From Research to Practice: Increasing Ability of Practitioners to Relate Family-of-Origin Communicative Techniques to Current Marital Satisfaction

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Research has shown a connection between family-of-origin communicative techniques and later marital satisfaction. However, little has been done to see how this information can be incorporated in family life education settings. The purpose of this study is to make a connection between research and practice by testing the validity of easy-to-use measurements informing this relationship. The results of a survey from 649 married individuals about the communicative practices within their family-of-origin and in their current marriage support the ability of practitioners to understand techniques utilized in marriage by interpreting those used in childhood. By associating the literature between family-of-origin communication and marital dynamics in a practical way, practitioners and educators will be better able to assess and assist married couples in therapeutic or educational settings.

Keywords: family-of-origin communication, marital communication, family life education

Introduction

Family researchers have established a strong link between marital communication skills and marital satisfaction (Ledermann, Bodenmann, Rudaz, & Bradbury, 2010; Schoebi, Karney, & Bradbury, 2012). Communication patterns have been found to be a robust predictor of marital outcomes (Rogge, Bradbury, Hahlweg, Engl, & Thurmaier, 2006), a mediator of stress in marital relationships (Ledermann et al., 2010), and a factor in relationship violence (Cornelius, Shorey, & Beebe, 2010). However, the bulk of this research explored the dynamics within the current couple dyad, and only recently have researchers begun to turn their attention to partners' families-of-origin and how communication patterns and other relationship dynamics may have been learned and transmitted intergenerationally (Gardner, Busby, Burr, & Lyon, 2011; Strait,

Sandberg, Larson, & Harper, 2015). Existing research suggests that both problematic and effective communication patterns in current romantic relationships may have their roots in family-of-origin interactions (Dennison, Koerner, & Segrin, 2014). Establishing a link between communication patterns modeled and learned within a person's family-of-origin and communication patterns practiced within the same person's current relationship has important implications for family educators in a variety of ways. For example, it aids in the identification of couples that may be at risk for marital dissolution through identifying communication patterns in the partners' families-of-origin. In addition, understanding family-of-origin communication dynamics suggests avenues of intervention in offspring's current relationships. Finally, such a link has potential for informing parenting practices. By identifying communication patterns within the home and adjusting accordingly, parents can increase the likelihood that their offspring will have more effective relationship dynamics and satisfaction.

In an effort to add to this body of literature, the current study explored the association between couples' present-day marital satisfaction and their family-of-origin communication styles by showing how this information can be used in a practitioner setting. Our purpose is to make a connection between research and practice by testing the validity of easy-to-use measurements. By associating the literature between family-of-origin communication and current marital dynamics in a practical way, practitioners and educators will be better able to assess and assist married couples in therapeutic or educational settings. The following is a brief discussion of the evidence for the impact of the dynamics within an individual's family-of-origin on his or her current couples' communication patterns followed by an explanation of the family communication theory underlying the Revised Family Communication Patterns Scale (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990).

Impact of Family-of-Origin on Present-Day Romantic Relationships

Family science scholars have long held the belief that the family is the primary socialization agent for how children manage future interactions (Berns, 2013) and that family-of-origin dynamics will influence offspring's individual and future family development (Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2011; Masarik et al., 2013). Research supporting these views suggests that early adult romantic relationships show evidence of intergenerational transmission of communication patterns and other relationship dynamics. For example, Story, Karney, Lawrence, and Bradbury (2004) found support for the idea that family-of-origin experiences shape interpersonal skills and behaviors in offspring in their study of 60 newlywed couples. The husbands in the sample who reported experiencing negativity in their families-of-origin were more likely to exhibit anger and contempt in their newlywed marital interactions (Story et al., 2004). In addition, the wives in the sample who reported a parental divorce also reported increased levels of psychological and physical aggression in their current relationship. Dennison et al. (2014) also examined the influence of family-of-origin characteristics on marital

satisfaction in newlyweds. The researchers found a strong correlation between such family-of-origin characteristics as parental divorce and interpersonal conflict with marital satisfaction for the wives in the study (Dennison et al., 2014). Conflict resolution styles in families-of-origin for both husbands and wives were associated with their conflict resolution styles in their current relationships (Dennison et al., 2014).

Although the literature establishes a connection, the translation between research and practice remains unclear. The ability of practitioners to further their understanding of current marital quality by interpreting family-of-origin communication relies heavily on a tool that easily measures the communicative techniques used while also acknowledging demographic factors that surround clients/students. The argument of the impact of family structure is one such justification that is commonly used in both therapy and family life education as a reason for research not being applicable to the student or client's personal life (Harris, 2013; Locke & Bailey, 2014).

Family-of-origin structure. Family-of-origin structure (e.g., single parent, stepparent, two-parent) has been linked with a number of offspring outcomes, including educational achievement (Baker, 2011; Björklund, Ginther, & Sundström, 2007), adolescent and premarital pregnancies (Powers, 2005), reproductive strategies (Sheppard, Garcia, & Sears, 2014), health issues (Ziol-Guest & Dunifon, 2014), psychosocial challenges (Wu, Hou, & Schimmele, 2008), entry into the labor force (Aquilino, 1996), and earnings (Björklund et al., 2007). Researchers have also speculated that family structure has an impact on an offspring's relationship outcomes, and the body of literature on divorce appears to support this link. For instance, Wolfinger (2003) found that marriages were almost twice as likely to fail if one partner had experienced a parental divorce and three times more likely to fail if both partners had experienced a parental divorce. These are particularly concerning statistics since the researcher also found that children of divorced families often marry each other. In another notable study, Amato and DeBoer (2001)—using data from a 17-year longitudinal study of marital instability—controlled for other possible contributing variables and concluded that offspring divorce is more strongly associated with the actual termination of the parental marriage than with any other factors.

The link established by researchers between marital satisfaction and communication processes has led many clinicians and educators to focus predominantly on intervening in current interactions between partners. Although this practice has demonstrated success (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2010), the above discussion suggests additional avenues for research that can inform both intervention and education for current couples with diverse family-of-origin structures, as well as provide a focus for current parental communication practices that could impact future relationships. Continuing research is needed to identify the dynamics in families-of-origin that specifically impact subsequent offspring relationships in a timely manner suited for

those practicing therapy or educating the community. The following is a brief discussion of a family communication model and measurement that could prove useful in achieving this goal.

Family Communication Patterns

Built upon the research of McLeod and Chaffee (1972), Fizpatrick and Ritchie (1994) developed the Family Communication Patterns model, proposing that family communication is "the result of cognitive processes that are determined by family relationship schemas" (p. 87). The Family Communication Patterns model draws on two basic conceptualizations. *Conversation orientation* refers to the degree that the family emphasizes and cultivates a positive atmosphere for independent exchanges of feelings and ideas. Families who score high on this dimension typically spend a lot of time in interactions with each other and share their thoughts and feelings. The associated beliefs are that open and frequent communication is essential to a rewarding family life as well as the primary vehicle for educating and socializing the young. Families scoring low on conversation orientation interact with each other less frequently, and there is less exchange of ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Children are consulted less on family decisions or activities, and open communication is not viewed as necessary for education and socialization of the young. *Conformity orientation* focuses on the use of communicative techniques to maintain a homogenous atmosphere of views, rules, and behaviors (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Those families scoring high in this dimension value harmony, conflict avoidance, and the interdependence of family members. Obedience to parents and other adults is valued, the families tend to be more traditional, and family members are expected to subordinate personal interests to the family interests. Families that score low in this dimension focus more on heterogeneous beliefs, individuality, and independence. Hierarchy is more flattened, and children are often involved in the family's decisions with family interests being subordinated to personal interests.

According to Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002), the conversation and conformity dimensions interact with one another to form four family types: consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire (see Table 1). Consensual and pluralistic families are both high on conversation orientation but are high and low on conformity orientation, respectively. Protective families are low on conversation orientation and high on conformity orientation, while laissez-faire families are low on both conversation and conformity orientations. Laissez-faire families tend to promote conformity, which results in low levels of conflict and an increase in skills to maintain satisfaction within the family. Conversely, pluralistic families do not conform to the guardian's views and openly communicate when disagreement does occur. Finally, consensuals are more likely to thrive on conflict and independence, while protective families promote agreement within the family unit and communicate less often.

Table 1. *Visual Depiction of Fitzpatrick's Typologies*

	High Conversation	**Low Conversation**
High Conformity	*Consensual*	*Protective*
Low Conformity	*Pluralistic*	*Laissez-Faire*

Research utilizing the Family Communication Pattern model and these typologies is widespread and includes such topics as conflict (Dumlao & Botta, 2000; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997), family ritualizing (Baxter & Clark, 1996), effect on children's attitudes (Booth-Butterfield & Sidelinger, 1998; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997), communication competence (Koesten & Anderson, 2004), reticence (Kelly et al., 2002), and family cohesiveness (Schrodt, 2009). However, few studies have investigated the potential of this measurement to be used in understanding the impact of family-of-origin communication patterns on current romantic relationships.

To our knowledge, the current study is the first attempt to establish a link between Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's (1994) family communication patterns in family-of-origin and present-day marital satisfaction. This connection is particularly concerning due to the suitability of this measurement to family life education settings and the robust research supporting a need for understanding family-of-origin communication when teaching about marital and parental techniques. The study's first hypothesis was generated based on the fact that a positive association has been established between effective communication skills and relationship satisfaction (Miller & Kannae, 1999; Sprecher, Metts, Burleson, Hatfield, & Thompson, 1995), and existing research—though sparse—has identified that high conversation orientation in family-of-origin is associated with increased ability to use communication skills in current relationships (Koesten, 2004). Therefore, we hypothesized that participants in the current study that reported higher levels of conversation orientation in family-of-origin would also report higher levels of relationship satisfaction:

> H1: High conversation orientation in family-of-origin is positively related with current marital satisfaction.

In a similar vein, high levels of conformity orientation in family-of-origin have been associated to negative behaviors during conflict, including verbal aggression (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Since negative communication behaviors have been linked to poorer marital outcomes (Carrére, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000), we anticipated that participants reporting high levels of conformity orientation in their families-of-origin would report lower levels of relationship satisfaction, resulting in the following hypothesis:

> H2: High conformity orientation in family-of-origin is negatively related with current marital satisfaction.

Finally, although the literature on divorce in family-of-origin indicates that offspring's relational skills are negatively impacted, Amato and DeBoer (2001) were also able to determine that the negative communication practices in the families-of-origin is more the predictor of relationship instability than the structure of the family (i.e., divorced household). This finding, coupled with the sparseness of research on family structure and relationship satisfaction, led us to speculate that family structure would impact family-of-origin communicative techniques but not the ability of family communication patterns to predict offspring relationship satisfaction, resulting in the following hypotheses:

> H3: Conversation and conformity orientation will vary based on structure of family-of-origin.
> H4: Current relationship satisfaction will vary based on family-of-origin type.
> H5: Current relationship satisfaction will not vary based on structure of family-of-origin.
> H6: Conversation orientation in family-of-origin will predict current relationship satisfaction regardless of family structure.
> H7: Conformity orientation in family-of-origin will predict current relationship satisfaction regardless of family structure.

Method

Procedure

A survey was mailed to 300 individuals in randomly-selected households from two large urban populations in a southeastern state. The survey design followed the procedure suggested by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) of three mailings (i.e., pre-notice, instructional, and follow-up letter). The contact information was obtained from the United Postal Services and only included known individuals who were over the age of eighteen and lived in a household with an opposite gender partner; this was an attempt to increase the likelihood of contacting those that qualified for the study. Regardless, only those who were married and an adult could complete the questionnaire. No additional restrictions were placed on respondents based on their race, gender, or age. The response rate was lower than expected (13%), so additional recruitment was done by (1) sending a link to the survey to all Directors of Graduate Studies at a southeastern college requesting that they forward it to their students and (2) creating an event on an online social networking site inviting members to take the survey. Comparisons were made among the three recruitment techniques, and no significant differences were found.

Sample

The three sampling techniques (i.e., mail, email, and social networking site) resulted in 649 individuals who were currently married. Of those participants, 66 (10.1%) had been married

before with a majority (83.1%) of those on their second marriages. The average length of time that the participants stated knowing their current spouse was a little under 15 years (*Min.* = 1.00 year; *Max.* = 46.00 years; *SD* = 10.10 years), while the mean for being married was almost 11 years (*Min.* = 1.00; *Max.* = 44.00; *SD* = 10.03). A small minority (.5%) noted that they were in an open marriage (e.g., swingers), while a few others (1.9%) stated that they were in same-sex relationships; the remaining participants categorized themselves as being in a heterosexual and monogamous relationship. A majority of the participants were female (72.2%) and Caucasian (91.9%). Almost equal representation was found among Asians (3.3%), African Americans (2.5%), Hispanics (1.5%), and Native Americans (1.5%). Multicultural (1.5%) and "Other" ethnicities (1.7%) were also presented as options, though it should be noted that the participants were able to select more than one category. The average age of the participants was 37.4 years with a minimum of 22 and a maximum of 57 years.

Participants were asked to identify the structure of their family-of-origin. A list was provided with eight options (e.g., mother and father, adopted parents) with the final choice being open-ended allowing the participants to describe their own family-of-origin. In particular, the following question was posed, "Please choose the description that best matches your guardian(s) while growing up. If your guardian(s) changed during your childhood, please choose the category that describes them for the majority of the time." A majority of the participants grew up in a nuclear household (*n* = 535; 82.2%), followed by only living with a mother (*n* = 51, 8.1%) and living with a mother and stepfather (*n* = 30; 4.6%). The remaining 3% (*n* = 22) was distributed among other forms of family arrangements including father and stepmother, grandparents, father only, adopted parents, and extended family members.

Measures

Fitzpatrick's family communication patterns. The only known study connecting Fitzpatrick's family communication patterns to the use of conflict behaviors in adult romantic relationships (i.e., Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002) utilized the Revised Family Communication Patterns Scale (RFCPS; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Therefore, this study chose the RFCPS to measure participants' perceptions of family communication norms rather than the lesser, though becoming more prominently, used Family Communication Environment Instrument (FCEI; Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008). Furthermore, the RFCPS was chosen over the original Family Communication Patterns Scale due to its better ability to "label and operationalize the underlying dimensions of conversation orientation and conformity orientation" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 42). Research supports the internal consistency and test-retest reliability of the scale with Cronbach's alpha indicating a high internal consistency for both scales (conversation orientation = .92; conformity orientation = .82; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990).

In the current study, the online software collected the participants' response to the question about family-of-origin and used it within this measurement to make sure the family communicative techniques assessed were that of the family structure chosen. Example statements included, "In our family, we often talked about topics like politics and religion where some members disagreed with others" and "My [selected guardian] often asked my opinion when the family was talking about something." The questions were also randomized (i.e., always appearing in a different order) on the online questionnaire to increase validity of responses. Cronbach's alpha for the study was found to be even higher than previous studies with .95 for the subscale conversation orientation and .87 for conformity orientation.

Measure of relationship satisfaction. The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) was chosen over the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) because of its brevity (i.e., 18 fewer items than the original DAS, easier for practitioners to use), multidimensionality, and its ability to distinguish between distressed and nondistressed individuals and relationships (Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995). The RDAS consisted of 14 items that provided a total score (RDASTotal) and 3 subscores: dyadic consensus (consensus; measuring the degree to which couples agree on matters of importance to their relationship), dyadic satisfaction (satisfaction; measuring the degree to which couples are satisfied with their relationship), and dyadic cohesion (cohesion; measuring the degree of closeness and shared activities experienced by couples). Example questions included, "How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?" and "Do you and your partner engage in outside interests together?" RDAS scores ranged from 0-48 with "distressed relation" having lower scores. The instrument has shown high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.90) and construct validity (Busby et al., 1995). In the present study, the following Cronbach's alphas were found for both subscales and for the overall questionnaire: consensus = .77, satisfaction = .82, cohesion = .76, and RDASTotal = .87.

Results

The relationship between the conversation and conformity orientations (as measured by the RFCPS) and relationship satisfaction was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Preliminary analysis was performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. The total score for the RDAS, when compared to conversation orientation, resulted in a small, negative relationship ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$). Similar findings were found with the subscales consensus ($r = -.19$, $p < .01$) and cohesion ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$). However, the relationship between the subscale satisfaction and conversation was a large, positive relationship ($r = .87$, $p = .00$). Although variations were found by subscales, the data generally supported our H1 that conversation orientation in family-of-origin would be positively associated with marital satisfaction in offspring.

Conformity orientation also showed notable correlations with relationship satisfaction. Positive relationships were found with conformity and relationship satisfaction (RDASTotal; $r = .08$), though also weak. The subscales of RDAS showed similar findings (cohesion, $r = .075$; consensus, $r = .053$) except for satisfaction, which revealed a medium, negative relationship ($r = -.35, p < .01$). Our H2, predicting that there would be a negative correlation between a conformity orientation in family-of-origin and marital satisfaction, was also generally supported by our data.

In response to H3, a general analysis of the arrangement of the family-of-origin was done based on their type of family communication and current marital satisfaction (see Tables 2 and 3). Preliminary testing revealed no significant gender differences between stepparent and single parent arrangements (i.e., mother or father). In general, those raised in a mother and stepfather household were more likely to report high on the conversation orientation, followed by living with only a mother, both the mother and father, and other family arrangements. For conformity orientation, living only with the mother resulted in the highest averages, closely followed by both the mother and father, mother and stepfather, and other. The overall score of marital satisfaction was highest for those who grew up with both parents, followed by mother and stepfather, mother only, and other types of family arrangements. As noted in Table 3, further variations were found with the subscales.

Table 2. Family-of-Origin Communication in Different Structures of Family-of-Origin

Family Structures		Conversation Orientation			Conformity Orientation	
	n	*M* (*SD*)	95% CI	*n*	*M* (*SD*)	95% CI
Mother/Father	535	41.24(12.52)	[40.12, 42.36]	535	31.12(7.01)	[30.50, 31.75]
Mother only	51	42.71(16.08)	[38.18, 47.23]	51	31.59(9.27)	[28.98, 34.20]
Mother/Stepfather	30	43.34(11.06)	[39.14, 47.55]	30	30.66(6.40)	[28.22, 33.09]
Other	22	39.29(18.96)	[29.55, 49.04]	22	24.71(10.77)	[19.17, 30.24]

Table 3. Marital Satisfaction in Different Structures of Family-of-Origin

Family Structures		Consensus		Satisfaction	
	n	*M* (SD)	95% CI	*M* (SD)	95% CI
Mother/Father	535	22.2(3.7)	[21.8, 22.5]	10.9(4.2)	[10.5, 11.3]
Mother only	51	21.4(4.3)	[20.2, 22.6]	10.6(5.2)	[9.1, 12.0]
Mother/Stepfather	30	21.4(4.5)	[19.7, 23.1]	11.2(4.6)	[9.5, 13.0]
Other	22	20.6(8.0)	[14.4, 26.7]	12.1(6.0)	[7.5, 16.7]

Family Structures		Cohesion		Total	
	n	*M* (*SD*)	95% CI	*M* (*SD*)	95% CI
Mother/Father	535	13.5(2.4)	[13.3, 13.7]	55.3(6.8)	[54.7, 55.9]
Mother only	51	13.8(3.4)	[12.8, 14.7]	54.4(8.8)	[52.0, 56.9]
Mother/Stepfather	30	13.8(2.5)	[12.8, 14.8]	54.9(7.5)	[52.0, 57.7]
Other	22	13.0(3.2)	[10.5, 15.5]	52.1(7.1)	[39.0, 65.2]

The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to assess for differences between family-of-origin types and present-day relationship satisfaction (i.e., H4). No significant differences were found with consensual ($U = 24204$, $z = -.91$, $p = .36$) and laissez-faire ($U = 24751$, $z = -.21$, $p = .83$) family types. However, significant differences were found with the other two family types. Pluralistic families revealed a significantly higher score on relationship satisfaction ($U = 32579$, $z = -3.61$, $p = .00$) when compared to those that were not pluralistic ($Md = 57$, $n = 208$ versus $Md = 54$, $n = 379$). Similar results were found with protective families ($U = 32489$, $z = -4.30$, $p = .00$); those that qualified as the protective typology were more likely to score higher on relationship satisfaction than those that were not ($Md = 58$, $n = 226$ versus $Md = 55$, $n = 361$).

To assess H5, a one-way, between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of family-of-origin structures on marital satisfaction and family-of-origin communicative practices. Participants were divided into the four groups shown in Tables 2 and 3. There were no significant differences found at the $p < .05$ level in marital satisfaction or family-of-origin communicative practices for the four family types. Assessment of the homogeneity of variances showed concerns on each Levene's test with the exception of the RDAS subscales consensus ($p = .07$) and satisfaction ($p = .08$).

For H6 and H7, regression models were formed to assess the association of family-of-origin communication with relationship satisfaction regardless of family structure. The outcome variable for the regressions was relationship satisfaction (including subscales) with predictor variables family structure, conversation, and conformity. To completely understand the prediction ability, a hierarchical regression approach was taken with variables entered in the aforementioned order. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted with no serious violations noted.

For viewing the impact of the family-of-origin's arrangement on relationship satisfaction (see Table 4), family structure was entered in step 1, resulting in a slight increase of total variance explained by the model. In particular, 7% ($F = 22.14$, $p < .001$) of satisfaction was accounted for when including family arrangement. The total variance explained on relationship satisfaction and consensus was only 1% ($F = 3.70$, $p < .05$ and $F = 3.56$, $p < .05$, respectively), while cohesion did not increase at all.

To assess the connection between conversation and relationship satisfaction while controlling for family arrangement, the variable from Fitzpatrick's RFCPS was inserted into step 2. The subscale explained an additional 5% of the variance in total relationship satisfaction, after controlling for family structure ($R^2 = .06$, $F = 12.86$, $p < .001$). Conversation explained an additional 4% of the variance of the subscales cohesion and consensus, after controlling for family structure ($R^2 = .04$, $F = 8.53$, $p < .001$ and $R^2 = .05$, $F = 9.45$, $p < .001$, respectively). Finally, conversation described an additional 76% of the subscale satisfaction, after controlling

for family structure ($R^2 = .83$, $F = 1001.76$, $p < .001$). In the final models, conversation was found to be a statistically significant predictor ($p = .00$) of the RDAS scale and subscales. Family structure was also found to be a statistically significant predictor in each final model with the exception of the subscale cohesion ($p = .41$), with conversation recording a higher beta value ($\beta = .20$, $p < .00$) than family structure ($\beta = .03$, $p = .41$).

Table 4. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Gender, Family Structure, and Family-of-Origin Conversation Patterns

| | Relationship Satisfaction | | | | | | | |
| | RDAS | | Cohesion | | Consensus | | Satisfaction | |
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1								
Family Structure	.01	-.09*	.00	.03	.01	.09*	.07	-.28**
Step 2								
Conversation	.06	.22**	.04	-.20**	.05	-.19**	.83	.88**

Note: *p < .05, **p < .001

The final hypothesis was approached in a similar way as the previous. Family structure was entered in step 1, while Fitzpatrick's conformity was entered in step 2 (see Table 5). After the entry of Fitzpatrick's conformity techniques, two subscales showed an increase in total variance explained by the model as a whole: satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = 9\%$, $F = 47.42$, $p < .001$) and cohesion ($\Delta R^2 = 3\%$, $F = 1.57$, $p = .20$). The overall score for marital satisfaction and consensus were less likely to be explained by Fitzpatrick's conformity variable ($\Delta R^2 = 1\%$ and 0%, respectively) when family structure was included. In the final model, family structure was a statistically significant contributor ($p < .05$) for all variables explaining relationship satisfaction except for the subscale cohesion ($p = .34$, $\beta = .03$). Conformity only showed to be a significant contributor to explaining relationship satisfaction in the subscale satisfaction ($p < .01$).

Table 5. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Gender, Family Structure, and Family-of-Origin Conformity Patterns

| | Relationship Satisfaction | | | | | | | |
| | RDAS | | Cohesion | | Consensus | | Satisfaction | |
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1								
Family Structure	.01	-.10*	.00	-.04	.01	-.09*	.06	-.28**
Step 2								
Conformity	.02	-.18*	.00	.07	.01	.05*	.18	-.35**

Note: *p < .05, **p < .001

Discussion

The results of this study lend support to the overall body of literature suggesting communication patterns are transmitted intergenerationally and family-of-origin communication does impact the relationship satisfaction of offspring (Andrews, Foster, Capaldi, & Hops, 2000; Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003; Story et al., 2004). For example, we found support for our first hypothesis that high conversation orientation in family-of-origin is positively related with offspring's marital satisfaction. This finding is not surprising given that individuals from families characterized by a high conversation orientation were socialized to value overall communication and spent time in their families-of-origin exchanging ideas and sharing thoughts and feelings. Since these are behaviors that have also been linked to marital satisfaction (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2006), persons practicing them could be expected to have greater levels of marital satisfaction. We also found support for our second hypothesis that high conformity orientation is negatively related with current marital satisfaction. Given that these individuals were socialized in families that valued harmony, avoided conflict, and placed personal needs below that of the family, these findings are also not surprising. Conflict avoidance and subjugation of personal needs have been associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction (Gottman, Gottman, & DeClaire, 2006; Olson, Olson-Sigg, & Larson, 2008), so it seems almost inevitable that these individuals will experience some level of dissatisfaction in their relationships.

Some of the results from the subscales of the RDAS used to measure relationship satisfaction were also predictable; however, some were not. For example, the finding that higher levels of conformity orientation were associated with lower scores on the dyadic satisfaction scales was consistent with hypothesis two. As stated above, communication patterns that result in conflict avoidance and denial of personal needs have been associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction in prior research (Gottman et al., 2006; Olson et al., 2008). The participants' patterns of dyadic consensus, or agreement about important issues, were also fairly predictable. For example, higher levels of conversation orientation were found to be negatively associated with dyadic consensus. Certainly, if couples feel free to air their independent ideas and thoughts—as those from a high conversation oriented family do—it is likely they also feel free to disagree. Therefore, agreement on important issues probably would not be as valued as it might be in couples who do not freely exchange contradictory thoughts or who may not feel they have the freedom to disagree. The finding that higher levels of conformity orientation in family-of-origin were linked to higher scores on dyadic consensus was supportive of this assumption, since these individuals were socialized in families that valued harmony and agreement.

Less predictable, however, was this study's findings on dyadic cohesion—or degree of closeness and shared experiences. Higher levels of conversation orientation in this study were negatively associated with dyadic cohesion, and higher levels of conformity orientation were positively

associated with dyadic cohesion. This relationship was further shown with variations in the four typologies: pluralistic (i.e., high on conversation and low on conformity) and protective (i.e., low on conversation and high on conformity) families scored higher on relationship satisfaction than those that were not. Although it might be speculated that being able to have a free exchange of thoughts, feelings, and ideas with a partner would lead to a sense of closeness, these findings suggest this may not be the case. The free exchange of thoughts and feelings did appear to lead to greater relationship satisfaction; however, it also appeared to lead to a sense of feeling less close to one's partner. Conversely, those with higher levels of conformity orientation reported higher levels of cohesion, or feeling close to their partners. Thus, partners may be engaged in a tradeoff between feeling close versus having more of a voice and individuality in the relationship.

However, if partners are sacrificing closeness for the ability to freely express thoughts and feelings and vice versa—as these findings suggest—this has direct implications for clinicians and educators. Targeting communication patterns in the current relationship is a common intervention in therapy and educational settings. By identifying the family communication pattern in the partners' families-of-origin, educators may be more focused on how they approach teaching communication skills. For example, although a high conversation orientation in families-of-origin indicates a free exchange of ideas, thoughts, and feelings, there is no indication that these thoughts and feelings are exchanged in an appropriate or relationship-building manner. For individuals from a high conversation orientation family, it may be salient to focus on how ideas and feelings are being conveyed, as well as on ways to reconnect after disagreements, techniques for repairing disruptions in the relationships, and emphasis on the importance of scheduling times to share being together in order to correct for the risk of reduced cohesion. For those individuals whose families were high conformity oriented, the challenge would be to retain that important sense of closeness in the relationship, while also increasing relationship satisfaction through more open communication. Educators may concentrate on helping the partners to improve direct communication of needs while also emphasizing that disagreements can occur without threatening the integrity of the relationship.

The findings that individuals from high conversation oriented families experience lower levels of dyadic consensus is less concerning; however, by providing partners with information that this pattern may be a byproduct of their more open approach to communication, clinicians and educators may be able to normalize, and thus lessen, the impact of lower consensus levels. Higher levels of consensus found in conformity oriented individuals are not problematic, but positive, and can be viewed as simply a characteristic of this pattern of family communication.

The other pattern that emerged from the data was the difference between the RDAS overall score and the subscale scores. For example, overall RDAS scores were negatively associated (albeit weakly) for individuals from high conversation oriented families and positively associated

(again, weakly) for those individuals from high conformity oriented households. Although this appears to be a contradiction, the lower scores for the consensus and cohesion subscales for conversation orientation and higher scores for consensus and cohesion subscales for conformity orientation undoubtedly accounted for the apparent contradiction between the overall dyadic adjustment scale scores and the relationship satisfaction subscale scores. However, for educators, the knowledge that this may be a consistent pattern for individuals who have these family communication patterns in their families-of-origin can help them to more accurately assess the strength of the relationship. It also underscores the need for clinicians and educators to view and interpret scores from the entire assessment tool before making conclusions.

Data indicated support for hypothesis three (i.e., conversation orientation and conformity orientation will vary based on the structure of the family-of-origin), and some interesting patterns emerged. For example, those growing up in a mother and stepfather household were more likely to use an open communication, high conversation oriented pattern, and those growing up in a mother-only family were highest in conformity orientation. Although caution should be exercised in drawing any conclusions, these findings do offer avenues of additional research and open up many questions. For example, if these findings were found to be consistent, what dynamics within the mother and stepfather configuration could explain the increased likelihood of a high conversation orientation? Since a mother-only home resulted in higher levels of conformity practices, and a mother and stepfather home probably spent some time as a mother-only home, what was it about the change in family structure that may have facilitated the change in family communication patterns? Does the need to recalibrate the family after the introduction of a new member into the spousal subsystem create an increased need for communication of thoughts and feelings that facilitates a conversation orientation?

In terms of implications, these findings add to the body of literature that indicates relationship patterns are established in families-of-origin and do have an impact on the quality of offspring's romantic relationships. Information drawn from this study's findings may be particularly useful to educators wanting to instill in parents the desire of increasing later relationship satisfaction in their children. The knowledge that fostering a high conversation orientation in their family in which open communication, free exchange of ideas, and expression of emotions are promoted could have the potential to yield results in future relationships may be of interest to them. Further drawing from these findings, clinicians and educators may want to inform parents that open communication may result in a sense of disconnection at times, and therefore, modeling relationship repair and intentional reconnection after disagreements may also be useful skills that could impact their children's future relational happiness.

This study does have limitations. Probably the most salient is that data were collected from individuals only as opposed to couples. Therefore, the researchers were unable to determine what the impact on relationship satisfaction would be for couples in which partners had different

family-of-origin family communication patterns. Future research would benefit from an exploration of how each partner's family-of-origin orientation would interact with the other partner's and impact the relationship satisfaction of each. Finally, as with all retrospective studies, the designation of conversation orientation or conformity orientation for participants' families-of-origin was based on participants self-report and experiences of several years prior to the study. As all participants were currently married, and therefore, not living in their family-of-origin, their responses to the RFCPS were, of necessity, based on their memory. Since current perceptions of past events are subject to reauthoring based on life experiences, and in this case, on the desire to view one's family-of-origin experiences as positive, care should be given to any interpretation of findings accordingly.

In conclusion, this study provided support for the idea that communication patterns are transmitted intergenerationally and that they can be measured and assessed in an educational setting. In addition, the study found that higher levels of conversation orientation in a participant's family-of-origin were positively linked to relationship satisfaction in his or her own marriage, and higher levels of conformity orientation in a participant's family-of-origin were negatively linked to relationship satisfaction in his or her own marriage. Patterns that emerged in scores of the RDAS subscales indicated avenues of intervention and education for couples, including an increased emphasis on relationship repair and reconnection. The ease of using the RFCPS and RDAS in educational and therapeutic settings should further the generalizability of these results.

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