An Exploration of Family Communication Environment, Everyday Talk, and Family Satisfaction

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The current study examined the types of everyday talk occurring most frequently within each of the three family communication environments and how family communication environment and everyday talk contribute to family satisfaction. Four hundred twenty participants representing 201 families completed measures representing these three constructs. Each of the three family communication environments predicted different types of everyday talk with variations in the directions of the predictions. These results reveal specific common communication behaviors occurring within each of Fitzpatrick and Ritchie’s family communication environments. However, the expressiveness family communication environment and everyday talk categories of joking around, recapping the day’s events, and relationship talk had the greatest impact on family satisfaction predicting 63% of the variance. Both the structural traditional and conflict avoidance family communication environments predicted different everyday talk categories, but neither was seen as a predictor of family satisfaction. The study concludes with a theoretical and practical explanation and applications of the results.

Keywords: Everyday Talk; Family Communication Environments; Family Satisfaction

Family communication research has surged over the past three decades and has provided important implications for both academics and practitioners (Galvin, 2004;
The impact of communication within families has been examined with conflict style (Zhang, 2008), communication competence (Koesten, 2004), child socialization (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Koesten, 2004), family satisfaction (Schrodt, Soliz & Braithwaite, 2008), communication apprehension (Hsu, 1998), healthy lifestyle behaviors (Fitzpatrick, Marshall, Leutwiler, Krcmar, 1996), and several other variables. Though valuable, these findings primarily focus on the macrolevel of family communication rather than on the communication that occurs every day within a family.

The current study investigates family communication environments and how these environments affect everyday talk within families. This study also examines the relationship between family communication environments and everyday talk with family satisfaction. Looking at these family communication variables will provide a more microlevel understanding of how families from each of the family communication environments communicate on a daily basis.

**Review of Literature**

**Theoretical Perspective**

Family communication schemata are “uniquely shared world views that provide individual family members with value and belief systems” (Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008, p. 249). As cognitive frameworks they guide individuals’ perceptions and understandings of relationships and communication (Schrodt, 2009). Koerner and Fitzpatrick’s (2002) general theory of family communication explains how these schemata influence family members’ communication with each other and with others that helps to form family communication environments. Two lines of research focusing on family communication schemata have contributed to the development of general family theory: Fitzpatrick’s (1988) typology of married couples and Ritchie’s (1991) family communication patterns research. Both researchers agreed that marital couple types and the views of parent-child communication patterns represent family communication schemata. Recognizing the similarities in their research, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) analyzed and identified three related dimensions based on marital and parent-child schemata. These dimensions represent the construct of family communication environment. The family communication environment (FCE) dimensions include family expressiveness, structural traditionalism, and conflict avoidance.

The family expressiveness dimension represents a conversation-oriented family where children are openly expressive of their ideas and feelings. The second dimension is structural traditionalism. These families have a conformity orientation among parents and their children, parents exercise power over their children, and they have a more traditional belief about marriage and family. Conflict avoidance is the final dimension and includes conformity orientation and a suppression of unpleasant topics and conflict (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). These authors posit that FCE influences everyday communication within the family.

FCE research has successfully documented that all three dimensions are associated with family cohesion (Schrodt, 2005), cognitive flexibility (Koesten, Schrodt, & Ford,
2009), healthy lifestyle choices (Baxter, Bylund, Imes, & Scheive, 2005), communication strategies (Golish, 2003), relational maintenance behaviors with friends (Ledbetter, 2009), and family discipline standards (Caughlin, 2003). These findings demonstrate that FCE includes cognitive orientations to several different types of common communicative behaviors (Koesten, Schrodt, & Ford, 2009; Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008). Researchers, however, have yet to examine a possible relationship between FCE and the construct of everyday talk. Based on how these cognitive dimensions affect family communication behaviors, it is likely that FCE influences the types of topics families talk about every day.

Everyday Talk in Families

The social world is created through everyday talk or the recurring patterns of speech that are communicatively part of personal relationships (Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996; Gubrium & Holstein, 1993). Everyday talk in personal relationships is the primary means by which relational patterns shape identities, expected behaviors, and rituals (Tracy, 2002). Interpersonal scholars argue that everyday interactions are part of a healthy relational process in dyadic relationships (Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991), which is also concurrent with communication behaviors that affect healthy family processes (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008). The types of everyday talk topics that are common within families have been identified. However, research has not discovered the influences on everyday talk topics (Schrodt et al., 2007; Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008). Family communication environments (FCEs) are cognitive structures that influence communication behaviors. Therefore, FCE may affect the types of everyday talk in families because the family’s communication environment is based on the family schema that is created through everyday interactions (Schrodt, 2009). Research has found that FCE includes cognitive orientations toward several different types of common communication behaviors within families (Koesten et al., 2009), which may also include the 20 everyday talk categories.

Most research on everyday talk focuses on dyadic relationships while few have looked at everyday talk in groups of friends or families (Schrodt et al., 2007; Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008). Schrodt and colleagues examined everyday talk within stepfamilies to determine the frequency of everyday talk among stepparents and children. Differences were found between children’s everyday talk topics with their parents and stepparents based on actor and relational affects. Cognitive or motivational influences on the types of everyday talk were not examined. Cognitive structures, fundamental to the family communication environment, may explain differences in everyday talk topics. Early research on everyday talk has found that the types and frequencies of everyday talk distinguish types of personal relationships (Duck et al., 1991). Therefore, if different family communication schemata impact communication behaviors, the types and frequencies of everyday talk may also be linked to FCE dimensions.

Duck et al. (1991) found that the predominant form of communication in intimate relationships is not only nonintimate but also nondistinguishable from
communication in other nonintimate relationship types. In other words, after intimate partners are comfortable in their intimate relationship, the majority of their communication is similar to their communication in other sorts of relationships. Based on these findings, Goldsmith and Baxter (1996) focused on everyday talk that occurs in personal relationships and developed a taxonomy of the most common types of this mundane or habitual communication. Both formal and informal types of talk are present in the taxonomy, but informal communication is most prevalent including gossip, joking around, catching up, and recapping the day’s events.

Though this taxonomy points out the most common types of everyday talk, it does not explain the influences on these habitual conversations. Family communication environment may play a role in the types and frequencies of everyday talk. For example, gossip, complaining, and conflict may not be as prevalent in conflict avoidant environments as compared to family expressive environments. Determining these differences is important, and exploring differences in satisfaction as a function of everyday talk and FCE is an equally important goal because the way families communicate on a daily basis influences satisfaction levels within family relationships (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008).

**Family Satisfaction**

Family communication schemata create a cognitive framework in which perceptions about the family are formed based on family interactions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Schrodt, 2009). Family satisfaction is a person’s felt experience or perception about the quality of the relationships and life within a family. The type of family communication environment and the daily conversations occurring among family members influence this perception of quality or satisfaction (Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008). However, family satisfaction is a difficult construct to gauge because of the complexities that occur when multiple relationships must be considered.

Family satisfaction may be best understood by balancing the relational aspect of interpersonal communication with the complexities of small group communication. Scholars have studied satisfaction in both dyadic relationships and within groups. Group satisfaction is the group’s felt experience or perception about the quality of group life that exists within the group (Anderson, Martin, & Riddle, 2001; Hecht, 1978). Anderson et al. consider both relational and group satisfaction research to better understand how group members’ satisfaction is affected by communication within their group. The current study adapts Anderson et al.’s group satisfaction definition to fit the family context, which focuses on quality of relationships and life within a specific family.

Satisfaction has previously been linked to family communication environments, which is also known to influence our communication behaviors in interpersonal relationships (i.e., everyday talk). Schrodt (2009) found that the family expressiveness environment was positively associated with satisfaction and structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance were inversely related to family satisfaction. Therefore,
findings linking types of everyday talk to satisfaction in stepfamilies (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008) may help explain Schrodt’s (2009) results regarding FCE’s correlation with satisfaction. However, everyday talk, FCE, and communication satisfaction have not been studied together. The FCE may play a role in the type of everyday conversations that occur within families and the satisfaction they experience.

Goals of this Study

Family communication environment (FCE) research has primarily focused on macrolevel communication within the family and has yet to examine the microlevel or mundane interaction families partake in daily. Everyday talk in interpersonal relationships shape identities, expected behaviors, and rituals (Tracy, 2002); all of which are affected by family communication schemata (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Focusing on these microlevel communication behaviors will lead to a better understanding of how FCE influences our daily communication and how specific daily interactions impact family satisfaction. The primary goal of this study is to examine FCE and how these dimensions affect the type and frequency of everyday talk and the levels of communication satisfaction within families. Embedded within this goal is to study the relationship of everyday talk and FCE. Linking a cognitive structure (FCE) with a communicative behavior (everyday talk) may explain why some everyday talk topics are more prevalent in some families than in others. Therefore, the following research questions will be explored in this study:

RQ1: Will family communication environment predict the type of everyday talk within families?
RQ2: Will family communication environment and type of everyday talk contribute to level of family satisfaction within families?

Method

Participants

Four hundred twenty individuals comprising 201 families completed an online survey. All participants had at least one other family member complete the survey in addition to themselves. Each family averaged around two (M = 2.09) members per family who completed the survey; however, the range of participating members per family was two to six. Though stepfamilies were encouraged to take part in the study, none of the participants had a stepfamily member complete the survey. The family members ranged in age from 18 to 65. Two hundred seventy-eight (66.2%) were between the ages of 18 to 22, twenty-two (5.3%) ranged from ages 23–27, six (1.4%) ranged from ages 28–35, four (0.9%) ranged from ages 36 to 40, 27 (6.4%) ranged from ages 41–45, 47 (11.3%) ranged from ages 46–50, twenty-seven (6.4%) ranged from ages 51–55, six (1.4%) ranged from ages 56–60, and three (0.7%) were 61 years of age or older. One hundred ninety (45%) of the participants were male and
230 (55%) were female. The majority of the participants (94.7%) were Caucasian and 22 participants (5.3%) were African American.

**Procedures**

Participants completed a 63-item online survey in approximately 25 minutes. Families were recruited via email through their children who were enrolled in a basic communication course at a medium-sized Midwestern university. Students who chose to participate were asked to forward the survey link to at least one of their immediate family members, but all family members over the age of 18 were encouraged to participate. Once participants accessed the online survey, they were directed to a page explaining informed consent and an overview of the study. Participants were instructed to answer the questions honestly. Each page of the survey included the instructions related to each scale.

**Measures**

**Family communication environment**

Family communication environments were operationalized using Fitzpatrick and Ritchie’s (1994) Family Communication Environment Inventory (FCEI). The FCEI includes 25 Likert-type items measuring participants’ perceptions of family communication schemata within three dimensions: expressiveness (10 items: e.g., “My parents or family members encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs”), structural traditionalism (nine items: e.g., “A woman should take her husband’s last name when she marries”), and avoidance (six items: e.g., “In my family it is better to avoid conflicts than engage in them”). Responses to these items are on 5-point scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The internal reliability of this scale was acceptable (α = .72). Each subscale also reported high or acceptable reliability: expressiveness α = .88, structural traditionalism α = .76, and conflict avoidance α = .78. Previous research has reported alpha reliabilities ranging from .65 to .95 for each of the FCE subscales (Baxter et al., 2005; Caughlin, 2003; Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Koesten et al., 2009; Schrodt, 2005, 2009).

**Everyday talk**

Frequencies of everyday talk among family members were operationalized using Goldsmith and Baxter’s (1996) Revised Taxonomy of Interpersonal Speech Events (RTISE). Schrodt et al. (2007) previously adjusted this taxonomy and created behavioral indices for each type of everyday talk that could theoretically characterize step-family interaction. This study used Schrodt’s rendition of the RTISE since it was already adjusted to a family context. The RTISE includes 20 Likert-type items measuring participants’ perceptions of how often they engage in the different types of everyday talk included in the taxonomy. These 20 categories are small talk, gossip, joking around, catching up, recapping the day’s events, reminiscing, making up, love
talk, relationship talk, conflict, serious conversation, talking about problems, complaining, persuading conversation, decision making, giving instructions, lecturing, interrogating, making plans, and asking a favor. Responses to these items are on 5-point scales ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (regularly). The internal reliability of this scale was good ($\alpha = .81$). Previous research has typically produced reliability alphas ranging from .82 to .92 (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008).

**Family satisfaction**

Family satisfaction was operationalized using an adapted version of Anderson et al.’s (2001) Small Group Relational Satisfaction Scale (SGRSS). The SGRSS includes 12 Likert-type items measuring group members’ perceptions of satisfaction within a small group. Responses to these items are based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale items were adapted to the family context for this study. Sample items include: “I look forward to seeing my family;” “I can trust my family members;” and “My family members make me feel liked.” Possible scores for this measure range from 12–60 and the higher the score, the more satisfied each participant is with his or her relationships with family members. The internal reliability of this scale was excellent $\alpha = .92$. Previous research using this scale has reported alpha reliabilities of .89 and .90 (Anderson et al., 2001).

**Results**

The goal of this study was to examine how family communication environments (FCEs) predict types of everyday talk within families and how FCE and everyday talk contribute to the level of family satisfaction. A series of simple and multiple linear regressions were used to test the research questions.

The first research question focused on how the type and frequency of everyday talk will be predicted by the type of family communication environment within families. Sixty linear regressions were used to examine this question because each everyday talk item acts as a separate dependent variable. Because of the number of regressions being run, the alpha value was adjusted to reduce the possibility of Type I error. The most stringent means of adjusting alpha for multiple comparisons is the Bonferroni correction (Abdi, 2007). The Bonferroni correction suggests that alpha should be set at $\alpha / n$, with $n$ being the number of tests being run on a given set of data. Therefore, alpha was set at .0025 for each set of 20 regression analyses. The expressiveness dimension positively predicted 13 of the 20 everyday talk categories, while the structural traditional dimension predicted only seven dimensions, four of which were negatively related. The conflict avoidance dimension significantly predicted 11 of the everyday talk categories. Only two everyday talk categories (lecture and interrogation) had a positive relationship with the conflict avoidance dimension and the other nine categories were negatively influenced. Tables 1 through 3 provide the information from the significant regression equations found for each of the three FCEs and the everyday talk categories that were predicted by each FCE dimension and the direction of the prediction.
### Table 1  Linear Regressions: Expressive Dimension as a Predictor of Everyday Talk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Everyday talk variables</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Talk</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>11.30</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joking Around</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>55.71</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catching Up</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>44.25</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapping the Day’s Events</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>81.91</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminiscing</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>54.28</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Up</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>35.10</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Talk</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>159.87</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Talk</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>50.08</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Conversations</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>31.87</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking About Problems</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>79.02</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>15.93</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Plans</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>17.30</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking a Favor</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>11.25</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Table 2  Linear Regressions: Structural Traditionalism Dimension as a Predictor of Everyday Talk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Everyday talk variables</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joking Around</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>14.25</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catching Up</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>13.16</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapping the Day’s Events</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>19.83</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Talk</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>16.30</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>26.37</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogation</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>43.32</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Table 3  Linear Regressions: Conflict Avoidance Dimension as a Predictor of Everyday Talk

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Everyday talk variables</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
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<tr>
<td>Catching Up</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>46.83</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapping the Day’s Events</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>34.71</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminiscing</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>16.10</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Talk</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>44.49</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Conversations</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>12.02</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking About Problems</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>16.07</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaining</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>14.92</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>11.64</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>11.95</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogation</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>11.95</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
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</table>
The second research question focused on how family communication environment and type and frequency of everyday talk predicted levels of family satisfaction within families. A multiple linear regression was used to examine this research question. A significant regression equation was found, $F(23, 314) = 25.62, p < .001$, with an adjusted $R^2$ of .63. The only family communication environment significantly predicting family satisfaction was the expressive dimension, $p < .001$. Three types of everyday talk also significantly predicted family satisfaction: joking around, $p < .01$; recapping the day’s events, $p < .05$; and relationship talk, $p < .001$. The Bonferroni correction was not used for this single regression. These results are presented in Table 4.

### Discussion

#### Explanation of Results

The goal of this study was to identify the effect family communication environment (FCE) dimensions (expressiveness, structural traditionalism, and conflict avoidance) have on the types of everyday talk, and how FCE and everyday talk categories affect family satisfaction. Overall the results indicate that each of the FCE dimensions predict different types of everyday talk and that the expressiveness dimension and the everyday talk variables of joking around, recapping the day’s events, and relationship talk significantly predict family satisfaction. These results support previous research that identifies and describes the type of everyday talk that is used within families and personal relationships (Duck et al., 1991; Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996; Schrodt et al., 2007) and also extends everyday talk research by applying Fitzpatrick and Ritchie’s (1994) FCE research. The research questions and explanations of these findings are discussed along with theoretical and practical applications and areas for future research.

The first research question examined how each family communication environment predicted everyday talk. Previous research describes FCE as cognitive structures that determine our communication behaviors within personal relationships (Schrodt, 2009), which supports why the mundane daily conversations or everyday talk are different based on the communication schemata of a family. Goldsmith and Baxter (1996) and Schrodt and his colleagues (2007) found that different everyday talk

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variables</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressiveness</td>
<td>.62***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joking Around</td>
<td>.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recapping the Day’s Events</td>
<td>.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Talk</td>
<td>-.16***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $F(23, 314) = 25.62$, Adjusted $R^2 = .63$, $p < .001$.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
categories occurred in a variety of personal relationships including parent-child, stepparent-child, and sibling relationships. Though these findings speak to these specific relationship contexts, they do not speak to the cognitive influence behind these everyday talk categories. Family communication schemata, or the three family communication environments, provide an explanation for the differences that occur in the informal communication in families.

Expressiveness describes high-conversation families that encourage individual thought (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). The results of the current study revealed that expressive families were more likely to enact the following everyday talk categories: small talk, joking around, catching up, recapping the day’s events, reminiscing, making up, love talk, relationship talk, serious conversations, talking about problems, decision making, making plans, and asking a favor (see Table 1). All of these everyday talk categories were positively predicted by expressiveness; however, love talk, talking about problems, recapping the day’s events, reminiscing, and joking around were the most strongly predicted by the expressiveness dimension.

These categories are not surprising for an expressive family because research shows that expressive families encourage and discuss ideas and feelings more frequently than other FCE types and equip family members with better information-processing and communication skills (Schrodt, 2009). Family members who are encouraged to discuss their feelings are more likely to participate in love talk and relationship talk. Expressive families also have stronger problem solving skills (Koesten et al., 2009) and a greater number of interpersonal communication skills (Koesten, 2004). Consequently, it is not surprising that expressive families talk about problems, joke around, reminisce and have serious conversations. These primarily positive communicative interactions assist in strengthening interpersonal relationships and problem solving.

The FCE of structural traditionalism significantly predicted seven everyday talk categories: joking around, catching up, recapping the day’s events, love talk, conflict, lecture, and interrogation. Though joking around, catching up, recapping the day’s events, and love talk were positively predicted by the expressive dimension, these categories were negatively predicted by structural traditionalism. Structural traditional families have a conformity orientation in which the parents exercise power over their children and have a more traditional view of family and marriage (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). This description supports the negative relationship of these mundane or ritualistic interpersonal interactions because research has shown that structural traditional families have fewer interpersonal communication skills (Koesten, 2004) and lower levels of family strength than expressive families (Schrodt, 2009). Koesten and Schrodt’s findings support why expressiveness, in the current study, positively predicted these everyday talk categories and structural traditional families negatively influenced these same behaviors.

Structural traditional families use conformity to avoid unpleasant topics and to enforce homogeneity of values and beliefs (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). Therefore, recapping the day’s events or catching up may reveal uncomfortable or negative topics, which are typically avoided by structural traditional families (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). This would explain the negative prediction of these everyday talk
categories because the children, for example, may be participating in activities that are not congruent with the traditional family’s values as they grow older and more independent.

Conflict, lecture, and interrogation were positively predicted by structural traditionalism. Though conflict is avoided by this type of family (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994), at least one participant was a college student, which may explain the increase in conflict because many students begin to explore new values and beliefs when they leave home (O’Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Structural traditional family members also show a decrease in interpersonal communication skills (Koesten, 2004). Both lecturing and interrogation, primarily negative communication behaviors, are not surprising and often play a role in family conflict.

Conflict avoidant families suppress unpleasant topics and avoid conflict as much as possible by imposing conformity (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). The conflict avoidance dimension negatively predicted joking around, catching up, recapping the day’s events, reminiscing, love talk, serious conversations, talking about problems, complaining, and decision making. All of these everyday talk categories were positively predicted by expressive families except complaining, which was not predicted in either direction by the expressiveness dimension. Avoiding conflict can also be done by avoiding communication. Recapping the day’s events, not discussing problems, catching up, or avoiding serious conversations are everyday talk categories that would not provide any catalysts for conflict to occur. Conflict avoidance has also led to lower levels of problem-solving skills (Koesten et al., 2009) and interpersonal communication skills (Koesten, 2004), which would explain why these everyday talk categories are not as prevalent (Duck et al., 1991).

Lecturing and interrogating were both positively influenced by conflict avoidant families. These results are surprising, but this too may be explained by the fact that at least one family member was a college-aged child. Lecturing and interrogating are also negative behaviors, and conflict-avoiding families are less skilled at problem solving and interpersonal communication (Koesten, 2004; Koesten et al., 2009).

The second research question examined how family communication environment and everyday talk contributes to the level of family satisfaction. The results indicated that the FCE of expressiveness and the everyday talk categories of joking around, recapping the day’s events, and relationship talk predicted 63% of the variance of family satisfaction. However, the expressiveness dimension was the strongest predictor of family satisfaction. This supports previous research that has found expressive families to be more satisfied because of the increased levels of communication and more developed interpersonal skills (Schrodt, 2009).

Three everyday talk categories also were significant predictors of family satisfaction. These categories were joking around, recapping the day’s events, and relationship talk. Both joking around and recapping the day’s events had positive influences on satisfaction; however, relationship talk had a negative influence. Schrodt, Soliz, and Braithwaite (2008) reported that stepfamilies who engaged in more everyday talk were more satisfied than stepfamilies who did not; however, the results from this study did not specify which everyday talk categories contributed most to the
satisfaction levels. The current results support these findings, because two of the everyday talk categories positively predicted satisfaction. In addition, the expressiveness environment predicted the most categories of everyday talk and was also the strongest predictor of family satisfaction. Everyday interactions are part of a healthy relational process in dyadic relationships (Duck et al., 1991), which is also concurrent with communication behaviors that affect healthy family processes (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008), which would more than likely lead to higher levels of family satisfaction.

Relationship talk was a negative predictor of family satisfaction. Though previous research supports higher levels of satisfaction when everyday talk is occurring more often (Schrodt, Soliz, & Braithwaite, 2008), these studies did not identify the categories that had the strongest influence. It might be posited that talk about the relationship signals a relational problem of some sort. For example, families may not discuss their relationships as often or have a need to clarify it in the same way people in early romantic relationships do. Status as a family member is more enduring than status in a new romantic relationship. Family relationships are defined by multiple means including biological relationships, legal ties, shared experiences, and history, or by the development of a living arrangement over time. Family relationships do change, but they tend to be relatively stable. If the expectation is that a family is stable, talk about the relationships among family members may signal a sea change. Perhaps, too, everyday talk categories such as serious conversations or talking about problems may allow for the discussion of the relationship issues. Little research has been done on everyday talk within families and future studies are needed to see if everyday talk in romantic and dyadic relationships is similar to everyday talk within families. Duck et al. (1991) described everyday interactions as ways to clarify or distinguish types of relationships, but families may not need to do this as often as people in other interpersonal relationships. Family members may see relationship talk as negative or they may discuss their relationships in a different type of conversation.

**Theoretical and Practical Contributions**

The current results provide several contributions to two areas of family and interpersonal research that had previously never been studied in conjunction with each other. They extend Koerner and Fitzpatrick’s (2002) general theory of family communication by providing more insight to outcomes of family communication environments and how these schemata influence communication behaviors such as the everyday talk categories predicted by the three family communication environments. This theory focuses on the cognitive frameworks that influence our communication and understanding of our family environments (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002), which would include the everyday conversations family members have with each other. By bridging these two areas of research, the study adopts new behavior-based outcome variables that focus on the microlevel communication within the family system.

These theoretically based findings also provide practical applications. The current results provide suggested types of everyday talk that can increase satisfaction within
families. Depending on the type of family environment, different everyday talk categories could possibly increase satisfaction levels if family members increase levels of everyday talk because it increases intimacy or closeness in relationships (Duck et al., 1991). The findings of this study provide support that higher levels of conversation (expressiveness) will provide more satisfaction within families and these everyday talk categories can be the starting point to increase conversation and interaction within families who are not as communicative (structural traditional and conflict avoidant). Participating in more everyday talk may also strengthen interpersonal communication or problem-solving skills.

Limitations and Future Research

Though this study provides new insights for both family communication environment and everyday talk research, all studies have limitations that must be considered. The sample included at least two members of each family, but a closer look into these families as individual units may provide interesting insights. Do family members agree on the amount of everyday talk that is occurring? Do they exhibit similar or distinctive family satisfaction? Everyday talk has primarily been researched using qualitative methods; the self-report strategy used in this study may not provide a realistic or accurate measurement of actual everyday talk behaviors. Social desirability may be playing a role in how participants responded to the amount they communicate daily. Providing a more in-depth look into each family’s responses would provide stronger validation for these findings. Future research should begin looking at families individually as units and then making comparisons with other family units to have a more accurate interpretation of “families” and not individuals. Complementing these results with observations may also provide more validation.

This study also used college students and their family members as the primary sample. It could be argued that college students’ everyday talk with their family members may drastically change because of a geographical distance between them. Proximity may be a confounding variable that could be taken into account in future research and may also provide more insight into the everyday talk construct. Studying how everyday talk changes over time or proximity, for example, may be different for each family communication environment. College students may also share more or less with their families based on their family communication environment, which may also provide more explanation to the structural traditional and conflict avoidant families’ positive influence on conflict, interrogation, and lecturing. Changes in the family system over time strengthen the argument of why the phenomenon of everyday interactions within families should continue to be studied.

Collectively, the results of this study provide support to fortify previous research on both family communication environments and everyday talk but also extend knowledge and theory. Expressive families participate in more categories of everyday talk and are more satisfied with their family communication. These results also provide an understanding of the types of everyday talk that are positively influenced by expressiveness and the types of everyday talk that contribute to higher levels of
satisfaction. These findings provide theoretical and practical contributions, which suggest rich future research opportunities.

References


