relationship.

Next, Axiom 6, which states, "similarities between persons reduce uncertainty while dissimilarities produce increases in uncertainty" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 106), and Theorem 21, which states, "similarity and liking are positively related" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 109), are also relevant to this study. Berger and Calabrese (1975) support their axiom by suggesting that, "similarity reduces the necessity for the

generation of a large number of alternatives for explaining behavior” (p. 106). Other research, including that of Parks and Adelman (1983), has also offered support for this axiom by demonstrating a negative relationship between perceived partner similarity and uncertainty. Thus, in this study, a respondent’s perceived similarity to a potential romantic partner may affect the respondent’s level of uncertainty, regardless of his or her parent's marital status.

Axiom 4, which states, “high levels of uncertainty in a relationship cause decreases in the intimacy level of communication content. Low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of intimacy” (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 103), and Theorem 14, which states, “Intimacy level of communication content and liking are positively related” (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 109) are also considered in this study. This axiom and theorem are germane to this study because some URT research has suggested that those who desire to have more friends than they currently have tend to communicate differently in initial conversations than do those who indicate they are satisfied with their current number of friends (Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck & Schulman, 1976). Specifically, Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck and Schulman (1976) found that those respondents who desired more friends than they currently have were more likely to share more intimate and opinionated information about themselves earlier in conversations than were those who indicated they were satisfied with their current amount of friends. Thus, it may be the case that those respondents who have fewer friends than they would prefer may demonstrate lower levels of uncertainty (higher levels of confidence) than those respondents who are satisfied with their current number of friends.

**Critiques of URT and responses by Berger and colleagues.**

Although URT has received much praise and has been the framework for countless studies, some critics have disagreed with the assumptions and tenets of the theory. For instance, Sunnafrank (1986) took issue with URT's claim that reducing uncertainty is the chief goal of initial communication and offered a reformulated approach to URT, which he named "Predicted-outcome-value (POV)" theory. The underlying principle of POV suggests that a central goal of initial communication is based on a "rewards-cost analysis" (p. 28) of the relationship that could potentially develop from the conversation. Although Sunnafrank (1986) does not deny that dyads involved in initial communication attempt to reduce uncertainty about one another, he claims that the rewards-cost analysis is the overriding goal in initial communication, and thus, "predicted-outcome-value perspective posits that a more primary goal [than reducing uncertainty] is the maximization of relationship outcomes" (Sunnafrank, 1986, p. 9). In fact, Sunnafrank (1986) suggests that "these two goals may be complementary: the reduction of uncertainty may aid individuals to achieve more positive experiences in the relationship" (p. 9). Thus, if one predicts a good outcome for a relationship with someone, he or she is more likely to increase communication with that person; if one predicts a negative outcome, he or she is likely to decrease communication with that person and then uncertainty is not an issue (Sunnafrank, 1986).

Berger and Gudykunst (1991) criticized Sunnafrank's challenge to URT by further highlighting how uncertainty reduction and relationship expectations work together in communication:

Predicted outcome values themselves are arrived at by uncertainty reduction processes; that is, one cannot generate such values without reducing uncertainty. Given the importance of uncertainty reduction to the determination of predicted outcome values...the primacy of predicted outcome values in determining the magnitude of uncertainty reduction efforts is misplaced. (p. 56)

Berger and Gudykunst's (1991) response defends URT's underlying premise by reiterating the centrality of the uncertainty reduction process in initial communication.

Kellermann and Reynolds (1990) also criticized URT, claiming there exists little support for the theory's third axiom, which states, "High levels of uncertainty cause increases in information seeking behavior. As uncertainty levels decline, information seeking behavior decreases" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 103). Kellermann and Reynolds (1990) asserted that, although the axiom seems "intuitive" (p. 67), their study (and others) did not find a correlation between level of uncertainty and information seeking. A suggestion that an axiom is unfounded is especially damaging in an axiomatic theory, because the theory's theorems are derived from these axioms (Gudykunst, 2005). Thus, if an axiom is inaccurate, so will be the derived theorem(s). Despite Kellermann and Reynold's (1990) suggestion, URT's original third axiom has remained a part of the theory, which continues to be framework for countless studies.

### **URT research.**

Despite these critiques, decades of research has supported or expanded upon URT's axioms, theorems and Berger and Calabrese's (1975) general assertion that reducing uncertainty is a chief goal of initial communication. A sampling of this research is described below.

*Axiom and theorem support.*

An early example of URT research was conducted by Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck and Schulman (1976). Their study asked respondents to review 150 hypothetical statements made during an initial, two-hour conversation between strangers and to sort the statements regarding the appropriate time to discuss each item during the conversation. Results indicated that biographic-demographic statements were nearly unanimously placed in the first part of the conversation, and the most intimate items were placed at the end. These findings are supportive of URT's second theorem.

Clatterbuck's (1979) research also provided structural support for URT. His research found a positive correlation between perceived similarity and attributional confidence (certainty), which supports URT's sixth axiom. Clatterbuck's (1979) findings also identified a positive correlation between attributional confidence (certainty) and interpersonal attraction, supportive of URT's seventh axiom.

Years later, Douglas (1990) conducted a study to test URT in which he evaluated two same-sex strangers' initial, brief conversations. Douglas' (1990) results validated three areas of URT. First, he found that uncertainty was reduced as the conversations continued, which is supportive of URT's first axiom. Second, as uncertainty was reduced, the participants asked fewer information-seeking questions of one another, a finding that is supportive of the theory's third axiom and third theorem. Finally, as uncertainty was reduced, the attraction each party felt toward the other increased, which supports URT's seventh axiom (Douglas, 1990).

Neuliep and Grohskopf (2000) conducted two studies that examined initial communication between two strangers – both same-sex and cross-sex pairs. They found

that satisfaction with communication increased for both parties when the participants indicated they were able to learn information and reduce their uncertainty about the other. These findings are supportive of URT's first and seventh axioms and fifth theorem, and demonstrate that reducing uncertainty about another individual in an initial dyadic conversation produced favorable perceptions toward the other following the conversation (Neuliep & Grohskopf, 2000).

*URT expansions.*

In addition to testing URT and providing support for its axioms and theorems, many researchers have expanded on the original theory. Such expansions include the proposal of additional theoretical axioms, the examination of uncertainty within a developed relationship and an intercultural adaptation of the theory, which are described below.

*New axioms.*

Research by Parks and Adelman (1983) led to the addition of an eighth axiom to the theory. This axiom asserts that as one increases his or her interaction with one's partner's family and friends, his or her level of uncertainty will be further reduced (Berger & Gudykunst, 1991). Years later, Kellermann and Reynolds (1990) suggested the addition of two new axioms to the theory, including, "As the target's behavior becomes more deviant, level of uncertainty increases" and, "The greater the incentive value of the target, the lower [the] persons' level of uncertainty" (p. 66). These suggested new axioms have not been added to URT. More recently, Neuliep and Grohskopf (2000) suggested

the addition of a ninth axiom, claiming that as uncertainty levels decreased during initial communication, levels of communication satisfaction increased between dyads.

*Uncertainty within a developed relationship.*

Whereas Berger and Calabrese (1975) focused on initial encounters, some researchers have found evidence that levels of uncertainty may at times increase and decrease during the course of a relationship (e.g., Berger & Bradac, 1982; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985; Turner, 1990).

For example, although Planalp and Honeycutt (1985) accepted URT's basic premise that reducing uncertainty through acquiring information is a central goal in communication, they argued that not all information reduces uncertainty. They suggested that information-exchange can also result in increased uncertainty between two people in a relationship if one person acquires new information about the other that is inconsistent with existing information. For instance, if someone in a romantic relationship says or does something that is not consistent with his or her usual behavior, the other member of the couple may experience an increase in uncertainty based on this new information.

Planalp and Honeycutt (1985) conducted research to test their hypothesis with dating couples and found that 90 percent of respondents stated they experienced an event in their relationship that increased their uncertainty about their partner. This uncertainty-increasing behavior affected both the respondent's beliefs about the other person, as well as themselves, along with affecting various aspects of the relationship, such as levels of trust and involvement between the two (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985). Similarly, Turner's (1990) research regarding increases of uncertainty experienced by married couples found

that 80 percent of respondents, both men and women, claimed they experienced an event that increased their levels of uncertainty about their spouse.

In an extension of Planalp and Honeycutt's (1985) findings, Knobloch and Solomon (2002) suggest that because uncertainty has been found to increase between two people involved in an existing relationship, this type of uncertainty ought to be examined and explained through its own lens, specifically tailored to examine relational uncertainty within already intimate relationships. This approach differs from examining one's thoughts about a partner during an initial encounter, which was the original focus of URT (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Rather than simply "uncertainty," Knobloch and Solomon (2002) refer to this construct as "relational uncertainty," which they define as "the degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement within interpersonal relationships" (p. 245). According to Knobloch and Solomon (2002), relational uncertainty consists of three components: self uncertainty (one's own doubts about his or her role in the relationship); partner uncertainty (doubts about one's partner's role in the relationship) and relationship uncertainty (doubts about the relationship itself). Examining all three factors offers a holistic view of the uncertainty within the relationship, as it pertains to the relationship itself (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002).

Recent research (e.g., Bevan & Tidgewell, 2009; Theiss & Solomon, 2008) has continued to apply Knobloch and Solomon's (2002) relational uncertainty construct to examine uncertainty within intimate relationships. Theiss and Solomon (2008) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the ways in which relational uncertainty affects intimacy in a relationship. The authors found that the higher the amount of relational uncertainty, the lower the level of intimacy existed between the couple, as reported by survey

respondents in the study. This finding, which supports URT's fourth axiom, might be explained because "the discomfort associated with this compromised communication situation [caused by high levels of relational uncertainty], as well as the more stylized and impersonal communication that results, acts as a barrier to intimacy in partners" (Theiss & Solomon, 2008, p. 627). Conversely, when a couple's relational uncertainty levels were lower, couples perceived higher levels of intimacy in their relationship. These researchers' efforts to expand URT to include issues of relational uncertainty sheds light on the ways in which uncertainty can affect communication within an interpersonal relationship, whether between new acquaintances or an established couple.

*Intercultural perspective.*

Although URT was developed and initially tested primarily in the United States, researchers have tested the theory and found support for it in intercultural dyadic situations (Berger & Gudykunst, 1991). For example, Gudykunst, Yang and Nishida (1985) conducted research with students enrolled in universities in the United States (considered to be a low-context culture) Japan and Korea (considered to be high-context cultures). They found support for URT in all three cultures and in three types of relationships, including acquaintances, friends and dating relationships. Based on these findings, the authors asserted that URT "can be generalized across relationships and cultures" (Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1985). Further, Gudykunst and Nishida's (1984) research in the United States and Japan studied students engaged in hypothetical conversations with strangers from their own culture and from another culture, examining uncertainty reduction processes that took place. Their results demonstrated support for

three of the four axioms of URT, suggesting that the theory is also applicable in intercultural contexts.

It should be noted that the original axioms and theorems of URT do not address the influence of ethnicity on one's level of uncertainty. However, results from these studies, and other similar studies (e.g., Gudykunst 1985) suggest that URT can be generalized to the initial communication between persons from similar or different cultures. Berger and Gudykunst (1991) explain this generalizability in the following way:

Levels of uncertainty are likely to be considerably higher in [intercultural] encounters than in intracultural encounters...[because] cultural dissimilarities are present. Given that Axiom 6 of URT focuses on the general similarity construct (not attitude similarity specifically), cultural similarity/dissimilarity easily can be integrated into the theory. (p. 47)

Gudykunst's (2005) more recent work has expanded the intercultural focus of URT into its own theory, named the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory of Strangers' Intercultural Adjustment. With its roots in URT, AUM suggests, "that strangers must manage their anxiety and uncertainty to adjust to the host culture" (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 448). Broadly speaking, AUM asserts that superficial causes, such as social identity or cultural similarity, are indicative of uncertainty and anxiety, which can be moderated through mindfulness, or being "consciously aware of our communication behavior" (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 425), and lead to intercultural adjustment. Gudykunst (2005) describes intercultural adjustment as "a process involving feeling comfortable in the host culture, as well as communicating effectively and engaging in socially appropriate behavior with host nationals" (p. 425). There are two main applications for his theory, "to help strangers adjust to host cultures" and "to design

intercultural adjustment training programs” (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 448). The creation of AUM is another example of how the tenets of URT are being used in recent research.

In the process of creating the intercultural expansion of URT, Gudykunst and Kim (2003) also introduced a new concept, which suggests that individuals have various “thresholds of uncertainty.” This concept suggests some people require more (or less) disclosure, resulting in less (or more) uncertainty in order feel comfortable communicating (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). For example, if an individual is involved in a dyadic conversation during which he or she feels uncertainty above his or her threshold, he or she will not have sufficient information to effectively predict the other’s communication behavior. This inability to predict the other’s behavior, which helps determine one’s own behavior, can cause discomfort and impede effective communication.

Conversely, if the level of uncertainty one feels during an initial conversation with a stranger is below his or her threshold of uncertainty, one might feel bored or uninterested in engaging in a conversation with the other because his or her communication behavior is too predictable. In this instance, one might feel as though there is nothing new to discover through conversing, since the level of uncertainty is so low and communication behavior is so predictable (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003).

In their discussion about thresholds of uncertainty, Gudykunst and Kim (2003) note that uncertainty is a cognitive response that is commonly experienced when meeting and interacting with strangers. In addition to the presence of uncertainty in initial communication with strangers, Gudykunst and Kim (2003) argue that it is also important to consider the closely related role of anxiety, the emotional response to an unfamiliar

situation. Gudykunst and Kim (2003) describe anxiety as a common emotional response to strangers that includes “the feelings of being uneasy, tense, worried, and apprehensive about what might happen” (p. 34), which are often found in participants of initial communication. As uncertainty is reduced through the exchange and information and increase in familiarity with a stranger, anxiety is also reduced. In the same way they assert individuals have varying thresholds of uncertainty, Gudykunst and Kim (2003) contend everyone has both a maximum and minimum threshold for anxiety. If the level of anxiety one feels is above one’s maximum threshold, one will feel too uncomfortable to communicate; if it is below one’s minimum threshold, one may not feel interested enough to communicate.

Understanding the emotional response (anxiety) associated with the cognitive response (uncertainty) of initial communication among strangers is potentially beneficial. There is a growing body of research that underscores the importance of the role of emotions in theory building (Planalp, 2003). Planalp (2003) asserts, “adding emotion enhances our ability to test and develop theories and make links to other theories and phenomena they might explain” (p. 93). Incorporating emotions into relationship research is especially useful, as relationships often grow, or terminate, based on emotional well-being (Planalp, 2003).

These diverse applications of URT and their results suggest that the theory is a useful conceptual tool that can effectively shed light on various aspects of initial human communication, which is why it was selected for use in this study. The following section reviews existing research regarding the impact of parental divorce on the communication tendencies and attitudes toward relationships among adult children of divorced parents.

**Impact of Parental Divorce on Attitudes and Communication**

Multiple studies have researched the impact of parental divorce on children. They have found a higher incidence of divorce among children with divorced parents (Amato, 1996; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Sanders, Halford & Behrens, 1999) and a significant, negative impact on both attitudes and expectations about marriage in children with divorced parents (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Gabardi & Rosén, 1991; Sanders, Halford & Behrens, 1999; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Weigel, 2007; Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2008). Research has also suggested such attitudes and expectations may contribute to increased levels of distrust toward future romantic partners among children from divorced parents compared to those whose parents are not divorced (Southworth & Schwarz, 1987; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000; Weigel, 2007). Further, individuals with divorced parents have been found to engage in dysfunctional interpersonal communication within their own romantic relationships, potentially resulting in higher rates of conflict than do those whose parents are not divorced (Amato, 2000; Amato, 1996; Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Sanders, Halford & Behrens, 1999). Although many studies have assessed the impact of parental divorce in developed, committed relationships, there is little research examining its impact on initial communication between potential romantic partners not yet in a relationship. It is also important to note that a small body of research suggests that parental conflict, with or without divorce, negatively impacts children's emotions and behaviors in both short- and long-term ways (e.g., Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Turner & Kopiec, 2006). Further, it should be noted that parental divorce and conflict does not affect all children in uniform ways. Research has suggested that various other factors surrounding divorce, including

additional family transitions such as the subsequent remarriage of a parent, may further increase the negative effects of divorce (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Such research has asserted that the more transitions a child faces following the divorce, the more negative effects the child may experience (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Other research (e.g., Sarrazin & Cyr, 2007) has suggested that some children are seemingly resilient to divorce's potential affects.

### **Divorce effects models.**

Researchers in the area of family and divorce attribute multiple reasons to the intergenerational transmission of divorce, and the above-noted harmful effects that can develop in children with divorced parents. Amato and Cheadle (2008) categorize such reasons into three popular perspectives that describe the relationship between parental divorce and children: the standard family effects model, the child effects model and the passive genetic effects model.

The standard family effects model suggests that parental conflict and instability that often occurs before, during and following a divorce, directly affects children negatively and can lead to detrimental short- and long-term behavior issues. Conversely, the child effects model suggests that children's behavioral problems cause family problems and stress for the parents, which can lead to interparental conflict and divorce. Lastly, the passive genetic model suggests that parents genetically pass various personality traits or behaviors, such as anti-social behavior, to their children. According to this model, adults who possess these traits are more likely to divorce, as these traits genetically predispose them to do so, and their children are likely to experience similar results from such traits (Amato & Cheadle, 2008).

Amato and Cheadle (2008) state that the standard family effects model is the one most commonly accepted by social scientists, as it has been well tested in the field (e.g., Amato & Booth, 2001; Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Sanders, Halford & Behrens, 1999). One recent study conducted by Amato and Cheadle (2008) demonstrated further support for this model. They conducted a study examining the impact of parental conflict in divorced families on children's behavior. The researchers surveyed families with either biological or adopted children. They found that as parental conflict increased, children's behavior problems, including getting in trouble at school or with police, increased; as parental conflict decreased, so did the incidences of children's behavior problems. Amato and Cheadle (2008) found a higher incidence of children's behavioral problems in families in which the parents were divorced than in families in which both parents were continuously married. Further, when children's behavior problems increased (or decreased), parental problems did not increase (or decrease), a finding that is consistent with the standard family effects model, but inconsistent with the child effects model (Amato & Cheadle, 2008). Most notably, the results did not show a difference in the above-noted trend in parental conflict and children's behavior problems between the families with biological or with adopted children, a finding that does not support the passive effects model of divorce effects, but is consistent with the standard family effects model (Amato & Cheadle, 2008).

### *Effects of divorce on children.*

Many of the effects of parental divorce have been studied in the fields of psychology and sociology, including divorce's impact on emotions, cohabitation before marriage, socioeconomic status, relational cognitions and behaviors and deficits of trust

toward the other sex (Amato, 1996; Gabardi & Rosén, 1991; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000; Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2008). A review of this research, however, can lead to inferences about how such impacts might affect communication behaviors in children with divorced parents. This section reviews some of the psychological and sociological effects of divorce, which may have implications for communication behaviors. The following section will specifically address research that has identified the effects of divorce on communication behaviors.

*Psychological and sociological effects of divorce.*

Amato (1996) found that parental divorce has a direct impact on the interpersonal behaviors of adult children, including increased problems with anger and jealousy with members of the other sex. Amato's longitudinal study investigated multiple ways in which parental divorce potentially affects children, including influencing their "life course and socioeconomic variables" (Amato, 1996, p. 629). His research results indicate that parental divorce moderately affects such variables as increasing children's likelihood of cohabitating before marriage, and marrying at a younger age, both of which have been linked to higher divorce rates (Amato, 1996).

Research has demonstrated that parental divorce may also affect adult children's attitudes toward committed relationships and levels of trusts toward those of the other sex. For example, Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley and Markman (2008) conducted a study that found a correlation between adult children with divorced parents and lower levels of relationship confidence and commitment in their own lives. Wallerstein and Lewis' (2004) longitudinal research also suggests that adult children with divorced parents experience difficulty committing to a long-term intimate relationship of their own.

Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) suggest that parental divorce leaves a lasting legacy on children's confidence in their ability to be part of a committed, lasting relationship.

Wallerstein, Lewis and Blakeslee (2000) state that in addition to experiencing the dissolution of their parents' marriage, children also experience a sense of abandonment when their parents divorce. This sense of abandonment can also lead to their inability to trust potential romantic partners later in life (Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000).

Amato (1996) also suggests that children with divorced parents may experience emotional instability stemming from the divorce, which may increase their level of distrust toward future romantic partners later in life.

Additionally, Gabardi and Rosén's (1991) research found that adult children with divorced parents were more critical of potential romantic partners and held a more negative attitude toward marriage than did those whose parents were not divorced. Gabardi and Rosén (1991) contend that this negativity might serve as a defense mechanism, suggesting adult children with divorced parents are fearful of experiencing a failed relationship of their own. Sorosky (1977) also suggests children with divorced parents are cautious in pursuing their own relationships out of fear that they might fail and then experience similar feelings of abandonment they may have felt following their parents' divorce.

Although these findings discuss psychological issues that children might experience as a result of parental divorce, there may be implications regarding how such issues might affect communication. For example, if adult children with divorced parents exhibit lower levels of trust toward or are more critical of potential romantic partners, these feelings may impede their ability or desire to effectively communicate with a

potential partner. If one is unable to communicate with a potential partner, this could affect whether a relationship develops between the two. Although no research has addressed this topic specifically, there has been some research regarding how parental divorce affects communication behavior in adult children, which is discussed below.

*Communication effects of divorce.*

Although Amato's (1996) study found evidence that parental divorce moderately affects children's future life decisions, some of which have been linked to higher divorce rates, he found stronger evidence "that interpersonal behavior is the primary mediator of parents divorce effects and that its role is largely independent of other explanatory variables" (p. 637). One such interpersonal behavior is parental communication, which he asserts has a direct impact on children, making it more influential than other variables. Amato (1996) concludes that children with divorced parents experience an increased exposure to poor dyadic communication models displayed by their parents, which inhibits their ability to learn effective communication skills, including problem-solving tactics. Further, if children do not learn effective communication skills, this hampers their ability to "successful[ly] function within [their own] marital roles," (Amato, 1996, p. 638), which increases their risk of divorce later in life.

Further, Herzog and Cooney (2002) conducted research that resulted in similar findings regarding the negative impact of parental divorce on the interpersonal communication behavior of adult children with divorced parents. Their study found that adult children with divorced parents demonstrated (among other negative communication traits) poorer listening skills and a lower ability to remain calm during discussions involving problems, than did those whose parents were not divorced during interpersonal

communication with their intimate partner (Herzog & Cooney, 2002). These studies provide support for the argument that parental divorce negatively impacts children's communication skills, both in short- and long-term ways.

*Influence of Age on Parental Divorce's Impact.*

In addition to asserting parental divorce's impact on children's communication patterns and attitudes, research also suggests that the child's age when a divorce occurs may affect the magnitude of its impact on him or her (Amato, 1996; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000).

Amato (1996) found that the younger the child is when his or her parents divorce, the more the divorce will negatively affect that child's communication behavior and decrease their trust in future partners. Specifically, his study found that individuals who were younger than 12 years old when their parents divorced were the most negatively influenced by the event (Amato, 1996). Amato (1996) suggests this is likely because younger children had a smaller time frame in which to learn functional dyadic communication skills from their parents. Further, Amato's (1996) results demonstrated that children who were younger than 12 years old when their parents divorced experienced the highest incidence of divorce later in life (children 13-19 years old had the second highest rate and those older than 20 had the lowest rate).

Results from Wallerstein's 25-year longitudinal study of the effects of parental divorce on adult children echo Amato's (1996) finding that the younger the child when the parental divorce occurred, the more the child was negatively affected (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000). Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) claim that parental divorce's negative effects tend to be most powerful in those adult children

who were six years old or younger when the divorce occurred. This is because these children “had so little capacity to comfort themselves” (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004, p. 360) during such a tumultuous time in their young lives.

### **The Relationship Between Parental Divorce and Uncertainty**

The previously reviewed research describes the long-term ways in which parental divorce has been found to affect children’s communication behaviors and cognitions regarding relationships. The child’s age at which a parental divorce occurred has also been found to be a mediating factor regarding the divorce’s impact. These long-term effects, including increased dysfunctional communication patterns, decreased levels of trust toward potential romantic partners and negative expectations about relationships could potentially increase one’s level of uncertainty during initial communication with a potential romantic partner.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

This study applies URT to an examination of the initial communication between potential romantic partners and also examines the possible influence of parental divorce on uncertainty levels in this context. Findings could lead to an understanding of how initial communication with a potential romantic partner might be affected by parental divorce. Considering the research findings from URT research and regarding the impact of parental divorce on communication patterns and attitudes toward potential romantic partners, the following research questions and hypotheses are proposed:

**RQ1:** How does the presence of parental divorce affect one’s level of uncertainty during initial communication with a potential dating partner?

Because prior research has identified increased negative communication patterns and distrust toward potential romantic partners in individuals with divorced parents (Amato, 1996; Gabardi and Rosén, 1991; Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Sanders, Halford and Behrens, 1999; Southworth and Schwarz, 1987; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000; Weigel, 2007), it is predicted that:

**H1:** Individuals with divorced parents are more likely to express a higher level of uncertainty than are individuals with non-divorced parents during initial communication with a potential romantic partner.

**RQ2:** Is there a difference regarding the age of an individual at the time of a parental divorce and the impact of parental divorce on his or her level of uncertainty?

Research indicates that the younger the child is when his or her parents divorce, the more the divorce will negatively affect the child's communication behavior and decrease the child's trust in future partners (Amato, 1996; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000). It is predicted that:

**H2:** The younger the individual was when the parental divorce occurred, the higher the individual's expressed level of uncertainty will be.

Previous research and theoretical speculation has indicated that perceived similarity and amount of friends may influence one's uncertainty levels during initial communication (e.g., Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck & Schulman, 1976; Parks & Adelman, 1983). However, because limited research has been conducted in this area, this study will not hypothesize about these variables, but rather ask the following research question:

**RQ3:** Do other variables, including perceived similarity or amount of friends, affect respondents' level of uncertainty?

### **Methodology**

The methodology described below was followed in order to test these hypotheses and answer these research questions. This study hypothesizes that the two major variables predicting an individual's level of uncertainty are the presence of parental divorce and the age when the divorce occurred. Thus, in H1, the independent variable is the presence of parental divorce; and in H2, the independent variable is the age when the parental divorce occurred. In both hypotheses, the dependent variable is the level of uncertainty expressed by respondents, which will be measured by respondents' confidence in their ability to evaluate potential romantic partners in initial communication.

Covariates that may affect an individual's level of uncertainty might include, but are not limited to, the respondent's age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation and amount of current friends. These variables' effect on the uncertainty level will shed light on the influence of such factors on uncertainty in an initial dyadic conversation with a potential romantic partner.

### **Sample**

For this study, 310 undergraduate students attending Marquette University and enrolled in introductory communication courses were recruited for voluntary participation. This sample – and the population from which it was selected – is likely to be unmarried, as the median ages of American men and women when first married are approximately 27 and 25 years old, respectively (U. S. Census Bureau, 2005). Thus, this sample is likely to be unmarried and old enough to be familiar with the experience of an initial conversation with a potential romantic partner.

Of the 310 recruited students, one student was married and four students were 17 years old, and thus, were excluded from the study, resulting in 305 valid surveys. The average age of the participants was 18.8 years old (ages ranged from 18 to 23); 125 of the participants were male and 180 were female; 251 of the respondents described their ethnicity as “white/non-Latino,” 19 as “Latino,” 18 as “African American,” seven as “Asian American” and nine indicated their ethnicity as “other;” 246 respondents indicated that their parents were not divorced and 49 indicated their parents were divorced. Six respondents noted that their parents were never married (respondents did not indicate the current relationship between their parents) and four did not answer the divorce question, thus these surveys were not included in the analysis. Seven surveys were missing other data, and were thus excluded from the analysis, resulting in 288 usable surveys in this study.

### **Procedures**

To test the hypotheses, an investigation was conducted using a convenience sampling of volunteers. After Institutional Review Board approval was granted, the survey was pre-tested on 20 undergraduate students, who were then asked if the survey was clear and understandable and if the hypothetical conversation seemed gender-neutral and realistic. The students indicated the survey was clear and seemed both gender-neutral and realistic; thus, no changes were made to the survey for the full-scale study.

The principal investigator contacted Marquette University teaching assistants and requested the opportunity to speak to their classes to recruit students to participate in the study. The classes included 14 sections of two introductory communication courses, comprised of College of Communication undergraduate students who are majoring in the

following areas: advertising, broadcast and electronic communication, communication studies, corporate communication, journalism, public relations or theatre arts. Once permitted to do so, the principal investigator spoke to students during class time, reviewing an informed consent form and asking students for their voluntary participation in the study. The students who volunteered to participate in the study first reviewed and signed the written consent form (see Appendix A). Next, the principal investigator reviewed the survey with the students and asked students if they had any questions about the survey. After any questions were answered, students were given approximately five minutes to complete the survey. Once all students had completed the survey, the principal investigator collected all surveys, thanked the students for their participation and the teaching assistants for their permission and left the room. Students were not offered extra credit for their participation in the study.

### **Instrument.**

A three-part survey (see Appendix B) was administered to consenting undergraduate students at Marquette University. The first section of the survey contained a series of questions and answers that could have taken place in a conversation between the participant and a potential romantic partner. These included eight questions about non-controversial topics commonly asked during initial conversations between potential partners (Berger, 1997; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The respondents were instructed to imagine themselves asking the questions, and then receiving the responses from a person whom they have just met and who could be a potential romantic partner. In this hypothetical conversation, the potential romantic partner reveals basic information about himself or herself (the potential romantic partner's sex is not indicated and all

information presented is purposely gender-neutral), including demographic and occupational information. This type of neutral information is characteristic of the typical information exchanged between strangers in the entry phase of a relationship, during which the highest level of information seeking occurs, with a goal of reducing uncertainty (Berger, 1997; Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

After reading the questions and answers, respondents completed the second section of the instrument – a questionnaire including a seven-item confidence scale (Clatterbuck, 1979), indicating their level of confidence regarding their ability to predict the potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings. This instrument, named CL7, was developed by Clatterbuck (1979) as a way to test levels of uncertainty during initial conversations between strangers by asking respondents to indicate their percentage of confidence in predicting the other's behavior (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Clatterbuck (1979) asserted that in order to test levels of uncertainty in respondents, there must exist a way to operationalize, or measure, respondents' attributional confidence in explaining or predicting the other's behavior. According to Clatterbuck (1979), "reducing uncertainty and increasing attributional confidence become synonymous" (p. 148). Berger and Bradac (1982) echo the usefulness of the CL7 tool and state that the instrument "is designed to measure persons' subjective feeling of uncertainty about others" (p. 18).

The CL7 instrument and instruments modeled after it have been applied to many studies to measure the level of uncertainty in actual or hypothetical dyads, and have shown reliability and validity (Clatterbuck, 1979; Berger & Bradac, 1982; Douglas, 1990; Turner, 1990). Specifically, Clatterbuck (1979) tested the internal consistency of CL7, which resulted in alphas ranging from .763 - .975 (p. 152). Clatterbuck's (1979) factor

analysis of the scale resulted in “a single principal component, with all items loading on that factor at a .60 level or higher” (p. 152), which further suggests the scale’s unidimensionality. Clatterbuck (1979) also demonstrated the construct validity of CL7 by determining no significant correlation between seven variables that “might counterfeit the effects of attributional confidence” (p. 152). These items included empathy, extraversion, dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, self-esteem, neuroticism and desirability (Clatterbuck, 1979).

In the current study, to complete the CL7 scale, respondents indicated their level of confidence in predicting the potential romantic partner’s behavior, values and feelings on a zero-to-100-percent bi-polar scale (zero percent indicating no confidence, 100 percent indicating complete confidence) for each of seven questions. The respondent’s level of confidence, in turn, indicates his or her level of uncertainty about various aspects of the potential romantic partner after reading the supplied conversation (the higher the respondent’s confidence, the lower his or her level of uncertainty, and vice versa). The mean of these seven confidence scale items served as the respondents’ CL7 score during analysis.

The third section of the questionnaire asked the respondents questions about their sex, age, ethnicity, nationality and the presence of parental divorce. Respondents were also asked to indicate, using a semantic differential scale, how similar they perceived themselves to be as compared to the person answering the questions in the hypothetical conversation. Next, respondents were asked to indicate their current amount of friends: too few, the right amount or too many. Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they are adopted, and if so, whether their adoptive parents are divorced. This question

was included to reduce confusion for those respondents who are adopted by asking them to answer with regard to their adoptive parents. If parental divorce is present, the respondent was also prompted to indicate his or her age when the divorce occurred.

### **Levels of Measurement and Coding**

After the surveys were completed, data were coded, as detailed below, and entered into SPSS for analysis.

The CL7 instrument measures respondents' level of confidence regarding their ability to predict a potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings. The respondents' level of confidence, in turn indicates their level of uncertainty about various aspects of the potential romantic partner after reading the supplied conversation (the higher the respondent's confidence, the lower their level of uncertainty, and vice versa). Respondents indicated their level of confidence on a zero-to-100-percent scale for each of seven questions; thus, the data were coded numerically, from 0-100. The CL7 scale uses a ratio level of measurement.

The second section of the questionnaire posed demographic questions to measure the various variables that may have affected the respondent's CL7 score. In this section, respondents indicated the following information: age (coded numerically, from 18-25, using a ratio scale); sex ("male," coded as 1 or "female," coded as 2, using a nominal level of measurement); ethnicity ("White/Non-Latino," coded as 1, "Latino/a," coded as 2, "African American," coded as 3, "Native American," coded as 4, "Asian American," coded as 5, and "Other," coded as 6); nationality ("United States," coded as 1, "Canada," coded as 2, and "Other," coded as 3); similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation (on a semantic differential scale, ranging from "very

dissimilar,” coded as 1 to “very similar,” coded as 7, using an interval level of measurement); the amount of friends respondents currently have (“too few,” coded as 0, the “right amount,” coded as 1, and “too many,” coded as 2); the presence of parental divorce (“no,” coded as 0 or “yes,” coded as 1, using a nominal level of measurement), and in the presence of divorce, the respondent’s age during which the divorce occurred (coded numerically, from 0-25, using a ratio level of measurement).

### **Analysis.**

First, because such a high percentage (82.3 percent) of respondents indicated they were “white/non-Latino,” a new, condensed ethnicity variable was computed in which the five non-white ethnicity categories were condensed into one category labeled, “non-white/minority.” Doing so allowed this nominal variable to be analyzed through multiple regression analysis. Next, a similar variable computation was completed for the nationality variable, which was condensed from three categories to two, resulting in two categories, including “United States” and “other.” This computation was conducted because such a high percentage (98 percent) of respondents indicated their nationality to be the United States. Finally, each respondent’s CL7 mean score was computed by creating a new variable that added the responses from each of the seven questions on the CL7 scale and divided by seven, thus calculating the mean score of these seven questions. This number can be considered the respondents’ CL7 score, indicating his or her level of confidence in his or her ability to effectively predict the potential romantic partner’s behavior, values and feelings. The respondent’s level of confidence, in turn, indicates his or her level of uncertainty about various aspects of the potential romantic partner after reading the supplied conversation (the higher the respondent’s confidence, the lower his

or her level of uncertainty, and vice versa). Thus, a respondent's CL7 score was considered his or her level of uncertainty during the data analysis in this study.

## Results

Although the results of this study are largely supportive of URT and past research on the theory (e.g., Clatterbuck, 1979; Parks & Adelman, 1983), neither hypothesis was supported by the results of this study. Theoretical implications of these results are discussed later in this paper.

### **CL7 Scale Reliability and Factor Analysis**

Following the variable computations in the previous section, the reliability of the seven-item CL7 scale was tested and a factor analysis was conducted to determine the unidimensionality of the scale. As noted earlier in this paper, initial testing of the CL7 scale by Clatterbuck (1979) demonstrated reliability with alphas ranging from .763 - .975. In this study, the overall Cronbach's alpha for the CL7 scale = .876, which is strong, and consistent with Clatterbuck's (1979) initial reliability findings of his scale. The overall alpha in this scale is strongest with all seven items of the CL7 scale included; thus, no items were deleted from the scale. Next, a factor analysis was conducted that resulted in a single principal component with all items demonstrating loadings of .623 or higher, which is also consistent with Clatterbuck's (1979) initial factor analysis of the CL7 scale. These findings suggest that the CL7 scale used in this study is unidimensional. Further, these results suggest that the use of the mean of the seven items on this scale as each respondent's CL7 score is an appropriate way in which to represent a respondent's confidence in his or her ability to effectively predict the potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings. The respondent's level of confidence, in turn, indicates his or her level of uncertainty about various aspects of the potential romantic partner after

reading the supplied conversation (the lower the respondent's mean score, the higher his or her level of uncertainty and vice versa).

### **Hypothesis 1**

To test H1, which states, "Individuals with divorced parents are more likely to express a higher level of uncertainty than are individuals with non-divorced parents during initial communication with a potential romantic partner," a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if a statistically significant relationship exists between the presence of parental divorce (the independent variable of interest in this study) and respondents' CL7 score, indicating respondents' level of uncertainty (the dependent variable). The following items were control variables included in this multiple regression analysis: respondents' age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation and amount of current friends.

This regression analysis resulted in a statistically significant overall ANOVA:  $F(7, 281) = 5.467, p < .0005$ . However, there was no statistically significant relationship identified between the presence of parental divorce and respondents' CL7 score (beta = .016,  $p = .772$ , ns). This finding does not support H1 in this study.

Notably, results of this multiple regression analysis identified two statistically significant relationships between covariates and respondents' CL7 score (level of uncertainty). First, respondents' perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation demonstrated a positive, moderately strong statistically significant relationship with respondents' CL7 score (beta = .321,  $p < .0005$ ). This result demonstrates that those respondents who perceived themselves to be more similar to the

potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation also indicated a higher level of confidence in their ability to effectively predict the potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings (thus, a lower level of uncertainty), in this study. This result supports URT's Axiom 6, which states, "similarities between persons reduce uncertainty, while dissimilarities produce increases in uncertainties" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 106).

The second covariate that demonstrated a positive, statistically significant relationship with respondents' CL7 score (level of uncertainty) was ethnicity (beta = .153,  $p = .010$ ). This weak (although statistically significant) relationship demonstrates that those respondents who were non-white were more likely to indicate a higher level of confidence in their ability to predict the potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings (thus, demonstrating a lower level of uncertainty), in this study.

The remaining covariates did not demonstrate statistically significant relationships with respondents' CL7 scores. These included respondents' age (beta =  $-.025$ ,  $p = .665$ , ns); sex (beta =  $-.087$ ,  $p = .129$ , ns); nationality (beta =  $.026$ ,  $p = .664$ , ns) and amount of current friends (beta =  $.058$ ,  $p = .306$ , ns).

Further,  $R^2 = .120$  ( $p < .0005$ ), which indicates that age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner, amount of current friends and the presence of parental divorce account for 12.0 percent of the variance in respondents' CL7 score (level of uncertainty). These results are also presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Relationship Between Attributional Confidence and Presence of Parental Divorce (H1)*  
 Multiple Regression Analysis (standardized betas)

Variables	CL7 (Attributional Confidence) Betas	Significance (p)
<i>Control Variables</i>		
Age	-.025	p = .665, ns
Sex	-.087	p = .129, ns
Ethnicity	.153	p = .010*
Nationality	.026	p = .664, ns
<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>		
Similarity to Potential Romantic Partner	.321	p < .0005**
Amount of Friends	.058	p = .306, ns
<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>		
<i>Independent Variable</i>		
Parental Divorce	.016	p = .772, ns
<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>		
Multiple R	.346	p < .0005**
<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	.120	p < .0005**
Overall ANOVA		
N = 288	F (7, 281) = 5.467	p < .0005**

*Note.* \* = p < .05      \*\* = p < .001

## Hypothesis 2

To test H2, which states, “The younger the individual was when the parental divorce occurred, the higher the individual’s expressed level of uncertainty will be,” a data subset containing only those students whose parents are divorced (N= 49) was created and analyzed in the same ways in which the entire data set was analyzed, as described earlier. First, the reliability of the seven-item CL7 scale was tested. The overall Cronbach’s alpha for the CL7 scale of this data set of students with divorced parents = .848, which is strong, and consistent with Clatterbuck’s (1979) initial reliability findings of his scale and the reliability of the CL7 scale of the entire data subset (.876).

Next, a multiple regression analysis was conducted within this data subset to determine if any statistically significant relationships exist between respondents’ age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation and amount of current friends (covariates), respondents’ age during which the divorce occurred (independent variable) and respondents’ CL7 score, indicating respondents’ level of uncertainty (the dependent variable).

This regression analysis did not result in a statistically significant overall ANOVA:  $F(6, 41) = .663$ , ns. Further, there was no statistically significant relationship identified between respondents’ age at the time of the parental divorce and the respondents’ CL7 score (beta = .099,  $p = .527$ , ns). This result does not support H2.

Also notable, the results indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship identified between any of the covariates and the respondents’ CL7 scores, nor between the respondents’ age at the time of the parental divorce and respondents’ CL7 scores. Specifically, these results included respondents’ age (beta = -.007,  $p = .966$ ,

ns); sex (beta = .190,  $p = .243$ , ns); ethnicity (beta = .079,  $p = .648$ , ns), perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner (beta = .181,  $p = .263$ , ns) and amount of current friends (beta = .027,  $p = .869$ , ns). All students in this data subset indicated that the United States was their nationality; thus, nationality was a constant in this regression. Further,  $R^2 = .088$ , which is not statistically significant ( $p = .680$ , ns). These results are also presented in Table 3.

### **Examination of Non-divorced Parents Data Subset**

Because there were differences between the entire data set and the divorced parents subset regarding which covariates demonstrated statistically significant relationships with respondents' CL7 scores, the non-divorced parents data subset ( $N = 241$ ) was next examined. The reliability of the seven-item CL7 scale was first tested. The overall Cronbach's alpha for the CL7 scale of this data set of students with non-divorced parents = .886, which is strong, and consistent with Clatterbuck's (1979) initial reliability findings of his scale and even higher than the reliability of the CL7 scale of the entire data subset (.876).

Next, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if statistically significant relationships existed between respondents' CL7 score, indicating respondents' level of uncertainty (the dependent variable) and the following control variables: respondents' age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation and amount of current friends. This regression analysis resulted in a statistically significant overall ANOVA:  $F(6, 234) = 6.956$ ,  $p < .0005$ .

Further, the results of this multiple regression analysis identified three statistically significant relationships between covariates and respondents' CL7 score (level of uncertainty), two of which were also identified in the entire data set analysis. First, respondents' perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation demonstrated a positive, moderately strong, statistically significant relationship with respondents' CL7 score ( $\beta = .341, p < .0005$ ). This result demonstrates that those respondents who perceived themselves to be more similar to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation also indicated a higher level of confidence in his or her ability to effectively predict the potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings (thus, a lower level of uncertainty) in this study. This result is similar to the relationship identified between respondents' perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner and respondents' CL7 score in the entire data set analysis (in that case,  $\beta = .321, p < .0005$ ).

The second covariate that demonstrated a positive, statistically significant relationship with respondents' CL7 score (level of uncertainty) was ethnicity ( $\beta = .196, p = .002$ ). This result demonstrates that those respondents who were non-white were more likely to indicate a higher level of confidence in their ability to predict the potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings (thus, demonstrating a lower level of uncertainty), in this study. This result is also similar to the relationship identified between respondents' ethnicity and CL7 score during the analysis of the entire data set (in that case,  $\beta = .153, p = .010$ ).

A third covariate that demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with respondents' CL7 score (level of uncertainty), which did not demonstrate a statistically

significant relationship during the analysis of the entire data set, was sex (beta =  $-.150$ ,  $p = .015$ ). This negative, weak (although statistically significant) relationship demonstrates that male students in this study were more likely to indicate a higher level of confidence in their ability to predict the potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings (thus demonstrating a lower level of uncertainty).

As was the case with the entire data set and with the subset of students whose parents are divorced, there was no statistically significant relationships identified between the following covariates and respondents' CL7 scores in the non-divorced data subset: respondents' age (beta =  $-.035$ ,  $p = .573$ , ns); nationality (beta =  $.023$ ,  $p = .717$ ) and amount of current friends (beta =  $.063$ ,  $p = .299$ , ns).

Further,  $R^2 = .151$  ( $p < .0005$ ), which indicates that age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner and amount of current friends accounts for 15.1 percent of the variance in respondents' CL7 score (level of uncertainty) in this data subset of respondents whose parents are not divorced. These results are also presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Differences in Divorced and Non-divorced Parent Data Subsets*  
 Multiple Regression Analysis (standardized betas)

Variables	CL7 Score: Attributional Confidence (Betas) And Significance (p)	
	Students with Divorced Parents	Students with Non-divorced Parents
<i>Control Variables</i>		
Age	-.007 (p = .966, ns)	-.035 (p = .573, ns)
Sex	.190 (p = .243, ns)	-.150 (p = .015*)
Ethnicity	.079 (p = .648, ns)	.196 (p = .002*)
Nationality	- (Constant)	.023 (p = .717, ns)
<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>	.049 (p = .525, ns)	.035 (p = .076, ns)
Similarity to Potential Romantic Partner	.181 (p = .263, ns)	.341 (p < .0005**)
Amount of Friends	.027 (p = .869)	.063 (p = .299, ns)
<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>	.030 (p = .506)	.116 (p < .0005**)
Age When Parents Divorced	.099 (p = .527, ns)	-
<i>R<sup>2</sup> Change</i>	.009 (p = .527, ns)	-
Multiple R	.297 (p = .680, ns)	.389 (p < .0005**)
<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	.088 (p = .680, ns)	.151 (p < .0005**)
Overall ANOVA	F (6, 41) = .663 (p = .680, ns) N = 47	F (6, 234) = 6.956 (p < .0005**) N = 240

Note. \* = p < .05      \*\* = p < .001

## Discussion

Although neither hypothesis was supported in this study (that is, the presence of parental divorce or the age at which parental divorce occurred did not seem to affect respondents' level of uncertainty), this study's findings are supportive of URT and past research utilizing the theory for several reasons. These include the fact that in this study, the CL7 attributional confidence scale performed in a consistent way with past URT research and that this study's results largely support URT's Axiom 6, which states that similarity and uncertainty are inversely related to one another. Further, this study offers interesting results that may warrant future research in the area of parental divorce's influence on initial communication with potential romantic partners.

First, in this study, Clatterbuck's (1979) CL7 attributional confidence scale performed in a consistent way with past research using the scale (e.g., Douglas, 1990), and demonstrated a high level of reliability. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for the scale ranged from .848 (the reliability of the scale in the divorced-parents data subset) to .886 (the reliability of the scale in the non-divorced parents data subset). The reliability of the scale in the entire data set was .876, which is strong and consistent with Clatterbuck's (1979) initial testing of the scale, which resulted in reliabilities ranging from .763 - .975.

Next, the results of both the entire dataset and the non-divorced parents data subset demonstrated a positive, moderately strong statistically significant relationship between respondents' perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation and respondents' CL7 score. These results demonstrate that those respondents who perceived themselves to be more similar to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation also indicated a higher level of confidence in

their ability to effectively predict the potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings (thus, a lower level of uncertainty) in this study. These results support URT's Axiom 6, which states, "similarities between persons reduce uncertainty, while dissimilarities produce increases in uncertainties" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 106). Berger and Calabrese (1975) support their axiom by suggesting that "similarity reduces the necessity for the generation of a large number of alternatives for explaining behavior" (p. 106). Other research, including that of Parks and Adelman (1983), has also offered support for this axiom by demonstrating a negative relationship between perceived partner similarity and uncertainty.

Interestingly, unlike the results in the non-divorced parents data subset, results in the divorced-parents data subset did not identify a statistically significant relationship between respondents' perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation and respondents' CL7 score. Though it is not clear why this result is different from that of the entire data set and the non-divorced parents dataset, this result is inconsistent with URT and may warrant future investigation. One potential reason for this result may be related to divorce's influence on children's interpersonal communication skills, as some research suggests. For example, Amato (1996) claims that children with divorced parents are exposed to poor dyadic communication models (their parents), which inhibits the children's ability to learn effective communication skills. Further, Herzog and Cooney's (2002) research found that adult children with divorced parents demonstrated poorer listening skills than did adult children whose parents were not divorced. It may have been the case that in this study, those students with divorced parents have inhibited interpersonal communication skills, as suggested by Amato (1996)

and Herzog and Cooney (2002), which limited their ability to perceive similarities between themselves and the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation of this study's testing instrument. If this is the case, it stands to reason that there would be no relationship between respondents' perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner and respondents' CL7 score (level of uncertainty).

Research by Gabardi and Rosén (1991) may shed light on another way in which the presence of parental divorce potentially affected respondents' ability to perceive similarities between themselves and a potential romantic partner. Their research found that adult children with divorced parents are more critical of potential romantic partners than are those whose parents are not divorced. Gabardi and Rosén (1991) suggest this may serve as a defense mechanism for adult children with divorced parents, who may be fearful of experiencing their own failed relationship. If it is the case in this study that respondents whose parents are divorced are more critical of potential romantic partners than are those whose parents are not divorced, perhaps respondents with divorced parents would fail to see similarities between themselves and the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation. Perhaps this influence resulted in a lack of relationship between respondents' with divorced parents perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner and their CL7 score.

Because this study was not designed to test the intricacies of how or why respondents' perceived their similarity to the potential romantic partner in the hypothetical conversation, it is not possible to definitively determine if these possible explanations are correct. Future testing, potentially involving role-playing and follow-up questions, may be able to address such questions and explain why there was no

relationship identified between respondents' with divorced parents perceived similarity to a potential romantic partner and respondents' CL7 score in this study.

The results of both the entire dataset and the non-divorced parents data subset also demonstrated statistically significant relationships between ethnicity and respondents' CL7 score. These results demonstrate that non-white respondents were more likely to indicate a higher level of confidence in their ability to predict the potential romantic partner's behavior, values and feelings (thus, demonstrating a lower level of uncertainty). Notably, results from the divorced-parents data subset do not demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and level of uncertainty. Although the original axioms and theorems of URT do not address the influence of ethnicity on one's level of uncertainty, research has suggested that URT is generalizable across cultures (e.g., Gudykunst, 1983). Berger and Gudykunst (1991) explain this generalizability in the following way:

Levels of uncertainty are likely to be considerably higher in [intercultural] encounters than in intracultural encounters...[because] cultural dissimilarities are present. Given that Axiom 6 of URT focuses on the general similarity construct (not attitude similarity specifically), cultural similarity/dissimilarity easily can be integrated into the theory. (p. 47)

It is important to note that the ethnicity of the potential romantic partner in the supplied hypothetical conversation of the survey was not specified and that respondents' perceived similarity to the potential romantic partner was controlled in this study. Yet, ethnicity was found to influence respondents' level of uncertainty in the non-divorced parents data subset. However, ethnicity was not found to influence respondents' level of uncertainty in the divorced-parents data subset.

The lack of ethnic diversity in the sample for this study may have influenced this result. As noted earlier, the majority of respondents (82.3 percent) in this study are white/non-Latino and the remaining ethnicities indicated by respondents (Latino, African American, Asian American and “other”) had to be combined in one category of “non-white” to allow for the multiple regression analysis of the survey data. Specifically, the ethnic representation in the non-divorced parents data subset (N = 246) includes 211 white/non-Latino respondents (86 percent) and 35 non-white respondents (14 percent). The ethnic representation in the divorced-parents data subset (N = 49) includes 37 white respondents (76 percent) and only 11 non-white respondents (this is 22 percent). Perhaps the small number of non-white respondents in the divorced-parents data (11 respondents) is inadequate to accurately identify nuanced findings related to ethnicity’s potential influence on respondents’ level of uncertainty, thus skewing the results in this study. These results may warrant future research with a more ethnically diverse sample of respondents whose parents are divorced.

The final covariate that affected levels of uncertainty in the non-divorced parents data subset, but not in the divorced-parents data subset, nor in the entire dataset, was sex. Sex demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with respondents’ CL7 score. This negative, weak (although statistically significant) relationship demonstrates that male students in this study were more likely to indicate a higher level of confidence in their ability to predict the potential romantic partner’s behavior, values and feelings (thus demonstrating a lower level of uncertainty). URT does not address sex’s influence on levels of uncertainty and research that has examined this topic, both in initial encounters

and in committed relationships, has not determined a clear relationship between the two (e.g., Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck & Schulman, 1976; Turner, 1990).

Interestingly, results in the divorced-parents data subset did not identify a statistically significant relationship between respondents' sex and their CL7 score. Though it is not clear why this result is different from that of the entire data set and the non-divorced parents dataset, research regarding how one's sex may influence one's role in a relationship might offer a plausible explanation. Wood (2005) states, "both cognitive development and social learning theories explain that, from childhood on, most females are encouraged to be sensitive to others and to relationships....women's involvement in caring gives them a standpoint that prioritizes attending to and caring for others" (p. 132). Wood's (2005) description of women placing a priority on their relationships is supported by research that found that women think more about their relationships than do men (Turner, 1990). It would stand to reason that if women spend more time thinking about their relationships than do men, women would likely experience more thoughts of uncertainty regarding relationships than do men (however, research is inconclusive regarding this, e.g., Duck, 1985; Turner, 1990). If indeed women experience more thoughts of uncertainty than do men, this may have contributed to the fact that male respondents indicated a lower level of uncertainty regarding a potential romantic partner in this study, in the non-divorced parents data set, as well as in the entire dataset.

However, parental divorce has been found to correlate with lower levels of relationship confidence (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004) and decreased levels of trust toward potential romantic partners in male and female adult children with divorced parents (Amato, 1996; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000). These observed divorce effects

would both seem to affect adult children with divorced parents' levels of uncertainty regarding a potential romantic partner. These findings might explain why there was no difference in respondents' sex and their level of uncertainty in the divorced-parents data set of this study. This finding may warrant future investigation.

### **Limitations**

As with all studies, there are limitations in this study that may have affected its results. First, data collection based on a hypothetical interaction has been considered problematic by some researchers who suggest a hypothetical situation produces different cognitions than does actual interaction (e.g., Vangelisti, Corbin, Lucchetti & Sprague, 1999). However, similar methods using hypothetical conversations have been successfully used by others studying levels of uncertainty in respondents (e.g., Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck & Schulman, 1976; Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman & Miller, 1976; Gudykunst, 1983; Yoo, 2009). Further, one benefit of this method is that it ensures that all respondents are exposed to the same stimulus, which provides a measure of consistency. Also, because respondents answer questions directly after reading the conversation, this method may facilitate more accurate results than asking respondents to answer questions based on retrospective accounts of actual initial conversations with a potential romantic partner. Some researchers in the area of URT have suggested respondents may inaccurately recall such actual events, which might affect the accuracy of respondents' answers (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985).

Another limitation of this study includes the fact that the sample includes young adults attending Marquette University. This may make the sample unrepresentative of all 18-25 year old adults in the United States population, because less than half of Americans

who graduate from high school today attend a four-year college or university (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). However, despite this limitation, the age range of Marquette University students is ideal for this study because the sample from this population is likely to be unmarried (U. S. Census Bureau, 2005), but still old enough to be familiar with the experience of an initial conversation with a potential romantic partner.

Also notable, the fact that Marquette University is a private Catholic, Jesuit university may make this study's sample unrepresentative of college students in general, as only 25.5 percent of students who attend college or university attend a private institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a). Further, an ethnic profile of the student population at Marquette University differs from that of U.S. colleges and universities as a whole. Of all colleges and universities in the United States, 64.4 percent of students are white and 32.2 percent are minorities (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b); at Marquette University, 84 percent of students are white and 16 percent are minorities (Marquette University, 2009). Although ethnicity was controlled for in this study, the lack of ethnic diversity at Marquette University is reflected in this study's sample and potentially affected some of the results, as discussed earlier. Future research might sample a more ethnically diverse population of young adults, including those who do not (and did not) attend a private, four-year college or university, which may more closely mimic the general population.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the fact this study's hypotheses were not supported, and thus, the results do not enable the author to extend URT, the findings regarding the relationship between similarity and uncertainty (with the exception of the divorced-parent data subset) support

URT and none of the other findings contradict the theory. Further, the results of this study demonstrated differences in the influence of similarity, ethnicity and sex on respondents' levels of uncertainty between those respondents whose parents are divorced, and those whose are not divorced. Although the reasons behind such differences are not clear, there are plausible explanations that are supported by research, which may shed light on these differences. First, research has found that parental divorce negatively affects one's interpersonal communication skills with potential mates (Amato, 1996; Herzog and Cooney, 2002), which potentially inhibits one's ability to identify similarities between oneself and a potential romantic partner and may, in turn, increase one's level of uncertainty in that context. Also, research has found that parental divorce is associated with lower levels of relationship confidence (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004) and decreased levels of trust toward potential romantic partners in male and female adult children with divorced parents (Amato, 1996; Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000;). It stands to reason that these two effects of parental divorce would increase one's level of uncertainty during communication with a potential romantic partner. As noted earlier, the lack of ethnic diversity in this study's sample may have skewed the results regarding how ethnicity may affect uncertainty when communication with a potential romantic partner.

Future research with a more ethnically diverse sample may be warranted to further investigate communication differences between the divorced-parent and non-divorced parent subgroups in an attempt to learn more about why these differences exist. Such research may shed light on the ways in which parental divorce may affect uncertainty levels during initial communication with a potential romantic partner. In addition to potentially expanding URT, this information might offer valuable insight for

those in the fields of child or family therapy, to help children with divorced parents understand and overcome potentially inhibited communication skills and feel more certain when communicating with potential romantic partners.

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## Appendix A

## Informed Consent Form

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY  
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Initial Communication in Potential Romantic Partners  
Julia Hansch  
College of Communication

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this research study is to investigate initial communication behavior and attitudes between young, unmarried adults. You will be one of approximately 270 participants in this research study.

**PROCEDURES:** You will be asked to read a brief conversation and then answer seven questions regarding your thoughts following the conversation. Lastly, you be asked to answer eight questions about yourself. The surveys and consent forms will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study and your name will not be associated with your answers.

**DURATION:** Your participation will consist of reading a brief conversation and answering a total of 15 questions. Your participation will take approximately 5 to 8 minutes.

**RISKS:** The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal, although you might experience emotional discomfort from some of the questions. If this occurs, you are allowed to skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. This precaution will minimize this risk.

**BENEFITS:** The benefits associated with your participation in this study include helping the researcher provide a better understanding of the topic being investigated.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential. All your data will be assigned an arbitrary code number rather than using your name or other information that could identify you as an individual. Although your name will appear on this consent form, it will not appear on your survey. The consent form and survey will be stored separately and your answers will not be connected to your name. When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name. The consent forms and surveys will be stored in a secured, locked building and all data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files three years

after the completion of the study. Research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:** Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time, even if you have signed this consent form, without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. To withdraw, hand this consent form or, if you have already signed and submitted this form, your survey to the researcher present and leave the room.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Julia Hansch at [julia.hansch@marquette.edu](mailto:julia.hansch@marquette.edu). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University’s Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Participant’s Signature	Date
Participant’s Name (please print)	
Researcher’s Signature	Date

## Appendix B

## Survey

*Please read the following conversation, imagining yourself as the person asking the following questions to someone you've just met and you might be interested in dating. The statements and questions are purposely gender-neutral, so if the person you might be interested dating is a woman, picture the person answering these questions as a woman; if the person you might be interested in dating is a man, picture the person answering these questions as a man. Try to envision yourself taking part in this conversation as you're reading it, which will make it seem more realistic. Think about how your new acquaintance's answers to your questions might help you predict his or her future behaviors, values, attitudes and feelings. Then answer the seven questions on the following page.*

*Question: Where are you from?*

I'm originally from Boston, but my family moved to Chicago when I was five and that's where we've been since.

*Question: What do you think of the weather here?*

Summer is great because there are tons of outdoor activities. Winters are cold and windy, and not much fun.

*Question: What do you like to do around here?*

There's always something to do in Milwaukee. Just last week, a group of us went to Miller Park, which was fun.

*Question: What else do you do like to do in your free time?*

I like to hang out with my friends and catch up on my sleep whenever I can!

I also volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

*Question: What do you think of Marquette?*

I like Marquette – it's a good school and I've made lots of friends here.

*Question: What's your major?*

I'm still undecided, but I'm leaning toward either business or communication.

*Question: What do you want to do after you graduate?*

I think I want to work in either marketing or finance.

*Question: What do you do when you're not studying?*

I work part time at Raynor Library, which is great because it gives me some spending money and when it's slow, I can study at my desk.

***Instructions: Please read the following questions regarding what you've just read and indicate your answers as a percentage in which zero percent indicates you have no confidence and 100 percent indicates you have complete confidence in the following questions. Each of your responses should fall between zero and 100 percent.***

1. How confident are you of your general ability to predict how he/she (the potential romantic partner who answered the questions on the previous page) would behave?  
\_\_\_\_\_ %
2. How certain are you that he/she would like you?  
\_\_\_\_\_ %
3. How accurate do you think you would be at predicting the values he/she holds?  
\_\_\_\_\_ %
4. How accurate do you think you would be at predicting his/her attitudes?  
\_\_\_\_\_ %
5. How well do you think you would predict his/her feelings and emotions?  
\_\_\_\_\_ %

6. How well do you think you could you empathize with (share) the way he/she feels about himself/herself?  
\_\_\_\_\_%
  
7. How well do you think you know him or her? (*Zero percent indicates not well at all; 100 percent indicates extremely well*)  
\_\_\_\_\_%

**Demographic Questions**

***Instructions: In this last section, please answer the following questions about yourself.***

1. How similar are you to the person answering the questions on the previous page?  
(Please circle)

Very Dissimilar    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Very Similar

2. How many friends do you currently have? (Please circle)

Too many                                      Right amount                                      Too few

3. Age at last birthday (please indicate): \_\_\_\_\_

4. Sex (please circle): Female                                      Male

5. Ethnicity (please circle):

White/Non-Latino                                      Latino/a                                      African American  
 Native American                                      Asian American                                      Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Nationality (please circle):

United States                                      Canada                                      Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Are you adopted? (Please circle):                                      Yes                                      No  
     If yes, are your adoptive parents divorced?                                      Yes                                      No  
     If yes, how old were you when they divorced? (Please indicate): \_\_\_\_\_

8. If you're not adopted, are your birth parents divorced?    Yes                                      No  
     If yes, how old were you when they divorced? (Please indicate): \_\_\_\_\_

***Thank you for your participation.***