



# Individual Personality Traits and Communicative Behavior in Adoptive and Non-Adoptive Families

Bibiana D. Koh, Ascan F. Koerner, Laurel Davis, & Martha A. Rueter



## Introduction

•The most consistent finding in studies examining family communication based on varying levels of genetic relatedness is that adoptive family communication is characterized as less warm and more conflictual compared with non-adoptive families (Lansford et al, 2001; Rosnati & Marta, 1997; Rueter, et al. 2009). However, research examining this difference is limited.  
•Two factors that may influence family communication: personality traits and varying levels of genetic relatedness (e.g. adopted vs. non-adopted).

### Theoretical Frameworks

•Person-environment transactional theory (Caspi et al., 1987, 1988; Scarr & McCartney, 1983)  
•Family Communications Patterns Theory (FCPT; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a, 2000b, 2004, 2006)  
•Actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny & Cook, 1999; Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010).

### The Present Study

The goal of the present study is to understand how parent and adolescent individual personality traits and adoption status independently contribute to individuals' communicative behavior (directed toward other family members) in adoptive compared to non-adoptive families.

## Participants

Data for this study were from the Sibling Interaction and Behavior Study (SIBS; McGue et al., 2007). Participating families at intake ( $N = 617$ ) had at least one parent and two adolescent siblings ( $M = 14.9$  years,  $SD = 1.9$ ). The present study used data from the mothers ( $M_{age} = 45.56$ ,  $SD = 4.23$ ), fathers ( $M_{age} = 48.23$ ,  $SD = 4.42$ ), elder (younger) sibling was adopted [International:  $n = 253$  (208), 67% (65% Asian)]. In 231 (208) families, the elder (younger) sibling was the biological offspring of both parents. Two adoptive families were removed from the sample due to ineligibility resulting in a final sample of 615 families.

Family Social Science  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
& HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## Measures

### PERSONALITY TRAITS: Self-report data

•**Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (MPQ;** Tellegen & Waller, 2008) –198-item, factor-analytically developed, self-report measure of three higher (Positive Emotionality, Negative Emotionality, and Constraint) and 11 lower order personality traits  
•**Personality Booklet – Youth Abbreviated (PBYA;** Tellegen & Waller, 2008) – shortened, 133-item version of the MPQ for adolescents under 16 years of age.  
•All MPQ and PBYA questionnaire items used a 4-point scale (1 = definitely false to 4 = definitely true) and were reverse coded as necessary so that high scores reflect high levels of a given trait.

### FAMILY COMMUNICATION: Observational data

•Assessed using trained observers' global ratings of dyadic (e.g. adolescent to mother, father to adolescent, etc.) family interaction tasks from the Sibling Interaction and Behavior Rating Scales (SIBRS; adapted from the Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales, Melby & Conger, 2001). All SIBRS are based on the following scale: 1 = not at all characteristic to 9 = mainly characteristic.

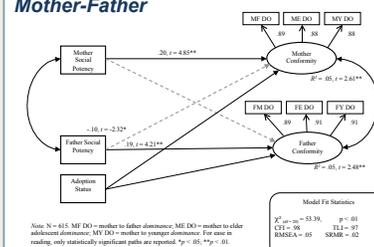
•**Conformity: Dominance scale (ICCs: .56 to .76).**  
•**Conversation:** measured using factor scores of the Warmth (ICCs:.37 to .72), Listening Responsiveness (ICCs:.34 to .63), and Communication (ICCs:60 to .75) scales.

•**Adoption status: 1 = adopted, 2 = not adopted.**

## Results

### Conformity Model

#### Mother-Father

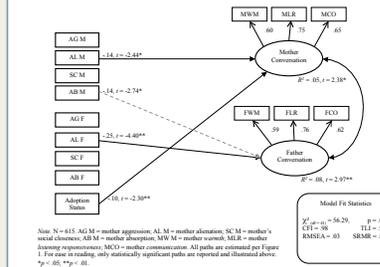


Note:  $N = 615$ . MF DO = mother to father dominance; ME DO = mother to elder adolescent dominance; MY DO = mother to younger adolescent dominance. For ease in reading, only statistically significant paths are reported. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Results

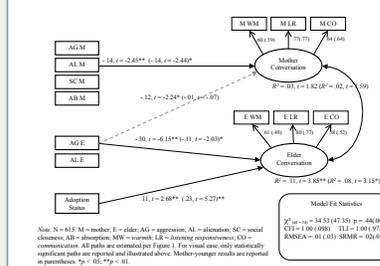
### Conversation Models

#### Mother-Father



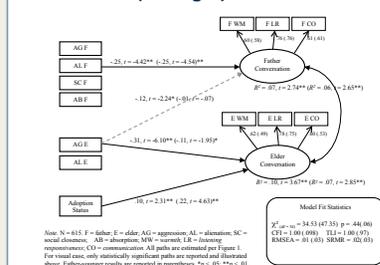
Note:  $N = 615$ . AG M = mother aggression; AL M = mother alienation; SC M = mother's social closeness; AB M = mother absorption; MW M = mother warmth; MLR = mother listening responsiveness; MCO = mother communication. All paths are estimated per Figure 1. For ease in reading, only statistically significant paths are reported and illustrated above. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

#### Mother-Elder (Younger)



Note:  $N = 615$ . M = mother; E = elder; AG = aggression; AL = alienation; SC = social closeness; AB = absorption; MW = warmth; LR = listening responsiveness; CO = communication. All paths are estimated per Figure 1. For visual ease, only statistically significant paths are reported and illustrated above. Mother-son/daughter results are reported in parentheses. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

#### Father-Elder (Younger)



Note:  $N = 615$ . F = father; E = elder; AG = aggression; AL = alienation; SC = social closeness; AB = absorption; MW = warmth; LR = listening responsiveness; CO = communication. All paths are estimated per Figure 1. For visual ease, only statistically significant paths are reported and illustrated above. Father-son/daughter results are reported in parentheses. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

Overall, findings from this study supported complex associations among personality, communication, and adoption status.

### Applicability of theoretical framework to study findings:

•As expected (and supported by partner effects), transactional theory helped explain associations between one family members' trait and another family members' communicative behavior.  
•As expected, personality helped explain why family members communicate the way they do – thus, strengthening FCPT.

### Personality and Family Communication

•Traits consistent with each family member's expected role (e.g. parent-driven versus equally disposed communication orientations) contributed to Conformity- and Conversation-oriented communication.

### Adoption Status

•Contrary to our expectations, the association between adoption status and communication was not supported in all dyadic Conformity and Conversation models.  
•Conformity behavior not specific to adoptive and non-adoptive family types.  
•Conversation behavior differed in adoptive and non-adoptive families (e.g. adoptive mothers more likely to engage in warm, responsive Conversation; adoptive adolescents less likely).

## Future Directions

•Prospective studies should measure additional traits (e.g. adolescent social potency, absorption, and social closeness).  
•Present study was cross sectional; future investigations should establish direction of effects.  
•Inquiries into ramifications of dyadic relationship patterns (i.e. contrast, compensatory) on family relationships in adoptive and non-adoptive families.  
•Implications of communicative behavior in adoptive families (i.e. adoptive mothers warm, responsive, and adopted adolescents less warm, responsive).

UNIVERSITY  
OF MINNESOTA  
Driven to Discover<sup>SM</sup>