MADISON, KARIS J., M.S. Parent, Child, and Relational Components of Child Disclosure about Peer Relationships in Early Adolescence. (2008)
Directed by Dr. Anne C. Fletcher and Dr. Andrea G. Hunter. 65 pp.

The purpose of this research was to explore the nature of child disclosure and the manner in which children's disclosure about peer relationships and activities with peers is shaped by the parental, child, and relational contexts within which parent-child communications are experienced. Twenty mother-child pairs participated in qualitative interviews about children's disclosure and nondisclosure concerning relationships with peers. Children were in 6th grade and evenly split between boys versus girls and African American versus European American. Three patterns of child disclosure were observed. Some children were unreserved in their disclosure. Other children screened the information given to their parents. A few withheld most information about their friends from their parents. Climates surrounding child disclosure were also identified. Most children identified climates within which disclosure was promoted more than discouraged. Some identified climates within which disclosure was discouraged more than promoted. A final group of children identified a balance between disclosure promotion and discouragement. How children choose to disclose and the disclosure climates they perceive were associated. Children who perceived disclosure promotion were most likely to disclose unreservedly or with some screening. Children who perceived a climate of disclosure discouragement were most likely to withhold disclosure or to screen their disclosure.

PARENT, CHILD, AND RELATIONAL COMPONENTS OF CHILD DISCLOSURE

ABOUT PEER RELATIONSHIPS IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE

by

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A Thesis Submitted to
the faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

Greensboro
2008

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, traditional measurement of parental monitoring of their children's
activities and friendships was challenged by the work of Stattin and Kerr (Kerr & Stattin,
2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Stattin and Kerr pointed out that most researchers who
purported to be measuring parental monitoring were actually measuring parental
knowledge of their children's activities. This finding led these researchers to ask how it
was that parents obtained their knowledge of their children's peer relationships. Their
findings indicated that voluntary child disclosure of activities was more predictive of both
parental knowledge and child norm breaking than were parental solicitation or parental
control. Child disclosure was defined as the act of children spontaneously or voluntarily
providing information about their activities and relationships to a parent. Stattin and Kerr
further suggested that parental monitoring is a bidirectional process that is dependent
upon characteristics of both parents and children. A child may be the active agent in
providing parents with knowledge, but the child's willingness to disclose information is
likely to be connected to behaviors of the parent.

What Stattin and Kerr's (2000; Kerr & Stattin, 2000) research did not address was
mechanisms that may explain variations in children's disclosure about their activities.
The goal of the current study is to explore the nature of child disclosure and the manner
in which children's disclosure about peer relationships and activities with peers may be

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shaped by the parental, child, and relational contexts, within which parent-child

communications are experienced. Specifically, this study will investigate the following

questions: (1) what are the variations in child disclosure to their mothers concerning peer

relationships?; (2) what are the characteristics of mothers, children, and parent-child

relationships that co-occur with child disclosure about peer relationships in early

adolescence?; and (3) how do varying patterns of child disclosure relate to varying

family climates consisting of mother, child, and mother-child relational characteristics?

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The theoretical foundation for this study is Family Systems Theory. Systems Theory seeks to understand families primarily through their member's interactions. These include interactions both within and beyond the family system. This framework values understanding of the whole over the individual because of the interconnections among members of a system. It also views the interactions between system members as cyclical, rather than linear. These key concepts of Systems Theory inform the understanding of parent-child interactions as they center on disclosure of children's peer relationships.

The Family System

A *system* can be defined as a set of interrelationships (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). A *sub-system* is a more specific relationship within a larger system (White & Klein, 2002). In the family system, the parent-child relationship is a subsystem. A *suprasystem* refers to entities beyond the family with which members of the family interact. A child's school system represents a supra-system of the family. Within the family system, there is interconnectedness between each family member. *Interconnectedness* means the actions of one family member affect every other member within the system (White & Klein). For example, the poor listening skills of one parent

may influence children's decisions concerning whether to disclose information to that parent. Similarly, the presence of a demanding, outgoing sibling may influence a quieter sibling to withdraw from family interactions. Because of this interdependence among members, the whole of the family system is considered to be greater than the sum of the individual family members. In other words, families display *emergent properties*, defined as characteristics of the whole not found in the individual members. For example, individually shy children may disclose openly and frequently within the family system if the system as a whole is characterized by open and engaging communication.

Family System Interactions

Family interactions are characterized by either negative or positive feedback loops (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). The type of feedback is not determined by specific actions, but instead by whether actions move the system back toward homeostasis or away from it. *Homeostasis* is a state of equilibrium or normal functioning. *Negative feedback loops* maintain homeostasis. *Positive feedback loops* bring change to the system. Children's initiation of communication with parents about their school friends could lead to either positive or negative feedback loops. If parents in a reserved family discourage such disclosure, a negative feedback loop occurs because such discouragement supports the homeostatic state of the family. If children's communications are accepted by parents and further encourage parents to disclose information about their own relationships, a positive feedback loop occurs. The interaction brings about change in the family communication style rather than returning it

to the homeostatic state of reserved communication. The balance of stability gained by negative feedback and flexibility promoted by positive feedback loops is necessary for successful system functioning (Whitchurch & Constantine).

Boundaries, Rules, and Goals of Family Systems

All systems have *boundaries* that define what is included in the system (White & Klein, 2002). A system's environment can then be defined as everything that interacts with the system, but is external to its boundaries (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Environment includes contexts, such as historical, political, or economic settings, in which family systems exist. Systems have varying levels of permeability in their boundaries (White & Klein). This can also be understood in terms of varying levels of interaction with the environment. High levels of permeability in boundaries might lead one family to learn sign language in an effort to communicate with a deaf friend of one family member. Another family with less boundary permeability might not include the deaf friend in their social activities.

The concept of boundaries also relates to the emotional connectedness of family members, and the relationships among subsystems (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). For example, boundaries focused on gender may result in adolescent girls disclosing peer relationship information to mothers, but not fathers. Similarly, there are unspoken *rules of transformation* that govern interactions among members of a given system (White & Klein, 2002). Over time, these rules of transformation determine the homeostatic state of interactions within a system. Children may understand the pressures faced by a parent in

a demanding job and know that weekdays are not a good time for disclosing peer relationship information to that parent. Rules of transformation are not explicitly communicated, but are learned through repeated interactions among family members.

Finally, family systems are goal-oriented (White & Klein, 2002). They are also characterized by *equifinality*, the ability to take different routes to reach the same goals (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). If a goal of parents is to obtain information about their children's peer relationships, there are many ways to attain this goal. Parents may feel they have the right to have this information, and may actively seek it out by talking with teachers, observing children, or questioning children directly. Parents who place a high value on their children's privacy may take a more passive approach, creating opportunities for children to provide this information voluntarily.

Considered together, these Systems Theory concepts provide a useful framework for understanding the family interactions that may surround children's disclosure of peer relationships to their parents.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Early adolescence is a developmental period involving change in several areas

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002). For example, new personal

identities are constructed and new social roles are assumed. During the transition from

childhood to adolescence, relationships with both parents and peers change. There is also

a shift to greater independence in activities. As a result, parents become increasingly

reliant on indirect rather than direct forms of supervision (Ladd, Profilet, & Hart, 1992).

The promotion from elementary school to middle school results in children developing

friendships with peers from a larger community, one about which parents may not be as

knowledgeable compared to the smaller community represented by the elementary

school. In combination, these factors may increase parents' dependence on child

disclosure as a source of their own knowledge of their children's relationships and

activities with peers.

Children and Peer Relationships

Similarity of adolescents and their friends. The association between children's

behavior and adjustment and the behavior and adjustment of their peers is well

documented in empirical literature. For example, adolescents' involvement in deviant

behavior; including conduct problems, substance use, alcohol abuse, high-risk sexual

behavior, and gambling; has been associated with peer involvement in these same behaviors. (Arata, Stafford, & Tims, 2003; Hussong & Hicks, 2003; Miller-Johnson, Winn, Cole, Malone, & Lochman, 2004; and Rai et al., 2003). For better or worse, adolescents' behaviors and attitudes are related to the behaviors and attitudes of their friends.

Influence and selection in peer relationships. Similarities between children and their peers can be attributed to both influence and selection. The process of influence occurs when "individuals who are initially dissimilar in their characteristics are paired and then become more alike because one person accepts the influence of the other" (Gilson, Hunt, & Rowe, 2001, p. 207). Peers influence children's behaviors through mechanisms such as peer modeling, imitation of peers, selective reinforcement of child behaviors by the peer, and child acceptance of peer advice (Fisher & Bauman, 1988). For example, in a study of social factors that influence the tendency to bully, Rigby (2005) found children and adolescents who perceived expectations from friends to be supportive of victims were less inclined to bully others. In an experimental design study, adolescents were also more influenced by peers to engage in risky behavior and make more risky decision making by peers than were adults in similar situations (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). This influence process is sometimes referred to as socialization (Kandel, 1978).

In contrast, the process of selection occurs when "individuals with prior similarity on some attributes of mutual importance purposefully select each other as friends"

(Kandel, 1978, p.428). Similarity can be found in specific interests of children. For example, athletic children may purposefully choose other athletic children for friends because of shared interests in a particular sport. Children may also select friends based on personal characteristics. Children who are generally less active than their peers may select other less active children as friends because of their shared activity level preference.

The processes of influence and selection are not mutually exclusive (Fisher & Bauman, 1988). Even so, researchers have exerted much effort into separating out these two effects. At one end of the spectrum, Sieving, Perry, & Williams (2000) found evidence of the peer influence playing a considerably greater role with respect to drinking behavior among adolescents than did selection. Kandel (1978) represents the middle ground, reporting that the two processes were approximately equal in explaining similarities between adolescents and their friends. Still other researchers have reported greater support for selection effects for cigarette and alcohol use and aggressive behaviors, yet do not negate influence among friends (e.g. Fisher & Bauman; Ennet & Bauman, 1994; Urberg, Değirmencioğlu, & Pilgrim, 1997; Poulin & Boivin, 2000).

In addition to influence and selection processes, social homogamy has been suggested as source of similarities between children and their friends. This term refers to "behavioral resemblance incidental upon (children's) general social circumstances" (Gilson et al., 2001, p.207). An example of social homogamy is school tracking of students by ability levels. In this example, children may become friends because they

share classes at school. Because of shared experiences, friends may have similarities that were not actively sought out and were not a result of one friend influencing the other. Gilson et al. found social homogamy to explain similarities in verbal intelligence, but not in delinquent behavior.

Jaccard, Blanton, and Dodge (2005) refer to a related phenomenon of "parallel events," meaning behavioral resemblance incidental upon particular physical and relational events. An example would be two young children who become friends because they are developing physically at the same rate. The parallel event of physical maturity in adolescence may result in both children concurrently becoming sexually active. Jaccard et al. found the parallel event of low quality relationships with mothers to moderate peer influence on adolescent binge drinking.

Parents of adolescents often desire to know with whom their children affiliate. Regardless of the source of peer homogeneity, empirical studies confirm that children's and friend's behaviors and attributes are closely associated. This close association warrants parental desires for knowledge about their children's peer relationships.

Parental Knowledge Concerning Children's Peer Relationships

Given similarities in adolescents' and peers' behaviors and attributes, and the risks and benefits inherent in social affiliations, parents' desires for information about their children's relationships and activities with peers are understandable. Not only is it understandable, but parents' levels of awareness or knowledge regarding their children's activities with peers has been contemporaneously related to child outcomes including

self-esteem, academic achievement, and involvement in deviant activities (Parker & Benson, 2004; Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993; Chen & Dornbusch, 1998). Other researchers have found low levels of parental knowledge to predict increases in delinquent behavior over time (Laird, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2003; Fletcher, Darling, & Steinberg, 1995). Parental knowledge has also been identified as a mediator of the association between negative family events and adolescent problem behavior (Dimitreva, Chen, Greenberger, & Gil-Rivas, 2004). It is important to note that while all of these studies measured parental knowledge of their children's activities with peers, most set out to study the degree to which parents monitored their children's activities. Until recently, it was assumed that parents' information about their children was obtained through their own monitoring efforts. Yet parental knowledge is not necessarily obtained from this one source alone.

If parental knowledge concerning children's activities with peers is associated with positive child development, the question of how parents obtain this knowledge becomes an equally important question. In their landmark study, Stattin and Kerr (2000) considered three possible sources of parental knowledge: parental solicitation (parents initiating conversation with children about peer relationships), parental control (parents requiring information regarding peers and activities with peers from children) and unsolicited child disclosure about peer relationships. Within Stattin and Kerr's sample of Swedish 14 year olds and their parents, child disclosure was more strongly linked to parental knowledge than was parent solicitation or control. Recently, Waizenhofer,

Buchanan, & Jackson-Newsome (2004) distinguished between active and passive methods parents might use in acquiring knowledge of adolescent activities. Active methods included parent solicitation and direct involvement in the activity. In contrast, knowledge of children's routines and receiving unsolicited information from children, spouses or others were considered passive methods. The results of this study revealed that fathers attained their knowledge through active supervision of children or prior knowledge of children's routine activities. Employed mothers also attained knowledge from familiarity with children's routines. None of the methods of attaining knowledge were predictive of non-employed mothers' knowledge. A gender effect, not seen in Stattin and Kerr, was observed in that parents relied more on child disclosure as a source of information about their daughters' activities than their sons' activities. Parents also had greater knowledge of girls' activities than boy's activities.

Child Disclosure Concerning Peer Relationships

Child disclosure can be the result of either passive or active methods of parents acquiring knowledge concerning children's peer relationships. Despite this, it is the strongest predictor of parental knowledge of children's activities. Thus, the behavioral advantages previously attributed to parental monitoring, (i.e., parental knowledge), do not necessarily result from parental behaviors or initiatives. This is not to suggest that parents play no role with regard to children's decisions to disclose information and the knowledge subsequently held by parents. Rather, bidirectional feedback loops may be at work. Specifically, children's characteristics may influence parents' behaviors, while

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parents' behaviors and characteristics may influence their children's level of disclosure. Children's level of disclosure might then influence parenting behaviors and so on.

In a study of parental trust in adolescence (Kerr, Stattin, & Trost, 1999), child disclosure predicted parent reports of trust between parent and child better than did child reports of parental control or parental solicitation. Furthermore, parent-child trust was more likely to develop when children disclosed information about their daily activities rather than information about their feelings, concerns, or past delinquent behavior. In response to these findings, Kerr et al. called for further research to explore predictors of children's level of disclosure to parents. It is this call to action that has motivated the current study to focus on identifying and understanding the parental, child, and relational contexts in which child disclosure of peer relationships and activities with peers take place. Without an increased understanding of the parental, child, and relational factors that cultivate and support disclosure, the fact that parents receive knowledge via child disclosure is limited in its usefulness to families.

The Components of Child Disclosure

For the purpose of this study, child disclosure is defined as parent-child interactions in which children provide information to their parents regarding peers and activities with peers. Because of the bidirectional influences suggested by systems theory, both parents and children are hypothesized to influence the likelihood and nature of child disclosure. This theoretical proposition is supported by empirical work. In an effort to uncover sources of interpersonal influence within families, Cook (2001) found

that parental influences were strongly affected by characteristics of children while

children's influences on parents were simultaneously dependent on parental

characteristics. Furthermore, in a study of adolescents' regulation of parental knowledge,

Marshall, Tilton-Weaver, and Bosdet (2005) found the process of child disclosure to

occur in coordination with parents. Adolescents considered how parents respond to and

how parents might use the information they provided. These researchers also found that

rules of transformation existed regarding disclosure from child to parent. Adolescents

and parents often agreed that certain issues, such as safety concerns, were under

jurisdiction of the parent, while other, more personal, issues were not. The following is a

review of research evidence supporting three distinct factors that may impact child

disclosure during the early adolescent years: parents, children, and the nature of parent-

child relationships.

  Parental Characteristics. Characteristics and behaviors of parents have been

associated with variations in both parents' knowledge concerning children's activities and

child disclosure itself. In their study of parental knowledge of children's daily lives,

Crouter, Helms-Erikson, Updegraff, and McHale (1999) reported gender differences in

parental knowledge in that mothers had more knowledge than fathers. These researchers

suggested that expectations for parental knowledge may be more explicit in mothering

than in fathering. Fathers' knowledge concerning children's daily lives was found to

increase (but not to surpass mothers' knowledge) with maternal employment. One

interpretation of this finding is that children are able to substitute one member of the

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family system for another based on availability. This study also considered mothers' gender role attitudes as they related to knowledge of adolescents' activities. Although gender roles were confounded with mothers' education level, less traditional mothers had less knowledge of their secondborns' daily lives than did mothers with more traditional gender role attitudes.

Fagot, Luks, and Poe (1995) reported that mothers' behaviors affected five-year-old children's willingness to communicate non-threatening information. Mothers, who were both positive and actively structured interactions by probing for information, reframing, and paraphrasing elicited the most information about children's participation in a previous task. These authors hypothesized that if parents' positive or negative interaction behaviors were repeated over time, the family system would come to be characterized by either higher or lower levels of child disclosure and communication, respectively. If this is so, these interactions at age five would have implications for child disclosure in early adolescence. Among adolescents, parental psychological control was associated with more disclosure and less secrecy regarding personal and peer issues (Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006).

Mounts (2002) explored the relation between parenting style and parental "monitoring," (parental knowledge of their adolescents' activities). Adolescents with authoritative parents reported significantly higher levels of parental knowledge than adolescents with parents of any other parenting style. Mounts found that parenting style moderated the association between parental knowledge and child drug use in the ninth

grade. For all parenting styles except uninvolved parenting, higher levels of knowledge were associated with lower levels of drug use. Similarly, Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, and Dowdy (2006) found that adolescents who identified their parents as authoritative were more likely to disclose disagreement with their parents than adolescents who did not identify their parents as authoritative. This study also found adolescents unlikely to disclose regarding issues about which parents had established firm rules. Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx, and Goossens (2006) found high responsiveness of parents, high behavioral control, and low psychological control to each independently predict self-disclosure among adolescents in Belgium. The present study will specifically consider parenting characteristics, beliefs, and behaviors of mothers in relations to child disclosure. The focus on mothers alone, as opposed to mothers and fathers, is justified by empirical work suggesting that mothers are more knowledgeable than fathers about their children's peer relationships. (Crouter, Helms-Erikson, Updegraff, & McHale, 1999; Waizenhofer, Buchanan, & Jackson-Newsome, 2004)

Child Characteristics. Because children constitute one half of the parent-child subsystem, their characteristics and perceptions must also be examined. A most basic characteristic of children is gender. Waizenhofer, Buchanan, & Jackson-Newsome (2004) reported parents to have greater knowledge of girls' activities than of boys' activities. Crouter et al. (1999) found that parents had greater knowledge of same-gender children's daily activities than cross-gender children. Similarly, Smetana and Daddis (2002) found mothers to report higher knowledge of daughters' activities than sons'

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activities. Papini and Farmer (1990) found that early adolescent girls engaged in more emotional self-disclosure with parents than did early adolescent boys. Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, and Dowdy (2006) reported that adolescent girls were more likely than adolescent boys to disclose regarding issues about which they disagreed with parents. Finally, adolescent boys have been found to withhold disclosure about personal issues more often than adolescent girls (Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006).

Children's beliefs and perceptions have been found to influence disclosure to parents. Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, and Campione-Barr (2006) reported that adolescents who believe they are obligated to disclose to parents regarding schoolwork, peers, and personal issues disclosed more to parents and kept fewer secrets from parents regarding these same issues. Likewise, Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, and Dowdy (2006) reported obligation to tell parents as the primary motivating factor for children to disclose to parents. Other motivators identified in this study were child perceptions that they could not get away with non-disclosure and hopes that parents would change their minds about an issue. Child factors that motivated non-disclosure included emotional reasons, fear of consequences, and belief that the issue was not under parents' jurisdiction. The current study will consider child characteristics and perceptions as influences on the nature and occurrence of child disclosure.

Parent-Child Relationship Characteristics. Beyond the individual characteristics of parents and children, the nature the parent-child relationship itself determines interactions within the family sub-system (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). Lollis and

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Kuczynski identified three relational characteristics that affect causality, agency, and power between parents and children. First, relationships have both past and future time dimensions. The history of interactions and anticipation of future interactions influence parents and children in their immediate interactions with each other. Second, the intimate and enduring relationship between parents and children allows for active agency to be expressed by both members of the sub-system. For example, knowing the other's unique personality traits, needs, and goals influences how each partner approaches interaction. The third aspect pertains to the nature of the relationship itself. For example, the level of emotional closeness between parents and children will influence the nature of their interactions.

Papini and Farmer (1990) described child reports of openness in family communication, family cohesion, and satisfaction in relationships with parents as being associated with higher levels of emotional disclosure among both male and female early adolescents. Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, and Campione-Barr (2006) found adolescents who reported high levels of trust in their parents also reported high levels of disclosure to their parents specifically regarding peer issues. Bakken and Brown (under review) identified avoidance of conflict with parents and loss of trust from parents as rationalizations adolescents used for not disclosing to parents. In a study of African American early adolescents, children's subjective perceptions of interactions with parents influenced the trust and communication levels in parent-child relationships two years later (Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2004).

Criss, Shaw, and Ingoldsby (2003) found higher levels of mother-son synchrony; defined in terms of harmony, interconnectedness, and shared affect during interactions; to enhance the flow of open mother-child communication in a study of early adolescent boys. Another study indicated that higher levels of adolescent filial self-efficacy contributed to increased openness in family communication both at that time and two years later (Caprara, Pastorelli, Regalia, Scabini, & Bandura, 2005). Filial self-efficacy refered to "an adolescent's perceived capability to exercise their expanding agentic role in their relationships with parents" (p. 73). This study also indicated that open family communication led to greater acceptance of parental monitoring as adolescents matured. Parental monitoring was measured through adolescent report of parental monitoring activities and child disclosure regarding their activities. Both mother-son synchrony and adolescent filial self-efficacy reflect the nature of the parent-child relationship. In response to studies such as these, the present study will examine the mother-child relationship in relation to child disclosure about relationships and activities with peers.

In sum, it appears that similarities of behaviors among adolescents and their friends create reasons for parents to desire information about children's peer relationships. Because several key child outcomes have been linked to parental knowledge of children's activities, the source of parental knowledge has became a focus of research. Child disclosure of information has been identified as a primary source of such information, but little is currently known about the nature and predictors of child disclosure. This study seeks to explore variation in child disclosure to mothers about

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friendships, identify types of composite family climates within which disclosure occurs, and explore the relationship between child disclosure and family disclosure climates.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

Sample

Participants were 20 mother-child pairs. These pairs were a subset of participants in a larger mixed method longitudinal project and were selected to participate in qualitative interviews during the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th years of the project, when the children were in the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grades, respectively. The current study focuses on child and mother semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted in Year 4. All students were in the 6th grade, except one who had been promoted directly from 4th grade to 6th grade and was in the 7th grade at the time of the Year 4 interviews. The larger quantitative study recruited 404 children from nine elementary schools in a single county in the southeastern region of the United States. Criteria for participation in the study were African American or European American ethnicity, the presence of the child's biological mother in the home, fluency in the English language, the child having been born in the United States, and participation in an earlier, school-based data collection.

The 20 mother-child pairs were selected using non-random stratified sampling, in which stratification was by race, gender and social class. This strategy was intended to reflect characteristics of the sample and to maximize diversity in these areas. The qualitative sample consisted of seven European American boys, three European

American girls, three African American boys and seven African American girls along with their biological mothers. Participants represented diverse socioeconomic backgrounds as defined by the Hollingshead Four-Factor Index of Social Status (1979), and corresponded to the diversity of the larger sample. Using Hollingshead's classification system, the distribution of socioeconomic status was: upper class (n = 3), upper middle class (n = 8) middle class (n = 4), lower middle class (n = 3) and lower class (n = 2). Families resided in rural, suburban, and urban neighborhoods.

Procedures

Mother and child interviews were conducted separately in the participants' homes by trained graduate research assistants. Interviewers for mother interviews were race and gender matched to minimize social distance between interviewee and interviewer (Oakley, 1981). Mothers responded to questions about (1) management of children's peer relationships and activities with peers, (2) how they obtained information about these relationships, (3) perceptions of the risks and benefits of intervening in children's relationship as opposed to being hands-off with respect to children's relationships, and (4) perceptions of and involvement in specific peer relationships. Children responded to questions regarding (1) the type of information they disclosed to their parents, (2) the extent to which their parents were knowledgeable about their peer relationships and activities, and (3) perceptions of the risks and benefits of disclosing information about their peer relationships to their parents.

Participant confidentiality was ensured by labeling interview files by

identification number only. When reporting results, pseudonyms were used for all references to actual persons. Each mother signed a written statement of consent for their own and their child's participation. Children gave oral assent for their participation in the study. Mother received $60 for their participation in the qualitative interviews and children received $10 gift cards to an entertainment store. The qualitative interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were reviewed and edited by a second party to ensure accuracy of transcription.

Coding Strategy

Child Disclosure. Mother and child qualitative interviews were coded for child disclosure about peer relationships. These codes included the content of children's disclosure and whether disclosure was spontaneous or solicited by parents. These codes also identified areas of non-disclosure (aspects of peer relationships that children do not disclose to their parents).

Parental Characteristics. Mother and child qualitative interviews were coded for parental characteristics as they related to child disclosure of information relating to peer relationships. Parental characteristics included factors such as parental beliefs about what they should or shouldn't know about their children's friendships, parental approaches to management of their children's peers, and strategies parents employed in their pursuit of knowledge about children's peer relationships.

Child Characteristics. Mother and child interviews were coded for child characteristics as they related to child disclosure of peer relationships. Child

characteristics included factors such as children's beliefs about parents' rights to know about children's friendships (coded from child interviews only), children's beliefs about parents (coded from child interviews only), and children's characteristics directly related to disclosing or withholding information from parents (coded from both child and mother interviews).

Parent-Child Relationship Characteristics. Child interviews were coded for parent-child relationship information. This included indicators of relational quality and communication patterns. Characteristics or communication patterns of the greater family system were also considered.

Plan of Analysis

As with most social research, this analysis utilized both deductive and inductive strategies (Layder, 1998). Qualitative analysis is often characterized as inductive in its approach. Yet all social researchers approach their analysis with prior assumptions and knowledge. Rather than letting prior assumptions and knowledge remain hidden, acknowledging them openly is more highly recommended (Layder; Allen, Fine, & Demo, 2000). Furthermore, theoretical frameworks provide a valuable focus to the analysis process (Layder).

In this study, the broad categories of child, parent, and relational contexts were deduced a priori from components of Family Systems Theory and supported with relevant empirical literature. The composition of these broad contexts was inductively gathered from the content of the interviews. This involved a process of multiple readings

of interview transcripts exploring relevant constructs within each of the contexts mentioned above. Codes were developed based on themes within the broad categories as identified in the previous step and based on child disclosure behaviors and content. The author and one additional graduate student coded all transcripts to establish reliability of the codes.

To ensure the codes accurately reflected the meaning of the participants, interpretative validity was addressed in two ways. Along with establishing reliability of the codes, the two coders engaged in on ongoing dialogue of how meaning and interpretation were portrayed by the codes. Also, as suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2000), negative cases were examined. Examples that did not fit the codes or negated a particular finding were used to evaluate the validity of the code or finding. The coding scheme was tested by both coders and revised multiple times until a good fit between the codes and data was established.

Once the data were coded, patterns of child disclosure were determined based on disclosure behavior and disclosure content. Each code representing a particular disclosure behavior or content of disclosure was labeled as indicative of high, moderate, or low disclosure (see Appendix A for a complete list of disclosure codes). The author and one additional individual conducted this task to maintain reliability at this level of analysis. Each child was given a disclosure score by subtracting the number of low disclosing factors from the number of high disclosing factors found in the child interviews. Based on the distribution of scores, children were divided into three groups

and descriptions of these three groups were written. Children with scores on the border between groups were compared to these descriptions and then assigned accordingly. This step ensured children were assigned to the group that best matched their disclosure pattern rather than raw scores alone. Subsequently, children in these groups were labeled: unreserved disclosers, screening disclosers, and withholding disclosers.

The next step involved the identification of constructs as they applied to characteristics of mothers, children, and mother-child relationships. In the course of this analysis it became apparent that the source (child, mother, or mother-child relationship) of the construct was not as important as the implication of the construct. Although theory dictated three probable sources of influence on child disclosure I found that what mattered was the type of influence, positive or negative, each factor had on disclosure. Accordingly, each child, mother, and relational code previously identified was labeled in one of the following ways: a promoter of disclosure; a discourager of discloser; or neutral/undetermined with regard to disclosure (see Appendix B for a complete list of disclosure promotion codes). The author and one additional individual completed this task. Most mother codes were labeled neutral/undetermined. Disclosure promotion scores were then determined by subtracting the number of disclosure discouragers from the number of disclosure promoters gleaned from child characteristics, child beliefs, two parent characteristics, and one relational characteristic. Children with positive scores were labeled as having a disclosure climate of promotion. Children with a negative score were labeled as having a disclosure climate of discouragement. Children with a score of

zero were labeled as having a disclosure climate balanced between promotion and discouragement.

Once the children were assigned both a disclosure pattern and a disclosure climate, an analysis of the co-occurrence of these two constructs was conducted. This cross-case analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1994) concluded the inquiry.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Through the use of qualitative data, rich information about child disclosure to
their parents about friendships emerged. Children varied in how and to what extent they
disclosed to their parents about their friendships. Children were either unreserved in their
disclosure to their parents, screened their disclosure to their parents, or withheld
disclosure from their parents. Family climates of disclosure differed in whether they
promoted or discouraged child disclosure. Some climates encouraged disclosure more
than discouraged, some discouraged disclosure more than encouraged, and others were
balanced between encouragement and discouragement of disclosure. In addition, an
association between child disclosure patterns and disclosure climates was found.
Children who were unreserved in their disclosure were more likely to experience
disclosure climates that promoted disclosure. Children who tended to withhold
information from parents were more likely to experience climates that discouraged
disclosure.

Patterns of Child Disclosure

There were different ways in which children disclosed information about their
friends to their parents. These disclosure patterns were labeled as unreserved, screening,
and withholding. The unreserved disclosure pattern was common among children in this

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study. As the name suggests, *unreserved* children disclosed to their parents about their friends without reservation. This pattern was characterized by thorough and uncensored disclosure. Nicholas is an example of a child who was unreserved in his disclosure. His mother offered this description of him, "I mean he is a very open child and will volunteer a tremendous amount of information without you even asking." Many children who were unreserved in their disclosure indicated that they told their parents everything about their friends. When asked how much she told her parents about her friends, Jessica emphasized, "I tell [my parents] every detail (....) Even my dad." When asked to recall a time when their parents did not know anything about what they were doing with their friends, unreserved children were generally unable to do so.   For example, Molly responded, "That's never [happened]. I always tell her what we are doing and stuff."

Unreserved children were also unrestricted in the content of their disclosure about friends. Their disclosure covered a wide range of topics from romantic interests to interpersonal conflicts. For example, Danielle told us "if something would usually happen between me and one of my friends, I'll usually tell my mom." When asked what he likes to share about his friends with his parents, Brandon responded, " Probably the big secrets, like liking a girl or something like that." Some unreserved children went so as far as to tell their parents when their friends misbehaved. Dwayne's mother reported:

> "He'll tell like if somebody did something on the bus. If one of the boys hit another one or got kicked off the bus. Or the girl that keeps teasing with him (....) He tells everything. From negative to positive, he'll tell me about them."

Unreserved children most often disclosed about their friends spontaneously. Their disclosure occurred within casual conversation with their parents as they discussed trivial, day-to-day interactions with their friends. Brandon described disclosing this way: "So I would know more about [what happened at school] and [my parents] wouldn't, so I would like tell them at the dinner table, or I would tell them when I am getting ready to go to bed." Danielle told us that:

> "[My mother] knows every detail [about my friends] 'cause like every time I come from school, I always ask, she will always ask what happened at school and I will tell her (….) I fill her in on what's happening at school.

Most mothers of unreserved children expressed satisfaction with their children's disclosure. None felt that they lacked information about their children's friends. Molly's mother described herself as "lucky" because her daughter would tell her which boys she considered cute. However, a few mothers felt their children were too unreserved in their sharing. Brandon's mother was of the opinion that he disclosed too much detail about his personal life. She recalled, "(…) he has called [his girlfriend] up on the phone for things and I am like, 'go in our bedroom and call her, don't do it in front of all of us, I mean, you need a little bit of privacy.' "

In sum, disclosing to parents about friendships comes naturally to children with an unreserved pattern of disclosure. These children told all with few exceptions.

Children with a *screening* pattern of disclosure were communicative with their parents, but did not necessarily provide complete information about their friends. One-

half of the children exhibited this disclosure pattern. Gabrielle illustrates the screening

pattern of disclosure:

> Gabrielle: I tell (my mother) just about everything about my friends, a lot. I tell
> her, she knows all my friends, but she doesn't know them 'cause I don't talk about
> all my friends a lot. I talk about certain ones all the time.
> Interviewer: Okay. So you talk, you talk to your mom about certain friends, but
> then some friends you don't talk about?
> Gabrielle: Right. She knows, I tell her who my friends are, but I won't tell her
> stuff about all of them.

It was typical of screeners to pick and choose information about their friends to disclose

to their parents.   For example, when asked how much he told his parents about his

friends, Eric responded, "Some things. 'Cause some of my friends she may not like, but I

like them."

Screening children sometimes disclosed about some friends and not others, or

disclosed about some aspects of their friendships and not others. Aliyah shared her

decision to only disclose information about her closest friends to her parents, "I tell them

about Emily and Megan. And those are, those are my best friends, those are like the only

people that I talk to [my parents] about." Screeners sometimes selected which friends to

disclose about based on the quality or behavior of the friends themselves. As illustrated

in the following dialogue, these children were more likely to tell their parents about

friends with positive behavior and attributes than those with negative behavior or

attributes.

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Interviewer: So which ones do you tell [your parents] about?
Malcolm: Like, mostly the girls, 'cause they don't hardly do nothing.
Interviewer: The girls don't do as many bad things?
Malcolm: Uh-huh [yes].

Friends of the opposite sex, or romantic interests, represented a topic these children were not likely to disclose to their parents. Caroline's mother told us that:

"[probing, asking questions] is probably the least effective way because, especially if it's about a boy 'cause she knows that I don't like the boy-girl thing at this age. And so she sometimes won't tell me about, you know, about this asking out stuff."

Children who screened information were also unlikely to expose their friends' negative behavior to their parents. When asked if there was anything they did not like to share with their parents, screening children told us things such as, " Yeah, when they get in trouble," "When they get in trouble or something," "I don't tell [my parents] some things, like, if they are going to fight somebody," and "One time my friend, Andrew, got detention, and I didn't say nothing about that to [my parents]."

Screening children were also less likely than unreserved children to disclose voluntarily. And, as demonstrated in the quote from Caroline's mother, they were unlikely to respond to parental attempts to probe children for information. Some parents of children who screened adopted special strategies to get their children to disclose. Bryan's mother told us, "One thing we have instituted this year is on Wednesdays he and I go out to breakfast every Wednesday. And so, when he is eating, he talks."

Although screeners were not completely forthcoming, some parents of screening

children were satisfied with the amount of information their children shared with them. Gabrielle's mother simply stated, " I think I know the right amount."   Other parents were keenly aware they were not receiving full disclosure and wished for more. One mother expressed:

> "Just to know a little but more about what kind of people they are and what their relationships are like. You know, how good of friends are they. You know, are they arguing about things, and if they are, what they are, that type of thing. Just, you know, more about how they are getting along."

This mother knew her child's friends by name, but did not know details. She was not satisfied to merely know names and faces; she desired information about their interactions.

Overall, the type of disclosure screening children engaged in was more functional than conversational. These children tended to let their parents know their friends' identities, but were not willing to disclose at a deeper level.

Withholding children chose to disclose little about their friendships to their parents. The amount of their disclosure ranged from minimal to non-existent. These children withheld similar types of information as screening children (romantic interests, interpersonal conflicts, and friends' negative behavior). But, unlike screening children, withholders also failed to provide even basic or neutral information to their parents. At times, this included even their friends' identities. When asked how much she told her parents about her friends, Destiny responded, "I don't tell them nothing." Destiny's mother also reported that she did not know much about her daughter's friendships

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"because Destiny don't really talk about her friends." Later, Destiny's mother described how Destiny tried to avoid interaction between her friends and her mother.

> "Whenever I go over [to the school], I mean, it's not like Destiny says, 'well, momma, this is so and so, so and so. She gets her stuff and is ready to go. [….] 'Destiny, who is that little girl?' 'That's just so and so. Let's go.'"

Disclosure from withholding children was often limited to information regarding friends already known by parents. When children were younger, parents may have been introduced to their children's friends, but that was no longer the case. For example, Shawn shared basic information about his activities with friends his mother knew from both the neighborhood and his elementary school, but did not talk about new friends he made in middle school.

> Shawn: As in there you heard where my mom is kind of, she is kind of dumbfounded about my friends because she doesn't really know about them.
> Interviewer: She doesn't know about your school friends?
> Shawn: Un-un [no]. Except the friends from my first elementary school. She knows about them, which is Darren, Alex, Gregory, and Jordan.
> Interviewer: Okay, so, when you've met new friends in middle school, do you tell her about them?
> Shawn: Umm, in the middle [school], not, not really.

This was also true of Destiny, the only friends her mother knew were her cousin who lived next door and her best friend from elementary school.

Mothers of withholding children were dissatisfied with their lack of information regarding their children's friendships. Destiny's mother stated that "it would be nice" to know more about her daughter's friends, but did not consider it likely to happen. These

parents expressed a defeated attitude regarding their ability to obtain information from their children.

Children with a withholding disclosure pattern did not confide in their parents about their friendships, neither did they casually discuss friendships with parents. These children maintained tight control over what their parents knew and did not know about their friends. The withholding pattern of disclosure was found least frequently among children.

Patterns of Disclosure Promotion and Discouragement

There was variation in how child disclosure was promoted or discouraged within mother-child dyads. Analysis of encouraging and discouraging factors revealed distinct patterns, or climates, of disclosure promotion: disclosure discouragement, a balance of disclosure promotion and discouragement, and disclosure promotion. This last was the most common disclosure climate.

Most children identified at least one factor that inhibited their disclosure. During the interviews, children were asked to identify risks to disclosing about their friends to their parents. The risk most frequently mentioned by children was the possibility of parents learning about negative behaviors and subsequently disapproving, limiting, or forbidding a friendship. Troy explained, "And if I tell stuff, bad stuff, like about if they get in trouble a lot, like, [my parents] won't let me go over to their house and spend the night and so." Children also mentioned the risk of provoking their parents' curiosity. When asked what is the worst thing about talking to your parents about friends, Caroline

answered, "When they start asking question after question." Aaron commented, "Sometimes I get kind of tired 'cause my parents just keep asking me question after question about [my friends]. And you know, I don't like it when that happens." Being lectured, teased, and misunderstood by parents were also risks mentioned by individual children. In Danielle's words:

> And usually, like, if what the conversation between me and my friends and if I thought it was funny and my mom didn't, it just, it kind of make me feel weird 'cause I would have thought that she would, like, laugh and stuff, but she would break out into this big lecture about how she thinks it's not right. But that's parents, so.

Children also held beliefs that discouraged their disclosure, such as the belief that parents do not have a right to know about children's friendships. In discussing child disclosure, Shawn told us, "It's not really as much of her business as it is mine." Shawn felt his mother didn't need to know about his friends any more than he needed to know about her friends. One child believed that his parents already knew more about his friends than he did, so he did not need to disclose information to them.

A final factor that discouraged disclosure was children's descriptions of themselves as private or preferring to keep information about their friendships to themselves. Shawn stated, "I am very confidential…I don't like to tell people about my problems. I just handle them myself." Caroline explained, "As you get older, you just don't want to tell [your parents] everything."

Most children were also able to identify factors that promoted their disclosure.

Predominate factors of disclosure promotion were beliefs that children held related to disclosing to parents. These beliefs included the importance of telling parents about friends and activities with friends, parents' right to know about children's friendships, a belief that parents had a good understanding of children's friendship issues, and a belief that parents would find out about friends with or without child disclosure. Chris summed up the belief that parents have a good understanding of friendship issues with his comment that "(parents) understand everything that you are going through because they went through the same thing you did." Jessica talked about her obligation to tell her parents about her friendships.

> Jessica: [My parents] have a right to know [about my friends].
> Interviewer: Okay. Just for their information?
> Jessica: Yeah, 'cause like if something really bad happened and something happened to them, you know, you would feel like really guilty that you didn't tell them that something happened and [if] you didn't tell them that they would be surprised, happy, or shocked about, you know.

Children also identified several benefits of disclosing to parents. One benefit was the trust and openness disclosure created between parents and children. For example, Troy reasoned: "If I tell (my parents) stuff about (my friends), they will trust them more and it tells them how good of people they are and I can, like, if they are really good people, I can go over to their house more." Gaining parent's advice was another benefit identified by children. Brandon remarked, "I thought if I could have a little bit of help with my friendships and life, why not?" Other children considered being able to entertain parents with funny stories to be a benefit of disclosing. Aaron recalled, "Sometimes there

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is funny things about my friends that I tell my parents and we all laugh together. And, yeah, I like telling my parents about the funny things." Another identified benefit was the knowledge parents gain from disclosure. Gabrielle explains:

> "So they, the best part [about talking to parents about friends] is so she'll know what kind of environment I am in at school, 'cause she is not always around 'cause she has to go to school too, so she will know what kind of environment I am in, I mean, in school and what kind of friends I got. If they are good ones or bad ones."

Attributes of children also contributed to disclosure promotion. Some children were talkative; others were unable to keep secrets. Gabrielle told us this about herself, "My brothers know about my friends too. (….) I tell my brothers about my friends. I talk. I talk to my grandma. I tell everybody about my friends. And what kind of friends I got." Children also told us that they felt free to disclose to parents when their peer group consisted of positive, well-behaved children. The absence of negative behavior encouraged children to be open with their parents. When asked if there was anything about his friends he would not like to tell his parents, Nicholas responded:

> "Not really. 'Cause, like, I don't hang out with guys that I wouldn't want to tell. 'Cause that is kind of like a guide, you know, if you don't want to tell your parents about what you are doing, then you might as well not do it."

A final positive influence on disclosure promotion was children's perceptions of their relationship with their parents. Children's views of the parent-child relationships were often positive, " I know that there is nothing that I couldn't tell my parents cause,

you know, they're umm, I can just tell them anything," or "[My parents] probably know every little detail [about my friends] 'cause I sort of feel like close to my parents." Such children often desired their parents' involvement and interaction with their friends. When describing her attendance at a social event, Jessica remarked, "[My mother] parked 'cause I wanted her to go in with us 'cause I am not embarrassed by my mom at all."

Variation in Disclosure Promotion by Child Disclosure Types

After identifying patterns of child disclosure to their parents and disclosure promotion climates, the next question addressed was: Were these three child disclosure patterns associated with disclosure promotion climates? The analysis revealed that there was an association between child disclosure and disclosure promotion (see Appendix C). Children who withheld disclosure from their parents described a climate of disclosure discouragement. Most children who disclosed unreservedly described disclosure promotion. Children who screened the information disclosed to their parents described various patterns of disclosure promotion, including disclosure discouragement, a balance of promotion and discouragement, and disclosure promotion.

Among children who reported disclosure discouragement, withholding children perceived a climate that was more discouraging of disclosure than did screening children. An example of this contrast is evident in the interviews with Brittany and Shawn. Both children were identified as experiencing climates that discouraged disclosure. Brittany reported that her mother sometimes negatively overreacted to Brittany's disclosure. Yet, this was the only indicator she identified that pointed to disclosure discouragement. She

did not identify any factors that encouraged her disclosure. In contrast, Shawn told us that he was very private, liked to keep information about his friends to himself, and believed his mother doesn't need to know about his friends. Each of these characteristics and beliefs discourages his disclosure. Brittany, with only one factor to discourage her disclosure, was a child who screened her disclosure to her parents. Shawn, who reported multiple items that discouraged his disclosure, was a child who withheld disclosure from his parents.

Similarly, among children who reported disclosure promotion, those who were unreserved disclosers identified the most supportive disclosure promotion climates. To illustrate this point, are the cases of Nicholas and Eric. Nicholas was encouraged to disclose to his parents in several ways: he believed parents would find out about friends even if he did not disclose; he believed his parents were people in whom he could confide; he believed disclosing builds his parents' trust in him; and he chose to only associate with friends about whom he felt comfortable talking to parents. Eric believed it was beneficial for his parents to know about his activities with friends and did not have any friends he was uncomfortable talking about to his parents. Both children reported disclosure climates that encouraged disclosure, but Nicholas, an unreserved discloser, had several more encouraging elements than did Eric, a screening discloser.

In summary, early adolescent children disclosed information about their friends to their parents in various ways. Some were unreserved in their disclosure. Other children screened the information given to their parents. A few withheld most information about

their friends from their parents. Children also have various climates surrounding their disclosure. Most identified a climate where disclosure was promoted more than discouraged. Some identified a climate where disclosure is discouraged more than promoted. Other children identified a balance between disclosure promotion and discouragement. How children choose to disclose and the disclosure climate they perceive were associated. Children who perceived disclosure promotion were most likely to disclose unreservedly or with some screening. Children who perceive a climate of disclosure discouragement were most likely to withhold disclosure or to screen their disclosure.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Within these qualitative interviews with early adolescent children and their mothers, we discovered that children disclosed information about their friends to their parents in different ways and to different extents. Some were unreserved in their disclosure. Other children screened the information given to their parents. A few withheld most information about their friends from their parents. Children also experienced diversity in family climates surrounding their disclosure. Most spoke of climates within which disclosure was promoted more than discouraged, yet others identified climates within which disclosure was discouraged more than promoted. A final group of children perceived a balance between disclosure promotion and discouragement. How children chose to disclose and the disclosure climates they perceived were associated in meaningful ways. Children whose home environments were characterized by disclosure promotion were most likely to disclose unreservedly or with some screening. Children who perceived environments of disclosure discouragement were most likely to withhold disclosure or to screen their disclosure.

Stattin and Kerr (2000) identified child disclosure as parents' primary source of information about their children's activities and linked disclosure to multiple measures of child adjustment and well-being. The current study used qualitative data to obtain a more

elaborate understanding of the processes that characterized child disclosure by considering the frequency with which disclosure occurred, the content of children's disclosure or non-disclose, and the motivations behind disclosure.

Patterns of Child Disclosure

Although variation existed, open disclosure to mothers was the norm for this sample of sixth grade children. This finding is consistent with the work of Bakken & Brown (under review) who found younger adolescents engaged in more disclosure and less censorship and deception than did older adolescents. Bakken and Brown suggested that disclosure declines as children age, but longitudinal research that examines child disclosure over time is needed to demonstrate such a pattern.

High levels of open disclosure to parents among adolescents are also consistent with Stattin and Kerr's (2000) findings that parental knowledge concerning children's activities and whereabouts were primarily due to child disclosure of information. If early adolescents are open in their disclosure to parents, then it would follow that parents use, even rely on, child disclosure as a source of information about their children's friendships and activities during this developmental period. This reliance could prove problematic if child disclosure does indeed lessen as children age. Parents who were formerly reliant on child disclosure may have to choose between knowing less about their children's activities and associates versus discovering new means of obtaining such information. Although child disclosure may serve as an important source of information for parents, parents would be wise to not put all their proverbial eggs in one basket when it comes to

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obtaining knowledge regarding children's friends and activities.

Also consistent with previous research (Marshall, Tilton-Weaver, & Bosdet, 2005) was the finding that children seldom used outright deception to keep information from parents. Rather, they employed strategies such as withholding specific details from parents or avoiding certain topics in discussions with parents. Such strategies have been identified in previous research as well (Bakken & Brown, under review; Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, & Dowdy, 2006; Marshall, et al.). The employment of such strategies indicates that children thoughtfully manage, or screen, their disclosure to parents. Children's avoidance of topics and withholding of details suggests that parents may not be desirable sources of information about children's disclosure. Although some parents may suspect their children's use of these strategies, others may be unaware of children's avoiding and withholding practices and may assume a level of honesty that is not present.

Unlike previous research on this topic, the current study did not find variation in disclosure by gender. Previous research has consistently indicated that girls engage in more open disclosure than boys and that parents have greater knowledge of girls' activities than of boys' activities (Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, & Dowdy, 2006; Papini & Farmer, 1990; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001; Smetana & Daddis, 2002; Waizenhofer, Buchanan, & Jackson-Newsome, 2004). It is possible that variation in disclosure by gender was simply not detected in the current project due to the small sample size. Alternatively, it may be that gender differences occur only with respect to

specific types of disclosure that were not the focus of the current effort. For example, children within this study were asked only about disclosure as it related to friendships, not as it related to engagement in delinquent or antisocial behavior. It may be that girls are more likely to disclose about such topics than boys. Finally, most of the reports of gender differences have resulted from studies of parental knowledge, not child disclosure (Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, & Dowdy, 2006; Papini & Farmer, 1990; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001; Smetana & Daddis, 2002). It could be that gender differences are not as prevalent in child disclosure as in parental knowledge.

Children's Influences on Disclosure Patterns

Despite the tendency of children to disclose to parents, most children did engage in some screening of information. In other words, children tended to not tell parents about select aspects of their relationships and activities with friends (such as negative behaviors of friends, participation in unapproved activities, and interpersonal conflicts with friends). The current study uncovered motivating factors that explained children's decisions regarding whether to disclose or to withhold disclosure. When open disclosure occurred, it stemmed largely from children's views of parents as having legitimate authority over children's lives, especially in matters of children's safety, and serving as a source of guidance for children. Other researchers have observed similar motivations behind children's decisions to disclose information to their parents. As reported in Bakken and Brown (under review), Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, and Dowdy (2006), and Marshall, Tilton-Weaver, and Bosdet (2005), children often feel obligated to disclose

regarding issues of safety and in an effort to maintain positive parent-child relations. Children are less likely to disclose information to parents when they believe the information is not under parents' jurisdiction (Bakken & Brown; Marshall et al.; Darling et al.). This is consistent with my findings that children viewed parents as having legitimate authority over children's lives. As suggested by Marshall et al., continuous renegotiation regarding the legitimacy of parental jurisdiction reflects a normative path towards autonomy in the lives of adolescents. In the current study, perceived parental jurisdiction was associated with child disclosure. This suggests that increased screening or withholding of information from to parents over time is reflective of normative development. It also is possible that differing levels of autonomy from parents within this sample of sixth grade children might explain of variations in levels of disclosure to parents.

Disclosure Climates

Unique to the current study was its comprehensive analysis of contextual influences surrounding child disclosure and the relationship of these influences to the occurrence of disclosure. As described above, previous research in this area has focused on identifying strategies and justifications behind children's decisions regarding disclosure and nondisclosure. Yet it is unlikely that these motivations are singularly responsible for children's decisions regarding disclosure. According to a family systems perspective, children do not operate in a vacuum, but rather in relationship with those around them. When considered together, child and parental influences on child disclosure

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can be thought of as creating a climate within which children disclose.

The most frequently cited motivator regarding non-disclosure in the current study was children's fear of consequences administered by parents. Certainly children's behaviors, and especially the presence of negative behaviors, contribute to children's fear of consequences. But in addition, parental handling of such behavior comes into play. Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, and Dowdy (2006) found that adolescents were more willing to disclose disagreements with parents when parents engaged in authoritative parenting. Conversely, when parents were low in authoritativeness and areas of disagreement were governed by hard rules, adolescents were less likely to disclose to parents. These findings provide support for the idea that parents who engage in authoritative parenting are more likely to gain information they need regarding children's friendships than are nonauthoritative parents. In this situation, consideration of child factors alone does not allow for a thorough understanding of child disclosure.

In keeping with a family systems perspective, the current study considered multiple sources of influence on child disclosure. The results confirmed that influences on child disclosure do exist beyond children themselves. Both characteristics of parents and the nature of parent-child relationships were found to influence child disclosure. These factors, in combination with child characteristics and beliefs, formed an overall disclosure climate. Although most scholars acknowledge that child disclosure represents a bidirectional process, we currently know more about child factors contributing to disclosure than about the role parents may play in this arena. Additional research on the

contributions of parenting styles and practices to the disclosure process is needed to fully understand the manner in which parents impact the disclosure process.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The results of this study are specific to a sample of European American and African American sixth grade children and their mothers. While the current study did not detect variation in child disclosure by ethnicity, we cannot generalize these findings beyond these two ethnic groups. Bakken and Brown (under review) found that disclosure functioned differently among African American families versus immigrant Hmong families. It is unknown what differences may have emerged with a more ethnically diverse sample in the current study. A similar sample limitation in this study is that of children's age. Bakken and Brown's study suggested decreases in disclosure as children grew older. Developmental changes occurring in adolescence, such as children's increasing autonomy from parents, may impact the nature of disclosure to parents. The current study focuses on child disclosure among children in the sixth grade, but findings cannot be generalized to children of other ages. A final sample limitation is that only mother-child family subsystems were included in this study. Previous research has indicated that mothers are the recipients of child disclosure more often than fathers and have the more knowledge of children's activities than do fathers (Crouter, Helms-Erikson, Updegraff, & McHale, 1999; Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campoine-Barr, 2006). Among children who reside with their mothers, the mother-child subsystems are of critical importance with respect to the study of child disclosure. Child disclosure

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among children not living with their mothers has not been studied to date. In light of these limitations, we suggest that further research on this topic consider how child disclosure varies among adolescents of different ethnicities, developmental stages, and family structures.

The families participating in qualitative interviews took on a substantial time commitment with respect to this research. It is likely that they are overly representative of well-adjusted families. The high numbers of children who disclosed without reservation could be accounted for by such adjustment.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a rich and informative picture of child disclosure to parents previously unavailable in this area of inquiry. We now know that children vary in the extent to which they disclose information to their parents concerning their friendships and that such variation is systematically related to both children's own thinking regarding the appropriateness and necessity of such disclosure, as well as the extent to which parents provide relational contexts that are supportive of disclosure. Researchers, practitioners, and parents would all benefit from adopting a perspective on child disclosure that recognizes the dynamic and interrelated roles of both child and parent in shaping child disclosure patterns during early adolescence.

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APPENDIX A: CHILD DISCLOSURE CODES

Table A1

Codes Indicative of High Disclosure

Disclosure Behaviors	DIS1: Talks about child voluntarily/spontaneously disclosing about friends or activities with friends
	DIS3: Talks about child disclosing about friends when probed/questioned by parent
Disclosed Information	DI1: Characteristics of friends
	DI3: Relationships with or interest in friends of the opposite sex
	DI6: Negative behaviors of friends
Undisclosed Information	UD6: Trivial and/or boring details about friendships or activities with friends
About whom does the child disclose?	WD1: Close friends, not acquaintances
	WD5: All friends

Table A2

Codes Indicative of Moderate Disclosure

Disclosure Behaviors	DIS4: Parent talks about child not disclosing when probed/questioned by parent
	DIS5: Talks about child partially disclosing when probed/questioned by parent
Disclosed Information	DI2: Positive and/or funny aspects of friendships
	DI4: Things that are bothering child or with which child needs help
	DI5: Activities (what they do with friends) or plans for activities with friends
Undisclosed information	UD1: Negative characteristics or behavior of friends
	UD2: Negative activities with friends
	UD3: Activities in which friends or peers engage without child
	UD5: Relationships with or interest in friends of the opposite sex
About whom does child disclose?	WD2: Friends already known to the parent, not new friends

WD4: Only friends from a certain context, such as school, church, neighborhood

Table A3

Codes Indicative of Low Disclosure

Disclosure Behaviors	DIS2: Talks about child not voluntarily/spontaneously disclosing about friends or activities with friends
	DIS4: Child talks about not disclosing when probed/questioned by parent
Undisclosed information	UD4: Negative or upsetting (to the child) aspects of friendships
About whom does child disclose?	WD3: "Good" friends, but not "bad" friends

APPENDIX B: DISCLOSURE CLIMATE CODES

Table B1

Disclosure Promotion Construct

Child Beliefs and Perceptions	IMP: Important for parent to know about child's friends and activities with friends
	RIT: Parents have a right to know about child's friends and activities with friends
	BEN: Perceives benefits of disclosing about friends to parents
	XRIS: Does not perceive any risks or downsides to disclosing about friends to parents
	UND: Parents understand children's friendship issues; can give good/relevant advice
	OMN2: Parent Omniscience: Parents will find out about friends or activities eventually, with or without child disclosure
Child Behaviors and Characteristics	TALK: Talkative, tends to talk a lot about many topics
	XSEC: Cannot keep secrets even though he/she tries or would like to
	XPRIV: Doesn't hold anything back, discloses openly
	PEER1: Doesn't have any "bad" friends; doesn't get into trouble with friends

Mother-Child	REL: Child talks about a positive relationship between parent
Relationship	and child, Ex: close, trusting, open

Table B2

Disclosure Discouragement Construct

Child Beliefs and Perceptions	XRIT: Parents do not have a right to know about child's friendships and activities with friends
	XBEN: Does not perceive any benefits of disclosing about friends to parents
	RIS: Perceives risks or a downside to disclosing about friends to parents
	XUND: Parents don't understand children's friendship issues; cannot offer good/relevant advice
	OMN1: Parent Omniscience: Parents have greater knowledge than children about child's friends; knowledge beyond what children might disclose
Child Behaviors and Characteristics	INV2: Desires to limit parental involvement in friendship to a certain level; seeks to maintain that level of involvement
	SEC: Secretive, not forthcoming about friends or activities with friends (somewhat devious)
	PRIV: Private, keeps information/stories about friends or activities with friends to him/herself
Parent Behaviors and Characteristics	XLIST: Parent is not a good listener; too busy to listen or uninterested in listening

NOS: Parent asks too many questions; is perceived as nosey

APPENDIX C: DISCLOSURE DISTRIBUTION

Table C1

Distribution of Disclosure Patterns by Disclosure Climates

	Disclosure Climate		
Disclosure Patterns	Discouraged	Balanced	Promoted
Withholding	Shawn		
	Destiny		
Screening	Malcolm	Jasmine	Gabrielle
	Caroline	Whitney	Eric
	Brittany	Troy	Aliyah
		Bryan	
Unreserved		Dwayne	Jessica
		Chris	Nicholas
			Aaron
			Molly
			Brandon
			Danielle