


2016

Decoding Metacommunication Patterns From African American Single Mothers to Sons

Michael-Kamau Henderson
Walden University

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Walden University

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Michael-Kamau Henderson

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Walden University

2016

Abstract

Decoding Metacommunication Patterns From African American Single Mothers to Sons

by

Michael-Kamau Henderson

MPA, Metropolitan College of New York, 2010

BPS, Audrey Cohen College of New York, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services: Criminal Justice

Walden University

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Abstract

With a significant number of African American single-parent families responsible for raising a generation of male children, the focus of this qualitative case study was on exploring the African American single mother-son dyad to identify metacommunicative signals delivered from mothers to sons. This study was grounded in a theoretical framework combining attachment theory and social learning theory. The research questions focused on identifying metacommunication messages passed from mothers to sons and how metacommunication patterns influence the youth's social identity. Four single mothers with adolescent sons and 4 unrelated adult sons of single mothers participated in semistructured interviews. Data were collected and analyzed using content analysis and coding supported with NVivo software. Key findings revealed that the metacommunication was a dominant form of communication in the African-American family construct, and affected the parenting styles. From the mother's retrospective reports, African-American mother's adapted an authoritarian or helicopter parenting styles to control and protect their sons from racism, becoming victims of crime and violence, being arrested, or incarcerated. The key finding from the sons' retrospective reports was that negative metacommunication from single mothers to sons was associated with insecure attachment, avoidance, and risky behaviors. The implications for social change are that positive metacommunication can strengthen the African American single mother-son dyad. This information may lead to intervention strategies for targeting negative metacommunication patterns from African American single mothers to sons and teaching new communication rules that foster a secure relationship.

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Dedication

As the first member of my family to receive a doctorate, I dedicate this research to the Henderson and Houser family. I hope my trail-blazing experience will inspire the younger generation as well as those family members who desire to pursue academic excellence.

Acknowledgments

This study is a tribute to the African American single mothers who invited into their lives to listen to their stories and challenges of raising sons in the inner city. I also thank the unrelated sons for contributing their time and insights on the experience of being an African American male raised in a single-parent household and its impact on their prosocial development. Thanks to the mothers and the unrelated sons, I know more about the dynamic of the mother-son dyad and how it shapes the son's social, emotional, and cognitive development over their lifespan.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Barbara Benoliel, Dr. Tracey Phillips, and Dr. Kimberly Farris for their dedication and for helping me shape and frame this study. I thank my spouse, Linda, and my sister-in-law, brothers, friends, and colleagues who have supported me through the years with unwavering encouragement and advice. Finally, I thank Sonia Castleberry for her editing service, advice, and timely response.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The movements of expression in the face and body, whatever their origin may have been, are in themselves of much importance for our welfare. They serve as the first means of communication between the mother and her infants; she smiles approval, and this encourages her child on the right path, or frowns disapproval. The movements of expression give vividness and energy to our spoken words.

—Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 1872.

Researchers have identified the particularly important role interpersonal communication between mothers and sons plays in the sons' social development; for instance, it can foster bonding, self-esteem, or self-efficacious or risk-taking behavior (Bandura, 1977; Elliott, Powell, & Brenton, 2013; Piquero & Sealock, 2010; Runcan, Constantianu, Ielics, & Popa, 2012; Sterrett, Jones, & Kincaid, 2009). Bekoff (1972), Bateson (1972), and Flaherty and Sadler (2011) discussed interpersonal communication from the lens of metacommunication. Metacommunication is a form of communication that involves a variety of nonverbal behaviors such as kinesics, body language, and the paralinguistic use of the voice, which is altered through loudness, pitch, and tone. Metacommunication is significant to relationship building, learning appropriate social skills, developing social identity and trust, defining the relationship, and understanding how these signals can impact prosocial development (Flaherty & Sadler, 2011).

When it comes to mothers as single parents raising sons, it appears that interpersonal communication might play an even more significant role in relationships

between single mothers and their sons. Numerous researchers have argued that adolescents raised in single-parent households are more prone to risky and delinquent behavior than those from two-parent homes, and that interpersonal relationships may affect the child's psychosocial well-being (Elliott et al., 2013; Piquero & Sealock, 2010; Runcan et al., 2012; Sterrett et al., 2009). Further, researchers have found that African American boys raised by single mothers are at risk of coming into conflict with the law (Akhlaq, Malik, & Khan, 2013; Lindberg, Fugett, & Lounder, 2014; Savage, 2014).

In the African American community, interpersonal communication is predominantly metacommunicative, meaning that it is indirect or implicit (Bateson, 1981; Leong, 1993). However, the body of knowledge on the metacommunication process in the African American single-parent household is limited. The focus of the present study was an exploration of how interpersonal communication issues, including metacommunications, between single-parent mothers and sons might influence secure attachment, avoidance and risky behavior, and son's encounters with the criminal justice system (Cupach, Canary, & Spitzberg, 2010; Flaherty & Sadler, 2011; Gantt & Greif, 2009; Mooney, Deatrack, & Horowitz, 2014). This research might lead to the development of intervention strategies to target negative communication patterns that might impede the sons' social development or ability to engage in positive interpersonal relationships. Further, results from this study might provide insight on how communication strategies can empower African American single parents by increasing communication competence, which could then lead to improving interpersonal relationships with their sons. Most importantly, this study might add to the gap in the

body of knowledge described as interpersonal pragmatics (Arundale, 2013); in this case an African American single mothers experience of raising her son or sons.

This chapter includes the study's background, problem statement, research questions, nature, and theoretical frameworks. It also includes the research questions; definitions of key terms; and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. It concludes with a discussion of the study's significance and a brief overview of the remaining chapters.

Background of the Study

Researchers have found that approximately 70% of African American children are born out of wedlock and when young, 67% of this population lives in single-parent homes, which is disproportionate to the rest of the U.S. population (Elliott et al., 2013; Parent, Jones, Forehand, Cuellar, & Shoulberg, 2013). Numerous studies have shown that adolescents raised in single-parent households are more prone to risky and delinquent behavior than those from two-parent homes (Elliott et al., 2013; Piquero & Sealock, 2010; Runcan et al., 2012; Sterrett et al., 2009). Further, researchers have found that African American boys raised in single-parent households face disproportionately higher rates of detention, suspension, expulsion, and special education placement in schools compared to those in two-parent households (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010; Woolard, 2009).

According to Gantt and Greif (2000), the interpersonal relationship between single African American mothers and their sons constantly evolves as the mothers continue developing coping strategies for raising and protecting their sons. Important to the present study, Gantt and Greif also emphasized the importance of understanding the

interpersonal dyad from an historical context and how it has influenced the parenting styles of African American mothers. Lindberg et al. (2014) found that a negative interpersonal relationship can foster attachment insecurity, which can lead to risky behavior and/or criminal activity.

Elliott et al. (2013) expounded on the struggle and demands of being a single African American mother raising a son and on how social policy frames many of these parents as bad mothers. The key findings in their study were that single mothers raising sons struggled more than mothers of other racial groups; were more inclined to be marginalized, unemployed, and to lack financial resources; and were more likely to be poor and live in impoverished conditions. Thus, they need the greatest assistance such as supportive community-based programs. Furthermore, Elliott et al. showed that the parenting styles of African American mothers, such as helicopter parenting, monitoring, and consistent intervention, were solely to protect their sons from a hostile and racial society. These findings are relevant because it was my assumption that African American mothers are predisposed to social strains (Agnew, 2001) that may affect how the mothers deliver metacommunicative signals to their sons.

The present study was based on the seminal work of Ainsworth (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) and Bowlby (1982), pioneers of attachment theory, and on Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. Flaherty and Sadler (2011) showed that secure attachment between adolescent mothers and children leads to positive cognitive, social, and adaptive behavior and that securely attached infants and children showed more positive long-term outcomes in self-esteem, self-efficacy, and positive

interpersonal/intrapersonal growth. Moreover, Flaherty and Sadler showed that attachment security fosters the mother's responsiveness and sensitivity to child's needs, which promotes trustworthiness, confidence, and adaptability in the child's later development. Findings from Flaherty and Sadler's study also showed that insecure attachment can lead to or is associated with negative outcomes in the cognitive and emotional domain.

Bandura's social learning theory informs how socialization and communication influence the individual or group's interpersonal/intrapersonal growth and relation to others. Bandura (1977), Bateson (1972), Bekoff (1972), and Bormann (1972), have shown that metacommunication defines the interpersonal dyad as social play or shared fantasies that influence the in-group's consciousness, social identity, and daily social interaction. Furthermore, Bateson showed that individuals who failed to decode the conveyed message were inept and more inclined to become victims or scapegoats in their social group. Cupach et al. (2010) noted the importance of managing interpersonal, intercultural, and family conflict through communication competence and constructive guidelines. Key findings from Cupach et al.'s study showed that interpersonal conflict in the child's development affected the child's interpersonal relationships with others later in life.

According to Bateson (1972), metacommunication is a form of communication that involves a variety of nonverbal behaviors such as kinesics, body language, and paralanguage or paralinguistics, which include volume, pitch, rate, and tone. It conveys coded messages that are ambiguous and often create confusion or paradoxes. Hartwell-

Walker (2009) stated that metacommunication involves nonverbal cues that can enhance or confuse how a message is interpreted or decoded in a dyadic relationship.

Branco (2005) argued that metacommunication plays a fundamental role in the context of peer and social skills development in early childhood. According to Olson, Baiocchi-Wagner, Kratzer, and Symonds (2012), there has been limited study on the correlations between stressors and communications. For example, Olsen et al. argued that unlike families in the past, families today experience a multitude of stressors such as social media; bullying and online predators; and the stress of caring for youth with disabilities, autism, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The communication process prior to and after the stressor is of interest to scholars. In the African American community, there has been limited study on postslavery influence on the African American family, how scholars have assigned meaning to the metacommunication process, and metacommunication's effects on the parent-child dyad (Gantt & Greif, 2009; Olson et al., 2012).

Problem Statement

Given the number of African American children born out of wedlock and being reared by single parents, specifically their mothers, and studies that have shown that adolescents raised in single-parent households are more prone to risky and delinquent behavior, there could be a correlation between these factors. Importantly, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory argue that early messages from the primary care provider affect the child's self-image and cognitive and behavioral development. Bowlby argued that a secure interpersonal relationship promotes

positive outcomes over the child's lifespan and that early attachment styles can impact the child's later life with others. Bandura showed that observational learning—that is, the child mimicking and modeling the behavior of the parents or normative behavior—promotes secure attachment and cognitive and emotional adaptive behavior as well as strengthens the child's relationship with others. Furthermore, researchers have found that communication incompetence can influence attachment anxiety and disrupt the child's interpersonal-intrapersonal development with family members and others (Akhlaq et al., 2013; Cupach et al., 2010; Keating, Russell, Cornacchione, & Smith, 2013; Olson et al., 2012). According to Lindberg et al. (2014), criminal behavior, alcoholism, and depression are a few variables that have been linked to attachment insecurities. Thus, the evidence shows that insecure attachment is correlated with externalized behavioral problems and criminality.

Akhlaq et al. (2013) stated that society's fundamental building blocks depend on family and social structures as well as cultural beliefs and values. As such, communication is most important during the adolescent years. Akhlaq et al. described family communication as a way in which verbal and nonverbal exchanges allow family members to express their needs and desires and resolve conflicts in the family. Effective communication skills, according to Akhlaq et al., can lead to positive resolution through developing coping strategies, problem-solving skills, school achievement, moral maturity, and the ability to handle stress, thereby fostering adaptability and togetherness.

There is extensive research on African American parenting styles (Sterrett et al., 2009; Tamis-Lemonda, Briggs, McClowry, & Snow, 2008) and how socioeconomic

conditions such as poverty, impoverished communities, unemployment, public assistance, and the absence of fathers create social strains that can impact the single parent (Agnew, 2001; Bandura, 1977; Kingston, Hizinga, & Elliott, 2009). After conducting a review of the literature, I found few studies specifically on interpersonal communication between African American single mothers and their sons (Branco, 2005; Elliott et al., 2013; Gantt & Greif, 2009; Collins, 2008; Koesten & Anderson, 2009; Runcan et al., 2012). There appeared to be a need for research exploring the metacommunication patterns used by single mothers and how their now adult sons interpreted the messages, which contributed to forming their social and personal identities. Specifically, there is a gap in the literature on implicit metacommunication patterns between African American single mothers and sons and how these patterns might help or hinder the development of the interpersonal growth necessary for managing risky behavior (Elliott et al., 2013; Gantt & Greif, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide an understanding of the communication processes between African American single mothers and their sons and to explore the benefits of identifying implicit metacommunication patterns in this mother-son dyad (see Appendix A for an illustration of this process). Researchers have shown that metacommunication defines relationships, builds relationships, and conveys communication patterns. They have shown how metacommunicative signals can encourage or hinder interpersonal growth (Andresen, 2005; Bateson, 1981; Bekoff, 1972). In addition, metacommunicative signals are conveyed through paralinguistic and nonverbal cues skills acquired earlier in life, which involve decoding or interpreting

signals in order to understand the message. Metacommunication was relevant to the study because it informs how patterns of communication and nonverbal or paralinguistic behavior used in a mother-son dyad can strengthen or weaken the interpersonal relationship. Moreover, it informs how a positive or negative behavior in the parent-child dyad, such as a parent's responding to the needs of the child through smiling, touching, and eye contact, can impact the child's social development and lead to a more secure relationship (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1982).

Research Questions

The focus of the present study was how metacommunication messages are delivered from African American single mothers to their sons and how the sons make meaning of the messages. The questions developed to reflect the phenomenon under study and to guide the research were: What are the metacommunication messages delivered from single mothers to sons in an African American mother-son dyad, and how do implicit metacommunication patterns influence the youth's social identity as young adult?

Theoretical Bases of This Study

The theoretical frameworks of this study were Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory. Bowlby stressed the major influence of parent-child attachment on the child's social and cognitive development. He argued that a secure relationship between parent and child fosters adaptive behavior, independence, and self-efficacy and increases self-esteem and positive interpersonal growth over the individual's lifespan. On the other hand, an insecure relationship can result in avoidance

and maladaptive behavior, low self-esteem, and the child seeking emotional comfort elsewhere. Bandura argued that social learning informs socialization readiness—that is, cooperation and cognitive, affective, and emotional competence. Social learning promotes collectivity, which encourages sharing and individuals engaging in the same cultural experience. His findings also showed that social learning involves observational learning such as mirroring the behavior of others, mastering specific skills, motor skills, and the ability to verbalize and remember (Bandura, 1977). Bandura also found that symbolic communication or social media, which motivates and guides one's actions, influences cognitive and affective behavior, and he asserted that human development is embedded in the ecology of the human experience or collective experience (Bandura, 2011).

These communication patterns can have even further consequences. According to the literature, risky behavior and delinquency are influenced by implicit communication patterns developed in the interpersonal relationship between a single mother and son (Bormann, 1972). In addition, ineffective communication can foster or decrease prosocial development in the adolescent, increasing the potential for communication incompetence, a deficit in interpersonal skills, and low self-esteem, and may lead to deviant and risky behavior (Bormann, 1972; Gantt & Greif, 2009; Keating et al., 2013).

The Nature of This Study

An interpretive, qualitative parallel case study approach was employed for the present study. According to Marshall (1996), the intent of qualitative research is to inform and provide an understanding of the psychosocial phenomenon fostering the

cognitive and affective growth of the respondents, and it is the most effective approach for answering why and how questions.

I conducted eight case studies. Four cases were drawn from a population of single African American mothers of sons and four cases were drawn from a population of unrelated African American men ages 18 years and older. The rationale for selecting sons from unrelated mothers was to avoid potential bias between mothers and sons. I also wished to avoid verbal disagreements between mothers and sons on the interpretation of messages or the sons feeling the need to protect their mothers; that is, not to contradict them or to help them save face.

There were two sets of interview sessions. The first set of sessions included semistructured interviews with the mothers to identify and code recollections of implicit metacommunication. Messages from the mothers were collected from the transcribed data retrieved from the recording and observations done during the interviews. The content was then analyzed to identify implicit communication patterns, coded, categorized into themes, and cross-coded to compare coding of mothers to sons. The second session involved interviews and recorded sessions with adult sons raised by African American single mothers in different households. In this case, the data collected were based on the sons' experiences, recall, and interpretation of the implicit metacommunication messages, such as their mother's words and body and facial expressions. The analysis emphasized the importance of communication patterns, the parent-child dyad, social identity, and how the sons experience the interpersonal dyad between themselves and their mothers.

The findings contribute to the limited body of linguistic knowledge in this particular area and can edify human services providers in the fields of education, corrections, counseling, and medicine as well as parents who are affected by communication incompetence. The findings could also provide information for supporting intervention strategies to compliment behavioral and cognitive therapy by informing therapists about negative metacommunication patterns in the mother-son dyad.

Definition of Terms

Interpersonal pragmatics: This term refers to the study of language used in interpersonal experiences during contact through media, face to face, or in small groups. In addition, the concept includes the study of metaphors, models, and linguistic theories (Arundale, 2013).

Metacommunication: Metacommunication refers to a variety of paralinguistic and nonverbal forms of communication and behaviors such as kinesics, body language, and the paralinguistic use of voice, loudness, pitch, and tone. It conveys coded messages that are ambiguous and often create confusion or paradoxes (see Appendix B for a metacommunication model; Bateson, 1981; Mandal, 2014; Runcan et al., 2012).

Mother's absence: This concept refers to a lack of physical affection, attachment, comfort contact, or social engagement in a parent-child dyad (Bandura, 2009; Flaherty & Sadler, 2011).

Mother's involvement: The interpersonal relationship between mother and son has been described by Bandura (2011) as the socialization process that impacts the son's cognitive and affective growth through the following: attention, which is due to interest

and attraction; retention, or remembering symbolic forms; and motor reproduction, which uses motor skills as well as intrinsic and extrinsic influences.

Mothers' presence: The mother's presence includes parental interaction and patterns of communication, responsibility, and bonding, which can encourage or impede self-efficacious behaviors and interpersonal and intrapersonal growth into adolescence and over the lifespan (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 2015; Bowlby, 1982).

Personal identity: This term describes individual perceptions of self and personal attributes and interpersonal relationships with others as well as understanding one's strengths and weakness, which is also linked to low or high self-esteem (Luyckx et al., 2013).

Self-efficacy: Self-efficacy refers to the individual's confidence, goal attainment, and performance—that is, to achieving a specific task through hard work, perseverance, and a plan of action (Dubois-Comtois, Moss, Cyr & Pascuzzo, 2013; Erozkhan, 2013).

Self-esteem: A self-evaluation that is an approval or disapproval of self, self-esteem is the belief that an individual has significance, success, and self-worth, which impact social and personal identity as well as self-efficacious behavior (Bandura, 1977; Bjornebekk, 2008; Dubois-Cyr & Moss, 2013).

Social identity: This concept refers to individuals' perceptions of their relation to the in-group or group members and the development of language, how communication is utilized and developed within the small group, and or influence on the members' perception or biases (Hackel, Lossner, & Van Bavel, 2014; Harwood & Giles, 2005).

Assumptions

Assumptions for this study included that the participants would speak openly and honestly in responding to the questions. A second assumption was that the experiences they described were recalled as examples of the kinds of experiences of the group they represented, either single-parent African American mothers or sons of single-parent African American mothers.

Scope and Delimitations

The present study was limited to an exploration of metacommunication in the context of an African American single mother-son dyad; it did not include communication involving both parents. The unit of analysis was four African American women who are single mothers 18 years of age or older raising sons and four African American men 18 years of age or older raised by single parents in different households. The unit analysis was kept narrow in order to control the saturation of data driven by the interviews and transcribed data. Only implicit interpersonal communication such as paralinguistic and nonverbal patterns of communication and how the sons encoded, decoded, and experienced the messages was considered. Finally, the study was limited to two theoretical frameworks: Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory.

Finally, the study was meant to create an understanding of the lived experiences of African American mothers and sons' interpretation of these experiences. The ultimate goal was to determine whether patterns of communication competence or incompetence

validate Bandura's (1977) social learning theory or Bowlby's (1969) theory of insecure attachment.

Limitations

In this study, the sample only represented a small group of African American women who are mothers and therefore cannot be transferred to a larger population. In addition, restricting the study to African American mothers neglected other mothers, such as stepmothers and grandmothers, who might be active in the child's life. Although the study was purposive and the participants selected were those who have the lived experience and could answer the research questions, my inquiry was limited to unrelated sons and their interpretation of messages, which could also have produced inaccuracies, personal biases, or a lack of insight (Elo et al., 2014; Morse, 2015). Unlike quantitative inquiry, this study was not designed for massive data management, which made it difficult to achieve credibility and confirmation (Morse, 2015).

The Significance of This Study for Social Change

This study is significant because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the communication process experienced in a single-parent African American mother-son dyad and an exploration of the benefits of identifying implicit metacommunication patterns. In addition, study results can inform intervention strategies for targeting negative communication patterns that might impede the sons' social development or ability to engage in positive interpersonal relationships with others. Results from this study provide insights on how communication strategies can empower parents by increasing communication competence and their interpersonal relationship with sons.

Most important, these study results add to the gap in the body of knowledge that can be described as interpersonal pragmatics.

Researchers have established that cultivating an environment that nurtures and supports the child will promote parent-child engagement as well as result in lifelong benefits such as positive interpersonal and intrapersonal growth (Bandura, 1977; Bowlby, 1982; Elliott et al., 2013; Flaherty & Sadler, 2011). Teaching parents how to respond to their children's needs through effective communication can encourage a dialog of open communication and show parents how to recognize negative communication patterns and nonverbal behaviors, which can potentially reduce risky behavior and address attachment issues and avoidance anxiety (Bowlby, 1982; Woolard, 2009). According to Ainsworth et al. (1978), Bandura (1977), Bowlby (1982), and Sahdra and Shaver (2013), when children feel secure or safe and protected, they are inclined to be self-efficacious and confident, they have a positive self-image, and as adults they have attributes of a secure and autonomous parent.

Summary

The aims of the present study were to provide a better understanding of how metacommunicative signals delivered from mothers to sons inform attachment security, avoidance behavior, cognitive and emotional growth (see Appendix C for a list of metacommunication cues). I explored how messages are conveyed through change of voice, facial expression, and body language and how sons interpret these messages. The ultimate goal was exploring metacommunicative patterns and implications of what is commonly referred to as primal communication, which define and influence the

interpersonal relationship (Bateson, 1981; Bekoff, 1972; Castelli et al., 2012; Mandal, 2014).

Using communication outcomes as a determinant, I tested Bowlby's (1969) theory of insecure and secure attachment. According to attachment and social learning theories, social interaction between mother and son establishes their interconnectedness and determines long-term consequential outcomes. In other words, these interactions shape how one behaves from childhood through adulthood (Bandura, 1977; Bowlby, 1982; Castelli et al., 2012; Craig, Gray, & Snowden, 2013; Flaherty & Sadler, 2011).

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on various models of communications, linguistics, paralinguistics, communications incompetence, and, most importantly, communication patterns that influence parent-child interpersonal experiences and their potential outcomes. Also in Chapter 2 is a description of the two theoretical frameworks that guided the study: Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory. Research methodology and measures are presented in Chapter 3. Findings from data collected for the present study are discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes study results, implications for social change, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction

The present study was exploratory in nature with a focus on patterns of metacommunication signals sent from African American single mothers to sons and on how these signals might influence insecure attachment and avoidance behavior in the sons. How sons interpret metacommunicative signals might negatively affect prosocial growth and lead to antisocial behavior and encounters with the criminal justice system (Cupach et al., 2010; Flaherty & Sadler, 2011; Gantt & Greif, 2009; Mooney-Doyle et al., 2014). Such knowledge could lead to intervention strategies designed to teach rules of communication and strengthen the interpersonal relationship between parents and children, health professionals and clients, attorneys and clients, and teachers and students (Johnson & Aaron, 2013; Runcan et al., 2012). Most important, findings from this study could help parents recognize negative metacommunication patterns that might affect their relationship with their children and their parenting style and impede their sons' social development or ability to engage in secure positive relationship with others (Akhlmaq et al., 2013; Mandal, 2014; Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, & Taylor Murphy, 2012). Further, I believed that results from this study would add to the body of knowledge described as interpersonal pragmatics.

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the theoretical foundation for the present study; specifically, work of Ainsworth et al. (1978), Bandura (1977), Bateson (1972), Bekoff (1972) Bormann (1972), and Bowlby (1982) in the field of social science, linguistics, and human development. I assert that these studies add richness and depth to

the present research because their premise of how people communicate remains relevant for interpersonal communication competence and prosocial growth.

This literature review details Bowlby's (1982) theory that attachment insecurity and avoidance behavior are related to the parent's negative response, such as not showing physical affection and not smiling, to the child's needs. Attachment security, on the other hand, reflects a positive response such as the parent smiling, touching, and using vocal cues that builds trust, confidence, and resilience and impacts the child's cognitive and emotional domain. I also explored Bandura's (1977) theory that social learning is contingent on the child's engagement with the parents or significant others as well as the environment. Hence, it is the child's experience with parents and environment, or cultural conditioning that promotes social readiness and appropriate metacommunicative skills. The combined theories formed the theoretical framework for exploring metacommunications between African American single mothers and sons and are further explored in this chapter.

Research Strategy

The literature reviewed included contemporary and archival resources due to the lack of a body of knowledge on implicit metacommunication patterns in single African American mother-son dyads. Additional resources were obtained through the general search engines ScienceDirect, EBSCO, SocINDEX, and Google Scholar. The following general search terms were used: *implicit communication*, *explicit communication*, *metacommunication*, *patterns of communication*, *interpersonal relations*, *single-parent households*, *interpersonal communication*, *intergroup communication*, *African American*

single parents, and *single-parent mother raising son*. More specific terms were used to capture the theoretical context: *social strains*, *dyadic relationships*, *bonding*, *communication conflict*, *linguistics*, *socialization*, and *lexicon*. In addition, I accessed scholarly journals related to the topic through the Schoenberg Library in Manhattan.

These searches resulted in abundant sources on explicit communication but none that provided broad knowledge or in-depth analysis of how implicit metacommunication is operationalized in a single African American mother-son dyadic relationship or how implicit metacommunication patterns are used in the African American family unit. The present study was limited to exploring metacommunication patterns, interpersonal relationships, and contextual cues in this mother-son dyadic relationship. This literature review was intended to contribute to the limited body of knowledge on metacommunication patterns in the single African American mother's household by providing a discussion of existing studies and in-depth analysis on the phenomena of metacommunication.

Theoretical Framework

Two relevant theoretical frameworks were used for this study: attachment theory and social learning theory. In undertaking this case study inquiry, I reviewed the literature to identify historical and contemporary views of the interpersonal communication process of single African American mothers and sons. Specifically, I focused on how sons decoded and encoded messages delivered by their mothers and the consequential outcomes—that is, potential attachment insecurity and avoidance behavior—resulting from the sons' interpretations of the metacommunication messages.

According to communication scholars, metacommunication is every form of communication except verbal content. It focuses more on the behavioral construct or interpretive frame and less on the verbal content expressed in the interpersonal dyad-implicit signals that define and impact the interpersonal relationship (Andresen, 2005; Bekoff, 1972; Darwin, 1872; de Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Siberg, van Gameren, & Vlug, 2009; Mandal, 2014).

According to Grof (1981), Bateson coined the term metacommunication and discussed its impact on social development. While additional research has been documented, the interpersonal mother-son dyad and social learning in the African American single-parent household remain underexplored areas. Much scholarly literature has highlighted the significance of the parent-child dyad, including literature on bonding, the effect of positive communication, communication and social identity, intergroup communication, competence, interpersonal conflict, family communication, social learning, and attachment (Bandura, 1977; Bowlby, 1982; Collins, 2008; Cupach et al., 2010; Olson et al., 2012). In addition, Collins (2008) argued that there are ecological factors, such as impoverished conditions and lack of community support and resources that contribute to what he noted as the pathology of African American women and its impact on their interpersonal/intrapersonal relationships. Collins discussed the differences in how African American mothers raised their sons and daughters as a result of these strains. Collins's (2008) study is relevant because it addressed African American women's issues from a scholarly perspective, particularly parenting, raising their sons, and dealing with absent fathers, and discussed the effects of politics, education,

relationships, and socioeconomics impact on African American mothers. Collins (2008) and Roberts (2014) argued that African American mothers were more likely than mothers of other demographics to be impacted emotionally and put under stress due to social policies that perpetrated racism. In addition, according to both researchers, African American mothers were more likely to be labeled as poor, to be single parents, and to be the least educated, which are factors more likely to impact their parenting style and interpersonal relationship with their sons. Despite the work of these two researchers, the gap in research on metacommunication from an Afrocentric construct and the interpersonal experience of the African American mother-son relationship remains.

In a seminal work, Bandura (1977) argued that social learning is a form of socialization on par with cultural conditioning, which involves individuals sharing the same cultural experiences, norms, values, customs, and religion. He described social learning as observational learning, which requires the abilities to verbalize and remember (Bandura, 1977). Bandura identified four concepts necessary for social learning: attentional behavior, or an individual's interest in or attraction to a subject; the ability to retain information, remembering actions in symbolic forms through cognition and verbalization; motor reproduction, such as physical ability or agility of behavior; and reinforcing and motivational norms, which are intrinsic or extrinsic values that influence or govern behavior. Thus, adolescents' social development depends on how their learning occurs or is experienced while socializing with others. Metacommunication is the linchpin that influences behaviors and informs cognitive and affective growth (Caine, 2011).

Bowlby (1982) stressed that attachment between parents and children affects the child's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Building from Bowlby, it may be that metacommunication patterns can also affect parent-child bonding; for instance, negative metacommunication and absence of physical proximity and verbal affection might lead to anxiety or avoidance attachment in keeping with Bowlby's ideas.

The unique contributions of the present study are a holistic description of the phenomenon of implicit metacommunication, particularly the decoding process, and the identification of the implicit metacommunication patterns in the dyadic relationship between mother and son. As Hartwell-Walker (2009) stated, a message is determined not only by the content that is communicated via verbal exchange and body language but also by paralinguistic cues such as tone of voice and diction. This form of communication in an interpersonal relationship is often coded, which can either enhance or impede the message delivered. From the perspective of symbolic convergent theory, Bormann, Knutson, and Musolf (1997) described communication as the sharing of fantasies within the in-group that fosters group interaction, cohesiveness, and expression of information, which is encoded and decoded by its members and is influenced by family, culture, and environment.

The Dynamics of Communication

Communication is defined as the explicit or implicit exchange of information between two persons. This communication is an interpersonal experience signaling who the individuals are, how they want to be identified, and how the messages should be interpreted (de Vries et al., 2009). In the present study, the emphasis was on the

paralinguistic and nonverbal communication in messages sent by mothers and decoded by sons. Researchers have found that open communication supports adolescents' interpersonal/intrapersonal relationships, self-esteem, and prosocial growth while communication incompetence leads to low, insecure attachment and self-efficacious behavior (Akhlaq et al., 2013; Cupach, 2010; Erozkhan, 2013).

Bormann (1972) argued that communication is the linchpin of group cohesiveness and is created through exchanging fantasies, stories, and jokes that elicit emotions, specifically about past and future events. Bormann et al. (1997) pointed out that these fantasies encourage a positive emotional tone and verbal exchange in the group, which I contend would reduce what Bowlby (1982) described as attachment insecurity and avoidance behavior. Similarly, Runcan et al. (2012) defined communication as a natural process in which information and feelings are transmitted, received, and interpreted in a dyadic relationship. Although Bormann's (1972) and Runcan et al.'s (2012) theories differ, their premises are similar. Bormann saw the interpretation of communication in the parent-child interpersonal relationship as depending on available resources, time constraints, parents' communication skills, and the frequency of communication, which supports communication competence. Runcan et al. focused more on the nature of the exchange of what they described as fantasies, which result in group cohesiveness and effective communication. In addition, Runcan et al. argued that parent-child communication is necessary for and strengthens interpersonal growth, specifically the ability to communicate effectively with others, which involves listening, availability, understanding, and sharing commonalities and emotions. Runcan et al. postulated that

effective and quality communication in a mother-son relationship can foster a positive or negative relationship. Thus, it is important that mothers avoid communication patterns that preach to or humiliate the child and instead listen to and encourage the child to talk, express feelings, and be unafraid to speak up (Runcan et al., 2012).

Unlike Bormann (1972) and Runcan et al. (2012), Akhlaq et al. (2013) contended that communication is most important during adolescents' emotional and biological growth. The exchange of verbal and nonverbal information among family members allows adolescents to express their needs and desires and, when effectively conducted, can result in positive resolutions to family conflicts through employing coping strategies and problem-solving skills and can thus foster adaptability and togetherness (Akhlaq et al., 2013). According to Akhlaq et al., adolescents benefit most from open communication. Like anger and aggression, metacommunication appears to be a coping strategy parents use consciously or unconsciously to manage stress or depression (Agnew, 2001; Wright, Day, & Howells, 2009). For example, mothers faced with financial hardship are least likely to show physical affection, which can reduce togetherness, hinder problem-solving skills development, and result in ineffective interpersonal communication between parent and adolescents (Akhlaq et al., 2013).

Keating et al. (2013) provided a more analytical approach to understanding the dynamics of interpersonal communication in discussing two-family constructs and family members' perceptions and patterns of communication rather than focusing on interpersonal communication. Although holding similar views as other theorists, Keating et al. also considered the antecedents, outcomes, perceived consequences, and rationale

of difficult conversations. Keating et al. argued that perceptions and communication patterns play a key role in family communication as well as the interpersonal experience. For example, conversation-oriented families who were more responsive to open communication had greater self-efficacy, willingness to self-disclose, and ability to fend for themselves. In contrast, in conformist-oriented families communication was structured around obedience to the family hierarchy and, consistent with the African American construct of the protective family, these families had low levels of conversation, stress conformity, and interdependence (Bateson, 1981; Collins, 2008; Elliot et al., 2013).

Altogether, the evidence presented in the seminal work of Akhlaq et al. (2013), Bormann (1972), and Runcan et al. (2012) supports that communication competence is linked to family satisfaction in adolescents, leads to open communication, fosters adaptability and interpersonal/intrapersonal growth, and strengthens the parent-child relationship. In addition, Akhlaq et al. stressed the importance of family constructs and perceptions of communication.

Importantly, a review of the literature demonstrated the significance of cultural differences in communication patterns (Collins, 2008; Gantt & Greif, 2009). Specifically, African American mothers' protectiveness of their sons is an adaptive behavior rooted in the postslavery era, which influences their parenting style and continues to affect the African American mother-son dyad (Collins, 2008; Gantt & Greif, 2009). Researchers have shown that the experience of African mothers raising their sons was unparalleled to any other ethnic groups due to the post slavery and Southern experience. The cultural

conditioning affects their parenting style and mental health, which also impacts their coping strategies (Agnew, 2001; Collins, 2008; Gantt & Greif, 2009).

Gantt and Greif (2009) also postulated that African American males were more likely to be raised in poverty and in a single-parent household and that an African American mother's single household contributed to perilous conditions affected by crime and drugs and has been overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Agnew (2001) argued that social strains, poverty, public assistance, racism, and unemployment compromised communication competence and impacted the family's stability and interpersonal communications between African American mothers and their sons. According to Agnew, social strains are criminogenic agents that can affect communication and coping skills and can lead to instability in the family and to sons engaging in risky and criminal activity. Furthermore, African American mothers have been labeled as authoritarian parents; that is, being overprotective, controlling, and disciplinarian and more prone to using metacommunication, vocal cues, facial expression, critical gazing, and body posture that encourages obedience (Collins, 2008; Gantt & Grief, 2009).

Despite Keating et al.'s (2013) views, the importance of effective communication in families and developing trust, open communication, bonding, and self-efficacious behavior are stressed in the general body of knowledge. The implication that secure attachment and positive social interaction fosters prosocial growth is consistent with Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning and Bowlby's (1982) theory of attachment. Bekoff's (1972) early study on communication emphasized metacommunication's

influence on contextual cues, action, and behavior, and Bekoff argued that it informs how mammals and children learn socially acceptable behavior through social play. Thus, social play and social interaction develop communication skills that impact adolescents' social and personal identities.

According to Akhlaq et al. (2013) and Koesten and Anderson (2009), communication is significant to adolescents' prosocial development. The empirical evidence shows that poor interpersonal communication correlates with at-risk behavior, and healthy family communication is a predictor of adolescents not engaging in risky behavior (Akhlaq et al., 2013; Koesten & Anderson, 2009). The authors also argued that families exhibiting strong interpersonal connections with their children provided the structure, discipline, and supervision shown to produce favorable outcomes in achievement and reduced aggression and substance abuse (Akhlaq et al., 2013; Koesten & Anderson, 2009).

A Repertoire of Metacommunication

In metacommunication, implicit codes and signals are recognized only through social play or social interaction. According to Bateson (as cited in Hartwell-Walker, 2009), metacommunication is communication about communication; its content often requires individuals to decode it. Metacommunication takes on two forms: paralinguistic, which involves changes in the voice such as yelling and speaking quickly or slowly, and nonverbal cues; in this case, parents' body language such as eye contact and hand waving, which suggests disapproval or approval. The complexity of metacommunication

can support or contradict the delivered messages; it is not always what is said but how it is said—proximity, posture, and eye contact—that is most important (Mandal, 2014).

Bateson's (1981) linguistic study considered metacommunication to be implicit and to require the individual to interpret the code, meaning, or intent behind the message delivered in interpersonal communication. However, Andresen (2005) and Bekoff (1972) argued that humans and animals develop metacommunication through play or social interaction. Metacommunication influences children's prosocial growth through how they interpret play and decode and encode messages in interpersonal discourse.

Caucci and Kruez (2012), Krumhuber, Kappas, and Manstead (2013), and Metaxas and Zhang (2013) discussed the importance of nonverbal communication through facial expressions. Metaxas and Zhang proposed an innovative approach to studying metacommunication and used computer-generated images to reveal how members of an interpersonal dyad used nonverbal communication. Metaxas and Zhang argued that technology allowed them to track and interpret nonverbal cues transmitted through facial expressions and body language and helped them determine individuals' message or intent. Krumhuber et al. examined facial expressions' impact on sociointeractions and human development and found that facial expressions are interpreted based on perceptions of them; for example, consistency in facial cues can distinguish genuine and fake expressions of emotion. When facial expressions are inconsistent with body motion, the cohesion of subjectivity and expression can be seen as low and result in misinterpretation by the receiver. Thus, the message delivered through

metacommunication might be perceived as explicit although the intent is to display implicit nonverbal and paralinguistic cues (Mandal, 2014).

Facial expressions influence others' responses; complement other forms of explicit, implicit, and paralinguistic communication; and play a significant role in the social development of the child raised in a single-parent household (Krumhuber et al., 2013). Krumhuber et al.'s (2013) findings are consistent with Darwin (1872), Ekman and Friesen (2003), and Mandal (2014) in terms of the dynamic of facial expression and messages conveyed, suggesting that facial expression is the primary signal system of communication that affects emotions like grief, despair, joy, guilt, and contempt, which are significant to early child development and more evident in women than men.

Children respond to voice cues and gazes, which provide cues about individuals' attention and intent (Vida & Maurer, 2013). As a nonverbal form of communication, eye contact can take on two forms: direct, which communicate interest, threats, or dominance; and averted, which convey deception and avoidance. In many cases, nonverbal cues are driven by cultural conditioning and reflect dominant behaviors, authority, or ritualization common in African American and Asian cultures (Bekoff, 1977; Darwin, 1859; Leong, 1993; Matsumoto, 2001; Triandis, 1994). In addition, Vida and Maurer (2013) found that voice and gaze are cues that can foster social judgment and reduce implicit or ambiguous communication. Children are responsive to verbal and nonverbal cues and, like adults, interpret and internalize them in order to satisfy their needs, which can encourage self-esteem and either self-efficacious or risky behavior (Vida & Maurer, 2013). Vida and Maurer (2013) argued that voice cues influence

children more than adults because children are more sensitive to auditory cues than visual cues.

According to Caucci and Kreuz (2012), facial cues can correlate with words and tone of voice used to indicate sarcastic intent. It is assumed that interpersonal relationships, in-group experiences, friendships, and cohesion lead to inferability; thus, members of a group can recognize sarcasm and are more apt to use it than strangers. Moreover, Caucci and Kreuz added that paralinguistic cues such as tone of voice, verbal expressions, and changes in facial expression can influence individuals' perceptions and relationships with others.

Like Krumhuber et al. (2013), Caucci and Kreuz (2013) stressed the importance of facial expressions and argued that they are among the best indicators of sarcasm. Like shame, humiliation, and criticism, sarcasm can lead to anger and negative emotions, which Day (2009) pointed to as a main cause of aggression and violent behavior in adolescents and adults. However, Heide (2013) presented a different paradigm and an unorthodox approach, studying nonverbal communication from a charismatic perspective. This work is relevant to understanding the complexity of metacommunication and its link to the success of many professionals, physicians, educators, and politicians. Importantly, Heide argued that although charisma is abstract and incapable of being measured, it is verbal and nonverbal. He focused on the process of charisma and asserted that in psychotherapy nonverbal charismatic can enhance learning and the interpersonal relation between clinicians and clients. Heide also found that nonverbal behaviors have a positive outcome on clients' behavior and are linked to the therapist's credibility. Nonverbal

behavior increases the perception of charisma and therefore is significant for the outcomes in a variety of fields (Heide, 2013).

Erozkan (2013) postulated that communication skills and interpersonal problem-solving skills correlate with self-efficacious behavior and are predictors of social self-efficacy. In addition, Erozkán argued that communication competency increases self-esteem, confidence, and problem-solving skills and reduces pathologies, anxiety, and loneliness. Johnson and Aaron (2013) contended that humans have an innate ability to recognize nonverbal cues for violent threats; if nonverbal cues in humans could be generalized to acts of aggression, then perceptions of nonverbal cues could predict violence and aggression. However, humans' nonverbal behavior is unlike animal's biologically ingrained behavior, which makes threats of violence easily recognizable (Johnson & Aaron, 2013).

Johnson and Aaron (2013) reviewed the steadily growing knowledge of and research on nonverbal behavior in human communication in various social contexts such as exchanges between superiors and subordinates, classroom teaching, employment interviews, marital relations, and medical care provision. Johnson and Aaron's research has also covered the criminal justice system, including court proceedings and the jury selection process. Their intent was to understand nonverbal predictors of violent behavior; that is, the form in which violence is revealed, whether in nonlinguistic body language or in tone, pitch, and fluency. In spite of the limited scientific knowledge on nonverbal cues linked to violence, Johnson and Aaron found abundant nonscientific

information on interpreting body nonverbal cues or predicting nonverbal menacing behavior.

Johnson and Aaron (2013) cited Hubbard as having the most current research on the topic. Hubbard's study involved African American second graders and revealed that anger, expressed by facial expression, change in tone, and kicking or physical threats, indicated impending acts of aggression or violence that correlated with the children feeling rejected by their peers or losing a game. Despite the limited number of nonverbal indicators or anger cues, Johnson and Aaron also pointed out that Hubbard provided a theoretical framework for future studies and nonverbal measures to test the association between nonverbal and violent behavior.

Seminal studies by Andresen (2005), Bateson (1972), Bekoff (1972), Darwin (1859), and Vygotsky (1987) showed that social development in organisms depends on metacommunication and social play. Similarly, metacommunication is crucial to children's social development. Scholars have also argued that metacommunicative skills are intrinsically related to the social ontogeny of the organism and that communication skills are necessary for normal behavioral development and social interaction (Andresen, 2005; Bekoff, 1972). Most relevant are studies showing that isolated and rejected animals lack the communication skills needed to survive; similarly, children without a secure attachment develop insufficient interpersonal communication skills (Andresen, 2005; Bekoff, 1972). Although metacommunication has been primarily studied in animals, Andresen and Bekoff drew parallels to the use of metacommunication in humans'

learning of appropriate social skills, which requires decoding and understanding the intent behind messages.

Despite the differences in the theoretical approaches, debates, theories, and methodologies, the work discussed here emphasizes that communication includes understanding how explicit or implicit communication is delivered and sent and how it impacts the receiver.

Metacommunication: A Cultural Construct

In the African American community, metacommunication is a dominant form of interpersonal communication, which is often indirect or implicit (Bateson, 1981; Leong, 1993). Similarly, Branco (2005) postulated that metacommunication is actions or behaviors that send messages, whether intentional or unintentional. It is implicit and culturally driven and takes the form of paralinguistic and nonverbal cues linked to consequential outcomes. Metacommunication is significant to children's social development (Branco, 2005).

A review of the literature showed that the cultural perspective must be considered for the present study's purposes. Researchers have shown that the communication patterns in African American single-parent households are structured around cultural ties, that is, the attitudes and behaviors that reflect collectivity; high context, which is relied on more in nonverbal cues; interdependence; kinship; maintaining harmony; and the individual's desire to think and act in the best interest of the group, whether family or extended family, thus conforming to standards that embodies close communication and submission to a hierarchal system; for example, respect toward the elders and matriarchy

(Matsumoto, 2001; Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2013; Triandis, 1994). Communications scholars and cross-cultural theorists contend that environment or situational factors are attributes that affect interpersonal communication, which is significant in relationship building and intimacy (Collins, 2008; Gantt & Grant, 2009; Hood, Brevard, Nguyen, & Belgrave, 2013; Matsumoto, 2001; Roberts, 2014; Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2013; Triandis, 1994), and have shown the significance of culture or cultural conditioning such as norms and behavior and their effects on the in-group and interpersonal experience; specifically, social politeness or avoidance behavior. Hence, the legacy of slavery has affected African American mothers' interpersonal relationship with sons, and parenting styles such as authoritarian and controlling have been viewed as punitive, heavily monitoring, and threat-based (Elliott et al., 2013; Gantt & Greif, 2009; Hood et al., 2013; Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014).

Consequently, many African American mothers have conceivably adapted authoritarian or helicopter parenting styles to control and protect their sons from becoming victims of crime and violence, being arrested, or being incarcerated. The parenting style or practice was to instill survival skills such as avoiding conflict, exhibiting submissiveness, and not being antagonistic in a system that Roberts (2014) deemed to regulate, oppress, and marginalize Black mothers through social policies, which makes their life experiences different from Black men and any other ethnic group. Agnew (2001) alluded to the impact of social strains and their potential to compromise communication between mothers and sons. On the other hand, Gabbidon (2007) cited Du Bois, who argued the overall effect of social strains, while Whitaker, Whitaker, and

Jackson (2014) highlighted the implications of social problems such as living in poverty, being on public assistance, and low socioeconomic status and their impact on the African American family, which have led to fragmenting the family and devaluing the community through oppressive and racist policies.

African American Single-Parent Households

African American single mothers face daunting challenges or what Agnew (2001) defined as social strains, which can impact the fluency of metacommunication messages from mothers to sons. According to Parent et al. (2013), 70% of African American youth are born of wedlock and 67% live in single-parent homes. African American males from single families confront far more challenges, such as risky behavior, drugs or substance abuse, and criminal activity, than youth raised in a two-parent household. Sterrett et al. (2009) revealed that sons raised by African American single mothers in impoverished conditions and in communities lacking resources such as social support are more at risk of maladaptive behavior such as being disruptive or hyperactive. Sterrett et al. also highlighted the importance of the ecological context, which involved kin, coparents, grandparents, and male role models engaging in the interpersonal dyad with the sons. It is the interpersonal experience that shapes and impacts the youth's psychosocial well-being; that is, the ability to relate to others, show self-efficacious behavior, and adaptability. Moreover, the researchers pointed out the importance of quality parenting and positive metacommunication; for instance, mothers who display warmth, emotional support, and voice pleasantness are referred to as authoritative parents. Thus, according to study

findings, youth raised by authoritative parents are less inclined to have attachment insecurity, avoidance behavior, depression, or maladaptive behavior.

In investigating the intricate interpersonal communication between mothers and sons, the role of African American mothers' parenting styles—authoritative, authoritarian, or laissez-faire—in the contexts of family and relationship with sons is central (Collins, 2008; Gantt & Greif, 2009; Keating et al., 2013) to understanding the communication patterns, specifically metacommunicative signals, because it influences or describes the interpersonal dyad (de Vries et al., 2013). For example, researchers have found that African American mothers are more prone to be authoritarian due to their desire to protect their sons and prevent them from becoming statistics (Collins, 2008; Gantt & Greif, 2009). Agnew (2001) found that African American families were disproportionately subject to a number of situational factors that can affect the interpersonal communication between African American mothers and sons; for instance, stress and depression stemming from being on public assistance, unemployment, absent fathers, and living in poverty-stricken neighborhoods and raising their sons in crime-infested communities. Bandura (1977) and Bowlby (1982) referred to such factors as social strains and contended that they lead to social pathologies. Bandura added that poor interpersonal experiences between mothers and children impact socialization whereas Bowlby argued that the quality of the relationship in early childhood determines how the child bonds with the parent or care provider. This evidence is persuasive and supports the rationale for exploring the significance of mother-son interpersonal communication and

metacommunication, which Gantt and Greif (2009) noted constantly evolves as mothers adopt coping strategies for raising their sons.

The evidence also suggests that socioeconomic status, absent fathers, and marginalization of African American women can influence the parent's mental health and communication competence and foster poor intrapersonal/interpersonal growth in the son (Agnew, 2001; Bandura, 1977; Elliott et al., 2013). Bowlby (1982) added that whenever a child does not receive nurturing or an appropriate response from the parent or care provider, the child fails to develop the affective and cognitive skills needed to be a stable, productive individual.

Similarly, Moilanen, Shaw, and Fitzpatrick (2010) argued that parenting practices influence the quality of the relationship, encourage the child's self-regulatory behavior and confidence, and reduce misbehaving and risky behavior. For example, Moilanen et al. found that antagonistic parents were more inclined to use paralinguistic and nonverbal behavior, namely insulting, criticizing, instilling guilt, and repressing the children's feelings, which undermined interpersonal/intrapersonal growth. The consequential outcomes included increased psychopathologies and decreases in self-regulatory behavior, prosocial development, self-esteem, and suppressed emotions (Moilanen et al., 2010). Although Moilanen et al. did not specifically reference the relationship between African American mothers and sons, it is significant because Moilanen et al. highlighted how positive parenting practices facilitate self-efficacious behavior and confidence whereas parents labeled authoritarian, overprotective, or antagonistic facilitate negative metacommunication signals, feelings, and emotions that lead to rejection, shame, or

humiliation and are counterproductive to establishing a secure relationship (Craig et al., 2013; Moilanen et al., 2010).

Collins (2008), Segrin et al. (2012), and Uji et al. (2014) showed that authoritarian parents are intrusive, controlling, instill obedience, and are punitive. Uji et al. also added that, when viewed by White standards, Black families appear to fit the authoritarian model, which is a parenting style that has lasting impact on the sons' interpersonal-intrapersonal growth.

Hamilton-Mason, Hall, and Everett (2009) aligned with Agnew (2001), Elliott et al. (2013), and Gantt and Grief (2009) in identifying a multitude of factors such as racism, sexism, unemployment, and socioeconomic strain along with structural conditions, inequalities, and marginalization that can impact mother-son interpersonal communication and affect interpersonal skills, self-esteem, and security attachment in the sons. Hamilton-Mason et al. added that African American mothers have developed unique strengths and characteristics to manage these many variables affecting their psychosocial well-being. Importantly, Hamilton-Mason et al. noted that social pathologies such as racism, sexism, and unemployment produced negative consequences such as ineffective coping strategies, anger, shame, and depression, which impacted African American mothers' interpersonal relationships with children, spouses, and friends.

Despite agreement among Collins (2008), Elliot et al. (2013), Gantt and Grief (2009), Parent et al. (2013), and Sterrett et al. (2009) that a multitude of factors, such as social strains and parenting practices, impact mother-son relationships,

metacommunication has not been explored, particularly its impact on attachment anxiety and avoidance behavior, its distinctive patterns, or its influence on affective and cognitive skills in adolescence. In other studies, Andresen (2005) and Bekoff (1972) demonstrated that metacommunication takes the form of social play and influences contextual cues and that humans, like animals, learn to recognize behavior as playful or threatening.

Historically, in the African American family construct African American mothers were the matriarch and head of household as a result of social policies that fragmented the family unit such as fathers not being able to reside in the same household if the mothers received public assistance and stereotypes that devalued and marginalized African American women (Collins, 2008). Many were stigmatized as dependent on public assistance, raised their families on limited resources, and lived in impoverished communities (Collins, 2008; Elliott et al., 2013; Roberts, 2014; Whitaker et al., 2014).

Despite this, African American mothers were the breadwinners and the protectors. They provided the structure and enforced family values and positive social norms in their children. Researchers have noted that social strains are factors that have contributed to African American mothers' overly protective or authoritarian parenting style, especially as it pertained to protecting their sons from harm or becoming a statistic (Agnew, 2001; Collins, 2002; Gantt & Greif, 2009). However, many studies have shown that authoritarian parenting is harmful because it impacts the youth's self-esteem, self-regulation, academic performance, and adaptability (Elliott et al., 2013; Hood et al., 2013; Uji et al., 2014). Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Bowlby (1982) showed that affective and cognitive growth depended on the mothers' responsiveness to the child's needs and

that smiling, showing physical affection, and using vocal cues facilitates bonding whereas the mother's nonresponsiveness leads to attachment anxiety or avoidance behavior. Researchers such as Ainsworth et al., Andresen (2005), Bateson (1972), Bowlby, Caucci et al. (2012), Erozan (2013), Mandal (2014), Runcan et al. (2012), and Savage (2014) also showed that metacommunication strengthens the relationship between parent and child and that any incongruence in the words and metacommunication signals can affect bonding and the child's socialization skills.

Metacommunication and Attachment Insecurity

The literature reviewed presented limited information on metacommunication and insecurity attachment, especially from an Afrocentric perspective. Little work has been done on how metacommunication is operationalized in the African American family construct, such as how signals are interpreted by the receiver; impact family members; and influence attachment, avoidance, and risky behaviors.

A pioneer in the field of linguistic science, Bateson (1972) argued that a breakdown in metacommunication can lead to attachment insecurity. Therefore, it is important that individuals master metacommunication because it is critical to social development and learning appropriate behavior (Bateson, 1981).

Bateson (1972), Bekoff (1972), and Bowlby (1982) revealed that metacommunication signals are delivered through vocalization, facial expressions, laughter, smiles, and frowns and that metacommunication involves an interactive experience or contextual dependency and continues to be a developmental phenomenon. Bekoff, Bowlby, and Cupach et al. (2010) each demonstrated the significance of

metacommunication in the social development of children and adolescents, especially its impact on self-esteem and social identity. Importantly, bonding and communication rest on the mother's or care provider's responsiveness, which also determines how dependent on one another an adult and child become (Bekoff, 1972). Bowlby (as cited in Ainsworth et al., 1978) emphasized the importance of bonding as children develop interpersonal and communication skills through socially interactive play with their peers.

Unlike Ainsworth et al. (1978), Bekoff (1972), Bowlby (1982), and Craig et al. (2013) argued that attachment functioning mediates the effect of parenting on personality traits associated with psychopathic behavior, which is characterized by impulsivity, antisocial tendencies, and a range of interpersonal and emotional deficits correlated with criminality and recidivism. Craig et al. also proposed that high levels of protection by parents might result in attachment anxiety because the child does not learn to be independent and thus fails to develop coping skills and support-seeking strategies.

Lindberg et al. (2014) agreed with Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Bowlby (1982) on attachment behavior. However, Lindberg et al. argued against Craig et al. (2013), contending that interpersonal relationships influence, not mediate, the development of criminal activity, which is linked to insecure attachment with the mother, father, in-group, or out-group.

In another argument regarding communication and attachment theory, Dubois-Comtois, Moss, Cyr and Pascuzzo (2013) noted that mother-child communication influences developmental adaptation and attachment patterns at an early age. Dubois-Comtois et al. (2013) echoed Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Bowlby (1982) and added that

insecure children exhibit avoidance behaviors, do not engage in conversation with parents, have low self-efficacious behavior, and lack confidence. Thus, a positive early-childhood experience with the mother increased security and attachment representation in school children.

Although focusing on the love relationships of at-risk women, McCarthy and Maughan (2010) offered a different perspective. The authors asserted that attachment insecurity impacts children as they become adults, and a secure relationship with parents leads to autonomous behavior and secure relationships with others in adulthood (McCarthy & Maughan, 2010). Similarly, Bandura (1977) and Bowlby (1982) observed the importance of attachment and social interaction and noted that parents who are not responsive to the child's needs increase the potential for maladaptive or risky behavior in the child.

Unlike Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Bowlby (1982), Buddhist psychologists Sahdra and Shaver (2013) presented a cultural perspective on nonattachment and the adult's experience, personality development, and interdependence influenced by Eastern spirituality and psychology. Sahdra and Shaver found that nonattachment, through mental fixation, reduced clinging and aloofness whereas the attachment theorists focused on children's behavior and emphasized the impact of attachment and avoidance on their well-being and interpersonal growth as adults.

Despite conceptual differences, Sahdra and Shaver (2013) agreed with Bowlby (1982) that a supportive, loving interpersonal relationship promoted security and self-regulation and shaped the individual's cognitive and affective skills. Sahdra and Shaver

held the premise that attachment, or fixation, fosters pain, suffering, and mental health disorders and thus focused on intervention strategies to reduce attachment behavior. They found secure adults to be more compassionate, forgiving of parents and others, objective, and sympathetic (Sahdra & Shaver, 2013).

Notwithstanding the different conceptual or theoretical frameworks employed, Ainsworth et al. (1978), Andresen (2005), Bandura (1977, 2002), Bateson (1972), Bekoff (1972), Bowlby (1972), Craig et al. (2013), and Dubois-Comtois et al. (2011) agreed that communication and metacommunication are interrelated and related to attachment security and prosocial development in children. Therefore, based on the literature, it can be argued that poor interpersonal communication between mothers and sons can foster contextual cues that impact attachment and avoidance behavior and increase maladaptive and criminal behavior (Bowlby, 1982; Craig et al., 2013; Cupach et al., 2010; Erozkan, 2013; Harwood, 2005).

Sahdra and Shaver (2013) demonstrated the importance of culture diversity in the fields of social science and psychology in showing nonattachment's relationship to the independence and dependence of adults. Like many earlier theorists, Dubois-Comtois et al. (2013) highlighted the significance of early positive childhood experiences with the mother, which have been shown to have a positive throughout the child's life (Ainsworth, et al., 1978; Bandura, 1977; Bowlby, 1982). Overall, researchers have found that ineffective communication weakens the parent-child relationship; hinders interpersonal growth; and increases anger, feelings of rejection, and avoidance behavior (Bandura, 2002; Bowlby, 1982).

Summary

The family is considered the most important institution in society. However, the African American family has faced many challenges due to the postslavery experience and has been characterized as extended, interdependent, and matriarchal (Collins, 2008). Moreover, African American single mothers have been marginalized and stigmatized as dysfunctional, and public policies have continued to weaken and fragment the Black family through the years.

The evidence shows that bonding, family values, and norms are influenced by the interpersonal relationship between parents and children or care providers, which also enhances the relationships outside the family structure (Bandura, 1977; Bowlby, 1968; Cupach et al., 2010). However, as postulated by Agnew (2001) and Frazier (1950), social strains in families have led to pathologies such as depression and other mental health problems that negatively influence parenting behavior, disrupt the parent-child relationship or experience, and hinder communication fluency in children.

Although there is limited research on how metacommunication affects the interpersonal relationships of African American single mothers and sons, it is assumed to impact adolescents' prosocial growth, self-esteem, and social and personal identities. Additionally, ineffective communication can give contextual cues that foster anger and feelings of rejection, shame, and humiliation (Cupach et al., 2010; Harwood & Giles, 2005).

Failing to understand the role of metacommunication or nonverbal play can result in communication incompetence, poor interpersonal skills, nonconformity, parental

neglect, verbal aggression, name-calling, criticism, and, most importantly, adolescents' inability to derive meaning from parents' metacommunicative signals (Cupach et al., 2010). In addition, communication incompetence can lead to pathologies, unhealthy relations, low self-esteem, and a lack of trustworthiness, which encourages risky behavior (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1982; Olson et al., 2012).

There remains a gap in the literature on the topic of metacommunication specifically as it relates to the African American mothers' process of communication and interpersonal experience with sons. Therefore, I posited that further studies are needed from this perspective with more of a focus on (a) specific patterns of metacommunication and their potential impact on sons; (b) social strains that might influence how mothers deliver metacommunication to sons; (c) the possible links of metacommunication to attachment, avoidance, and criminal behavior; (d) intervention strategies to aid parents, care providers, and professionals in understanding metacommunication and consequential outcomes; and (e) recognition of the various metacommunication forms; for example, tone, diction, change in voice, body movement, eye contact, proximity, and environment.

The lack of this knowledge points to the significance of such research in building healthy parent-child relationships and developing intervention strategies to encourage bonding between mothers and sons. Moreover, such research could provide an approach for educating parents on how to recognize metacommunication cues in order to reduce attachment issues and avoidance behavior. This treatment or approach could also teach parents to avoid contextual cues that can foster anger, aggressive behavior, and low self-efficacious behavior in sons.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I describe the research design, approach, and methodology that best addressed the research questions for the present study as well as the instruments that were used to generate the thick descriptions that constitute concrete and detailed reporting (Tracy, 2010).

The purpose of the present qualitative case study was to provide an understanding of the communication process experienced between single African American mothers and their sons and to explore the benefits of identifying implicit metacommunication patterns. A key focus was on identifying intervention strategies to target negative communication patterns that might impede the sons' social development or ability to engage in positive interpersonal relationships. I believed that the findings from this study would provide insight on how communication strategies can empower African American single parents by increasing communication competence and their interpersonal relationships with their sons. Most importantly, I hoped that the present study would help close the gap in the body of knowledge described as interpersonal pragmatics.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the following: (a) design and rationale, (b) paradigm, (c) role of the researcher, (d) research questions, (e) methodology, (f) data collection, (g) data analysis, (h) limitations of the study, and (i) ethical considerations.

Design and Rationale of the Study

I chose a qualitative study, or the naturalistic model, because it allows gaining a more comprehensive understanding of unexplored areas. This type of study is described

as having the following characteristics: the research is conducted in a natural setting, it is qualitative in design, and the researcher is the data instrument. According to Lincoln and Guba (2012) and Morse (2015), a qualitative study is purposeful, inductive, relies on emerging data, involves case study reporting, is interpretative, and is measured by trustworthiness. Furthermore, according to Lincoln and Guba, because the researcher is the primary instrument in a naturalistic inquiry, it is believed that humans tend to respond more effectively to natural events in the environment; therefore, they are more apt to pick up cues and respond simultaneously.

In addition, a qualitative study can provide the researcher a thick description, detail, context, emotions, and an understanding of participants' interpersonal relationships with others, which is the essence of qualitative reporting (Morse, 2015). In my case, it added breadth and an in-depth understanding of metacommunication between single African American mothers and sons. Choosing this approach also allowed me to explore how metacommunication delivered from mothers to sons is decoded and how the sons make meaning of the messages. Furthermore, I could assess any consequential outcomes from the sons' perspectives. My intent was to contribute to the current body of literature and to highlight the experiences of single African American mothers raising their sons.

Paradigm

In defining a case study, Yin (2003) wrote that it is an exploratory or descriptive study used in the fields of economics, social science, and behavioral science to provide a body of knowledge that informs how sociopolitical conditions or phenomena impact the

lived experience of individuals and groups. The intent of the case study is to make meaning of contextual conditions relevant to the study through data collection, data analysis, and observation.

I believed that the case study approach would allow me to explore, understand, identify, and decode the patterns of communication in African American single mothers' households. Therefore, I believed the case study/exploratory paradigm would best satisfy my inquiry, because the study was in-depth and exploratory and I could target specific occurrences of communication in the family construct (Olson et al., 2012). In addition, a case study would allow me to target a specific demographic sample and use content analysis; that is, searching text for words and themes that emerge and can be linked to patterns of communication (Elo et al., 2014; Krippendorff, 1980). Furthermore, the study involved an in-depth analysis of individuals; that is, data and case material on individuals relating to a specific problem (American Psychological Association, 2009).

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation; therefore, the credibility of the study is contingent on the researcher's skills, engagement with a live person, resources, and rigor as well as the researcher maintaining neutrality or reflexivity to avoid subjectivity (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2014). In addition, the role is not only to serve as an active participant but also to use active listening to engage the interviewee in open-ended probing questions that will result in contextual clarity, rich description, and emerging data through an inductive analysis.

The Research Questions

I explored how implicit metacommunication patterns are delivered from African Americans single mothers to their sons and, most importantly, how sons make meaning of these messages and how they impact their prosocial growth. The research questions were: What are the implicit metacommunication messages delivered from single mothers to sons in an African American mother-son dyad, and how do implicit metacommunication patterns influence the youth's social identity as a young adult?

Methodology

I implemented an interpretive, qualitative; parallel multiple case study design with four cases drawn from African Americans single mothers of sons as well as a parallel sample from four sons unrelated to the single mothers in the study. I conducted two separate sets of interview sessions. The first phase was a semistructured, recorded interview with the mothers to identify, based on their recollections, metacommunication patterns such as paralinguistic and nonverbal cues delivered from mothers to sons (Runcan et al., 2012). The second phase was with the sons unrelated to the mothers, and data collected were based on the son's recollection and interpretation of the metacommunication messages (see the Implementation section for details). I used interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore: (a) how the sons experienced the interpersonal communication, (b) metacommunication patterns recognized by the sons, (c) prosocial growth (d) the son's perspective of the consequential outcome.

Sampling Procedure

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a sample should (a) be relevant to the conceptual framework, (b) generate rich information, (c) enhance generalizability, (d) be a description and an explanation, (e) be ethical, and (f) be achievable. According to Marshall (1996), the most common sampling technique for case studies is a purposeful sample, which involves selecting a group of individuals who can answer the research questions (Marshall, 1996). The sampling process involves selecting information that illuminates the research questions with a focus on data that continue to emerge during the inductive process, yielding credible and reliable information relevant to the phenomenon explored (Bodie, Vickery, Cannava, & Jones, 2015; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012b).

The demographic questionnaire for the present study (see Appendix D) highlighted questions on ethnic identity, ages of mothers and sons, highest level of education, income, religious affiliation, and household size. Miles and Huberman (1994) added that it is important that the researcher establishes boundaries and a theoretical frame of reference. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Maxwell (2013), sampling and data collection should generate emerging data that are deep, descriptive, and saturated and that will satisfy the research questions and design.

The sample ($N = 8$) represented two sampling units, single mothers age 18 years or older ($n = 4$) and unrelated sons age 18 years or older ($n = 4$). Despite the increasing contributions made through qualitative research, there remains a controversy over the appropriate sample size; yet, the qualitative inquiry is the best approach for a naturalist

inquiry and studying the participants in their own environment (Houghton et al., 2013; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012a). Elo et al. (2014) asserted the sample size depends on the nature of the phenomenon, study, and saturation while Miles and Huberman (1994) and Yin (2003) stated that in qualitative sampling the units are small groups of people studied in-depth in their environment.

To get the anticipated sample size and to address potential withdrawals, flyers were posted on billboards and at community centers in neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens (see Appendix E). In order to address any potential participant's withdrawal, I kept the contact information of participants referred through snowball or criterion sampling.

As stated, the criteria for the first sample were African American single mothers, age 18 years or older, raising sons in the urban community. The second sample was unrelated sons to mothers in the sample, also age 18 years or older, and raised by African American single mothers. Prior to the interview process, the nature of the study was fully disclosed to the mothers and unrelated sons via conversation and an informed consent form (see Appendix F). Because the focus was on the lived experience of African American mothers raising sons as well as the sons' experiences, the assumption was that the participants would be able to answer the questions and that their responses would be based on their experiences (Tracy, 2010).

The rationale for recruiting throughout neighborhoods of Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan was in part a contingency plan to ensure that I had large enough populations to draw from to ensure that my sample size was met. According to the literature, African

American single mothers raising sons are most impacted by poverty and impoverished communities and more inclined to provide low monitoring to their sons, who are then more at risk of having encounters with the criminal or juvenile justice system (Agnew, 2001; Bowlby, 1982; Elliott et al., 2013; Woolard, 2009).

To adjust or adapt to unexpected change in the study—for example, the participants refusing to participate in the study, early withdrawals, or failing equipment—I remained open minded and reflexive, understanding that the study can potentially impact the outcome; importantly, mindful of my biases (Pozzebon, Rodriguez, & Petrini, 2014). Miles and Huberman (1994) and Tracy (2010) stated that self-reflectivity, serious thought, deconstruction, contemplation, and creativity can also help researchers deal with unexpected change, assumptions, or constraints encountered during the execution of the study.

Data Collection

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Marshall (1996) stated that sampling and data collection should generate emerging, deeply descriptive, and saturated data that meet the needs of the study and credibility criteria. In my study, I used more than one approach in that I conducted two sets of interviews, used content analysis, and used multiple theories. According to Houghton et al. (2013) and Tracy (2010), multiple resources can increase study credibility and reliability.

As previously mentioned, the initial plan was to post flyers in neighborhoods located in the boroughs of Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. The flyer provided brief information on the nature of the study, criteria for eligibility, and a contact number.

Individuals who were accepted were given an informed consent form to complete; it disclosed details regarding the study and potential risks. In addition, all study participants were given a gift certificate valued at \$10. Prior to starting any interview sessions, I reflected on the interview protocol provided by Janesick (2011; see Appendix G). For instance, I discussed and provided details of the study to the participants. In order to build trust, I disclosed my interests regarding the study. I discussed the length of the interview, which was approximately 45 min, in order to relieve or reduce participant anxiety. I shared the sample size with participants. I recorded the sessions and took notes for reflective purposes. Finally, I established a rapport with the participants.

Interview Implementation

The overall interview strategy I chose was McNamara's (2009), who proposed seven strategies to guide interviews: (a) occasionally check if the recorder works and is usable, (b) simplify to one question at a time, (c) be neutral, (d) encourage conversation with probing questions or use interjections like "uh huh," (e) be discreet in note taking, (f) make transitions from one topic to the next, and (g) maintain control and do not allow the participant to stray.

In my study, the first phase was a face-to-face interview with mothers, including time-framed questions relating to the mother's recall of past occurrences, descriptions of paralinguistic and nonverbal cues delivered to sons, how situational factors may have an impact on how these messages were delivered from the mother's perspective, and the son's response to both the contextual cues and metacommunicative messages. The following are examples of the interview questions (see Appendix H for more detail on

interview questions asked of the mothers):

- Tell me what is it like to be an African American mother single mother raising a son in the inner city.
- How would you describe your parent style: authoritarian, authoritative, or easy-going?
- Can you describe or demonstrate the nonverbal cues commonly used in the dyad with your son?

The second phase was a personal interview with sons unrelated to the mothers previously interviewed. This approach was intentional and designed to reduce any personal influence between the mothers and the sons. The questions also had a time frame with more of a focus on how the sons interpreted the metacommunicative patterns identified in the first phase with the mothers. Another important focus was if there were consequential outcomes as a result of the metacommunication messages from the son's point of view. The following are examples of the interview questions for the sons (see Appendix I for more detail on interview questions asked of the sons):

- Tell me what is it like to be an African American male raised in a single-parent household in the inner city.
- Can you remember specific patterns of communication/nonverbal cues; that is, eye contact, body language, gestures, facial expression or voice change? (Probe: How have they impacted your attitude and behavior?)
- Tell me about your relationship with you mother. (Probe: Can you describe the relationship in terms of closeness, secure or not secure?)

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the focus of a qualitative study is on the interpretation of phenomena by a live person and how this individual makes meaning of the phenomena. Hence, research for the present study included collecting raw data on personal experiences, introspection, life stories, and observations that are relevant to understanding the use of metacommunication and how the unrelated sons interpreted it. Importantly, I explored how or if metacommunicative patterns impact the sons' prosocial growth as young adults. I used probing questions to encourage the participants to explain or provide more detail related to the questions asked (Bodie et al., 2015). I used a recorder to document the data collected from the semistructured interviews. The recorder was placed in the participants' view, and I also discreetly took notes so as to not distract the participants.

Observation Technique

The expression/descriptions of metacommunication patterns generated from the questions were noted on the interview question forms (see Appendix H and Appendix I) as the narrative was recorded. I relied on nonverbal immediacy cues such as head nodding, smiling, eye contact, and body orientation. Through understanding the nonverbal immediate cues, I acknowledged the interviewee's responsiveness to my questions. This strategy was important because it allowed me to be flexible in how I delivered my questions or presentation in order to bond with the participants.

I believed I could gain a more favorable response as a nonverbal active listener; that is, making eye contact, nodding, and being attentive to the interviewee's self-disclosure, which is important for building a rapport (Bodie et al., 2015; Manusov &

Patterson, 2006). Importantly, during the interview sessions the interview questions for mothers and unrelated sons were descriptive or big picture questions in order to generate emerging data (Janesick, 2011). In addition, attention was given to the mother's explanation and demonstration of metacommunication cues expressed during the interview; for example, having the mother demonstrate types of physical affection and or provide examples of facial expression used to signal approval or disapproval of specific behaviors. For the sons, the questions were designed to elicit their recollections or memories. Probing follow-up questions (see Appendix I) were used to get an in-depth understanding of how the sons decoded metacommunication signals experienced in the mother-son dyad.

Janesick (2011) and McNamara (2009) discussed models of protocols for conducting qualitative interviews while Bodie et al. (2015) cited Heritage and Watson and the significance of sequential questions in an interview process (see Appendix J), which is a model that I adapted for the present study because it helped clarify how interview questions should be constructed and framed.

However, according to Bodie et al. (2015), there are no best practice or models, but there should be consistency in how a semistructured interview is constructed and there should be a guide to develop question-and-answer sequences. How the interviewer leads the questions, uses follow-up probes, and ensures that the participants are familiar with the topic and that they can answer the questions will ensure that the questions are aligned with the study, are appropriate, and generate saturated data (Janesick, 2011; McNamara, 2009).

In qualitative research, observation is critical because data collection takes on many forms such as observing the environment and gathering documents. What is heard or seen and communicated or not communicated can be deemed significant (Maxwell, 2013). As the primary data collection instrument for the present study, my tools for observing and gathering data were sights, sounds, and feelings that helped me interpret and make sense of the information gathered. Because the focus of the study was metacommunication, during the interview sessions I paid close attention to the verbal and nonverbal cues expressed by mothers and sons such as explicit or implicit messages or changes in tone of voice, facial expression, posture, or hand movements that may have contradicted or inferred accuracy in their response to the questions. Verbal or nonverbal cues can also inform if the participants are nervous or relaxed, which allowed me to be more responsive to their needs.

Data Analysis Plan

I recorded, transcribed, coded, cross-coded and reviewed the semistructured interviews. Because qualitative inquiry can lead to data saturation, it can be overwhelming for the researcher; it is important that the scientist develops a system of management (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Yin, 2014). As such, I chose to use the six-point system established by Marshall and Rossman (2010):

1. Data organization.
2. Data immersion.
3. Theme generation.
4. Coding.

5. Interpretation.
6. Reflexivity.

Data Organization

The raw data were transcribed from the recording, coded, and loaded into NVivo Pro 11, where the codes were organized into nodes, themes, and categories and then color-coded for meaning. In addition, NVivo was used to create diagrams, case profiles for participants, and comparison analysis between cases (see Appendices, K, L, M, N, and O). Through a content analysis I was able to make meaning of data and identify and highlight descriptive words that described paralinguistic cues or provide words that described nonverbal communication. For instance, in an interpersonal dyad specific words might show how a mother explains why there was a need to change the tone in her voice, use hand signals, or withhold physical affection (Scholl, 2013). The overall research analysis was based on content analysis, which involved interpreting the trends, patterns, and differences in words that emerged in the text or context to provide new insight or guide my actions (Krippendorff, 1980).

As noted, I managed the data by using NVivo 11, a comprehensive program that allows researchers to process, analyze, and interpret raw data; code their observations; and file their documents. I have found NVivo to be a useful tool for organizing and filing data as well as learning to code, transcribe, edit, and produce nodes for easy retrieval of codes, keywords, phrases, patterns, and themes in storage. In addition, it is a viable instrument for establishing research profiles and providing support and relevant literature, importing documents to PDF files, creating nodes and codes, developing reports, and

keeping track of a project. The data imported to NVivo 11 can be encrypted to ensure privacy and the confidentiality of a respondent, researcher, and organization studied (QSR International, 2011). I also used a reflection journal to record my thoughts and feelings, interactions with participants, the date of the interview sessions, time, location, impressions, and my reactions to the study. For safekeeping, backup copies of all data will be kept on an external hard drive stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. The data will be discarded approximately 5 years after it is collected (Janesick, 2011; Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Data Immersion

During the interview sessions, I listened to the interviewees and kept notes of the information shared. After transcribing the data, I reviewed and highlighted passages in the transcript that were consistent and meaningful to avoid personal biases or prejudging. I also reread all transcripts for patterns, themes, or codes relevant to the topic and highlighted emerging data (Elo et al., 2014; Krippendorff, 1980). Immersion entailed unraveling and exploring the hidden assumptions that may only be revealed through metacommunication from both mothers and sons during the interview sessions.

Generating Themes

As I expressed my rationale for the study to the participants, I hoped to get them motivated and relaxed enough to engage in a conversation that would provide rich and descriptive information. I worked to develop a rapport with the participants and led with probing questions to encourage broader descriptive information. The purpose was to identify emerging data, recurring patterns, keywords, and trends to the point of saturation

(Elo et al., 2014). I isolated and constructed the raw data into codes, cross codes, themes, and categories to understand and identify the metacommunication patterns delivered from mothers to sons. In addition, in the course of transcribing the recorded data I explored and identified codes and themes that may reveal how the sons made meaning of the metacommunication messages from mothers.

Data Coding

According to Elo et al. (2014), Houghton et al. (2013), and Rudestam and Newton (2002), there are different coding approaches. However, the overall strategy is to capture or identify cues, patterns, and nuances relevant to a study. Open coding is the analysis of the entire text for descriptive categories or saturation. Axial coding involves matching categories and subcategories. Hand coding involves the tedious reviewing of field notes and/or transcripts as well as highlighting or color-coding words, phrases, or sentences that give meaning to the study. The challenge was to apply the codes categorically and use them as a means of identifying the concepts that are important and relevant to the participant's interpretation. I focused primarily on open coding, hand coding, and color-coding to highlight the themes or categories from the transcript. Elo et al., Krippendorff (1980), and Miles and Huberman (1994) posited that coding involves content analysis and is the process of transcribing and synthesizing information from field notes, raw data, or transcription and giving it meaning. Codes are clusters of information in the form of words, phrases, or sentences from the context studied, which are then formed into themes or categories to organize the information or data and identify patterns, trends, or differences (Krippendorff, 1980).

Interpretation

Interpretation of data involves identifying the significance of the study, making meaning of the results, and providing insight or informing as well as making inferences and conclusions (Elo et al., 2014). Importantly, understanding the participant's values and beliefs and how they inform the participant's worldviews is relevant to the study (Maxwell, 2013). Janesick (2011) argued it is the researcher's obligation to describe the theoretical model that drives his or her study. Hence, I used the seminal works of Bandura (1977), Bateson (1972), and Bowlby (1982) to guide my actions and my interpretation of my findings. I also tested Bowlby's attachment theory and Bandura's social learning theory against my assumption that metacommunication can potentially impact an adolescent's prosocial growth. More crucially, metacommunication may foster attachment insecurity and avoidance behavior. To get to the essence of the phenomenon, I used an interpretative phenomenological perspective to reflect my findings. Thus, I moved from a broader reframing of reference to a narrower retrospective narrated by mothers and sons as it related to metacommunication patterns.

Reflectivity

To deal with my personal biases or subjectivity, I engaged in self-evaluation, maintained self-awareness, kept a journal, and reflected on how my experience may create constraints that may impact the findings of the study. I also discussed my concerns with colleagues and allowed them to review the data and give feedback. In addition, I used member check, which allowed the participants to review the transcript for accuracy and correct any discrepancies (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The criteria that are used to test the soundness of the qualitative paradigm and reflect assumptions and truth values are trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness

As the primary instrument in the study, it was my knowledge and skillset that determined my competence as a researcher; in addition, the data collection process, setting, and recording equipment were all relevant to ensuring trustworthiness. Self-awareness and neutrality are paramount to ensuring trustworthiness, specifically as they relate to the researcher's personal involvement in the study, which can influence stereotypes, culture, or assumptions based on his or her personal experiences (Tracy, 2010). According to Elo et al. (2014) and Maxwell (2013), trustworthiness correlates with the competency of the individual leading the study or conducting data analysis. Hence, the individual's track record will ultimately validate his or her work ethic. Another means of establishing trustworthiness was through submitting the study methodology to Walden's IRB because methodology informed the implementation and process of collecting the data; for instance, discussing the interview protocol, informing the participants of the study, getting consents and signatures, and choosing the instruments for recording and data analysis.

Credibility

Researchers must use certain strategies to establish credibility. I first determined if my research questions were appropriate and that they aligned with the research topic

and the bedrock of the data collection and analysis. Second, I ensured that the data collection and analysis complemented the research questions designed for the interviews. Third, I ensured that my assumptions related to the study were accurate or logically connected. Fourth, I ensured that there was a theoretical approach; that is, ethnography or case study, phenomenological or narrative. Fifth, I asked myself if the study would add or contribute to the current research and/or if it would improve a practice (Maxwell, 2013). In terms of ensuring study credibility, Tracy (2002) wrote that the criteria for excellence in qualitative study are contingent on the topic, rigor, sincerity, resonance, contribution, and coherence.

Dependability/Audit Trail

The audit trail I proposed established reliability because the methodology was transparent and informed others about how the research was conducted. In essence, it was a roadmap of diagrams and charts that shows the measuring instruments, the recording process, interview sessions, raw data, the coding process, and the transcripts, which were organized and uploaded in NVivo Pro 11. Triangulation was another strategy. It involved cross-checking multiple data sources to avoid intrinsic biases (Elo et al., 2014; Houghton et al., 2013)—for instance, triangulating field notes with a transcript, having a colleague review the transcripts and recording a confirmation, and using NVivo to develop comprehensive diagrams to establish an audit trail (see Appendices K, L, M, N, and O).

Transferability

The present study's results are significant to the case study sample; specifically single African American mothers and sons of single African American mothers.

However, I believe that many single mothers raising sons would be able to identify with the findings in this study or share experiences similar to the single African American mothers in this study. Tracy (2010) postulated that transferability occurs when others can empathize with a story or when it overlaps with their personal experience; for instance, a single parent sharing with others how emotionally daunting it is to raise and effectively communicate with her teenage sons in the absence of their father.

Limitations of the Study

The main attribute of this study is that it was qualitative in nature, which meant the focus was on the lived experience of the participants, a consideration of their worldviews, and how they make meaning of the phenomena that inform affection and cognition. Thus, the focus of the study was people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). In addition, the information was in-depth, rounded, and exploratory, and allowed descriptive inference (Yin, 2014). Moreover, the personal narration led to an understanding of how trends, patterns, or even deficits can influence phenomena. Furthermore, as information emerged, it contributed to existing research and/or led to a new paradigm or body of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 2012).

Despite the advancement of the qualitative paradigm, there are still scholars who are skeptics and continue to question its credibility as a research method in contrast to the quantitative approach (Tracy, 2010). Because case studies are often selected based on their uniqueness and the sample size can differ, it is difficult to generalize findings. Furthermore, because the focus is on people, it is difficult to sample large data and aggregate them systemically; hence, in qualitative research, the focus is not on

predictions or outcomes. Most importantly, it has been argued that subjectivity is an inherent limitation for qualitative researchers; however, reflexivity, neutrality, and triangulation are strategies to address this limitation (Maxwell, 2013).

Dissemination of Findings

A summary of the study and its findings was provided at debriefings of all participants. The study was detailed in the current document, placed in Walden University's archive, and submitted to peer-reviewed journals for consideration.

Ethical Considerations

It is primarily the researcher's responsibility to avoid causing harm, protect the participants' integrity, enforce confidentiality, and protect data. More important considerations include being aware of the data types that may impede or affect IRB approval such as working with a vulnerable population of children and elders (APA, 2013). Other ethical considerations include not identifying a theoretical transferability or no informed consent that explains the protocol and the rights of the participant. Hence, it is important to inform the participants of any potential risk that may occur during the interview session, such as the emergence of negative feelings, anger, or stress (APA, 2013; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Finally, to ensure that all ethical considerations are adhered to, the participants in this study were adults age 18 years or older; thus, they could give consent and they also met the age requirement mandated by the IRB. An incentive can be an effective means of recruiting and compensating participants for their services, but it should not be so high that it can lead to coercions (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Tracy (2010) discussed rationale ethics, which refers to the researcher's intrinsic

values or self-awareness. Therefore, he or she values the interdependent relationship with participants and will work in their best interests.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I provided a step-by-step overview of the research methodology, including the research design, researcher role, instrumentation, recruitment, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. I also discussed the theoretical models that guided my actions and that were the rationale for the research design and the challenges of being influenced by one's personal biases as well as creating strategies to deemphasize the biases. Strengths and limitations of the research design were also addressed. In Chapter 4, I discuss the present study's results.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide an understanding of the communication processes experienced between single African American mothers and their sons and to explore the benefits of identifying implicit metacommunication patterns. A key focus of the present study was on identifying intervention strategies to target negative patterns of communication that might impede the sons' social development or ability to engage in positive interpersonal relationships. I believed that the findings from this study would provide insights on how communication strategies can empower African American single parents by increasing communication competence and their interpersonal relationships with their sons. Most importantly, I hoped that findings from the present study would help close the gap in the body of knowledge described as interpersonal pragmatics regarding African American single mothers' experience raising sons.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the present study were: What are the metacommunication messages delivered from single mothers to sons in an African American mother-son dyad, and how do metacommunication patterns influence the youth's social identity as a young adult?

Participant Demographics

The unit analyses of this study consisted of eight participants from Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan. There were four African American single mothers age 18 years or over raising sons residing in an urban community. There were four African American

men raised by an African American single mother age 18 years or over raised in the city of New York. Table 1 presents participants' demographics.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Generation	Educational level obtained	Employed
S1	Male	56	Baby boomer	High school diploma	Student
S2	Male	27	Generation Y	Associate of arts degree	Yes
S3	Male	69	Baby boomer	Master of arts degree	Teacher
S4	Male	24	Generation Y	Associate of arts degree	Yes
M1	Female	51	Generation X	Doctor of philosophy degree	Teacher
M2	Female	39	Generation Y	Bachelor of arts degree	Counselor
M3	Female	46	Generation X	Master's degree in social work	Yes
M4	Female	45	Generation X	Bachelor of arts degree	Yes

All mothers reported that they were employed. They were not asked if they were married or divorced. Education levels varied: two had graduate degrees and two had undergraduate degrees. The number of children in the household varied from one to three.

Of the unrelated sons, three reported they were employed and one was in college. One was married, one was divorced, and two were not married. Educational levels varied: one had completed high school, one had a graduate degree, and the other two had at least two years of college. The number of children in the household varied from one to three.

Data Collection

Participants were assigned numbers to protect their identity. The data collection process began with the primary instrument (myself as the researcher) conducting one interview session with each participant. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 min. All interviews were recorded. When interviews were complete, data were retrieved from the digital recorder, uploaded to my computer, and transcribed. The transcripts were then reviewed for rich, detailed data based on the participants' lived experiences, which was then entered into the NVivo software. Themes were then generated to saturation. In addition, data were retrieved from my field notes and journal.

Circumstances Encountered

Throughout conducting the interviews, there were three incidents that disrupted the flow of information, and in one case the participant could be classified as a member of a vulnerable group (hearing impaired) as defined by the IRB. As noted in the IRB application, the selection process may not always identify a vulnerable group; as a result, I may have unknowingly recruited from a vulnerable group. However, because members of this group are also likely to be impacted by the phenomenon in question, it would have been unethical to exclude them from the study.

After recruiting S3, we met at the library, and the librarian provided us an area to conduct the interview. The librarian asked that we keep it low because there were other events going on in the area. I agreed, and after walking up to the second level we sat at the table. S3 sat to my left. I began to brief him on the study, and after asking if there were any questions, he said, “You have to speak up because I have trouble hearing.” Despite the unexpected challenge, we proceeded with the interview, and as anticipated I had to request that S3 try to speak a little softer so that we did not disturb the others in the area. One person had already come out of her class and asked that we keep it down. After 20 min into the session, I was able to complete Question 5. However, because of the situation, my ability to probe or get the participant to elaborate more, a technique to encourage and draw out rich and descriptive information (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), was limited. After the interview, there were some concerns as to whether I had obtained significant data; however, after I reviewed the recorder and transcript, the data were significant.

While conducting an interview with S4 in the library, we were seated at a round table and S4 was seated across from me. I noticed during our conversation that S4 kept turning to his right and looking over his shoulder. The distraction at times impacted the fluency of the conversation. After reviewing the recorded session, I realized I had missed the opportunity to follow up on a significant response from this participant. For example, S4 had explained that he smokes marijuana and had problems. In reviewing the transcript, I realized that I had missed an opportunity to dig deeper into the nature of the problem-probe for clarity, which could have led to a more descriptive response.

During my interview with M2, a person entered the room and spoke in a loud, disruptive tone. Shortly after, a security officer interrupted the interview and informed me that another group was scheduled for the room. I paused the session, went out to meet with the officer, and explained that we needed approximately 15 more minutes if another room was not available. I was allowed to continue the session, but the fluidity of the session was disrupted. Because M2 was energetic and enthusiastic about the study she was able to bounce back without missing a beat as if there was no disruption. While observing her metacommunication cues (bright eyed, smiling, talking with hands, and rhythm in speech), it was clear that she enjoyed the session. According to communication experts, when the implicit and explicit cues are congruent the signals can be interpreted as trustworthy (Runcan et al., 2012, Savage, 2014).

Data Analysis

Inductive Process

As a naturalistic inquiry, the inductive process was purposeful and began with myself the researcher as the primary instrument in a naturalistic or qualitative inquiry. I used a Sony digital recorder to record the semistructured open-ended interviews with the eight participants. I then took the data from the recorder and uploaded it to my computer; importing the file to NVivo Pro 11 and submitting to TranscribeMe via NVivo for coding.

Coding Process

The coding process involved hand coding, open coding (analyzing text, labeling), axial coding (reanalyzing open coding and identifying categories) and focus coding

(reanalyzing, building on previous codes and creating themes), linking research questions with theories (see Appendix K).

The sets of data generated from the coding process were organized and integrated into NVivo files as charts, graphs, nodes, and classifications, which allowed me to explore, review, and reanalyze the emerging data to the point of saturation. I was then able to contextualize and make meaning of the data. Furthermore, the coding process allowed me to explore, understand, and link the data to a theory

Codes, Categories, and Themes

Content analysis (see Appendix L) was used to study the raw data and link them to a theoretical framework. To also make meaning of the text, in vivo coding was used (focusing on the participant voice), holistic/lump coding was used to analyze chunks or portions of the texts, and theming was used to identify patterns and word frequency that could be linked to theory.

From Coding to Emerging Data

The codes was generated from (a) asking the interview questions; (b) getting the participant's response; (c) conducting a content analysis; and (d) coding, categorizing, and generating themes. The participants M1, M2, M3, and M4 were all asked the same open-ended questions, which were followed by a comparative analysis; that is, showing the similarities in the mothers' and the unrelated sons' responses to the questions.

Responses to Interview Questions

First Theme: Parenting Practices Affect Metacommunication

The African American single mothers (M1, M2, M3, and M4) were asked “How would you describe your parenting style?” Responses were mixed; however, the mothers’ descriptions of their parenting practices were significant. For instance, most claimed to be strict and protective of their sons, used physical discipline if they had to, and were lenient or controlling.

In describing the metacommunication cues delivered to sons, the mothers were descriptive, animated, and chuckled as they went through the motions of showing their facial expressions, such as the stare down or evil eye, (cutting the eyes) or in other cases the wide eye with hands on their hips and leaning forward. Some demonstrated the frown (squinting the eyes and showing their teeth) or stonewalling (just being silent) while others demonstrated threatening gestures like reaching for a belt. What was revealed in the study was how the mothers all answered the research questions similarly; for instance, the patterns of metacommunication delivered to sons, the types, and the frequencies.

During the interviews many of the mothers reported that their relationships with their sons improved after they changed their parenting style; for instance, transitioning from an authoritarian style (strict and controlling) to an authoritative style (more responsive, providing support and guidance, active listening, and engaging in open communication).

A few of the mothers reported that being strict or not being present negatively impacted the relationship with their sons. M1 said, “The child really didn’t have no

voice.” M3 explained, “Me working everyday was part of my issue,” which seemed to have led to ongoing contention and an insecure relationship with her oldest son.

The mothers’ responses were coded, potential categories were developed such as learning curve, disciplinarian, learned behavior, laissez-faire, and children have no voice, and the theme of parenting practice affecting metacommunication cues was developed.

The coding process used to generate the codes, categories, and themes was a combination of the following: holistic/lump coding, which focused on chunks or the whole text), emotion coding, which focused on feelings and word frequency, in vivo or verbatim coding; that is, coding the voice of the participants, and descriptive coding, which focused on detail. The codes were highlighted and italicized in the transcript.

M1 said she was strict. “I would say strict, but understanding. But I had to learn. I learnt that.” When asked, “What do you mean you had to learn that?” she replied,

I had two sons and my sons, they’re not two years apart, they’re six years apart.

So I learned to do different. I learned to listen more instead of being—I was the beginning, with my first son, I was a parent like my mother. I said my mother and father, but I’m going to say my mother, because my mother was the disciplinarian. You do something wrong, you get beat for it. You do something wrong, you get punished for it. You do something wrong, you really didn’t have any say so, for me, for my parents. Whatever my mother said, whatever my father said, that’s what it was. The child really didn’t have a voice. But I learned that you have to listen to the child as well. So that’s what I started doing. Of course, with

my first son, I did more beating, like my mother, than listening, and it didn't help.

It didn't help.

According to the literature, the African American authoritarian parenting style or practice is to instill survival skills in their sons such as teaching them how to avoid conflict, exhibit submissiveness, and not be antagonistic in a system that is oppressive toward Black males (Roberts, 2014).

Similarly, M2 said, "Just really strict; I really got that discipline behavior from my parents. I am strict with him; I think that something that has to be done nowadays, strictness. There's a curfew and he is my only son." Although M2 maintained that her parenting style is authoritarian, she also seemed to have adopted the helicopter parenting style, which is consistent with parents motivated by fear, anxiety and the need to control and protect their sons from harm. Elliott et al. (2013) showed that the parenting styles of African American mothers, such as authoritarian or helicopter parenting, monitoring, and consistent intervention, were solely the results of protecting their sons from a hostile and racial society.

M3 said she is "A firm package person. My children can get me—if I raise my tone and they get that little sad look, I kind of fall back a little. I'm very pleasing. I must say and I will say I that I have spoiled my children." When asked "spoiled them?" M3 elaborated

Yeah [chuckles]. They're spoiled because when I was growing up as a kid, on Saturdays I knew I had to go get up and clean. My kids don't know what it's like to get up and clean on a Saturdays or Sunday. They know how to get up on

Sunday and attend church, but as far as the cleaning aspect, you know how in my era you knew. This is your Saturday chore, or, this is your Monday chore, your Wednesday chore. You did dishes. You took out garbage. A lot of the times I enable my children to be lazy.

M3 also reported a lack of physical proximity between her and the oldest son. “Me working everyday was part of my issue.” She added, “When everything was said and done, and we did sit down and go to counseling, one of the things he expressed was . . . ‘But you was never home. You was never home. You put work before me.’”

M3 reported that her parenting style and work schedule affected her relationship with her oldest son, which resulted in ongoing contention, defiant behavior, and the son engaging in gang activity; behavior that Bowlby (1982) described as seeking a comfort zone or an attachment figure elsewhere. M3 further stated that as a result of her relationship with her oldest son, she is “now strict;” however, the data revealed an adapted parenting style much more similar to helicopter parenting; that is, controlling and heavy monitoring, which parallels with the authoritarian parenting style.

When asked about parenting styles, M4 asked what they were. I gave the following examples: authoritarian, helicopter, authoritative, and laissez-faire, of which she affirmed, “I am a mixture of the first two,” authoritative and helicopter parent. She stated,

And honestly, I would say I’m a mixture of the first two because helicopter parenting can get crazy. Depending upon how sensitive it is, but I would be lying if I sat here and said I may have not have dabbled and dabbled in helicopter

parenting. The way I was raised was like children should be seen, not heard. Our opinions really didn't matter. I didn't raise my kid like that. I would listen to him. I never thought this day would come because I always said, I would not be like my mother when I was younger, and she yelled, but I can see where I may have picked up some things from the females in my family, along with my own personality and my little crazy disposition all mixed in one. I think it's just a cultural . . . well, some it can be cultural.

Research has shown that authoritarian parenting and metacommunication are culturally driven and dominant in the African American community, which has been linked to the postslavery experience (Collins, 2008; Gantt & Greif, 2009). Results from the present study showed that, based on the mothers' responses, the authoritarian parenting style is the least effective and encourages metacommunication cues that support discipline and controlling and closed communication, which can foster humiliation, shame, and feelings of rejection.

Second Theme: Relationship Means Feeling Connected

The unrelated sons S1, S2, S3, and S4 were asked "How would you describe your relationship with your mother?" Three sons reported experiencing a secure relationship; one stated that his relationship was insecure. The participants who described their relationship as secure or insecure aligned with Bowlby's (1982) theory of attachment and consequential outcomes.

In the interviews with sons, what was significant and revealing was the sons were very protective and cautious when disclosing information about their mothers.

Importantly, the sons' responses to the interview questions aligned with those from the unrelated mothers in that most claimed their mothers were strict and used physical discipline if they had to while others said there was no discipline or abuse. When the sons were asked to describe the metacommunication signals delivered from their mothers their recall was consistent with that of the mothers, but they were not as animated in their descriptions. The sons simply said they could remember the facial expressions, the stare (eye contact) or hands on their hips, finger pointing, smile, frown, or words of encouragement. Many spoke of the lessons learned; what men should not do, get a job, get an education, or not disrespect women. In addition, they praised their mothers for how they turned out both socially and personally.

The unrelated sons' responses were coded, potential categories (strict, nonresponsiveness, uncertainty, secure and supportive) were developed, and a theme was generated (a relationship means feeling connected). The coding process used to generate the codes, categories, and themes was a combination of the following: holistic/lump code (focusing on chunks or the whole text), emotion coding (feelings and word frequency), in vivo or verbatim coding; that is, coding the voice of the participants, and descriptive coding (focusing on detail). The codes were highlighted and italicized in the transcripts.

S1 stated, "Now, there's not really much communication or interaction. I'd really just prefer to stay out of the house." When asked the follow-up question "Okay, what about when you were younger?" S1 stated "I'd still prefer to stay out of the house. But I guess we would talk more often, like if she has a question about whatever, she would ask. When younger, we talk about too much anyway." When I asked about paralinguistic

cues, S1's response was "I mean, yeah, she used to be louder, not much as a yell but you could hear that she wanted me to—as far as if school was involved and she didn't like my grade or something." While talking with S1 about paralinguistic cues, there was a lot of chuckling and body language that suggested he felt relaxed.

In the course of elaborating, S1 said, "That's how it's like. Or if she wanted me to go to the store, she would speak a little softer. Like I could tell just from the way she calls me that she wants me to do something for her." When asked "So, how does that sound? How is it different from the normal sound?" S1 said,

Well, regularly, she tends to be like—she calls my name or whatever and if she's just telling me something as far as, there's food on the stove, rather than, 'Oh, can you go to the store for me? I need you to—something.'"

When I asked S1 to define his relationship with his mother, he stated, "Yeah, we're cool. I think so. Like, if I'm comparing it to how other people relate to their mothers, then we're not secure."

In the course of the interview, S1 also shared that there was a lack of physical affection. "We don't hug, we don't kiss on the cheek." When I asked how he felt about it, he shrugged his shoulder and implied he was cool with it. On the other hand, S2 praised his mother for the love he experienced and for having a secure relationship. He said, "Her love is so massive for us and we knew it" and added "She showed us tremendous affection, I mean, we never felt that my mother didn't love us. So, that whole household was full of that." S2 also stated that he was profoundly impacted by his relationship with his mother. He said,

My mother looked at us—When she looked at us, you could look at her face and know she was extremely proud, happy, and honored to be our mother. So we were proud and happy and honored to be her sons.

When asked how he would define the relationship, S2 said,

Close and secure. Close and secure. I mean, we never thought—even if we didn't have stuff, it didn't matter, we had her. We had each other. That's the whole idea that day, that's it. Never kind of—felt that she wasn't in our corner.

In all that was said, S2 spoke consistently of the physical affection experienced in the relationship with his mother and brother.

Similarly, S4's response was "Relationship with my mom. I'm her baby girl [chuckles]. It's funny because my name was Myab. She was hoping I was a girl." When prompted with the word "Right," S4 said, "She had three older ones already, three older sons. She was babying me since I was the young one. A lot of things that my brother could do, I couldn't do." When prompted again with the word "Right," S4 said,

I used to stay at home, even though my brothers are one year apart from me. She's the first person I would turn to if I had a problem. We have a secure relationship. We have a secure relationship.

When asked how this relationship impacted him as an individual, S4 said,

I'm just more sewn in the background. That's how I am. I'm cool, calm, and collected [chuckles]; she taught all of us to respect elders and also, to respect women. . . . taught me to never put hands on a female. To respect women. If it

ever comes to that point that a man should raise their hand at another female, they should walk out the door. Because that's not right.

S4 also mentioned how he deferred to his mother when there was a problem between him and his fiancé.

My fiancé, we got into—she started yelling at me and she started hitting me. So I said, I don't want to do this. I called my mom and I said, Mom, you better come over right because I want to leave.

When asked “Do you consider yourself to be confident?” S4 said,

Mom definitely taught us to be confident when we were younger. More so be leaders than followers. She definitely teaches that and self-esteem definitely. She always picked us up, which is something every parent should do. That's something that I'm going to teach my daughter to be confident and to be a leader. She probably—she will be all right.

Of the four cases, S2 was a model case and confirmed Bowlby's theory of attachment security and presumed outcome (emotional and cognitive development). S2's case was the most informative and provided the most insightful as it pertains to the dyadic relationship between mothers and sons and adaptive outcomes such as self-efficacy, confidence, and being highly motivated.

Discrepant Cases

In the following examples, the adaptive outcome did not seem to be consistent with Bowlby's (1982) theory. The majority of the unrelated son cases were confirmations of adaptive outcomes except for S1 and S3. Ainsworth et al. (1978), Bandura (2011), and

Bowlby (1982) posited that mothers provide the template for the child's emotional and cognitive growth. In the dyadic relationship, studies have shown that if the mother or care provider is responsive to the child's needs, there is a positive affect or attachment security throughout the child's lifespan. However, parental deprivation or lack in responsiveness can result in attachment insecurity, which is more likely to foster anxiety, avoidance, or anger, with consequential outcomes being maladaptive behavior, risky behavior, or the child not mastering his or her environment (Bandura, 2011; Bowlby, 1982).

S1 described his relationship with his mother as insecure and the relationship void of any physical affection. As a result, his peer group became his comfort zone or alternative base. S1 stated because he and his peers were raised in single-parent households they formed a bond and supported each other. From comments made in the interview session, it was clear that the adaptive outcome, in this case, was linked to his positive relationship with his peers or metagroup, who shared a common thread. It seemed as if the bonding with the group reduced S1's potential for engaging in risky behavior or encountering the juvenile justice system.

On the other hand, S4 described his relationship with his mother as secure. He told how he was the baby boy, and constantly described the relationship as secure, close or friend like. S4 also said that there was a lot of affection—hugs, kisses, and praise—and that affection was reciprocated between him and his brothers.

Further elaboration with S4 revealed that despite his claim of having a secure relationship he often spoke of engaging in risky behavior and expressed how it impacted his mother.

When I was younger I got kicked out, I didn't get kicked out of school, I got suspended because I had my weed on me in school, so I was home taught the rest of the year. . . . Then I was tired of smoking weed.

Another point of interest was when S4 discussed his behavior and its impact on this mother. He said,

But we did something very bad, you know, say we did something that could land us in jail—she would cry. She would cry. She'd cry, and then we'd go over and hug her, and we'd say "I'm sorry." It's funny when I look back at it on my childhood and what not, I really didn't do nothing bad. Not bad, bad.

I would conclude the adaptive outcome for S4 was inconsistent with Bandura (2011) and Bowlby (1987), who maintained that a secure relationship or bonding fostered adaptive behavior, like self-efficacy, which increases self-esteem and positive interpersonal growth over the individuals' lifespan.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The criteria used to test the soundness of the qualitative paradigm, assumptions, and truth values are trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness

As I engaged in the research process, I kept a journal that contained notes of my objective and subjective feelings; for instance, after listening to a recorded session I realized I had missed an opportunity to have the participant elaborate more on a significant response to an interview question, hence resulting in my missing rich and in-depth information. In other cases, I noted the importance of maintaining focus and being a proactive listener; not judging, showing emotions, or influencing the answers by intentionally leading the questions or through my metacommunicative signals. For additional support, I also relied on a colleague to be a sounding board or to cross-check the data to avoid personal biases or distort the results.

Elo et al. (2014) and Maxwell (2013) argued that trustworthiness is associated with effective preparation, data collection, and competency of the individual leading the study or conducting data analysis.

Credibility

To establish credibility as proposed in Chapter 3, I ensured that my research questions aligned with the research topic and the literature review and that the participants could answer the questions. Second, I ensured that the data collection and analysis linked to the research questions and theoretical framework. Third, I ensured that the theoretical framework would guide my case study. Fourth, I ensured that though my knowledge and skill I could yield high-quality data and that the study was evidence based; that is, that both seminal work and current studies on interpersonal communication were considered. I hoped that study results would effect change by having quality criteria

with an aim to contribute to the current research. Morse (2015) said the criteria for assessing trustworthiness of a qualitative or naturalistic inquiry are to redefine the terminology for achieving rigor, reliability, validity and generalizability (p. 1212) and replace it with credibility, dependability and transferability. Importantly, the emerging data were contextualized and comparative, and discrepant cases were discussed.

Dependability/Audit Trail

The audit trail remained consistent with the strategy stated in Chapter 3, which was designed to establish reliability through the rigor of the methodology and informed the components that Elo et al. (2014) asserted are significant for conducting a qualitative content analysis: (a) preparation, (b) organization, and (c) reporting the findings. As part of my analysis, I also created diagrams that show the measuring instruments and the coding process (see Appendices M, N, and O).

In addition, for reflexivity a journal was instrumental because it informed my reactions to the study, my assumptions, and my interpretation of the participants' words, nonverbal and paralinguistic cues, and feelings (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Janesick, 2011; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Lastly, triangulation was another strategy employed in the current study. This involved cross-checking multiple data sources to avoid intrinsic biases and to ensure validity (Morse, 2015); for instance, triangulating field notes with a transcript or having a colleague review the transcripts and recording a confirmation or words regarding the dependability of the sources.

Transferability

Study results were significant for the case study sample, specifically single African American mothers and sons. The implications are that the study results will benefit those parents who can empathize or share experiences similar to African American single mothers in this study. Importantly, mothers can learn competent communication skills that will strengthen the mother-son dyad in the absence of their father.

The findings could contribute to the limited body of linguistic knowledge in this particular area and edify human services providers in education, corrections, counseling, and medicine as well as parents who are affected by communication incompetence. The findings could also provide intervention strategies for families that can target specific communication patterns as well as inform developmental theories and provide insights on how communication incompetence can impede treatment or influence the goal for treatment outcome. Tracy (2010) postulated that transferability occurs when others can empathize with a story or when it overlaps with their personal experience; for instance, a single parent sharing with others how emotionally daunting it is to raise and effectively communicate with her teenage sons in the absence of their father.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the process of ensuring that the interpretations are created from the raw data—the participants' voices and lived experiences—and are not a misrepresentation of the researcher's personal biases or manipulation. The strategies that were used to avoid misconstrued data and inaccuracies in my interpretations were

reflective writing in my journal, triangulation of source and theory (multiple theories), member checking, comparative analysis and paraphrasing, and in vivo coding using the participants' voices.

Summary

Understanding that metacommunication outcomes could be detrimental to the well-being of sons, I tested Bowlby's (1969) theory of insecure and secure attachment. According to attachment and social learning theories, interpersonal experiences between mothers and sons determine outcomes.

As a result of a thorough, in-depth, and systematic data analysis as well as listening to the participants' voices and lived experiences, findings from the present study answered the research questions and aligned with Bowlby's theory of attachment and Bandura's theory of social learning. Study findings also showed that the mothers are the most significant attachment figures, impacting affective and cognitive development as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal growth (Bandura, 2011; Bowlby, 1982). Moreover, throughout the interview process, the male participants engaged in recalling their childhood experiences, which for some forced them to tap into deep emotions. For others, the interview session was cathartic and seemed to be therapeutic. The feelings elicited from the participants were overwhelming at times, fostered empathy, and gave me an understanding of the importance of metacommunication as a strategy for strengthening the interpersonal relationship between mothers and sons.

Although most of the participants seemed to have internalized their experiences, they were not cognizant of their impact until after the interview. For example, S3 became

sad and teary eyed after talking about his mother. I paused and asked if talking about his relationship with his mother made him sad. His response was,

Oh yeah, but you know what? Why I'm sad about it, it makes you very proud.

And it gave us our model, as to what we would have to do, or if we had to do it, no doubt about it.

In other cases participants wanted to continue talking even after the recorder was turned off. S4 wanted to continue with the discussion even though his fiancé and son were waiting for him while he was doing the interview. M2 and M4 also continued to talk after the recorder was turned off. For the sons and the mothers, the discussions seemed to have been cathartic and just as insightful for them as they were for me.

During the interviews, it was clear that the African American single mothers were definite about their parental identity, making their roles and lived experiences significant to the well-being of their sons. To be transparent about the challenges of an African American single mother, it also was important to elaborate on the social strains that impact the parenting practice and the metacommunication signals unconsciously delivered to their sons.

The data revealed that the mothers' primary concern was to secure a relationship with their sons and to protect them from racism, police abuse, street violence, and gangs. As a result, the primary parenting style in the African American community is authoritarian, which many of the participants reported had been passed from mothers to daughters? Importantly, the parenting style was significant and has been shown to influence metacommunication patterns delivered from mothers to sons.

What was most revealing was the similarity in the metacommunication cues shared between mothers and sons, which supports Bandura's (2011), Bateson's (1972), and Branco's (2005) contentions that metacommunication is culturally driven and a socially learned behavior. Subsequently, there was a paradigm shift after some of the mothers acknowledged that their parenting skills had negatively impacted their relationship with their sons. M1 shifted from authoritarian to authoritative when stating that her relationship with her youngest son was less contentious, and M4 seemed to have adopted the helicopter parenting style and contended that she had more control over her youngest son.

However, M2 maintained the authoritarian paradigm, which she said was learned from her parents, but she also showed the highest level of engagement (physical proximity and affection) with her son. Study findings showed that in many cases the mothers were not responsive to their sons' needs due to having multiple jobs or working long hours. The most profound evidence was revealed by M4 when she shared a conversation with her son who said, "But you was never home. You was never home. You put work before me" and by S4, who said, "We don't hug, we don't kiss on the cheek."

Study evidence showed that negative metacommunication cues can contribute to an insecure attachment, resulting in the son seeking a confront zone or attachment figure elsewhere (peers, gang affiliation, or engaging in risky behavior), an alternative outcome discussed by Bowlby (1987). Ainsworth et al. (1978) stated that for the mother and infant to develop a secure the mother has to be responsive to the infant's metacommunicative

signals, which they listed as crying, sucking, eye contact, touch, and clinging. What was insightful for me was learning that people have an innate need to be connected with a base, or as Bowlby (1982) called it an attachment figure (mother or care provider); hence, the security or reassurance is reinforced through metacommunicative signals experienced in the dyad.

Through further analysis, study results showed the sons' desire to protect and maintain loyalty to their mothers. Many were empathetic and felt a need to help or contribute to the household in any way possible; for instance, dropping out of school as S3's case. Moreover, in the course of interviewing the unrelated sons most were receptive to the metacommunication cues delivered by their mothers such as touches, kisses, hugs, changes in tone of voice, and praise.

The sons who said they had a secure relationship or bond with mothers reported having positive intrapersonal-interpersonal growth as well as academic success. For example, S3 was employed and seeking to further his education and had seemingly aged out of his risky behavior, S2 earned his master's degree and is professionally employed, and S4 initially dropped out of school to help his mother and then decided to pursue a career through culinary school. Again, the data consistently showed that positive metacommunication fosters a secure relationship and positive prosocial skills, which aligned with Bowlby's (1982) theory of attachment security as well as with Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning in that the sons and mothers adopted the attitudes and behaviors of their parents.

Of the four cases, S1 was unique and the only one in the group who stated that his relationship was not secure and was void of physical affection. Yet, he revealed empathy, compassion, and caution as he spoke about his relationship with his mother. As previously discussed, he seemed to have found solace in his peers or metagroup. According to S1, he and his peers shared a common thread as the majority was raised in a single-parent household, and the group seemed to have insulated themselves from negative influences. He said, “The friends that I have around me like my friends turned out to be the support group. The camaraderie that we have, because we’ve been around each other for so long it’s like—and we’re all adults.”

An interesting point made by S1 was his position on being raised in a single-parent household. “When you have two different parents, you have two different views, and you have the opportunity to clasp that into what you have or how you view it. So you could pick from whatever side that you choose.” He added, “In a one-parent household, it’s limited information, limited experiences.” I found this to be a profound and insightful perspective from a member of Generation Y, often characterized as a generation of youth who are into themselves and project a sense of entitlement.

The findings addressed the two research questions, which also aligned with Bowlby’s theory of attachment and Bandura’s theory social learning, hence identifying the significance of positive metacommunication in the mother-son dyad and its impact on attachment security, insecurity, and avoidance behavior. Furthermore, study results showed how relevant social learning is to adaptive behavior and learning the appropriate parenting and socialization skills. The metacommunication concept provides a framework

that can impact social change by teaching parents effective interpersonal communication. This knowledge can also be used to encourage positive relationship building between Human Services providers and their clients by teaching how metacommunicative signals are culturally driven (Akhlaq et al., 2013, Leong, 1993, Matsumoto, 2001).

The results from the present study were disseminated to my dissertation chairperson via a PowerPoint presentation. The participants also received a brief summary of the study. In Chapter 5, I provide an interpretation of the findings, implications for social change and recommendations, delimitations, and further recommendation for future studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide an understanding of the communication process experienced between African American single mothers and sons and, more important, to explore and identify patterns of metacommunication and how they impact the relationships between mothers and sons. Moreover, how negative metacommunication affect the son's personal and social identity.

Marshall and Rossman (2010) stated that qualitative data inform and provide an understanding of the psychosocial phenomenon that fosters the respondents' cognitive and affective growth and is the most effective at answering why and how questions.

Study results provided insights on how metacommunication strategies can empower African American single mothers by increasing communication competence and their interpersonal relationships with their sons. Results show the role metacommunication plays in shaping parenting styles and relationships. They also show how these patterns of communication are passed one from one generation to the next and encourage parenting practices that foster demandingness, control, or closed communication.

Key Findings and Results

In this study a few of the mothers reported that they were strict, controlling, and in many cases absent due to working long hours and multiple jobs. The findings revealed that metacommunication impacted the parenting styles, which fostered behaviors like being demanding and controlling, making threats, hitting, frowning, stonewalling, and

nonresponsiveness. Bowlby (1982) stated that a secure relationship between mother and infant or child is directly related to the mother's responsiveness to the child's needs and early interpersonal experiences. Thus, the mother's attitude and behavior were shown to be relevant as they relate to her responsiveness to the infant's metacommunication cues such as crying, making eye contact, smiling, sucking, and the need to be touched (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Ogilvie, Newman, Todd, & Peck, 2014). It was evident that the mothers' responsiveness was the linchpin for building a secure relationship with their sons.

In the retrospective reports from the unrelated sons, most described having a secure relationship with their mothers as they experienced high levels of physical affection, hugs, kisses, touch, smiling, praise, and open communication. When asked about their prosocial skills or relationships with others they reported being confident and able to get along with others. The unrelated son who did not have a secure relationship with his mother reported having to deal with some interpersonal-intrapersonal challenges. S1 mentioned that he was confident in his own space, "But when I start thinking of what people would think about it then the confidence level drops a little bit." He added that this limited his ability to network with people he did not know. Keating et al. (2013) reported that ineffective communication could foster or decrease prosocial development in the adolescent and increase the potential for communication incompetence and a deficit in interpersonal skills, cause low self-esteem, and create a pathway to deviant and risky behavior.

The present study's findings revealed how important it was for the mothers to be aware of their parenting style as the awareness allowed them to transition to a more effective parenting style and to avoid metacommunication patterns that led to insecure relationships with their sons. Negative metacommunication impedes the mother's responsiveness to sons and results in such outcomes as the sons engaging in gang activity, crime, and delinquency (Whitaker et al., 2014). Study results also showed that parenting practices in which mothers were responsive to, advocated for, listened to, and encouraged their sons to talk and express themselves fostered secure and positive prosocial outcomes (Runcan et al., 2012).

During the study, I conducted a comparative analysis to see the similarities and difference in the data as they related to the mothers' responses to the interview questions as well the responses from the unrelated sons. The findings showed that in most cases there was no difference in how the mothers responded to the interview questions or the unrelated sons' responses. The retrospective reports were similar as they related to participants sharing with me how they would describe a secure or an insecure relationship. For example, the mothers and sons described a secure relationship as open communication, reciprocity, supportiveness, and being present and actively involved whereas an insecure relationship reflected a parent being absent, closed communication, and nonresponsiveness.

Furthermore, the unrelated sons reported that they were most impacted by their mothers' absences due to working long hours and multiple jobs. Like the unrelated sons, the mothers also reported that having to work long hours and multiple jobs had negatively

impacted their relationship with their sons. For example, M3 shared why her relationship with her oldest son was insecure and stated that her son felt she cared more about her job than him. As a result, the son was defiant and started to engage in gang activity. Her assertion confirmed findings in the literature review; for instance, Bandura's (1977) and Bowlby's (1982) argument that an insecure mother-son dyad can impact the child's cognitive-emotional growth and have long-term consequences. In addition, Ogilvie et al. (2014) cited Bowlby regarding early messages from the primary care provider affecting the child's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development. Ogilvie et al. (2014) added that a secure interpersonal relationship fosters adaptive behavior, independence, and self-efficacy and increases self-esteem and positive interpersonal growth over the lifespan. Bandura showed the significance of observational learning; that children learn through mimicking and modeling the parents' behavior, which promotes secure attachment and cognitive and emotional adaptive behavior. Importantly, social learning or observational learning strengthens the child's relationship with others.

The present study's most significant finding is the negative effects of culture, social strain, and public policies on metacommunicative signals from mothers to sons (Kelch-Oliver & Smith, 2015) and how the sons' interpretations of the metacommunication cues impacted their social and personal identity. For instance, the vast majority of the unrelated sons linked smiling, hugging, touching, engagement, and positive praise to a secure or close relationship with mothers and positive interpersonal-intrapersonal growth. S2 said, "A lot of hugging. I mean my mother, a lot of praising, you know? A lot of—there was a body language like because you know can think of them—

you can praise—there’s a certain look.” When I asked about his interpersonal skills, he said they were “Strong, very strong.”

S4 said, “She would hug us and kiss us. She would say good job. She’d probably take us out somewhere nice. When I got on the honor roll the first time she put that sticker proudly on her bumper, back bumper. She was proud of me.” When I asked about his interpersonal skills, he said, “My mom definitely taught us to be confident when we were younger. More so be leaders than followers. She definitely teaches that and self-esteem definitely.” In both cases, a positive relationship was contingent on immediacy stimuli such as metacommunication cues like touching, physical proximity, eye contact, praising, and head nodding as noted by Scholl (2013).

The findings also revealed that authoritarian parenting, characterized by being strict, demanding, controlling, and with closed communication, was the dominant parenting style for most African American single mothers. This is also consistent with findings on parenting styles. Findings from the literature review showed that African American mothers had been labeled as authoritarian parents. They were seen as overprotective, controlling, disciplinarian, and more prone to using metacommunication, changes in tone and facial expression, criticism, gazing, changes in body posture, and closed communication that encourages obedience (Collins, 2008; Gantt & Grief, 2009; Keating et al., 2013). Furthermore, according to the literature metacommunication is culturally driven and reflects dominant behaviors, authority, or ritualization common in African American culture (Bekoff, 1977; Darwin, 1859; Matsumoto, 2001; Scholl, 2013; Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2013; Triandis, 1994).

Because metacommunication is linked to parenting style, I asked the mothers about their parenting styles. A few shared that they were strict and how their parenting style had negatively impacted their relationship with their son or sons. They changed in order to strengthen their relationship with their sons. When I asked about their parenting styles, they said they learned the styles from their parents. M2 said, “I got that discipline behavior from my parents. My parents were very strict on me. I don’t know why [chuckles]. They were strict on me. Whatever I learned from them, I carry it over to my son.” Many of the mothers’ behaviors were consistent with Keating et al. (2013) in that close communication was often found in households where the emphasis was on obedience and parental control.

When I asked the unrelated sons about their mothers’ parenting styles the responses were similar to the mothers regarding strictness of discipline, S4 said, “She would stay on top of us. We didn’t stay out all night. We didn’t go to any of our friends house to sleep overs. My mom was very strict.” On the other hand, S3 said,

Discipline? Go to the room, can’t go outside, no TV because she didn’t really use any force when I was coming up that I can remember. I have never seen her use any force, nothing, towards us, any of my siblings, including me.

My interpretation of the unrelated sons’ mother-son dyads is that the sons seemed to recognize that while the metacommunication cues received from the mothers may have been strict, controlling, or demanding, the intent was good. They understood that their mothers were trying to protect them from gangs, drugs, and encounters with the criminal justice system.

However, S1, the only unrelated son who reported not having a close or insecure relationship with his mother, reported bonding with his peers who, like himself, were raised in a single-parent household. S1 sought a comfort zone or figure elsewhere, which aligned with Bowlby's (1982) contention that a mother's nonresponsiveness can lead to an insecure attachment and the child seeking comfort elsewhere.

Limitations of the Study

The present study's limitations were the following: (a) the interview questions could have been framed better to encourage more enriched data, (b) not having follow-up sessions with each participant, which may have increased the trustworthiness, and (c) a small number of participants, as having more could have increased the study's reliability and validity.

As a qualitative inquiry, subjective space is shared between the researcher and participants, which adds richness and dimension to a study. But because of this subjective space, there is also the potential for personal biases that can affect the study (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Tracy (2010) argued for the point of self-reflectivity, which entails maintaining self-awareness, honesty, and transparency as a means for reducing subjectivity.

Because I relied on retrospective reporting, there was a potential for exaggerations or inaccuracies in the mothers' and unrelated sons' recalls. Throughout the interview sessions, there was the potential that my metacommunicative signals such as facial expression, head nodding, and pattern of speech could have influenced the participant's responses. Moreover, the selected sample only represented a small segment of the

African American single-mother population and therefore cannot be transferred to a larger segment of the population. Also, by restricting the study to African American single mothers, other individuals who might have been in the sons' lives, such as stepmothers, grandmothers, and single fathers, were not included. The study was limited to unrelated sons and their interpretation of messages from their mothers, which could also have produced inaccuracies due to recall or personal biases.

Recommendations

I assert that the social change process began with developing more research on the challenges African American single mothers experience in raising their sons and their need to adapt parenting practices to protect their sons. It also begins by developing a greater understanding of how metacommunication affects parenting styles and leads to long-term consequences (Pezzella, Thornberry, & Smith, 2015; Whitaker et al., 2014).

I would advocate for legislative policies that would address oppressive public policies that promote racial inequities and marginalize and undervalue African American single mothers and sons (Pezzella et al., 2015). In addition, I would advocate for legislative policies that promote change by developing school-based curricula for teaching high school and college students the role metacommunication plays in shaping parenting styles (demandingness or responsiveness) and in fostering adolescents' social and personal identities.

Finally, I would encourage intervention services through public services that support single mothers raising sons by linking to evidence-based programs, after-school programs and community service. I would also encourage alternative programs for the

socially challenged. A final recommendation is to provide subsidies or stipends that would allow single parents to enroll their sons in these programs.

Implications

Implications that can be drawn from the present study are as follows. First, social change can impact oppressive social policies and reduce racial practices that have led to marginalizing and undervaluing African American mothers and sons. Second, human services providers, policymakers, and other stakeholders can learn to recognize and use their metacommunication skills to build and strengthen their interpersonal relationship with clients. Third, professional workers and care providers can be taught through in-house training how personal and cultural biases influence negative metacommunication cues and thus undermine the interpersonal dyad. For instance, they can be taught to recognize and understand how the marginalization of individuals or groups is coded in bigotry, rhetoric, and acts of violence and that these codes or metacommunicative signals are mirrored in the attitudes and behaviors of the person or group and are influenced by their culture; that is, institutional values and beliefs (Andresen, 2005; Bateson, 1981; Bekoff, 1972; Matsumoto, 2001; Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2013). Fourth, the findings inform how social strains affect the family's interpersonal expression and how metacommunication is delivered and received.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this study was the seminal work of Bowlby (1982), who argued that early messages from the primary care provider affect the child's self-image, cognitive, and behavioral development and that a secure interpersonal

relationship promotes positive outcomes over the lifespan, and Bandura (2011), who showed that observational learning—that is, mimicking and modeling parental or caregiver behavior—promotes secure attachment and cognitive-emotional adaptive behavior and strengthens the child’s relationship with the parent or care provider. The implications are that individuals who experience warmth, affection, and parental support are more likely to feel secure.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework supports that negative metacommunication can influence attachment response and disrupt the child’s interpersonal relationships. Finally, I would assert that those who will benefit most from this body of knowledge are human services providers, teachers, members of law enforcement, counselors, and members of the judicial system who have systemically, through their institutions, demonized, marginalized and undervalued the African American community.

Conclusion and Social Change Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide an understanding of metacommunication between African American single mothers and their sons and to explore the benefits of identifying metacommunication patterns and outcomes. A key focus of the present study was on identifying and exploring metacommunication patterns that might impede the mother-son dyad and the sons’ social and personal identities. The study was based on retrospective reports from the mother’s lived experiences of raising their sons and unrelated sons’ lived experiences of being raised by their mothers in a single-parent household.

Chapter 4 was based on retrospective reporting and content analysis, which allowed me to review the transcript for patterns, concepts, and word frequency and to generate the following themes to satisfy my assumptions and research questions: (a) metacommunication affects parenting styles, reflecting the various patterns of implicit communication from mothers to sons, (b) relationship means feeling connected, reflecting mothers' and sons' interpretations of secure relationships, (c) cultural influences affect social learning, (d) maternal deprivation and nonresponsiveness impact sons' personal and social identity, (e) the affect of social strains on implicit communication, which showed how metacommunication shapes parenting styles and practices, (f) protecting sons from being a statistic, which encouraged the mother's demandingness and controlling behaviors, and (g) responsiveness coded in metacommunication such as hugging, warmth, and physical proximity.

The theoretical framework for the present study confirmed Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory; that is, attachment security is linked to the positive metacommunication from mothers to sons, which promotes social-cognitive development over the lifespan. It also confirmed Bandura's (2011) argument that the role of social or observational learning is linked to mimicking and modeling behavior, which I assert are metacommunication cues coded in the attitude and behavior of the mothers that can strengthen or weaken the mothers' and sons' relationships as well as the sons' cognitive and emotionally adaptive behaviors. Literature reviewed for the present study suggested that social strains influence metacommunication signals from mothers to sons, which impact parenting styles and influence the sons' cognitive and emotional growth

(Ainsworth et al., 1978; Akhlaq et al., 2013; Bandura, 1977; Bateson, 1981; Bekoff, 1972; Bormann, 1972; Bowlby, 1982; Mandal, 2014; Segrin et al., 2012).

According to the eight participants interviewed for the present study, metacommunicative signals were determinants that affected parenting style and parental bonding and influenced the sons' prosocial growth. The themes varied according the metacommunicative signals, the impact of parenting style and practices, and the sons' perceptions and interpretations of the cues.

Study findings support the theory that parental bonding or attachment security is predicated on a chain of events, social strains, (extrinsic and intrinsic), metacommunication (nonverbal and paralinguistic), and parenting practices (demandingness or responsiveness; Agnew, 2001; Schroeder & Mowen, 2014; Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2013). Study findings further show that the early interpersonal expressions between the mother and son will determine if the relationship is secure or insecure; the latter affecting the son's social-cognitive and emotional growth (Keating et al., 2013; Ogilvie et al., 2013; Schroeder & Mowen, 2014; Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2013). The findings also align with findings from the literature review in that metacommunication plays a significant role in the relationship-building process and that a secure relationship is based on open communication, warmth, and the parent's responsiveness (Craig et al., 2013).

Through retrospective recall, the mothers reported that their parenting styles were passed from their mothers to them. In addition, study findings showed that metacommunication is culturally driven, affects parenting styles (demandingness or

responsiveness) and practice, and affects the mother-son dyad and the sons' social-cognitive and emotional development in the cases I examined. The unrelated son's interpretations of their mothers' nonverbal expressions were linked to fostering a secure or an insecure relationship, thus impacting cognitive and emotional growth. I would posit that this study furthers the assumption and suggests future research to confirm it empirically that negative metacommunication can lead to insecure attachment and avoidance behavior as well as foster risky behavior and the sons' encounters with the criminal justice system.

I believe that findings from this study contribute to the limited body of knowledge described as interpersonal pragmatics (Arundale, 2013); that is, African American single mothers' interpersonal experiences of raising son or sons in the inner city and the long-term consequences and outcomes of doing so.

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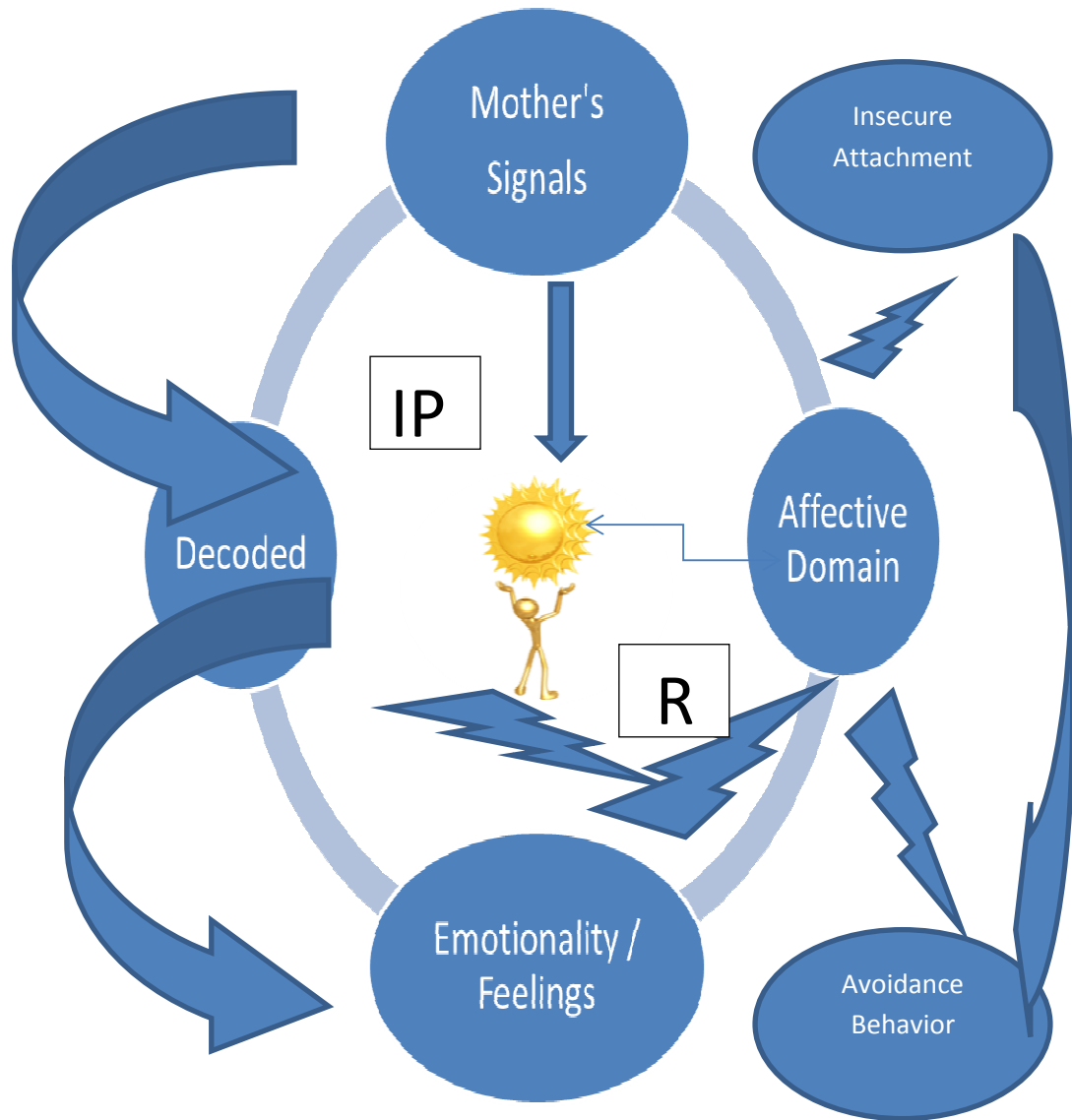
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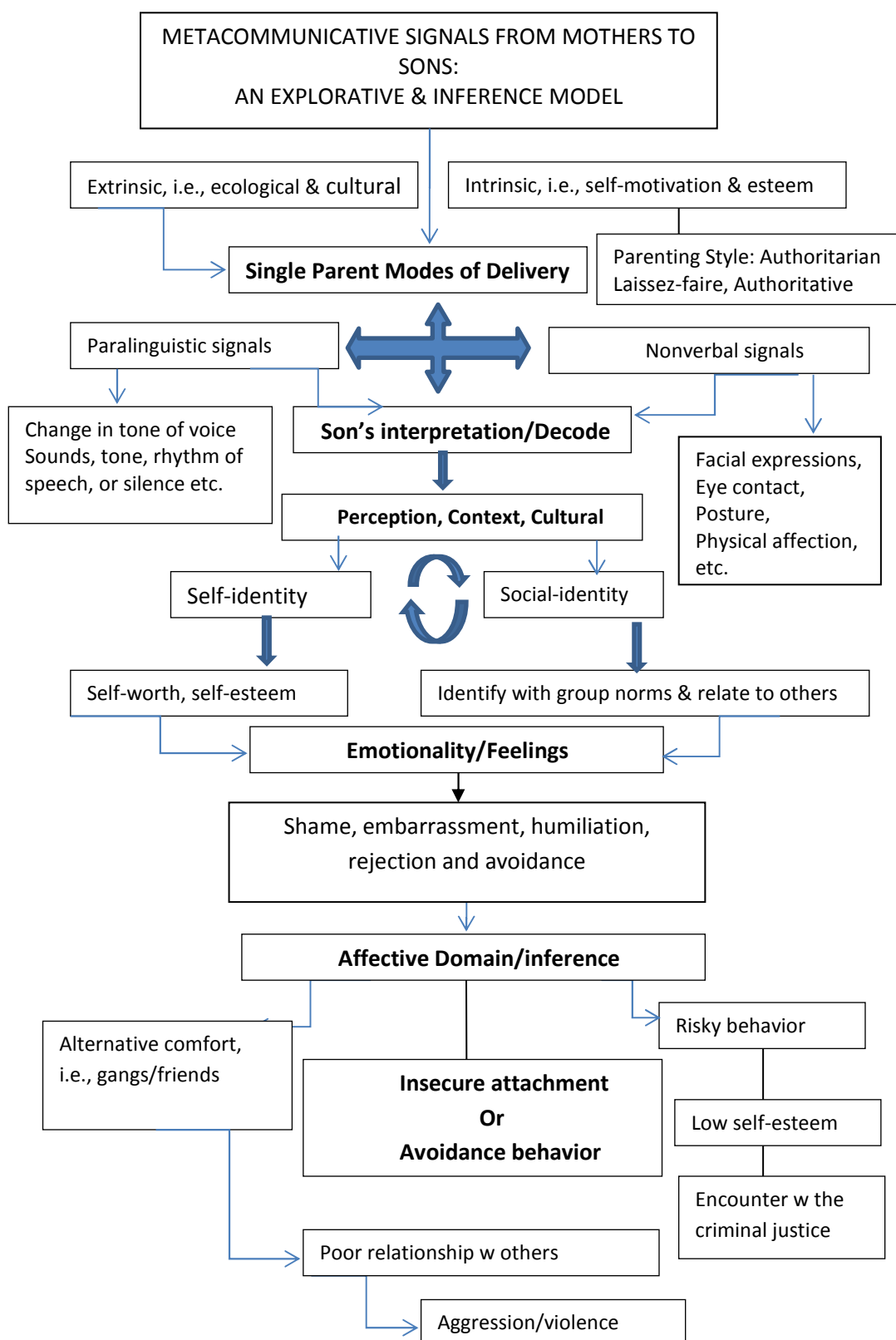
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Appendix A: Metacommunication From Mother to Son



***Information Processed/IP**
***Response/R**
***Diagram B. Functionality**

Appendix B: Metacommunicative Explorative and Inference Model



Appendix C: Metacommunication Cues

Nonverbal signals/body language:

Rigid posture
Turning away
Proximity
Physical affection/bonding through touch
Pointing and leading
Hands on hips
Isolation, i.e., avoiding contact
Folding arms
Clinched fist
Pushing/spanking
Power chop and leading forward

Paralinguistic signals:

Change in tone of voice/pitch for emphasis
Rhythm of speech
Rapid, deep or shallow breathing
Stop talking
Yelling

Facial expression:

Frowns
Gazing
Raised eyebrows/low
Tight lips
Sadness/joy
Smiling/not smiling
Teary/glassy eyes
Refusing to make eye contact
Anger

Appendix D: Demographics Questionnaire

Age

What is your age? _____

Or

What is your month and year of birth? (MM/YYYY) _____ / _____

Sex

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

Marital status

Are you:

- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated
- Never been married
- A member of an unmarried couple

Employment status

Are you currently:

- Employed for wages
 - Self-employed
 - Out of work for more than 1 year
 - Out of work for less than 1 year
 - A homemaker
 - A student
 - Retired
 - Unable to work
-

Education completed

What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?

- Never attended school or only attended kindergarten
 - Grades 1 through 8(Elementary)
 - Grades 9 through 11 (Some high school)
 - Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)
 - College 1 year to 3 years (Some college or technical school)
 - College 4 years (College graduate)
 - Graduate School(Advance Degree)
-

Family size

How many children live in your household who are...

- Less than 5 years old?
- 5 through 12 years old?
- 13 through 17 years old?

\$ 10 GIFT CERTIFICATE FOR 45 MINUTES INTERVIEW

Walden University

100 S Washington Ave #900, Minneapolis, MN 55401

PH.D Criminal Justice candidate

Seeking

**African American Single Mothers raising son
and Men raised by African American Single
Mothers to participate in a research study**

REQUIREMENT:

- Volunteer African American single mothers 18 and older
- African American males 18 and older
- All data gather will be confidential
- Please feel free to share this information with other friends
- Must complete form to receive certificate

Interested volunteers may contact:

Mr. Henderson at 

Appendix F: Consent to Participate in a Research Study

PROJECT TITLE: Decoding Metacommunication Patterns of African American Single Mothers to Sons.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Michael-Kamau Henderson from the Criminal Justice Department at Walden University. The study is in partial completion of my dissertation for my Doctorate in Criminal Justice. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Michael-Kamau Henderson, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify metacommunication patterns delivered from mothers to sons, and how they may foster risky behavior or criminal activity.

Metacommunication is a form of communication that involves a variety of nonverbal behaviors such as body language, (gestures, frown, smile, gaze or touch) and paralinguistic cues like (yelling, change in tone, rhythm of speech or sarcasm). In addition, I want to look at the son’s perspective to understand, how metacommunication signals from the mother may have affected the son’s social identity, personal identity and interpersonal relationship with others.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- be interviewed by Mr. Henderson from Walden University.
- participate in an interview for approximately 45- minutes. Notes will be written during the interview,
- the data will generated from the audiotape of the interview, transcription, notes of your description or demonstration of metacommunication signals delivered or interpreted and,
- to protect your privacy only your first name will be used in the study

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. The criteria for being a participant in the study are 1) African-American single mothers, 2) 18 and older, 3) raising a son or sons, and 4) unrelated sons 18 and older.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk or minor discomfort as a resulted of sharing or recalling the metacommunicative signals delivered or experienced in the mother's son-dyad.

Moreover, having the participants demonstrate or provide a deep description of the metacommunication signals; such as, (describing behavior, changes in one's tone, posturing, or sharing feelings), which may lead to embarrassment, guilt, or shame. On the other hand, your contribution to the study may help develop intervention strategies for mothers raising sons.

This investigation may also lead to intervention strategies and a model for change that can help others in the professional field learn how to use metacommunication strategies to strengthen their professional relationship with clients.

Payment:

Upon completions of the study, you will receive a \$10.00 gift certificate.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your surname or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by encryption, a back-up hard drive and secured in a file cabinet. Finally, the transcribed Data will not be reproduced and kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university.

Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at ([REDACTED]). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is [REDACTED]. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.** You will also be provided with a copy of this form to keep; in addition to receiving a 1-2 page summary of the results of the study.

I have read the above information and understand the study. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

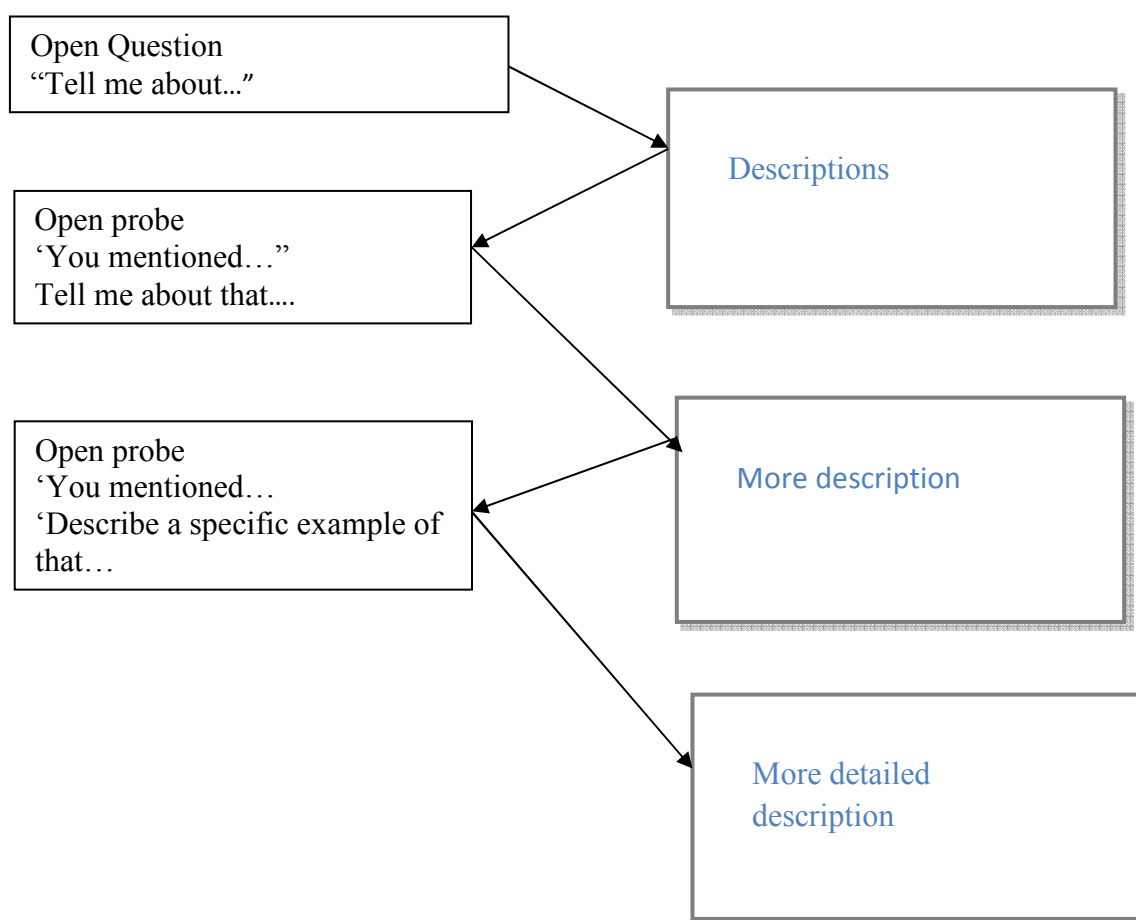
Researcher's Signature

Appendix G: Interview Protocol

Interview protocol: Decoding Metacommunication Patterns of African American Single Mothers to Sons

- Provide details of the study,
- self-disclose my interests regarding the study,
- discuss the length of the interview, which will be approximately 45 minutes,
- include an appropriate sample size,
- record sessions, and
- take notes and establish a rapport with participants (Janesick, 2011).

Appendix H: Open-Ended Questions Sequential Formulation



Bodie, Vickery, Cannava, and Jones (2015) stated that Heritage and Watson’s model is significant because it provides a template and understanding as to how the interviewer can reframe a sequence of questions and probes. The model describes how open-ended questions can be reframed to generate rich and in-depth information. For instance, the questions and probe are used to encourage the interviewee to self-disclose or flow with answers; hence, the emerging or saturated data is consistent with a qualitative protocol.

Appendix J: Interview Questions and Observational Protocol for Mother and Interview
 Questions and Observational Protocol for Unrelated Son

Mother

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Position of interviewee:

Project: Decoding Metacommunication Patterns of African American Single Mothers to Sons

Questions

1. Tell me what is it like to be an African American single mother raising a son in the inner city.

2. How would you describe your parent style, authoritarian, authoritative or easy-going?

3. Can you describe or demonstrate the nonverbal cues commonly used in the dyad with son?

***Observing content and gesture analysis** as demonstrated by the participant:

- **Cue category:** () facial expression,

***Descriptions:** examples, frown/facial markers, gazing, tight lips, smiles/sarcastic smirk

4. Can you recall how often you gazed, used hand gestures, and or changed your tone while interacting with son? Probe: What was the circumstance?

- **Cue category:** () body movement/gesture

***Descriptions:** examples, finger pointing and head tilting, hitting, pushing

- **Cue category:** () paralinguistic/vocal cues

***Descriptions:** example, name calling, yelling, teasing, or stonewalling

5. How often do you show physical affection, i.e., touching, playing, hugging or sharing the same space, and remember your son's responses? Probe: How does your son respond?
-
-

- **Cue category:** () proximity

***Descriptions:** examples, physical affection, touching, intimate distance, bonding

- **Cue category:** () symbolic

***Descriptions:** examples, clench fist, or hands on hips/arms crossed feet apart

Unrelated Son

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Position of interviewee:

Project: Decoding Metacommunication Patterns of African American Single Mothers to Sons

Questions:

1. Tell me what is it like to be an African-American male raised in a single-parent household in the inner city.
-

2. Can you remember specific patterns of communication/nonverbal cues, i.e., eye contact, body language, gestures, facial expression or voice change? Probe: How has it impacted your attitude and behavior?
-

***Observing content and gesture analysis** as demonstrated by the participant:

- **Cue category:** () facial expression

***Descriptions:** examples, frown/facial markers, gazing, tight lips, smiles/sarcastic smirk

- **Cue category:** () body movement/gestures

***Descriptions:** examples, finger pointing, head tilting, hitting, pushing

- **Cue category:** () paralinguistic/vocal cues

***Descriptions:** example, name calling, yelling, teasing, or stonewalling

- **Cue category:** () symbolic

***Descriptions:** examples, clinch fist, hands on hips/ crossed arms feet apart

3. Tell me about your relationship with you mother? Probe: Can you describe the relationship in terms of closeness, secure or not secure?

- **Cue category:** () proximity

***Descriptions:** examples, physical affection, touching, intimate distance, bonding

- **Cue category** () body movement/gesture,

***Descriptions:** examples, finger pointing, head tilting, hitting or pushing

- **Cue category** () paralinguistic/vocal cues,

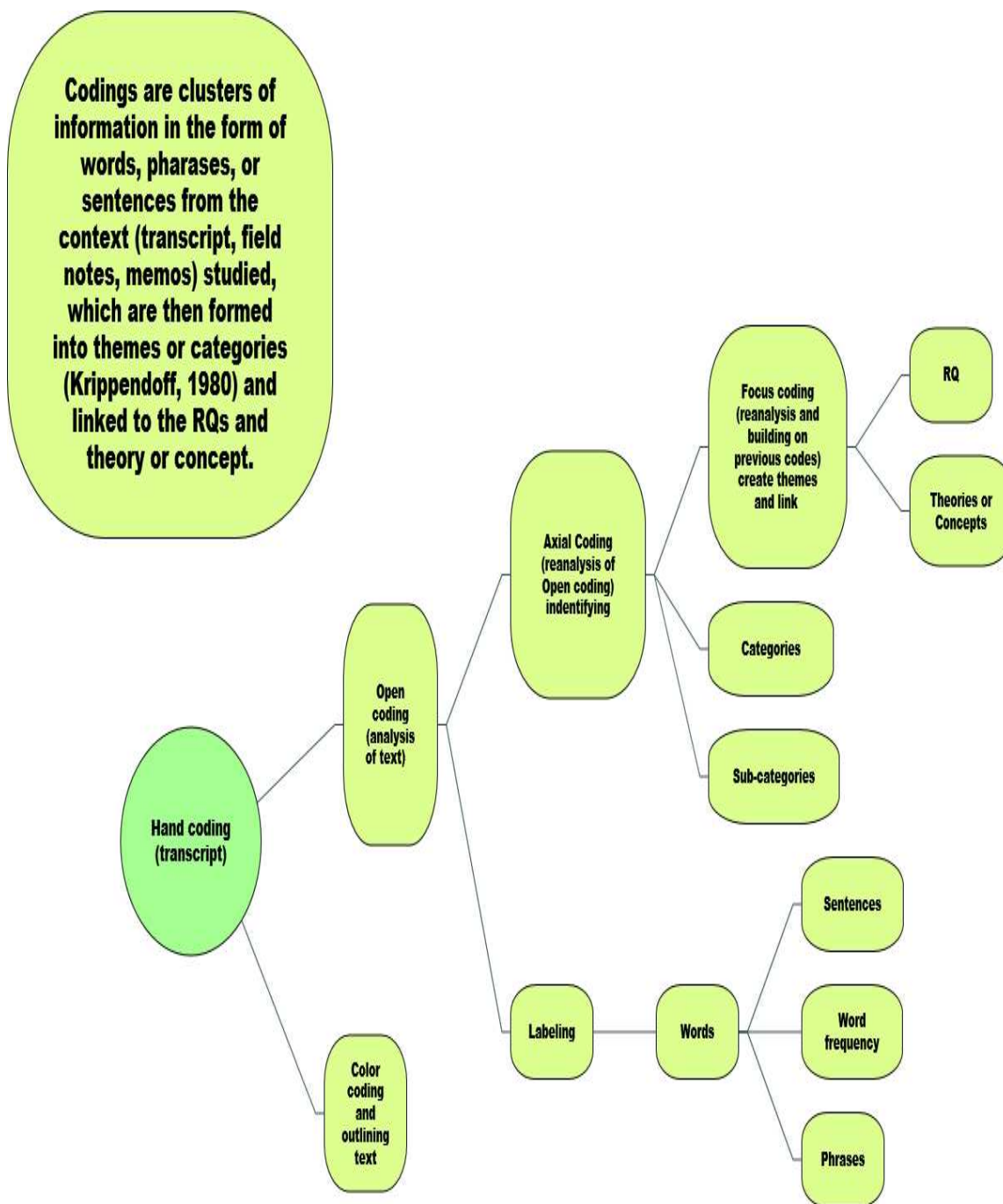
***Descriptions:** examples, name calling, yelling, teasing, compliments or stonewalling

- **Cue category** () symbols

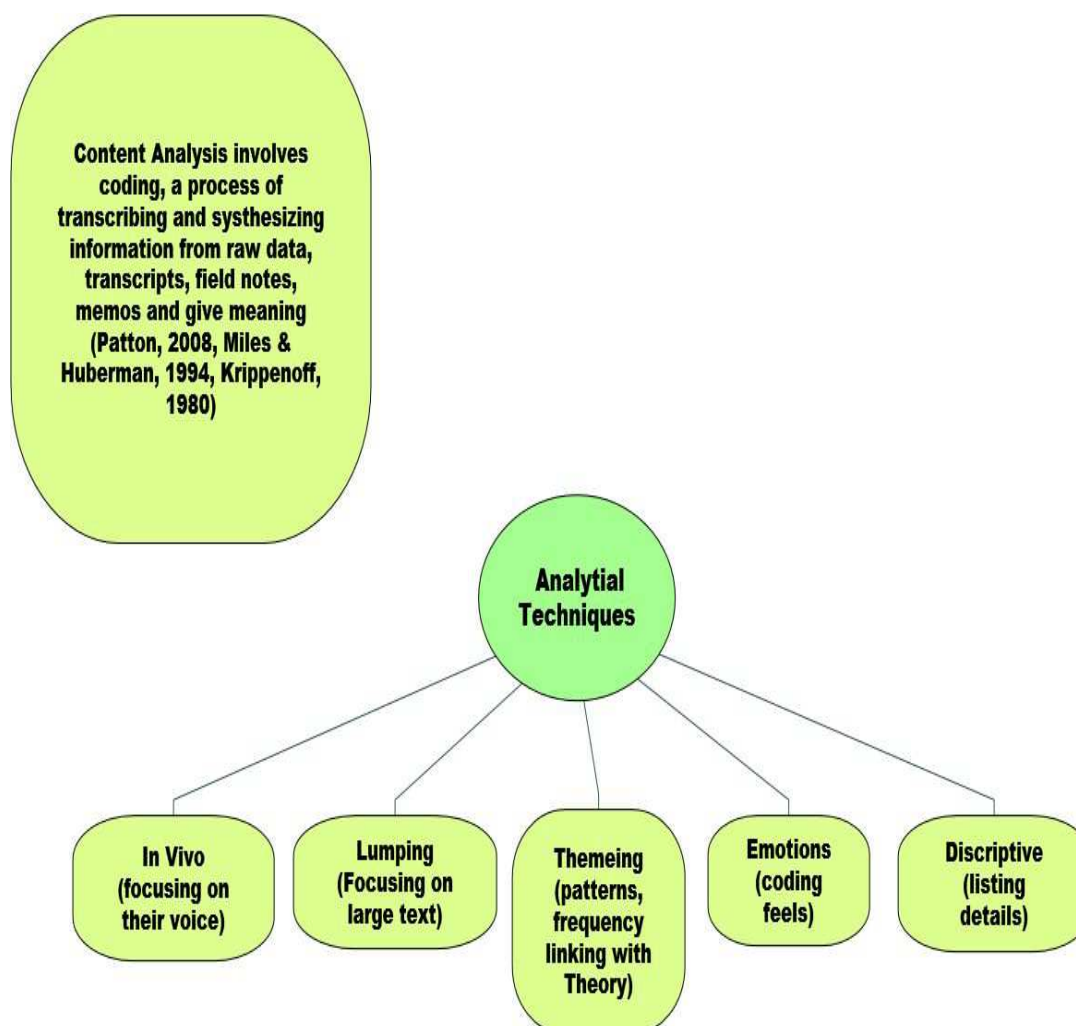
***Descriptions:** examples, clinch fist, hands on hips/arms crossed feet apart

4. How has this experience impacted yourself-esteem and relationship with others?

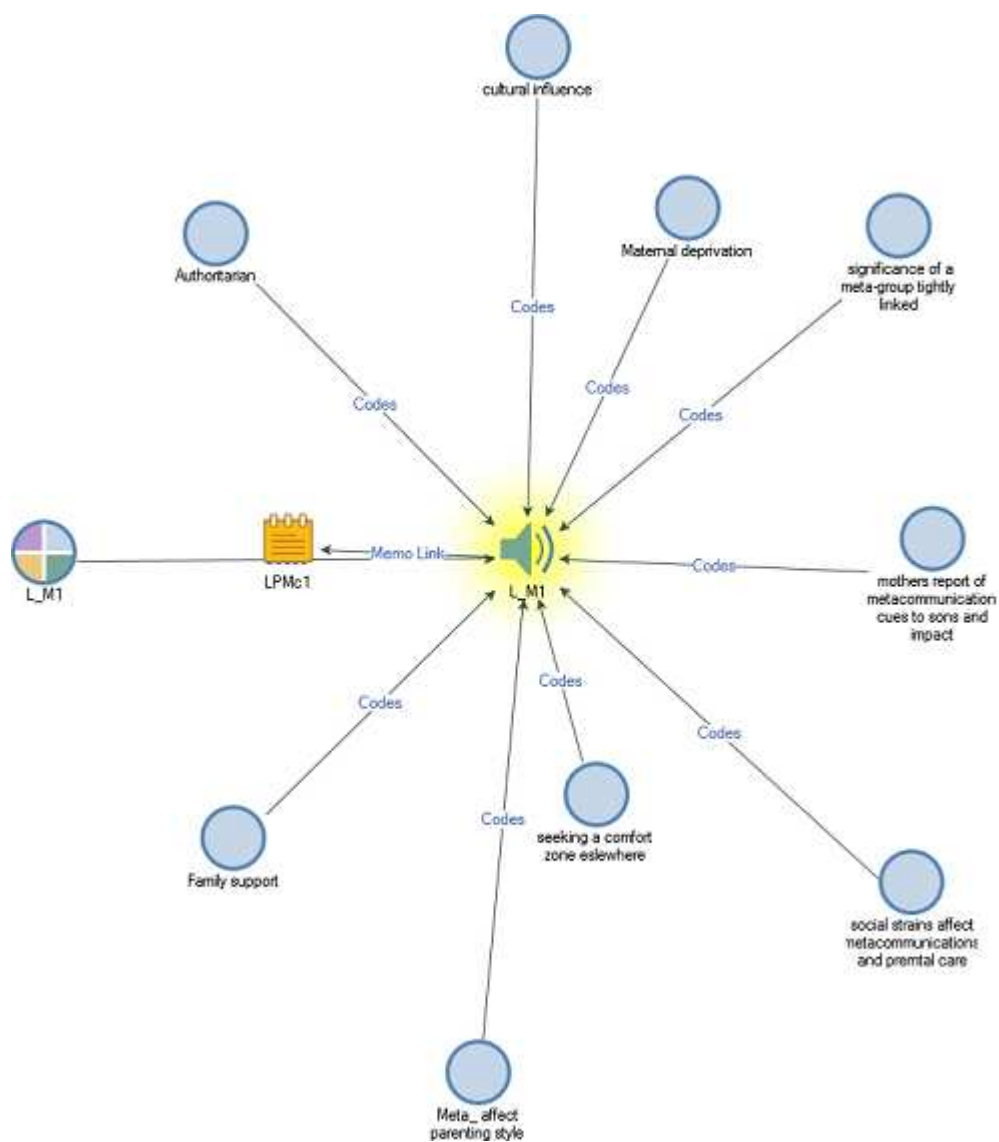
Appendix K: Coding Process



Appendix L: Content Analysis

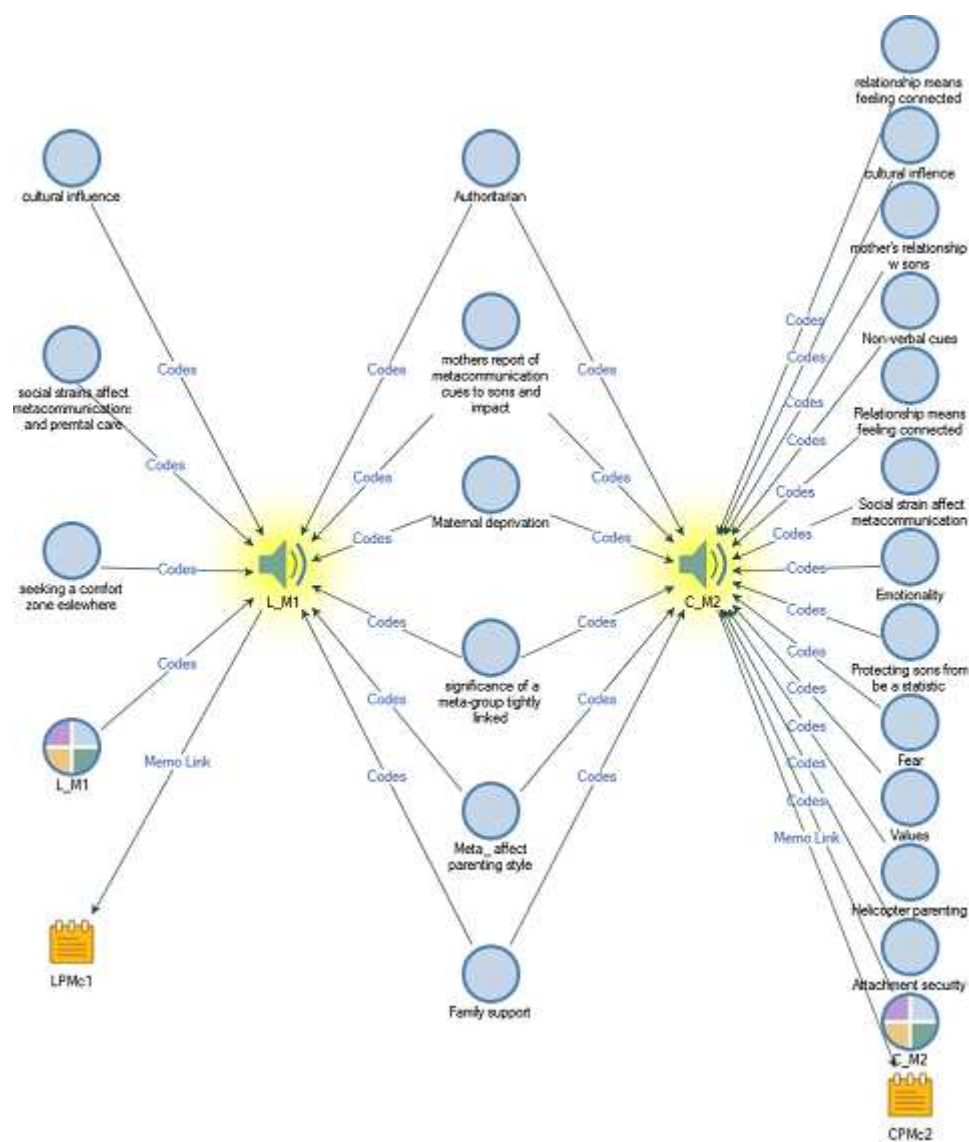


Appendix M: Case M1, Node/Codes and Themes



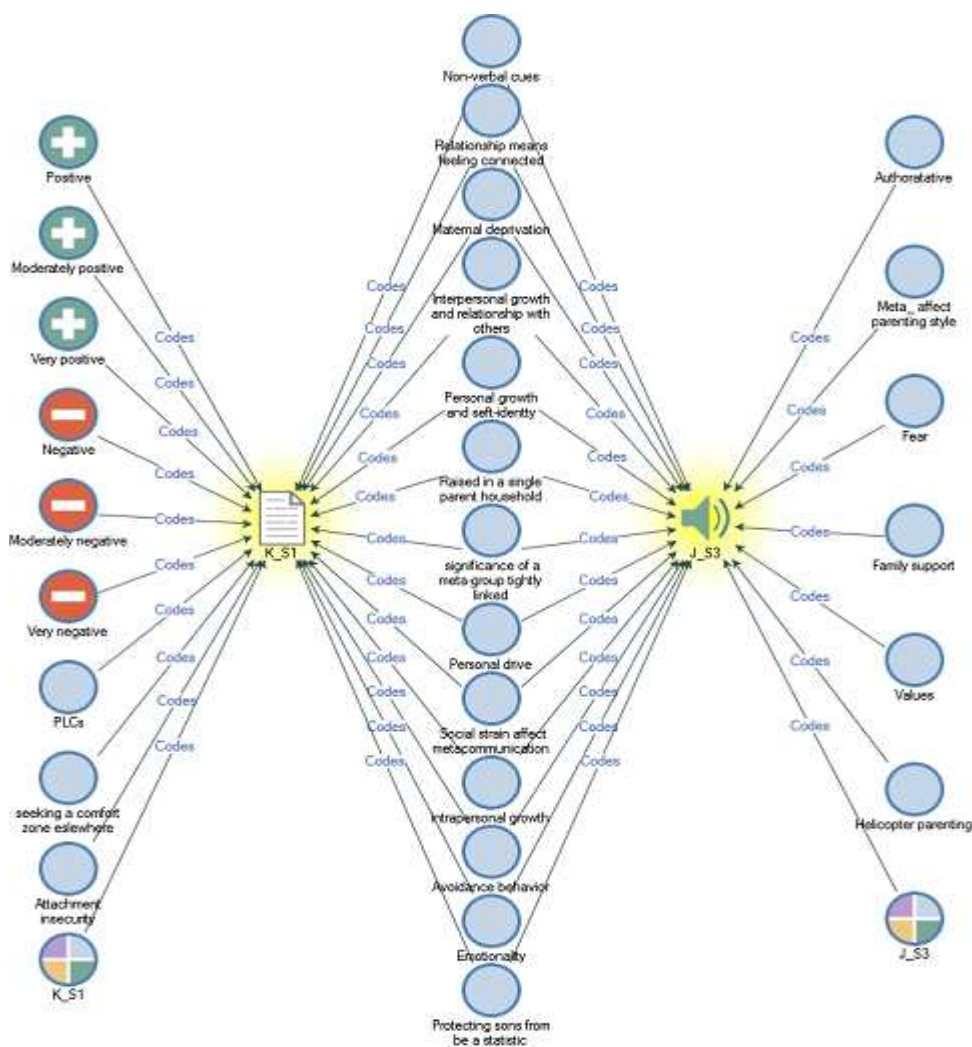
This diagram represents M1's retrospective reports and codes/themes organized via NVivo Pro 11 for content analysis, interpretation and findings. In the diagram is the classification profile (gender, age and generation), memo for noting comments (e.g., afterthoughts), audio accessibility to retrieve data from transcript or developing codes. The emerging themes that showed significance were: (a) maternal deprivation, (b) meta-affect on parenting style, (c) seeking a comfort zone, and (d) significance of the metagroup, etc. The assumptions were drawn from the themes and linked to Bowlby's attachment theory and Bandura's theory of social learning. In all the cases involving the sons the aim was to satisfy the RQs and assumptions regarding metacommunication effects on the son's prosocial development.

Appendix N: Comparison Diagram A, M1 and M2



In this diagram, the circles represent nodes/themes; (a) the middle shared view by M1 and M2 relating to the RQs, (b) left M1, unique responses to RQs, and (c) right M2, response to RQs. In the retrospective report M1's parenting style/authoritarian and transitioned to authoritative. M1 metacommunication cues (high demandingness and low responsiveness). The relationship with the eldest son was strained and insecure due to work schedule and lack of physical proximity—outcome: son was defiant and problematic. On the other hand, in M2's retrospective report, authoritarian (high demandingness and low responsiveness), but the data revealed her parenting style as a helicopter (high demandingness and low responsiveness). M1 and M2 reported their parents were strict (high demandingness). M2's relation with son secure, with high levels of physical affection and proximity. Of significance in the cases involving the mothers, their main objective was to protect their sons from harm, racism, violence and gang activities. The mothers loved their sons but raised their daughters.

Appendix O: Comparison Diagram B, S1 and S2



This diagram depicts the nodes/codes and themes. The shared views by S1 and S2 are represented in the center. Contrast views to the left S1 and right S2 outside of the center. S1's retrospective report and data revealed S1's relationship with mother was insecure—parenting style laissez-faire (low demandingness and low responsiveness). S1 sought a comfort figure elsewhere (metagroup or positive peer group). He shared how he felt uncomfortable dealing with others outside of his circle. S3's retrospective reported and data revealed that S3 had a secure relationship with his mother. He reported a high level of (physical affection cues, hugging, kissing, and touching and praise). He identified his mother as authoritative, fair and not abusive; and accredited his work ethics, confidence, and positive prosocial skills to his mother.