

CHAPTER 2

What Is Family Communication?

CHAPTER PREVIEW

1. The Communication Process
2. Social Construction and Co-Creating Family Relationships
3. Communication Patterns and Processes That Affect Family Outcomes
4. Supporting Functions Shaping Family Communication
5. Family of Origin Influences

DIFFERENCES IN WORLDVIEW

Bruce grew up in a household where he learned not to trust anyone who was not a member of the family because “There’s always somebody out to get you.” His grandfather, swindled twice by trusted business partners, taught his children to be wary of outsiders, a belief passed down to his son and eventually to his grandchildren. When Bruce finished high school, he joined the family business in order to keep the company run by relatives. At age 22, he met and married Melissa, a warm, friendly, and trusting person. Unfortunately, their core worldview differences haunted their marriage. Bruce would say things like, “Don’t depend on anyone else. Take care of problems yourself,” and “You can only depend on your family.” Melissa kept thinking that Bruce would realize how narrow his perspective was as he grew older. She had grown up in a family surrounded by the warmth of adult friends and close neighbors; she made good friends in high school that she remained close to, even though Bruce did not like them. Despite their fundamental worldview differences, the couple created a good life—until the children arrived.

As the children aged, Bruce discouraged them from forming close friendships. Siblings and cousins were expected to meet each other’s needs for companionship.

Bruce insisted that they could not sleep over at other people's houses, join organized sports, or loan their toys to anyone. Although Melissa tried to convince Bruce that he was overreacting, his position never changed. In fact, he became increasingly angry when she would get involved with neighborhood female friends, friends at work, or would spend time on social media. After years of struggling with her husband's lack of trust and his need for tight control, as well as managing her need for friends and the children's need for outside companionship and participation in a larger world, Melissa chose to end their marriage.

INFLUENCES OF THE FATHER

Julio grew up in a family in which his father worked outside the home while his mother stayed home to raise Julio and his two younger sisters. Julio's father was in the insurance industry and traveled a lot for work. Consequently, Julio didn't see his father very often. Yet, Julio's father was the disciplinarian in the family. Whenever Julio or his sisters were misbehaving, his mother would say things like, "You better stop it, or I will tell your father." The threat of having his father discipline him was often enough to make Julio shape up. When he was young, his father would spank him; as he became older, his father would ground him or take away other privileges. Julio's father tended toward bursts of anger and verbal attacks, using words like "dumb," "bad," "irresponsible," and "worthless." After such incidents, Julio's father would never apologize, but seemed to go out of his way to be nicer toward him. Julio assumed his father loved him, even though he never said the words.

Later in life, Julio married Julie and a few years later their first child, Alex, was born. Julio loved being a father. But as Alex entered the "terrible twos," he became a challenging child. Julio relied on what he had learned from his father about discipline, spanking Alex and calling him a "bad boy." Such behavior caused a great deal of tension between Julio and his wife, Julie. Julie had been raised in a family where milder disciplinary tactics were used; neither she nor her siblings had ever been spanked. Her parents were soft-spoken, patient people who doled out more love and empathy than punishment. Julie preferred these tactics and was shocked the first time that Julio spanked their son. These struggles continued until Alex was 6, when Julie insisted they talk with a counselor because the disagreements were affecting their marriage. During their marital counseling, Julio realized he had "become" his father—that he was re-creating the unhealthy communication patterns in his relationship with Alex.

In its simplest form, we might think about family communication as the way that members send messages to one another. Sometimes, it really is as simple as that—for instance, a parent might tell an adolescent daughter, "Be home by 10 p.m. on a school night" or a divorced father might say to his son, "Tell your mother

to take you shopping for school supplies before bringing you home on Sunday.” This message transmission function of communication is important, but if this was all that was involved with family communication, we would not need a whole book about it or a class on this topic. Consider these two examples again. In the first example, while the parent expects the adolescent daughter to be home by 10 p.m., the daughter may decide that she is old enough to choose to spend an extra hour with friends as long as she gets enough sleep to be ready for school in the morning. Or, the divorced mother may decide not to take her son shopping for school supplies because she believes she has been picking up more than her share of the financial responsibilities for his care. In both of these examples, communication involves more than transmitting messages, right? Regarding the first example, the parent is likely not going to appreciate the daughter’s choice to violate curfew, and may take this decision as a challenge to parental authority. The divorced mother’s refusal to take her son shopping may also be her way of communicating with her former spouse; in this case, she believes financial inequity is taking place.

Members of family systems can easily become caught up in predictable, and often unexamined, life patterns that are influenced, at least in part, through their cultures, past experiences, and interactions with family members. As you will recall from Chapter 1, we view the family as *a system shaped in communication processes and patterns that both create and reflect family relationships*. For most of us, for better or worse, our family is such a big part of who we are that we are often not aware of how much our family shapes how we perceive the world, or how we interact with those inside and outside of our family. For example, when we look at the behaviors of Bruce and Julio in the cases that began this chapter, as well as their wives’ differing backgrounds, we see that examining their family experiences helps us understand their behavior as husbands and fathers. Likewise, when you were a child, in both explicit and implicit ways, your family taught you how to experience and express intimacy, how to handle conflict, how to have your needs met, how to make decisions, and how to share information inside and outside the family boundaries. You may not have even been aware of your own family socialization until you interacted with other families, heard different messages in school or church, or saw how families were portrayed in a novel or on television. Especially when what you observed was different than your own family experiences, you likely became more aware and reflective of your own family interaction.

From our perspective, families are created and defined primarily through their interaction patterns, rather than through their structures.¹ Family systems are created, enacted, and changed as family members create their social reality, as well as their personal identities.² This means that communication is more than the way that we send messages to others; rather, communication takes center stage in shaping family identity. Our purpose in this chapter is to help you appreciate the central role that communication plays in all aspects of family life.

In order to understand the family as an interactive system, we will take a closer look at what family communication is and examine how we frame family communication in this book. First, we provide an overview of communication as a transactional process. Second, we focus on the perspective of social construction and co-creating family relationships. Third, we focus on the perspective of communication patterns and processes that affect family outcomes. Fourth, we introduce some supporting functions that shape and influence family communication, and finally, we conclude this chapter by discussing how one's family of origin influences contemporary family systems.

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

In its broadest sense, we define **communication** as a symbolic, transactional process of creating and sharing meanings.³ Understanding communication as *symbolic* implies that people use words, images, and behaviors to create meanings. *Symbols* represent objects, thoughts, or feelings we use to form shared *meanings*. We use different symbols to express our thoughts and feelings, such as (a) written and oral language, (b) nonverbal cues, including facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, movement, posture, appearance, and spatial distance, and (c) objects and images, such as photos, rings, clothing, and even time—for example, how long we take to reply to a text message. Family members may express their thoughts and feelings through hugs, gifts, teasing, shouting, rolling eyes, wearing a special outfit, returning an engagement ring, or even silence. Each of these symbols must be mutually understood to create shared meaning. For instance, if family members do not understand or agree on the definition of a certain term or idea, misunderstanding will result, as you can see in this example:

In my first marriage, my wife and I often discovered that we had very different meanings for the same words. For example, we agreed we wanted a “large” family, but I meant three children and she meant seven or eight. I thought “regular” sex meant once a day, and she thought it meant once a week. I thought spending “a lot” of money meant spending over \$1,000, but she thought it meant spending over \$100. In my second marriage, we talk very frequently about what our words mean so we don’t have so many disagreements.

Communication as Transaction

Taking this view of communication means that we understand communication as *transactional*, in that we are always simultaneously sending and receiving messages,

and continually adapting to the context and people with whom we interact.⁴ To follow, we discuss five characteristics of a transactional communication perspective.

First, a transactional communication perspective *focuses on relationships between family members*, rather than on individuals. The joint actions of family members contribute to the development of unique relationships and family systems. For example, siblings may create nicknames or teasing patterns that allow them to feel connected, but no one else could joke with them in the same way without creating tension or highlighting their outsider status. We see the centrality of communication in family systems as they continually use symbols and create shared meanings within their relationships. Sometimes family members come to share perceptions and expectations, but other times, they do not, as in this example:

My father and brother had a very difficult relationship for many years, although both of them had excellent relationships with everyone else in the family. Dad always had a more biting and sarcastic sense of humor. I thought Dad was funny, but Daniel often took his jokes as a personal attack. Daniel saw Dad as repressive and demanding, although I would characterize Dad as serious and concerned. Dad viewed Daniel as careless and uncommitted, although no one else saw him that way. Whenever they tried to talk to each other, each responded to the person he created in his mind. It was a continual battle.

In the previous example, knowing Daniel or his father separately does not help you understand their interaction or how each interpreted the behavior of the other. Their relationship creates a context for how they perceive each other and interact.

Second, a transactional communication perspective helps us highlight that *family members interact within cultural and social contexts*, such as ethnic heritage, gender patterns, and geographic location, which frame our experiences and expectations—and that those expectations are always changing, sometimes slightly and other times dramatically.⁵ What would happen if you became part of a family system from a culture different than your own, such as one that believes males are the decision-makers in the family, or one that believes adults do not have the same rights to privacy you have been raised to expect? Our views of reality are also affected by family history and traditions across generations, where we live (e.g., a rural or urban community) and, at times, even influences like birth order.

Third, viewing communication as transactional necessitates that we recognize and understand *communication as a process*. This implies that communication and relationships are never static or stay still, but are always developing and changing over time; communication both affects and reflects these changes. Moving into adulthood, you have probably noticed a number of these changes: you may be surprised when your little brother or sister, now an adolescent, starts talking with

you about adult topics. Sometimes, we become aware of communication and relational changes during big life events, such as moving out of our parents' household, becoming engaged, or seeing a relative move into an assisted-living facility. We also witness changes in everyday events: a child no longer wants a parent to tuck them into bed or an older aunt decides to stop coming to weekly family dinners. As big and small changes occur, family members may find the need to renegotiate their relationships.

Fourth, from a transactional perspective, communication involves the *negotiation of shared meanings*.⁶ If meanings are not shared by those interacting, confusion or misunderstanding ensues. Imagine that a father gives his son a credit card to get clothes for an upcoming dance. The father says, "Keep the cost to a reasonable amount." In his own mind, the father may be thinking of a certain amount, say \$100, and is shocked to find \$300 of expenses appearing on his bill. A primary family task involves creating and negotiating meaning as we interact.⁷ Think about how you and your parents have negotiated meanings in your relationship across the years, and how this process is in continual flux. By taking a transactional perspective, we understand that communication is central to the process of creating a family's social reality.

Although meaning-making sounds like a very individualistic process, remember that the transactional perspective helps us see that each communicator constantly affects and is affected by the other(s) with whom they share relationships. Perceptions are co-created within a relational system and are constantly influenced by that system. Each person brings unspoken beliefs to an interpersonal encounter, as shown in this example:

My mother and stepfamily clash regularly because they hold divergent views about human nature. My mother believes people are inherently good and should be trusted. My stepfather, Jack, assumes that people seldom tell the truth or the whole truth in difficult situations. Whereas my mother tends to believe what people tell her, Jack looks for the holes in every story. This drove me crazy when I was a teenager. Jack would grill me constantly about my activities, whereas my mother would accept my explanations or excuses, and this often caused a lot of tension between them as well.

The family system provides contextualized meaning and influences how you assign meaning to what you see, hear, and feel. If you consider handmade gifts as a special sign of caring, you may value a hand-knitted scarf, whereas an expensive necklace may not convey strong affection. The physical and social systems within which you operate provide certain perceptual filters, constraints, and experiences that influence individual and collective perceptions. In this way, "No two children grow up in the same family." For example, many siblings disagree on the kind of



Lakov Filimonov/Shutterstock.com

PHOTO 2.1

Family members negotiate meanings in a variety of family activities

family life they experienced together. One sister may state, “Mom was very caring and nurturing,” whereas her brother asserts, “Mom always wanted to interfere and smother us with too much involvement.” Meanings change over time as well; an oldest sibling may have experienced more cautious and strict parents, whereas the youngest child may experience parents who are less strict and more relaxed. Each person experiences “family” differently, as indicated in the following example:

In our house, my sister Diane was considered the “problem child.” As far as psychologists can determine, her emotional difficulties stemmed from an unknown trauma when she was age 3, when they suggest she was rejected by my parents at a time when she needed love. The reality was that Diane functioned as a scapegoat for all of us. Although Diane and I are close in age, we experienced a different family because of the negative way she perceived the family and family members perceived her.

Over time and through interaction, family members negotiate and coordinate shared meanings.⁸ You have learned to interpret and understand the meanings within your family. As a child, when you heard your mother yell your full name in a certain way, you knew by the tone of her voice what to expect next. When your

father puts his arm around your shoulder, it may mean “I support you” or “Slow down, relax.” Over time, hopefully, you learn to understand your family members’ intended messages. Meanings change and are renegotiated over time as children move into adolescence, as adults witness the decline or death of their parents and grandparents, or as world events force people to reevaluate their values and beliefs. For example, after U.S. terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, some long-term cohabiting couples decided to marry, whereas others attempted to repair ruptured family ties.

Fifth, understanding communication as transaction means that we engage different levels of meanings: the *content level* and the *relationship level*. The content level contains information, whereas the relationship level indicates how the information should be interpreted or understood. The relationship level usually involves a greater reliance on nonverbal cues that help you interpret what was said within the context of a particular relationship. When your older sister says, “When are you going to pick up those clothes?” the content of the message seems clear, but it is up to you to determine by the tone of her voice if she is *really* questioning at what time of day you will remove the dirty socks and jeans, or if she is telling you to remove them in the next 30 seconds or face her wrath.

How do we best interpret relational aspects of a message? Metacommunication occurs when people communicate about their communication—for example, when they give verbal and nonverbal indications about how their messages should be interpreted and understood. Remarks such as “Wait, no, I was only kidding,” “This is important,” or “Talking about this makes me uncomfortable” signal how another should interpret comments. Clear nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, gestures, or vocal tones, may indicate whether a comment is humorous or serious. Metacommunication clues us into the relational level of messages, as we listen and look to the unique family system and our experiences with different people in the family system to interpret the content of messages. This concept is especially important to understand when communicating via technology—such as by phone, text messaging, or online—as so many nonverbal cues that help us interpret a message are missing. Online, it may be hard to tell if someone is joking or serious. This is one reason many people like to add emoji symbols to a text message as a way to metacommunicate how the words are to be interpreted.

Sometimes, people will use metacommunication to agree about how they will communicate in the future. For example, family members may talk about how they might engage in conflict or express affection in a more desirable way. Metacommunication serves an important function within families because it allows members to state their needs, clarify confusion, and establish more constructive relational patterns. If distressed members find themselves continually fighting over the meaning of the messages, the need to engage in metacommunication becomes commonplace.

In this section, we discussed five characteristics of a transactional view of communication. If nothing else, our discussion of communication as transaction helps us realize the complexity of communication, especially communication within family systems. This might help us realize why we need a whole book and class on family communication.

In Chapter 1, we made the claim that communication is the primary way that families develop, create, maintain, and alter identity. This, of course, makes the study of family communication central to how we form and enact families and stresses the importance of understanding communication processes in family systems more fully. Within our broad definition of communication as a symbolic, transactional process of creating and sharing meanings, we have identified two important approaches to understanding what communication, and family communication in particular, accomplishes in our family relationships. We will detail these two approaches to follow: (a) social construction and co-creating family relationships, and (b) communication patterns and processes that affect family outcomes.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND CO-CREATING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

In this first perspective on family communication, we focus on how families are co-created, maintained, and altered within communication and behaviors.⁹ This view of family communication comes from a meta-theoretical perspective called social construction. Remember that in Chapter 1, we explained a meta-theoretical perspective as standing back and taking a broad, comprehensive view of a process or phenomenon. When we think about families from the meta-theoretical framework of *social construction*, we realize that communication is much more than the way messages are transmitted; rather, communication is a transaction in which we co-create our social world and relationships, including our families.¹⁰ When your family demographics place you in the cultural majority where you live, it might be somewhat challenging to think about your family as socially constructed. Each family system is unique, yet because of their similarity to cultural models around them, members of majority family systems share similar worldviews and roles, and do not have to carefully think about what it means to be family, or work at creating and being a family. Most of the time, members of these families have fewer challenges working out their roles, communication patterns, and expectations within the family, nor do they have to explain or defend their family to those outside of the family because their family form is the norm.

The experience of being the majority isn't shared by all families, however. One author of your textbook, Kathleen Galvin, developed the concept of *discourse-dependent families* to help bring to light challenges faced by families that are nontraditional—those that are sometimes called “evotypical” or “postmodern”

families, such as adoptive, single-parent, LGBTQ, or step-families.¹¹ These families may not have biological and/or legal ties, or well-developed cultural models, to guide them. For example, a divorced woman with children who remarries someone who also has children already knows what it's like to be a "mother," but perhaps not what it means to be a "stepmother." She may not have had much direct experience with other stepfamilies to know what to expect. In essence, members of a stepfamily are a group of previous strangers who learn by trial and error as they interact and negotiate their roles in the new family.¹² Similarly, households headed by persons who are gay or lesbian will interact and co-construct their own family identity and expectations.¹³ Even the labels we use for family members may be debated, as found in this example of a same-sex couple who became parents:

When Susan was pregnant with our first child, she and I discussed what names we'd use with the children. We knew she would be "Mommie" but my label was a challenge. I looked for words for mother in different languages but could not find any that worked. One day in class Susan was telling her students about our challenge and one asked her "Why don't you call her Nome?" which was pronounced "Nomie". The student said it is the word for mother in one of the Native American tribes from our area of the state. That was perfect and that's how I became Nomie. I had also read that kids will name parents themselves. When Susan is not around, they will call me "Mommie" and when we are together they will switch to "Nomie."

In comparison to more culturally traditional two-parent, first-marriage families, discourse-dependent families have a greater reliance on communication to figure out how to be a family. They will need to interact to develop their own unique set of roles and expectations because they do not have existing cultural models to light their path.¹⁴ In Chapter 1, we talked about voluntary kin, wherein people create families with those who are not biologically or legally related. Let's take a look at the following "Family Matters" to learn more about how voluntary kin relationships provide another snapshot into the important role of communication as social construction.

As we think about the experiences of more nontraditional, discourse-dependent families, we can see the central role of communication in co-constructing these family systems. When you think about it, these families literally "talk themselves into being." You might be able to anticipate some of the challenges these families face as they develop. As an example of one type of discourse-dependent family, in a recent examination of positive stepparent-stepchild relationships, for example, adult stepchildren who have developed a positive relationship with their stepparent can reflect back on how they came to regard this person as a family member and

FAMILY MATTERS: CONSTRUCTING VOLUNTARY FAMILY THROUGH TALK

Communication scholar Dawn O. Braithwaite and her colleagues set out to understand the relationships of people who consider themselves to be family, but are not related by birth (biology) or law (e.g., marriage). In this qualitative study, Braithwaite and her research team used a social construction framework to analyze interviews with 110 people who said that they had voluntary kin in their lives. They analyzed 1,475 pages of interview transcripts, and discovered four different types of voluntary kin (VK) families: (a) *substitute kin* (VK stood in for or replaced the biological or legal family of origin in situations of death or complete estrangement); (b) *supplemental kin* (VK functioned as an addition to the family of origin, fulfilling needs unmet by the family of origin or stepping in when there was a geographic distance); (c) *convenience kin* (VK developed during a specific time period, such as during college or while serving in the military together); and (d) *extended kin* (VK were created from a coming together of both biological or legal family members with nonrelated others, for example, neighbors becoming family).

In all four of these VK types, the members came to regard each other as family as they interacted over time and co-created family relationships, roles, and expectations. The VK families were socially constructed in communication, both within the relationship and externally to others, including their family of origin. Although VK represented a departure from families formed via biology or law, members of voluntary families most often used the traditional family model and labels to create, understand, and legitimize this new family form. For example, they might say, “She is like a sister to me” and use the traditional, biological sister relationship to figure out how to treat a VK sister. VK are created in communication, as Braithwaite and her colleagues found they are significant and meaningful relationships that may be especially important when families of origin live far away, are missing due to death or estrangement, or do not share significant life values. For example, some LGBTQ persons taking part in the study were estranged from, or just not close to, their family of origin and formed significant and life-long substitute or supplemental voluntary family ties. Consequently, Braithwaite and her research team demonstrated that communicating to create and sustain VK relationships matters.

For further reading, see Braithwaite, D. O., Bach, B. W., Baxter, L. A., DiVerniero, R., Hammonds, J., Hosek, A., and Wolf, B. (2010). Constructing family: A typology of voluntary kin. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 388–407.

positive parent figure in their lives. In most cases, these families experienced quite a bit of struggle and misunderstanding that they had to work through.¹⁵ One stepdaughter told the story of her stepfather confronting her landlord about a termite infestation in her rental unit. She related: “I’ve never had a dad backup, so that was probably the biggest turning point too. He felt more like a father. He called my kids his grandkids, no hesitation.”¹⁶ It was through repeated interactions like these that this daughter and stepfather co-constructed their positive relationship, and we can see this relationship reflected in her talk about her stepfather as “a dad backup” and “like a father” to her.

Discourse-Dependence and Negotiating Internal and External Boundaries

All families—but in particular, discourse-dependent families—use communication to define, explain, and legitimize their family, both within the family system and to others outside of it. First, Kathleen Galvin summarized four different strategies of *internal boundary management* through which discourse-dependent families create and maintain members' internal sense of “we-ness” or being a family.¹⁷ These communication strategies include naming, discussing, narrating, and ritualizing (see Figure 2.1).

FIGURE 2.1

Internal boundary management strategies for communicating a sense of strategy

Internal Boundary Management

Naming

Naming plays a significant role in the development of internal family identity when members struggle to indicate their familial status and connections.

- We call my birth mother Aunt Carrie or Carrie.
- My stepgrandmother goes by “Nona Pat.”

Discussing

Discussing reflects the degree of difference among family members, which affects the amount of ambiguity in their family situation. This occurs when members see few role models for their family form.

- We talk about Karin’s anonymous sperm donor and his musical talents.
- Jack asked how he thought he should address his birth mother whom he located.

Narrating

Narrating involves the emergence of family stories; stories represent the family’s definition of itself. Members tell and retell, to themselves and to others, the story of who they are and how they got there.

- Let’s get out the scrapbook with your adoption story.
- Tell Uncle Jack about the first time I introduced you to your stepmother.

Ritualizing

Ritualizing allows families to accomplish their “emotional business” as they enact their identity. Family rituals include major celebrations and mundane routines.

- Our family celebrates “Gotcha Days,” or the days on which they adopted each of us.
- My father and stepfather agreed to walk me down the aisle together.

Republished with permission of SAGE Publications from *The family communication sourcebook*, by Lynn H. Turner and Richard West, 2006; permission conveyed through copyright clearance center.

In addition to developing identity internally, discourse-dependent families often need to explain and sometimes defend their families *externally* to those outside of the family. For example, researcher Karla Bergen studied communication and the socially constructed identities of **commuter wives**—women who live away from their spouses and children part of the time because of work or school commitments.¹⁸ Although men have more often lived away from family (e.g., truck drivers, military members), this is a much more nontraditional role for married women, especially for those with children at home. Bergen found that commuter wives often received questions from extended family members, friends, and even relative strangers that highlighted the non-normative aspect of their family relationship. For example, people asked questions such as “You mean, your husband lets you do this?” “How do you keep two houses clean?” or “Doesn’t your husband really miss you?” These questions reflected more than just curiosity or requests for information; they highlighted the perception that these women might be neglecting their role as a wife or mother. Many of the women found it necessary to explain and even defend their choice to be a commuter wife. In another study, communication scholar Elizabeth Suter interviewed parents who had adopted children from China. Adoptive parents were asked questions by others such as, “Is this your real child?” Like the commuter wives, these adoptive parents communicated in ways that affirmed and defended their family identity for others and for themselves.¹⁹

In addition to internal boundary management, Galvin also summarizes four different strategies of *external boundary management*, as discourse-dependent families communicate their sense of “we-ness” or being a family to those outside of the family system.²⁰ These strategies include labeling, explaining, legitimizing, and defending (see Figure 2.2).

When we use a social construction perspective to understand family systems, we better understand how we create our social realities, including families, in our everyday communication. We socially construct nearly everything about our worlds, from who we include as a member of the family or not, to the labels we use to refer to one another, to how we celebrate holidays, and how we decide what to discuss in the family and with others.

You may have noticed that all the examples we have highlighted in this chapter were from nontraditional or evotypical families. We did this because we recognize that it may be easier for you to see how families are co-constructed in interaction in these types of families. However, it is important to stress that we believe *all families are socially constructed*, even if that process is less obvious in traditional families. Although you might have grown up not thinking much about what it means to be a daughter or sister—for example, as family roles change and shift, the need to interact and co-create these family roles becomes important. If a parent gets a promotion to a more demanding job, the oldest son or daughter may take on some of the parenting roles of making dinner and making sure younger siblings do their homework.

FIGURE 2.2

*External
boundary
management
strategies for
communicating
a sense of
family*

External Boundary Management**Labeling**

Titles and positions provide an orientation to a situation; labeling frequently involves identifying the familial tie when introducing or referring to another person.

- I want you to meet ____, my [choose option] stepfather, Bill, my mother's husband, my Pops.
- Maggie is . . . [choose option] my mother's friend, my mother's partner, my stepmother.

Explaining

Explaining involves making a labeled family relationship understandable, giving reasons for it, or elaborating on how it works. Usually this is a response to non-hostile inquiry.

- My sister used a sperm donor and her eggs. I was the gestational carrier.
- We adopted him from China when he was 8 months old.

Legitimizing

Legitimizing invokes the sanction of law or custom: it positions relationships as genuine and conforming to recognized standards.

- My mother and Don have been together for 14 years. He functions as my father.
- I adopted my husband's son after his former wife died. He calls me "Moms."

Defending

Defending involves shielding oneself or a familial relationship from attack, justifying it, or maintaining its validity against opposition. This is a response to hostility or a direct challenge.

- My mother gets enraged when people ask if I'm her "real daughter."
- When someone tells me my mothers will go to hell, I tell them off.

Republished with permission of SAGE Publications, from *The family communication sourcebook*, by Lynn H. Turner and Richard West, 2006; permission conveyed through copyright clearance center.

The concepts of communication as social construction and discourse-dependence both stress that throughout our lives, we continually communicate to co-construct, define, and redefine our family relationships, and our own identity. From a social constructionist perspective, *all* families are discourse-dependent, and communication is the critical central process by which we continually make and remake our families throughout the lifespan.²¹

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND PROCESSES THAT AFFECT FAMILY OUTCOMES

This second perspective on family communication, which some scholars have called an *effectual* approach,²² involves understanding communication processes and patterns that influence how families live life together. In this section, we focus on two theoretical approaches that represent this perspective. When you encounter other families in your community, when you travel, and even in the media, you may be less likely to notice the ways their communication practices are similar to your own. You may attend to how everyday ways of relating, making decisions, sharing feelings, and handling conflict vary from your personal experiences. Via communication, families create form and content as members engage in family-related functions. Simply speaking, a **function** is something a system must do, or an operation it must perform, to establish family identity and enact family life. In this next section, we discuss two effectual approaches to understanding how communication facilitates family functioning: (a) the circumplex model of marital and family systems, and (b) family communication patterns theory.

Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems

In their attempt to integrate the numerous concepts related to marital and family interaction, family researchers David Olson and his colleagues developed what is known as the circumplex model of marital and family systems.²³ This model bridges family theory, research, and practice by identifying two central dimensions of family behavior, or family functions, that characterize all family systems: family cohesion and family adaptability. Each of these dimensions is divided into four levels matched on a grid to create 16 possible combinations of family functioning, which are labeled as family types. The four family types in the center of the grid are called *balanced*; the four family types at the extreme corners of the grid are seen as *dysfunctional*. In other words, Olson and his colleagues argued that families with moderate scores on cohesion and flexibility represent reasonable functioning, whereas families with extreme scores on both dimensions represent family dysfunction.

Over time, Olson revised the circumplex model to include three dimensions: (a) cohesion, (b) adaptability, and (c) communication. The two central dimensions remain family cohesion and adaptability, which are identified as the intersecting lines of an axis that can be used to classify families based on their level of functioning. The third dimension is family communication, which is positioned as a facilitating dimension that enables couples and families to move along the cohesion and adaptability dimensions, but because it is a facilitating dimension, it is seldom included in the model diagrams. We do not present the entire circumplex model here; rather, we have adopted the dimensions of cohesion and adaptability

as primary family functions that are facilitated by different kinds of communication behaviors. With this in mind, let's examine how family members might experience each dimension before considering one theory of family communication that informs our understanding of how families move to greater or lesser degrees of cohesion and adaptability.

Cohesion From the moment of birth, you have been learning how to manage issues of distance and closeness within your family system. You were taught directly or subtly how to be connected to, or separated from, other family members. For example, you received messages about when to solve problems on your own and when you should ask your parents for help. In other words, every family socializes its members about the extent to which closeness is encouraged or discouraged. Cohesion is defined as the emotional bonding that family members experience with each other and includes concepts of "emotional bonding, boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision-making, interests and recreation."²⁴

Although differing in terminology, the concept of cohesion has been identified by scholars from various fields as central to understanding family life.²⁵ Early on, family researchers have viewed "distance regulation" as a major family function;²⁶ family therapists have talked about "enmeshed and disengaged" families;²⁷ and sociologists have described the family's need to establish a pattern of separateness and connectedness.²⁸ Regardless of the specific terms used to describe this primary family function, the circumplex model identifies four levels of cohesion as follows:

1. *Disengaged*. At the lowest level of cohesiveness, family members maintain extreme separateness and independence, experiencing little belonging or loyalty.
2. *Connected*. With some degree of cohesiveness, family members experience emotional independence as well as some sense of involvement and belonging.
3. *Cohesive*. As family cohesiveness grows in intensity, family members strive for emotional closeness, loyalty, and togetherness with only some emphasis on individuality.
4. *Enmeshed*. At the highest level of cohesiveness, family members experience extreme closeness, loyalty, dependence, and almost no individuality.²⁹

Through their communication, family members develop, maintain, or change their patterns of cohesion. Because a father may decide that it is inappropriate to continue the physical closeness he has experienced with his daughter now that she has become a teenager, he may limit his playful roughhousing. This nonverbal message may be confusing or hurtful to his daughter. She may become distant, find new ways of being close, develop more outside friendships, or attempt to force her father back into old patterns of relating. In another family, a husband may demand more intimacy from his wife as he ages by asking for more serious conversations,

making more sexual advances, or sharing more of his feelings. His wife may ignore this new behavior or increase her intimate behaviors.

According to the circumplex model, balanced families generally are found at *connected* or *cohesive* levels, and thus, tend to be more functional. In *enmeshed* families, however, members are so intensely bonded and over-involved that individuals experience little autonomy or fulfillment of personal needs and goals. Total loyalty is expected. Family members appear fused or joined so tightly that personal identities do not develop appropriately; thus, members are highly interdependent, as indicated by the following example:

My mother viewed us as "best friends," a mixed blessing. I relied on her heavily in high school and college when I had a lot of problems with other girls who hated my theatrical successes. She cried on my shoulder about my dad and her hard life. Now that I'm entering the entertainment industry, my mother has positioned me at the center of her life—her dreams and plans are totally intermeshed with mine. This level of "togetherness" has cost me romantic partners and created problems in my career.

At the other end of the cohesion continuum, members of *disengaged* families experience extreme emotional separateness, as each member is given high autonomy and individuality, and as individual interests are prioritized.

Throughout this book, we will examine a variety of ways that families deal with issues of coming together or remaining apart, and how they communicate in an attempt to manage their levels of cohesion. For now, it is important to note that families do not remain permanently at one point on the cohesion continuum. Because there are widely varying cultural norms for acceptable or desirable levels of cohesion, what seems connected or cohesive for one family may be viewed as disengaged or enmeshed for another family.

Adaptability (or Flexibility) When you think of the changes in your own family over the past five or ten years, you may be amazed at how different the system and its members are at this point. A family experiences change as members move through developmental stages and manage stresses that arise in everyday life, such as adapting to an illness or a job transfer of one of its members. Even everyday living involves managing relational tensions that necessitate greater or lesser degrees of flexibility.

According to Olson and his colleagues, **flexibility** can be defined as the amount of change in a family's leadership, role relationships, and relationship rules. It includes concepts of "leadership (control, discipline), negotiation, styles, role relationships and relationship rules."³⁰ Family flexibility, or adaptability, focuses on

how family systems manage stability and change, and it ranges from extremely low to extremely high levels as follows:

1. *Rigid*. At extremely low levels of adaptability, family members experience an inability to change in response to internal and external demands, as well as authoritarian leadership and strict roles and rules.
2. *Structured*. With some degree of flexibility, family members experience more moderate levels of change, as well as limited shared decision-making, leadership, and relatively stable roles and rules.
3. *Flexible*. With increased adaptability, family members experience high levels of change, shared decision-making, and shifting rules and roles.
4. *Chaotic*. At extremely high levels of flexibility, family members experience very high levels of change, nonexistent leadership, confusion, and inconsistent (or nonexistent) rules and roles.³¹

Each human system exhibits both stability-promoting processes and change-promoting processes. Family systems need periods of stability as well as change in order to function. *Chaotic* families are characterized by little structure and few rules and roles. Due to almost total unpredictability, members cannot maintain predictable relationships and common meanings. At the other extreme, *rigid* families resist change and growth, leaving members continuously repeating old patterns of behavior that inhibit healthy family relationships. Again, according to the circumplex model, balanced families are generally found at structured or flexible levels of adaptability, meaning family members do not experience extreme chaos or stifling rigidity.

Although most scholars consider either an excess or a lack of change to be dysfunctional, they view a system's ability to change its structure as necessary and desirable. For example, parents may have strict rules about Internet and social media use for younger children and may monitor their interactions early in life very carefully. As children mature, however, most parents give their children more freedom on the Internet. In addition to technology, issues of ethnicity and socioeconomic status also affect a family's experience of change. Families confronting poverty and relying on social welfare agencies, for instance, often experience life as more chaotic than those who live in a secure economic situation, which makes it easier to manage outside stresses.

Family systems constantly restructure themselves as they pass through predictable developmental stages, such as pregnancy or when children enter into adulthood. Likewise, when positive or negative stresses arise, involving such issues as money, illness, or divorce, families must adapt. Finally, family systems must adapt both structurally and functionally to the demands of other social institutions and to the needs of their own members, as evidenced here:

My son and daughter-in-law adopted an older child from foster care and had to adapt their communication patterns to accommodate her. Although lying was forbidden in their family, when they adopted Shirley they had to reassess this position, because she had learned to lie for most of her life in order to fit into the culture of different foster homes. My son and daughter-in-law had to learn to be more tolerant of this behavior, particularly when she first joined the family, or they would have had to send her back to the agency.

As you may have surmised, communication is central to the adaptive function of a family, as effective adaptation relies on shared meanings. Through communication, family members learn to regulate their adaptive behaviors, thereby affecting the system as a whole. Olson and his colleagues hypothesized that when families exhibit a balance between change and stability, more mutually assertive communication styles, shared leadership, successful negotiation, role-sharing, and open rule-making and rule-sharing occur.

Although the term “communication” does not appear on the various visual representations of the circumplex model, it is a critical factor in how families manage cohesion and flexibility. Specifically, Olson and his colleagues suggested that communication facilitates a family’s movement to greater or lesser degrees of cohesion and adaptability via six communication behaviors: active listening, speaking skills, self-disclosure, clarity, staying on topic, and communicating respectfully. Communication researcher Paul Schrodtt added to this initial list by emphasizing the importance of empathy, expressiveness, and effective problem-solving in helping to create healthy levels of family cohesion and flexibility.³² Families that lack these important communication skills are often unable to change when needed.

Applying the work of Olson and his colleagues, you can visualize the mutual interaction of flexibility and cohesion within families by placing them on an axis (see Figure 2.3a). By adding the extremes of cohesion (disengagement and enmeshment) and flexibility (rigidity and chaos), you can imagine where more or less functional families would appear on the axis (see Figure 2.3b).

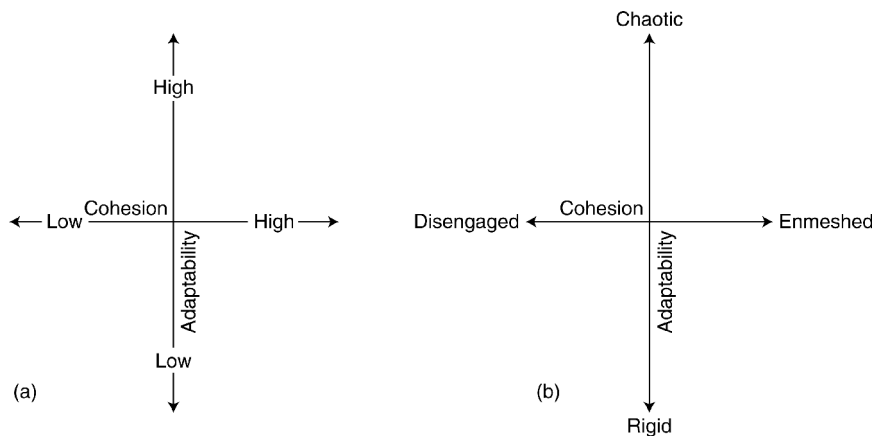
The central area of the model represents balanced or optimal levels of flexibility and cohesion, although there may be instances when a different pattern could aid a family through a particular developmental point or through a crisis. The outside areas represent the extremes of cohesion and flexibility, which are often characterized by less healthy and/or dysfunctional communication patterns.

Most well-functioning or balanced families avoid the extremes, except when members are under high levels of stress. In those situations, placement at the extreme may serve a specific purpose for a period of time, an idea we develop further

in Chapter 11. If a family member dies, for example, a highly cohesive communication pattern may be critical as the family mourns the loss and adjusts to life without this person. At the time of a family death, members may find themselves at point Y (see Figure 2.4a). Such a family may be experiencing extreme closeness among remaining members but chaos in terms of dealing with the changes in roles or in everyday activities. In contrast, a family with a teenager may find itself shifting from point X to point Z on the axis, as the adolescent demands greater freedom and less connectedness from the family and forces changes in the system (see Figure 2.4b).

FIGURE 2.3

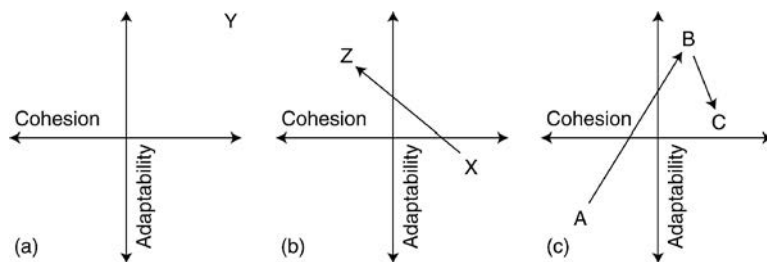
Family cohesion–adaptability axes



Copyright (© 2015) from *Family communication: Cohesion and change*, (9th ed.), by Kathleen M. Galvin, Dawn O. Braithwaite, and Carma L. Bylund. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, a division of Informa plc.

FIGURE 2.4

Application of family cohesion–adaptability



Koerner, A. F., & Schrod, P. (2014). An introduction to the special issue on family communication patterns theory. *Journal of Family Communication*, 14:1. Reprinted by permission of the publisher (Taylor & Francis Ltd, <http://www.tandfonline.com>).

The situation in the following quotation may be graphed as two moves (see Figure 2.4c):

As a small child, I lived in an active alcoholic family in which people kept pretty much to themselves. We did not talk about the problems caused by our parents' drinking and we acted as if things were fine. Yet we were very rigid because we never could bring friends into the house, and we never let outsiders know about the drinking. My older sister always took care of me if there was a problem, while my older brother locked himself in his room. Thus, we were at point A. When my parents finally went into treatment, the house was crazy in a different way for a while, since no one knew exactly how to act, but we did get closer and we were all forced to discuss what was going on. I guess we got closer and almost too flexible or unpredictable (point B). Now, five years later, I'm the only child left at home and my sober parents and I have a relatively close and flexible relationship (point C).

If you think about stages in your family life, you should be able to envision how the family shifted from one point to another on the cohesion–adaptability axes at different times. Families at different developmental stages appear more functional in different quadrants of the model, reflecting their life-stage demands. For example, young couples without children function best in either the upper-right or lower-left quadrants. Families with adolescents function best in the central, or balanced, area; older couples relate best in the lower-right quadrant. Adolescents function best when they have average cohesion, being neither enmeshed with parents or disengaged, and when their adaptability is midway between rigidity and chaos. Although these trends may differ for families from varying ethnic origins or particular sets of values, in general, researchers support maintaining a flexible attitude toward what it means to function well as a family. Throughout the remainder of this textbook, we will use the cohesion–flexibility framework found in the circumplex model as a backdrop for understanding family communication. With this in mind, let's turn our attention to a communication theory that provides one example of how communication scholars have advanced our understanding of family functioning.

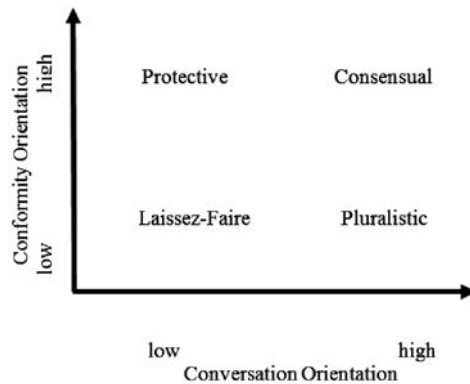
Family Communication Patterns Theory

In order for families to function at optimal levels of cohesion and adaptability, members must be able to coordinate their daily activities and behaviors and function as a group. Family communication patterns (FCP) theory attempts to explain how family members develop a shared social reality through communication, a reality that is based largely upon family members' perceptions of agreement in attitudes,

beliefs, and values.³³ According to this theory, all families are characterized by shared worldviews that are unique to each family and that provide individual family members with value and belief systems, or schemas.³⁴ **Schemas** represent organized knowledge structures that individuals use to make sense of different phenomena. FCP theory suggests that we develop an initial set of schemas from working models of how parents and children interact, and that ultimately, these schemas shape how we perceive our social environments and communicate with our family members and others outside the family.

To achieve some level of agreement and coordinate their daily activities, family members rely on two primary schemas, or orientations, to communication. First, a **conversation orientation** references the degree to which all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained interaction about a wide range of topics.³⁵ Families high in conversation orientation encourage members to talk frequently and openly about a variety of issues; they spend a lot of time sharing their thoughts and feelings with each other, as well as updates on their individual activities. Conversely, individuals from families low in conversation orientation interact less frequently with one another, as they typically avoid discussing most of their private thoughts, feelings, and activities with other family members. Second, a **conformity orientation** refers to the degree to which family communication stresses a climate of homogeneity of beliefs, values, and attitudes.³⁶ Families high in conformity orientation emphasize a uniformity of beliefs and attitudes, obedience to parents and other authority figures, and the interdependence of family members. In essence, high conformity families believe in a “traditional” family structure; they tend to be highly cohesive and hierarchical, and they favor their family relationships over relationships external to the family.³⁷ Families low in conformity orientation, on the other hand, do not subscribe to a traditional family structure, as they believe in the independence of family members, personal space, and that relationships outside the family are equally as important as family relationships. Low-conformity families believe in less cohesive and hierarchically organized families, and they subordinate family interests to the personal interests of each individual member.³⁸

Using these two orientations to family communication, researchers have identified four family types: pluralistic, consensual, protective, and laissez-faire families (see Figure 2.5). *Pluralistic families* are high in conversation orientation and low in conformity orientation. Parents in these families encourage open, unconstrained discussions that involve all family members and a wide range of topics, and they do not feel a need to be in control of their children by making decisions for them. In *consensual families*, which are high in both conversation and conformity orientations, communication is characterized by a tension between pressure to agree and to honor parental authority, on the one hand, and an interest in open dialogue and in exploring new ideas together, on the other.³⁹ *Protective families* possess low conversation orientation and high conformity orientation, as

**FIGURE 2.5**

Four family types created by conversation and conformity orientations

Koerner, A. F., & Schrodt, P. (2014). An introduction to the special issue on family communication patterns theory. *Journal of Family Communication*, 14:1. Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Taylor & Francis, www.tandfonline.com.

communication is characterized by an emphasis on obedience to parental authority and by little to no concern for open communication among family members. As communication scholars Ascan Koerner and Paul Schrodt noted: "Parents in these families believe that they should be making the decisions for their families and their children, and they see little value in explaining their reasoning to their children."⁴⁰ Finally, *laissez-faire families* are low in both conversation and conformity orientations. Parents and children tend to talk infrequently and their conversations are limited to a small number of topics, as family members are largely uninvolved in each other's lives. As a result, most members of *laissez-faire* families are emotionally divorced from their families, they avoid conflict, and children learn to look to others outside the family for social support and help with decision-making.

As you can see, conversation and conformity orientations provide further information about how family members relate to one another as they seek to fulfill a variety of family functions. In fact, researchers have demonstrated that both orientations (a) help facilitate the primary functions of cohesion and adaptability,⁴¹ (b) are associated with a variety of family communication behaviors and relational outcomes, including conflict and aggression, affection, deception, satisfaction, and closeness (among others), and (c) are predictive of family members' health and wellness, although conversation orientation is more predictive of health outcomes than conformity orientation.⁴²

When you think back to your own family, what type of family do you think you grew up in? How high or low were your family's conversation and conformity orientations? And how did your family's conversation and conformity orientations influence your family's cohesiveness and adaptability? These are but a few of the questions you can consider as you apply FCP theory to the primary functions

identified by the circumplex model. However, these two functions are not the only functions that influence how you and your family members relate to each other. In the next section, we will discuss four secondary, or supporting, functions that also influence family communication.

SUPPORTING FUNCTIONS SHAPING FAMILY COMMUNICATION

It is easier to understand that family systems are socially constructed through patterns of interaction that influence family outcomes when we look closely at the supporting functions that shape family life. Early on, sociologists Robert Hess and Gerald Handel identified five processes, or *family functions*, that impact the development of a family's message system.⁴³ Because one of these functions relates to cohesion, which we have discussed in detail, we will focus on the remaining four: (a) family images, (b) family themes, (c) family boundaries, and (d) family biosocial issues. Each of these functions interacts with a family's point on the cohesion–adaptability axes and influences a family's communication patterns, so it is important to understand their unique and subjective meanings emerging from interaction.⁴⁴

Family Images

First, relationship patterns can be viewed as metaphors, which allow people to understand one element in terms of another. There are simple metaphors and root metaphors. A *simple metaphor* may be “My sister is a butterfly. You can never get her to settle down.” On the other hand, *root metaphors* assume a connection between a way of talking about the world and a major analogy or metaphor; they reveal an underlying worldview. In other words, a root metaphor captures a family's core value(s). Such root metaphors might include service, competition, spirituality, or achievement. Identifying small and simple metaphors is relatively easy; identifying an overarching root metaphor usually takes a good deal of thought and analysis. One study of college students' family metaphors revealed 138 options for one's family of origin; images such as rock, tree, circus, security blanket, safety net, and basketball team appeared more often than others.⁴⁵

If you had to create a single mental image or a root metaphor for your family, what would it be—a nest, a broken wagon wheel, a corporation, a rowing team, or a rock? Metaphors represent the family's collective experience. Each member, and often the family system as a whole, develops images of what the family unit and its members are like; these images affect his or her patterns of interaction with the others. In well-functioning families, members' metaphors, images, stories and abilities to take the perspectives of others reflect health and well-being.⁴⁶ The

following root metaphor conveys a good deal of information about this family coping with the loss of their wife and mother:

Since my mom passed away, our family has become like a basketball team, with my dad as a player-coach. We all work together for the survival of our team, and we all contribute. Each one of us has strengths and weaknesses, yet there is always that force driving us to achieve more together. As the player-coach, my dad has the responsibility of guiding our performances and our practices; as the scorekeeper, my uncle keeps the records.

Relationships within family systems may be viewed metaphorically. One set of siblings may be viewed by the family members as “two peas in a pod”; another set may be “oil and water” that do not mix well. If a son holds an image of his mother as a protector, he may see her defending him to a teacher or a neighborhood bully as going to battle for him. If the son holds an image of his mother as overly protective, he may perceive her protective behaviors as behaving like a jailer, inducing conflict. Family members will experience conflict if their images are divergent—for example, one person may see the family as a “nest” that promotes nurturing and protection, whereas the other sees it as a “corporation” involving a strong power structure and strict organization. It is important to realize that complete consensus around family images is unlikely, and change is inevitable; thus, how family members will react to certain messages or images will never become totally predictable. The family metaphor indicates members’ collective identity, shapes and is shaped by interaction, and may serve as an effective way to convey a sense of connection.⁴⁷

Family Themes

In addition to images, each family shares themes. A **family theme** represents a pattern of feelings, motives, fantasies, and conventionalized understandings grouped around a particular locus of concern, which takes form in a family system.⁴⁸ Essentially, family themes capture a fundamental view of reality and a way of living within that worldview. Themes reflect “Who are we?” and “What do we do about it?” within a set of values, such as security, strength, dependability, caretaking, inclusion, separation, and kindness. Family themes are reflected in statements about the collective values and identity of the family system: for example, “Niensens play to win,” “You can *only* depend on your family,” “You can always do better,” “Garcias never quit,” or “Always have Plan B.”

Themes reflect the beliefs that guide family members’ actions; thus, you may understand a family’s themes by both what they say and by their actions. Family themes are created and reflected in behavioral patterns: a family with the theme

“We have a responsibility for those less fortunate than us” would be seen working on a Habitat for Humanity home or donating to a foodbank. In this way, cohesive families with prominent themes display a clear family identity; the example of Bruce and Melissa, at the beginning of this chapter, demonstrates how difficult it is for family members to hold disparate, strong core themes. Family themes undergird everyday life, as the following example portrays:

I grew up with the theme “We’ll love you anyway.” This conveys the idea that the family will always forgive you and be there for you regardless of mistakes in judgment or action. Even when it’s a shameful situation, such as getting kicked out of school or fired, or thrown in jail, the family stands behind that member. No members are rejected or cut off.

Family Boundaries

Third, family boundaries exist between family members and between the family unit and the outside world. Most families establish external and internal boundaries. The boundary defines the family system as an entity by creating a permeable

PHOTO 2.2

Some families have a theme of “Working together keeps us together”



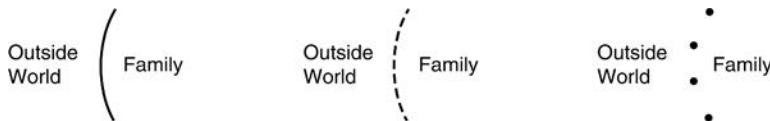
Racorn/Shutterstock

separation between its interior (family members) and the environment. You can imagine boundaries as physical or psychological borders that regulate family members' access to people, places, ideas, and values. Some family boundaries are highly permeable, or flexible, allowing easy movement across them. For example, some parents permit or encourage their children to make many different kinds of friends, explore alternative religious ideas, and encounter controversial ideas through media; such permeable boundaries permit new people, ideas, and values to enter the family.

Open boundaries support the flow of information or people from the external environment, or support an open exchange of information among family members. Although we can see some advantages to having open family boundaries, some families establish few or no family boundaries at all. In these cases, members experience little sense of family membership and have no control over other members' contact with people, places, ideas, or values. Such systems provide little collective identity and tend to be chaotic. Other families establish boundaries that are more rigid or closed, seeing this as a way to protect the family system, their beliefs, and their way of life. In these families, parents may retain partial or complete control of their children's activities to prevent them from experiencing people or ideas that they consider different or undesirable. Members of these families are socialized to respect family boundaries, as does the grandfather in the following example:

My grandfather says, "The family does not end at the front step." When you are a Gonzalez, you represent the entire family—your aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and your heritage. This means that one must be at one's best whenever in public and never tell negative family stories or secrets.

Rigid boundaries around the family system are designed to protect information about the family and to guard family secrets.⁴⁹ For instance, in a family with an alcoholic member, the others may create a strong external boundary in order to prevent outsiders from learning the family secret. Families cannot always control



Copyright (© 2015) from *Family communication: Cohesion and change* (9th ed.), by Kathleen M. Galvin, Dawn O. Braithwaite, and Carma L. Bylund. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, a division of Informa plc.

FIGURE 2.6

External boundaries

their own external boundaries because everyday interactions occur between family members and social systems,⁵⁰ such as schools and the media. Families desiring rigid external boundaries may homeschool their children and restrict access to the Internet, for example.

Family systems also establish internal boundaries with each other and around particular subsystems within the family. For example, the adult subsystem represents a significant, bounded dyad that shares private information, as well as sexual and emotional connections. Children are not allowed to share in all aspects of their parents' relationship and parents establish privacy boundaries around themselves, as highlighted in the following example:

My parents viewed their illnesses as private. My father had surgery and needed to stay at the hospital for a short visit. My mother decided to keep this a secret and not tell anyone, even their adult children. When we figured it out and called to check in on our parents to see how they were, my father became angry that no one came to see him at the hospital. He refused to speak with us for weeks. All five of us children felt that, because we were not told about any of their illnesses, we were considered outsiders.

Internal boundary expectations may also differ across cultural groups. Given the high degree of interdependence among extended family members in many ethnic cultures, a family may have less rigid boundaries between households, which creates strong emotional ties and mutual assistance. When new immigrant families face issues such as language barriers or limited outside support, their extended family ties become even more critical and intense.⁵¹

Problems can arise if the family's internal boundaries, particularly the marital or partnership boundary, are highly permeable. In these cases, children can be co-opted into fulfilling some functions of the spousal role, with parents using children as confidants or relying on them for assistance that exceeds the child's ability. When internal boundaries are inappropriately crossed, roles become confused and members may feel angry or hurt.

Family Biosocial Issues

Fourth, families operate within a larger culture that provides models and socializes members into biosocial roles based on such factors as gender, age, and position in the family (like "oldest sister" or "first-born son"). All of these biosocial roles are tied into power, as they suggest or govern relationships within and outside of the family system. Families differ in the extent to which such criteria determine the power and responsibilities of each member. Whereas position-oriented families

allocate rights and responsibilities according to the family members' rank or position in the family, person-oriented families tend to rely more on individuals' interests, talents, and availability to determine what is expected of them.

In addition, the family serves as a primary source of gender identity.⁵² Gender identity both affects and reflects family interaction. A family that assigns responsibilities based on a member's gender differs from one that uses personal interest or preference as the basis for assigning responsibilities. In families that assign responsibility based on a member's gender, rather than personal interest or preference, females will likely be socialized toward cooking and home care and males toward yard care and repairs. Gendered familial expectations may be subtle and surprising. In one study of parental attitudes and infidelity, for instance, researchers found that both mothers and fathers regarded sexual infidelity as more distressing when committed by a daughter-in-law than by a son-in-law.⁵³ In contrast, they found emotional infidelity was more distressing when it involved a son-in-law. Such traditional gender beliefs are often unrecognized but operational. Cultural gender expectations vary, but they all affect gendered family roles. Such a cultural perspective on gender roles is displayed in the following comment:

My mother has characteristics of both the Korean attitude and the Western point of view toward women. She fulfills the Korean view of what a woman should be by being the primary nurturer of the family. She is the parent who drove us to piano lessons and took care of us when we were sick. She is the parent that we talk to first when we have a relational problem. In addition to being the nurturer of the family, she also meets the Western view that women should have careers. She is an equal financial contributor to our family. This helps us relate to her even more.

Other value decisions relate to the use of power within the family structure. To what extent are decision-making and authority issues resolved according to traditional gender and role configurations? Flexible families tend to engage in ongoing negotiations about power and decision-making; for example, as many children become more technologically proficient than their parents, the adults increasingly include younger members of their family in decisions about technology purchases and turn to them for technological assistance.⁵⁴

Family images, themes, boundaries, and biosocial issues interact with a family's functions of cohesion and adaptability. You likely find it insightful to reflect on how these functions manifest themselves in your own family of origin. Generally, flexible families will experience greater variety in images, themes, boundaries, and responses to biosocial issues than will rigid families. For example, a family with boundaries and themes that support strong family interdependence and traditions will be more likely to develop extremely high cohesion and low adaptability, in

contrast to a family with flexible boundaries and themes supporting independence. What is important to remember is that communication in family systems both reflects and influences a family's most central values. Through interaction, families establish their patterns of cohesion and adaptability, and develop their images, themes, boundaries, and responses to biosocial issues, thus reminding us again about the central role of communication in co-creating and enacting family relationships.

FAMILY OF ORIGIN INFLUENCES

We end this chapter with a discussion on the profound influence of our family of origin. We might hear people say, "My son's a Rosenstein, all right. He'll walk up and talk to anyone without a trace of shyness," or "My grandparents and parents always fought by yelling at each other and then forgetting about it. My wife doesn't understand this." These statements indicate family of origin influences on the communication patterns of future generations. The term **family of origin** refers to the family or families in which a person is raised. One's family of origin is generally considered to be the earliest and most powerful influence on personal development and a primary source of expectations concerning how families should function.⁵⁵ The opening vignette describing Julio and his father's patterns of discipline provides an example of the power of family of origin patterns.

The term *family of origin influences* refers to how current relational experiences and interaction patterns reflect: (a) unique multigenerational transmissions, and (b) members' ethnic heritages. One's multigenerational and ethnic background influences what each person brings to their relationships and families in adulthood, and influences the experiences of these families. Given your own family of origin experiences, you may desire to create an adult family similar or different from the one you experienced as a child. However, even when your goal is to take a different path, you may find yourself re-creating patterns similar to your earlier experiences. For instance, researchers have identified links between family of origin attachment styles and adolescents' behaviors in romantic relationships in young adulthood.⁵⁶ In addition, adolescent experiences of hostility or positive engagement in their family of origin are predictors of these behaviors in their own children.⁵⁷

Multigenerational Transmissions

Families of origin provide important blueprints for communication and relational patterns of future generations. Initially, communication is learned in the home, and throughout life, the family setting provides a major testing ground for new communication skills or strategies. Each young person who leaves the family of origin to form a new family system carries a set of conscious and unconscious rules

of relating to others, based on the socializing influence of his or her family.⁵⁸ Consequently, the family of origin serves as the first communication classroom. Consider the following example of a wife who describes the differences in nonverbal communication in her family of origin from that of her husband, Rob:

It was not until I became closely involved with a second family that I became conscious of the fact that the amount and type of contact can differ greatly. Rarely, in Rob's home, will another person reach for someone else's hand, walk arm in arm, or kiss for no special reason. Hugs are reserved for comfort. When people filter into the den to watch television, one person will sit on the couch, the next on the floor, a third on a chair, and finally the last person is forced to sit on the couch. And always at the opposite end! Touching, in my home, was a natural, everyday occurrence. Usually, the family breakfast began with "good morning" hugs and kisses. Even as adults, no one ever hesitated to cuddle up next to someone else, run their hands through another person's hair, or start tickling whoever happens to be in reaching distance.

Patterns learned in the family of origin tend to persist unless there is significant intervention. For instance, one research team examined the continuity of supportive parenting across generations and found that factors like interpersonal relations,



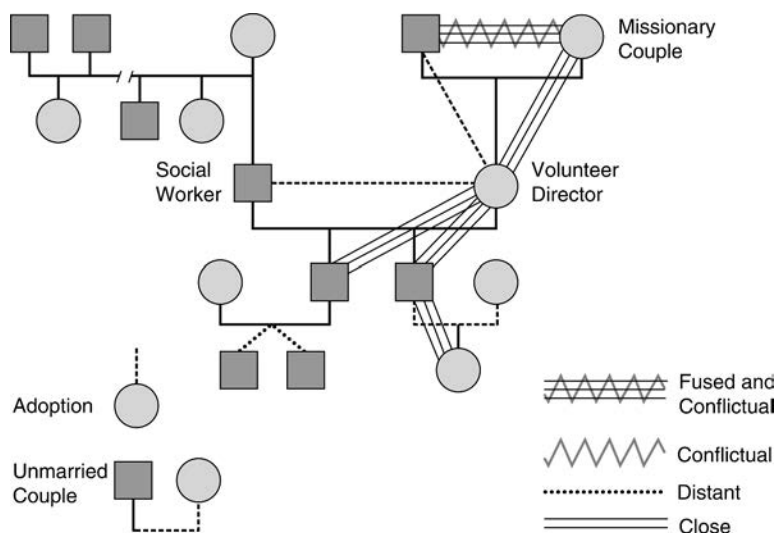
Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock

PHOTO 2.3

Messages and meanings pass from one generation to the next

FIGURE 2.7

A genogram depicting multi-generational systems



Copyright (© 2015) from *Family communication: Cohesion and change* (9th ed.), by Kathleen M. Galvin, Dawn O. Braithwaite, and Carma L. Bylund. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, a division of Informa plc.

social participation, and role modeling are perpetuated through intergenerational continuity.⁵⁹

Multigenerational patterns can be represented in images called family genograms. A **genogram** is a multigenerational family tree that depicts familial relationships visually. It records information about social relationships and biological and psychological issues in the family across three or more generations.⁶⁰ Genograms help members of family systems envision the influences of their own intergenerational transmissions.⁶¹

Consider Figure 2.7, a multigenerational genogram that contains examples of highly connected parent–child relationships, a family theme of service, and flexible boundaries. In this particular genogram design, males are represented by squares and females by circles. The nature of the lines that link people reflects the interactive nature of their relationship. For example, jagged lines imply conflict.

The power of multigenerational transmission is part of a puzzle we see unfold in families. In the following passage, a young woman reflects on her painful experiences and insights:

I have come to learn that my behavioral problems were a reaction to my mother's alcoholism, and to her emotional distance during my infancy and childhood. Likewise, my mother's behaviors had a similar origin. Affected by her own mother's chronic

depression, my mother never received the affirmation she needed and desired. Yet, having been reared by an alcoholic mother, my grandmother was in no better position to be an effective mother or role model for intimacy. With such unavailable models, the women in my family were perpetually unable to develop this essential capacity. Consequently, my own mother built our relationship from a faulty blueprint.

Some of the factors subject to multigenerational transmission include gender roles, patterns of closeness and distance, factors that link individuals (such as names or physical similarities), boundary management practices, conflict patterns, and parenting styles.⁶² These are important to pay attention to, as some serious family challenges like alcoholism, eating patterns, and divorce (to name a few) appear to have some basis in family of origin experiences and messages.⁶³ These patterns may emerge, consciously or unconsciously, across three or four generations. We should be careful to avoid thoughts of family determinism or feelings of fatalism, however. Although some children replicate the problematic patterns of communicating that they witnessed in their family of origin, others create well-functioning adult familial relationships.⁶⁴ Certainly, researchers need to continue to study how and why family members repeat or escape unhealthy family of origin patterns.

Resilience, or the processes by which some individuals and relationships recover and even thrive after the experience of adversity, appears to account for some of the variance in how family members experience challenges.⁶⁵ Resilience not just involves recovery within a family system, but also focuses on how families can sustain positive states over time.⁶⁶ Communication scholar Patrice Buzzanell stresses the important role of family communication in resilience, which is literally “talked into being.”⁶⁷ Resilient children, even those dealing with adversity, are able to escape challenges that may have vexed their family for one or more generations. They are able to deal effectively with stress and challenges, and exhibit the capacity to bounce back from adversity, develop realistic goals, problem-solve, and treat themselves and others with respect.⁶⁸

We want to point out that intergenerational patterns need not be dramatic or even negative. Most relationships that significantly influence family members are of the perpetual but dormant kind. In fact, communication scholar Steve Duck describes these family patterns as “part of the unchallenged and comfortable predictability of lives made up of routine, regular conversation, and assumptions that most of tomorrow will be based on the foundation of today.”⁶⁹ Patterns move across generations, yet some patterns change within a particular generation, with influences moving across different family roles. Although we are well aware that parents influence children, for instance, children also shape their parents’ behavior, reflecting bidirectional interpersonal communication patterns.⁷⁰

In the end, the family of origin plays a significant role in creating and developing members' communication patterns, and is tied closely to both the primary functions of cohesion and adaptability, and the secondary functions that support the primary functions—images, themes, boundaries, and biosocial issues. Taken together, all these factors contribute to create a framework for examining family communication.

Ethnicity

The role of ethnicity in multigenerational communication patterns often remains overlooked. Ethnicity relates to cultural factors such as common ancestry, language, nationality, and beliefs. Ethnicity also represents the immigrant group's class and occupational skills that link to historically or regionally specific jobs, housing stock, and political conditions.⁷¹ The influence of ethnicity can be powerful because individuals retain ethnic values and identification across many generations after immigration.⁷² One of our Arabic students reflected on how culture influences family communication:

Growing up in an Arab household, our immediate family and our extended family reflected the strong patriarchal influence and a theme of "family is family," which implied active support of many relatives. We lived by the Arabic proverb "A small house has enough room for one hundred people who love each other." We shared joys, sorrows, money, and things among and across generations.

A family's cultural heritage includes communication norms and expectations, which are often maintained for generations. For example, an emphasis on "keeping things in the family," or the way in which sensitive subjects are discussed, passes from generation to generation, reflecting individual and cultural influences. We see the influences of family culture and ethnicity in issues such as age, gender, roles, expressiveness, birth order, separation, or individuation. For example, first- and second-generation Italian families are known for functioning within a network of other relatives, such as *gumbares* (old friends) and godparents, from whom mutual support and family honor is expected. These families may place a greater value on gendered role distinctions, with the father as the undisputed head of the family and mother as the heart.⁷³ Many African Americans share a communal sense of identity and value extended kinship, religion, and spirituality.⁷⁴ African American parent-child interaction patterns designate parents as cultural advisors and coaches, given their unique need to socialize children to manage situations of racial derogation.⁷⁵ African American parents tend to exhibit the "imperative mode," or directive communication with their children as a protective authority.⁷⁶

Multiracial/ethnic families are especially discourse-dependent, and members must rely on communication as they navigate their identities, family roles, and expectations within the family and externally with others.⁷⁷ In fact, family communication scholars are studying interaction within multiracial/ethnic families as intergroup communication, and looking at how interaction influences family members' identification across cultural groups.⁷⁸

Biological/Genetic Factors

In addition to multigenerational transmissions and ethnicity, current scientific research in biology and genetic studies will also influence the field of family communication over the next several decades.⁷⁹ In the past 20 years, the impact of physiology, genetics, and evolution on interaction patterns has gained greater attention, due to a renewed focus on biological contributions to individual and family communication practices.⁸⁰ Researchers are discovering evolutionary and biological influences on communication, such as exchanging affection,⁸¹ investing in relationships, and ending relationships when trust has been sacrificed.⁸² As scholars continue to investigate the associations among interaction patterns and their physiological effects, their work stands to contribute significantly to a global understanding of family communication patterns.

Biology not only *influences* family communication, but is also the *topic* of family communication. Since the turn of the century, communication scholars have shown an increased interest in the intersection of family communication and health.⁸³ Family communication about genetics involves both disclosure and discussion. In the cases of genetic disorders, factors like gender, culture, family role, family structure, and privacy rules can impact how and what the first family member identified as having the disease (who is called the *proband*) communicates with the rest of the family.⁸⁴ Once the initial illness disclosure is made, ongoing family discussions about it tend to be gendered and reflective of established family communication patterns. We will discuss family communication about genetics further in Chapter 12.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we highlighted the profound effects of communication on developing, living in, and altering family systems across the lifespan. Rather than viewing communication simply as the way we transmit messages, we adopted a transactional perspective on communication, viewing communication as the symbolic, transactional process of creating and sharing meanings. We focused in on two broad, metacommunicative perspectives on family communication: (a) families as socially constructed in interaction, as discourse-dependent, and co-created in family communication, and (b) families as reflected in and affected

by communication patterns, illustrated by the circumplex model and family communication patterns theory. After discussing the primary functions of cohesion, adaptability (or change), and communication, we ended the chapter by highlighting some of the most important supporting functions and family of origin influences that shape family communication and experiences across the lifespan.

Discussion Questions

1. Thinking about your own family, identify three areas of shared meaning that your family would have to explain to someone who was visiting your family for a week in order for that person to understand your family. What would your houseguest need to know in order to understand how your family makes sense of the world (e.g., teasing means “Dad likes you”)?
2. How might an enmeshed family communicate in ways that differ from a disengaged family? And how might the behaviors you identify also influence the degree of flexibility found in both family types?
3. What are some factors that influence how well family might move from one point on the cohesion–flexibility grid to another? Can you describe a time in your own family when your family system moved to another location within the circumplex model because of some life event or unexpected circumstance?
4. How does your family, or a family you know, communicate one of their family themes to those outside the family? What images, boundaries, and biosocial issues support that theme?
5. What types of communication patterns can you identify from your parents’ families of origin to *your* family of origin? And to what extent will you accept, reject, or modify these patterns in your own family one day?
6. Draw a family genogram that represents the relationships between your family members today. How would this genogram have been different five years ago? Ten years ago? And what might it look like five or ten years from now?

Key Words

Cohesion	Flexibility
Communication	Function
Commuter wives	Genogram
Conformity orientation	Metacommunication
Conversation orientation	Resilience
Family of origin	Schemas
Family theme	

NOTES

1. Whitchurch, G. G., & Dickson, F. C. (1999). Family communication. In M. B. Sussman, S. K. Steinmetz, & G. W. Peterson (Eds.), *Handbook of marriage and the family* (2nd ed, pp. 687–704). New York: Plenum Press.
2. Baxter, L. A. (2014). Theorizing the communicative construction of “family”: The three R’s. In L. A. Baxter (Ed.), *Remaking “family” communicatively* (pp. 33–50). New York: Peter Lang.
3. Wood, J. T. (2000). *Relational communication: Continuity and change in personal relationships* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
4. Floyd, K. (2014). *Communication matters* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
5. Wood (2000).
6. Stewart, J. (1999). Interpersonal communication: Contact between persons. In J. Stewart (Ed.), *Bridges not walls* (7th ed., pp. 13–43). New York: Random House.
7. Wood (2000).
8. Breunlin, D. C., Schwartz R. C., & Kune-Karrer, B. M. (2001). *Metaframeworks: Transcending the models of family therapy* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
9. Baxter (2014); see also Braithwaite, D. O., Foster, E., & Bergen, K. (2018). Social construction theory: Communication co-creating families. In D. O. Braithwaite, E. A. Suter, & K. Floyd (Eds.), *Engaging theories in family communication: Multiple perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 267). New York: Routledge.
10. Braithwaite et al. (2018); see also Foster, E., & Bochner, A. (2008). Social constructionist perspectives in communication research. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of constructionist research* (pp. 85–106). New York: Guilford.
11. Galvin, K. M. (2006). Diversity’s impact on defining the family: Discourse dependence and identity. In L. H. Turner & R. West (Eds.), *The family communication sourcebook* (pp. 3–19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
12. Schrod, P. (2014). Discourse-dependence, relational ambivalence, and the social construction of stepfamily relationships. In L. A. Baxter (Ed.), *Remaking “family” communicatively* (pp. 157–174). New York: Peter Lang.
13. Suter, E. A., Daas, K. L., & Bergen, K. M. (2008). Negotiating lesbian family identity via symbols and rituals, *Journal of Family Issues*, 29, 26–47.
14. Braithwaite et al. (2018).
15. Braithwaite, D. O., Waldron, V. R., Allen, J., Bergquist, G., Marsh, J., Oliver, B., Swords, N., & Tschampl-Diesing, C. (2018). “Feeling warmth and close to her”: Communication and resilience reflected in turning points in positive adult stepchild–stepparent relationships. *Journal of Family Communication*, 18, 92–109.
16. Braithwaite, Waldron et al. (2018).
17. Galvin (2006).
18. Bergen, K. M. (2010). Negotiating a “questionable” identity: Commuter wives and social networks. *Southern Communication Journal*, 75, 35–56; see also Bergen, K. M. (2010). Accounting for difference: Commuter wives and the master narrative of marriage. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 38, 47–64.
19. Suter, E. A. (2008). Discursive negotiation of family identity: A study of U.S. families with adopted children from China. *Journal of Family Communication*, 8, 126–147.
20. Galvin (2006).
21. Baxter (2014).
22. Ibid.
23. Olson, D. H., Sprenkle, D., & Russell, C. (1979). Circumplex model of marital and family systems: Cohesion and adaptability dimensions, family types, and clinical

- applications. *Family Process*, 18, 3–28; see also Olson, D. H. (2000). Circumplex model of marital and family systems. *Family focus on . . . death and dying* (p. F4). Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
24. p. 145 in Olson (2000).
 25. Pistole, M. C. (1994). Adult attachment styles: Some thoughts on closeness–distance struggles. *Family Process*, 33(2), 147–159.
 26. Kantor, D., & Lehr, W. (1976). *Inside the family*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
 27. Minuchin, S., Montalovo, B., Guerney, B. G., Rosman, B. L., & Schumer, F. (1967). *Families of the slums: An exploration of their structure and treatment*. New York: Basic Books.
 28. Hess, R., & Handel, G. (1959). *Family worlds*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
 29. Olson, D. H., DeFrain, J., & Skogrand, L. (2008). *Marriage & families: Intimacy, diversity and strengths* (6th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. Olson, D. H., Olson-Sigg, A. K., & Larson, P. J. (2008). *The couple checkup*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
 30. p. 147 in Olson (2000).
 31. Olson et al. (2008). *Marriage & families: Intimacy, diversity and strengths*.
 32. Schrod, P. (2005). Family communication schemata and the circumplex model of family functioning. *Western Journal of Communication*, 69, 359–376.
 33. Koerner, A. F., & Schrod, P. (2014). An introduction to the special issue on family communication patterns theory. *Journal of Family Communication*, 14, 1–15.
 34. Floyd, K., Schrod, P., Erbert, L. A., & Trethewey, A. (2017). *Exploring communication theory: Making sense of us*. New York: Routledge.
 35. Koerner, A. F., Schrod, P., & Fitzpatrick, M. A. (2018). Family communication patterns theory: A grand theory of family communication. In D. O. Braithwaite, E. Suter, & K. Floyd (Eds.), *Engaging theories in family communication: Multiple perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 142–153). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
 36. Ibid.
 37. Koerner & Schrod (2014).
 38. Ibid.
 39. Ibid.
 40. p. 8 in Koerner & Schrod (2014).
 41. Schrod (2005).
 42. Schrod, P., Witt, P. L., & Messersmith, A. S. (2008). A meta-analytical review of family communication patterns and their associations with information processing, behavioral, and psychosocial outcomes. *Communication Monographs*, 75, 248–269.
 43. Hess & Handel (1959).
 44. White, J. M., & Klein, D. M. (2002). *Family theories* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
 45. Pawlowski, D. R., Thilborger, C., & Cieloha-Meekins, J. (2001). Prisons, old cars, and Christmas trees: A metaphoric analysis of familial communication. *Communication Studies*, 52, 180–196.
 46. Koenig Kellas, J., Willer, E. K., & Trees, A. R. (2013). Communicated perspective-taking: Spouses' perceptions of each other's behaviors during stories of marital stress. *Southern Communication Journal*, 78, 326–351.
 47. Pawlowski et al. (2001).
 48. Hess & Handel (1959).
 49. Vangelisti, A. L., & Caughlin, J. (1997). Revealing family secrets: The influence of topic function and relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 14, 679–705.

50. Socha, T. J., & Stamp, G. H. (2009). *Parents and children communicating with society: Managing relationships outside of the home*. New York: Routledge.
51. Bush, K. R., Bohon, S. A., & Kim, H. K. (2010). Adaptation among immigrant families: Resources and barriers. In S. J. Price, C. A. Price, & P. C. McKenry (Eds.), *Families and change: Coping with stressful events and transitions* (4th ed., pp. 285–310). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
52. Wood, J. T. (2013). *Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and culture* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
53. Fenigstein, A., & Peltz, R. (2002). Distress over the infidelity of a child's spouse: A crucial test of evolutionary and socialization hypotheses. *Personal Relationships*, 9, 301–312.
54. Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York: Basic Books.
55. McGoldrick, M., Gerson, R., & Petry, S. (2008). *Genograms: Assessment and interventions* (3rd ed.). New York: W. W. Norton.
56. Dinero, R., Conger, R., Shaver, P., Widaman, K., & Larsen-Rife, D. (2008). Influence of family of origin and adult romantic partners on romantic attachment security. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22, 622–632. See also Hare, A. L., Miga, E. M., & Allen, J. P. (2009). Intergenerational transmission of aggression in romantic relationships: The moderating role of attachment security. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 6, 808–818.
57. Whitton, S. W., Waldinger, R. J., Schulz, M. S., Allen, J. P., Crowell, J. A., & Hauser, M. A. (2008). Prospective associations from family-of-origin interactions to adult marital interactions and relationship adjustment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(2), 274–286.
58. DeGenova, M. K., & Rice, F. P. (2005). *Intimate relationships, marriages, and families* (6th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
59. Chen, Z., & Kaplan, H. B. (2001). Intergenerational transmission of constructive parenting. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 63, 17–31.
60. McGoldrick, M., Gerson, R., & Petry, S. (2008). *Genograms: Assessment and intervention* (3rd ed.). New York: W.W. Norton Company.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Amato, P. R., & Cheadle, J. (2005). The long reach of divorce: Divorce and child well-being across three generations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 67, 191–206. See also Watt, T. T. (2002). Marital and cohabiting relationships of adult children of alcoholics: Evidence from the National Survey of Families and Households. *Journal of Family Issues*, 23, 246–265.
64. Rutter, M. (2002). Family influences on behavior and development: Challenges for the future. In J. P. McHale & W. S. Grolnick (Eds.), *Retrospect and prospect in the psychological study of families* (pp. 321–351). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
65. Kent, M., Davis, M. C., & Reich, J. W. (Eds.). (2013). *The resilience handbook: Approaches to stress and trauma*. New York: Routledge.
66. Zautra, A. J. (2009). Resilience: One part recovery, two parts sustainability. *Journal of Personality*, 77, 1935–1943.
67. Buzzanell, P. M. (2010). Resilience: Talking, resisting, and imagining new normalcies into being. *Journal of Communication*, 60, 1–14. See also, Buzzanell, P. M. (2018). Communication theory of resilience: Enacting adaptive-transformative processes when families experience loss and disruption. In D. O. Braithwaite, E. A. Suter, & K. Floyd (Eds.), *Engaging theories in family communication: Multiple perspectives* (2nd ed, pp. 98–109). New York: Routledge.

68. Saphir, M. N., & Chaffee, S. H. (2002). Adolescents' contributions to family communication patterns. *Human Communication Research*, 28, 86–108. See also Goldstein, S., & Brooks, R. B. (2013). Why study resilience? In S. Goldstein & R. B. Brooks (Eds.), *Handbook of resilience in children* (pp. 3–14). New York: Springer.
69. p. 91 in Duck, S. (1986). *Human relationships: An introduction to social psychology*. London: Sage.
70. Olson et al. (2008). *Marriage & families: Intimacy, diversity and strengths*. Saphir & Chaffee (2002).
71. Coontz, S. (1999). Introduction. In S. Coontz, M. Parson, & G. Raley (Eds.), *American families: A multicultural reader* (pp. ix–xxxiii). New York: Routledge.
72. McGoldrick, M., Giordano, J., & Garcia-Preto, N. (2005). Overview: Ethnicity and family therapy. In M. McGoldrick, J. Giordano, & N. Garcia-Preto (Eds.), *Ethnicity and family therapy* (3rd ed., pp. 1–40). New York: Guilford Press.
73. Giordano, J., McGoldrick, M., & Klages, J. G. (2005). Italian families. In M. McGoldrick, J. Giordano, & N. Garcia-Preto (Eds.), *Ethnicity and family therapy* (3rd ed., pp. 616–628). New York: Guilford Press.
74. McGoldrick, M. (2003). Culture: A challenge to concepts of normality. In F. Walsh (Ed.), *Normal family processes: Growing diversity and complexity* (3rd ed., pp. 235–259). New York: Guilford Press. See also Stewart, P. E. (2010). Stress and coping in African American families. In S. J. Price, C. A. Price, & P. C. McKenry (Eds.), *Families and change: Coping with stressful events and transitions* (4th ed., pp. 311–331). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
75. Socha, T. J., Bromley, J., & Kelly, B. (1995). Invisible parents and children: Exploring African-American parent–child communication. In T. J. Socha & G. H. Stamp (Eds.), *Parents, children and communication: Frontiers of theory and research* (pp. 127–145). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
76. Chandler, D., A'Vant, E. R., & Graves, S. L. (2008). Effective communication with Black families and students. *Communique Online*. *NASP Communique*, 37(3). Retrieved June 12, 2013 from www.nasponlin.org
77. Galvin, K. M., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2014). Family communication theory and research from the field of Family Communication: Discourses that constitute and reflect families. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 6, 97–111.
78. Soliz, J. E., Thorson A. R., & Rittenour, C. E. (2009). Communicative correlates of satisfaction, family identity, and group salience in multiracial/ethnic families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 819–832.
79. Booth, A., Carver, K., & Granger, D. (2000). Biosocial perspectives on the family. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1018–1034.
80. Afifi, T. D., Davis, S., & Denes, A. (2015). Biological and evolutionary theory. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodts (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
81. Floyd, K., Hesse, C., & Generous, M. L. (2018). Affection exchange theory: A bio-evolutionary look at affectionate communication. In D. O. Braithwaite, E. A. Suter, & K. Floyd (Eds.), *Engaging theories in family communication: Multiple perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 17–26). New York: Routledge.
82. Afifi et al. (2015).
83. Gaff, C. L., & Bylund, C. L. (Eds.). (2010). *Family communication about genetics: Theory and practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
84. Galvin, K. M., & Grill, L. H. (2009). Opening up the conversation on genetics and genomics in families: The space for communication scholars. In C. S. Beck (Ed.), *Communication yearbook* (Vol. 33, pp. 213–257). New York: Routledge.