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The Relationship Between Family Communication Patterns
and an Individual's Emotional Intelligence.

Priscilla Osredkar

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University of Portland

Department of Communication Studies

Abstract:

Emotional intelligence affects almost all areas of life. The intention of this study is to better understand if other factors are associated with one's level of emotional intelligence. This study in particular focuses on the relationship between Family Communication Patterns (FCP), emotional intelligence and direct personalization of conflict, an aspect of Taking Conflict Personally (TCP). Fifty-one participants from a city in the northwest region of the United States were analyzed in this study. This study found that direct personalization and a family communication pattern that emphasized conversation were both related to aspects of emotional intelligence.

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1. Introduction

In Goleman's book (1995, 2006) *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, he addresses the fact that IQ is no longer the determinate of one's success. He asserts that emotional intelligence is as essential as IQ in anticipating achievement for an individual later in life (Goleman, 1995, 2006). Goleman (1995, 2006) goes even further to suggest that the way in which society is currently framed, we are primarily taught informational material up through secondary education. Everything from social to emotional knowledge has been left out for children to learn on their own. Without such critical preparation, the sole responsibility for a formation of such knowledge falls onto the family (Goleman, 1995, 2006). If one's family of origin impacts one's emotional intelligence, we could benefit on learning more about family communication style and its effects on emotional intelligence. An insufficient amount of research has explored the relationship between family communication, emotional intelligence, and the adult child. This study strives to bring us closer to understanding the relationship between the communication patterns of one's family-of-origin and the individual's emotional intelligence. For exploratory purposes the study briefly addresses family communication and its impact on "taking conflict personally"

2. Literature Review

2.1 Family Communication Patterns (FCP)

2. 1. 1. Conversation Orientation and Conformity Orientation and Four Types of FCP

Families differ in the extent to which they encourage conversation and the extent to which they demand conformity to family values. We will examine these phenomena together but first explore the early research in these areas. McLeod and Chaffee (1972) initially conceptualized the notion of socio-oriented and concept-oriented families, which later became conversation orientation and conformity orientation typologies.

Conversation orientation refers to whether or not the family encourages or discourages communication about the members' feelings, emotions, opinions and/or beliefs.

Conformity orientation assesses the degree to which adherence to family norms and beliefs are required. If parents encourage their children to possess the same beliefs and opinions as they do, the family would be categorized on high conformity orientation (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994).

Building on McLeod and Chaffee's (1972) work, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) developed an extensive classification of Family Communication Patterns (FCP) dividing the family dynamic into four categories that stem from previous ideas of conversation- and conformity orientations. The four categories are comprised of Consensual (high conversation and high conformity), Pluralistic (high conversation and low conformity), Protective (low conversation and high conformity) and Laissez-Faire families (low conversation and low conformity). For clarification, these terms will be explained further.

According to Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994), consensual families encourage conversation, but stress the agreement of family beliefs and norms. Children in these families may agree, pretend to agree, or are submissive. Pluralistic families encourage

communication whether or not the children's ideas differ or match the family's values. Protective families do not communicate much about their ideas, but obedience is expected and reinforced. Children of such families are not equipped to form their own strong beliefs; and therefore, are easily persuaded by other ideas whether within the family or outside of the family. Lastly, Laissez-faire families are those who have little interaction between members. Outsiders to the family easily influence the ideas of children in laissez-faire families (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). Now that terms have been clearly defined, we will look at research findings related to the Fitzpatrick-Ritchie model.

Research has shown that both conversation- and conformity oriented families have significant impact on members through relational interactions. Specifically, they shape the worldview of their children through verbal and nonverbal behavior (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Schrodtt et al., 2008). The primary function of the family is to provide a supportive environment for development (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) found that enforcing conformity and avoiding hostile topics helped families avoid conflict. Whether this is healthy for the family or is not known. Schrodtt, Witt and Messersmith (2008) found that children with high conversation orientation are more likely than children with low conversation orientation to develop interpersonal skills for intimate relationships and abilities that are beneficial for conflict management. Overall, families with high conversation tend to have and foster better interpersonal communication skills for a variety of circumstances (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994).

In addition, FCP is the starting point for learned behavior involving communication, which includes conflict styles, and is also a contributor to psychological

outcomes such as depression and anxiety (as cited in Schrodt et al., 2008). This implies that psychological outcomes are not just genetic, but a consequence of the nurturing, or lack thereof, in an individual's family. Yet, even adults who have suffered from a horrible childhood experiences in a protective family environment had the capacity to view an accurate image of the family later on. Those individuals were able to speak of and positive and negative aspects, which led them to better outcomes (as cited in Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). Thus, FCP has the capability of significantly affecting an individual's outcomes in life because of the interaction between members of their family-of-origin. Taken together, research on FCP shows that patterns are related to an individual's interaction style and overall outlook on life. We turn now to examine research on FCP and emotional intelligence.

2. 1. 2. Conversation Orientation Applied to Emotional Intelligence

Keaton and Kelly (2008) found that an increase in conversation orientation correlated to an increased emotional intelligence. In their article, they state, "children develop the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions if they are raised in families with open communication and discussion about feelings" (Keaton & Kelly, 2008, p. 112). This finding is important because children learn from these discussions of feelings that they have with their parents how they are to appropriately utilize emotion in different circumstances (as cited in Keaton & Kelly, 2008). High conversation orientation, again, appears to foster a positive learning environment for children, but in this case particularly, the formation of understanding emotions. On the other side of the spectrum, low conversation orientation also shapes how children learn to handle emotions. Children

learn that they do not need to talk about their feelings and they “may infer that their emotions are not important and are to be kept to oneself” (Keaton & Kelly, 2008, p. 112). Even though it is not explicitly mentioned, lack of verbalization is a form of communication. Children learn implicitly that their feelings and emotions are irrelevant and thus, learn not to share them.

Keaton and Kelly (2008) did not find any correlation of conformity orientation with emotional intelligence. Lam and Kirby (2002) concur suggesting that conformity orientation has more to do with beliefs and opinions rather than the ability to understand emotions.). Unless a belief is related to specific emotion, conformity orientation would not overlap with emotional intelligence.

2. 2 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been interpreted differently among researchers; thus, it has been split into two categories: ability and trait emotional intelligence. Almost every source has its own way of distinguishing between the two, but the main differences are in their measurement. Ability emotional intelligence is the observed skill an individual has in relation to emotion. Typically, ability emotional intelligence is viewed “as a traditional intelligence and is comprised of a set of skills that combines emotion with cognition” (as cited in Stough, Sarklofske, & Parker, 2009, p. 43). A challenge of the ability approach is that measuring actual ability has proven difficult. In contrast, the trait approach relies on self-report. The trait approach to emotional intelligence focuses more on characteristics of personality, where it involves the “emotion-related self-perceptions and behavioural dispositions relating to the perception, processing and utilization of emotion-laden

information” (Mavroveli, Petrides, Sangareau & Furnham, 2009, p. 259). In other words, trait emotional intelligence is an attribute of an individual that allows them to understand their own and other’s emotions. Those with high emotional intelligence use such information to act as a guide for their behavior (Lam & Kirby, 2002). Because distinguishing between the two types of emotional intelligence is quite muddy, this study will focus on a general understanding of emotional intelligence.

For the purpose of this study, emotional intelligence involves four factors: perception of emotions, managing one’s own emotion, social skills or managing others’ emotions, and utilizing emotion (Stough et al., 2009). First, perceiving emotion involves the ability to sense and distinguish between emotions through one-on-one interaction, observation of others through real or represented communication, or visualization through pictures, art and culture (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Second, managing one’s own emotion involves being able to understand emotion enough to recognize and regulate emotion occurring within the self in addition to being able to verbalize one’s own emotion (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Third, management of other’s emotions or one’s own development of social skills involves the ability of being able to navigate the emotions of others. Such a skill makes it possible for individuals to understand and relate with others. Further, it helps a person reach their goals by being able to direct emotion where it is needed (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Lastly, utilization of emotions involves the ability to use emotion for various activities such as thought process or problem solving. An emotionally intelligent person can use or put aside emotion in order to best perform on the task at hand (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Depending on the aspect of emotional

intelligence that is being looked at, the boundaries of each factor can be quite permeable. We will now examine each of these more closely.

2. 2. 1. Perception of Emotions

In this section we will discuss the perception of emotion. Perception of emotion is the most fundamental piece of emotional intelligence outside of the self. It is the basis upon which everything else falls upon (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Perception of emotion involves how one understands the emotions going on all around them. A key factor of perception of emotion is empathy because it involves the comprehension of what others are feeling (Mayer, Di Paolo & Salovey, 1990). Those who can accurately perceive emotion are more likely to be able to empathize, though the two do not always occur together. Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka, Rhodes and Wendorf (2001) found that higher scores of emotional intelligence were correlated with higher scores of empathy. This implies that those who have the ability to feel the emotions of others have a strong sense of emotional intelligence. Such findings suggest that it is not just the ability regulate emotions so much that one can ignore distracting emotions, but also the ability to really relate to another individual on their level of emotions.

Perceptions of emotion also include the ability to understand facial expression. Mayer et al.(1990) found that “people are not usually taught how to read these facial expressions; instead, they are assumed to know them...[and that those with] social difficulties have often failed to acquire such skills of emotional perception.” This is significant because as Goleman (1995, 2006) states, we are not taught outside of certain academic limits. Perception of facial expression is not taught in school and if it is, it isn't

up until the collegiate level, where someone has to major in a subject that discusses the matter. We turn now to a second element of emotional intelligence, managing one's own emotions.

2. 2. 2. Management of One's Own Emotion

Perceptions of emotions can also be internal. Those who are able to take an internally negative emotion and are able to see more than one interpretation are apt to score highly in emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 1990). Such regulation of emotion could be very beneficial for a variety of life skills. This leads to the importance of intrapersonal skills, which refers to managing emotions in the self. Some people are not able to control and regulate their emotion. For example, people who suffer from depression may have a difficult time reframing negative interpretation of other's communication. Part of this may be due to early childhood learning in their family of origins, but others may be genetically predisposed. Some may be able to snap out of it and create a positive thought, but at the same time, the learning of their early childhood may be pushing against such positive thoughts unsuccessfully, which may enhance depression in addition to a genetic foundation. Such persons are in need of changing the patterns that they learned long ago (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). Additionally, Mayer and Salovey (1995) found that people who appear to have a normal and healthy regulation of emotion might be worse off when faced with change. Such individuals regulate their emotions well under their familiar and stable conditions, but once they are out of that environment they may have trouble adapting because they never had to do so. We will now discuss this in more detail.

Mayer and Salovey (1995) identify three levels of intrapersonal emotions: emotional orientation, emotional involvement, and emotional expertise. The first level, emotional orientation refers to a “person’s basic adaptational learning of emotion” (Mayer & Salovey, 1995, p. 206). This level would identify with the example above of a person who appears to be emotionally intelligent on the surface, but when faced with significant change, struggles. This is so because the emotional orientation requires an individual to unconsciously understand emotion (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). The next level, emotional involvement, “relates to a low level of conscious emotionality [where there is an]...openness to emotion and skillfulness at framing situations so that the right emotions emerge” (Mayer & Salovey, 1995, p. 206). Such a level shows great emotional regulation as it appropriates the correct emotion with the situation. The third and final level is emotional expertise, which “refers to expert knowledge about feelings and their regulation” (Mayer & Salovey, 1995, p. 206). Such a status would indicate someone who has studied such material at length, so as to be able to integrate such knowledge within his or her daily life. Such measures appear to be too broad because not everyone will fit into each category. Most people would fall between levels.

Although researchers’ measures differ, they all agree that the ability to control emotions correlates with high emotional intelligence (Austin, Saklofske, Huang & McKenney, 2004). Moreover, Schutte et al. (1998) found high emotional intelligence is associated with an extensive list of intrapersonal skills, such as less alexithymia (inability to describe one’s emotions), increased awareness of one’s feelings, better skills in repairing mood, positivity (therefore less negativity) and being more open to experience. Intrapersonal skills, though dealing with internal emotions have the potential to relate

with external interactions whether it be good or bad. Essentially, the way in which someone feels affects his or her interpersonal relationships. Next we will discuss the research on managing emotions in others as part of emotional intelligence.

2. 2. 3. Management of Other's Emotions

Emotional intelligence is also concerned with the implementation of social skills. Research suggests that, “emotional competence is a crucial component of social development and contributes to the quality of interpersonal relationships” (as cited in Schutte et al, 2001, p. 254). This argument is strengthened by the fact that high emotional intelligence is associated with being liked by one's peers (Mavroveli et al., 2009). Mavroveli et al. (2009) also asserts that those with high emotional intelligence were quicker at recognizing facial expression and perceiving emotion. Social skills were linked with not only to successful communication, but also acceptance by one's peers. Knowing this, interpersonal issues that are dealt later in life could be avoided or lessened in severity if teachers assessed children's ability to perceive emotion through recognizing facial expressions (Mavroveli et al., 2009).

Schutte et al.'s (2001) study found an assortment of interpersonal skills that related to emotional intelligence. Schutte et al. (2001) examined self-monitoring, taking perspective, general social skilled ability, cooperation, close relationships, marital satisfaction and prospective partners attraction. Schutte et al. (2001) found a correlation between self-monitoring and empathy; and a correlation between perspective taking and social skills with emotional intelligence (Schutte et al., 2001). Marital satisfaction was also correlated with emotional intelligence. Close relationships were only partially

correlated (Schutte et al., 2001). Schutte et al. (2001) warned that emotional intelligence might not be the sole variable involved with these correlations because there are many other variables that could also contribute.

2. 2. 4. Utilization of Emotion

The final factor of emotional intelligence is that of utilizing emotions. People can use emotions positively and negatively. One can use emotions positively by being flexible, creative, motivated and paying attention (Schutte et al., 1998). Using emotions negatively has to do with control and ability to regulate emotion. Austin et al. (2004) found that those who score high in utilizing emotions have good control over emotions but, Lam and Kirby (2002) found no such correlation. Instead, Lam and Kirby (2002) found that regulation of emotion was linked to enhanced cognitive performance and was a better predictor of enhanced cognitive performance than general intellect. We will now discuss how emotions can be further utilized in relation to task performance.

One who scores high in emotional intelligence is able to understand mood, feeling and emotion, on behalf of both the self and others (Lam and Kirby, 2002). This is significant because people typically “do not cause their emotions to occur and have little control over which emotions they experience” (Lam & Kirby, 2002, p. 140). Being able to influence how emotion affects an individual and to turn emotion into positive energy strongly correlates with better performance on tasks. Lam and Kirby (2002) suggest that such individuals will use what they call “buffering techniques” in order to filter their emotions so that they do not disrupt the task at hand. Overall, those who can utilize their emotion for sake of their tasks improve performance.

2.3 Taking Conflict Personally (TCP)

For exploratory purposes we will also investigate Taking Conflict Personally. Conflict is a variable that has come up with both FCP and emotional intelligence. TCP involves the tendency to “personalize conflict, experience stress during it, to feel persecuted, to project the possibility of positive or negative relational consequences and to enjoy or dislike conflict interactions” (Hample & Dallinger, 2010, p. 299). There are five dimensions of TCP including direct personalization, stress reactions, persecution of feelings, relational effects and personality bias, though the present study only focuses on direct personalization (Hample & Dallinger, 2010). Hample and Dallinger (2010) also note that there is often confusion over the difference between defensiveness and TCP because they have similar characteristics. However, defensiveness is a reaction of emotion whereas TCP is a whole characterization of an interaction. TCP involves the possibility of defensiveness, but TCP encompasses more than defensiveness. Defensiveness involves the sensitivity to a self-perceived flaw, which is a flaw that an individual is already aware of but does not self admittedly relate to (Stamp, Vangelisti & Daly, 1992).

Direct personalization has much to do with one’s perception of one’s emotional reaction. Hample and Dallinger (2010) describe direct personalization as, “the hurt that people may experience when engaging in conflict. Most of the items refer to negative feelings that occur when people feel that they have been criticized” (p. 314). Hample and Dallinger (2010) also mention that those with this particular dimension have the tendency to try and avoid such conflict. The research anticipates that a person who scores high on

the direct personalization subscale of TCP would have low emotional intelligence, since high emotional intelligence suggests that an individual can consciously control emotion. No research has explored this connection. Additionally, no one has explored whether TCP might relate to family communication patterns. Given that the present study is addressing both emotional intelligence and family communication patterns, it is an opportune time to find out if TCP relates to either of these constructs.

TCP is largely involved with emotional interactions. For example, the way in which one expresses emotion during a situation of conflict greatly affects interpersonal relationships (Hample & Dallinger, 2010). In regard to direct personalization, such tendencies can hurt the relationship because the person blocks feedback and cuts off learning about oneself. Having false beliefs about oneself and others is likely to contribute to relationship deterioration. Hample and Dallinger (2010) also found that people react to another's emotions as much as their own. This emphasizes the importance of how one perceives the emotional climate because it can improve or worsen conflict. One's level of emotional intelligence and the degree to which one takes conflict personally may contribute to conflict escalation.

3. Current Research Gaps and Direction of Study

The current research fulfills a gap because no study has explored FCP and its relationship to emotional intelligence with post-high school participants. Also, no research explores family communication patterns and TCP. The aim of this study is to better understand the relationship between FCP, emotional intelligence, and TCP.

A preliminary factor analysis of the FCP scale indicated that only the original two factors, conversation and conformity emerged. To that end, only those variables, not the full FCP model were used in this study and led to the following research questions:

- RQ₁: Is there a relationship between conversation orientation and one's perception of emotion?
- RQ₂: Is there a relationship between conformity orientation and one's perception of emotion?
- RQ₃: Is there a relationship between conversation orientation and management of one's own emotions?
- RQ₄: Is there a relationship between conformity orientation and management of one's own emotions?
- RQ₅: Is there a relationship between conversation orientation and management of other's emotions/social skills?
- RQ₆: Is there a relationship between conformity orientation and management of other's emotions/social skills?
- RQ₇: Is there a relationship between conversation orientation and utilization of emotion?
- RQ₈: Is there a relationship between conformity orientation and utilization of emotion?
- RQ₉: Is there a relationship between conversation orientation and direct personalization?
- RQ₁₀: Is there a relationship between conformity orientation and direct personalization?
- RQ₁₁: Is there a relationship between emotional intelligence and direct personalization?

4. Methods

4. 1. Procedure

Participants were found using the snowball technique and volunteer sampling with an online survey tool, surveygizmo.com. It was done using three different strategies. First, a Facebook event was made where about one hundred and fifty friends were invited

to participate. Second, coworkers at the researcher's internship were contacted by email with the link of the survey. They were asked to pass the survey onto others. Third, two professors distributed the survey via email to their classes. The survey was anonymous.

4.2 Participants

A total of 84 people responded, 55 finished the survey and 33 were partially filled out and unfinished. The 33 partial surveys were discarded. In the end, 51 survey responses were analyzed. The participants were primarily in the Northwestern region of the United States and 43 were in the 18-24 age range. Four were of the ages 25-34. Four were of the ages 35-54. Thirty-four of the participants were female and 17 were male. Participants included university (78.4%) and non-university students (21.6%). Over two-thirds of the participants had at least four members in their family (68.6%). The mean number of people in the immediate family was 4.25 people. Nineteen participants were the oldest children. Eighteen were the youngest and 10 were middle children. Four participants were the only child.

4.3 Materials

Participants used an online consent form in which clicking "next" signified that they agreed to the specifications and permitted them to access the survey. Participants were asked to respond to 85 questions (Please see Appendix A for questionnaire), 74 of which used a 5-point Likert scale. The remaining 11 questions involved nine nominally measured questions on demographics and two exploratory open-ended questions where participants were asked to describe the following:

1. To what extent, if at all, do you think that the way your family communicated relates to how you handle emotional issues today? Please explain.
2. To what extent, if at all, did one parent set the communication in the family? Please explain.

Of the 75 Likert scale questions, the survey was made up of three previously used and published questionnaires. The first part explored the participant's responses concerning their family communication patterns using the Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) Revised Family Communication Pattern instrument (RFCP). The RFCP involved a 26-item scale. Cronbach's alpha for the RFCP scale had a range of .84 to .92 (Rubin et al., 2009). In the second section, the questionnaire investigated participant's emotional intelligence using the Austin et al. (2004) revised version of Schutte et al.'s (1998) Emotional Intelligence scale. Austin et al. (2004) modified Schutte et al.'s (1998) 33-item scale by reverse wording a total of nine items that were formally positively worded. Additionally, Austin et al. (2004) enhanced the questionnaire by adding eight new items that were based off the short form of the BarOn EQ-i. Cronbach's alpha for the modified Emotional Intelligence scale was .85 (Stough, C. et al., 2009). Lastly, the final section involved a short, seven-item questionnaire concerning direct personalization measuring the concept of Taking Conflict Personally (TCP) using Hample and Dallinger's (1995) Revised Taking Conflict Personally scale (RTCP). Cronbach's alpha for the RTCP scale was .866 (Hample & Dallinger, 1995).

4.4 Content Analysis

As part of the study a content analysis was performed for the exploratory questions. The unit of analysis was the explanation each participant gave in response to the exploratory questions at the end of the questionnaire. First, each of the two types of responses were coded as to whether they agree, disagree or fell somewhere in the middle. Specifically the first question was coded as either no/unaffected, yes/affected, somewhat affected, or not sure. The second question was coded as either no/neither parent, yes/one parent or both parents. Further analysis depended on the responses given and looked for themes that appeared in common with other participants.

5. Results

5.1 Reliability and Scale Factor Correlations

For Austin et al.'s (2004) 41-item EI scales, the questions were divided into the four categories of "Utilization of Emotions", "Management of Other's Emotions/Social Skills", "Perception of Emotion" and "Management of One's Own Emotions" (see Table 1). Cohen's Kappa for internal consistency was run to find the reliability of all four factors including "Utilization of Emotions" $\alpha = .633$, "Management of Other's Emotions/Social Skills" $\alpha = .867$, "Perception of Other's Emotion" $\alpha = .549$, and "Management of One's Own Emotions" $\alpha = .724$. Since reliabilities of "Utilization of Emotions" and "Perception of Other's Emotion" were low, they were eliminated from subsequent analyses.

Table 1
Distribution of Questions for Assessing Emotions Scale

Factor	Questions Associated
Perception of Emotion	14, 16, 21, 29, 33, 38
Management of One's Own Emotions	1, 5, 6, 8, 17, 19, 20, 22, 28, 30, 31, 32, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41
Utilization of Emotion	4, 10, 23, 25, 34
Management of Other's Emotions/Social Skills	2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18, 24, 26, 27, 35

Note. Questions were distributed by categorization, not previous study.

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's (1994) Revised Family Communication Pattern 26-item measure factored into two categories, "Conversation Orientation" and "Conformity Orientation" (see Appendix A). They were tested for reliability. Both factors were reliable: Conversation Orientation, $\alpha = .919$; Conformity Orientation, $\alpha = .863$.

Pearson bivariate correlations were run to find out if there was any relation between FCP orientations and two of the four emotional intelligence factors as well as "Direct Personalization" from the TCP scale. Table 2 below displays the results.

Research questions 1, 2, 7, 8 were thrown out because of unacceptable reliabilities. Research question 11, which asked whether emotional intelligence has any relation to direct personalization, was split into two questions with the factors of EI that were reliable, Management of One's Own Emotion (question 11) and Management of Other's Emotion (question 12).

Findings for research questions 4, 5, 6, 9 were statistically insignificant. For research question 3, which asked if there is a relationship between conversation orientation and management of one's own emotions, a small correlation was found ($r = .311$; $p = .026$). For research question 10, which asked if there is a relationship between conformity orientation and direct personalization, a positive correlation was found ($r = .333$; $p = .017$). A negative correlation was found for question 11, which explored the

relationship between management of one's own emotions and direct personalization ($r=-.493$; $p=.001$). For research question 12, which asked if there is a relationship between management of others' emotions and direction personalization, a low, negative correlation was found ($r=-.308$; $p=.028$) (see Table 2).

Table 2
Correlations of Variables

Correlated Variables	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Management of One's Own Emotions & Direct Personalization	-.493	.001
Conformity Orientation & Direct Personalization	.333	.017
Conversation Orientation & Management of One's Own Emotions	.311	.026
Management of Other's Emotions & Direct Personalization	-.308	.028
Conversation Orientation & Social Skills	.197	.167
Conversation Orientation & Direct Personalization	-.196	.169
Conformity Orientation & Management of One's Own Emotions	-.102	.477
Conformity Orientation & Social Skills	-.031	.828

Note. $p < .05$

5. 2 Exploratory Accounts

Each question was evaluated on a yes, no, or a middle ground response (see Tables 3 and 4). Further exploration of the response for each question yielded different themes for analysis. The first question asked if the participant thought that the way their family communicated related to how they handle emotional issues today. A pattern emerged, suggesting that people saw their personal response to emotion as either close to

the example their parents gave, or they made an attempt to change the way they respond to emotion in order not to replicate their family of origin. (see Tables 5 and 6). Many participants mentioned that their family's communication style had a negative effect on the self (see Tables 6 and 7). Therefore, responses for the first question were coded as either no/no negative effect mentioned or yes/negative effect mentioned. Further analysis of the second question revealed that a number of people mentioned their parents were divorced (see Tables 6 and 8). Responses to the second question were then coded as no/no mentioning of divorce or yes/mentioning of divorce.

Table 3

Response to Exploratory Open-Ended Question 1 (Do You Think That the Way Your Family Communicated Relates to How You Handle Emotional Issues Today?)

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
No/Unaffected	2	3.9%
Yes/Affected	40	78.4%
Somewhat Affected	1	2.0%
Not Sure	1	2.0%
Invalid Response	7	13.7%
Total	51	100.0%

Table 4

Responses to Exploratory Open-ended Question 2 (Did One Parent Set The Communication Style in the Family?)

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
No, Neither Parent	3	5.9%
Yes, One Parent	28	54.9%
Both Parents	16	31.4%
Invalid Response	4	7.8%

Total	51	100.0%
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Table 5

Mentioning of an Attempt Made to Change Communication Style

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
No Attempt Made	45	88.2%
Attempt Made	5	9.8%
Invalid Response	1	2.0%
Total	51	100.0%

Table 6

Responses from Exploratory Questions

Categorization	Response Example
Change Attempted	<p><i>"I have now made it a point to be really open about communication and steer away from passive aggressive behavior."</i></p> <p><i>"The way my family handles emotion is more like ignoring them completely, so I try to do the opposite."</i></p> <p><i>"I think I took the opposite direction of communicating that my family participated in."</i></p>
Negative Experience	<p><i>"Now, I always internalize emotions and rarely ever discuss them with anyone, even my wife. I also often feel disinterested or even annoyed when people express their emotions to me."</i></p> <p><i>"It can be difficult to communicate with them and I think that I have trouble communicating with others because of this."</i></p> <p><i>"It was never a fair dialogue in our household...Often if we were upset, we were told we shouldn't feel that way, or that we were behaving in a manipulative way..."</i></p>
Mentioning of Divorce	<p><i>"My mom set 99.9% of the communication due to the divorce situation."</i></p> <p><i>"My parents are divorced so when we were with mom we did it her way and when we were with dad we did it his way."</i></p> <p><i>"We spent most of the time with our mother, so she certainly set the communication in the family. We all communicated in the</i></p>

same way until I was old enough to realized I could be more direct and assertive.”

Table 7
Negative Effect on the Self From Family’s Communication Style Mentioned

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
No	41	80.4%
Yes	9	17.6%
Invalid Response	1	2.0%
Total	51	100.0%

Table 8
Participants Who Mentioned Their Parents Were Divorced

Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
No, No Mention of Divorce	46	90.2%
Yes, Mentioning of Divorce	4	7.8%
Invalid Response	1	2.0%
Total	51	100.0%

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to see if adult children perceived that one’s family-of-origin affected emotional intelligence and direct personalization of conflict. Some qualified support for the connection among these variables was found.

Research question 3 investigated whether Conversation Orientation and Management of One’s Own Emotions were related. Results indicated that there was a small but significant correlation ($r=-.308, p=.028$). This finding is consistent with Mayer and Salovey’s research (1997) which found children with high emotional intelligence had

parents that helped them “identify and level their emotions” (p. 19) through conversation. Fitzpatrick and Ritchie’s work (1994) further supports this finding because the family types with high conversation orientation (pluralistic and consensual families) encourage discussion and are comfortable with it. Together, both studies provide evidence that families with high conversation foster good practice and development of ideas, which in turn can be applied to the understanding of one’s own emotions (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Families are not the only influence on an individual’s emotional intelligence: Mayer and Salovey (1997) state that a child’s teacher also contributes to developing a child’s emotional intelligence, but that influence is outside the purview of this study.

Research question 10 explored if any relationship existed between a family’s conformity orientation and direct personalization of conflict. A small but significant correlation was found. Individuals with families that enforced conformity tended to take things personally. To understand why conformity and taking things personally might be related, we need to review some of the characteristics of each. Families high in conformity put pressure on agreement and stress upholding family rules (Galvin, Bylund & Brommel, 2012). Research has shown that adult children of high conformity families feel less able to make their own decisions and hold their own beliefs (Fitzpatrick and Ritchie, 1994). Thus, in conflict, the adult child may feel more strongly the need to defend against information that challenges one’s beliefs. Defensiveness has been shown to occur when a self-perceived flaw has been critiqued (Stamp et al., 1992). Because the individual from a high conformity family is less able to make decisions, it is understandable why they might take conflict personally. One way of reducing challenges

to one's beliefs is to simply try and avoid conflict. Indeed, Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2004) have found that individuals who come from high conforming families are likely to try and avoid conflict. Hample and Dallinger (2010) also mention that those high on direct personalization have the tendency to try and avoid such conflict. With those two studies in agreement, it is reasonable a relationship between the two factors would appear as well in this study. Another explanation may be that because such individuals were not able to voice their own opinions and beliefs that they feel a stronger inclination to do so outside of the family. If it is not received well by others they may take it personally because of the insecurity of not being able to hold an opinion on their own like they may have hoped to be able to do outside of the home because they could not do so at home.

Regarding research question 11, which asks if there is a relationship between management of one's own emotions and direct personalization, a negative correlation was found. Participants who were good at managing their own emotions were less likely to take conflict personally. Taking conflict personally involves a negative emotional reaction to participating in a conflict. If one is good at managing one's own emotion, it makes sense that one would be less reactive to participating in a conflict. This study confirms Hample and Dallinger's expectation that one who is emotionally intelligent enables one to minimize defensiveness (Hample & Dallinger, 2010).

Research question 12 asked whether or not there was a relationship between managing others' emotions and direct personalization. Results showed that the two variables were negatively correlated ($r=.308$, $p=.028$). If an individual scored high on the aspect of emotional intelligence concerned with managing others' emotions, the

likelihood was that they would not directly personalize conflict. Such an individual would likely be able to manage the conflict so there was no need to become defensive. This finding may be illuminated by Mavroveli et al.'s research (2009) which found those with higher emotional intelligence were shown to be quicker at recognizing facial expression and perceiving emotion. The ability to understand facial expression and emotion may give an individual an advantage managing others' emotions. If an individual can understand why and how others are using emotion they are going to be less likely to take other's actions so personally.

The exploratory open-ended questions added additional insights to these findings. A majority of the participants (78.4%) felt that the way their family communicated relates to how they handle emotional issues today. Further analysis found that almost ten percent of participants attempted to change their communication from their family of origin's style. This was expressed in phrases like, "I try to do the opposite" of my family's communication patterns (see Table 6). In fact, seventeen percent responded that their family's communication patterns had a negative affect on the self. The second exploratory open-ended question inquired whether one parent was more influential than the other in shaping the family's communication style. A majority of participants (54.9%) commented that one parent set the tone. Out of all the participants that mentioned which parent set the tone for family communication, eighteen mentioned their mother as setting the tone, while seven mentioned their father as setting the tone.

These findings are important because they suggest how family communication patterns can foster positive and/or negative emotional interactions when the family

member becomes an adult. Such findings can be applied to any individual's life when they consider starting a new family of their own. The findings can act as a guide as to how certain aspects of family communication affect the relationships not only between family members, but also with the outside world.

7. Limitations and Further Research

The purpose of this study was to explore family communication patterns, emotional intelligence and taking conflict personally. It found that aspects of taking conflict personally, specifically direct personalization, was related to family communication patterns and emotional intelligence. The most obvious of limitation of the study involves the potential of self-report bias as the study was administered through a questionnaire. Small sample size also limits the generalizability of the study. There was also an application error, meaning that there was no control over how the questionnaire was administered. A couple reasons indicate an application error. First, an online survey tool was used over traditional pen and paper distribution, so there was little control over dissemination. The survey heavily relied on trust to each participant to fully complete the survey without other people's input. Also, the sample was found through both snowballing and volunteer sampling. Chances are that those who completed the survey shared similar demographics to the researcher since the connections were through her acquaintances. Another reason includes the fact that each question on the questionnaire wasn't randomized, meaning the questions were not rearranged differently for each survey taker. We do not know if the order of questions had anything to do with responses because of this error. Further limitations involve the fact that, because of the lack of

resources I did the coding of the content analysis. Thus, affecting intercoder reliability. The discussion of findings was limited in that there was not much literature to exactly support the findings because this study has never been done before. Further research is suggested on the factors that did not come up with a dependable reliability including “Perception of Emotion” and “Utilization of Emotion.”

Nonetheless, direction of the results indicates that family communication relates to aspects of both emotional intelligence and taking conflict personally. Further research might include observational studies and longitudinal studies.

8. References

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9. Appendix A

Questionnaire

Family Communication Patterns—RFCP Scale: 5-point Likert scale (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990)

Conversation Orientation

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

Conformity Orientation

16. My parents often say something like “You’ll know better when you grow up.”
17. My parents often say something like “My ideas are right and you should not question them.”
18. My parents often say something like “A child should not argue with adults.”
19. My parents often say something like “There are some things that just shouldn’t be talked about.”
20. My parents often say something like “You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad.”
21. When anything really important is involved, my parents expect me to obey without question.
22. In our home, my parents usually have the last word.
23. My parents feel that it is important to be the boss.
24. My parents sometimes become irritated with my views if they are different from theirs.
25. If my parents don’t approve of it, they don’t want to know about it.
26. When I am home, I am expected to obey my parents’ rules.

Emotional Intelligence—Assessing Emotions Scale: 5-point Likert scale (Austin et al., 2004)

Appendix A (Continued)

27. I know when to speak about my personal problems to others.
28. When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times when I face similar obstacles and overcame them.
29. I generally expect to fail when I try something new.
30. My mood has little effect on how I deal with problems.
31. Other people find it easy to confide in me.
32. I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people.
33. Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important.
34. I sometimes can't tell whether someone I am conversing with is serious or joking.
35. When my mood changes I see new possibilities.
36. Emotions don't have much effect on my quality of life.
37. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them.
38. I generally don't expect good things to happen.
39. When trying to solve a problem in my life, I find it helpful to be as unemotional as possible.
40. I prefer to keep my emotions private.
41. When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last.
42. I arrange events others enjoy.
43. I quite often misread what is going on in social situations.
44. I seek out activities that make me happy.
45. I am aware of the non-verbal message that I send others.
46. I have little interest in the impression I make on others.
47. When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me.
48. I tend to misread peoples' facial expressions.
49. I don't believe that my emotions give any help in coming up with new ideas.
50. I often don't know why my emotions change.
51. I don't find that being in a positive mood helps me come up with new ideas.
52. I find it hard to control my emotions.
53. I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them.
54. People have told me that I am difficult to talk to.
55. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on.
56. I compliment others when they have done something well.
57. I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send.
58. When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I have experienced the event myself.
59. When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas.
60. Emotions don't play a big part in how I deal with problems.
61. When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail.
62. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.
63. I help other people feel better when they are down.
64. I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles.
65. I find it hard to tell how someone is feeling from their ton of voice.
66. It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do.
67. I find it hard to make close friendships.

Appendix A (Continued)

Direct Personalization—RTCP scale: 5-point Likert scale (Hample and Dallinger, 1995).

- 68. I usually take criticism personally.
- 69. Conflict is a very personal thing for me.
- 70. When people criticize something I say, I don't take it personally.
- 71. It really hurts my feelings to be criticized.
- 72. When the rest of the group rejects one of my suggestions, I take it very personally
- 73. It doesn't bother me to be criticized for my ideas
- 74. I have a strong emotional reaction to being criticized.