Parents and Children Communicating with Society: Managing Relationships Outside of Home

Edited by
Thomas J. Socha
Glen H. Stamp
Parents and Children Communicating with Society

This volume opens a new frontier in family communication research as it brings together veteran researchers and younger scholars to explore the communication of parents and children as they create relationships outside the family. The work breaks new ground in family communication in three key areas:

- Communication between parents, children, and significant societal agents (childcare workers, teachers, coaches, healthcare workers)
- The role of media (Instant Messaging, hotlines) in parent-child-societal relationships
- Parent-child-societal communication and evolving parental and caregiver roles (step-parents, foster parents, gay/lesbian parents)

Families today raise children in complex relationships with society, and this volume reflects the significance of this condition in the studies of unique parent-child communication. This volume will be an indispensable tool for scholars, researchers, and students in communication, as well as psychologists and sociologists. It will help all readers achieve a better understanding of how parents, children, and key members of their societal sphere communicate.

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Communicating with Society
Managing Relationships Outside of Home

Edited by
Thomas J. Socha
Glen H. Stamp
To our parents…
Mary & Jim Socha
Nell & Fred Stamp
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Foreword

Anita Vangelisti

In 1995, Socha and Stamp published *Parents, Children, and Communication: Frontiers of Theory and Research*. The volume represented a milestone for communication researchers. Scholars in other fields had done extensive studies of parent-child interaction, looking at issues such as communication between infants and their mothers (Barratt, Roach, & Leavitt, 1992; Field, Healy, Goldstein, & Guthertz, 1990), the association between parent-child interaction and marital change (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991), and conflicts between adolescents and their parents (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1987; Smetana & Gaines, 1999). But, with the exception of some excellent work done in the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g., Delia & Clark, 1977; Haslett, 1983), communication researchers had left interactions between parents and their children largely unexamined. The Socha and Stamp volume served as an impetus, for many communication scholars, to study the various ways that parents and children relate to each other.

Now, more than 10 years later, Socha and Stamp have turned their attention to a different frontier. In *Parents and Children Communicating with Society: Managing Relationships Outside of Home*, they examine the communicative interface between parents, their children, and the outside world. Socha and Stamp have compiled a collection of chapters that address the links between families and a number of societal entities ranging from schools, to healthcare systems, to the media. In some cases, the entities under study are easily identifiable institutions (hospitals, childcare centers); in others, they are more abstract and difficult to identify (cyberspace, the public sphere). Although the societal entities examined vary from chapter to chapter, they all point to two common themes: first, that the interactions parents and their children have with society affect, and are affected by, their interactions with each other; and second, that communication researchers have a great deal to learn from, and about, the ways each of the relevant entities interacts with parent-child dyads. In short, this volume, like its predecessor, maps out territory for research on parent-child communication that is both influential and mostly unexplored by those who study communication.

The willingness of the volume’s authors to examine interactions between parents, children, and society is timely. Today, many of the constraints that
once prevented family members from communicating with a broad range of societal entities have been eliminated by technology. People travel now more than they used to, they have immediate access to news and information via the internet and, in many instances, they have more contact with the individuals who represent social entities. Parents who are concerned about their child’s performance in school can email the child's teacher or the school principal. Grown children who want information about an elderly parent’s health can seek out that information on the internet, email the parent’s physician, or go to an on-line forum to discuss the parent’s symptoms.

Although many of the constraints on communication between parents, children, and society have been lifted, researchers and theorists know relatively little about whether, and under what circumstances, the increased opportunity for communication is beneficial. Having greater access to information can be helpful in some situations and harmful in others (Brashers, 2001). Further, increases in the frequency of communication may not be indicative of high quality interaction or highly satisfying relationships. Indeed, some scholars have argued that the constant accessibility individuals are afforded by certain technologies has actually led to greater isolation and less satisfying, less intimate relationships (Putnam, 1995). It also is important to note that there are forces—both within and outside families—that shape the degree to which parents and children communicate with societal entities and the extent to which societal entities interact with parents and children. Family rules, cultural norms, and economic forces all can serve to encourage or discourage interaction between family members and society. The restrictions that some individuals face in their communication with society can shape their lives, and their relationships, as much as the access enjoyed by others.

Clearly, as noted by Socha and Stamp, the interactions that take place between parents, their children, and society are complex. Perhaps the most obvious source of their complexity lies in the fact that they involve multiple constituencies that operate on different levels. Thus, for example, each instance of parent-child-societal communication involves the simultaneous engagement of individuals (e.g., a parent, a child, a teacher), dyads (e.g., parent-child, parent-teacher, child-teacher), and groups (e.g., parent groups, classrooms of children, teachers in a school). Another source of their complexity lies in the process of communication itself (Sillars & Vangelisti, 2006). Communication conveys multiple meanings simultaneously. More specifically, researchers typically distinguish between the content of messages and the “command” (Ruesch & Bateson, 1951) or “relationship” (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) aspect of messages, suggesting that the former is literal and relatively explicit whereas the latter is implied and involves social or relational evaluations. Communication also is complex because it serves multiple functions. Whenever individuals, dyads, and groups interact, they simultaneously seek to fulfill multiple goals (e.g., coherence, impression management, persuasion; see Street & Cappella, 1985). In addition, each act of communication is interpreted in the context of the messages that precede and follow it. So, for
instance, when a parent, a child, and a school administrator interact, their communication is influenced by any prior interactions they may have had with each other as well as by interactions they may have had with others in their social environment. Even after they conclude their interaction, the way that each of them interprets the other’s communication is affected by subsequent interactions.

The studies and commentaries included in the current volume take on the challenge of exploring the complex interactions that occur between parents, children, and society. In doing so, they not only offer a rationale for studying parent-child-societal communication, they also provide grounds for conducting additional work on the subsystems that compose various parent-child-societal systems. For instance, understanding the different ways that parents, children, and teachers view schoolwork raises questions about how parents and children talk together about the work that children do at school, how parents and teachers communicate about homework assignments, and how teachers and children discuss the roles and responsibilities associated with schoolwork. Similarly, looking at interactions between nontraditional parents (e.g., stepparents, gay and lesbian parents), their children, and the larger community points to issues about how these parents communicate with their children about their parental role, how nontraditional parents cope with the challenges they face when interacting with the surrounding community, and how various members of the community interact with the children of nontraditional parents.

By highlighting questions that can be asked about the subsystems associated with parent-child-societal communication, the chapters in the current volume present researchers with the opportunity to further explore, and understand, each of the subsystems and their components. If, as suggested by this volume, researchers start their work by situating each subsystem within a larger system, they are likely to uncover information about the subsystems and their components that might not otherwise be uncovered. For instance, in examining conversations between healthcare professionals, children who are chronically ill, and the parents of these children, researchers are likely to find variables that predict the quality of the relationship between the parents and their children (DiMatteo, 2004). It may be that parents who involve their children in the interaction or who translate complex words or phrases for their children have higher quality relationships with their children than those who do not. Inasmuch as this is the case, researchers might then go on to examine the scope conditions that define the degree to which, and the circumstances in which, this sort of inclusion is functional for children (e.g., being included may be more important for older children than for younger children whereas being reassured may be more important for younger children). Similarly, interactions between parents and their children concerning the children’s use of various media may provide a telling indicator of their relationship (Jennings & Wartella, 2004). For example, the tendency of parents and children to approach (as opposed to avoid) discussions of this sort may predict the degree of trust and openness that characterizes their association with each other. It also may
be that the link between parents’ and children’s tendency to engage in these discussions and the quality of their relationship is moderated by such variables as the parents’ beliefs about the use of particular media and the parents’ willingness to explain those beliefs to their children.

Describing and explaining the various subsystems associated with parent-child-societal communication certainly will provide researchers and theorists with information they can use to better understand parent-child-societal interactions. However, as noted by systems theorists, larger systems cannot be understood solely on the basis of their subsystems or their parts. The chapters that make up the present volume not only provide a motivation for researchers to look at various parent-child-societal subsystems, they also underline the importance of examining the system as a whole.

Researchers have long argued that families are open systems and that, as a consequence, they should be studied in context. In bringing together the chapters written for this book, Socha and Stamp take this argument one step further. *Parents and Children Communicating with Society: Managing Relationships Outside of Home* suggests not only that we need to study families in context, but also that what we conceive as context can become an integral part of family interactions. Socha and Stamp are being modest in noting that this volume represents a first step in “navigating the terrain of communication for parents, children, and society” (chapter 1). The book does more than that. It reconceptualizes parent-child communication by defining societal contexts as interactive. This reconceptualization really does represent a new frontier.

References


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1 A New Frontier for Family Communication Studies
Parent-Child-Societal Communication

Thomas J. Socha and Glen H. Stamp

Over a decade ago within the field of communication studies, Parents, Children, and Communication: Frontiers of Theory and Research (Socha & Stamp, 1995) helped to launch research explorations of communication in parent-child relationships. That volume charted new theoretical and methodological terrain and built a platform for subsequent parent-child communication studies. This volume widens the platform of parent-child communication scholarship by bringing together veteran family communication researchers and newcomers to collectively explore the frontier of parents’ and children’s communication with the world outside of home. Specifically, the volume explores: communication processes and problems of parents, children, and society in the contexts of childcare, education, healthcare, and youth sports; how parents, children and societal agents use electronic media in their interactions; and communication challenges facing stepfamilies and gay/lesbian families in their interactions outside of home. Paraphrasing the thesis of a popular book that focused on children, It Takes a Village (Clinton, 1996), this volume examines communication between and among parents, children, and some of the villagers entrusted with children’s welfare.

A Rationale for Studying Parent-Child-Societal Communication

Family communication scholars have perennially regarded families as open social systems, that is, families both affect, and are affected by, interactions with society. Parents, children, and society connect in various communication contexts as interorganizations (e.g., family units and childcare centers), intergroups (e.g., groups comprised of family members and childcare-center members such as parent/child/childcare-center administrator, parent/child/childcare worker, child/childcare worker/childcare administrator, etc.), and in interpersonal relationships (e.g., relationships between a family member and a childcare center member, such as parent/childcare worker, child/childcare worker, parent/childcare administrator, child/childcare administrator, child/classmate, etc). The media of parent-child-societal communication can include face-to-face communication, print (e.g., parents’ letters, childcare center newsletters,
To date, research in the field of family communication has shed significant light on interorganizational communication between families and society via television (e.g., Bryant & Bryant, 2001), and tremendous strides have been made towards understanding communication within family systems as well as family relationships (e.g., Vangelisti, 2003). However, what is needed is a better understanding of the everyday intergroup and interpersonal interactions between parents, children, and the many societal systems to which families connect. Such an understanding should also include insights into parent-child-societal communication struggles unique to various types of families such as stepfamilies and gay/lesbian families as well as insights into the increasing role played by personal electronic media.

There are at least five reasons that support a warrant for research of communication in the everyday lives of parents, children, and societal agents/agencies: managing family-society boundaries and privacy, better handling of family-society communication problems and conflicts, managing family-society status inequalities, dealing with differences in communication standards and styles between families and society, and coordinating systems of shared care by families and society.

**Boundaries and Privacy**

First, in light of the many significant interdependencies between contemporary families and societal agencies (e.g., childcare, education, healthcare, organized sports, etc.), it is important to better understand how parents, children, and society use communication to manage the many boundaries between families and society as well as protect privacy (see Petronio, 1991, 2002). As with all groups, as parents, children, and society communicate they create and manage boundaries (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). These boundaries can sometimes become blurred, potentially creating confusion and misunderstandings in situations such as during a sports practice when a “father” and “son” must communicate as “coach” and “player,” or during a homework session when a “parent” and “child” interact as “teacher” and “student,” or during a medical consultation when a parent asks a pediatrician for his or her opinion “as a parent.” Some family-society boundaries are legal and can determine who can interact with whom about what, such as laws that prevent noncustodial stepparents from gaining medical information or school information about stepchildren.

Boundaries between families and society separate what is considered private or “family business” from what is public and available for display (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Many questions arise concerning, on the one hand, how to maintain family privacy, and, on the other hand, how to provide and secure information needed by systems outside of home, especially with societal agencies upon which families depend for essential services and support (i.e., childcare,
education, medical, governmental, etc.). For stepfamilies, foster families, and gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered families, managing privacy can be especially difficult due to legalities and clashing familial and societal values.

**Conflicts and Communication Problems**

Second, communication is used to manage the wide array of inevitable conflicts and problematic communication episodes between parents, children, and the outside world. Such situations can include, for example, managing value differences between parents, children, and childcare agencies over ways of directing children’s behaviors, managing clashes between parents, children, and healthcare agencies concerning optimal healthcare approaches, managing differences between parents, children, and athletic coaches concerning children’s athletic development, managing clashes between gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered family units and governmental institutions over childcare rights, and even managing clashes between parents, children and society over the extent to which to include children in conversations that directly affect them (children as full participants, limited participants, or left out).

Well-managed and effective communication between parents, children, and society can be an incredibly positive force, but mismanaged communication can become a catalyst for a host of negative outcomes that has led, in some cases, to physical injury to parents and societal agents (e.g., see Heinzmann, 2008), and although rare, death (e.g., the case of a father who beat another father to death during a hockey practice over a boy’s rough play as the team watched, see Hockey Dad, 2008).

**Status Inequalities**

Third, as parents and children communicate with the outside world, they are not always on equal footing with societal agencies. Parents turn to many agencies outside of home for assistance, support, and specialized knowledge and expertise. For example, by virtue of their extensive education, specialized training, and experience, medical doctors (relative to parents and children) bring greater relative informational status to parent-child-physician interactions. However, caring for the health of a child is ultimately the parents’ responsibility and, although they may lack scientific medical information, parents do bring particularized insights into their children. Thus, children’s healthcare is best regarded as a coordinated endeavor between children, parents, and medical practitioners, where coordination failures (sometimes and in part due to status conflicts) can pose significant risks and dangers. Similarly, successfully educating children is a coordinated effort between parents, children, and teachers, where, for example, status clashes between parents and teachers can compromise educational quality and jeopardize educational success.
Interactional Differences

Fourth, rules shaping family interaction at home (backstage) can mirror or be at odds with rules shaping interaction in public (front-stage) (e.g., Goffman, 1959, 1963; Sennett, 1976). For example, adults’ occasional use of vulgar language might be acceptable behavior in some homes, but is generally not acceptable behavior for parents (or children) while interacting at school (e.g., see Sennett, 1980). When familial and traditional-societal standards of politeness and decorum are in sync, this can result in positive social attributions during interaction outside of home (“Your children are so polite!”), whereas inconsistencies between familial and societal standards can lead to negative social attributions (“Your children are rude.”). Unfortunately, today it is not uncommon for children to hear parents publicly using vulgar language while watching children’s sporting events, or for children to hear vulgar language on television shows. In all cases, children are observing and learning about what constitutes effective and appropriate public communication as they view the adults communicating around them.

Shared Care

Fifth and finally, it is of particular importance to begin to understand communication between parents, children, and the primary societal systems upon which parents and children depend: childcare, healthcare, education, and recreation, to name but a few.

With respect to childcare, parents employed outside of home must extend their authority, in loco parentis, to outside care systems (see Sennett, 1980). Parents count on this care to be of high quality, and expect that care will be in concert with their values and styles. To secure this care, parents can turn to family members, and/or childcare systems outside of home. Parents are, of course, the primary participants in initiating and obtaining agreements of care, but children are also participants in this process and their point of view should be considered. Once agreements of care are struck, parents, children, and day-care agents and day-care participants begin to create a network of communication structures that serve communication functions including surveillance, information sharing, social influence, and so on. These structures can be many and varied: “daycare relationships,” (e.g., with daycare workers, other parents, etc.), “daycare groups” (e.g., advisory boards) as well as in “daycare organizational communication” (e.g., reading daycare-center handbooks). Parents communicating with a daycare center may also interact with organizations affiliated with the center (e.g., parks and recreation systems that sponsor programs, museums, governmental and professional agencies that regulate and monitor operations, etc.).

Since we know that children’s well-being is dependent on the effectiveness of parent-child interaction in the home, when daycare outside of home is utilized, by extension, children’s well-being also relies in large part on the
effectiveness of interaction within a given childcare system. However, since parents and daycare providers share childcare, it is important to better understand the contribution that parent-child-daycare center interactions have on children’s well-being.

New Directions in Parent-Child-Societal Communication

The volume seeks to open research in these five areas as well as offer a research agenda for future studies. The chapters in the volume represent work selected from proposals received in response to a national competitive call as well as invited research commentaries written by leading communication experts having expertise in the contexts of childcare and education, health communication, family media, and stepfamilies. The volume is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of parent-child-societal communication, rather the volume seeks to introduce communication scholars, students, and interested parties to parent-child-societal communication, draw attention to various significant lines of inquiry, and, similar to Socha and Stamp (1995), begin to build a platform for future inquiry. The volume is divided into four sections: childcare and education; health and recreation; families, society and electronic media, and evolving family-societal relationships.

Childcare and Education

Families depend on societal agencies outside of home for the daily care and education of children. Section one of the volume is comprised of five chapters that focus on parent-child-societal communication in the contexts of childcare and elementary education. Weigel and Martin (chapter 2: Connecting Two Worlds of Childhood: How Do Parents, Childcare Providers, and Children Communicate?) open the section with an overview that seeks to begin to address some fundamental questions: What is the nature of the communication between parents and child-care providers (e.g., frequency, content, behaviour, channels, affect, etc.)? What factors enable and hinder parent childcare-provider communication? What questions remain in understanding parent childcare-provider communication? Weigel and Martin report the results of a survey study of parents and childcare providers. Results suggest that parent childcare-provider communication is regular but brief (e.g., 3–5 minute conversations during pick-up time). The content of these conversations include information about the child's day, the child's behaviors during the day, and supportive miniparenting lessons. They also found that parents reported the most frequently used means of communication included newsletters, parent-provider meetings, and notes from the provider. Providers, on the other hand, reported that parents were more likely to read newsletters than any other form of home-childcare program interaction. The chapter concludes by offering an important, preliminary conceptual model for future studies.
Meyer (chapter 3: *Kids, Parents, and Organization: Cooperation and Conflict in a Child Development Center Culture*) reports on his continuing and extensive research of everyday communication in a daycare center. In this chapter he focuses attention on how individuals use communication to manage the variety of intersecting relationships in the context of a child-care center. Framing children as boundary spanners (liaisons), Meyer used interviews with parents and childcare workers, and engaged in participation observation with children to gather qualitative data to address how parents, children, and childcare workers managed these multi-layered connections and understandings. A variety of themes emerged from each point of view. From the point of view of children, it is clear that they have to manage a great deal of relational work with the many adults at the center, their parents, as well as the many children at the center. Across the 12 child themes identified by Meyer, children are indeed moving back and forth between the world of adults and the world of children, as when, for example, they have to decide to “tell a teacher” about another child’s behavior, or to ask for assistance in managing childhood relational struggles. Caregiver themes included trying to keep everyone happy (parents, children, and supervisors), managing boundaries between caregivers, children, and parents, as well as having to code-switch, or adapt their interaction to dramatically different audiences. Parents indicated they desired child-centered communication from the staff, wanted staff to be open, preferred staff to create a safe, community-feeling at the center, and wanted staff to model competent communication as they helped guide children. Meyer concludes:

Venues like child development centers may be viewed as communication crossroads, where norms and values from family and child cultures meet, blend, and clash. On the whole, preschool children seem to profit from becoming boundary spanners at such a young age, learning to adapt their communication strategies to varying organizational cultures. Future research could richly explore such crossroads and the recurring issues that emerge there, such as how power differences affect dominant norms in each culture and in their blending, how the family culture affects children interacting in child care cultures, and how extensive divergences in communication norms really may be between child care centers and family cultures. (Meyer, this volume)

Miller-Day and McManus (chapter 4: *The Interface of HOME-work and Low-Wage Maternal Employment*) examine home-school-work communication among working poor families trying to juggle homework along with long hours at work. The increasing number of mothers in the workforce has created work-family-school conflicts for many families. Families are trying to find creative ways to balance daily work-family-school responsibilities, with some relying on other family members for assistance and other families outsourcing this help (e.g., childcare). This chapter focuses on work and family interactions, specifically maternal low-wage work and mother-adolescent relationships. Their
chapter reviews research literature addressing work-family balance in working poor families, reviews the research literature intersecting maternal work and mother-adolescent relations, specifically focusing on mother-adolescent communication, and then reports on an original research study examining low-wage maternal employment, parenting, and mother-adolescent communication in a sample of 94 mother-youth pairs (with a qualitative follow-up with 10 families). The chapter highlights new problems such as the role of communication in parentification (assigning adult care-giving duties to children) and reminds us that families vary economically, socially, and educationally and that such differences make a difference in interaction among parents, children, and society.

Wingard's chapter (chapter 5: Communicating About Homework at Home and School) takes a closer look at the discourse of homework. The accomplishment of children's homework is one aspect of the relationship between the institutions of children's schooling and everyday lived family life. The chapter documents the day to day impact of children's homework in the everyday lives of dual-earner families. The chapter is based on three main sources of ethnographic data collected from 32 dual-earner families in the broader Los Angeles area. First, the corpus includes naturally occurring video-recorded interactions of parents and children negotiating and accomplishing homework on 2 weekday afternoons and on 2 weekend days. This data allows for examination of the face-to-face interaction that homework entails, including the ways in which papers from school and online assignments guide, as parents and children interpret and negotiate about them together. Second, the corpus includes separate open-ended interviews of parents and children about family education practices including their views of homework in family life. The data paint a varied picture of homework from the vantage points of teachers, parents, and children, showing how this task is perceived differently from each point of view. For example, parents look to teachers for guidance about their role in homework, but also want to shape their child's habits in their own ways, that is, they want predictability, consistency, and reasonableness.

Julie Yingling, Professor Emeritus (Humboldt State University), a nationally well-known children's communication scholar and leading developmental theorist, concludes section one with a commentary. Yingling is encouraged that communication is taking an important step by studying children and communication development. Theoretically, she reminds us that the section's studies only begin to examine the bandwidth of ages that are needed to create developmental theory and that studies need to follow the lead of these scholars and systematically include the point of view of children. Using Weigel and Martin's model, Yingling then points out that future parent-child-societal research can benefit from looking at both proximal and distal factors, and the need to widen outcome variables asking, for example, “what leads to an effective teacher, satisfied parent, and socially adept child?” Together, these chapters and Yingling's commentary suggest that it is important for future studies to understand that outcomes of childcare and education are shared among many stakeholders.
Further, these outcomes are also subject to developmental processes. We need to examine the interactions of parents, children, childcare providers, and educators across time and across the wide variety of contexts they share in order to better understand how these shared goals might be better realized. In the next section we turn our attention to connections between parents, children, and societal relationships pertaining to health and wellness.

**Health and Wellness**

Families also depend on societal agencies outside of home for their healthcare and wellness. This necessitates that families communicate with healthcare systems at interorganizational (e.g., a parent choosing a pediatrician using information on the internet), intergroup (e.g., a parent participating in a weight-management exercise group at a local hospital), and interpersonal levels (e.g., parents and children forming relationships with healthcare professionals—physicians, nurses, therapists, pharmacists, etc.). Receiving quality, routine healthcare is undoubtedly important for the well-being of families, and providing quality care is, of course, an important criterion used to assess healthcare systems. However, for families and healthcare systems, communication has become increasingly complex, costly, and fraught with many obstacles. For example, families with children facing special healthcare needs (e.g., particular medical conditions, developmental obstacles, etc.) encounter many layers of complexity as they coordinate a child's healthcare with a team of professionals representing diverse medical specialties. All parties involved must coordinate their lines of communication, if health management is to be positive and effective. In section two, five chapters focus on some of the increasing complexities of parent-child-societal communication in the contexts of health, wellness, and recreation.

Duggan and Petronio (chapter 7: *When Your Child is in Crisis: Navigating Medical Needs with Issues of Privacy Management*) examine circumstances surrounding the way that parents of children with unexpected, serious medical conditions, the care team, and child manage privacy boundaries within the context of navigating their health-driven relationship parameters. Their chapter uses Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM; e.g., Petronio, 1991, 2002) to examine conversations between physicians and parents of children who have recently been admitted to neonatal intensive care and conversations between parents and family members after meeting with the physicians. In addition to the need to use communication to manage parental anxieties and fears, issues of privacy loom large. On the one hand, medical participants require information upon which to base decisions of care, yet, on the other hand, as Duggan and Petronio point out, parents expect to manage the flow of information so as to protect family privacy among various goals. This process also involves governmental regulation (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, United States Department of Health & Human Services, 2008).
Communication Privacy Management Theory poses implications for the ways in which families play a role in advancing the health of their children as illustrated during high crisis times of medical need (Petronio, 2002). The application of CPM theory provides a map for ways physicians and the medical staff can involve parents, child, and family members as allies in the child’s health by recognizing the significance of learning the family’s rules that regulate privacy. Doing so eases the availability of having families grant or deny access to important private information that bears on the medical condition of their child.

Davis, Dollard, and Vergon (chapter 8: The Role of Communication in Child-Parent-Provider Interaction in a Children’s Mental Health System of Care) look at how the team planning process in general, and the wraparound and system of care processes specifically, affect child-family-provider interaction. In particular, their chapter examines system of care principles in practice in child-parent-provider interactions among children with severe emotional disturbances, their families, and mental healthcare providers with a preliminary goal of shedding light on how team communication address questions of how communication facilitates and inhibits care. Systems of care principles feature the acknowledgement that care (emotional, physical, spiritual) is a coordinated effort of families and various societal systems of care of varying specialties. As Davis et al. outline, successful care is dependent on coordinated case management. Relying on analysis of observations and field-notes, they highlight that stakeholders bring varied and often divergent framings to meetings, taking on ambiguous roles, but also share a desire to provide quality care. The chapter points to the work on bona fide groups (Stohl & Putnam, 1994, 2003) as a useful framework for future studies and inquiry.

Mills and Walker’s chapter (chapter 9: Early Intervention or Early Imposition: A Bona Fide Group Perspective Analysis of the Parent-Child-Early Intervention Relationship) also examines family-medical team communication in the context of early intervention teams by means of examples drawn from a variety of public sources (e.g., training manuals, guidebooks, examples drawn from online discussion postings, etc.). Early Intervention is a collection of services designed to support the development of children with disabilities under 36 months of age and to provide support for family growth and stability as they learn more about the child’s diagnosis. Ideally, providers and families work together to help maximize the child’s development and identify the family’s strengths, as well as provide assistance for potentially problematic areas. Their chapter offers a new perspective from the lens of the work on bona fide groups that highlights difficulties in coordinating care with severely disabled children where parents simultaneously stand-in for their children as well as function as parents in complex interactions with numerous medical members of the healthcare team.

In addition to healthcare, children and parents also depend on societal agencies to help meet their needs for wellness and fitness by means of participation in organized sports and recreational activities. In order to fulfill their
wellness/fitness needs, families can: connect with various kinds of organizations (e.g., YMCA’s, community-centers, schools, parks, etc.), join and/or form groups within these organizations (e.g., teams, exercise/fitness groups, etc.), as well as form relationships in these organizations and groups (e.g., with coaches, sports officials, league officials, team parents, player parents, etc.).

Communication between families and recreational sports systems are important to study in part because of the many shared benefits that families and society can derive from such interactions (e.g., increasing well-being, happiness, etc.), but, also in part, to shed light on increasingly common instances of negative communication, including violence, in interactions between parents, children, sports officials, and coaches. For example, the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO, 2006) reported that it receives more than 100 reports annually of violence against sports officials perpetrated by parents and/or children.

Turman, Zimmerman, and Dobesh (chapter 10: Parent-Talk and Sport Participation: Interaction Between Parents, Children, and Coaches Regarding Level of Play in Sports) interviewed parents of children involved in organized junior/high school sports to uncover how communication is used to manage boundaries with coaches as well as to manage children’s participation. By means of interviews, the chapter reports a study that examines topics of sport-talk within families and parents, children, and coaches as they negotiate boundaries and form relationships regarding sports participation. Parents identified a variety of sport-related topics (i.e., playing time, sport politics, inappropriate coaching behaviors, sports competitiveness) they typically discussed with coaches regarding their child’s sport. Despite coaches’ attempts to limit interaction with parents, parents employed a combination of direct and indirect methods to form three kinds of role relationships: spectator (high coach-parent distance), enthusiast (moderate coach-parent distance), and fanatic (low parent-coach distance). The study suggests that shared goals (e.g., physical fitness, sportspersonship, team values, etc.) not be lost in parent-child-coach interaction and that openness needs to be cultivated by coaches, parents, and players as they discuss topics that often prompt conflict such as playing time, negative coaching behaviors, and more. Applications for coaches and parents are discussed.

Littlefield and Larson-Casselton (chapter 11: Coaching Your Own Child: An Exploration of Dominance and Affiliation in Parent-Child Communication in the Public Sphere) examine the tenuous balance of coaching/parenting. Specifically, their chapter focuses on how parents and children in a coaching relationship described their communication in various settings. Their research contributes to a better understanding of communication between parents and children when they become coaches and members of the team; how parent/coaches and children communicate outside of the home in competitive contexts; and how the parent/coach and child communicate in public contexts with each other, as well as with other parents, coaches, and members of the
team. Based on an analysis of interviews with parents/coaches and children/players the chapter reports a study that examined communication and the management of relational control and support structures. Results highlight difficulties in negotiating parental/coaching authority, managing the public-private sides of coaching/parenting, the role of other family members, as well as managing information and privacy. The chapter highlights the need for research into instructional communication in the context of parents/coaches-children/players.

Section two concludes with a commentary by Gary Kreps, professor and chair of communication at George Mason University, regarded by many as the father of health communication. In particular, Professor Kreps calls attention to the lack of research about the role of family communication in health and wellness and highlights areas ripe for future research such as health information, patient support, care giving, role models for the management of health, as well as support for managing the complexities of navigating relationships with health agencies. His comments about the section’s chapters highlight many new avenues for collaboration between family communication researchers and health communication researchers especially in the new areas opened by the chapters such as team healthcare management and the role of athletic coaches, trainers, and health consultants and professionals in supporting the health and wellness of families.

**Parent-Child-Society Relationships and Media**

This section features three chapters that begin to consider the increasing role of various media in creating and maintaining family relationships outside of home. In the 21st century, media connect families and society in a wide array of commercial relationship. This not only includes television but an increasing presence of various forms of personal electronic media such as text messaging, instant messaging, hotlines, and more.

Weintraub Austin, Hust, and Kistler, (chapter 13, *Powerful Media Tools: Arming Parents with Strategies to Affect Children’s Interactions with Commercial Interests*) liken using media to using power tools, that is, power tools can be useful when individuals are trained how to use them and their use is supervised, but also present dangers when they are misused, or used without supervision. Because mass media is driven by commercial interests, parents and children’s participation with media affects their consumer relationships outside of home. Children, in particular, are learning about how to form and interact in commercial relationships as they consume television and have become a large audience for sellers. Before media, children learned how to communicate in commercial relationships outside of home by watching parents interact and negotiate with shop-keepers, tailors, butchers, and a wide variety of individuals selling, door-to-door, everything from ice to elixirs of youth. Today, television mediates and shapes family-societal commercial relationships virtually, sometimes with little or no face-to-face interactions. Weintraub Austin, et al.
Thomas J. Socha and Glen H. Stamp offer a new perspective of parental intervention of children’s media use that is intended to moderate the effects of viewing television on family-societal commercial relationships. As they conclude:

Neither parents nor children are defenseless in this situation. Armed with developmentally-appropriate active parenting strategies with child-centered goals in mind, such as active coviewing and parental mediation, parents can socialize their children to become critical thinkers toward media content. With media literacy as a family value, parents and children alike can learn to think reflectively about media content and to operate the powerful media tools in a way that benefit them as much as or more than the professionals targeting children for their own benefit. (Weintraub Austin, et al. this volume)

Kendall (chapter 14: Finding Adolescents through Cyberspace: Youth Workers, Teenagers, and Instant Messaging) examines adolescents who often have a strong desire to connect with caring adults outside of the home. How this connection occurs, however, has changed as adolescents are becoming increasingly technologically savvy, turning to cyberspace to establish and maintain friendships. The study reported in this chapter looks specifically at the role of youth pastors and how Instant Messaging (IM) is being used in their work with young people. The first study surveyed 72 IM’ing youth pastors asking them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of using IM. The second study surveys 138 college students who used IM in high school, asking them how they would feel about a youth pastor being an IM buddy. Most adolescents were positive about IM as a form of communicating with pastors, but others expressed discomfort about the presence of youth pastors in IM space. In spite of what was perceived as extensive investments of time, pastors, on the other hand, viewed these interactions as positive, with most recommending this as a means to communicate with adolescents. Kendall raises important questions about both the horizons and dangers of this new form of technology.

Penington and Baus (chapter 15: Response to Family Crisis: Mood Disorders, Supportive Listening, and the Telephone Helpline Volunteer) look at the central role of listening both inside and outside of home as playing a significant role in general family welfare but, in particular, in situations where family members are struggling with mood disorders. After reviewing the literature on therapeutic listening, Penington and Baus consider the training of telephone hotline volunteers by taking a close look at training manuals and sessions, as well as conducting a review of a recorded call. They conclude that active listening is a highly significant, but relatively understudied aspect of family communication, and that family members will turn to outside sources to fulfill their unmet needs to be heard. However, in doing so, additional problems can be created that concern the role of parental involvement, as well as untrained operators.
This section closes with a commentary by the renowned media scholar, Jennings Bryant (University of Alabama). Professor Bryant highlights the pioneering efforts of these chapters as they begin to move the field beyond existing normative data and into new worlds that he refers to as digital childhood, or digital family life. He points out that these studies raise heretofore unasked questions about complex interactions between parents–children–society–media interactions, and suggest new directions. He also points out that more work is needed on fuller explications of digital childhood, mobile and personal technologies, as well as the need to refine some of our basic models of family communication given work on this new frontier. Future researchers will benefit from these comments as well as the work of the authors in this section.

Evolving Caregiving Roles and Relationships

Given the variety of family forms today, coupled with ongoing redefinition of parental roles, we can also expect to find variety in the qualities of parent-child-societal relationships, especially for those families where definitions of parental authority are grounded in shifting legal and social ground. These kinds of relationships can pose unique challenges that can include reaching agreements about how to define a family member’s status, determining authority lines, managing divergent values, and so on. How well these communication obstacles are managed can affect the desired quality of a variety of outcomes, and worse, can also pose additional harm to struggling families.

Vogl-Bauer (chapter 17: When the World Comes Home: Examining Internal and External Influences on Communication Exchanges Between Parents and Their Boomerang Children) examines the communication of adult-children who return home to live (with or without their children). Her chapter explores how parents and boomerang children process messages that could rapidly and strongly impact their relationships. First, based on a review of literature, three primary communication issues faced by boomerang children and their parents are examined. Then four different theoretical perspectives: systems theory, relational dialectics theory, social exchange theory, and communication privacy management theory, are invoked to assess the role each could play when trying to understand how parents and their adult children cope with outside influences when adult children return home. Vogl-Bauer argues for the need for more research into boomerang child-parent communication as well as for the impact that such relationships have on young children returning to live in mom’s or dad’s childhood home.

Sixty-five percent of households contain children from a prior relationship, making them a stepfamily (Marano, 2000). Current estimates suggest that one third of children will live with a stepparent before they turn 18; however, this figure does not include children who may interact with stepparents while visiting a noncustodial parent (Visher, Visher, & Pasley, 2003). Even though many