All In The Family: Interpersonal Communication in Kin Relationships

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MALE and a female held hands and they strolled along together. They were small people, the male only four feet, eight inches and his female companion not much more than four feet tall. Behind the couple walked an adolescent, carefully stepping in the footsteps of the older male. Although this scene could have taken place anywhere, recently discovered fossils indicated that it actually occurred some 3.6 million years ago. Indeed, the discovery of this group is the first sign of the existence of a nuclear (hominid) family (Fisher, 1983). Anthropologists have shown that as early as four million years ago, males and females had begun to bond, to share and to work together in the rearing of their offspring.

The presence of an adult male is, however, not necessarily a universal characteristic of the family. The only universal family type is a small, kinship-structured group whose primary function is the nurturant socialization of the newborn. Three independent lines of evidence can be adduced for the cross-cultural and cross-historical universality of this family type. First, most societies of which we have records have such a kinship-structured group. Prolonged maternal care coupled with pronounced socialization of the young and extended relationships between mother and child occur in all human groups (Reiss, 1965; Stephens, 1963). Second, such prolonged maternal care for helpless and dependent infants is a characteristic shared with most other primates (Wilson, 1975). Young monkeys, for example, favor a cloth mother that purportedly dispenses nurturance during stressful or dangerous times over the wire mother figure that dispenses food (Harlow, 1958; Harlow & Harlow, 1965). Third, the loss of a primary caregiver seems to have a severe and devastating effect on human infants regardless of the amount of...

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nourishment they receive (Spitz, 1945; Yarrow, 1963). As the giving and receiving of emotional support is primarily accomplished through the verbal and nonverbal exchange of messages, the universality of this family form suggests the centrality of communication for understanding the family.

From such early simple dyadic structures, more elaborated kinship connections evolve. Kinship is often defined as the possession of a common ancestor in the not too distant past (Wilson, 1975). This definition suggests a biological reckoning yet it is the social definition of who belongs to whom and who is related to whom that is more critical (Reiss, 1971). To be kin to someone acknowledges a special tie of who stands in what relationship to whom, who owes what to whom, and how individuals of particular kinship are expected to pay their social debts. Considerations of complex kinship structures automatically entail the discussion of marriage and the family (Snedder, 1968). Through marriage, for example, husbands and wives become kin to one another. Each takes on a series of rights and duties to one another, and both stand in the same kin relationship to their children. For many theorists, kinship, marriage, and the family are an inseparable trinity whose defining features and interrelationships are frequently debated (Adams, 1966; Goodenough 1970; Reiss, 1965; Winch, 1968). Most agree, however, that essential to any definition of kinship, marriage, and the family is some reference to social relationships, their behavioral content, and the regulatory power of norms expressed in terms of rights and duties (Verdon, 1981).

This chapter is primarily concerned with the communication that occurs in the family. First, we demonstrate the importance of communication in any theoretical or conceptual attempt to understand the family. Second, we selectively examine some of the research that has been conducted across a number of academic disciplines on interaction within the nuclear family. Third, we offer some suggestions for future research.

A COMMUNICATION APPROACH TO KIN RELATIONSHIPS

Six major meta-theoretical perspectives dominate theorizing about the family. During the 1960s, the structural-functional, the interactional, and the developmental perspectives were predominant (Nye & Berardo, 1981). During the 1980s, greater emphasis has been placed on the conflict (Sprey, 1979), exchange (Nye, 1979), and system theory (Burr, Lehay, Day, & Constantine, 1979) perspectives. Of these, only the interactionist approach, which defines the family as a "unit of interacting personalities" (Burgess & Locke, 1963), assigns a central role to communication. This symbolic interactionist viewpoint is espoused in Bochner's (1976) article on communication in the family. We intend to show in this section that regardless of the meta-theoretical orientation to the study of the family, the concept of communication is necessary in any attempt to explain, predict, and understand family outcomes.

The linchpin around which our rationale for the theoretical importance of communication in kin relationships revolves is a recent codification by Reuben Hill of the most frequently utilized factors in all major theoretical approaches to the family (Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979, p. xii). This taxonomical effort charts the exogenous and endogenous factors of central concern to family theorists. As the major concepts of interest in analyzing the family are outlined in this perspective, the role of communication becomes crystalline when they are examined.

Exogenous Variables

Exogenous variables in the study of the family include both the extreme exogenous factors affecting family structures and processes as well as input variables that are more proximate to internal family processes. The extreme exogenous variables are those that deal with the social, political, and economic environment in which a kin group finds itself. Input variables include value orientations, social class, and access to resources and social networks (see reviews by Lee, 1980; Leigh, 1982). Historians who study both types of exogenous variables have shown us that nostalgia for a lost family tradition that never existed has prejudiced our understanding of the contemporary family (Goode, 1963). Current family forms are considered dysfunctional to the extent that they deviate from such nostalgic views.

The nineteenth-century family has been described by one historian as an emotional iceberg (Shorter, 1975). In contrast, the twentieth-century family has become an emotional refuge in an increasingly bureaucratic environment (Parsons & Bales, 1955), an environment that has taken over many of the other major functions of the family (for example, socialization of children, the care and nurturance of its members). The emotional relationships between parents and children are significantly altered in a society in which peers, and not parents, socialize adolescents. Likewise, in a society in which the aged are cared for by the state, the emotional bonds between adult children and their parents are changed. The functions performed by families are highly interdependent. Limiting the family, once a multifunctional unit of society, to the performance of only one function damages its ability to handle the one emotional function that remains (Lasch, 1977).

When emotional and psychological factors achieve preeminence in a society's view of the family, different demands are placed on communication among family members. If the major function of the modern family is emotional, greater demands are placed on all participants to engage in expressive communication. A societal commitment to expressivity is potentially risky (Bochner, 1982; Moscovici, 1967; Parks, 1982). Such commitments may also be potentially physically dangerous. The open expression of
strong negative feelings to individuals with whom one lives in close physical proximity may exacerbate tensions. An individual is more likely to observe, commit, or be a victim of violence within his or her own family than in any other setting (Gelles, 1974). The modern family is a place in which hatred and violence are felt, expressed, and learned as consistently as love.

A consideration of such exogenous variables strengthens our theoretical work on the family. Exogenous factors set the scope conditions for our conceptual efforts by reminding us of the historical and cultural limitations of our empirical generalizations. Additionally, exogenous variables can be directly and productively linked to internal family processes (for example, Bott, 1957). At the very least, these factors remind us of the range and diversity possible in family systems (van den Berghe, 1978). Environmental diversity dramatically affects the input variables and through these the meaning and even the frequency of communicative exchanges are altered.

Endogenous Variables

The internal, performance, and output variables are the endogenous factors in theoretical approaches to the family. The specific variables covered by these factors are diagrammed in Table 15.1. As we have argued, the exogenous variables can be used to predict kinship communication patterns. Communication, however—save in its most narrow definition of communication structure, that is, who speaks to whom—is overlooked in this taxonomy of major family variables. Although the centrality of communication in a variety of relational processes is commonplace for communication scholars, communication is assigned a peripheral role in traditional psychological and sociological studies of families and close relationships.

There are at least three senses in which communication can be conceptually related to these endogenous variables. First, communication can be construed as the underlying causal mechanism that translates the set of internal variables into the outcome variables. Second, communication can be seen as the intervening variable linking internal, performance, and output processes. Third, communication can be seen as constitutive in that it produces and reproduces the social structure of marriage and the family (McPherr, 1964). One's meta-theoretical framework determines which of these three orientations toward communication in kin relationships can be most fruitfully adopted. The specification of the relationships between the internal performance, and output variables is incomplete without the explication of the nature and function of communication.

Turning to Table 15.1, let us consider the relationships among one internal, one performance, and one output variable. Consider one variable from column A (role differentiation), one from column B (problem solving), and one from column C (marital satisfaction).

The need for problem solving in the working out of the roles of husband and wife in a marriage arises because of the cultural shifts in what constitutes appropriate role behavior for spouses. Like all roles, those of husband and wife have culturally prescribed rights and duties associated with them (Linton, 1945). The difficulty arises because there is a subtle revolution occurring in American family life (Smith, 1979). The U.S. Census Bureau recognized this in 1980 when they announced that the male would no longer be assumed to be the head of the household. Males no longer exclusively provide for their wives and children. The good provider role, once central to family life and exclusively male, has been reduced to the status of senior or coprovider (Slocum & Nye, 1976).

The new male family role has been expanded to include the display of more intimacy, nurturance, and expressivity. Not only are demands being made for more male communication and tenderness but also for more child care and housework. Such a major role realignment directly increases the amount of problem solving and negotiation that occurs between husbands and wives (Bernard, 1981).

In addition to the increasing role burdens placed on husbands, there is a marked divergence between the attitudes of the culture and the behaviors of husbands and wives. Individuals do not attitudinally support wives in a provider role for the family (Slocum & Nye, 1976), yet over 51 percent of married women work outside the home as of 1982 (Thorton & Freedman, 1983). Furthermore, although husbands are now expected to be more nurturant and expressive and to help with housework and child care, they do not appear to have adopted these behaviors. The majority of husbands in a random sample of 224 married couples rated themselves as neither expressive nor nurturant (Fitzpatrick & Indvik, 1982). And wives still do the housework and child care (Thorton & Freedman, 1983). For both husbands and wives, the prerogatives of their respective positions have faded far more slowly than have the obligations.

Such attitudinal and behavioral inconsistencies in marital role performance have a direct negative impact on marital satisfaction (Burr, 1973; Indvik & Fitzpatrick, 1982; Ort, 1950; Tharp, 1963). The inconsistencies between the expectations and the behaviors of husbands and wives lead to conflict. Such inconsistencies, as well as the tension they can generate, must be resolved to

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TABLE 15.1</th>
<th>Major Endogenous Variables Across All Theories of the Family</th>
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<tr>
<td>A: Internal</td>
<td>B: Performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family rules</td>
<td>Marrying</td>
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<td>Power allocation</td>
<td>Relationship adjusting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role differentiation</td>
<td>Problem solving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence and support structure</td>
<td>Child socializing</td>
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<td>Communication structure</td>
<td>Family planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information processing structure</td>
<td>Tension managing</td>
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the ongoing satisfaction of both parties. The resolution of these tensions requires communication and problem solving, which implicates techniques of negotiating, bargaining, decision making, and so forth.

**Internal Variables.** Internal family variables are frequently operationalized by a variety of verbal and nonverbal messages. The gestures, words, actions, silences, even the presence or absence of a family member, are representative of a number of different internal family concepts (Raush, Grief, & Nugent, 1979). Family rules are often defined through observation of the interaction that takes place among family members (Napier & Whitaker, 1978). Power allocation and role differentiation can be signaled by behaviors such as successful interruptions, talk-overs, and talk time (for example, Folger, 1978; Millar & Rogers, 1976). The affection and support structure of a family is manifested by the occurrence or nonoccurrence of specific nonverbal affect cues (for example, Lamb, 1976b) as well as language characteristics (Berger & Mishler 1970). The information-processing structure is measured by how information is shared in a family (Reiss, 1981). Finally, coordination is defined as the meshing of interaction sequences among or between partners (Berscheid, 1983).

A close examination of these internal variables suggests that a more parsimonious structure is possible. Perhaps the basic dimensions internal to the family are affect and power or cohesion and adaptability (Olson, Sprengle, & Russell, 1979). These are the major dimensions of interpersonal behavior according to a number of different perspectives (Bochnar, Kaminski, & Fitzpatrick, 1977). Control subsumes the internal concepts of family rules, power allocations, role differentiation, communication and information-processing structures, and coordination, whereas affect subsumes the affection and support structures (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1983).

The trend toward using verbal and nonverbal communication as operational definitions of internal family variables obscures important theoretical aspects of these variables. Although the direct exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages is central to family processes, communication alone can not explain all of the variance in family outcomes. The affective and cognitive perspectives as represented by these internal family variables would be better operationalized through a consideration of the attitudes, values, and/or relational theories that individuals and families hold concerning family interaction. Internal variables are best construed as the factors that account for the observed regularities in the performance variables and not as performance variables per se.

**Performance Variables.** Performance variables are overt behavioral activities. For communication researchers, these activities are primarily verbal and nonverbal exchanges. The six performance variables isolated in Table 15.1 are behavioral episodes that occur in families. These episodes can be examined at either the molar or molecular levels. Gottman (1979), who views conflict resolution as the major behavioral episode capable of predicting marital satisfaction, coded the specific molecular cues exchanged between couples during conflict. The interaction sequences between marital partners were the best predictor of a couple’s experienced satisfaction with a marriage (Gottman, 1979).

An explicit analytical separation of classes of internal and performance variables may help in the development of concepts and theories at the same level of abstraction, that is, the individual, dyadic, triadic, and so forth. Performance variables can be studied at the individual level of social behavior by focusing on the communication style of a given individual (Norton, 1983). These variables can also be studied at the dyadic level by examining messages in sequence at the interact, double interact, or higher order. Many of the existing dyadic level concepts are better considered communication concepts (for example, complementarity, reciprocity, dominance, and so forth) because the linking between two individuals occurs behaviorally within the exchange of messages. Theories do not need to restrict themselves to concepts at the same order of abstraction, but theories of communication in close relationships must explicitly deal with the issue of how these classes of concepts translate across levels. Is it an individual’s marital satisfaction that is explained by an interaction pattern between spouses? Or is it some dyadic level measure of “marital satisfaction”? Or is it both (and under what conditions)?

**Output Variables.** The first major family outcome variables that we have isolated in Table 15.1 are satisfaction and stability measures. Satisfaction concerns one’s subjectively experienced contentment with either a marital or parent-child relationship. Family solidarity is a stability dimension that objectively examines whether or not a given family is intact. Parents separate or divorce and children run away, and such events can be taken as measures of family instability.

Family functioning is a multidimensional construct. It has been defined in three major ways. First, does the family accomplish major family goals? The goals to be accomplished successfully by the family are specified by the theorist. These goals may include the appropriate socialization of the children and the stabilization of the adult personality. Or optimal family functioning may include the development of a specified set of interaction competencies (Farber, 1964). Second, does the organization of the family violate societal principles? A family is, for example, organized along age and gender lines. The presence of coalitions across such lines results in dysfunctional outcomes (Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, & Phillips, 1976; Mishler & Waxler, 1968). One way to measure these coalitions is to see if parents are more responsive interactively to one another than either is to the children. Third, does the family contain a diseased member? The psychological or even some
physical problems of a child are defined as prima facie evidence of family dysfunction (for example, Henry, 1965).

Embedded in the concept of functioning is a consideration of the "normalcy" of a family. Originally, normality was defined as the absence of disease in a family, although more detailed models have recently evolved (see Walsh, 1982). Such an output measure necessarily involves prescriptions on the part of the theorist. Radical critiques of the family maintain that where a function best, the family is the ultimate destructive social form. Only the family glues individuals to others based upon a sense of incompleteness, stymies the free formation of one's identity; exerts greater social control than children need; and indoctrinates members with elaborate and unnecessary taboos (Cooper, 1970). The very intensity of such critiques reminds us of the prescriptive nature of many definitions of optimal family functioning. We are not suggesting that this output variable be abandoned but that researchers clearly specify their values and orientations as they pursue research on the functional family.

Finally, status attainment refers to the maintenance or achievement of a particular socioeconomic position for a family. Often whether a child attains the same or better status level as the parent, particularly the father, is of concern. Status attainment involves measuring the occupational choices made by a child in comparison to the father. Often the exposure to a model and the ability to talk with others about various occupations leads to a child's awareness and eventual choice of specific jobs or careers (Woelkel & Haley, 1971).

Although not represented in Table 15.1, Hill (1979; as cited in Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979) isolated another class of major factors often treated in theories of the family. These are family development, family learning over time, intergenerational processes, economic life cycles and family performance, and family innovations. Each of these concepts adds the social time dimension to the model and recognizes the longitudinal nature of the family. Such concepts serve to remind us that families follow a repeated pattern of organization, disorganization, and change. Any comprehensive approach to the family must take into account the repeated continuities and discontinuities in family life.

Explicating the role of communication in predicting family outcomes variables clarifies the ways different internal variables have led to different outcomes. A traditional orientation to male and female roles, for example, constrains the communication between marital partners, which leads to a high degree of satisfaction for some couples yet not for others (Fitzpatrick, 1983).

Summary

In this section, we have delineated the major factors related to family processes and have argued that many family theories have underplayed or ignored the role of communication in predicting family outcomes. To rectify this omission, we have offered three ways to examine communication as the link among the internal, performance, and output variables. We have also proposed that a complete theory of the family must take into account exogenous factors as they impinge on internal family processes.

Given the plethora of research on the family in general, we have limited our review to the nuclear family. We have organized the review according to a systems theory analogy (Galvin & Brommel, 1982). Thus we have split off the subsystems in the family that can (and have been) examined apart from one another. We have used the system theory metaphor because we believe that treating the family as a system has two major advantages. First, by reminding us of the interrelationships of various levels of society, systems theories force us to consider the conditions under which dyads can be examined separately. Second, this perspective suggests that both verbal and nonverbal messages can be used to study the links between (among) members of a system.

We have divided the review into two categories: individual social behaviors and interpersonal processes. At times, in the placement of research into a category may seem arbitrary or even procrastenst to the reader. Because there is far more research at the level of individual social behavior in the study of kinship, we have often resorted to placing behavioral observations of interaction in the presence of a family member into the interpersonal process category.

Our purpose is not to develop a theory of communication in kinship relations but rather to bring many strands of research on communication in the family together. Like the long-hidden sinopia underlying the frescos of the middle ages, the sketch that we offer of the role of communication in kinship relations has the promise of illuminating the underlying structure of these relations more clearly. We now consider the dyadic subsystems within the nuclear family.

THE MARITAL PAIR

In the twentieth century the key question motivating much of the research on marriage is: Why do some marriages fail and others do not? Most theorists today agree that the major predictor of marital stability is the satisfaction experienced by each individual in the marriage (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Satisfaction and related concepts such as happiness, adjustment, marital quality, lack of distress, or integration reference subjectively experienced contentment with the marital relationship (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Lewis & Spanier, 1979). The communication that occurs between married partners appears to be the primary predictor of marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1979; Noller 1980). In the next section, we examine some of the individual social behaviors that relate to marital happiness.
Individual Social Behaviors

Prior to 1960, most scholars were concerned with the identification of a broad range of demographic and personality correlates of marital happiness (Burgess & Wallin, 1953; Terman, 1938). More recently, the ability to resolve interpersonal problems and express affect to a spouse are the focus of concern in predicting marital satisfaction (Snyder, 1979). The relationship between communication variables and marital satisfaction as seen from the perspective of the married couples themselves is remarkably consistent; that is, the happily married believe that they have good communication with the spouse (Fitpatrick, 1983). Such views include openness (Norton & Montgomery, 1982); self-disclosure of thoughts and feelings to the spouse (Levinger & Senn, 1967); perceived accuracy of nonverbal communication (Navran, 1967); and the frequency of "successful" communicative exchanges (Bienvenu, 1970).

The above findings appear to resolve the relationship between communication and marital happiness, except that all couples are capable of manipulating their verbal communication behavior to conform to a happy or unhappy marital stereotype (Vincent, Friedman, Nugent, & Messerly, 1979). The facility with which couples can feign a happy or an unhappy marriage suggests that such stereotypes are pervasive. Furthermore, asked to rate a conversation purportedly occurring in a happy or unhappy marriage (Giles & Fitpatrick, 1985), individuals correctly identified the communication correlates of such relationships. The stereotypes of what constitutes good communication in a happy marriage are robust ones.

Such stereotypes have recently been attacked as representing ideological biases and/or as representing simplistic views of the nature of human relationships (Bochner, 1982; Parks, 1982). These critiques, although valid, may be missing a critical point; that is, the pervasiveness and power of these stereotypes may have a major impact on communication in marriage. Happily married spouses may direct interaction (for example, questioning strategies) in such a way as to validate the kind of communication they expect to see in their own marriage (Snyder, 1981). The stereotype of the happy couple as open and expressive may subtly influence a couple to select topics that do not reveal problems or disconfirm one's view of the marriage or of the other spouse. Stereotypes may create happiness because both believe in them and decode the communication in the marriage accordingly. These stereotypes may set expectations for a relationship that cannot be met and hence may lead to dissatisfaction.

Interpersonal Processes

In predicting marital satisfaction, both theories of power and affect, particularly as exercised in conflict situations, have been expounded. Much greater emphasis has been placed on the study of power between intimates than on affect. The interactional views of families, for example, focus on control to the exclusion of affect (Raush et al., 1979).

Power is the ability to produce intended effects on the behavior or emotions of the other (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1976). Power is often linked to the ability of a husband or wife to grant or withhold resources (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). The resources that contribute to one's power are not necessarily economic ones (Saffillios-Rothschild, 1979) but include anything that a husband or wife can use to exercise control in a given situation (French & Raven, 1959). Tying power exclusively to the concept of resources is theoretically myopic because it misses the ongoing and dynamic nature of power between intimates. Resources work, for example, because they influence the choice of message strategies (deTurck, 1984) effective in producing the desired outcome.

Power is seen during interactions in which husbands and wives have at least partially conflicting interests. Conflicting interests can arise during family discussions, problem solving, conflict resolution, or crisis management (Olson & Cromwell, 1975). Interactively, speakers exercise control by maintaining attention on themselves and by extensive verbal participation. Spouses also control the contributions of others through attempted and successful interruptions and the skillful use of questions (Mishler & Waxler, 1968).

A number of systems define couples according to their usual patterns of control in conversations (Ericson & Rogers, 1973; Mark, 1971; Siuzuki & Beavin, 1965). Three types of couples can be defined by the message exchange patterns that are observed as couples communicate with one another: symmetrical, complementary, and parallel (Lederer & Jackson, 1968; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Symmetrical couples have higher levels of role discrepancy; the couples who manifest lower proportions of competitive symmetry have higher levels of satisfaction in their marriages (Rogers, 1972). Symmetrical exchanges are more common among upper-class couples (Mark, 1971), although these results are not replicated (Ericson, 1972). Complemental couples, in which the husband is dominant, report higher levels of satisfaction and less role discrepancy (Miller & Rogers, 1976; Courtright, Miller, & Rogers-Miller, 1979). Parallel couples use a balance of these patterns across topics or situations. Because the research has been limited on both topics discussed and on interaction duration, it has been difficult to define parallel couples.

Outcomes of power processes are usually measured as who wins or who makes the decision in an interaction (Olson & Cromwell, 1975). One recent study has added a measure of marital satisfaction to the usual "who wins" measure because in intimate relationships, there are many Pyrrhic victories (Dillard & Fitpatrick, 1984).

Our understanding of power in intimate relationships would benefit from a serious consideration of four points. First, power is not a unidimensional
concept (Haley, 1963). Not only who makes particular decisions, but also who decides that this person may make those decisions and who determines who will decide which spouse will make a decision are necessary pieces of the power puzzle. Second, a dynamic view of power would be enriched by acknowledging the range of outcomes that a persuader might be interested in achieving in family situations (deTurck, 1984). Third, both the actual resources that an individual brings to a family exchange and the prevailing normative beliefs about who should exercise power interact to predict what occurs communicatively and how satisfied the parties are with the outcome. Fourth, a focus on sequences of interaction necessitates an examination of how compliance (noncompliance) affects husbands’ or wives’ attempts to assert power over one another (Sprey, 1979).

The expression of affect between married partners has also been examined most often under conditions of conflict or disagreement. In contrast to unhappy couples, happy couples exhibit more nonverbal positive affect cues (Rubin, 1977); agreement and approval (Birchler, 1972); attempts to avoid conflict (Rausch, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974); supportive behaviors (Wegener, Revenstorf, Hahlweg, & Schindler, 1979); compromises (Birchler, 1972); agreement than disagreement in conversations with their spouses (Gottman, 1979; Riskin & Faunce, 1972); and consistency in the use of nonverbal affect cues (Noller, 1982).

A major affect model is the Structural Model of Marital Interaction (Gottman, 1979). This model suggests that there is more patterning and structure in the interaction of dissatisfied than satisfied couples. Furthermore, the satisfied exhibit more positivity and are less likely to reciprocate negative behaviors. All the concepts in the model are tested in terms of affect. Even dominance, a type of patterning, is measured by the asymmetry in predictability of emotional responsiveness between husbands and wives.

Based on this model, both the frequencies of the individual behaviors that couples exhibit in the presence of one another and their interaction patterns are examined. Although all couples are equally likely to reciprocate positive affect, unhappy couples are more likely to reciprocate negative communication behaviors than are happy couples (Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Rubin, 1977). The interaction of an unhappy pair shows more asymmetry in predictability than does the interaction of a happy one. In an unhappy marriage, one spouse is more emotionally dominant than another. Such extreme patterning seems to occur even at the physiological level (Levenson & Gottman, 1983). As they communicate with one another even on the topic of “How was your day?,” the unhappily married showed a high degree of predictable physiological responses to one another’s comments. Such physiological chaining of responses suggests one reason why couples report feelings of being trapped in a marriage.

A major approach that links affect and power is that of Fitzpatrick and her colleagues (Dindia & Fitzpatrick, in press). This polythetic classification scheme (Fitzpatrick, 1976, 1983, 1984; Fitzpatrick & Indvik, 1982) is based on three conceptual dimensions: interdependence, communication, and ideology. Interdependence and communication are affect dimensions, measured through the self-reports of individuals. Control has been measured, following the lead of Ericson and Rogers (1973), by the interaction of the couples (Fitzpatrick, Best, Mabry, & Indvik, 1985; Williamson, 1983). In addition to affect and control, the ideological beliefs and standards that couples hold on a variety of family issues have been salient in distinguishing among couples.

Based on these dimensions, individuals can be categorized as one of three relationship definitions. These three definitions are: traditional, independent, and separate. Traditions are very interdependent in their marriage; have conventional ideological values about marriage and family life; and report an expressive communication style with their spouses. Independents are moderately interdependent in their marriage; have nonconventional views about marriage and family life; and report a very expressive communication style with their mates. Separates are not very interdependent in their marriage, are ambivalent about their views on marriage and family life, and report very little expressivity in their marital communication.

The individual relational definitions of husbands and wives are compared and couple types are generated. Nine couple types can be constructed from the possible combinations of husband and wife relational definitions. In previous research, approximately 60 percent of the individuals agree with their spouse on a relational definition. These are the “Pure” types: Traditional, Independent, and Separate. The other 40 percent are distributed among the other six couples types. These couples are called the “Mixed” types. The “Separate/Traditional” (Fitzpatrick, 1984) type does not occur with any greater frequency than any other Mixed type but it is often significantly different from the other couples on a number of variables. Thus it is often treated as a defined couple type and appears separate of the other Mixed types.

An active program of research (Fitzpatrick, 1976, 1977, 1981a; Fitzpatrick & Best, 1979; Fitzpatrick & Indvik, 1982; Fitzpatrick, Fallis, & Vance, 1982; Fitzpatrick, Vance, & Witteman, 1984; Sills, Pike, Redman, & Jones, 1983; Williamson & Fitzpatrick, in press; Witteman & Fitzpatrick, in press) has shown that the couple types can be discriminated on a number of self-report and behavioral dimensions. Table 15.2 displays some of the major findings in this program of research. For clarity, the findings on the relational typology have been organized along the lines of the first figure, listing the major family variables.

The range of the empirical findings indicates that the typing of couples is not merely artifactual but reflects important underlying dimensions of relationships. Displaying the findings in this manner indicates that other outputs of family processes have been ignored in this typology. It is evident, however, that in the descriptions of ongoing relationships such as marriage, it
TABLE 15.2
Couple Types and Related Endogenous Variables: Self-Report and Behavioral Correlates

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<th>Input Variables</th>
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<td>Ideology uncertainty  a</td>
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<td>Affective and Support</td>
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NOTE: Blank spaces indicate that the comparisons have not been made across couple types in some studies. Zeros indicate that differences were not obtained through statistical tests.

Double pluses (+ +) indicate extremely positive statistically significant relationships were found between the two variables, double negatives (− −) indicate extremely negative relationships. The plus (+) and minus (−) signs indicate that these couple types were intermediate on the endogenous variables studied. T signifies Traditionalists; I, Independents; S, Separates; S/T, Separate/Traditionals; and M, Mixed couple types.

a. This signifies the concept was measured through self-report.

b. This indicates that behavioral measures were obtained.

This indicates that the differences displayed were obtained only for the wives. More detailed description of the various research studies may be found in Fitzpatrick (1983, 1984), or the specific studies cited in the references.

Communication in Kin Relationships

appears to be useful to categorize couples along a number of internal variables, to code their performance, and predict their outputs.

Stages in the Marital Relationship

One of the difficulties in discussing the family in a developmental perspective is that most of the research conducted on the topic has used cross-sectional post hoc designs. Such designs provide a poor basis for detecting developmental trends (Baltes, 1968; Rollins, 1975) because there is potential confusion between cohort effects and actual developmental changes. The scarcity of longitudinal research is not the only problem in studying family development. Most family stage theories, concerned only with intact families, mark family developmental stages according to the age of the oldest child (Duvall, 1971). This approach ignores other family systems, for example, the common one of a single mother rearing two female children (Aldous, 1978). Furthermore, the age of the oldest child may not be a particularly sensitive mark of internal family dynamics. Despite these difficulties in achieving a reasonable and broadly applicable model of family development, theorists have dealt increasingly with notions of change through time in family systems. In the section that follows, we treat some of the research on stages in the marital relationship.

Courtship and Early Marriage. The voluminous literature on initial attraction has been little help in explaining or predicting courtship progress or early marital processes (Huston & Levinger, 1978). One major explanation for this fact may be the overidentification of the concept of attraction with the concept of attitude (Berscheid, 1982). In ongoing relationships, individuals do not have the clear, bipolar unambiguous responses to one another implied by the attitude construct. Commitment to attraction as attitude skews research and theory on relationships into both a stability framework and an exclusively cognitive one at that (Berscheid, 1983; Graziano & Musser, 1982).

The theoretical approaches concerned with the processes through which partners select mates are stage or filter theories (Duck, 1976; Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962; Lewis, 1973; Murstein, 1967). Each implies that individuals progress toward long-term commitments by filtering various pieces of information concerning cognitive compatibility. The successful completion or passing through of a particular stage is accomplished through the
discovery (mutual) of similarities and value consensus. In some approaches, relational partners are viewed as rational buyers in the marriage marketplace, moving from a state of surface contact to a state of deep mutual involvement through an incremental exchange of rewards (Huesmann & Levinger, 1976; Levinger & Huesmann, 1980). An excellent critique of these approaches can be found in Bochner (1983).

Huston and his associates (Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, & Cate, 1981) developed a typology of courtship styles based on the time and rate trajectory of couples’ reports of relational progress. These styles were further discriminated by the frequency and character of the interaction within the couples as well as between the couples and others. Although we can not fully describe the courtship styles, one style is particularly striking. A couple type emerges marked by less positive affect and less companionship than other couples. Intriguingly, these couples resemble a type of married couple, called the “Separates,” identified in another theoretical perspective (Fitzpatrick, 1984). It appears that some couples begin marriage relatively disaffiliated and non-companionate yet holding traditional sex role ideologies (Huston et al., 1981).

Interaction in courtship has significant impact on early marriage outcomes. There is strong support for the sleeper effect (Markman, 1979, 1981). In other words, the effect of conflict during courtship does not show up until later in a marriage. Even serious conflict during courtship does not appear to affect a couple’s satisfaction with the relationship at the time but it does predict dissatisfaction with the partner and the marriage up to five years later (Kelly, Huston, & Cate, in press).

Transition to Parenthood. A major stage in the marital career is the transition toparenthood (Rossi, 1968). Strong pronatalist pressures exist in our society, and such pressures establish a closely defined link between marriage and parenthood (Peck & Senderowitz, 1974). Voluntarily childless couples are often viewed as selfish, unhappy, lonely, immature, and emotionally unstable (Pohlman, 1966), although these stereotypes may be fading (Veevers, 1981). Negative social sanctions are reserved for those couples who choose to have one child and thus reap many of the benefits and fewer of the burdens of child rearing. The transition to parenthood starts a family that should include two to four children (Aldous, 1978).

Important attitudinal changes begin to occur during pregnancy. Women begin reevaluating their parents along traditional lines, especially their own mothers (Arbeit, 1975). Pregnancy sets off a traditionalizing process, reinforced by the withdrawal of the wife from the workplace to await the birth of the child. Less equalitarian relationships between husbands and wives are one outcome of childbearing (Rossi, 1968). Expectant mothers become more introspective during pregnancy, and this serves to distance a husband and wife (Lamb, 1978a).

Much of the research focuses on the woman during pregnancy and later (Lamb, 1978a). The strongest predictor of a woman’s psychological adapta-

tion during pregnancy and throughout the first year of the infant’s life is the quality of her marriage. Women who are happily married have fewer physical symptoms during pregnancy and are substantially better adjusted at the time of childbirth than are women who are unhappily married. Marital adjustment does not, however, predict maternal adaptation (Grossman, Eichler, & Winickoff, 1980). During actual childbirth, the presence of a husband in the delivery room serves as an effective analgesic. During childbirth, when husbands talk to wives about the course of labor, her well-being, and topics unrelated to the childbirth, wives seem to experience less pain (Anderson & Standley, 1978; Henneborn & Cogan, 1975). Such analgesic effects warrant further investigation.

When another party is added to the family constellation, some change in the husband and wife dyad can be expected to occur. From one dyad, the family now contains three (husband-wife; father-child; mother-child). The birth of a child represents a 200 percent increase in the number of dyads in the family as well as the possibility of a triad. Thus new structural constraints are introduced into the family system. Change from an existing pattern may induce stress, crisis, and even dysfunction, yet change is often a necessary condition for developmental growth.

For many couples, the arrival of a child has a negative impact on their marital quality, especially for wives (LeMasters, 1957; LaRossa, 1977). The birth of the first child has even been called a “crisis” (LeMasters, 1957). Considering the birth of a baby as a crisis is an overstatement, although the event necessitates rather complex shifts in identity, role behavior, and communication (Cowan, Cowan, Coie, & Coie, 1978). The arrival of a child completes the move from equalitarian and less differentiated role patterns in a marriage into more traditional ones. One national probability sample indicated that after the birth of a first child, wives lose decision-making power in their relationships and the help of their husbands with housework. Not only did such self reported behaviors change, but the ideological beliefs of couples also took a turn toward traditionalism (Hoffman & Manis, 1978).

Levels of marital satisfaction change curvilinearly across the history of a marriage. For couples who stay married, general satisfaction decreases simultaneously with the arrival of the oldest child until he or she reaches adolescence. As children mature and leave home, satisfaction again increases, yet it never attains its early marriage high (Rollins & Galligan, 1978). The decline and rise of marital satisfaction may occur at various stages of the family career because of the decrease in companionship between husbands and wives. A decline in the frequency of positive companionship experiences with the spouse from the birth of a child through the preschool stage may account for the decrease in marital satisfaction during this period (Lerner & Spanier, 1978). The decrease in marital satisfaction during these years may be compensated for by the increase in satisfaction in the parental role. Children give couples a shared task, a common goal, and undoubtedly a topic for flagging marital conversations. A consideration of how various levels of
output variables of family processes compensate for one another would greatly expand our understanding of the family.

Separation and Divorce. Although it may seem curious to list separation and divorce as stages in the marital career, estimates on the divorce rate suggest between 30 to 40 percent of all marriages experience this stage (Thorton & Freedman, 1983). Even larger percentages of couples separate at some point in the marriage. Separation and divorce can be viewed as stages in a marital career not only because they occur frequently but also because they are viewed by individuals as serious crises involving major developmental changes. Most people marry, and marrying is associated with significant changes in the way we view ourselves, our partners, and our world. Consequently, the breakup (or potential break up) of this relationship is a serious crisis (Bloom, White, & Asher, 1979). In most scales of stress and illness, the death of a spouse, divorce, and marital separation receive the highest stress scores (Holmes & Rahe, 1976).

Today, few societal barriers exist to the breakup of a marriage. As the external barriers are removed, the internal barriers become paramount. The interpersonal and dyadic factors, such as companionship, emotional gratification, and communication, account for an increasingly high amount of the variance in marital satisfaction (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). There is, however, a dark side to this dependence on the internal barriers to relational disintegration. As more pressure is placed on internal factors, individuals increasingly examine their own reasons for remaining in a marriage. Such heavy justificatory burden on the internal contents of the relationships may turn the relationship sour (Berscheid & Campbell, 1981). Each partner watches the pulse of the relationship. Time and energy are spent discussing and assessing the state of the relationship. Such pulse watching leads to increased insecurity, for each knows that the connections in the marriage may be tenuous. Increased importance is thus placed on maintaining intense positive feelings for one’s spouse. Unfortunately for the longevity of many marriages, it is not only difficult to maintain a high level of intensity of feelings for anyone through time, but also relational vigilance increases negative feelings of jealousy and possessiveness (Berscheid & Campbell, 1981).

Divorce is not a single event but a series of legal, psychological, sexual, economic, and social events strung out over a period of time (Bohannan, 1970; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). One of the difficulties of studying divorce is that the legal fact is a poor marker for an interpersonal process. This legal step can occur at any number of places along a psychological continuum of relational dissolution. The separation that proceeds a divorce involves repeated distancing, partial reconciliation, new withdrawal, and eventual equilibrium for many couples (Weiss, 1975). This approach-avoidance occurs because love erodes before attachment fades (Weiss, 1975). The latter is a bonding to the other that gives rise to a feeling of ease when the other is accessible (Bowlby, 1972). Attachment explains why couples who are separating experience extreme distress even if both desired to separate.

These are stage theories concerning the dissolution of close relationships (Baxter, 1984; Bradford, 1980; Duck, 1982a, 1982b; Knapp, 1978; Lee, 1984). The most comprehensive model (Duck, 1982b) incorporates social and psychological factors into the process of relational termination. Like revisionist views of courtship (Bolton, 1961), disengagement is now conceptualized as a dialectical process that does not follow the same trajectory for all couples. The research on what individuals actually say during relational disintegration is nonexistent, although Miller and Parks (1982) have developed a taxonomy of disengagement strategies. Disengagement processes are difficult to examine as they occur. The procedures developed for retrospective accounts of courtship progress may be profitably adapted in this area (Huston et al., 1981).

What couples say to others is critical in the dissolution process. Six months after separation, women rehash and ruminate on the causes of the relationship disintegration (Harvey, Weber, Yarkin, & Stewart, 1982). Women relate dissolution to interpersonal problems rather than to the structural factors that men mention (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976). Called grave dressing (Duck, 1982b) or accounts (Harvey et al., 1982; Weiss, 1975), these statements are histories of a relationship that structure events in a narrative sequence to allocate blame for relationship failures. Such accounts bring the social context into the study of relationships. Theorists in other areas of family processes would be wise to follow this lead.

In considering marital dissolution, not only the stages through which a relationship passes but also patterned differences among individuals or couples (Kressel, Jaffee, Tuchman, Watson, & Deutsch, 1980) demand consideration. Kressel and his associates (1980) isolated types of divorcing couples. These couple types, demonstrating as they do particular patterns of affect and conflict, are similar to couples in ongoing marriages isolated in the relational typology (Fitzpatrick, 1984).

In this section, we have attempted to show how communication operates in a marriage. The similarity in some of the work across these disparate areas is striking. Three independent lines of investigation of marriage at three different points in time—courtship (Huston et al., 1981), marriage (Fitzpatrick, 1984), and divorce (Kressel et al., 1980)—yield remarkably similar results. From early in courtship, some couples seem to start their relationships as “Separates,” emotionally and psychologically less involved with one another. These Separate couples, who emerge in cross-sectional studies of marriage, tend not to communicate very much with one another and rarely engage in serious conflicts. Such a type of couple appears again in divorce mediation. From early in courtship, it appears that some couples do not develop the numerous interconnected sequences of interaction that Berscheid links to the experience of strong emotion in close relationships (Berscheid, 1983). Whether the couples who begin in this fashion are the ones who end this way, our current cross-sectional data cannot tell us. Undoubtedly, the process of relational growth and disintegration takes marked-
ly different paths for different couples. In the next section, we examine some of the issues typically studied concerning parent-child communication.

THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Early work on the relationship between parents and children can be termed social mold theories. These theories assume that the child is a passive partner in socialization, awaiting the molding of its parents (Hartup, 1978). With the realization that a child contributes to the marriage and the family, more child-centered theories and research emerge (Bell, 1968). Not only when they reach adolescence or adulthood but also as an infant, a neonate, or even in utero, children can influence a broad variety of family processes (Lerner & Spanier, 1978). The behavior of even the youngest child can stimulate, elicit, motivate, and reward the actions of parents. Currently, both the social mold and the child-centered orientations have been supplanted by a perspective that views parents and children as simultaneously and mutually influencing one another. Each serves as the stimulus for the other's behavior. In this section, we examine some of the major research efforts directed toward understanding this parent-child communication process.

Individual Social Behaviors

Research on individual social behaviors generally focuses on how parental message selection influences the development of a variety of characteristics in the child (Hess, 1981). Parental messages can be broadly characterized as support and control messages (Rollins & Thomas, 1979; Steinmetz, 1979).

Behaviors that make a child feel comfortable in the presence of a parent are support messages. These include praising, approving, encouraging, physical displays of affection, giving help, and cooperating with a child. Behaviors designed to gain compliance with the wishes of the parent are called control messages. Control messages include coercion, induction, and love withdrawal. Coercive messages focus on external reasons why the child should comply with the parent and involve physical punishment, the direct application of force, the deprivation of material objects or privileges, or the threat of these. Induction messages focus on the internal reasons why the child should comply with the parent and involve explanations, reasons, or pointing out the consequences of an act for the child or for others. Love withdrawal focuses on a combination of internal and external forces for compliance. These techniques indicate disapproval of the child's behavior with the implication that love will not be restored until the child does what the parent wishes. Love withdrawal is manifested by ignoring the child, isolating the child, explicit statements of rejection, or nonverbal behaviors signaling coldness or disappointment (Rollins & Thomas, 1979).

Relying on the impressive recent work of Steinmetz (1979) and Rollins and Thomas (1979), we summarize the empirical relationships between parental communication strategies and selected child outcomes, particularly aggression, dependency, cognitive development, conformity, moral development, creativity, and self-esteem. We sorted the relationships according to the sex of the interactants. Because a basic discrimination in definitions of the family surrounds age and sex, we did not want to speak of general parent-child patterns without first examining the individual dyadic combinations. Gender-based differences have been understudied in close relationships (Peplau, 1983), and ours was an attempt to remedy that situation.

The effect of supportive parental messages on children of all ages seems clear. Across all possible combinations of parent-child dyads (father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, mother-daughter), supportive messages lead to higher self-esteem, more conformity to the wishes of the parents in both young children and adolescents, and inhibition of aggression or antisocial behavior in a variety of settings. Rejection, the opposite of support, leads to greater dependency on the part of all children. With the exception of the mother-daughter dyad, supportive messages also facilitate the development of higher moral standards in children. Based on a careful examination of the research, there is little doubt that making a child feel loved, supported, and comfortable in the presence of a parent leads to the development of a large range of socially valued behaviors in the child.

The relationship between cognitive development and supportive parental communication holds clearly only in same-sex pairs. Supportive messages from a father lead to academic achievement, masculine sex-role identification, and cognitive development in a son. For mothers and daughters, an inverse relationship exists between supportive messages from a mother and a daughter's achievement in school. When the mother engages in positive and warm interactions with her daughter, she facilitates the daughter's cognitive development and feminine sex-role identification, yet curiously not her drive to succeed in school. This finding is our only indication of negative outcomes resulting from supportive communication messages. Perhaps supportive and loving messages from a mother cause a female child to reject external success as measured by school performance and to turn to more traditional activities. Alternately, the mothers in these dyads may have little ambition concerning their daughters' achievement in school.

The development of socially valued and prosocial behaviors in children is facilitated not only by the use of supportive messages but also by maternal responsiveness, the discussion and acceptance of feelings, and the reinforcement and modeling of prosocial behavior (Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980). A nurturant parent-child relationship is basic to the development of prosocial behavior in children (Hoffman, 1970). Because it reduces a child's needs, nurturance helps to increase positive orientations toward others and identification with the nurturant parent (Staub, 1978).
The relationship between extreme parental control strategies and child outcomes is also demonstrably clear based on the empirical research. Extreme control attempts such as physical punishment lead to aggression in virtually all children, and coercive attempts of any kind lead to less internalization of moral standards in children. Other more subtle forms of parental control do not necessarily lead to any obvious child outcomes. More research is needed in parental control strategies. The lack of theory-based discriminations of various forms of parental persuasion beyond the extremes of physical aggression has limited our understanding of parental control messages and child outcomes (deTurck, 1984).

Because families are defined by age and gender hierarchies, dyadic sex composition must be considered when studying the effects of parental message styles on children. It would be of great theoretical utility to link the input and performance variables that we have been discussing to the output variables in Table 15.1. Certain compliance-gaining procedures may work equally well in socializing a child to the wishes of a parent yet have remarkably different effects on family solidarity.

The research results on how the withdrawal of parental love actually affects child outcomes are very mixed. Because these messages involve the manipulation of affect to achieve an end, their operationalizations may have to be carefully delineated. The theoretical relationship between affect and power in intimate relationships needs greater attention from theorists. It stands to illuminate many facets of family life, not only child socialization. In any consideration of human relationships, affect is inextricably related to power (Waller, 1938). From the beginning of the parent-child relationship, there is a unique union of love and discipline, which makes socialization possible.

The research results on the use of induction techniques, that is, reasoning with one's child, are also mixed. The use of such a technique can be expected to vary in subtlety as the child develops cognitively (Applegate, Burke, Burleson, Delia, & Kline, 1983). Indeed, the ability of a mother or father to adjust his or her messages based on the developmental level of the child is paramount in all styles, not only the inductive one. Thus the neglect of developmental differences may be obscuring our understanding of how induction messages work in producing child outcomes.

Our discussion of parent-child communication has proceeded as if communication existed on only one level. Of course, communication occurs across many levels (Bateson, 1975). Messages that contradict one another across the various levels of communication are taken to be related to a variety of dysfunctional outcomes for families. Messages from different channels (verbal, prosodic, kinesic, facial, and so forth) may create a paradox by the simultaneous assertion of contradictory meanings. If this situation occurs many times, in an intense relationship in which partners cannot comment on the paradox or even escape the field, it constitutes a double bind (Abelès, 1976). Despite the importance of this construct in the interactional view, there is little empirical support that double binds actually lead to dysfunctional family outcomes (Olson, 1972). This construct is difficult to examine as it may be impossible to create double binds, given all of the previously named conditions, in any laboratory. Further, the most obvious pathology associated with the double bind, namely, schizophrenia, is now believed to have a neurochemical basis (Garmezy, 1974).

Despite the disappointing laboratory tests on double bind, studies on the consistency of verbal and nonverbal channels of communication continue to be viewed as valuable enterprises. There appear to be significant differences in the communication consistency of mothers of disturbed versus normal children (Bugental & Love, 1975). Specifically, mothers of disturbed children sent more inconsistent messages than mothers of normal children (mean age: 9; see Bugental, Love, Kaswan, & April, 1971). Most mothers may have "perfidious female faces" in that in both normal and disturbed families, mothers smiled regardless of the content of the messages they sent to their children (Bugental, 1974; Bugental, Love, & Gianetto, 1971). A key question remaining is when do children of varying ages begin to see and understand these communicative discrepancies.

Although intriguing, these results have not been replicated in five other studies (Jacob & Lessin, 1982). Although the examination of inconsistency in family communication continues to be a topic of importance for all interested in family processes, two oversights must be corrected in future research. First, developmental issues such as the age of the children must be considered. Children show developmental differences across a number of nonverbal recognition and encoding skills. These differences may be sex linked (Mayo & Henley, 1981). Research must thus take into account not only the developmental age of the child but also his or her sex. Second, more attention should be paid to theoretical models of the relationships among channels of communication. Communication channels carry differential levels of information for receivers. This area may be especially important in studying individuals who have interaction histories with one another such as family members. Third, across any age group, inconsistencies must reach a particular level before they are perceived by communicators (Atkinson & Allen, 1983). The psychological reality of channel inconsistency is a major point that must be considered in studies of family communication (Folger & Poole, 1980). Fourth, a consideration of recent functional approaches to the study of nonverbal communication may give the study of inconsistent family communication a needed theoretical transfusion (for example, Patterson, 1983).

Interpersonal Processes

As young as seven weeks, infants and their mothers have been observed in "proto-conversations" or interactive sequences characterized by eye gazing, face-to-face orientation, patterns of turn-taking, variations in vocal intonation,
and obvious mutual pleasure (Bateson, 1975; Stern, 1977). Researchers in
mother-infant interaction have developed elaborate and powerful models of
dyadic interaction to explain these processes. In these models, communica-
tion, in its most basic form, involves mutuality, intersubjectivity, and
reciprocity (Ryan, 1974).

Infants are predisposed to the development of primitive communication
skills. From early on, the behavior of an infant forms patterned, functional
units that are easy to recognize. The first communication from a baby is a cry.
Infants selectively attend to the world around them. They indicate a prefer-
ence for human faces over other shapes and look at faces and try to talk to
them rather than bottles or breasts (Bell, 1974). Infants also have preferences
for the human voice, and by the end of the first month can be quieted by soft,
high-pitched talking (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1971).

Care givers recognize these patterned units and assume that at least some
of them provide indications of what is happening inside the infant (Richards,
1974). They respond to the differential cries of an infant and identify three
types of cries: hunger, pain, or anger. Objectively, these cries differ in terms
of pitch, pattern, and intonation (Wass-Hockert, Lind, Vuorenkoski, Parten-
en, & Valarne, 1968; Wolff, 1971). The care giver helps the infant not only
to achieve appropriate levels of tension and arousal but also to organize the
behavior to which the care giver contingently responds (Sroufe, 1979). A
baby’s smiles, burps, and coos are responded to by an adult as turns in
conversation. Care givers use tag questions and other postcompleters to
pass the conversational turn to a baby (Snow, 1972). Indeed, the greater the
use of questions by the mother, the greater the mother’s desire to interact
reciprocally with her infant (Snow, 1977). Effective care givers even fill in
a turn for an inactive baby (Spieker, 1982) by acting as if the baby had
responded in the appropriate sequence.

Care givers adjust their speech when speaking to infants and children at
early stages of language acquisition. Mothers adjust their speech to young
infants to keep the conversation going and to engage the attention of the
infant (Kaye, 1980; Snow, 1977). With infants of six months or older, the
mother adjusts her speech by using syntactically simpler utterances in order
to make herself understood by the child. This adjustment helps both the
child’s understanding and general linguistic capacity (Bellinger, 1980).

“Baby talk” differs from other talk in prosody, in redundancy, and in
grammatical complexity (Wells & Robinson, 1982). The various features of
baby talk serve different and orthogonal functions. The clarification function
is served by the “comm register,” which includes the attention-getting
devices noted in “motherese” (Snow, 1977) and in the simplification of speech
and its prosodic characteristics. The expressive function is served by the “aff
register,” which is primarily verbal and includes the use of pet names, the
playful repetition of names, and the use of diminutives and endearments.
Because babies are both linguistically incompetent and typically inspire
affection, baby talk occurs in both comm and aff registers. These functions
may be extended to adult conversations. In families or close relationships,
those who are perceived as incompetent may periodically be addressed in the
comm register and those who inspire affection may be addressed at certain
times in the aff register. Recent research on care giver-elderly interaction
suggests that the elderly, during caretaking interactions in nursing homes,
are addressed in the comm register (Giles, 1984) and that spouses and lovers
tend to be addressed in the aff register (Hopper, Knapp, & Scott, 1981).

The interaction we have been describing takes place during the first six
months of an infant’s life. These interaction patterns set the stage for the
development of the attachment bond. Attachment is a tie that one person
forms to another specific person, binding them together in space and
enduring over time. An infant appears to become attached to the figure or
figures with whom he or she has the most interaction (Ainsworth, 1973;
Ainsworth & Bell, 1969). Attachment is indicated by behaviors that promote
proximity such as signaling behavior like crying, smiling, and vocalizing;
orienting behavior such as looking, moving toward, or following the other;
and active physical contact such as clinging or embracing.

The attachment bond between a mother and an infant predisposes the
infant to comply, at a later date, with the wishes of the mother. The
willfulness to be obedient rather than any understanding of the content of the
mother’s message emerges from the development of a secure attachment
bond in the dyad. Infants categorized as securely or anxiously attached to
their mothers at 18 months of age were followed at 24 months. Infants who
could employ their care givers as a secure base from which to explore and
who positively greeted their mothers following a stressful separation experi-
ence (or were comforted by her presence) displayed more skill in problem
solving and were more cooperative than were the less securely attached
toddlers (Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1982). Infants appear initially inclined to
be social and somewhat later ready to comply with the wishes of those persons
who are most significant in their environment (Stayton, Hogan, & Ainsworth,
1982). Compliance from the young occurs only when affect has been
established in the relationship.

Previous work on attachment placed primary emphasis on emotion. Recent
explanations have, however, assigned a central role to cognitive
factors. The appearance of separation anxiety between 8 and 12 months is
considered the behavioral manifestation of attachment. Separation distress
at the temporary (permanent) loss of the care giver occurs at this stage in
cognitive development because the infant can retrieve a schema for an event
that is not in the immediate visual field. The infant’s ability to recall stored
information, to retrieve a past schema, and to compare that schema to the
present information is now thought to lead to the emotional distress (Kagan,
1979).

In our discussion, we have shifted between the terms care giver and
mother. Most theories assume the primacy of the mother-infant bond
(Bowlby, 1972; Freud, 1949; Winnicott, 1964). In these theories, the mother is
The ability of an infant to form attachments to more than one primary figure has clear survival value (Mead, 1942). Infants form attachments to both fathers and mothers, although the nature of the interaction between infant and each parent may differ. Fathers engage in more play and mothers in more care-giving activities with an infant. Infants prefer the physical, nonintellectual, rough and tumble play initiated by fathers (Lamb, 1976a; Parke & O'Leary, 1976). How much nurturance and what type of nurturance fathers give to older children remain to be seen. That men can be nurturant has been clearly demonstrated. One major multinational study of men in public with children indicated that the touching, proximity, and visual contact maintained by men with male and female children did not differ from that exhibited by women (Mackey & Day, 1979). American fathers do not seem to mind child socializing yet they still reject child care (Slonum & Nye, 1976). Even cross-culturally, taking a child to the park is now an appropriate role for both fathers and mothers, yet changing a diaper is still women's work.

The interactions that facilitate attachment also facilitate the learning of language. Reciprocity (sensitivity to the partner) and intersubjectivity (experience of two persons with shared knowledge of the world) set the stage for the onset of intentional communication. Babies begin to look at a desired object, gesture and vocalize toward it, and alternate glances between the desired object and the care giver. The emergence at nine months of this intentional signaling is a major stage in language development (Bates, 1979; Bates, Camaioni, & Volterra, 1975). By developing a stable group of conventional gestures, babies are making the discovery that the objects they desire have names (Speiker, 1982). The similar focus on objects by the care giver and the infant helps the infant to learn words. Primitive communication, followed by attachment between infants and care givers, sets the stage not only for language learning but for most other facets of a child's development.

The study of family relationships has much to gain from the study of care giver-infant interaction. A life-span developmental approach to the study of attachment among family members would illuminate a major aspect of family process. Much can be learned from the research on infant attachment—both conceptually and methodologically. Debates arose in the infant literature with the realization that attachment did not demonstrate either individual stability or trait consistency across samples, situations, or time (Sroufe, 1979). The problem appeared to rest with the operationalization of attachment as a count of the duration or frequencies of attachment behaviors (Sroufe, 1979) rather than with any conceptual inadequacy. From this we have learned that in studying emotional phenomena, we have to look for stable categories of behavior rather than stable discrete behaviors. For a number of reasons, the infant may show one type of attachment behavior at two months but a very different type of attachment at 20 months (Sroufe, 1979). This differential behavioral display of the same underlying construct may occur because the child is continuing to develop sensory-motor skills between the time periods when the measurement occurs. Multiple measurements of constructs appear necessary in the study of affect in all social relationships (Fitzpatrick, 1981b).

In adult relationships, the manner in which certain affective states affect representations of the relationship is beginning to be researched (Fallis, 1984).

In this section, we have seen that parent-child communication is often studied at the level of an individual social process. The major lines of research on interpersonal processes in parent-child communication are limited primarily to the care giver-infant domain. Across both of these divisions, we begin to see a conceptual confusion between affect and power in the relationship of parents and children. Both parents and children use affect to achieve their persuasive goals; and power can create affect. In the next section, we turn to a consideration of one of the less frequently examined family dyads: the sibling relationship.

SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

Eighty percent of the population live the first third of their lives in families with siblings. The kinds of interactions that children have with their siblings have a profound influence on the personal happiness that they experience in the family growing up (Bowerman & Dobash, 1974). And early affective relationships between sibs appear to predict interaction between them in adulthood (Bank & Kahn, 1982a, 1982b).

Influenced by Freud (1949), much of the early literature on family interaction discussed the sibling relationship in terms of negative affect (Bossard & Boll, 1950). Children show signs of hostility, anxiety, and competition at the birth of a younger sibling (Cameron, 1963). Sibs tend to
compete in the family for the love, attention, and favor of one or both of the parents (Levy, 1937). This rivalry purportedly is much stronger when the age interval between children is four years or less (Koch, 1956). Some recent observational work in families finds no empirical support for this age interval hypothesis in the observed aggressive, imitative, or pro-social behaviors of children toward their close or far interval sibs (Abramovitch, Corter, & Lando, 1979; Abramovitch, Corter, & Peplar, 1980; Dunn & Kendrick, 1981).

During the beginning of the school years, however, increased positive behavior and decreased aggression to a widely spaced (much younger) sibling may appear (Minnett, Vandell, & Santrock, 1983). Whatever the degree of hostility between sibs, it may be resolved by consistent parental affection, the development of an attachment bond between siblings, and the socialization of aggression (Tsukada, 1979).

Other more positive aspects of the interaction between sibs have been given less attention. The possession of a sibling may make early socialization complete because siblings provide peer role models and training in cooperation, conflict management, and accommodation. They also offer to one another companionship, security, and love (Duberman, 1973). Indeed, siblings may create for one another very different environments within the family.

Individual Social Behaviors

The most extensive work that has been undertaken on sibling relationships examines the effects of birth order on personality development and achievement (Falbo, 1981; Toman, 1961). Characteristic personality traits for each birth order are described. Even the eventual marital adjustment of an individual is linked to position in the family of origin (Toman, 1961). It is entirely plausible that individual differences in tactics, aggression, sex-role preferences, and interests in latter-born children can be attributed to the processes of identification and modeling of older siblings. The conforming, achievement, and affiliative behaviors of only and first-born children may be attributed to that child's special relationship to the parents (Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970). Very few studies of the interaction between parents and children or between siblings have been conducted to test these ideas. Much of this research has been motivated by curiosity rather than theory. Arguing that a structural subposition in a family unit leads to given personality outcomes for an individual leaves the why question unanswered. Some appreciation of the psychological or communication conditions that occur when an individual occupies a birth-order position (Schvaneveldt & Ihinger, 1979) is necessary to understand why a specific birth position in a family leads to given outcomes for a family member. Furthermore, serious methodological flaws must be corrected in these studies (Schooler, 1972).

Communication in Kin Relationships

Stage in family development, leave most of the empirical findings on this topic in confusion. To sort through these findings, meta-analysis may yield some promising results (for example, Hyde, 1984).

Interpersonal Processes

Sibling status variables of age, birth order, birth interval, and sex do not account adequately for sibling differences (Scarr & Grajek, 1982). Dunn (1983) argues that these constructs may be inadequate to account for sibling behavior because they reference complementary behaviors (A is older than B) in an attempt to predict reciprocal behaviors (A and B are mutually aggressive). Conceptual discriminations between peer, sibling, and parent-child interaction in terms of reciprocity and complementarity would help. Although recent theoretical interest in the development and maintenance of peer relationships in children may not be directly applicable to the study of sibs (for example, Hartup, 1978; La Gaipa, 1981), valuable lines of research could examine the nature of differences in peer and sibling interactions.

Peer interactions are reciprocal interactions in that each can understand the reasoning and perspective of the other. Parent-child interactions are complementary interactions in that the behavior of each differs from but fits that of the other. Sibling relationships include the direct reciprocity of peers because of their intensity, familiarity, intimacy, and the recognition and sharing of interests. The frequent imitation by siblings of the actions of one another, the demonstration of joy and excitement in coaction sequences, and the willingness of each to engage in prosocial and comforting actions are examples of reciprocity of interaction between sibling pairs. Given the age differences between sibs, these relationships also have aspects of the parent-child relationship (Dunn, 1983, pp. 788-789). Care giving, teaching, attachment, and language are aspects of inherent complementarity in sibships.

Four-year-olds are capable of making speech adjustments to two-year-olds (Shatz & Gelman, 1977) and can adjust their communication to dolls representing others (Sachs & Devin, 1976). All the two- and three-year-olds studied (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982) made systematic adjustments in speaking to their fourteen-month-old siblings. Older sibs tend to clarify their speech for their conversational partner, but only those older sibs who had particularly warm relationships with the infants used expressive linguistic features. Conversational turns in these sibling interactions were shorter than those of the mother with the infant and were not responded to as strongly by the infant. Both mother and infant attempted to maintain the attention of the other, whereas sibling-infant turns were primarily nonverbal sequences such as alternate imitations of one another over a shorter span of time.

Comparisons of the interaction of 4- to 8-year-old children with parents and with sibs indicated that the interaction behavior of a target child was remarkably different with parents versus siblings (Baskett & Johnson, 1982).
Interactions with the parent were more numerous and varied than were those with a sibling. Children talked, laughed, and touched the parents more and were more compliant with their wishes. Undesirable behaviors directed to parents seemed designed primarily to draw attention (for example, whining, demands for attention, and so forth). The only pro-social behavior that occurred more frequently in sibling interaction than in parent-child interaction was that children tended to play or work with one another more. In general, brothers and sisters used more physical aggression, yelling, hitting, and negative commands with one another than did with parents. Regardless of the state of the relationship between the sibs, the sibs preferred interacting with a parent to interacting with their sib.

Preschool-age children both offer their toys and talk to their 18-month-old sibs. The toddlers watch and imitate the older children and take over the toys the older child abandoned (Lamb, 1978b). Both same- and mixed-sex sibling dyads of close and far spacing interact a great deal. Once a minute, in this study, a sib initiates or responds to the other member of the dyad. Older children in each pair initiate most (84 percent) of the antagonistic acts, regardless of the sex or age differences among the dyads, and most of the pro-social acts as well. Younger children initiate most of the imitative behaviors in both same- and mixed-sex dyads. In same-sex dyads, older boys are more physically aggressive than older girls. Girls tend to initiate more pro-social acts and respond positively to the pro-social acts of a sister (Abramovitch et al., 1979, 1980).

Eighteen months later a subset of the same-sibling pairs (mixed and same sex) was observed. Their ages ranged from three years to seven years and as before they were categorized according to a small age spacing (1 to 2 years) or a large age spacing (2.5 to 4 years). The interaction patterns among the children were approximately the same. Older children engaged in more cooperation, help, and praise. Although older children initiated interaction more often, the younger child maintained the interaction by reciprocating pro-social behavior, submitting to aggressive behavior, and imitating his or her siblings. As children got older, they tended to increase the number of pro-social acts in their sibling contacts. Yet there also was an increase in mixed-sex antagonism and a decrease in mixed-sex imitation. The occurrence of these sex differences in the interactive behaviors of siblings may indicate the beginning of sex typing (Peplar, Abramovitch, & Corter, 1981).

Children as young as 4 years old serve as attachment figures for siblings. Over 52 percent of one sample of young children were active and effective in caring for their younger siblings who were distressed when the mother left the room. Although infants may prefer a maternal attachment figure (for example, Lamb, 1978b), infants allow themselves to be comforted by a sibling. With strangers, infants also seem to use the sibling as an attachment figure and a secure base from which to explore (Stewart, 1983).

Little work has been done on the interaction patterns of older sibling pairs. The majority of adolescents say they are close to their sibs. Adolescent females report more affect toward their sibs than do males; same-sex sibs are preferred; and younger children have stronger affect toward older sibs than vice versa. In addition, affect decreases with age and is stronger in families with two children (Bowerman & Dobash, 1974). The sib relationship with the greatest contrast in feeling, and hence the most at risk for conflict, is the older brother-younger sister relationship. The least contrast in feeling and the least at risk for conflict is the older sister-younger brother relationship.

More than peers or even other family members, siblings are accessible to one another during the entire length of the developmentally formative years. They share time, space, and personal history to a degree unlikely in peer relationships (Bank & Kahn, 1982a, 1982b). Perhaps more importantly, siblings influence one another at every stage in the development of their personal identities. Such influence may be accomplished through the social comparison process, which specifically occurs in sibling but not necessarily in peer interactions (Tesser, 1980). Sibs tend to compare themselves to one another on a number of dimensions not limited to attractiveness, intelligence, accomplishments, and so forth. Finally, we may turn to our sibs later in life in times of family crises, such as divorce (Ambrose, Harper, & Pemberton, 1983). Indeed, at the end of our lives, our living companions and our best friends will often turn out to be our sibs.

In this section, we have indicted the individual social process research on sibling relationships for its theoretical and methodological weaknesses. In the study of interpersonal processes of siblings in the family, systematic research efforts are just beginning. As a consequence, these efforts are primarily aimed at describing the interaction process in different age and sex-sibling pairs. The mapping of these interaction patterns needs to be supplanted with theoretical models explicating why the patterns emerge. Such efforts are vital to an understanding of family processes not only with younger children but also across the life span of the individual and the family.

**THE FAMILY AS A UNIT**

Riskin and Faunce's (1972) observation that the least studied family unit was the family itself still holds today. Most of the research on the family involves studying the husband-wife or mother-child dyads. Although some research does consider triads or even a four-person family group, relatively little research effort is directed at the whole family. The major paradigm guiding research on the family as a unit was that which linked disturbed family communication processes to psychological and social deviance outcomes for offspring. Such a perspective dates to at least the 1950s. Bateson's group at Palo Alto, Bowen and Wynne at NIMH, Lidz and his associates at Yale, and
Ackerman's research group at the Family Mental Health Clinic in New York were independently arriving at the conclusion that observable, ongoing family interaction patterns could be directly linked to outcomes for children (Raush et al., 1979).

When the family is studied as a unit, the research involves bringing families together to discuss a problem or to engage in a task that allows the family to interact (Bochner, 1974). The interaction of the family is then transcribed and some verbal and/or nonverbal coding scheme is applied to the material. The purpose of the research is usually to discriminate functional from dysfunctional families on the basis of their interaction patterns. Whereas work in the early 1960s concentrated on the differences between normal and schizophrenic families (see the review by Jacob, 1975), research in the 1970s branched out to include abusive and neglectful families (for example, Burgess & Conger, 1978); families with an abnormally aggressive (for example, Patterson, 1976) or delinquent child (for example, Alexander, 1973); or an alcoholic parent (for example, Mead & Campbell, 1972). Overall, researchers have found that clinic-referred children and adolescents are likely to come from families in which positive, nurturant, and supportive behaviors occur at depressed rates whereas noxious, aversive, or negative interactions are relatively frequent (Conger, 1981, 1983). Although some research was conducted to see how normal families of various levels of functioning interacted (for example, Lewis et al., 1976; Loeb, 1975), most family research explores the interaction differences between healthy and unhealthy families. The differences between these two types are expected to outweigh the differences within these types.

In the 1980s, the orientation of mapping interaction differences in disturbed and nondisturbed families continues (for example, Reiss, 1981). More concern is shown, however, for describing normal family processes in a range of different temporal, structural, and sociocultural contexts (Walsh, 1982). Developmental researchers are also beginning to study "normal" family triads, particularly mother, father, and infant (Parke, 1979). A consideration of the triad reveals that there are at least nine different direct and indirect ways that the interaction in any triad can be modified (Parke, 1979). Consider the parents P1 and P2. One could examine the impact of (1) P1's modification of P2's behavior on the child; (2) P2's modification of P1's behavior on the child; (3) P1-child relationship on P2-child interaction; (4) P2-child relationship on P1-child interaction; (5) P1's modification of child's behavior on P2-child interaction; (6) P2's modification of child's behavior on P1-child interaction; (7) P1-child relationship on P1-P2 relationship; (8) P2-child relationship on P1-P2 relationship; and (9) P1-P2 relationship on the child. Each of these nine ways that interaction can be studied in a triad (and generalizations beyond to the four- and five-person family) are important pieces of the puzzle of family process. These potential relationship linkages have not been as yet examined in any great detail.

In the next sections, we consider the work that has been done on interpersonal processes in healthy family units. This work is relatively new and indicates an important trend for future studies of family communication. Because there is so little empirical research mapping and comparing individual social behaviors of the family as a unit (for an exception, see Olson et al., 1983), the next section primarily examines the interpersonal processes within selected family triads. For theoretical and pragmatic reasons, we need to know far more about the range and diversity of the functioning of the family as a unit before we can understand or recognize dysfunctional family interaction patterns have indirect effects as well. The intervention of a mother in sibling quarrels has been linked to differences in the frequency of hostile behavior between siblings three months later (Kendrick & Dunn, 1982). When the second born was eight-months-old, mothers prohibited a significantly larger number of physical quarrels than they did six months later. When mothers frequently restrained or punished the physical quarrelind behavior of first-born sons, these boys responded more aggressively six months later to their sibs. The pattern of first-born daughters was exactly opposite (Dunn 1983).

Father-Mother-Infant Triads

The relationship between spouses appears to have an effect on how the infant is treated. In general, the greater the negative affect between the husband and wife, the greater the negative affect directed toward the infant (Pederson, Anderson, & Cain, 1977).

Parent-infant interaction is affected by the presence of the other parent. Mothers interact and smile more at their infants alone than they do in the presence of the fathers; fathers engage in those activities with the infant only when the mother is present (Parke & O'Leary, 1976). The overall quality of mother-infant interaction appears to be decreased by the presence of the father (Clarke-Stewart, 1982; Parke & O'Leary, 1976). Yet it appears that the quality of the father-infant interaction is higher when the mother is present. To the degree that this finding generalizes to other family dyads at different ages of the child, the radical shift in interactional quality with the addition of the father to the mother-child dyad will have intriguing implications for models of family communication. It may be that there is an inherent limitation...
in the amount and quantity of affect that can be expressed in these family tridias. Infants at both 8 and 13 months appear to be equally attached to both mothers and fathers. Infants prefer their fathers, however, and direct a greater number of affiliative behaviors (smiling, laughing, looking) toward fathers than mothers. The question of the differential strength of the attachment of an infant to mothers and fathers is still an open one (Parke, 1979). The importance of studying the family as a unit, especially the father-infant-mother triad, is viewed as a promising direction for future research (Parke & Asher, 1983). Such research makes important conceptual distinctions between attachment and affiliation in human relationships.

Father-Mother-Young Child Triad

There is a strong relationship between parental discord and negative child outcomes. The observation of family interaction in structured situations indicated that unhappily married parents directed more negative behaviors toward their child and were more likely to have children with severe behavior problems (Johnson & Lobitz, 1974). Furthermore, in a free interaction task, problem family members provided fewer positive and more aversive consequences for pro-social behavior and more positive and fewer aversive consequences for deviant behavior than did nonproblem families (Conger, 1983).

Not only do problem families exhibit more negativity than nonproblem families, but there also appears to be more negativity overall in families than in stranger groups. Mothers appear to use more negative sanctions with their own children and more positive, encouraging statements with other children as they supervise the performance of a task (Halverson & Waldrop, 1970). Children are more obedient to strangers than to their mothers and show greater task performance with strangers (Landauer, Carlsmith, & Lepper, 1970). In comparing the interactions of middle- and lower-class families with 11- and 16-year-old boys, Jacob (1974) found that both social class and age of child significantly changed both the patterns of conflict and dominance in the triad. Specifically, families with an 11-year-old expressed greater disagreement with members than did families with a 16-year-old. Middle-class families talked more and interrupted one another more successfully than did lower-class families. Sixteen-year-old sons gained in influence in these family triads; in middle-class families this was at the expense of the mother, whereas in lower-class families such influence gain was at the expense of the father.

Father-Mother-Older Child

In his review of 57 family interaction studies composed of both triadic (33 studies) and quadradic (24 studies) interaction designs, Jacob (1975) systematically divides the studies into those with quantitative and qualitative measures of affect, dominance, communication clarity, and conflict. He shows that no reliable differences can be uncovered from the empirical research. Methodological problems in these works abound, not the least of which is the noncomparability of the studies in terms of age, sex, and even number of family members present during an interaction (Jacob, 1975). The within-group variability was too high in the samples of disturbed families. For example, the ages of the schizophrenic children in the same study might range from 12 to 47. In addition, no attempt is made to consider the possible within-group variability in the “normal” families against whom the dysfunctional are compared. Without any controls on the samples, these normal families can be expected to exhibit different patterns (Olson et al., 1983).

A program of research comparing normal and disturbed families that stands out for its theoretical and methodological sophistication is that of Reiss and his colleagues (Reiss, 1981a, 1981b). Believing that theories of the family built around impulse, affect, or power have fared badly in explaining or predicting family behavior, Reiss (1981) has developed a model emphasizing the families’ construction of reality. Families are said to differ along three dimensions: (1) their experience of the world as ordered; (2) their belief in the world as open, accessible, or accommodating; and (3) their experience of novelty in the world. This program of research is of special importance to communication researchers for two reasons. First, a family’s construction of social reality is represented in the interaction of family members with one another. The social construction of reality is indicated by the lexical speech, the nonlexical speech, and the nonverbal behavior of family members as it is organized into recurring patterns. Second, the model offers a rigorous communication explanation for how parental abnormalities lead to deficiencies in offspring.

In this section, we have seen that the interaction between any two family members can be affected in a variety of direct and indirect ways by the presence and behavior of a third person (Holde, 1979). Although this point is often acknowledged by theorists, very little systematic research has addressed this question. The research that we have reviewed points to major interaction differences when the dyad becomes a triad. One of the greatest difficulties in this research (apart from its scarcity) is how rarely these interactional differences are connected to major family outcomes. When we undertake such research in the future, it should be in the interest of linking interaction to a variety of important theoretical outcomes. Although the proper domain of communication research is the study of messages, these messages must be connected to the theoretically relevant internal and output family process concepts.

CONCLUSION

In treating a subject as broad as kinship relations, it is helpful to read a number of social science literatures and attempt to draw parallels among
these areas. This is too rarely done by social scientists. The purpose of this review was to give the reader a sense of the range of questions that have been asked about communication in families. Although not comprehensive in coverage, the review does establish a fundamental question for the study of communication in kin groups. That is, in each of the subsystems of the family, how do the input variables (Figure 15.1) affect performance and consequently lead to particular outputs? Throughout the review, we have seen that scholars in various traditions have taken pieces of this question. Some have been concerned only with the performance variables, rarely linking these to major family outcomes. As Cappella (1984) has argued, extensive analyses of interaction sequences, although not without their descriptive charms, do not yield much information about potential connections among important concepts. When a link is made, it is usually between a performance and an output variable with little consideration of internal variables. Researchers, for example, typically relate interaction patterns to levels of marital satisfaction (Ting-Toomey, 1983).

In the field of communication the relationships among the internal, performance, and output variables have been largely ignored. We usually consider only a very limited number of family outputs. Marital processes have demonstrated effects on child outcomes, yet it would be rare to see in a communication study any variables linked to marital communication other than those that represent marital quality. As our research into family processes expands so it is hoped will our concern for alternative output variables. It is also interesting to note that only marital and parental satisfaction are considered in Table 15.1. We remind scholars that children, even the very young, are capable of qualitatively assessing their family relationships, including the job being done by their parents.

Twenty years ago, Haley (1963) argued that our theories of family process were stymied by a lack of dyadic-level constructs. This is no longer true, for a variety of such concepts appear in the kinship literature. Naturally, the names of what are actually the same concepts often differ or perversely different concepts often have the same name. Although this confusion is to be expected when researchers come from different academic disciplines, it cannot be tolerated. Take, for example, the concept of complementarity. In the sibling literature, this concept has a decidedly cognitive flavor, for it is defined as not sharing the same point of view (Dunn, 1983). In the marital literature, complementarity has a decidedly behavioristic tinge, for it is the exchange of maximally different control messages (Millar & Rogers, 1976). The area of communication in kinship relations would greatly benefit from a series of concept explications that would allow theorists to draw together much disparate literature (see, for example, Bochner & Krueger, 1979). The move by Lewis and Spanier (1979), treating the numerous marital satisfaction concepts as all tapping marital quality (a new one), was an important breakthrough in understanding the role of communication in marital processes. Because many of the dyadic-level concepts are actually communication constructs (reciprocity, symmetry, dominance, affiliation, control, and so forth), such explications will help in theory-building efforts in interpersonal communication.

Our review of the kinship literature suggests directions for new research and theory. Few studies consider more than one family dyad at a time, and most of the research energy is spent on husbands and wives. Certainly, sibling pairs are still underresearched (Irish, 1964), and the similarities and differences between siblings and peers will become an important topic in the next decade of research. In addition to an expansion of the family dyads and triads that are studied, greater care will be paid to sampling not only actors (family dyads or units) but also behaviors and contexts. The need for well-designed laboratory studies of family interaction is apparent. Given the difficulty of drawing careful samples of family dyads and triads, more social scientists will turn to meta-analysis procedures to make sense out of the knowledge base already accumulated (Glass, McGraw, & Smith, 1981). In doing such analyses, attention must be paid to the fact that much of what we know about given areas of family life emerges from the analysis and reanalysis of the same data set. Some carefully designed work would be useful in an analysis of this literature.

We suggest a life-span developmental approach to three major concepts isolated in this review: attachment, affiliation, and control. Although we see these concepts discussed again and again across the family subsystems, few theorists explicitly acknowledge the relationships among them. For all its members, the family represents a curious combination of love and control. Whether the dyad be a dating pair in which romance conceals an ongoing power struggle between males and females that requires the control of one's emotions (Waller, 1938), a married couple arguing over a serious issue, or a parent trying to socialize a child, attachment and affiliation are inextricably bound up with control in intimate relationships. Extensive interaction with family members and close physical proximity lead to the development of an attachment bond. In human development, the attachment bond predates affiliation and in human relationships seems to outlast it (Weiss, 1975).

There is a legitimate monopoly of coercion in family life, with each member attempting to control the attitudes, behaviors, and feelings of the other. This control is rarely active without a high degree of affect (positive and negative) in family interactions. Love is used in the service of control and control is used in the service of love in family life. Babies are obedient months later because parents showed their love and concern earlier and an attachment bond between parents and child developed. The withdrawal of love is a control technique used by parents (and by children) to gain compliance. Dominance can be defined as the asymmetrical response of one spouse to the emotional displays of another. Repeatedly, research shows that love and control

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operate simultaneously in family life. Explicit theoretical statements about the expected relationships among these constructs across the life span are needed.

One immediate requirement of a life-span developmental approach to the study of these concepts is a description of clusters of behaviors that represent these constructs and are hypothesized to change over time in family life. The operationalizations of these constructs can thus be sensitive to the developmental changes in individuals and in the family. Attachment implies accessibility, and the manner in which an infant demonstrates the level of accessibility that he or she wants from adults around him or her is different than that needed by a toddler, a spouse, or a divorcing partner.

Such operationalizations need not ignore self-reports, for these are important assessments of the views of family members on their interactional processes. Although there are a number of steps that can be taken to improve self-report measures (Indvik, 1980), an innovation in family studies would be a consideration of the different perspectives that family members have on the same issues. Even when using well-designed measures, the perspectives of family members may be expected to differ (Duck & Sant, 1983). Multiple perspectives should be of primary concern to communication theorists.

Measurement of these important constructs must move beyond observations of behavior in the presence of target others to an examination of pattern and sequence in family interaction. Complex interactional models of family processes need to be tested. The results of these models should include frequency data, simultaneous behaviors, tests of interactional structure through time, and sequential analysis. Reporting findings in this manner (for example, Gottman, 1979; Sillars, 1980; Williamson, 1983) allows numerous connections to be built with other programs of research. This type of methodological reporting will also prove useful in examining the psychological reality of communication for family members. It is possible that family members themselves count frequencies of behavior and not complex interactional sequences when assessing their relationships. Individuals in ongoing relationships may not be able to see the patterns in which they are enmeshed even though these patterns actually predict certain classes of outcomes in family life.

Models of interaction are incomplete without some consideration of cognitive or interpretative processes (Planalp, 1984). Indeed, it would be of major conceptual importance for theorists to link the interactional and cognitive perspectives. To accomplish this link for family systems, two points must be taken into account. First, major cognitive developmental differences separate not only parents and children but also siblings only a few years apart in age. Second, the study of interaction and the study of cognition are radically different in levels of abstraction. Thus the rules of correspondence between these levels must be specified. Third, to code the interaction that occurs among family members without concern for the meaning that these individuals are assigning to these messages is as futile as to present messages to intimates out of the stream of interaction.

Innumerable pronouncements have been made about the modern family and its alleged demise. Despite changes in traditional family patterns, Americans consistently report that a happy marriage and a good family are the most important aspects of life (Thornton & Freedman, 1983). The study of communication in the family will become a major part of interpersonal communication theory and research in the next decade not only because the family is of import to the society at large but it also presents an interesting context in which to pursue important questions about human communication.

NOTES

1. For example, only 26 references are directly made to communication in the over 800 page authoritative two-volume series on the most recent theories regarding the family (Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979a, 1979b). In the first three volumes of Personal Relationships (Duck & Gilmour, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c), only six references in 850 pages were made to communication, although the fourth volume (Duck, 1982a) does contain one essay on communication in dissolving relationships.

2. This chart is essentially an analytical device isolating the central factors employed in the theoretical approaches to the study of kin relationships. Theories that employ a consensual approach would tend to see less of a conceptual differentiation between internal and performance factors (Poole, McPhee, & Sebold, 1982). For example, role differentiation would not exist separate and apart from its instantiation in the ongoing conflict or problem-solving activities of a couple or a family.

3. All these output measures are clearly value laden. It is clearly a value of the society that individuals be satisfied in relationships and that children achieve the same (or higher) status as their parents. The concept of family functioning and normalcy is a different order of value orientation because it is hidden in the conceptual arguments of the theorist. Our point here is only to consider the nature of the assumptions of the theorists studying adequacy of family functioning.

4. The system analogy reminds us of the fundamental law of family interaction (Bossard, 1956, p. 253). That is, the number of reciprocal relationships or dyads (X) in a family with a given number of members (Y): X = Y(Y - 1)/2. Consequently, a family with 7 children has 36 possible dyadic combinations. Even the proverbial two-child family has six dyadic links. This equation ignores the possibility of potential for triads and larger size combinations. All of these should be considered for a complete theory of the family, yet adding or subtracting even one family member has dramatic implications for the structure of family interactions (Broderick & Smith, 1979).

5. These couples were labeled enmeshed, autistic, direct conflict, and disengaged conflict. The enmeshed couples evidenced high ambivalence, communication, and conflict about the divorce, whereas the autistic couples showed high ambivalence but had little explicit conflict. The direct conflict couples engaged in open conflict and communication about the divorce decision but at somewhat lower levels of intensity than the enmeshed type. The disengaged couples had limited communication and conflict.

6. The selection of parental message strategies for dealing with children is strongly influenced by the parent's place in the social stratification structure (Gecas, 1979). Although socioeconomic status has a direct effect on a variety of parental message selection strategies (Bernstein, 1971), we limit ourselves to the impact of parental communication on a variety of intellectual, social, and emotional outcomes for children. We have limited ourselves to these variables in conformity to Table 15.1, which emphasizes endogenous rather than exogenous variables.

7. As data for the generalizations we offer, we reexamined the charts constructed by Rolls and Thomas (1979) and Steinmetz (1979). In many cases, we found the decision rules on which
they based their empirical generalizations about the parent-child dyads too liberal. They tended to
follow a simple majority rule or tally system in examining the research. We reanalyzed the
charts based on more stringent criteria. No subset of studies could indicate that the relationship
between the variables was in the opposite direction. Furthermore, we examined separately all
studies of various sex of parent and sex of child combinations.
8. Few of the studies that Dunn (1983) listed, however, actually mathematically examined the
reciprocal or complementary structure of the interaction. Indeed, the frequencies or rates of
social behaviors analyzed in these studies are inadequate for summarizing social interaction over
time (Gottman & Ringland, 1981).
9. For a critique of this review, see Doane (1978a). For a response to that critique, see Jacob

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