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**SCRIPTED VS. REAL:
AN ANALYSIS OF PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS
IN AFRICAN AMERICAN SITCOM FAMILIES
AND REAL LIFE FAMILIES**

**A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Syrenthia Johnson Robinson
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Kenneth,
who walked through this journey with me from the beginning.

Thank you, honey, for your support and patience.

I also want to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Bessie D. Johnson, and to
my father Eddie L. Johnson. Thank you Mama and Daddy for always standing by
me, encouraging me and believing in me. You are incredible role models.

To my brother, Maurice, thank you for inspiring me and
giving me that comic relief when I needed it.

And, to the rest of my family, and my friends, a special thanks
for your love and your confidence in me.

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study of the parent-child interactions in African American families as they are portrayed on television and as they are experienced in real life. The research methods- frame analyses, focus groups, and a parent-child relationship questionnaire- facilitated the exploration of common interactions between parents and their children, such as their verbal communication styles (conversation orientation, conformity orientation), conflict management styles (avoiding, accommodating, confronting, compromising, collaborating) and level of closeness (disengaged, separated, connected, enmeshed).

To examine the parent-child relationships depicted in African American television families, four television shows were included in the analysis: *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show*, and *That's So Raven*. Three episodes from each television series with parent-child interactions as the main story line were examined for communication style, conflict management, and closeness.

A parents' focus group and a children's focus group was conducted and a Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire was administered to each group to explore real African American parent-child relationships with regard to communication, conflict management, and closeness. The focus groups consisted of three traditional, two-parent African American families with one child per family ranging in age from 9- to 10-years-old.

In categorizing communication styles, conflict management, and closeness, each dyadic pair (mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, or father-son) was considered. The findings show more conversation orientation practiced in the real parent-child relations as well as the TV families. In the real African American families, the most recurring conflicts were between the mother and child. The parent-child conflict management styles most often used in the real families were confronting, compromising, and collaborating. Nearly all of the parent-child conflicts in the TV families were resolved using collaboration. A close, connected parent-child relationship was experienced in the real families and the TV families.

When assessing emotional closeness, conflict management, and communication styles, the results indicated that the quality of the African American parent-child relationships appears to be positive both in real life and on television. Additionally, the results indicated that there are more similarities than differences between African American parent-child relationships depicted on television and experienced in real African American families.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From the Andersons (*Father Knows Best*) to the Douglasses (*My Three Sons*) to the Evans (*Good Times*) to the Huxtables (*The Cosby Show*) to the Connors (*Roseanne*), television families have provided entertainment and have reflected the changing structure of American society since 1947 with the advent of the television sitcom. Families on television have become one of our most enduring benchmarks for assessing how the American family is or should be in the real world.

There is agreement that television content influences social cognition (as cited in Douglas, 2003; Wright, St. Peters, & Huston, 1990). It does so through repetitive and habitual viewing. As a result individuals who view are more likely to develop expectations that resemble the social narratives they watch on television.

This exploratory study considers this notion by examining the parent-child relationship in African American families as depicted on television sitcoms and by assessing how, if at all, the parent-child experiences on the shows mirror and influence real life occurrences. This issue is important to investigate so as to expand the knowledge base about the extent television families reflect reality and the level of influence these families have on the functions and interactions of real families, by specifically exploring parent-child relations. Of the many different relationships we form over the course of our lives, the relationship between parent

and child is among the most important. Researchers in the field of child development and family studies have devoted considerable attention to the parent-child relationship in an attempt to understand how that relationship develops and functions over time.

The significance of specifically looking at African American families in the present study rests on the fact that most studies that have investigated television effects and minority groups have focused on how the study participants defined individual characters or how they compared the characters to other races (Douglas, 2003). There is a lack of research on parents and children's responses to family portrayals, which this study will explore.

Minority family life on television, particularly the parent-child relations among minority groups, has not been the subject of much inquiry in the communication field. This study will explore scripted and real African American parent-child relations with theoretical approaches such as relational and family communication schemas, a family cohesion model, and conflict theory. The study will build upon existing research and provide a greater depth of knowledge by exploring the scripted and the real relationship and interactions of a parent and child within a minority family unit. As William Douglas (2003) explained:

Television families insinuate their way into our lives. Their doors are always open to us and, despite the apparent fiction, we recognize their experience, sometimes because it reminds us of our own and sometimes because it reinforces and extends our sense of life and relations in families unknown to us.

On a daily basis families are exposed to these massive amounts of media messages that produce various depictions of how parents can parent and how children can respond to their parents. This dissertation reports how parent-child relationships are portrayed on television. The study looks primarily at the patterns of verbal interactions, as well as how issues and conflicts are dealt with by the parents and the children in four different shows that feature African-American families. The study explores whether the parent-child relationship within the TV families reflect the reality of actual parent-child relationships or an ideal representation. Or, is it simply a popular portrayal meant to attract an audience.

The study is based on a frame analysis of episodes of four family-oriented television sitcoms that feature African-American families from the 1990s and today. Focus groups and questionnaires were also used in the study to explore real African American families' understanding of their own parent-child relationship as it relates to parent-child relationship portrayals on television.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Families' Use of Television

Television has become a household staple in most American homes and has assumed a permanent place within the home. In 1948, fewer than 1 in 200 homes had a television set; by 1956, over half had a television set, and by 1962, nine out of ten homes were equipped with a television (Andreasen, 1990). By 1956, American families were watching more than 5 hours of television a day; by

1971, families watched more than 6 hours a day, and by 1983, viewing time had exceeded 7 hours each day (Andreasen, 1990).

Television viewing is the primary family activity, and family members are absorbed by the medium (DeGrane, 1991). Some families plan their activities, such as family dinner, around television viewing. Television functions within the family system. “The family system can be seen to include the family unit and the television. Family members interact with each other and with the television, both individually and as a family unit” (Goodman, 1983, p. 408).

Behavior associated with television viewing is a complex area of research. There are differing views about the effects of television viewing among families. Paul Lazarsfeld (1955) was one of the first scholars to push for more coordinated television research and for “detailed and large-scale studies of what actually goes on in the home” (p. 244). Some scholars suggest that viewing may be linked to more frequent and positive family interactions (Brody, Stoneman, & Sanders, 1980; Lull, 1980a, 1980b). However, there are scholars who argue that television viewing affects family interaction in a different way that’s not always positive, citing very little family interaction where at times interaction is stifled or suspended when families watch television together (Maccoby, 1951; Brody et al., 1980; National Institute of Mental Health, 1982).

James Lull (1990) distinguished some of the ways that families use television by focusing on the rituals of television use in families. He characterized the social uses of television by families as “structural” and

“relational.” Structural in the sense where television is used as a “companion” as families go about their everyday living and routines, and relational whereas television influences the processes of interaction between family members.

Undoubtedly, television viewing commonly occurs amid everyday family life. To gauge all of its social uses and effects would be a daunting, and nearly impossible, task, even more so when one considers the clash and differing reports from effects research scholars as to the impact television viewing has on family members.

Families on Television

Families are situated prominently in the television programming content across a wide range of genres including sitcoms, dramas and soap operas. Of particular significance and interest for this study was the depiction of the family in American television sitcoms. Throughout the history of the sitcom, the mother and father and children have adhered to a consistent and perpetuated set of stereotypes. Initially when sitcoms featuring families first began airing on television more than 50 years ago, the families were commonly structured where the father/husband was the breadwinner of the family, the mother/wife stayed at home, handled the household duties, and her primary job was mothering the children (e.g., *Leave It To Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, and *The Donna Reed Show*). These families were fanciful visions of the traditional nuclear, ‘All-American’ family. They were programs that presented idealized versions of White middle-class families in suburban communities.

From the 1960s, the television family was altered a bit with some shows that featured 'broken' families that were led by a single father (e.g., *My Three Sons* and *Family Affair*) or by a single mother (e.g., *Julia* and *Here's Lucy*). By the 1970s there was a significant change as the depiction of family life became more diverse, although never completely representative of every American lifestyle. There was an attempt to reach a new demographic group of urban, blue-collar professionals, working women, and a rising African American middle-class with programs such as *All In The Family*, *Maude*, *Good Times* and *The Jeffersons*.

Before the 1970s, African American, Hispanic and Asian family life was hardly ever dealt with on television. However, when these families were given roles, they were usually portrayed humorously (e.g., jokesters, clownish, the object of disparaging humor) or stereotypically (e.g., poor, lazy, hostile, criminals). One of the early African American programs was *Julia*, a nurse and single mother who had a young son. The program premiered in 1968. Other shows that followed over the next two decades that featured African Americans as a family unit includes *Sanford and Son* (1972), *Good Times* (1974), *That's My Mama* (1974), *The Jeffersons* (1975), *The Cosby Show* (1985), *227* (1985), *Family Matters* (1989), and *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990). These shows attempted to portray the missing elements of the family shows which featured suburban, White American families and which lacked any ethnic or racial diversity.

While the 1970s introduced more African American families on the tube, the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s saw a change in the structure of the TV family with programs featuring single moms (who were either divorced or never married), such as *One Day at a Time* (1975) and *Kate and Allie* (1984). The 1980s and 1990s saw an influx of prime-time soap operas (e.g., *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and *Knots Landing*) and domestic comedies (e.g., *Family Ties*, *Growing Pains*, *Family Matters*, *Roseanne*, *Married With Children*, and *Full House*), featuring both idealized families and dysfunctional families. Over the course of the 1980s and through the present, it appears that the structure, ethics, mores and socio-economic configuration of the television family has changed along with the television viewing audience and has transformed into a group quite different from the television families of the 1950s and 1960s. The sitcom family today is edgier and more susceptible to conflicts and problems. There are more serious issues (e.g., violence, substance abuse, sexuality) that today's sitcom family deals with than the predicaments the TV families faced in the fifties or sixties.

Research indicates that the African American sitcom family has been through several phases as well, which is discussed in detail in the following chapter. The structure of some of the early shows with African American casts featured households run by mothers who were either widowed or divorced, such as *Julia* (1968), *Good Times* (1974), and *What's Happening* (1976). *Good Times* actually began as a show about a family with two parents, but the story line changed after its second season on air to where the father died and the mother was

left with the struggles of taking care of a family of three kids in a ghetto in Chicago. By the 1980s and through the 1990s there were more two-parent African American households presented on television (e.g., *The Cosby Show* (1984), *227* (1985), *Family Matters* (1989), *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990), *The Parenthood* (1995), *Moesha* (1995), *The Hughleys* (1998).

The depiction of the socioeconomic status of African American families on television has been through some transformations also. Some of the first family shows featuring African Americans portrayed them as low-income, lower middle-class, or poor (e.g., *Julia* (1968), *Sanford & Son* (1972), *Good Times* (1974), *What's Happening* (1976)). The first introduction to an upper middle-class African American family came in 1975 with *The Jeffersons*. On air for 10 years, *The Jeffersons* featured a successful businessman who moved his family to a spacious high-rise apartment, which at that time was a sign in the African American community that this was a family that had made it. As *The Jeffersons* on-air run was ending, another upper class African American television family was just beginning its run. *The Cosby Show* (1984) was one of the most popular family shows featuring an African American family in the history of television- so popular in fact that it has been running in syndication since 1987 and can be seen on broadcast and cable channels today. *The Cosby Show* depicted a two-parent family of seven where the father was a doctor and the mother was a lawyer living in an upscale Brooklyn neighborhood. Soon after *The Jeffersons* and *The Cosby Show*, the social and economic status of African American television families

changed. By the mid-1980s families were depicted more as middle-class families living in a decent neighborhood or in the suburbs (227 (1985), *Family Matters* (1989), *The Parenthood* (1995), *Moesha* (1995), *The Hughleys* (1998)).

It seems that the portrayals of African American families have become more expansive to include a variety of family images, structures, economic levels, and values. These changes in the depictions of television families are influenced by the changing values of American society. The changing values of society are also reflected in the separate relationships within the television families as a whole, like the relationship between husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, brothers and sisters, etc. While many studies have looked at different television families and their representations on television, as outlined in Chapter 2, there are gaps in existing knowledge about the portrayal of the parent-child relationship on television, especially among African American TV families. More comprehensive discussion about the research literature that is available, as well as other studies that have reported on the portrayal of families on television, will be addressed in the next chapter.

Dynamics of the Parent-Child Relationship

Within family structure, the parent-child relationship is an important one. In the early years of children's lives, parents are the most important figures in their world. Their approval, love and support are critical to children. Consequently, much of what children do and say is aimed at maintaining that love and approval. As children get older and have more contact with people other than

their parents, other people, such as peers, will influence their behaviors and attitudes.

As children move into adolescence, parents remain the most important providers of support, but relationships with friends and also with siblings become increasingly important sources of support (Frey & Rothlisberger, 1996; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985a; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). The parent-child relationship faces many challenges and influences. Some influences highlighted by researchers include life course experiences, social and psychosocial adversities and characteristics of parents and children (Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, & Sturgess, 2001).

There has been a considerable amount of attention given to the parent-child relationship in an effort to understand how it develops and functions over the lifespan. Among the many questions family studies researchers examine are those concerning normative changes in the parent-child relationship over the course of development (e.g., *How does the parent-child relationship change during adolescence?*), the impact of variations in the parent-child relationship on the child's behavior and functioning (e.g., *Which types of discipline are most effective during the preschool years?*), and the effects of the parent-child relationship on the parent (e.g., *How are adults affected by parenthood?*) (Bednar & Fisher, 2003; Lanz, Scabini, Vermulst, & Gerris, 2001; McLanahani & Adams, 1989; Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003; Stormshak, Bierman, McMahon, & Lengua, 2000; White & Matawie, 2004).

Deeply embedded in the parent-child relationship is the child's first experience of connectedness, or intimacy with another human being, and that is usually with the mother. There is the common notion of the bond between a mother and her child. Theoretical approaches (e.g., attachment theory) have been used to conceptualize the nature of mother-child relationships.

Up until recently, there has been very little focus in the research literature on issues related to the father-child relationship. There is a growing body of research on the nature and extent of paternal involvement (Bulanda, 2004; Lis, Zennaro, Mazzeschi, & Pinto, 2004; Beitel & Parke, 1998; Amato & Rivera, 1999), the characteristics of father-child interaction (Kazura, 2000; Von Klitzing, Simoni, Amsler, & Bürgin, 1999; MacKinnon-Lewis, Castellino, Brody, & Fincham, 2001; and Ricks, 1985), and the potential impact of fathers on their children's development (Lewis & Lamb, 2003; Russell & Russell, 1982; Seiffge-Krenke, 2001).

The parent-child dyad is an important dimension of the family unit. The ways in which the mother and child, and the father and child interact in their distinct relationships are areas this study will look at with African American television families and real life families.

Parent-Child Relations Among African American Families

Research on parent-child relations in families of color is minuscule compared with studies reported on White families. Also, the research has painted a questionable picture of how families of color, such as African American

families, function. Often researchers have ignored significant variation within minority groups in order to make general statements about the groups as a whole (Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992). In most studies, differences have been interpreted as deficits in research of African American families. Often comparison studies have confounded income and social class and ethnicity so that middle class White families are compared with low-income African American families. As a result, African American families have appeared to be lacking in their parental beliefs and practices. African American parents have been characterized as harsh, rigid, and strict (Bartz & Levine, 1978; Lassiter, 1987). African American mothers have been described as rarely taking their child's needs or wants into account and of expecting unyielding obedience to parental authority (e.g., Baumrind, 1972). This style has generally been contrasted with a more responsive and child-focused pattern – that is, the disciplinary style of middle-class White mothers (Kelley et al., 1992). African American fathers have been reported to employ more strict and arbitrary rules on their children than White and Chicano fathers (Durrett, O'Bryant, & Pennebaker, 1975).

There is a gap in knowledge about the African American family. Historically, studies have been designed that contrast African American families with White families rather than looking at each group in and of itself. One study suggested that the “stricter” parenting styles of African Americans may be more in the eye of the (White) beholder than in African American parenting. When both African American (in-group) and non-African American (out-group) observers

watched and coded mother-daughter interactions, out-group observers rated the mothers' parenting styles as more restrictive in their use of control. They also noted more conflict in the interactions than did in-group observers (Gonzales, Cauce, & Mason, 1996).

In a review of child-rearing studies, one researcher (Peters, 1985) found indications that when both White and African American parents were studied, White child rearing practices were held as the standard. However, even when White parents were not part of the study, the child-rearing standards of African American parents were compared indirectly with White standards. In either case, parenting behaviors that deviated from White child-rearing practices were viewed as inferior and problematic. There is a need in the family studies field for more comparative research, which would provide better, clearer insight into the child-rearing attitudes in the African American family.

In sum, television plays a big part in our lives and family activities are often times influenced by television. Research indicates that the ways in which families use television vary and can have a positive or negative effect on how family members interact. Over the past 50 years, different family types have been depicted in TV sitcoms and the like. The 1970s saw an upheaval in changing the structure and the appearance of television families by creating more multicultural portrayals that included African Americans. Of the different relationships within a family unit on television or in real life, this study will focus on the parent-child relationship in both types of family settings. This study reports on the parallels

between the parent-child relationship in African American television families and real African American families, and the perceptions held by real African American families.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Television viewing is a habitual and often shared activity in which real families routinely find themselves absorbed by life and relations in fictional families (Douglas, 2003). With so many different family models on television, it becomes easy for us to compare our real family life with the ones depicted on television and draw conclusions. We may measure our family values and beliefs against the ones portrayed on television, or we learn from them. And, based on our beliefs, we may agree or disagree with how parents communicate with or discipline their children or how children respond to their parents. The connection we make between real life family relationships and television portrayals of family relationships, like the parent-child relationship, is drawn in part from our own family experiences.

The general question this study attempts to answer is: How do television portrayals of the parent-child relationship in African American families relate to conceptions that African American parents and children hold about the parent-child relations within their own family?

That general question subsumes several related questions, as follows: How do the parent-child interactions in real African American families compare to the parent-child interactions in fictional African American television families? What

are the patterns of verbal interaction between the parent and child? What types of issues or conflicts do the parent and child face or deal with? What are the approaches to solving conflicts/problems? How much emotional bonding is experienced between the parent and child?

This chapter was a complete overview of the premise of this dissertation study. Chapter Two focuses on the review of previous research and how it relates to this study. Chapter Three is a description of the general methodology and takes you through the process by which the study was executed. The study results are presented in the fourth chapter, followed by a summation and discussion of the findings in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been sustained interest in researching television families. This chapter explores a number of areas of research related to television families in general and specifically African American television families. First, we take a look at what previous studies have reported on the ways in which viewers identify with television characters and how much television contributes to conceptions about families and expectations about family life. Next, we examine the stereotypical images commonly found in the depictions of television families. Then, there is a review of what research has found about African American families on television.

The chapter then provides a complete picture of the theoretical frameworks – Fletcher’s (1993) model of relationship schemas, cohesion using Olson, Sprenkle, and Russell’s (1979) Circumplex Model of Family Functioning, Rahim and Magner’s (1995) five-style conflict management model, and Fitzpatrick and Ritchie’s (1994) family communication schemas – used to guide this research study. There is a detailed description of each and previous studies’ reports of their application in real families, television families, and parent-child relationships portrayed on television.

Identifying with TV Families

The significance of the television family derives, in part, from the importance of the family in America and, in part, from the popular and ubiquitous

nature of television (Douglas, 2003, p. 21). Television series paint both a fanciful and believable picture of how American families live. The number of television series featuring a family as the primary story vehicle nearly doubled from 1950 to 1990, with more than half of the shows in each decade falling into the situation comedy category (Skill & Robinson, 1994).

People around the world spend a great part of their lives watching television. As a result, it is reasonable to infer that television viewers identify with a variety of characters, events, and relationships they see repeatedly on television. Although intended for entertainment, television families are depicted in ways that make sense to viewers. Viewers are likely to be attracted to those familial characters or relationships that are familiar and relevant to them. Viewers tend to seek out families on television that look and behave like their own. Mayerle (1991) asserted that viewers recognize television characters and situations because they are similar to the characters and situations in their own lives. Thus, the premise of this study is to discover how, if at all, real African American families identify with the characters and events that occur in African American television families.

Our ideas are, in part, shaped by television content, and what we think about family is shaped by television as well (Perse, Pavitt, & Burggraf, 1990; Rothschild & Morgan, 1987). Television content may be used as a base for understanding marriage and family (Robinson, Skill, Nussbaum, Moreland, 1985). Television families are seen to offer lessons about “appropriate” family life

(Greenberg, Hines, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Atkin, 1980; Lull, 1980a, 1980b). The patterns of family life presented regularly on television could possibly influence the patterns of real families. As Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan (1980) suggested consistent viewing cultivates images within the viewer. Consistent viewers may find some general characteristics of storylines from family programs so widespread and so often repeated that they come to believe these behaviors characterize most of the real life situations. (Gerbner et al., 1980).

Understanding and Interpreting TV Families

Cultural studies scholarship suggests that viewers of media are not passive recipients of media messages but actively read and construct their own interpretations and messages (Abercrombie, 1996; Kaplan, 1992). Audiences are critical viewers who use their own experiences to critique media messages and use their interaction with others to construct their understanding of the world (Abercrombie, 1996; Granello, 1997). How audiences perceive and understand television is not determined solely by television program content; rather viewers select from and assign significance to specific televised messages through social interaction and experience (Granello, 1997; Buckingham, 1993). Television teaches us about us, as we talk about ourselves (Dates & Stroman, 2001).

As with most television content, the portrayals of families can influence viewers' expectations of family life and family relations. Television portrayals are seen to affect cognition because together they form a public record of the family and, as such, provide a consensual reality to viewers, a shared way of

thinking about and interpreting family life and family relations (Douglas, 2003, p. 12). In the exploration of family portrayals, little research has examined the viewers' interpretations of television families and how they incorporate these meanings into their everyday lives and conversations. Most researchers use content analyses on family roles, family structure, and family interactions to formulate their arguments (Cantor, 1991; Cantor & Cantor, 1992; Douglas & Olson, 1996; Skill, Wallace, & Cassata, 1990; Weiss & Wilson, 1996), and some researchers assume that content determines the viewers' meanings (Brown, Childers, Bauman, & Koch, 1990; Buerkel-Rothfuss & Mayes, 1981) rather than examining qualitatively what audiences are actually taking from media. Therefore, to understand the effects of television, it is fitting to explore the meanings viewers produce from television content. For example, in a study examining parents and children's perceptions about how families are portrayed on television, Albada (2000) found that in general, the parents and children believed that television family images are capable of influencing viewers' beliefs about what exists, what is normal, what is right, and how they should behave within families. In a study investigating children's perceptions of realism of television families, Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday (1990) found that perceived social realism among second-, sixth-, and tenth-graders varies according to the content being judged. The children reported approximately half of all real life families were like those in the family series they watch most often (*The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*); and that the emotions of the characters were portrayed realistically. How

television families handle their emotions was perceived to be among the most realistic of all the content tested, suggesting that children may be more likely to take this content seriously which could mean that the healthy portrayals of emotions on family series could be an important source of social learning for children and adolescents (Dorr et al., 1990).

Compared to adults, children, like the sample from the Dorr et al. (1990) study, may be more affected by television content. The portrayal of the family in television programs may be especially influential for children, based on their limited experience with various family types, level of television exposure, and susceptibility to the influence of role models (Olson & Douglas, 1997). However, the process by which they are influenced is common among all television viewers. As previously noted, in general, how we use and create meaning from watching television depends on our talk and interaction with others. Among children, television meanings are discussed socially among children's peer groups, and through this interaction, children create meanings out of the programs' messages and content (Peterson and Peters, 1983). In a study that looked at how 9- to 13-year-old girls individually and collectively interpret family situation comedies, Fingerson (1999) found that girls use their own individual experiences to critically evaluate television families and they incorporate the morals and values of each television program into their collective talk with peers. Buerkel-Rothfuss, Greenberg, Atkin & Neuendorf (1982) investigated the influence of watching family television programs on what children believed about television

families. The authors looked at how realistic children perceived the behavior of television families to be and what children thought they learned from television about family life. Their survey results from a sample of more than 600 fourth-, sixth-, and eighth-graders indicated that the children who frequently watched family shows appeared to believe that families in real life show support and concern for each other. There were similar findings in a separate study of adolescents who compared television parents to their own parents. In the study examining adolescents' perceptions of television parents from shows such as *All in the Family*, *Good Times*, *Maude*, and *Happy Days*, adolescents thought that according to their own values, the television parents behaved as they felt a good parent would. However, the adolescents felt that their own parents made better choices than television parents (Miller & Beck, 1976).

It is apparent that television provides direct and incidental learning from which interpretations and meanings are created. The best method to use to examine those interpretations and meanings is to consider the means by which they are constructed, which is through the individual viewer's social interactions with others.

The Image of TV Families

Television portrayals are often considered realistic, a condition that enhances the likelihood that viewers will develop beliefs consistent with those of television (Abelman, 1990). Television families such as the Huxtables (*The Cosby Show*) and the Connors (*Roseanne*) are often posited to present family life

and family relations in ways that viewers deem realistic (Douglas, 1996). One element of realness viewers may look for and find in television families like the Huxtables and the Connors is the structure of the families. In everyday American life, the model family structure is the nuclear family (Dorr et al., 1990), and in the realm of prime-time network television, the conventional, nuclear family configuration (married couples with children, married couples without children, and married couples with grown children) remains the dominant vehicle for telling stories about family life (Gerbner et al., 1980; Skill, Robinson, & Wallace, 1987). Over a six-year period (1979-1985), Skill et al. (1987) analyzed the range and extent of family-life configurations in prime-time television across conventional and non-conventional (e.g., single parents with one or more natural, adopted, or foster children) types of portrayals. They found that prime-time network television tends to reinforce conservative to moderate models of family life. More than 65% of all families in the study were found to be conventional in configuration (oriented toward the nuclear family unit).

Much of the research also indicates that television presents images of families as traditional and happy (Perse et al., 1990; Signorielli, 1982; Skill et al., 1987; Skill et al., 1990). They are described as demonstrating affiliative behaviors characterized by mutual affection, involvement and cooperation (Frazer & Frazer, 1992; Greenberg et al., 1980; Heintz, 1992; Lichter, Lichter, Rothman, & Amundson, 1988; Skill & Wallace, 1990). Television reinforces this illusion of intact, happy, and interacting families. However, television families are not

without their problems as other studies have defined some of the more modern television families very differently. Albada (2000) looked into parents and children's responses to family portrayals and found that they perceived TV families as predominantly non-traditional. In a content analysis of television families from 1954 to 1994, Douglas and Olson (1996) found that the parent-child and sibling relational environment became more conflictual, less supportive, and less stable in modern television families.

Some critics note that television depicts families in a biased way, reflects anti-family images, and reinforces anti-family values. Some have argued that television glorifies an idealized, unattainably happy nuclear family that is really patriarchal and constraining (Morgan, Leggett, & Shanahan, 1999). Television has been blamed for the total demise of the traditional, conventional family. "On more than one occasion fictional television has been cited as a major contributory influence to the apparent destruction of the nuclear family" (Skill & Robinson, 1994).

Research examining the television family may enhance our understanding of life and relations in real families as well as mimic development of the real American family (Douglas, 2003, p. 13). However, there are several studies that offset that possibility. Skill and Robinson (1994) examined the demographic characteristics of television families during the period of 1950-1989 and concluded that there was minimal convergence between fictional families and real families. In regards to the depiction of family life, Cantor (1991) argued that

unlike most real families, television families adhere to traditional values, such as hard work and responsibility, regardless of their social or economic circumstances. Additionally, Larson (1993) found that television presentations exaggerate the amount of interaction between family members. Nevertheless, the accuracy in the representations of family life on television in comparison to real family life is ultimately determined by the viewers' interpretations, which are rooted in their social environment.

African American TV Families

The White nuclear family predominates as the ideal family on television. Unfortunately there is currently not a more balanced portrayal of African American families on television. In summarizing the portrayal of African Americans and their families during the period of 1969 to 1982, Stroman (as cited in Douglas, 2001, p. 218) noted that few television shows featured a husband, wife and children living together and few of them portrayed a lifestyle other than that of a poor struggling African American family. Also, in television programs past and present, the African American family is commonly presented in situation comedies and in a predominantly Black setting. *Julia*, which first broadcast in 1968, began the African American domestic comedy cycle. *Sanford and Son* (1972), *Good Times* (1974), *That's My Mama* (1974), *The Jeffersons* (1975), *The Cosby Show* (1985), *227* (1985), *Frank's Place* (1987), *Family Matters* (1989), *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990), *In the House* (1995), and *My Wife & Kids* (2001) – were some of the shows that followed *Julia*, each with their own special set of

messages about African American family life. These shows have presented television audiences a perspective about African American family life and a point of view from which they can relate to their own experiences.

For most people who are moderate to heavy viewers the only familiarity they have with African Americans and African American family life is through the images they see portrayed on television. These portrayals have a considerable impact on those who watch them so it is important that the portrayals are indeed representative of African American families. But this has not always been the case. Dates & Stroman (as cited in Douglas, 2001) examined racial and ethnic depictions of families. They concluded that the social realities of African American, Asian American, Native Americans, and Latino families have not been portrayed accurately; rather their portrayals are the stereotyped views of minorities held by television industry decision makers. Sweeper (as cited in Douglas, 2001, p. 145) content analyzed 93 episodes of family comedy-drama series for the period 1970 through 1980. The focus of the investigation was the comparison of portrayal characteristics of African American and White families. The findings of this study indicated that members of African American families were more likely to come from broken homes than were White family members. Overall, when compared to White families, interactions among African American family members were more conflictual. African American television families were also seen as being segregated or secluded from others.

Graves' (1993) analysis of the portrayals of African Americans on television found that African American families are commonly featured as isolated from other families and rarely engage in cross-ethnic interactions. In a longitudinal comparison of family roles, family structures, and interactive behavior of African American and White television families, Greenberg and Neuendorf (1980) found conflictual relations between and among African American family members. In shows such as *That's My Mama* and *The Jeffersons*, African American sons were portrayed as being dominant, initiating much of the family interaction. Also, in contrast to African American families in real life, extended kinship with family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc., was minimal, and role portrayals were centered on spouses, parents, children and siblings.

The depiction of the African American family gradually has changed and moved into a more positive direction. The family roles and interactions of the more contemporary African American television families are different from those from the 1960s and 1970s. Merritt & Stroman (1993) noted in their research that the more positive portrayals of African American families started to emerge with shows like *Charlie and Company*, *The Cosby Show*, and *227* in the late 1980s. African American families had both husband and wife present; the spouses interacted frequently, equally, and lovingly with each other; and children are treated with respect and taught achievement-oriented values. This signified the emergence of an optimistic view of African Americans families and their

portrayal on television. It was also an affirmation that a family's prosperity and happiness are not limited by ethnicity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Relational Schemas and Parent-Child Relationships on Television

Family life involves the relationships among family members. This study examined the distinctiveness of the parent-child relationship within the family unit as it is portrayed on television. One theory that may explain how such relationships are formed and maintained is the concept of relational schemata. Early work on relational schemata defines it as “coherent frameworks of relational knowledge that are used to derive relational implications of messages and are modified in accord with ongoing experience with relationships” (Planalp, 1985). In other words, relational schemas are knowledge structures that people develop that they carry with them and these schemas help them interpret, remember, and organize information and make sense of different relationships. Relational schemas are expected to influence persons' encoding and decoding of information, the inferences and evaluations they make, how they memorize social events, their information-seeking behavior, and ultimately their interpersonal behaviors (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a).

A model regarding the composition of relationship schemas was proposed by Baldwin (1992, 1995). According to Baldwin's model, relational schemas consist of three components, or sub-schemas: (1) a *self schema*, which can be described as the self-concept and includes self-relevant thoughts, such as one's

ideals and goals, one's emotions, and one's attitudes and beliefs; (2) *others' schema*, which consists of knowledge of the other with whom one is in the relationship which includes perceptions of others and of their beliefs and attitudes; and (3) *interpersonal scripts*, which consist of expectations generalized from past interactions. Baldwin's main theoretical claim is that these three sub-schemas are highly interdependent. Any change in one will effect changes in the others (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a).

Relational schemas also consist of interrelated pieces of declarative and procedural knowledge about relationships (Baldwin, 1992). Declarative knowledge refers to descriptive knowledge of the attributes and features of things, whereas procedural knowledge refers to a person's knowledge of if-then contingencies (e.g., If I depend on my partner for support, I will be let down) (Baldwin, 1992). The declarative and procedural knowledge can be used to interpret social situations, to form expectations about behavior, and to plan behavior (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a).

A theorist who also explored the realm of relationship schemas challenged Baldwin's model. Fletcher (1993) proposed a model with more narrowly defined relationship schemas. Fletcher conceptualized relationship schemas as existing at different levels of specificity, ranging from generalized knowledge about all social relationships to the unique knowledge about only one particular interpersonal relationship. Fletcher's model includes relationship schemas at three levels of generality. On the most general level is knowledge that applies to all

social relationships, whether the person is a stranger, an acquaintance, a best friend or a nemesis. On the second level are relationship type beliefs that include knowledge specific to the different types of relationships one is likely to have, such as parental relationships, romantic relationships, and friendship relationships. The third level is the most specific level and consists of specific relationship schemas that apply to one particular relationship a person has with one specific person (e.g., mother-daughter relationship, father-son relationship, mother-son relationship, etc.). These specific relationship schemas contain memories and experiences made within the context of a particular relationship and are what make each relationship unique from other relationships (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a).

This study will follow Fletcher's interpretation of relational schemas. However, whether one follows Baldwin's model or Fletcher's model, relational schemas in general are the result of direct, personal experiences and are influenced by a number of factors. Anderson (1993) suggests that at least six different factors contribute to the development of relational schema and relational knowledge: (1) culture, (2) mass media, (3) prior interactions, (4) third parties, (5) observing friends' behaviors, and (6) intervals between interactions. In regards to family relationship schemas, these factors are shared among family members as are other socializing influences, such as family lore and family traditions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a). Family members contribute to the development of family relationship schemas by defining themselves and

communicating about their relationship to one another and their interactions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a).

Of the factors that are influential in the development of relational schemas, the medium of television undoubtedly plays a major role. Media are both a model and a reflection of interpersonal relationships as well as family relationships that are incorporated into viewers' own behavior (Andersen, 1993). If viewers do follow Bandura's (1994) social learning model and mimic what they see on family television programs and if television family characters reflect how families should be, then research indicates that television is painting a picture in which family relationships, namely the parent-child relationships, are consistently warm and supportive.

As cited earlier, analyses of television family portrayals tells us that family interaction on television is consistently positive, with little conflict, but the depiction of the parent-child interaction appears to vary. Much of the research does not focus on the interactions of the parent and the child within the parent-child relationship on television, but the concentration is more on the child's behavior in the family or in the parent-child relationship. For example, Abelman (1990), in an analysis of the television family on religious television, found that, in these television families, children dominated family interaction. Atkins (1986) conducted a comparative analysis of family lifestyles and interactions across two sets of 30 commercial network television programs. One set was developed and aired in the 1960s, the other in the 1980s. The findings indicated that children in

the 1980s programs initiated more interactions and exhibited more numerous interactions with their parents than children in the 1960s programs.

In a more recent study, Jordan (1995) looked at children on prime time situation comedies from the early 1990s and their interactions within the family. She found that children have more conversations with adults than with other children. Jordan further noted that children on television are shown as precocious, manipulative, and adult-like in their maturity and sensitivity. Adults on television often assume the less mature role in their interactions with children, asking children for advice or entrusting them with their problems and secrets.

Some studies have reported findings where children typically conform to parental authority and are more likely than parents to seek support and attention, and parents are more likely to command and provide reassurance (Skill & Wallace, 1990; Shaner, 1982; Greenberg et al., 1980; Skill et al., 1990). These findings reinforce the widely accepted view of parent-child relations in which both parents and children perform traditional roles where television mothers are associated with emotionality and family togetherness and television fathers are more often linked to decision-making and discipline in the family. Consistent with this model, television children occupy a dependent status that is confirmed by their use of subordinate conversational behaviors, their recurrent inability to resolve problems, or their obedience to parental authority (Douglas, 2001).

The parent-child interaction within the family is also strongly influenced by the parents' child-rearing practices (Macoby & Martin, 1983). This is evident

in real families as well as TV families. Baumrind (1966, 1971) has extensively explored parenting practices in real families. Baumrind categorizes and labels parenting according to authoritarian, authoritative, or permissive patterns of behavior. The authoritarian parent expects high levels of obedience from a child without the need to explain the rationale behind a rule or punishment. An authoritative parent allows the child autonomy within the framework of the parent-child relationship and within reasonable limits. A permissive parent encourages a high degree of autonomy for the child and avoids exercising parental control. Although these parenting styles are based on White middle-class samples, researchers have applied the categories to African American families.

Hill (1995) addressed the influence of parenting style on aspects of the family environment in African American families and found indications that authoritative parenting leads to positive family environments in African American families. Unlike some research that indicates that more controlling parenting may lead to better child outcome in African American families, this study found that authoritarian parenting was not related to positive aspects of the family environment.

Research suggests that parental disciplinary style indirectly influences children's beliefs about televised portrayals and how they related to the real world (e.g., Abelman, 1986, 1990; Singer, Singer, & Rapaczynski, 1984). Abelman (1990) found that, when parents exhibited primarily inductive disciplinary techniques (i.e., use of reasoning, explanation), the relationship between their

children's television viewing and beliefs about the occurrence of supportive behavior in real families was enhanced.

On television, Baumrind's parenting typology is seen in the portrayals of parenting behaviors. Dail & Way (1985) conducted a study to investigate the nature of parenting behaviors portrayed in family-oriented prime-time television programs. With respect to patterns of child rearing, they found that fathers are portrayed as more authoritarian than mothers and children are shown as being the most accepting of authoritarian child rearing patterns exhibited by both mothers and fathers. This is interesting in view of Baumrind's (1971) belief that authoritative child rearing patterns are healthiest for both children and their parents.

The parenting style of parents in television families has been consistent since depictions of family life began on television. Television parents of the 1950s-1960s (e.g., *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It To Beaver*, *Julia*) and those of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s (e.g., *The Cosby Show*, *Family Ties*, *My Wife & Kids*) never physically punish the children characters. Almost no scolding occurs because parents and children discuss issues together. The parents always retain control and decision making authority. Seemingly, the secret of successful parenting on television is a willingness to communicate and an understanding of how to compromise without relinquishing authority (Lichter, Lichter, Rothman, & Amundson, 1988).

Television content analyses have long reported that parents in family situation comedies usually are portrayed as what can be best described as “super parents”- rational, loving, wise, nurturing and active. Research indicates that viewers retain images of television parents that match the “super parents” of family television programs (Reep & Dambrot, 1994). Just as there are interpretations and perceptions that come from viewers and critics on what makes the ideal television family, “super parents” are models of what many would consider the ideal parents.

These television models of parenting are influential, and not only to children as often cited in studies. Adults who watch family situation comedies may be learning how to parent, how to behave, and what types of information to disclose through the parent-child interactions they observe on television. While they are more likely to bring critical viewing skills to the programs they view than children, they, too, may be influenced over the long-term by the consistency of the relationships they witness (Jordan, 1995).

Cohesion in Television Families and Parent-Child Relations

Cohesion is an important facet of family life. It is an important dimension for trying to understand interactions among family members. Cohesion, also referred to as closeness, within a family consists of a positive climate of the family involving affection, sharing of ideas and interests, and concern for one another.

In their examination of the research on families, Olson, Sprenkle, and Russell (1979) conducted some of the first analyses in family cohesion and found it to be one of the two concepts most often used in describing family behavior – the other concept being “adaptability”. Cohesion and adaptability are the two primary dimensions of a family systems model developed by Olson et al. (1979) called the Circumplex Model of Family Functioning. The model was created for clinical application and identifies two components of family cohesion: “the emotional bonding members have with one another and the degree of individual autonomy a person experiences in the family system” (Olson et al., 1979, p. 5).

The model also describes four levels of cohesion within families: (1) disengaged, (2) separated, (3) connected, and (4) enmeshed. In the disengaged family, there is very low cohesion and the family members are independent, and the emotional bonds are weak. There is a lot of personal separateness and independence and limited communication among the family members. In the separated family, there is low to moderate cohesion. Family members exhibit considerable independence, but emotional bonds are stronger than in disengaged families. There is also a moderate amount of communication among family members. Connected family members display moderate to high cohesion, have less independence, and the emotional attachments are relatively strong. All family members communicate well with one another and share common interests. The enmeshed family has very high cohesion. There is limited individual autonomy, and the emotional bonds are extremely strong. Family members are very

dependent on each other. Communication is high in a least one direction, but the lines of communication may not travel both ways (Olson et al., 1979).

Family communication is another dimension on the Circumplex Model and includes such variables as empathy, attentive listening, speaking for self, speaking for others, self-disclosure, and respect/regard. Family members express their cohesion and deal with the issues related to adaptability (e.g., problem-solving and negotiation) through communication. Within the parent-child relationship, parents communicate their caring and support (or lack of) both verbally and nonverbally. Children also communicate their love and caring for their parents through such means as smiling and touching, as well as through the things they say and the actions they perform (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993).

There are not many studies that have examined cohesion in parent-child relations in real life families or television families. The few studies that have looked at cohesion in television families suggest relatively highly shared involvement between television parents and their children. In their circumplex analysis of television family systems, for example, Bryant, Aust, Bryant, & Venugopalan (2001) concluded that modern families exhibited moderately high levels of parent-child cohesion, namely, mutual involvement, emotional closeness, and recognition of relational boundaries. Contemporary television parents and children appeared more involved than some earlier generations. Likewise, modern parent-child relations were judged mutually respectful. There are similar findings in an analysis comparing television family presentations from

the 1960s and the 1980s. Atkins (1986) observed that the modern families showed more closeness and support of each other. However, the 1980s families were more likely to engage in affectively negative displays, such as opposing, ignoring, and evading others and withdrawing from other family members.

Despite the disparate findings in regards to displays of cohesion in television families, mutual love appears to be a constant feature of television family life. Cantor (1991) and Cantor and Cantor (1992) argue that in domestic comedies, parents and children regularly exhibit an abiding love for each other, even during conflict.

Communication in Television Families and Parent-Child Relations

Communication facilitates in the achievement of appropriate levels of cohesion in families. Communication enables family members to express feelings and attitudes openly to one another, deal with conflict, solve problems, and make decisions and plans. The ways in which families communicate have important implications for the psychological well being of family members and their social functioning (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993).

Just as relational schemata theory explains how different relationships (e.g., parent-child relationships) within a family unit are formed and maintained, family communication schemata exist within a family unit as well and are knowledge structures that represent the external world of the family and provide a basis for interpreting what other family members say and do, as well as messages about the family (as cited in Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). Individuals in the

family encode and process messages from family members and about the family in terms of family communication schemas.

There are a number of theoretical frameworks that characterize the communication that occurs in the family. This study focuses on a communication-centered approach originally developed by communication scholars McLeod and Chaffee (1972) and later modified by Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994). McLeod and Chaffee (1972) created an instrument to measure family communication patterns called the Family Communication Patterns (FCP) instrument. The FCP assesses the influence that family communication has on the way families construct social reality in general, and how children use external information in that process, in particular.

The FCP instrument consists of two dimensions that measure family communication: socio-orientation and concept-orientation. Socio-orientation is interpreted as a style that values parents' authority, and the notion that children should defer to them, and concept-orientation is interpreted as a style that emphasizes the importance of expressing one's opinion, both parent and child, and of examining both sides of an issue (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972).

About 20 years after McLeod and Chaffee introduced their FCP model, it was reinterpreted by scholars Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994; Ritchie, 1991; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). After noting a series of research findings inconsistent with McLeod and Chaffee's framework, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie reinterpreted the FCP dimensions as measures of "conformity orientation" and

“conversation orientation” in families and developed a model referred to as the Revised Family Communication Pattern instrument (RFCP).

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie defined conversation orientation as the degree to which families create a climate where all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained interaction about a wide array of topics. These families spend a lot of time interacting with each other, and family members share their individual activities, thoughts, and feelings with family. In these families, actions or activities that the family plans to engage in as a unit are discussed within the family, as are family decisions. Conformity orientation refers to the degree to which family communication stresses a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs. Families are characterized by interactions that emphasize a uniformity of beliefs and attitudes. Their interactions typically focus on harmony, conflict avoidance, and the interdependence of family members.

Like McLeod and Chaffe’s FCP, the RFCP focuses on the interactions between the parents and children because it is during these intergenerational exchanges that parents socialize their children and define the concept of family communication. However, unlike the FCP, the RFCP focuses more closely on the actual communication that occurs between parents and children, and it focuses less on the interactions’ consequences for information processing (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b).

Conversation orientation and conformity orientation have successfully been used to describe and to explain family communication patterns. Research

has demonstrated the effect of conversation and conformity orientation on outcomes for families. In a study using Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's two dimensions to explore the role of the family communication climate on parent-child communication choices in real families, Barbato, Graham, and Perse (2003) found that conversation-oriented families communicated with their children for relationally-oriented motives such as affection, pleasure, and relaxation, and conformity-oriented families communicated with their children for personal-influence motives such as seeking control and escaping. They also found that mothers and fathers differ in their communication with younger sons and daughters to some extent. Parents report talking with daughters more than sons for inclusion reasons (i.e., to alleviate loneliness and to share feelings). There were gender differences also found when parents reported communicating with their children to escape. Fathers report communicating more with their sons and mothers report communicating more with their daughters when their motives are to "get away" from the pressures of work and worries (Barbato et al., 2003).

Families develop and sustain a variety of different communication patterns. One way to address this variability is to create a typology of families. The two dimensions of conformity and conversation orientation interact with one another to create four different family types. *Pluralistic* families, high on conversation orientation and low on conformity orientation, perceive open communication and emotional supportiveness in the family. They are families that welcome open, unrestrained discussions among all family members and the

parents do not feel the need to be in control of their children. *Protective* families, low on conversation orientation and high on conformity orientation, see their families as emphasizing obedience and conformity and as avoiding open conflict. There is an emphasis on obedience to parental authority. *Consensual* families, high on both conversation and conformity orientation, perceive their family as expressing strong pressures toward agreement even as they encourage children to take an interest in ideas and to express their feelings. The parents are typically interested in what their children have to say, but believe they should make decision for the family. *Laissez-Faire* families are low on both conformity orientation and conversation orientation and perceive their families as characterized by little parent-child interaction. These families believe that all family members should make their own decisions, but parents have little interest in their children's decisions (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). There has been very little, if any, research that has explored the existence of these family typologies in television families. This study does so in its analysis of four family sitcoms featuring African American characters.

As for the parent-child communication patterns in families, studies of parent and child communication have focused mainly on the issue of communicative influence (Douglas, 2003). Influence attempts are common in television families as parents and children try to resolve differences, establish understanding, or simply "get their own way" (Douglas, 2003). For children, the family is the main context responsible for shaping their communication values.

Parents play a pivotal role in developing and shaping the child's perception of communication in the family, and these perceptions change as the child matures (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990).

The range and intensity of communication patterns between television family members has expanded over the years. Families on television today and from the past two decades exhibit communication and emotions that are both negative and positive. Furthermore, the models of family communication on television appear to be tempered with a sincere concern and respect for the members of their respective families (Atkin, 1986; Skill & Wallace, 1990).

Conflict in Television Families and Parent-Child Relations

Conflict is natural and inevitable in all human interaction and is inherent in close interpersonal relationships. This is the premise of conflict theory. Conflict is an expected part of all systems and interactions, including social systems, family systems, and parent-child interactions. Conflict arises, in part, because all social systems have scarce resources over which conflict will arise (Winton, 1995). In families, these scarce resources include time, money, space, attention, affection, and love (Winton, 1995). People first learn about how conflicts work and how to resolve interpersonal problems with their families (Noller, 1995). Conflict is a necessary element in the development of family relationships and occurs among family members as a result of incompatible goals or violations of relational expectations (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990).

Family conflict typically occurs through verbal interaction known as arguments, disputes, and quarrels. How family members respond to conflicts is assessed by their conflict style. Conflict styles measure dyadic communications in conflict situations. There are a number of taxonomies that measure from two to five conflict styles or strategies (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Folger, Poole, and Stutman, 1993). Rahim and Magner (1995) found support for a five-style model using a factor analysis. They identified the five conflict styles as *avoiding*, *accommodating*, *confronting*, *compromising*, and *collaborating*. Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative: the person relies on physical or emotional retreats (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993) or changes the topic, thereby not actively continuing in conflict. Avoiders focus on getting away from conflict. Accommodating puts concern for the relationship above one's own concerns (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993) by letting the other person have what they want. People who are accommodating in conflicts give in rather than stay active in the conflict. Confronting is coming face-to-face with the conflict. It is characterized by assertive behaviors where one person's concerns are actively pursued at the expense of the others. Confronting styles leave little room for flexibility in resolving the conflict and can escalate a conflict. Compromising reflects an intermediate solution that satisfies part of what both parties want. Each party gives up on something and keeps something. Finally, the collaborating style is active and high in both assertiveness and cooperation. Parties work to redefine the conflict so they can find a solution that will meet the needs of both people in

the conflict. To do this, collaborators share high levels of information about the issues and perceptions concerning the conflict.

A model similar to Rahim and Magner's is Thomas and Killman's model of conflict management. Thomas and Killman (1974) developed a model that identified five strategies for dealing with conflict: accommodate, avoid, collaborate, compete/directive, and compromise. The difference between the two models is the "compete/directive" strategy in Thomas and Killman's model which is described as an individual not giving in and considers his or her own solution best, and is more concerned about having their needs met than with the stability of the relationship.

Two studies point specifically to relationships between conflict styles and the family communication patterns described earlier in this chapter. Koerner and Fitzpatrick's (1997) survey of families with one teen discovered a direct relationship between conformity orientation and conflict avoidance. In contrast, conversation orientation was negatively correlated with conflict avoidance. However, this study looked at only one conflict style rather than attempting to assert how different family communication patterns might result in different conflict response styles. Dumlao (as cited in Dumlao & Botta, 2000, p. 178) did examine different conflict styles in a study which found connections between family communication types (e.g., pluralistic, protective, consensual, laissez-faire) and several conflict styles. Her sample survey of 63 young adults asked them how they generally handled conflicts with their fathers and found that

pluralistic young adults tended to use higher levels of collaborating and confronting. Consensuals tended to use collaborating less than pluralistics and relied most on compromising. Laissez-faire young adults tended to use confronting and protective young adults used both avoiding and accommodating conflict styles.

Research on family conflict has focused mostly on marital conflict rather than parent-child conflict, and the parent-child conflict research that is available has been directed at mainly parents and adolescents. This may be because there are reports that parent-child conflict increases between childhood and early adolescence, 10-15 years of age, and decreases thereafter (Montemayor, 1983). However, other studies note that older adolescents (age 18 and older) have been found to be less likely to concede to parents in conflictual situations than are younger adolescents (Smetana, Yau, Restrepo, & Braeges, 1991; Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2003). Traditionally, stress in parent-adolescent relationships has been viewed as the result of changes in adolescents brought about by puberty (Montemayor, 1983). Previous research has determined that adolescents' interactions differ when they interact with one parent (e.g., in dyadic interactions) than when they interact with the other with adolescents reporting higher rates of conflict with mothers than with fathers or sibling (Laursen & Collins, 1994; Montemayor & Hanson, 1985). This is probably because mothers and daughters spend more time together and have lives that are more intertwined (Montemayor, 1983).

There has been little research focusing specifically on the conflicts within the child-parent or adolescent-parent relationships in African American families. However, one study indicates that self-reported conflict intensity increases in African American families in early adolescence and is greater among families with girls than boys, although few consistent changes in reported conflict frequency or incidence were found (Smetana & Gaines, 1999). In another study of African American adolescent girls, Cauce, Hiraga, Graves, Gonzales, Ryan-Finn, & Grove (1996) found that girls and their mothers reported conflicts and disagreements over mundane, everyday issues, but age differences were not reported, and their analyses focused only on girls. Nevertheless, these studies suggest that, as in other families, adolescent-parent interactions in African American families may become more negative with age, particularly with girls.

If parents and children/adolescents are in constant conflict, eventually the issue arises of how they can manage and/or resolve the conflict. In a study examining conflict resolution in families with adolescents, Smetana, Yau, & Hanson (1991) found that conflicts were left unresolved more in families with boys than girls. Also, conflicts over chores and interpersonal relations were more difficult to resolve than conflicts over personal style. Some parents and children report that their arguments are usually settled through talk and to the satisfaction of all involved (Lichter et al., 1988). Yet, there are reports of other patterns of conflict resolution commonly used. For example, in their telephone survey of 10th graders, Montemayor and Hanson (1985) found that 47% of conflicts with parents

are resolved by walking away, 38% are resolved by adolescents giving in to their parents, and only 15% are marked by negotiation. In contrast, in a study of spontaneous family conflicts audio-taped or videotaped at the family dinner table, Vuchinich (1987) found that only 3.8% of conflicts were resolved by withdrawal; 61% of conflicts ended in a standoff, 21% ended in submission (primarily by children submitting to parents), and 14% ended in compromise. Differences between these two studies may be due to the more limited definition of conflicts and the broader age range of children (from 2 to 22 years of age; average age=11) in the Vuchinich study. Of the different conflict resolution tactics, research also suggests that collaboration and compromise are more developmentally mature modes of conflict resolution in adolescence and are associated with healthier family functioning than unilateral solutions, such as one party giving in to the other (Macoby and Martin, 1983).

Conflict on television, specifically in situation comedies, is very brief, rarely lasting more than an episode. Although members of television families are more likely to behave affiliatively than oppositionally (Larson, 1993, 2001), and while most conflict is easily resolved (Cantor, 1991), disagreements and disputes are a standard characteristic of television family life.

There are several studies that have focused on the portrayal of conflict on prime time. The relationships among members in some television families are seen to have become predominantly negative (Heintz, 1992; Larson, 1989). Consistent with this position, Comstock and Strzyzewski (1990) have reported

that conflict episodes not only are common in modern families but also often involve overt negative evaluations of one family member by another and attempts by family members to blame each other. They also discovered that families featured in situation comedies were more conflictual than families featured in either nighttime soaps or dramas. In addition, they found stereotypical gender differences in conflict strategies, with mothers engaging in prosocial conflict with their sons and in competitive conflict with their daughters. In contrast, fathers demonstrated their authority in conflict with their sons but were more prosocial in conflict with their daughters.

Two studies found differences in family conflict interactions by family type. Skill and his colleagues (Skill & Wallace, 1990; Skill, Wallace, & Cassata, 1990) examined the power of relationships as well as conflict escalation and resolution strategies on 25 prime-time programs. The authors reported that, overall, intact family members exhibited more conflict resolution strategies and were more harmonious than non-intact family members. Single-parent families engaged in more conflict escalation acts than two-parent families, but mixed families were the least harmonious and engaged in the most conflict escalation. In their examination of the patterns of interpersonal conflict in television's intact, non-intact, and mixed-family settings, Skill, Wallace, & Cassata (1990) found that fathers and sons in the intact family exhibited the highest levels of conflict escalating behaviors compared to their female counterparts. But, in the mixed family, sons seemed to exhibit the highest conflict-resolving behaviors.

It is not the potential for conflict or even the presence of conflict that characterizes family relationships as distressed or troubled. Rather, how family members interact during conflictual situations determines the quality of their relationship (Montemayor, 1986). In television, although contemporary families often exhibit high levels of conflict, many of them seem able not only to resolve that conflict but to also establish a relational environment that viewers define as substantially confirming (Douglas, 1996).

The traditional nuclear family remains an image with significant impact in a society. According to research, that image is often times idealized on television and presents unattainable and unrealistic goals for viewers. But television has evolved and become diverse in its presentation of the family where it also addresses the imperfections of modern family life. In whichever manner families and interpersonal relationships, such as parent-child relationships, are depicted on television, they all have the potential to lead viewers to question the adequacy and quality of their own family life.

Numerous studies have examined the representation of family on television from structure to gender roles to occupations to parenting behaviors. Previous studies have looked at how television family images can influence viewers' perceptions about what exists, or should exist, within real families. Some studies have reported on the ways in which African American families have been portrayed on television. But, no one has looked at how family television shows featuring African American families correlate with real African American

family life, or more specifically at the connection between television and real life African American parent-child relationships. This study will address the following overall question:

In what ways do television images and portrayals of the African American parent-child relationship relate to conceptions that African American parents and children hold about the parent-child relations within their own family?

This study proposes that conceptions about the parent-child relationship on television and in real life can be shaped by the communication style, conflict management style, and cohesion or closeness within the parent-child relationship, which leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the verbal communication styles in African American parent-child relationships on television compared to real life experiences in African American families?

RQ2: How does the occurrence and management of parent-child conflicts in African American families on television compare to real life experiences in African American families?

RQ3: How does the closeness in African American parent-child relationships on television compare to the real life experiences in African American families?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This is an exploratory study of the parent-child interactions in African American families as they are portrayed on television and as they are experienced in real life. This chapter explains the methods that were used in carrying out the study. A combination of research methods was employed: frame analyses, focus groups, and a questionnaire. These methods helped in understanding the social functioning of the parent-child relationship in African American families on screen and off. The research methods facilitated the exploration of the common interactions between parents and their children, such as their verbal communication styles, conflict management styles and level of closeness.

The general type of research for this study was descriptive which was used to illustrate the characteristics of a sample via interviews and observation. The components that were studied are parent-child communication and conflict and closeness in depicted and actual African American families. Another component under study was real African American families' conceptions about African American parent-child relationship portrayals on television.

Parent-child communication can contribute to the overall family's day-to-day interactions. The communication component was chosen to examine the verbal communication styles in families and look specifically at the verbal interactions experienced in an actual and a scripted African American parent-child relationship.

The conflict component was chosen because it has been shown to be inherent in close interpersonal relationships (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). As noted in the previous chapter, researchers have found that conflict is associated with the overall quality of interpersonal relationships (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). Conflict theorists see conflict as natural, normal, and inevitable in all social systems, including family systems (Winton, 1995). Conflict is a functional part of a family system.

The close relationship of the parent and child is an important part of the family system. The bonds between parents and children are constantly evolving and growing across a life span. The level of psychological closeness one feels with one's parents may be represented by a consistent degree of closeness, a gradual increase in closeness, a decrease in closeness, or a series of ups and downs (Golish, 2000). There are numerous factors that can contribute to the changing nature of the parent-child closeness.

The component related to the conceptions held about African American parent-child relationships on television was chosen to determine how African American parents and children define their own relationships and parent-child relationships in general. The component also explores whether the parent-child relationship portrayals on television correlate with real experiences in African American families.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Frame Analysis

Four programs were recorded for analysis in this study: *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show*, and *That's So Raven*. *My Wife & Kids* is a show that was a first-run broadcast network series but was airing in syndication at the time this study was conducted. It is a comedy series about an African American husband and wife with three children set in Connecticut. The series chronicles the Kyle family and their experiences. The husband is a business owner, the wife is a former stay-at-home mom seeking ventures outside the home, and the children consist of a teenage son and daughter and the youngest being a 6- or 7-year old daughter. Storylines range from the ups and downs of the husband and wife relationship, to the ways in which the parents are heavily involved in their children's lives, to the various antics, and sometimes-serious situations, the children get caught up in.

Family Matters is an off-network syndicated sitcom. It was one of the longest running African American sitcoms along with *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985) and *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992). Set in Chicago, Illinois, *Family Matters* depicted an African American middle-class family called the Winslows. It consisted of a husband (a police officer) and wife (department store worker) and their two children (teenage son and daughter) who lived in a house along with the husband's street-wise mother, the wife's sister and her young son. The cast of family members changed as the show evolved. The Winslows dealt with life's

inevitable ups and downs considering their living arrangements, and at the same time having to deal with their children's friends who were like their own kids as well.

Family Matters is generally best known for its most popular character, the ultra nerd Steve Urkel. Initially, Urkel was supposed to be on the show one time, but because of audience and ratings reaction he became a primary character after the first season of the show. This study incorporates those earlier episodes of *Family Matters* when the show originally focused on the Winslow family.

The Cosby Show, as previously noted is one of the longest running family sitcoms featuring an African American family. It is an off-network syndication and features the Huxtable family. The family is African American and made up of a husband/father who is a doctor, a wife/mother who is a lawyer, and their five children living in Brooklyn, New York, and dealing with typical family issues, such as the difficulties of children growing up.

That's So Raven was a first-run cable series and was also airing in syndication at the time this study was conducted. The sitcom revolves around the adventures of an African American teenager with psychic powers, Raven Baxter, and her family (mother, father & brother) and friends.

Several criteria were used in choosing the shows for the study. First and foremost, the shows had to depict African American families. Second, at the time of the study, the shows needed to be a non-animated series airing on broadcast and/or cable television. Third, the African American family shows were to be

representative of a traditional or intact family unit. At the time of this study, *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show*, and *That's So Raven* were representative of these criteria.

In addition to the criteria, I chose *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show*, and *That's So Raven* to be included in the study because, out of the four, only one show has been included in previous studies. Based on a review of literature (Inniss & Feagin, 1995; Frazer & Frazer, 1993; Taylor, 1989), *The Cosby Show* appears to be the most common African American family show used in the analysis of a majority of previous studies done dealing with television families.

The recording of the shows occurred over a 12-month period beginning in September 2004 and continued through September 2005. The shows were half-hour series and typically aired five times a week in syndication (Monday-Friday) at various times during the day.

The programs were not sampled randomly because the study is specifically focusing on parent-child interactions in African American families on television. Only select episodes in which the main storyline dealt with parent-child interactions were considered, and I chose three episodes from each show to include in the analysis (see Appendix A).

The analysis focused on Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. For Research Question 1, the area explored was communication styles. Elements that relate to the communication style between the parent and child were categorized and

coded. The categories were created based on Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's (1994, Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990) conceptualizations of how families communicate – conversation orientation and conformity orientation – as discussed in Chapter 2. According to Fitzpatrick and Ritchie, these two dimensions interact with one another to create four family relationship types that differ from one another – consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire (1994). For the purpose of this study the four family types were slightly modified and referred to as “parent-child relationship” types. The relationship types were sub-categorizations of the degree to which conversation orientation and conformity orientation occur.

The area explored for Research Question 2 was conflict management style. For the purpose of this study, conflict was defined as communication that shows a struggle between two interdependent parties over goals they perceive to be incompatible or resources they perceive to be scarce (Hocker & Wilmot, 1995). Conflict management style was defined as the strategy to overcome conflict. Categories were recorded based on Rahim and Magner's (1995) five conflict management styles model. As noted in Chapter 2, the five conflict styles include: avoiding, accommodating, confronting, compromising, and collaborating. Each category is derived from how conflict is handled and dealt with between the parent and child on the four shows.

The area explored for Research Question 3 was closeness. For the purpose of this study, closeness was defined as the quality of the emotional bonds between parents and children that is mutual. In the analysis of the four shows,

categories were created based on the cohesion dimension of Olson, Sprenkle, and Russell's (1979) Circumplex Model of Family Functioning. The cohesion dimension of the model assesses whether families are separated or connected in their emotional bonding to each other. There are four levels of cohesion: disengaged, separated, connected, and enmeshed. Olson, Sprenkle, and Russell's model refers to whole family relationships; however, for this study it was modified to refer to parent-child relationships.

In categorizing communication styles, conflict, and closeness, each dyadic pair (mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, or father-son) was considered.

Focus Groups

The focus groups in this study were carried out to address the broad research question (*In what ways do television images and portrayals of the African American parent-child relationship relate to conceptions that African American parents and children hold about the parent-child relations within their own family?*) and the three research questions. It is during this process the concept of relational schemas, discussed in the previous chapter, comes into play to address the broad question and the research questions. Because relational schemas are dual representations consisting of a self-schema and an other-schema, the focus groups helped conceptualize parent-child relational schemas as combinations of the parents' perception of themselves in the parent-child context

and their perception of the child, and as combinations of the children's perception of themselves in the parent-child context and their perception of the parents.

Guided by a semi-structured interview guide, the focus groups took place in July 2005 in a hotel conference room. I served as the focus group moderator. Three traditional, intact two-parent families participated in the focus groups. The focus groups were divided into two separate groups: a parents' focus group and a children's focus group. Segregating the parents and the children was an effort to encourage open and honest dialogue and encourage the participants, especially the children in this study, to express themselves unreservedly without worrying about repercussions for what they said. The participants were instructed to keep all comments made in their interview sessions confidential, and I would keep the participants' identities confidential in reporting the results.

The duration of each focus group was one-and-a-half hour. Before each interview session the participants completed a 45-item questionnaire that asked basic questions about the parent-child interactions within their own families and assessed the perceived quality of parent-child relationships. The Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire (Furman & Buhrmester, 2001) (Appendix B) consists of 40 questions and is designed to gather information about parent-child relationships and the factors that influence their development. This questionnaire was chosen because it encompasses parent-child communication styles, conflicts or arguments and gauges the closeness between the parent and child. To investigate the cohesion element more extensively, five questions were added to

the Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire. Cohesion questions were pulled from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II (FACES II) (Olson, Bell, & Portner, 1990) and incorporated. FACES II is a family self-report instrument based on the Circumplex Model designed to assess family functioning type.

There is a child version and a parent version of the Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire. Realizing that within a family the dynamics of the parent-child relationship varies from the mother-child, father-child, mother-older child, or father-younger child, therefore, the children completed two separate questionnaires for each parent, and the parents completed a questionnaire for each child in their family.

The questionnaire consists of 19 subscales and five factors. The five factors include (a) Personal Relationship – containing items related to companionship and closeness (e.g., “How much do you and this child/parent do nice things for each other?”); (b) Warmth – containing items related to nurturance, affection and admiration for one another (e.g., “How much do you feel proud of this child/parent?”); (c) Disciplinary Warmth – containing items related to praise, prosocial behaviors, and shared decision making (e.g., “How much do you tell this child that he or she did a good job?”/“How much does this parent tell you that you did a good job?”); (d) Power Assertion – containing items related to quarreling and verbal punishment (e.g., “How much do you yell at this child for being bad?”/“How much does this parent yell at you for being bad?”);

and (e) Possessiveness – containing items related to control and protectiveness (e.g., “How much do you want this child to be around you all of the time?”/“How much does this parent want you to be around him or her all of the time?”).

The questionnaire is reinforcement for the interviews and an aid in realizing issues related to communication style, conflict and closeness within the parent-child relationships that were undiscovered or not brought out in the focus groups.

Upon completion of the questionnaire, the participants were shown an episode from *My Wife & Kids* and from *Family Matters* that depicted parent-child interactions. Due to time restraints, no episodes were shown of *The Cosby Show* or *That’s So Raven* in either focus group, but the participants declared they were familiar with the two shows as they had been with *My Wife & Kids* and *Family Matters*. The interviews began thereafter.

The focus groups were to supplement the frame analysis for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. For Research Question 1, the focus groups sought to find the level of conversation orientation and conformity orientation in real African American families. The focus group interviews inquired about real African American parent and child perceptions and assessments of the level of communication they experience in their relationship. The interviews also helped in exploring their conceptions about how their own experiences relate to the portrayals on television.

The participants were asked such questions as: What do you think about the way communication between the parent and child is depicted in African American families on television? In what way is your communication style similar and different than the African American parents and children in *My Wife & Kids* and/or *Family Matters*, and shows like *The Cosby Show* and *That's So Raven*? Generally, do you find it easy or difficult to talk with your parents/child? Why? Are there certain topics you do not talk about with your parents/child? Is your family environment one in which you (the parent and child) feel completely free and unrestrained to discuss anything?

For Research Question 2, the focus groups explored the types of conflicts encountered and the approaches to conflict management and resolution within the parent-child relationships. The focus groups were also helpful in exploring the perceptions of how conflict is dealt with on television in African American parent-child relationships. The participants were asked such questions as: What conflicts do you encounter in your parent-child relationship? How often do you have conflicts or arguments with your parent/child? How are the parent-child issues of conflict on *My Wife & Kids* and/or *Family Matters*, and on shows like *The Cosby Show* and *That's So Raven*, similar or different to your own parent-child issues of conflict? What are your approaches/methods of conflict management or resolution? Parents, what discipline practices do you find to be more effective? Children, what do you think about the way your parents discipline you?

The focus groups also explored the parents and children's perceived levels of closeness in their relationships. In relation to Research Question 3, the participants were asked such questions as: How often does your mother/father/child express affection to you? How close do you feel toward your mother/father/child? How interested is your mother/father/child in the things you do? How does the closeness of the parent-child relationships on *My Wife & Kids* and/or *Family Matters*, and on shows like *The Cosby Show* and *That's So Raven*, compare to your own relationship with your parents/child?

The study also inquired about the participants' opinions about the African American parent-child relationship in general and how it is played out on television. The focus group interviews delved into the social constructions and interpretations the participants had about the parent-child relationships in African American families, and provided detailed background about the reasons the participants felt the way they did.

The participants were asked such questions as: How would you define the dynamics of your own parent-child relationship? What do you think about the African American parent-child relationship as it is depicted on television? How is your parent-child relationship similar or different than the parent-child relationships portrayed on television? How accurate or inaccurate are the parent-child relationship portrayals on television?

The goal was to capture the participants' understanding and meaning of a parent-child relationship, and their understanding and meaning of their own

parent-child relationship as it relates to parent-child relationship portrayals on television.

The focus groups were recorded on audiotape and transcribed.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The focus group participants consisted of three traditional, intact two-parent families who have watched at least five episodes each of at least two of the shows included in this analysis -- *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show*, and *That's So Raven*.

Letters were mailed to churches and social organizations in an East Tennessee city soliciting participants for the study. The letters explained the purpose of the research project and the type of families being sought. Traditional, intact two-parent African American families was the main criterion for research participants since the television shows in the study consisted of families with two parents in the household. It was important to mirror the family typology presented on television.

Another criterion concerned the children. Each family had to have at least one child not younger than 8-years-old and not older than 18-years-old. In this study, two of the children were 9-years-old and the other child was 10-years-old. It was important for this study that the child participants were able to fill out the questionnaire and to be able to verbally convey their own perceptions.

Children at the third grade level typically are fluent readers. Fluent readers are able to read for meaning (National Association for the Education of Young

Children, 1998; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The average age of a child, without special needs, in the third grade is eight. And, according to developmental psychologist Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development in children (Piaget, 1952, Ginsburg & Oppen, 1988), children 7-11 years old gain new competence in thinking, start to conceptualize, and the child begins to reason logically, and organize thoughts coherently. Piaget referred to this as the concrete operations stage in a child's development. The formal operations stage occurs in children 12-years-old and up. In this stage, children are able to think about abstract relationships and the child's cognitive structures are like those of an adult and include conceptual reasoning.

The maximum age limit of 18 was needed for this study because the purpose of the study was to look at the interactions between the parents and their young/adolescent child as opposed to the parent-adult child interactions. And, again there was the intention to mirror those depictions on television.

The participants in this study were middle- to upper-class families. The mothers and fathers were white-collar professionals. The families lived in the suburbs or urban area of an East Tennessee city.

ANALYSIS

Because the study is specifically focusing on parent-child interactions in African American families on television, the programs were not sampled randomly. Only those episodes that dealt with parent-child interactions were chosen. Three episodes from each program were included in the frame analysis.

The areas explored in the analysis were: communication style, conflict management style, and closeness. A coding sheet was created and divided into three sections that dealt with each area to be explored and instructions on how each should be coded (Appendix C).

Communication style was categorized as: (1) conversation orientation and (2) conformity orientation. Likert scales were developed to rate the degree of communication style among the mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, and father-son. Based on the level of conversation orientation and conformity orientation coded for mother-child and father-child relationships, the type of parent-child communication encountered would be characterized according to Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's model (1994).

For the conflict management variable, each conflict situation was categorized for the relationship between the characters involved in the conflict and the type of conflict management styles used by both characters. Conflict management style was classified as: avoiding, accommodating, confronting, compromising, and collaborating.

Closeness was examined for the type of closeness exhibited between each parent-child dyad. It was categorized as: disengaged, separated, connected, and enmeshed.

Two graduate students and I independently examined the programs. The two graduate students were from the field of mass communication. Training sessions were conducted with the two graduate students wherein detailed

instruction sheets were provided, operational definitions were explained, and categories were clarified.

A pilot study was conducted to check for consistency among the three individuals that would be examining the programs. They examined a chosen sample of episodes – one episode from *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show*, and *That's So Raven*. The consistency among the graduate students and I examining the programs was assessed using a method in which I checked how often their answers matched and how much they deviated. Through this assessment I was able to gauge where the coding instrument needed tweaking or revising. Approximately 90% of the time the two graduate students and I had similar results in the pilot study.

The pilot study episodes were not included in the sample of episodes used in the full analysis. There was approximately 95% agreement among the two graduate students and me in the analysis of the full sample of episodes.

I used frequencies to summarize the results. There were simple tabulating and comparing frequency counts and percentages of the coded content.

I transcribed the focus group interviews and reduced the information by noting recurring themes or patterns. From there, I identified tentative categories of responses from each family as they related to parent-child communication styles, conflict management, closeness and conceptions about parent-child relations on television. Final categories were composed to code all responses.

Because a small number of families participated in the study, the questionnaire scores were analyzed using frequency counts. The responses from each parent and each child were compared.

This chapter is a map of how the study was conducted. The next chapter reports the details of the findings.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND SUMMARY

As stated in the previous chapters, the study reported here examined African American parent-child relationships depicted on television sitcoms and experienced in real African American families. This chapter is organized in terms of the three research questions and reports the findings from the focus groups and questionnaires, and the frame analyses under each research question. The chapter reports the communication styles and patterns of verbal interaction between the parents and children on television and in real families. Next it examines the occurrence and management of parent-child conflicts in television African American families and real families. It then reports the closeness exhibited in television and real life parent-child relationships.

To preserve anonymity, the family members are assigned a coded identity to report the details of the parents' focus group and the children's focus group. Each family is appointed a code name: Family1=F1; Family 2=F2; and Family 3=F3. And each family member is given a code name consistent with his or her family code:

Family 1 = Father (F1); Mother (F1); Child (F1)
Family 2 = Father (F2); Mother (F2); Child (F2)
Family 3 = Father (F3); Mother (F3); Child (F3)

The chapter concludes with a report of the focus group participants' overall conceptions about parent-child relations portrayed on television compared

to their own experiences, but first a recounting of the parents' and children's use of television and the type of family programs watched.

TELEVISION USE AND SHOWS WATCHED

The two focus groups (parents' focus group and children's focus group) reported having between five and six televisions in their homes. Each child in the children's focus group reported having a television in their bedrooms. The parents and children reported watching television together most of the time, but occasionally they watched television individually without other family members. Parents and children reported watching television programs that featured African American families mainly on cable networks such as the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon. They reported watching *My Wife & Kids* and *Family Matters*, but the most commonly watched shows among the children were *That's So Raven*, *The Cosby Show*, and *Sister Sister*. *The Cosby Show* was the show most commonly watched among the parents. A rundown and description of each show and the episodes included in the analysis are in Appendix C.

COMMUNICATION STYLES

The first research question asked: What are the verbal communication styles in African American parent-child relationships on television compared to real life experiences in African American families? This study considered the communication styles of conversation orientation and conformity orientation in the analysis. Conversation orientation is the degree to which families create a climate where all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained

interaction about a wide array of topics. These families spend a lot of time interacting with each other and family members share their individual activities, thoughts, and feelings with family. Conformity orientation refers to the degree to which family communication stresses a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs. Families are characterized by interactions that emphasize a uniformity of beliefs and attitudes.

Focus Groups and Questionnaires

Reports from the focus groups point toward varied communication styles among the parents where there were reports of what appeared to be conversation orientation and conformity orientation in their parent-child relationships. The mothers and fathers reported a difference in the communication styles their children had with each of them. In one instance a mother and father reported that their son communicated more openly with the father than with the mother:

Mother (F2): Now they [referring to her sons] feel free to tell Daddy anything and everything...but not Mama.

Moderator: Why do they do that?

Mother (F2): Well, it's just like...

Father (F2): Her reaction...

Mother (F2): Right.

Father (F2): He [referring to their oldest son] will say something to her and she's like- 'What?!'...and then he'll say- 'Nothing', and then she's like- 'What?! Tell me!'

Mother (F2): Now I will admit, so I've backed off some...they do, they'll talk to him more so than me...

Father (F2): He came home one time and asked about sex. I said 'Ookay'. He said- 'You know what I'm talking about, huh?', and I said- 'Yees...well, tell me about it'. And he said- 'Well, don't worry about it'. And I said- 'You can tell me anything'.

Another mother and father from the parents' focus group reported that their daughter talked unreservedly more often with the mother than with the father:

Mother (F1): I've always told her [referring to her daughter] that she can say anything she wants to. She has a right to say anything she want to in the house, but now, she doesn't have control over how I will react. Okay, so if you want to get grown and you want to say whatever you want to say, that's fine. But then you're going to pay the consequences. There is a reaction to whatever you say, okay.

Despite the reports of unbalanced parent-child communication patterns, on their questionnaire, all of the participants in the parents' focus group said they encouraged unrestrained communication from their children (see Table 1).

Table 1
Parent-Child Communication from the Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire
(Parent's Version)

	<u>Hardly at All</u>	<u>Not Too Much</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Very Much</u>	<u>Extremely</u>
How much do you and this child tell each other everything?			●■	●●■	
How much do you ask this child for his or her opinion on things?		■	●■	●●	■
How much do you listen to this child's ideas before making a decision?			●	●●■	■

Note. ● = Mothers ■ = Fathers

The children reported the same on their questionnaire (see Table 2). They said that they felt they could have open communication with their parents, especially about how to handle school bullies:

Child (F2): Sometimes I ask her [referring to his mother] stuff – ‘What can I do, like there’s a bully bullying me’...I asked my father too. He was like– ‘You need to be tough boy, knock ‘em down to the ground’...[*Moderator: So you talk to your mother about this and she tells you what?*]... She’s like “Stop all this fighting and ignore it.”

Child (F1): Like this girl in 4th grade...she always use to do mean things to me...and every time I go home and cry from school...and I’d say ‘Mommy, she kept bossing me around and picking at me and stuff like that’. And my mom was like ‘well, you just need to ignore her and just don’t play with her’. And my dad

Table 2
Parent-Child Communication from the Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire
(Children's Version)

	<u>Hardly at All</u>	<u>Not Too Much</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Very Much</u>	<u>Extremely</u>
How much do you and this parent tell each other everything?	●	●	■	■■	●
How much does this parent ask you for your opinion on things?	●	●	●■■	■	
How much does this parent listen to your ideas before making a decision?			●■	●■■■	

Note. ● = Mothers ■ = Fathers

says, well, my mom and my dad says – ‘Well, if she doesn’t stop, then we’ll talk to [the teacher] about that...’

Child (F3): My mom, she says that to ignore, or whatever, don’t play with them. But my daddy says that if they come over and they kick you, or whatever, if they try to fight or push me to the ground or they try to punch me, or whatever, he said that I can fight back...

Contrary to what was reported in the parents’ focus group, the children reported in their focus group that they communicated with their mother and father equally, not one more than the other. However, in the Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire, the children reported that it was much easier to discuss their problems with their fathers, and the fathers thought the same (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 3
Parent-Child Problem Discussions from the Parent-Child Relationship
Questionnaire (Children's & Parent's Version)

	<u>Hardly at All</u>	<u>Not Too Much</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Very Much</u>	<u>Extremely</u>
How much easier is it for you to discuss problems with this parent? (Children's Version)			●●	■■■	●
How much easier do you think it is for this child to discuss problems with you? (Parent's Version)			●	●●■	■■

Note. ● = Mothers ■ = Fathers

In addition, the children said that they found it difficult to talk about certain things (e.g., when they get into trouble at school) with both their parents because of the reaction they may get from them:

Moderator: Do you feel free to say whatever is on your mind to your parents?

Child (F3): No, I don't...It's just hard to, 'cause when I can't get it out, like when I wanna say it I can't get it out and then when I don't wanna say it, I just don't because I know they're just gonna get all wild and whatever.

Child (F1): No, sometimes I just don't feel like saying it, but I have to because I feel like a little scared like they're gonna get mad and they start to get so excited...and they start to get mad.

The parents and children found some similarity and some differences in the communication style exhibited in African American parent-child relationships on television compared to their own. Like their own reported experiences, the

children found that the parent-child communication on shows like *My Wife & Kids* and *Family Matters* consisted of the children characters talking to their parents about problems and other things, but noted that there were some shows they watched where the children characters did not talk to their parents.

A mother from the parents' focus group reported a comparison between parent-child communication in African American TV families and her own experience with her child:

Mother (F1): She [referring to her daughter] loves to hear stories about when you were little...She gets a kick out of hearing about when we were little and things that happened...Relating back to *The Cosby Show* he always shared his stories and wasn't ashamed to say - 'I did some stupid things when I was younger,' - she loves hearing when we messed up.

Also from the parents' focus group, a mother reported an instance where she was watching *The Proud Family*, an animated television series about an African American teenage girl and her family on the Disney Channel. In an episode she viewed, the mother expressed her disapproval of how the parents in the show reacted to their child who had organized the neighborhood kids to start a strike for higher allowances. The mothers also cited how they disapproved of the way TV parents, in general, communicated with their children about sex and consented to their children dating at an early age:

Mother (F2): Well, they [referring to parents and teen daughter on *The George Lopez Show*] discuss the issue of sex and her going on birth control and bringing the boy to the house... There were things that I would never, never do. But I don't, he can tell you [pointing to her husband]. I am one, I don't feel comfortable discussing sex of any kind, any issue involved with sex. Go talk to your father.

Mother (F1): You can do that because you have two sons. With a daughter you gotta talk about sex.

Mother (F2): I believe that's why God blessed me with boys.

In sum, conversation orientation is practiced in the parent-child relations of the focus group participants, with same gender parent-child dyads (father-son, mother-daughter) communicating more often. While children reported on their questionnaire that they tended to talk with their fathers about their problems, there were certain things they said they could not talk to either parent about – like when they got into trouble at school. Also, parents and children saw some similarities and differences in the communication style in African American parent-child relationships on television compared to their own experiences.

Frame Analysis

Conversation orientation was the dominant communication style found in the four shows included in the analysis. However, there were some elements of conformity orientation present. In *My Wife & Kids*, there were instances of both

conversation orientation and conformity orientation. In the episodes chosen for analysis (see Appendix C), there were moderate to high occurrences of both conversation orientation and conformity orientation found between the parents and the older daughter and the son (see Figures 1 & 2)¹.

This appeared most often between the mother-older daughter, father-older daughter, and father-son dyads. The communication within the parent-child relationship was one in which the parent and child would be unrestrained in sharing their individual thoughts, opinions, and feelings. An example of this was found in Episode 1, when the mother, Jay, and the daughter, Claire, are not getting along. Claire's communication with Jay is one in which she freely expresses her dislike of how she thinks her mother treats her. Jay is responsive to Claire's feelings and together they find a way of getting along better.

But, concurrently, there were elements of conformity orientation present where the child conformed to the ideas and desires of the parents in order to maintain harmony. The most frequent occurrences of conformity orientation were found in the father-son dyad in Episodes 1 and 2. As in Episode 1 when the son, Junior, is failing Algebra because of a lack of motivation, the father, Michael, comes up with ideas to motivate him (with money and an attractive tutor), and Junior follows his father's ideas with very little input of his own about why he thinks he is failing Algebra or what help he needs. And, in Episode 2, after Junior is caught having sex with his girlfriend, he and Michael are at odds for most of

¹ All figures are located in the Appendix.

the episode unrestrained in their exchange of heated words and expressing their feelings about what had happened. By the end of the show, Junior conforms to the authority and demands of his father.

Based on the parent-child communication patterns in *My Wife & Kids*, the Kyle family appeared to fall into two of the four family communication typologies described in Chapter 2 -- the Pluralistic family typology (high conversation orientation, low conformity orientation), as well as the Consensual family typology (high conversation orientation, high conformity orientation) (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994).

There were very few communicative interaction patterns between the younger daughter and the parents in *My Wife & Kids*. There were similar findings in *Family Matters*. The younger daughter in *Family Matters* was rarely seen in the episodes, and therefore there was not any communication or interaction between her and the parents on any level.

The communication patterns that were found in *Family Matters* indicated that the Winslows were presented as a Pluralistic family. There was mostly high conversation orientation recorded compared to the levels of conformity orientation recorded (see Figures 3 & 4). There appeared to be an open climate of discussion in this TV family. In Episode 1, the older daughter, Laura, spoke unreservedly to her father, Carl, about her humiliation when he set her up with a date for a dance without her knowledge. In the same episode, the mother, Harriet, and Laura had an open exchange about their thoughts and feelings about boys and

relationships. At the beginning of Episode 2, there were instances of conformity orientation, where the communication between the father and son was one-sided with the son feeling stifled in his attempt to tell his father the truth about his fake report card. By the end of the episode, the communication composition turned to conversation orientation when the son gets the opportunity to tell the truth to his father, which led to both discussing their thoughts and feelings.

There was very little or no conformity orientation represented. The coders found the most conversation orientation between the mother-older daughter and the father-older daughter. This may be due to the storylines of the episodes viewed for this analysis. For example, Episode 1 and 3 involved the interactions between Laura and both parents, while Episode 2 centered on the interactions of the Eddie with the father.

The Cosby Show regularly revealed conversation orientation to be most prevalent between both parents and all of the children (see Figure 5). Most of the communication occurred between the father and the children rather than the mother and the children. There were moderate to high levels of conformity orientation as well, found, for the most part, in the father's communication with each child (see Figure 6). For example, Episode 1 centered on the idea of children going to their parents for help when they are in trouble or have problems. The father, Cliff, led a conversation with all of the children, except the youngest who was not included in the situation, about not being afraid to come to him or their mother if they ever got into a jam or were faced with a dilemma. Initially in

a blasé manner, the children agreed to do so, but when Cliff pressed the issue, the children spoke candidly saying if they were in trouble they would seek the help of a friend before going to either parent for fear that the parents would get mad, this was an illustration of conversation orientation. Cliff stressed to the children how important it was for them to come to him or their mother before a friend if they were ever in trouble. By the end of the show, the children's minds had changed and they agreed to go to their parents before going to a friend, an instance conformity orientation where the children took notice of their parents' thoughts and feelings and responded accordingly.

The parent-child communication patterns in *The Cosby Show* present the Huxtables as a combination of what is described as the Pluralistic family, where open, unrestrained communication is welcomed, and the Consensual family, where there is an open exchange between parent child, but the parents assert power and make family decisions.

There were similar occurrences in *That's So Raven*. The family of *That's So Raven* appeared to correspond with the Pluralistic and Consensual family typology. Also, there were mainly high levels of conversation orientation recorded (see Figure 7) and moderate to high instances of conformity orientation (see Figure 8). Like *The Cosby Show*, most of the parent-child communication in this show occurred in the father's interaction with the daughter and the son. This again may be due to the storylines of the episodes viewed for this analysis.

However, there was a difference between the communication style of the Baxters compared to the Huxtables. In this show, although the parents and children freely exchanged their thoughts and opinions, there was, at times, an underlying motive behind the dialogue of the children in an effort to trick their parents or get their way, as presented in Episodes 2 and 3.

Episode 1 was different in that it featured open and honest communication from the parents and children in their interactions with each other. Raven and her father faced fear and conquered it, and Cory and his mother built on their mother-son relationship while building a desk.

Overall, the TV families often times fell within the Pluralistic and Consensual family typologies. There were instances of conversation orientation and conformity orientation communication styles found in *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show* and *That's So Raven*. Although conversation orientation occurred at higher levels, there were moderate to high conformity orientation, which occurred mostly in the father-child dyad.

CONFLICT AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The second research question asked: How does the occurrence and management of parent-child conflicts in African American families on television compare to real life experiences in African American families? In this analysis, the study considered the conflict management styles of avoiding (getting away from the conflict, or changing the topic), accommodating (giving in rather than staying active in the conflict), confronting (to come face-to-face; assertive

behaviors where one person's concerns are pursued at the expense of the other's), compromising (a solution where each person in conflict gives up on something and keeps something), and collaborating (a solution that will meet the needs of both persons in conflict without each having to give up anything).

Focus Groups and Questionnaires

In the focus groups and the questionnaire, the children reported that they did not have much conflict or many arguments with their mothers or fathers. The parents reported that the mother and child had the most conflicts in their families, either because the mother and child's personalities were the same and they "butt heads," or because the mother is considered more as the disciplinarian in the family. The mothers are reportedly most often in conflict with their children because of issues such as what the child should and should not wear, telephone time, dating, the child leaving home to do things on their own, and the child wanting to have the last word in disputes.

As far as conflict management, a few mothers reported they manage conflict with their children through confrontation:

Mother (F1): But with [her child's name] you have to deal with it at that point. She's a very intelligent little girl, if you don't she feels as if 'I've gotten over – I've gotten over.' You've got to deal with it right at that time, whether it's in a store, whether it's whatever, you have to deal with it at that point

in time. The punishment has to be issued at that time...She's got to know what it is at that point in time...

And compromising:

Mother (F1): You know, you can compromise with your child over what needs to be done, such as, 'no, you can't wear those heels today, but tomorrow is Sunday, we're going to church, you can wear those heels.' We had a situation where she was upset because I would not allow her to go to a party that one of her friends was having. And the reason why was that she's almost ten, the little girl is turning 10, but the invitation came from the little girl to her in her back-pack, didn't get a communication from the Mom, from the parents whatsoever. So she didn't go to that party, but now I compromised, 'you can't go to the party' but I invited another friend over, so she did have someone to share that time with.

And through collaboration:

Mother (F3): I think when we punish or discipline we talk together. Whatever the situation may be...we all sit down and discuss it... and let them all put their input on it...

The children reported on their questionnaire that their parents often followed their suggestions for resolving conflicts or problems and they thought

their mothers did this more than their fathers. With the parent's version of the questionnaire, one mother said that she did not follow her child's suggestions for resolutions of problems between the both of them. The other parents said that they did follow their children's suggestions, sometimes.

The parents also gave details about their discipline practices when their children misbehaved. In the parents' focus group, one set of parents said they used spanking as a discipline practice, another set of parents said they only used spanking as discipline when the child was young, while the other set of parents said that they did not spank their child:

Mother (F2): And we still do the spanking, you know. And everybody does not agree with that. You know when you see these families on TV, they don't, that's one of the things, they do not discipline and one of the things they don't encourage, and I think because it is such it's seen now as a bad thing, you know.

Mother (F3): With the little ones you have to do more to explain it [the bad behavior or act] to them. I'm not good with time out. You know, it's just, I'm going to get me a switch and I'm spanking them [referring to her younger children]. And I think if you do more, in my opinion, if you do more of that while they're young you don't have to do so much when they get older.

Father (F2): We had the time out with...[names his youngest son], it didn't affect him one bit. Time out...it didn't work. He's playing, he's doing this, he's doing that, it didn't work at all...it didn't work at all. But I had to maybe, you know, spank him once and then he has to think about it, you know – 'Next time this going to happen to you'...that's all you have to do is threaten you'll get a belt.

Strangely, although some parents reported "spanking" their child, when asked on the questionnaire if they "hit the child when he or she has been bad," the parents said they did not.

The children affirmed this when asked on their questionnaire. Also from the children's focus group, they noted ways in which their parents disciplined them:

Child (F2): They spank us, take everything away, the TV, Xbox, Gamecube, Playstation 2, PS1, PSP, anything that you like.

Child (F3): Yeah, like I get on punishment...and sometimes we get to pick which one [*punishment*] we don't want.

Child (F1): Well, like they give me a spanking and like they'll say 'you're not watching TV for a week' or...every day I come home from camp I would have to do work, no TV, stuff like that...

In regards to what they see on television, the parents and children found some similarity and some differences in the conflict management styles and

discipline practices exhibited in African American parent-child relationships on television compared to their own. From the parents' focus group, one parent reported that there were similarities in their parent-child conflict management compared to how it is handled on shows such as *The Cosby Show* and *The Bernie Mac Show*. Another parent noted that they carry out the same discipline practices portrayed on *The Cosby Show* where the parents made the children go to their bedrooms when conflicts arose and wait to hear their punishment:

Mother (F2): Well, in some cases I can relate to what's going on with Bernie Mac [referring to *The Bernie Mac Show*], you know, to the point where he disciplines to certain aspects, especially the little girl, you know and how he deals with her. Also, with *The Cosby Show*, you know, sometimes, you know, that mother can give you a look, and I can give my kids a look and...enough is enough, you know, Mama done reached her limit.

Mother (F3): I remember an episode on *The Cosby Show* where they [the children] use to hate when Cosby wouldn't give them their punishment and see if they could wait up in their room, and they were like – 'Just go ahead and punish me now and get it over with!' So we'll make them go think about what they did, and we'll talk about it, you know, because sometimes we [referring to herself and her husband] might disagree

and we don't like to disagree in front of them. But we'll talk about it...so when we go in their room it's like we're together on it...

One father noted that television portrayals of how African American fathers disciplined their children have improved from days past:

Father (F1): We're strongly roped in discipline and I'm not saying that it has to be spanking and using belts and all of that. It's that we have a different level of discipline and I think we have a different level of standards than European Americans. So I think it [television] shows our level of discipline. I think we need to be careful sometimes for it not to show the pure negative parts. Sometimes we reflect back to *Good Times*. Every time James [the father on *Good Times*] got mad he would throw a chair or pull the belt off. And again that may be the '70s and that's how they were writing it. I didn't always like it. That gave the stereotype for that's how we did things. So I think now it does show the appropriate discipline element that we can sit down and talk to...our kids.

From the children's focus group, one child saw similarities in the way parents and children on television dealt with conflict compared to how their own parent-child conflicts are handled, which is by using a method he says he learned

in school referred to as the A-R-M system -- avoiding, resolving or managing the conflict:

Child (F2): Well, they [referring to *Family Matters* and *My Wife & Kids*] discuss their problem. They discuss their problem first and make a decision...and make the person feel better that the conflict was resolved...

Moderator: The way that they deal with those conflicts on TV, how is that similar or different from the way you and your parents deal?

Child (F2): Sometimes we do the A-R-M system.

Moderator: Is that what you see on TV in how they deal with it?

Child (F2): Sometimes. Sometimes they avoid it, resolve it, and manage it.

Conversely, another child stated that conflicts and disagreements with their mother and father are handled differently than what's portrayed on television:

Child (F1): Like on TV it's different when children are arguing with their father like, and with their mother, like arguing not like we do at home. They're like 'I hate you', 'you're stupid', 'I'm moving out of this house' ...you don't be saying that kind of stuff at our house...

In sum, although the participants from the children's focus group reported not having much conflict with either of their parents, the parents reported

conflicts with their children, with the most recurring conflicts between the mother and child. The conflict management style most often used by parents were confronting, compromising, and collaborating, and both parents and children reported spanking as a discipline practice used. Also, the parents found similarities in the conflict management styles they used and those acted out in African American television families such as *The Cosby Show*.

Frame Analysis

The frame analysis found various forms of conflict management styles played out in the four shows included in this analysis. In *My Wife & Kids*, each of the three episodes included in the analysis presented a parent-child conflict situation. In Episode 1, the conflict involved the father trying to motivate the son to succeed in Algebra, and the mother-daughter relationship problems. In dealing with each situation there was a combination of conflict management styles used – avoiding, confronting, compromising, collaborating and accommodating. With the father and son, the father confronted the son about his lackluster efforts in Algebra and compromised with the son so that his Algebra grades would improve. The compromise entailed the father granting incentives in the form of money and hiring an attractive tutor, to motivate the son to do better, and in return the son taking the extra time necessary to work harder to improve his Algebra grades. And unsurprisingly the son was accommodating to the father's compromise.

With the mother and daughter relationship conflict, the daughter initially avoided addressing the discord she had with the mother until the mother

confronted the daughter about the problem. Both mother and daughter resolved their differences by collaborating to find ways to improve their relationship.

Episode 2 included a conflictual situation that involved the mother, father, and son when the son is caught having sex with his girlfriend in his mother and father's bed. As expected, the mother, father and son collectively confront the conflict. The father and mother confront their son about being irresponsible for having sex with his girlfriend and disrespectful to them for having sex with his girlfriend in their bed. The son confronts his mother and father when they speak harshly to and about his girlfriend.

However, although the conflict involves both parents with the son, the storyline is written where the father and son are more at odds than the mother and son. The mother is more accommodating in the conflict in trying to find a quick resolution rather than staying active in the conflict. She tries to change the father's mind when he kicks their son out of the house. But it is the father and son who reach a resolution through collaboration and accommodation conflict management styles. The father and son talk through their conflict, and the father offers a resolution that would allow the son back in the house with a stipulation that he would move into the garage --and the son agrees so that he can make amends with his father.

Episode 3 involved a conflict between the father and older daughter when the older daughter takes her father's automobile for a drive without his permission. When she thinks the automobile has been stolen, the older daughter

tries to avoid the conflict facing her. When the father finds out the truth, he initially confronts the daughter. Both father and daughter come to a resolution through collaboration where the father promised to teach the daughter how to drive again while being more patient with her, and the daughter promised to be more responsible.

Every conflictual situation in *My Wife & Kids* appeared to have been resolved with collaboration between the parent and child. These were instances where parent and child work to find a solution that will meet the needs of both without each having to give up anything.

There were similarities found in *Family Matters*. In Episode 1, two different conflicts occurred with one child. The older daughter was in conflict with the mother when the mother would not allow her to attend a school dance. The older daughter was also in conflict with her father when he set her up with a date to the dance without her consent.

The mother-daughter conflict was addressed through confrontation, with the older daughter confronting the mother about her rule about the daughter being too young to go out on a date or to a dance. The conflict was resolved when the mother used the accommodating conflict management style, with a little persuasion from the father, to allow the daughter to go to the dance with a date.

The father-daughter conflict interaction was one in which the daughter confronted the father. The father acknowledged his actions were wrong and therefore used the accommodating management style with the daughter.

Episodes 2 and 3 presented low levels of conflict. In Episode 2 of *Family Matters* the son tried to confront the father with the truth about his fake report card grades, but the father, unknowingly through his actions, avoids what the son was trying to tell him. There are elements of collaboration between the father and son when the father learns the truth, sees the real report card grades and encourages the son to always do his best.

In Episode 3, the father used two conflict management styles when he confronted the older daughter when she made plans to go to a concert with a friend instead of keeping a promise to spend time with him for an annual “father-daughter date night.” Soon after the father was accommodating within the conflict by allowing the daughter to go to the concert with her friend and postponing their time together. In the end the older daughter worked out a solution where they collaborated and enjoyed their “date night.” Again, collaboration seemed to be the dominant conflict management style portrayed in a TV family’s parent-child relationship.

The Cosby Show presented very few conflict situations. The storylines and subject matter encompassing the parent-child relations in *The Cosby Show* were not as controversial compared to the other shows in this analysis. The interactions could be described more distinctively as parent-child debates where the parent and child had discussions about issues of concern. The conflictual situations played out in *The Cosby Show* involved the parents getting the children to agree to come to them instead of their friends if they were in trouble and

needed help, the parents coming up with the best way to teach the youngest daughter how to ride a bike, and the parents urging one of the daughters to decide on a college to attend. During every account, accommodating and collaborating were the conflict management styles used.

The same could be found in *That's So Raven*. The conflict in Episode 1 (see Appendix C) was more of a debate between the father and daughter, and the mother and son, which resulted in a collaborating management style for each parent-child dyad. The conflict between Raven and her father involved a disagreement about a cooking competition whereas the father, a professional chef, did not want to participate for fear of losing. But by midway through the show the conflict was resolved through collaboration, with Raven and her father participating in the competition. The conflict between Cory and his mother involved an effort by the mother to strengthen their mother-son relationship by building a desk for his room. Cory resisted his mother's attempts, worried that his mother was treating him like a baby. After discussing their thoughts and feelings, Cory and his mother collaborated on engaging in more enjoyable activities to build their relationship.

Episode 2 presented an instance of parent-child conflict when the daughter tried to deceive her parents by avoiding telling them about the problems she had at school with a teacher. When the daughter pretended to be her mother in order to meet with the teacher for a conference, the mother and father found out and

confronted her about her misdeed. The result was the daughter compromising by giving up access to her personal telephone for a while.

Similar conflict management styles were portrayed in Episode 3 where the daughter deceived the father when she used money he gave her to buy a calculator for school to buy a blouse instead, and tried to keep it from him. When the father discovered the truth, confrontation was the management style he used, which resulted in a compromise on the part of the daughter where she gave up her free time to wash loads of dishes.

In sum, a combination of all management styles were presented in the shows included in the analysis. Nearly all of the parent-child conflicts in the shows were resolved using collaboration.

CLOSENESS/COHESION

The third research question asked: How does the closeness in African American parent-child relationships on television compare to the real life experiences in African American families? In the analysis four levels of cohesion within families was considered: disengaged (parent and child are independent; emotional bonds are weak; limited communication), separated (parent and child exhibit independence; emotional bonds are stronger than disengaged relationships; there is moderate communication), connected (parent and child communicate well with one another and display less independence; strong emotional attachments), and enmeshed (parent and child have no independence;

emotional bonds are very strong; communication is high, but the lines of communication may not travel both ways).

Focus Groups and Questionnaires

In each of the focus groups, the children said that they felt close to both their moms and dads, and that they did not feel closer to one parent more than the other.

Moderator: Why do you feel close to both?

Child (F3): Because they both do everything with us.

Child (F1): Both the parents, they both love you. They both will always be with you. They both care about you. They both care to see if you're safe...and they both do a lot of things for you.

The parents reported the same; however, they described different levels of closeness their child had with the mother and the father in their families. Two mothers noted changes in the level of closeness between each parent as the child grew older:

Mother (F1): There's a definite difference between the mother and the daughter and the father and the daughter, especially now I see [daughter's name] getting older. Now since she's getting older, I guess when she was younger she was more of a daddy's girl, basically, now since she's gotten older she's more of a mama's girl. And I think it's because, for obvious reasons, we're the same sex.

Mother (F3): I noticed my daughter, like anytime I'm ready to go out the house, she's ready to go, but she's [now] wanting to be around Daddy a lot.

A mother and father reported that their children were closer to the father due to circumstances that enable the father and children to spend more time together:

Mother (F2): You know but they spend, because of his work schedule...they spend a lot more time with him [pointing to her husband] versus me and especially with a lot their activities he's taken them because I work quite a bit.

Father (F2): I noticed that with personal issues, my oldest boy he will tell me and say 'Don't tell Mama'. I say 'Okay, that's fine'.

Both the parents and children were asked about expressions of closeness in their different parent-child relationships. The children reported feeling close to their parents when their moms and dads did things for them, such as take them places like the park or school. And, they felt closeness because their parents cared for them and showed interest in the things that they did:

Child (F1): ...They're both interested in things. They really want to know a lot of things like 'Tell me, tell me, I wanna know, I wanna know.' They're like really interested in the things that I say.

Child (F2): It's like when I get A's, E's and S's, my mom and my dad sometimes take me out...and we be spending a lot of time with each other going out...and when I like get an award my mom is like 'Go baby!', and my dad will put thumbs up...

The parents reported feeling close to their children when there were loving exchanges with their child, such as hugs, kisses, horseplay, and when the child asked the parents to do activities together. However, a few parents reported that as their children mature, the displays of affection become less frequent or changes:

Mother (F1): Our relationship is more she's still in that huggy, kissy feeling with mommy or whatever, and now with daddy, she'll hug and kiss, but I think since she's started to develop she kind of hugs him, but not a bear hug, you know.

Mother (F3): So I do notice her like, she'll just come and hug on him or lay on his shoulder. Even if she don't even like what he's watching, just to lay beside him, she wants that attention from him now, and that's something different. I noticed that.

In the Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire, the parents and children had comparable responses regarding closeness in their respective relationships that indicated they were affectionate and shared time and activities together. The

children and parents had differing opinions of how the closeness in African American parent-child relationships on television compared to their own. In the children's focus group, they reported that in some cases their relationship and closeness with their mothers and fathers was different than the parent-child closeness displayed on television:

Child (F1): It's kind of different a little because some of the things, I mean, I'm close to my mom and my dad different, and I really like love them, and like on TV, like...it's kind of different.

Child (F2): Well, sometimes they discuss things the other way and sometimes they don't discuss though, they just leave it. They don't discuss it. But some parents on the TV shows discuss their problems and resolve their problems, that's how my family is, we resolve it.

The parents saw some similarity between their closeness with their child and the parent-child closeness and affection portrayed on shows such as *The Cosby Show* and *Sister Sister*. One of the fathers reported picking up from an African American family television show a way of improving the closeness in his relationship with his daughter:

Father (F1): One thing I will say TV does do sometimes it gives you some kind of storyline that can teach you how to do certain things with your children. For example, when I was watching *Sister Sister* one time...when Ray [the father]...said that he did a

date with his daughter at least once a month. And that's something I picked up from that... So I have to admit I got that from *Sister Sister*, have a date with your daughter once a month.

And one of the mothers noted a likeness with how closeness is displayed in *The Cosby Show*:

Mother (F1): That's what I liked about *The Cosby Show*...they showed a lot of affection. It was always grabbing – 'Come on here!' – you know, in a playful way. But he [Bill Cosby] was always grabbing and hugging or kissing or something with one of the kids. We say good-bye every morning and we say our prayers in the morning, we hug and we kiss.

Based on these focus group reports, the level of the participants' parent-child closeness appear to correspond with the "connected" component of family cohesion. Yet the closeness level seemed to vary between each parent-child dyad. Also although the children thought the parent-child cohesion portrayed on television was different from their own experiences, the parents thought there were some similarities, particularly in *The Cosby Show* and *Sister Sister*.

Frame Analysis

The television families displayed high emotional bonds and closeness as well. In *My Wife & Kids*, most of the displays of closeness occurred between the parents and the older daughter and the son. The parent-child closeness was

mostly connected and the emotional attachments were relatively strong and the parents and children communicated well with one another. The coders found a few instances where it appeared the parent-child closeness began as disengaged and separated but would metamorphose into something different. For example, the emotional bonding between the mother and daughter in Episode 1 began very low (disengaged) but progressed to moderately high (connected) by the end of the episode after they both discussed improving their communication. Also, in Episode 3, the level of closeness between the father and son started off as separated but changed to a connected closeness when they spoke unreservedly with one another about the disrespect the son showed toward the father.

The closeness portrayed in *Family Matters* was connected as well. Like *My Wife & Kids*, the exchanges of closeness occurred with each parent-child dyad except the mother-younger daughter dyad or the father-younger daughter dyad. Unlike *My Wife & Kids*, the level of closeness did not vary from the beginning to the end of an episode. In each episode of *Family Matters*, there was a consistent degree of a connectedness between the parents and older children. The parents and older children shared a close emotional bond. They also turned to one another for support and problem solving.

The same expressions of closeness and cohesion were found in *The Cosby Show* and *That's So Raven*. In both series, there were not any accounts by the coders of disengaged or separated parent-child relations. In *The Cosby Show* and *That's So Raven*, the father and mother showed elements of “connected” cohesion

with each of the children. There was an emphasis on togetherness and shared interests, particularly in *The Cosby Show*. Episode 1 showed the parents and children pointing at the importance of always being open and honest with one another come what may. In Episode 3 the parents and children illustrated emotional closeness and support when one of the daughters, Denise, struggles with a decision about whether to choose a college to attend close to home or miles away from home.

Togetherness and support were played out in *That's So Raven* between the parents and children. In Episode 1, there was the appearance of togetherness between the father and daughter in the cooking competition, as well as between the mother and son in their efforts to assemble the desk. Episode 2 showed the support of the mother and father for the daughter, Raven, after she shows remorse for trying to deceive a teacher in order to hide her transgressions from her parents. The mother and father reprimanded and punished Raven for her wrongdoing, while emphasizing their support of her regardless of her mistakes.

In sum, there were many expressions of affection that indicated strong emotional bonds and closeness in the TV families included in this analysis. Although in a few instances it appeared to be a disengaged or separated relationship, the parent-child cohesion would ultimately metamorphose into a connected relationship.

TELEVISION VS. REAL LIFE

In addition to showing how parent-child relationships in African American families on television compare to real African American families, this study also sought to find out the conceptions African Americans hold about their real parent-child relations within their own family compared with the portrayals on television. In the children's focus group, they reported that they were aware that the parent-child interactions on television are "just people acting." They said that the shows were not representative of what occurs in their own parent-child relationships. However, the children did think that shows such as *That's So Raven* and *Sister Sister* had some likeness to the parent-child interactions they experienced in their own families:

Child (F2): ...*That's So Raven's* family, um, you know *That's So Raven*, well, it's kind of like some people's families. They get along with each other and stuff and they spend time together sometime, they watch TV.

Moderator: So you would say that your family is kind of like *That's So Raven's* family?

Child (F2): Almost like it.

Child (F1): My family is something like *Sister Sister* partly. My mom is kind of funny like Lisa is, she does some pretty funny stuff. Well, my dad is not really like Ray...but um, I'm something

like *Sister Sister*...and I'm something like *That's So Raven* too.

The parents reported that overall there was some accuracy and inaccuracy in how African American parent-child relationships were depicted on television when compared to their own experiences. The parents said that they did not like the negativity, but they did like to use some of the positivity on television and apply it to their own family:

Mother (F1): It's TV, but sometimes it has merit. I use TV as an example of what not to do and teach between reality and fantasy.

Mother (F3): Can take a bit of it and leave a bit of it. It doesn't always have a perfect ending in real life like on TV.

The parents also reported that the African American parent-child relationships on television that were more representative of their own were *Family Matters* and *The Cosby Show*, with *The Cosby Show* being cited more often:

Father (F1): Now one thing I will say about Claire [*The Cosby Show*], she was a true Black mother. I mean she, I have to give her credit, and I mean to say that stereotypically...any of us could relate to a Black mother the way Claire was I think...she played that role out well.

Mother (F1): That's what I thought was good about Cosby as far as him being funny, because even though he got angry sometimes, every time on that show, even though he was angry or disappointed with that child, before that show ended he was either hugging that child or nurturing that child in some way and it wasn't always – 'I'm gonna hit you upside your head. I'm gonna hit you. I'm gonna spank you' or whatever.

Additionally, the parents said that there needed to be more appropriate programs with African American families on television. Also of note is that the parents said that their choice of what television programs to watch was not based on race, but on the quality of the program.

SUMMARY

There are many different family models on television. Based on these portrayals that we see, it is easy to compare and draw conclusions about our real family life. We may measure our family values and beliefs against what is portrayed on television, asking ourselves questions like- 'Does my family do that?' 'Is this family better than mine? Worse?' The connection we make between real family relationships and fictional TV family relationships is drawn in part from our own family experiences. This study explored the depiction of the African American parent-child relationship on television and its association with real African American parent-child relationships. The general question this study

attempted to answer is: In what ways do television portrayals of the African American parent-child relationship relate to conceptions real African American parents and children hold about the parent-child relations within their own family?

That general question subsumes three research questions, as follows: What are the verbal communication styles in African American parent-child relationships on television compared to real life experiences in African American families? How does the occurrence and management of parent-child conflicts in African American families on television compare to real life experiences in African American families? And, how does the closeness in African American parent-child relationships on television compare to the real life experiences in African American families?

Qualitative analysis techniques were used to conduct this study. I directed focus group interviews with three African American families with two parents living in the household with at least one child 8-18 years old. The focus groups were divided into a Parents' Focus Group and a Children's Focus Group. Each participant also completed a Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire.

Additionally, two trained graduate students and I examined four television shows that featured conventional African American families with children, which included *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show*, and *That's So Raven*. Episodes of the shows were recorded over the course of one year

(September 2004-September 2005), and three episodes per show, which featured parent-child interactions, were chosen by me to include in the analysis.

First, in exploring the communication styles, the focus group participants reported practicing conversation orientation in their parent-child relations. However, there was a difference of opinion between the two groups as to who talked with whom the most. The children said they communicated with both parents equally, but the parents thought the communication with their children was unbalanced with more communication occurring with same gender parent-child dyads (e.g., mother-daughter, father-son).

Also, the feedback children received from their parents cultivated the unequal communicative relationship reported by the parents. One mother-father couple said their son talked more with the father because of the mother's reaction to what he says made him hesitant to share things with her. Another couple from the group said their daughter talked more often to the mother but the mother said that her daughter knows to expect a reaction from her, citing that her daughter "has a right to say anything she wants to...but she doesn't have control over how I will react."

Mothers and fathers reported encouraging open and unrestrained communication with their children, citing in their Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire that they told each other everything, asked their children their opinions, and listened to their children's ideas before making decisions. The children said they felt they had open communication with their parents as well.

However, from their responses on the questionnaire, the children cited it being easier to talk with their father more so than their mother about their problems. Yet, the children said in their focus group that it was difficult to talk to either parent about situations when they had gotten into trouble at school because their parents would “start to get so excited...and they [would] start to get mad” and “get wild.” Therefore, they were not likely to share such things with either parent.

While the participants from the focus groups, for the most part, appeared to engage in open, unrestrained communication, the children did not think TV children spoke much with their parents about problems and other things in the shows that they watched like *My Wife & Kids* and *Family Matters*, as they did in their own parent-child relationships. In exploring another comparison made between real and TV African American parent-child relations, one mother thought that her style of communicating with her daughter mimicked how the father from *The Cosby Show* shared childhood stories with his children, noting that her daughter got a “kick” out of hearing when she and her husband were “little and things that happened.”

In another comparison, a few moms from the parents’ focus group noted a few problems they had with how TV parents communicated with their children. One mother disapproved of the way the parents from the ABC television series, *The George Lopez Show*, handled discussions with their daughter about sex, her taking birth control, and allowing her boyfriend in the house. Another mother

said that she did not like the way the parents from the animated television series, *The Proud Family*, reacted to their child who organized a strike for higher allowances among the neighborhood kids.

In the analyses of the television shows included in this study, conversation orientation was the main communication style found in the shows included in the analysis, although there were some instances of conformity orientation. In *My Wife & Kids*, there were moderate to high occurrences of both conversation orientation and conformity orientation between the parents and the older daughter and the son. Although the parents and children more often unreservedly shared their individual thoughts, opinions and feelings, the most occurrences of conformity orientation happened between the father and son, where the son often times conformed to the desires of the father in order to maintain harmony.

Not much of that was depicted in *Family Matters*. The parent-child communication patterns in *Family Matters* were mostly open and unrestrained. There was very little or no conformity orientation represented in *Family Matters*. Conversation orientation was the dominant communication style in the show and occurred mainly between the mother-older daughter and the father-older daughter.

Also of note, in *My Wife & Kids* and *Family Matters*, the communication always occurred between the parents and the older daughter and the older son. The younger daughter in the two families did not play an active role.

All of the children played an active role in *The Cosby Show*. The parent-child communication patterns revealed much conversation orientation, with a few

instances of conformity orientation. These patterns of communication occurred with father engaging in talks and discussions with the children more so than the mother.

The same was found in *That's So Raven*. Like *The Cosby Show*, the father was the dominant communicator with the children, and there were high levels of conversation orientation and moderate to high instances of conformity orientation.

Based on the parent-child communication patterns from *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show* and *That's So Raven*, all fell within the Pluralistic and Consensual family typologies, where there was open, unrestrained communication between the parents and children, but there were instances where the parents asserted power and made family decisions.

Next, I looked at parent-child conflict. There was variation in the recall of the occurrence of conflict between the parents' focus group and the children's focus group. The participants from the children's group said they did not experience much conflict with either of their parents. However, the parents reported conflicts with their children, with the most recurring conflicts between the mother and child. Accordingly, the mothers said they used confronting, compromising, and collaborating most often as conflict management styles with their children. Conflicts or disagreements would occur over things such as what the child can wear, time spent on the telephone, and dating/having a girlfriend or boyfriend.

While the mother-child conflict appeared to be more common, conversely the children thought that their mothers were more inclined to follow their suggestions for resolving the conflict more so than their fathers.

The parent-child conflict management approaches and resolutions would sometimes entail various discipline practices by the mother and father. As a method of discipline, the children said that their parents would take away things they enjoyed such as their video games and restricted their television viewing.

Both parents and children reported spanking as a discipline practice that occurred when the child misbehaved. Strangely, when asked on the Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire if they *hit* their child when he or she had misbehaved, the parents answered “no.” Also, the children answered in the same way when asked if their mother and father *hit* them when they behaved badly.

In regards to TV families, some of the conflict management styles and discipline practices parents said that they used are similar to what they saw portrayed in African American parent-child relationships on television. The mothers and fathers more often cited *The Cosby Show* as the best example of how they carried out conflict management and resolution with their children, noting how the parents in the show could communicate with their kids by simply giving them “a look,” or they would confront the conflict with their children and then make them wait to hear what their punishment will be when they have misbehaved – all things that they practiced in their own parent-child relationships.

The children were a bit divided on their assessment. One child thought that the parent-child conflict management styles portrayed on television shows like *My Wife & Kids* and *Family Matters* resembled how he and his parents handled conflicts, which was by using what he referred to as the “A-R-M system” – Avoid, Resolve, and Manage, a method he said he learned in school. Alternatively, another child disagreed with how conflict was handled between parents and children on television, citing that the way the children argued with their fathers and mothers on television, saying things like “I hate you” or “You’re stupid,” was not how things happened in her home. “You don’t be saying that kind of stuff at our house,” the child said.

A combination of all conflict management styles was presented in the shows included in the analysis. But the most common conflict management style employed in *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, and *That’s So Raven* was collaboration. There were very few parent-child conflicts in *The Cosby Show* and the few conflict situations that did occur were not as controversial compared to the other shows. For example, in *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, and *That’s So Raven*, the parent-child conflicts consisted of failing to maintain mutual respect, the children defying the rules set by the parents, and lack of honesty from the children and parents.

While there were some differentiations between the parents and children in their accounts about their communication and conflicts, they had common perceptions regarding their closeness. The parents and children said they felt they

had a close relationship with each other. However, the level of closeness varied between each parent-child dyad. The mothers and fathers thought that there was a different kind of closeness their child shared with each of them either because a parent-child dyad spent more time together or consisted of the same sex (e.g., mother-daughter, father-son). Or, they thought that it may be as the child grew older their relationship with each parent changed, and the child began to seek attention from a different parent.

While the levels of closeness varied between each parent-child dyad, the way they expressed their closeness through displays of affection varied as well. The children thought their parents expressed their closeness when each one would do things for them and when each parent showed interest in the things they did. The parents felt their children expressed closeness when they had loving exchanges with them, such as hugs and kisses, and when the children initiated spending time together.

The expressions of closeness parents experienced in their relationships with their children, they also saw it portrayed on television on shows like *The Cosby Show* and picked up tips on how to develop a closer relationship with their children from shows like *Sister Sister*. On the other hand, the participants from the children's group thought that their closeness with each of their parents was different in some ways than television portrayals, such as how TV parents and children resolved their problems and expressed their love for each other.

In *My Wife & Kids*, *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show*, and *That's So Raven*, the TV parents and children appeared to share strong emotional attachments and have a “connected” type of closeness/cohesion. They expressed their closeness by doing things together, talking with each other, and being supportive when problems arose.

There were different stages of closeness in *My Wife & Kids* whereas the parent-child interaction would start off being portrayed as disengaged or separated, but as the storyline evolved, by the end of the show there would be depictions of a connected parent-child dyad. As for *Family Matters*, *The Cosby Show*, and *That's So Raven*, there were consistent portrayals of a connected closeness/cohesion throughout each show.

On the whole, the results presented above indicate that there are not many differences between African American parent-child relationships depicted on television and experienced in real African American families. A discussion of the findings is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In African American families, like most families, building and maintaining a positive parent-child relationship demands open communication and constructive conflict management to help ensure parents and children stay close and connected. The results of the study provide support for Fitzpatrick & Ritchie's (1994; Ritchie, 1991; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990) Revised Family Communication Pattern construct in determining how families communicate. Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's two model dimensions, conversation orientation and conformity orientation, were used to explore the parent-child communication styles in the three African American families that participated in this study.

The parent-child communication in the families shows characteristics of moderate-to-high levels of conversation orientation and moderate levels of conformity orientation. The mothers, fathers and children from each family believed their parent-child relationships consisted of an open flow of communication where there were candid exchanges of ideas and feelings and frequent interactions with one another. They talked mostly about school and school-related activities or events, and about the children's friends, sex, and the parents' childhood. However, their communication was not as open as they conceptualized it to be. There were modest degrees of conformity orientation present as well. The children reported feeling that there were certain things they could not talk to their mothers or fathers about, like when they would get into

trouble at school. Consistent with conformity orientation (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990), the children repressed some of their feelings in an effort to avoid controversy and maintain a harmonious relationship with each parent.

Also, in this group there was more communication between same-gender parent-child dyads. There was more communication between the mothers and daughters and between the fathers and sons. Prior research has made claims and assumptions about the distinctness of the four (mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, father-son) parent-child dyads. For example, Bassoff (1987) suggested that mothers and daughters were closely identified and that their sameness bonds them to each other. The same is often highlighted in regards to father-son relationships.

But there was one thing that was surprising. When it came to discussing problems, although it would seem so, gender did not seem to matter among the participants. The children reported on their questionnaires feeling more comfortable discussing problems with their fathers, and the fathers thought the same. As revealed in the focus groups, this was not because of the father's gender, but due in large part to the mother's reaction to hearing about the problems her children came to her about. The mothers had a tendency to have a more overt, aggressive reaction to things than the fathers. The fathers tended to have a more calming demeanor when their children came to them with problems. This supports prior research that has shown that most young children and adolescents feel close to their fathers as sources of help, advice and moral support

(Amato, 1987). Also, in more recent years there has been an increase in research on the influence of fathers in children's lives, with particular attention to the processes through which fathers influence children's development (Coley, 2001).

Overall, the combinations of conversation- and conformity-orientation show behaviors in the parent-child communication patterns that are associated with one of four family types: Consensual families. The study participants fit the mold of consensual families in that they were traditional families in which communication was characterized by a tension between pressure to agree and preserve the existing hierarchy within the family, on the one hand, and an interest in open communication and in exploring new ideas, on the other hand (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002).

One of the characteristics of conversation-oriented parent-child relationships is having unrestrained communication, which can lead to conflicts or disagreements. Like most parent-child relationships, conflict is an inevitable occurrence which was present in the participants' relationships as well. The parents and children differed in recounting how often they were in conflict with one another. Although the children did not think they experienced much conflict with either parent, the moms and dads said they have faced quite a few conflicts with their children. And surprisingly, the most recurring parent-child conflicts were between the mother and child among this group of participants. However, this phenomenon was not so unusual among parent-child relationships. Apparently this finding is consistent with previous studies that looked at

adolescent-parent conflict. Extant research shows that mothers are more likely to be involved in contentious exchanges with offspring more often than fathers (Collins & Russell, 1991; Laursen, 1995; Laursen & Collins, 1994; Montemayor & Hanson, 1985; Smith & Forehand, 1986). This may be due to the level of involvement mothers have with their children on a daily basis. Traditional parental roles define mothers as the primary caregivers and nurturers for their children (Renk, Roberts, Roddenberry, Luick, Hillhouse, Meehan, Oliveros, & Phares, 2003). Consequently the high level of interaction compared to fathers makes the mother-child relationship more vulnerable to incidents of conflict.

Both the parents and children agreed that the conflicts occurred over minor issues. Prior research documents that disagreements occur regularly, especially in mid-adolescence, and that they tend to be minor and concern mundane, everyday details of family life (Collins, 1990; Montemayor, 1986; Smetana, 1989). In this study, the basis for most of the mother-child conflicts were disagreements when it came to the children wanting to establish their independence and wrangling with their mothers to have the last word in an argument. The mother-child conflicts, as well as parent-child interactions in general, are set off due to factors associated with environmental, cultural, and individual attributes of both the parent and child (Kendler, 1996).

In resolving their conflicts with each other the mother and child more often used three of Rahim and Magner's (1995) five conflict management styles- confronting, collaboration and compromising. Conversely, previous research in

relation to parent-adolescent conflict resolution has found avoidance to be the most frequently used conflict management style (Montemayor & Hanson, 1985). Other research has reported compromise and joint discussion (collaboration) to be relatively infrequent (Montemayor & Hanson, 1985; Vuchinich, 1987).

In addition to using confronting, collaboration, and compromising as their chief conflict management styles, the mothers, fathers and children disclosed that when conflict arose the children's privileges were withheld and spanking was used as a form of discipline or punishment when the conflict entailed the child misbehaving. Interestingly, both the parents and children found a distinction between spanking and hitting as a manner of discipline. Neither the parents nor the children equated spanking with hitting. There appears to be different connotations associated with the word hit and the word spank. Perhaps for the participants hitting had more of a negative implication than spanking. This is a subject matter that warrants further investigation.

While there were conflicts in the participants' parent-child relationships, overall the parents and children appeared to share a close relationship. As noted earlier, they shared good, open, unrestrained communication and maintained strong emotional attachments, all characteristics of connected, cohesive relationships as illustrated in Olson, Sprenkle, and Russell's (1979) Circumplex Model of Family Functioning.

In this study, two factors appeared to contribute to the degree of closeness or cohesion shared between each parent and child: time spent together and

growth of the child. Though the children felt equally close to both parents, the parents were more discerning and noticed a difference in how they were each close with their child. Time spent together appeared to influence the level of closeness each parent shared with his or her children. Clearly in most cases, the more time a child spends with one parent, the more that parent-child relationship is likely to be one that is close.

When considering the amount of time parents spend with their children, mothers have been found consistently to have higher levels of involvement with regard to direct interaction accessibility and responsibility compared to fathers (Leslie, Anderson, & Branson, 1991; McBride & Mills, 1993; Peterson & Gerson, 1992). Some studies have attributed this to the gender of parents and the gender of the children, reporting differences between sons and daughters in their relationships with either mother or father (Collins & Russell, 1991; Maccoby, 1990). However, there are studies that counter these findings. Research indicates that differences in interaction patterns between the child and the two parents do not predict the amount of time parents spend in direct interaction with their children (Renk, Roberts, Roddenberry, Luick, Hillhouse, Meehan, Oliveros, & Phares, 2003). Also, differences in children's emotional responses toward their mothers and fathers have been found to be non-significant (Bronstein, 1984; Russell & Russell, 1987). Observational studies in middle childhood indicate that despite differences in the occurrence and the kind of parent-child interactions, children respond to mothers and fathers in the same way, displaying generally

positive affect toward both (Margolin & Patterson, 1975; Russell & Russell, 1987).

In this study, according to the parents, there is variability from family to family in amount of interaction each child spent with each parent. Based on the participants' recounting of time spent together, in one family the father had a closer relationship with the child, and in two other families the mothers had the closest relationships. There were not patterns whereas the mothers interacted more often or were more responsive to their children than the fathers. In fact, the fathers appeared to be active participants in their children's lives.

The maturing of the child also shaped the participants' parent-child closeness and cohesion. The parents noted changes in closeness as the child changed, growing older and turning to one parent more so than the other for affection (e.g., hugs, kisses) and attention (e.g., the parent showing interest in what the child does). This follows existing research that notes how the dynamics of the parent-child relationship is continuously evolving. As children get older their relationships with mom and dad changes. Parent-child relationships endure many challenges, particularly once the child transitions into adolescence (Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, & Sturges, 2001; Frey & Rothlisberger, 1996; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985a; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985b; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). In this study, it looks as if that process has already begun between the parents and their 9- and 10-year-old children.

Overall, the parents appeared to be highly supportive of their children by investing time and playing an active role in the nurturance, guidance and disciplining of their children. Both parents and their children seemed to love each other and expressed their love for one another regularly.

Scripted vs. Real

While considering communication style, conflict management style, and cohesion/closeness, this study sought to explore the ways in which television portrayals of the African American parent-child relationship relate to conceptions real African American parents and children hold about the parent-child relations within their own family. The overall conceptions the participants in this study held about television portrayals of African American parent-child relationships were similar. The children and the parents thought that there were some parallels and some dissimilarity in how African American parent-child relationships were depicted on television compared to real life experiences. The children appeared to be completely aware that the parent-child interactions portrayed on television were “just people acting.” Still, they did find a few likenesses of their own parent-child relationships in shows such as *That’s So Raven* and *Sister Sister*. In their focus groups, the children noted how it was easier to talk to their fathers about problems than their mothers. There are strong, connected father-child relationships portrayed in *That’s So Raven* and *Sister Sister*. It appears that the children in this study identified with those relationships.

Of the shows included in this analysis, the parents considered *Family Matters* and *The Cosby Show* to be more representative of the parent-child relationships they have in their families, with *The Cosby Show* being named more often.

The fact that Bill Cosby, the star and producer of the show, has a Doctorate Degree in Education (Ed.D.) may well have contributed to the success of the show. Cosby was able to use his background in education and his creative control over the show to not only present a television portrayal of an intelligent, non-stereotypical African-American family, but also to present a favorable image of African American parent-child relationships. The parents in this study identified more often with the parenting styles in *The Cosby Show*. As they cited in their focus groups, they found most of the parenting techniques used on *The Cosby Show* to be similar to their own styles of parenting. They even admitted picking up a few tips here and there from the show as well.

The parenting styles portrayed in *The Cosby Show* and the parenting styles the parents in this study described using in their parent-child relationships are representative of the “authoritative” parenting style described in Baumrind’s typology of parenting styles. Authoritative parents give their children a particular amount of independence within the structure of the parent-child relationship. “They monitor and impart clear standards for their children’s conduct. They are assertive, but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive. They want their children to be assertive as well

as socially responsible, and self-regulated as well as cooperative (Baumrind, 1991).

In general, the parents thought that there were some things that could be taken away from the television portrayals of parent-child relationships overall, citing that they could “take a bit of it and leave a bit of it.” Although it’s TV, “sometimes it has merit,” one parent said. The shows featuring African American families present favorable images of parenting and are, to a certain degree, consistent with the reality of parenting in the families involved in this study. The television characters serve as role models in a sense that the parents from this study mimicked or borrowed from the TV parents’ communication styles, methods of conflict management, and displays of closeness with their TV children.

Finally, although the parents found representations of their parent-child relationships in shows like *Family Matters* and *The Cosby Show*, they noted a need for more television programs featuring African American families. Yet they said that race was not a factor in choosing what to watch on television. They looked foremost at the quality of the television program.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, in assessing emotional closeness, conflict management, and communication styles, the results indicate that the quality of the African American parent-child relationships appear to be positive both in real life and on television. Additionally, the results indicate that there are more similarities than

differences between African American parent-child relationships depicted on television and experienced in real African American families. For the most part, the TV families included in this study appeal to the common values of real African American families when it comes to open, unrestrained communication, and dealing with conflicts while maintaining a close, connected relationship.

This study lends support to the theory of relational schemas in that it shows how the real and fictional African American parent-child relationships are nourished and sustained. It illustrates how the mothers, fathers, and children each through communication, conflict management and emotional closeness, interpret and perceive their individual parent-child relationship. These interpretations, in turn, influence how they define themselves and their relationships, and how they interact with one another such that their relationship is unique from other family or peer relationships.

For families, this study shows the likelihood of how the television family can improve our understanding of life and relations in real families. In addition it illustrates how the family structure of African American families appears to be strong and intact as it is depicted on television. In particular there is the recognition of how good communication styles, effective conflict management, and shared closeness in parent-child relationships in traditional, intact families can transcend race.

The research implications that can be drawn from this study are that television is a mechanism that stimulates a dialogue and a consciousness about

family relationships. The study implies how our perceptions of television portrayals of family relationships, such as parent-child relationships, are not necessarily determined by the program content itself, but how we associate those depictions with our own interactions and experiences in such relationships.

This study bears some strengths in that it gives unique accounts of how real African American families think about and identify with fictional television families, which is rarely found in extant research. The study also builds up the scant research about families of color.

The analysis is unique in that it looked solely at African American parent-child relationships and did not contrast them against any other race as has been commonly done in past research. The study also delves into how television portrayals of parent-child relationships ties into real families' beliefs about parent-child relations, families and their family values.

This study is also distinctive from similar studies in that it looked at the parent-child relationship from the parents' perspective and from the child's perspective. Yet, there is potential for more research. Future research should be conducted to explore the implications of this study for parent-child relationships in single-parent families. Because there are few television shows that feature two-parent African American families, there are even fewer, if any, which feature single-parent African American families. Therefore, realistically, the research would have to consider all possible ethnic groups presented on broadcast and cable television.

Another area of research may be to look at sibling relationships in African American families. Commonly siblings are portrayed on television as adversaries. It would be interesting to compare and contrast siblings' real life experiences to fictional depictions on television.

A few limitations to the study should be noted. This study lacks generalizability because of the sample size of the television shows and the time period in which the shows were recorded for analysis. Also, the size of the focus group participants restricts the generalizability of the study because it is a convenience sample of families and not representative of the entire African American population of families. Another limitation is how the families in the study shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds. To increase generalizability future research would call for a larger sample of focus group participants from varied social classes so that there is a greater diversity of thoughts, interpretations and perspectives, and contribute to a better understanding about families.

Despite these limitations, this study broadens our understanding of parent-child relationships in African American families. In addition, this analysis extends our knowledge base of the way real families, overall, perceive and relate to families on television.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

SHOWS INCLUDED IN THE FRAME ANALYSIS*

My Wife & Kids

Working It (Episode 1) - With the son, Junior, in danger of failing algebra, the father, Michael, comes up with a unique plan to help him pass; and the mother, Jay, has mother-daughter relationship problems with the older daughter, Claire.

Junior's Risky Business (Episode 2) – The father, Michael, throws the son, Junior, out of the house after he and the mother, Jay, find their son in their bed with his girlfriend. Jay disagrees about the punishment, and the family household is not a happy one. As for Junior, he has been banished to a tent in the backyard.

Claire's Permit (Episode 3) - The older daughter, Claire, gets her learner's permit, but that doesn't necessarily mean that her father, Michael, will permit her to drive. But he does relent and takes her out for a driving lesson, but it doesn't go well.

Family Matters

Laura's First Date (Episode 1)

The older daughter, Laura, is humiliated when her father and brother pity her for not having a date for an upcoming dance and each tries to set her up on a date.

Straight A's (Episode 2)

On report-card day, the son, Eddie, expects the worst, but he and his family is surprised when he gets a card with high marks. The father, Carl, is incredibly proud and starts making big plans for Eddie's future. But later Eddie finds out a friend pulled a practical joke, and tries to tell his father the truth.

What Do You Know (Episode 3)

The father and daughter, Carl and Laura, make plans for their annual father-daughter date. Later Laura gets tickets to see her favorite music group in concert the same night of the father-daughter date, and she tries to come up with a plan to do both.

* The episodes chosen for this analysis were assigned episode numbers. However, each has the original episode titles given when they were first produced.

The Cosby Show

Denise's Friend (Episode 1) - Denise's (the second eldest daughter) friend takes a problem to her father, Cliff, instead of her own parents, which makes Cliff wonder what his children would do in similar circumstances.

An Early Spring (Episode 2) - The father and mother try to teach the younger daughter, Rudy, how to ride her bike without training wheels, but only one parent is successful in teaching her. The son, Theo, learns the value of studying. A self-conscious Vanessa, the third eldest daughter, tries to hide a zit.

Denise's Decision (Episode 3) - The family anxiously and patiently wait for the second eldest daughter, Denise, to decide where she's going to college.

That's So Raven

Chef-Man and Raven (Episode 1) – The daughter, Raven, encourages her father, Victor, to enter a cook-off against his old culinary school rival, and helps him in the competition. In an effort bond with her son, Cory, the mother gets Cory to help her set up a new desk for his room, but he's reluctant.

Mother Dearest (Episode 2) – The daughter, Raven, gets into trouble when she tells off a spiteful teacher and then tries to impersonate her mom when the teacher demands to meet with Raven's parents.

Point of No Return (Episode 3) – The daughter, Raven, spends \$100, which was intended for a calculator, on a new shirt instead; and Cory tries to get out of going shopping with his dad, because he's embarrassed to be seen by other kids.

APPENDIX B

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE (PCRQ)

W. Furman

CHILD VERSION

Instructions: Please answer all questions.

This questionnaire is about my *MOTHER* *FATHER* (circle one)

My name: _____ (completed by)

- | | Hardly at All
1 | Not Too Much
2 | Somewhat
3 | Very Much
4 | EXTREMELY
5 |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. Some parents want their children to spend most of their time with them, while other parents want their children to spend just some of the time with them. How much does this parent want you to spend most of your time with him or her? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. How much does this parent not let you go places because he or she is afraid something will happen to you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. How much do you and this parent care about each other? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. How much do you and this parent disagree and argue with each other? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. How much do you and this parent do nice things for each other? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. How much do you and this parent like the same things? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Some parents praise and compliment their children a lot, while other parents hardly ever praise and compliment their children. How much does this parent praise and compliment you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. How much does this parent order you around? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. How much do you and this parent tell each other everything? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. How much does this parent spank you when you misbehave? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. How much do you admire and respect this parent? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. How much does this parent admire and respect you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Some parents take away privileges a lot when their children misbehave, while other parents hardly ever take away privileges. How much does this parent take away your privileges when you misbehave? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. How much does this parent show you how to do things that you don't know how to do? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. How much does this parent yell at you for being bad? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. How much does this parent ask you for your opinion on things? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. How much do you and this parent go places and do things together? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. How much does this parent make you feel ashamed or guilty for not doing what you are supposed to do? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

19. Some parents talk to their children a lot about why they're being punished, while other parents do this a little. How much does this parent talk to you about why you're being punished or not allowed to do something?	1	2	3	4	5
20. How much does this parent want you to do things with him or her rather than with other people?	1	2	3	4	5
21. How much does this parent not let you do something you want to do because he or she is afraid you might get hurt?	1	2	3	4	5
22. How much do you and this parent love each other?	1	2	3	4	5
23. How much do you and this parent get mad at and get in arguments with each other?	1	2	3	4	5
24. How much do you and this parent give each other a hand with things?	1	2	3	4	5
25. Some parents and children have a lot of things in common, while other parents and children have a little in common. How much do you and this parent have things in common?	1	2	3	4	5
26. How much does this parent tell you that you did a good job?	1	2	3	4	5
27. How much does this parent tell you what to do?	1	2	3	4	5
28. How much do you and this parent share secrets and private feelings with each other?	1	2	3	4	5
29. How much does this parent hit you when you've been bad?	1	2	3	4	5
30. How much do you feel proud of this parent?	1	2	3	4	5
31. Some parents feel really proud of their children, while other parents don't feel very proud of their children. How much does this parent feel proud of you?	1	2	3	4	5
32. How much does this parent forbid you to do something you really like to do when you've been bad?	1	2	3	4	5
33. How much does this parent help you with things you can't do by yourself?	1	2	3	4	5
34. How much does this parent nag or bug you to do things?	1	2	3	4	5
35. How much does this parent listen to your ideas before making a decision?	1	2	3	4	5
36. How much do you play around and have fun with this parent?	1	2	3	4	5
37. Some parents make their children feel bad about themselves a lot when they misbehave, while other parents do this a little. How much does this parent make you feel bad about yourself when you misbehave?	1	2	3	4	5
38. How much does this parent give you reasons for rules he or she makes for you to follow?	1	2	3	4	5
39. How much does this parent want you to be around him or her all of the time?	1	2	3	4	5
40. How much does this parent worry about you when you're not at home?	1	2	3	4	5
41. How much do you feel close to this parent?	1	2	3	4	5
42. Sometimes it is easier to discuss problems with certain family members. How much easier is it for you to discuss problems with this parent?	1	2	3	4	5
43. When there is a problem between you and this parent, how much does this parent follow your suggestions for solving the problem?	1	2	3	4	5
44. How much do you avoid this parent at home?	1	2	3	4	5
45. How much do you and this parent share interests and hobbies with each other?	1	2	3	4	5

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE (PCRQ)

W. Furman

PARENT VERSION

Instructions: Please answer all questions.

This questionnaire was completed by MOTHER FATHER *(circle one)*

The phrase "this child" refers to: _____ (completed about)

	Hardly at All 1	Not Too Much 2	Somewhat 3	Very Much 4	EXTREMELY 5
1. Some parents want their children to spend most of their time with them, while other parents want their children to spend just some of the time with them. How much do you want this child to spend most of his/her time with you?	1	2	3	4	5
2. How much do you not let this child go places because you are afraid something will happen to him or her?	1	2	3	4	5
3. How much do you and this child care about each other?	1	2	3	4	5
4. How much do you and this child disagree and argue with each other?	1	2	3	4	5
5. How much do you and this child do nice things for each other?	1	2	3	4	5
6. How much do you and this child like the same things?	1	2	3	4	5
7. Some parents praise and compliment their children a lot, while other parents hardly ever praise and compliment their children. How much do you praise and compliment this child?	1	2	3	4	5
8. How much do you give orders to this child?	1	2	3	4	5
9. How much do you and this child tell each other everything?	1	2	3	4	5
10. How much do you spank this child when he or she misbehaves?	1	2	3	4	5
11. How much do you admire and respect this child?	1	2	3	4	5
12. How much does this child admire and respect you?	1	2	3	4	5
13. Some parents take away privileges a lot when their children misbehave, while other parents hardly ever take away privileges. How much do you take away this child's privileges when he/she misbehaves?	1	2	3	4	5
14. How much do you show this child how to do things that he or she doesn't know how to do?	1	2	3	4	5
15. How much do you yell at this child for being bad?	1	2	3	4	5
16. How much do you ask this child for his or her opinion on things?	1	2	3	4	5
17. How much do you and this child go places and do things together?	1	2	3	4	5
18. How much do you make this child feel ashamed or guilty for not doing what he or she is supposed to do?	1	2	3	4	5

19. Some parents talk to their children a lot about why they're being punished, while other parents do this a little. How much do you talk to this child about why he or she is being punished or not allowed to do something?	1	2	3	4	5
20. How much do you want this child to do things with you rather than with other people?	1	2	3	4	5
21. How much do you not let this child do something he or she wants to do because you are afraid he or she might get hurt?	1	2	3	4	5
22. How much do you and this child love each other?	1	2	3	4	5
23. How much do you and this child get mad at and get in arguments with each other?	1	2	3	4	5
24. How much do you and this child give each other a hand with things?	1	2	3	4	5
25. Some parents & children have a lot of things in common, while other parents & children have a little in common. How much do you and this child have things in common?	1	2	3	4	5
26. How much do you tell this child that he or she did a good job?	1	2	3	4	5
27. How much do you tell this child what to do?	1	2	3	4	5
28. How much do you and this child share secrets and private feelings with each other?	1	2	3	4	5
29. How much do you hit this child when he or she has been bad?	1	2	3	4	5
30. How much do you feel proud of this child?	1	2	3	4	5
31. Some children feel really proud of their parents, while other children don't feel very proud of their parents. How much does this child feel proud of you?	1	2	3	4	5
32. How much do you forbid this child to do something he or she really likes to do when he or she has been bad?	1	2	3	4	5
33. How much do you help this child with things he or she can't do by him- or herself?	1	2	3	4	5
34. How much do you nag or bug this child to do things?	1	2	3	4	5
35. How much do you listen to this child's ideas before making a decision?	1	2	3	4	5
36. How much do you play around and have fun with this child?	1	2	3	4	5
37. Some parents make their children feel bad about themselves a lot when they misbehave, while other parents do this a little. How much do you make this child feel bad about himself or herself when he or she misbehaves?	1	2	3	4	5
38. How much do you give this child reasons for rules you make for him or her to follow?	1	2	3	4	5
39. How much do you want this child to be around you all of the time?	1	2	3	4	5
40. How much do you worry about this child when he or she is not at home?	1	2	3	4	5
41. How much do you feel close to this child?	1	2	3	4	5
42. Sometimes it is easier for children to discuss problems with certain family members. How much easier do you think it is for this child to discuss problems with you?	1	2	3	4	5
43. When solving problems between you and this child, how much do you follow this child's suggestions for resolutions?	1	2	3	4	5
44. How much does this child avoid you at home?	1	2	3	4	5
45. How much do you and this child share interests and hobbies with each other?	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C

Coding Sheet Instructions

**Please read the instructions carefully. They have been slightly revised from the version you previously worked with in the Pilot Study.*

A. Episode Number

Please note the episode number. There are two DVDs and each DVD has two shows. There are three episodes of each show. The episodes are the order below:

DVD #1

Family Matters

Episode 1 – Laura's First Date

Episode 2 – Straight A's

Episode 3 – What Do You Know

My Wife & Kids

Episode 1 – Making the Grade

Episode 2 – Get Out

Episode 3 – Claire's Permit

DVD #2

The Cosby Show

Episode 1 – Denise's Friend

Episode 2 – An Early Spring

Episode 3 – Denise Decision

That's So Raven

Episode 1 – Chef-Man and Raven

Episode 2 – Mother Dearest

Episode 3 – Clothes Minded

B. Communication Style

Next to each parent-child dyad (Mother-Older Daughter, Father-Younger Daughter, Mother-Son, etc.), circle the level of the conversation orientation and the level of the conformity orientation portrayed in the episode.

If in the episode a parent-child dyad interacts **20 seconds or less** or is not featured or does not depict a communication style, please circle N/A (4), Not Applicable.

Below are definitions of the communication styles - conversation orientation and conformity orientation - to help in your analysis:

Conversation orientation:

- The parent and child participate in unrestrained communication;
- The parent and child are free to express their individual thoughts, opinions, and feelings;
- The parent and child spend time interacting with each other;
- The parent and child share their individual activities with each other;

Conformity orientation:

- The parent and child participate in restrained communication, where there is a homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs;
- The parent and child's relationship is based on the sharing of the same activities, thoughts, and feelings;
- The parent and child's interactions focus on harmony, conflict avoidance, and the interdependence of each other.

C. Conflict Management Style

Next to each parent-child dyad, circle the conflict management style portrayed by each parent and each child in the episode.

Conflict is: A state of opposition or disagreement between a parent and child.

If in the episode a parent-child dyad interacts **20 seconds or less** or is not featured or does not depict any conflict management styles, please circle N/A (6), Not Applicable. **There may or may not be instances of conflict in the different shows.**

Below are definitions of the conflict management styles – *avoiding*, *accommodating*, *confronting*, *compromising*, and *collaborating* – to help in your analysis:

- *Avoiding*: unassertive and uncooperative; parent and/or child rely on physical or emotional retreats, or change the topic; parent and/or child focus on getting away from conflict.
- *Accommodating*: parent or child gives in rather than stay active in the conflict; parent or child puts concern for the relationship above their own concerns by letting the other person have what they want.
- *Confronting*: assertive behaviors where one person's concerns are actively pursued at the expense of the others.
- *Compromising*: parent and child work to find a solution that will meet both of their needs; each person in the conflict gives up on something and keeps something.
- *Collaborating*: high in both assertiveness and cooperation; parent & child work to find a solution that will meet the needs of both of them without each having to give up anything.

Conflict description:

At the bottom of the sheet, in one or two sentences write a brief description of the conflict(s) that occurred in the episode.

****If you circled more than 1 conflict management style for a parent and/or a child, briefly describe:***

If you circle more than one conflict management style for a parent and/or child, please briefly describe why that parent and/or child had more than one conflict management style at the bottom of the coding sheet. For example, in a mother-daughter dyad, if you circle the mother exhibiting “avoiding” and “confronting” management styles, in a sentence or two describe why.

D. Closeness/Cohesion

For each parent-child dyad, circle the closeness/cohesion dimension portrayed in the episode.

If in the episode a parent-child dyad interacts **20 seconds or less** or is not featured or does not depict a closeness/cohesion dimension, please circle N/A (5), Not Applicable.

Below are definitions of the closeness/cohesion dimensions – *disengaged*, *separated*, *connected*, and *enmeshed* – to help in your analysis:

- *Disengaged*: The parent and child are independent, and the emotional bonds are weak. There is limited communication between the parent and child.
- *Separated*: The parent and child exhibit considerable independence, but emotional bonds are stronger than in disengaged parent-child relationships. There is also a moderate amount of communication.
- *Connected*: The parent and child display less independence, and the emotional attachments are relatively strong. The parent and child communicate well with one another.
- *Enmeshed*: The parent and child have no independence, and their emotional bonds are very strong. The communication is high in at least one direction, but the lines of communication may not travel both ways.

E. Your Overall Assessment of the Parent-Child Relationship in This Episode:

Please give your assessment of the parent-child relationship in each episode. Note things that you think would be helpful in the researcher's analysis.

Coding Sheet: *Family Matters*

A. Episode number: _____

B. Communication Style:

	<u>Low</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Mother-Older Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Mother-Younger Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Mother-Son</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
 <u>Father-Older Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
 <u>Father-Younger Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
 <u>Father-Son</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4

C. Conflict Management Style: (For each parent-child dyad, circle all that apply)

	<u>Avoiding</u>	<u>Accommodating</u>	<u>Confronting</u>	<u>Compromising</u>	<u>Collaborating</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Mother-Older Daughter Conflict</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Older Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Mother-Younger Daughter Conflict</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Younger Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Mother-Son Conflict</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Son	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Older Daughter Conflict</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Older Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Younger Daughter Conflict</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Younger Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Son Conflict</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Son	1	2	3	4	5	6

Conflict Description(s): _____

***If you circled more than 1 conflict management style for a parent and/or a child, briefly describe why.**

D. Closeness/Cohesion (circle only one for each parent-child dyad):

	<u>Disengaged</u>	<u>Separated</u>	<u>Connected</u>	<u>Enmeshed</u>	<u>N/A</u>
Mother-Older Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Mother-Younger Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Mother-Son	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Older Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Younger Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Son	1	2	3	4	5

E. Your Overall Assessment of the Parent-Child Relationship in This Episode:

Coding Sheet: *My Wife & Kids*

A. Episode number: _____

B. Communication Style:

	<u>Low</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Mother-Older Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Mother-Younger Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Mother-Son</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Older Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Younger Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Son</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4

C. Conflict Management Style: (For each parent-child dyad, circle all that apply)

	<u>Avoiding</u>	<u>Accommodating</u>	<u>Confronting</u>	<u>Compromising</u>	<u>Collaborating</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Mother-Older Daughter Conflict</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Older Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Mother-Younger Daughter Conflict</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Younger Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Mother-Son Conflict</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Son	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Older Daughter Conflict</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Older Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Younger Daughter Conflict</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Younger Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Son Conflict</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Son	1	2	3	4	5	6

Conflict Description(s): _____

***If you circled more than 1 conflict management style for a parent and/or a child, briefly describe why.**

D. Closeness/Cohesion (circle only one for each parent-child dyad):

	<u>Disengaged</u>	<u>Separated</u>	<u>Connected</u>	<u>Enmeshed</u>	<u>N/A</u>
Mother-Older Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Mother-Younger Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Mother-Son	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Older Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Younger Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Son	1	2	3	4	5

E. Your Overall Assessment of the Parent-Child Relationship in This Episode:

Coding Sheet: *The Cosby Show*

A. Episode number: _____

B. Communication Style:

	<u>Low</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Mother-Daughter 1 (Saundra)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Mother-Daughter 2 (Denise)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Mother-Daughter 3 (Vanessa)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Mother-Daughter 4 (Rudy)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Mother-Son (Theo)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Daughter 1 (Saundra)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Daughter 2 (Denise)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Daughter 3 (Vanessa)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Daughter 4 (Rudy)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Son (Theo)</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4

C. Conflict Management Style: (For each parent-child dyad, circle all that apply)

	<u>Avoiding</u>	<u>Accommodating</u>	<u>Confronting</u>	<u>Compromising</u>	<u>Collaborating</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Mother-Daughter 1 (Saundra)</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter 1	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Mother-Daughter 2 (Denise)</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter 2	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Mother-Daughter 3 (Vanessa)</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter 3	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Mother-Daughter 4 (Rudy)</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter 4	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Mother-Son (Theo)</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Son	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Daughter 1 (Saundra)</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter 1	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Daughter 2 (Denise)</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter 2	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Daughter 3 (Vanessa)</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter 3	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Daughter 4 (Rudy)</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter 4	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Son (Theo)</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Son	1	2	3	4	5	6

Conflict Description(s): _____

***If you circled more than 1 conflict management style for a parent and/or a child, briefly describe.**

D. Closeness/Cohesion (circle only one for each parent-child dyad):

	<u>Disengaged</u>	<u>Separated</u>	<u>Connected</u>	<u>Enmeshed</u>	<u>N/A</u>
Mother-Daughter 1 (Saundra)	1	2	3	4	5
Mother-Daughter 2 (Denise)	1	2	3	4	5
Mother-Daughter 3 (Vanessa)	1	2	3	4	5
Mother-Daughter 4 (Rudy)	1	2	3	4	5
Mother-Son (Theo)	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Daughter 1 (Saundra)	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Daughter 2 (Denise)	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Daughter 3 (Vanessa)	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Daughter 4 (Rudy)	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Son (Theo)	1	2	3	4	5

E. Your Overall Assessment of the Parent-Child Relationship in This Episode:

Coding Sheet: *That's So Raven*

A. Episode number: _____

B. Communication Style:

	<u>Low</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Mother-Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Mother-Son</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Daughter</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4
<u>Father-Son</u>				
Conversation orientation	1	2	3	4
Conformity orientation	1	2	3	4

C. Conflict Management Style: (For each parent-child dyad, circle all that apply)

	<u>Avoiding</u>	<u>Accommodating</u>	<u>Confronting</u>	<u>Compromising</u>	<u>Collaborating</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Mother-Daughter Conflict</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Mother-Son Conflict</u>						
Mother	1	2	3	4	5	6
Son	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Daughter Conflict</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daughter	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>Father-Son Conflict</u>						
Father	1	2	3	4	5	6
Son	1	2	3	4	5	6

Conflict Description(s): _____

***If you circled more than 1 conflict management style for a parent and/or a child, briefly describe.**

D. Closeness/Cohesion (circle only one for each parent-child dyad):

	<u>Disengaged</u>	<u>Separated</u>	<u>Connected</u>	<u>Enmeshed</u>	<u>N/A</u>
Mother-Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Mother-Son	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Daughter	1	2	3	4	5
Father-Son	1	2	3	4	5

E. Your Overall Assessment of the Parent-Child Relationship in This Episode:

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Scripted vs Real: An Analysis of Parent-Child Interactions in African American Sitcom Families and Real African American Families

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the parent-child relationship in African American families as depicted on television sitcoms and assess how, if at all, the parent-child experiences on the shows mirror occurrences in real African American families. The study will look primarily at the patterns of verbal interactions, the degrees of closeness, as well as how issues and conflicts are dealt with by the parents and the children on television and in real life.

INFORMATION

The participants recruited for this study will be four African American families with two parents (a mother & father), with at least one child (but no more than 3 children) between the ages of 8 and 18.

As a participant you will be a part of a focus group and fill out a questionnaire about your understanding of your own parent-child relationship in your family. There will be two focus groups. One focus group will include the parents only and the other will include the children only. The focus groups will be conducted in a secured location and each focus group is expected to last up to 3 hours. The researcher will conduct one focus group interview with each group on two different days. One day will be devoted to interviewing the parents from each family, and another day will be devoted to interviewing the children from each family. The parents' focus group will include 8 participants and the children's focus group will include from 4-12 participants of children ages 8 to 18.

RISKS

This study poses minimal risk.

Because children are involved in the study, in the event that information such as abuse or neglect is revealed, the principal researcher is obligated to report it to the police (referred to as "Mandatory Reporting").

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse study participants for medical claims or other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the researcher in charge, Syrenthia J. Robinson, [REDACTED]

BENEFITS

The benefit from participating in this study is the contribution to the communication field and the family studies field about the imagery of African American families on television. Your participation will impart some understanding of how the parent-child dyad is depicted on television compared to how it is experienced in real African American families.

Participant's Initials _____

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. The focus group audiotapes and questionnaires will be stored securely and will be made available only to the researcher, the researcher's dissertation chair and committee members unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

The focus group audiotapes and questionnaires will be destroyed after the successful completion of the researcher's dissertation defense.

Additionally, the principal researcher will urge the focus group participants not to repeat what they hear from others in the focus groups. However, the principal researcher cannot guarantee complete confidentiality because she has no control over the focus group participants.

COMPENSATION

For complete participation in this study your family will receive a *Thank You* Gift Basket, \$50 gift certificate to a Knoxville restaurant, and a \$50 gift certificate to Blockbuster Video Store. If your family, or a member of your family, withdraws from the study prior to its completion, your family will receive a *Thank You* Gift Basket.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Syrenthia J. Robinson, at [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, contact the UT Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's name (print) _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

Human Subjects in Research

The University of Tennessee

**Office of Research
Research Compliance Services**

Assent Form

Assent is required for children (17 years of age and under) participating in a research study. Assent must be obtained in addition to parental consent.

Hello,

I am Syrenthia Robinson, a graduate student at the University of Tennessee and I am conducting a study that will look at and compare parent-child interactions in African American sitcom families and real African American families.

You are being asked to participate in a project that will help me learn about how African American parent-child relationships you see on television compare to your own parent-child relationship you experience in your families. If you agree to help me, you will be in a small group of children that are your age or close to your age. You will start off by answering the questions on a form called The Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire. You will fill out one that relates to your mother and one that relates to your father. After that I will show you a few segments from two shows – *My Wife & Kids* and *Family Matters*. Then we will start talking about your own parent-child relationship in your family and the ones you see on television in shows like *My Wife & Kids* and *Family Matters*. As we talk and I ask you questions, I will be recording your answers on an audiotape. All of this will take about 3 hours, and we will take breaks throughout, or if you need to take a break just let me know.

None of the other children in your group or your parents will see the questionnaires that you fill out and your parents will not find out the answers to the questions that I ask you. We are not going to put your real names on the questionnaires. I will give you a fake name to use so no one will be able to know which questionnaires were yours. The questionnaires and the audiotapes will be kept in a locked drawer in my dissertation chair's office, and only I, my dissertation chair and committee members will have access to them.

You do not have to help me with this project. You can stop helping me whenever you want to. You can refuse to help me even if your parents have said yes.

Are you willing to help with this project? If you want to help in the project, please sign your name on the line below:

Yes, I want to help in the project: _____

Child's Name: _____

Parent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact me, Syrenthia J. Robinson, at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

APPENDIX E

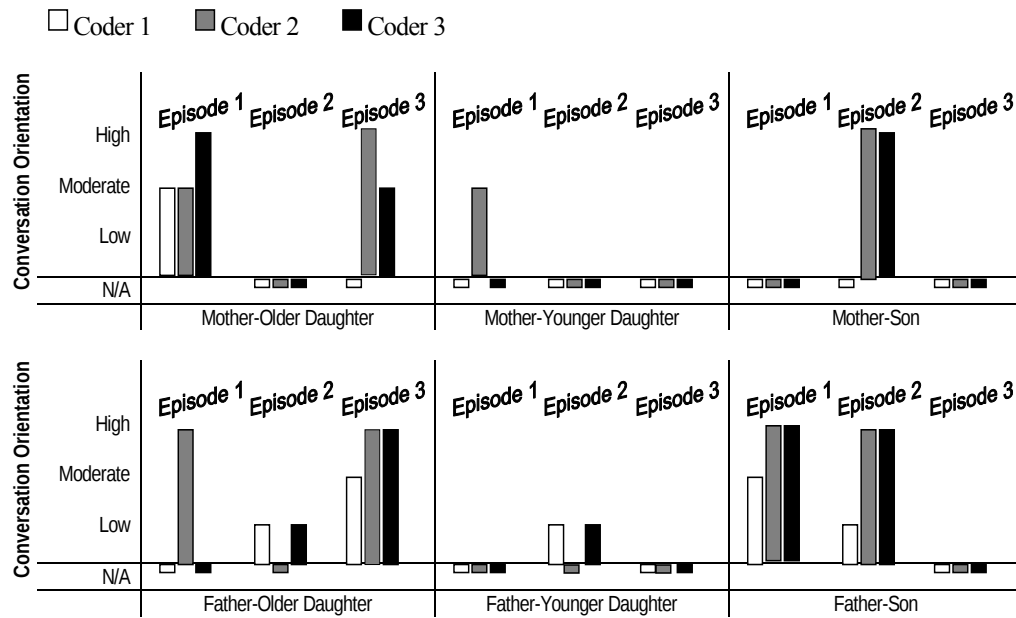


Figure 1. *My Wife & Kids* Parent-Child Conversation Orientation.

Mother-Older Daughter: 33% Moderate, 22% High; Mother-Younger Daughter: 11% Moderate; Mother-Son: 22%; Father-Older Daughter: 22% Low, 11% Moderate, 33% High; Father-Younger Daughter: 22% Low, Father-Son: 11% Low, 11% Moderate, 44% High

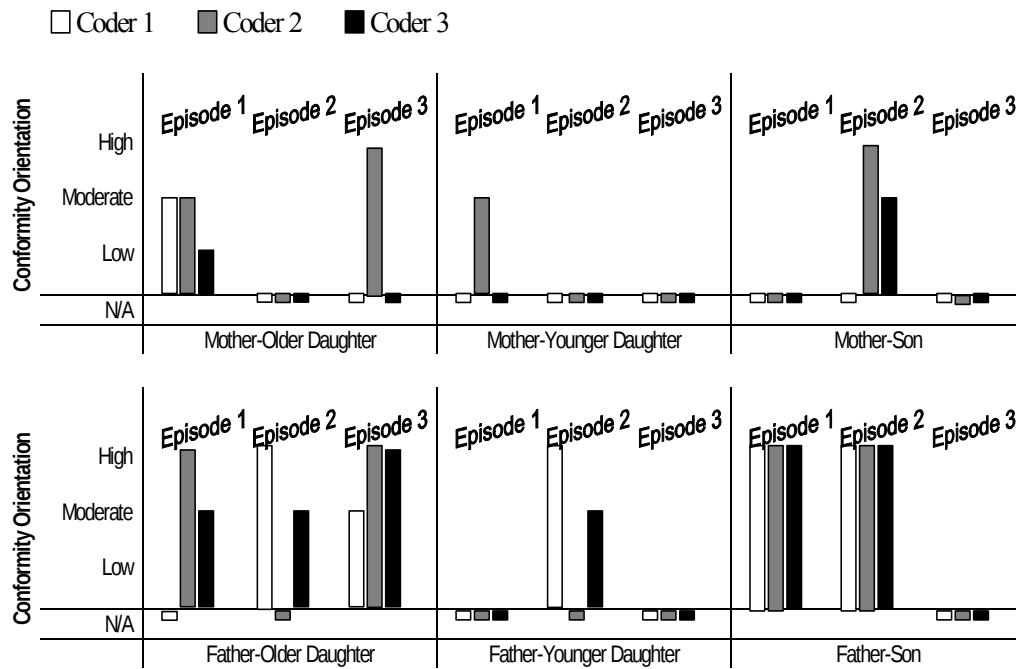


Figure 2. *My Wife & Kids* Parent-Child Conformity Orientation.

Mother-Older Daughter: 11% Low, 22% Moderate, 11% High;

Mother-Younger Daughter: 11% Moderate; Mother-Son: 11% Moderate,

11% High; Father-Older Daughter: 33% Moderate, 44% High;

Father-Younger Daughter: 11% Moderate, 11% High; Father-Son: 66% High

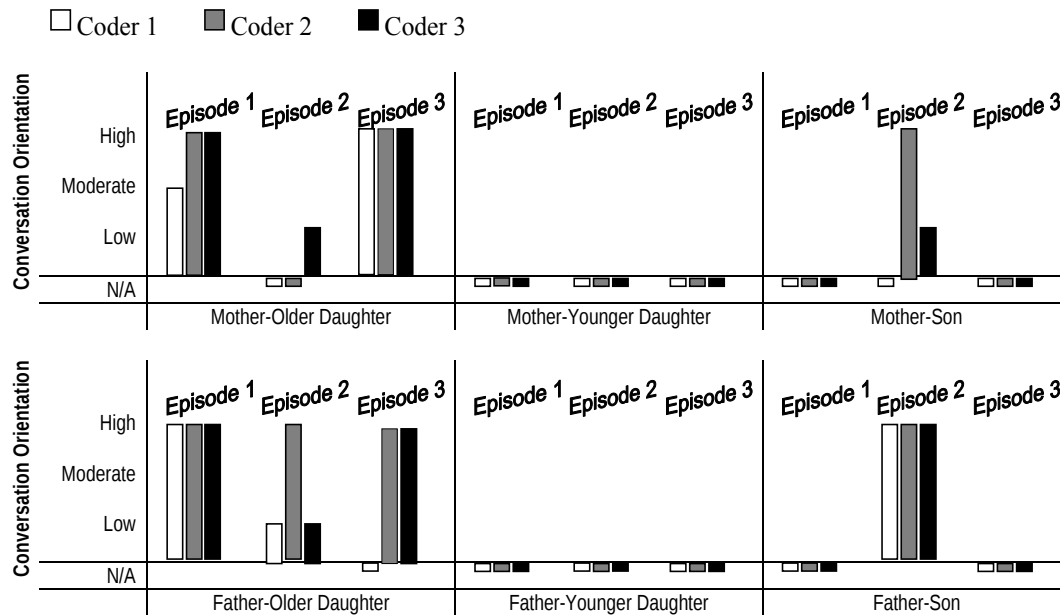


Figure 3. *Family Matters* Parent-Child Conversation Orientation.

Mother-Older Daughter: 11% Low, 11% Moderate, 55% High;

Mother-Son: 11% Low, 11% High; Father-Older Daughter: 22% Low,

66% High; Father-Son: 33% High

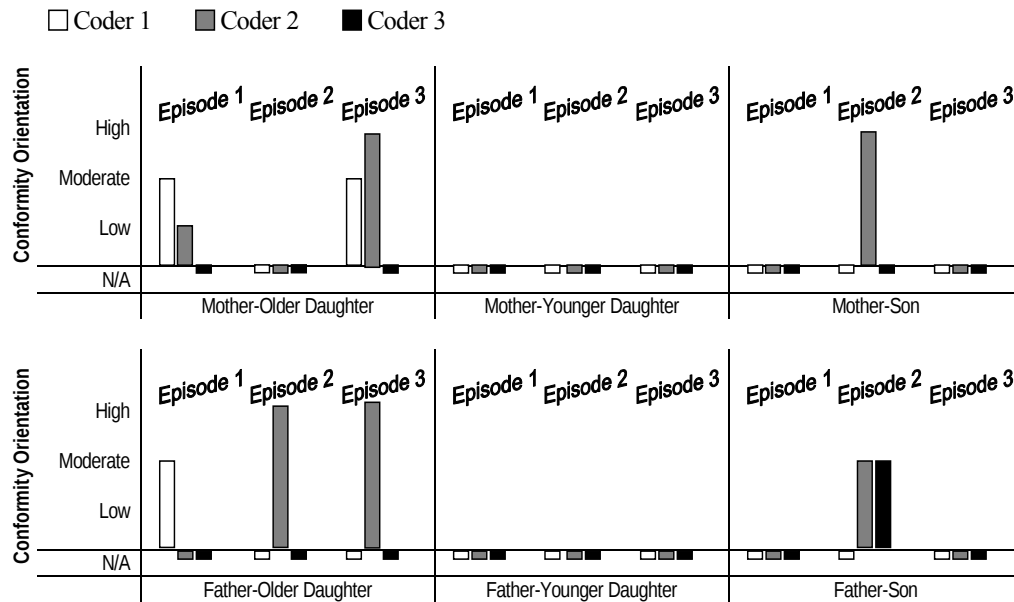


Figure 4. *Family Matters* Parent-Child Conformity Orientation.

Mother-Older Daughter: 11% Low, 22% Moderate, 11% High;

Mother-Son: 11% High; Father-Older Daughter: 11% Moderate, 22% High;

Father-Son: 22% Moderate

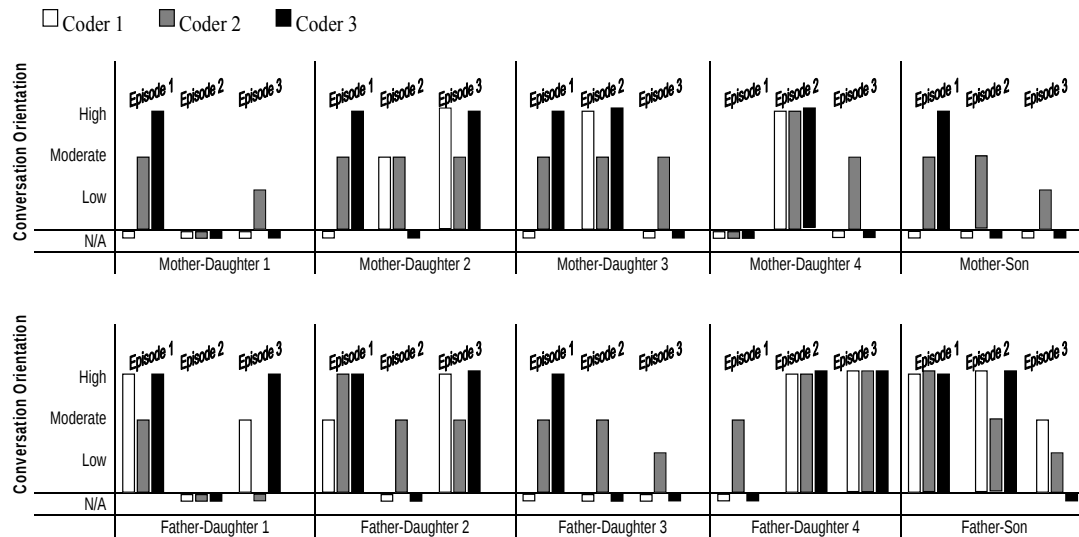


Figure 5. *The Cosby Show* Parent-Child Conversation Orientation.

Mother-Daughter 1: 11% Low, 11% Moderate, 11% High; Mother-Daughter 2: 44% Moderate, 33% High; Mother-Daughter 3: 33% Moderate, 33% High; Mother-Daughter 4: 11% Moderate, 33% High; Mother-Son: 22% Moderate, 11% High; Father-Daughter 1: 22% Moderate, 33% High; Father Daughter 2: 33% Moderate, 44% High; Father-Daughter 3: 11% Low, 22% Moderate, 11% High; Father-Daughter 4: 11% Moderate, 66% High; Father-Son: 11% Moderate, 55% High

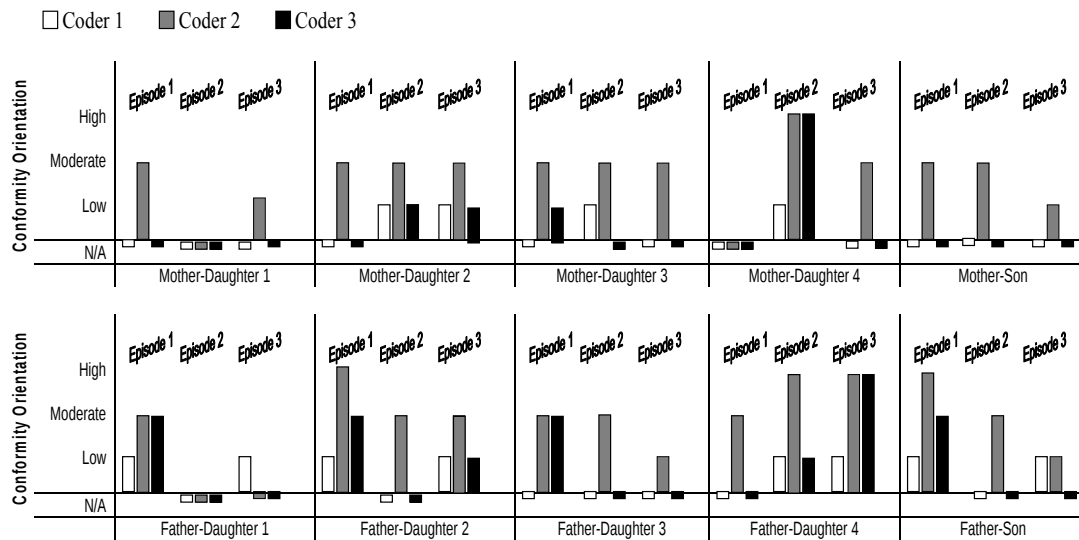


Figure 6. *The Cosby Show* Parent-Child Conformity Orientation.

Mother-Daughter 1: 11% Low, 11% Moderate; Mother-Daughter 2: 44% Low, 33% Moderate; Mother-Daughter 3: 22% Low, 33% Moderate; Mother-Daughter 4: 11% Low, 11% Moderate, 22% High; Mother-Son: 22% Moderate; Father-Daughter 1: 22% Low, 22% Moderate; Father Daughter 2: 33% Low, 33% Moderate, 11% High; Father-Daughter 3: 11% Low, 33% Moderate; Father-Daughter 4: 33% Low, 11% Moderate, 33% High; Father-Son: 11% Low, 22% Moderate, 11% High

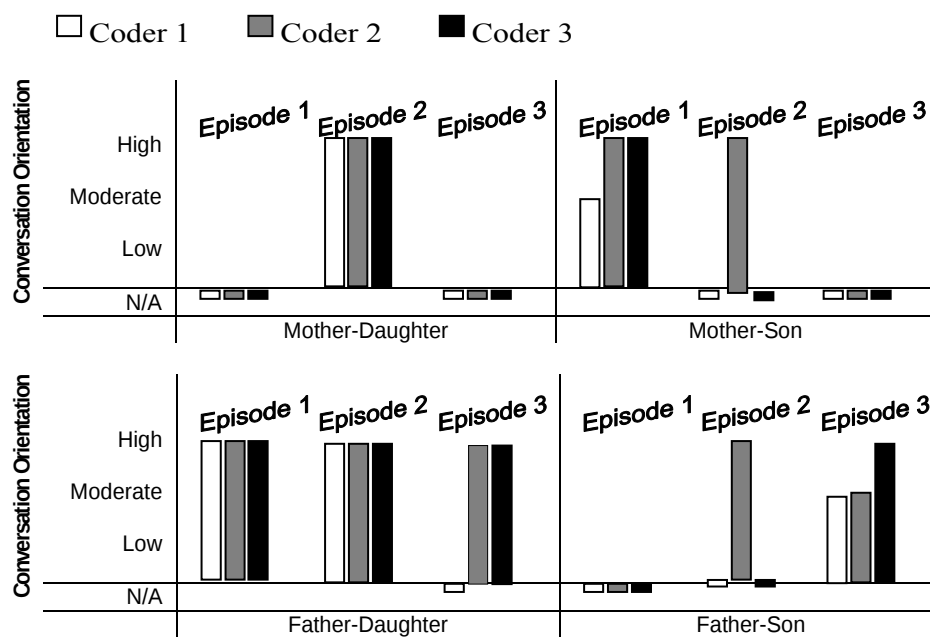


Figure 7. *That's So Raven* Parent-Child Conversation Orientation.

Mother-Daughter: 33% High; Mother-Son: 11% Moderate, 33% High

Father-Daughter: 88% High; Father-Son: 22% Moderate, 22% High

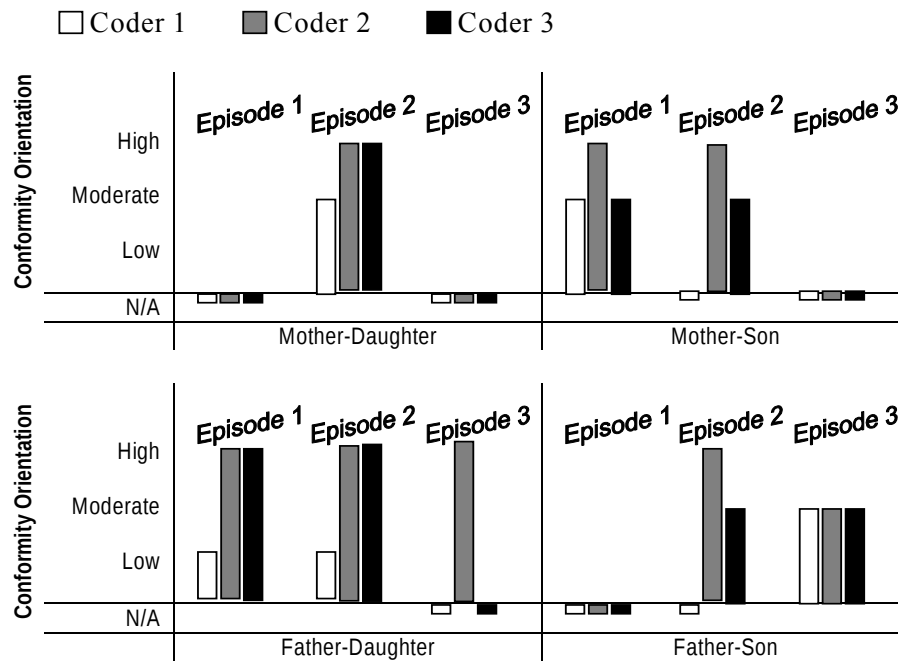


Figure 8. *That's So Raven* Parent-Child Conformity Orientation.

Mother-Daughter: 11% Moderate, 22% High; Mother-Son: 33%

Moderate, 22% High; Father-Daughter: 22% Low, 55% High;

Father-Son: 44% Moderate, 11% High

VITA

Syrenthia Johnson Robinson was born in West Point, MS. She is a 1991 honor graduate from West Point High School. From there, she went on to the University of Southern Mississippi where received a B.S. degree in Radio, Television & Film, with an emphasis in Broadcast Journalism, in 1995. Later, in 1998, from the same university she received an M.S. degree in Mass Communications.

While attending school at the University of Southern Mississippi she worked part-time at the campus radio station during a semester as a copy editor and news announcer. Also during her time there as a student she served a year-long internship at a local television station. After receiving her B.S. degree, and while pursuing her M.S. degree, Syrenthia worked in television news as an assignment editor and news producer at the NBC affiliate television station in Hattiesburg/Laurel, MS.

In 1998 she moved to Knoxville, TN to continue her work as a television news producer in a larger market for the CBS affiliate. In 2000, Syrenthia left broadcast television news and turned her skills and talents to cable, working for the lifestyle cable network HGTV as a Program Evaluator and a Program Manager. In that same year, while working full-time at HGTV, she entered the doctoral program in the College of Communication and Information at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Syrenthia received her doctoral degree in December 2006.