

POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS IN PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AS MEDIATORS  
OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND SHARED FAMILY IDENTITY

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Political Conversations in Parent-Child Relationships as Mediators of  
Family Communication Patterns and Shared Family Identity

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## Political Conversations in Parent-Child Relationships as Mediators of Family Communication Patterns and Shared Family Identity

For over 50 years, communication scholars have researched family communication patterns (FCPs) and their associations with information-processing, behavioral, and psychosocial outcomes (Koerner & Schrodts, 2014; Schrodts et al., 2008). Family communication patterns theory (FCPT) is concerned with how parents educate and socialize their children by attempting to create a shared social reality. The mechanisms used to create this shared social reality continue with children through adulthood (Koerner & Schrodts, 2014). As part of these efforts, scholars have examined the mediating and moderating factors associated with FCPs. For example, scholars have investigated how certain communication behaviors and processes (e.g., conflict styles, political philosophy, relational maintenance, jointly told family stories) mediate the associations among FCPs, wellness, and identity and relational outcomes (Beck & Ledbetter, 2003; Ledbetter, 2015; Ledbetter & Beck, 2014; Thompson & Schrodts, 2015).

For most, the family represents an important in-group and the place where children learn not only how to communicate more generally, but about politics specifically as they begin to develop their political identity (Lay et al., 1998; McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2009). Most young adults feel that they can communicate about politics with their parents, but this typically holds true when young adults felt respected and when there is a family environment that encourages the exchange of political ideas (Ekstrom, 2016; Levinson & Yndigeg, 2015). Furthermore, high-conversation oriented families create environments where communication is viewed as a means of exchanging ideas on a variety of topics and where every family member's opinion is respected (Koerner & Schrodts, 2014). On the other hand, high-conformity oriented families do not view communication as a way to exchange ideas, but rather to encourage homogeneity of attitudes, beliefs, and values. Given that both family orientations to communication may encourage (or



discourage) the discussion of politics between parents and their young adult children, and that political conversations, in general, hold potential to polarize individuals across different political lines, such conversations are likely to be associated with family functioning, family identity, and relational outcomes. Indeed, one identity outcome that could potentially vary as a result of political conversations is shared family identity.

*Shared family identity* (SFI) represents the extent to which members of an in-group are able to minimize their differences and focus on their shared group identity as the salient one (Soliz, 2007, Soliz & Harwood, 2006). In other words, “shared family identity represents a common in-group categorization” (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009, p. 83), or the extent to which family members are able to focus on the characteristics that give them their family identity. Scholars have examined SFI in grandparent-grandchild relationships (Fowler, 2015; Soliz & Harwood, 2006), in sibling relationships (Phillips & Schrodt, 2015), and in mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships (Rittenour, 2012). SFI is characterized by family interactions that express inclusivity and solidarity (Soliz et al., 2009), and it is indicative of group members perceiving little psychological distance among themselves (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Although it predicts in-group/out-group distinctions within the family, scholars have yet to consider how conversational behaviors, such as parent-child political conversations, might further explain how different FCPs facilitate (or inhibit) feelings of SFI between parents and children. Thus, the present study seeks to extend FCP theory by examining the role of political conversations as an explanatory mechanism for FCPs and SFI.

This study could potentially have several implications. First, theoretically, this study could further our understanding of how SFI is created through parent-child political conversations, conversations that emerge from the relational schemas that are socialized via conversation and conformity orientations in the family. Second, in a more practical sense,

researchers have observed that 11% of couples in the United States (U.S.) ended their relationship after the 2016 Presidential election due to deep political disagreements, with the number doubling to 22% among millennials (Wakefield, 2017). Understanding how political conversations among family members enhance or inhibit feelings of SFI may reveal important insights into processes of political polarization that undermine relational and familial stability. Scholars have argued that political polarization in the U.S. and the ideological gap among Democrats and Republicans is continually growing and has reached its highest in almost a century (Hare et al., 2014; Iyengar et al., 2012). Thus, by examining how FCPs enhance or inhibit SFI via political conversations, and by implication, the in-group/out-group distinctions that political conversations among parents and their young adult children may reflect, this study could shed further light on the degree to which political polarization in the U.S. has pervaded family life. In other words, political polarization and disagreement may be so prevalent that individual family members (who may have a difference of opinion) may not see themselves as being a part of the same family. To test this line of reasoning, the present study employs FCPT to examine how conversation and conformity orientations are associated with political conversations among young adults and their parents, as well as young adults' feelings of SFI.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

#### **Family Communication Patterns Theory**

FCPT is grounded in *co-orientation* (Newcomb, 1953), or the process by which two or more people (typically a dyad) focus their cognitive attention on an object in their social world and develop beliefs and opinions about the object. There are two cognitions that emerge from co-orientation (Koerner & Schrodts, 2014). The first type of cognition is an individual's own beliefs about the object, and the second is the individual's perception of the other individual's belief regarding the object. These two types of cognitions determine three attributes of the co-

orientated dyad: agreement, accuracy, and congruence. *Agreement* is the similarity or dissimilarity about two people's perception of an object. *Accuracy* refers to the similarity between a person's perception of the other person's beliefs and attitudes and the other person's actual beliefs. For example, if one relational partner believes that the other is a moderate Democrat and the partner truly is a moderate Democrat, then there is accuracy. *Congruence* refers to the similarity between a person's own beliefs and the same person's perception of the other person's beliefs. As Koerner and Schrodtt (2014) noted, agreement, accuracy, and congruence not only are properties of a co-oriented dyad or group; these three attributes may also define a shared social reality. "A *shared social reality* exists when dyads or groups are in agreement about an object, are aware that they share this agreement (i.e., are congruent), and are accurate in their beliefs about the shared perception (i.e., have accuracy)" (Koerner & Schrodtt, 2014, p. 3). There are two primary reasons why co-orientation leads to a shared social reality. First, if family members hold inaccurate beliefs about one another, this could lead to misunderstandings and conflict. Second, families have a psychological need for congruence or for holding similar attitudes toward objects. Likewise, there are practical reasons why co-orientation will usually lead to a shared social reality, as family members must work together to coordinate their everyday activities and function as a group.

According to FCPT, there are two mechanisms that parents invoke as they socialize their children to make sense of their environment, which in turn create more or less of a shared social reality with their children: conversation and conformity orientations. *Conversation orientation* is the degree to which parents create a climate of open conversation and encourage free, frequent, and spontaneous interactions with one another on a variety of topics (Koerner & Schrodtt, 2014). Families that are high on conversation orientation tend to have democratic decision-making where every family member is encouraged to have an opinion and voice. These families value

the exchange of ideas and view frequent communication as the best way to educate and socialize their children. In essence, they view communication as central to family functioning (Koerner & Schrod, 2014).

On the other hand, *conformity orientation* is the degree to which the family communication environment stresses a climate of homogeneity of beliefs, attitudes, and values (Koerner & Schrod, 2014). For children, it consists of respect for parental authority, pressure to adopt the parents' values and beliefs, experiencing parental control, and having greater or lesser freedom to question the parents' values and beliefs (Horstman et al., 2018). Families that are high on this dimension are typically conflict avoidant in a desire to maintain harmony. Parents in high conformity families are the sole decision-makers in the family because they believe they know what is best for their children. These families view communication not as a means of exchanging ideas, but as a means of encouraging uniformity of beliefs, of teaching respect for authority (particularly parental authority), and of creating similar attitudes and values among family members (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b).

According to FCPT, conversation and conformity do not occur independent of each other, but instead can (and often do) interact to create four family types: consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire families. *Consensual* families are high on both conversation and conformity orientations. Family communication within this family type is characterized by a tension of preserving the existing hierarchy and structure within the family, yet encouraging open communication and the exploration of new ideas (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Parents within consensual families value what their children have to say, but still believe that they know best. Conflict within this family is viewed as a threat to family functioning, but because conflict may negatively affect family relationships, these families understand the importance of conflict resolution (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Second,

*pluralistic* families are high on conversation orientation and low on conformity orientation.

Family communication within this family type consists of unrestrained conversation on a variety of topics. Family members' opinions are evaluated on the merits of the arguments rather than on which family member communicates the opinion (Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). Children from pluralistic families are encouraged to participate in family decision-making, which helps them develop independent thinking skills. There is no overt pressure to conform or obey, so these families typically are low in conflict avoidance. These families openly address their conflict, engage in positive conflict resolution strategies, and typically resolve their conflicts (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b).

Third, *protective* families are low on conversation orientation and high on conformity orientation. In these families, family communication is a means to enforce uniformity rather than a way to exchange ideas. Consequently, children in these families are easily persuaded by authority (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972). In this family type, family members are expected to avoid conflict and behave in ways that preserve the family culture and norms. These families often lack the skills to engage in healthy conflict management because communication skills are undervalued (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b). Children see little value in family discussions and tend not to trust their own decisions (Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). Finally, *laissez-faire* families are low on both conversation and conformity orientations, as family communication within this family type is characterized by uninvolved and emotionally divorced interactions. Children from *laissez-faire* families are likely to be more heavily influenced by groups and peers outside of the home (Koerner & Schrodt, 2014; McLeod & Chaffee, 1972). These families do not value conformity nor communication, so conflicts are rare (Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). Because children from this family type do not receive support from their parents, they tend to question their decision-making skills and are easily persuaded by others.

In recent investigations of FCPs and identity outcomes, scholars have found that identity gaps mediate the relationship between FCPs and relational intentions, and that family identification (i.e., the degree to which one feels a connection with their family) moderated this mediation effect (Phillips et al., 2018). Likewise, in sibling relationships, scholars have observed self-disclosure and relational uncertainty as mediators of the association between FCPs and relational quality in sibling relationships (Schrodt & Phillips, 2016). When these findings are coupled with FCPT's assertion that co-orientation processes produce greater or lesser degrees of agreement within families, one would expect that conversation and conformity orientations would enhance (or inhibit) SFI.

### **Shared Family Identity**

SFI is rooted in communication accommodation theory (CAT) (Dragojevic et al., 2016; Giles et al., 1991; Shepard et al., 2001) and is concerned with group-based identity categorization and communication. CAT posits that through communication, group members negotiate psychological distance (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Accommodative behaviors, which reflect person-centeredness and decreased perceptions of group distinctions, are positively associated with SFI, whereas nonaccommodative behaviors, which create social distance between individuals and are associated with perceptions of group distinctiveness, are negatively associated with SFI (Harwood et al., 2006; Soliz, 2007; Soliz & Harwood, 2006). Overaccommodation and underaccommodation are negatively correlated with SFI, whereas conversation satisfaction is positively correlated with SFI in stepparent-stepchild relationships (Speer et al., 2013). Hence, family members' perceptions of SFI represent relationships where group distinctions within the family are minimal (Soliz, 2007).

Schrodt and colleagues (2008) found that FCPs were associated with a host of behavioral, psychosocial, and information-processing outcomes. They found that conversation orientation is

positively associated with psychosocial outcomes (e.g., SFI), whereas conformity orientation had a small, but meaningful association with psychosocial outcomes. Hence, one might reason that high conversation orientation is positively associated with SFI given that such an orientation is likely to encourage a variety of conversations where thoughts and feelings are shared among family members. Over time, these conversations are likely to create stronger feelings of family membership and in-group status:

*H<sub>1</sub>*: Family conversation orientation is positively associated with young adults' reports of shared family identity with their parents.

Conversely, a high conformity orientation may or may not lead to greater feelings of SFI given recent efforts of scholars to revise and expand dimensions of the construct (e.g., Horstman et al., 2018). On one hand, the pressure children experience to adopt the attitudes, beliefs, and values of their parents may create SFI, particularly when the pressure co-occurs with a high conversation orientation. On the other hand, the pressure to conform may illicit the opposite reaction if children grow to resent their parents' authority and expectations of strict adherence to their worldviews. Theoretically, in some families a high conformity orientation may be positively associated with SFI if young adults agree with (and adopt) their parents' attitudes, values, and beliefs, whereas in other high conformity oriented families, the pressure to adopt those attitudes and beliefs may create an oppressive and stifling environment that inhibits SFI. Thus, conformity orientation is likely to be associated with SFI even though the precise direction of this association is unknown. Likewise, conformity orientation may also moderate the positive association between conversation orientation and SFI with both parents, given that increased pressures to adopt the values and beliefs of parents may strengthen the in-group identifications of both children and their parents as they openly discuss a variety of topics. Consequently, the next set of hypotheses were advanced to test this line of reasoning:

*H*<sub>2</sub>: Family conformity orientation is associated with young adults' shared family identity with their parents.

*H*<sub>3</sub>: Family conformity orientation moderates the positive association between conversation orientation and young adults' shared family identity with their parents.

### **Political Conversations in Family Relationships**

Not only are FCPs likely to be directly associated with SFI, but they may be indirectly associated via specific communication behaviors that are guided by the relational schemas formed through both FCP orientations. Among a host of communication behaviors that could explain how FCPs enhance (or inhibit) feelings of SFI, few are potentially more impactful than discussions of politics. Political conversations have the potential to reveal underlying worldviews and values about an individual and, consequently, can create differences and changes to the health of a relationship (Johnson et al., 2011). Furthermore, scholars have identified political discussions as one indicator of political socialization in adolescents (Kim & Kim, 2007; Meadowcroft, 1986). *Political socialization* is the process of how children begin to relate and develop attitudes toward democratic principles, values, political parties, and ideas associated with politics (Thorson, Leshner, et al., 2016; Thorson, McKinney, et al., 2016). During early adolescence, children not only begin to form their personal identity, but they may begin to question what their parents say and develop deeper commitments to certain religious, occupational, and political values (Erikson, 1966; Marcia, 1980). The role of family is well-recognized in political socialization scholarship (Shah et al., 2009), and a chief theoretical concern of FCPT is how parents socialize their children in attempting to create a shared social reality. In fact, in its infancy, the theory was originally concerned with political communication in families and how parents chose to discuss media with their children (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972). Presently, scholars are using FCPT to investigate different political outcomes and noting,



for example, that conversation orientation is positively associated with civic participation and political engagement (Liebes & Ribak, 2009; Shah et al., 2009), the credibility of a political candidate (Ledbetter, 2015), and the frequency of political discussions within the family (Liebes & Ribak, 2009) and outside of the family (Hively & Eveland, 2009). Despite the value of these lines of research, however, researchers have yet to consider how political conversations might function as an explanatory mechanism for the associations among FCPs and SFI with parents.

Most recently, scholars have examined the relational outcomes of political discussions about the 2016 elections within the family (Johnson et al., 2019). Johnson et al. (2019) discovered that conversation orientation was associated with less stress after the election, whereas conformity orientation was associated with more stress, post-election. They also found that conversation orientation was positively associated with the perceived effect of political talk on family closeness, whereas conformity orientation was negatively associated with the perceived effect of political talk on family closeness. These findings are likely because high conversation-oriented families create a climate that encourages the free exchange of ideas that values every family member's opinion and voice (Koerner & Schrodtt, 2014). However, high conformity-orientated families create a climate that encourages uniformity of beliefs, attitudes, and values, where parents believe that they know best and are less likely to value everyone's opinion on a political issue. Despite Johnson and colleagues' (2019) findings, however, their research only examined conversations related to the 2016 Presidential election.

According to FCPT, a high conversation orientation encourages open and free discussions on a wide variety of topics, and thus, this orientation should be positively associated with the frequency with which young adults discuss politics with their parents. Given the pressure to adopt parental attitudes, values, and beliefs that comes from a high conformity orientation, however, as well as the conflict avoidance that often characterizes this orientation to

family interaction, conformity orientation should be negatively associated with the frequency of political conversations that occurs among young adults and their parents. To test this line of reasoning, two additional hypotheses were advanced:

*H<sub>4</sub>*: Family conversation orientation positively predicts the frequency with which young adults discuss political topics with their parents.

*H<sub>5</sub>*: Family conformity orientation negatively predicts the frequency with which young adults discuss political topics with their parents.

Likewise, FCPT would suggest that the positive association between conversation orientation and the frequency of political discussions with parents would vary as a function of conformity orientation, such that pluralistic families (i.e., high conversation, low conformity) would encourage greater frequency of political conversations between parents and their children than consensual families (i.e., high conversation, high conformity) given the inherent pressure to agree with parental values and beliefs in the latter family type. Thus, a sixth hypothesis was advanced to test this line of reasoning:

*H<sub>6</sub>*: Conformity orientation moderates the positive association between conversation orientation and the frequency with which young adults discuss politics with their parents.

Not only are political conversations likely to emanate from different orientations to communication in the family, but they likely encourage (or discourage) stronger feelings of in-group status and SFI. For instance, researchers have investigated the role of political conversations in people's lives and found that individuals are more comfortable discussing politics with people who share similar views (Carlson & Settle, 2016; Mondak, 2010; Noelle-Neuman, 1993; Settle & Carlson, 2019). Likewise, individuals are fearful of expressing an opinion that might be perceived as unpopular (Hayes et al., 2013). With political polarization continuing to rise and the subsequent division between liberals and conservatives growing larger

by the day, the within-group social networks of individuals from different political ideologies are becoming increasingly homogenous (Settle & Carlson, 2019). Polarization could lead to bias and anger toward the opposing party and may lead individuals to discuss politics infrequently (Mason, 2015; Wells et al., 2017). This also extends to parent-child interactions in the family. In fact, Levinsen and Yndigeegn (2015) found that young adults who perceive that their parents are politically distant are less likely to have political discussions with them. Nevertheless, scholars have yet to consider how the frequency of political conversation could lead to ingroup/outgroup distinctions within the family. Because political conversations have the potential to be divisive among family members, especially if they do not hold the same political beliefs, they can either enhance or diminish SFI. Thus, the following hypothesis tests the relationship between frequency of political conversations in parent-young adult child relationships and SFI:

*H<sub>7</sub>*: Frequency of political conversations among young adults and their parents will positively predict their reports of shared family identity with their parents.

Finally, if FCPs are predictive of the frequency with which young adults and their parents discuss politics, and if such discussions enhance or diminish feelings of SFI, then political conversations may function as explanatory mechanisms for the associations between both orientations to family communication and SFI. With conversation orientation, the freedom to discuss a variety of political topics may be indicative of a strong and vibrant parent-child relationship, one in which young adults can trust their parent(s) enough to discuss potentially discrepant views on topics that may otherwise threaten a less secure parent-child relationship. Within a secure and supportive family communication environment, discussions of politics may explain how open and free interactions among young adults and their parents encourage greater feelings of SFI. Likewise, with conformity orientation, (in) frequent discussions of politics may further explain how the pressure to adopt parents' attitudes, beliefs, and values diminishes young

adults' feelings of SFI with their parents. Thus, a final hypothesis was advanced to test this line of reasoning:

*H<sub>8</sub>*: Frequency of political conversations with parents mediates the relationship between family communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientations) and young adults' shared family identity with their parents.

### **Method**

Participants were 235 young adults from first-marriage (84.3%,  $n = 198$ ) and post-divorce families (15.7%,  $n = 37$ ) ranging in age from 17 to 37 with a mean age of 19.3 ( $SD = 1.5$ ). Participants included 95 males and 140 females, most of whom were white (84.3%,  $n = 198$ ), although 7.7% ( $n = 18$ ) were Latinx, 3.8% ( $n = 9$ ) were biracial, 2.6% ( $n = 6$ ) were African American, 0.9% ( $n = 2$ ) were Native American, and 0.9% ( $n = 2$ ) were Asian American. When asked who they lived with when not attending college, the majority reported living with their biological mother and father (85.1%,  $n = 200$ ), living only with their biological mother (6.0%,  $n = 14$ ), or with their biological mother and stepfather (5.1%,  $n = 12$ ). In addition, most reported having one sibling (37.4%,  $n = 88$ ), two siblings (34.5%,  $n = 81$ ), or three siblings at most (14.9%,  $n = 35$ ), although 7.7% ( $n = 16$ ) were the only child. In terms of birth order, most participants were first-born (43.4%,  $n = 102$ ) or second-born (34%,  $n = 80$ ) children in their family. Finally, participants reported talking an average of 4.0 and 2.1 hours per week with their mother and father, respectively.

### **Procedures**

After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, student volunteers from a private university who provided informed consent were invited to complete an online questionnaire using Qualtrics software (see Appendix). Surveys were completed anonymously, and in classes

where instructors granted permission, students were awarded minimal class credit (less than 2%) for participation in the research. All participation took place outside of regular class time.

## **Measures**

### **Family Communication Patterns**

Participants' FCPs were measured using the conversation orientation subscale of the Revised Family Communication Patterns (RFCP) instrument (Ritchie, 1991) and Horstman et al.'s (2018) Expanded Conformity Orientation Scale (ECOS). First, the RFCP subscale consists of 15 items asking respondents to evaluate the extent to which their FCPs reflect a *conversation orientation* (e.g., "My parents encourage me to challenge their beliefs and ideas," "I can tell my parents almost anything"). Given its similarity to the frequency of discussing politics with parents, one item from the conversation orientation subscale was deleted (i.e., "In our family, we often talk about topics like politics and religion where some persons disagree with others"). Second, the ECOS consists of 24 items that assess four dimensions of family *conformity orientation*: respect for parental authority (e.g., "My parents insist that I respect those who have been placed in positions of authority"), experiencing parental control (e.g., "My parents try to persuade me to view things the way they see them"), questioning parental authority and beliefs (e.g., "In our home, we are allowed to question my parents' authority"), and pressure to adopt parental values (e.g., "My parents encourage me to adopt their values"). Responses to both measures were solicited using a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). The validity and reliability of both FCP measures are well established (Hortsman et al., 2018; Schrodt et al., 2008). In this study, the conversation orientation subscale produced an alpha coefficient of .92. Likewise, the ECOS produced alpha coefficients ranging from .81 for questioning parental authority to .86 for parental control, .87 for pressure to adopt

parental values, and .90 for respecting authority. A composite conformity orientation score was created by averaging all four dimensions ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

### ***Frequency of Political Conversations***

Using McCurry et al.'s (2012) measure of frequency of religious conversations as an example, I created a measure that assesses the frequency of political conversations that participants reported having with their mother and father, separately. In their measure, McCurry et al. (2012) assessed the frequency with which young adults discuss a variety of religious topics with their romantic partner. Following a similar set of procedures (e.g., using a focus group to brainstorm topics), I generated a relatively exhaustive list of 19 political topics from current news and previous literature (e.g., President Trump, gun rights, voting, immigration, healthcare, etc.). Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they discuss each topic with their mother and father using a 5-point frequency scale that ranged from *never* (1) to *very often* (5). McCurry et al. (2012) reported excellent internal reliability for their measure with an alpha coefficient of .98. For this study, the measure of political conversations produced an alpha coefficient of .93 for political talk with mother and .95 for political talk with father.

### ***Shared Family Identity***

Participants reported on their SFI with their parents using Soliz and Harwood's (2006) Shared Family Identity (SFI) scale. This scale consists of six items that assess the degree to which participants perceive themselves and their parent as members of the same family (e.g., "Above all else, I think of my mother as a member of my family"). Responses were solicited using a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Soliz and Harwood (2006) reported alpha coefficients for the SFI scale ranging from .90 to .96, and in this study, the measure produced alpha coefficients of .83 and .92 for SFI with mother and father, respectively.

### *Control Variables*

In addition to individual and family demographic items that may be useful as control variables (e.g., age, gender, divorce status, number of siblings), participants reported both their own political orientation and party affiliation, as well as their perceptions of their parents' political orientations and party affiliations. This included two separate questions for participants and for each parent (e.g., "To what extent do you consider yourself a Democrat or Republican?" and "To what extent do you consider yourself a Liberal or Conservative?"). For political orientation, responses ranged from *extremely liberal* (1) to *extremely conservative* (7). For party affiliation, responses ranged from *strong Democrat* (1) to *strong Republican* (7). Likewise, participants reported on their perceived political similarity to each parent. Political similarity was measured using one question for each parent (i.e., "Do you consider your mother [or father] to have similar political views as you?"). Participants responded with "yes" or "no" for each parent.

### Data Analysis

Pearson's product-moment correlations were used to test H1, H2, H4, H5, and H7. To test H3 and H6, hierarchical regression models were obtained. An orthogonalized interaction term was created to model the interaction effect of conversation x conformity in both models (Little et al., 2007). To test H8 for the presence of indirect effects, four separate path models were obtained using Model 4 in Hayes's (2018) PROCESS macro for SPSS (v. 3.1) and bootstrapping procedures with 10,000 samples. Separate models tested for reports of political conversations and SFI with mother and father, respectively, to control for multicollinearity between similar reports for both parents.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses for Family Characteristics

An initial screening of the data revealed that SFI with both parents was severely skewed. Thus, the data transformation procedure of taking the inverse log of both scores was applied to reduce the skewness in both outcome measures. The distributions of all other measures were within acceptable levels of skewness and kurtosis.

Preliminary analyses were conducted to determine if any relevant control variables were needed for tests of H3, H6, and H8. A set of Pearson correlations revealed no significant associations between age, birth order, number of siblings (as a proxy for family size), and the two outcomes of SFI with parents. A set of one-way ANOVAs revealed significant differences in SFI with both parents, however, based on divorce status (using transformed scores), as young adults from divorced families reported less SFI with their mother ( $M = .73$ ,  $SD = .27$ ) than those from first-marriage families ( $M = .82$ ,  $SD = .23$ ),  $F(1, 233) = 4.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ , as well as less SFI with their father ( $M = .63$ ,  $SD = .33$ ) than those from first-marriage families ( $M = .81$ ,  $SD = .25$ ),  $F(1, 233) = 4.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ . Given an insufficient number of young adults from post-divorce families ( $n = 37$ ) to conduct appropriate statistical comparisons, all subsequent analyses were conducted using only the young adults from first-marriage families ( $N = 198$ ). A second set of ANOVAs revealed no significant differences in SFI with both parents based on biological sex, although daughters reported higher conversation orientations ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) than sons ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ),  $F(1, 196) = 5.51$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ , as well as less frequent political talk with father ( $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) than sons ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = .87$ ),  $F(1, 196) = 4.45$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ .



### **Preliminary Analyses for Political Affiliation**

Given disproportionate responses to the two items assessing party affiliation and political orientation, both items were re-coded to create three groups: Republican/conservative (i.e., responses ranging from 5 to 7), Democrat/liberal (i.e., responses ranging from 1 to 3), and “neither” (responses of 4 to each item). Preliminary analyses were then conducted to determine if there were significant differences in any of the variables based on the political affiliations and identities of the participants and their parents. First, using participants’ party affiliation as the predictor variable, a one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in conversation orientation,  $F(2, 195) = 3.21, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$ , as participants who identified as Republican ( $n = 113$ ) reported higher family conversation orientations ( $M = 5.46, SD = .91$ ) than those who identified as Democrats ( $n = 40, M = 5.01, SD = 1.20$ ) or as identifying with neither party ( $n = 45, M = 5.18, SD = 1.20$ ). Likewise, Republican ( $M = 2.47, SD = .67$ ) and Democratic participants ( $M = 2.37, SD = .76$ ) reported engaging in more frequent political talk with their mother than those who endorsed neither party ( $M = 2.09, SD = .77$ ),  $F(2, 195) = 4.75, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$ . However, only Republican participants ( $M = 2.50, SD = .76$ ) reported engaging in more frequent political talk with their father than Democratic participants ( $M = 2.15, SD = .80$ ) or those who endorsed neither party ( $M = 2.03, SD = .91$ ),  $F(2, 195) = 6.67, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$ . No significant differences in SFI with either parent emerged based on the political affiliations of the participants.

The next set of ANOVAs, using participants’ liberalism vs. conservatism as the predictor variable, revealed significant differences in political talk with mother and father, as well as differences in SFI with father. First, participants who identified as conservative ( $n = 119, M = 2.44, SD = .66$ ) or liberal ( $n = 46, M = 2.40, SD = .75$ ) reported engaging in political talk more frequently with mother than those who identified as neither ( $n = 33, M = 2.05, SD = .84$ ),  $F(2,$

195) = 3.92,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ . Likewise, conservative ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) and liberal participants ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) reported engaging in political talk more frequently with father than those identified as neither ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ),  $F(2, 195) = 3.64$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ . Importantly, conservative participants reported higher SFI with father ( $M = .84$ ,  $SD = .23$ ) than liberal participants ( $M = .73$ ,  $SD = .27$ ),  $F(2, 195) = 3.79$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ , although participants endorsing neither reported levels of SFI with father ( $M = .79$ ,  $SD = .25$ ) that were not significantly different from either of the other two groups. Hence, participants' conservatism vs. liberalism was dummy-coded and entered as a control variable in tests of H8.

Attention was then given to participants' perceptions of their parents' political affiliations. First, a set of one-way ANOVAs revealed significant differences in frequencies of political talk with both parents based on young adults' perceptions of their parents' party affiliations. Participants who identified their mother as a Republican ( $n = 131$ ,  $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) or a Democrat ( $n = 37$ ,  $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) reported engaging in political talk with their mother more frequently than those who identified mother as neither ( $n = 30$ ,  $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = .80$ ),  $F(2, 195) = 3.57$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ . Likewise, participants who identified their mother as a Republican reported engaging in political talk with their *father* more frequently ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) than those who identified mother as neither ( $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = .84$ ),  $F(2, 195) = 4.36$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ , although participants identifying mother as a Democrat did not engage in significantly less or more political talk with father ( $M = 2.31$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) than those who identified mother as Republican or neither, respectively. No significant differences in SFI with either parent emerged based on participants' perceptions of their mother's political affiliation.

A second set of one-way ANOVAs, using participants' perceptions of father's political affiliation, revealed significant differences in reports of political talk with both mother and father that were nearly identical. Specifically, participants who identified their father as a Republican ( $n$

= 141,  $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) or as a Democrat ( $n = 31$ ,  $M = 2.30$ ,  $SD = .79$ ) reported engaging in more frequent political talk with father than those identified their father as neither ( $n = 26$ ,  $M = 1.84$ ,  $SD = .84$ ),  $F(2, 195) = 5.53$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ . Likewise, participants who identified their father as a Republican ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) or as a Democrat ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) reported engaging in more frequent political talk with mother than those identified their father as neither ( $M = 2.01$ ,  $SD = .78$ ),  $F(2, 195) = 3.93$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ . Again, no significant differences emerged in SFI with either parent based on participants' perceptions of their father's political affiliation.

Finally, two sets of independent samples t-tests were conducted to explore potential differences based on participants' perceptions of political similarity with their parents. In terms of political similarity with father, participants who reported having similar political views ( $n = 164$ ) reported higher conversation orientations ( $M = 5.45$ ,  $SD = .93$ ) than those with dissimilar political views ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ),  $t(39.91) = 3.56$ ,  $p < .01$ . Likewise, they reported engaging in more frequent political talk with father ( $M = 2.39$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) than those with dissimilar political views ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = .88$ ),  $t(196) = 2.66$ ,  $p < .01$ . No significant differences in SFI with either parent emerged based on political similarity with father. Conversely, participants who reported having similar views with mother ( $n = 171$ ) reported higher SFI with mother ( $M = .83$ ,  $SD = .23$ ), but not with father, than those who reported dissimilar political views with mother ( $n = 27$ ,  $M = .72$ ,  $SD = .23$ ),  $t(196) = 2.46$ ,  $p < .05$ . Consequently, the two path models testing  $H_8$  for SFI with mother included perceived political similarity as a control variable (dummy-coded), whereas the two path models testing  $H_8$  for SFI with father included perceptions of father's liberalism vs. conservatism.

## Primary Analyses

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, alpha reliabilities, and Pearson correlations for the effective sample, are displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables (N = 198)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Conversation	5.31	1.06	.92	-					
2. Conformity	4.48	.80	.86	-.45**	-				
3. FPT with Mother	2.36	.72	.93	.15*	-.08	-			
4. FPT with Father	2.32	.83	.95	.19**	-.10	.72**	-		
5. SFI with Mother	.82	.23	.83	.30**	-.12	-.10	-.04	-	
6. SFI with Father	.80	.25	.92	.20**	.02	-.13	.01	.77**	-

*Note.* FPT = frequency of political talk. SFI = shared family identity.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

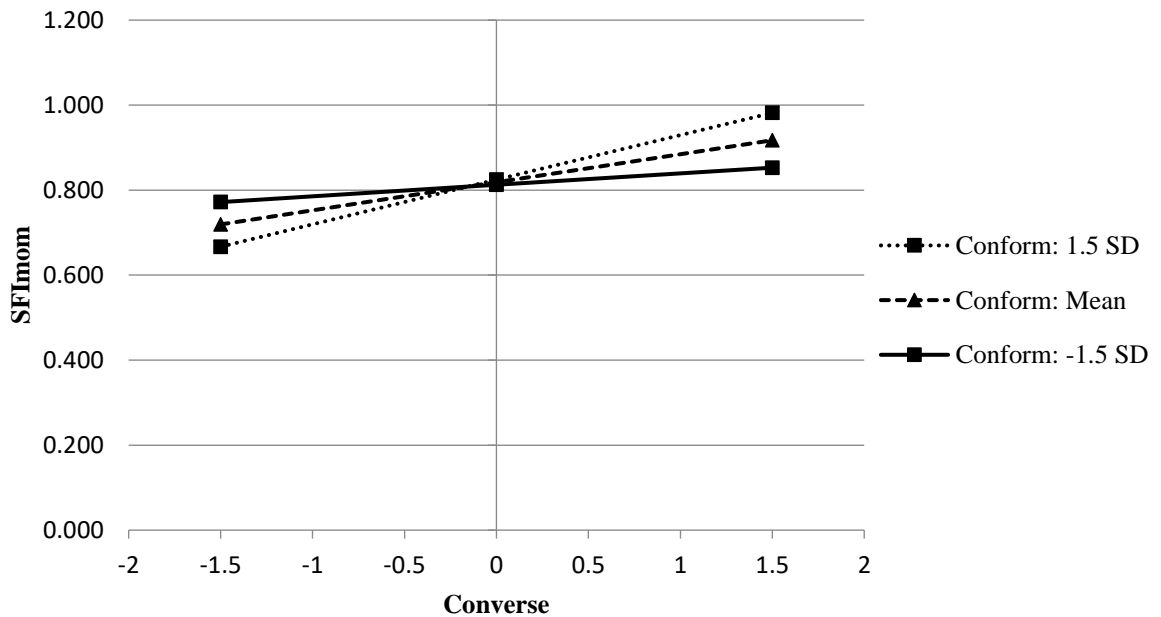
$H_1$  predicted a positive association between family conversation orientation and young adult children's reports of SFI with their parents. Pearson's product-moment correlations indicate that conversation orientation is positively associated with SFI with mother ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ) and father ( $r = .20, p < .01$ ). Thus,  $H_1$  was supported.

$H_2$  predicted that family conformity orientation would be associated with young adults' reports of SFI with their parents. The results indicate that conformity orientation is not associated significantly with SFI with mother ( $r = .12, p = .09$ ) or father ( $r = .02, p = .81$ ). Thus,  $H_2$  was not supported.

$H_3$  predicted that conformity orientation would moderate the positive association between conversation orientation and young adults' SFI with their parents. Two separate hierarchical regression models revealed that the interaction effect of conversation  $\times$  conformity on young adults' reports of SFI approached statistical significance with mother ( $b = .03$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $t = 1.89$ ,  $p = .06$ ) but not with father ( $b = .01$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t = .67$ ,  $p > .05$ ). The decomposition of this marginal interaction effect (see Figure 1) revealed that conversation orientation positively predicted SFI with mother at moderate ( $b = .01$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $z = 3.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ) to high levels of conformity ( $b = .11$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $z = 3.89$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not at low levels of conformity ( $b = .03$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $z = 0.88$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Notwithstanding this marginally significant pattern, the results did not support  $H_3$ .

**Figure 1**

*Decomposition of Conversation  $\times$  Conformity Interaction Effect for SFI with Mother*



*Note.* SFI<sub>mom</sub> = shared family identity with mother. Converse = conversation orientation. SD = standard deviation.

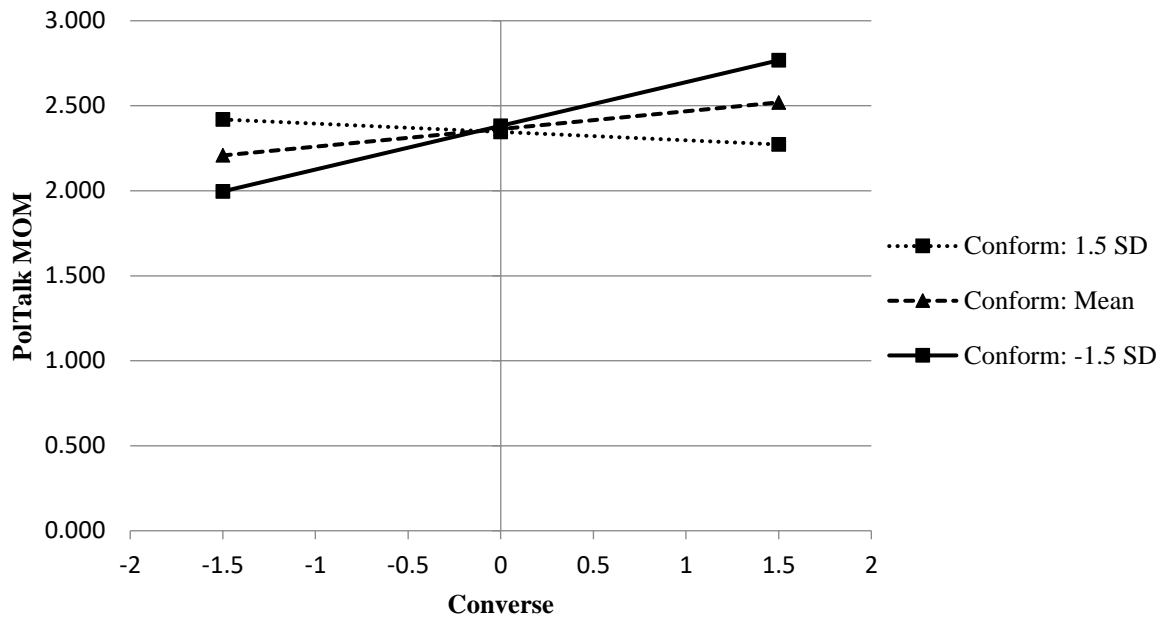
$H_4$  predicted that conversation orientation would positively predict the frequency with which young adults discuss political topics with their parents. The results indicate that conversation orientation is positively associated with discussions of political topics with mother ( $r = .15, p < .05$ ) and father ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ), and thus,  $H_4$  was supported.

$H_5$  predicted that conformity orientation would negatively predict the frequency with which young adults discuss political topics with their parents. Contrary to the findings for conversation orientation, Pearson correlations reveal that conformity is not associated significantly with discussions of political topics with mother ( $r = .08, p > .05$ ) or father ( $r = -.10, p > .05$ ). Thus,  $H_5$  was not supported.

$H_6$  predicted that conformity orientation moderates the positive association between conversation orientation and the frequency with which young adults discuss politics with their parents. Two separate hierarchical regression models revealed that the interaction effect of conversation x conformity on the frequency with which young adults discuss politics was statistically significant with mother ( $b = -.10, SE = .04, t = -2.29, p < .05$ ) but not with father ( $b = -.02, SE = .05, t = -0.32, p > .05$ ). The decomposition of the interaction effect for mother (see Figure 2) revealed that conversation orientation positively predicted the frequency with which young adults discussed politics with mother at low levels of conformity ( $b = .26, SE = .09, z = 3.01, p < .01$ ), but not at moderate ( $b = .10, SE = .05, z = 1.92, p > .05$ ) to high levels of conformity ( $b = -.05, SE = .09, z = -0.58, p > .05$ ). Thus,  $H_6$  was partially supported.

**Figure 2**

*Decomposition of Conversation x Conformity Interaction Effect for Political Discussions with Mother*



*Note.* PolTalk MOM = political discussions with mother.

$H_7$  predicted that the frequency of political conversations among young adults and their parents would positively predict their reports of SFI with their parents. This hypothesis was not supported, as the results reveal that frequency of political conversations are not significantly associated with SFI with mother ( $r = -.10, p > .05$ ) or father ( $r = .01, p > .05$ ).

### **Tests of Indirect Effects**

$H_8$  predicted that frequency of political conversations would mediate the relationship between FCPs (i.e., conversation and conformity orientations) and young adults' SFI with their parents. The first regression model, using conversation orientation as the predictor variable and political conversations with mother as the mediator, produced a significant multiple correlation

coefficient,  $R = .36$ ,  $F(3, 194) = 9.82$ ,  $MSE = .048$ ,  $p < .001$ , accounting for 13.2% of the shared variance in SFI with mother. After controlling for political similarity with mother ( $b = .097$ ,  $t = -2.13$ ,  $p < .05$ ), conversation orientation ( $b = .067$ ,  $t = 4.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and frequency of political talk with mother ( $b = -.049$ ,  $t = -2.27$ ,  $p < .05$ ) emerged as significant predictors in the model. However, the indirect effect of conversation orientation on SFI with mother was not statistically significant ( $b = -.005$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $CI: -.013, .001$ ).

The second regression model, using conformity orientation as the predictor and political conversations with mother as the mediator, also produced a significant multiple correlation coefficient,  $R = .24$ ,  $F(3, 194) = 3.98$ ,  $MSE = .052$ ,  $p < .01$ , accounting for 5.8% of the shared variance in SFI with mother. Contrary to the model for conversation orientation, only political similarity with mother ( $b = -.119$ ,  $t = -2.53$ ,  $p < .05$ ) emerged as a significant predictor in the model and the indirect effect of conformity orientation was not statistically significant ( $b = .003$ ,  $SE = .003$ ,  $CI: -.003, .011$ ). Hence, when testing the indirect effects of FCPs on SFI with mother, the results provided no support for  $H_8$ .

Two additional regression models were tested to examine the indirect effects of both FCP orientations on SFI with father through frequency of political conversations with father. The first model, using conversation orientation as the predictor variable, produced a multiple correlation coefficient that was statistically significant,  $R = .26$ ,  $F(4, 193) = 3.61$ ,  $MSE = .06$ ,  $p < .01$ , accounting for 7.0% of the shared variance in SFI with father. After controlling for significantly less SFI with father for participants who identified their father as liberal rather than conservative ( $b = -.103$ ,  $t = -2.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ), conversation orientation emerged as the only significant predictor in the model ( $b = .043$ ,  $t = 2.58$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The indirect effect of conversation orientation on SFI with father through political talk with father was not statistically significant ( $b = -.002$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $CI: -.010, .006$ ).



The second regression model, using conformity orientation as the predictor variable, produced a multiple correlation coefficient that was not statistically significant,  $R = .19$ ,  $F(4, 193) = 1.89$ ,  $MSE = .06$ ,  $p = .11$ . Collectively, then, the results of both regression models for political talk with father did not support  $H_8$ .

## Discussion

Although increased attention is being given to political polarization and the role that politics play, more generally, in conversations among family members, scholars have yet to consider how political conversations among young adults and their parents may explain how FCPs enhance (or inhibit) feelings of in-group status among young adult parents. Thus, the primary goal of this study was to understand if political polarization has now pervaded family life: Do young adults experience intergroup distinctions with their parents as a function of their political talks? Overall, the results provided only modest support for the theoretical line of reasoning advanced in this report. On one hand, the results support FCPT by demonstrating that family conversation orientation is positively associated with political conversations and SFI with both parents. Likewise, although family conformity orientation is largely unassociated with political conversations and SFI with both parents, it did moderate the positive associations between conversation orientation and both outcomes with mother. However, the results provided no evidence to suggest that frequency of political conversations mediate the associations among both FCP orientations and SFI with both parents. Consequently, the findings of this study provide at least three implications worth noting.

### **Family Conversation Orientation, Political Talk, and SFI**

First, family conversation orientation may be important for encouraging the kinds of conversations and other accommodative behaviors that strengthen family identity and the in-group categorizations that young adult children hold about their parents (and potentially, other

family members). When parents engage in open and honest conversations about a multitude of topics with their children and encourage independent thinking and participatory decision-making, such conversations are likely to enhance the cognitive flexibility (Koesten et al., 2009), communication competence (Schrodt et al., 2009), and confirming behaviors of their children (Schrodt et al., 2007; Young & Schrodt, 2016). The relational schemas reflected by a high conversation orientation likely guide young adults to engage more often with their parents and others outside of the family. Because of this open communication environment, young adult children are more likely to discuss political topics with their parents and to view their parents as part of the same in-group (family), even though the latter association does vary as a function of the former. In this family environment, young adults are less likely to view their parents as outsiders or out-group members. This is likely due to the communication environment that high conversation-oriented families create, as members learn to value and respect everyone's ideas and opinions and create open and frequent dialogue with other members (Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). This finding not only extends FCPT, but also our theoretical understanding of SFI. Family environments that encourage free and frequent dialogue with one another tend to minimize young adults' perceptions of group distinctions within the family and increased conversations about politics.

### **Family Conformity Orientation, Political Talk, and SFI**

Second, conformity orientation was largely unassociated with SFI and political talk with parents. Conformity orientation was measured across four dimensions—respect for parental authority, experiencing parental control, questioning parental authority, and pressure to adopt parental values. Although conformity orientation was not associated with SFI or political talk with parents, this study relied upon a composite measure derived from the four dimensions of the ECOS, thus masking distinctions in association between certain dimensions of conformity

orientation and both outcomes. In other words, there may be meaningful associations between the different dimensions of the ECOS and SFI and political talk with parents that were masked by the decision to create an overall composite score. Furthermore, conformity orientation may not have been associated with either outcome because of other factors that were excluded from the present investigation. For example, one's affect toward their family communication environment may moderate the association between conformity orientation and SFI. In other words, if young adults from conformity-oriented households view their communication environment favorably, then it may result in higher degrees of SFI, whereas young adults who hold negative appraisals of their high conformity family may experience less SFI with their parents. When averaged together and appraisals of conformity are left unaccounted for, the total association between conformity orientation and SFI may be statistically non-significant. Likewise, the question of whether or not different dimensions of conformity orientation are associated with SFI and other relational outcomes may depend upon the intensity of the political conversations that occur between young adults and their parents.

Although conformity orientation was unassociated with political talks with parents and with SFI, it did moderate, to some degree, the association between conversation orientation and both outcomes with mother. For instance, young adults from consensual families reported higher degrees of SFI with mother than those from pluralistic families reflecting, perhaps, a delicate balance between preserving hierarchy and respecting parental authority while valuing children's opinions and making them feel included as family members. These families understand the importance of positive conflict resolution and are less likely to view conflicts as destructive or threatening to the family (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990), including those that may involve political topics. Because of this, young adults from consensual families likely experience higher degrees of SFI with their family

members than those from pluralistic families, given that the latter are not guided by the same pressures to maintain similar attitudes, beliefs, and values.

On the other hand, young adults from pluralistic families were more likely to discuss politics with mother than young adults from the other family types. This is likely because pluralistic families view communication as a means to exchange ideas and discourage homogeneity of ideas and beliefs among family members. As a result of these open and free conversations on a variety of topics, young adults from pluralistic families likely develop the communication efficacy to engage in political talk with their parents even if they perceive that they have differing political opinions. Indeed, parents who create an open communication environment will likely welcome political talk and even opinions contrary to their own. Of course, the question of why these patterns emerged for mother but not for father remain. It could be that because mothers and fathers express varying degrees of warmth and control with their children (Baumrind, 1971; Hamon & Schrodtt, 2012; Schrodtt, 2019), mothers may play a particularly meaningful role in the political socialization of their children and in the ensuing outcomes of this process (cf. Schrodtt & Afifi, 2018). Given that young adult children often report closer relationships with their mother than with their father (O'Mara & Schrodtt, 2017; Schrodtt & Afifi, 2018), future research comparing how mothers and fathers socialize and engage their children in politics is needed.

### **Political Conversations as Mediators of FCPs and SFI**

The final set of implications emanates from the final goal of this study, which was to test the frequency of political conversations with parents as potential mediators of the association between FCPs and SFI. Although no significant indirect effects emerged, the first model accounted for 13.2% of the shared variance in SFI with mother and yielded significant effects for conversation orientation and political talk with mother (after controlling for perceived political

similarity with mother). Likewise, conversation orientation emerged as the only significant predictor in the model predicting SFI with father, although the model accounted for much less shared variance in this outcome. One explanation for these findings stems from the political and relational homogeneity of the sample. Specifically, the young adult children from first-marriage families in this study were largely conservative Republicans who perceived that their parents were the same. The use of a political homogenous sample of young adults may have restricted the degree to which significant indirect effects could be detected, especially given how skewed SFI with both parents turned out to be. Most of the young adult children in this study reported nearly (or absolute) maximum scores on SFI with both mother and father, with 88.4% and 85.4% of participants scoring no lower than 6.00 and as high as 7.00 on a 7-point scale for SFI with mother and father, respectively. Hence, young adult children did not perceive their parents to be in an out-group, and perhaps as a result of the ceiling effect observed in SFI, group distinctions and meaningful indirect effects could not emerge from the data. This may be because group distinctiveness is less salient in parent-child relationships but may be more salient in other familial relationships (e.g. grandparent-grandchild, adult siblings, in-laws). Likewise, by only measuring the frequency of political conversations between young adults and their parents, this study may have omitted other important facets of political conversations, such as the intensity of the conversation, feelings of affective polarization, or even the motivation or efficacy of young adult children to discuss politics in general. Future research should consider other facets of political communication in more ethnically and culturally diverse families before dismissing the more general theoretical premise of this report.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Although these implications provide modest support for FCPT and extend our understanding of how both communication orientations in the family are associated with political

conversations and SFI with parents, this study has several limitations worth noting. One key limitation of this study was the homogeneous sample collected from a private university where the majority of participants were white and identified as conservative or Republican. This not only limits the generalizability of the findings to the particular political and familial demographics of the sample, but it may have contributed in other ways to the non-significant associations reported here. Second, participants' reports of SFI with parents were heavily skewed, such that young adults reported high levels of SFI with both parents regardless of their (dis)similarity in political orientation or whether they engaged (in)frequently in political talk. This too limited the degree to which meaningful associations among political conversations with parents and SFI could be detected. It also implies that SFI between children and parents in first-marriage families is less varied and/or robust than in other family relationships, which has implications for examining how much or how little young adult children communicate in accommodating ways with their parents. For example, young adult children may not be aware of their over- and underaccommodating practices when discussing certain political topics with their parents, as they may have developed certain habits of talking with both parents that help them avoid discomfort or conflict when discussions of politics arise. Scholars should conduct more research to understand if young adult children are aware of the accommodative behaviors, and the potential group distinctions that may or may not flow from them, during their political conversations with parents. Of course, dyadic research that incorporates the perspectives of both parents and their children would provide an even more complete test of the proposed associations examined in this study. Finally, given that young adults from divorced families reported lower levels of SFI with both parents, future researchers should examine other communication behaviors and processes that enhance (or inhibit) SFI across these two family types.

Despite the limitations of this study, the results do extend our knowledge of FCPs, political conversations, and perceptions of group distinctions within parent-child relationships. We now understand that families that foster open, free, and frequent dialogues on a variety of topics are more likely than not to have young adult children who report greater SFI when thinking about their relationships with their parents. Consequently, environments that encourage dialogue likely have more positive interactions, which in turn would likely inhibit group distinctions. In future research, scholars should examine potential moderating factors of the explanatory process tested here, albeit using other indicators of political conversations among family members. For example, family members' political knowledge, populist attitudes, and political involvement and activism could all influence the degree to which the family communication environment enhances (or inhibits) the personal and relational outcomes of engaging in political conversations with family members. Likewise, future scholars might re-examine the degree to which different dimensions of conformity orientation differentially predict SFI with family members, given the more general premise of FCPT that high levels of conformity should contribute to perceptions of agreement, accuracy, and congruence in attitudes and beliefs. Are there dimensions that are more robust in predicting political communication behaviors and processes? For example, the dimensions of experiencing parental control and respect for parental authority, which both may emanate from more dictatorial forms of conformity in the family, may undermine the degree to which children experience SFI with parents more so than parents encouraging their children to adopt their values. Finally, scholars should consider other communication behaviors that may alter the frequency of political conversations and associated outcomes, such as parenting styles, conflict styles, communication and political efficacies, and temperament, to name a few. By exploring these potential avenues for further research, it would provide a more robust understanding of political conversations

within families and extend our knowledge of political socialization in family systems. With political polarization on the rise, examining these future directions would enable communication scholars and practitioners to identify “best practices” for parents and other family members who engage in political conversations with one another. Through these types of investigations, scholars can encourage parents and their families to engage in constructive political conversations to enhance the political knowledge and involvement of future citizens in a democratic society.



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**Appendix**  
**Demographic Items and Survey Measures**

1. What is your sex?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Other
2. What is your age? (insert age) \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your race?
  - a. Latino/Hispanic
  - b. African American/Black
  - c. Caucasian/White
  - d. Native American
  - e. Asian/Asian American
  - f. Biracial:
  - g. Other:
4. (If applicable) What is your classification?
  - a. College Freshmen
  - b. College Sophomore
  - c. College Junior
  - d. College Senior
5. Who do you currently live with (or when you lived at home, who were your primary caretakers)?
  - a. Biological (or adoptive) Mother
  - b. Biological (or adoptive) Father
  - c. Both mother and father
  - d. Mother and Stepfather
  - e. Father and Stepmother
  - f. Other (please specify):
6. If your parents are still married, how long have they been married (in years).? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are both of your biological (or adoptive) parents living? YES NO
8. If participant answered “no” to question 7, which parent is *not* living? FATHER or MOTHER
9. Are your biological (or adoptive) parents divorced? YES NO
10. If participant answered “yes” to question 8, how long has it been since your parents divorced? \_\_\_\_\_
11. On average, how often do you talk with your MOTHER during a typical week?  
\_\_\_\_\_ hours and \_\_\_\_\_ minutes
12. On average, how often do you talk with your FATHER during a typical week?  
\_\_\_\_\_ hours and \_\_\_\_\_ minutes
13. How many siblings do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
  
14. Please circle the number which *best represents* your birth order:

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      11 or more

### **Political Identification**

1. To what extent do you consider yourself a liberal or a conservative?
  - a. Extremely liberal (1)
  - b. Liberal (2)
  - c. Somewhat liberal (3)
  - d. No preference (Neither Liberal nor Conservative) (4)
  - e. Somewhat Conservative (5)
  - f. Conservative (6)
  - g. Extremely Conservative (7)
2. To what extent do you consider yourself a Democrat or Republican?
  - a. Strong Democrat (1)
  - b. Democrat (2)
  - c. Lean Democrat (3)
  - d. No Preference (4)
  - e. Lean Republican (5)
  - f. Republican (6)
  - g. Strong Republican (7)
3. To what extent do you consider your mother a Democrat or Republican?
  - a. Strong Democrat (1)
  - b. Democrat (2)
  - c. Lean Democrat (3)
  - d. No Preference (4)
  - e. Lean Republican (5)
  - f. Republican (6)
  - g. Strong Republican (7)
4. To what extent do you consider your father a Democrat or Republican?
  - a. Strong Democrat (1)
  - b. Democrat (2)
  - c. Lean Democrat (3)
  - d. No Preference (4)
  - e. Lean Republican (5)
  - f. Republican (6)
  - g. Strong Republican (7)
5. Do you consider your mother to have the similar political views as you?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
6. Do you consider your father to have the similar political views as you?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

### **Frequency of Political Conversations**

Please indicate the frequency to which you talk about these topics with your mother. Randomize items.

- 1- Never, 2- Seldom, 3- Sometimes 4- Often, 5- Very Often (same scale used in McCurry et al.)
1. President Trump
2. Former President Obama
3. U.S. Congress
4. Voting
5. Democratic Party
6. Republican Party
7. The news media
8. Abortion
9. Gay marriage
10. Death Penalty
11. Gun rights
12. Debt-free college
13. Immigration
14. Environment
15. Taxes
16. International affairs
17. Healthcare
18. Attending a political rally
19. Upcoming Presidential elections 2020

Please indicate the frequency to which you talk about these topics with your father. Randomize items.

- 2- Never, 2- Seldom, 3- Sometimes 4- Often, 5- Very Often (same scale used in McCurry et al.)
20. President Trump
21. Former President Obama
22. U.S. Congress
23. Voting
24. Democratic Party
25. Republican Party
26. The news media
27. Abortion
28. Gay marriage
29. Death Penalty
30. Gun rights
31. Debt-free college
32. Immigration
33. Environment
34. Taxes

35. International affairs
36. Healthcare
37. Attending a political rally
38. Upcoming Presidential elections 2020

### **Revised Family Communication Patterns Assessment**

#### Conversation Orientation Scale

1. My parents often say something like “Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions.”
2. My parents often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something.
3. My parents encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs.
4. My parents often say something like “You should always look at both sides of an issue.”
5. I usually tell my parents what I am thinking about things.
6. I can tell my parents almost anything.
7. In our family we often talk about our feelings and emotions.
8. My parents and I often have long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular.
9. I really enjoy talking with my parents, even when we disagree.
10. My parents like to hear my opinions, even when they don’t agree with me.
11. My parents encourage me to express my feelings.
12. My parents tend to be very open about their emotions.
13. We often talk as a family about things we have done during the day.
14. In our family we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future.

#### Expanded Conformity Orientation Scale

1. My parents expect us to respect our elders.
2. In our home, I am expected to speak respectfully to my parents.
3. My parents have clear expectations about how a child is supposed to behave.
4. When I am home, I am expected to obey my parents’ rules.
5. My parents insist that I respect those who have been placed in positions of authority.
6. My parents emphasize certain attitudes that they want the children in our family to adopt.
7. In our home, my parents have the last word.
8. My parents expect me to trust their judgement on important matters.
9. I am expected to follow my parents’ wishes.
10. My parents feel it is important to be the boss.
11. My parents become irritated with my views if they are different from their views.
12. My parents try to persuade me to view things the way they see them.
13. My parents say things like “You’ll know better when you grow up.”
14. My parents say things like “You may not understand why we are doing this right now, but someday you will.”
15. My parents say things like “My ideas are right and you should not question them.”
16. In my family, family members are expected to hold similar values.
17. I am expected to adopt my parents’ views.
18. My parents encourage me to adopt their values.

19. Our family has a particular way of seeing the world.
20. I feel pressure to adopt my parents' beliefs.
21. I am expected to challenge my parents' beliefs.
22. In our home, we are allowed to question my parents' authority.
23. My parents encourage open disagreement.
24. In our home, we are encouraged to question my parents' authority.

### **Shared Family Identity**

Directions: Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your relationships with your mother using the scale below.

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree, 4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 5 = Somewhat Agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree

1. I am proud to be in the same family as my mother. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. My shared family membership with my mother is not that important to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. Above all else, I think of my mother as a member of my family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. My mother is an important part of my family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I feel as if we are members of one family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I feel as if we are members of separate groups. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Directions: Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your relationships with your father using the scale below.

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree, 4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 5 = Somewhat Agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly Agree

1. I am proud to be in the same family as my father. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. My shared family membership with my father is not that important to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. Above all else, I think of my father as a member of my family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. My father is an important part of my family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I feel as if we are members of one family. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I feel as if we are members of separate groups. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

## VITA

### Personal Background

Xavier Scruggs  
November 15, 1995  
Huntsville, Alabama  
Son of Felicia and Henry Scruggs Jr.

### Education

Diploma, J. O. Johnson High School,  
Huntsville, Alabama, 2014

Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, University  
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Master of Science, Communication Studies,  
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### Experience

Lab Instructor, Texas Christian University,  
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## ABSTRACT

### POLITICAL CONVERSATIONS IN PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AS MEDIATORS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS & SHARED FAMILY IDENTITY

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Using family communication patterns theory, this study tested the degree to which political conversations between young adults and their parents mediate the associations among family communication patterns (FCPs) and shared family identity (SFI).

Overall, frequency of political talk with parents did not mediate the associations among FCPs and SFI. Results did indicate that higher family conversation orientation is associated with increased political talk between young adults and their parents, as well as higher SFI with both parents. Evidence did emerge to suggest that conformity orientation moderates conversation orientation and frequency of political conversations and SFI with mother. Additionally, the political ideology/affiliation of both the young adult and parents predicted the frequency of political talk between young adults and their parents. The results of this study extend FCPT by providing insight into the communication orientations that enhance the common in-group categorizations that young adults hold about their parents.