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INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS BETWEEN AFRICAN
AND HISPANIC AMERICAN MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS: COLLEGE-AGE
DAUGHTERS' REPORTS OF THEIR MOTHERS' COMMUNICATION

By

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ABSTRACT

This study is an examination of Black and Hispanic college-age women's self-reports of their perception of the communication with their mothers and how this communication influenced them. Most of the literature reported in the review analyzes the influence that parents have on their children based on the way they convey messages and interact with them. The method used to collect the data for this study was focus group interviews. Results indicated that mothers clearly had topics that they emphasized (i.e. discussed with their daughters) and those that they did not discuss for various reasons. Topics such as academics and work ethic were frequently discussed, while sports and sex were not. Both sets of topics, those discussed the most and least appeared to have influenced the daughters. A self-disclosure scale revealed that most daughters reported medium to high self-disclosure, and being influenced in some way by their mothers.

INTRODUCTION

Family communication is an important aspect of our lives because the family is the first social unit through which human beings interact with the world. This study examines self-reports of African and Hispanic American college age daughters concerning the influence they perceived their mothers' communication had on them. The quality of parent-adolescent relationship is linked to both adolescent self-concept and adolescent peer relationships according to Dekovic et al. (1997). "An intimate relationship is a direct consequence of mutual self- disclosure, according to research conducted on family communication" (Adler & Towne, 1999, p. 23; Altman & Taylor, 1999, p.56). According to Greenberg et al. (1983) mutual disclosure is widely held to contribute to feelings of closeness, and adolescents are most likely to function in a healthy manner when they feel closer to their parents.

While research has focused on the influences of self disclosure on families (Dolgin, 1996; Dolgin & Berndt, 1997; Jackson et al., 1997; Dekovic, 1997), fewer studies have focused on African and Hispanic American mothers and their communication with their daughters (Cause et. al, 1996; McLoyd et al., 1996). This study will examine the relationship between the mothers' communication dynamics with their daughters and the daughters' perceived communication competence in a variety of social settings. Because families are the first significant social context in which we interact, our family members will undoubtedly have an influence in the way we will interact with others outside the family nucleus. Research on peer relations and the effects of parenting (Dekovic, 1997) shows that the quality of the relationship with parents significantly predicts the degree of peer involvement and the quality of the relationship with peers. Further, Dekovic argues that adolescents who have more satisfying relationships with parents also have more positive relationships

with peers. According to some of the current literature on African American family communication, the quality of the relationship between an African American female adolescent and her mother or female guardian is, perhaps, the most prominent interpersonal relationship to her psychological development and adjustment (Cause et al., 1996; Perry, 1999). For many of these young women, there is little doubt that the mother figure is the central adult in their lives. Not only is it important for females to form and maintain a close relationship with at least one adult, healthy adjustment and the development of protective mechanisms against stressors may depend largely on mother-daughter cohesion, this includes emotional and interpersonal closeness (Debold, Brown, Weseen, & Brookins, 1999; Wentzel & Feldman, 1996). So when we are examining the degree to which a mother can influence her daughter, we might find that the mother can have a permanent influence on her daughter's communication aptitude.

RATIONALE

The importance of examining mother-daughter communication is evident based on the literature which points to the influence mothers have on daughters. Our first interaction with another human being is most likely with our parents and specifically with our mother. Consequently, the outcome of this experience often becomes our model of what the world is like. Arliss (1993) explains, "Our desire to understand communication with the people we call "family" is substantial and enduring, not only because most of our early communicative experiences take place in this context but also because, as adults, we recognize that we live in a culture where family relationships have a unique significance" (p. 2). Robinson (2000) stated that "a positive relationship with the mother and greater communication within the family system during adolescence are related to more positive relationships in young adulthood" (p. 780). Not only is our family our first social setting, but it also is our initial communication model. From the time we are born we are encoding and decoding messages with our family members and most likely with our mothers. The types of early messages we receive from our mother, will be a direct manifestation of the way we will interact with the world beyond our family.

Several studies have shown that much of what a daughter expects for herself comes from perceiving what her mother expects of her (McLoyd & Hernandez-Jozefowics, 1996; Rigsby et al., 1997). The present study attempts to examine the relationship between the communication dynamics of African and Hispanic American mothers and their daughters and the daughters' perceived communication aptitude. However, in order to have a better understanding of this topic, it is imperative to point out what some researchers have brought into observation regarding the bond between mother and daughter.

Miller (1984) advanced that “the earliest mental representation of self is as a “being-in-relationship” (p. 79). Drake (1992) continues that “under most circumstances, a mother attends to the baby’s core self, that is her emotions, more during infancy than in any other period of development” (p. 27). Further, Drake advances that “the infant is in turn responding to the mother’s emotions; an infant’s early internal image of the self includes feeling the other’s emotions and acting on the emotions coming from the other as they interplay with her/his own emotions” (p. 27). According to Surrey (1984), it is the little girl’s mothering relationship with her mother that forms her most basic primary self-definition. Thus, Drake states that “a little girl not only identifies with mother as mother, her sex role model, but also takes in a core sense of self as mother” (p. 27).

The process of becoming an adult is one that needs the support of the parents, especially the mother. Family communication is one of the most vital forms of communication because not only is it involuntary, it is also influential when it comes to the development of positive role models during the daughters’ formative years. Some scholars (Damon, 1983; Epstein & Erskine, 1983; Magnusson & Allen, 1983; Stern, 1977, 1985; and Tronick & Adamson, 1980) described an interactional approach of connecting with our mothers in our formative years that is present from birth. Their hypothesis puts forth the idea that an infant can engage in an interactional process with her mother. Drake describes this as a two-way process in which the infant greatly impacts on the mother and on the response she receives from the mother. This is different from traditional theories (Mahler, 1968; Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975) which perceived the newborn as unreceptive and reliant with few communication skills.

Some studies have examined that mothers are very influential when it comes to shaping their daughters’ lives (Cause et al., 1996; Perry, 1999; Wentzel

& Feldman, 1996; Tesser & Campbell, 1982). Two of the most important aspects are the daughters' emotional and social development. The individual has to be able to effectively interact with others and it has been suggested that the mothers have the opportunity to provide a foundation that will serve as the model that daughters will employ when they have to interact with the world. "Mothers serve as significant role models for their daughters by influencing their self-esteem, gender role, psychological closeness, and familial relationships" (Tesser & Campbell, 1982, p. 11). However, Petrocelli et al. (2003) argue that the lack of a positive and supportive relationship can lead to undesirable outcomes for both mothers and daughters.

The subject of mother-daughter communication is significant because mothers have the power to change our society by improving the way they communicate with the women who will be future mothers. The previously presented studies suggest that the outcome of mother-daughter interactions could define the type of person into which the daughter will develop.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There exists a considerable amount of literature on the influence that parents' communication have on their children; however, research on the influence that African and Hispanic American mothers have on their daughters is sparse. A large amount of the literature reported in this review reveals research that generally concerns the influence that parents have on their children.

Effective communication is generally regarded as a central feature of high-quality family functioning. According to Petrocelli et al. (2003) "families that report high levels of general family functioning are generally healthy, lack psychological problems, develop cohesion, adapt appropriately to gestures and conflicts, and set clear family rules and boundaries" (p. 379). "This is particularly so when children reach adolescence and begin to establish a clearer sense of their own identity and the ability to make decisions for themselves" (Jackson et al, 1997, p. 310). This review of literature explores the primary conditions that influence parent-child communication. First, communication scholars describe three main factors that have a direct effect on parent-child communication. The first factor is the disparity between family communication and other relational types, (for example, friendships, and romantic relationships). Age and gender are also factors that play a fundamental role in the parent-child communication context. Second, the level of verbal aggressiveness that parents use with their children appears to have a pervasive influence on the children's emotional and social development. Third, self disclosure has been a research focal point for some family communication and psychology scholars. Self disclosure is an important aspect of family communication because based on the degree of mutual disclosure shared by parent and child some conclusions can be reached regarding the quality of the relationship the parent and child share. Furthermore, extensive research was found regarding the communication

dynamics existing between mothers and daughters when dealing with the topics of sexual behavior and education (Rigsby et al., 1997; Hutchinson, 2002; Dilorio et al., 1999; Dutra et al., 1999; Jaccard et al., 1998). These last two topics seem to be a central focus of researchers who study the relationship between mothers and daughters.

Family communication is different than any other relational type because this type of communication is involuntary. This means that communication within the family has to occur whether the family members have a high-quality relationship or not. We have the choice to choose who we want to interact with outside of our families, but we cannot choose who our family members are going to be. Miller and Lane (1991) explain “adolescents report that parental disclosure is among the most pleasurable experiences that they and their parents share” (p. 181). Satisfying interpersonal exchanges between the parent and the child, of course, also serve to increase closeness. Research demonstrates that age has an effect on the communication between parents and their children. According to Beatty et al. (1992) it has long been recognized in the family communication literature that the effect of parent behaviors and attitudes may be strongly influenced by the child’s age. The child’s age may affect the communication with the mother because there are certain topics that the mother may feel hesitant to speak about with her daughter. (e.g., menstruation, sex, religion, etc.). The mother may think that these topics are not appropriate to speak about with a child of a certain age or the mother may perceive that her own educational level is not high enough to clearly articulate her feelings about a particular subject. Discomfort with certain topics may also hinder a mother from talking to her daughter (McKeever, 1984). Consequently, the mother and daughter do not establish a consistent communicational pattern and the daughter may perceive that the mother is too cautious in choosing what topics to talk about. If the

mother consistently communicates to the daughter about topics which are important to each of them, then the daughter may perceive more effective communication between them.

Communication and Gender

Gender also has been recognized as a significant factor affecting parent-child communication. According to Jackson et al. (1997) “adolescents report that they talk more with mother than with father and most adolescents see their mother as more understanding and accepting, while fathers tend to be regarded as more judgmental, more inclined to impose authority, and less willing to discuss emotional or personal issues” (p. 311). Some studies have specified that gender may play a critical role in the progress of a child’s self-esteem (Roberts et al., 1996; Miller, 1984; Carlson et al., 2000). A few scholars have argued that there are strong qualitative differences in women and men’s self-esteem—for example, women’s self-esteem is more dependant on significant others, while men’s self-esteem is based on autonomous achievements (Kling et al., 1999; Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992; Thorne & Michalieu, 1996).

According to Block (1983), sociocultural expectations are dependent upon the child’s sex. Sex differences have been found in the display of temperament. “While traditional literature does seem to be problem-focused, more recent research tends to support the thesis that mother-daughter bonds are often warm, caring, and mutually supportive” (Bromberg, 1983, p. 15). Both, the child and parents’ sex appear to play a vital role. While the father tends to put more emphasis on disciplining the children and preparing them for a tough road ahead; the mother seems to be the one who is more in touch with their emotions, which in turn leads to a warm and caring relationship (Block, 1983; Arliss, 1993).

Verbal Aggressiveness

Researchers have examined the influence that verbally aggressive parents have on their children. An aggressive verbal personality may seem to be an appropriate channel to transmit some messages to children but this approach is often met with negative consequences. Infante (1980) views a defining feature of verbal aggressiveness as intent to inflict psychological pain or harm. The literature on parents' degree of verbal aggressiveness indicates that effective communication produces positive outcomes whereas violence and verbal aggressiveness could lead to perpetual emotional harm.

Although there is much research that shows that verbal aggression can lead to negative consequences for the later life of children, there is also research that shows that its effects greatly depend on the context and tone in which the message is presented. Recent studies have exposed that males tend to react better to certain verbal aggression than females. Beatty et al. (1992) reported a strong positive relationship between adult sons' perceptions of sarcasm and criticism from fathers and their fathers' self-reported trait verbal aggressiveness. This particular finding is important because other studies have shown that sarcasm and criticism from fathers have negative effects on sons' social relationships and personal development (Beatty & Dobos, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c). Interestingly, Infante, Rancer, and Jordan (1996) found that "[p]articipants perceived more verbally aggressive behavior than actually existed when the dyad composition was female" (p. 315).

Taken together, these findings appear to be somewhat contradictory; however, the consequences of verbal aggression in interpersonal relationships are "almost always destructive" (Infante, 1987a, p. 165). The extensive list of psychological harms inflicted by verbal aggression includes embarrassment, feelings of inadequacy, humiliation, hopelessness, despair and depression

(Infante, 1987a). According to Solomon and Coise Serres (1999) "Parental verbal aggression alone as separate and distinct from physical punishment contributes to lowering children's self-esteem and school achievements. Given the extent of the use of verbal aggression by ordinary parents the authors suggested a need for parent education on the topic of positive methods of child rearing." (p.2)

Studies by Hememway, Solnick, and Carter (1994) and Davis (1996) have shown that parents employ verbal aggression on their children, not with the intention of hurting them, but with the intention of controlling their children's behavior. In their studies they have observed parents and their children in natural settings such as shopping centers and amusement parks and found that many parents threaten their children with physical violence in order to make them obey. Most of the adults observed were White, African American, and Hispanic adults, mostly women. From these findings it is clear that yelling and threatening is a widespread form of parent-to-child interaction, which suggests that it is used by "ordinary parents." Since this seems to be a common form of communication between parents and children it could be suggested that the term "verbal aggression" is not only used in extreme circumstances.

The research on child abuse reports on the many forms which verbal aggression can take, including insulting and name-calling (Brown, 1984), belittling and denigrating (Dean, 1979), disapproving, using sarcasm (Rohner & Rohner, 1980), and threats of abandonment (Hart & Brassard, 1990). It has been documented that psychological aggression almost always accompanies physical abuse (Claussen & Crittenden, 1991) and that this combination has negative effects on the child. Effects reported by various researchers include; less perseverance, enthusiasm, and concentration (Egeland, Sroufe, & Erickson, 1983); anxiety and violent behavior (Green, 1990); behavior problems (McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995); low self-esteem (Briere & Runtz, 1988; Gross & Keller,

1992; Wodarsky, Kurtz, Gaudin, Jr., & Howing, 1990); anger, depression, and dependency (Briere & Runtz, 1988).

Ney (1987) proposed that verbal aggression of children is on the increase because of highly publicized reactions against physical abuse in recent years. Claussen and Crittenden (1991) and Vissing, Straus, Gelles, and Harrop (1991) proposed that psychological aggression is even more harmful to children than physical aggression. It has become necessary therefore, to attempt to detach the effects of verbal aggression on children from those of physical abuse. In addition, at least two studies have shown that verbal aggression strongly correlates with children's lower self-esteem (Briere & Runtz, 1990; Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Nerbison, (1996). It can be established that verbal aggression coming from parents is certainly more damaging to children than verbal aggression coming from any other adults. Children who perceive themselves as having frequently been targets of verbal aggression from their parents perceive themselves as less competent in their school work, as less comfortable with their own behavior, and generally feel less worthy (Rudd et. al, 1998).

Self Esteem

Empirical findings have supported the theoretical proposition that self-esteem in children and/or adolescents is related to parents' warmth and acceptance (Coppersmith, 1967; Dekovic & Meeus, 1997). Several studies have found that children and adolescents' observation of authoritative parenting, parental affection, and parental acceptance are reliable predictors of the child's level of self esteem as a young adult (Carlson, Uppal & Presser, 2000; Paulson et al., 1991; Herz & Gullone, 1999; Roberts & Bengston, 1996). Studies have also revealed that low self-esteem can be predicted by looking at the adolescents' perception of their parents as authoritative, as using psychologically harsh

words, and as being overly firm (Lorber, 1994; Litovsky & Dusek, 1985; Hanson, 1994). In addition, children and adolescents' high self-esteem has been linked to examinations of positive mother-adolescent communication (Forehand et al., 1998).

Communication and Education

The family environment is an essential place in which adolescents receive continuous messages about who they will or will not become, in terms of education and career (Kerpelman, Shoffner, & Ross-Griffin, 2002). A few factors have been isolated as the main reasons why some mothers would not engage in talks about education with their daughters. The most commonly reported are the mother's educational level and socioeconomic status. Some women's low educational level may contribute to their feeling intimidated, embarrassed, or incompetent to talk about education and career goals with their daughters. They may even view their teenage daughters as having more knowledge than they do so this creates a barrier in the mother's mind. In some instances the mother may not place importance on her daughter achieving a high level of formal education because they never achieved a high educational level and yet have been somewhat successful in life. Maternal education has been shown to be related to mothers' views of their children. For instance, "African American mothers who have had some education beyond high school, compared to mothers with less education, have been shown to hold more positive views of their children, in terms of their achieving higher educational goals" (Jackson, 1997, p. 20). Another important factor has to do with time. Some mothers' socioeconomic status may present a barrier for them because they are single mothers who need to work long hours each day to provide for their families, thus having little-to-no time to have conversations with their daughters regarding education.

Despite the fact that having a lower level of education has been directly linked to some mothers' unsympathetic parenting performances (Jackson, 1994; McLoyd, 1990) and more negative views of their children reaching their educational goals (Wilson and Kohn, 1995), other studies have reported no link between mother's educational level and positive parenting abilities (Strom et al., 1991). Still, other studies suggest that the daughter's expectations to attend college and succeed academically are related to the mother's expectations of whether her daughter would attend college and graduate (Rigsby et al., 1997).

African American female adolescents' future educational aspirations also have been linked directly to parental expectations and support of adolescents' academic achievement (Kerpelman, Shoffner, & Ross-Griffin, 2002). A study conducted by Smith-Maddux (1999) about the social networks and resources of African American eighth graders reported that the adolescents' conversations with their parents of school programs, parents' expectations for their children's highest educational level, parent's involvement in school related activities, and parents' own educational level were some of the strongest predictors of African American eighth-graders' educational goals. Moreover, research by Schvaneveldt et al. (2002), using a nationally representative sample of African Americans, Caucasians, Hispanic, and Asian Americans, indicated that parental participation in adolescents' scholastic activities in the eighth grade predicted postsecondary educational attainments two years post high school.

Parental involvement with children's education has been the center of research for several decades and still continues to be of significant importance in contemporary times (Bogenschneider, 1997; Eccles, Jacobs, Epstein, 1991; Muller, 1998; Schneider & Coleman, 1993). In general, studies have found a positive correlation between active parental involvement and children's academic achievement. In short, a considerable amount of the research found for this

study reveals that parental participation with their children is very important for positive academic experiences and children's perceptions of themselves as being capable of achieving their academics goals.

Although gender equality has come a long way in our society, in many instances boys more than girls are encouraged to go further academically. Results found in several studies suggest that parents tend to generally favor sons over daughters in various ways (Carter & Wojtkiewicz, 2000). For example, research studies have reported that fathers who have both sons and daughters are more involved with their sons' academics (Harris & Morgan, 1991; Rigsby et al., 1997). The literature on gender role socialization maintains that parents treat daughters and sons differently due to the patriarchal values that elevate males over females in the social order (Lorber, 1994; College Center for Research on Women, 1992).

Further, research has found that traditional socialization practices have a male bias; sons, unlike daughters, are provided with greater opportunities for personal achievement (Eccles et al., 1990; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1985). One study articulates that gender differences is a product of socialization that conventionally has emphasized personal relationships of dependency, conformity, and submissiveness for females, as opposed to achievement, autonomy, and assertiveness for males (Block, 1983). In addition, females experience more problems dealing with low self-esteem during adolescence than do their male counterparts, this negatively affect their educational attainments (Smith, 1992; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994).

This literature suggests that parents' different involvement with daughters and sons on academic issues may lead to differences in goal-setting and goal attainment. With the number of women in the United States labor force steadily increasing, a shift in the expectations parents have of their daughters can

emerge. It is essential that parents get equally involved with both their daughters and sons when it comes to their educational development.

Effective communication within the family circle is regarded as highly significant because it has the potential of having a permanent effect on the family members (Gilligan, 1996; Kenemore and Spira, 1996; Smith et al., 1998; Josselson, 1994; Markstrom-Adams, 1992; Ruebush, 1994; West-Stevens, 1997; McLoyd, 1990). Grotevant and Cooper (1986) indicate that communication helps the adolescent to clarify her position within the family and to learn to be sensitive to the ideas and feelings of others. "While there is considerable consensus about the importance of communication and evidence that such communication may vary according to family role and sex, surprisingly little is known about the ways in which parent-adolescent communication may change as the adolescent grows older or as a result of variations in the situation or topic around which communication takes place" (Jackson et al, 1997, p. 315). Adolescents' reports of their perception of the communication with their parents suggest that effective family communication is associated with satisfaction within the family and with lack of disagreement between adolescents and their parents. The effects of parent-adolescent communication can last a lifetime. This idea makes the study of parent-child communication a central issue that deserves careful attention from communication scholars.

Communication and Sexual Behavior

Parents' influence on the sexual attitudes and behaviors of their adolescent children is another major contributor to the assessment of the mother-daughter relationship. This influence has taken the form of five pathways studied by several scholars including (Luster & Small 1994, 1997; Miller et al., 1999; Miller et al., 1986). These pathways include parental monitoring, parental modeling of sexual behaviors (Whitbeck, Simmons & Kao, 1994), parental

disapproval of adolescent sexual activity (Santelli, DiClemente, Miller et al., 1999; Luster & Small, 1997; Miller, Forehand & Kotchick, 1999; Dittus & Jaccard, 2000; Miller & Norton, 1998; Moore & Furstenberg, 1986; Whitaker & Miller, 2000), and parent-child sexual risk communication (Jaccard, Dittus & Gordon, 1996; Dilorio et al., 1999; Dutra et al., 1999; Hutchinson, 2002; Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998; Miller et al., 1998; Leland & Barth, 1993; Pick & Palos, 1995). Although all of these facets of parent-child relations have been discussed as potential influences on adolescents' sexual behaviors, parent-child communication has been characterized by some as being critical (Pequegnat & Szapocznik, 2000; Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998). Parents can tailor messages to the developmental level of their children, capitalize on teachable moments, provide a moral context for sexual behavior, and serve as ongoing source of support and information (Pequegnat & Szapocznik, 2000; Meschke et al., 2000; Jaccard et al., 1996; DiClemente & Wingood, 2000; Hutchinson et al., 2001).

Communication between mothers and daughters can have health benefits for daughters. A study conducted by Hutchinson et al. (2003) supports the contention that sexual risk communication between mothers and daughters provides protection against two important STI- and HIV- related sexual risk behaviors, i.e., number of episodes of sexual intercourse and number of days of unprotected intercourse. The study's findings support the notion that mothers who communicate with their daughters about sex can affect their daughters' sexual behaviors in positive ways (Hutchinson et al., 2003).

Although parent-teen communication is important in the sexual domain, many parents fail to engage in such conversations with their adolescent sons and daughters. Jaccard and Dittus (1991) found that, for a sample of 12-to 16-year-olds, about 15% to 25% of the parents had not discussed sex with them. Newcomer and Udry (1985) reported data from a sample of 1,100 junior high

school students in which 33% of the males indicated that their mother “has taught them things about sex” and 62% of the females indicated the same. Other studies have found that parents are not the main source of sex education (Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982; Yarber & Greer, 1986).

Several studies have been conducted to closely inspect the reason why parents might not talk about sex with their teenage children. Fox and Inazu (1980b) reported that parents mostly discussed sex-related topics with their daughters when the daughters were between the ages of ten and thirteen years; with daughters from European American and more religious families having discussed more topics by age 12.5 years than daughters from African American and less religious families. The best predictors of communication were patterns of early communication and the daughter’s report of the quality of the mother-daughter relationship (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000).

Jaccard and Dittus (1991) identified three main reservations that parents had about discussing sex with their teens, which were correlated with the extent of parent-teen discussions (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000). These reservations focused on the possibility of embarrassing the teen, having difficulty finding the right time and place to have such discussions, and having difficulty explaining things clearly (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000). Taken as a whole, these studies suggest that parental reluctance to engage in conversations with their teen may be influenced by (a) sexually specific reservations about communication (e.g., a conversation about sex might be embarrassing) and (b) more general family environment variables (e.g., the quality of the overall relationship of the parent and teen) (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000). Numerous studies have identified that in order for adolescents to diminish sexual risk behavior, it is critical for the parents to engage in healthy conversations about this topic. These studies have advanced that parents, specifically mothers, have some reservations regarding

their communication with their teen about sex. These results underscore the importance of fostering high-quality relationships between teen and parents in general; as such relationships probably affect the level of communication that takes place about important topics, such as sexual activity (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000).

Self Disclosure

The level of the parents' disclosure can have a significant influence on the children's perception of the quality of the communication with their parents. Research reveals that mothers have a higher level of self-disclosure than do fathers (Forehand et al., 1998). This trend may suggest that fathers have a harder time communicating with their children. A number of studies have found that mothers are perceived to have a more intimate, open communicative style and to share confidences more than fathers (Pipp et al, 1985). In a recent study, Dolgin (1996) asked parents to describe their disclosure to their adolescent children. "Mothers were more likely to claim venting, seeking emotional support, and seeking advice from their adolescent children, whereas fathers more frequently reported trying to change their children's behavior" (Dolgin et al, 1997, p. 433). These studies suggest that gender plays a critical role in the use of mutual self-disclosure between the parent and child. We can see that mothers tend to have a higher degree of self-disclosure than fathers, which in turn suggests that the mother-child communication may be more effective than father and child.

Altman and Taylor (1999), in their model of social penetration, describe two ways in which communication can be more or less disclosive: breadth and depth. According to Altman and Taylor (1999) breadth is defined as the range of subjects being discussed. The instrument used as a guideline (see appendix) during the focus group interviews consisted of a variety of subjects that

represented the breadth of the communication between the mother and the daughter. The depth of the information being volunteered refers to “the shift from relatively non-revealing messages to more personal ones” as cited by Adler & Towne, (p. 359). Depth was assessed by asking the participants questions from the list subjects, moving from impersonal messages (e.g. inquiring about mother’s disclosure to her daughter regarding her relationship with her classmates) to more personal and revealing ones (e.g. inquiring about mother’s disclosure to her daughter regarding the mother’s romantic relationships), represented the depth of the communication with their mothers. Adler and Towne (1999) explain that a relationship can be defined as impersonal or intimate by determining its breadth and depth.

Interestingly, a parental disclosure study by McLoyd and Wilson (1990), established that mothers who more frequently communicated about their money problems and personal problems to their children had children with elevated levels of psychological anguish compared with children whose mothers communicated less about those concerns. However, based on McLoyd and Wilson's (1990) study and Weiss's (1979) observations, together with structural family theory (SFT), mother-to-child disclosure about family problems not only may result in adjustment difficulties for youngsters but also may arbitrate, and therefore help to explain, the connection between parental disclosure and youngsters' social adjustment. Moreover, research suggests that adolescent girls may be particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of serving as emotional confidants to their mothers when their mothers experience demanding events in their lives (Gore, Aseltine, & Colten, 1993; Wallerstein, 1985).

According to scholars (Sessa & Steinberg, 1991; Silverberg, Marczak, & Gondoli, 1996; Weiss, 1979) mother-to-child disclosure of financial concerns may have negative effects for youngsters' maturity. Obviously, such disclosure may increase youngsters' awareness of their family's situation and their parents' concerns about that situation. In reaction to their increased knowledge about difficulties in their family's situation, adolescents may feel overwhelmed with responsibility for their parents' emotional well-being (Bassoff, 1987; Glenwick & Mowrey, 1986; Wallerstein, 1985). Researchers affirm that this heightened knowledge and feeling of responsibility may be outside youngsters' managing capability and in the end, may result in risk for adolescents' social adjustment (Bassoff, 1987; Wallerstein, 1985).

Some studies suggest that detailed mother-to-daughter disclosure is associated with daughters' greater psychological distress but not with closer feelings toward the mother (Hetherington, 1989 & Wallerstein, 1985). In a study by Koerner et. al (2004), the authors found that "detailed mother-to-daughter disclosure regarding four of five sensitive topics (i.e., financial concerns, negativity toward ex-husband, job ups-and-downs, and personal concerns) was positively and robustly associated with daughter psychological distress." (p.48). They also found that greater depth of mother-to-daughter disclosure about the topics was not related to a stronger sense of closeness. "In fact, if the data from this sample of adolescents suggested any pattern with respect to maternal disclosure and perceived mother-daughter closeness, it was one in the opposite direction. For example, detailed mother-to-daughter disclosure about parenting challenges was significantly and negatively associated with perceived mother-daughter closeness." (p. 49).

Scholars have explained maternal disclosure effects on their daughters; expressing that listening to mothers' disclosures may cause daughters to worry about their mothers (Glenwick & Mowrey, 1986; Wallerstein, 1985; Weiss, 1979b); and also this may lead to anxiety or depressive signs (Borkovec, 1994; Silverman et al., 1995). Although the depth of mother-to-daughter disclosure in the areas of finances and personal problems was found to be positively associated with daughter's psychological distress, worry about mother did not appear to act as a mediating factor for those disclosure topics. Furthermore, when mothers express their financial concerns and their grievance, the tone of the disclosure may be quite depressingly and involve feelings of upset or worry. As research on physiological reactions to intimate self-disclosures suggests (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993), listening to such disclosures may be confusing for the daughter.

Scholars suggest that when mothers have a discussion openly with their daughters about issues that are meaningful and appealing to their daughters' lives (e.g., leisure-related topics, relationships); both mothers and daughters tend to develop deeper feelings of mutual closeness. Conversely, when those relationships cross into confidant relationships (with the daughter as confidant) there may be some risks involved (Rich, 1990; Silverberg & Gondoli, 1996; Surrey, 1991).

By adolescence, mothers may begin to view both sons and daughters as a close friend. However, existing research on the nature and quality of parent-adolescent relationships offers some reason to believe that mothers might be more suitable to talk to daughters than to sons about sensitive topics. In particular, although researchers who study adolescents have found few consistent differences between mother-son and mother-daughter communication dynamics in terms of closeness and conflict (Steinberg, 1987), at

least in married families, some researchers have suggested that mother–daughter relationships tend to be somewhat closer and more intimate than mother–son relationships (e.g., Surrey, 1991; Youniss & Smollar, 1985) especially in single-mother families. In addition, in a study, Dolgin (1996) indicated not only that parents who had been divorced report somewhat more disclosure to their late adolescent children than do parents in continuously intact families but also that divorced mothers of daughters disclose more than divorced mothers of sons.

This literature reveals, among other things, that frequent and in-depth maternal disclosures, having the teenager as a confidant, were associated with adolescent social adjustment difficulties, primarily emotional anguish. Both, quantitative and qualitative analyses brought to light the relationship between maternal disclosures and adolescent anxiety, suggested the importance of how disclosures are made, and revealed several gender differences in reactions to maternal disclosures. Perhaps a more important question is whether adolescent gender acts as a mediator in the connection between mother-to-adolescent disclosure and adolescent social adjustment difficulties. Nonetheless, several theoretical models (Compas & Wagner, 1991) suggest that adolescent daughters would be more susceptible or responsive to stressors, especially those stressors that involve others, because females tend to be more sensitive to others' feelings than men are. In this same context, mothers-to-daughters relationships have the potential of developing heightened feelings that may disperse into other social contexts.

Although researchers have attempted to investigate the effects of parents' disclosures to their children, very little research has been conducted about the depth of parents' disclosure. The limited amount of research available implies that mothers are more likely to disclose personal problems to their children

(Dolgin, 1996; McLoyd & Wilson, 1992). In psychology literature, scholars have advised that mothers tend to break generational limits by using their children as emotional confidants (Bassoff, 1987; Glenwick & Mowrey, 1986; Hetherington, 1989; Wallerstein, 1985; Weiss, 1979). Also, research on the association of parent to child disclosure may be limited to clinical case studies. This literature provides provisional support for the suggestion that parental disclosure of own problems or concerns is associated with youngsters' social adjustment difficulties (McLoyd & Wilson, 1990; Weiss, 1979).

The role of a parent, especially a mother, will be the earliest source of influence for the daughter. It is this researcher's contention that this influence will mainly come from the topics which the mother discusses with her daughter especially through the delicate period of adolescence. These discussions may include topics from self esteem to sex, from work ethic to social relationships. This study attempts to examine the degree to which a mother's communication influences her daughter in the African and Hispanic American communities. The following research questions will guide this study:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What topics do African American and Hispanic American college age daughters self-report were discussed the most with their mothers?

RQ2: What topics do African American and Hispanic American college age daughters self-report were discussed the least with their mothers?

RQ3: Do African American and Hispanic American college-age daughters perceive their mothers' communication has influenced them?

RQ4: To what degree do African American and Hispanic American college-age daughters perceive that their mothers self-disclose to them?

METHOD

Data were collected via focus group interviews. The focus group interview is an appropriate method to answer the posted research questions because it allows the participants to discuss their experiences about their communication with their mothers and will allow the investigator to gain greater insight into mother-daughter relationships than would be possible with a more quantitative/objective format. Furthermore, the focus group interview allows the researcher to gain insights beyond the verbal assertions of the participants by observing some of the nonverbal messages being sent by the participants. This may add another interesting dimension to the study's findings. In the following section, the study's context, participants, and procedures are discussed.

Context

The Florida State University, a coeducational, state funded public institution in the southeast, provided the context for the study. The Florida State University enrolls approximately forty thousand graduate, undergraduate and professional students. From this population, eight focus groups interviews consisting of two to five African and Hispanic American college age women were selected for the purpose of gathering qualitative data to answer the research questions posited.

Participants

Twenty nine participants were selected on the basis of age, cultural background, college student status, and cohabitation with the mother prior to attending college. The participants were African and Hispanic American female college students between the ages of 18 and 30. To participate, they must have cohabitated with their mother for the period encompassing their pre-teen and teenage years (12-19), for at least four consecutive years. After the above mentioned criteria were met, the researcher asked the prospective participants if

their mothers were African and Hispanic American. The participants were identified through various student clubs and organizations at the institution where the focus groups were held. The participants were a convenience sample recruited via interpersonal networks. The researcher asked known individuals to recruit members for the focus groups given the demographic criteria. Each known participant was encouraged to bring at least three other participants for each focus group interview. The researcher informed friends to bring in other participants until he reached the desired number for the study, between 25 and 35 participants. Each individual's participation was voluntary and there was no compensation or penalty for early withdrawal. Additionally, each participant was informed of the nature of focus groups interviews and of the probability of a minimal level of risk involved. The researcher also communicated to the participants that they might experience apprehension when thinking about their experiences growing up with their mothers. The focus groups facilitator was going to be available to talk with the participants about any emotional discomfort they may experience while participating in the focus groups. Furthermore, the facilitator informed the participants that they are able to stop their participation at any time they wished.

Procedure

The main reason for using the focus group approach was to analyze the participants' perception of their mothers' communication style and to gain knowledge of the amount and type of information shared.

Focus group interviews were conducted to gather the qualitative data that would help answer the research questions. Each focus group interview was videotaped in rooms with a capacity for fifteen to twenty people each. The participants were asked to discuss twelve topics that the researcher considers would help in gaining greater insight about their mothers' communication.

Participants were asked to discuss their mothers' message behavior with them regarding the topics of relationships, academics, work ethic, nutrition, sports/recreation, sex, menstruation, politics, spirituality, drugs/alcohol, self-esteem, and fears. Finally, the participants were asked to rate their mother's communication frequency on a ten-point scale with ten indicating the highest frequency and one indicating the lowest frequency.

The total length of each focus group interview was about two and a half hours. The facilitator spent about ten minutes with each topic and the participants' responses were held to a two-minute time limit. The facilitator used a timer to time the responses and ensure that each participant adhered to the time allotted. Some participants went over their allotted time and the facilitator requested that they conclude their response. The facilitator did not encourage discussions that went over the time limit due to other participants' time constraints.

At the end of the interviews the facilitator briefed the participants regarding confidentiality after they leave the room. The participants were reminded that they had signed an informed consent form that carefully instructed them that they must maintain the information exchanged within the boundaries of the room where the focus group interviews occurred. After the briefing, the participants were instructed to leave the room and also advised that they should not share any of the information shared with the facilitator with any future participants. All participants understood the instructions and were escorted out of the room by the facilitator. After all the participants left the room, the facilitator waited a few minutes and then advised the next group of interviewees to make their way into the room where the following focus group session would begin.

ANALYSES

In this section, the researcher identifies topics ranging from the highest communication frequency from the mother to the daughter to the topics having the lowest communication frequency, as reported by the daughters. A high communication frequency is defined as topics where more than sixty percent of all the participants indicated the mother discussed or shared information with them. A low communication frequency is defined as topics where more than sixty percent of all the participants indicated the mother did not discuss or share information with them. Additionally, influence was assessed from direct statements from the daughters indicating that their mothers' communication and behavior influenced them in some way. Finally, the researcher identifies how the daughters rate their mothers' degree of disclosure. The degree of self disclosure was measured on a ten point scale ranging from (1) low self disclosure and (10) high self disclosure. Because of the general nature of these analyses, the information obtained here should be considered descriptive.

The results obtained from the focus group interviews reveal that all the participants seem to have been influenced by both the verbal and nonverbal messages shared with their mother while growing up. A high degree of disclosure implies that the mother disclosed to the daughter a wider range of topics and in depth. A low degree of disclosure suggests that the mother did not disclose as in depth and a short range of topics with the daughter. The degree of depth was measured by examining if the mother talked to the daughter about intimate topics such as both of their sex lives, romantic relationships and major fears in life. For example, they learned about work ethic, discipline carrying out school tasks, and having a strong faith. The topics with the highest communication frequency from mother to daughter are discussed in this section.

RESULTS

The first research question (*RQ1*) asks “What topics do African American and Hispanic American college age daughters self-report were discussed the most with their mothers?”

From the twelve topics described in the interview outline (see appendix), there were six topics that yielded a high communication frequency from mother to daughter. The table below offers a break down of the number of participants who reported that their mothers frequently discussed these topics with them. These topics were (1) work ethic, (2) religion, (3) nutrition, (4) menstrual cycle, (5) academics, and (6) self esteem.

Table 1 - Topics Most Frequently Discussed-

| <i>Work Ethic</i> | <i>Religion</i> | <i>Nutrition</i> | <i>Menstrual Cycle</i> | <i>Academics</i> | <i>Self Esteem</i> |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 75%(n=22) | 72%(n=21) | 66%(n=19) | 66%(n=19) | 66%(n=19) | 62%(n=18) |

* This table reflects the number and percentage of participants who reported these topics were discussed frequently by the mothers.

Work Ethic

Seventy five percent of the participants, (n=22) reported that their mother pushed them to develop a solid work ethic to achieve their goals in life, and not having to depend on their spouses in the future. Work ethic played a critical role in both the mothers and daughters’ lives. The daughters expressed that their mothers were open when it came to having a solid work ethic. Also, the daughters said that they learned non-verbal messages from their mothers. Their mothers are women who may have had to overcome some big obstacles in life

and their circumstances taught them the importance of having a strong work ethic.

The topic on which the mothers disclosed most often was work ethic. Like academics, the mothers heavily emphasized the importance of having a strong work ethic to accomplish the daughters' goals in life. Twenty two of twenty nine participants expressed that their mothers disclosed something to them regarding having a solid work ethic. This topic deals with the mother by talking to her about the importance of working hard in life. Similarly to academics, the mothers stressed to their daughters that without working hard a woman will not get ahead in life. As one participant explained "my mom was a perfectionist, so the word perfect invaded my vocabulary quiet a long time ago." This means that her mother communicated to her that as a woman she had to do things "perfectly" in order to gain the respect and attention of others. Some of these women come from societies where women are oppressed, thus they understand the importance of consistently performing at the highest level. As women, they must do the job twice as well as men. Their daughters appear to understand this information coming from their mothers. One participant revealed "my mother always discloses to me the problems she has at work and how I need to work hard so I can be in a better position than she is." Some of the mothers appear to be fearful of their daughters ending up in the same position that they are in, therefore they are always vocal about the things they should do to avoid this from happening. A set of interesting statements revealed that some mothers do not want their daughters to simply "work" but to find what they love. For example, one participant revealed that "from my mother I learned that I needed to find my passion so I do not have to work because I have to but because I want to." Another participant expressed that her mother told her that "I have to use

my career in a special way, not just as a job.” Other participants articulated how their mothers always pushed them to work hard because they did also.

The mother’s background plays a key role in the messages they communicate to their daughters regarding any topic. But it appears that work ethic is a topic common to most of the mothers represented in this study. Seventy five percent (n=22) of the participants expressed that their mothers did emphasize hard work and this was a topic that they consistently talked to them about.

Religion

Most mothers were religious women who wanted their daughters to develop a faith in God. Seventy two percent of the participants, (n=21) expressed that their mothers were women of faith who inculcated their beliefs into them. The participants expressed that their mothers were very religious and told them the importance of having a faith.

Religion was the second highest topic that the daughters revealed their mothers talked to them about. Seventy two percent, (n=21) articulated that their mothers disclosed to them regarding topics related to religion. For the purpose of this study, religion deals with the mother’s messages to the daughter about being spiritually rich, conversations about the mother’s religious involvement and the power of praying, the mother openly expressing her personal belief system to the daughter and the daughter expressing how it influenced her.

“When I was younger, my mother emphasized that attending church and having a faith was important, but after I grew up she let me decide what I wanted to do on my own.” Some participants also revealed that their mothers were so involved in their religion that their daughters perceived them as fanatics. As one participant expressed it “my mom is an extremist about religion. When I got married at an early age and I left, she called me to tell me that I was the anti-

Christ.” Another participant articulated that “my mother would say things about God and the devil all the time, and she tried to impose her beliefs on me.” Conversely, other mothers were understanding and gave their daughters the freedom to choose what they wanted to do with their lives. One participant expressed “she told me that the word in the Bible is what matters not what people say.” Another one replied “she stressed religion, but she made me form my own opinion about it.” We can see a clear contrast here. Some mothers gave their daughters the power to choose, while others tried to impose their ideals on them.

Nutrition/Eating Habits

Sixty six percent of the participants, (n=19) stated that their mothers stressed the fact that they needed to have healthy nutrition/eating habits to keep a lean figure because we live in a society where appearance is important. But this belief came second to the fact that staying healthy is what is important. The participants also expressed that many family members had had problems with their health due to weight problems. The mothers then used their own family members as examples so the daughters realize the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Nutrition and eating habits got the third highest percent of mother-to-daughter communication frequency. Sixty six percent, (n=19) of the participants stated that their mothers disclosed to them topics related to eating habits and nutrition. The topic of nutrition has to do with the mother disclosing her concerns about the daughter’s diet/eating habits, the mother using personal examples detailing her struggles and/or successes dealing with her lifestyle or a particular diet. Additionally, any talks the mother had with the daughter about having eating disorders. This topic closely ties to the self esteem topic. Some of the mothers strongly emphasized to their daughters that maintaining a healthy

diet is important because it allows them to keep their weight down. The mothers touched upon the concept that a big woman is looked down upon in this society. Many mothers seemed to be concerned with their daughters being neglected because of their weight. Others went to extremes and pushed their daughters hard to keep their weight down and to eat healthy.

Another reason why some of the mothers disclosed about eating habits was because health problems run in the family and the mothers wanted to make the daughters aware so they do not have problems when they get older. As one participant put it "Some of our family members have diabetes so my mother is very adamant about my food intake." Other participants continued to say "my mother was always there to care about my nutrition." "She was always on top of us about eating well." It appears that the mothers were just very concerned about their daughters keeping their weight down. Other participants explained "my mother is always very conscious of what I eat." "My mother is always telling me to watch my weight." Another participant expressed "she has influenced me a lot; she is a very healthy person." Along with work ethic and religion, eating habits were the top three topics that the daughters revealed their mothers disclosed most.

Based on what the researcher observed in the focus group interviews, it seemed like the mothers had been very influential when it came to the daughters' weight because the majority of the participants were not people who would be seen as overweight. One participant asserted that "she would emphasize dieting; she would ask me to go on diets with her." Another one concluded "my mother was a health fanatic; she always told me to eat right." These statements reveal that eating habits is an important topic for the mothers along with religion and work ethic.

Menstrual Cycle

Sixty six percent, (n=19) expressed that their mothers were open about discussing the menstrual cycle. Most of them revealed that their mothers viewed and expressed it to them as a rite of passage into womanhood. The rest simply expressed that it was nature, and it was something that happened to all women.

Sixty six percent, (n=19) participants explained that their mothers talked to them about the menstrual cycle. All of these participants said the mother was very open and always available to talk about the menstrual period and what it was about. This topic has to do with the mothers treating the menstrual period as taboo in the household, the mother being open or apprehensive about sanitary approaches, cleanliness, and further explanations about what the menstrual period is.

Academics

Sixty six, 66%, (n=19) reported that their mother discussed information regarding education and topics related to academics. The participants stated that their mothers put heavy emphasis on always doing well in school and obtaining an education. The topic of education and academics played an important role as one of the topics about which the mother talked to their daughters the most. Sixty six percent (66%) of the mothers communicated to their daughters about this topic. Some of the mothers were teachers and therefore were strongly committed to helping their daughters do their best in school.

Focus group interviews gave important insights into the participants' experiences with their mothers. The topic of education/academics includes inquiries about homework and how the mother handled hers, the mother's interest in grades and disclosures about hers, also talks about the mother's college and career choices and how these influenced the daughters' choices.

A participant revealed that her mother told her that “a woman is worthless without an education.” The mother talked to the daughter about her struggles to get an education and how society expected her to be a housewife, but she refused to be crushed by the iron fist of earlier periods. The daughter revealed that “by using what my mother told me as an example, I knew that since then I was going to go to college and get a higher education degree.” Revelations such as this point to the idea that having a person in a position to influence us, (i.e., a parent) can have lasting effects on our approach to life as adults. An important aspect to observe is how the daughters expressed how their mothers communicated to them that they did not have the same opportunities that the daughters do today, and the mothers still performed well, the daughters should do even better. Most of the daughters revealed that this was a critical influential factor in them wanting to perform well in school. One participant expressed that “my mother would tell me about her experiences in school and she would help me if she could, if she could not she would find someone who could.” Another participant continued “my mom is an elementary school teacher; she always deeply cared about school.” The factors of making the mother proud and continuing the “generational success,” or in some cases breaking the “generational curse” of not having the opportunity to go to school were strong motivational and influential factors in the daughters desiring to do well in school.

There is a clear emphasis on the mothers’ side; they simply desired their daughters to do better than they did in life. One participant asserted that “my mom has always been really focused with me doing well in school. She emphasized school so much that she did not want me to work until I finished all my schooling.” Another participant explained that “my mother always expressed to me to if I wanted to do better in life I needed to do well in school.”

Gathering from these participants' statements it is apparent to observe how their mothers were very compelling and their stories influential to their daughters.

Self Esteem

Self esteem was another topic that mothers and daughters seemed to have discussed extensively. Sixty two percent, (n=18) reported that their mother talked to them about issues they had with self esteem and how they should not let those same issues affect their lives. Some mothers spoke to their daughters about issues with their appearance or other experiences that had left them with low self-esteem. These circumstances led them to talk to their daughters about issues women have to deal with regarding society and self esteem.

Sixty two percent, (n=18) of the participants expressed that their mothers disclosed to them about issues surrounding self esteem. Although it was one of the items that scored the lowest within this category, the researcher gathered interesting insights regarding issues of self esteem women face in this society. The topic of self esteem refers to the mothers' messages about self esteem, conversations about self-worth, confidence level; talks about life aspirations, and stepping toward achieving goals (showing of high self esteem). Some of the women indicated that their mothers tried to put them down, lower their self esteem instead of boosting it. Others expressed that their mothers simply did not talk to them about self esteem at all.

Self esteem surfaced as a topic that was very close to the participants and their mothers. The reason for this is that both mothers and daughters had been through situations in life in which their self-esteem had been challenged. The mothers had been through difficult experiences regarding the way they had been treated by society, specifically the opposite sex. In some cases the mothers had been singled out because they were immigrants and/or they did not speak with a mainstream English accent and this led them to develop low self-esteem. One

participant revealed “my mother tends to have low self-esteem because of her accent sometimes. But she always told me that is going to be alright.”

Although some of the mothers struggled with self esteem they still tried to turn things around with their daughters. A participant articulated that “my mom always told me how proud she is of me and the things that I have accomplished in life. She said not worry about anything because I could do anything I wanted.” “This always gave me a boost and kept me going, but I hated when she was down.”

Some of the mothers had been very open with their daughters regarding their self esteem problems; others simply expressed their problems by putting their daughters down. For example, one daughter expressed how her mother used to tell her that “my mother always put me down and told me that I would not amount to anything because I was dumb.” Another participant expressed that her mother “always told me that I was not very pretty because she was not pretty and she was her daughter.” One participant articulated that “my mom has major self esteem issues because of things that happened to her when she was younger...she told me how her parents never supported her with any of her dreams...also, when she moved to America, she got into a relationship with a man that always mistreated her and put her down.”

Self esteem appears to be a topic that brings the mother and daughter closer together, especially when the daughter notices her mother experiencing problems related to it. In the cases where the mother always had self esteem and expressed things to the daughter to boost hers, the daughter simply reaped the benefits of having that energy around her. But the mother appeared to be consumed by low self esteem, the daughter deeply empathized with her and felt compelled to console her.

The second research question (RQ2) asks “What topics do African American and Hispanic American college age daughters self-report were discussed the least with their mothers?”

Of the twelve topics outlined in the focus group interview outline (see appendix), six topics are identified as having the lowest communication frequency from the mother and the daughter. The researcher defines topics with the lowest communication frequency as topics where sixty percent or more of the participants indicated that their mothers did not discuss much with them. The topics that were discussed the least between the mothers and daughters are discussed below. The table below illustrates the percentage of participants who reported what topics their mothers discussed the least with them.

Table 2 - Topics Least Frequently Discussed-

| <i>Sports/ Recreational Activities</i> | <i>Fears</i> | <i>Relation- ships</i> | <i>Sex</i> | <i>Drugs/ Alcohol</i> | <i>Politics</i> |
|--|--------------|----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| 79%(n=23) | 69%(n=20) | 66%(n=19) | 66%(n=19) | 62%(n=18) | 62%(n=18) |

*This table reflects the number and percentage of participants who reported these topics were not discussed frequently by the mothers.

Sports/Recreational Activities

Seventy nine percent (n=23) of the respondents, agreed that their mother did not talk to them much about topics related to sports or recreational activities. This topic yielded the highest number of participants indicating that their mothers did not discuss with them. Twenty-three out of the twenty-nine participants expressed that their mothers did not talk to them about sports because they simply did not have an interest for them. The participants

continued that the mothers would support them if the daughters had an interest in a sport, but discussion did not reach far beyond this level.

This topic yielded the least amount of self-disclosure from mother to daughter. The participants revealed that their mothers did not volunteer information when it came to sports or recreational activities. Sports and recreational activities refers to the mother disclosing any information about sports related topics, talks about the mother abilities/inabilities to play sports, the mother showing serious interest in the daughter's abilities or inabilities to play sports.

Fears

Sixty nine percent, (n=20) of the participants expressed that their mother did not engage in any talks with them about their fears in life. The mothers who did discuss this issue expressed fear that something would happen to the daughters and not to themselves. This topic of fears refers to the mother's revelations about her main fears in life, any disclosures about issues such as going to jail, personal safety for herself and her daughter, death, sexual abuse, or life-threatening diseases.

Some of the daughters revealed that the mothers did not engage much in talks regarding the mothers' fears in life, and when they did say something it was to express a fear related to the daughters. Many daughters even defended their mothers' stance by saying that they would not want their kids to see any weaknesses coming from them either. It is a matter of showing their children that they are strong women.

Relationships

Sixty six percent, (n=19) stated that their mothers did not disclose much to them regarding the mothers' relationships with others. This is a topic where many participants expressed that their mothers influenced them by observing

them, but not by disclosing to them anything related to how the mothers carried themselves in their relationships with others, whether it was class peers, friends or family members.

Nineteen of the women interviewed in the focus groups revealed that their mothers did not disclose to them regarding issues surrounding their relationships with others. This is 66% of the women interviewed. For the purpose of this study, relationships deals with how much the mother talked to the daughter about the mother's relationships with her classmates, friends, romantic relationships and with her family members. Some participants agreed that they had been influenced by their mothers' lack of socialization with others because they behave similarly.

When it came to relationships it appears that the mothers thought this was a topic that was supposed to be private. Some of the mothers did talk to their daughters about family relationships, but romantic and relationships with friends appeared to be off limits as a topic of self-disclosure with their daughters. Some participants expressed that it was simply in the mother's nature not to reveal much about her life. "She is very introverted; sometimes she just has a hard time expressing her feelings." Other mothers have in contrast, tried to express things to their daughters but the daughters would refuse to listen. "She has never told me anything relationships; it has been mainly me watching her. She has tried to tell me about her romantic relationships, but I do not really want to hear it."

Another point mothers tried to make without disclosing much to their daughters was to be careful when meeting other people and not to trust anyone. "My mother did not disclose much to me, the main thing that she has told me is to be careful when I meet other people." Other women expressed that they noticed how their mother was always observant of their interactions with other

but almost never commented on what they saw. "I noticed that my mom was very observant of me and my actions, but did not really express herself about what was on her mind." Another participant replied "if you asked her for feedback she would give it to you, but my mom never volunteered any information."

Sex

Sixty six percent (n=19) of the participants revealed that their mother did not talk to them any information about topics related to sex. Sex refers to the mother jokingly talking to the daughter about the mother's sexual experiences, any talks about learning how to masturbate, the mother talking to the daughter about her sexual experiences as example for the daughter's sexual experiences, or any disclosures about the mother struggling with her sexual orientation.

Many of the participants agreed that this was a very unique topic in the sense that they simply did not desire that their mothers would discuss anything with them. Some participants concluded that their mothers attempted to disclose information to them regarding their sex life, but they refused because it was information that they were not interested in knowing about from their mothers.

Mothers usually waited until the daughters were older if they were going to disclose anything about sex. Other mothers simply packaged their message by telling their daughters not to trust men. "My mom always stressed not to trust men because they always had plan B." Several participants emphasized their mothers wanted them not to trust men or wait until marriage to have sex. This appears to be case more frequently with Hispanic mothers, as one participant explained "she always told me you have to get married a virgin." "She said I would like for you to get married a virgin, but it is okay if you don't."

Other mothers emphasized the age factor, since they had gotten married at an early age; they wanted their daughters not to do this. "My mom married

young so she told me not to do it.” Sex was a topic that did not receive much discussion from the mothers. It is interesting to point out that usually the mothers who had their daughters at a young age were the ones talking to their daughters about sex, unlike their older counterparts.

Drugs/Alcohol

Sixty two percent, (n=18) of the participants revealed that their mother did not disclose information to them about topics dealing with drugs and alcohol. Drugs and alcohol has to do with the mother having any serious educational talks about these substances with the daughter, talks about the mother or friends and close family members abusing drugs and alcohol. The topic of drugs and alcohol was also among the least discussed topics.

When it comes to this topic it appears that nonverbal communication is as important as verbal communication. Other mothers simply told the daughters to use their family members as examples of what not to do “she just said to look at my aunts and uncles because alcohol runs in our family.”

Politics

Politics was another topic that yielded low communication frequency from the mothers. Sixty two percent of the participants, (n=18) expressed that their mother did not engage in talks with them about politics. In a few cases, the mothers came to the United States as young adults and kept attuned with the political landscape of their native countries and somewhat neglecting the domestic landscape. Other mothers were simply not interested in politics and therefore almost never talked to their daughters about this topic.

The mothers’ interactions with their daughters were divided into those who cared about politics but did not talk to them much, and those who simply did not care about politics at all. Politics deals with the mothers’ talks with their daughters about current political issues, the mother expressing her stance on the

issues, the mother talking about her political party preference, and candidate preference, if different from her party of choice, also disclosing her stance on policies that directly affect them.

The third question (*RQ3*) asks “Do African American and Hispanic American college-age daughters perceive their mothers’ communication has influenced them?” The following data obtained from the daughters’ responses in the focus group interviews attempt to answer this question:

Whether it was influencing their daughters positively or negatively, the mothers appeared to have influenced their daughters, according to the daughters’ report. The answer provided here are mostly quotes directly from the daughters regarding their mothers’ influence in their lives. These quotes are organized starting with the topics that were frequently discussed and then continuing with those that were not.

Work Ethic

A main message here coming from the mothers was that the mothers had worked very hard and so should the daughters. One participant explained “my mother told me that she had worked her butt off to get all the things that we had so I feel that I have to do the same.” Another one said “my mother told me about her struggles and she had always worked hard and so should I.” For some mothers, the idea of having to depend on a spouse was what seemed to motivate them to speak to their daughters about the importance of working hard to get what they wanted in life. As one participant put it “my mother never liked the idea of any man giving me anything; she said work hard for your own things, so I try to do that.” Conversely, other mothers seemed to be a bit more liberal and simply told their daughters that they had work to do and they needed to do it. Another participant said “my mother was very liberal; she said do what you have to do, do your best.”

Religion

Many of the daughters expressed that the mothers made them go to church when they were kids, but as adults the mothers gave their daughters the freedom to choose a path, a religion. "My mother left it up to me after I was old enough." "I believe my mother gave me the choice to choose, but with her emphasis on religion I know it will play an important aspect in later in life, just not right now." One daughter explained that her mother "always encouraged me to have a faith; we knew we were Christians Religion appeared to be very important for the mothers, but the influence they had on their daughters appeared to be somewhat minimal. This may be a case in which when a subject is overemphasized as some daughters reported, it may push the message target away.

Nutrition/Eating Habits

One of the participants articulated that "My mother said I should not get fat, there is no reason for me to get fat. She told me do not overeat and always exercise so I live in the gym." As we can see here, the mother's tone is one of challenge; she is telling her daughter that there is no reason she should get fat. The mother appears to be telling her daughter that she should not get fat because if she does then she will have to deal with the consequences that come with it. Another participant asserted "she always fed me natural foods and she was always there for me and talked about what I ate." This mother carefully watched what the daughter consumed, and this speaks to the mother's concern with the daughter's health and physical appearance. Interestingly, other participants were even on diets with their mothers. Some daughters talked about how their mothers were very concerned about their figures and they expressed to their daughters that they did not want them to look like them when the daughters get

older. A participant revealed that “we are both on the Atkins diet because we are trying to cut down.”

Menstrual Cycle

Ten participants expressed that their mothers played little to no part in coaching them through the initial phase of the menstrual period. And many mothers did not discuss the topic in detail until after the daughter had their period for the first time. One participant explained that “my mother talked to me about it after it happened.” But others received plenty of help from their mothers from the beginning “my mom said start packing pads in case something happens. She told me how she learned to clean herself and taught me how to be clean, I am extremely clean today.” Another participant articulated that “she was always open about it; I absorbed a lot from her.” As one participant put it “my mom was never shy about it; she talked to me about it before and after it happened so I am not shy to discuss it in public at all.” Another participant continued “she was very open; she told me all about it, we would always talk about it.” One participant concluded “it was never taboo in my house; my mother was a nurse so I even give my friends some advice.” Although this topic fell under the highest rated self disclosure topics, the researcher believes the percentage of women whose mothers talked to them about the menstrual period was very low.

Academics

The consistency expressed by the participants about how much their mothers disclosed to them regarding academics reflects a high degree of caring because the mothers consistently expressed to their daughters the value of an education. For example one participant articulated that her mother... “was always very involved and supportive...My mom told me that she graduated top five of her class and I wanted to follow her example.” This participant continued

to say that “I always knew that I would graduate top of my class in High School, go on to get my bachelor’s, and master’s degrees because that was what my mom did.” These statements denote a high degree of influence coming from the mother. The daughter is not only eager to follow her mother’s example, but she also listens to and puts into action what the mother has told her about the importance of performing well academically. This example illustrates the researcher’s assumption which is that the degree of parents’ disclosure, in this cases the mother, will highly influence their children’s decisions later in life.

Self Esteem

In some cases participants stated that their mothers used to talk to them about self esteem because their mothers always talked to them about it, but the daughters also said that the mothers just confused low self esteem with shyness. One participant asserted “my mother would talk to me about self esteem all the time, maybe because she thought I had problems with it.”

Other participants said that their mothers always told them things to boost their self esteem, but most of the motivating came from the mothers’ showing of high self esteem. “My mom always had high self esteem, so I believe that is where I get it from.” “My mom always complimented me, and she never talked to me about any self esteem issues that she had; it was always positive things she had accomplished because she had a positive outlook towards life so I’ve never had any self esteem problems as opposed to a lot of my friends.”

Some of the participants brought up how their mothers’ looks correlated with their high self esteem and this seemed to be the case with the daughters as well. Furthermore, the daughters strongly emphasized how their mothers fervently expressed to them not to pay attention to what other people thought of their looks or character. One participant explained “my mother was very conscious of how she looked, she always had high self esteem and she told me

not to care about what other people thought of how I looked.” Another participant expressed “my mom thinks she is the prettiest woman in the world; I have never seen her down.” In some cases the mother had been through a major trauma as a child and she reflected this as an adult.

Sports/Recreational Activities

This subject represents the most clearly defined topic when it came to the mothers’ communication with their daughters. Many participants revealed that the mothers would attempt to engage in conversation with them, if the daughters asked a specific question, but usually without much success. “Mom is not a sports person, unless I asked her for something specific, she usually knew nothing about it.” Other mothers simply supported their daughters when they showed interest in a sport. “She simply did as much as she could, she would sometimes emphasize doing it.” Most participants agreed that the main reason why their mothers did not care much about sports was because they did not play sports as a child. “She was never very active herself, so she really did not care about talking to us about sports.” The facilitator got such an interesting reaction from the participants when asked about their mother and sports; it was as if they were surprised that he had asked about this topic. Many of the answers simply consisted of a phrase such as “she never talked about sports.” Other mothers went as far as not supporting their daughters doing sports because they felt sports are mainly for boys, or they did not want them to get hurt. “She did not really care about sports; she did not support me doing sports so eventually I got discouraged.” “She never understood what sports were.” “She paid very little attention to sports.” Sports and recreation activities is the topic that received the clearest response from the participants.

Fears

Some daughters expressed that “my mom has never been concerned about much,” “she has never expressed any fears to me so I never really think about bad stuff happening.” In this case, it appears that the mother was more concerned with hiding from the daughter the things that she was afraid of. Or maybe the mother did not want to create any fears in the daughter’s by expressing to her the things that she was afraid of in life. As one participant put it “she has never expressed any major fears to me,” another participant continues “she has never told me anything about her fears. I don’t have any major fears other than losing a family member and my own life” Some mothers did not disclose much about any fears to their daughters, but one thing they told them was that they did not want to lose them. “She only told me that she was afraid of losing us.” “She said she did not want us to fail in life.” Another participant expressed “my mom just did not want anything happening to her kids.” As expressed by the daughters, mothers either did not want to show any fears to their daughters and if they did it was related to the daughters’ well being.

Relationships

Some women stated that they had acquired some of their mothers’ traits when it came to dealing with other individuals simply by observing how the mother behaved. One participant explained “my mother does not call anybody just to talk, I am the same way.” Other participants agreed that their mothers were part of large families and therefore it was sometimes difficult to establish solid ties with their siblings. The participants said that their mothers never talked to them about their romantic relationships or with their family members. A participant concluded that: My mom is a very private person, especially with me. She does not disclose anything about her private life. My mother did not really talk to me about any of her relationships; a couple of things here and there,

but very superficial. Another participant continued “she would tell me many things, but they did not mean anything, it was all bogus stuff.”

Sex

The main claims coming from the daughters is that they were not interested in talking to their mothers about sex, on the other hand the daughters who did want to talk with the mothers about sex said that their mother would attempt to talk to them, but it was mainly superficial information. One participant asserted “she would only try to talk about on the surface, nothing really serious.” According to a number of participants, the mothers saw sex as taboo in the household. One participant went as far as saying that her mother was a prude. For some mothers their religious beliefs may have played a factor in their conservatism when it came to talking to their daughters about sex. As one participant put it “my mom has never said the word sex in front of me, so I really don’t talk about it.” According to one participant, her mother took an extreme action when “my mom found out that I had premarital sex [and] she tried to commit suicide with me in the car.” It appears that the message mothers wanted to express to their daughters was that they must wait until marriage before they have sex. “She gave me advice and told me to wait until marriage, but she knew that I might find somebody I really cared about, but I listened to her and haven’t had sex.”

Drugs/Alcohol

As one daughter put it “we never had any conversations about it.” “It was never a problem and we never talked about it.” Even though they did not engage in many talks with their daughters about it, other mothers gave them the freedom to choose what was best for them after they were overage. “My mom did not say much about it, she said it is ok to try it after I turn twenty one.” Other mothers express themselves to their daughters in ways that sent indirect

message, for example, by not consuming any kind of alcoholic beverage. One participant revealed “my mom did not talk to me about drugs and alcohol; she did not even take Tylenol.” Other participant expressed “my mom has never drunk, she cannot drink; she has influenced me a lot nonverbally.” A participant continued “I do not remember her ever telling me to drink or not to drink; I just knew by her actions I could not do it.” In other households it appears that not much had to be said to understand that these substances were forbidden. Several participants expressed that they were aware they could not do it. “I do not remember her ever telling me anything about it; I just knew not to do it.”

Politics

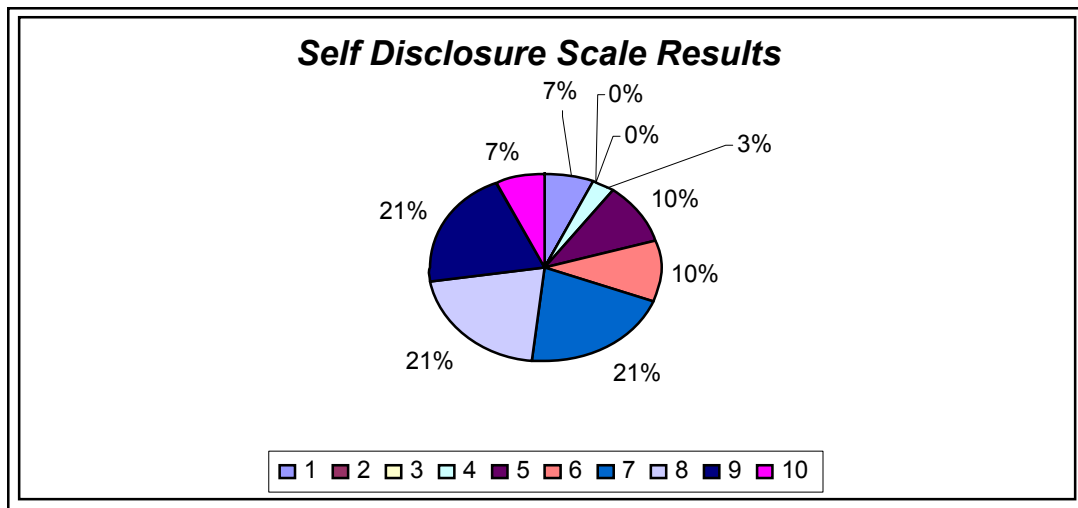
Some of the mothers were very liberal about allowing their daughters to create their own viewpoints about politics. The participants agreed that if the mother was not interested in politics she would sometimes encourage the daughter to be involved because she felt it was important although she was not involved. One participant explained “my mom never told me anything about her preferences; she told me I had to create my own and I have.” Other participants simply stated that their mother did not care about politics and expressed it openly to their daughters. “No, she did not say anything about it so I really don’t care much for politics.” “My mom does not care about politics.” “Let me just sum it up for you, she does not talk to me about anything!” Other participants expressed that although their mothers did not talk to them about politics, they would always hear the mothers talking to the fathers about it. Some of the participants expressed that they engaged mostly in any kind of political talks with either their father or an older sibling, but rarely with their mother. One participant articulated that “my mom never talked to me about politics, I learned mostly from my brother.” Politics was a clearly marked terrain

for the daughters, they either knew their mothers were into politics or they hated it. There is a clear line separating where people stand.

The fourth research question (RQ4) asks “To what degree do African American and Hispanic American college-age daughters perceive that their mothers self-disclose to them?” The information obtained from the following communication scale attempts to answer this question:

Communication Scale: Daughters Rating of Their Mothers’ Self Disclosure

During the focus group interviews, the facilitator employed a final question to sum up the general feelings of how the daughters perceive their mothers’ overall self-disclosure and the reasons why they feel as they do. This final question was employed as a 10-point scale ranging from (1) low self-disclosure to (10) high self-disclosure (see appendix).



*This chart represents the results, in percentages, of how the participants perceived their mother’s overall self-disclosure. This was measured on a scale from 1-10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest.

Sixty nine percent of the participants (n=20) gave their mother a seven or higher rating (i.e. six participants gave their mother a seven, six gave their mother eight, six gave their mother a nine, and two participants said that their

mother deserved a ten rating. The mean for all the participants' answers was *seven*). This number appears to reflect the participants' answers during the interviews. The twenty participants who gave their mothers a score of seven or higher represented sixty two percent (n=18) of all the participants in the study. Thus, slightly over half of the subjects felt their mothers used self-disclosure with them.

Sixty nine percent, (n=20) of the participants reported that their mother talked to them about the study's topics. These twenty participants expressed that their mother shared personal information to them. They said that their mothers were very observant and constantly disclosed to their daughters information regarding their past experiences related to the topics used in this study. Some of the daughters continued that in some instances their mother would attempt more information than the daughters needed. When it came to topics such as sex and romantic relationships, some of the daughters said that their mother would try to be explicit but the daughters refused to listen to what their mothers had to say because they thought it was "too much information." These participants also revealed that their mothers were always available to discuss difficult topics with them such as sex, religion, and self esteem. These participants also reported that they not only were influenced by their mothers' verbal disclosure but also by their nonverbal messages. In addition, the mothers who talked more to their daughters were perceived more as a close friend and warmer individuals as opposed to the mothers who were in the lower end of the scale, they were said to be either shy, private, or simply dry individuals.

Thirty one percent, (n=9) of the participants gave their mothers a score of six or lower. Those participants who expressed their mother deserved a six or lower rating said that their mothers were just "very private" women who did not really verbalize much to anyone. Others expressed that their mothers had a hard

time expressing their feelings but that they meant well, and they influenced their daughters immensely with their nonverbal messages. Other daughters suggested that their mothers were shy women who struggled with having in-depth conversations with their teenage daughters about any topic, and especially topics such as sex, religion, self esteem and the mother's romantic relationships.

Although these participants expressed that their mother did not self-disclose much to them, some of them worked hard at being influential in their daughters' lives. Even though their messages were always superficial, they did attempt to serve as positive examples to their daughters by instilling in them a solid work ethic and high moral values as exemplified by their behavior.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the focus group interviews yielded relevant data that allowed the researcher to reach several conclusions regarding the inquiries made in this study. The focus groups' questions served to obtain data that will be used by the researcher to better understand the dynamics of interpersonal communication between African and Hispanic American mothers and daughters.

Topics with High Communication Frequency

Work Ethic

Work ethic was one of the most clearly defined topics per the data collected in the focus group interviews. Twenty-two participants stated that their mothers disclosed information to them about the importance in developing a strong work ethic. This data suggests that Black and Hispanic mothers see themselves as women who must overcome obstacles in order to move forward and they appear to convey this information to their daughters as articulated by the daughters. From the answers that the researcher received, it was evident that the mothers felt as if this was one, if not, the most important information that they could convey to their daughters in order for them to have a better future.

Religion

The results on this topic varied immensely. Most of the participants stated that they were raised in religious homes with families that attend a religious center on a regular basis while other participants had not really had this experience until they attended with friends and their families. Within the group of daughters that came from families that frequented a religious service, some stated that religion seemed like an obsession to their mothers due to the fear of what could happen otherwise, while other mothers allowed their daughters to have an option. This is a very interesting observation because one of the reasons

why the researcher chose some of these socially polarizing topics is to see how parents, in this case mothers, interplay with them and their children. These subjects reflected how a topic such as religion can be polarizing because people hold very different views about it.

Nutrition/Eating Habits

It would be interesting to question the mothers to find out the reasons why they stressed their daughters to keep a slim figure and not gain weight, sometimes even superseding staying healthy. It would also be interesting to examine if the mothers are stricter with their daughters as opposed to their sons regarding dieting and proper eating habits.

Menstrual Period

The menstrual period is one of the topics the researcher expected the participants to reveal that their mothers disclosed the most. The reason for this is because the mother is the female parent and as one that has been through the same experience. It would be expected of the mother to be the one who carefully coaches the daughter through the beginning stages of this process.

It is important to point out that many of the mothers were considerably older than their counterparts. So the generational gap may play a role in the way some of the mothers approached dealing with their daughters and the menstrual period. Some of the mothers were in their sixties, while others were only in their early forties. Maybe older mothers were more reluctant to discuss the topic than younger mothers. As more research is conducted on this subject, the researcher expects this number to increase because the mother should be the first in line to coach her daughter through this always difficult initial phase of the menstrual period.

Academics

When it came to academics, the daughters and the mothers seemed to have developed open channels of communication because those mothers who talked to their daughters about academics did so consistently, based on the daughters reports. The mothers viewed academics as important aspect of moving forward in this society and they talked to their daughters about their scholastic experiences whenever necessary. As stated in the results section, 65% of the daughters revealed that their mother's communicated with them about topics surrounding academics with the intention of encouraging them to perform well in school. One interesting observation is the fact that although the women whose mothers did not stress the importance of an education still wound up attending college. This is important because although certain things are not emphasized by the mothers, the daughters still managed to make decisions with certain important things in life such as going to college.

Self Esteem

Based on the participants' testimonials during the interviews it is interesting to see how women who belong to these communities appear to struggle with self esteem. It is also interesting to note that based on the participants reports, the mothers are open with their daughters about their struggles with self esteem. Some participants were not afraid to show their emotions when it came to their experiences with their mothers dealings with self esteem. This denotes that both daughters and mothers were not afraid to expose themselves in order to receive help from their loved one.

Topics with Low Communication Frequency

Sports

Twenty-three out of twenty nine participants revealed that their mothers did not talk to them about sports. The daughters' reports suggest that certain

views about women are still stand today. The participants' nonverbal behavior during the focus group interview was interesting to observe how they knew immediately that sports was not a topic their mothers cared to discuss with them.

Fears

This was a topic that also yielded interesting results because the participants revealed that their mothers, as opposed to topics such as self-esteem, were very apprehensive about showing their daughters any sign of fears. The mothers, based on the daughters' reports, seemed to be very apprehensive about revealing any fears to their daughters as this would appear as a sign of weakness. The main fear that surfaced from the daughters' revelations was that the mothers were afraid of anything to happen to their daughters.

Relationships

Although this study has a small sample, it is interesting to observe how such an important topic for anyone is somewhat disregarded by some of the mothers. One would think that coaching and disclosing important information to our children would be a primary task for any parent, but it does not appear to be the case based on the information collected from this study.

Sex

The main observation that came from this topic was that although some of the mothers were willing to disclose information to their daughters about sex and sexual behavior, nineteen participants (65%) stated that they were not interested in discussing with their mothers any topic related to sex because it was embarrassing and also they felt more comfortable with girlfriends who were going through the same experiences they were going through.

Drugs/Alcohol

Nonverbal communication seemed to play an important factor when it came to the influence the mothers had on the daughters regarding drugs and

alcohol. Some of the participants revealed that their mothers did not have to disclose much because they knew from their mothers' actions and nonverbal messages that these substances were prohibited at all times. When the mothers did disclose information it was to pose friends and family members who had succumbed to the effects of drugs and alcohol.

Politics

This study attempted to explore not only non-controversial topics, but also divisive ones. This study examined how the mothers' communication regarding controversial topics played out in the familial context. Politics is a topic that yielded interesting data because the participants who expressed that their mothers disclosed about politics were very passionate about what they discussed with their mothers and their mothers' revelations. These daughters seemed to have been influenced by their mothers' communication on the topics, while the daughters who reported that their mothers did not participate in politics did not seem to be as passionate about this topic. This result partially speaks of the mothers' influence over their daughters the researcher hypothesized in this study.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has limitations that must be brought to light because by minimizing these limitations, in the future the researcher can improve the study's implementation. This research follows a previous study conducted by the researcher on African and Hispanic American fathers and sons. This present study attempted to improve or fill in some of the voids left by that study. By expanding the number of participants, the researcher wanted to examine if certain patterns of communication from the parents persisted. The researcher also wanted to explore the difference in communication dynamics in the family by focusing on the females rather than the males. It appears that some of the communication patterns fathers used with their sons persisted with the mothers and their daughters. The African and Hispanic American women reports in the focus group interviews revealed that many mothers, seen sometimes as the more sensitive and understanding of the two parents, may not disclose with their daughters more than the fathers do with their sons.

One of the major limitations was sample size. Although the sample size was expanded, this sample is still not substantial enough to be able to more thoroughly examine this topic. However, the researcher believes this number was adequate to observe some general descriptions of communication between mothers and daughters. Additionally, if the sample is larger and certain communication patterns between parents and children continues this helps validate the researcher's hypothesis. Besides the small sample size, the focus group interviews by themselves may not be the best method to collect data for this topic. This method could be coupled with a quantitative method to strengthen the study's assessment. A pre and a post test would probably add valuable information to the study's results. Although the participants appeared to be open and honest with their answers, the focus group interview setting may

not be the best context in which to openly express oneself regarding communication with one's mother.

Perhaps one the most apparent limitations this study poses is the facilitator's gender. As a Hispanic male, the facilitator may have been a hindrance for some of the participants to express more candidly about their relationship with their mother. Talking about intimate topics within our families is not easy and it would probably be more difficult to discuss with someone of the opposite sex. A Hispanic or African American female may have created a more cohesive environment for the daughters to express themselves. A female facilitator may have also found that some experiences related to her and express it to the participants, and this may have opened up the dialogue.

Family communication is a critical characteristic of our daily lives, finding a way to improve communication in the familial setting should be a main concern for communication scholars. One of this study's goals is that it can serve as a springboard for future research on family communication in minority groups. There are many studies on family communication, but not that many that specifically focus on how Hispanic and African American families communicate and how this communication could be improved. Bringing awareness and insight to this topic may be the most significant contribution of this study.

In spite of its limitations, this study possesses great value that can be useful for future scholars exploring related topics. African and Hispanic Americans represent the two largest minority groups in the United States. These cultures are reported to have high divorce rates, and a high number of single-parent homes where the mother is the sole parent. The study of family communication in the Hispanic and African American communities is of great

importance as these populations continue to grow and become an integral part of the fabric of the United States.

APPENDIX

Focus Group Interview Outline

Introduction:

- a. Introduction of facilitator (“My name is _____, I will be the moderator for this focus group, thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study.”)
- b. Introduce topic & purpose of study (“The topic we will be talking about today is the dynamics of interpersonal communication between African and Hispanic American mothers with their daughters. The purpose of this study is to examine how your mother’s communication has influenced you as an adult in different areas of your life.”)
- c. Explain participants rules for focus group (read below):

***Focus Group Interviews Rules:**

Read Informed Consent out loud

- a. Speak honestly and do not make judgments of others.
- b. Be respectful even if you disagree. Allow each other to explore their thoughts and feelings, even if they make you uncomfortable.
- c. Speak but allow others to speak
- d. Speak only for yourself
- e. Confidentiality is very important
- f. Time limit of 10 minutes per item, which means 2 min. per person on average.

Topics and Questions to Guide Discussion

1. Relationships:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding her relationships with others and how you feel this influences the way you interact in the same contexts with other people:

- A. Relationships with her classmates
- B. Relationships with her Peers
- C. Relationships with her Family Members
- D. Her Romantic Relationships

2. Education:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding academics. Have these disclosures had an effect on the way you approach academics in college?

- A. Inquiries about homework and how she handled hers
- B. Interest in grades/grade reports; any disclosure about hers
- C. Talks about her college choices/careers to serve as example for yours

3. Work Ethic:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding her work ethic. Have these talks had an influence in the way you handle yourself today?

- A. Influence of house chores/teaching them, did she show you how she does them
- B. Talks about types of jobs/ location and careers and how she managed herself

4. Nutrition:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures regarding her nutrition/eating habits and whether this has had an effect on your lifestyle:

- A. Concerns about diet/eating habits, did she give you any personal examples about hers
- B. Talks about eating disorders, disclosure of hers (if any)

5. Sports/Recreation:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding sports and recreational activities and how this influenced you to like/dislike sports.

- A. Talks about sports, teams, players; her sports abilities/inabilities
- B. Did she show any interest in your sports abilities, teach you anything

6. Sex:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures regarding sex and whether you feel it shaped your attitude towards sex today.

- A. Any jokes about it related to her life
- B. Talks about Masturbation, teach you anything
- C. Her sexual experiences as examples for yours
- D. Sexual orientation (any disclosure about wanting to be with same sex partner)

7. Menstrual Period:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding the menstrual period and whether you feel these revelations influenced the way you deal with/see the female menstrual period today.

- A. Did she express it as being a taboo in the house?
- B. Was your mother apprehensive/open about her experiences with her period
- C. Was she open or apprehensive about sanitary approaches?

8. Politics:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding politics in general and whether these talks helped shape the way you view politics.

- A. General Issues of importance, her feelings about them
- B. Her Political party preferences, explained why?
- C. Candidate preferences (if different from her party), explained why?

9. Spirituality:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding spirituality and any topics related to religion. Have these talks influenced you in any way?

- A. Any talks about being spiritually rich
- B. Conversations about her religious involvement/saying prayers
- C. Openly expressing personal belief system? Did it influence you?

10. Drugs/Alcohol:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding drugs/alcohol and whether these revelations have had an influence in the way you deal with issues surrounding these substances.

- A. Educational talks about these topics
- B. Disclosure about friends/herself using drugs/alcohol
- C. Any talks about close family members using drugs/alcohol?

11. Self-Esteem:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding any self-esteem problems. Also talk about any observations of your mother's non-verbal messages about self-esteem and whether this has influenced you in any way.

- A. Talks about life aspirations and steps toward reaching goals
- B. Disclosure about self-esteem (low confidence level)

12. Fears:

Please tell me about your mother's disclosures to you regarding her main fears in life, whether these talks have influenced you in any way.

- A. Any revelations about her main fears
- B. Any disclosure of being afraid of going to jail, personal safety, death, sexual abuse, life-threatening diseases.

13. Self Disclosure Scale:

- Using a scale from 1 – 10, with one being the lowest level and ten being the highest level, how would you rate your mother's communication with you and why?

Closing Statements:

- Thank you for participating in this focus group interview.
- Be respectful of others; everything said here, must stay here.
- Remember that you have signed an informed consent form in which you promised to maintain confidentiality.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author, Wilfredo Alvarez, was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic on September 12, 1978. The author is the oldest of three children born to Wilfredo Alvarez and Natividad Lajara. The author was raised in Santo Domingo until the age of sixteen when he relocated to the Bronx, New York.

The author attended Nuestra Senora del Rosario de Fatima High School in Santo Domingo. Upon completion of four years of high school in the Dominican Republic the author moved to the Bronx, New York where he completed another two years of high school at Theodore Roosevelt High School. After completing high school in the Bronx in the summer of 1997, the author matriculated at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) that following fall. While at RIT, the author was involved with several student clubs and organizations and received several honors. The author enjoyed many leadership roles including Student Government College of Liberal Arts Senator and president of Latino America Unida, Lambda Alpha Upsilon Fraternity, Inc. The author also served as Social Coordinator and Active Student Member of the Latin American Student Association as well as Student Representative for the Assistant Provost for Diversity Advisory Committee. The author made Dean's List several academic quarters and received student leader recognition from several offices at the institute. As part of his degree requirement, the author completed two Cooperative Education Program experiences at Manufacturers and Traders Trust Company (M & T Bank) as a Financial Service Representative.

The author attained his Bachelor of Science degree in Professional and Technical Communication (PTC) on May 25, 2002. After completing his BS, the author began his graduate work in communication at the Florida State University (FSU) in the fall of 2003. This master's thesis is submitted to the FSU College of Communication in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the

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During the author's tenure as a student at the Florida State University he worked on several projects related to several areas in the communication field. The author completed research projects in the rhetoric of the civil rights movement as well as Lloyd F. Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation theory. The author also conducted research in the area of mass communication, specifically film, by conducting a study that analyzed how people are influenced by the amount of information placed in motion picture trailers. The author also conducted research in the areas of organizational and intercultural communication. He completed research papers focused on how effective intercultural communication influences our interactions with people who are different.

The author also served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for three semesters. The author taught the Fundamentals of Speech labs. This course is required for all FSU students. The course focused on different theories in the field of communication as well as an introductory course for beginning public speakers. This course met the Oral Communication Competency Requirement (OCCR) for all FSU students.

After completing his Master of Science degree, the author aspires to continue his education by pursuing a doctorate degree in the areas of interpersonal/organizational communication. The author plans on using his education to serve as a positive role model to influence the lives of people the same way his life has been influenced by others. The author aspires to become an educator and a mentor to young adults.