

Effect of Primary Goal on Secondary Goal Importance and Message Plan Acceptability

Janet R. Meyer

Prior to speaking, a person may anticipate outcomes of a message. Such outcomes often pertain to the relevance of the message to secondary goals such as impression management or relationship maintenance. Based on expected outcomes, a decision is made to say, to edit, or to withhold a message. This study asks whether anticipating that a message would conflict with a secondary goal affects perceived message acceptability differently when different primary goals are pursued (e.g., comforting, providing feedback). Eight primary goals and four secondary goals were investigated. Findings show that secondary goal importance and the extent to which expected conflict with a secondary goal reduces message acceptability varies across primary goals.

Keywords: Cognitive Editing; Cognitive Models; Message Production; Primary Goal; Secondary Goal

Persons often anticipate outcomes of what they plan to say prior to speaking. An individual might consider the consequence of expressing an opinion for a short-term goal, such as solving an immediate problem, or a long-term goal, such as maintaining a relationship. Based on the outcomes expected, speakers decide whether a message is acceptable to say (Hample, 2005; Hample & Dallinger, 1987; Meyer, 1997).

Judgments of message plan acceptability are influenced by a variety of concerns. Research on social influence indicates that the acceptability of a request message

Janet R. Meyer (PhD, University of Michigan) is Associate Professor in the School of Communication Studies, Kent State University. An earlier version of this study was presented at the 2006 International Communication Association convention, Dresden. The research was supported by a Summer Research Award from the University Research Council, Division of Research and Graduate Studies, Kent State University. Correspondence to: Janet R. Meyer, School of Communication Studies, Kent State University, P.O. Box 5190, Kent, OH 44242. E-mail: jrmeyer@kent.edu

depends not only on linguistic criteria and anticipated effectiveness but on the consistency of the message with various secondary goals (Hample, 2005). The latter include goals pertinent to impression management, relationship maintenance, acting consistently with one's principles, and performing facework (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1989; Hample & Dallinger, 1987, 1992; Meyer, 2002; Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998).

To date, research on the role of secondary goals in message planning has focused primarily on persuasive messages (cf. Sabee & Wilson, 2005). How secondary goals affect the design of messages involving primary goals other than an influence goal is less well understood. The present research explores this issue.

Primary vs. Secondary Goals

A distinction between primary and secondary goals emerged from the recognition that the wording of requests is influenced by goals beyond a goal to persuade (Dillard, 1990; Dillard et al., 1989; Hample & Dallinger, 1987). For present purposes, a primary goal is viewed as a linguistic goal to produce a message that will be understood as a particular "type" of message with respect to its intent (e.g., as a request, answer, or account). Identifying a speaker's primary goal both categorizes and attributes purpose to his/her communication. Primary goals are pursued in the service of higher level, noncommunication goals (Dillard, 1990). An intent to produce a request for action is one type of primary goal. This study assumes that message designers also pursue primary goals to comfort, to account for a failure, to provide feedback, to reply to a request for action, to answer a question, to self-disclose, and to make small talk.

A primary communication goal is pursued in a unique situational context. For example, a primary goal to offer an account is preceded by a failure. In contrast, secondary goals, such as presenting the self positively, are relevant in many situations (Meyer, 2001). The current study investigates the relevance of four secondary goals to decisions about the acceptability of messages representing eight primary goals. The secondary goals pertain to impression management, not offending, relationship maintenance, and acting on one's principles.

Theoretical Assumptions

The study adopts a cognitive approach to understanding message production. The mental processes underlying message planning have been the focus of a number of models (Dillard, Anderson, & Knobloch, 2002; Greene, 1984, 1997; Meyer, 1997; Wilson, 1990). With respect to cognitive structure, the present research adopts the assumptions of the implicit rules model (IRM; Meyer, 1997). A brief summary of some of the model's assumptions is given below.

The IRM holds that message planning relies on two general types of implicit rules: *situation-action associations* and *action-consequence associations*. Situation-action associations connect a situation schema containing a communication goal and situation features to linguistic actions useful in pursuing the goal. For example, a situation

schema containing a primary goal to make a request and contextual features might make accessible actions such as conventional forms (“Could you”), syntactic structures, words, and nonverbal behaviors. Once a message plan is constructed, components of the plan can cause action-consequence associations to become activated. The latter rules connect cognitive representations of actions to consequences of such actions in similar contexts in the past. For example, a speaker might realize the message, “That’s actually a good point,” could be taken as implying the hearer’s comments generally are not good points. Activation spreading from a message consequence can make accessible knowledge about the relevance of the consequence to the speaker’s goals (e.g., the message conflicts with a secondary goal to not offend). Based on expected consequences and their relevance to his or her goals, a message planner decides whether a message is acceptable to say. Beyond the general assumption that persons can weigh positive and negative consequences of saying a message, the IRM does not address the nature of the processing whereby speakers determine the acceptability of a message for output.

One theory that does consider how expected outcomes are related to an intent to pursue the behavior is the theory of reasoned action (TRA; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). According to the TRA, behavioral intent is predictable from a person’s attitude toward the behavior and a subjective norm. The attitude toward the behavior is influenced by the extent to which expected outcomes are evaluated as positive vs. negative, weighted by the subjective likelihood the outcome will occur (belief strength). Judging a not-yet-spoken message as acceptable to say is similar to adopting a positive attitude toward the behavior of saying it. Thus, the TRA might reasonably be applied to judgments about the perceived acceptability of a message plan.

Implications of the TRA

It is not the purpose of this research to provide a test of the TRA in the domain of message production. It is of interest to consider implications of the TRA for the way decisions about message acceptability might be made. One implication is that speakers may anticipate outcomes of a message. Knowledge about the likelihood of each outcome (*b*) and an evaluation of each outcome (*e*) would contribute to the speaker’s attitude toward saying the message. Predominantly negative outcomes could result in a decision to withhold or edit the message. The extent to which any negative expected outcome caused a message to be judged less acceptable would depend not only on the likelihood of the outcome but on *how* negative the outcome was expected to be.

When the behavior is producing a message, a possible negative outcome is that saying it would conflict with a secondary goal. For example, a person might foresee a moderate likelihood that a message would offend the hearer. *How* bad it would be to offend the hearer (e.g., on a scale from slightly bad to very bad) should depend on the context. The consequence of offending might be evaluated very bad (–3) during a sales presentation, but only slightly bad (–1) when asking someone to stop an annoyance. If so, the TRA implies that the expected outcome of offending should have a greater negative impact on the attitude toward saying the message (i.e., perceived

message acceptability) in the former situation than in the latter, all else equal. If the magnitude of the negative evaluation attached to expected conflict with a secondary goal varies across situations, the factors that influence such evaluations should be of interest to communication scholars working in a number of areas.

Contextual Influences on Evaluations of Expected Consequences

The factors influencing perceptions of *how* bad it would be to say a message that conflicts with a secondary goal and, ultimately, a decision as to whether to say the message, could span a broad range. Such evaluations should depend upon knowledge activated in working memory at the time the message is designed. One factor that would seemingly influence the evaluation attached to expected conflict with a secondary goal is the immediate importance of the secondary goal. Extant research suggests that secondary goal importance varies across situations (Hample & Dallinger, 2002; Meyer, 2002, 2005; Schrader & Dillard, 1998; Wilson et al., 1998). For example, Wilson et al. (1998) found that perceptions of face threat and the importance of negative and positive facework in requests depend upon whether one is asking a favor, enforcing an obligation, or giving advice. Wilson et al. propose that the situational factors defining a particular influence goal combine with the constitutive rules for directives (Searle, 1979) to provide tacit knowledge about face threat and the importance of positive and negative facework when pursuing that influence goal.

Of concern in the present study is the question of how a speaker pursuing a primary goal, such as comforting or offering an account, determines *how* bad an expected message outcome entailing conflict with a secondary goal would be. Above, it was suggested that such evaluations should be influenced by the immediate importance of the secondary goal. It is of interest to consider how such knowledge might be retrieved from memory given the assumptions of the IRM. In line with Wilson et al. (1998), it is assumed that a speaker's knowledge about the importance of secondary goals is influenced partly by situational knowledge unique to the pursuit of a particular primary goal. In the context of the IRM, such knowledge might be retrieved in the following way. At the time a message is designed, a speaker's representation of the situation will be organized by a situation schema containing a primary goal and situation features. Such schemas are abstracted from multiple past experiences of pursuing the primary goal in similar situational contexts. As for any schema, the knowledge made accessible in working memory when the schema is activated will include not only the critical features differentiating the situation schema from other situation schemas but knowledge that has come to be associated with the schema over multiple past experiences of pursuing the primary goal. If it can be assumed that humans devote considerable time to appraising the relevance of events to their goals (Lazarus, 1991), then the knowledge made accessible by activating a situation schema containing a primary goal should include beliefs about the relevance of pursuing the primary goal to other goals held by the speaker, including secondary goals. For example, a schema containing a primary goal to provide feedback could make accessible the knowledge that there is a potential for hurting the other's feelings in such situations

and that special efforts must be taken if one wishes to avoid such outcomes. Based on this knowledge, a speaker might realize that a secondary goal to not offend is important when providing feedback. In contrast, a schema containing a primary goal to account for a failure might make accessible the belief that making a positive impression increases the likelihood that an account will be accepted.

In general, if a message designer becomes aware that a secondary goal is important when pursuing his/her current primary goal, an expected message outcome involving conflict with that secondary goal should be evaluated more negatively than if the secondary goal were of less importance given the primary goal. If this is true, then the perceived likelihood that a message would conflict with a secondary goal should have a stronger negative effect on message acceptability if the primary goal is one where the secondary goal tends to be important than if the primary goal is one where the secondary goal is of lesser importance, all else equal. One purpose of the study was to explore this possibility (see RQ2).

The above reasoning assumes that the importance of secondary goals varies across primary goals. Evidence that secondary goal importance depends on the nature of the primary goal has come primarily from the social influence research (Schrader & Dillard, 1998; Wilson et al., 1998). Whereas the above-noted study by Wilson et al. focused on positive and negative facework, Schrader and Dillard (1998) investigated the effect of influence goal type on the importance of five secondary goals identified by Dillard et al. (1989, i.e., identity, interaction, relational resource, personal resource, and arousal management goals). Schrader and Dillard found that the importance of the five secondary goals varies across influence goals. For example, a relational resource goal was more important when requesting assistance from parents than when enforcing an obligation or stopping an annoyance. A secondary interaction goal was more important when pursuing relational initiation than when pursuing give-advice or routine-activities goals. Whereas these studies show that the importance of secondary goals varies across influence goal types, how secondary goal importance varies across primary goals other than an influence goal is less clear. In one study pertinent to this issue, Sabee and Wilson (2005) studied the politeness strategies used by students when discussing disappointing grades with an instructor. The frequency of use of politeness strategies (i.e., off record, negative politeness, positive politeness, bald on record) depended on whether the student's primary goal was to learn, to persuade, to fight, or to impress.

A primary objective in the current study was to determine whether the importance of secondary goals pertinent to impression management, not offending, maintaining the relationship, and acting consistently with one's principles differs across the eight primary goals of interest. Based on the above considerations, two research questions were investigated:

- RQ1: Are secondary goals (a) to make a good impression, (b) to not offend, (c) to maintain a good relationship, and/or (d) to act consistently with one's values and principles significantly more important when pursuing some primary goals than when pursuing others?
- RQ2: Does the anticipated likelihood a message would (a) make the speaker look bad, (b) offend the hearer, (c) damage the relationship, or (d) conflict with

the speaker's values/principles have a stronger negative effect on perceived message acceptability for primary goals where the secondary goal is of *high* importance than for primary goals where the secondary goal is of *moderate* or *low* importance?

Method

Participants

The respondents were 155 undergraduates (65.8% female) at a large Midwestern university. They completed the study to obtain research points. Participants were 82.6% Caucasian, 7% African American, 2% Asian, and 8.4% other ethnic groups. The mean age was 20.4 years. They were randomly assigned to complete one of five questionnaires. Each questionnaire was completed by 31 participants.

Materials

Secondary goals

The questionnaires contained two parts. In Part 1, a participant read 20 hypothetical situations (without messages). Each appeared at the top of a different page. Below the situation, he/she rated the importance of four secondary goals in the situation. Three scales anchored by *Not real important* (1) and *Extremely important* (7) measured the importance of an *impression goal* (e.g., "Getting the hearer to see me positively"), *not offend goal* (e.g., "Being careful not to offend the hearer"), and *relationship maintenance goal* (e.g., "Getting along well with the hearer"). Two items measured the importance of a *values/principles goal* (e.g., "Maintaining my own ethical standards").

Message ratings

Part 2 of each questionnaire contained the same 20 situations the participant had read in Part 1, but a message now appeared below the situation. Participants responded to the statement, "This message is entirely acceptable," on a scale from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree* (7). They rated the likelihood of four possible message outcomes on a scale from *Very unlikely* (1) to *Very likely* (7): "Saying this would make me look bad in the eyes of the hearer," "Saying this would offend the hearer or hurt his/her feelings," "Saying this would conflict with my values or principles," and "Saying this would damage my relationship with the hearer" (see Hampe & Dallinger, 1987; Meyer, 2005). The outcomes represent conflict with goals to make a good impression, not offend, act consistently with one's principles, and maintain the relationship, respectively.

Primary goals

The hypothetical situations were such that the production of a message in the situation would require the speaker to pursue one of eight primary goals. The primary goals were: provide feedback, comfort, stop annoyance, reply to a request for a favor

(reply-RF), reply to a request for information (reply-RI), make small talk, account for a failure, and self-disclose to a higher status hearer. Three situations evoking each primary goal were used. For example, “provide feedback” situations involved providing feedback on a poem, a friend’s lasagna, and a haircut. To further increase generalizability, three messages that might be spoken in each of the 24 situations were employed. Thus, across participants, the stimulus material included 72 situation-message combinations (i.e., three situations evoking each primary goal \times three messages for each situation). Each participant read only one message for a given situation. One situation-message combination (used for the “provide feedback” primary goal) was the following:

Your roommate, Chris, likes to write poetry. Chris has just written a new poem and reads it to you to get feedback. Your reaction is that it is dumb and meaningless. You say: “I’m not sure you’re cut out to be a poet.”

To keep questionnaires to a reasonable length, five questionnaires were created. Each was completed by 31 participants. Each questionnaire contained 20 of the 24 situations utilized. Across questionnaires, each of the 24 situations was rated for the importance of secondary goals by 93 participants. Across questionnaires, each of the 72 situation-message combinations was rated by 31 participants. (The questionnaires contained nine additional situations that were rated for secondary goal importance to provide a basis for selecting situations for a different study).

Results

Reliability

Coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was calculated across the items measuring each secondary goal, separately for each of the 72 situation-message combinations. The *alphas* were then averaged. The average *alphas* were .83 ($SD = .08$) for items measuring the impression goal, .81 ($SD = .09$) for the not offend goal, and .83 ($SD = .09$) for the relationship goal. The mean correlation between the two items measuring the values goal was $r = .75$ ($SD = .13$).

Means

Across the 72 messages, the mean rating of *message acceptability* (7 = most acceptable) was 3.39. (Means ranged from 1.96, $SD = 1.49$, to 5.12, $SD = 1.87$.) Mean ratings of the likelihood of the four outcomes (7 = *Very likely*) were as follows: *look bad*: overall $M = 5.01$ (range: 3.01 to 5.91); *offend/hurt*: overall $M = 4.57$ (range: 1.93 to 6.24); *conflict with values*: overall $M = 4.30$ (range: 2.81 to 6.02); *damage relationship*: overall $M = 4.73$ (range: 2.33 to 5.92).¹

RQ1: Secondary Goal Importance

RQ1 asked whether the importance of four secondary goals differs across eight primary goals. The mean importance of each secondary goal across situations involving

each primary goal is shown in Table 1. To answer RQ1, one-way repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted separately for each secondary goal. Multivariate tests showed a significant effect of primary goal on the perceived importance of an *impression goal*, $F(7, 85) = 56.6$, $p < .001$, Wilks' $\Delta = .18$, partial $\eta^2 = .82$; *not offend goal*, $F(7, 84) = 75.3$, $p < .001$, Wilks' $\Delta = .14$, partial $\eta^2 = .86$; *relationship goal*, $F(7, 83) = 76.1$, $p < .001$, Wilks' $\Delta = .14$, partial $\eta^2 = .87$; and *values/principles goal*, $F(7, 86) = 19.7$, $p < .001$, Wilks' $\Delta = .38$, partial $\eta^2 = .62$. Multiple comparisons employing Bonferroni-adjusted significance levels confirmed that the importance of each type of secondary goal depends on the primary goal pursued (Table 1).

For example, a secondary *impression management goal* was significantly more important when the primary goal was to account for a failure ($M = 6.35$) or self-disclose ($M = 6.49$), than for any of the six other primary goals ($ps < .01$). A *not offend* goal was more important when comforting ($M = 6.62$) than for any other primary goal and more important when accounting ($M = 6.08$) than for five primary goals. Not offending was *least* important when stopping an annoyance ($M = 3.50$) or replying to an RI ($M = 3.91$). *Relationship maintenance* was more important when comforting ($M = 6.52$), accounting ($M = 6.50$), or self-disclosing ($M = 6.45$), than for any other primary goal and *least* important when stopping an annoyance ($M = 3.39$) or replying to an RI ($M = 3.76$). A *values/principles* secondary goal varied less across primary goals, with seven of the eight mean importance ratings exceeding 5.0 on the 7-point scale. Nonetheless, it was more important when self-disclosing ($M = 6.16$), comforting ($M = 5.96$), or accounting ($M = 5.85$), than for other primary goals.

Table 1 Mean Importance of Secondary Goals as a Function of Primary Goal

Primary goal	Secondary goal			
	Impression management	Not offend or hurt	Relationship maintenance	Values/principles
1. Provide feedback	4.92 _a (1.15)	5.94 _a (1.01)	5.86 (0.88)	5.26 _a (1.24)
2. Comfort hearer	5.25 _a (1.35)	6.62 (0.61)	6.52 _a (0.52)	5.96 _{bc} (1.07)
3. Stop annoyance	4.37 _b (1.39)	3.50 _b (1.39)	3.39 _b (1.36)	5.06 _a (1.41)
4. Reply to RF	4.48 _b (1.36)	4.20 _c (1.49)	4.09 _{cd} (1.39)	5.13 _a (1.43)
5. Reply to RI	4.10 _b (1.53)	3.91 _{bc} (1.61)	3.76 _{bc} (1.52)	4.44 (1.76)
6. Make small talk	5.03 _a (1.14)	4.85 (1.20)	4.68 _d (1.37)	5.15 _a (1.34)
7. Account for failure	6.35 _c (0.72)	6.08 _a (0.83)	6.50 _a (0.57)	5.85 _b (1.10)
8. Self-disclose	6.49 _c (0.55)	5.81 _a (0.92)	6.45 _a (0.54)	6.16 _c (0.93)

Note. Figures represent the mean importance of the secondary goal in the column across situations representing the primary goal in the row. Means are on a 7-point scale; a higher mean = greater goal importance. Standard deviations are in parentheses. RF = request for favor. RI = request for information. Within a column, means sharing a subscript do *not* differ significantly at $p < .05$.

$N = 93$.

RQ2: Effect of Anticipated Outcomes on Message Acceptability

RQ2 asked whether the perceived likelihood a message would conflict with a secondary goal has a stronger negative effect on message acceptability for primary goals where the importance of the secondary goal is *high* than for primary goals where the secondary goal is of *moderate* or *low* importance.

Goal importance

To answer RQ2, each secondary goal was categorized as *high*, *moderate*, or *low* in importance when pursuing each primary goal. The importance of a secondary goal was considered high if the mean importance of the secondary goal across the three situations involving the primary goal was ≥ 6.00 (on the 7-point scale), moderate if mean importance ratings were ≥ 4 but < 6 , and low if mean importance ratings were < 4.0 . Secondary goals defined as high, moderate, and low in importance for each primary goal are shown in Table 2. The validity of this manipulation was confirmed in *t* tests. Mean importance ratings for the *relationship* goal were significantly higher for each primary goal where it was high in importance than for each primary goal for which it was moderate or low in importance (all $ps < .01$). Similar results were found for the *impression* goal ($ps < .01$). The mean importance of a *not offend* goal was significantly higher for each primary goal where it was of high importance than for each primary goal where it was of low importance ($ps < .01$). In seven of eight comparisons, the mean importance of the not offend goal was significantly higher for primary goals where it was high in importance than for primary goals where it was moderate in importance ($ps < .05$). The mean importance of the *values/principles* goal was significantly higher for the primary goal where it was of high importance than for six of the seven primary goals where it was of moderate importance ($ps < .05$).

To learn whether the strength of the inverse relationship between the likelihood of conflict with a secondary goal and message acceptability differed across primary goals (RQ2), Pearson *r* correlation coefficients were obtained. Initially, correlations between the perceived likelihood of each outcome (e.g., make me look bad) and message acceptability were calculated separately for each of the 24 situations. To increase statistical power, these correlations were calculated across the three messages employed with each situation (i.e., $n = 93$). (Power to detect correlations of .30 and .40 [$p < .05$] was .83 and .98 respectively; Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The outcome likelihood-acceptability correlations were then averaged across the three situations evoking each primary goal. Table 2 shows the resulting mean correlations. As the standard deviations indicate, for most mean correlations, variability across the three averaged correlations was relatively small.² To determine whether the average outcome likelihood-acceptability correlation was significantly higher for primary goals where the secondary goal the outcome conflicted with was of high importance than for primary goals where the same secondary goal was of moderate or low importance, the mean correlations were compared in two-tailed tests using the *Fisher r-to-z'* transformation (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Table 2 Mean Secondary Goal Importance and Mean Outcome Likelihood-Acceptability Correlations

	Primary goal						
	Provide feedback	Comfort	Stop annoyance	Reply to RF	Reply to RI	Make small talk	Account for failure
Self-disclose							
Impression management goal							
Mean importance	4.92 ^M	5.25 ^M	4.37 ^M	4.48 ^M	4.10 ^M	5.03 ^M	6.35 ^H
Make me look bad-acceptability	-.57 (.08)	-.70 (.05)	-.37 _{ac} (.11)	-.51 _{bd} (.06)	-.67 (.13)	-.74 (.08)	-.70 _{ab} (.03)
Not offend or hurt goal							
Mean importance	5.94 ^M	6.62 ^H	3.50 ^L	4.20 ^M	3.91 ^L	4.85 ^M	6.08 ^H
Offend/hurt hearer-acceptability	-.58 _d (.05)	-.71 _{abc} (.15)	-.34 _{ade} (.07)	-.43 _b (.09)	-.54 (.14)	-.58 _e (.13)	-.54 (.13)
Relationship maintenance goal							
Mean importance	5.86 ^M	6.52 ^H	3.39 ^L	4.09 ^M	3.76 ^L	4.68 ^M	6.50 ^H
Damage relationship-acceptability	-.58 _f (.05)	-.69 _{abc} (.11)	-.23 _{adefg} (.17)	-.48 _b (.09)	-.50 _c (.05)	-.68 _g (.08)	-.64 _d (.05)
Values/principles goal							
Mean importance	5.26 ^M	5.96 ^M	5.06 ^M	5.13 ^M	4.44 ^M	5.15 ^M	5.85 ^M
Conflict w/values-acceptability	-.53 (.04)	-.62 (.21)	-.55 (.07)	-.60 (.07)	-.58 (.05)	-.68 (.02)	-.58 (.11)

Note. The first line beneath each subheading shows the mean importance of the secondary goal across situations evoking each primary goal (columns). Within a row, superscripts indicate whether the secondary goal was high (H), moderate (M), or low (L) in importance given the primary goal. The second row beneath each subheading shows the mean outcome likelihood-acceptability correlation across the three scenarios evoking the primary goal. Standard deviations (in parentheses) indicate variability in the three correlations. Within a row, mean correlations sharing a subscript differ at $p < .05$. (Subscripts are shown only for comparisons between goal importance categories.) Correlations $\geq .27$ and $\geq .20$ are significant at $p < .01$ and $p < .05$ respectively. $N = 93$.

A secondary *impression management goal* was categorized as high in importance when pursuing two primary goals: accounting and self-disclosing. As Table 2 indicates, the negative relationship between the likelihood of the look bad outcome and message acceptability was significantly stronger when the primary goal was *accounting* than for two primary goals where a secondary impression goal was of moderate importance (stop annoyance; reply-RF). The mean look bad-acceptability correlation was significantly stronger when the primary goal was *self-disclosure* than for the stop annoyance and reply-RF primary goals where impression goal importance was moderate. A secondary *goal to not offend* was high in importance for two primary goals: comforting and accounting. For *comforting* messages, the average offend hearer-acceptability correlation was significantly stronger than for three primary goals where the importance of not offending was moderate (reply-RF; self-disclose) or low (stop annoyance). The mean offend hearer-acceptability correlation for the *accounting* goal was not significantly stronger than for any primary goal where not offending was of moderate or low importance.

A secondary *relationship maintenance goal* was high in importance when comforting, accounting, and self-disclosing. When *comforting*, the damage relationship-message acceptability correlation was significantly higher than for three primary goals where a relationship goal was of low or moderate importance (stop annoyance; reply-RI; reply-RF). For the primary goal of *accounting*, the damage relationship-acceptability correlation was stronger than for the stop annoyance primary goal where the relationship goal was of low importance. When *self-disclosing*, the damage relationship-acceptability correlation was significantly greater than for the stop annoyance primary goal where relationship maintenance was of low importance. A secondary *goal to act consistently with one's principles* was categorized as high in importance when self-disclosing and of moderate importance for all other primary goals. The conflict w/values-acceptability correlation when self-disclosing was not significantly higher than for any other primary goal. No other comparisons reached significance.

To provide a more general answer to RQ2, the average outcome likelihood-acceptability correlation across the eight cases where the relevant secondary goal was high in importance (mean $r = .65$) was compared with the same mean correlation across the four cases where the relevant secondary goal was low in importance (mean $r = .40$; see Table 2). A Fisher r -to- z' test showed the two r s differed significantly, $test\ statistic = 2.35$, $p < .05$ (two-tailed). The difference between the mean outcome likelihood-acceptability correlation when the relevant secondary goal was of high importance and the same mean correlation across 20 cases where the relevant secondary goal was of moderate importance (mean $r = .57$), though in the expected direction, was not significant ($test\ statistic = .82$).

Discussion

Past research has shown that persuasive messages perceived to conflict with secondary goals often are judged unacceptable for output (Hample, 2005; Hample & Dallinger, 1987). Research on social influence also indicates that the importance of

secondary goals varies across types of influence goals (Schrader & Dillard, 1998; Wilson et al., 1998). The present study asked whether the magnitude of the negative effect of expected conflict with a secondary goal on message acceptability depends on the importance of the secondary goal, given the primary goal. Employing eight primary goals, most unrelated to social influence, the study also asked whether the importance of four secondary goals differs across the primary goals.

Effect of Primary Goal on Secondary Goal Importance

The results confirm that the importance of secondary goals to make a good impression, not offend, and avoid relational damage vary significantly across the eight primary communication goals. For the college student participants, impression management was most important when pursuing primary goals to account for a failure or self-disclose to a higher status other. Not offending was most important when comforting or offering an account but also important when providing feedback or self-disclosing. Relationship maintenance was most important when comforting, accounting, or self-disclosing, but also important when providing feedback. The importance of a secondary goal to act consistently with one's principles was highest when self-disclosing, comforting, or offering an account, but moderate to high for all primary goals. The latter result is consistent with past findings that an identity goal is at least moderately important across a range of influence goal types (Schrader & Dillard, 1998).

Secondary goals to not offend and to avoid relational damage were deemed *least* important when stopping an annoyance or replying to a mundane request for information. For stop annoyance messages, these findings are not surprising. Speakers who believe the hearer is infringing on their rights may feel less obligated to address prosocial secondary goals. The moderate importance of these goals even in stop annoyance requests suggests, however, that they play some role in message design in most communication. For example, Schrader and Dillard (1998) found that the importance of a relationship resource goal when stopping an annoyance was not significantly lower than for most other influence goals. Why all four secondary goals in the current study were relatively lower in importance when replying to a mundane request for information is less obvious. In all three scenarios involving this primary goal, the request for information came from a person who was not well known (grocery store clerk, stranger asking for the time, unknown student). Whether the importance of these secondary goals is also discounted when answering mundane questions from well-known and/or higher status others will need to await further research.

As noted, research on requests has shown that the importance of secondary goals varies across influence goals (Schrader & Dillard, 1998; Wilson et al., 1998). The current findings indicate that the importance of four secondary goals varies across a diverse set of primary communication goals unrelated to social influence. An additional finding of research on request messages is that the effect of influence-goal type on secondary goal importance can vary with features of the situation (Meyer, 2001, 2002). Future work will need to determine whether the effects of a given primary goal

on secondary goal importance observed in the current study hold across a variety of situational contexts.

An additional objective of research on secondary goals should be to better understand the cognitive processes whereby message planners determine the importance of secondary goals when formulating messages to pursue primary goals. Given the assumptions of the implicit rules model, one possibility is that the schematic situational component of a situation-action rule, once activated, makes accessible beliefs about the relevance of the primary goal in the schema to secondary goals. Such knowledge could then contribute to the evaluation of expected message outcomes involving conflict with a secondary goal.

Message Acceptability Judgments

A second purpose of the study was to determine whether anticipated conflict with a secondary goal has a stronger negative effect on message acceptability when the secondary goal is of high (vs. moderate or low) importance when pursuing the primary goal. The results confirm that the extent to which expected conflict with a secondary goal negatively impacts message acceptability varies across primary goals. However, evidence that these differences are due to the importance of the secondary goal, given a particular primary goal, was inconsistent. An omnibus test indicated that expected conflict with a secondary goal reduces message acceptability significantly more when the importance of the secondary goal, given the primary goal, is high, rather than low. More specific comparisons showed, however, that the negative effect on acceptability of anticipated conflict with a secondary goal was significantly stronger for primary goals where the importance of the secondary goal was high (vs. moderate or low) in 4 of 12 comparisons for the impression goal, 3 of 12 comparisons for the not offend goal, and 5 of 15 comparisons for the relationship-maintenance goal. The effect of anticipated conflict with the speaker's values on acceptability was not greater when a secondary values/principles goal was of high importance (i.e., when self-disclosing) than for other primary goals. Thus, the extent to which anticipated conflict with a secondary goal negatively impacts message acceptability appears to be determined by factors other than, or in addition to, the typical importance of the secondary goal given the primary goal.

One implication of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), if extended to the behavior of saying a message, is that each expected outcome will be assessed for likelihood of occurrence or strength (*b*) and evaluated on a good-bad dimension (*e*). The current research measured only the perceived likelihood of outcomes. With respect to the evaluation of outcomes, it was reasoned that outcomes involving conflict with a secondary goal should be viewed as more negative if the secondary goal tends to be important when pursuing the primary goal. The mixed findings for RQ2 suggest that the evaluation of expected conflict with a secondary goal (and ultimately message acceptability) likely is influenced not only by the importance of the secondary goal given the primary goal but by other situational features as well. For example, a secondary goal to not offend may be important when the primary goal

is comforting, but the extent to which the expected outcome of offending is evaluated negatively when comforting (and hence negatively impacts acceptability) could depend on factors such as whether the other is at fault for the problem causing distress, the magnitude of the distress, or relational features. Consistent with the latter possibility, Hample and Dallinger (2002) found that the perceptual dimensions of compliance gaining situations identified by Cody, Woelfel, and Jordan (1983) predicted the editing criteria used in deciding whether to endorse compliance-gaining messages.

The results of the present study do indicate that the degree to which expected conflict with a secondary goal reduces message acceptability varies across primary goals. Most evident was that expectations of offending, damaging the relationship, or looking bad had a smaller inhibiting effect on acceptability when the primary goal was stopping an annoyance. Prosocial secondary goals appear to take a second seat to efficiency when speaker's rights are being infringed on. The anticipation of offending or doing relational damage also had a weaker effect on acceptability when the primary goal was replying to a request for a favor. A lesser effort to address these secondary goals may be considered justifiable when responding to a message that is viewed as a threat to one's autonomy.

Expectations that a message would make the speaker look bad or damage the relationship had the *strongest* negative effect on acceptability when the primary goals involved self-disclosing, accounting, comforting, and making small talk. The anticipation of offending/hurting the other had the strongest negative impact when comforting. The negative impact on acceptability of expected conflict with the speaker's values was moderate to high across all primary goals.

It should be noted that the four message outcomes investigated emerged from research on communicators' reasons for judging compliance-gaining messages unacceptable (Dillard et al., 1989; Hample & Dallinger, 1987). Expected conflicts with the same secondary goals appear to be highly predictive of acceptability judgments for messages representing a range of primary goals other than an influence goal. One objective for future work on the anticipation of message outcomes should be to better understand how expected conflict with a secondary goal leads to the activation of knowledge that might be used to edit a message. Perhaps the realization that a message intended to comfort could have the unwanted consequence of offending makes accessible a secondary goal to avoid offending (see Meyer 1997; Wilson, 1990). Given the assumptions of the IRM, a decision to pursue the secondary goal would activate a situation-action association with a situation schema partially matched to the secondary goal and current features. Activation from the situation schema would make accessible linguistic cues that could be integrated into the plan for pursuing the comforting goal.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study has a number of limitations that should be noted in drawing conclusions from the findings. First, the participants read hypothetical situations and messages and then rated the likelihood of four outcomes supplied to them. Although anticipated conflicts with the secondary goals clearly influenced message acceptability, it would be

of interest to know more about the outcomes persons in real-life settings contemplate when deciding whether to say messages involving the eight primary goals. A second limitation is that the study looked only at undesirable message outcomes. A better understanding of how positive and negative expected outcomes lead to decisions to say or withhold a message would contribute to theories of message production. Future research should determine whether expected message outcomes are appraised primarily on likelihood of occurrence and an evaluative dimension, as the TRA would suggest, or in other respects as well (for example, see Makoul & Roloff, 1998).

Third, the relatively large number of statistical tests employed to compare the averaged outcome likelihood-acceptability correlations increases the likelihood of an experimentwise Type I error. Interestingly, the averaged correlation coefficients seem to suggest that, for most primary goals, the four secondary goal conflicts contribute about equally to acceptability decisions (i.e., differences could be due to sampling error). However, given the moderate to high correlations between some pairs of outcomes, coupled with the variability in pairwise correlations of outcome ratings across situations (see note 1), it would be hasty to conclude that the outcomes contribute equally to perceived acceptability without further research (cf. Hample & Dallinger, 1992). From a cognitive perspective, asking "Which outcomes contribute the most to acceptability ratings?" may contribute less to theory than would knowledge about the patterns of thought persons engage in when deciding whether to say a message. A message planner might anticipate that a message could offend the hearer, that offending would make a bad impression, and that both outcomes would damage the relationship. Speak-aloud protocols could be employed as one means of investigating such thought processes.

Finally, it should be noted that decisions to say or withhold a message are influenced no doubt by factors in addition to anticipated conflicts with secondary goals. Perceptions of message acceptability may also be influenced by relationship factors (Cloven & Roloff, 1993; Hample & Dallinger, 2002), third parties, emotional states, individual differences (Hample & Dallinger, 1987; Meyer, 2004), and/or contextual factors specific to particular primary goals. For example, when providing feedback, decisions about whether to say a potentially offensive message could depend on the extent to which the behavior being criticized is alterable or reversible (e.g., whether a new item of clothing may be returned). A comprehensive understanding of how speakers decide whether not-yet-spoken messages are acceptable will need to await research on a range of predictors and the manner in which they interact.

Notes

- [1] Correlations between outcome likelihood ratings varied across situations. The range of *Pearson r* coefficients for each pairwise correlation of outcomes across the 24 situations was as follows: look bad-offend, $r = .22$ to $.93$; look bad-value conflict, $r = .34$ to $.86$; offend-value conflict, $r = .33$ to $.86$; look bad-damage relationship, $r = .38$ to $.91$; offend-damage relationship, $r = .29$ to $.87$; value conflict-damage relationship, $r = .30$ to $.84$.
- [2] Outcome likelihood-acceptability correlations for each of the 72 situation-message combinations are available from the author.

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