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ABSTRACT

The argument for renewed theoretical development in the study of family communication has several implications. One is that researchers should concentrate on family communication as such rather than expanding generalizations from family communication to other groups and institutions; this requires grappling more specifically with the explication and testing of theoretical propositions about the ways in which family communication functions. The roster of possible hypotheses includes such empirical theories as reinforcement, selective perception, information-seeking, and de facto selective exposure. Methodologies that are quite different from those used in the past will have to be devised and employed. Firsthand observation, experimental variation, and longitudinal designs are all needed. The latter is particularly important because the greatest implications of what is known about family communication have to do with developments occurring long after the child matures and leaves the family. Both observational and experimental ingenuity are needed to test specific hypotheses about the nature of the process by which family communication patterns shape the developing child's construction of the world around him. (Author/RL)

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS IN THE FAMILY:

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADAPTABILITY AND CHANGE

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COMMUNICATION PATTERNS IN THE FAMILY: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADAPTABILITY AND CHANGE

A few years ago Jack McLeod and I published a paper, based on research we had done in collaboration with Dan Wackman and others, called "The Construction of Social Reality."[1] In it we went into considerable detail on the role played by parent-child communication structures in the home, as a determinant of various components of a child's cognitive development in relation to the world outside the immediate family environment. The empirical findings, which I will summarize shortly here, are rather strong and consistent across a variety of studies, including those done by us and by others since the preparation of that overview. Family Communication Patterns, or FCP as those of us in its primary group of close acquaintances know it, is about as trustworthy an independent variable as I have encountered in some years of survey research on mass media use and effects, political behavior, and interpersonal co-orientation.[2]

But my main purpose here is not to restate past findings, rather it is to outline an agenda for future research that can build on the first phase of FCP research, which by this time seems to have run its course. Three broad theoretical questions, each of which is capable of generating empirical answers, suggest themselves. First, what is the nature of the process by which habitual family communication patterns structure a person's subsequent communication, cognitive activity, and directed social behaviors? Second, to what extent can propositions based on FCP research be generalized to the functioning of social systems other than the family, such as work and peer groups, institutional arrangements, and community or even national "character"? Third, what does FCP research predict about a person's capability in life, after reaching adulthood and departing the family context, to develop the communication competences and adaptabilities that seem to be necessary to function successfully in modern society?[3] Each of these three questions can be answered narrowly, within the immediate bounds of available empirical evidence, or quite loosely in

the fashion of blue-sky speculation and hyperbole. Here I will try to steer a middling course, keeping an eye on the fixed points we are already familiar with, while at the same time pointing toward some routes for further exploration.

The Power Analog

Although the interplay between communication and social power is itself a fascinating topic, the most hopeful approach to the study of communication is as a substitute, or functional equivalent, for power relationships. Just as diplomacy is said to be the alternative to war, so communication is the alternative people have to attempts to wield forcible control over one another. Most early studies of parent-child relationships were analyses of lines of power; ordinarily these had to do with the amount and kind of power parents exercised over their children. Home relationships could be characterized as, for example, democratic and participatory on the one hand, or autocratic and repressive on the other. A given family could be located at some point along the continuum between these extremes.

By analogy, we originally assumed that communication structures could be arrayed along a continuum that stretched from homes where youngsters were encouraged to examine several sides of an issue and to come to their own conclusions about it, to the opposite extreme where parents cautioned children not to argue or worry about the world outside, nor to question the views of their elders. Our data soon told us that we were wrong in assuming that this simple dichotomy would locate the poles of a single continuum. To be sure, we found families where one of these patterns prevailed, and other families where the other was the characteristic pattern of pattern of parent-child communication. But the families "in between" did not consist of a single homogeneous group. There were some in which neither of the extreme patterns was stressed, but there were also many families where the parents seemed simultaneously to send <u>both</u> messages to their children. This latter combination, which we found most interesting, can be recognized by students of interpersonal communication as a subtle form of the double-bind. Consider the evidence and draw your

own conclusions from it, the parents in effect say, but don't upset the internal harmony of our household.

The Variable A-B-X Model

The existence of this fourth type of family -- and we have consistently found about equal numbers of each of the four types in various samples -- made it clear to us early on that we would not be able to apply the simple dichotomous analogy from power structures to family communication.[4] For empirical reasons we needed a conceptual model that would provide separately for the presence or absence of each of the two general patterns of parent-child interaction. For this purpose we chose an adaptation of Newcomb's A-B-X model of communication.[5]

In the A-B-X model, the interactants are labeled persons A and B, and they are assumed to be cooriented to one another and to an external topic of mutual interest, which is labeled X. From A's point of view, there exist four cognitions: his feelings toward the other person (A-B relations), his feelings about the topic of communication (A-X relations), his estimate of the other person's feelings toward him (perceived B-A relations), and his estimate of the other person's feelings about the topic toward which they are cooriented (perceived B-X relations). From B's point of view a similar set of four cognitions are assumed to exist. An external observer can, by interrogation of A and B, gather estimates of all eight of these cognitions in a coorientation situation and thus put himself in a position to describe the total A-B-X system from an "objective" viewpoint that would be impossible for either A or B to construct alone.[6]

Coorientational methods have indeed been used this way, for such diverse purposes as marriage counseling and intervention in community controversies.[7] But one of the most typical findings in field studies is that the A-B-X situation is often an incomplete one. Whereas the model assumes that all eight cognitions described in the previous paragraph exist, often in fact several of them do not. Many people interact with one another without giving much thought to, say, the other

person's B-X relations. Instead of assuming that these relations constitute a set of givens applicable to every situation, it makes better sense to treat them as variables. To simplify the model for discursive purposes, one can conceive of a variable A-B-X model, in which either of two kinds of relations may be either present or absent. That is, A-B relations may or may not be relevant, and the same holds for A-X and B-X relations.

The fourfold typology that is generated by these two dichotomies coincides nicely with the four types of families I described earlier. As those who have followed this research literature know, we have given distinctive labels to each of the four types. Families in which only A-B relations, i.e. considerations of interpersonal harmony and deference to elders, are stressed we have called "protective" families. The contrasting type, where A-X and B-X relations (i.e. concentration on external issues and their merits) are stressed without reference to interpersonal considerations, is called a "pluralistic" family. If the parents do not stress either kind of relation, we call it a "laissez-faire" family. Finally, there are "consensual" families, where parents attempt to put emphasis on both A-B and A-X considerations.

The label "consensual" represents a hypothesis, and one for which we have some supporting evidence. Newcomb's model predicts that interpersonal communication will be characterized by a "strain toward symmetry", which among other things would mean a tendency for positively attracted pairs of persons (like the typical parent and child) to become more similar in their opinions over time.[8] Wackman reviewed data from several quite different studies, however, and found little evidence of increased agreement within interacting dyads.[9] Newcomb's "symmetry" principle turns out not to be a strong theory in the sense of empirical prediction. What it may be instead is a statement of the conditions that are necessary for interpersonal consensus-building to occur. That is, if we decompose the full A-B-X model into its separate assumptions, the "strain toward symmetry" Newcomb predicts would only be expected within an interpersonal system in which both A-B and A-X relations are defined as

important. In short, this would occur only in the type of family we have called "consensual." In one field experiment on husband-wife discussion of current news topics, the greatest change in the direction of coorientational agreement was indeed found within the consensual family type.[10]

Hypothetical Functions of FCP

While the consensual home is perhaps the most interesting from a theoretical standpoint, the greatest empirical contrast is usually that between the protective (A-B) and pluralistic (A-X) types. Children from the former are lowest and from the latter highest, for example, in sensitivity to the informational level in a persuasive message[11]; grade average in school[12]; and feeling an obligation to be politically active when they grow up[13]. The children of protective families spend the most time watching television and the least time reading newspapers[14], and are the ones who see the greatest commonality between themselves and TV's most celebrated bigot, Archie Bunker.[15] The pluralistic children stand out in such respects as scoring very high on measures of political knowledge[16]; spending the least time with TV[17]; and in exhibiting no correlation between their own media use and that of their parents.[18] Pluralistic families are the ones in which conflicts over which TV program to watch are most often settled by compromise or vote, rather than by the parents simply asserting their power prerogatives.[19] Pluralistic parents do not come to agree with one another more following discussion of current news issues, but they are the type most likely to increase the accuracy of their perceptions of one another's opinions; protective parents, by contrast, instead of becoming more accurate or agreeing more, simply come to believe (incorrectly) that they have reached greater agreement.[20]

While those contrasts between pluralistics and protectives seem to add up to a coherent pattern, the children in consensual homes display some fascinating discontinuities. For example, they report the highest levels of attention to news in the media, yet they score the lowest of any group on measures of political knowledge[21]

and of cognitive differentiation in analyzing current issues.[22] While the parents in consensual homes are politically well informed, the only item on which their children are better informed than their peers is accurate knowledge of the parents' political party preference.[23] Despite spending a lot of time on homework, consensual youngsters do not get especially good grades.[24] Although these findings are far from definitive, they do coincide with our assumption that some of the internal tensions associated with a communicatory double-bind exist within the child who must cope with the consensual family's emphasis on the total A-B-X system.

While empirical findings like these continue to accumulate, very little work has been directed toward the underlying theoretical problem of explaining why they occur. Let me suggest some alternative explanations. One might be that of simple practice. The child in the pluralistic home is encouraged to work with ideas and information; consequently he should become more skilled in this regard than his peers. (The fact that the consensual child is similarly encouraged without acquiring commensurate skills would argue against this explanation, however.) Another simple approach would be a hypothesis of reverse causation: parents who find themselves confronted with a child who is actively acquiring and processing information about the world outside have little choice but to permit a great deal of pluralism in family discussions. (Again, this explanation is more difficult to employ in accounting for the discontinuities in the behavioral patterns of consensual children.) A third proposition that has been advanced is teleological in character: consensual families move toward agreement, pluralistics toward greater accuracy, and protectives toward higher perceived agreement ("congruency"), all because those are the implicit goals of those kinds of families. This approach is essentially an expansion of Newcomb's "strain toward symmetry" hypothesis, adding in effect companion hypotheses of strains toward accuracy when only A-X and B-X relations are attended to, and toward congruency when only A-B relations are important. But to expand the number of descriptive hypotheses is not to advance an explanation of why they might occur. If anything, it serves to compound the mystery.

A variant on the "practice" hypothesis would be a "reinforcement" explanation. Being based upon field survey questionnaires as a data collection method, our research has not observed parent-child interaction closely enough to ascertain whether parental emphases include post-behavioral reinforcements (positive or negative) to any significant extent. We have asked "how much" and "how often" the parents "say" or "stress" various A-B and A-X themes, but in this form of measurement the person is asked to sum across many years of habitual interaction and give an overall estimate of frequency or emphasis. Whether these parental behaviors consist of admonitions in advance of possible behavioral choices on the part of the child, or instead consist of reactions to behaviors the child has already emitted, can not easily be determined with the kind of data we have accumulated to date. To the extent that the latter, post-behavioral, instance predominates, one might advance and test various propositions about the power of parental communication to shape the child's habitual behavior by various schedules of reinforcement.

Some of the items we have used in our measuring instruments seem to describe post-behavioral reactions. Examples: "How often do your parents answer your arguments by saying something like, 'You'll know better when you grow up'?" and "How often do they admit that children know more about some things than adults?" Other items refer instead to events that would probably occur prior to the child's own behavior, such as "How much do your parents emphasize that getting your ideas across is important even if others don't like it?" and "How much do your parents talk at home about things like politics and religion, where one person takes a different side from the other?"

If these latter communicatory acts occur before the child has actually done anything, they cannot serve a reinforcement function in the normal sense of that term. Instead, they seem to be intended as guidelines for the child to follow in the future. Our assumption has been that such guidelines precede and organize the child's personal construction of the world as he encounters it in the process of growing up. FCP does not merely correlate with other behaviors that occur in the family; as noted above, it is a strong and systematic predictor of cognitive as well as behavioral events that occur in other contexts: in school, in reaction to persuasive messages, in the use of mass media, and so forth.

What is the nature of this structure that the child apparently learns in the family but carries out into the rest of the world? I have already outlined some assumptions that we have made in response to that very large question. We have assumed that it is organized along the general lines of the A-B-X model, with A-B and A-X relations being variables rather than givens. Much of the research has very literally followed this model, treating each of the two FCP dimensions as a separate graded variable and entering them both into regression equations as a block of predictors; sometimes one is a strong predictor and the other not, sometimes they predict in opposite directions, and occasionally they both predict a dependent variable in the same direction.

The model we have preferred, however, goes a step further and assumes that these two dimensions will interact in the case where both are very high, which is to say the consensual family. In this case either a four-fold typology (as outlined earlier), or a regression analysis that includes a multiplicative term representing the interaction of the two dimensions, is technically feasible. Unfortunately, the latter procedure -- which is the more comprehensive from a statistical standpoint -- admits severe technical difficulties. One of the happy features of the two FCP dimensions is that they tend to be uncorrelated with one another; this means that there is very little problem with multicollinearity when both are entered in the same multiple regression equation. But when the two values are multiplied to produce an interaction term, the resulting product is of course highly multicollinear with both of the dimensions of which it is the product.[25] To enter the two main effects and the interaction into a single analysis produces beta coefficients that defy interpretation.

Meanwhile, our theoretical understanding of the process is not advanced by toying with more elaborate forms of data analysis. Let me return to the four-fold typology and consider two theories of communication, either of which might account for at least some of the empirical findings. For the sake of familiarity I will call these the "selective perception" and "information-seeking" hypotheses.

Selective perception is a well-established principle in mass communication effects research. It is derived from gestalt psychology, and is encapsulized in Krech and Crutchfield's principles that (1) the perceptual and cognitive field in its natural state is organized and meaningful, and (2) perception is functionally selective.[26] A family communication structure that is organized along, say, A-X lines becomes in effect a "cognitive map" that the child can use in making sense out of the many stimuli that reach him via his communicatory and experiential daily life. Those items that fit an A-X structure, such as the content of arguments, will tend to be noticed and retained; those that seem irrelevant to A-X considerations will either not be noticed or be easily forgotten. The child from an A-B family environment will, on the other hand, select from the totality of stimuli in his environment those which fit the structure in which he has learned to perceive the world. These will quite likely be different aspects from those selected by the A-X child. There is experimental evidence, for example, that pluralistic adolescents (from A-X homes) are much more attentive to the content of persuasive messages, whereas the consensuals (from A-B-X homes) are more sensitive to the source than to the message itself.[27] Protectives (A-B) respond to the prestige of a message source, but neither to the source's expertness nor to the content of the message itself.[28]

Information-seeking is a hypothesis that places the child in a more active (less reactive) role vis-a-vis his environment. Here the assumption is that, when confronted with an ambiguous or unstructured situation, the child from an A-B home will search for cues that will help him make sense of things on the basis of the people involved, whereas the A-X person will instead look for resolution in the abstract content of the situation. There is less research evidence relevant to this hypothesis than to any of the others I have mentioned here. In one survey, adults were posed a mythical imbalanced A-B-X situation: a plan they had thought to be very good was rejected as unsuitable by a person they liked and admired.[29] Those who had come

from pluralistic homes were the ones most likely to respond with direct communication activity, such as counterarguing or asking the person why he held this contrary opinion. Those from protective homes, by contrast, were most likely to say they would experience internal upset, and either seek support for their position from other people, or withdraw from the dilemma by, for example, giving up on the plan they had originally thought to be a good one. The consensuals would be most likely to seek an authoritative solution by referring the dispute to a third party to decide. Note that it is the A-B families' products who seek their "information" in the form of opinions of other people, and the A-X people who instead seek information about the issue itself.

A final hypothesis worth consideration in connection with certain findings is that of de facto selective exposure. It is often observed that people tend to be exposed to messages that are congenial to the opinions they already hold. As Sears and Freedman have observed in a review of a number of these studies, however, this selectivity can usually be accounted for by the messages that are sent to a person rather than by an active preference on the person's part for such messages.[30] A family is a locus of message-sending, and we might reasonably assume that A-X families will share content-related information more than will A-B families. As mentioned earlier, an experimental discussion between husbands and wives produced an increase in perceived agreement (congruency) despite no change in actual agreement, in protective couples.[31] The explanation for this probably lies in selective message-sending. Since only their interpersonal (A-B) relationship, and not the issue being discussed, is defined as important by these couples, each person should be expected to find those areas of the overall issue on which they agreed, and to talk mostly about them. Areas of disagreement would be avoided, so that each person would come to believe that the two of them agreed more fully than was actually the case. This state of "pluralistic ignorance" can easily be fostered by selective patterns of information-sending. In pluralistic homes, too, there was no increase in agreement, but because these couples were not concerned about A-B problems they were free

to express their differences fully; the result was a strong increase in the accuracy of their perceptions of one another's views.

The roster of possible hypotheses that is taking shape here is, in the round, that of empirical theories of communication in general: reinforcement, selective perception, information-seeking, de facto selective exposure, etc. Any one of these hypotheses is sufficient to explain certain findings that have been reported in FCP research. None of them seems to be a comprehensive theory that would account for all of the results. No study has attempted to pit one hypothesis against another, to see which explains more different observed phenomena or which predicts known outcomes more strongly. To do this kind of research would require modifying our methodology in many respects. My purpose in outlining these hypotheses here is not to suggest that the "correct" answer lies somewhere in this little list, but rather to point out the differences among them in the hope of stimulating new forms of investigation. It may well be that the most satisfying theory will turn out not to be any of those I have enumerated above. They are, after all, borrowed and rather shopworn, and no one of them has been thunderingly successful in explaining other types of communication phenomena. But I do believe that the time has come for us to undertake more theoretically based studies of family communication patterns.

Some Caveats on Generalization to Other Systems

In the early phase of FCP research, we often suggested that the variable A-B-X model could profitably be generalized to the study of social micro-systems other than the family. Why not extend it to analysis of the socializing effects of peer groups, school environments, work organizations, church structures, formal groups, and so on? Here I would like briefly to enter some evidence against the easy assumption that FCP functions might have direct analogs in other social spheres. This is not to say that none of the principles developed from family studies applies to other social structures; some of them surely do. But we have already found some serious limitations on generalization of the research, and no one has yet looked very far or hard for direct empirical analogs.

One reason for this is that there is no basis for expecting any other institution to have the socializing force of the family. A child enters the family at, literally, the most impressionable age, and stays in it throughout what are widely thought to be "the formative years." While "learning" and "development" may continue throughout life, early learning spread over the years in which cognitive capacities are emerging and cognitive structures formed; it should have a more pervasive impact than later increments to that base. Since most of our family studies are either of children or of young adults, the family is the single environment in which most of the people involved will have spent the greatest amount of time. Consequently we should not anticipate that any results concerning the impact of family communication structures will be rivaled in their empirical intensity by analogous results attributable to other social systems.

A second reason why family influences are likely to overshadow empirically those of other institutions is that there is more variance between families, and less variance within a given family over time, than is characteristic of other institutions. One family will emphasize A-B relations and another A-X relations, and in each the members see this as quite appropriate and desirable. Compare this to a commonly studied example, the school. While one teacher may vary considerably from another in pedagogical style, the overriding purpose of the educational system is A-X in nature; further, the child ordinarily moves from one teacher to another in succeeding years (in elementary school) or in succeeding hours (in secondary school), so that inter-teacher style differences will rarely be sustained long enough to make a very strong or permanent mark on a single student's development. Schools themselves may differ in communicatory style; very autocratic (A-B) teaching methods contrast vividly with, say, participatory modes of learning. Still, the variance between schools is probably far less than that among families; rather few children are educated in schools that are consistent in communicatory structure throughout the growing years, and those who are have in many cases been sent there by families that selected these schools because they are extensions of the family structure.

Another reason why FCP influences might not be found in other social environments is that many of the things that parents do and say to their children simply do not occur in other interpersonal relationships. A prime example is the adolescent peer group. In one study, we started with a list of five A-B and five A-X items from the FCP measurement battery. When we tried to pretest these on some secondary school students, it soon became obvious that most of them were ludicrous in the peer-group context. Adolescents would not think of telling their friends that they ought to get their ideas across even if others don't like them, or that it isn't good to argue. (We finally did come up with a truncated list of two A-B items and two A-X items, and did find some very weak evidence of generalizability of FCP findings to peer communication structures.[32]) In general, parents occupy the special role of being both social and cognitive mentors to their children, and other social institutions and sources rarely attempt to perform most of the socializing functions that are assigned to parents in our society.

A further caveat is that we have found evidence that the two-dimensional FCP structure I have described throughout this paper does not necessarily hold up outside the kinds of populations we have typically sampled. Studies conducted in other countries, usually with only a couple of items representing each dimension, have confirmed the robustness of our major overall conclusions. But in some samples the two factors break down into more than two. One comparison of black and white families in Wisconsin cities found that, while the two-factor model fit whites quite well, at least one and perhaps two additional factors were needed to describe the black families.[33] Rather than attempt to generalize FCP findings to other kinds of social systems, we would do well to expend further effort on studies of the family itself for a while. I suspect that a thorough examination of the replicability of some of the studies I have summarized above would show that the picture is not nearly so clearcut as I might have implied here.

Extending to Life Beyond the Family in Time and Space

The general theme of this symposium has to do with the role of communication in preparing people for adaptation to a changing, "modernizing" world. Obviously from all I have said to this point, I believe that the structure of communication in the family has a great deal to do with this. Specifically, it appears as though the "protective" parents are attempting to ward off a threatening world outside the home, and it is ironic -- albeit unfortunate -- that in doing so they leave their children less capable of self-protection than others are. When we have conducted experiments with college students, for instance, those from protective backgrounds are the most susceptible to persuasive messages.[34]

Two lines of theory bear striking similarities to what seems to be occurring in our FCP research. One is McGuire's now-classic work on "immunization" against persuasion as a consequence of exposure to counterarguments.[35] The A-X family environment in effect prepares the youngster to withstand persuasion attempts by immunization through presentation of more than one side of various issues. A second related model is Bernstein's concept of "elaborated" and "restricted" codes in language learning.[36] Those who grow up in a closed social subsystem that communicates only in its own restricted code are thereby rendered incapable of adapting to the language usage expectations of other subsystems; the protective family corresponds, if only loosely, to this description. By contrast, those who learn the "elaborated" code that is used universally in the society can move easily from one situation to another in life with little loss in communicatory facility. While Bernstein's model is grounded in the British social class structure, and is advanced as an explanation of the transmission of working class limitations from one generation to another, it is theoretically applicable to horizontal divisions of scoiety as well as to vertically separated strata.

Socioeconomic status is often suggested as an "explanation" for ECP differences. When we have incorporated an SES index into regression analyses, we have found that

FCP and SES account for about equal amounts of variance in most of our dependent variables, and are only moderately correlated with one another.[37] (Generally, A-B relations are associated with low SES and A-X with high.) This has provided an empirical response to those who reflexively offer SES as an alternative explanation of any survey finding. But from a theoretical perspective SES does not in itself explain it merely locates differences between social strata. To the extent that the two predictors are intercorrelated, FCP might be viewed as the explanation of differences between socioeconomic levels in society, rather than vice-versa. Because our research interests have focused mainly on communication and social psychological variables, there has been little study of the relationship between FCP and social structure. Students from less developed countries, where social stratification tends to be extreme and A-B relations apparently dominate family communication, often express particular interest in this topic. To date, however, there has been much more speculation than data or specified theory on the FCP-SES linkage.[38]

A most intriguing value judgment lies at the heart of the relative merits of the consensual and pluralistic modes of child rearing. As professional communicators we might think in terms of either of two broad roles: the informative, or the persuasive. It appears overall that the pluralistic FCP is most likely to produce knowledgeable and versatile persons, but the consensual may well be superior in preparing a person for persuasive roles in life. Note again the difference between the two types of families in our experimental husband-wife discussion: the pluralistic couples became more accurate in the perceptions of one another's opinions, but it was the consensuals who actually moved closer to a family consensus on the topics they discussed.[39] These are not status differences, as these two types of families are about equal on SES indicators; what is being produced are role differences. To put it in terms you might expect of a Journalism professor, the pluralistics seem to be preparing to be reporters and editors while the consensuals are being well schooled for careers in public relations and advertising.

By criteria based on current performance, we should not hestitate to prefer the pluralistic mode. As young people, these are the ones who are getting the most out of their educational opportunities and the extended "education" available via the mass media; they are also becoming more thoroughly socialized to the political world they will have to cope with as adult citizens. The same cannot be said of the consensuals, but it may be that their experience in balancing A-B and A-X considerations in their youth will prepare them better for some important roles in adult life. The longitudinal research that would be needed to assess this possibility has not been undertaken to date. For the most part we have been preoccupied with youth and have done little to determine the kinds of adults that grow out of different FCP backgrounds.

The term "adaptability" in the subtitle of this paper refers to an attribute of individuals, and its relationship to FCP should be fairly clear. Those raised in A-X families can be expected to modify their behavior in later life primarily in terms of communicable content, by information seeking and sharing. Those from A-B backgrounds should organize their behavior on the basis of interpersonal relationships and feelings of group solidarity. The term "change" in my subtitle is an attribute of the social environment surrounding the individual. The long-range questions have to do with which FCP background produces persons who are (a) more sensitive to changes in society and (b) better equipped to adapt their behavior to those changes. From the research record it appears that the pluralistics are most likely to satisfy those criteria. But I also suspect that the consensuals will (c) care more about the changes that do occur and so (d) be more likely to change their own behavior in adaptive ways.

Future Research

In the 13 years since we began FCP research, it has followed a rather narrow path. The basic method of data collection has been the survey questionnaire, and the FCP dimensions have been used as independent variables to predict a variety of

communication behaviors. Some of these dependent variables have been also measured in survey instruments, so the data are simply correlational. In a few studies, standard communication experiments have been run and the dependent variable has been differential reactions of the various FCP types to the same experimental variation. From the perspective of attributing causation to FCP, these findings too are correlational. To the extent that there is a "theory" in this body of research, it consists of a set of assumptions overlaid with an accumulation of findings. The approach to theory has been largely inductive and post hoc. There have been sporadic attempts to replicate FCP findings in studies of social micro-systems other than the family, in hopes of increasing generalizability.

While this paper does not pretend to be a full or formal exposition of a theory of family communication, it is an argument for renewed theoretical development. This argument has several implications. One is that we should concentrate on family communication as such, rather than try to expand hazy generalizations from families to other groups and institutions, and we should grapple much more specifically with the explication and testing of theoretical propositions about the ways in which family communication functions. This will almost surely entail methodologies that are quite different from those we have used in the past. First-hand observation, experimental variation, and longitudinal designs are all needed. The latter is particularly important because the greatest implications of what we think we know about family communication have to do with developments that occur long after the child matures and leaves the family to take an independent place in the world. Both observational and experimental ingenuity are needed if we are to test specific hypotheses about the nature of the process by which family communication patterns shape the developing child's construction of the world around him.

This is admittedly an ambitious research agenda. It cuts across conventional academic disciplines from child development to social psychology to interpersonal

communication to mass communication. It has implications for related fields such as consumer behavior, education, social stratification, and political socialization. It will require coordinated and collaborative efforts of specialists in very different methods of data collection, whose work can only be unified by a commonly understood conceptual paradigm. Such truly interdisciplinary programs of research are exceedingly rare in social science, so the challenge is a formidable one. Perhaps that is why I find it so appealing.

APPENDIX

TYPICAL QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS MEASURING FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

1. These are some of the things that parents say to their children as they are growing up. I'd like you to think about your family conversations and then tell me for each of the following items how frequently you have heard similar things whether very often, often, sometimes, rarely or never.

   Do they....

   a. Tell you that their ideas are correct and that you shouldn't question them (A-B)

   b. Say that you should always look at both sides of an issue (A-X)

   c. Answer your arguments by saying something like "You'll know better when you grow up" (A-B)

   d. Say that you should give in on arguments rather than making people angry (A-B)

   e. Admit that you know more about some things than adults do (A-X)

   f. Talk at home about things like politics or religion, where one person takes a different side from others (A-X)

2. Now, could you tell me how much your parents emphasize the following things, whether very much, pretty much, somewhat, not too much or not at all.

   Do they emphasize....

   a. That it is important to get your ideas across even if others don't like it (A-X)

   b. That every member of your family should have some say in family decisions (A-X)

   c. That you shouldn't argue with adults (A-B)

   d. That the best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it (A-B)

Footnotes

1. Jack M. McLeod and Steven H. Chaffee, "The Construction of Social Reality" in James Tedeschi (ed.), The Social Influence Processes (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972), pp. 50-99.

2. There is no single comprehensive review of the many studies on this topic. The sources referenced in this paper comprise most of the literature, but the reader is cautioned that this is not intended as a full review of the major findings either.

3. This question is occasioned by the topic of the symposium for which this paper was prepared, with particular reference to the issues raised in the keynote paper W. Barnett Pearce, "Communication and the Social Order."

4. Jack M. McLeod, Steven H. Chaffee, and H.S. Eswara, "Family Communication Patterns and Communication Research," paper presented to Assn. for Education in Journalism convention, 1966.

5. Theodore M. Newcomb, "An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts," Psychological Review, 1953, 60:393-404.

6. For an overview of coorientational theory see McLeod and Chaffee, "Interpersonal Approaches to Communication Research," American Behavioral Scientist, 1973, 16:469-499. This issue (16:4) of the journal contains a variety of studies applying coorientational concepts to different research topics.

7. R.D. Laing, H. Phillipson and A.R. Lee, Interpersonal Perception: A Theory and Method of Research (New York: Springer, 1966). Larry R. Meiller and Glen M. Broom, "Experiments in Community Consensus-Building: A Coorientational Analysis," paper presented to Assn. for Education in Journalism Convention, 1976.

8. In this respect Newcomb's model is quite similar to a number of homeostatic theories of opinion change, especially Heider's "balance" model of interpersonal relations. One of many good reviews of this area is Robert B. Zajonc, "The Concepts of Balance, Congruity and Dissonance," Public Opinion Quarterly, 1960, 24:280-96.

9. Daniel B. Wackman, "Interpersonal Communication and Coorientation," American Behavioral Scientist, 1973, 16:537-50.

10. This study was originally reported in George Pasdirtz, "An Approach to the Study of Interaction Processes," paper presented to the Assn. for Education in Journalism convention, 1969. The published source is Garrett J. O'Keefe, "Coorientation Variables in Family Study," American Behavioral Scientist, 1973, 16:513-36.

11. H.S. Eswara, "An Interpersonal Approach to the Study of Social Influence: Family Communication Patterns and Attitude Change," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1968. See also Jack M. McLeod and Steven H. Chaffee, "Social Reality" op.cit., fn. 1.

12. Jack M. McLeod, Steven H. Chaffee and Daniel B. Wackman, "Family Communication: An Updated Report," paper presented to Assn. for Education in Journalism convention, 1967.

13. Kenneth Sheinkopf, "Family Communication Patterns and Anticipatory Socialization," Journalism Quarterly, 1973, 50:24-30.

14. Steven H. Chaffee, Jack M. McLeod and Charles K. Atkin, "Parental Influences on Adolescent Media Use," American Behavioral Scientist, 1971, 14:323-40.

15. John Leckenby, "Attribution of Dogmatism to TV Characters," Journalism Quarterly, 1977, 54:14-19.

16. Op.cit., fn. 1.

17. Op.cit., fn. 14.

18. Ibid.

19. John Dimmick, "Family Communication and TV Program Choice," Journalism Quarterly, 1976, 53:720-23.

20. Op.cit., fn. 10.

21. Op.cit., fn. 1.

22. Ibid.

23. A review of relationships between FCP and a variety of political behaviors is Steven H. Chaffee, Jack M. McLeod and Daniel B. Wackman, "Family Communication Patterns and Adolescent Political Participation," in Jack Dennis (ed.), Socialization to Politics: A Reader (New York: John Wiley, 1973).

24. Op.cit., fn. 1.

25. Jacob Cohen and Patricia Cohen, Applied Multiple Regression/Correlation Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences (New York: Wiley, 1975).

26. David Krech and Richard S. Crutchfield, "Perceiving the World," in Wilbur Schramm and Donald Roberts (eds.), The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, Rev. Ed. (University of Illinois Press, 1971).

27. Op.cit., fn. 1 and fn. 11. Vernon Stone and Steven H. Chaffee, "Family Communication Patterns and Source-Message Orientation," Journalism Quarterly 1970, 47:239-46.

28. Ibid.

29. Op.cit., fn. 12, fn. 1.

30. David O. Sears and Jonathan L. Freedman, "Selective Exposure to Information: A Critical Review," in Schramm and Roberts, op.cit., fn. 26.

31. See fn. 10.

32. Steven H. Chaffee and Albert R. Tims, "Interpersonal Factors in Adolescent Television Use," Journal of Social Issues, 1976, 32:18-115.

33. Richard L. Allen and Steven H. Chaffee, "Racial Differences in Family Communication Patterns," Journalism Quarterly, 1977, 54:8-13,57.

34. Op.cit., fn. 27.

35. William J. McGuire, "Persuasion, Resistance, and Attitude Change," in Ithiel de Sola Pool and Wilbur Schramm (eds.), Handbook of Communication (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973).

36. Basil Bernstein, "The Ethnography of Communication," in J.J. Gumperz and D. Himes (eds.), American Anthropologist Special Publication, 1964, 66:55-69.

37. Op.cit., fn. 12.

38. Replications of findings from U.S. samples have been conducted in India and in several Latin American countries, but usually only one or two items have been used to represent each FCP dimension. A published example is Jack M. McLeod, Ramona R. Rush and Karl Friederich, "The Mass Media and Political Information in Quito, Ecuador," Public Opinion Quarterly, 1968-69, 32:575-87.

39. Op.cit., fn. 10.