JOINT FAMILY STORYTELLING AS A MEDIATOR OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND FAMILY STRENGTHS

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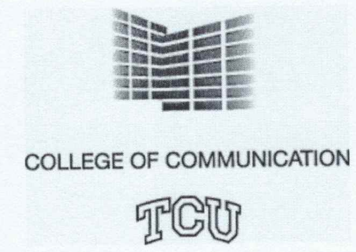

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Using family communication patterns theory (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a), this study tested the degree to which joint family storytelling mediates the relationship between family communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientations) and family strength. Participants consisted of 267 young adults from first-marriage families. The results indicated that conversation orientation is positively associated with both joint family storytelling behaviors (i.e., engagement, polite turn-taking, perspective-taking and coherence) and family strength, while conformity orientation is negatively associated with various joint family storytelling behaviors and family strength. The results also indicated that joint family storytelling partially mediates the relationship between family conversation and conformity orientations and family strength. Specifically, the level of engagement and politeness of turn-taking mediate the relationship between conversation orientation and family strengths, while perspective-taking and the politeness of turn-taking mediate the relationship between conformity orientation and family strength.

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Joint Family Storytelling as a Mediator of Family Communication Patterns and Family Strengths

Over the last few decades, researchers have devoted a substantial amount of attention to family communication patterns (FCPs) and the effect they have on various family behaviors and individual outcomes. Within this body of work, family communication patterns theory (FCP theory; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a; Ritchie, 1991; Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1990) identifies the underlying cognitive frameworks that guide people's communication behaviors both in the context of family interaction and in contexts outside of the family. For instance, FCP researchers have found meaningful relationships between conversation and conformity orientations (as two forms of FCPs) and family members' resiliency (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997) and conflict styles (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002c), as well as family strengths (Schrodt, 2009). Collectively, researchers have demonstrated that FCPs are associated with various behavioral, psychosocial, and information processing outcomes that have important implications for how individuals are able to function in their relationships and day-to-day lives (Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008).

Despite the value of this research and evidence to indicate that FCPs are associated with psychosocial and mental health outcomes, a key tenet of FCP theory is that the relational schemas embedded within conversation and conformity orientations guide family member interactions within and outside of the family (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b). Thus, it is important to identify communication behaviors that could mediate the relationship between people's schemas regarding family communication and the well-being outcomes that result from the use of such schemas. To this end, some scholars have already begun to identify communicative behaviors that do, in fact, mediate family communication schemas and well-being outcomes (Koesten, Schrodt, & Ford, 2009; Schrodt & Ledbetter, 2007; Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007). For example, Schrodt et al. (2007) identified parental confirmation and

affection as mediators of FCPs and children's mental well-being. They found evidence to suggest that the presence (or absence) of confirming and affectionate behavior from parents as a result of FCPs may be partially responsible for their children's well-being. Furthermore, Schrodt and Ledbetter (2007) found that young adults' perceptions of their parents' demand-withdraw patterns mediates part of the effects that conversation and conformity orientations have on young adult children's mental well-being.

With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Schrodt & Ledbetter, 2007), most of the recent research examining potential mediators of FCPs and family wellness have focused almost exclusively on individual behaviors. According to family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974), however, the whole of family interaction is greater than the sum of individual family members' perceptions. Thus, research investigating the degree to which jointly enacted communication activities mediate the associations between FCPs and well-being is warranted. One such activity is *joint family storytelling*, as researchers have discovered that storytelling is positively associated with such outcomes as marital and family satisfaction (Trees & Kellas, 2009), as well as physical and psychological health (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Indeed, scholars have demonstrated that family storytelling behaviors are tied to well-being, yet less is known about how, if at all, storytelling emerges as a function of family communication patterns. It stands to reason that the cognitive frameworks people hold about family communication (e.g., conversation and conformity orientations) should be associated with both their individually enacted, and collectively enacted, communication behaviors (e.g., the extent to which family members tell stories together). These jointly enacted communication behaviors, in turn, are likely to be associated with family members' psychosocial outcomes, including personal resiliency (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997, 2002b), the ability to cope, and physical health (Pennebaker &

Seagal, 1999). It is therefore important for researchers to focus on people's behaviors that may result from their family communication schemata because doing so would bring about a more complete understanding of the cognitive and behavioral processes involved in family interactions that promote family members' adjustment.

One family outcome that has received increased attention in the family counseling and social work literatures is family strengths. Researchers have shown, for instance, that understanding communication behaviors that reinforce family strengths has lasting implications for helping families cope with stress, adapt, and succeed (Marsh, 2003). Schrodt (2009) found that family strengths are positively associated with expressiveness (i.e., conversation orientation), and negatively associated with structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance (i.e., conformity orientation). Despite his findings, however, questions remain as to *why* conversation and conformity orientations are associated with family strengths. Given evidence to suggest that jointly told family stories help family members make sense of stressful experiences (Kellas, 2005), it stands to reason that jointly told family stories may mediate part of the associations between FCPs and family strengths.

Given this reasoning, the beliefs people hold about the nature and purpose of family communication may influence their tendency to get together as a family and retell shared experiences. Likewise, a family's tendency to get together and re-tell shared experiences may, in turn, affect the "relationship qualities that contribute to the emotional health and well-being of the family" (DeFrain & Stinnett, 2003, p. 637). Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which young adults' perceptions of joint family storytelling mediate the associations among family communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientations) and family strengths.

Theoretical Perspective

Family Communication Patterns Theory and Family Strengths

Two distinct theoretical perspectives informed this investigation. The first theory is family communication patterns theory (FCP), which is useful for understanding how people conceptualize family communication. Originally, FCP theory emerged from McLeod and Chaffee's (1972, 1973) research, which aimed to understand how parents discuss (or not) current events in the media with their children. Through their research, they posited that families attempt to achieve agreement on conversational topics primarily through two different processes. The first is *socio-orientation*, which represents the degree to which social roles and relationships have a greater influence on children's decision-making than their own information-processing skills. A *concept-orientation*, on the other hand, represents the degree to which parental discussions of ideas and concepts encourage children to develop their own information-processing and decision-making skills. Whereas a family high in socio-orientation typically holds a preference for harmonious parent-child relationships over ideas (i.e., avoiding conflict for the sake of family peace), a family high in concept-orientation holds a preference for ideas over relationships (i.e., valuing open discussions despite differing opinions) (Schrodt et al., 2008). In both cases, families negotiate shared realities and often work toward agreement about the topic at hand, but they arrive at their conclusions using different methods of communication (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006).

McLeod and Chaffee's original conceptualization of FCP theory was popular in mass communication research during the 1970's and 80's (Ritchie, 1991). However, certain concerns regarding the original FCP instrument arose, as did critiques about the labeling of the main dimensions of the theory. Specifically, Ritchie (1991) thought the original conceptualization of

socio-orientation led to an incorrect belief that family members tend to agree for the sake of harmony, rather than as a result of parental authority and control. These concerns led Ritchie to re-conceptualize and rename the two main dimensions of the theory (Schrodt et al., 2008). According to Ritchie (1991), *conversation orientation* is a more accurate label for concept-orientation and refers to the "the degree to which families create a climate in which all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained interaction about a wide array of topics" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006, p.54). Parents of conversation-oriented families believe in the importance of open communication as a means of teaching and socializing their children. Members of these types of families often share about their day-to-day activities, as well as their thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, *conformity orientation* more accurately describes the central idea behind socio-orientation, as it "refers to the degree to which family communication stresses a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006, p. 55). This family communication orientation is closely linked with the concepts of tradition and hierarchy. Parents in conformity oriented families believe in the importance of uniformity, and they often make decisions for the whole family without consulting their children in the decision-making process (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006).

According to FCP theory, the interaction of these two orientations creates four different family types. The first family type is referred to as *consensual* (i.e., high conversation, high conformity), and is characterized by a tension between a belief in hierarchy and an interest in open communication. Parents in these types of families spend time explaining their decisions to their children because they believe their children's opinions matter, and yet they believe parents should have the "final say" because they believe that is the appropriate parental role. *Pluralistic* families (i.e., high conversation, low conformity) converse often and are unrestrained about

topics of conversation. Parents in pluralistic families tend to allow children to make their own decisions, even if the parents don't agree, and they often encourage children to participate in decision-making processes for the family. Third, *protective* families (i.e., low conversation, high conformity) are characterized by a strong belief in uniformity and a low need for conversation. Parents in these families often make decisions for the family without discussion or consideration of the children's opinions. Furthermore, these families are often characterized by expectations of strict obedience to parental authority. The final family type is referred to as *laissez-faire* (i.e., low conversation, low conformity) and is characterized by "few and often lifeless interactions between family members that involve only a limited number of topics" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006, pp. 58-59). Members of these families tend to live very independent lives, and can even be described as "emotionally divorced" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006, p. 59).

Researchers have dedicated the better part of two decades of research documenting the associations between these four family types and various behavioral and psychosocial outcomes (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997; Schrodt et al., 2008). For example, research indicates that children from consensual and pluralistic families tend to have better conflict management skills (e.g., less avoidance, more positivity, and less aggression) than children from protective and laissez-faire families (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Hamon and Schrodt (2012) discovered that, in general, children from pluralistic families report fewer symptoms of depression and higher self-esteem than children from the other three family types. Other researchers have found differences in communication apprehension (Elwood & Schrader, 1998), cognitive flexibility (Koesten, Schrodt, & Ford, 2009), interpersonal skills in romantic relationships (Koesten, 2004), resiliency (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997), and the enactment of family rituals (Baxter & Clark, 1996) based on membership in one of the four family types.

Collectively, these studies have contributed to three more general conclusions drawn from FCP research, namely, that conversation and conformity orientations are inversely associated with each other, that conversation orientations are positively associated with personal and relational well-being in family members, and that "the influence of conformity is less clear and more dependent on the subtle nuances of authority that are enacted within the family" (Schrodt et al., 2008, p. 251). In addition to these general patterns, it is clear that FCPs are associated with a variety of behavioral and psychosocial outcomes (Schrodt et al., 2008).

One wellness outcome that has received growing attention in the family counseling and therapeutic literature is family strengths (Allison et al., 2003; Cook & DeFrain, 2005). The construct of family strengths grew out of contributions from various fields, including counseling psychology, prevention research, positive psychology and social work (Smith, 2006). It can be described as "the set of relationships and processes that support and protect family members, especially during times of change" (Schrodt, 2009, p. 172). Aspinwall (2001) proposed that such strengths possess transcendent qualities, helping people resist both mental and physical problems. From a family social work perspective, Marsh (2003) argued that family strengths research should examine not just relationship qualities of strong families, but specific behaviors that could be indicators of family strengths. Likewise, Greeff (2000) suggested that marital communication and expressiveness are key contributors to family functioning.

To that end, DeFrain and Stinnett (2003) identified six primary characteristics of strong families: (a) regular expressions of affection and appreciation, (b) a commitment to the well-being of each family member, (c) positive communication and an ability to resolve conflict constructively, (d) a tendency to enjoy quality time together, (e) a sense of spiritual well-being, and finally, (f) an ability to effectively manage stress and unexpected crises. Furthermore,

"families who define themselves as strong commonly say they love each other, find life together satisfying, and live in happiness and harmony with each other" (DeFrain & Stinnett, 2003, p. 637).

Using Koerner and Fitzpatrick's (2002a) general theory of family communication, Schrodt (2009) examined the extent to which *expressiveness*, *structural traditionalism*, and *conflict avoidance* were related to family strengths and satisfaction. The most current generation of FCP research identifies these three constructs as the foundational dimensions of family communication environments. Expressiveness is conceptually and functionally isomorphic with a conversation orientation, and together, structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance represent distinct dimensions of a conformity orientation (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Schrodt et al., 2008). Schrodt (2009) reported that expressiveness is positively correlated with family strengths and satisfaction, while structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance are inversely correlated with both outcomes. Specifically, he found that all three dimensions of the family communication environment accounted for 43% of the shared variance in family strength. Given that expressiveness is part of a conversation orientation and structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance are dimensions of a conformity orientation (Schrodt et al., 2008), similar associations should emerge between conversation and conformity orientations and family strengths. In order to replicate Schrodt's (2009) findings, then, the first two hypotheses were advanced for consideration:

H1: Family conversation orientation is positively associated with family strength.

H2: Family conformity orientation is negatively associated with family strength.

In addition, FCP theory and empirical evidence suggests that conversation and conformity orientations often interact to predict psychosocial outcomes, including family

strengths (e.g., Schrodt, 2009; Schrodt et al., 2008). Thus, a third hypothesis was advanced for consideration:

> H3: Conversation and conformity orientations will interact to predict family strengths, such that members of pluralistic families (i.e., high conversation, low conformity) will report more family strength than members of protective families (i.e., low conversation, high conformity).

Although researchers have demonstrated that conversation and conformity orientations are likely to be directly associated with family strengths (i.e., Schrodt, 2009), family scholars have recently shown an increased interest in identifying the theoretical mechanisms that help further explain the direct effects of both orientations on family well-being. Consequently, the next section reviews narrative theory, more generally, and recent research on joint family storytelling specifically.

Narrative Theory and Joint Family Storytelling

The second theory that informed this investigation is narrative theory (Fisher, 1987, 1988). Unlike most communication theories, the term narrative theory functions more as an umbrella term which encompasses several different approaches to studying narrative communication (Kellas, 2008). However, there are some general terms that unite narrative theories, including *narrative, story,* and *storytelling.* The term *narrative* “is used either in a narrow sense to specify the genre of story, or in a broad sense to cover a vast range of genres, including not only stories but also reports, sports and news broadcasts, plans, and agendas among others” (Ochs, 1997, p. 189). *Story* often refers to “the recounting of some noteworthy event, and may be described as a genre of narrative” (Kellas, 2008, p. 243); it typically includes a beginning, middle, and end (i.e., an identifiable plot). Finally, the term *storytelling* simply refers

to the act of telling a story, often resulting in the construction and reflection of relational culture (Kellas, 2008).

The act of narrative storytelling has been linked with various physical and psychological health benefits. For example, Pennebaker and Beall (1986) demonstrated that people exhibit improvements in their physical health after writing about traumatic experiences. In fact, Ramirez-Esparza and Pennebaker (2006) indicated that a story does not need to be considered a "good" story by an outside observer to result in improved health; rather a "good" story is one that helps individuals make meaning out of their otherwise confusing experiences.

In the context of family relationships, storytelling often occurs in the form of joint family storytelling, or "collaborative constructions through which people [together] recount events by assigning plot, character, and setting in a way that helps them make sense of and give meaning to the events and to their relationship" (Koenig, 2002, p. 12). Langellier and Peterson (2006a, 2006b) argued that family storytelling is not just one behavior in which families engage, but an interactive phenomenon through which family is created and maintained. Using narrative performance theory, they argued that "storytelling constitutes or performs family identity" (Langellier & Peterson, 2006b, p. 100). Within this framework, then, family storytelling behaviors hold special importance because they contribute to creating and maintaining family identity.

Operating from a more social scientific approach to narrative, Kellas (2005) identified four primary dimensions of joint family storytelling. First, she identified *engagement* as the degree to which family members are verbally and nonverbally responsive, warm, and lively in the telling of the story. *Turn-taking* refers to the distribution of talk time between family members and the level of politeness when rotating turns of speaking. *Perspective-taking* refers to

the degree to which family members are able to validate and incorporate others' experiences and perspectives into the rendering of the story. Finally, she conceptualized *coherence* as the degree to which family members are able to negotiate the details of the story, as well as how the details of the story fit into the overall picture of the family. Her research findings indicate that perspective-taking is the dimension most strongly associated with family satisfaction, cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning (Kellas, 2005). Family satisfaction can also be predicted through the way in which family members share stories about their families (Vangelisti, Crumley, & Baker, 1999). More generally, Kellas (2008) found that families who identified as storytelling families and who engaged in more joint family storytelling were more satisfied than families who did not tell stories together. When coupled with Schrodt's (2009) finding that family satisfaction and strength are positively associated with each other, it seems plausible to suggest that joint family storytelling is likely to be positively associated with family strengths.

In addition, researchers have yet to examine the degree to which FCPs are predictive of jointly told family stories, though there is indirect evidence to suggest such associations exist. For example, Kellas (2005) found that certain dimensions of joint family storytelling (e.g., family storytelling identity, perspective-taking) are positively associated with family cohesiveness and adaptability, two primary dimensions of family functioning. Likewise, Schrodt (2005) demonstrated that family expressiveness is positively associated with family cohesiveness and adaptability, whereas structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance are negatively associated with both dimensions of family functioning. Therefore, it stands to reason that if expressiveness (as a form of conversation orientation), structural traditionalism, and conflict avoidance (dimensions of conformity orientation) are predictive of family cohesiveness and

adaptability in a manner consistent with that of jointly told family stories, then perhaps family conversation orientation would be positively associated with dynamic, engaging, jointly told family stories:

H4: Family conversation orientation is positively associated with the engagement, perspective-taking, turn-taking, and coherence dimensions of joint family storytelling.

Conversely, a family conformity orientation, by definition, promotes homogeneity of attitudes, beliefs, and values among family members. This pressure toward agreement is likely to inhibit jointly told family stories, as only one perspective (i.e., that of the parents) is likely to emerge as validated and important. To test this, a fifth hypothesis was advanced for consideration:

H5: Family conformity orientation is negatively associated with the engagement, perspective-taking, turn-taking, and coherency dimensions of joint family storytelling.

FCP theory suggests that families that have a high conversation orientation and a low conformity orientation (i.e., pluralistic families) are more likely to engage in conversations about a variety of subjects (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Likewise, the theory suggests that families that have a high conformity orientation and a low conversation orientation (i.e., protective families) are less likely to talk as a group about various topics. Rather, conversations in these families typically involve parents telling children how to behave and think, and do not involve the common sharing of thoughts and ideas. Based on this line of reasoning, the following hypothesis is advanced for consideration:

H6: Conversation and conformity orientations will interact to predict joint family storytelling, such that young adults from pluralistic families will report a higher frequency of joint family storytelling than young adults from protective families.

Joint Family Storytelling as a Mediator of FCPs and Family Strengths

The final purpose of this study was to test the degree to which joint family storytelling mediates the associations between FCPs and family strengths. Researchers have indicated that family stories help individuals form their personal and familial identities (Kellas, 2010; Thompson et al., 2009), as well as their general worldviews (Stone, 1988). The individual act of storytelling is associated with various psychological and physical health benefits, especially in situations of personal and family difficulty (Kellas, 2005, 2010; Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Ramirez-Esparza & Pennebaker, 2006). For example, people who write about difficult experiences report visiting their doctor significantly less often than those who do not write about their difficult experiences (Pennebaker, & Beall, 1986). More recent research indicates that people experience the most significant health benefits from personal narrative when they are able to switch perspectives, when they use positive language, and when they use cognitive words (indicating they are assigning meaning to the experience) (Ramirez-Esparza & Pennebaker, 2006). In addition to revealing the mental and physical health benefits of individual storytelling behaviors, researchers have also demonstrated similar well-being outcomes associated with joint family storytelling. For instance, Kellas (2005) found that families who identified as storytelling families and/or who jointly told stories together were more satisfied than families who did not tell stories together. Indeed, the sense-making process that often occurs as a result of joint family storytelling in the context of difficulty can help strengthen relationships (Kellas, Willer, & Kranstuber, 2010).

Although researchers have yet to specifically examine the relationship between joint family storytelling and family strengths, there are indirect reasons to believe that one exists. For example, joint family storytelling represents a communication behavior that is likely to help

families cope with difficult situations, and the ability to cope with difficult situations is considered a family strength (DeFrain & Stinnett, 2003). Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that satisfied families enjoy spending time together, and spending time together is also a trait of strong families. Consequently, the following hypothesis was advanced:

H7: Joint family storytelling that is characterized by high levels of engagement, perspective-taking, coherence, and polite turn-taking will be positively associated with family strength.

Finally, Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002a) argued that family communication schemata (e.g., conversation and conformity orientations) are initially guided by how parents communicate with each other and with their children, and are closely intertwined with the actual communicative behaviors family members engage in within the family. Consequently, while the schemas themselves are likely to have direct associations with family strengths (cf. Schrodt, 2009), the communicative behaviors that family members jointly enact as they share in the telling of family stories may be more salient to young adult children, and thus, have an even greater influence on their perceptions of family strengths. If such is the case, then it stands to reason that joint family storytelling may mediate the associations among conversation and conformity orientations and family strengths. To test this line of reasoning, a final hypothesis was advanced for consideration:

H8: Joint family storytelling will mediate the associations among family communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientations) and family strengths.

Method

Participants

The final sample included 267 young adult children from a medium-sized, private university in the Southwest. Consistent with the university population from which the sample was drawn, approximately 59% of the participants were female and 41% were male. Ages ranged from 18 to 38, with a mean age of 19.5. Most of the participants were Caucasian (79%), though 9% were Hispanic, 4% were African American, 3% were Asian, and 5% specified “other.” Eleven percent of participants were only children, 40% had only one sibling, another 30% had two siblings, 15% had three siblings, and the remaining 5% had four or more siblings. Participants reported talking with their mothers an average of 4.9 hours per week, and with their fathers an average of 3.2 hours per week. When not attending college, 80% of participants reported that they lived with both of their parents, 10% said they lived with just their mom or just their dad, and the remaining 10% said they lived with a parent and stepparent or had another living arrangement. Participants whose parents were divorced were excluded from the original data given insufficient sample sizes to conduct appropriate statistical comparisons.

Procedures

After receiving IRB approval, participants were solicited directly through the university’s basic speech communication course. Once informed consent was obtained, participants completed a questionnaire on a volunteer basis. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and would be offered an alternative research assignment in order to receive the extra credit they would have been awarded for completing the survey. After completing the survey, participants were thanked for their participation. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Measures

Family communication patterns. Young adults' perceptions of their family communication patterns were measured using the Revised Family Communication Patterns (RFCP) scale (Ritchie, 1991; Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1990). This measure consists of 26 Likert items asking respondents to evaluate the extent to which their family communication patterns reflect *conversation* (15 items, e.g., "My parents encourage me to challenge their beliefs and ideas," "I really enjoy talking with my parents, even when we disagree") and *conformity* orientations (11 items, e.g., "My parents often say things like 'You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad'") (see Appendix). Responses were solicited using a five-point scale that ranged from (1) *Strongly disagree* to (5) *Strongly agree*. The validity and reliability of the RFCP is well-established, and in this study, the scales produced acceptable alpha coefficients of .89 for conversation orientation and .82 for conformity orientation.

Joint family storytelling. To date, joint family storytelling has been studied largely through observational methods that involve coding storytelling behaviors (Koenig, 2002; Kellas, 2005; Kellas & Trees, 2009; Trees & Kellas, 2009). In the absence of an established survey measure, this study used an adapted measure of joint family storytelling which incorporates the four family storytelling behaviors from Kellas and Trees' (2009) research (i.e., engagement, turn-taking, perspective-taking, and coherence) in a self-report survey format. The scale consisted of 15 frequency (and Likert-type) items, ranging from (1) *Never/Strongly disagree* to (7) *All the time/Strongly agree*. Example items included: "When my family gets together and tells a story, everyone shows interest in the story being told" (engagement), "When my family gets together and tells a story, every person is involved in the telling of the story" (turn-taking), "When my family tells stories, we are able to 'put ourselves in each other's shoes'" (perspective-

taking), and “When my family tells a story, we usually agree on the details of the story” (coherence) (see Appendix). Likewise, three additional items were developed to assess the perceived frequency of jointly told family stories (i.e., “Two or more members of my family get together to tell stories of things our family has experienced,” “As a family, we tell stories,” and “My family is a storytelling family”). Acceptable internal reliability estimates were obtained for four of the five measures, including engagement ($\alpha = .77$), turn-taking politeness ($\alpha = .85$), perspective-taking ($\alpha = .91$), and storytelling frequency ($\alpha = .92$), with the exception being the coherence dimension ($\alpha = .61$).

Family strengths. Family strengths was operationalized using Olson et al.’s (1982) Family Strengths Scale © (FSS). The FSS consists of 12 Likert-type items that assess family members’ perceptions of the strength of their families (e.g., “We really do trust and confide in each other,” and “We are proud of our family”). The first item of the scale (“We can express our feelings”) was not included in the measurement due to its conceptual overlap with family conversation orientation. Responses were solicited using a 5-point scale that ranged from (1) *Strongly disagree* to (5) *Strongly agree*. Researchers using the FSS have provided evidence in support of the validity and reliability of the scale, with previous alpha reliability estimates ranging from .83 to .87 (Schrodt, 2009). In this study, the FSS produced excellent reliability with an alpha coefficient of .89.

Data Analysis

H1, H2, H4, H5, and H7 were tested using Pearson’s product-moment correlations. H3, H6, and H8 were tested using hierarchical regression analyses. For the first two regression analyses, conversation and conformity orientations were entered as predictors of family strengths and joint family storytelling respectively at step one, followed by the interaction term for

conversation and conformity at step two. In the final regression model for H8, conversation, conformity, and the interaction term for both orientations were entered as predictors of family strengths at step one, followed by joint family storytelling at step two. Tests of mediation were performed using nonparametric bootstrapping procedures in SPSS. Following the recommendations of Little, Card, Bovaird, Preacher, and Crandall (2007), the interaction terms were created by centering the first-order predictors and orthogonalizing the product term by regressing it onto the first-order predictors and saving the unstandardized residual.

Results

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and Pearson's product-moment correlations, for all variables in this study are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Product-Moment Correlations among all Variables (N =267)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Converse	5.10	0.95	--							
2. Conform	3.79	0.98	-.43**	--						
3. JFST	5.05	1.50	.50**	-.07	--					
4. Engage	4.83	1.41	.49**	-.13*	.73**	--				
5. Persp-tak	5.15	1.20	.60**	-.30**	.43**	.53**	--			
6. Coherence	4.87	1.05	.39**	-.13*	.38**	.42**	.59**	--		
7. Turnpolit[a]	5.32	1.16	.48**	-.26**	.31**	.44**	.72**	.52**	--	
8. Famstrgth	3.85	0.68	.57**	-.34**	.40**	.48**	.56**	.41**	.56**	--

Note. Converse = family conversation orientation. Conform = family conformity orientation. JFST = frequency of joint family storytelling. Engage = engagement. Persp-tak = perspective-taking. Turnpolit = politeness in turn-taking. Famstrgth = family strength.

[a]Turn-taking was operationalized using survey items to measure both politeness and distribution of turns. However, no significant associations emerged between conversation and conformity orientations and the distribution of turns taken. Thus, this dimension was excluded from further analysis.

**p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

Primary Analysis

H1 predicted that family conversation orientation would be positively associated with family strength. The results indicate that family conversation orientation is positively associated with family strength, $r = .57$, $p < .01$. Thus, H1 was supported.

H2 predicted that family conformity orientation would be negatively associated with family strength. Again, the results indicate that family conformity orientation is negatively associated with family strength, $r = -.34$, $p < .01$, and thus, H2 was also supported.

H3 predicted that conversation and conformity orientations would interact to predict family strengths, such that members of pluralistic families (i.e., high conversation, low conformity) would report more family strength than members of protective families (i.e., low conversation, high conformity). A hierarchical regression analysis produced a significant multiple correlation coefficient, $R = .58$, $F(3, 263) = 45.08$, $p < .001$, accounting for 34% of the shared variance in family strength. At step one, conversation ($\beta = .52$, $t = 9.33$, $p < .001$) and conformity orientations ($\beta = -.12$, $t = -2.13$, $p < .05$) were significant predictors in the model. At step two, the interaction term was not statistically significant, and thus, H3 was not supported.

H4 predicted that family conversation orientation would be positively associated with engagement, perspective-taking, coherence, and turn-taking dimensions of joint family storytelling (JFST). As noted in Table 1, conversation orientation is positively associated with the engagement ($r = .49$, $p < .01$), perspective-taking ($r = .60$, $p < .01$), and coherency ($r = .39$, $p < .01$) dimensions of joint family storytelling, as well as with the perceived politeness of turn-taking during the telling of such stories ($r = .48$, $p < .01$). Thus, H4 was supported.

H5 predicted that family conformity orientation would be negatively associated with the engagement, perspective-taking, coherence, and turn-taking dimensions of joint family

storytelling. The results indicate that conformity is negatively associated with the engagement ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$), perspective-taking ($r = -.30$, $p < .01$), coherency ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$), and turn-taking dimensions ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$) of jointly told family stories. Thus, H5 was supported, though the magnitude of the associations for engagement and coherency were negligible.

H6 predicted that conversation and conformity orientations would interact to predict joint family storytelling, such that young adults from pluralistic families would report a higher frequency of joint family storytelling than young adults from protective families. A hierarchical regression analysis produced a multiple correlation coefficient that was significant, $R = .53$, $F(3, 263) = 33.50$, $p < .001$, accounting for 27.6% of the shared variance in frequency of jointly told family stories. At step one, conversation ($\beta = .57$, $t = 9.84$, $p < .001$) and conformity orientations ($\beta = .18$, $t = 3.07$, $p < .01$) were significant predictors in the model. At step two, the interaction term was not statistically significant, and thus, H6 was not supported. It is worth noting that conformity orientation is inversely (though not significantly) associated with the frequency of joint family storytelling at the bivariate level of analysis. In the multivariate model, however, conformity orientation becomes a *positive* predictor after controlling for conversation orientation. According to Tabachnik and Fidell (2007), negative or net suppression occurs when the sign of a regression weight of an independent variable (e.g., conformity) is the opposite of what would be expected on the basis of its correlation with the dependent variable (i.e., frequency of JFST). Thus, conformity orientation is relatively unrelated to frequency of JFST *unless* one accounts for conversation orientation, at which point conversation suppresses the irrelevant variance in conformity and allows the positive effect of conformity orientation on the frequency of JFST to emerge.

H7 predicted that joint family storytelling that is characterized by high levels of engagement, perspective-taking, coherence, and polite turn-taking would be positively associated with family strength. Consistent with the results for family communication patterns, the results indicate that each of these dimensions of joint family storytelling is positively associated with family strength (see Table 1). Thus H7 was supported.

Finally, H8 predicted that joint family storytelling would mediate the associations among family communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientations) and family strengths. Prior to testing for indirect effects, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted using conversation, conformity, and the interaction term for both at step one, followed by the frequency of JFST and the four characteristics of JFST (i.e., engagement, perspective-taking, turn-taking politeness, and coherency) at step two, as predictors of family strength. This analysis produced a significant multiple correlation coefficient, $R = .69$, $F(9, 257) = 26.45$, $p < .001$, accounting for 48.1% of the shared variance in family strengths. At step one, conversation orientation ($\beta = .52$, $t = 9.35$, $p < .001$) and conformity orientation ($\beta = -.12$, $t = -2.13$, $p < .05$) emerged as significant predictors in the model. At step two, conversation orientation ($\beta = .26$, $t = 3.96$, $p < .001$), conformity orientation ($\beta = -.10$, $t = -2.02$, $p < .05$), engagement ($\beta = .15$, $t = 2.05$, $p < .05$), and turn-taking politeness ($\beta = .26$, $t = 3.93$, $p < .001$) emerged as significant predictors in the model. Bootstrapping analyses revealed partial support for this hypothesis (see Table 2). Positive indirect effects emerged for conversation orientation on family strengths through the engagement and turn-taking politeness dimensions of jointly told family stories. On the other hand, negative indirect effects emerged for conformity orientation on family strengths through the perspective-taking and turn-taking politeness dimensions of jointly told family stories.

Table 2

Bootstrap Analysis of Indirect Effects (N = 267)

Indirect Effect	β	*SE*	CI (Lower, Upper)	κ^2
Conversation Orientation				
1. Conversation JFST Family strength	.000	.024	-.056, .054	.000
2. Conversation engagement Family strength	.050	.025	.003, .110	.158*
3. Conversation perspective-taking Family strength	.034	.033	-.034, .110	.089
4. Conversation coherency Family strength	.010	.016	-.021, .049	.028
5. Conversation turn-taking Family strength	.092	.025	.045, .145	.251*
Conformity Orientation				
1. Conformity JFST Family strength	-.004	.005	-.023, .004	.007
2. Conformity engagement Family strength	-.014	.009	-.045, .000	.023
3. Conformity perspective-taking Family strength	-.032	.017	-.079, -.006	.053*
4. Conformity coherency Family strength	-.004	.006	-.021, .006	.006
5. Conformity turn-taking Family strength	-.050	.017	-.088, -.023	.084*

Note. JFST = frequency of joint family storytelling. CI = Bias corrected and accelerated confidence intervals.

$^*p < .05$.

Discussion

The principal goal of this study was to examine the relationships among family communication patterns (FCPs), joint family storytelling (JFST), and family strengths. More specifically, using FCP theory (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a; McLeod & Chaffee, 1972, 1973) and narrative theory (Fisher, 1988), this study tested whether young adults' perceptions of joint family storytelling mediates the relationship between FCPs (i.e., conversation and conformity orientations) and family strength. Overall, the results largely supported the theoretical line of reasoning advanced in this report. Family conversation orientations are positively associated with characteristics of joint family storytelling (e.g., engagement, perspective-taking, polite turn-taking), whereas conformity orientations are inversely associated with characteristics of joint family storytelling. More importantly, different dimensions of jointly told family stories mediate the associations between these two family communication orientations and family strengths, though the one common mediator for both conversation and conformity orientations and family strengths was the perceived politeness of turn-taking during the telling of family stories. Consequently, the results of this study extend both FCP theory and narrative theory by providing at least three implications worth noting.

First, the results extend our understanding of how conversation and conformity orientations are associated with characteristics of jointly told family stories. Specifically, when parents engage in open and honest conversations about a multitude of topics with their children and encourage independent thinking and participatory decision-making, they are more likely to also engage in joint family storytelling that is engaged, where family members take each other's perspective, participate in polite turn-taking, and produce family stories that are relatively coherent. Conversely, a conformity orientation is relatively unrelated to the frequency with

which family members engage in jointly told family stories. The findings do suggest that when such stories are told, however, the degree to which parents emphasize a homogeneity of attitudes, beliefs, and values within the family is likely to undermine how engaged and polite family members tend to be, as well as how well they take each other's perspective and produce a coherent narrative. One explanation for these findings can be found in the theoretical underpinnings of FCP theory. McLeod and Chaffee (1972, 1973) proposed that through the open discussion of a multitude of topics, children from conversation oriented families are able to develop information-processing skills that allow them to view topics from multiple points of view. Given the results of the current study, it is possible that these information-processing skills allow members of conversation oriented families to listen to and consider each others' perspectives when they tell stories as a family, as well as develop a coherent beginning, middle, and end of the story. McLeod and Chaffee also argued that conformity oriented families stress a homogeneity of attitudes and beliefs. This discourages family members from thinking about issues from multiple perspectives, because they are taught that there is only one perspective that matters (i.e., the parents' perspective). In light of the current findings, it seems that the inability to consider other family members' perspectives carries over to joint family storytelling. In addition, the negative association between polite turn taking and conformity orientation is consistent with FCP theory, given that children in conformity oriented families are expected to listen to and adopt parents' points of view without question.

Despite these findings, however, the results provided no evidence to suggest meaningful differences in young adults' perceptions of family strength, or of the qualities of jointly told family stories, among the four family types. Contrary to previous research (e.g., Schrodt, 2009; Schrodt et al., 2008), no significant interaction effects emerged for conversation and conformity

orientations as predictors of family strength or of characteristics of JFST (H3 and H6). In one sense, these results may have resulted from using the more general measure of conversation and conformity orientations found in the RFCP than more specific measures of these two orientations, such as the FCEI (cf. Schrodt, 2009). In the FCEI, conformity orientation is divided into two sub-dimensions: structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance. Separating conformity into these sub-dimensions may provide a more accurate and nuanced picture of conformity orientation and its associations with family outcomes. For instance, Schrodt (2009) previously reported that family expressiveness moderates the inverse association between structural traditionalism and family satisfaction. Perhaps important information is lost when researchers collapse structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance together into one index of a family's conformity orientation. On the other hand, it could simply be the case that conversation and conformity orientations combine to predict JFST and family strengths in ways that do not necessarily involve processes of moderation. For instance, the results did reveal that conversation orientation suppresses the irrelevant variance in conformity orientation so that it emerges as a positive predictor of the frequency of JFST. This may suggest that consensual families (and more specifically, parents) use JFST to create and sustain the shared opinions, beliefs, and values of the family, in essence encouraging children's participation in family interaction while maintaining some level of control over the eventual narrative that is produced by such jointly-told family stories.

The second noteworthy set of implications to emerge from this study revolve around JFST and family strengths, specifically, that families who engage in joint family storytelling tend to be stronger than families that do not (H7). Put simply, the act of retelling shared experiences and including family members in the telling of family stories may help families effectively cope

with external pressures and stress, navigate conflict, and more generally withstand adversity. This particular finding is meaningful because it confirms and reinforces previous findings in counseling research (e.g., Cook & DeFrain, 2005), as well as previous research on the health benefits of narrative. For instance, Pennebaker and his colleagues (1986, 1997, 1999, 2006) found that writing about difficult experiences not only helps individuals heal emotionally, but it can also help improve their physical health. In a similar vein, talking through difficult experiences and incorporating the perspectives and support of other family members in making sense of them may help alleviate the stress and anxiety typically associated with such experiences. This, in turn, may not only help family members develop more effective coping skills as individuals, but collectively as a whole. Consequently, it is helpful to know that group enactments of narrative can potentially have similar beneficial effects for the potential reduction of individual and family stress, given that joint family storytelling seems to promote family strength.

Third, and perhaps most notably, the results of this study suggest that certain aspects of joint family storytelling do, in fact, mediate the relationship between (FCPs) and family strength (H8). Although the sheer frequency of JFST does not mediate the relationship between FCPs and family strength, certain qualities of JFST do mediate the positive, indirect effects of conversation orientation and the negative, indirect effects of conformity orientation. For example, conversation oriented families are more likely to jointly tell stories in an engaged and polite atmosphere, which in turn may enhance the overall strength of the family. One explanation for these positive, indirect effects is that engaged and polite family members confirm each other and validate each other’s contributions to the telling of the story. This likely helps family members build (a) trust in each other, (b) confidence to share private information and/or difficult

circumstances, and (c) a more general sense of family identity and pride (i.e., characteristics of family strength).

On the other hand, although high conformity families are no less likely to tell stories together than low conformity families, the family communication environment against which specific moments of JFST occur in these families is qualitatively different than that found in conversation oriented families. According to the young adult children in this study, when conformity oriented families tell stories together, they are less likely (and perhaps, less able) to take each others' perspectives. Likewise, they perceive that the way in which family members take turns is less polite than those reported on by young adult children in conversation oriented families. Both of these tendencies in conformity oriented families, in turn, predict less family strength. These results are meaningful, not only because they are consistent with FCP theory (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002) more generally, but because they further clarify *why* a high conformity orientation may undermine healthy family functioning. For instance, Koerner and Cvancara (2002) found that families high in conformity orientation (i.e., consensual and protective families) exhibited more regulatory behaviors, less empathy, less confirming behaviors, and less perspective-taking behaviors than families low in conformity orientation. Likewise, high conformity orientation tends to negatively predict well-being in individual family members (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). One explanation for the results found here could be that a high conformity orientation discourages children from learning important communication behaviors from joint family storytelling events, such as perspective-taking and polite turn-taking, that enable young adult children to understand, confirm, and support other family members in their times of need. In fact, conformity orientations are positively associated with self-orientation frames of reference (Koerner & Cvancara, 2002). Thus, the results of this study further confirm

the idea that high conformity orientation changes the nature of JFST so that it becomes less communal and participatory and, perhaps, more of a mechanism that conformity-oriented parents use to tell *the* family story that they expect other family members to adopt. In other words, storytelling in conformity oriented families may function more so as a tool that parents use to inform their children of what their worldview is going to be rather than as a shared, participatory experience where children are invited to develop their own values, beliefs, and opinions.

Theoretically, the results of this study extend both FCP theory and narrative theory in meaningful ways. For instance, with regards to FCP theory (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002), the findings reinforce Schrodt's (2009) research linking FCPs to family strengths. Clearly, families that develop and encourage expressiveness and a conversation orientation in the family are more likely to be strong families capable of responding to external stressors and adapting to change. Families with a high conformity orientation, on the other hand, are less likely to develop such strength and coping faculties. More importantly, the results extend previous efforts to identify some of the theoretical mechanisms (or communication behaviors) that tie FCPs to family well-being (e.g., Schrodt et al., 2007). To the extent that family members engage in a variety of shared storytelling experiences, such experiences not only further the shared reality that parents initially create and sustain through conversation and conformity orientations, but they operate as a set of communication behaviors that enhance family strength and enable family members to make sense of life experiences. With regard to narrative theory (Fisher, 1987, 1988), the findings extend our understanding of how jointly told family stories enhance the health and well-being of family members, namely, by strengthening their family identity, developing a sense of trust and confidence in other family members, and enabling family members to cope with external stressors. The results also extend narrative theory by identifying two relational schemas, namely

conversation and conformity orientations, that likely enhance (or inhibit) the degree to which parents model communication behaviors helpful for telling family stories and making sense of life experiences.

Practically speaking, the results of this study also offer some worthwhile insights. For example, those who study family counseling may be interested to know that the family communication environment parents create and sustain through conversation and conformity orientations is associated not only with the frequency of JFST, but with certain storytelling behaviors that enhance family strength. Indeed, encouraging the open discussion of a variety of ideas and beliefs models for children healthy forms of perspective-taking, conversational engagement, and turn-taking skills necessary for seeking and providing social support outside of the family. Conversely, parents who attempt to create not only a unified front as parents, but a unified and shared family reality that leaves little room for individual development and growth, are likely to inhibit their children from developing the kinds of information-processing and behavioral skills needed for coping with stress. To the contrary, allowing children to participate in storytelling and showing an interest in what they have to say can be beneficial for the whole family.

Although this study provides theoretical and practical contributions to family communication research, the results should be interpreted with caution given the inherent limitations of the research design. The use of self-report measures from young adult children certainly limits the findings to the perspective of a single family member. Likewise, the homogenous nature of the sample limited the generalizability of the findings to predominantly white, affluent families. A related, but perhaps more notable limitation is the use of survey report measures to assess young adults' perceptions of joint family storytelling. Indeed, all of the

previous research on JFST has relied on observational methods of data collection and analysis, yet this study used previous research to try and advance brief, survey measures of storytelling engagement, perspective-taking, turn-taking politeness, and coherency. Although most of these measures produced acceptable internal reliability estimates, the reliability of the coherency scale was questionable due to the small number of items included in the measure. Future researchers might combine observations of families jointly telling family stories with survey measures of individual family members' perceptions of the experience to more fully investigate how JFST enhances family wellbeing. Finally, the results of mediation tests should be interpreted with caution given the correlational nature of the data.

Despite these limitations, however, the results of this study extend our understanding of how FCPs are likely to enhance jointly told family stories, which in turn strengthen families as a whole and perhaps enable them to cope with external stressors and change. Future researchers may want to replicate this study once the joint family storytelling measure has been further tested and established as a valid and reliable survey measure of joint storytelling in families. Likewise, it may also be beneficial to test these associations with a larger, more diverse sample, and observe family members telling stories together in a natural setting. In fact, researchers may find that a social relations model (e.g., Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) would enable them to partition actor effects, partner effects, relationship effects, and family effects for jointly told family stories, which would advance our understanding of JFST at a systemic level of analysis. Other scholars may find that FCPs and JFST work together to build a shared family identity, which in turn enhances the individual and collective coping skills of family members. Through these types of investigations, scholars can advance our understanding of family communication by examining other group behaviors that may facilitate healthy family functioning.

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Appendix

1. What is your age? ______

2. What is your biological sex? (please circle one)
   a. Male
   b. Female

3. What is your current classification in school?
   1. First-year student
   3. Sophomore
   4. Junior
   5. Senior
   6. Graduate student
   7. Other

4. What is your ethnicity or race?
   1. White
   2. African American
   3. Hispanic American
   4. Native American
   5. Asian American
   6. Other (please specify): ______________________

5. Who do you currently live with? (Or when you lived at home, who were your primary care takers?)
   1. Biological (or adoptive) mother
   2. Biological (or adoptive) father
   3. Both mother and father
   4. Mother and stepfather
   5. Father and stepmother
   6. Other (please specify): _______________________

6. If your parents are still married, how long have they been married (in years)?: _________

7. Are both of you biological (or adoptive) parents living? (circle) YES NO

8. Are your biological (or adoptive) parents divorced? (circle) YES NO
   8a. If you answered "yes" to question 6, approximately how long has it been since your parents divorced? ______________
   8b. If your parents are divorced, how long were they married before they divorced? __________________

9. On average, how often do you talk with your MOTHER during a typical week?
   ___________ hours ___________ minutes

10. On average, how often do you talk with your FATHER during a typical week?

___________ hours ___________ minutes

How many siblings do you have? ______________

Please circle the number which best represents your birth order:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Instructions: For each question, circle the number that best represents how your family as a whole communicates.

Two or more members of my family get together to tell stories of things our family has experienced.

Never	Rarely	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Very Often	All the time
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

As a family, we tell stories.

Never	Rarely	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Very Often	All the time
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

My family is a storytelling family.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

When my family gets together and tells a story, every person is involved in the telling of the story.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

When my family gets together and tells a story, everyone shows interest in the story being told.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

When your family tells a story together, how much time does each family member talk? (Fill in percentages so that they add up to 100%.)

(Below is an example of what this item looked like in Qualtrics)

MOM	30%
DAD	40%
BROTHER	20%
ME	10%

How satisfied are you with this distribution?

Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

When my family engages in storytelling, I would describe the atmosphere as polite.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

When my family tells stories, we are courteous and respectful to each other.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	SD			N			SA
When my family tells stories, we are able to "put ourselves in each others shoes" so we can understand where each person is coming from.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
During a typical family storytelling experience, my family makes an honest effort to understand the perspective of whomever is telling the story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When we listen to each others' stories, we are successful at understanding each others' perspectives.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	SD			N			S A

When my family engages in storytelling, the story usually has a definitive beginning, middle and end.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When my family tells a story together, we disagree about the details or circumstances of the story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When my family tells a story, we usually agree on the details of the story.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. I feel as if we are members of one family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I feel as if we are members of separate groups.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Directions: For each item, please circle the number that best represents your level of agreement using the following scale:

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

	SD			N			SA
1. In our family we often talk about topics like politics and religion where some persons disagree with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. When anything really important is involved, my parents expect me to obey without question.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. My parents often say something like "Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. In our home, my parents usually have the last word.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. My parents often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. My parents feel that it is important to be the boss.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. My parents encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. My parents sometimes become irritated with my views if they are different from theirs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. My parents often say something like "You should always look at both sides of an issue."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. If my parents don't approve of it, they don't want to know about it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I usually tell my parents what I am thinking about things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I can tell my parents almost anything.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. When I am at home, I am expected to obey my parents' rules.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. In our family we often talk about our feelings and emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. My parents often say things like "You'll know better when you grow up."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	SD			N			SA
16. My parents and I often have long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I really enjoy talking with my parents, even when we disagree.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. My parents often say things like "My ideas are right and you should not question them."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. My parents encourage me to express my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. My parents often say things like "A child should not argue with adults."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My parents tend to be very open about their emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. We often talk as a family about things we have done during the day.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. My parents often say things like "There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. In our family, we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. My parents often say things like "You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. My parents like to hear my opinion, even when I don't agree with them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Family Strengths Inventory	SD		N		SA
1. Family members respect one another.	1	2	3	4	5
2. We share similar values and beliefs as a family	1	2	3	4	5
3. Things work out well for us as a family	1	2	3	4	5
4. We really do trust and confide in each other	1	2	3	4	5
5. Family members feel loyal to the family	1	2	3	4	5
6. We are proud of our family	1	2	3	4	5
7. Accomplishing what we want to do seems difficult for us	1	2	3	4	5
8. We have the same problems over and over	1	2	3	4	5
9. There are many conflicts in our family	1	2	3	4	5
10. We are critical of each other	1	2	3	4	5
11. We tend to worry about many things	1	2	3	4	5