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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Does Family Communication Orientation Relate to How We Use Time? A Preliminary Study on Family Communication Patterns and People's Perspective on Time

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Abstract

A web survey study of 853 respondents examined whether family communication patterns predicted people's orientation to time. Conversation orientation was negatively and significantly related with a past negative perspective on time and was positively and significantly related to past positive, present hedonistic, and future orientation perspectives on time. Conformity orientation was positively and significantly related to past negative, present hedonistic, and present fatalistic perspectives on time but was negatively and significantly related to a past positive perspective on time. Multiple linear regression results indicated that both conversation orientation and conformity orientation were significant predictors of various time orientations.

Introduction

Significant and important relationships have been established between family communication patterns as measured by the Revised Family Communication Patterns Scale (RFCP) (Koerner & Schrodt, 2014) and a wide range of dependent variables, including those broadly classified as information processing, behavioral, and psychosocial (e.g., Hesse & Rauscher, 2016; Schrodt et al., 2008; Thorson & Horstman, 2014). Similarly, Zimbardo's Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999) has recently been used to predict many variables associated with mood, cognition, personality and behavior (e.g., Adams & Nettle, 2009; Stolarski et al., 2014; Tsferidi et al., 2017; Villaron et al., 2016). However, to our knowledge, no study has yet explored a possible empirical relationship between communication patterns in the family of origin and time perspectives; additionally, only limited research has considered factors which might influence the development of time perspectives overall. This preliminary analysis of connections among family communication pattern dimensions and time perspectives begins to establish those relationships, potentially extending the predictive power of the RFCP in a new direction while moving scholarly understanding of the development of time perspectives beyond mere speculation.

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Review of Literature

Research over four decades has led to the development and revision of Family Communication Patterns Theory, which in its current form holds that two critical dimensions of how families of origin communicate can have a significant impact on a child's later life in multiple ways (Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). Conversation orientation "is defined as the degree to which families create a communication climate in which all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained interaction about a variety of topics" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b, p. 85). In contrast, families with a low level of conversation orientation would not be expected to have those wide-ranging, open-ended conversations, talking less often and with limited topics.

The other dimension, conformity orientation, refers to the degree to which parents want their children to conform to their own views (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b). Families with a high conformity orientation might have frequent interactions, but all family members would be expected to agree on key values and beliefs. "Family interactions typically focus on harmony, conflict avoidance, and the interdependence of family members" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b, p. 86). For families lower in conformity orientation, interactions might emphasize "individuality and independence of family members" (p. 86). Though the original conceptualization of the two dimensions suggested that they are orthogonal, more recent scholarship has suggested that they may have a moderate inverse relationship (Keating, 2016). As a result, Keating (2016) has suggested that scholars use appropriate statistical tests, like regression analyses, that are capable of determining the unique influence of each dimension on dependent variables.

Schrodt et al.'s (2008) meta-analysis divided the types of variables influenced by conformity and conversation orientation into three categories: information processing, behavioral, and psychosocial. Information processing variables include materialism, cognitive complexity, and political identity, while behavioral outcomes include shopping behaviors and use of power. Psychosocial outcomes include self-esteem and self-concept (2008). Notably, both of the family communication dimensions had the strongest relationship with psychosocial outcomes in the meta-analysis, suggesting that those concepts may be more influenced by communication in the family of origin than the other two types of variables. One important psychosocial variable which has not yet been studied in conjunction with family communication patterns is time perspective.

Time Perspective

Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) define time perspective as "the often nonconscious process whereby the continual flows of personal and social experiences are assigned to temporal categories, or time frames, that help to give order, coherence, and meaning to those events" (p. 1271). People are believed to enact varying degrees of five types of time perspectives, as opposed to being characterized as having only a single specific type. The time perspectives include two past-focused dimensions, two present-focused dimensions, and one future-focused dimension. The past negative dimension involves focusing on one's past in a negative way, while past positive involves viewing the past as "glowing, nostalgic" (p. 1278). The present hedonistic perspective references a focus on enjoying the present, without much consideration for the future (p. 1278). Interestingly, present fatalistic "represents the absence of a focused time perspective," with an assumption that people lack control over what happens to them in the future, no particular focus on the past and a belief that "humans are at the whimsical mercy of

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'fate'" in the present (p. 1278). The future perspective involves "planning for and achievement of future goals" (p. 1278). Time perspectives may be traits, but also can be situation-specific and may be consciously altered by individuals who strive to do so (Harber et al., 2003).

Researchers have found relationships between one or more time perspectives and academic engagement (Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007), health behaviors (Keogh et al., 1999), substance use (Barnett et al., 2013; Braitman & Henson, 2015), and even the likelihood of students signing up for research studies (Harber et al., 2003). The high volume of research using the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) and consistent, predictable results lend credence to the validity of both the concept and the specific scale used to measure the five factors. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) have explicitly stated that there is no one "best" time perspective, arguing that one which is relatively balanced and situationally fluid as needed enables greater adaptability to the wide range of contexts in which time perspective might play a role. An ideally balanced perspective would generally include high levels of past positive and present hedonistic, with moderately high future and low past negative and present fatalistic (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). Empirical research has consistently suggested that the future perspective in particular is linked with ostensibly good outcomes, including less substance abuse (Keogh et al., 1999), increased physical exercise (Griva et al., 2015), and even having highly supportive significant others (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009). However, Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) do caution that while the future perspective may be associated with careful planning and appropriate concern for future consequences of present behaviors, it may also have its negatives including a possible lack of altruism.

In all of the research cited above, time perspective is used as an independent variable. Little to no research empirically addresses factors which might influence a person's time perspective, but several authors at least offer some speculation. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) believe that people might over-emphasize a particular perspective due to "many learned factors, with cultural, educational, religious, social class, and family modeling among the most prominent" (p. 1272). Similarly, Harber et al. (2003) also list "family models" as one factor influencing time perspective (p. 256), and one study did find an association between attachment in a family of origin and time perspectives (Blomgren et al., 2016).

Given the strong influence of family communication patterns on numerous psychosocial variables and the speculation of other scholars, it is reasonable to expect relationships among conformity and conversation orientations and time perspectives. Koerner and Schrodt (2014) argued that conversation orientation might lead to increased communication competence, self-confidence and self-esteem in children, which could in turn lead to other "positive child outcomes" (p. 12). Future planning is commonly considered to be among the discussions that families with a high conversation orientation might have (e.g., Koerner & Schrodt, 2014), and so perhaps a higher degree of conversation orientation might lead to adopting a future time perspective. Conversely, a high level of conformity orientation might lead children to be less likely to "discuss their intentions with their families," which could perhaps lead them to be less future-oriented (p. 13).

Though no research has directly addressed possible links among family communication patterns and time perspectives, some published scholarship at least hints at a possible connection. Hendry and Ledbetter (2017) found positive relationships between both conformity and conversation orientation and genealogical communication in families. For Hendry and Ledbetter, genealogical communication refers primarily to genealogical narratives, which "reference the family's past, with particular concerns for the family's origin, heritage, and

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identity constructed across generations" (2017, p. 118). Conformity orientation was significantly associated with more negative genealogical communication, which would seem to imply Zimbardo and Boyd's (1999) past negative time perspective; however, negative communication in and of itself does not necessarily indicate a past negative time perspective. The current study has the potential to clarify this relationship.

With such limited research, it is difficult to speculate regarding the specific nature of the relationships among family communication patterns and time perspectives. However, speculation by the psychologists who developed the concept of time perspective in its current form, along with limited research by communication scholars, indicate that a connection is likely. Therefore, the research questions presented below are non-directional, given the very early state of this scholarship.

Research Questions

RQ1: Are there relationships among family communication patterns and how people approach time?

RQ2: Do demographics, conversation orientation, and conformity orientation predict time perspectives?

RQ2a: Do demographics, conversation orientation, and conformity orientation predict a past negative perspective on time?

RQ2b: Do demographics, conversation orientation, and conformity orientation predict a past positive perspective on time?

RQ2c: Do demographics, conversation orientation, and conformity orientation predict a present hedonistic orientation perspective on time?

RQ2d: Do demographics, conversation orientation, and conformity orientation predict a present fatalistic perspective on time?

RQ2e: Do demographics, conversation orientation, and conformity orientation predict a future orientation perspective on time?

Method

Participants were recruited from a basic communication course research pool at a large southeastern liberal arts university administered by SONA, which is a participant pool administration program that allows participants to complete a variety of activities for course credit. Participants chose whether they wanted to complete this Institutional Review Board approved study, other studies, events, or an alternative assignment. Participants who chose this study then filled out a web survey administered via Qualtrics, a survey software platform. As utilized in the Fife et al. (2016) study utilizing the RFCP and Wisesmann et al.'s (2018) study utilizing the ZTPI, questions about sex and age were assessed. To address biological sex, "What is your sex?" was asked with male and female as responses (M=1, F=2). Respondents could also choose to not answer this question. Age was assessed by the question "What is your age?" Of the 853 people who chose to participate, 192 (22.5%) were men and 661 (77.5%) were women. Ages of respondents ranged from 18-27 ($M = 18.24$, $SD = .68$).

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Measures

After reading an Institutional Review Board approved consent form, participants then filled out a number of measures. Time was measured with Zimbardo's Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999) on a 5-point scale with strongly disagree (coded as a 1) to strongly agree (coded as a 5). The past negative perspective was measured by five items such as "I often think of what I should have done differently in my life."($M = 27.03$, $SD = 8.81$, $\alpha = .90$). The past positive subscale was composed of 9 items such as "It gives me pleasure to think about my past" ($M = 34.03$, $SD = 6.56$, $\alpha = .86$). Present hedonistic was composed of 15 items such as "It is important to put excitement in my life," ($M = 50.72$, $SD = 10.33$, $\alpha = .89$). The present fatalistic subscale had 9 items and was composed of items such as "My life path is controlled by forces I cannot influence" ($M = 20.89$, $SD = 6.36$, $\alpha = .85$). Future orientation was composed of 13 items such as "I am able to resist temptations when I know that there is work to be done" ($M = 48.33$, $SD = 8.39$, $\alpha = .86$).

To assess family communication orientation, the Revised Family Communication Pattern Instrument (Children's Version) by Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002a) was used. Conversation orientation (15 items) and conformity orientation (11 items) patterns in families was assessed. Responses were strongly disagree (coded as a 1) to strongly agree (coded as a 5). The conversation orientation subscale included such questions as "Every member of the family should have something to say in family decisions" ($M = 52.35$, $SD = 12.89$, $\alpha = .93$). The conformity subscale ($M = 33.54$, $SD = 8.29$, $\alpha = .86$) had questions such as "When I am home, I am expected to obey my parents' rules."

Results

To test the research question that there is a relationship between family communication patterns and how people use time, Pearson correlation coefficients were conducted. See Table 1. Conversation orientation was negatively and significantly related with a past negative perspective on time and was positively and significantly related to a present hedonistic perspective on time, a future orientation perspective on time, and a past positive perspective on time. Conformity orientation was positively and significantly related to a past negative perspective on time, a present hedonistic perspective on time, and a present fatalistic perspective on time but was negatively and significantly related to a past positive perspective on time.

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Table 1

Correlations between Revised Family Communication Patterns and Time

Measures	Conversation Orientation	Conformity Orientation	*M*	*SD*
Past Negative	-0.26***	0.29***	2.70	0.88
Past Positive	0.51***	-0.22***	3.78	0.73
Present Hedonistic	0.13***	0.09*	3.38	69
Present Fatalistic	-0.00	0.19***	2.32	0.71
Future Orientation	0.24***	-0.00	3.72	0.65
M	3.49	3.05		
SD	0.86	0.75		

Note. $N = 854$. Higher scores are indicative of more extreme responding in the direction of the construct assessed. *$p<.05$, ** $p <.01$, *** $p <.001$

Research question 2a examined whether sex, age, conversation orientation, and conformity orientation predicted a past negative perspective on time was tested with a linear multiple regression model. See Table 2. The model was significant $R^2 = .13$, $F(4, 846) = 32.49$, $p < .001$. Age $t = 3.59$, $p < .001$ and conformity orientation $t = 6.91$, $p < .001$ were positive significant predictors of a past negative perspective on time and conversation orientation $t = -5.60$, $p < .001$ was a negative significant predictor of a past negative perspective on time. The model predicted 13% of the variance in a past negative perspective on time.

Research question 2b examined whether sex, age, conversation orientation and conformity orientation predicted a past positive perspective on time. The model was significant $R^2 = .27$, $F(4, 846) = 79.32$, $p < .001$. Conversation orientation $t = 15.69$, $p < .001$ was a positive significant predictor of a past positive perspective on time. Age $t = -2.49$, $p = .013$ and conformity orientation $t = -2.39$, $p = .017$ were negative significant predictors of a past positive perspective on time. The model predicted 27% of the variance in a past positive perspective on time. See Table 2.

To test research question 2c which examined whether sex, age, conversation orientation and conformity orientation predicts a present hedonistic orientation to time a multiple linear regression was utilized and was significant $R^2 = .04$, $F(4, 846) = 7.96$, $p < .001$. Conversation orientation $t=4.99$, $p < .001$ and conformity orientation $t = 3.82$, $p < .001$ were positive significant predictors of a present hedonistic orientation to time. The model predicted 4% of the variance in a present hedonistic orientation to time. See Table 2.

To test research question 2d, which examined whether sex, age, conversation orientation, and conformity orientation predicted a present fatalistic perspective on time, a multiple linear regression was conducted and was significant $R^2 = .05$, $F(4, 846) = 11.52$, $p < .001$. Age $t =$

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2.50, *p* = .013 *and conformity orientation t* = 5.79, *p* < .001 *were positive significant predictors of a present fatalis*tic perspective on time. The model predicted 5% of the variance in a present fatalistic perspective on time. See Table 2.

       To predict whether sex, age, conversation orientation and conformity orientation predicted a future orientation perspective on time, a multiple linear regression was conducted to test research question 2e. The model was significant R^2 = .09, $F(4, 846)$ = 20.04, *p* < .001. Sex *t* = 4.36, *p* < .001 (being female), conversation orientation *t*= 6.94, *p*<.001, and conformity orientation *t* = 2.19, *p* = .029 were positive significant predictors of a future orientation perspective on time. Age *t* = -2.01, *p* = .045 was a negative significant predictor of a future orientation on time. The model predicted 9% of the variance in future orientation. See Table 2.

Table 2

Time Orientation Regressed on Family Communication Patterns

Variable	Past Negative	Past Positive	Present Hedonistic	Present Fatalistic	Future Orientation
	b(SE)	*b*(SE)	*b*(SE)	*b*(SE)	*b*(SE)
Constant	-.12 (.80)	3.90(.60)***	2.05 (.66)**	.16 (.67)	3.64(.60)***
Sex (M=1, F=2)	-.03 (.07)	.06(.05)	-.01(.06)	-.11(.06)	.22 (.05)***
Age	.15 (.04)***	-.08(.03)*	.03(.03)	.09(.04)*	-.06(.03)*
Conversation Orientation	-.19(.03)***	.41(.03)***	.14(.03)***	.05(.03)	.18(.03)***
Conformity Orientation	.27(.04)****	-.07 (.03)*	.12(.03)***	.19(.03)***	.06(.03)*
R^2	.13***	.27***	.04***	.05***	.09***

Note. N=851. **p* < .05, *** p* < .01, **** p* < .001

Discussion

       The focus of this preliminary study is to investigate possible relationships among family communication patterns and time perspectives and, further, to begin to analyze the specific relationships discovered. Clearly, there are several interesting and important relationships among the concepts, and thus the overarching first research question is supported. Specific results are described in more detail below.

       Unsurprisingly, conversation orientation predicts the more positive aspects of time perspectives, including demonstrating a positive relationship with past positive, present hedonistic, and future time perspectives, while demonstrating a negative relationship with a past negative perspective. In a very broad sense, conversation orientation does seem to predict more positive outcomes (Schrodt et al., 2008), so it is not surprising that it is associated with more

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positive aspects of a time profile. With respect to the past positive time profile in particular, the results seem to be in line with the findings of Hendry and Ledbetter's (2017) study on genealogical communication – people who have open, honest, free-flowing conversations about the past seem better able to focus on the positive aspects of it. It also seems reasonable that people who are able to have these open, honest, regular conversations within a family of origin might be more future-oriented. Though theoretical rationale for this point is somewhat more limited, some of the original theoretical descriptions of conversation orientation (i.e., Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b) note that families jointly discussing and planning future activities is common for highly conversation-oriented families, as noted above.

The significant, positive relationship between conformity orientation and the past negative time perspective also matches family communication patterns theory. A high degree of conformity orientation implies a strong desire on the part of the family of origin to pass along its existing values and traditions. Some of those traditions may certainly be negative. This finding is very much in line with the research of Hendry and Ledbetter (2017), suggesting that conformity orientation may be linked to a "dark side" understanding of family genealogy. Overall, conformity orientation seems to predict the less positively regarded time perspectives, including present fatalistic and past negative time perspectives. This finding is also in line with Schrodt et al.'s (2008) meta-analysis, although they also point out that the conformity orientation is not inherently negative if the values that the family of origin wishes to inculcate are positive values. Finally, both dimensions predicted the present fatalistic perspective on time, which is also in line with numerous FCPT studies (e.g., Fife et al., 2016; Hendry & Ledbetter, 2017) showing that both dimensions might predict the same dependent variables in similar ways.

The study also makes a significant contribution to the time perspective literature. As noted in the literature review, scholars studying time perspective have focused to this point on its value as an independent variable, with very limited speculation regarding how people develop individualized time perspectives (e.g., Harber et al., 2003; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Thus, this study is one of the first of its kind to demonstrate a meaningful empirical relationship between communication patters in the family of origin and the development of an individual's time profile. Future research could further clarify this relationship. Additionally, researchers using the ZTPI have started to use combinations of dimensions for a more sophisticated "time profile" (Braitman & Henson, 2015); statistical analysis in a future study could also consider clusters of perspectives as "types" together instead of singular continuous dimensions. Such an approach might allow for additional theoretical clarity.

Limitations & Future Directions

There were a number of limitations to this preliminary study. One of the first was that the study was only conducted at one university. Another limitation was that the sample was predominantly female (77.3%). Unlike Wiesmann et al.'s (2018) findings whereby sex was correlated with the time perspectives of past negative, present hedonistic, and present fatalistic perspectives, in this study, sex was only a significant predictor for the future time orientation (women were higher). This might have been due to our predominantly female sample. This finding should be replicated with a more diverse sample to see if this holds up before one can conclude that females may view time significantly differently than males. Another limitation was the age of the respondents. Because the communication research pool at the university where this study was conducted predominantly taps first year students, and the student body is

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predominantly traditionally aged students, most of the participants were 18 years old. Given the lack of diversity in age, the fact that age was a significant negative predictor for past positive and future orientation perspectives and a positive significant predictor for past negative and present fatalistic orientations implies age does matter when examining time perspectives. As Wiesmann et al. also found, age was positively and significantly correlated with past negative perspectives and present fatalistic perspectives but they found no correlations with past positive and future orientations which may be due to their sample being between 60-91 years old. Clearly, age should be examined when doing this type of research. Future studies should examine more diverse populations, particularly with respect to age. In addition, future studies should add other variables dealing with communication to determine if family communication variables beyond communication patterns help predict more of the variance in the time variables.

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