

THIS ISN'T ABOUT ME: COMMUNICATION PRIVACY MANAGEMENT

THEORY AND PUBLIC CONFESSION

Kära Ann Caskey Brittain

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2013

APPROVED:

Brian Richardson, Major Professor
Zuoming Wang, Committee Member
Jay Allison, Committee Member and Chair of
the Department of Communication
Studies
Mark Wardell, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate
School

Brittain, Kära Ann Caskey. This Isn't About Me: Communication Privacy Management Theory and Public Confession. Master of Science (Communication Studies), May 2013, 83 pp., 2 tables, 1 illustration, references, 68 titles.

Individuals at the DFW Church publicly confess intensely personal information, such as drug and alcohol addiction, spousal and child abuse, stripping, and sexual abuse. Using communication privacy management theory (CPM), I examined the way individuals at the DFW Church manage their private information, how they make disclosure decisions, and how they manage boundaries around their private information. I interviewed 13 individuals who participated in public confession, and coded their responses to identify the common themes and tactics for making disclosure decisions. Through this process, I pioneer the application of CPM to examine public disclosure events, rather than dyadic or small group disclosures. I also expand our current understanding of motivations for disclosure; rather than focusing on selfish or therapeutic motivations, participants want to encourage others through their disclosure. In terms of boundary management, individuals at the DFW Church believe that God owns part, or all, of their information; thus, disclosing their pasts is “not about them.” Participants construct a new identity through their testimony narrative, effectively putting the old person in the past and presenting a new, Christian identity to the church body for group approval. In this context, confessing a negative behavior becomes a way to build a positive image by showing the drastic reformation that has taken place in that person’s life. Lastly, I propose the public disclosure model—which involves boundary testing, audience analysis, and choice of disclosure path—to be tested for use in future research.

Copyright 2013

by

Kära Ann Caskey Brittain

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank Dr. Richardson for his support, encouragement, and insight throughout the research process. Your mentorship and guidance have been invaluable, and have made me a better scholar and researcher. I would also like to thank Dr. Allison for his green pen and thorough editing. I have grown more as a writer with your help than in any course thus far. In addition, I want to thank Dr. Wang for her encouragement and positivity. Your knowledge and advice were instrumental during the research process. Of course, I cannot forget my coders without whom the project would not have happened. Thank you, Blake McDaniel and Andrea Lovoll, for your hard work and dedication. To all the faculty and staff in the Department of Communication Studies, thank you for your mentorship, for challenging me to grow as a scholar and student, and for the amazing memories.

Next, I am deeply indebted to my family and friends for the love, support, and encouragement throughout this process. To my husband, thank you for your patience, understanding, and forgiveness of the many late nights and frozen dinners. To Todd, Laurie and TJ Caskey, thank you for your constant encouragement to pursue my goals. To my dear friends who helped me make it through, I cannot say thank you enough: Hailey Drescher, Miranda Chesson, Melodee Sova, Flora Ceka, Laura Maninger, and Cindy Gordon.

Lastly, I want to thank the DFW Church for opening their doors for me, and to the individuals who shared their stories. Thank you for the opportunity to know you, and your willingness to participate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|----------------------------------------------|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... | iii |
| LIST OF TABLES..... | iv |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | v |
| Chapters | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Context and Audience | 3 |
| Theoretical Framework | 5 |
| Purpose..... | 7 |
| 2. LITERATURE REVIEW | 9 |
| Self-presentation and Disclosure | 9 |
| Communication Privacy Management Theory..... | 12 |
| Christianity and Public Confession | 16 |
| Research Questions..... | 17 |
| 3. METHOD..... | 19 |
| Research Context..... | 19 |
| Recruitment and Participants..... | 20 |
| Procedure | 22 |
| Data Analysis | 22 |
| Verification | 25 |
| 4. RESULTS..... | 27 |
| Privacy Rule Development | 27 |
| RQ2 Boundary Management..... | 47 |
| Public Confession Model | 50 |
| Summary..... | 54 |
| 5. DISCUSSION..... | 57 |
| Theoretical Implications..... | 57 |
| Practical Implications | 63 |
| Limitations | 66 |
| Directions for Future Research | 67 |
| Conclusion | 69 |
| APPENDICES | 72 |
| REFERENCES..... | 77 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | Page |
|---------------------------------------------------|------|
| Table 1 Participant Demographic Information | 21 |
| Table 2 Open Coding Categories..... | 28 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | Page |
|----------------------------------------|------|
| Figure 1 Public disclosure model | 50 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Maria* sat in front of the camera, and shared her story of sexual abuse by family members, heavy drinking, self-mutilation, and battling with suicidal thoughts. Darla walked onto the stage at the front of the church and began her own testimony, sharing a past of pornography addiction and sexual promiscuity. Both of these individuals are members of a Dallas-Fort Worth area (DFW) church, who shared intimate details of their lives in front of a congregation of over 2000 people, and posted their testimony videos on the DFW Church website.

For most individuals, the idea of revealing personal struggles or potentially damaging behavior is terrifying. Researchers (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Brown, 1998; Paulhus & Reid, 1991; Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995) have demonstrated that people want to reveal the best possible version of themselves to others, especially when the audience members are strangers. Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902/1956) both have theorized that an individual's idea of self is constructed through interactions with others. Specifically, the self is formed by the perceived reaction of others, sometimes dubbed the "looking-glass self" (Cooley, 1902/1956). Individuals then work to generate positive reactions from others in order to build up a positive self-image. Self-presentation is the term scholars (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980) used to describe the "manner in which individuals plan, adopt, and carry out strategies for managing the impression they make on others" (p. 23).

One aspect of self-presentation is disclosure, or the revealing of private information to

* All names of persons and places have been changed to protect the participants.

another person (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Gitter & Black, 1976; Herold & Way, 1988). Individuals must make several decisions when contemplating disclosure, most importantly considering the consequences of that disclosure (Petronio & Martin, 1986). Rawlins (1983) examined the reasons why people must consider the results and suggested:

[T]he individual's tolerance of vulnerability is at stake. Disclosing personal information makes the self susceptible to hurt by others. This being so, the self's willingness to unveil personal matters will depend upon whether the resulting vulnerability is perceived to be tolerable. (p. 7)

Researchers (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Brown, 1998; Paulhus & Reid, 1991; Tice et al., 1995) have supported the conclusion that individuals disclose more self-enhancing information to strangers in an effort to diminish the likelihood of hurt. By disclosing positive information, disclosers attempt to control audience response. Other researchers (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Anderson, Kunkel, & Dennis, 2011) have suggested that individuals avoid specific topics they consider taboo, primarily as a mechanism to protect the self. By avoiding taboo topics, disclosers avoid risks to their reputation or self. These results contribute to a building body of knowledge explaining the way individuals choose what, how, and to whom to disclose.

Self-presentation is often a balance between wanting to create a positive impression on others and the simultaneous desire to avoid the perception of egotism (Schlenker, 2003). Scholars (Homans, 1961; Jourard, 1971a; Tice et al., 1995) have found that individuals, at times, will strategically use negative self-disclosure to achieve a positive result. Negative self-disclosure includes disclosing things that could cause someone to have a negative opinion, like illegal activities or negative traits. However, individuals typically reserve negative self-disclosure for conversations with friends or for reciprocation with other individuals who have already disclosed (Gitter & Black, 1976; Rawlins, 1983; Tice et al., 1995). When used outside of

specific contexts, particularly with strangers, negative self-disclosure can be costly (Derlega & Stepien, 1977; Tice et al., 1995). Individuals protect themselves by making specific decisions about their disclosure, sometimes concealing and sometimes revealing. The act of self-disclosure is not an accident; rather, it is a deliberate communicative action performed to serve a purpose (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Goffman, 1959; Tice et al., 1995).

Given the prevalence of research showing that individuals desire to produce a positive audience response and are less likely to share information when there is a risk of a negative evaluation, I questioned what lead individuals to self-disclose publicly to an audience of hundreds, even thousands, of strangers. In this study, I examined a population of individuals who publicly disclosed at church services or through online video testimonies posted on the church website.

Context and Audience

The DFW Church is a multi-site Christian church that provides four services per weekend at each of its three campuses, serving an average of 9,000 people (J. Williams, personal communication, March 8, 2013). While many of the attendees would identify themselves as Christian, only 5,357 of those 10,000 people are members of the DFW Church itself (J. Williams, personal communication, March 8, 2013). On any given weekend, the audience includes DFW Church members, attendees who identify as Christians, and attendees who identify as non-Christians. When individuals engage in public disclosure, they are giving a testimony, or conversion story, in front of the congregation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a testimony is as an “open attestation or acknowledgement; confession, profession. *Obs.* or *arch.* except in Evangelical circles” (“testimony,” n.d., definition 5a). A testimony typically follows a

uniform format, where individuals discuss life before conversion, the moment of conversion, and life after conversion.

Individuals give their testimonies in a few different contexts, and church members participate in one or more of these types. First, there are monthly services during which a number of people give a public testimony prior to their baptism. Baptism is a process where a pastor or other believer dips the newly converted individual under water in a symbolic ritual that indicates their conversion to the Christian faith. According to the DFW Church Statement of Faith:

Water baptism is only intended for the individual who has received the saving benefit of Christ's atoning work and become His disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the church, oneself and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Water baptism is a visual and symbolic demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection. It signifies that a person's former way of life has been put to death and depicts a release from the mastery of sin. (DFW Church website, March 30, 2013)

Prior to baptism, individuals must share their testimony with the congregation. They can share them personally or have the person baptizing them read a prepared testimony on their behalf (DFW Church website, March 30, 2013). While giving a public testimony is a condition of membership, individuals have complete authority on the level of detail and depth of information they disclose, meaning that even this mandated process is a strategic one.

The second context for public testimony is in smaller group settings as part of a particular service provided by the DFW Church called Recovery. Recovery meets once per week, with anywhere from 50-200 people in attendance. The target audience includes people who self-identify as struggling with a specific behavior, including things like eating disorders, alcoholism, drug abuse, or physical abuse. Participants split into behavior-specific groups for

small group meetings. Each month, one person will share his or her testimony in front of Recovery, which is usually a 30-40 minute presentation. DFW Church staff may request specific individuals give a public testimony, or they may solicit volunteers. As with the previous context, individuals have autonomy in what they decide to reveal to the audience.

The third context for public testimony is through a written copy posted on the DFW Church website. DFW Church staff author these testimonies, with the oversight of the participant, and post them online with photographs and the participant's name. The last context for public testimony is through video. In this context, staff members with the DFW Church ask for volunteers or target specific people to share their testimony for a recording. DFW Church staff play these videos during service across all campuses, and post them on the DFW Church website. The videos on the DFW Church website are of particular interest because they are accessible to the public. Each participant's name corresponds to his or her testimony video, eliminating any anonymity for the disclosed information. While the primary visitors of the DFW Church website are likely members or individuals who subscribe to the same beliefs, the videos are readily available to anyone. Anyone can access the videos through a simple Internet search using the discloser's name. For example, if an employer searched for information about a potential or current employee who happened to be in one of those videos, that video would populate in the results list. The video's publicity lessens the control an individual has over that private information, and increases the risk associated with disclosing the information (Greene, 2000; Petronio, 1991; Petronio, 2002; Yep, 2000). If someone confessed about past drug addiction, alcoholism, or other potentially risky behaviors, other individuals could locate that information.

Theoretical Framework

The issue of self-disclosure becomes especially relevant when placed in a social context. Petronio (2004) argued that individuals feel a sense of ownership over their private information, and thus feel they can control what happens to it. This control includes the ability to analyze the information to be shared, the person(s) with whom it will be shared, and the environment in which the disclosure will take place. Communication privacy management theory (CPM) is a lens through which scholars analyze how individuals manage their personal, private information and the ways in which they negotiate sharing it with others (Venetis et al., 2012). By focusing on privacy, CPM changes the focus from information about the self to the communicative process by which people conceal or reveal private information.

CPM includes five theoretical suppositions (Petronio, 2002). The first supposition is that disclosure and intimacy are not the same. Individuals may engage in private disclosure for reasons other than building intimacy. Second, individuals feel ownership over their private information, and set up boundaries to manage that ownership. Boundaries serve as a protection against outside threats to privacy, and individuals modify boundaries to accommodate their needs. These boundaries may be personal or collective, depending on the number of people privy to the private information. The third supposition involves ownership and resulting control. Petronio (2002) argued that because individuals feel ownership over private information, they also perceive they have the right to control access to that information. In order to protect the self, dignity, and autonomy, individuals choose whether to reveal or conceal private information, and to whom they disclose. Additionally, individuals maintain a system of rules to manage the boundaries around the information. Individuals

develop a personal system of rules to manage boundaries around their own information, or develop collective systems to govern co-owners of shared private information. The discloser brings the listener into a cooperative partnership to manage the privacy of disclosed information. The last supposition is the management of the dialectical tension between concealing and revealing. As individuals disclose, the information becomes more public and less private. Individuals must then manage the conflicting desire to be both private and public.

While existing research in the areas of self-disclosure and CPM points to the idea that individuals want to present the most positive versions of self, and do so with a deliberate communicative strategy, the examples used in the opening paragraph of this chapter highlight instances where people violate this norm. Individuals who deliberately self-reveal, or confess, previously hidden and potentially negative behaviors represent a contradiction to existing literature and theory. In this study, I examine this contradiction further to identify motivations for publicly disclosing despite the potential for negative audience response.

Researchers have utilized CPM to examine interpersonally shared stories of sexual abuse disclosure (Petronio, Flores, & Hecht, 1997), social networking settings (Bateman, Pike, & Butler, 2011), and health communication (Greene 2009). However, researchers have not applied CPM in examining *public* disclosures that occur between a speaker and a large, relatively anonymous audience. This study seeks to expand the explanatory capabilities of CPM by extending it to a context that scholars have yet to examine.

Purpose

At the DFW Church, individuals disclose behaviors like drug abuse, infidelity, alcoholism, sexual abuse, and pornography addiction in front of a massive congregation and, at times,

immortalize their stories on the Internet. In this study, I seek to expand our understanding of why individuals would willingly share private, potentially damaging information with a large group of people or post it on the Internet, seemingly without concern for personal image.

The findings of this study contribute to CPM by examining individuals who violate norms of behavior by sharing private, potentially negative behaviors in a public setting. Existing CPM research, which focuses primarily on disclosure decisions within interpersonal relationships, may not adequately explain this phenomenon. Additionally, as part of this study I synthesize literature to provide deeper understanding of motivations for public disclosure. In application, this study provides additional examples of ways individuals manage self-disclosure and private information in a specific context: Christian confession.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-disclosure and communication privacy management are ways to examine the human practice of managing privacy. Communication theorists (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Brown, 1998; Paulhus & Reid, 1991; Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995) have posited that individuals strive to present the most advantageous version of themselves to others, especially to strangers, and will conceal private information that is potentially damaging. However, this study features individuals who violate these norms of behavior by publicly sharing potentially negative behaviors with a large, anonymous audience and online to strangers. In this chapter, I explore the existing theoretical framework that applies to the context of this study, and articulate the gaps in existing research that this study aims to address.

Self-Presentation and Disclosure

Self-presentation is an important piece of identity formation. Mead (1934) theorized that the self arises through reflexive thought and interaction with others. In fact, Mead (1934) argued that an individual experiences herself from the standpoints of others within her social group. Cooley (1902/1956) also discussed a similar theory of self through his concept the “looking-glass self.” From this perspective, the perceived reactions of others aid in constructing the self; individuals then work to generate positive reactions from others in order to build up a positive self-image. Goffman (1959) took this concept a step further by describing the conscious effort individuals make to “control the conduct of others, especially in their responsive treatment of him/her” (p. 3). Rather than describing the social construction of self

as a passive process, Goffman (1959) argued that it is an active process wherein individuals are invested in the response of others and will act in ways that encourage the desired reaction.

Self-presentation is an intentional and reciprocal process involving an individual's performance and an audience's response (Cooley, 1902/1956; Goffman, 1959). The way individuals act or behave becomes a way to construct and reinforce identity. Arkin, Appelman, and Burger (1980) defined self-presentation as the "manner in which individuals plan, adopt, and carry out strategies for managing the impression they make on others" (p. 23). Individuals want to create positive reactions and minimize disapproving reactions by enacting strategies that create a more approving impression (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980).

Leary and Kowalski (1990) also discussed self-presentation, though they did so in terms of impression management, where individuals "foster impressions in others' eyes" (p. 34). They theorized three ways that individuals benefit from impression management: maximizing reward while minimizing risk; enhancing self-esteem; and developing desired identities (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). When individuals maximize reward and minimize risk, they aim to convey a good impression to minimize negative responses, and to increase responses like approval or friendship (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). As individuals manage their self-esteem, their self-presentations can result in audience reactions either boosting or deflating their self-esteem. Individuals typically try to gain self-esteem boosters, like compliments or praise, rather than self-esteem deflators, like insults (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Lastly, Leary and Kowalski (1990) argued that individuals engage in self-presentation as a way to create identity. Basing their work on other scholars (Baumeister, 1982b; Gollwitzer, 1986; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982), they argued, "development of one's identity occurs through impression-relevant behaviors that

are responsive to interpersonal factors” (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 38). As such, existing literature on self-presentation indicates individuals desire to create a positive impression on others, which raises the question of why individuals would risk damaging that positive impression by intentionally and publicly confessing potentially negative information.

Though individuals want to present the best version of themselves to others, in order to develop interpersonal relationships, individuals are required to exchange information, some of which may be more intimate or private in nature (Taylor, 1968). Even among friends, this dichotomy can be problematic as individuals balance revealing personal information to gain closeness with a need to protect themselves and limit personal disclosure (Rawlins, 1983). Often individuals base the decision about what to reveal upon specific situations or topics, which requires some knowledge of the existing relational norms (Rawlins, 1983). As relationships develop, individuals co-create rules and norms about appropriate topics to discuss, depth at which to discuss them, and how to deal with vulnerability (Petronio, 2002; Rawlins, 1983). Relational partners base future disclosures on these co-created norms.

Self-disclosure refers to the sharing of personal information between two people (Gitter & Black, 1976). While self-disclosure is one of the most important aspects of intimacy within friendships, individuals still seek to protect themselves by limiting the information they reveal (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998). In a study of motivations to reveal personal information, Afifi and Guerrero (1998) found that self-protection was the most common reason individuals avoided specific topics. Tice, Butler, Muraven, and Stillwell (1995) differentiated between self-promoting, self-derogating, and modesty as three ways individuals self-disclose to friends and strangers. Though individuals must maintain a balance in order to avoid reputations of being

boastful or negative, they will ultimately lean towards self-promoting when interacting with strangers and modesty when interacting with friends (Gitter & Black, 1976; Herold & Way, 1988; Tice et al., 1995). These results correlate with the premise that identity claims require validation from others, so in order to maintain the identity an individual desires, people must enact specific behaviors to generate the desired response.

Communication Privacy Management Theory

Self-disclosure takes on new complexities when placed in a public context, particularly when considering the strategic nature of disclosure. Individual control over private information is central to the discussion of disclosure. Petronio (2004) argued that because people feel they own their personal information, they attempt to control what happens to it. The feeling of control is particularly important for people, because disclosure can increase risk and make the individual more vulnerable. Often, individuals must navigate competing demands to conceal and reveal private information, and manage privacy by establishing boundaries that vary from completely open to completely closed (Petronio, 1991). Individuals utilize criteria and rules to determine what to disclose and to whom (Petronio, 1991).

Petronio (2002) identified five criteria that form the basis for these rules: risk-benefit ratio, culture, contextual constraints, gendered criteria, and motivations for privacy. The risk-benefit ratio criterion includes an evaluation of the potential risks of disclosure against the benefits of revealing or concealing the information (Petronio, 2002). Culture also plays a role in the decision to disclose, as cultural norms may influence an individual's decisions regarding privacy (Petronio, 2002). An additional aspect that affects the decision to disclose is the context. Circumstances, appropriateness, and even the physical location can alter the decision

to disclose. For example, children who disclose sexual abuse often choose a particular location for their disclosure in order to maintain security (Petronio, Reeder, & Hecht, 1996). Though some researchers (Certner, 1973; Hoffman-Graff, 1977; Kohen, 1975; Shapiro & Swensen, 1977) have contested that gender is a differentiating factor, other researchers argued that men and women have different sets of rules that govern disclosure (Bath & Daly, 1972; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Dindia, 2000; Petronio & Martin, 1986). Lastly, motivations may contribute to disclosure decisions (Petronio, 2002). Individuals base their disclosure rules and decisions on their needs, which could include things like attraction, liking, reciprocity, or expected rewards (Petronio, 2002). The rules that govern disclosure can be static or changing, as individuals negotiate them with others or learn them from existing rule sets (Petronio, 2004).

Another way that individuals manage their communication privacy is through assessing the information they plan to share. In a health communication study, Greene (2009) identified five components that individuals evaluate prior to disclosing information: prognosis, preparation, relevance to others, stigma, and symptoms. As patients receive health information, motivation to share disease prognosis may vary based upon the severity of the prognosis (Greene, 2009). Patient motivation to disclose is particularly pertinent when dealing with terminal illnesses, where individuals may face increased desire to disclose or drop the topic altogether (Hinton, 1998). In approaching the potential diagnosis, preparation may influence the patient's decision to disclose (Greene, 2009). Greene (2009) found that there appears to be an inverse relationship wherein the more time an individual has to prepare, the less likely they are to disclose and vice versa.

Another important consideration in health related disclosure is that of audience, and

the relevance of disclosure to that audience (Greene, 2009). When a patient feels he or she has an embarrassing condition, that individual may feel pressure to conceal health related information due to feelings of vulnerability and risk (Greene, 2009). These issues become particularly pertinent in discussions of erectile dysfunction (Rowland, Thornton, & Burnett, 2005), obesity (Brown, Ueno, Smith, Austin, & Bickman, 2007) and HIV (Greene & Faulkner, 2002). The impact of symptoms upon the decision to disclose is similar to stigma, in that individuals are more likely to disclose when their symptoms become too visible to conceal (Greene, 2009). Greene's (2009) findings indicated that in instances of health related disclosure, individuals protect themselves from embarrassment as long as possible, and often disclose once it becomes impossible to conceal the symptoms.

Regardless of their topical specificity, these rules for health related information assessment maintain that individuals consider and evaluate information prior to making the decision to disclose. In addition to analyzing the information, disclosers also consider the quality of relationship with the audience, and predict how the audience is likely to respond when making disclosure decisions (Greene, 2009). Typically, individuals will choose to disclose to those with whom they have a higher relational closeness and quality, while concealing with those who are more distant. However, situations arise that contradict these assumptions, as in the case of public disclosure of private information. The individuals in this study disclose to an audience that varies in relational closeness. Researchers have not yet accounted for individuals who reveal private information in public; consequently, they do not understand what rules govern these individuals' decisions. In this study, I examine this question to provide further illumination on the ways individuals analyze the audience prior to disclosure, and how that

analysis impacts the discloser's decision to reveal intensely personal information in a public setting. In this specific context, disclosers are speaking to a large, mainly anonymous audience. While some audience members may be relational partners, other audience members are unknown. Though disclosers can anticipate that the audience has a similar faith background, they must still overcome the desire to conceal from people of high relational distance. I examine how individuals classify or analyze their audiences in order to proceed with a public confession.

In addition to assessing the information to be disclosed, anticipated response is another method disclosers utilize to determine whether to reveal their private information. Typically, individuals only disclose when they have confidence in an accurate prediction of the audience's response (Greene, 2009). Other scholars (Jellison & Riskind, 1977; Jourard, 1971b; Omarzu, 2000; Taylor, 1968) have examined the rewards by which disclosers are motivated. Omarzu (2000) named five social rewards: intimacy, or the pursuit of closeness; social control, wherein the audience can bestow benefits or rewards for disclosure; social approval, or attempts to increase acceptance and liking; relief of distress, during which individuals talk about problems and negative emotions to relieve stress; and lastly, identity clarification, which helps to clarify self-knowledge. As individuals' goals change and they desire differing social rewards, the disclosure changes either in content or in the targeted audience (Omarzu, 2000).

In the present study, individuals disclose private information to a large, diverse audience. While that audience may be comprised primarily of people with similar belief systems, the audience often includes visitors or people not associated with the church. In the case of online videos, the audience is largely anonymous. In both instances, individuals must

make disclosure decisions based on minimal audience information. The results of this study provide additional ways that individuals anticipate audience response when the audience is large and diverse in composition, by either downplaying audience response entirely or focusing on one component of the audience.

Existing research in self-disclosure and communication privacy management theory (CPM) indicate that individuals strive to create a positive social identity to maintain their own self-esteem, and enact a deliberate communicative strategy in order to comply with social norms, perform the most acceptable version of self, and manage their privacy. This study examines a group of individuals who violate this expectation by revealing private, potentially negative behavior to a group of strangers, either in person or on the Internet through video recordings.

Christianity and Public Confession

In varied contexts, self-disclosure may have different definitions and different names. In a Christian context, the focus of this study, self-disclosure may take the form of spiritual confession, defined as “a public or private verbal behavior in which individuals (1) acknowledge that they have violated a standard that is imbued with spiritual significance and (2) seek forgiveness for their violation” (Murray-Swank, McConnell, & Pargament, 2007, p. 276). Sinful behavior, as determined by the religion’s sacred text, refers to a violation of religious standards. In Christian history, confession most likely began as public but has now morphed into four main types: one-on-one, confession within the laity, testimonial style, and pastoral counseling (Murray-Swank et al., 2007). In a study of spiritual confession, Murray-Swank et al. (2007) identified four psychological functions: “reducing guilt and shame, seeking social connection,

seeking meaning and coherence, and impression management” (p. 282). However, research on spiritual confession has focused on the psychological benefits and types, rather than examining the motivations behind choosing a particular type of confession.

Another name for confession within the church is a testimony story. Christian authors (Castaldo, 2012; Jacobs, 2008; Wilkinson, 2012) defined a testimony as a story that depicts pre-conversion life, the conversion moment, and post-conversion life. Jacobs (2008) argued that individual stories, or testimonies, are integral to the communal narrative of the Christian church, particularly those that identify as evangelical. He further argued that testimonies are “a speech genre whose purpose is to describe a life genre” (Jacobs, 2008, p. 20). His argument is that testimonies are a specific type of speech that ultimately describes a type of life: the Christian life (Jacobs, 2008). Other authors (Egan & Papson, 2007; Hymer, 1995) have asserted that conversion stories might be an attempt to construct a new identity, but viewed conversion stories from a psychological or sociological perspective. Rather than examining the communicative nature of the phenomenon, these authors (Egan & Papson, 2007; Hymer, 1995; Jacobs, 2008) have examined historical or sociological aspects of religion. In this study, I examine this line of argument from a communication standpoint, utilizing existing research on self-presentation and privacy management as a lens to examine this strategic, communicative phenomenon.

Research Questions

Researchers have discussed many ways for individuals to manage private information. However, a gap exists in the way that scholars have used CPM to examine public disclosure. The majority of research on CPM focuses on small, interpersonal interactions, and scholars

have not yet applied this theory to larger social gatherings. In the context chosen for this study, the audience is relatively unknown, but should be sympathetic by having a similar faith background. Furthermore, although the online videos may never be seen, the fact that they could be means risk is involved with disclosure. Even though the disclosers have autonomy about what to disclose, many choose to reveal intensely personal information. Though individuals may have a sense of comfort with church members, they must still overcome existing norms of self-presentation and disclosure behavior to confess personal information publicly. In order to understand this seeming contradiction to the current theoretical understanding of disclosure, and to expand CPM to additional research contexts, I sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1a: Does CPM account for participant self-revelation of private, potentially negative behavior in public?

RQ1b: What are the common themes or trends between participants in terms of decision making prior to disclosure?

RQ 2: How do participants discuss their boundary management behaviors prior to public disclosure?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Individuals strategically manage personal information, and make careful decisions about self-disclosure. In order to maintain positive self-presentations, individuals typically present only the most positive versions of themselves to others, especially when in the company of strangers or when dealing with intensely personal information (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Brown, 1998; Paulhus & Reid, 1991; Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995). However, the participants of this study violate these norms by revealing private, potentially negative behavior in public to a large audience composed primarily of strangers. I used communication privacy management theory (CPM) to examine the reasons why individuals chose to disclose in such a public manner. This chapter outlines the methodology, procedure, and data analysis for this study.

Research Context

In this study, I examined individuals' public testimonies within a large, evangelical church in the Dallas, Texas area called the DFW Church. DFW Church is a single, large church with three campus locations. These campuses host over 9,000 people each weekend for church services. Once per quarter, each campus holds a "celebration service" during which church members share their testimonies and go through baptism. A testimony is an individual's story of conversion to the Christian faith. These stories typically follow a standardized arc: confession of wrongdoing, intervention by God/Christ, and the current state of the person's spiritual journey. During these confessional periods, church members disclose personal information. In addition to the celebration services, some members volunteer to record video testimonies that

DFW pastors show during church services throughout the year and occasionally post to the church website. The church website also includes written testimonies. The last context in which participants gave a public testimony was during Recovery, a smaller ministry focused on aiding individuals with a history of addiction or abuse. At Recovery, individuals give their testimony to an audience that varies from 50-200 people, and it lasts approximately 30 minutes. In this study, I focused on individuals who gave their testimony by one of these four methods, and sought to understand their reasons for publicly disclosing in this manner.

Recruitment and Participants

I utilized two methods of recruitment. First, I posted the interview opportunity on the DFW Church's social networking website, The City. This website offers discussion boards, email distribution lists, and the ability to send private messages to individual members. I posted the interview opportunity on the "Requests" discussion board and sent out an email to the church-wide distribution list. Second, I utilized a purposeful sampling technique to recruit participants who publicly revealed private information. Purposeful sampling for interviewing involves making informed decisions about who to interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Because I was interested in a particular group of individuals, I targeted specific people based on their participation in public confession. I sent private messages via The City to individuals who had testimony videos posted on the website.

Through these methods, I recruited 14 church members who gave their testimonies live during the Celebration Service or Recovery, or taped them for use on the church website. All of the participants had given their testimony more than one time, so I asked them to focus on the first or most public testimony given. Of these, one participant did not qualify for inclusion in

this study due to an inapplicable interview. The participant I excluded used the interview period to proselytize, rather than answering my questions. The remaining 13 participants consisted of six people targeted through private messages and seven people who self-selected and responded to my church-wide email. Two participants identified as male while the remaining participants identified as female. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 42, with an average age of 28. All participants identified as Caucasian. See Table 1 for more information about participants, including alias, age, gender, race, type of testimony, and summary of confessed behavior.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

| Alias | Gender | Age | Race | Type of testimony | Testimony Content |
|-----------|--------|-----|-----------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Eva | F | 35 | Caucasian | Video testimony | Infertility issues |
| Maria | F | 31 | Caucasian | Video testimony | Sexual abuse, suicide |
| Lucy | F | 29 | Caucasian | Baptism testimony | Drugs, alcohol |
| Aaron | M | 30 | Caucasian | Baptism testimony | Alcohol, lying |
| Beth | F | 33 | Caucasian | Recovery testimony | Eating disorder |
| Christina | F | 25 | Caucasian | Recovery testimony | Supernatural conversion |
| Darla | F | 33 | Caucasian | Video testimony | Pornography addiction |
| Francine | F | 42 | Caucasian | Recovery testimony | Spousal & child abuse |
| Gwen | F | 20 | Caucasian | Baptism testimony | Drugs, sexual activity |
| Helen | F | 27 | Caucasian | Written Testimony | Stripping, rape, drugs |
| Irene | F | 23 | Caucasian | Recovery testimony | Drugs, sexual activity |
| John | M | 20 | Caucasian | Video testimony | Drugs, sexual activity |
| Nadine | F | 18 | Caucasian | Baptism testimony | Drugs, sexual activity |

Procedure

In order to ensure confidentiality, I changed the church name and gave pseudonyms to participants. I attend the DFW Church, but did not previously know any of the study participants. I informed participants of my membership status prior to conducting any interviews. I conducted audio-recorded interviews using a semi-structured, open-ended format (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). This approach allowed me to inquire about past events, and to gather information about processes that would not be accessible otherwise (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Respondents selected interview times and dates that were most convenient for them, and interviews took place off church property at a location of the respondent's choosing. This method ensures both a safe place and a safe time for the respondent (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), which was important considering they were discussing personal information. The majority of the interviews took place in a public setting, like coffee shops or restaurants. Two interviews took place at the respondents' homes. I designed interview questions in response to the research questions using CPM as the basis (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed them verbatim. I transcribed a total of 5 hours and 40 minutes of audio-recorded interviews, which yielded 57 pages of text.

Data Analysis

The first step in data analysis was to determine if the data fit with Petronio's (2002) pre-existing typology. I wanted to see if CPM accounted for participants' public disclosure, particularly in the area of privacy rules. In order to analyze the interview data, I developed a codebook with category names, definitions and examples for each category, and a place to

mark the location within the transcripts where the code occurred (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). This codebook included the five criteria from CPM that form the basis for disclosure rules, a category for boundaries, references toward audience, and a category for other important statements not incorporated elsewhere (See Appendix B for detailed codebook and examples).

The first category was risk-benefit ratio (Petronio, 2002). This category included any statement that showed the participant's awareness or evaluation of risk or benefit associated with publicly testifying or confession. Risk types included safety, stigma, face, relational, or role (Petronio, 2002). The second category was culture, defined as any statement about cultural influence on the decision to disclose or the information disclosed in the testimony (Petronio, 2002). Culture examples were references toward the DFW church, Texas, ethnicity, or any other cultural groups that could influence disclosure decisions. The next category included contextual constraints, which included any statement referencing contextual influences on the decision to disclose, or on the information the participant selected to disclose. Influencers included location, circumstances of the disclosure event (i.e. Baptism, Recovery program, etc.), traumatic events, therapeutic situations, and life circumstances (Petronio, 2002). Another category examined gendered criteria, defined as any statement referencing the impact of gender on the decision to disclose, or the information the participant selected for disclosure (Petronio, 2002). The last disclosure rule category included motivations for privacy (Petronio, 2002). This category included any references to why the participant wanted to testify publicly.

In order to address RQ 2, I included references to boundary management. Boundaries are the second component of CPM, and are a way to examine how individuals protect private information, make decisions on who to include within the boundaries, and when to expand the

boundaries to others (Petronio, 2002). When analyzing the data, coders looked for references toward boundaries around specific information, or indications that disclosers expanded boundaries to new individuals. I also included a category for references towards the audience. When analyzing the data, coders looked for instances where disclosers specifically talk about the audience, and how the audience influenced their disclosure decisions. Lastly, the other category incorporated any statements that seemed important but did not fit into the other categories.

Once the transcriptions and codebook were completed, I gave them to a team of two, trained coders. To train the coders, I coded the first transcription and pulled out 20 statements I viewed as important. For the purposes of this study, I followed a technique similar to that of Banks, Louie, and Einerson (2000). I examined the first transcription for “identifiable units of meaning,” or “tokens,” and coded them into the codebook categories (Banks et al., 2000, p. 303). Units of meaning could be sentences or paragraphs, but express one complete thought relevant to the categories of interest. I provided the coders with the 20 statements, and had each person code them using the codebook. After they finished, we compared the results and achieved 80% intercoder reliability. We also discussed any differences and made clarifications to the codebook. While reliability is not traditional for qualitative analysis, I felt the cohesion between the coders provided confirmation that we would find meaning in the transcription text itself. After the training period, I divided the transcriptions between the two coders. The coding team pulled out all the relevant tokens from the transcriptions and organized them into comprehensive categories; specifically, they placed tokens into the five pre-identified categories: risk-benefit, gender, culture, context, and motivation. They also looked for tokens

containing references toward boundaries.

Once the coders completed data organization, I began the open coding process. I went through each of the categories, read each token line-by-line, and considered what meaning I could derive from it. Through this process, I followed axial coding, which Lindlof and Taylor (2011) defined as “creating a new set of codes whose purpose is to make connections between categories” (p. 252). Using the constant comparison method, I identified new, more inclusive categories (Banks et al., 2000; Creswell, 2009). For example, within the risk-benefit category, one participant said “And maybe if I shared this, you know, they would hear that and be encouraged themselves” (Eva, interview). I placed that in a category called encouraging others. Another participant said, “I went into it with this preconceived thing that there would be people who would be disgusted, maybe” (Helen, interview). I placed this token in a category called risk of diminished reputation or image. Once all tokens were synthesized into the final categories, I created a second codebook that addressed RQ1b. I ended data collection once I reached theoretical saturation, or the point at which I no longer found new ideas through the interview and coding process, and existing categories have repeated evidence (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

Verification

For the purposes of this study, validity involved a few steps to verify accuracy and reliability of the findings. In terms of reliability, Gibbs (2007) suggested the following guidelines: error-checking transcriptions, ensuring consistency during coding, and clear communication among the research team. Accuracy is focused on the interpretation of the findings. In order to ensure accuracy, this study adhered to the following strategies: first, I

utilized triangulation, which is a method of cross-comparing evidence from several sources to verify the results; second, self-reflection was a key piece throughout analysis as I attempted to reveal any bias that may influence interpretation; and third, I used member checking where results and themes were shared with participants to ensure data was interpreted accurately (Cresswell, 2009). For the member check, I revealed my codebook, coding process, and final category results to one of the study's participants. I explained the process in detail, and asked for feedback. She agreed that I captured the sentiment of the data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Privacy Rule Development

In order to answer RQ1, I examined the data for evidence supporting the five criteria of privacy rule development: risk-benefit ratio, culture, contextual constraints, gendered criteria, and motivations for privacy (Petronio, 2002). These five criteria enable participants to make decisions about what, and to whom, disclosure occurs. In terms of risk-benefit, I looked for references to benefits and risks associated with disclosure, as well as the type of risks individuals felt existed in this specific context. These risks included relational risk, face risk, and varying risk levels. To examine culture, I identified points where participants refer to organizational cultural influences on the decision to disclose. When analyzing the data for context references, I found references to situational influencers and descriptions of how the context of disclosure in the church provided comfort or security to the participants. In terms of gender, I sought participant references toward the influence of gender on their decisions to disclose, or on the content of their disclosures. Lastly, to examine motivations, I searched for moments when participants talked about their goals or purposes in sharing their testimonies. See Table 2 for more information on the open coding categories for privacy rule development.

Table 2

Open Coding Categories: Privacy Rule Development

| Main Category | Subcategories |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Risk-benefit | Benefit for the self Risk for the self Benefit for others Risk of others |
| Culture | DFW Church culture is unique—people, beliefs, honesty/openness Difference between Christian culture or stereotypes and DFW Church culture |
| Context | Situational influencers Context provides comfort/safety |
| Gender | Sex-role norms Feedback from audience members of the same sex impacts disclosure |
| Motivation | Self-focused motivation Other-focused motivation |

Risk-Benefit Ratio

After examining the data, I found that participants discussed four distinct types of risk or benefits: other-focused benefits, self-focused benefits, other-focused risks, and self-focused risks. Other-focused benefits included encouraging others and educating others about church ministries. Self-focused benefits included an increased sense of confidence because of prior disclosures and feeling revitalized by public disclosure. Other-focused risks included the public nature of disclosure and face risks.

First, within *other-focused benefits*, there were five instances where participants mentioned that one key reason for the decision to disclose was the benefit of helping or encouraging others. For example, Maria disclosed her history of sexual abuse by her father and brother because of her desire to help others, saying:

There are women out there who need to hear that it is okay, and it’s not your fault, and it’s okay to talk about it, to be healed from it. So that’s why I included that particular part in the testimony. (Maria, interview)

Another participant, Darla, mentioned that disclosing was not just a positive action for her.

While many scholars (Hymer, 1995; Murray-Swank, McConnell, & Pargament, 2007; Sellner, 1990) have argued that confession yields cathartic or therapeutic results, for Darla, her own mental wellbeing was not the end goal. Instead, she viewed public confession as a way to motivate others to action:

It's not just about me sharing my story for me, it's not supposed to end on a feel good note. It's actually a point of action, I think, for people. It's like implanting hope into their heart of like, okay, I'm not alone, there is hope for change and I can take those steps. (Darla, interview)

Participants also mentioned that disclosing their private information might educate others about available church ministries. Eva, who disclosed about her struggle with infertility, used her testimony as an opportunity to talk about a specific ministry at the DFW Church for women with fertility issues. She mentioned specifically that she wanted to do a video testimony so that “they [other women] would know more about this particular ministry that the church had and be encouraged to come” (Eva, interview).

The second theme that I found, which I named *self-focused benefits*, included five instances in which individuals discussed benefits for themselves after public confession. This theme included comments about feeling confident because of previous disclosure and feeling revitalized by the act of public confession. Maria expressed increased comfort because she had previously publicly disclosed during her baptism. When she was videotaping her testimony for the DFW Church website, she mentioned it was not as difficult as it could have been:

I had already given my testimony when I was baptized several months previously, so it wasn't like I was disclosing anything that hadn't already been disclosed, but specifically what I needed—who I needed to talk about as far as who was the abuser in my life, and what I needed to say, and who needed—what did people need to hear from me. (Maria, interview)

Her desire to speak to a specific audience and the prior public disclosure lessened her feeling of

risk, which made videotaping the testimony an easier process. Two participants also referenced feeling a sense of revitalization or freedom after publicly confessing. Maria reflected on this, saying, “it was refreshing to me to be able to be open and honest about where I was and what I was struggling with” (Maria, interview). Darla also articulated this feeling:

I think that’s really freeing to know I don’t have to keep it all together. Because growing up, I had to keep it all together, or at least look like that. And to really actively speak against that has been one of the reasons I stayed at the DFW Church. Just like, you don’t have to keep it all together. It has nothing to do with you or your merit. (Darla, interview)

Both participants articulated this benefit as one they thought of prior to deciding to disclose. When evaluating risks against benefits, this benefit helped to outweigh risks of public disclosure.

The third theme was *other-focused risks*. There were six instances where participants acknowledged the public nature of their disclosure and the risk they felt about that, or the fact that others might judge them differently after the public testimony. For example, John disclosed about drug and alcohol use as well as sexual promiscuity. Prior to recording his testimony, he recalled his thoughts about the risk: “I was like okay, so the reality is I’m about to spill everything I’ve ever done in my life in front of a camera that’s going to be shown to thousands of people. Okay, well let’s do it” (John, interview). Maria also discussed her conflicted emotions about the publicity of her confession, saying:

I felt like what I was wanting to say, I felt comfortable with, and confident that was what God wanted me to say, but it was still very difficult for me to say those things to a camera knowing that hundreds of people would see it. (Maria, interview)

Despite these hesitations about the large audience, all of the participants who had conscious concerns about the public nature of their confession proceeded with the act anyway.

In addition to the size of the audience, other participants discussed face risks associated with public confession. Face risk is other-focused in that participants were concerned about the audience response to the content of their confession. One participant, Francine, disclosed about her history of stripping and allowing her husband to abuse her children. In the moments leading up to her public testimony, she shared her fears that others would think differently of her, saying, “there was some concern that people that I cared about their opinion for me would have a bad opinion of me” (Francine, interview). Christina shared a similar fear when she disclosed about the supernatural experience that led to her conversion, saying:

I don't mind being different because I know I am an odd bird, but I think that piece of it [her story], it was either they won't believe me or they'll think I'm crazy. And I don't want to be perceived as that, especially on Day One with these people that I want to grow close with. (Christina, interview)

These participants acknowledged the risks associated with their public confessions, but went forward with it in spite of the risks to their image and the risk of a large audience knowing intensely personal things about them.

The fourth theme I found was *self-focused risks*. In four instances, participants mentioned weighing a relational risk, or risk that the disclosure could damage one of their relationships. I included the relational risk category in the self-focused area because individuals expressed that disclosure was a specific risk for them personally, whereas face risks involved how others would feel, act, or respond. In this category, participants reflected on a fear that they would lose or damage a relationship. Maria mentioned this particular risk twice, saying first, “I did not tell my family initially until after it was recorded, until it was about to air. And I didn't tell them what was going to be in it” (Maria, interview). Later, she reflected on the decision-making process about whether to disclose that her brother was one of her abusers:

My brother's still alive, he lives in the area, there are people in this area who know him. I knew there was a risk of him being embarrassed by what I had to say, which was why I prayed over that extra, saying "Lord, do I need to say this?" (Maria, interview)

Francine, who disclosed about her abusive husband, expressed her fear that he would come to the church the day of her testimony:

Actually one of the few things I was afraid of was that for some reason, he would find out and be there and start a fight with me in front of everyone, which he does all the time anyway. So just to speak truth was a scary thing. (Francine, interview)

Lastly, Gwen talked about the risk of her parents learning of her past behavior during her public confession:

I found out my parents were going to be able to make it, and I was like oh no, oh no! And I went back and was like, I'm going to change all of it [her testimony]. And then I said "no, I can't do that." God is wanting me to share this and this is about Him, this is not about me, so I need to keep it how it really is. (Gwen, interview)

All three participants mentioned a very specific risk of changing or harming their relationships with others, but proceeded with their public testimonies despite these risks. Gwen went as far as to separate herself from the content of her testimony, saying it was not about her anyway. I will revisit this idea in the next chapter.

Culture

I identified two specific categories referencing culture: *DFW has a unique culture* and *tension between Christian culture stereotypes and DFW Church*. There were 23 instances in which participants referred to DFW having a unique culture, whether that was due to the people who attend the church, the beliefs espoused by the church, or the expectation of honesty and confession. The second category included two references to a tension between stereotypes about Christian culture and the culture of DFW Church. Participants expressed knowledge about Christian stereotypes, and that those stereotypes influenced their disclosure

decisions in some way.

Eva talked about the reason why she chose the DFW Church, specifically saying, “we felt we identified most with that group of people and that service time” (Eva, interview). Lucy echoed this sentiment, saying, “The very first time I went to the DFW Church with our friends, I instantly felt at home, and that was the first time that had ever happened to me” (Lucy, interview). Another participant, Beth, mentioned that the people at the DFW Church were supportive, which she found encouraging. She said, “Everybody was willing to help and pray and talk and hang out” (Beth, interview). All three participants mentioned the people who attend the DFW Church as a reason they felt they belonged or that they had support and encouragement.

Participants also referenced the beliefs espoused by the DFW Church. Eva mentioned that as a reason for staying with the DFW Church, saying, “We have the same kind of beliefs, the same ways of expressing those beliefs, and we appreciated their approach, I think, the most” (Eva, interview). Lucy tied the beliefs at the DFW Church to the act of confession:

Aside from the fact that over and over, it’s [confession] talked about in the Bible, and just you know, Gospel centered community is about living openly and honestly with each other and sharing your faith, not concealing it. Being the light of the world. So yeah, if somebody asks me how I’m doing, I’m probably too honest. I’m like, okay, I’m having a really rough day, I’m struggling with this today. But at the same time, I think it’s important that we [Christians] do that to show others that we’re real. That we take God’s word seriously. (Lucy, interview)

For these participants, the belief system at DFW Church was an important reason for staying, and for engaging in public confession.

Another aspect of the DFW Church culture mentioned in the interviews is the idea that the church is unique, or it is different from other churches. Maria talked about the differences

between the DFW Church and a prior church she attended:

I grew up in church, but it wasn't like this [DFW Church]. It was like everybody—I mean, my family was a mess. My father was abusing me, my brother was abusing me, all of this stuff was going on, but it was so important that we looked good that nothing ever got talked about. I knew it was fake because I knew what my dad and my mom were saying publicly in church to these people at church was not what was happening at home.

For Maria, the DFW Church culture encouraged her to speak up about her past, in contrast to her prior church that focused on positive images regardless of what was really happening behind closed doors. Beth also mentioned the encouragement she felt at the DFW Church to share, in contrast to her previous church where she was a volunteer:

I was working as a youth intern at a church here in Dallas, and when I revealed my eating disorder at that church, half of the pastoral church wouldn't talk to me anymore. It was a little traumatic. And so even the youth pastor who I was working with, and had been working with for a year, was like oh...and then wouldn't return emails, texts, and those kinds of things. So that's when—you know, I came to the DFW Church in 2007, it took me a long time to get to that point [of confessing]. But the DFW Church being a safe place, and other people going look, this is what we struggle with, it was so helpful to me. (Beth, interview)

Beth's history of confession resulted in a directly negative response, which ultimately caused her to leave her place of employment. Through her experiences at the DFW Church, however, she expressed an increased comfort and encouragement to confess.

Safety was a common descriptor that participants used to describe the DFW Church culture. Eva said that, "the support groups played a role in helping me to have a safe place to vocalize the things I was dealing with to where I did feel comfortable talking about it in public" (Eva, interview). Maria connected the culture of the church to the pastoral examples, saying:

I loved how raw and honest Robert [one of the pastors] was, and the preaching there, and the teaching, and the community. I mean, people are like, you're encouraged to be honest, you're encouraged to not hide where you are. You're encouraged to be honest to each other, and open, and I was just—spent most of my life hiding things from people

and that was really exhausting and damaging. And so, it was refreshing to me to be able to be open and honest about where I was and what I was struggling with. (Maria, interview)

Lucy echoed this idea, saying:

I feel like at our church, it's the whole "it's okay to not be okay, as long as you don't stay there," and I feel like a lot of people truly live by that, and those who don't, I'm not concerned with them. (Lucy, interview)

For her, the culture of the DFW Church expects honesty and openness, and as for people who would judge her harshly, they are not her concern because in her estimation, they do not follow DFW Church cultural norms. Christina articulated this value, too, saying, "The church is not for good people. It's for broken people who need healing. So if you're not going to walk in there and be willing to be open about who you are, then it's without purpose" (Christina, interview).

The participants repeatedly referred to the safety of the DFW Church culture, and the expectation for honesty and openness from its members. These characteristics are especially relevant, because cultural norms and expectations that exist within the church influence the decision to disclose. The compelling part of these expressed values is that the cultural community of the DFW Church overrides societal level norms about appropriate disclosure and saving face. In this context, individuals apparently follow the DFW Church norms rather than adhering to existing societal norms.

The second component of culture is the tension between Christian culture stereotypes and the culture at the DFW Church. There were two instances of participants referencing stereotypes. One example stereotype was that Christians are individuals who have reached a deep level of despair, and as a result, turn to Christianity as a way to climb out of that despair. With that stereotype in mind, people expect a specific type of testimony that fits their picture

of Christianity. Another stereotype that a participant referenced was the ideal Christian woman as mild-mannered, polite, and accommodating. Aaron talked about the stereotype of what a Christian confession should contain:

It seems like a lot of people view Christians as people who are just so far down the rabbit hole they hit the bottom, and there was nowhere to look but up, and hey look, there's God! Kind of like—AA was the last resort, drug rehab, and you know, you hear all of those and a lot of people identify the Christian faith with that. So it gets tough to break that stigma and realize that that's not—most people aren't saved that way, those are exceptions, so to speak.

He expressed feeling a tension between this stereotypical confession, and other DFW Church confessions where people disclose things like lying or pride. Beth also talked about stereotypes, but focused on gender stereotypes of how southern Christian women should behave. She expressed her thoughts about moving from Missouri to Dallas, and how her understanding of Christian culture changed.

Come to find out that Christian means a totally different thing here than it does in Missouri. My thing is that I feel like down here, in the south, you're supposed to be that typical southern, sweet, hospitality [sic], Christian lady and so I bought into that for many, many years. And I was like oh my gosh, I have to be this prim and proper, do everything for everybody, and I'm a Christian so I should be sweet to everybody and never stand up for myself, and then I realized that I was a doormat. I had that perception of being this nice southern Christian lady. I was like oh, they don't complain, they don't share, they don't struggle, and if they do struggle, then it's "Oh, I'm trusting God." (Beth, interview)

Beth continued, articulating how the DFW Church culture is different from this stereotype, by encouraging her to be more open and share her struggles. Both participants expressed a tension between a stereotype of Christian culture and the culture that exists at the DFW Church. Both participants articulate that the DFW Church culture encourages confession, though the content of that confession may uphold or contradict the stereotype.

Context

Participants referred to two contextual aspects that affected disclosure decisions: *situational influencers* and *comfort/security*. First, participants talked about situational influencers, or external characteristics that influenced either the decision to disclose or the content of the disclosure. The situational influencer context is external to the individual discloser and their internal influences. Second, participants discussed specific aspects of the overall DFW church context that provided comfort or safety.

In terms of *situational influencers*, I found 13 instances in which participants referred to some type of situational influence that was important to privacy rule formation. DFW Church staff approached some participants and specifically requested them to give a public testimony. Certainly, these types of requests influenced participants' decisions to disclose publicly. Eva expressed that she may not have done it without being approached by DFW Church staff.

I think they [DFW Church staff] were looking for someone to do a testimony that was dealing with infertility related issues, so they had come to one of the group leaders in --- -- just to see if anyone would be open to doing it, and that's kind of how I was approached with it. (Eva, interview)

DFW Church staff also approached Maria after she gave her testimony during her baptism. She said, "several months later, they approached me to do a video" (Maria, interview). Four other participants shared similar stories of DFW Church contacting them after hearing their testimony from some other source, and specifically asking them to share their stories in a more public way. For Darla, staff members knew she served in the Recovery ministry program and asked her to share her testimony, replacing the usual pastoral teaching. A similar thing happened to Francine, who was asked to do a 30-40 minute version of her testimony. Staff members knew Helen served in an off-site ministry program for strippers and asked her to create a written

testimony for the DFW Church website. Lastly, John sent an email version of his testimony when responding to a call for testimonies, and a staff member contacted him to film a video testimony instead. In all of these situations, the participants had shared their story in some other form, and after DFW Church staff contacted them, presented their testimonies again in a more public manner.

Another situational influencer was the audience make-up. Participants discussed the way that the audience size and composition affected the ways they disclosed, as well as the content of what they shared. Beth said, “I think there is a difference between standing up in front of 12,000 people and saying something, and confession to Recovery group or small group or something like that” (Beth, interview). Participants expressed a high awareness of the differences between a Christian and non-Christian audience. Lucy said:

There’s certainly church lingo that, if you’re either a regular attender or believer, you know whose phrases and those terms, whereas somebody—when you’re in a group of people who are mostly nonbelievers, yeah they’re not going to understand certain things, so you have to explain it so that they can understand it. (Lucy, interview)

Both participants expressed an awareness of the audience and its influence on disclosure decisions.

The second component of contextual influence was that of *comfort/safety*. Participants expressed that the environment of DFW Church, or receiving guidance from DFW Church staff, gave them a feeling of comfort or safety that influenced their disclosure decisions. I found 16 instances in which participants referred to some element of comfort based on the context of the disclosure. One of these aspects was receiving guidance from DFW Church staff on the testimony content. Eva described the way the staff assisted while videotaping her testimony, saying, “they really didn’t have a lot of ‘to do’ things, it was just ‘hey, we want Christ to be the

hero here and tell your story.’ They really left it open ended to what you wanted to say” (Eva, interview). Darla, who disclosed about her pornography addiction, expressed appreciation for guidance on how detailed to be. In talking about how the staff helped, she said, “they definitely advise you, don’t get so detailed that you’re going to cause someone else to fantasize about something they don’t need to be thinking about” (Darla, interview). Prior to giving his baptism testimony, Aaron received instructions from DFW Church staff on the structure of his testimony:

The DFW Church had a guideline. They told us to keep it to two minutes, or three minutes, or something like that. And they gave us a—you need to say some things about your past, then kinda what led up to conversion, and kinda where you’re going. (Aaron, interview)

In all three cases, participants talked about the way the DFW Church staff provided a level of guidance regarding the testimony, but expressed that they felt enough freedom to say what they needed to say. Participants talked about the feedback as a positive thing, and something that made giving their testimony an easier process, more comfortable experience. They felt secure in the information they disclosed.

Two participants mentioned the fact that this was a repeated testimony made it something they were more comfortable sharing. Eva said specifically, “This wasn’t the first time I’ve said this. If it had been, there’s probably no way I would have done that” (Eva, interview). In her case, the only reason she did the public testimony was because she had already disclosed this information to a smaller group and became more comfortable with the content of her testimony. Darla also mentioned that sharing her testimony twice before doing the video prepared her for a filming a video testimony. Both participants felt more comfortable with a public testimony because the repetition of the information made them more

comfortable with the content, and with sharing the information with others.

Another participant referenced the importance of having support present during the public confession. Maria had a friend present with her during the filming of her video testimony and expressed how that assisted her: “My best friend was there with me. It would have just been me and the two camera guys, and that would have been weird, so I asked her to be there and she did that for me” (Maria, interview). In addition to having support from friends, participants mentioned that the physical context of the DFW Church helped them to feel comfortable publicly testifying. Lucy mentioned, “I feel like the more you’re immersed in an environment, the more you pick up on things, and the more comfortable you get” (Lucy, interview). For Lucy, being involved in the church gave her a sense of comfort. Darla explained how watching other people confess gave her comfort in following the same process:

It was the honesty of not having to hide anymore, not—like watching other people who had walked through hard seasons and really didn’t hold any shame. And it was a lot of the testimony that I heard there to be—to feel confident and unafraid to walk out, and not feeling like I needed to cover myself, but being able to say this is who I am and I need help. (Darla, interview)

Nadine took it a step further, referring to the church audience as her family:

I realized, telling my testimony, I looked out and I saw—this is my family. These are my brothers and sisters and my Father [God] is looking at me right now. I don’t need to worry about home. And that’s when I boldly proclaimed my testimony.

For all of these participants, some aspect of the context of their disclosure gave them comfort and enabled them to disclose publicly. Whether receiving input on the testimony content, repeatedly sharing it to gain comfort with the content, having friend support, or feeling like the environment was a safe place, the context of the public confession influenced the way participants disclosed.

Gender

In terms of gender influence on disclosure, I found two themes amongst the participants: *anticipating feedback from community members of the same sex* and *sex role norms*. One female participant mentioned that she thought about how the female community would respond to her public disclosure. In a moment of doubt, Maria prayed about what to say in her testimony, and shared that experience during her interview:

I prayed over that extra, saying “Lord, do I need to say this?” His response was very clear, that there are women out there who need to hear that it is okay, and it’s not your fault, and it’s okay to talk about it, to be healed from it. So that’s why I included that particular part in the testimony. (Maria, interview)

In this response, Maria articulated that she was motivated by a desire to help others, and specifically, to help the female community. She shared her feeling that women needed to hear her message, and thus proceeded with her public confession. She later continued, saying “I just wanted women out there to know that there’s no shame in what happened to you, and I wanted them to hear that from someone who had been there” (Maria, interview). For Maria, the female audience influenced the content of her disclosure in a meaningful way.

In addition to audience members of the same sex, I also found that sex role norms influenced participant disclosure. The first of these norms was that women could openly express emotions. Maria explained this, saying:

I think the fact that I was crying in most parts of my testimony, I think that was more acceptable because I’m a woman. If I had been a man, that would have been a lot harder. I think even in Christian circles, men are just not expected to cry so you don’t see it a lot. Even in the church you don’t see it. I’m a very emotional person, so I’m glad I had that, it’s expected of me. I’m a woman, it’s fine. (Maria, interview)

Maria did not worry about concealing her emotions, as she felt it was an expected behavior from a female. Due to gender norms, Maria said she felt she could express her emotions more

freely.

While women said that they could express emotions more freely, some participants shared that they felt they had to restrict their content because of a mixed-gender audience.

Francine shared her thought process as she planned her testimony:

Some of those people [the audience] struggle with pornography addiction and stuff like that, and I was a stripper for about five years, and so that was part of the story I was telling. So how to share that in a way that communicated the reality of that situation, without stirring things that it shouldn't stir in people, so that was a little tricky to walk through. (Francine, interview)

Irene also expressed the idea that mixed-gender audiences impacted what she shared, saying "So obviously, there are things I'm only going to share with girls that I'm not going to share with guys" (Irene, interview). Gwen connected the difficulty of a mixed-gender audience with the specific content of her confession. When deciding how to confess about sexual promiscuity, she had to determine the way to articulate that particular behavior:

It's [sex] always been a really difficult topic. Especially in a men and women audience. When you're in a small group, they don't need to know that and it's even harder for them to know that, so, it's really hard to find a balance in there. But that's another reason I didn't go into nitty gritty details, I was just like "sexual sin," bam, that's it. (Gwen, interview)

Four participants agreed with Gwen's line of thought, and connected the particular behavior with the difficulty of sharing their personal information. To be more specific, these participants said that some "sins" were expected by one gender and not another, so sharing a behavior that contradicted a sex role norm was more difficult than sharing one that was expected. Aaron shared his perspective, saying:

I think there's things that are almost expected sins of men. So when you confess to them, it's not a shock to anyone, whereas, say a woman who struggles with pornography, people will be like, oh my, I can't believe that! (Aaron, interview)

Darla, who did confess to a pornography addiction, shared similar thoughts as she reflected on her decision to disclose. She first described how it was more difficult for her to talk about the issue because of being a female:

I mean obviously there was a lot of shame there originally, of really feeling less of a woman. Like there was something wrong with me. Like if this was a man's problem, then obviously I must be more closely related to men and so there was a lot of sexual attraction questions in my head of like, am I supposed to be a man, you know, all of those wrestles. So whenever they [DFW Church staff] asked me to do my testimony, I said I would love to because I know that this is a problem, and people don't talk about it. (Darla, interview)

Later, Darla mentioned that this sex role norm became a motivating factor for her as well, because she wanted people to discuss pornography and masturbation more openly within the female community, as well as to bring awareness to the male community. Gwen reflected similar thoughts about feeling pressure when confessing sexual behaviors in public. She said, "A lot of people assume masturbation is for men, porn is for men, and guys struggle with sex and sex topics. But girls, a lot of times, they do, but it's not talked about" (Gwen, interview). She reflected that confessing sexual behavior in public was much more difficult because of these sex role norms, and her fear of the audience judging her more harshly because of her female gender. Nadine also expressed this fear, saying, "The sexual sin, for a girl, was hard to say because you are automatically called, in this society, a slut. Automatically" (Nadine, interview). Later, Nadine mentioned that other behaviors were easier for her to confess: "When it comes to the pride and drugs, I think it was much easier being a girl, because that's also expected. So it's whatever is expected by society, for me to say, was easier to say" (Nadine, interview).

All of the participants who discussed gender saw it as an influential factor in their

decisions about what to disclose, and how to disclose it. Whether tailoring their message to a mixed-gender audience, or dealing with the fear of disclosing a behavior that violated a sex role norm, the participants were very aware of their own gender and that of their audience when creating their messages. While some researchers (Certner, 1973; Hoffman-Graff, 1977; Kohen, 1975; Shapiro & Swensen, 1977) have indicated that gender does not play a role in disclosure, in this context, gender does affect disclosure decisions.

Motivation

In the last category of privacy rule development, I found two themes within motivation. Participants expressed motivations that were either *self-focused* or *other-focused*. Within self-focused motivation, I found three instances in which participants expressed a more individual motivation to confess publicly. Eva expressed it as feeling “compelled” to share her story.

Maria stated that she thought about her confession in terms of her needs:

Who I needed to talk about as far as who was the abuser in my life, and what I needed to say. Specifically, what had the Lord done in my life, and so I felt like what I was wanting to say, I felt comfortable with, and confident that was what God wanted me to say. (Maria, interview)

Aaron referenced his public disclosure as simply fulfilling the membership requirement to join the church and the Christian faith:

Part of it [decision to confess publicly] was just a gradual kind of process, post-conversion, about what steps do you need to take as a believer, and one of those was that you need to be baptized. And part of it was to be a member of the DFW Church, you have to be baptized, and in order to be baptized, you have to have a public confession of faith. That’s what the scripture seems to indicate as far as when you read it. All baptisms follow a public confession, so in order to be obedient, you obey, whether or not you feel like that’s something comfortable to do. (Aaron, interview)

All three of these participants referred to a motivating factor that is served personal needs.

I found included 12 references to the second theme, other-focused motivation. I

defined other as any person other than the self, including references to God. Two participants mentioned God as a motivator for engaging in public disclosure. Francine provided a good example of this sentiment, saying:

Well, the purpose of sharing your testimony is so others can see how God is glorified in what He's done in our lives, and to share that no matter how bleak the situation, there's hope. That all things are working to the good of those who love Him, and are called according to his purposes. (Francine, interview)

Irene agreed with this sentiment, claiming that her ultimate goal was to “paint a picture, accurately, of what God did, and what he had to do to pull me to that point” (Irene, interview). She continued, “I wanted to accurately show, this is who I was, so you know it wasn't me. I also wanted to make it clear that it wasn't just that I got my act together, you know. The Lord saved me” (Irene, interview). For these two participants, the main purpose of their public testimony was to “glorify God” or to tell their perceptions of the way God changed them.

Another motivation referenced by the participants was the desire to bring hidden subjects to life. Two participants expressed a desire to talk about issues that people did not often like to discuss. Maria shared her battle with suicidal thoughts in her testimony, and stated that her motivation was to bring awareness to a serious issue that people do not know how to handle:

Talking about my struggles with suicide I thought was really important too, because that's another thing people just don't talk about. It's just—because no one knows how to handle that. And it's really common, even in the church it's really common, but people don't know how to handle that. (Maria, interview)

Darla also indicated that her goal was to bring pornography into discussion through her public confession:

It [pornography] was so shaping to really how I lived functionally in every aspect of my life, and so it wasn't that I wanted to make much of that sin at all, like it wasn't that I

wanted people to see the dark side, it was just like—I think we think it’s something we can do behind closed doors, that no one knows about, but really affects every relationship and how I see myself. So I think that was one of the reasons that I wanted to concentrate on that in that particular video. (Darla, interview)

Both of these participants expressed that their particular behavior was one that people did not discuss openly, and they wanted to change that through their public confession.

Another motivation that participants identified was the desire to encourage others.

One participant, Eva, viewed public confession as a way to encourage others to participate in available ministries at the DFW Church. In her confession about infertility, Eva advertised the DFW Church ministry that offered support to women struggling with that issue and encouraged women to attend. Others said that publicly confessing was a way to encourage others in their own lives. In addition to her desire to encourage participation in a ministry, Eva expressed that she wanted to help encourage others. She shared a desire to “encourage someone else” or to “help someone feel comfortable sharing” (Eva, interview). She also articulated her feeling that sharing past experiences helped ease feelings of isolation: “It’s important for other people to know they’re not alone, and when they hear you, it’s like oh wow, well they’re saying—I’m right there too” (Eva, interview). Maria expressed similar feelings, saying,

I wanted women out there to know there’s no shame in what happened to you, and I wanted them to hear that from someone who had been there, and that they could get help and this was a safe place to do that. (Maria, interview)

Helen viewed her confession as an opportunity to share her faith, as well as giving another person hope or encouragement. She said:

My hope, when I lay it all out there, which is what I tend to do when I’m telling it [her testimony], is that somebody is going to hear that and hear that there’s hope, and maybe even ask questions, how can I have that hope? (Helen, interview)

All of the participants who expressed this desire to motivate others viewed their public

confession as a way to reach out to other people, to encourage them, or to inform them about church ministries dealing with specific issues.

Privacy Rule Development in the Public Context

In my first research question, I asked if CPM accounted for the public, self-revelation of private information. I also sought to explain how participants in this context make decisions about disclosure. After analyzing the data, I found that CPM could be used to examine public acts of self-disclosure, and that participants follow the privacy rule development process outlined by Petronio (2002). Participants openly discussed the way that risk-benefit ratios, context, culture, gender, and motivation influenced the decision to disclose, as well as what they disclosed. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

RQ2: Boundary Management

Once individuals have formulated their privacy management rules, they must also account for their relationships with others as they make decisions to disclose. Petronio (2002) labeled this “boundary coordination operations,” (p. 85), where individuals manage boundaries around their information, as well as who is allowed to enter those boundaries. As participants in this study reflected on their experiences with public confession, they shared how they manipulated and managed their privacy boundaries throughout the confession process. I identified two common themes among participants: boundary testing prior to public disclosure and managing breadth and depth of disclosure.

Boundary Testing Prior to Public Disclosure

Prior to giving their public testimony, several participants shared their testimonies with friends, family, or DFW Church staff. I labeled this process *boundary testing*, as participants

seem to be testing the process of opening up the boundary around their private information to a smaller audience prior to the public confession. Lucy talked about that process, saying:

Part of my preparation was actually writing out my testimony, and then emailing it to the pastors so that they can read through it and just make sure it's appropriate. I talked to my husband, because he lived so much of it [the events recounted in her testimony] with me, obviously I had him proofread it. And then our pastor, I sent it to him and he approved it. (Lucy, interview)

Participants even discussed editing or amending parts of their testimony based on feedback from their test audience, indicating that participants use this as an opportunity to test potential reactions to their confession. Aaron responded to feedback from his group leader, and shared this reflection on the preparation process:

I gave it to my home group leader at the time to read over, and he made some suggestions and I edited some things. Or revised some statement and repositioned some things, and sent it to somebody at the church. (Aaron, interview)

Francine followed a similar editing process, though she said it was to verify her portrayal of events in her past. In her words:

I read it to my sister, just to get constructive feedback on sentence structure, and here's what I'm trying to say, and people who knew the story so they could say yeah, you were conveying that correctly. Or no, it sounds like you're saying this when I know you don't mean that. So not to change it or to fix it, but to make sure that what I communicated was, in fact, what I wanted to communicate. (Francine, interview)

Francine also shared her testimony with her daughter prior to disclosing publicly, and gave the following reason for that decision:

I did read it [her testimony] to my daughter, because though I didn't address her specifically in it, but I'm going to tell my story to a community of people who will then see her with me, so I wanted her to be comfortable with it. (Francine, interview)

For Francine, her daughter's comfort and agreement with the content of her testimony was crucial to Francine's decision-making process. Francine viewed her daughter as a co-owner of

the information, and sought to get her approval before continuing. Other participants also sought approval, but did so with church leadership. Helen expressed a lot of anxiety about presenting her testimony, and she utilized boundary testing as a way to make sure she was following the church guidelines:

I talked to _____, who is over Recovery, and I was actually a lot more concerned about it [her testimony] than they were. Because I kept emailing and saying well, how should I word this, and just asking these questions, and she said 'just go for it.' And I said really? You trust me to just go for it? (Helen, interview)

Despite feeling a sense of ownership over her information, Helen sought input and guidance on the way she should share that information with the audience.

Managing Breadth and Depth

In addition to seeking feedback to test boundaries, participants used feedback as a way to manage the breadth and depth of their testimonies. Eva mentioned that she was very conscious of how much she disclosed during her testimony, saying, "I wanted to include a few specifics, so maybe people could identify with what I was going through that may have had a similar situation. You know, kind of a balance between too broad and too specific" (Eva, interview). Lucy viewed this process as a more spiritual event, saying:

You know, honestly there were some things that I honestly completely forgot about until later. So I would have to attribute that to the Holy Spirit, just putting on my heart what I needed to share and what I needed to withhold at the time. (Lucy, interview)

Some participants admitted that they refrained from sharing some information, though their motivations for continuing to conceal details varied. Beth admitted that she was very guarded with information about her eating disorder saying, "I kept some of the motivation or cause behind the eating disorder, I didn't share that" (Beth, interview). Nadine wanted to protect her dating partner at the time, who also attended the church. She concealed details about her

sexual behaviors in order to protect her partner, articulating that it was his responsibility to disclose that information to his community. Darla concealed information by limiting detail. As previously discussed, Darla disclosed her pornography addiction to a mixed-gender audience. She described her struggle with managing breadth and depth as follows:

I was thinking all of this needs to be said. I don't want to skirt around the truth because I want people to hear exactly what I used to struggle with, and how intense it truly was. That it wasn't something I happened to do every once in a while, it wasn't that I'd seen it before. It was that it truly took control of my life for a period of time. So I think that seriousness needed to happen, but not with detail. (Darla, interview)

These participants each expressed the need to maintain some boundaries around their personal information, though had different reasons for doing so. Whether due to fear of repercussion, fear of judgment, or just limiting detail rather than content, each one consciously managed the breadth and depth of information shared during their public confession.

Public Confession Model

Data analysis revealed that participants followed a similar process leading up to public confession. I propose the following model as a way to understand how individuals make disclosure decisions in the context of public confession. The first stage, boundary/message testing, is an optional stage. This step involves disclosers sharing their planned testimony with friends or family prior to sharing publicly. The second stage is audience analysis. During this stage, disclosers consider the audience and tailor their message to that audience. The last stage is selecting a disclosure path, which includes three potential paths: full disclosure, strategic disclosure, or protective omission disclosure. See Figure 1.

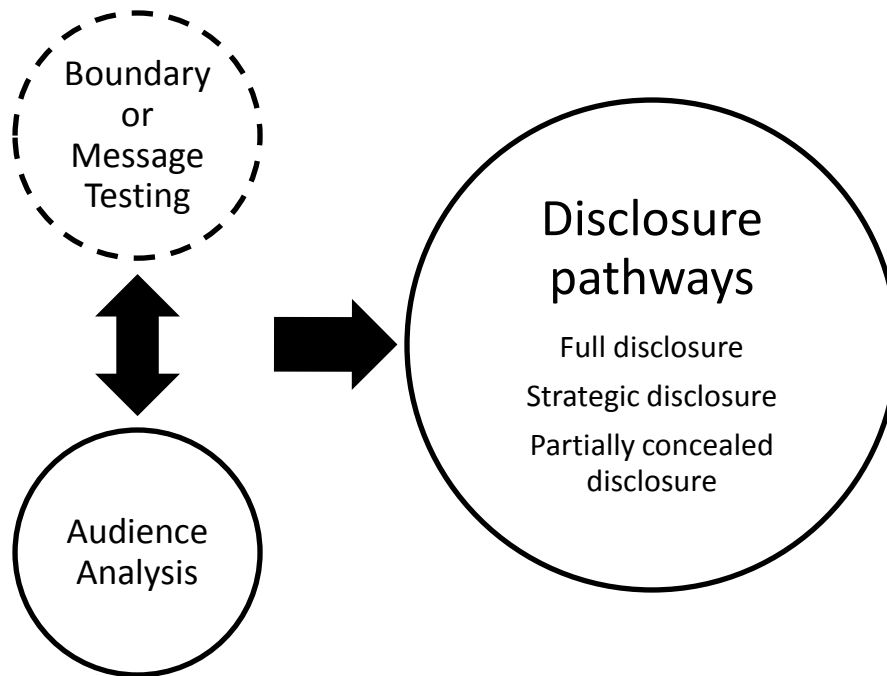


Figure 1. Public confession model.

Participants may or may not engage in the first part of the process, which is boundary/message testing. In this study, eight participants (61.5%) engaged in boundary testing prior to their public confession. They shared their testimony with friends, family, or DFW Church staff. Not all participants engaged in this behavior, so it is not a prerequisite for engaging in audience analysis. However, this is an important stage to recognize in the model because several participants did begin their disclosure process with boundary testing. Those who did utilize boundary or message testing engaged in a reciprocal process between boundary testing and audience analysis, wherein they shared their testimony, made edits to it, and shared it again for additional feedback.

All participants (100%) engaged in some type of audience analysis. This process includes thinking of people with similar issues, changing the content based on the perceived audience, and considering audience expectations. Participants reflected on how they targeted their

message to individuals with similar histories or backgrounds, and chose a level of detail that would enable audience members to identify with the public testimony. Participants also shared that they had a specific audience in mind as they planned their testimonies. The composition of that audience varied from participant to participant. Some considered and planned for individuals of a similar background, others for believers or nonbelievers, and some focused on the gender composition of the audience. In addition, participants shared that the DFW Church culture and audience expects honesty and disclosure. Individuals who engage in public confession use these techniques to analyze their audience prior to public disclosure. Once individuals go through these stages, they select a disclosure path. I identified three different paths: *full disclosure*, *strategic disclosure*, and *protective omission disclosure*.

Full Disclosure

The first pathway, *full disclosure*, involved participants saying that they disclosed everything without holding back. I identified seven participants (53.8%) who followed this disclosure path: Maria, Aaron, Darla, Francine, Gwen, Helen, and John. These participants dismissed concern about the audience's reaction, and proceeded with their testimonies. For example, Aaron shared his thoughts leading up to the public confession:

Don't worry about the audience. Don't worry about the reaction. Especially in a huge audience, you're not going to see most of them again in daily life, so you shouldn't worry about the impact. If you're truly confessing amongst believers, and you're a new believer, they'll be gracious in that. So if you find yourself getting judged by them, you're probably not in the right place. (Aaron, interview)

Gwen expressed a similar sentiment, though she classified it in a different way, saying "I finally just had to, overall over everything, accept that this is not about me. If they think I'm this, who cares? It's not about me" (Gwen, interview). Helen also expressed the belief that her public

testimony was something beyond herself, and focused on the result rather than the audience response. In her words:

It's just that innate thing that we want to look good, I guess, but like I said before, knowing that there's a greater purpose than that and it's not about me looking good. It's hopefully about people being set free by what you have to say. (Helen, interview)

Another participant, John, mentioned that confessing was like a rock rolling down a hill, a process that kept going the more he spoke:

At some point in time, you expect to have that well up in you to where you're like, I need to hide something. Like, I can't completely strip the chicken off the bone, I've got to leave something that people don't know. And that just, that never occurred. It never occurred to me that you should start hiding, like you should start pulling it back a little bit. It was just once it started, everything kind of kept flowing. Like a rock downhill. It just kept rolling. (John, interview)

These participants stated that they bared everything during their public confession, and did not keep anything hidden from the audience. Whether by diminishing the audience feedback, separating themselves from the content of their confession, or by keeping their thoughts on the ultimate goal of the confession, these participants indicated that they publicly disclosed everything there was to disclose.

Strategic Disclosure

The second pathway some participants took was that of *strategic disclosure*. Five participants (38.5%) chose this path: Eva, Lucy, Beth, Christina, and Irene. In this group, participants made strategic decisions about what and how to disclose based on their audience analysis. Lucy shared her thoughts on the way she changed her testimony when presenting it to the church prior to baptism versus in a smaller, home group setting:

When you're getting up in front of the church to give your public profession of faith, it is to possibly move unbelievers to draw them nearer to Christ. So, that kind of affects—changes some of the things that you share, whereas in the home group setting, it's

already believers. It's already people who are involved in the church, members of the church, so with that motivation being different, it affected what I wanted to share and what I thought was pertinent to achieve deeper community versus helping to draw people near. (Lucy, interview)

Other participants who followed this path discussed similar strategic choices made depending on the audience. Helen shared her impressions about how different audiences shaped the content of her testimony:

I have actually felt more comfortable in an environment of non-Christian people than I have in an environment of Christian people. Unfortunately, we can say that in the body of Christ, there still is a lot of that "holier than thou" sort of thing. So I have told my testimony to—especially to girls in the strip clubs and managers in the clubs, and I have felt very free to be myself, and free to talk about the Lord and not change the way that anything is worded. Not water it down. (Helen, interview)

Other individuals, as previously discussed, evaluate the gender make-up of the audience. In some instances, participants disclosed less simply because they were addressing a mixed-gender group. Helen made this decision, saying, "There were some things that I gave less details about, for instance a rape situation and things like that, just because I knew it would be male and female" (Helen, interview). Individuals who chose this disclosure path did not do so to conceal information for their own reputation; rather, they viewed their testimony as a strategic communicative act that was dependent upon the audience they were trying to reach. With that in mind, they tailored their messages and highlighted different aspects of their story for different audiences.

Protective Omission Disclosure

In contrast to this idea, the third path is that of *protective omission disclosure*. I identified only one participant (7.7%), Nadine, who followed this path, though in a larger sample size, I speculate there would be a higher number who partially conceal. In this path, the

individual specifically concealed or hid part of her testimony out of fear of opening boundaries. Rather than being a choice based on reaching a target audience, the participant in this category sought to protect herself or others by limiting the information she disclosed. Nadine concealed information about her past sexual activity because she feared her current partner would experience judgment from his peers. She also revealed there were some things she only confided to her best friend, and did not reveal in her public confession: “Every time I see her, I’m like hey, I’m dealing with sin right now. But other than that, she’s the only one I share the deepest, darkest sins that I feel” (Nadine, interview). The participant who chose this path purposefully concealed information because of her fear of opening boundaries and the fear of potential ramifications for herself or others.

Summary

In this study, I sought to answer two research questions. First, I asked if CPM accounted for participant self-revelation of private, potentially negative behavior in public; further, I asked what common themes existed within the specific context of DFW Church in regards to decision making prior to disclosure. Second, I asked how participants discussed their boundary management behaviors prior to public disclosure.

In answer to RQ1, I found that CPM does account for participant behaviors prior to public disclosure. During the interviews, participants articulated specific criteria they utilized to make decisions about what, and to whom, to disclose. Using Petronio’s (2002) five criteria for formulating privacy rules as a guide, I identified specific ways the participants used these criteria to formulate their own privacy rules in the context of public confession. In terms of risk-benefit ratio, participants identified four strategies: other-focused benefit, self-focused

benefit, other-focused risk, or self-focused risk. For culture, participants articulated two cultural influencers: the unique culture of DFW Church and the tension between Christian culture stereotypes and DFW culture. For context, interviewees identified two types of contextual influencers: situational influencers and comfort/security. With regard to gender, participants expressed two main themes: anticipating feedback from community members of the same sex and sex role norms. Lastly, with regard to motivation, participants identified either self-focused or other-focused motivations. Participants utilized Petronio's (2002) five criteria, even within a public confession context.

In addition to utilizing the privacy rule development criteria, I also examined boundary management within the public confession context. Participants revealed two primary phases for boundary management: boundary testing prior to public disclosure and managing breadth and depth of disclosure. Utilizing the information provided during analysis of RQ2, I proposed the public confession model with three potential confession pathways: full disclosure, strategic disclosure, and protective omission disclosure. These results are examined further in the next chapter, along with theoretical and practical implications, limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

Self-Disclosure and CPM in the Public Context

Scholars have used communication privacy management theory (CPM) to examine many contexts: health disclosure (Brown et al., 2007; Greene, 2009; Greene & Faulkner, 2002; Rowland, Thornton, & Burnett, 2005); child abuse disclosure (Petronio, Reeder, & Hecht, 1996); family disclosure (Martin & Anderson, 1995); and organizational privacy management (Shapiro, 1990). The primary disclosure situations within these studies are dyadic or small group context; or the studies deal with group management of private information. To date, CPM is untested in public disclosure scenarios, or situations in which people disclose private information to a large audience. The results of this study expand the capabilities of CPM to this broader context, which can illuminate the ways individuals make disclosure decisions prior to public confession. The next step would be to examine CPM in other public contexts, such as public confessions on television shows, or any other public confession in a non-religious context.

One important factor to remember is that when interviewing participants, I utilized an open-ended question format. Participants responded to the questions with answers that ultimately fit nicely into the CPM categories, without specific guidance or prodding. Though the questions were developed with that end in mind, participants provided a lot of information that specifically related to CPM without being explicitly asked for that information. The seamless connection between the raw interview data and CPM provides further evidence that CPM can be used successfully in this new research context.

While researchers (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Brown, 1998; Paulhus & Reid, 1991; Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995) have demonstrated that people reveal the best possible version of themselves, my findings indicate that context and organizational culture can override these socialized tendencies. As Rawlins (1983) argued, individuals use existing relational norms to make disclosure decisions. Even in the public context, the existing norms within the DFW Church culture influenced the participants in their disclosure decisions. By expecting honesty and providing public examples to potential members, individuals who come to the DFW Church learn the church culture and norms through attendance. These norms then influence participants in their own acts of public disclosure.

When examining the theoretical suppositions within CPM, I found several points of connection. First, my study upholds Petronio's (2002) argument that disclosure and intimacy are different things, and that individuals disclose for reasons other than building intimacy. To examine this issue, I only looked at the motivations that participants stated explicitly. In my study, individuals listed many motivations for public disclosure without referencing building intimacy with others. For participants in this context, their primary goals were to encourage others or bring hidden topics to light. These findings differ from other research on confession and motivation, which typically does not include other-focused motivation. Sellner (1990) detailed several goals that Alcoholics Anonymous lists for public confession:

[E]nd the compulsion to drink or abuse drugs, increase self-knowledge, new self-confidence, relief and release from feelings of guilt, delight, humility, loss of fear, emergence from a terrible sense of isolation, healing tranquility, a sense of gratitude, the ability to begin to forgive others and oneself, and possibly...feel[ing] the presence of God. (p. 339)

His list does not include a single reference to reaching out to others, or encouraging others through confession. While attendees may think of encouraging others as a motivation, Sellner's results do not report any specific acknowledgments like those found within this study. Murray-Swank et al. (2007) listed reducing guilt and shame, seeking social connection, seeking meaning and coherence, and impression management as the primary functions of spiritual confession. Omarzu (2000) named five social rewards for disclosure: intimacy, social control, social approval, relief of distress, and identity clarification. Other scholars list disclosure goals like building intimacy (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Rawlins, 1983), developing positive impressions (Arkin et al., 1980; Tice et al., 1995), or individual mental health (Cozby, 1973; Jourard, 1959). This study adds to existing literature by showing an additional set of motivators. Participants in this study viewed disclosure as a way to inspire, encourage, or reach out to others. Rather than focusing on impression management, reducing guilt, increasing intimacy, or any of the other numerous motivations that have been previously discussed, these participants are adamant that their primary motivation is to encourage other people. Other scholars should add this finding to existing typologies regarding disclosure motivations.

Second, Petronio (2002) argued that individuals set up boundaries to protect their private information. The participants in my study discussed a variety of ways they construct or deconstruct boundaries around their information, and how they change those boundaries depending on the audience. Through boundary testing, participants explored potential reactions by allowing new people into boundaries. Participants also acknowledged that they altered the boundaries around their private information based upon the audience they wanted to reach and by managing the breadth and depth of their confessions. Despite the public

nature of their disclosure, the participants still utilized boundaries to suit their particular needs at a given moment and in a particular context.

In the last three theoretical suppositions, Petronio (2002) argued that individuals feel ownership over their private information and, thus, control access to that information through privacy rules and managing the tension between the desire to be private and public. My study expands these theoretical suppositions in some compelling ways. Some participants referred to the idea that their testimony or confession “wasn’t about them,” but about God. Rather than feeling individual ownership over their histories, they expressed a belief that God owned that information. Gwen went as far as to say, “I wouldn’t edit it [my testimony] because it’s not mine to edit” (Gwen, interview). While many participants expressed this idea of co-owning their information with God, at the same time, they gave up control of managing their information by confessing publicly. Once they shared that information with hundreds of people, individuals could no longer manage audience members’ use of that information. Lastly, while some participants did admit to concealing information, others asserted that they were completely open without feeling the tension to maintain privacy. Aaron described it as a rock rolling downhill, and that he continued his testimony without any hesitation. Some participants mentioned feeling a tension, but proceeded with the public confession anyway.

Jacobs (2008) claimed that individuals who give public testimonies may have an awareness of the public nature of testimonies, but articulated that this awareness is primarily a subconscious awareness of “the extent to which our choices are dialogical, public, and self-presentational” (p. 30). In the context of this study, participants were consciously aware of the dialogical and public nature of their testimonies. In fact, participants altered and tailored their

testimony stories based upon the targeted audience. Rather than being a subconscious, psychological process, participants engaged in a conscious, strategic, communicative act.

CPM in the religious context

In the context of a church or religious setting, organizational culture apparently encourages confession as a mode of establishing membership with the group. Jacobs (2008) theorized, but lacked evidence, that that this may be true of testimony stories. Based on the results of this study, I argue that individuals use the testimony or public confession as a way to assert membership with the group, and to gain affirmation of their identity from the audience. Building on Cooley's (1902/1956) looking-glass self, I argue that giving a public confession actually builds a positive self-image by generating positive reactions from other church members. Though this behavior seems to contradict social norms, in this particular culture, members have flipped that norm so that public disclosure is a positive, even expected, behavior. Though it seems to contradict research by Leary and Kowalski (1990), in which they argued that disclosing negative behavior could have a negative impact on identity, I argue that through public confession, my participants were declaring a new identity. My argument is similar to Omarzu's (2002) concept of identity clarification, wherein disclosers help confirm self-knowledge by engaging in disclosure. By confessing their past, potentially negative behaviors, these individuals developed a desired identity as a redeemed Christian. In the Christian context, redemption is a desired identity, making public confession a way to claim and portray that new identity.

Many participants referenced the DFW Church culture as one of safety that encourages honesty. Researches (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Brown, 1998; Paulhus & Reid, 1991;

Tice et al., 1995) have argued that individuals disclose more self-enhancing information to strangers in order to create a positive impression on others. In this particular context, participants may feel that by confessing publicly, they are able to show the amount of transformation or “redemption” they have experienced in their lives. As a result, the disclosure of private information may become a self-enhancing act. The more intense the content, the greater the amount of change the individual can portray, thus leading to a more positive impression in the estimation of the audience. Omarzu (2002) discussed a similar idea in his concept of social approval as a motivation for disclosure. In this context, disclosing personal information is a way to generate positive response. In this study, I would argue that by revealing previous behaviors, disclosers hoped to demonstrate transformation to their audience.

Public Disclosure Model

Based on the results of this study, I propose a model to explain participant behavior when making disclosure decisions. In the first stage, called boundary/message testing, participants may disclose to friends or family prior to the public confession event. This provides the participants an opportunity to test anticipated response, get feedback, and make changes to their disclosure before doing it publicly. The next stage, though not necessarily in sequential order, is that of audience analysis. Participants consider the sex of the audience, belief systems, issue-specific struggles, and audience expectations prior to making disclosure decisions. Once one, or both, of those stages is complete, participants decide which disclosure path to follow: full disclosure, strategic disclosure, and protective omission disclosure. If a participant chooses full disclosure, they essentially reveal all of their past behaviors and

troubles to their audience without edits. Strategic disclosure may involve the same level of transparency, but disclosers make more strategic decisions about vocabulary, breadth, and depth of their confessions. The last path, protective omission disclosure, involves participants making a conscious decision to conceal some of their past behaviors.

This model has a few theoretical implications. First, it provides a way to examine public disclosure events in a similar way to dyadic or small group disclosures. Scholars can use the model as an analytical tool to apply to other contexts. Second, the model provides options for future research to answer the following propositions:

Proposition 1: Do participants engage in boundary and message testing?

Proposition 2: Do participants consciously analyze the audience? How does this analysis influence disclosure decisions?

Proposition 3: Do participants choose one of the three paths: full disclosure, strategic disclosure, or protective omission disclosure?

By examining these questions in future research, scholars can continue to expand and enrich our understanding of disclosure, CPM, and public disclosure.

Practical Implications

Church Culture

The results of this study can aid churches or other organizations seeking to encourage public disclosure. Participants discussed the importance of a culture of honesty, and having support in place before and after disclosure events. If church leaders are considering making public confession a component of their services, they should evaluate the church's culture.

Other research (Greene & Serovich, 1998; Wills, 1990) on CPM and disclosure has revealed the

importance of support, encouragement, and trust in the decision to reveal private information. The results of this study correlate with that finding, and indicate that creating a climate of support and honesty can yield more willingness to disclose, as well as better audience responses to those disclosures. One participant, Beth, expressed having negative experiences with sharing her information, which ultimately resulted in that employee leaving her former church. If churches want to avoid that type of reaction, they will need to invest time in creating a culture of honesty and support.

Another implication of this study is the deeper understanding of audience analysis prior to public disclosure. If other churches already participate in public confession, or their leaders plan to add that component, they can utilize this information to help their participants plan for their audience. As these individuals discussed, things like faith, gender, or size affected the content and detail of their confessions. Churches should be prepared to provide that type of assistance or information to people preparing to give their public testimony. Providing information on who the audience is, the size of the audience, and the audience composition can help disclosers make the decisions they need about their public testimony.

The results of this study may also provide a caution to church leaders. By having public confession as a regular feature, the church constructs an expectation and norm for that type of testimony. Some participants expressed a feeling of inadequacy or anxiety because their public testimony would not display the same level of change. For example, one participant stated that giving a public testimony about lying is forgettable, and perhaps less desirable than one about drug addiction or a more seriously troubled history. Church leaders should be aware that by setting this expectation, potential members might feel pressured to meet the norms of the

group by committing “bigger” sins to have something to confess, or could cause members to experience anxiety or inadequacy about their own testimonies.

When individuals are confessing intensely personal stories, there is a high risk of negative repercussion. While only one participant talked specifically about the negative results of her public testimony, it is probable that there are many more stories within the church about negative consequences of confession. Maria shared her story about disclosing her history of sexual abuse by her father and brother. After testifying at her baptism, and then recording a video for the church website, she shared this story about how her family reacted:

They were just horrified, and we were estranged for a long time. My brother threatened me with physical harm for saying something in public, and there’s just been a huge backlash from them. And then I’ve gone through a really deep depression afterwards, just really struggled. Actually had another suicide attempt, and it was really rough. (Maria, interview)

For Maria, her public testimony resulted in fractured family relationships, deepening her already existing struggle with suicidal thoughts and depression, and ultimately resulted in an attempt to take her own life.

Any organization that encourages public confession or testimony, especially when there is no anonymity for the discloser, needs to be aware of the potential ramifications, both for the individual and for the organization. Based on the results of this study, and namely, Maria’s story, church or organizational leaders should take steps to prepare for the impact of serious confessions. Leaders should provide information prior to the public disclosure to help prepare individuals for the potential outcomes. They should ensure that participants fully evaluate the potential risks prior to engaging in public disclosure. If the participant continues, leaders should provide services for therapy, intervention, or other support to help participants with difficulties

that may arise after the confession. With an understanding of CPM, the church and the audience become co-owners of an individual's private information when a public disclosure occurs, and should treat that co-ownership responsibly. Rather than encouraging public disclosure and then leaving that person to sort out any resulting effects, communities that require or encourage confession should be prepared to help. Leaders may also need to consider how public the information should be, and whether it should be shared outside of the organizational culture with people who do not understand confession as the cultural currency.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations. One limitation involves the participant recruitment process. Any time participants self-select, there is a risk that they differ from the majority of the population in some way (Freyd, 2012). Respondents who volunteered for this study may be less prone to privacy, or have different ideas about disclosure than non-respondents. Another limitation is in the make-up of the sample population. The vast majority of the respondents were female, and all were Caucasian. Having a pool primarily composed of women (85%) probably limited the impact of gender on disclosure in the study. Having a single race represented limits the understanding of how race may influence disclosure, as well as excluding other racial groups' experiences with public disclosure. Race could also be an influencer when the discloser is a different race than the majority of the audience, as non-white participants have differing histories and race relations that could provide different insight into this phenomenon (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Future researchers should strive to attract participant pools that include more diversity in gender and race. One last limitation is that as a member of the DFW Church, I share the ideology of the participants, which could influence my

interpretation of the results. An outside researcher may interpret the data differently. I attempted to minimize this limitation by having two independent coders who are not members of the DFW Church and are unfamiliar with the context.

Directions for Future Research

The results of this study illuminate some areas of future research. First, scholars should test the proposed public disclosure model. I based this model on data collected from a church context; other researchers should examine its applicability to other communities that encourage public disclosure, such as reality television, twelve step organizations, and other non-religious settings that incorporate public disclosure. Testing this model in these settings would further enhance the model's explanatory power with regard to discloser behavior prior to a public disclosure event. Future research can use these three propositions to guide research questions or hypotheses to examine participant behavior:

Proposition 1: Do participants engage in boundary and message testing?

Proposition 2: Do participants consciously analyze the audience? How does this analysis influence disclosure decisions?

Proposition 3: Do participants choose one of the three paths: full disclosure, strategic disclosure, or protective omission disclosure?

These questions can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research. Scholars should examine whether one of the three disclosure paths is more common than the others, or whether any statistical correlation exists between boundary testing, audience analysis, and the final disclosure path chosen by the participant. Scholars could examine whether the two prior stages have a significant influence on the participant's final decision, or whether no correlation

exists between them. Potentially, scholars could work on developing a predictive model that could anticipate disclosure path based upon involvement in the other stages of the model. One last area of interest would be to determine if the context of the public disclosure creates a vast difference in the selected disclosure paths. For example, in this study, being in a religious context may have influenced participants to select, by majority, the full disclosure path. Other contexts may have different results, and scholars could examine how the traits of that context would influence the way participants navigate the model.

Second, future researchers should examine the concept of “trauma trumping,” or the idea that people feel pressured to disclose more serious or traumatic things that the person who disclosed previously. One participant mentioned feeling that his testimony was not severe enough, which could indicate a phenomenon that occurs because of the pressure for all members to engage in public confession on a regular basis. Scholars should study whether this pressure to match, or exceed, other peoples’ disclosure influences disclosure decisions, content, or motivations.

Another avenue to explore is that of audience response to public confession. Scholars should investigate if communities develop collective rules for how to deal with disclosed information. Do church members feel a sense of ownership over that person’s story? Do they gossip? What are the rules for talking about a person’s testimony? Future research in this area would illuminate our understanding of how people respond to disclosure, as well as how they co-manage private information with disclosers.

Scholars should also examine the difference between mediums of public confession. For example, in this context, there were four: baptism services, written testimonies, video

testimonies, and Recovery testimonies. Scholars should determine if there are differing patterns of behavior or rule formation based upon the medium of the public confession. In a similar vein, scholars should investigate the way content influences disclosure decisions. For example, are there differing patterns of rulemaking and boundary management between those who disclose with salacious details versus those that do not?

Conclusion

Public disclosure is a fascinating communicative phenomenon that challenges our preconceived notions of acceptable public behavior. In most existing research (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Brown, 1998; Paulhus & Reid, 1991; Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995), findings have indicated that individuals want to present the best possible version of themselves to others in order to receive positive reinforcement from the audience. One aspect of self-presentation is the strategic management of private information. CPM provides a lens through which scholars analyze how people manage their private information, and how they negotiate sharing that information with others (Venetis et al., 2012). Not only do individuals develop privacy rules to govern their disclosure decisions, but they also manage boundaries around their information, individually or with information co-owners (Petronio, 2002). In the context of this study, I explored why individuals at the DFW Church chose to publicly disclose private information, and pioneered the application of CPM to examine this form of public disclosure.

Ultimately, I found that CPM is useful in examining public disclosure, and drafted a public disclosure model to be tested in future research. In addition, I gathered unique information about the DFW Church context, and about how the participants made disclosure

decisions prior to their public testimony. Participants described the DFW Church as a unique church with a culture of honesty and openness, which led many participants to feel safe during the act of public disclosure. Rather than being motivated by a selfish or therapeutic desire, participants asserted that they wanted to encourage others through their disclosure. One of the unique features of this community is the way participants managed boundaries around their private information. Several participants expressed the belief that God owned part, or all, of their information, meaning that when they disclosed it in public, they were not even talking about themselves. In their words, “It’s not about me.” Participants were able to construct a new identity through their testimony, effectively putting the old person in the past and presenting a new, Christian identity to the church body for group approval. In this context, confessing a negative behavior becomes a way to build a positive image by showing the drastic reformation that has taken place in that person’s life.

While not all participants experienced a flawless disclosure process, as seen in Maria’s familial conflict after her testimony, participants almost unanimously referred to the testimony process as freeing and uplifting. In retrospect, they each described the public confession process as one essential to the Christian church, and one they would participate in again. Despite the risks involved, each person still opted to disclose some amount of private information to a large, diverse audience. By differentiating their old and new identities, individuals at the DFW Church construct a narrative that depicts pre-conversion life, the conversion moment, and the new person entering into the faith. By describing their story as “not about them,” people feel free to disclose any, and sometimes all, of the private information most of us keep hidden from public view. In closing, I quote from the DFW

Church's sacred text: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17, English Standard Version).

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Age _____

Sex _____

Race: Caucasian African American Hispanic Asian Other

Date of public testimony _____

Date of interview _____

1. How long have you been attending the DFW Church?
2. How were you first introduced to this church, and what made you decide to stay?
3. Tell me about your decision to give your testimony. Why now?
4. Did you speak with other people to seek their advice before deciding to publicly confess?
5. How did you decide what information to share?
6. Why did you select this information to share?
7. What made you choose some information over others?
8. Why did you decide to give your testimony publicly?
9. Tell me about the decision making process.
10. Do you think being a man/woman made your decision easier or harder?
11. Did you think about the audience during your decision making process?
12. Did you think about how the information you shared would affect others?
13. Finish this sentence for me: "Publicly confessing or testifying was like (what) for me."
14. Have you ever experienced regret about doing a public testimony? Tell me about that.
15. Have you ever been glad you disclosed publicly? Tell me about that.

16. What types of reactions have you received since giving your testimony? What reactions have been encouraging? What reactions have been discouraging?
17. If you had it to do all over again, what, if anything, would you do differently?
18. What advice would you give to someone who was considering making a similar public confession?
19. Do you think public confession is generally good for the Christian church?
20. If you were giving your public testimony to a non-Church or non-believer audience, would you change what you said? How would you change it?

APPENDIX B

CODEBOOK

Risk/Benefit

This category includes any statement that shows the participant's awareness or evaluation of risk or benefit associated with publicly testifying or confessing. Risk types: evaluating levels of risk; safety risks; stigma risks; face risks; relational risks; role risks. Risks are evaluated PRIOR to act of confession.

Example: "My brother's still alive, he lives in the area, there are people in this area who know him. I knew there was a risk of him being embarrassed by what I had to say, which I was why I prayed over that extra, saying "Lord do I need to say this?" His response was very clear, that there are women out there who need to hear that it is okay and it's not your fault and it's okay to talk about it, to be healed from it. So that's why I included that particular part in the testimony."

Culture

This category includes any statement about cultural influence on the decision to disclose, or the information disclosed in the testimony or confession. This could include references toward the church, Texas, ethnicity, etc. Culture refers to the cultural influence that affects the participant PRIOR to disclosing.

Example: "We have the same kind of beliefs, the same ways of expressing those beliefs, and we appreciated their approach, I think, the most."

Context

This category includes any statement referencing contextual influencers on the decision to disclose, or the information disclosed in the testimony or confession. Some examples: location, circumstance of the event (baptism, Recovery/Steps program, bible study), traumatic events, therapeutic situations, and life circumstances. Context refers to influencers PRIOR to the participant disclosing.

Example: "Well, I had been a part of the Infertility Ministry for a while and I think they were looking for someone to do a testimony that was dealing with infertility related

issues, so they had come to maybe, even, one of the group leaders in -----, or somewhere, and of course we're going here to the ----- campus, and so they brought it to some of us who were starting up the Infertility Ministry in ----- just to see if anyone would be open to doing it, and that's kind of how I was approached with it."

Gender

This category includes any statement referencing the impact of gender on the decision to disclose, or the information disclosed in the testimony or confession. This includes gender influencers PRIOR to the act of disclosure.

Example: "I know my husband has a hard time sometimes being more open and vocal about stuff he's dealing with, and that is somewhat of a stereotype because some guys are more open and they don't mind sharing those kind [sic] of things."

Motivation

This category includes any statement referencing reasons why the participant wanted to publicly testify or confess. It may also include the goals participants have for the results of the testimony or confession. This refers to motivations the participant had PRIOR to disclosing.

Example: "I think I felt compelled to do that because I know what I've been through and I felt like, and knowing other people who came to the ministry also have experienced similar feelings and struggles, you know, and so it was kind of this sense of feeling like maybe with what I'm saying, I can encourage someone else."

Metaphors/Simile

This category includes any statement that uses metaphor or simile to talk about publicly testifying or confessing.

Ex: "Publicly testifying was like sharing the hope that was inside me."

Boundaries

This category includes any statement that references boundaries put up around specific information or individuals. It may also include statements about who owns the private

information, or what happens to it once the information is shared. May also include information about who was allowed into the boundaries during planning stages.

Ex: "I think I probably reviewed it with my husband and just said, let me run through this and see what you think."

Audience

This category includes any statements that reference the audience directly, especially in terms of demographics, believer/non-believer status, etc.

Example: "I think I certainly had others who had been struggling with the same thing in mind."

Other

This category includes statements that are important, but not captured in the categories above.

Example: "So that another piece I said towards the end, bringing it back around that, this is what happened, this is the hope that I have, and this is still an issue. That it's not like, oh I'm over it now, but that it's still a struggle, but this is how we're getting through it."

REFERENCES

- Afifi, W. A. & Caughlin, J. P. (2006). A close look at revealing secrets and some consequences that follow. *Communication Research*, 33(6), 467-488. doi:10.1177/0093650206293250
- Anderson, M., Kunkel, A., & Dennis, M. R. (2011). "Let's (not) talk about that": Bridging the past sexual experiences taboo to build healthy romantic relationships. *Journal of Sex Research*, 48(4), 381-391. doi:10.1080/00224499.2010.482215
- Arkin, R. M., Appelman, A. J., & Burger, J. M. (1980). Social anxiety, self-presentation, and the self-serving bias in causal attribution. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38(1), 23-35. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.38.1.23
- Banks, S. P., Louie, E., & Einerson, M. (2000). Constructing personal identities in holiday letters. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 17(3), 299-327. doi:10.1177/0265407500173001
- Bateman, P. J., Pike, J. C., & Butler, B. S. (2011). To disclose or not: Publicness in social networking sites. *Information Technology & People*, 24(1), 78-100. doi:10.1108/09593841111109431
- Bath, K. E. & Daly, D. L. (1972). Self-disclosure: Relationships to self-described personality and sex differences. *Psychological Reports*, 31(2), 623-628. doi:10.2466/pr0.1972.31.2.623
- Baumeister, R. F. (1982). A self-presentational view of social phenomena. *Psychological Bulletin*, 91, 3-26. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.91.1.3
- Bloor, M. & Wood, F. (2006). *Keywords in qualitative methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brown, J. D. (1998). *The self*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Brown, T. N., Ueno, K., Smith, C. L., Austin, N. S., & Bickman, L. (2007). Communication patterns in medical encounters for the treatment of child psychological problems: Does pediatrician-parent concordance matter? *Health Communication*, 21, 247-256. doi:10.1080/10410230701307717
- Castaldo, C. (2012, December 3). *How to tell your story of God's grace* [Web blog post]. Retrieved from <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/12/03/hot-to-tell-your-story-of-gods-grace>
- Certner, B. C. (1973). The exchange of self-disclosures in same-sexed groups of strangers. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 40(2), 292-297. doi:10.1037/h0034446
- Cooley, C. H. (1902/1956). *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Free Press. (Original work published 1902)
- Cozby, P. C. (1973). Self-disclosure: A literature review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 79(2), 73-91. doi:10.1037/h0033950

- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Derlega, V. J. & Stepien, E. G. (1977). Norms regulating self-disclosure among Polish university students. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 8(3), 369-376. doi:10.1177/002202217783009
- Dindia, K. (2000). Sex differences in self-disclosure, reciprocity of self-disclosure, and self-disclosure and liking: Three meta-analyses reviewed. In S. Petronio (Ed.), *Balancing the secrets of private disclosures* (pp. 21-36). Mahwah, NJ: LEA.
- Dindia, K. & Allen, M. (1992). Sex differences in self-disclosure: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(1), 106-128. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.112.1.106
- Egan, R. & Papson, S. D. (2005). "You either get it or you don't": Conversion experiences and the *Dr. Phil Show*. *Journal of Religion & Popular Culture*, 10. Retrieved from <http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/index.html>
- Freyd, J. J. (2012). A plea to university researchers. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 13(5), 497-508. doi:10.1080/15299732.2012.708613
- Gibbs, G. (2007). *Analyzing qualitative data*. London: Sage.
- Gitter, A. G. & Black, H. (1976). Is self-disclosure self-revealing? *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 23(4), 327-332. doi:10.1037//0022-0167.23.4.327
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (1986). Striving for specific identities: The social reality of self-symbolizing. In R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *Public self and private self* (pp. 143-160). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Greene, K. (2000). Disclosure of chronic illness varies by topic and target: The role of stigma and boundaries in willingness to disclose. In S. Petronio (Ed.), *Balancing the secrets of private disclosures* (pp. 123-135). Mahwah, NJ: LEA.
- Greene, K. (2009). An integrated model of health disclosure decision-making. In T. D. Afifi & W. A. Afifi (Eds.), *Uncertainty and information regulation in interpersonal contexts: Theories and applications* (pp. 226-253). New York: Routledge.
- Greene, K. & Faulkner, S. L. (2002). Self-disclosure in relationships of HIV-positive African-American adolescent females. *Communication Studies*, 53(4), 297-313. doi:10.1080/10510970209388595
- Greene, K. & Serovich, J. M. (1998). Epilogue. In V. J. Derlega & A. P. Barbee (Eds.), *HIV and social interaction* (pp. 369-384). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Herold, E. S. & Way, L. (1988). Sexual self-disclosure among university women. *Journal of Sex*

Research, 24, 1-14. doi:10.1080/00224498809551394

- Hinton, J. (1998). An assessment of open communication between people with terminal cancer, caring relatives, and others during home care. *Journal of Palliative Care*, 14, 15-23. <http://www.criugm.qc.ca/journalofpalliativecare/index.html>
- Hoffman-Graff, M. A. (1977). Interviewer use of positive and negative self-disclosure and interviewer-subject pairing. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 24(3), 184-190. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.24.3.184
- Homans, G. C. (1961). *Social behavior: Its elementary forms*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Hymer, S. (1995). Therapeutic and redemptive aspects of religious confession. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 34(1), 41-54. doi:10.1007/BF02248637
- Jackson, R. L., Drummond, D. K., & Camara, S. (2007). What is qualitative research? *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 8(1), 21-28. doi:10.1080/17459430801617879
- Jacobs, A. (2008). *Looking before and after: Testimony and the Christian life*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Jellison, J. M. & Riskind, J. (1970). A social comparison of abilities interpretation of risk-taking behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 15(4), 375-390. doi:10.1037/h0029601
- Jourard, S. (1959). Self-disclosure and other-cathexis. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 59(3), 428-431. doi:10.1037/h0041640
- Jourard, S. (1971a). *Self-disclosure: An experimental analysis of the transparent self*. New York: Wiley-Interscience.
- Jourard, S. (1971b). *The transparent self*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.
- Kohen, J. A. (1975). Liking and self-disclosure in opposite sex dyads. *Psychological Reports*, 36, 695-698. doi:10.2466/pr0.1975.36.3.695
- Lindlof, T. R. & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.
- Leary, M. R. & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(1), 34-47. doi:10.1037//0033-2909.107.1.34
- Martin, M. M. & Anderson, C. M. (1995). The father-young adult relationship: Interpersonal motives, self-disclosure and satisfaction. *Communication Quarterly*, 43, 119-130. doi:10.1080/01463379509369963

- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Murray-Swank, A. B., McConnell, K. M., & Pargament, K. I. (2007). Understanding spiritual confession: A review and theoretical synthesis. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 10*(3), 275-291. doi:10.1080/13694670600665628
- Omarzu, J. (2000). A disclosure decision model: Determining how and when individuals will self-disclose. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 4*(2), 174-185. doi:10.1207/S15327957PSPR0402_05
- Parks, M. R. & Floyd, K. (1996). Meanings for closeness and intimacy in friendship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 13*(1), 85-107. doi:10.1177/0265407596131005
- Paulhus, D. L. & Reid, D. B. (1991). Enhancement and denial in socially desirable responding. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*(2), 307-317. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.60.2.307
- Petronio, S. (1991). Communication boundary perspective: A model of managing the disclosure of private information between marital couples. *Communication Theory, 1*, 311-332. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.1991.tb00023.x
- Petronio, S. (2002). *Boundaries of privacy: Dialectics of disclosure*. New York: The State University of New York Press.
- Petronio, S. (2004). Road to developing Communication Privacy Management Theory: Narrative in progress, please stand by. *Journal of Family Communication, 4*(3-4), 193-207. doi:10.1080/15267431.2004.9670131
- Petronio, S. & Martin, J. N. (1986). Ramifications of revealing private information: A gender gap. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 42*(3), 499-506. doi:10.1002/1097-4679(198605)42:3<499::AID-JCLP2270420317>3.0.CO;2-I
- Petronio, S., Flores, L., & Hecht, M. (1997). Locating the voice of logic: Disclosure discourse of sexual abuse. *Western Journal of Communication, 61*(1), 101-113. doi:10.1080/10570319709374565
- Petronio, S., Reeder, H. M., Hecht, M. L., & Mon't Ros-Mendoza, T. (1997). Disclosure of sexual abuse by children and adolescents. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 23*(3), 181-199. doi:10.1080/00909889609365450
- Rawlins, W. K. (1983). Openness as problematic in ongoing friendships: Two conversational dilemmas. *Communication Monographs, 50*(1), 1. doi:10.1080/03637758309390150
- Rowland, D. L., Thornton, J. A., & Burnett, A. L. (2005). Recognizing the risk of erectile dysfunction in a urology clinic practice. *BJU International, 95*, 1034-1038. doi:10.1111/j.1464-410X.2005.05460.x
- Schlenker, B. R. (2003). Self-presentation. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of*

- self and identity* (492-518). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Sellner, E. C. (1990). What Alcoholics Anonymous can teach us about reconciliation. *Worship*, 64(4), 331-348. <http://www.litpress.org/Subscriptions/Journals/worship.html>
- Shapiro, A. & Swensen, C. H. (1977). Self-disclosure as a function of self-concept and sex. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 41(2), 144-149. doi:10.1207/s15327752jpa4102_4
- Shapiro, E. (1990, February). How Johnson Controls guarded its big secret. *New York Times*, pp. D2, D5.
- Taylor, D. A. (1968). The development of interpersonal relationships: Social penetration processes. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 75(1), 79-90. doi:10.1080/00224545.1968.9712476
- Testimony. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/199748?rskey=HdwJ39&result=1&isAdvanced=false>
- Tice, D. M., Butler, J. L., Muraven, M. B., & Stillwell, A. M. (1995). When modesty prevails: Differential favorability of self-presentation to friends and strangers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(6), 1120-1138. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.69.6.1120
- Venetis, M. K., Greene, K., Magsamen-Conrad, K., Banerjee, S. C., Checton, M. G. & Bagdasarov, Z. (2012). "You can't tell anyone but...": Exploring the use of privacy rules and revealing behaviors. *Communication Monographs*, 79(3), 344-365. doi:10.1080/03637751.2012.697628
- Wicklund, R. A. & Gollwitzer, P. M. (1982). *Symbolic self-completion*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Wilkinson, A. (2012, February 27). *Tell your story, tell it well* [Web blog post]. Retrieved from <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/02/27/testimonies-beyond-facebook>
- Wills, T. A. (1990). Multiple networks and substance abuse. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 9, 78-90. doi:10.1521/jscp.1990.9.1.78
- Yep, G. A. (2000). Disclosure of HIV infection in interpersonal relationships: A communication boundary management approach. In S. Petronio (Ed.), *Balancing the secrets of private disclosures* (pp. 83-96). Mahwah, NJ: LEA.