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MANIFESTATIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE RESILIENCE IN EXPERIENCES OF
SERIAL ARGUMENTS AMONG ADULT CHILDREN OF HARMFUL PARENTAL
ALCOHOL USE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Brooklyn Willis

August 2023

The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

MANIFESTATIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE RESILIENCE IN
EXPERIENCES OF SERIAL ARGUMENTS AMONG ADULT CHILDREN OF
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by

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August 2023

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ABSTRACT

MANIFESTATIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE RESILIENCE IN EXPERIENCES OF
SERIAL ARGUMENTS AMONG ADULT CHILDREN OF HARMFUL PARENTAL
ALCOHOL USE

by Brooklyn Willis

This thesis investigated the ways in which adult children of harmful parental alcohol use manifest resilience through the lens of the Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR). The CTR presents five communication processes by which resilience, which is the ability to overcome hardship, is demonstrated. Serial arguments, the repeated and unresolved conflicts that occur between romantic partners, were utilized as the context to study resilience. Interviews were conducted to learn about perceptions of serial argument resolvability and the ways and frequencies in which resilience manifested. A pre-interview survey gathered information pertaining to relationship satisfaction and perceptions of resilience. A thematic analysis identified all five CTR processes were present, and additional theme of adaptive communication arose as a related process that demonstrates resilience. Findings support and extend applications of CTR and extends the idea that resilience manifests in simple, everyday stressful events, like serial arguments. Future directions include a focus on translating theory into practice in the form of teaching resilience processes to adult children of harmful parental alcohol use.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

Harmful parental alcohol use is a disruptor within families. Previous research has typically explored harmful parental alcohol use from the lens of the struggling parent. However, children are often negatively impacted by the disruptions caused by their parents. As such children of harmful parental alcohol use may be exposed to more opportunities to demonstrate resilience, which is their ability to successfully overcome adversity, when compared to children of non-harmful parental alcohol use (Carr & Kellas, 2018; Luthar et al., 2000). The Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR) suggests that resilience can be developed, enacted, and improved upon through communication processes (Buzzanell, 2010). Like adult children of harmful parental alcohol use, some individuals are confronted with more adversity and may be exposed to environments that promote more negative communication behaviors that potentially hinder resilience. Although numerous studies have attempted to understand resilience among adult children of harmful parental alcohol use, to date no study has utilized CTR. Previous research and applications of the CTR focus on exploring communicative resilience during stressful life experiences. Due to the volatility common in the interpersonal experiences of adult children of harmful parental alcohol use (Beesley & Stoltenberg, 2002; Kearns-Bodkin & Leonard, 2008), an everyday stressor such as serial arguments may provide a useful context for exploring manifestations of resilience in communication processes. Using structured interviews and surveys, this study identifies how adult children of harmful parental alcohol use communicate resilience in reflections of experiences of serial arguments with their romantic partners. In order to understand the potential for resilience among adult children of harmful parental alcohol use and the

connection to CTR within the context of serial arguments, the following section defines resilience, describes experiences in families affected by harmful parental alcohol use, and the outcomes resulting from growing up in that family environment. Then, CTR is presented generally as well as situated within the context of adult children of harmful parental alcohol use. Finally, the concept of serial arguments is introduced and considered in terms of the resilience framework and experiences of adult children of harmful parental alcohol use.

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

Resilience

 Resilience is an interdisciplinary and complex construct. Southwick et al. (2014) provided interdisciplinary definitions of resilience, coming from the fields of biology, psychology, sociology, and communication through a collaborative panel and paper about resilience. The various definitions put forth by the authors all work to inform the understanding of resilience. The first definition put forth is a trait based one, where resilience is the capacity that one possesses to successfully adapt to disturbances (Southwick et al., 2014). A further explanation of resilience is that it is a stable trajectory of functioning after a highly adverse event, a definition drawn from the discipline of psychology and the study of acute traumatic experiences (Southwick et al., 2014). These two ideas suggest that resilience is relatively stable and innate, but there are other ways that resilience has been defined that view it more as a continually evolving and reoccurring process. Another definition from Southwick et al. (2014) most closely aligned with this research, is that resilience is a process used by individuals or groups to harness resources to sustain well-being because of hardships. Across definitions resilience generally reflects the ability to bounce back from and overcome adversity in life. More importantly, it is a process that one continues to navigate over time.

 The idea that resilience is a process to be utilized over time, is consistent with the conceptualization of resilience from a communication lens, in which resilience is primarily developed through interactions with others (Buzzanell, 2018). This is an important distinction in resilience research because it implies that we can reinforce our own resilience

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through dyadic interactions. Specifically, Carr and Kellas (2018) suggest that, though some people are predisposed to be more resilient than others, resilience can accumulate over time through close and supportive interpersonal relationships. In a study exploring family communication and resilience, they found that flexibility and the presence of cohesion led to higher levels of resilience for children later in life (Carr & Kellas, 2018). Conversely, children who were not exposed to such positive interactive qualities were more likely to have difficulties with resilience in adulthood. Facing adversity during childhood does not automatically suggest that one will struggle with resilience, but rather positive interpersonal interactions can foster resilience processes. In another study that explored parent-child communication and adolescent emotion regulation, Haverfield and Theiss (2020) found that parents who engaged in more emotion coaching communication—teaching their child how to navigate emotions, equipped the child with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage those emotions better in the future. Haverfield and Theiss (2018) also found that when adult children who were exposed to harmful parental alcohol use in their family of origin had at least one parent who engaged in supportive communication, they reported higher levels of resilience and self-esteem and lower levels of depression when compared to those who did not have this type of parental interaction. Taken together, evidence highlights the role of communication in manifestations of resilience.

Resilience has been defined as a process that includes growth and development, but there are some factors that individuals may have, or are able to develop, that can make them more adept at engaging in communication processes that foster higher levels of resilience.

Interpersonal communication skills may include a broad range of behaviors and attributes that one possesses that are essential for successful interactions between people (Brown et al., 2021). These skills include openness, empathy, and immediacy and they serve to foster strong interpersonal relationships (Brown et al., 2021; Gilligan et al., 2016). Interpersonal, or dyadic communication, focuses on how these tools can be utilized to improve relationships, therefore interpersonal communication skills are essential to building and enacting resilience. People who face hardships during childhood might not learn these communication skills and behaviors and therefore might have more difficulties interpersonally that inhibit resilience.

Harmful Parental Alcohol Use

Adult children of harmful parental alcohol use are often exposed to greater adversity, poor interpersonal communication, and may be confronted with more opportunities to demonstrate resilience. In the United States alone, nearly 10.5% of American children under the age of 17 live with at least one parent who suffers from an alcohol use disorder (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). When children grow up with a parent who harmfully consumes alcohol, their experiences are often vastly different from those growing up with a non-harmful or non-drinking parent. Examples of behaviors that parents who harmfully consume alcohol may exhibit are prioritizing alcohol over other things, even to the extent of neglecting family or work obligations (Dube et al., 2001; Schade, 2006). Parents who suffer from harmful alcohol use struggle when trying to engage in their parental duties, as they often turn to alcohol to cope with their problems rather than work through them in a productive manner, leading to a focus on alcohol rather than family. There are many negative personality outcomes for parents who harmfully consume alcohol, such as lower levels of

tolerance for frustration, lower levels of self-esteem, and higher levels of anxiety, all of which contribute to the hardships they face with fulfilling parental roles (Schade, 2006).

Further, the communication dynamics in families affected by harmful parental alcohol use typically reflect higher levels of conflict and an inconsistency in nurturing versus controlling behaviors on behalf of the parent harmfully consuming alcohol (Beesley & Stoltenberg, 2002). There is also a higher chance that there will be familial problems with communication related to conflict, resulting in chaos and greater unpredictability (Straussner & Fewell, 2011). All of these negative patterns, especially the chaos and unpredictability, can cause children to experience significant turbulence, which then has a negative impact upon their development and future communication patterns (Liepman et al., 1989). Growing up in an environment exposed to these harmful communication behaviors can have implications on childhood and later in life.

Outcomes of Adult Children of Harmful Parental Alcohol Use

Adult children of harmful parental alcohol use frequently report mental, emotional, and physical challenges attributed to growing up with a dangerous drinking parent. Depressive symptoms are a common outcome resulting from poor parent-child and peer relationships such as those found in children of parents who harmfully consume alcohol (Kelley et al., 2010). This population is at higher risk of these strained relationships due to the inconsistent and often distant parenting that they experience. When parents are not emotionally available to their children it can affect the quality of their relationship, which can further strain the emotional and mental development of the children (Kelley et al., 2010). Depressive symptoms can prove to be a roadblock in future relationships for adult children of parents

who harmfully consume alcohol. A three-year study conducted by Kearns-Bodkin and Leonard (2008) found that adult children of parents who harmfully consumed alcohol were less satisfied in their romantic relationships when compared to adult children of parents who did not harmfully consume alcohol. Similarly, Beesley and Stoltenberg (2002) found that adult children of parents who harmfully consume alcohol reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction when compared to those in relationships who did not have parents who harmfully consume alcohol. Another developmental outcome that children of parents who harmfully consume alcohol demonstrate is their eventual detrimental alcohol use. Rossow et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis on the effects that parental alcohol use has on children in longitudinal cohort studies, and the most common negative effect that was found was that those children were at an increased risk of engaging in harmful alcohol use behaviors themselves. In addition to alcohol use, Anda et al. (2002) found that harmful parental alcohol use increased the risk of depression in adult children by almost 50%. Relatedly, adult children of harmful parental alcohol use often report a dysfunctional sense of self (Beesley & Stoltenberg, 2002). These factors also contribute to the struggles that many adult children of parents who harmfully consume alcohol face later in life.

Mediating Role of Communication in Families of Harmful Parental Alcohol Use

As noted earlier, interpersonal interactions within the family system can impact developmental outcomes. Conformity and conversation orientations within a family refer to the breadth of topics and homogeneity of beliefs demonstrated through family communication (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). In families affected by harmful parental alcohol use, paternal alcoholism was associated with a conformity orientation, but the effects

it had on the self-esteem of the child were mediated by a conversation orientation (Rangarajan & Kelly, 2004). Similarly, Haverfield and Theiss (2018) found that higher conversation orientations in families affected by harmful parental alcohol use were related to higher levels of resilience in adult children. In another study focused on parental responsiveness, which refers to both nonverbal and verbal communication from parents that supports their child's needs and embraces their individuality (Peterson & Hann, 1999), Haverfield and Theiss (2017) found that adolescents in families struggling with parental alcohol use disorder demonstrated lower emotion regulation—the child's ability to regulate emotions effectively, in response to lower parental responsiveness and higher parental control. This type of communicative environment can put a strain on one's ability to overcome obstacles, but it does not necessarily predispose them to be incapable of resilience.

Resilience Among Adult Children of Harmful Parental Alcohol Use

Studies have identified positive outcomes among adult children of harmful parental alcohol use. Palmer (1997) conducted a study to determine the resilience of those with parents who harmfully consume alcohol and found that adult children of parents who harmfully consume alcohol are capable of exhibiting resilience and that it is not a discrete behavior or belief, but rather a process that one can move through. Many adult children of harmful parental alcohol use may not be exposed to interpersonal communication skills or relational interactions that promote resilience, but they are still able to manifest resilience. Another outcome for adult children of harmful parental alcohol use is the increase in resilience and decrease in other negative outcomes over time, especially during and after the college years (Jennison & Johnson, 2001; Kim & Lee, 2011). Furthermore, if children of

harmful parental alcohol use experience positive stigma—the belief that a difficult situation has made one stronger and allowed them to develop positive characteristics, they are likely to demonstrate higher self-esteem and resilience (Haverfield & Theiss, 2015). Through re-framing their hardships as opportunities and recognizing their strengths, adult children of harmful parental alcohol use may be able to distance themselves from their negative family environments and prevent them from following similar trajectories (Haverfield & Theiss, 2015). Lastly, families of parents who suffer from harmful alcohol use may utilize adaptive communication. This refers to the ability of families to overcome difficulties stemming from parental alcohol use to develop strong and effective communication despite the challenging conditions they face as a result of harmful parental alcohol use, and the negative communication patterns they were exposed to (Haverfield et al., 2016). This ability to adapt and improve communication can be carried into adulthood, making adult children of harmful parental alcohol use more capable of adapting and improving their own personal communication skills. Adaptive communication is often an overt and intentional act, wherein people deliberately break negative communication patterns. Not all adult children of harmful parental alcohol use will have the same negative and positive outcomes from their childhood experiences but, just because one was exposed to a difficult childhood due to harmful parental alcohol use, does not predetermine their developmental and interpersonal successes later in life. Taken together, adult children of harmful parental alcohol use may be exposed to poor interpersonal communication skills that may hinder resilience. On the other hand, there may be some exposure to supportive relational interactions that promote resilience. One way

to explore manifestations of resilience through interpersonal interactions is through the Communication Theory of Resilience.

The Communication Theory of Resilience

Consistent with previous framings of resilience, the Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR), created by Buzzanell (2010), emphasizes that resilience is a process. According to the theory, resilience is triggered by a particular event, typically a distinct turning point or an accumulation of difficulties, which signals a reaction (Buzzanell, 2018). Resilience in the face of these events can be cultivated and maintained through communication (Buzzanell, 2018). According to the theory, resilience is constituted in and through five communication processes: 1) crafting normalcy, 2) affirming identity anchors, 3) maintaining and using communication networks, 4) putting alternative logics to work, and 5) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. Resilience is constructed both individually and collaboratively within dyads using these five communication processes and each process operates differently by utilizing different communication behaviors, but all of them express and contribute to resilience. In the paragraphs that follow, each of these processes are reviewed and explored in a review of previous research applying CTR.

Crafting Normalcy

The first communication process defined in CTR is crafting normalcy. This refers to how individuals or dyads work to return to normal after a stressful event. While "normal" is different for everyone, it is considered a desirable state of being, where one is not experiencing any further negativity from the event. The discourse surrounding normalcy includes both explicit and implicit messages that emphasize normality and the mundane

regularities in life that symbolize successful adaptation following the aftermath of hardship (Buzzanell, 2010). The methods by which people communicate normalcy vary but the general goal is to return to their regular ways of existing and to integrate the disruption into their lives in a way that shows that they were able to overcome it. Buzzanell (2010) suggests that normalcy is created through talking about and maintenance of typical routines and rituals. Maintaining routines and practicing regular behaviors is another way that normalcy can be crafted through nonverbal communication and behaviors. A swift return to normalcy is often a main goal when engaging in an argument, so it is a process often enacted intentionally.

Affirming Identity Anchors

The next communicative process of resilience is affirming identity anchors (Buzzanell, 2010). This can take place both intrapersonally (internal dialogue) and interpersonally (external dialogue) through reflection of and connection to one's identity. Everyone is composed of a multitude of identities. These identities serve as anchors to their humanity. Examples of identities include but are not limited to relational identities such as "mother", "student", and "partner", or those based on race, sex, age, gender expression, and sexual identity. Perceived strength in identities reflects a strong sense of self that can contribute to one's ability to communicate resilience. When confronted with challenges, relying on one's identity and leaning into an identity can help to boost resilience. People tend to enact the identity that is most beneficial or meaningful for them during times of hardship (Buzzanell, 2018). This demonstrates the concept of the self, and one's identities, as being fluid and changing. When affirming one's identity anchors as a resilience process, the identity that one

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may rely on might be one that becomes more salient during the hardship, or it could be a constant and strong identity. One example would be if someone receives bad news about losing out on a job promotion. They may still lean on their identity as a good employee to reinforce their beliefs that they worked as hard as they could and the next time the possibility of promotion arises, they will have the confidence to try again. These identities can also be external and even linked to other people. In dyadic relationships, especially romantic ones, being a "partner" is both an internal and external identity. The goal of communicating about the relational identity with a partner is to return to or maintain the previous level of their identity as relational partners. This communication process can take place through internal thoughts during a dialogue about what makes you "you" and how it relates to existing central identities. Externally, it can take place with a relational partner and include conversations both about oneself and the relationship with the relational partner. The process of repeatedly reaffirming and validating individual and relational identities is a key part of bolstering resilience through anchoring oneself, or the relationship, against uncertainties and difficulties.

Maintaining and Using Communication Networks

The third process, maintenance of communication networks is a process of connecting with others for support and fortifying relationships. Through repeated (positive) interactions with friends, family, coworkers, and beyond, people can build support that can help them bounce back from hardships more easily. Buzzanell (2018) suggests that interactions with social networks can take place virtually or face-to-face. This communication process, reflective of social capital, focuses on how our interactions with others can help reinforce our

resilience and ability to overcome challenges. There are many different benefits that come from using one's social network. People can commiserate with others or draw strength from the fact that others have overcome similar issues. Furthermore, trusted others can often give advice, either specific to the situation at hand or generally, that can be useful in making sense of and coping with challenges. This process of communicating with others and getting support from them when faced with difficulties is another way that resilience is bolstered and demonstrated. The social capital that is built through interactions with one's communication networks during "good times" can be drawn upon when one is facing hard times.

Putting Alternative Logics to Work

The next communication process that helps to build resilience is to put alternative logics to work. This process involves the use of contradictory ways of doing things or thinking about situations through reframing to make sense of the disruptive event and the reaction or response to it. When individuals or dyads reframe situations, they actively use communication to spin their circumstances so that they feel better about them. An example of creating alternative logics would be reframing the end of a romantic relationship to find closure. One way in which this communication behavior may manifest is through "grave dressing", which is the act of cleaning up accounts and explaining the dissolution of a relationship, especially by making sense of relational history after the relationship has been terminated (LeFebvre et al., 2014). This relates to resilience because it allows people to make sense of the challenges that they faced and then work to overcome them. The alternative logics process boosts resilience by acknowledging the hardship, recognizing what it means, labeling it as such, and then seeking out creative ways to deal with and recover from it

(Buzzanell, 2010). This communication process works best within the dyad that is facing the challenge but can also be adopted in conjunction with the process of maintaining and using communication networks when an individual seeks outside help to create alternative logics as a response to the turmoil.

Legitimizing Negative Feelings While Foregrounding Productive Action

The fifth and final communication process as defined by the CTR is legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. When faced with any type of negative situation or challenging circumstance it is easy to get lost in that negativity. When an individual acknowledges and recognizes the negativity they are facing while simultaneously emphasizing positivity and forward motion, they demonstrate resilience. This takes place through communication and meta-communication—communication about communication and can be considered the strongest embodiment of resilience (Buzzanell, 2018). Backgrounding the negativity is not the same as repressing or ignoring it. Instead of dwelling upon negativity, this process reflects the utility of redirecting attention from the negative event towards activities or events that bring about positivity or productivity (Buzzanell, 2010). Within a dyad, partners can work together to determine which positive and productive steps they can take to surmount the obstacle, and they can do this by communicating about it.

Applications of the Communication Theory of Resilience

To date, the CTR has been applied in numerous contexts including interpersonal, family, and health communication to understand and validate the communication processes that foster resilience. Many of these studies have been quantitative in nature, using statistical measures and quantitative analysis to learn about the resilience processes. One such study

explored CTR in the context of cancer patients and their partners. A cancer diagnosis is one example of a significant disruption to a couple's lives that presents numerous challenges (Venetis et al., 2020). This study centered on how dyadic communication plays a role in constructing resilience within romantic relationships. The study found that all five communication processes measured were positively related to at least one of the two predicted outcomes—health management and evaluations of dyadic coping (Venetis et al., 2020). Utilization of the CTR processes was linked to positive outcomes in that when both the cancer patient and their partner enacted resilience through these processes there was an increase in the experiences of both the individual (management of their cancer prognosis) and the couple (how they coped dyadically). Furthermore, the CTR processes work similarly for both partners, meaning that when looking to use these findings practically, they can be applied to both partners instead of differentiating by role (Venetis et al., 2020). Again, the results support the link between the CTR processes and resilience, especially in the context of a romantic partnership.

Another study investigated the connections between dyadic communication and coping with resilience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lillie et al. (2021) surveyed married couples to measure dyadic coping, amount, and types of resilience communication processes, emotions, and relational uncertainty surrounding the effects of COVID-19. The study utilized a measure called the Dyadic Communicative Resilience Scale that uses closed-ended questions to measure the five CTR processes. Findings suggest that the use of these resilience communication processes can positively impact a romantic relationship by way of increasing evaluations of dyadic coping (Lillie et al., 2021).

The CTR resilience processes have also been examined qualitatively. In the context of immigration, Scharp et al. (2020) studied migration triggers, which are the frequent obstacles faced by immigrants, and the communicative resilience processes that are enacted because of them (Scharp et al., 2020). These triggers include bureaucratic obstacles, cultural differences, and physical distance. What differentiates migration triggers from other types of traumatic or large-scale stressors is that they are often experienced repeatedly. This study used open-ended interview questions to learn about the frequencies of each resilience process as demonstrated by participants, and to gather detailed information about the ways in which the processes were enacted. In response to migration triggers, participants demonstrated four out of the five CTR processes, where putting alternative logics to work was the most ubiquitously positive resilience communication process utilized (Scharp et al., 2020). Collectively, the communicative processes of resilience are found to have positive outcomes for relational partners, and can be enacted in response to a variety of triggers and obstacles. Based on the range of triggers identified in previous research people may enact resilience in the face of even smaller, every-day instances of adversity such as serial arguments.

An additional qualitative study that researched the ways that communicative resilience processes were enacted was conducted by Turner et al. (2022). This work analyzed how working mothers responded with resilience to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Again, open-ended questions were used to learn about the manifestations of each process. It was found that both crafting normalcy and maintaining and using communication networks were demonstrated by all 24 participants, followed by putting alternative logics to work (22), legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action (16), and

affirming identity anchors (12) (Turner et al., 2022). Participants all illustrated various ways they enacted each process and how they were beneficial. Furthermore, this study did not focus on the pandemic itself (a macrodisruption), rather it focused on how resilience is enacted in response to the microdisruptions caused by the pandemic (Turner et al., 2022). The emphasis on smaller-scale instances that require resilience is unique and highlights the importance of utilizing resilience in all scenarios, not just high intensity trauma events.

An additional part of resilience is the experience of anticipatory resilience. This is a type of resilience where one learns from previous challenges and can carry that knowledge to future disruptions wherein, they will require resilience again (Kuang et al., 2021). In this study, memorable messages were conceptualized as brief yet memorable and applicable messages, from sources such as proverbs, song or movie quotes, or other important cultural artifacts, that serve as guides when facing hardship (Kuang et al., 2021). These memorable messages are considered forms of anticipatory resilience because they allow individuals to carry forward lessons from previous challenges and combine them with wisdom learned vicariously from others (Kuang et al., 2021). Kuang et al. (2021) found that the participants who reported more anticipatory resilience were more likely to frequently enact the CTR processes. This suggests that memorable messages are a strong example of anticipatory resilience, which is connected to the manifestations of the CTR processes. Another important finding is that the enactment of CTR processes depends on both material and discursive resources, meaning that some people will be more capable of manifesting resilience through these processes depending on their situations (Kuang et al., 2021). This implies that there are

factors that impact the ways and frequencies with which people can enact resilience processes.

A final application of the CTR involved the relationship between family communication patterns and anticipatory resilience. As previously stated, family communication patterns have a strong impact on children, especially in terms of their social and emotional development and resilience (Haverfield & Theiss, 2018; Rangarajan & Kelly, 2004). Boumis et al. (2023) researched how family communication patterns, the CTR processes, and memorable messages as a form of anticipatory resilience were all related. They used a survey to measure family communication patterns, memorable message positivity and efficacy, the CTR processes, and resilience (Boumis et al., 2023). It was found that memorable messages were positively associated with both the enactment of CTR processes and with a conversation orientation within family communication (Boumis et al., 2023). The last key finding was that family communication patterns were directly related to resilience processes, with both conversation and conformity orientations having a significant association with the enactment of the CTR processes (Boumis et al., 2023). This furthers the understanding of how anticipatory resilience is connected to the manifestation of CTR processes, but more importantly, how family communication during childhood continues to affect people into adulthood.

Serial Arguments

As noted, previous research on CTR explores communicative resilience in the context of a triggering event. As Scharp et al.'s (2020) study suggests, triggering events may include daily stressors. An extremely common form of stress within any type of relationship is serial

arguments. Serial arguments are defined as arguments in which the participants engage in multiple conflict episodes about the same issue repeatedly, without any resolution (Bevan, 2014). Depending on the relationship, different topics and types of disagreements tend to arise and can turn into serial arguments. For example, arguments can be about public, professional, or personal topics, including different types of behaviors or values (Cionea & Hample, 2015). A typical serial argument comes about in stages. An initial incompatibility, disagreement, or challenge is what sets about the first stage in serial argumentation wherein participants determine if they are going to confront their partner about the issue (Trapp & Hoff, 1985). If a confrontation occurs, an argument begins and becomes serial as it occurs cyclically and repeatedly without resolution (Bevan et al., 2008; Trapp & Hoff, 1985). This process is what creates and sustains the stressful nature of the serial argument, the continued "heating up" and "simmering down" that takes place before and after the occurrence of the argument (Bevan et al., 2008).

Bevan et al. (2008) created the Serial Argument Process Model (Figure 1), which is serves as a concrete foundation for how these arguments can be understood. The model is the cornerstone of how serial arguments are experienced, thus very influential in the current study. In this model (see Figure 1), conflict tactics used by a partner interact with perceived resolvability, goal importance, rumination, and motivation to achieve goals. Conflict tactics are the ways in which people approach conflict communication, and include integrative, distributive, and avoidance tactics (Bevan et al., 2008). Specifically, integrative tactics involve a partner trying to negotiate with the other while still having concern for both parties, distributive tactics involve attempting to assert one's own requests, and avoidance tactics

involve shifting topics, denial, or bypassing the confrontation (Canary et al., 1998; Ohbuchi & Tadeschi, 1997). Perceived resolvability refers to beliefs about the likelihood of agreement and conclusion of the serial argument, and goal importance is the level at which relational partners view the intensity of the serial argument (Bevan et al., 2008). Another component is the construct of rumination, or the ongoing thoughts about a distressing event. Rumination is associated with the motivation to achieve serial argument goals (Bevan et al., 2008). These components of serial arguments are all important but perceived resolvability is the one most closely associated with relational satisfaction, even more so than the frequency of serial arguments (Worley & Samp, 2015). This suggests that the communication patterns enacted during a serial argument play a larger role in the hope for resolution of the argument and conversational experiences of relational partners than the content or frequency of the argument. Another important aspect of the serial argument process is that there are also phases that take place, known as "heating up" and "simmering down". The "heating up" phase is when frustrations build up because partners cannot convince the other to agree or come to an agreement, and the "simmering down" phase is when the partners recognize that the content of the argument or the relationship itself is more important than the frustrations they are experiencing as a result (Bevan et al., 2008).

Figure 1.

Serial Argument Process Model for Positive Serial Argument Goals
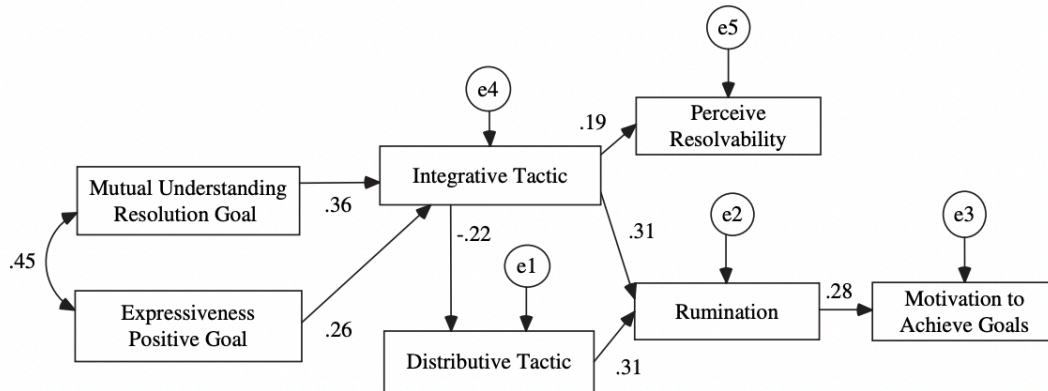
Serial arguments can be experienced in friendships, family, and professional relationships but are often found in romantic relationships (Cionea & Hample, 2015). Romantic relationships involve frequent contact, development of interdependence, and rely on self-disclosure (Johnson & Roloff, 1998). This suggests that relational partners engage in every-day occurrences of life together in ways that are unique to being intimate partners. Through the regular exchange of information and navigation of interdependence romantic partners inevitably encounter conflict. Serial arguments are a small, repeated form of conflict, and it is estimated that romantic partners have around three to four ongoing serial arguments that they engage in repeatedly (Johnson & Roloff, 1998). The types of arguments that typically arise within romantic relationships can easily turn into serial arguments due to the lack of resolvability of the topics such as intimacy, personal flaws, and communication issues (Kurdek, 1994; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). The communication, both within and about the serial argument, is related to the resolution of the argument, which links serial arguments to the communicative processes of resilience.

Work done by Richardson (2002), related to resilience, suggests that the process of resilience is best studied in the context of disruption given that it is how resilience is accessed. Without stressors, whether internal or external, individuals will not have a reason to build or manifest resilience. Although there is interest in the communication processes that build resilience it is impossible to study them without first identifying stressors or triggers that cause relational partners to draw upon their resilience. Since serial arguments are disruptive and rely on various features of communication in order to navigate, they serve as a useful context for examining manifestations of resilience through communication processes. Further, serial arguments take place frequently and repeatedly, which may demonstrate how resilience can be enacted in everyday experiences. If resilience can be developed and enacted during smaller scale events like serial arguments, it could, for example, help to foster a stronger foundation within the relationship. In turn, when couples face more serious, high-stress scenarios that are more challenging to overcome they may be more capable of doing so.

Serial Arguments and Adult Children of Harmful Parental Alcohol Use

Adult children of harmful parental alcohol use will likely face the same issue of serial arguments as all other couples, but their unique backgrounds and experiences could impact the ways they communicate surrounding the argument. Common developmental outcomes amongst adult children of harmful parental alcohol use such as low self-esteem (Anda et al., 2002; Kelley et al., 2010) and difficulties with emotion regulation (Haverfield & Theiss, 2017), could impede constructive communication surrounding serial arguments, and in turn, their demonstration of resilience. On the other hand, adult children of harmful parental

alcohol use may be more equipped and capable of enacting these resilience communication processes. As explained previously, adult children of harmful parental alcohol use have been shown to demonstrate increased resilience and a decrease in negative outcomes over time (Jennison & Johnson, 2001; Kim & Lee, 2011). Furthermore, they can utilize reframing methods to focus on their strengths and positive characteristics, which leads to higher self-esteem and resilience (Haverfield & Theiss, 2015). These outcomes, both negative and positive, make it so that the adult children of harmful parental alcohol use are a beneficial population within which the CTR and serial arguments can be studied.

To date, there has been no research directly studying CTR in the population of adult children of harmful parental alcohol use or in the context of smaller triggering events like serial arguments. Based on the information provided above, the goal of the current study aims to determine the prevalence and enactment of communicative resilience processes among adult children of harmful parental alcohol use in their experiences of serial arguments. As such, the following question is proposed:

> RQ1: How do adult children of harmful parental alcohol use communicate resilience in their experience of a serial argument with a romantic partner?

Methods

Given the previous focus on quantitative research, the current study adopts a predominantly qualitative approach, focusing on participant descriptions of how communicative resilience processes manifest in serial arguments, but also accounts for the frequencies of CTR processes and participant perceptions of relationship satisfaction, serial argument resolvability, and resilience. The goal of this study design is to not only learn about the presence and frequency of the processes in the context of participant experiences but to determine the ways they are enacted and how those communicative strategies could be used in practical contexts. Therefore, the foundation and framework of this study utilizes a post-positivist lens, including both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data within this research perceptions and observations of resilience could be explored. The main strengths of mixed-methods research, in general, is that it produces a more complete picture of a phenomenon and offers useful knowledge for both theory and practice (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The following section provides an overview of the study sample, procedures to collect data, and process for analyzing interview and survey data.

Sample

The sample size for the study was a total of 13 participants. Overall, 34 people contacted the PI with interest to participate. Of the 34, 30 took the eligibility survey and were eligible to continue. For various reasons a number of eligible participants did not continue to be a part of the study. Reasons include lack of available timing and expressed lack of interest. Other participants simply dropped out of the study without sharing why. Eligibility criteria

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required that participants be over the age of 18 and identify as being in a romantic relationship. The definition of a romantic relationship for this study was being committed to a partner for at least six months, as this time frame has been determined to be long enough to develop a serial argument (Bevan, 2014). The participant must have also self-identified as an adult child of a parent who harmfully consumes (or consumed) alcohol, verified using the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (CAST). The shortened version of the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test, the CAST-6 is a validated measure consisting of six items used to determine classification of an adult child of parents who harmfully consumed alcohol (Hodgins et al., 1993). If the respondents select "yes" as a response to two or more questions, the measure states that their parent(s) engaged in harmful alcohol use behaviors. The assessment questions relate to the behaviors of the participants' parents and their own emotions and thoughts about said behaviors. Therefore, if someone selected "yes" to two or more questions they would be considered eligible to participate in the study.

Procedures

Following IRB approval, announcements about the study including a recruitment flyer were circulated on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Reddit), posted in online listservs (e.g., National Council on Family Relations, COMMNotes), and shared among virtual support groups geared towards adult children of harmful parental alcohol use. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit as many participants as possible. Potential participants were encouraged to contact the Primary Investigator (PI) via email to confirm their interest in the study. Once contacted, potential participants were sent a Qualtrics screening survey link to confirm participant eligibility (see screening survey in Appendix A). This eligibility

survey included information about the study and consent to participate as well as the CAST-6. Once the initial screening survey was completed by the participant, the PI reviewed the results of the CAST-6 measure. If the participant was recognized as an adult child of harmful parental alcohol use, they were sent a link to complete a pre-interview survey. The pre-interview survey consisted of demographic questions and measures of resilience and relationship satisfaction. The questions in this survey were tested through a mock-interview with a member of the target population who did not participate in the survey. The questions were determined to be understandable by the lay-person and yielded useful responses. The survey also included a prompt that asked participants to list up to three serial arguments that they commonly have with their relationship partner that they would be willing to discuss in a recorded interview (see pre-interview survey in Appendix B). Examples of serial argument topics were provided to participants and included conversations about getting married, leaving dishes in the sink, and texting with an ex-partner. Upon completion of the pre-interview survey, the PI contacted participants to schedule the interview. Those who did not meet study eligibility based on the screening survey were notified as such and had no further involvement in the study.

Once a date and time were established, an interview with the participant took place over Zoom. As required by the IRB the advisor for this study was present for all interviews. The Zoom recording function was utilized for transcribing and coding purposes. Based on the completed survey, a recurring argument topic that was listed by the participant was selected by the PI and confirmed with participants at the start of the interview. Participants were then asked to briefly describe the serial argument topic, how the argument typically comes about,

what it entails, and its frequency. Then they were asked to consider typical instances of the serial argument as they responded to subsequent questions. Next, the PI asked a series of four questions utilizing a 5-point Likert scale, based on Johnson & Roloff's (1998) measure of perceived argument resolvability. Finally, 2-3 interview questions were asked for each of the five CTR processes, for a total of 11 open-ended questions (see Appendix B for full interview script). The interviews ranged from 13 minutes 10 seconds to 37 minutes 36 seconds, with an average length of 22 minutes 7 seconds. The interview questions were used to determine the presence of communication processes related to resilience and the different ways they were enacted by the participant. To conclude the interview, participants were given time to include any additional information they found important to share. Then the PI thanked participants for their involvement in the study, answered any further questions participants might have (i.e., when the study would be available to read), and informed them of the delivery method of their compensation, a $15 digital Amazon gift card, which concluded participant involvement in the study.

Data Analysis

Prior to analyzing the data, the PI downloaded each interview recording, created a unique identifier for the participant, and transcribed the interview verbatim. Pre-interview survey data and interview questions pertaining to perceived resolvability were collapsed into an excel spreadsheet according to the unique identifier created for each participant interview. Demographic information and all measures were analyzed using descriptive statistics via SPSS. Demographic information included gender, age, race/ethnicity, duration of the relationship in months, and highest level of education. Descriptive statistics were also used to

confirm the range and mean for perceived resolvability, relationship satisfaction, and resilience.

Survey Measures

Adult Children of Harmful Parental Alcohol Use. The CAST-6 was used to verify identification as an adult child of harmful parental alcohol use, as part of the eligibility criteria. The 6-item measure determines harmful parental alcohol use exposure status based on participants responding "Yes" to two or more question. This measure has been used previously (Elgán et al., 2020) and was found to have good reliability ($\alpha = .88$).

Resilience. To measure perceived resilience, the brief Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) was used (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This scale measured participant's perceived resilience. The CD-RISC has been tested in many different contexts and has been supported as a valid measure of individual resilience. The 10 questions in this measure use a Likert scale from 0 (not true at all) to 4 (very true). The total scores range from 10 (lower resilience) to 40 (higher resilience). This measure has been assessed previously (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007) and found to have good reliability with an alpha of .85. For participants who completed all parts of the current study, the scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .82$).

Relational Satisfaction. To determine participant satisfaction in their relationships with an identified romantic partner, the relationship satisfaction subscale of the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) Inventory was used (Fletcher et al., 2000). This subscale is a 3- item measure on a Likert scale of 1-7. The score is calculated by summing the responses to the questions, with a range of 3-21. This measure utilizes the subjective

perceptions and evaluations of the partners within a relationship to measure the relationship quality, and in this specific case, relationship satisfaction (Fletcher et al., 2000). In Fletcher et al. (2000) the reliability for the relationship satisfaction component of the index was high (α = .93). In the current study, the measure also demonstrated high reliability (α = .97).

Perceived Resolvability. At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to respond to four questions about how resolvable they perceive the serial argument to be. The potential range for perceived resolvability scores is 0 (high resolvability) to 20 (low resolvability), the lower the score the more resolvable the argument is perceived to be. This measure has previously been used and showed a high level of reliability (α = .89) (Johnson & Samp, 2022).

Serial Argument Topics

Participants were asked to include up to three topics that they identify as recurring, unresolved arguments with their relational partner. There are several different categories of serial arguments as explained previously. The purpose of collecting and analyzing this information was to illustrate the different types of serial arguments discussed by participants. Each participant listed two to three serial arguments, totaling 35 different arguments. Appendix C includes a table with all serial arguments listed and the ones selected to discuss during each interview. The serial argument topics fall into the categories of behavioral, personal, and idea-based conflicts (Cionea & Hample, 2015). Behavioral conflicts made up 60% of the argument topics, followed by personal conflicts at 28.5%, and idea-based conflicts made up the remaining 11%. The topics selected for discussion were chosen by the PI and agreed upon by the participant. The PI chose topics that were simultaneously not too

invasive or personal but detailed enough to gather pertinent information about the serial

argument and potential resilience communication processes.

Table 1.

Serial Argument Topics

Participant Identifier	Serial Argument 1	Serial Argument 2	Serial Argument 3
P01	Sleeping habits (going to bed too late)	Temper control	Excessive phone usage*
P02	Boundaries with family	Having children	Being / arriving late*
P03	Differing conflict styles / behaviors*	Lack of sexual activity	
P04	Introducing to family	Spending time together*	
P05	Family	Chewing	Not communicating need for space*
P06	Gender equality	Phone call with ex-partner*	
P07	Using condoms	Cheating	Getting home late*
P08	Getting married	Division of chores*	Finances
P09	Not calling	Texting with ex-partner*	
P10	Kitchen roles*	Strange phone calls	Unnecessary friends
P11	My mom's drinking	Being a stay-at-home mom	His lack of empathy*
P12	Putting things away*	Working on home projects	Frequency of visits to family
P13	Conflicts over money*	Excessive drinking	Kids living at home
* Signifies the serial argument selected for the interview			

Communication Processes

Interview data underwent a thematic analysis to explore manifestations of communicative

resilience (Buzzanell, 2010). The five processes from the CTR were used as a priori codes

and then additional codes were added based on emergent themes or concepts found in the

data (Dehn et al., 2022). This thematic analysis approach used deductive logic to identify instances of or references to each CTR process, of which the literature has already provided examples and guidelines. Then an inductive analysis enabled emergent themes outside of the CTR processes to be captured. To code data, each transcript was read through several times to first identify the CTR processes present. As the transcripts were read, key quotes that suggested the use and manifestation of each CTR process were highlighted and transferred to a coding spreadsheet. Each example of a process was included, regardless of whether it came directly from a response to a question related to a specific process. In other words, when participants referenced a different process than the one under consideration in the line of inquiry, it was still noted. To that end, the frequencies of each CTR process were calculated within each interview and across interviews. Based on the analysis, all five CTR processes were evident along with one additional theme of adaptive communication.

Results

To describe findings, the results of this study will be reviewed beginning with an overview of descriptive statistics and the types of serial arguments selected. Next, each of the five CTR processes will be reviewed in order of frequency to describe the ways in which participants manifest resilience through each communicative process. Lastly, the emergent theme of adaptive communication will be defined and explored as it pertains to communicative resilience.

Descriptive Statistics

Six of the participants identified as women (46%), six identified as men (46%), and one identified as non-binary/third gender (8%). The age range of the participants was from 23 to 59 years of age, with an average of 29 years. The majority of participants identified as Caucasian/White (46%), 38% as Black/African American, 7% as Hispanic/Latino, and 7% as Asian/Pacific Islander. The average duration of romantic relationships was 41 months (3 years 5 months), with a range from 6 to 144 months (12 years). In terms of education four participants had completed high school (30%), two had completed some college (15%), five had a 4-year college degree (38%), and two had a Masters Degree (15%).

In terms of perceived resolvability, the range of participant responses was 8-17, with an average of 12.7, showing moderate perceptions of resolvability. Relationship satisfaction, as measured by the PRCQ Index, ranged from 6-21 with an average of 16.78, suggesting that participants were generally satisfied with their relationships. For self-reported resilience from the CD-RISC, scores ranged from 16 to 40, with an average of 30, suggesting that participants perceived themselves as having higher levels of resilience.

Serial Argument Topics

In terms of the actual serial argument topics discussed in the interview, 84% were behavioral and 16% were personal. Examples of idea-based conflicts often were simply not clear or robust enough to discuss during the interview. Examples of behavioral conflicts typically revolved around a partner's unwanted or unappreciated behaviors, such as "excessive phone usage", "excessive drinking", "loud chewing", and "putting things away", and several participants cited arguments about interactions with ex-partners. Another type of behavioral serial argument occurred when both partners were having difficulties or disagreements about behaviors that they both were engaging in. These types of conflicts included financial disagreements, issues with the division of chores, and differing conflict styles and behaviors. Serial arguments like these tended to include a lot more direct communication and more demonstrations of the CTR communication processes. Given that both the participant and their partner were struggling, it seems like the desire to improve the situation is what led to demonstrations of communicative resilience. Personal conflicts were similarly nuanced but less frequent. They manifested in serial arguments about a lack of sexual activity, spending time together, introducing a partner to one's family, and frequency of visits to family. The core of these arguments is personal disagreement, typically driven by emotions, and contained a high amount of communicative resilience. Idea-based conflicts were the least frequent but included topics like "having the kids live at home", and "deciding on being a stay-at-home mom". However, no idea-based conflicts were selected to discuss. These different conflict types demonstrate the variation across serial arguments, yet many similar resilience communication processes were enacted.

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Communication Theory of Resilience Processes

Recall that the research question driving this study considered how adult children of harmful parental alcohol use's communicate resilience in their experiences of serial arguments with their romantic partner. It was found that all five CTR processes were present across the interviews. This finding supports the notion that the processes as defined by the CTR are present and enacted by adult children of harmful parental alcohol use in the context of serial arguments. In order of frequency, the CTR processes most used by adult children of harmful parental alcohol use were legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding positive action, crafting normalcy, maintaining and utilizing communication networks, affirming identity anchors, and putting alternative logics to work. The following section provides a more detailed breakdown of the frequencies of each process as well as examples of how each manifest in communication about serial arguments with a romantic partner.

Legitimizing Negative Feelings While Foregrounding Positive Action

Of the five communication processes, the most frequently demonstrated process was legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding positive action (27%). Recall that this process involves recognizing the fact that the situation, in this case the serial argument, is negative and then taking positive steps to move forward, through communication or meta-communication (Buzzanell, 2018). This process was found in every interview with a total of 40 representative quotes, and an average of 3.07 instances per interview, ranging from 1-6 mentions and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.57. One very common example was the notion of making concrete steps or plans to move forward. This came up in several interviews in different ways. For example, participant 1 noted that when the serial argument arises, they

speak with their partner and agree that "*something more constructive [is] needed… and set up a little bit of rules*". They would then work together to make and follow through on constructive plans. Participant 08 mentioned that they made "*a plan of action*" for themselves and their partner that, over time, has helped minimize the intensity of instances when this serial argument has taken place. They went on to explain that they "*always start small … if it's one minute to put something away, 5 minutes to put something away, just give me a hand with this one thing, we start small to build new habits*" These references to actual concrete positive action steps such as that the participants were making align with the definition of this communication process in the CTR. Participants were very conscious about how they enact positive change, frequently citing that they look for solutions and ways to change habits or patterns, instead of ruminating about the negative feelings that often accompanied these arguments.

Many responses referencing positive action steps also included references to self-care and other intrapersonal communication behaviors that helped the participant feel more positive about the situation and prepared to take steps to move forward. These types of intrapersonal behaviors are reminiscent of self-care, and the aim of these behaviors is to improve the participants overall wellbeing, which in turn assisted them in engaging in resilient communication behaviors. Participant 13 explained that he has "*a connection with a higher power now that [he] didn't have growing up*" and that he relies on "*a lot of prayer and meditation and self-care sometimes, not just stewing over the same thing over and over*" to help him remain positive. These self-care behaviors also included a lot of breathing exercises and meditative practices that participants used as tools to improve their overall emotional

wellbeing, return from a heightened emotional state in the moment, and increase their ability to remain positive and productive during the serial argument.

Another common approach within the process of legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action is verbally or nonverbally communicating love and positivity to their partner. This includes thinking positively about their partner and their relationship without necessarily communicating those thoughts. Some prevalent examples in this category include "*intentionally think[ing] positively about [my] partner and [our] relationship*" (P3), with other participants making references to being sympathetic, "*showing a loving and caring attitude*" (P13). These communication patterns and behaviors displayed a continued effort to make forward, positive change in the aftermath of serial arguments, instead of focusing only on the negative experience of the serial argument. One final example of this communication process is evident when a participant 08 said that after an instance of their serial argument they always "*hit [my partner] with the 'I love you, I'm going to do what I can to support you, we're gonna change this, or do this differently*". Participants expressed positivity while also acknowledging the new strategies they have found to navigate the serial argument.

Crafting Normalcy

The next most frequent communication process was crafting normalcy (23%), which had a total of 35 instances. The average was 2.69 instances per interview, with a range of 0 to 8 mentions ($SD = 2.01$). To reiterate, this process refers to the actions or conversations that participants took to return to a state of "normal" after the serial argument. These communication behaviors take place both individually, and through interactions with a

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partner. Crafting normalcy was often described as the conversation that occurred after the argument that helped participants and their romantic partner return to baseline interaction. Many participants noted a shift to negative emotions and thoughts in the direct aftermath of a serial argument. Participant 4 stated that the serial argument "*puts me in a bad mood, I get kind of upset and I kinda shut down*". However, that negative feeling shortly dissipates as the participant goes on to say that he *"always goes back to talking to her and texting her soon after"* to return to normal within their relationship. The process of crafting normalcy appears to happen unconsciously as participants frequently reference concepts like "*talking through it ... communicating about the issue and getting past it*" (P5), as a way they return to feeling normal. These conversations may not explicitly involve efforts to craft normalcy, but they work to do so, nonetheless. Examples of crafting normalcy also involve similar behaviors to the previous communication process of legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. These behaviors can involve nonverbal communication. Participant 08 noted the use of physical touch to "*show that we do still care and that we are supporting [them] through the situation*", which helped to bring back a normal, comfortable, and loving feeling within their relationship.

Emotion regulation appeared as part of the process of crafting normalcy. Behaviors that help with or demonstrate emotion regulation included calming oneself down, practicing mindfulness, and accepting one's emotions at the time. The emotion regulation strategy that participants practiced most was taking time and space away from their partner to calm down so that the argument never escalated too drastically. For example, participant 1 referenced "*Taking time away to cool down*" and participant 08 mentioned the importance of letting both

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partners "*get calm and collect [themselves]*". Participants reported that taking time away

from their partner, even if it was only for a few minutes, was very important to their

subsequent conversations and their ability to craft normalcy. Relatedly, participants touted

their ability to recognize one's own feelings and then take time to work through them before

returning to communicate with their partner. Participant 1 explained how her "*family has a*

history of hot tempers … and it's hard to control the problem once it starts and [she] gets

angry" so she is "*always aware of difficulties with anger and works hard to stay calm."* A

key aspect of crafting normalcy is the ability to return to a normal emotional state so that any

future conversations take place in a calm and constructive state for both partners, and

therefore is more productive. Normalizing not the serial argument itself but the ability to

communicate about it is an important part of the communication process of crafting normalcy

for adult children of harmful parental alcohol use. Other participants opted to leave the scene

of the argument, whether that was to get out of the house or just to another room and then

returned when they felt more capable of having a constructive and typical interaction. The

communication that takes place after one or both partners take physical space and time away

from each other reflects demonstrations of resilience because participants are not allowing

the serial argument to disrupt their life, they are able to overcome the challenge and do so in

a way they deem effective.

Maintaining and Utilizing Communication Networks

References to maintaining and using communication networks were also frequent (23%),

there were a total of 35 instances with an average of 2.69 per interview and a range of 0 to 6

mentions ($SD = 1.77$). As previously described, communication networks are defined as the

people with whom one feels comfortable connecting with and receiving support from. Relying on one's communication network, be that friends, family, coworkers, or others, for positive interactions supports resilience in that individuals are better equipped to make sense of and bounce back from the argument. Typically, participants spoke with a few trusted others, whether that was family members or close friends, and those interactions tended to help the majority of the time. In reference to a specific support group and his mentor, participant 13 stated "*I have a small group who I can relate to and people in my program to bounce things off of …[the support] has 100% helped*". This mirrored participant 3's response about her tight-knit but diverse group, saying that her "*[friends] offer a lot of perspectives…[they]are helpful and also affirm experiences.*" Asking for advice from family members was another commonality among participants, and participants frequently noted that they specifically speak with their mothers about the serial argument. Whether this is a new-found source of help, such as with participant 04 who "*just recently started talking to [his] mom about it*" or one frequently utilized like participant 08 who stated that they "*talk with Mom a lot, she's totally my support person*", participants find that getting advice from their mothers' is very helpful. Participant 08 goes on to state that "*it's always help, never harm from her. I think she's kind of a genius… She provides some sort of outside information that neither of us had ever thought in the moment to try and whenever we give it a shot it works.*" Participants identified trusted members within their communication network that they could rely on for support and advice and given how prevalent this communication process was across interviews it suggests that it is an easily enacted and beneficial process of the CTR. Participant 2 mentioned another reason for utilizing one's communication network;

"*it helps to talk about whatever's going on in the relationship instead of keeping it all inside.*" Participants reported experiencing both catharsis and commiseration as benefits of discussing the serial argument with their trusted support group of friends and/or family. Utilizing communication networks helps people to understand that they are not alone in their struggles, they can receive emotional support, and often directly benefit from advice and suggestions given to them.

Affirming Identity Anchors

Affirming identity anchors was the fourth most frequently used process (16%). There was a total of 23 instances, averaging 1.76 instances per interview, with a range of 0 to 3 (*SD* = 0.94). The process of affirming identity anchors typically takes place through internal thoughts and reflection about the various identities one is composed of (Buzzanell, 2018). Participants were able to lean into and take comfort from their identities. There were many different types of identities referenced but most of the participants expressed similar ways in which they leaned on their identities as a resource for and manifestation of resilience over the course of their serial argument. The first type of identity that was frequently discussed were racial identities or cultural backgrounds. This came in two main forms; first some participants relied on their cultural identity and related communication patterns to support their emotions as they worked through the argument. With participant 2, this presented in a very interesting cultural explanation that as a wife she wore many hats, "*the wife is sometimes like a mom because they take care of you … sometimes like your daughter because she depends on you … and then of course she is your counterpart and equal*". She explained that she was proud to be someone her husband could rely on to get through hard

times but even more proud of how they work together as counterparts. Her reliance on the cultural norms that she was taught as a child greatly influenced her ability to enact resilience. Another cultural reference was from participant 6 who proudly identified himself as "*a true African*". He felt as if the serial argument he was having with his partner was affected by his ego and noted that many African men had been taught from a young age to be strong, and proud, and a sense of ego had been instilled in him. However, he recognized the need to put his ego aside noting that his partner "*was actually seeing [the argument] from a different perspective, and [he] wanted to respect that*". While still drawing strength from his cultural background he learned to be more understanding and that everyone has a different background and perspective. Participant 3, however, found that her identity as a white woman often caused harm to her partner because he identifies as a person of color. She explained that she was nervous to engage or pursue the serial argument any further because she feared she would be "*enacting dominance, enacting privilege … given just being a white woman, it's unavoidable*". Nonetheless, she also used that identity and that discomfort to learn, grow, and "*reflect on privilege and positionality just to really try to perspective take*". Racial identities and cultural backgrounds evidently play a substantial role in the communication process of affirming identity anchors, especially when partners are of different racial or cultural backgrounds.

The next group of identity described by participants were personality traits. The most common traits that people pointed to were patience, the ability to remain calm, and independence. Participants who cited patience as one of their strongest personality traits expressed that they were able to lean into that and wait until their partner was ready to either

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have a conversation or return to normal interactions, which helped minimize the intensity of the serial argument, thereby demonstrating resilience. Participant 7 stated that "I've learned that I am actually very patient", participant 04 noted "I'm just a very calm person and overall understanding", and participant 13 expressed that "I've always had a heck of a lot of confidence in who I am … my personality traits have always been positive". The ability to recognize and draw on those identities benefitted participants in the experience of the serial argument and reflective of affirming identity anchors.

The last category of responses relating to the process of affirming identity anchors were responses that focused on identities in relation to others. The first relationship that was referenced was their romantic relationship with their partner. Actions or conversations that center the relationship as part of the solution to the serial argument without intensely blaming one person or the other were common. Participant 1 noted that in the build-up to, during, and in the aftermath of the argument the participant always reminded her husband that they are "*work[ing] together towards the same direction*" which helped them to remain strong and resilient as a couple. She also felt more confident in herself when viewing her relationship as a true partnership. Connecting both previous categories of maintaining and utilizing communication networks and crafting normalcy, one very interesting response from participant 08 focused on how they affirm their own identity as a "*whole person … not somebody's better half*" and individually both partners "*get back in touch with the singularity of [themselves]*" before returning to each other and leaning into their romantic relational identity. Identities are multi-faceted, but some become more salient during and after serial

arguments. Participants who were more aware of and confident in their identities appeared better able to demonstrate resilience according to the process of affirming identity anchors.

Putting Alternative Logics to Work

The least commonly cited communication process was putting alternative logics to work (10%), with a total of 15 instances, averaging 1.15 instances per interview, ranging from 0 to 3 (*SD* = 0.92). Alternative logics are the contradictory thoughts or ideas that one creates through re-framing the issue or communicating about it differently. Putting these alternative logics to work often takes place through communication surrounding the topic of the serial argument, not about the instance of the argument itself. Most of the responses that reflected the use of alternative logics focused on celebrating the small wins and even slight progress made towards resolution as opposed to tackling the argument as a whole. Participant 1 discussed that she tries hard to "*focus on the improvements*" she sees in her partner as the serial argument occurrences continue. Instead of acknowledging the situation and addressing it in its entirety, participants minimized it and looked for wins where they could. Alternatively, another participant explained that she has completely changed her expectations so that when she does talk with her partner about the issue she is no longer as affected. In a similar instance, participant 3's serial argument was often influenced by the actions of others outside of her relationship. She frequently reminded herself and her partner that the "*external circumstances that cause the issue won't be in [their] lives for very much longer*". They talk about the future, and scenarios where they do not have to deal with the people causing them harm, and then are preemptively grateful that they could overcome their current situation. Another example of putting alternative logics to work is perspective taking, wherein

participant 5 figuratively "*puts [themself] in the shoes of [their] partner to walk a mile*". This allows them to see the argument from the other side and ultimately with that new-found perspective, they can have more productive communication with their partner. Furthermore, participant 5 noted that she would use the results of the argument, in her case needing to give her partner space, to her benefit. Instead of canceling plans she will "*go do them alone ... have personal space and be excited by just being by [herself]*". When she returns home and her partner is ready to have a conversation about the issue, they are both in a more positive and calmer mindset. Being able to transform a potentially negative situation into a positive one is a great example of putting alternative logics to work.

Adaptive Communication

Beyond the five CTR processes already described, another theme emerged when analyzing the transcribed interviews, the idea of practicing adaptive communication (9%). There were 14 instances of this behavior, averaging 1.15 instances per interview, and ranging from 0 to 3 instances ($SD = 1.29$). Adaptive communication refers to comments from participants about the negative behaviors observed during childhood and their efforts to actively avoid those patterns in their current relationships. This theme is distinct from the CTR processes because it is not something that is typically enacted during the serial argument, rather it is a strategic and deliberate effort to change one's communication patterns and behaviors in general, especially as related to conflict. Most participants brought this topic up when discussing what has influenced their communication and the way they handle the serial argument with their partner. When discussing their adaptive communication, participants typically first mentioned their experiences with their parent's harmful alcohol

use behavior and how that impacted their understanding and use of communication patterns.

They then went on to explain how they intentionally adjusted their own communicative

approaches, particularly in regards to relationships and conflict, in an effort to avoid

engaging in communication behaviors similar to that of their parent(s). Of the 13

participants, 6 of them directly brought up their parent's alcohol use and their subsequent

implementation of adaptive communication.

For example, watching parents argue, oftentimes without any resolution or for no

apparent reason, influenced participants to recognize these behaviors in their own

interactions and adjust to minimize those situations. Participant 5 mentioned that her parents

frequently argued: "*just to argue… [and] watching that growing up made [her] really wanna*

make sure that whoever [she] was living with or would spend [her] life with, was able to

actually talk through a problem and not want to argue just to argue". Participant 8 stated that

they:

> "grew up watching my parents argue about [their] mom working all the time and
> [their] dad not working as much, and he still wouldn't pick up the slack … so [they]
> watched that and said, 'I need to make sure my partner never feels like they're doing
> everything and I'm doing nothing."

This was directly tied to the topic of the serial argument but also tied to the idea that adult

children of harmful parental alcohol use were exposed to a lot of negative communication

patterns and learned from them to engage in more constructive conflict behaviors. Participant

2 explained that it took time for her to learn what was acceptable and not acceptable in

romantic relationships because, in her childhood, *"[she] thought that relationships were all*

about domestic violence, like [she] thought that was love" and as an adult "*had no clue what*

healthy relationships looked like". Eventually she and her partner both recognized that "*both*

of [their] parents were in unhealthy relationships and what was modeled in childhood was not the ideal partner to seek later on". Adult children of harmful parental alcohol use may be negatively impacted as a result of growing up with a parent who harmfully consumed alcohol however, a possible silver lining is that they may be more equipped to recognize negative communication patterns and behaviors and prevent them from taking place within their own romantic relationships.

Discussion

This study utilized the Communication Theory of Resilience to study how adult children of harmful parental alcohol use manifest resilience in serial arguments with their romantic partners. Adult children of harmful parental alcohol use demonstrated resilience in the face of serial arguments with their romantic partner by enacting the CTR processes. Furthermore, it was found that the most frequently used and helpful communicative process for this population was legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. Following legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action were the processes of crafting normalcy and maintaining and utilizing communication networks, which were enacted at an equal frequency. Communication patterns and behaviors within these processes took many forms but were present in every interview, and participants expressed the benefits of them often. The remaining two CTR processes, affirming identity anchors and putting alternative logics to work, were also present thereby strengthening the utility of the CTR. Further, findings support the idea that resilience can be enacted in more minor everyday stressors such as serial arguments, not just in times of intense upheaval or trauma. Taken together, findings present implications for both theory and practice.

Communication Theory of Resilience Processes

Of the five CTR processes, legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action was the most frequently evident in the data. This is an example of an integrative tactic, wherein one partner puts forth their ideas and negotiates with the other, while still focusing their partner's ideas as well (Ohbuchi & Tadeschi, 1997). When foregrounding productive action, the goal is to move forward productively through the serial argument in a way that is

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positive for both partners, thus it is an integrative conflict tactic. It was found across every interview with detailed examples of how participants enacted the process. Consistent with previous research (Buzzanell, 2010), adult children of harmful parental alcohol use also create plans and take productive steps to move forward after a serial argument to overcome adversity. Foregrounding positivity and productivity allowed adult children of harmful parental alcohol use to take control of the circumstances surrounding the serial argument, something that they likely could not do during childhood due to turbulence within the household (Liepman et al., 1989). Therefore, being able to do so as an adult within their romantic relationships shows how they can overcome both the adverse experiences of their childhoods and the difficulties of the serial arguments, thus demonstrating resilience. This process also includes the concept of emotion regulation. When one is able to recognize their feelings, legitimize them, and remain positive and productive, they are regulating their emotions in a mature way. Furthermore, this process was found to be very intentional. Participants clearly made decisions about their actions and communication patterns in order to create positive and productive action. This included examples of both internal considerations and external conversations with partners to manifest this CTR process.

The ability to craft normalcy, to return to some semblance of normal interactions following a serial argument, was another communication process of resilience frequently demonstrated by adult children of harmful parental alcohol use. Most participants recognized that it took work for them to "get back to normal", whether that included calming down by oneself first, or by going directly into conversations with their partner right away. Previous research on this process found more attempts to communicate as if things were normal, such

as asserting and performing normal behaviors and carrying on with life as if everything was in fact normal (Buzzanell, 2010). Much like in the study conducted by Scharp et al. (2020) participants explained the ways they try to continue with typical behaviors or activities during or after the serial argument. This finding suggests that an important part of crafting normalcy is to return to normal communication patterns and behaviors. Instead of ruminating on the serial argument, partners quickly return to normal as a way to begin moving forward. One finding surrounding this process that has important implications for the study of the CTR is that participants frequently engaged in meta-communication about the serial argument. In a way they crafted normalcy by normalizing the communication surrounding the argument. Results suggest that partners can demonstrate resilience by normalizing the communication about the serial argument to readily return to normal. This does not normalize or encourage the serial argument to continue, rather it gives partners an additional tool to manage when it does occur. Consistent with the previous process, crafting normalcy was typically found to be intentional. When purposefully trying to craft normalcy, participants used methods like actively trying to return to normal types of conversations with their partners, or even engaging in meta-communication about the serial argument. By deliberately approaching the process of crafting normalcy participants were more easily able to return to normal, thus demonstrating resilience.

Another CTR process often utilized by adult children of harmful parental alcohol use was maintaining and utilizing communication networks, another example of an integrative conflict tactic. This process was important to participants because it helped build and demonstrate resilience in several ways. First, the ability to share information about their

serial arguments with others allowed participants to draw upon the existing bonds they have with their support networks and learn from the advice given to them. Previous research has found that maintaining and utilizing communication networks is deeply intertwined with the rest of the CTR processes, and this finding was supported in the current study (Buzzanell, 2010). While utilizing communication networks, participants were also able to affirm their identity anchors, craft normalcy, and foreground productive and positive action. Interactions with one's network takes place repeatedly and over time, enabling participants to continually develop and manifest resilience. The most closely related process was that of affirming identity anchors, wherein participants were able to rely on those close to them to support both their individual and relational identities. As they positively interact with the people around them, adult children of harmful parental alcohol use are not only demonstrating the CTR process of utilizing their communication networks, but they are also tapping into other processes, thus strongly reinforcing resilience. This finding is contradictory to the idea that adult children of harmful parental alcohol use have difficulties in other interpersonal relationships during adulthood, but it is supported by some research which suggests that this population frequently develops deep and supportive social networks (Menees, 1997). As some participants noted, they developed rich relationships with their friends because of not having such relationships with their biological families, suggesting the importance of voluntary kin (Braithwaite et al., 2010). Voluntary kin are the people who one has mutually selected to become a part of their family, and it is clear that adult children of harmful parental alcohol use benefit from voluntary kin relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2010). When maintaining and utilizing communication networks, this process often requires a conscious

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decision to discuss arguments. In other words, people intentionally and actively work to address arguments in order to engage in the CTR process of maintaining and utilizing communication networks. Collectively, the key finding related to this CTR process is that adult children of harmful parental alcohol use have strong communication networks that help to foster resilience.

One of the least identified CTR processes in the data was affirming identity anchors. Based on this finding, it appears that participants did not rely on their identities in the ways demonstrated in previous research however, when participants did utilize this process, the examples conveyed the benefit of this strategy in overcoming difficult circumstances (Buzzanell, 2010). Included in participants responses were both personal and relational identities that were used to bolster one's self-assuredness. Many parts of one's identity are often thought of as changing and evolving, but within the context of resilience and the CTR specifically, the focus is on stable identities that one knows to be true of themselves in the moment. During serial arguments, certain identities appear to serve as anchors enabling resilience. In the case of these serial arguments, those that have a clearer sense of themselves in that moment or during that argument may be better equipped to engage in this communicative resilience process. An additional finding related to the serial argument process was that certain identities became more salient either before, during, or after the serial argument. When working through the argument with one's partner their relational identity became more important, whereas when internally thinking about the issue participants relied more on who they are as individuals. This can be related to the "heating up" and "simmering down" phases of the serial argument process model (Bevan, et al.,

2008). When the argument is heating up participants usually focused more on their personal identities and how they were related either to the topic of the argument or how they were handling it, but as the argument simmered down, they reunited with their partner and emphasized their relational identities. Unlike the first three processes, affirming identity anchors was both intentional and unintentional. The majority of examples included focusing on aspects of one's identity that felt stable and important in the moment. In addition, there were more subconscious or subtle behaviors found. After participants actively recognized an important identity related to the serial argument, they then tapped into that identity subconsciously. For example, personal traits and strengths were mentioned directly, and participants often followed-up those statements with examples of them acting out those traits. The initial recognition and affirmation of the identity was the first step of this process, but it was just as important when participants unintentionally engaged in behaviors based on that identity.

This process utilized more subconscious behaviors which could explain why this process was less frequent in the data, compared to very intentional processes. Ultimately, all different types of identities were found to be interrelated and important to how adult children of harmful parental alcohol use manifest resilience.

The most infrequent CTR process was putting alternative logics to work. This appeared to be the least conducive and recurrent resilience process for adult children of harmful parental alcohol use, unlike other research wherein it was found to be very common and ubiquitously beneficial in terms of resilience for participants. Scharp et al.'s (2020) study on migration triggers discussed how participants had many ways to create and put alternative

logics to work. In the context of serial arguments, the issues that participants face may be more trivial and require less need for alternatives to cope. It is possible that participants utilize alternative logics less because they have a greater understanding of what a dysfunctional relationship can look like, and they view their situation as more functional. Similarly, they may have learned from the negative communication patterns they experienced during childhood to avoid falling into the same patterns, ultimately reducing the intensity of the serial arguments. In other words, the serial arguments that were discussed were not typically serious, therefore they did not feel the need to engage in this process. Notably, there were few nuanced explanations of communication behaviors that fell in line with the CTR process of putting alternative logics to work. A possible reason for this is the nature of the questions posed in the interview. The questions were aimed at discerning how participants thought about and dealt with the experience or outcome of the serial argument, to see how they re-frame the situation, but the responses were more in line with other processes and rarely captured information directly about alternative logics. This process is likely the hardest to "see", as it is a particularly subconscious behavior. Perhaps it is hard for participants to recount examples of enacting this process. Further, it is hard to discern when behaviors or communication patterns might suggest the use of alternative logics as opposed to other CTR processes such as legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action or crafting normalcy. When analyzing the transcripts for any occurrences of this process, whether in the context of the specific interview questions or not, it was rare to find detailed and clear examples. However, the low frequency of this CTR process is not necessarily due to the complexity of the questions, but potentially because it is simply the least useful process

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for adult children of harmful parental alcohol use. When participants demonstrated three or more CTR processes in their interviews, putting alternative logics to work was consistently absent, suggesting that it is not helpful or easily enacted or observed within this population and context.

The CTR processes were not isolated. In many instances they overlapped or occurred very closely together to increase their usefulness. The most frequently combined processes were legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action and crafting normalcy. These two processes included similar examples and worked well together to foster resilience. In addition, affirming identity anchors and maintaining and utilizing communication networks were occasionally interrelated. While communicating with others, or with one's partner, various identities became more salient as they were considered more stable or important at the time. Typically, when communicating with friends or family members one's personal identities were drawn upon, whereas when directly communicating with one's partner the relational identity was stronger. Putting alternative logics to work was not found in conjunction with any other processes, likely due to its unique and subconscious nature. This suggests that not only are the CTR process frequent and useful on their own, but they can also become even more potent when used together.

When considering the frequency of the CTR processes it is also important to consider the perceived resilience and relationship satisfaction scores. The average perceived resilience as measured by the CD-RISC was 30 (maximum 40), which means that participants believe that they are highly resilient. This makes sense given the frequencies and detailed descriptions given about the CTR processes. While there was no statistically significant correlation, it

suggests the utility in further examination. In addition, relationship satisfaction was high, which could indicate two things. First, participants who have satisfying and fulfilling relationships are more likely to enact these resilience processes because they have built a strong foundation within their relationship. Second, it could be that their frequent use of the CTR processes when dealing with serial arguments contributes to their overall relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, participants averaged 12.7 out of 20 on perceived resolvability. This means that they believe the serial argument is moderately resolvable, which also impacts the presence of the CTR processes in their interview responses. Since they do not think the argument is likely to be resolved their focus is on how to manage the argument as opposed to solving it. It also suggests that the arguments are representative of what is considered a serial argument, in that they are not likely to be resolved. These three concepts are both closely related to the enactment of communicative resilience processes and the way that participants experience their serial argument.

Emergent Theme – Adaptive Communication

A new and unexpected theme emerged from the data, adaptive communication, which refers to the ability to learn from observed negative communication behaviors and adapt or change one's own behaviors to be more positive and productive. Many participants referenced negative experiences during childhood that impacted their beliefs about communication. Some participants were able to immediately learn from and actively do the opposite of those observed parental behaviors, while others had to learn through their own failed experiences. Previous research identified similar uses of adaptive communication within families of a parent who harmfully consumes alcohol (Haverfield et al., 2016). This

theme is distinct from the CTR processes because it focuses more on the deliberate strategic effort to change one's communication patterns, rather than on the communication itself. This is important because it shows growth and development, which can be seen as markers of resilience. Adult children of harmful parental alcohol use are able to observe negative behaviors from their past and intentionally change their own communication patterns and behaviors. When discussing ways that the participants had learned from and adapted their communication in response to observing others during childhood, they also included references to the five CTR processes. This suggests that adaptation is a very closely related process to the processes of communicative resilience and points to the need for additional research on adaptive communication in relation to CTR processes, among and beyond adult children of harmful parental alcohol use.

Implications for Theory

This study found that the five CTR processes were evident among adult children of harmful parental alcohol use, reinforcing the utility of these processes in fostering resilience and providing another view of resilience among this population. This shows that, despite facing many challenges during childhood, adult children of harmful parental alcohol use can and do demonstrate communicative resilience. The potential turbulence, inconsistency, and negative communication patterns experienced in childhood, do not necessarily impede one's ability to manifest communicative resilience (Beesley & Stoltenberg, 2002; Straussner & Fewell, 2011). Carrying forward this idea and applying it to the CTR, it suggests that this theory transcends populations and can be enacted by anyone.

Further, it supports the process aspect of this theory, that resilience can be enacted repeatedly. Previous research on the Communication Theory of Resilience examined communication processes in the context of intense, high trauma situations. This study found that resilience processes can be demonstrated in repeated, every-day stressors like serial arguments. It is an important distinction and implication for future research of this theory. In other words, resilience is enacted in every-day situations that disrupt life, even just to a minimal level, and the processes identified by CTR are useful strategies for promoting resilience even in these moments. The findings also support the idea that the CTR processes are inter-related and entangled, given that many responses hinted at multiple processes occurring at the same time (Buzzanell, 2018). This entangled nature was further solidified as participants detailed the ways they used the processes in tandem over time when recounting their experiences with serial arguments. During each serial argument instance and over the course of their repetitive occurrences, participants demonstrated strong connections between processes, and even combined aspects of them. In terms of the CTR this could mean that the processes not only work individually but could even be more useful when integrated and combined.

Although the focus of this study was on the manifestation of the CTR processes in the context of serial arguments, the information gathered about serial arguments provide insights to the conceptualization of serial arguments. Based on reports of perceived resolvability, participants believed that the arguments they were engaging in with their partners were neither highly resolvable nor highly unresolvable. This reinforces the notion that serial arguments continue over time without reaching resolution. The resilience processes enacted

during the serial arguments do not serve to solve the arguments, rather they are used to work through the arguments each time they arise. This also parallels phases of the serial argument in terms of the primary act of confronting a partner, the secondary process of heating up and cooling down over time, and the ways in which partners engage in different types of communication during these different phases (Bevan et al., 2008; Trapp & Hoff, 1985). The CTR processes utilized appear to change depending on the phase of the serial argument. Participants most frequently manifested the CTR processes during the "simmering down" phases of the serial arguments, where they are trying to move past the frustrations of the argument and focus instead on the issue as a whole or the relationship (Trapp & Hoff, 1985). This can be exemplified by the processes of legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action and crafting normalcy. These processes both involve moving forward after the argument and, just like the cooling down phase, can take place repeatedly over the course of the serial argument. This informs the understanding of the serial argument process and how different communication and CTR processes are enacted in different phases and allows for the potential to examine specifics of when and how the processes are enacted. Moreover, as the CTR processes are manifested differently over the course of the serial argument, they also demonstrate the use of different conflict tactics, specifically integrative ones. Depending on the argument, many participants used the CTR processes of legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action and crafting normalcy rather quickly, trying to integrate goals and center the success of the couple rather than the continuation of the argument. Furthermore, it was found that some of the CTR processes, as well as aspects of serial arguments, were more intentional compared to

others that were more subconscious in nature. The "heating up" process was more covert at the start, but as participants began to realize that they were experiencing an instance of the serial argument, it became more overt and obvious. This continued throughout the use of the intentional CTR processes, and into the "simmering down" phase. Throughout the different phases of serial arguments and across the CTR processes, some communicative processes were very intentional, whereas others took place more subconsciously.

Additionally, this study is unique in that it used qualitative methods to study the experiences of serial arguments. This novel approach allowed for the collection of descriptive data around serial arguments, how communication takes place and changes, and how resilience is enacted during these experiences. The qualitative methods used assisted in learning more about the detailed manifestations of the CTR processes as well as exploring alignment with the serial argument process. Overall, the various aspects of the CTR are present and connected to the different phases and aspects of serial arguments.

Another important finding about serial arguments is that adult children of harmful parental alcohol use expressed that they learned things each time the argument took place, which they could then use the next time the argument arose. Since serial arguments are by nature frequent issues within relationships, being able to understand what communication behaviors are beneficial or not is a key part of working through the arguments. This could be related to both the adaptability of adult children of harmful parental alcohol use and to the repetitive nature of the serial argument. As previously stated, adult children of harmful parental alcohol use appear to adapt their communication as they overcome challenges, and combined with the fact that serial arguments happen frequently, it is possible that these two

factors influence how the participants can manifest resilience and work through the arguments. Once again, participants are not resolving the issue, they are just learning how to better manage the arguments when they do occur. Relatedly, the ability to successfully manage the serial arguments could be connected to the relatively high levels of relationship satisfaction reported by participants. This could be either a cause or an effect, but either way, it is possible that there is a correlation between the ability to move through and manage serial arguments and relationship satisfaction. Regardless of the potentially challenging experiences of their childhoods, or because of the positive communication skills and strengths they learned as a result of their childhoods, adult children of harmful parental alcohol use are still able to manifest communicative resilience through these processes. Further, it ties together every-day situations.

The additional theme of adaptive communication is related to the experience of serial arguments and the conflict styles enacted by participants. At its core, adaptive communication is the intentional shift in communication patterns and behaviors, including when engaging in conflict, from what one learned or observed during childhood. As children observe their parents' relationship they learn behavior patterns, including conflict resolution strategies, that typically stick with them until adulthood (Feldman et al., 1998). Adult children of harmful parental alcohol use are unique in that they adapt their communication away from the negative patterns that they may have observed during childhood. From these observation, they intentionally push back against what was modeled for them, and instead engaged in more constructive communication processes, especially in the context of conflict and serial arguments.

Implications for Practice

This study presents several practical implications in terms of applying the findings to adult children of harmful parental alcohol use, their experiences of serial arguments, and the study of serial arguments in general populations. First, the CTR processes provide a useful guide for practitioners working with adult children of harmful parental alcohol use and for adult children themselves. Whether through therapy, guided self-help books, classes, or other methods of distribution, the concepts, and processes of the CTR could be packaged for broader dissemination and application. This could be particularly helpful to adult children of harmful parental alcohol use who are struggling in their interpersonal relationships, who may not have communication networks to lean on for support. Beyond the findings related to the CTR, the emergent theme of adaptive communication could also be drawn upon to help adult children of harmful parental alcohol use. Many participants noted that they were influenced by negative communication behaviors during childhood, and they actively worked to avoid or break those patterns in adulthood. It would be beneficial for adult children of harmful parental alcohol use to understand the potential for behavior change. Although they experienced certain types of communication patterns and conflict behaviors growing up, they do not have to continue those behaviors and are deserving of more healthy interactions in their own lives.

There are also practical implications for serial arguments and important takeaways for general populations to utilize resilience processes. When engaging in serial arguments people can manifest resilience through the processes described in the CTR, therefore people who are struggling with serial arguments would benefit from learning about these processes. Using

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communication to manifest resilience is not a hard concept to grasp, so educating people about the CTR can help them to be better prepared to handle serial arguments in resilient ways. The basic concepts behind each CTR process are easy to understand, however, it is more difficult to enact these processes in real life scenarios, so it is important to practice them in safe settings. It is useful to be prepared to handle the serial argument situation when it arises therefore, learning the CTR processes and practicing how to use them in realistic argument scenarios can help people develop communicative resilience. Again, whether this is through therapy or other self-help methods, applying the CTR to real world experiences of serial arguments can help people manage their communication and adjust their expectations surrounding their serial arguments. Furthermore, this extends to any population and dyadic relationship, given that the CTR processes have been effective across stressful circumstances and relationships. It is beneficial to apply the findings of this study to the general public through the continued study of resilience and serial arguments in broader populations.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that caused difficulties and delays, and impacted the data that was collected. One limitation had to do with the circulation of the study. Posts were created via Reddit in several Subreddits focused on academia or higher education. Interested participants reached out to the PI via direct chats. One participant mentioned that they had a few friends interested in participating so they shared the study with them as well. According to the CAST-6 all participants were eligible however a few of the serial argument topics were inappropriate. It became apparent after four interviews that there was a pattern occurring. Upon returning to the pre-interview survey, it was observed that a

few of the previously interviewed participants and many of the ones who had completed the survey but were not yet interviewed had selected the same response on the CAST-6 to each question, whether that was "always true", "somewhat true" or "never true". Due to the uncertainty stemming from this seemingly interested and eligible group, several scheduled participants were asked to elaborate on their survey responses and the serial arguments they selected to discuss. The purpose of this extra step was to determine the legitimacy and appropriateness of the serial argument topics listed. Based on the responses during the second vetting stage, three participants who had already been scheduled for an interview were told that they were unable to continue with the study. It is possible that the compensation offered enticed people to participate even if they were not actually qualified. Another limitation is related to the self-reported resilience as determined by the CD-RISC. The average resilience score for participants was very high, which could be because the study was looking at a particularly resilient subset of the population. Further, although the sample size is considered appropriate for qualitative, interview-based research (Malterud et al., 2016), findings are not generalizable to the larger population of adult children of harmful parental alcohol use. While the sample size is small, a strength of the study is the frequency in which serial arguments typically occur, thereby enabling better recall when compared to other studies that ask participants to reflect on a previous interaction. Some participants even noted that they had engaged in the serial argument within the past few days, furthering their ability to accurately recall the experience.

Future Directions

While the findings from this specific study are not wholly generalizable, they do inform future directions and highlight gaps in research that should be explored. First and foremost, continued research into the experiences of adult children of harmful parental alcohol use, especially the way that resilience manifests in that population, is of paramount importance. Since it has been found that the CTR processes are present in adult children of harmful parental alcohol use's experience of serial arguments with romantic partners, one potential avenue for future study is to determine what the most beneficial actions within those processes are and determine efficient ways to circulate that knowledge broadly. Many participants, and adult children of harmful parental alcohol use in general, seek out therapy. Identifying ways to implement these resilience processes through therapy, or other forms of self-help, would be beneficial. Additionally, it would be useful to incorporate CTR processes in couples therapy, for adult children of harmful and non-harmful parental alcohol use, to manifest resilience when confronted by serial arguments. Another potentially useful direction for future research would be studying the interrelated nature of the CTR processes and how they can be combined for optimal efficacy and resilience. Furthermore, the emergent theme of adaptive communication is another avenue for future research. Due to its prevalence among adult children of harmful parental alcohol use, it would be useful to explore this strategy further in resilience research, particularly within the framework of the CTR.

Conclusion

Throughout this research study the overarching goal was to explore how resilience is communicated within the population of adult children of harmful parental alcohol use in the

context of serial arguments with their romantic partners. This was done through the framework of the Communication Theory of Resilience, and the specific context of serial arguments. The intersection of theory, population, and context created a unique way in which each could be studied. The findings largely support existing literature about the CTR and the experiences of adult children of harmful parental alcohol use. The presence of all five CTR processes provide another example of how adult children of harmful parental alcohol use demonstrate resilience. The process demonstrated most frequently was legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. This communicative resilience process refers to the ways in which this population can reclaim some control and embody resilience by making necessary changes to make their situations, in this case serial arguments, more manageable. Findings also illustrate that resilience can, and should, be enacted in every-day situations, not just in the aftermath of serious obstacles. In sum, the findings of this study further theoretical and practical understandings and applications of the Communication Theory of Resilience and serial arguments. More importantly however, they shine a positive light on the often-challenged population of adult children of harmful parental alcoholics and show that they can be incredibly resilient in the face of hardships.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Part 1 - Consent, CAST for Verification of Participation Eligibility

Consent

1. Do you consent to participate in this survey?

    a. I Agree

    b. I Do Not Agree

2. Do you consent to audio and video recordings of later observations and interviews?

    a. I Agree

    b. I Do Not Agree

3. Are you 18 years of age or older?

    a. Yes

    b. No

CAST brief (Yes/No)

1. Have you ever thought that one of your parents had a drinking problem?

2. Did you ever encourage one of your parents to quit drinking?

3. Did you ever argue or fight with a parent when he or she was drinking?

4. Have you ever heard your parents fight when one of them was drunk?

5. Have you ever felt like hiding or emptying a parent's bottle of liquor?

6. Did you ever wish that a parent would stop drinking?

Part 2 – Pre-Interview Survey

1. Demographics

1. What is your biological sex?

    1. Male

    2. Female

2. What is your gender?

    1. Male

    2. Female

    3. Non-binary / third gender

    4. Prefer to self-describe ----

    5. Prefer not to say

3. What is your age in years? ---

4. What is your ethnicity (select all that apply)

    1. African American

    2. Asian / Pacific Islander

    3. Caucasian / White

    4. Hispanic / Latino

    5. Indian

    6. Middle Eastern

    7. Native American

    8. Other ---

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

    1. High School

    2. Some College

      3. 2-year College Degree

      4. 4-year College Degree

      5. Masters Degree

      6. Ph.D., MD, or other advanced degrees

      7. Other

  6. What is the duration of your romantic relationship in months? —

2. CD-RISC 10 (5 pt Likert scale; not true at all (0) - true nearly all the time (4)

  1. I am able to adapt when changes occur

  2. I can deal with whatever comes my way

  3. I try to see the humorous side of things when I am faced with problems

  4. Having to cope with stress can make me stronger

  5. I tend to bounce back after illness, injury, or other hardships

  6. I believe I can achieve my goals, even if there are obstacles

  7. Under pressure, I stay focused and think clearly

  8. I am not easily discouraged by failure

  9. I think of myself as a strong person when dealing with life's challenges and difficulties

  10. I am able to handle unpleasant or painful feelings like sadness, fear, and anger

3. Perceived Relationship Quality Inventory - Satisfaction Section (7 pt Likert scale; (1) not at all - (7) extremely)

  1. How satisfied are you with your relationship?

  2. How content are you with your relationship?

3. How happy are you with your relationship?

4. A serial argument exists when individuals argue or engage in conflict about the same topic over time, during which they participate in several (at least two) arguments about the topic. Please list up to 3 examples of serial arguments that you have with your partner. During the interview I will you questions related to one of the serial arguments listed.

    1.

    2.

    3.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Of the serial arguments that you listed:

I selected:

To talk about in this interview. Can you take a moment to briefly explain how this argument comes about and what it typically looks like or involves?

So to confirm this is an argument that has occurred on a number of occasions?

For the first 4 questions I will have you answer on a scale of 1-5, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree.

1. I believe that this argument will never be resolved

2. I do not think my partner and I will ever agree on this issue

3. I anticipate that this issue will always be a problem

4. I think we will eventually resolve this argument.

Thank you for that information. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about how you navigate:

Please answer in as much detail as you feel comfortable sharing!

Crafting Normalcy

1. How does the ending of this argument affect the rest of your day with your partner?

2. How do you adjust to having normal interactions after having this argument?

Affirming Identity Anchors

1. Our identities are the many unique characteristics that make us up. How do you think your identities (as a student, friend, employee, etc.) are connected to this argument topic?

2. How do you use your various identities to make you feel better after this argument?

Maintaining and Using Communication Networks

1. Do you talk to your friends or family about this argument?

2. How do those conversations help you or harm your ability to cope with this argument?

Putting Alternative Logics to Work

1. How do you deal with the outcome of each serial argument occurrence?

2. How do you use what you learn each time this argument comes up to prepare you for future occurrences of this argument?

3. What do you do to manage your feelings or expectations after engaging in the argument?

Downplaying Negative Feelings While Foregrounding Productive Action

1. In what ways do you try to remain positive after this argument instead of feeling negative about it?

2. How do you take steps to move forward after this argument?

Great, that is all the questions I have for you today. I appreciate your reflections. I now want to give you some time to add anything you think might be useful or you would like to share about this topic. Such as where you learned these skills or what influenced you to try to

handle this argument in the ways that you do. Following this session, I will email you a gift

card as a thank you for your time. Do you have any last questions or comments?