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**'GO AHEAD-KILL YOURSELF': A LOOK AT PARENT-CHILD
COMMUNICATION AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICANS**

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Abstract

This thesis looks at parental communication styles specifically among African Americans. It seeks to determine how adult children of African American's categorize their parents' communication style and consequently if this style is related to their current self esteem status. To study these concepts, an analysis of current parental communication theories was done. Additionally, research data was collected through observation, questionnaires and interviews. While the research results tenuously suggest that there may be a preferred style of parental communication among African Americans and that there could be a relationship between this and the self- identified self esteem of their children, it more significantly indicates that this area of study deserves to be research and examined more widely and closely.

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This research could not have been completed without the love, support, selflessness and patience of Daron Ellington. Thank you.

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Lord, Give Me The Strength Not To Kill This Child

I was about seven years old when, in my excitement to get to the pastry store, I stepped off the curb and onto the busy street without looking. My mother yanked me back on to the sidewalk and uttered the words I would hear many a time whenever I did something potentially life threatening: “Go Ahead. Kill yourself.” She continued to berate me, questioned my common sense and ultimately denied me the sugared bun I had been craving.

This parental expression of anger in the face of danger was common not only for my siblings and I but also for my cousins and family friends. There was the time my brother slipped while climbing a waterfall and was punished. There was the time my cousin fell while dancing and consequently wasn't allowed to play outside for a week. And there was the time the next door neighbor accidentally stepped on a nail and was spanked in public by his father.

Throughout my life – as a child, during college, and currently at many social gatherings – my brothers, sister, cousins and African American friends have swapped ‘war’ stories of our parents’ reaction to our varied mishaps, accidents and slip ups. These accounts are usually vastly different from those recounted by my European-American friends. Recently, *The Steve Harvey Morning Show* – a morning talk show that is rated number one among 25-54 year olds in New York and other markets as well as among African American listeners (Urban, Spanish Language Stations Dominate Major Radio Markets, 2008) – aired a segment that asked listeners to call in with ‘what did your mama use to tell you’. Submissions were all along the

line off ‘I’m gonna knock you back into next week’ and ‘I’m going to beat you so hard, your children are going to cry’.

While these personal discussions with friends and family are in the name of humor as was the segment on *The Steve Harvey Morning Show*, I can’t help but wonder if there might be a more serious undercurrent to these parental statements and more broadly how African Americans communicate with their children. As an adult, I assume my mother loved me all along and that her “Kill yourself” comments and accompanying anger was her way of dealing with the fear and anxiety she felt at the possibility that her child could have been seriously hurt. However, is this the same mindset of many adult African-American children? A few of my family members have insinuated that their lack of assertiveness and self-confidence may be due in part to the constant questioning of reasoning ability and public punishments they received as children. Some assert that such treatment has made them stronger or more successful. Do other African-Americans feel the same way?

Rationale

If so, the implications are interesting. In his paper “Social Cognitive Theory” (1989) renowned psychologist Albert Bandura explains that what one believes can greatly influence one’s behavior. So whether or not there is a link between how parents communicate with their children and those children’s later success in life, the children’s **belief** that how their parents’ spoke to them has impacted them as adults is important.

Consider that though African Americans make up only about 13% of the general population in the United States (Bureau, 2007), they make up 40 % of the prison population (Sabol, Couture, & Harrison, 2007). Furthermore, African Americans are surpassed only by American Indians in the percentage of persons living below the poverty level (Bishaw & Semega, 2008). Consider also that only 14% of African Americans hold a bachelor's degree or higher (Educational Attainment in the United States, 2002). In light of these statistics, if parental communication plays *any* part in the behavior of African Americans as adults, it deserves to be studied thoroughly.

Research Question

Please note that I do not attempt to do such wide-ranging research here. Such research would involve extensive and varied studies; years of compiled information and vast sample groups. This investigation seeks to examine on a small scale if there is any basis for doing exhaustive research. As such, this investigation is threefold. **Within the past 30 years, how have some African Americans communicated with their children? Secondly, how do these children rate their own self esteem and thirdly, does a given sample of adult African Americans believe that their parent's communication styles influence(d) their current success?**

In the examination of these questions further subsidiary questions arise. Namely:

1. What are the major classifications of parental communication and what has been said about their effectiveness?
2. Do African Americans communicate with their children differently than other ethnic groups?

3. Do children who indicate having been raised with a particular communication style rate themselves as having high or low self esteem?

Delimitations

Due to the available resources and scale of this research, there are several limitations. First, there will be no distinctions made between two-parent, single-parent and grandparent household. Since the intent at this stage is to focus on what the adult believes about the parental styles, the parent themselves will not be the focal point. For this reason also, there will be no distinction made between males and females.

Secondly, this investigation will focus on adult children between the ages of 21 and 45 because they would have been children within the last generation or 30 year span. Finally while various parenting styles will be researched, due to available resources the focus will be on the predominant style used by African American parents residing in the New York/New Jersey metro area.

Definitions

To ensure a clearer understanding of this study, several key terms need to be defined.

African-American: “An American (esp. A North American) of African origin; a black American” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2001). For the purposes of this study, the term ‘African American’ will also include persons of African Caribbean descent living in the United States.

Parent: “A person who is one of the progenitors of a child; a father or mother. Also, in extended use: a woman or man who takes on parental responsibilities towards a child, e.g. a stepmother, an adoptive father; a protector, guardian.” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008)

Communication: “The exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols” (Communication, 2008). By extension then **Parental Communication** can be defined as the exchange of meaning between a father mother or guardian and child. And **Communication Style/Pattern** can be defined as the technique used to exchange meanings between individuals.

Success: “The fortune (good or bad) befalling anyone in a particular situation or affair” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2001). Thomas T. Hoerr also describes success as-

- The capacity to face the unknown with confidence.
- The courage to go against the norm.
- Being satisfied with who you are and what you have done.
- A connection to something larger than yourself.
- A life free from poverty and debt. (Hoerr, 2008)

So this study will consider the traits of confidence, self esteem, individuality, personal satisfaction and financial stability as key indicators of success.

You Better Eat Those Vegetables! vs. Would You Like Carrots Or Peas?***Styles of Parental Communication***

In their article “Parenting style as a Mediator between Children’s Negative Emotionality and Problematic Behavior in Early Childhood” (2008), Paulussen-Hoogeboom, Stams, Hermanns, Peetsma, and Van Den Wittenboer, describe what they call the commonly accepted two dimensions of parental behavior. Parents in the “supportive” dimension make their children feel comfortable. They make their child feel accepted through the use of warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness. Paulussen-Hoogeboom et al. assert that supportive parenting is needed for “the formation of secure attachments and other positive developmental outcomes” (Paulussen-Hoogeboom, Stams, Hermanns, Peetsma, & Van Den Witenboer, 2008).

Conversely lack of supportive parenting may lead to behavioral problems (Paulussen-Hoogeboom et al, 2008). The second dimension is “control”. This refers to what the parent does in an effort to get the child to do what the parent wants. The parent’s behavior may be negative or positive.

From the various combinations of these two designs emerge the **Authoritative** Parent and the **Authoritarian** parent (Coplan, Hastings, Lagace-Seguin, & Moulton, 2002) (Rothbart & Bates, 1998). Authoritative parenting involves firm control combined with lots of warmth and the application of explanations and reasoning. Authoritarian parenting involves using power without warmth and nurturing and may even include corporal punishment. There is little or no explanation or reasoning and two –way communication is not encouraged (Coplan et al., 2002; Rothbart et al., 1998) Both Coplan et al. (2002) and Rothbart et al. (1998) agree that

authoritative parenting is beneficial in child development. They also purport that authoritarian parenting may contribute to negative emotionality in children such as defiance and low impulse control.

There is also the **Permissive** Parent and the **Neglectful** Parent (Baumrind, 1971; 1991). The permissive parenting style is characterized by indulgence, high responsiveness and leniency and avoidance of confrontation (Baumrind, Parenting styles and adolescent development, 1991). The neglectful parental style is characterized by low involvement, non responsiveness and low “demandingness” (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). While there are differing point of views as to the extent to which Parental communication styles affect children, scholars generally agree that authoritative communication is positively related to cognitive development, high self esteem, strong academic performance, greater socialization etc. (Baumrind, 1971; 1991; Chapell et al., 1998; Steinberg, 1990). Thus the authoritative style of parental communication is considered the preferred style of parenting.

Parental Communication and Wealth

Some posit that higher socioeconomic families tend to adopt a more child-centered authoritative style of parenting while families in lower socioeconomic households tend to adopt a more authoritarian parenting style (Campbell, 1995). Explanations for this include more financial and emotional stresses and less organizational support for parents of lower socioeconomic status (Campbell, 1995).

In a recent study, mothers were observed while engaging with their infants (Garrett-Peters, Mills-Koonce, Adkins, Vernon-Feagans, & Cox, 2008). The mothers positive and negative

interactions were noted (specifically how they spoke to the child). The child's temperament (as indicated by the mother) as well as what the mother knew about infant development was also noted. The study revealed that mothers with higher income and knowledge about infant development exhibited more positive "emotion talk" with their children. The researchers concluded that "mothers' emotion language with infants is not sensitive to child factors but is associated with social contextual factors and characteristics of the mothers themselves" (Garrett-Peters et al., 2008).

Parental Communication and Cognition

There are some who go on to infer that parental communication styles can be related to a child's cognitive development. That is, they suggest that a child's intellectual ability is not only attributed to heredity and social constraints but also to parenting style (Freeberg, 1967). Of these, there are two schools of thought. Those who believe that a more authoritarian communication style (no explanations, focus on conformity) leads to greater academic success and those that believe that a more authoritative communication style (reasoning, firm affection) will lead to greater academic success. (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993) (Brown et al., 2008). In fact a study of adolescent school achievement published in 1987 revealed that while authoritarianism was "negatively predictive of grades among White and Asian-American students and Hispanic-American girls", this was not so for African American students and Hispanic-American boys (Dornbusch, Ritter, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). Explanations for this include the different perceptions of parenting styles by both children and parents across ethnicities (Jackson-Newsom, Buchanan, & McDonald, 2008).

Parental Communication and Ethnicity

An examination of parent child communication cannot be done without raising the issue of ethnicity. As already indicated, there are differing results in parental style studies when the data is broken down by ethnic origin (Dornbusch et al., 1987). For example, African American parents are more likely than European American parents to adopt a more Authoritarian communication style (Dornbusch et al., 1987).

Explanations for different patterns as related to different ethnicities include, different cultural norms, different perceptions and different interpretations (Chao, 1994; Rudy & Grusec, 2001; Gonzales, Cauce & Mason, 1996). For instance, the strict obedience and more Authoritarian style noted in Asian American families may be seen as normal in Asian American culture and thus more readily accepted while the same communication pattern may be seen as restrictive in European American culture (Chao, 1994). This difference in perception may influence why the authoritarian style shows no negative effect or arguably positive outcomes in some studies (Jackson-Newsom, Buchanan, & McDonald, 2008). The idea is that children interpret such a style as necessary to protect them from the physical environment. They perceive the low affection high control style of communication as the means by which their parents care for them and thus an outwardly authoritarian style is interpreted as a caring, warm authoritative style (Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Steinberg, 1996).

Additionally, Gonzales et al. (1996) found that parent child interaction in African American families was more likely to be seen as harsh by non African American observers than by African American observers. This indicates that the difference in perceptions of not only the

children but the researcher can skew the results of a study (Jackson-Newsom et al., 2008). For instance an authoritative parent could be identified as authoritarian by a researcher but authoritative by the child. In their article describing a study they had done on parents and children of Caribbean heritage, Janet Brown and Sharon Johnson (2008) cite instances of children referring to corporal punishment and other authoritarian behavior as expressions of love and caring on the part of their parents (Brown & Johnson, 2008).

It must be noted that there are those who reject the idea that non European parents tend to be more authoritarian. Citing the overuse of African Americans of lower socioeconomic status and from dysfunctional studies in previous studies, researchers Bluestone and Tamis-LeMonda (1999) sought to examine the parental communication styles of working and middle class African American mothers. They found that the majority of these mothers self reported using reasoning and child-oriented techniques in communication with their children. They linked depression rather than ethnicity or culture to higher levels of authoritarian parental styles among mothers (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999).

Parental Communication and Generational Change

Some scholars suggest that as time passes and generations change, parental communication styles are affected. Lundberg, Perris and Adolfsson (1999) explain that “profound changes in cultural mores and values do occur over time even within the same societal context”. They go on to suggest that change from an agricultural to and industrial society, increase in working mothers, change in birth rates are all incidents that may have caused change in parental communication style and the perception of parental communication style throughout the years

(Lundberg et al., 1999). So a parental communication style, commonly seen as authoritative fifty years ago may now be considered more authoritarian depending on cultural, economic and social changes. Additionally, changes in parental responsibility, environment or family structure could affect parental communication styles within a culture.

Parental Communication and Delinquency

Parenting styles have also been linked to patterns of delinquency (Hoeve, Blokland, Dubas, Loeber, Gerris, & Van Der Laan, 2008). Researchers used a 14 year longitudinal study of boys and identified five delinquency paths:

- Nondelinquent trajectory – boys who committed no delinquent acts.
- Minor persisting trajectory – boys who steadily commit non-serious delinquency.
- Moderate desisting trajectory- boys who committed more serious acts of delinquency in their early teens but whose delinquent acts declined as they got older.
- Serious persisting trajectory – boys who continually committed serious (violent) acts of delinquency.
- Serious desisting trajectory – boys who committed serious (violent) acts of delinquency up until their mid teens but whose delinquent acts declined sharply thereafter.

Three parental styles were identified: the aforementioned authoritative, authoritarian and neglectful styles. From this study, it was discerned that there is a link between neglectful parenting style and the moderate desisting and serious persisting and desisting trajectories. Specifically, boys who were linked to neglectful parenting were more likely to follow paths of

serious delinquent behavior. This behavior may or may not continue as they grew older.

Authoritarian parenting was linked to the serious persisting trajectory. This means that boys identified as being a product of low affection, high control parenting were more likely to commit serious delinquent acts and continue to do so as they grew older.

But can these examples of parental behavior and communication style be correlated to the lives these children go on to live?

Parental Communication and the Future

In an effort to examine this question, Dutch researcher Jacques Zimmerman along with Martin Eismann and Marcelo Fleck questioned two hundred and ninety seven university students. The questions related to the students quality of life and gathered information on the parenting styles used by their parents, the coping mechanisms they currently use, life events and symptoms of depression. Zimmerman, Eismann and Fleck concluded that “perceived child rearing practices was significantly associated with the quality of life of the students” (Eismann, Fleck, & Zimmerman, 2008).

Similarly A. Furnham and H. Cheng set out to study the link between parental styles, self esteem and an individual’s self-professed happiness (Furnham & Cheng, 2000). They administered a personality questionnaire, a self esteem scale a parental authority questionnaire and a happiness inventory to individuals between the ages of 14 and 28. Results indicated that self esteem was a direct indicator of happiness and that self esteem was directly related to perceived parenting styles (Furnham & Cheng, 2000). Further research shows that

the correlation between personality, self esteem and parenting style extends beyond adolescence (Herz & Gullone, 1999).

A Note on Self Esteem, Happiness and Success

Researchers Roy Baumeister, Jennifer Campbell, Joachim Krueger, and Kathleen Vohs (2003) set out to determine if there was any relationship between self esteem, happiness and success. To do so, they reviewed the empirical results of major research on the subject. Among other findings, they discovered that “the link between self-esteem and happiness is strong. People with high self-esteem are significantly, substantially happier than other people. They are also less likely to be depressed, “either in general or specifically in response to stressful, traumatic events” (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). While they were unable to identify a specific reason as to why this was so they noted that many studies confirmed this link.

Although they uncovered differing views as to the success of people with high self esteem, they acknowledged that rigorous research on the issue hypothesizes that the same background causes of high self esteem may lead to success.

What Did You Do?!

Observation

In light of the differing views on the parental communication styles of African Americans, it is important that a firsthand observation of African American parental communication styles be done. This will not prove or disprove the hypotheses put forth in the literature examined but rather produce a touchstone for this study. That is, how African Americans communicate with their children is central to this research study. Therefore a direct observation of any of the theories suggested in the review of related literature is central to the validation of the literature and to the validation of this study.

As such, parent-child communication will be noted by observing African American parents and children at three parks in northern New Jersey. The parks were chosen based on the socioeconomic status of the surrounding neighborhoods as listed in the 2007 US census. Each park represented low income, middle income and high-income neighborhoods respectively. Since parents may tend to modify their behavior with their children if they know that they are being observed (Furnham & Cheng, 2000), parents will not be aware that they are being observed beforehand. Communication patterns adhering to any of the proposed theories examined will be noted and a generalization as to the predominant style used will be made. No identifying characteristics will be noted.

Questionnaire

Psychologists Dr. John R. Buri developed a questionnaire designed to measure parental authority (PAQ), or disciplinary practices, from the point of view of the child (of any age) (see Appendix A). The PAQ has three subscales: permissive, authoritarian and authoritative/flexible (Buri, 1991). A revised version of this questionnaire (see Appendix C) will be distributed to 200 African Americans between the ages of 21 and 45. Questions from the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (see Appendix B) are also included on the questionnaire (see Appendix C). The Rosenberg scale was designed to measure an individual's feeling of self worth and self acceptance (Rosenberg, 1965). Though questions may seem repetitive, they are specifically selected to determine parental style and provide equal scoring for each subscale.

The complete questionnaire will be administered through the online survey website Zoomerang. Zoomerang recruits users to join its "ZoomPanel" through online advertising via Zoomerang itself and on other websites. They also have partnerships with direct marketing services through which they target "hard to reach" groups in order to ensure that their panel of individuals surveyed is truly representative. As a result Zoomerang's online panel of possible survey takers closely mirrors the wider U.S. population in geographic distribution, gender, age, income and presence of children (Zoomerang Customer Help, 2008). The questionnaire for this study will be sent to a randomly selected group of Zoomerang panelists who are African Americans between the ages of 21 and 45. Zoomerang will also provide demographic information on the subjects (age, gender, income range) which will be noted.

The questionnaire will be scored by adding the numbers chosen for each individual question. Parental Assessment Question results will be separated from self esteem results. The PAQ scores will be divided by subscales (possible 10 -50 points). Higher scores on a given subscale indicate that an individual experienced permissive, authoritative or authoritarian parental communication styles. For the self esteem questions, items 31, 33, 34, 37 and 40 will be scored according to the number chosen while the remaining items will be reverse scored. An example of this can be seen in Table 1. The higher the score attained (possible 50), the higher the person's self esteem.

Table 1

Example of Scoring for Self Esteem Questions

Item #	Scale Number Chosen	Score	Explanation
31	1	1	
32	5	1	Reversed scored
33	4	4	
34	3	3	
35	5	1	Reversed scored
36	5	1	Reversed scored
37	4	4	
38	1	5	Reversed scored
39	1	5	Reversed scored
40	2	2	
	TOTAL	27	

In an effort to minimize the bias of false reporting caused by the desire to fit in socially or embarrassment (Furnham & Cheng, 2000), the promise of strict confidentiality and/or anonymity will be stressed.

Interviews

To get an even more qualitative sense of how individuals perceived the way their parents communicated with them as well as a sense of the individual's self worth, four interviews will be conducted. African American subjects between the ages of 21 and 45 will be given the revised PAQ/RSE questionnaire previously discussed (Appendix C). Two persons whose scores indicate high self worth as well as two persons whose scores indicate low self worth will be interviewed. Responses to the PAQ will be discussed as well as will perceptions and stories regarding the parental communication style as recalled by each person. Subjects will also be asked to describe the parenting style they use, will use or would have used with their own children. Interview questions will be open-ended and semi-structured based on questions in the PAQ (see Appendix D). The purpose of this is to elicit information that may not have been anticipated and thus not asked by the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Through these interviews, it is anticipated that a more rich insight into the perceptions, feelings and experiences of the group will be garnered. That is, the interviews are expected to enhance data collected from the questionnaire.

Limitations

The limitations of these research tools must be noted. First, there is the possibility that people may misrepresent themselves in an effort to be socially accepted as explained earlier.

Furthermore, both the questionnaire and the interviews may be subject to what McCrae and Costa (1993) call “retrospective bias”. This is the idea that events when recalled may be different from the reality of when the event actually occurred. So depending on variables such as a current state of mind, life experiences or memory, an individual may report that the communication style of their parents was more or less harsh than it actually was (McCrae & Costa, 1993). Finally the presence of the researcher especially for the observations and interviews may not only affect the responses of the research subjects but also color the data collected. This is because all information is recorded through the biases (even if small) of the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

And What Did We Learn From This?

Observation

The behavior of African American parents at the low-income, middle-income and high income parks all seem to reflect Authoritarian and Authoritative parental styles. No behavior that could be classified as Permissive or Neglectful was observed. There were many instances where parents yelled at or scolded their children for hurting themselves and several where the parents forced the child to leave when the child questioned a directive. This type of Authoritarian communication was seen at all parks but seemed more common at the low-income and middle-income parks. There were also instances where the parent reasoned with the child and explained the reason for not being permitted to do something. This Authoritative behavior, though also observed at all parks, was most common at the high-income park and was only observed in one instance at the low-income park. There were no instances observed where the parent allowed the child to do whatever he/she wanted and there were none where a parent completely ignored what a child was doing.

Questionnaire

Of the 200 questionnaires distributed only 112 were answered completely. Therefore the 88 incomplete surveys were discarded. The answers to the remaining questionnaires were scored and tallied. Four respondents (0.36%) indicated that the communication style of their parent was permissive. Thirty respondents (27%) indicated that their parents were Authoritative. The majority, sixty one (55%) indicate that they were raised by Authoritative parents. The scores

of seventeen respondents (15%) did not indicate that their parents exhibited one style more so than another. That is, their scores were equal on all three subscales. Based on the scores, fifty respondents (45%) self identified as having low self esteem. Thirty five (31%) self identified as having normal self esteem and twenty seven (24%) self identified as having high self esteem (see Appendix E).

All four respondents who indicated that their parents used a Permissive communication style identified themselves as having low self esteem. Of the sixty one who showed that their parents used an Authoritative style, the majority, 25 (41%) self identified as having low self esteem. Twenty two (36%) indicated that they had normal self esteem and fourteen (23%) indicated that they had high self esteem. The self esteem of the respondents who indicated that they had Authoritative parents was evenly split across the board. Nine (33%) indicated they had low self esteem, nine (33%) indicated they had normal self esteem and nine (33%) indicated they had high self esteem (see Appendix F).

Interviews

Very few people indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. Therefore instead of the intended four people - two with high esteem and two with low esteem respectively - only only two people in total were interviewed. One had scores on the questionnaire indicating high self esteem and the other had scores indicating low self esteem. Both persons indicated on the questionnaire and in the interviews that their parents used an Authoritarian Communication style. They both laughingly recounted tales of being sent to pick out their own "switch" with which to be beaten and of having indentations of belt patterns on their skin that lasted for

days. Though both admitted that they would raise their children differently neither was willing to say that anything their parents did was wrong or affected them negatively. In the interview both professed to have extremely high self esteem even though the results of the questionnaire showed otherwise.

So What?

Observation

The observation of parent child communication in the three parks is admittedly subjective and qualitative rather than quantitative. It however, shows that the incidence of Authoritarian behavior among African Americans is not limited to the researcher's family and friends. Furthermore the higher instances of Authoritarian behavior observed at the low-income park seem to reinforce the research data indicating that families of lower socioeconomic status tend to adopt a more Authoritarian style (Campbell, 1995).

Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire are quite significant. The majority of these African Americans surveyed believe that their parents used an Authoritarian communication style. The majority also indicate that they have low self esteem (Appendix E). On the surface this information is seems very telling but it gives rise to the questions: how many individuals who were raised with an Authoritarian parent indicate having low self esteem, how many indicate having high or normal self esteem, how many with permissive parents have high, low or normal self esteem respectively, et cetera. It is the further analysis that makes the results more poignant.

Astoundingly, individuals who indicate that they were raised by Authoritative parents fell equally across the self esteem categories - 33% indicated having low self esteem, 33% indicated having normal self esteem and 33% indicated having high self esteem (see

more African Americans that not use Authoritative parental Communication (or at the very least their children believe they do). Therefore many African Americans could be more likely than not to have low self esteem and the accompanying drawbacks of low self esteem.

The 15% of respondents whose scores did not show a partiality to one parental style over another seemed to be individuals who chose the same response for all the questions posed.

Interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to provide more insight as to the responses and to qualitatively enhance the data collected from the questionnaire as well as to gain further understanding of how these respondents related their success to their parents communication style(if at all). This desired result however, was not attained. Though the persons interviewed willingly supported their claim that their parents made use of an Authoritative parenting style, they down-played their responses to the self esteem questions. Though they said they insisted that the parental communication style used by their parents helped them in life they grudgingly admitted they would not raise their children in the same manner. The paradoxes of the interviews and the inconsistency between interview responses and questionnaire responses could be due to the researcher's presence and the subjects' unwillingness to exhibit socially unacceptable behavior (Furnham & Cheng, 2000).

Summary

Scholars agree that there are at least three major styles of parental communication.

Authoritarian parental communication is inflexible, rigid and leaves no room for give and take.

Permissive parental communication allows the child to make most of their own decisions and provides little guidance. Authoritative parental communication is generally considered the best style to utilize and is characterized by firm but flexible communication.

This study set out to identify if African Americans mainly use Authoritarian parental communication as thought, how adult children of African American parents rate their own self esteem and the communication style of their parent and if these adult children believe their parents' communication style has had any bearing on their success. The results indicate that African Americans do make use of an Authoritative parental communication style greatly. They further suggest that there may be a relationship between African Americans who believe they had Authoritarian parents and who may have low self esteem. These results though not absolutely conclusive, clearly indicate that more research on this subject is warranted. The avenues to research are manifold:

- Does difference in gender play a role?
- How big of a role does socioeconomic status play?
- Is there an exact correlation between how African American parental communication style and the adult path of their children?
- Does this phenomenon only affect African Americans?
- Does region matter?
- Is poverty, immigration, education a factor?

The answers to questions like these not only serve to increase knowledge in the field of Communication but also could help parents and children alike to produce and become better functioning members of society.

APPENDIX A

Parental Authority Questionnaire

Instructions: For each of the following statements, circle the number of the 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) that best describes how that statement applies to you and your mother. Try to read and think about each statement as it applies to you and your mother during your years of growing up at home. There are no right or wrong answers, so don't spend a lot of time on any one item. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each statement. Be sure not to omit any items.

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

1.	While I was growing up my mother felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	Even if her children didn't agree with her, my mother felt that it was for our own good if we were forced to conform to what she thought was right.	1 2 3 4 5
3.	Whenever my mother told me to do something as I was growing up, she expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions.	1 2 3 4 5
4.	As I was growing up, once family policy had been established, my mother discussed the reasoning behind the policy with the children in the family.	1 2 3 4 5
5.	My mother has always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable.	1 2 3 4 5
6.	My mother has always felt that what her children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want.	1 2 3 4 5
7.	As I was growing up my mother did not allow me to question any decision she had made.	1 2 3 4 5
8.	As I was growing up my mother directed the activities and decisions of the children in the family through reasoning and discipline.	1 2 3 4 5

9.	My mother has always felt that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to.	1 2 3 4 5
10.	As I was growing up my mother did <i>not</i> feel that I needed to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority had established them.	1 2 3 4 5
11.	As I was growing up I knew what my mother expected of me in my family, but I also felt free to discuss those expectations with my mother when I felt that they were unreasonable.	1 2 3 4 5
12.	My mother felt that wise parents should teach their children early just who is boss in the family.	1 2 3 4 5
13.	As I was growing up, my mother seldom gave me expectations and guidelines for my behavior.	1 2 3 4 5
14.	Most of the time as I was growing up my mother did what the children in the family wanted when making family decisions.	1 2 3 4 5
15.	As the children in my family were growing up, my mother consistently gave us direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.	1 2 3 4 5
16.	As I was growing up my mother would get very upset if I tried to disagree with her.	1 2 3 4 5
17.	My mother feels that most problems in society would be solved if parents would <i>not</i> restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up.	1 2 3 4 5
18.	As I was growing up my mother let me know what behavior she expected of me, and if I didn't meet those expectations, she punished me.	1 2 3 4 5
19.	As I was growing up my mother allowed me to decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from her.	1 2 3 4 5
20.	As I was growing up my mother took the children's opinions into consideration when making family decisions, but she would not decide for something simply because the children wanted it.	1 2 3 4 5
21.	My mother did not view herself as responsible for directing and guiding my behavior as I was growing up.	1 2 3 4 5
22.	My mother had clear standards of behavior for the children in our home as I was growing up, but she was willing to adjust those standards to the needs of each of the individual children in the family.	1 2 3 4 5
23.	My mother gave me direction for my behavior and activities as I was growing up and she expected me to follow her direction, but she was always willing to listen to my concerns and to discuss that direction with me.	1 2 3 4 5
24.	As I was growing up my mother allowed me to form my own point of view on family matters and she generally allowed me to decide for myself what I was going to do.	1 2 3 4 5

25.	My mother has always felt that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to as they are growing up.	1 2 3 4 5
26.	As I was growing up my mother often told me exactly what she wanted me to do and how she expected me to do it.	1 2 3 4 5
27.	As I was growing up my mother gave me clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but she was also understanding when I disagreed with her.	1 2 3 4 5
28.	As I was growing up my mother did not direct the behaviors, activities, and desires of the children in the family.	1 2 3 4 5
29.	As I was growing up I knew what my mother expected of me in the family and she insisted that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for her authority.	1 2 3 4 5
30.	As I was growing up, if my mother made a decision in the family that hurt me, she was willing to discuss that decision with me and to admit it if she had made a mistake.	1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX B

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle **SA**. If you agree with the statement, circle **A**. If you disagree, circle **D**. If you strongly disagree, circle **SD**.

1.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA	A	D	SD
2.*	At times, I think I am no good at all.	SA	A	D	SD
3.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA	A	D	SD
4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA	A	D	SD
5.*	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	SA	A	D	SD
6.*	I certainly feel useless at times.	SA	A	D	SD
7.	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA	A	D	SD
8.*	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	SA	A	D	SD
9.*	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	SA	A	D	SD
10.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA	A	D	SD

Source: Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire distributed to African Americans between the ages 21-24 on Zoomerang.com:

This survey is being conducted as part of a Master's level thesis research in the department of Communication, College of Arts and Sciences at Seton Hall University. The topic being examined is how African American parents communicate with their children and what these children (now adults) believe about this communication style.

It is estimated that this survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Responding to the survey is voluntary and respondents may choose not to participate at anytime. All responses are anonymous and will be kept strictly confidential. Data collected will be stored electronically on a USB memory key only and kept in a locked secure physical site.

If you would like further information or would like to know the outcome of the study, please contact me at champake@shu.edu.

Instructions: For each of the following statements, circle the number of the 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) that best describes how that statement applies to you and your parent /guardian. Try to read and think about each statement as it applies to you and your mother during your years of growing up at home. There are no right or wrong answers, so don't spend a lot of time on any one item. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each statement. Be sure not to omit any items.

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

1.	While I was growing up my parent/guardian felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	Even if the children didn't agree with them, my parent/guardian felt that it was for our own good if we were forced to conform to what they thought was right.	1 2 3 4 5
3.	Whenever my parent/guardian told me to do something as I was growing up, they expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions.	1 2 3 4 5
4.	As I was growing up, once family policy had been established, my parent/guardian discussed the reasoning behind the policy with the children in the family.	1 2 3 4 5

5.	My parent/guardian has always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable.	1 2 3 4 5
6.	My parent/guardian has always felt that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want.	1 2 3 4 5
7.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian did not allow me to question any decision they had made.	1 2 3 4 5
8.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian directed the activities and decisions of the children in the family through reasoning and discipline.	1 2 3 4 5
9.	My parent/guardian has always felt that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to.	1 2 3 4 5
10.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian did <i>not</i> feel that I needed to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority had established them.	1 2 3 4 5
11.	As I was growing up I knew what my parent/guardian expected of me in my family, but I also felt free to discuss those expectations with my mother when I felt that they were unreasonable.	1 2 3 4 5
12.	My parent/guardian felt that wise parents should teach their children early just who is boss in the family.	1 2 3 4 5
13.	As I was growing up, my parent/guardian seldom gave me expectations and guidelines for my behavior.	1 2 3 4 5
14.	Most of the time as I was growing up my parent/guardian did what the children in the family wanted when making family decisions.	1 2 3 4 5
15.	As the children in my family were growing up, my parent/guardian consistently gave us direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.	1 2 3 4 5
16.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian would get very upset if I tried to disagree with them.	1 2 3 4 5
17.	My parent/guardian feels that most problems in society would be solved if parents would <i>not</i> restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up.	1 2 3 4 5
18.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian let me know what behavior was expected of me, and if I didn't meet those expectations, they punished me.	1 2 3 4 5
19.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian allowed me to decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from her.	1 2 3 4 5

20.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian took the children's opinions into consideration when making family decisions, but they would not decide for something simply because the children wanted it.	1 2 3 4 5
21.	My parent/guardian did not view herself as responsible for directing and guiding my behavior as I was growing up.	1 2 3 4 5
22.	My parent/guardian had clear standards of behavior for the children in our home as I was growing up, but was willing to adjust those standards to the needs of each of the individual children in the family.	1 2 3 4 5
23.	My parent/guardian gave me direction for my behavior and activities as I was growing up and she expected me to follow her direction, but she was always willing to listen to my concerns and to discuss that direction with me.	1 2 3 4 5
24.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian allowed me to form my own point of view on family matters and she generally allowed me to decide for myself what I was going to do.	1 2 3 4 5
25.	My parent/guardian has always felt that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to as they are growing up.	1 2 3 4 5
26.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian often told me exactly what they wanted me to do and how they expected me to do it.	1 2 3 4 5
27.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian gave me clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but was also understanding when I disagreed with them.	1 2 3 4 5
28.	As I was growing up my parent/guardian did not direct the behaviors, activities, and desires of the children in the family.	1 2 3 4 5
29.	As I was growing up I knew what my parent/guardian expected of me in the family and they insisted that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for their authority.	1 2 3 4 5
30.	As I was growing up, if my parent/guardian made a decision in the family that hurt me, they were willing to discuss that decision with me and to admit it if they had made a mistake.	1 2 3 4 5
31.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	1 2 3 4 5
32.	At times, I think I am no good at all.	1 2 3 4 5
33.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	1 2 3 4 5

34.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	1 2 3 4 5
35.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	1 2 3 4 5
36.	I certainly feel useless at times.	1 2 3 4 5
37.	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	1 2 3 4 5
38.	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	1 2 3 4 5
39.	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	1 2 3 4 5
40.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	1 2 3 4 5

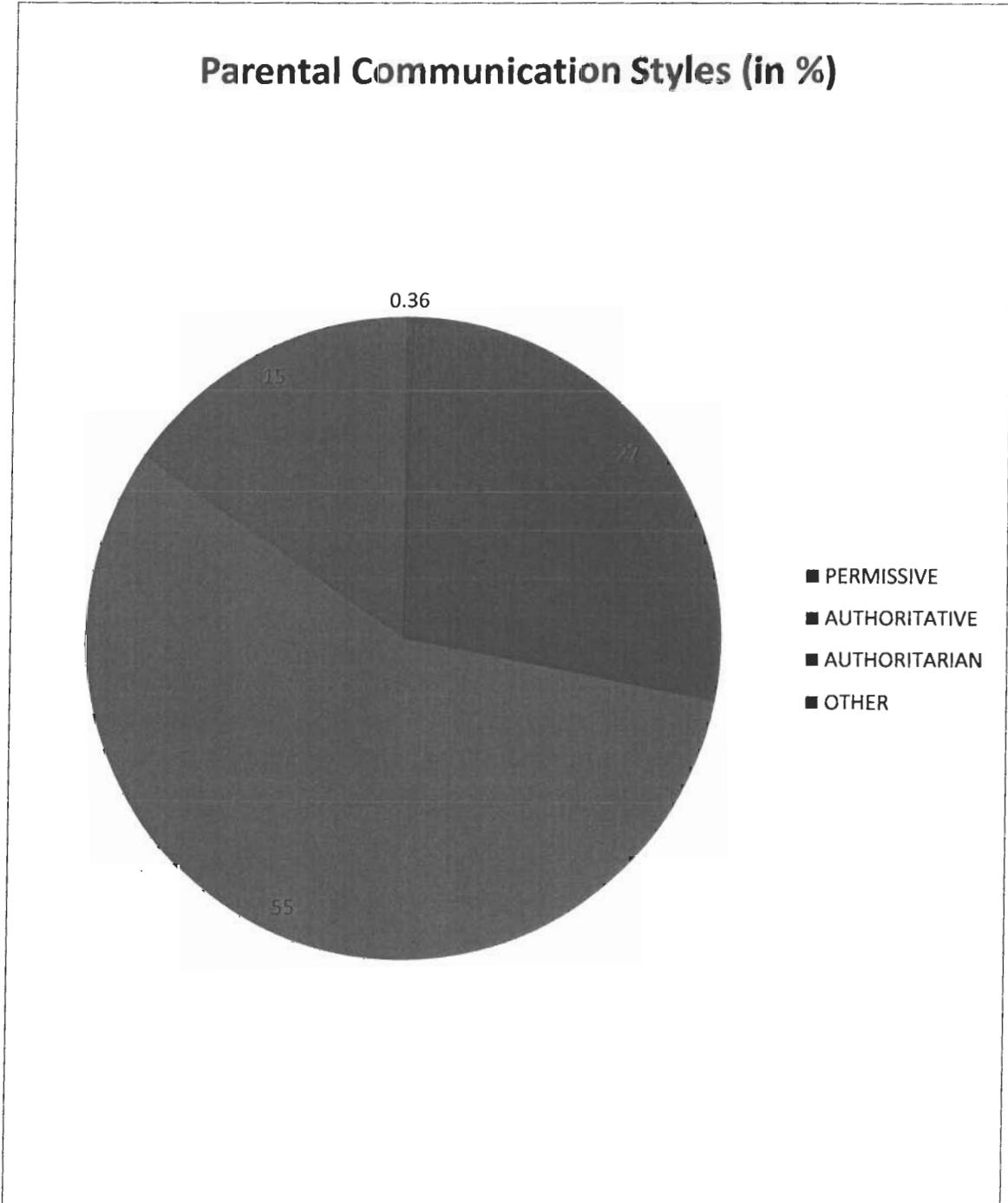
APPENDIX D

Example of questions used to frame interviews

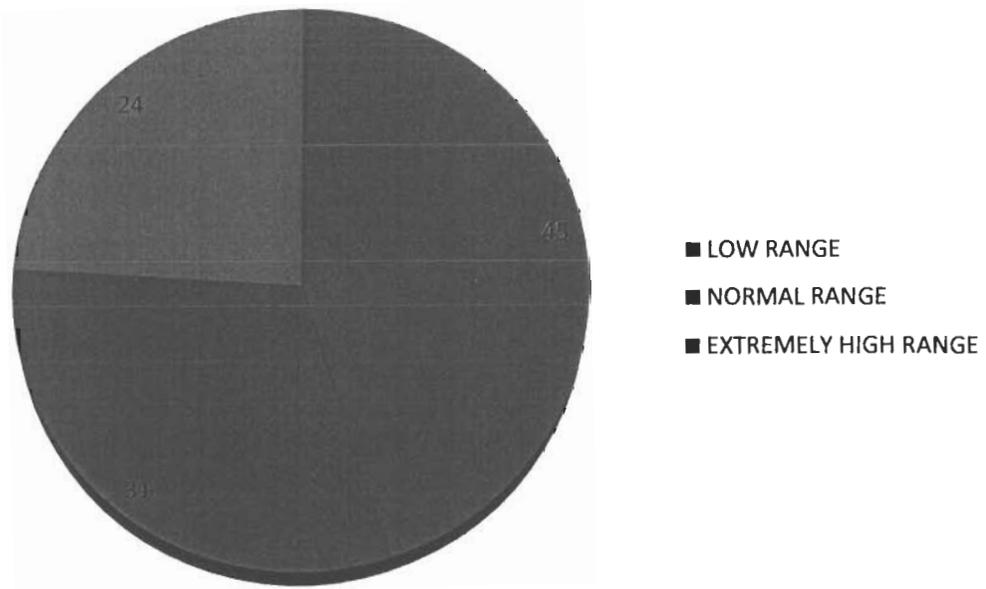
1. During your childhood, would you consider your parents/guardian strict/harsh, permissive, neither?
2. When you were between the ages of 2 and 12, do you believe your opinions were important to your parents/guardians?
3. Do you believe that your parents'/guardian's communication style has had any influence on your current status in life? How so?
4. Indicate which statement applies to you.
 - I am confident
 - I would like to be more confident
 - I am not confident
5. Do you consider yourself a successful person?
6. Will you communicate with your children in the same manner in which your parents did with you? Why or why not?

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire Results - General

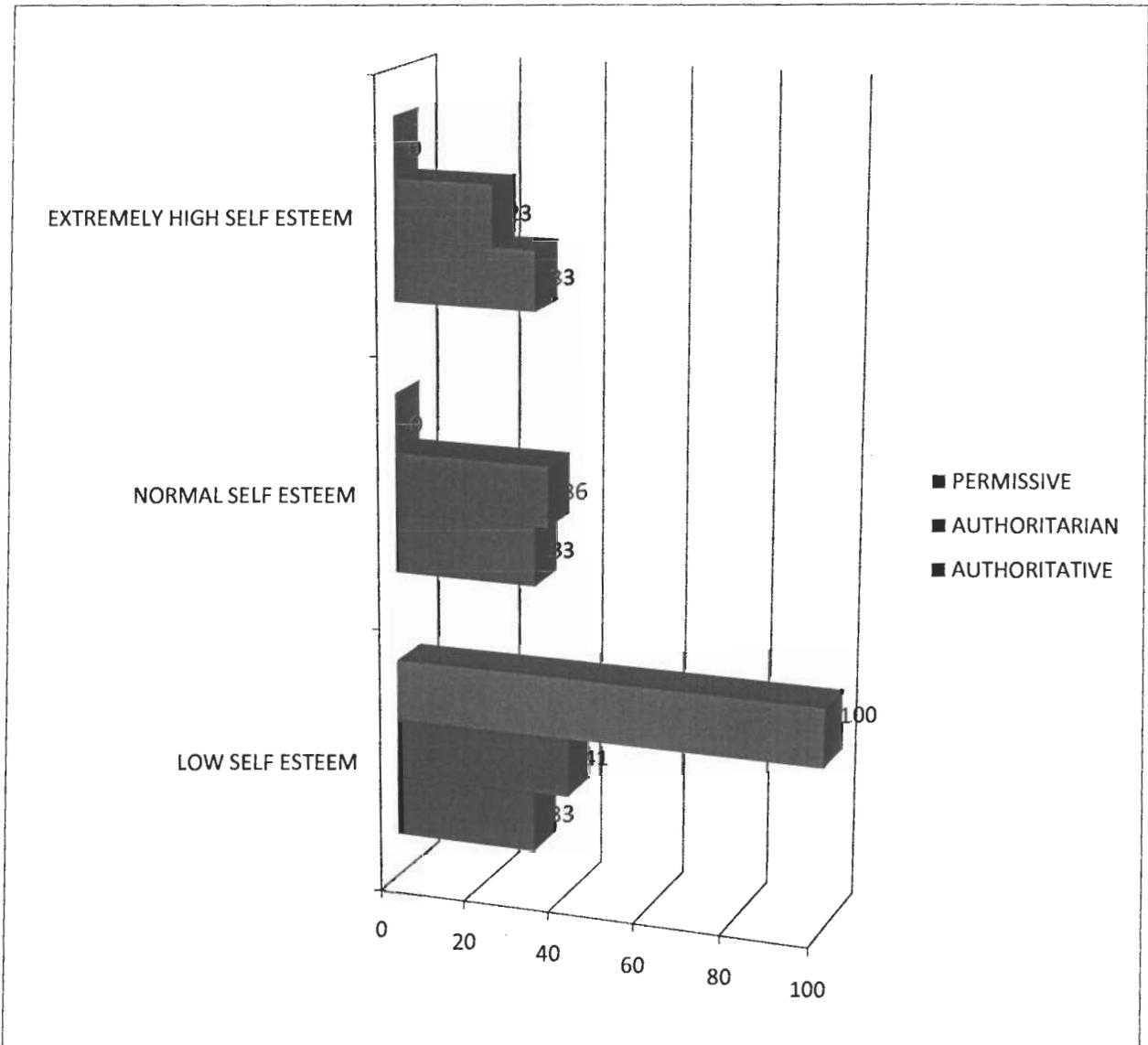


Self Esteem (in %)



APPENDIX F

Questionnaire Results – Parental Communication Style vs. Self Esteem



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WRzb3J0PSZwX3Jvd19jbnQ9MzAsMzAmcF9wcm9kcz0mcF9jYXRzPSZwX](http://zoomerang.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/zoomerang.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faqid=198&p_created=1067563183&p_sid=WCQ4Pqlj&p_accessibility=0&p_redirect=&p_lva=&p_sp=cF9zcmNoPTEmcF9zb3J0X2J5PSZwX2dyaWRzb3J0PSZwX3Jvd19jbnQ9MzAsMzAmcF9wcm9kcz0mcF9jYXRzPSZwX)