

**African American Parents' Perceptions of  
How Their Digital Practices Affect the Parent-Child Relationship**

by

Teyuna Trynea Darris

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Communication and the Arts

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aimed to understand African American parents' perceptions, observations, and experiences concerning their digital practices and whether or not these practices have any impact on their communication with their children. The theories that guided this study are housed in the sociopsychological communication tradition (i.e., uses and gratification theory and the family communication patterns theory) and the sociocultural communication tradition (i.e., cultivation theory). Thirty-five in-depth interviews of African American parents who completed a qualifying survey were conducted. The interview transcripts underwent a thematic analysis to understand the interviewees' perceptions, observations, and experiences related to the research questions, which addressed their digital practices. The insights from this study can benefit African American parents, caregivers of African American children, scholars, professionals (e.g., educators and social workers), and policymakers to create best practices that could help scholars and practitioners provide more data-informed and data-driven support to African Americans in various contexts (e.g., parenting, family planning, education, social services, etc.).

*Keywords:* African Americans, parenting practices, digital practices, technology, media, child development

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## Dedication

This dissertation is first dedicated to my daddy, Leroy Martinas Darris, Jr., for being my daddy and teacher. Daddy, you taught me to do, be, have all the best I can, and honor our family name. I hope that when you consider my life, you'll be pleased. Second, I dedicate this milestone to my mother, Diana Darris. Thank you for being my mother and showing me how things are done. Thank you for being so kind and mothering me in a way that only you can. Next, I want to dedicate this dissertation to my paternal grandmother, Mrs. Dorothy Darris. You've instilled so much in me, and everything you do is with enthusiasm and passion. You've inspired me to do, to be, and to have all the best that I can. Thank you for loving me, Grandma.

To my maternal grandmother, Ms. Thelma Marie Coleman, whose life has taught me to keep going despite the challenges along life's journey, I say thank you. I also dedicate this dissertation to all of my teachers who taught me how to read, write, count, play musical instruments, debate, paint, process payments, and make PowerPoints and Excel spreadsheets. You've each helped to mold me into something of a generalist. You gave me an array of meaningful knowledge and wise sayings, and you taught me how to get knowledge and develop skills. You also taught me how to have a good work ethic. You did all of this for me with passion and compassion. Thank you.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to Dr. Paul McKee at Saint Louis Community College. Thank you for teaching me that the foundation of effective communication is love. Dr. McKee, I remember the first day of Communication 101. The clock read 8:00 a.m. on a Monday morning in August when you taught our class the importance of esteeming those with whom we communicate as being higher than ourselves and edifying them during our exchange, whether it

was to inform, entertain, or achieve some other purpose. You said to avoid being a resounding bell or a tinkling symbol. I hope to communicate like this someday.

## **Acknowledgments**

With these words, I acknowledge the passion and dedication with which my teachers impressed upon me the importance of knowledge and skill, not only for the sake of obtaining them but to make our world better.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Family Communication Patterns (FCP)

Family Shared Social Reality (FSSR)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

King James Version (KJV)

Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PRSAI)

## CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

### Overview

This qualitative study explored African American parents and the impact that their digital media practices have on their communication with their children. To understand this subject, the researcher conducted a series of 35 interviews with African American parents to learn about their digital media practices, analyzing their responses to determine what they know, understand, personally observe, and experience in their relationships and communicative interactions with their children as it relates to these practices.

The researcher posited at the start of the study that African Americans and their use of technology seem to be an insufficiently researched topic in scholarly research, and there seemed to be fewer studies that had focused on the impacts of digital media on African Americans (e.g. as individuals and family units). Therefore, this study added to this small body of research and provides best practices and insights that can benefit the work of industries, including education, social work, public policy, and future research studies.

This study was framed by the sociopsychological and sociocultural traditions of communication, which were developed by Craig and Mueller (2007). The sociopsychological tradition proposes that communication occurs as a result of the interactions between the brain and behavior (Craig & Mueller, 2007). The sociocultural tradition examines explicitly the relationship between society and communication, theorizing that communication is the means through which meaning is produced in a culture (Craig & Mueller, 2007). Moreover, the data collected from this study was found to validate the uses and gratification theory, which explores how people deliberately choose to consume media for various purposes and may or may not experience positive or negative effects because of media consumption (Berelson, 1959). The

claims of the family communication patterns theory, which was the second theory that guided this study, posit that “to function optimally, families create a family shared social reality (FSSR), broadly defined as [a] shared understanding of one another” (Samek & Rueter, 2011). Finally, the cultivation theory posits that long-term exposure to media influences one’s perception of the world and personal self-concept and conduct (Griffin, 2012, p. 357). This was the third theory that guided this study.

### **Background and Situation to Self**

This background section provides context for the study by introducing key literature and concepts that underpinned the research. Personal context of the researcher and an account of some philosophical assumptions and personal experiences that motivated her to conduct this qualitative study are presented. In Chapter Two, a more thorough review of relevant literature is presented.

The researcher began this study with a focus on African Americans because she herself is an African American, she is familiar with African American culture (and its various subcultures), and she is familiar with the African American experience in the United States. Therefore, this study’s focus on the African American demographic proved to be far less complicated than it would have been had a demographic of which the researcher was not a member had been selected. While the original focus of this study was the American demographic (i.e., parents and children), the researcher decided to narrow the research focus to a smaller demographic to make this study more productive. This change inspired the researcher to plan for a longitudinal study among varying racial and ethnic demographics in the United States, ultimately helping other scholars and practitioners to understand the interconnection of various people groups' use of digital media and technology in the 21st-century American society. The researcher curated many

seminal and recent studies that relate to this present research topic. Moreover, she realized that the outcome of this study could fill in research gaps and add to the body of research about this significant societal topic, focusing on the interests and needs of African Americans, other peoples of African descent, persons of color (in general), and American society overall.

Moreover, the researcher believed that this topic was essential in communication and media studies today because parents play a critical role in their children's personal, social, and mental development and well-being (Rowe, 2017). If any of these areas are neglected in a significant way, children could experience many difficulties as they transition into adulthood (Schickedanz et al., 2018). For example, Bates and Pettit (2015) argued that the temperament, parenting practices, and parenting skills of a parent are empirically related and play a significant role in their child's social development. Feldman (2015) similarly presented critical data from her findings about the role of the parental brain on parenting practices and their effects on the child's neurological development, which determines the child's ability to live and function in society.

The researcher believes that a person's ability to communicate effectively is a critical ability that begins its development as children are growing, where they learn from parents and caregivers who teach, guide, and direct them. This guidance helps them to grow into adults who are capable of (1) building positive and productive relationships with other people (Keijsers & Poulin, 2013), (2) seeking, obtaining, and maintaining employment (Segrin et al., 2012), and (3) becoming emotionally, socially, and academically intelligent (Anderson, 2018). In other words, parenting practices seem to predominantly affect a child's ability to healthfully, positively, and productively function in society. The researcher posited that if the parent's practices (including social, financial, and technological) are not conducive to the child's personal, social, and mental development and well-being, the child could become an adult with impaired and/or undeveloped

communication abilities and skills, which could then affect their ability to positively and productively function in society.

This study was necessary to conduct, as it added to the body of scientific research literature by exploring Americans, their digital media use and practices, and the impact of those practices on American society. First, this study specifically explored the impacts of excessive digital media and technology use in African American homes and communities. The research especially noted the impact of media usage on communication quality, frequency, and effectiveness. This information was ascertained through qualitative interviews through which parent participants shared their perspectives and observations about the effects of their digital practices. Second, this study increased the variety of scientific research literature that scholars and practitioners (e.g. social workers, educators, and policymakers) can use to produce best practices in collaboration with African American parents, supporting the overall development and well-being of their children personally and socially. In addition, the insights from this study can help to develop best practices that are beneficial for individual digital media usage, increasing productivity, and enhancing technological savviness among families.

As this study provided real-world examples of how one ethnic group (i.e. African Americans) uses digital media, its insights could be used as reference literature for future similar and dissimilar studies that explore matters concerning African Americans, as well as Americans in general. Finally, this study's findings were established to support the development of parenting best practices in the digital age for both African American parents and American parents collectively. These insights may be used to improve parenting practices and thus improve the lives of American children through benefits including increased emotional intelligence, social sophistication, and critical thinking skills.

This study's focus on the effects of African Americans' digital media practices on the parent-child relationship was influenced by the researcher's collective experiences as a public elementary school teacher and as an academic tutor of elementary and high school students in urban, inner-city, and suburban school districts. While working in these settings, she observed that while most of the students seemed to use digital media and technology for entertainment purposes, they also seemed to generally share five significant characteristics. First, their reading, writing, and computing mathematics scores fell below grade level. Second, they primarily consumed digital media for entertainment purposes. Third, they lacked the necessary technological skills to use digital technology for productivity purposes (e.g., interpreting and creating charts and graphs, creating spreadsheets and school presentations, typing essays, and organizing data). Next, they often created digital media content that either presented themselves or their peers negatively (and sometimes stereotypically). This content was also used for risky or contentious interactions, such as conducting Zoom or Facetime meetings to argue and schedule fights to take place when the students would return to school. Lastly, they generally lacked the necessary social skills to achieve their goals as members of a larger society (e.g., obtaining and maintaining steady employment and adapting one's conduct to different social settings). The researcher sought to understand whether these five digital practices she observed in her students and their peers were learned from or influenced by their parents and/or caregivers.

Moreover, since the researcher began working as an educator and researching social issues among African Americans, she became aware that most African American children are born to unwed parents (Daniels, Jr, Kakar, & Chaudhuri, 2017), and many of them do not live in the same home with their fathers and mothers (Hemez & Washington, 2021). Additionally, the

researcher had previously been unaware of the mass incarceration rates of African American people (especially men) and the role that these dynamics have played in

1. the destruction of the African American family structure (Wilcox, Wang, & R., 2021),
2. undermining social cohesion and economic stability within the African American community (Damaske, Bratter, & Frech, 2017) and
3. influencing broader societal perceptions and policies affecting the American community (Scott, 2015).

These and other adverse social issues play a significant role in the perceptions and uses of digital media in the African American home. For example, because of these and other challenges, some African American parents might excessively consume digital media content for entertainment purposes to distract themselves from the stressors of their daily challenges (Lloyd, Alvira-Hammond, Carlson, & Logan, 2021). On the other hand, others might excessively use digital media because of a lack of discipline (Brevers & Turel, 2019), or they may not know of more productive alternatives for entertainment, communication, or personal growth.

The researcher was interested in learning the reason(s) for what she believed was an excessive, and often, inappropriate use of digital media and digital technology among African American parents and children. Therefore, she set out to determine through this study whether this perceived problem was real. In the case that it would be proven to be a real problem, the researcher wanted to identify ways that could solve, or at least mitigate, the effects of this problem and help African American parents and children to ultimately interact with each other, the larger American and increasingly global society, as well as technology in a more efficient and productive way that supports their overall development and well-being as individuals and flourishing family units.

## **Problem Statement**

The problem is that African Americans' digital practices seem to have an adverse impact on parent-child communication (i.e. communication quality, frequency, effectiveness, etc.), and could play a role in what seems to be an excessive use of digital technology and digital media consumption by African American youth. The prominence of digital media in modern society presents many challenges and opportunities that are new to the human experience. The ability to digitally communicate enables parents to supplement their digital practices with media that can enrich or compromise their parent-child communication, parent-child relationship, as well as their children's personal and social development and well-being (Gjylbegaj & Abdi, 2019). Failure to identify the ways in which parents and children use digital media to support their individual and familial needs can have adverse effects on the parent-child relationship, the child's personal and social development and well-being, the family unit, and society as a whole (Fernández-Rasines, 2013).

Although existing research literature contains a vast array of scientific studies related to parenting practices, digital media practices, and the effects of these practices on children, there seems to be a small number of studies that have focused on the African American home environment and the impacts of digital media on parent-child communication. Recent research literature has explained that many parents do not have sufficient knowledge about technology to support their children's personal and social development and well-being (Yaman et al., 2021). While most of these previous studies focused on other people groups, some indirectly considered the role of African American parenting and digital practices through surveys related to a more prominent theme or topic.



Given this, more research into the digital and parenting practices of African Americans was deemed necessary. The researcher posited that best practices could be developed from this research to positively impact the African American parent-child relationship and enhance the development and well-being of African American children personally and socially. Therefore, the specific problem addressed by this research was African Americans' digital practices and the impact of those digital practices on parent-child communication. The qualitative approach of this study (i.e. open-ended interview questions and a thematic analysis of interview responses) enabled an in-depth exploration of the interview participants' perceptions and experiences with their digital practices and the ways in which parent-child communication has been impacted in their family unit (i.e. communication quality, frequency, effectiveness, etc.).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand African American parents' perspectives about how their digital media practices impact parent-child communication in their family unit. Moreover, the researcher's scholarly area of interest was a convergence of culture and media with technology and society. Thus, this qualitative study explored if and how African American parents' usage and perceptions of digital media affect African American parent-child communication. The researcher developed this purpose statement during her numerous observations, discussions, and interactions with African American parents in both academic and non-academic settings in which digital media and technology use seemed to heavily influence African American children's personal and social interactions, practices, norms, and beliefs, oftentimes in a manner that seemed detrimental to their ability to flourish in the home environment and society at large.

The researcher's concerns included African American (elementary and secondary school-aged) children's ability to effectively communicate with others (e.g. friends, relatives, classmates, strangers, future employers, etc.) who live both within and outside of the home. The researcher was also concerned about the children's ability to effectively communicate with others in a manner that is conducive to the way in which they desire others to communicate with them. Communicating with others also relates to how the children present themselves to the world and is primarily influenced by their interactions with and observations of the parent or caregiver (i.e. the individuals who play the parental roles in the children's lives whether on a short-term or long-term basis). These phenomena were explored through qualitative interviews with 35 African American parents (n = 35). The collected interview transcripts were analyzed using a thematic analysis to determine whether the research findings validated the theoretical framework that guided this study (i.e. uses and gratification theory, the cultivation theory, and the family communications pattern theory). Chapter Three presents the research method and design of this study in detail.

### **Significance of Study**

A study of this kind was necessary to add to the body of scientific research literature that explores Americans and their digital media practices, technology usage, and the impact that these behaviors have on American society (Auxier et al., 2020). This study is significant, as it added to the scientific research literature by specifically exploring the impacts of excessive digital media and technology use in African American homes and communities (Yu et al., 2022). In addition, this study increased the variety of scientific research literature that scholars and practitioners (e.g. social workers and educators) can use to produce best practices in collaboration with African American parents and care givers)to support their children's overall personal and social

development, as well as their emotional well-being. Another reason this study is significant is because it contributed to what seems to be a limited body of scientific research literature that explicitly explored African Americans' digital media usage in their homes and the associated effect(s) on African American children (as individuals) and parent-child communication which often seems to reflect the parent-child relationship.

In addition, the researcher hoped that this study would enable other researchers and industry professionals (e.g. educators, social workers, and policymakers) to collaborate with African American parents and caregivers to create best practices that could help them to (if needed) improve their digital media practices and interpersonal interactions with each other as parent and child. In this way, these best practices could help to improve their interactions as a family unit (Rideout et al., 2016). This study provided real-world examples of how one ethnic group (i.e. African Americans) uses digital media. This, and other, scientific data can be used as reference literature to support future similar and dissimilar studies that explore matters concerning African Americans and all Americans in general (The Nielson Company, 2018). Finally, the findings of this study can be used to create parenting best practices for African American parents, which could consequently improve the personal and social development and well-being of African American children (e.g., emotional intelligence, social sophistication, and critical thinking skills) (Coyne et al., 2017).

### **Research Questions**

Four research questions framed this qualitative study, where the first was a primary research question and the subsequent three were secondary research questions. The interview questions that were generated from these primary and secondary questions are addressed in Chapter Three.

**RQ1:** What perceptions do African American parents have about their personal use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media and digital technology (in general and in the home environment)?

The researcher asked the study participants (n = 35) four qualitative interview questions that were based on RQ1 (i.e. the primary research question), which lent understanding about how African American parents perceive their own digital media practices and consumption in general. These perceptions included contexts of being alone, being with friends and colleagues, as well as when they are at home with or without their children.

**RQ2:** What perceptions do African American parents have about their children's use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media (in general and in the home environment)?

The researcher asked the study participants (n = 35) six qualitative interview questions based on RQ2 (i.e. a secondary research question) to help the researcher understand African American parents' perceptions about their children's digital media practices and consumption. Data from RQ2 also shed light on the reasons for their digital media practices and consumption in the varying contexts in which their children might use digital media and technology.

**RQ3:** Do African American parents perceive that their digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with their children?

The researcher asked the study participants (n = 35) two qualitative interview questions based on RQ3 (i.e. a secondary research question) to better understand African American parents' perceptions of their personal digital media practices and the effects, perceived or actual, on their communication and relationships with their children. These associated effects related to the quality, frequency, and effectiveness of interactions and were demonstrated in front of their children.

**RQ4:** Do African American parents perceive that their children’s digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with them as parents?

The researcher asked the study participants (n = 35) two qualitative interview questions based on RQ4 (i.e. a secondary research question) to better understand African American parents’ perceptions about their children’s digital media practices and whether they perceive a correlation between the way their children use digital media and the way their children communicate with them, taking note of the quality, frequency, and effectiveness of their communication as well as the general relationship with their children.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are necessary to review, as these terms were relevant to this study.

- *Appropriateness:* This term refers to something that is achieved or understood through focusing “... on a holistic understanding of appropriateness as a whole” (Patnaik & Bhowmick, 2022; Moon & Hwang, 2018, p. 125-127 ). Appropriateness has been invariably linked with how effective and sustainable a particular technology practice and intervention is, while administering the same to solve a problem (Sianipar et al., 2014). Appropriateness investigates how developmental principles can be incorporated to promote sustainability (Zhou et al., 2017). The term has always been context-specific, depending on the end-user of a technology. However, devising a standardized metric for evaluating appropriateness can facilitate the easy operation of appropriate technology, or *AT* (Lissenden et al., 2015). Martí-Herrero et al. (2014) “posited the need for a comprehensive review and understanding of appropriateness” (Patnaik & Bhowmick, 2022).

- *Computer-mediated communication*: Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is “an umbrella term that encompasses various forms of communication through networked computers (i.e. videoconferencing, phone calls, email messages, etc.) (Cleveland, 2020)”.
- *Digital audio*: Digital audio is “a technology that is used to record, store, manipulate, generate, and reproduce sound using audio signals that have been encoded in digital form. The term refers to the sequence of discrete samples that are taken from an analog audio waveform. Instead of a continuous sinusoidal wave, digital audio is composed of discrete points which represent the amplitude of the waveform approximately” (Technopedia, 2016).
- *Digital literacy*: This form of literacy refers to “a constellation of life skills that are necessary for full participation in our media-saturated, information-rich society (Hobbs, 2010).” (Renee Hobbs’ full definition and explanation of *digital literacy* can read in : Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action by Renee Hobbs (2010)).
- *Digital media*: This term refers to “any form of media that uses a screen, including televisions, smartphones, video games consoles and computers and social media” (Zhang & Chang, 2016, p. 579 – 592).
- *Digital practices*: Digital practices refer to what people do with and through digital media, preferably through the internet and in relation to what is done and occurs offline. However, the term also addresses how people relate to technology (University of Siegen, 2016).
- *Excessive*: Any repeated use of and/or exposure to something that causes a negative or adverse effect on a person’s mental, emotional, physical, social or other areas of a life (APA, 2019; Jurnal Ners, 2019; Hawkey, 2019). This can include damage, loss, or

impairment in these areas, as well as in one's general well-being (Rahmawati et al., 2019).

- *Excessive (or, problematic) media use*: Problematic social media use refers to “being preoccupied with social media, having a strong motivation to use social media, and spending an excessive amount of time on social media leading to impairments in their social, personal and/or professional life, as well as psychological health and well-being (Kircaburun, Jonason, & Griffiths, 2018, pp. 264-269).
- *Media*: This term refers to “the main means of mass communications, especially, newspapers, radio and television regarded collectively; the reporters, journalists, etc. working for organizations engaged in such communication” (The Chicago School of Media Theory at Chicago University, 2021). Media also refers to “those institutions which make use of copying technologies to disseminate communication (Luhmann K. , 2000)”.
- *Media convergence*: Media convergence is “a theory in communications where every mass medium eventually merges to the point where they become one medium due to the advent of new communication technologies” (Chakaveh & Bogen, 2007, pp. 811 - 814).
- *Mediatization*: Mediatization is a term that encompasses “the changes brought by media into every aspect of our lives. It goes beyond the conventional textual analysis, production economic-politics and audiences' studies” (Nie, Kee, & Ahmad, 2014, pp. 362 - 367).
- *Parenting practices*: This umbrella term “includes the totality of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors that parents bring to settings in which they interact with their child or children” (Alwin, 2008, pp. 142 - 157).

- *Print media*: A paper-based means of communication (e.g. printed books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, photographic film, audio tapes, video tapes, and other traditional or analog media) (Chandler & Munday, 2011).
- *Propaganda*: A “consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea, or group” (Bernays, 1928, p. 25).
- *Social media*: Social media are “computer-mediated communication software that enable users to create, share, and view content in publicly networked one-to-one, one-to-many, and/or many-to-many communications” (Hopkins, 2017).

### **Summary**

This chapter introduced this qualitative study, which was designed to explore if and how African American parents' usage and perceptions of digital media practices affect African American parent-child communication. The theoretical framework that guided this study included the sociocultural and sociopsychological traditions of human communication (Craig & Mueller, 2007). Furthermore, the three communication theories selected for this study were the uses and gratification theory, the family communication patterns theory, and the cultivation theory. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the limited body of research literature that has explored peoples of African descent and technology, and the implications of digital practices on society. Chapter Two presents a review of this existing body of literature.



## **CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

This chapter provides a review of the existing research literature relevant to this study. Specifically, this chapter reviews the theoretical framework that guided this research, which included the sociopsychological and sociocultural communication traditions (Craig & Muller, 2007) as well as the uses and gratification theory, family communication patterns theory, and cultivation theory. Existing literature about family communication, parent-child communication, and relationships is also reviewed in the following sections.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Sociopsychological Communication Tradition**

The researcher surmised that the sociopsychological communication tradition is a family of similar theories that ask, “How can I get others to change?” Moreover, the sociopsychological tradition is one of the seven major communication traditions outlined by Craig and Mueller (2007) and views communication as a behavior-oriented phenomenon that can be influenced through factors in one’s contextual environment in which communication takes place (Theoretical Traditions, 2018). Through this tradition’s lens, communication occurs as a result of the interactions between the one’s brain and one’s behavior (Theoretical Traditions, 2018, p. 1762). Hence, the sociopsychological tradition focuses on how communication (i.e. interactions, expressions, and influence) is affected by attitudes, perceptions, cognition, emotions, and the other aspects of psychology (Manning, 2018, p. 1762). In other words, one’s mind and one’s communication norms, situations, and contexts are examined through the interaction of the mind and behavior (Hewes & Planalp, 1987). Notably, this interaction is considered the point in which information processing and understanding occur (Greene, 1989).

According to Littlejohn et al. (2017), the sociopsychological tradition consists of three divisions including behavioral, cognitive, and biological. Each of these divisions is supported by theories that explore (1) how people behave in communication situations (i.e. behavioral), (2) thought patterns (i.e. cognitive), and the effects of the brain's structure, neurochemistry, and function with genetic factors on human behavior and communication (i.e. biological) (Littlejohn et al., 2017). This qualitative study explored the perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings of African American parents about their personal digital practices and how they (i.e. the parents) understand the impact of these phenomena on themselves and the reasons, motivations, needs, and uses that influence and/or formulate their digital media practices.

### ***Family Communication Theories***

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1992) suggested that family communication has dramatically changed as a result of societal changes, specifically in relation to the way families function. They asserted that a theoretical approach should be used to understand the family communication practices of the modern family.

A theory of family communication is important for understanding communication processes in general. In spite of this apparent convergence of interests, social scientists in a number of academic disciplines interested in the family as a context of communication have only recently begun to acknowledge similar interests. (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1992, p. 566)

Many theories have been applied to family communication studies to understand how digital media usage affects family communication (Dworkin et al., 2018). These theories include the uses and gratification theory as well as metatheories such as the family systems theory, social capital theory, and family communication patterns theory. To understand communication, the

family systems theory “focuses on interactions between people in a family and between the family and the context(s) in which that family is embedded” (Watson, 2012, pp. 184-193).

According to Machalek and Martin (2015), social capital theory holds that “social relationships are resources that can lead to the development and accumulation of human capital. For example, a stable family environment can support educational attainment and support the development of highly valued and rewarded skills and credentials” (pp. 892 – 898). A recent example of the use of this theory was by Jang and Dworkin (2014) who used the social capital theory to study how parents (especially mothers) use the internet for social support as they learn how to be mothers.

This present qualitative study used the uses and gratification theory and the family communication patterns theory to explore and answer the four research questions that were outlined in Chapter One. In Chapter Five, the relationship between this study’s two communication traditions and three communication theories is discussed, along with the works of communication scholars Ong, Ellul, Postman, and McLuhan. This discussion provides a synchronized example of how human interaction with digital media and technology has, over time, increasingly changed communication practices and thus cultivated some fundamental changes to how individuals communicate and relate to each other.

### ***Family Communication Patterns Theory***

The *Family Communication Patterns* (FCP) theory was “based on research by McCleod and Chaffee (1972), (McCleod & Chaffee, 1972), Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994). Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (, 1990)) have conceptualized conversation and conformity orientations in families as central beliefs that determine much of how families communicate and conformity orientation to various outcomes for families, such as conflict and conflict resolution (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997a), children’s resiliency to adverse environmental influences (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 1996),

children's future romantic relations (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997b) utilization of social self-restraint and social withdrawal behaviors (Fitzpatrick, Marshall, Leutwiler, & Krcmer, 1996), enactment of family rituals (Baxter & Clark, 1996), and the effects of parents' work environments on the family context (Ritchie, 1997) (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 83).

Dyess (2017) described how FCP "assumes that people's beliefs about family interrelationship vary in the extent to which communication is perceived as open and abiding by the specialized structure within the family" (p. 6). This theory can be used to study the relationship between family communication and individual and family outcomes, as well as to explain how "families create social situations to stimulate shared understanding based on individuals' psychological need for consistent cognitions between family members, as well as a pragmatic need to predict other family members' behaviors" (Dworkin et al., 2018, p. 803).

According to Dworkin et al. (2018), FCP posits that families have a shared reality which is created through conformity orientation and conversation orientation. The researchers defined *conformity orientation* as "the degree to which families create an environment characterized by uniform beliefs, attitudes, and interactions", while *conversation orientation* was defined as "the degree to which families create a climate where all members are encouraged to participate freely in family interactions" (Dworkin et al., 2018, p. 803). Moreover, there are four categories that can be used to describe the patterns of family communication, which can also be classified along the spectrums of conformity and conversation. These categories include protective, consensual, laizze-faire, and pluralistic (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, pp. 85-88). Thus, conversation orientation

is defined as the degree to which families create a climate in which all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained interaction about a wide array of topics. In

families on the high end of this dimension, family members freely, frequently, and spontaneously interact with each other without many limitations in regard to time spent in interaction or topics discussed (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 85).

Other attributes of families with a high conversation orientation include spending lots of time communicating, interacting with each other, in addition to a generating a general openness to share personal thoughts, feelings, and activities with each other (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Moreover, activities and actions that are intended for the participation of each family member are generally considered in a family discussion, where the decisions made during these discussions are generally considered to be family decisions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Rudi et al. (2015) used FCP to explore the frequency with which adolescents communicated with their parents using email, telephones, and text messaging. Their study found that the frequency of communication using one of these three means varied based on the amount of conformity orientation and conversation orientation in each family (Rudi et al., 2015). In this present study, the findings were analyzed to determine whether the communication patterns of the families represented in this research corroborate the claims of FCP. Chapter Five presents a discussion of these findings.

### ***Uses and Gratifications Theory of Elihu Katz***

Elihu Katz developed the uses and gratification theory in response to research conducted by another communications scholar, Bernard Berelson (1959), who had published a paper in which he zealously asserted that the future of the communication field was bleak and at risk of fading out. Berelson and other scholars in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century believed that media were doing something to people and often asked, “What do media do to people?” Thus, their research was often conducted through this lens (Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001). Conversely, Katz approached

communication research with the belief that people were doing things with media and therefore would frequently ask, “What do people do with media?” (Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001).

With the uses and gratification theory, Katz attempted to explain that people consume lots of media of various types, from various sources, for various reasons, and are therefore not likely to be affected by their media consumption in the same way (Griffin, 2012). This theory also holds that understanding the media consumer’s need to consume media justifies the consumption, making any positive or negative effects of media consumption on the consumer easily identifiable and understandable (Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001). Hence, the uses and gratification theory explores how people deliberately choose to consume media for various purposes, and may or may not experience positive or negative effects because of that media consumption (Berelson, 1959). This theory holds five assumptions: (1) people use media for specific purposes, (2) people use media to gratify their needs, (3) media compete for people’s time and attention, (4) people are affected by media in different ways, and (5) people can accurately report their media consumption and the associated motivations for it (Berelson, 1959).

One might posit that the uses and gratification theory is similar to, or compatible with, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs because both theories posit that a person takes specific actions to satisfy specific needs. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is divided into *D-needs* (i.e. deficiency needs), which relate to a person's physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem needs, and *B-needs* (i.e. growth or being needs), which relate to a person’s self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). Further analysis of these two theories might lead one to posit that one consumes media to fulfill certain needs in order to achieve a specific experience, feeling, or satisfaction.

Katz's uses and gratification theory has helped researchers identify active and passive media consumers, revealing helpful insights into the study of people's media consumption habits as they relate to digital media (Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983, Severin & Tankard, 1997; McQuail, 2010;). However, a significant weakness of this theory is that while it emphasizes the media consumers' selected behaviors and reasons for engaging in media consumption, it does not make provisions for the instances when media consumers inadvertently or unconsciously consume media (Griffin, 2012). Katz's theory allowed the researcher in this present study to explore the media consumer's role (i.e. the person) in the communication process.

### ***Sociocultural Communication Tradition***

The sociocultural communication tradition can be summarized as a framework that asks, "Does our dominant language shape our reality?" The sociocultural tradition is similar to the sociopsychological tradition in that it similarly explores human psychology and communication interactions. However, the sociocultural tradition specifically examines the relationship between society and communication, theorizing that communication is the means through which meaning is produced in a culture (Manning, 2018, p. 1762). Hence, this tradition explores the interactions of collective individual roles, rules, norms, meanings, and understandings (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009) and how one's social identity is a fusion of the self with the cultural roles that one lives out in the social and cultural groups in which one belongs (Collier, 2009). Therefore, the sociocultural tradition "focuses on the effects of the production, maintenance, and reproduction of [small] social formation... to a global phenomenon" (Ochieng, 2014, p. 25 ).

### ***Cultivation Theory***

The cultivation theory, derived from the sociocultural tradition, posits that long-term exposure to media influences one's perception of the world, personal self-concept, and conduct

(Segrin et al., 2012). In this present study, this theory was applied to better understand African American parent's perceptions, observations, and experiences concerning how their digital practices influence their children's perceptions about themselves and the world around them. Chapter Five discusses how the qualitative findings of this study, which pertain to the ways in which African American children are being socialized and influenced by media to engage in certain behaviors that shape and satisfy their desires, connect with the sociocultural lens of the cultivation theory.

## **Related Research Literature**

### **Human Relationships and Human Communication**

Whether it is verbal or nonverbal, communication is the exchange of messages between groups and individuals (University of Minnesota, 2010). For decades, researchers have developed many models and theories of human communication to help scholars and practitioners understand communication and its various types, forms, modes, and media (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). According to Littlejohn et al. (2017), types of communication include mass communication, small group communication, and intrapersonal communication. Communication forms, modes, and media include writing and illustrations, verbal and nonverbal cues, and Twitter (Dewatripont & Tirole, 2005). Moreover, these forms, modes, and media occur in various contexts, environments, and relationships.

Despite the purpose and context in which relationships occur, they are generally developed and maintained through verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and their applicable media. The family unit, which is second to the individual person, is generally considered the most basic group, or entity, within society, and is often referred to as the building block (Segrin & Flora, 2011). In the 20th and 21st centuries, scholars such as Marshall McLuhan



(McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*, 2010), Walter Ong (Ong, 2012), and Neil Postman (1985) argued that the increased technologization of global society would have adverse effects on all levels of human society if people do not effectively manage how and why they use technology. Furthermore, Neil Postman specifically asserted that “technology always has unforeseen consequences, and it is not always clear, at the beginning, who or what will win, and who or what will lose” (Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 1985).

In the 21st century, and now, in a COVID-19 affected world, digital communications are increasingly used to build and maintain all types of relationships in addition to coercing people who previously would not use digital communications to now use it for business, government, education, healthcare, and other matters. While previous research has already explored the effects of digital communications on the family unit, the sudden increase in media consumption and digital communications is changing how families interact. Specifically, digital practices are changing how parents and their children communicate (Procentese et al., 2019).

### **Family Communication and Digital Media**

The saturation of digital media in daily life has dramatically changed the way families communicate and relate to each other (Duggan et al., 2015). In recent research literature, studies have been conducted to understand parents' perceptions of the risks associated with their children's digital media consumption, carefully examining how parents consume digital media and manage their children's consumption (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2016). Researchers have also aimed to understand how parents can help their children to have positive and rewarding digital media experiences, while also finding ways to support parents in this process (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2016). As research into this topic has progressed, light has been shed on how

parents' digital media experiences (as individuals and as a part of a family unit) impact their views about (1) the safety, value, and risk of digital media consumption, (2) the role that digital media play in the family unit, and (3) how family members communicate and relate with each other and with society at large (Coyne, et al., 2017).

Samek and Reuter (2011) described FCP as a "... broadly defined" and "shared understanding of one another..." (pp. 1015 – 1031) that enables a family to create a shared social reality. To achieve this shared reality, FCP "... requires that family members perceive a topic similarly, believe others share their attitudes and perceptions, and finally, be accurate in their beliefs" (Samek & Rueter, 2011, pp. 1015-1031) argued that this shared reality does not necessarily need to include parents and their adolescent children's views about general, daily matters. Instead, the shared reality must relate to matters that are related to one's personal values and issues of morality (Laursen & Collins, 2004).

A study conducted by Duggan et al. (2015) presented findings that provide insight into the digital activities of parents and how those activities affect their parenting practices, abilities to make decisions for their families, and social skills in various settings. Research findings from van Kruistum and van Steensel (2017) explored 24 Dutch parents, who represented 15 Dutch families, and the mediation of their 6- and 7-year-old children's digital media consumption. A qualitative analysis of this study found that the parents generally employed space, guidance, and regulation as their mediation styles. In addition, the themes of balance, freedom, and protection were identified as having played a key role in the parents' mediation of the children's media consumption (van Kruistum & van Steensel, 2017). Van Kruistum and van Steensel reported that the parents did not want to prohibit the children's digital media use, had no fear of allowing

them to use digital media without mediation, and regularly used digital media to educate their children.

Further quantitative and qualitative studies have found that although parents allow their children to use digital media freely, they are also fully aware of the risks associated with the practice (Tarihi & Tarihi, 2018). Parents' views and use of digital media are harming their parenting practices, adversely affecting their children's personal and social development and well-being. The saturation of digital media in daily life has dramatically changed the way families communicate and relate to each other (Duggan et al., 2015).

Other research literature has explored how social media use impacts family relationships due to its impact on family communication. For example, “the ways families use and are affected by social media are particularly complex, driven by sociohistorical context, geographical location, rapid technological innovation, and accessibility” (Dworkin et al., 2018, pp. 796 – 813). Dworkin et al. (2018) posited that “although there has been an increase in research on technology use and social media use in particular, there remains little on family relationships” (pp. 796 – 813).

Dworkin et al. (2018) reviewed the existing literature on family research and social media, forming hypotheses about the various research findings available. Their findings led to three conclusions including (1) despite the widespread use of social media, scholars have only recently begun to understand the impacts of social media on family relationships, (2) there is little information available about how to best support parent and family online educational needs, and (3) social media companies possess the information that scholars need to study and support the exploration of the impacts of social media use on family communication and relationships

(Dworkin et al., 2018). Dworkin et al. also asserted that there is a limited focus on parenting practices and the parent-child relationship in research literature (Dworkin et al., 2018).

### **Parent-Child Communication and Non-Familial Communication**

The parent-child relationship is another topic featured in the existing research literature that explores the impact of digital media consumption on the family unit. Children's self-development and ability to relate to other people are highlighted by this literature, as researchers like Coyne et al. (2017) have been especially interested in understanding how children's personal and social development are affected by the amount and quality of the digital media consumed within the family unit (i.e. by both children and parents). Coyne et al. explored family units with high digital media consumption in comparison with those with low to no digital media consumption. Coyne et al.'s study consists of four major key findings related to the impacts of media use on family dynamics, parental mediation practices, the effects of parental mediation practices on child development, in addition to support the need for the conduction of longitudinal studies to help researchers to understand they dynamics and impact of media use on child development and the importance of thoughtful and informed parental mediation (Parenting and Digital Media, 2017). This evidence supports the argument that parents' and children's relationships as well as their personal and social development are adversely affected by excessive media consumption. Analyses of how parents implement family rules for digital media consumption and the relationship between these with the broader family unit have also been conducted (Ding & Li, 2023; PLOS ONE, 2021; Council on Communications and Media, 2021; Radesky & Christakis, 2021). Scholars have provided recommendations and guidance for educators, policymakers, and healthcare providers to take specific actions that can improve how families communicate and relate to one another (Coyne et al., 2017).

In addition to familial relationships, research literature has explored how children's non-familial relationships with friends and, as they age, other adults are affected by the parent-child relationship and their digital media consumption (Dunbar, 2018). Dunbar (2018) conducted an inductive approach to study the psychosocial and neurobiological phenomena that affect the development of friendships, including the role the endorphin system in shaping social behaviors (e.g. laughing) and friendship maintenance. Additionally, various studies (Marciano et al., 2021; Ding & Li, 2023; PLOS ONE, 2021), including case studies (Ding & Li, 2023; PLOS ONE, 2021; Council on Communications and Media, 2021; Radesky & Christakis, 2021), and theoretical frameworks (attachment theory: Simpson, Collins, & Salvatore, 2021; ecological systems theory: Bronfenbrenner, 1979; social learning theory: Bandura, 1977; media practice model: Steele & Brown, 1995; developmental psychopathology framework: Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996) have been conducted to support the study of the effects—both positive and negative—of children's physical, social, emotional, and mental development and how actual or potential addiction to digital media is related. Furthermore, a data-backed comparison of the negative and positive effects of digital media is represented in the research literature. Lissak (2018) conducted a case study of a nine-year-old boy with an ADHD diagnosis, demonstrating how his digital media consumption affected his personal and social development. This study provided explicit insights into the role, value, and areas of improvement needed in current popular parenting practices.

### **Social Impacts of Digital Media and Technology Use**

The societal impacts of digital media technology and its use in different societies has also been explored in research literature. A web-based, cross-sectional survey of 23,532 Norwegians, between the ages of 16 and 88, used the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), the

Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Narcissistic Personality-16 to analyze the relationship between each subjects' narcissism, self-esteem, and any addictive or excessive social media use (Andreassen et al., 2017). The results demonstrated that young women of lower socioeconomic backgrounds were the most narcissistic and had the lowest self-esteem (Andreassen et al., 2017).

Another study conducted by Khan (2019) explored how social media marketing impacted the spending practices of Arabs who use social media. The researcher interviewed two hundred forty-one Saudis using simple random sampling and probability sampling. Khan learned that the participants' purchase intentions, value consciousness, and brand loyalty were impacted by corporate social media marketing strategies.

Zhang and Chang (2016) distributed a questionnaire to 816 Chinese fifth- and sixth-graders, which explored digital media literacy and the internal and external variables that affect it. Their study found that the students' interpersonal communication skills were inferior to their digital media literacy skills (Zhang & Chang, 2016). Additional research has asserted that a fourth industrial revolution has caused the familial and societal impacts of digital media in the modern world, spanning across South Africa, Brazil, China, and the United States (World Economic Forum, 2016). These findings demonstrated in research literature support the position that excessive digital media consumption affects the parent-child relationship and children's personal and social development.

### **Digital Media Practices, Consumption, and Perspectives**

Duggan et al. (2015) explored the digital media practices of parents, young children, and teenagers and specifically investigated how their individual and collective digital activities affected them as families and individuals in different life stages. Their telephone study (i.e. the Princeton Survey Research Associates International) of 2,003 English and Spanish-speaking

adults living in the continental United States found that 75 percent of all parents who used social media are mothers. In addition, at least one-third of the parents who participated in the survey were very concerned about their children's social media use. However, the remaining two-thirds had little to no concern about their children's social media use (Duggan, et al, 2015).

Additional studies have explored teenagers' perceptions of the friendships they have developed through offline gaming. One such study conducted by Eklund and Roman (2017) collected the survey responses of 115 students who were asked to list their friends, define friendships, and answer questions about their interpersonal relationships first in the context of school and then elsewhere. The students were also asked to detail their hobbies, which included digital gaming. The study found that 93% of the male respondents considered gaming to be a very important hobby compared to 7% of the female respondents. Moreover, the students who gamed more often reported have more friends on average (Eklund & Roman, 2017). This evidence warrants for future researchers to study the quality of students' friendships and how gaming affects their familial relationships as well as their personal and social development.

An additional analysis of the effects of digital media on teenagers and young adults of various ethnicities and who were native English speakers was conducted by Hogue and Ills (2019). The researchers aimed to understand the effects of digital media on impressionable young women between the ages of 17 and 27. Hogue and Ills measured the impact of each participant's reaction to their peers' social media posts, whom they identified as being more attractive than themselves. This study found that all of the women who participated in this study had worse body image due to their exposure to photographs of women they felt were more attractive than themselves (Hogue & Mills, 2019). Studies of this nature can provide insight into

how people and ideas outside of the home can influence the family unit, as well as reveal how family members relate to themselves and others.

Koranteng et al. (2018) conducted an empirical study on a sample of 586 post-secondary students, examining the correlation between the intensity of knowledge-sharing, student engagement, and the relationships the students developed on social networking sites (pp. 1131-1159). Through the lens of social capital theory, their study found that the students did not believe that social networking sites are useful learning tools. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that there is no relationship between a student's engagement in the learning process and knowledge-sharing. This conclusion of Koranteng et al.'s study can help future researchers understand students' attitudes about technology and relationship-building, specifically in relation to how students' parents use digital media in their parenting practices and the role that those parenting practices play in the students' personal and social development.

A 2021 study by Yaman et al. (2021) investigated whether parents engaged in a “conscious and safe use of the internet across Turkey (p. 76 – 88)”. The findings revealed that not only was parents’ knowledge about conscious and safe internet use insufficient, but the necessary skills to teach their children about safe internet usage and behaviors were also insufficient (Yaman et al., 2021). Radesky et al. (2016) explored whether there is a relationship between parents’ use of mobile devices (e.g. tablet computers and smartphones) while in the presence of their young children (aged 0 to 8 years) and negative parent-child interactions. The researchers conducted 35 in-depth interviews of English-speaking caregivers who were sampled from various ethnic, educational, and employment backgrounds. The findings concluded:

Participants consistently expressed a high degree of internal tension regarding their own mobile technology use, which centered around three themes relevant to intervention



planning: (1) Cognitive tensions (multitasking between work and children, leading to information/role overload), (2) emotional tensions (stress-inducing and reducing effects), and (3) tensions around the parent-child dyad (disrupting family routines vs serving as a tool to keep the peace). (c, pp. 694 – 701).

As a result, the researchers concluded that “helping caregivers understand such emotional and cognitive responses may help them balance family time with technology-based demands” (Radesky et al., 2016, p. 694 – 701 ). Another study conducted by Duggan et al. (2015) presented findings that provided insight into the digital activities of parents and how those activities affect their parenting practices, ability to make decisions for their families, and social skills in various settings. Researchers Elias and Sulkin (2017) examined toddlers’ visual media consumption in a series of 289 face-to-face surveys of Israeli parents. The toddlers' ages ranged from 1 ½ to 3-years-old. Findings revealed that parents allowed their toddlers to control their own digital media consumption (which was generally used for entertainment purposes) and that this parenting practice has become common (Elias & Sulkin, 2017).

A study conducted by Smahelova et al. (2017) examined how parents mediate their children's digital media consumption. The researchers specifically assessed whether the parent participant allowed the child to be involved in the mediation process, where the mediation strategies and the timing of those strategies were analyzed. Their study concluded that most parents allowed their children to participate in the mediation process and recommended that parents and children receive training to properly manage the children’s media consumption (Smahelova et al., 2017). A study like this provides insights into the parent-child relationship and offers a general understanding about the environment and daily life experiences of parents and their children as they interact with digital media and each other. Moreover, these insights shed

light on some of parents' and children's specific social, personal, mental, and emotional development needs.

### **African American Families and Digital Media**

In the book, *Handbook of Parenting*, McLoyd et al. (2019) shed further light on the African American home environment and enhanced scholarly understanding of the roles that digital media and digital technology play in the African American home, as well as the digital practices of parents and their children. They shared the following observations about African American parenting in the United States:

African American parents are more involved in their children's education at home than they are at school, and although less involved at school than European American parents, they show comparable or higher levels of academic socialization and involvement at home. In addition to a desire to enhance their children's academic performance, African American parents' involvement in their children's education is often motivated by a desire to mitigate racial bias in classrooms and school systems, unease about the quality of schools their children attend, and concern that the costs of academic failure and school misbehavior are uniquely high for African American children. (p. 57-107).

The Pew Research Center (2015) explored whether American parenting styles positively or negatively affect their children's personal and social development and well-being. The study found that Americans' parenting styles differ based on the parents' personal values and philosophies, aspirations, worries, financial status, and family structure. Moreover, the results indicated that the more wealth a parent has, the better the home life, home environment, and neighborhood they can provide their child. Thus, the more likely that child will (1) live in a safe, stable, and enriching environment, (2) have greater access to the information resources needed to

thrive in the home and community, and (3) receive a better quality education than children whose parents have little or no wealth (Pew Research Center, 2015). This study provided insight into some of the dynamics that affect the African American home, which could contribute to the role of digital media in the African American home.

LeCuyer and Swanson (2017) conducted an analysis to learn if a parents' authoritarian attitude plays a role in their children's self-limiting beliefs. Their study found that African American families “may hold more authoritarian attitudes than [European-American] families... the direction of effect of authoritarian attitudes on children's outcomes appears to be the same in both ethnic groups” (LeCuyer & Swanson, 2017, p. 1). These insights could be extended towards understanding how parents' attitudes shape their parenting styles, thus affecting how they interact with their children and the development of their children's personal and social well-being.

A 2005 analysis of Asian-American and African-American parents found that while Asian-American parents place a higher emphasis on educational attainment and are less passionate in their interactions with their children, African-American parents are more passionate in their interactions with their children and place a lower emphasis on educational attainment for their children (Wu & Qi, 2005, p. 19). Although this study was conducted 16 years ago, its findings provided insight into how millennial-generation parents were reared and thus aided scholarly understanding of some parenting practices belonging to the African American parents who participated in this present study. Moreover, understanding these practices helped the researcher in this study to have a better understanding of the parents' use of digital media and digital technology in their homes, and how they allow their children access. Consequently, this provided insight into the genesis of some African American children's understanding and uses of

digital media and digital technology, as well as the impacts associated with this understanding and usage.

Another study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2015) explored how American youth between the ages of 8- and 18-years-old use media, and the genesis of their media use practices and norms. The purpose of this study was to understand the ways in which American youth use media and why their usage practices and patterns came into being. The impact of their media use on their personal and social development and well-being, was analyzed among African Americans, White Americans, Hispanic and Latino Americans, and Asian Americans (Pew Research Center, 2015). Within this analysis, the variable of literacy was also addressed. This research was useful to this present study because it shed light on how African American children gain access and use digital media and digital media technology. Moreover, this research shed light on children's literacy, which provided the researcher with greater insight into the priority and impact of digital media in the African American home compared to other factors such as study time and family time.

Rideout et al. (2016) conducted a study in partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which aimed to understand the ways in which, and the degrees to which, African American families use and learn with technology outside of the classroom and other formal settings, and the relationship of this phenomenon with African American youth who have an interest in STEM careers. Their study yielded 12 significant findings, from which the researchers presented five recommendations. First, the data demonstrated that computers are frequently used and enjoyed by African American youth, who are confident about their computer skills which include problem-solving abilities such as troubleshooting problems. Second, African American youth prefer to use smartphones more than any other device. Third, African American youth

understand the importance of computers to their academic future and career outcomes. Fourth, few African American youth have ever learned how to code or write computer programs. Next, many African American youth hold an interest in learning how to use computers in a variety of ways.

The sixth finding of Rideout et al.'s (2016) study was that the likeliness to express interest in learning how to code and state that they can troubleshoot computer problems was greater among African American boys than African American girls. Seventh, the likeliness of African American parents to allow their children to experiment with computers and the internet was greater for their sons than for their daughters. Next, the research found that knowledge about computers from informal sources (like peers) is less likely to occur for African Americans youth who have lower socio-economic backgrounds. The ninth finding revealed that although they prefer to use computers for most school and career-related tasks, African American youth are almost as likely to use mobile devices as computers to complete these tasks. Tenth, African American youth report that they frequently see online content that is disrespectful to the African American people group, particularly regarding African American women. Additionally, the research demonstrated that African American parents recognize the importance of computers in their children's futures, and are confident about their own computer skills. Lastly, African American youths' attitudes about computers are closely related to those of their parents (Rideout et al., 2016, pp. 6-12).

This study ultimately found that African American youth have a “great unmet interest in learning more about computers. There is no lack of aspiration on young people’s parts...” (Rideout et al., 2016, p. 52). Given this evidence, this study was valuable to the present research project because it helped the researcher to have insight from a recent study about various

dynamics that play a major role in African American youth's attitudes about digital media and digital technology, how they access and use it, as well as their understanding of the use and roles of digital media and digital technology in their futures.

### **African American Youth and Digital Media**

A study conducted by Northwestern University (2011) explored the different roles that media play in the lives of Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian children between the ages of 8- and 18-years-old in the United States. The researchers specifically analyzed the (1) types of media the participants used, (2) the amount of time they spent engaged in various media activities, (3) the specific media platforms they used and the media devices they owned, and (4) the media environment within their households (Northwestern University, 2011, p. 2). The findings revealed that, on average, minority youth (i.e. African American, Hispanic and Asian) consumed 4 ½ more hours of media on a daily basis than White youth. Additionally, African American and Hispanic youth were found to devote more time to watching television, with African American youth consuming 3 hours and 8 minutes of television and Hispanic youth consuming 2 hours and 28 minutes per day (Northwestern University, 2011, p. 2). The study also reported that 84% of African American youth had a television in their bedrooms, followed by 77% of Hispanic youth and 64% of White and Asian youth. Among African American youth, 78% were demonstrated to eat meals while the television is on and those between the ages of 8- and 14-years-old spend the least amount of time reading books in a typical day (i.e. approximately 18 minutes in comparison to 31 minutes for White youth and 23 minutes for Hispanic youth).

A study conducted by Baker et al. (2011) found that African American youth, who had participated in a summer digital production program, produced content that focused on their friendships and academic experiences. Their study found that loud rap music and fast scene

changes were significant characteristics that the youths used to express themselves. Baker et al. concluded:

When placed in a supportive, academic environment and provided with digital production resources, students who traditionally face barriers due to cultural and economic inequalities digitally express to their peers an interest in academic and positive peer relationships, and that these youth communicate their experiences through a shared production style that reflects their border cultural experiences. (p. 530 – 547 ).

Although Baker et al.'s (2011) study did not directly relate to the purpose of this present research, their insights into how African American youth might understand and use digital media as a self-expressive communication tool and in various contexts were very helpful. Additionally, their study shed light on the sorts of artistic expression that African American youth might use for self-expression as both individuals and as members of the larger African American culture.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented an in-depth review of the literature that was relevant to this study's research questions. The sociopsychological and sociocultural communication traditions were discussed, in addition to the uses and gratifications theory, family communication patterns theory, and cultivation theory. Next, existing literature about family communication, parent-child communication, and African American digital media practices were reviewed. Studies exploring the relationship between excessive digital media use and communication within the family unit were addressed. The next chapter discusses the method that this study used to explore the perceptions of African American parents about their digital media practices and the impact they have on the parent-child relationship.





## **CHAPTER THREE – METHOD**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore African American parents' perceptions of how their digital media practices impact their communication with their children. This chapter presents a detailed account of the methodology that directed this research. First, a discussion of the study's qualitative design is provided. Second, the four research questions are presented. Next, details pertaining to the study's setting, participants (n = 35), and procedures are provided. Lastly, the data collection and thematic analysis processes, validation strategies, and ethical considerations of this study are addressed.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

This study was structured by a qualitative research design. Qualitative research allows for knowledge-sharing between research participants, who possess a particular knowledge set, experience, understanding, or piece of information, and the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181). This knowledge-sharing produced by qualitative inquiries aids researchers by expanding their understanding of the world (Patton, 2015). According to Patton (2015), qualitative research methods are used to:

Facilitate [the] study of issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, require the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned. (p. 22)

Characteristics of qualitative designs include a *natural research setting* (i.e. the place where the research problem generally occurs), the researcher as a key instrument in the study, multiple data sources, inductive and deductive data analysis, an emphasis on the experiences and meaning interpretations of participants, an emergent process, holistic accounting, and reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 181-182). Moreover, qualitative data seeks to understand the cause of a phenomenon (i.e. why it happened) and the manner in which the phenomenon occurred (i.e. how it happened) (Ivan, 2021).

Qualitative data is the descriptive and conceptual findings collected through questionnaires, interviews, or observation. Analyzing qualitative data allows us to explore ideas and further explain quantitative results. While quantitative data collection retrieves numerical data (what, where, when), qualitative data, often presented as a narrative, collect the stories and experiences of individual patients and families. (Ivan, 2021).

Moreover, the researcher adapted Creswell's (2012) mixed-methods research practices model to the procedures that were used in this qualitative study. This study therefore used the following visual research strategy based on Creswell's model, which advised researchers to:

(1) decide if a mixed methods study is viable, (2) determine the justification of combining methods, (3) plan the data gathering procedure(s), (4) develop the questions, (5) collect the data, (6) analyze the data, and (7) write the report accordingly. (Creswell J., Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study explored four research questions, where the first was the primary question and the following three were secondary questions.

**RQ1:** What perceptions do African American parents have about their personal use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media and digital technology (in general and in the home environment)?

**RQ2:** What perceptions do African American parents have about their children's use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media consumption and digital technology use (in general and in the home environment)?

**RQ3:** Do African American parents perceive that their digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with their children?

**RQ4:** Do African American parents perceive that their children's digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with them as parents?

### **Setting**

As this qualitative study was conducted during an era when social distancing was a widespread practice (in the United States of America) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews for this study were conducted via the telecommunications platform of Microsoft Teams, which allows computer-mediated audio/video communications. This method was selected for this study, as qualitative interviews generally consist of unstructured, open-ended questions "...that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" about the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 186). For research participants who were unable to complete the interview via Microsoft Teams, they were given the option to be interviewed via telephone.

### **Participants**

The sample size of this qualitative study included 35 participants ( $n = 35$ ). All participants were African American parents of school children (i.e. 5-grade through 9-grade students) who use digital media and digital technology. Eligibility criteria required that participants had to be an African American parent of one or more African American middle school children (i.e. Grades 5 – 9 students) who were enrolled in school (public, charter, private, or homeschool) or an alternative education program (see Figure 1). Second, participants were required to have lived in the United States of America for at least 10 years. Third, both parent and child had to be using some form of digital media and/or digital technology for any reason. Digital media was defined as “any form of media that uses a screen, including televisions, smartphones, video games consoles and computers and social media (Zhang & Chang, A Study of Digital Media Literacy of the 5th and 6th Grade Primary Students in Beijing, 2016, pp. 579-592)”.

Marital status did not play a role in the eligibility criteria of this qualitative study, and one or both parents (per family represented) were welcomed to participate in the interview as individuals or as a couple. Ultimately, one parent from each family participated in the study’s interview. Lastly, for the purposes of this study, an African American was defined as a member of the Black race that descended from Africa and is a descendent of American slaves. These people are also, generally, born in the United States of America, or in one of its territories, and are generally members of the African American culture. One of the signs of this cultural affiliation is that the African American has one of the variations of an American accent and speaks African American vernacular English and American English.

## Procedures

To legally and ethically conduct this qualitative study, the researcher first sought the approval of Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval was sought by submitting the IRB packet to the IRB via Cayuse, which is on the Liberty University website. Upon reviewing this study's research proposal and accompanying documents outlining the ethical considerations that would be taken (i.e. the IRB packet), the IRB approved this study.

African American parents were recruited to participate in this qualitative study through the assistance of local school districts and the university system of the researcher's state of residence (i.e. Missouri). Using IRB-approved social media posts on Facebook, X (i.e. formerly Twitter), Instagram, and LinkedIn, the researcher recruited 35 participants (n = 35) and an additional 15 potential participants on a contingency basis (e.g. in case a participant declined to interview, was no longer available, or the saturation of data had not yet been reached). The initial participants who were interested in the study engaged with the social media posts by directly messaging the researcher on the media platform or calling the phone number that was provided in the post to further discuss the opportunity. For those who wanted to continue with the screening process, the researcher sent them a link via email and phone to a pre-screening questionnaire. Each parent participant completed this questionnaire to confirm that they fully met the study's criteria. According to the University of Maryland (2022):

Pre-screening, for IRB purposes, is the term used to describe activities before obtaining informed consent (i.e. before enrollment) to determine initial eligibility for and interest in a study. Pre-screening may be performed over the telephone, in-person or online and may not include any research procedures.

This study required each potential research participant to answer five pre-screening questions. To initiate this process, the researcher first conducted a pre-screening phone call to ensure that the potential participant was (1) informed about the purpose and nature of the study and the five pre-screening questions, (2) informed about the estimated length of the subsequent study interview (i.e. 30 to 60 minutes), (3) available to complete the pre-screening questionnaire, and (4) offered the opportunity to answer the pre-screening questions in person (University of Maryland, 2022). For those who agreed to the pre-screening questionnaire, they were emailed a link which directed them to the questionnaire (see Table 1). At the top of the form, they were asked to input their name, address, phone number, and email address before completing the questionnaire.

**Table 1**

*Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire*

1. **Are you of African American ethnicity?**
2. **Are you a parent of one or more children who are students between 5th and 9th grade?**
3. Do you and your children currently live in the United States of America?
4. **Do you** and your children use any form of digital media and/or technology for any reason?
5. **Would you** be willing to participate in a 30-to-60-minute confidential interview to discuss this topic further (via Zoom, or telephone) during an evening or weekend day and time slot?

While completing this step, the researcher explained that the pre-screening questionnaire would be sent to the potential participant and used to determine their eligibility to participate in this qualitative study. Second, the researcher informed them that each of the five questions would require a simple “Yes” or “No” response. Next, the researcher asked potential participants one question at a time, allowing a few seconds to give them adequate time to answer each question with either a “Yes” or “No” response. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher only recorded the first name, or initials, of participants at the beginning of the pre-screening phone call (University of Maryland, 2022). This was achieved by typing the information into a secure Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. For participants who were determined to be both eligible and available to participate in this study, additional information was securely recorded including their first and last name, contact information (i.e. home address, phone number, and email address), date of birth, and responses to the pre-screening questionnaire. The researcher stored this information in a Microsoft Access database titled, “AA Parents and Digital Media Study – 2022”. Participants who passed the pre-screening questionnaire were then each assigned an alias, which was used in lieu of their first and last names to maintain their anonymity before, during, and after all phases of the research process.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher collected 2,727 initial responses to the pre-qualifying questionnaire. Of these respondents, the researcher identified 54 eligible participants and followed up with them to schedule their research interviews. All participants were provided with an informed consent form, which was signed prior to their interviews. The eligible research participants took part in either an internet-mediated interview via Microsoft Teams or a telephone-mediated interview during which the researcher asked them 14 qualitative questions that addressed their knowledge,

skills, experiences, and uses of their and their children's digital media and digital technology, in addition to their perceptions and attitudes about the role digital media and digital technology play in their family unit. A few close-ended and quantitative questions were also asked of participants, such as the number of daily hours they and their child use digital media and technology. As these interview responses were collected, the researcher paid attention to the described household behaviors and activities of participants, which included cell phone usage, a preference for texting family members over direct verbal communication, and the use of digital media devices for diverting children's attempts at parent-child communication.

### **Quantitative Interview Questions**

Interviews began with a set of 18 close-ended quantitative questions to establish the researcher's understanding of the research participants and their children's digital media and digital technology practices and skills, in addition to basic demographic information, their children's academic performance and social and physical activities, in addition, the condition of parent-child communication within the various research participants' homes. Moreover, the researcher used 14 qualitative interview questions that began in the open-ended and qualitative questions section of the study. These questions were used to collect data directly related to the research questions which are explored in this study (see Appendix E). In summary, the research participants' responses to RQ1 related to their personal use of digital media and technology (i.e., usage patterns, perceptions and attitudes about digital practices, content consumption and reflections about how their digital practices impact themselves and their home environment). Research participants' responses to RQ2 related to the research participants' children's use of digital media and digital technology (i.e., children's usage patterns, parental observations, concerns, and how the parents controlled the digital content their children consumed). RQ3



related to the impact of the research participants' digital practice on their communication and relationships with their children. RQ4 related to the research participants' perceptions and observations concerning the impact of their children's digital practices on the parent-child relationship (i.e., communication and relationships with their parents). The myriad responses to these quantitative research questions provide insight into the various dynamics and nuances within contemporary African American family contexts, and how the use of digital media and digital technology have impacted African American parenting and intergenerational relationships. See Appendix E to read the quantitative and qualitative questions that were used to conduct this qualitative interview.

### **Qualitative Interview Questions**

The 35 in-depth interviews with African American parents consisted of a set of 14 qualitative questions that were based on one of the four research questions. Notably, the researcher did not ask the actual research questions during the interviews. Instead, the qualitative interview questions that were aligned with the research question(s) were asked of the participants (see Table 2).

***Table 2***

*Association of Interview Questions with Research Questions*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Qualitative Interview Questions</b>
RQ1: What perceptions do African American parents have about their personal use, consumption, and practices of digital media and digital	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In general, how do you use digital media technology?</li> <li>2. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your digital media technology use?</li> </ol>

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technology (in general and in the home environment)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. In general, what types of digital media content do you consume?</li><li>4. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your digital media content consumption?</li></ol>
RQ2: What perceptions do African American parents have about their children's use, consumption, and practices of digital media and digital technology (in general and in the home environment)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. In general, how does your child use digital media technology?</li><li>2. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your child's digital media technology use?</li><li>3. In general, what types of digital media content does your child consume?</li><li>4. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your child's digital media content consumption?</li><li>5. Please tell me about how you mediate, moderate, govern, or control your child's digital media technology use.</li><li>6. Please tell me about how you mediate, moderate, govern, or control your child's digital media content consumption.</li></ol>
RQ3: Do African American parents perceive that their digital media	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your digital</li></ol>

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practices affect their communication and relationship with their children?	<p>media practices affect how you communicate with your child.</p> <p>2. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your digital media practices affect your relationship with your child.</p>
RQ4: Do African American parents perceive that their children’s digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with them as parents?	<p>1. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your child’s digital technology practices affect how they communicate with you.</p> <p>2. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your child’s digital media practices affect their relationship with you.</p>

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Collectively, the researcher conducted 54 qualitative interviews, but upon data analysis, chose thirty-five interviews that provided the most rich and descriptive information addressing this study’s research questions. These interviews were then set aside for thematic analysis and served as the final study sample. Of these interviews, 31 were conducted via Microsoft Teams and 6 interviews were conducted via telephone. Upon completion of each interview, each participant received an Amazon gift card in the amount of \$5.00 from the researcher. The researcher used funds from her personal income as a public school teacher to offer this participation incentive. Gift cards were purchased from Amazon.com and delivered to each

participant via email. The data collected through these interviews provided the researcher with a better understanding of the participants' home dynamics, personal and familial characteristics, practices, beliefs, and attitudes about digital media in their homes.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Once the interview data was collected, a thematic analysis of the participants' responses was conducted. The researcher adapted Nowell et al.'s (2017) linear presentation of Braun and Clark's (2006) 6-phased method for thematic analysis to this study, where a thematic analysis can be understood as an "interactive and reflexive process that develops over time and involves a constant moving back and forward between phases" (p. 4). Each of the following thematic analysis steps were adapted from the eight phases of the trustworthiness criteria that were established by Nowell et al. (2017) (see Appendix D).

First, each qualitative interview was printed and organized into a binder by date in chronological order. Second, the researcher read each interview, highlighting any relevant and enriching comments and information. Third, the researcher opened the study's thematic analysis chart using Microsoft Word and typed quotations from each participants' responses to the interview questions (see Appendix C). This aided the researcher to better understand the study's research problem and identify findings relevant to the research questions. This information was typed into the interview questions column of the thematic analysis chart. Next, the researcher gleaned codes from any similarities that were identified from the data and listed them in the codes column of the thematic analysis chart. Once codes were identified, they were organized into themes. The researcher listed the themes in the themes column of the thematic analysis chart. Step six involved analyzing each entry in the thematic analysis chart, where the researcher wrote a summary of the data. A report was then drafted of the thematic findings. Lastly, the

researcher wrote an explanation as to how this thematic analysis can help researchers better understand the perceptions and usage of digital media of African American parents and those of their children. This explanation can be found in the usefulness section of the thematic analysis chart. To view the thematic analysis chart template used in this study, see Appendix C.

These steps allowed the researcher to identify commonalities among the perspectives and experiences that the parents expressed during the interviews. Responses that this analysis paid close attention to included (1) the amount of time parents and children interact with each other, both with and without digital technology, (2) the amount of time parents and children interact with digital technology on their own, (3) whether parents and their children are generally able to effectively communicate with each other, and (4) how digital practices and other interpersonal communication and media variables were reported to affect each participant's ability to effectively relate to themselves and to each other. Four digital practices that the researcher looked for included cell phone and video console usage, television consumption, other video-watching activities, and whether parents reported to give devices to their children and their reasons for doing so.

Portions of these responses were coded according to the specific subjects that were discussed. Codes included (1) parents' media practices, (2) parents' perspectives about media and technology, (3) parents' perspectives about how their children use media and technology, (4) children's media practices, (5) children's personal development, and (6) children's academic performance. Next, the codes were organized into themes which included (1) parent feels children are not hindered by media or technology use and (2) parent believes that parent and child need to improve media practices.

### **Researcher's Role**

In this qualitative study, the researcher studied and interpreted the impact of African American parents' digital practices on parent-child communication by conducting 35 interviews of African American parents. Interview transcripts were thematically analyzed to explore the participants' lived experiences, observations, and perspectives about their own digital practices and those belonging to their children. The researcher also analyzed the affect that participants described digital practices having on their parent-child communication. To do this, the researcher assumed an objective role as she designed the study, collected the data, analyzed the data, interpreted the findings, and shared the study insights. This approach allowed for an unbiased collection and analysis of participant responses, as the researcher's personal biases were detached from the study as much as possible.

There are five biases that are relevant to disclose regarding this study. Throughout this study, the researcher held a personal bias perceiving that most African Americans (and most American parents, in general) perform digital practices that have an adverse impact on parent-child communication, which leads to African American children being influenced to engage in digital practices that result in an excessive use and consumption of digital media, technology, and content. Second, the researcher is a graduate and former employee of one of the Missouri public school districts that was contacted in this study to assist her with finding qualified research participants. Third, the researcher is a former employee of three of the Missouri public school districts that were contacted to support the participant recruitment efforts for this study. Next, the researcher is a current employee of one of the nearby public school districts that was asked to help screen potential research participants. Lastly, the researcher is a graduate of the university from which she requested assistance with locating and screening qualified individuals to participate in this study.

## **Validation Strategies**

Validation strategies are important to demonstrate the accuracy and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2018). This study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework to demonstrate trustworthiness. In qualitative research, *trustworthiness* refers to the value and/or degree of truthfulness presented in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Lincoln and Guba's framework posited that the worth of a study depends upon its trustworthiness, which is demonstrated by the study's (1) credibility, (2) dependability, (3) confirmability, and (4) transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following sections describe the application of these strategies in this study.

### **Credibility**

*Credibility* is confidence in the validity (i.e. truth) of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was achieved through the researcher's use of peer debriefing, which provided “an external check on the research process” (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, pp. 1 - 13). In addition, the technique of examining referential adequacy was used as a means to “check preliminary findings and interpretations against the raw data” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3). Lastly, credibility was demonstrated through member checking, which “tested the researcher's findings and data interpretations with the participants” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), *dependability* demonstrates that the research findings are consistent and repeatable. Dependability ensures that the research process is “logical, traceable, and clearly documented” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 388 – 396 ). In this study, dependability was achieved through theory triangulation, researcher triangulation, member

checking (which occurred during each qualitative research interview), and thick descriptions of content. Moreover, those who read this study and its findings were able to make judgements about the research process by examining the procedures themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

*Confirmability* refers to the degree of objectivity demonstrated in the research findings, as the findings should be shaped by the responses of participants and not by the researcher's personal biases or motivations. Guba and Lincoln (1989) argued that confirmability can be established when dependability, credibility, and transferability are achieved. Therefore, this validation strategy was demonstrated in this study through the demonstrations of credibility, dependability, and transferability.

### **Transferability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), *transferability* is the demonstration that the research findings can be applicable in other contexts. Nowell et. al (2017) argued that “transferability refers to the generalizability of inquiry” (p.1 – 19). Not only is this achieved through a case-to-case transfer (Tobin & Begley, 2004), but Nowell et al. argued that “the researcher cannot know the sites that may wish to transfer the findings. However, the researcher is responsible for providing thick descriptions, so that those who seek to transfer the findings to their own site can judge transferability (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, pp. 1 - 13)”. Hence, the researcher used rich, thick descriptions to support the transferability of this study's findings (Geertz, 1973).

### **Ethical Considerations**

To ensure ethicality throughout this qualitative study, the researcher used Creswell's (2018) approach to guide the research. For example, Creswell posited that the researcher should seek the approval of the IRB associated with the researcher's university. Therefore, in this study,



the researcher submitted the study proposal to the IRB at Liberty University. Additionally, Creswell posited that research participants should not be pressured to sign consent forms at the start of a study. Therefore, the researcher in this study informed each participant that they were not required to sign the consent form if they did not want to participate in the study. She committed to open, honest, and transparent communication with study participants, informing them of their rights to participate in the study or opt out. Participants were also informed of their rights to request that their interviews, observation notes, or survey responses be discarded and not added to the research study.

During the data collection phase, Creswell (2018) emphasized the importance of maintaining rapport and respect for each research participant. Thus, the researcher in this study sought to ensure that each research participant understood the purpose of the study. The researcher also sought to ensure that each research participant knew and understood how the data was going to be collected. During the qualitative interviews, she avoided asking participants any leading questions. Moreover, the researcher conducted herself in a manner conducive to gaining the trust of research participants and secured their data with passwords on both her computer's hard drive and an external hard drive.

During the data analysis phase, Creswell (2018) stated that the research participants' privacy and anonymity should be respected. The researcher demonstrated this ethical consideration by assigning an alias to each research participant and creating a composite profile of each research participant using their assigned alias (see Appendix E). Finally, Creswell stated that the researcher should demonstrate honesty, transparency, and integrity while the data is being reported, shared, and stored. Therefore, the researcher reported this study's data in an

honest, complete, and unbiased manner that is appropriate for the future audiences who will read and learn from research.

Research participants in this study were not subjected to harm in any way whatsoever. The dignity and respect of participants was prioritized, and the full consent of each participant was obtained before the study. Moreover, the protection of each participant's privacy was maintained and ensured by the researcher. For example, the researcher did not use the participants' names during their interviews but instead used the aliases that had been assigned to each of them. Moreover, the participants were informed of this study's use of aliases in the consent form and before the start of the interview. Adequate confidentiality and anonymity of participants was also ensured in this study. Furthermore, the researcher committed to avoid any form of deception or exaggeration about the purpose, functions, or execution of this study, as well as to declare any affiliations related to this study (e.g. financial). There were no conflicts of interest related to the researcher or this research project.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the research methods applied in this study for exploring African American parents' perceptions of how digital media practices affect parent-child communication. First, the study's qualitative research design was explained. Second, the four research questions, data collection procedures, and thematic analysis approach were presented. Lastly, the validation strategies and ethical considerations of this qualitative study were reviewed. Chapter Four presents the research findings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

This qualitative study aimed to explore African American parents' perceptions of how digital media practices affect parent-child communication in their families. This chapter presents the findings of this study, which were identified through a thematic analysis of 35 qualitative interviews conducted with African American parents of middle school-aged children. First, the demographics and qualitative profiles of the research participants are presented. Second, findings from the qualitative interviews are thoroughly reviewed according to the interview questions associated with each of the study's four research questions. Next, the themes and codes identified through the analysis are reviewed. Chapter Five discusses these findings and their significance in more depth.

### **Participants**

#### **Demographics**

The final sample of this study included 35 participants. Table 3 details the participants' demographics, which represent the minimum eligibility criteria of this study as described in Chapter Three. Eleven participants in their 20s were between the ages of 25 and 29. Seventeen participants in their 30s were between the ages of 31 and 39. Lastly, seven participants in their 40s were between the ages of 40 and 46.

Although both parents of the children represented in this study were invited to participate in the interviews, only one parent from each family decided to participate. Sixteen of the research participants were females and mothers, while the remaining 19 participants were males and fathers. Collectively, 10 participants were married (i.e. five married men and six married women), 19 were single and had never been married (i.e. ten were single men and nine were

single women), four were divorced (i.e. two divorced men and two divorced women), and two were separated from their spouses (i.e. one man and one woman).

In addition, the number of children living in the research participants' households ranged from one to six, totaling 114 children represented in this study. Of these children, 52 were middle school students (i.e. enrolled in Grade 5 through Grade 9) and for every three, one child was enrolled in an education program (i.e. public school, charter school, private school or homeschool). There was one household in which three children were enrolled in middle school. The mother of this trio reported that this was because two of her three middle school children were twins and were enrolled in the same public school.

**Table 3**

*Demographics of Research Participants*

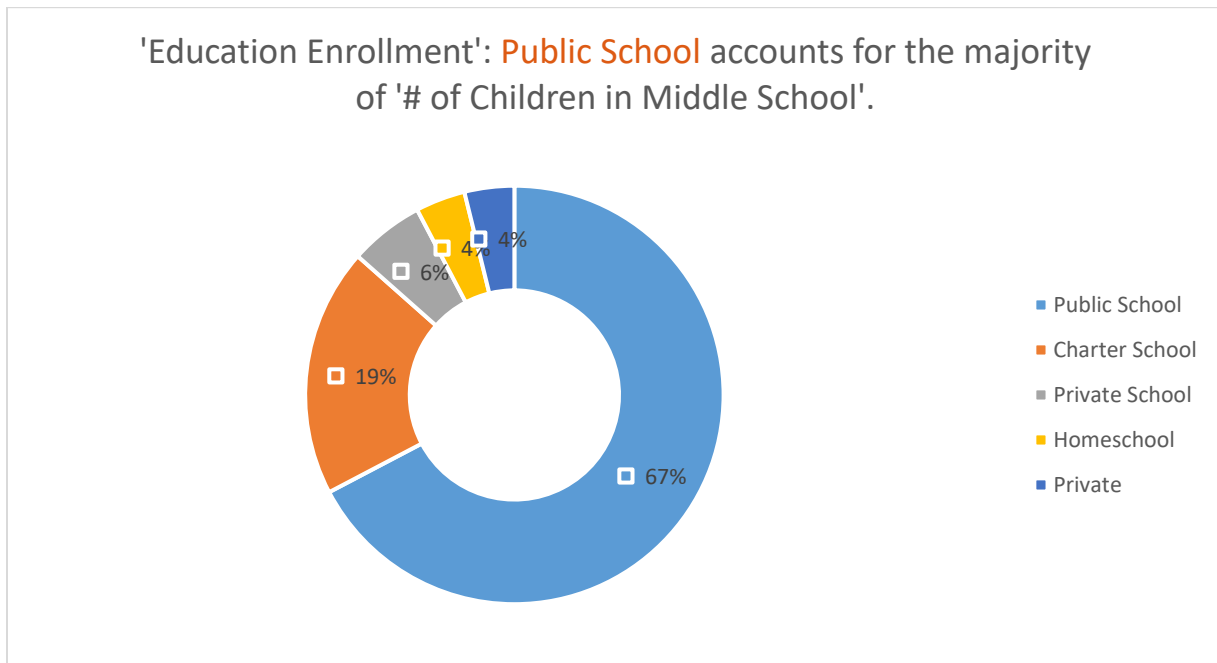
ID#	Participant Alias	Sex	Marital Status	Age	Occupation	# of Children	# of Children in Middle School	Education Enrollment	U.S. Region of Residence
1	Steven	M	Single	27	U.S. Postal Clerk	3	1	Charter School	Midwest
2	Doniece	F	Married	39	Office Assistant	2	2	Public School	South
3	Alexis	F	Married	41	Custodian	4	2	Public School	Midwest
4	Andrea	F	Separated	33	Unemployed	5	1	Public School	West
5	Stanton	M	Single	26	Delivery Driver	6	1	Charter School	Northeast
6	Edmond	M	Divorced	34	School Secretary	3	2	Public School	Midwest
7	Jaylynn	F	Married	32	Receptionist	2	1	Public School	Midwest
8	Gregory	M	Married	41	Video Editor	2	1	Public School	South
9	Carter	M	Single	45	Store Clerk	1	1	Public School	South
10	James	M	Single	32	Unemployed	4	1	Public School	Midwest
11	April	F	Single	31	Store Clerk	7	1	Public School	Midwest
12	Keisha	F	Single	27	Housewife	2	2	Private	Midwest
13	Michelle	M	Single	26	Stay-at-Home Mom	3	2	Homeschool	Northeast
14	Deena	F	Single	29	Unemployed	5	2	Charter School	West
15	Tyrone	M	Divorced	33	Custodian	2	1	Charter School	South
16	Cole	M	Separated	24	Unemployed	3	2	Public School	South

17	Michaela	F	Divorced	35	Bank Teller	4	1	Public School	Northeast
18	Briana	F	Married	40	Daycare Worker	2	1	Public School	Northeast
19	Robert	M	Married	31	Traffic Lawyer	3	1	Private School	South
20	Christopher	M	Married	29	Accountant	1	2	Private School	South
21	Dontae	M	Single	28	Human Resources Manager	4	2	Charter School	South
22	Maurice	M	Single	29	Construction Worker	5	2	Public School	South
23	Jer'asha	M	Single	33	Registered Nurse (RN)	3	1	Charter School	Midwest
24	Ebony	F	Single	36	School Food Service Worker	2	2	Public School	South
25	Jessica	F	Married	37	Office Manager	4	1	Public School	West
26	Dana	F	Single	39	Apartment Complex Manager	6	2	Charter School	Northeast
27	John	M	Divorced	41	Construction Worker	4	2	Public School	South
28	Craig	M	Married	41	Mechanic	3	1	Public School	South
29	William	M	Married	46	Process Engineer	1	1	Public School	Midwest
30	Gilbert	M	Single	39	Assembly Line Worker	3	1	Public School	South
31	Henry	M	Single	42	Delivery Driver	4	2	Public School	South
32	Christine	F	Single	26	Store Clerk	2	2	Public School	South
33	Nadia	F	Single	29	Unemployed	3	3	Public School	West
34	Amanda	F	Single	32	Bus Driver	4	1	Public School	West
35	Jace	F	Single	34	Unemployed	2	1	Public School	South
					<b>Total number of children</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>52</b>		

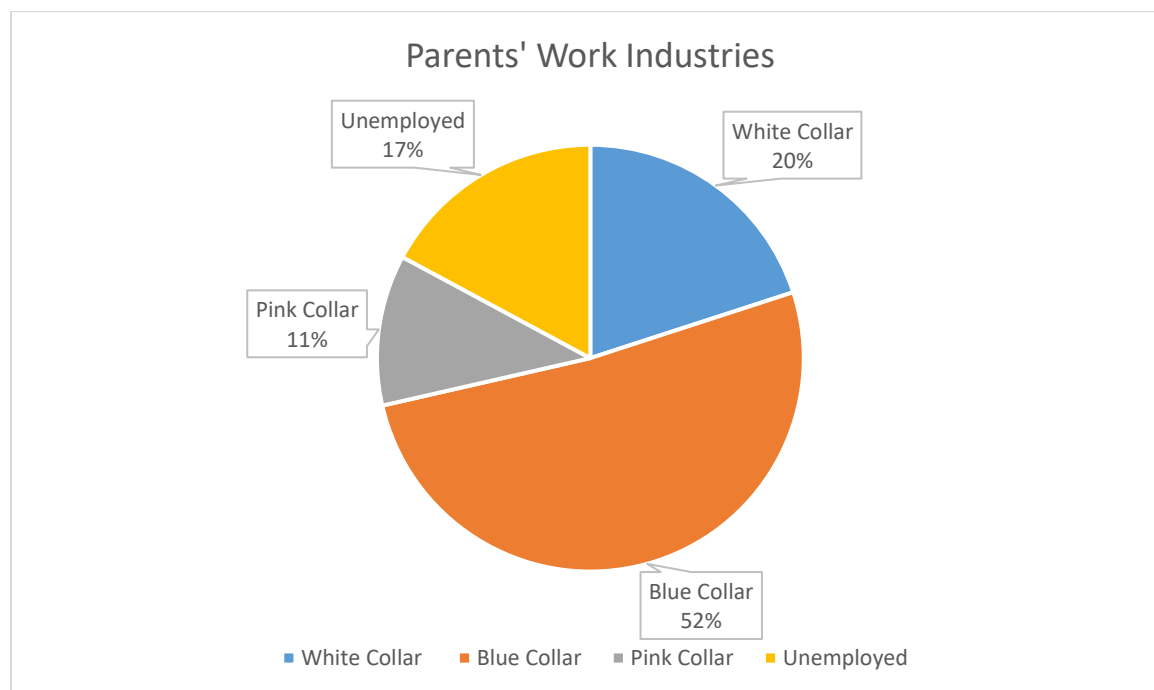
*Note.* The data presented in this table was collected by the researcher during the qualitative interviews during which she assigned each research participant an ID number in the chronological order in which the interviews occurred and an alias to use in lieu of their real names.

School enrollment for the 52 middle school children (i.e. students enrolled in Grade 5 through Grade 9) belonging to the research participants (i.e. the parents of these middle school children) consisted of 36 students enrolled in public schools, 10 students enrolled in charter schools, five students enrolled in private schools, and one student enrolled in a homeschool. Of these participants, nine lived in the Midwestern United States (i.e. Missouri and Kansas), sixteen lived in the Southern United States (i.e. Kentucky, Texas, Alabama, West Virginia, and

Tennessee), five lived in the Northeastern United States (i.e. New York and Rhode Island), and five lived in the Western United States (i.e. California and Washington). Public schools accounted for the majority of the students' education enrollment as reported by the parents who participated in this qualitative study (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1***Education Enrollment of Middle School-aged Children*

Regarding work industries represented in this study, seven research participants (20%) were white-collar workers who held jobs in administration, banking, human resources, and accounting. Eighteen research participants (52%) were blue-collar workers who held either skilled or non-skilled labor jobs in the automobile, manufacturing, construction, and retail industries. Four research participants (11%) were pink-collar workers (i.e. workers who held jobs in the service industry) who held jobs in education, health care, food service, and childcare. Six research participants (17%) indicated that they were currently unemployed and searching for employment in fields including retail, childcare, and support services. These participants also reported that they had previously held jobs as call center representatives, daycare workers, secretaries, and construction workers. The following pie chart summarize these demographics (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2***Work Industries of Parent Participants***Qualitative Profiles*****Steven***

Steven is a 27-year-old single father of three children (one of whom is enrolled as a middle school student at a charter school). He and his family live in the Midwest where he works as a mail clerk for the United States Postal Service. During his interview, Steven reported, “I have Apple and PC at home. I like both worlds and I want my kids to use both worlds.”

***Doniece***

Doniece is a 39-year-old office assistant who lives in the Southern United States with her husband and their two children, who are enrolled in a public school. Her son is 10 years old and enrolled in Grade 5, while her daughter is 12 years old and enrolled in the Grade 6. Both students attend a public elementary school in the Southern United States. During her interview, Doniece



reported, “I don’t really monitor what my kids do online, or any of what they watch, read, listen to, and so on. I probably should do better.”

### *Alexis*

Alexis is a 40-year-old custodian who lives in the Midwest with her husband and their four children. They have a 12-year-old son who is enrolled in Grade 7 and a 13-year-old son who is enrolled in Grade 8. Both students attend a public middle school in the Midwest. During her interview, Alexis reported, “I’d like to meet the parent who has children who have perfect digital habits. Let me know if they’re real.” Alexis also reported that she uses YouTube videos to find and practice cardio and strength training workouts to stay fit.

### *Gregory*

Gregory is a 41-year-old married father of two children (one of whom is a 14-year-old boy enrolled in Grade 9 at a public high school). Gregory and his family live in the Southern United States where he works as a video editor. During his interview, Gregory described his son’s digital practices by reporting, “I know he’s addicted to digital media and digital technology because he uses it all day, but I like how he uses it for art.” Gregory also reported that he himself is a former YouTuber but had to delete his channel due to his familial and career responsibilities.

### *Andrea*

Andrea is a 31-year-old mother who is unemployed (she previously worked in retail) and separated from her husband. She lives in the Western United States with her five children. One of her children is enrolled in Grade 7 at a traditional public school in the region where they live. During her interview, Andrea shared:

I try to ensure that we have a balance of family time, and I also like to have time for myself and with my husband. So, sometimes, I will watch what you like to call

“media content” with my children and husband. Other times, it’s just me and my husband, and sometimes it’s just me. I like to keep things balanced.

### ***Stanton***

Stanton is a 26-year-old single father and delivery driver who lives in the Northeastern United States where his 13-year-old son is enrolled in Grade 8 at a public charter school. During his interview, Stanton recounted, “Sometimes, my son calls me a digital tyrant.” In his free time, Stanton watches Dragon Ball Z – a popular and longstanding anime cartoon.

### ***Edmond***

Edmond is a 34-year-old divorced father who works as a school secretary at a high school in the Midwest. Edmond is also the father of three children – two of whom are 13-year-old twin boys who are enrolled in Grade 8 at a traditional public elementary school (also known as an “ele-middle school”) in the Midwest. During his interview, Edmond reported, “The kids already know what I expect of them, and if they don’t follow my expectations, then they get consequences.” He also expressed interest in pursuing a hobby producing TikTok videos with his children.

### ***Jaylynn***

Jaylynn is a 32-year-old married mother of two children who attend a traditional public school. She lives in the Midwest United States with her husband and children, where she works as a receptionist for a small firm. During her interview, Jaylynn reported, “I’m interested in learning more about how AI might take over things. I want my kids to be ready.” Jaylynn also reported that she likes to garden in her backyard.

***Carter***

Carter is a 45-year-old single father of a 10-year-old boy who is enrolled in Grade 5 at a public elementary school. Carter works as a store clerk in a major retail company in the Southern United States. During his research interview, Carter said, “If he keeps at it, my son might be able to make money for his digital hobbies.” Carter also reported that he prefers to read newspapers than to watch the 24-hour news cycle to learn about current affairs.

***James***

James is a 32-year-old single father of four children, all of whom attend traditional public schools in the Midwest where they live. He previously had a career in construction until a work-related injury caused him to become unemployed. James has a 14-year-old-son who is enrolled in Grade 9. During his research interview, he shared, “If I wasn’t so busy, then I’d spend more time with my kids whether it’s using digital media, or just us playing board games or just being together without toys and media.”

***April***

April is a 31-year-old single mother of seven children, where one is enrolled as a Grade 7 female student at a public school. April and her children live in the Midwest where she works as a store clerk. During her research interview, April reflected, “I think my kids use digital media and digital technology too much, they really should be reading more.”

***Keisha***

Keisha is a 27-year-old housewife of two children, where one is enrolled as a Grade 5 student at a private elementary school. Keisha and her family live in the Midwestern United States. During her research interview, Keisha reflected:

When I was a kid, and probably when you were a kid, we didn't play video games and use electronics as much as the kids do today. It's bad that it's gotten to this. We need to do better as parents and as a society. Today, the kids really are dumber than what they used to be, and we are not as close as we should be as parent and kid. I'm not doing all I could be doing with my kids. They basically do what they want with their tablets and phones.

***Michelle***

Michelle is a 26-year-old housewife and mother of three children whom she homeschools in their home in the Northeastern United States. Of her three children, two of them are a set of male-female twins who are Grade 5 students. During her research interview, Michelle said, "I have a very hand-off approach to checking on what my kids watch and do."

***Deena***

Deena is a 29-year-old single mother of five children. Two of her children are sisters enrolled as middle school students at a public charter school, where one is in Grade 7 and the other is in Grade 8. Deena and her children live in the Western United States where she is currently unemployed with a work history in customer service and call centers. During her research interview, Deena said, "I know I need to do better with my kids and their devices, but I get overwhelmed."

***Tyrone***

Tyrone is a 33-year-old divorced father of two children, where one is enrolled as a Grade 6 student at a public charter middle school. Tyrone and his children live in the Midwestern United States where he works as a custodian at a private corporation. He also owns and operates a janitorial start-up company. During his research interview, Tyrone reported, "I watch crap, and

a lot of it. My kids do, too. Me and them watch too much crap. It's an addiction, basically. My family is not as close as it should be. I'm not close to my kids like I need to be, and they are not close to me like they need to be."

***Cole***

Cole is a 24-year-old father of three children, two of whom are sons enrolled as a Grade 5 and a Grade 6 student at a traditional public school. Cole and his family live in the Southern United States where he is currently unemployed with a work history in construction. During his research interview, Cole said, "I'm happy with the amount of time that my sons use digital media and digital technology."

***Michaela***

Michaela is a 35-year-old divorced mother of four children, where one is enrolled as a Grade 5 student in a traditional public elementary school. Michaela and her family live in the Northeastern United States where she works as a bank teller. During her research interview, Michaela said, "Digital media and tech have helped my family to stay connected and basically get closer."

***Briana***

Briana is a 40-year-old married mother of two children, where one is enrolled as a Grade 9 student in a traditional public high school. Briana and her family live in the Northeastern United States. During her research interview, Briana said, "I think it's safe to say that my son is addicted to digital media and digital technology."

***Robert***

Robert is a 31-year-old married father of three children, one of whom is an 11-year-old boy enrolled as a Grade 5 student in a private school. Robert and his family live in the Southern

United States where Robert works as a traffic lawyer. During his research interview, Robert said, “My son helps me to lead our home using his tech skills.”

### ***Christopher***

Christopher is a 29-year-old accountant and a married father of two children who are both enrolled in a private school. His 12-year-old daughter is enrolled as a Grade 8 student at a private middle school. He also has a 14-year-old son who is enrolled as a Grade 9 student at a private high school. Christopher lives and works in the Southern United States with his family. During his research interview, Christopher reported, “I’m pretty bored with the way I use digital media and digital technology. I should probably watch the news a little more so that I can know what’s going on.”

### ***Dontae***

Dontae is a 28-year-old single father of four children, two of whom are enrolled as Grade 5 students at a public charter school in the Southern United States. Dontae works as a human resources manager. During his interview, Dontae shared, “I’m trying to be a good role model for my kids. I also monitor how they use digital media and digital technology.”

### ***Maurice***

Maurice is a 29-year-old construction worker and single father of five children, two of whom are enrolled in a public middle school. One of his daughters is enrolled as a Grade 7 student and the other daughter is enrolled as a Grade 8 student. Maurice and his family live, work, and attend school in the Southern United States. During his research interview, Maurice reported, “Sometimes, I feel stressed out about all this digital tech stuff. Sometimes, it makes things complicated, and helps get kids addicted.”

***Jer'asha***

Jer'asha is a 33-year-old registered nurse and single mother of three children, one of whom is a 13-year-old boy enrolled as a Grade 7 student at a public charter school. Jer'asha lives in the Midwestern United States with her family. During her interview, Jer'asha's reported, "I know that at some point I need to do something different about my kids' digital life."

***Ebony***

Ebony is a 36-year-old food service worker and single mother of two boys who attend a traditional public elementary school. Ebony's 10-year-old son is enrolled as a Grade 5 student and her 12-year-old son is enrolled as a Grade 6 student. Ebony and her family live in the Southern United States. During her research interview, Ebony reported, "I don't really know how me, and my family got to this point where basically, it feels like technology has taken over our lives."

***Jessica***

Jessica is a married 37-year-old office manager and a mother of four children, one of whom is a 10-year-old boy enrolled as a Grade 5 student at public elementary school. Jessica lives in the Western United States with her husband and children. During her interview, Jessica asked the researcher, "Could you help me to handle my family's media habits better?" Jessica also reported that she spends some of her free time coloring in adult coloring books.

***Dana***

Dana is a 39-year-old apartment complex manager and single mother of six children. Her two youngest children are 14-year-old twin boys who are enrolled as Grade 9 students at a public charter high school. Dana and her family live in the Northeastern United States. During her interview, Dana shared:

I wish that I could use digital technology like my kids do. I need to keep up with them so that I can know what they're doing because they get away with a lot of things that they should not be doing because they know that I don't know how to use the technology that they are using.

***John***

John is a divorced 41-year-old construction worker and father of four children, two of whom are 12-year-old twin girls who are enrolled as Grade 6 students at a traditional public elementary school. John and his family live in the Southern United States. During his interview, John remarked:

Do schools teach kids how to use technology? Can they teach parents and adults, too? I need to know how to use it better so that I can watch them better because I don't really monitor how they use digital media and digital technology.

***Craig***

Craig is a 31-year-old mechanic and a married father of three children. One of his children is a 14-year-old boy who is enrolled as a Grade 9 student at a traditional public high school. Craig and his family live in the Southern United States. During his interview, Craig told the researcher with a sigh of disappointment, "I practically live online and my kids do, too."

***William***

William is a 46-year-old process engineer and a married father of one son who is enrolled as a Grade 8 student at a traditional middle school. William and his family live in the Midwestern United States. During his interview, William reported, "I just want my kid to be well-rounded and successful in his life."



***Gilbert***

Gilbert is a 39-year-old assembly line worker and single father of three children. One of his children is a 12-year-old girl who is enrolled as a Grade 6 student at a public elementary school. Gilbert and his family live in the Southern United States. During his interview, Gilbert reported, “If I could figure out how to expose them to other things so that they are not all into this media and technology stuff, then I think I would be a better parent.”

***Henry***

Henry is a 42-year-old delivery truck driver and a single father of four children, one of whom is a 12-year-old daughter enrolled as a Grade 7 student at a traditional public middle school. Henry's other child is a 14-year-old daughter enrolled as a Grade 9 student at a traditional public high school. Henry and his family are based in the Southern United States. During his interview, Henry reported, “I like that my son is willing to use our smartphones to stay in touch with each other. I need to stay in touch with my son.”

***Christina***

Christina is a 26-year-old store clerk and single mother of two children, one of whom is a 13-year-old daughter enrolled as a Grade 8 student at a traditional public middle school. In addition, Christina's 14-year-old son is enrolled as a Grade 9 student at a traditional public high school. Christina and her family are based in the Southern United States. During her interview, Christina reported, “I take away their tech toys as a punishment when they get out of line.”

***Nadia***

Nadia is a 29-year-old unemployed single mother of three children, where one is a 12-year-old son enrolled as a Grade 7 student and her two 13-year-old twin daughters are enrolled as Grade 8 students. All three of Nadia's children are enrolled at the same public middle school in

the Western United States, where they live. During her interview, Nadia reported “I’ve been trying to figure out how to break my kids’ addiction to their games and videos. It’s really become a problem.” Nadia also reported that since she has become unemployed, due to company downsizing, she has learned the value of using websites like Coursera to help her gain marketable job skills.

### ***Amanda***

Amanda is a 32-year-old bus driver and a single mother of four children, one of whom is a 12-year-old daughter enrolled as a Grade 7 student at a traditional public middle school. They live in the Southern United States. During her interview, Amanda reported that she likes to solve jigsaw puzzles and word puzzles in her free time. Reflecting on her daughter’s digital practices, Amanda said:

My daughter is moderately skilled using digital media and digital technology. I want her to become highly skilled and independent using digital media and digital technology because I think it would be a good career field for her and she can start now to gain lots of technology skills.

### ***Jace***

Jace is a 34 year-old unemployed single mother who lives in the Southern United States where her 13-year-old daughter is enrolled in a public middle school. When responding to the first research question, Jace said, “I’m trying to keep good digital practices (as you put it) so that they can use all the digital stuff the right way. I’ve never really thought about how it affects our parent-child relationship.” She also reported, “I like to play Kahoot when we have family functions.”

## **Findings**

Thirty-five qualitative interviews conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams and telephone were thematically analyzed in this study. Narrative summaries and key quotes providing rich and meaningful data were recorded by the researcher for each interview. This section presents these findings according to the study's four research questions and their associated interview questions which were answered by the research participants (see Table 2).

### **Research Question One**

The primary research question in this study (RQ1) aimed to understand the perceptions that African American parents have about their personal use, consumption, and practices of digital media and digital technology (in general and in their home environment). Four qualitative questions assigned to RQ1 were asked of the research participants (n = 35) to answer this primary question (see Table 4). Participants were found to collectively hold a variety of perceptions about their personal use, consumption, and practices of digital media. Eight participants reported that they were satisfied about their personal consumption of digital media content and use of digital technology, while 20 participants reported that they were not satisfied and knew that they needed to improve their digital knowledge, digital skills, and digital practices. Moreover, seven reported that they had little to no concern or thought about their digital practices. The following subsections present these four interview questions and their findings.

#### ***Table 4***

##### *Interview Questions Associated with RQ1*

<b><i>Research Question</i></b>	<b><i>Interview Questions</i></b>
<i>RQ1: What perceptions do African American parents have about their personal use, consumption, and</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In general, how do you use digital media technology?</li> <li>2. What are your thoughts, feelings,</li> </ol>

practices of digital media and digital technology (in general and in the home environment)?

- experiences, observations, or perspectives about your digital media technology use?
3. In general, what types of digital media content do you consume?
  4. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your digital media content consumption?

### ***General Use of Digital Media Technology***

The first interview question associated with RQ1 asked participants how they use digital media and digital technology in general (see Table 4). The aim of this question was to learn the degree and array of the research participants' experiences with consuming digital media content and using digital technology. One participant, who went by the alias of Jace in this study, responded to this question by explaining that she mostly uses digital media for entertainment purposes, such as watching documentaries and other films. In addition to entertainment, Jace reported to use digital media for productivity purposes (e.g. education, research, communicating with family and friends, and performing work duties).

Furthermore, Jace described her evenings with her children, which involve the regular use of digital devices (i.e. Google Chromebooks) to complete homework assignments while navigating simple and complex hardware/software problems as they arise. Jace explained that while she often helps her children to solve the more complex computer problems, her children are generally able to proficiently and independently fix them.

Jace also shared that homework time is a period during which her family bonds together, as they must interdependently work together to ensure that each member completes their homework correctly. Once completed, homework time is followed by study time and practice

quizzes. Jace shared that she is proud that her children enjoy learning and helping each other to learn. Moreover, she is proud to be a positive digital role model to her children and believes that their mostly positive digital practices and loving bonds as a family will play a major role in their long-term familial relations as siblings and mother-child relationship.

The 12 codes gleaned from Jace's interview included: family closeness (fc), technical skills (ts), personal development (pd), role model (Rm), positive effects (Pe), expectations (ex), monitoring and governance (m/g), frequency and time (f/t), priority (pr), productivity/creativity (p/c), effectiveness (e), and communication (comm). These codes suggest that Jace models to her children her expectations for their digital practices and overall digital citizenship in a manner that helps their family to maintain close bonds (evidenced by their behavioral pattern of helping each other during homework time and providing each other technical assistance). These codes also suggest that Jace's family bonds support her children's personal development as they gain technical skills while doing homework together and helping each other to use their devices. Moreover, these codes suggest that Jace and her children positively benefit from their digital practices, as they have incorporated digital technology and digital media into their daily lives in a way that not only helps them to complete their homework and other important tasks, but also to communicate and bond with each other during family time.

When answering this same question about general digital media use, another parent participant (whose alias was Christopher) responded by candidly explaining that he feels bored and uninterested in his current digital practices, which is why he mostly engages in them out of habit. What's more, Christopher shared that he uses digital media because of the need to distract himself from various life stressors including his job. He said that some of the content he and his children often consume together includes Dragon Ball, anime, and franchises like Marvel, DC,

and Capcom. Christopher also acknowledged his need to consume more informative content, such as the news and books, and spend less time using online platforms like YouTube and Facebook. Overall, Christopher described his general digital media practices as habits that need to be broken. He explained that as a father and as a man, in general, his media consumption habits should be beneficial to his personal growth. Notably, Christopher elaborated that he has become increasingly concerned about his digital practices because he has noticed that his children also spend large amounts of time each day consuming digital media (e.g. watching television, TikTok, and YouTube) and texting with friends on their smartphones. He stated that he was concerned that his children might become more interested in spending time engaging in their digital practices than spending time with him and each other.

The five codes gleaned from Christopher's responses included: content (c), personal development (PD), negative effect (Ne), frequency/time (f / t), and productivity/creativity (p / c). These codes suggest that Christopher feels that his digital practices are having a negative effect on himself and on his family. These codes also suggest that Christopher is aware that he could use digital media and digital technology in a way that could enrich himself and his family. The researcher found that Christopher's responses to this primary research question also answered the second and third research question.

### ***Perceptions and Experiences with Digital Media Technology***

The second interview question associated with RQ1 asked participants to share their thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about their digital media technology use (see Table 4). This question aimed to understand the perceptions and experiences of research participants about their digital media and digital technology use, and how this usage has influenced their worldviews about digital media and technology in general. The researcher

assumed that this information would play a key role in how the research participants, as parents, allow their children to consume digital media content and use digital media technology.

During her qualitative interview, Jer'eesha responded to this question by explaining that she personally uses digital platforms (e.g. Hulu and Netflix) for entertainment purposes. In addition, she stated that shopping on websites (e.g. Target and Amazon), managing her schedule using Google Calendar, and completing work tasks using Google and Microsoft technology play a critical role in her daily life personally and professionally.

Moreover, Jer'eesha shared that there is a marked difference in the way that she and her children's father allow their children to use digital technology and consume digital media. While Jer'eesha allows her children to use digital media and technology as they see fit, the children's father has strict guidelines for how they should consume digital content and use technology when they are with him in his home. Jer'eesha further explained that giving her children the freedom to use digital technology and consume digital content liberally enables her to continue carrying out her desired tasks (and other compulsory tasks) without interruption.

The five codes gleaned from Jer'eesha's responses included: productivity/creativity (p/c), purpose (p), priority (pr), monitoring/governance (m / g), and communication (comm). These codes suggest that, as a parent, Jer'eesha gives her children the autonomy to consume digital media content and use digital technology without restrictions, monitoring, or governance. Jer'eesha's responses also suggest that she allows her children to use digital technology to mitigate interaction with them. On the other hand, her responses also suggest that her children's consumption of digital media content and use of digital technology are subject to restrictions, monitoring, and governance when they are in their father's home. Jer'eesha did not report any positive or negative observations, experiences, or opinions. She did report, however, that she

regularly uses digital technology for her own personal productivity (e.g. shopping and calendar management).

Another research participant, Jessica, had this to say about her perceptions and experiences with digital media use in her home:

I admit that technology has been a babysitter from my youngest child when she was an infant to my oldest child when he was born. It helps me to keep them distracted so that I can do what I'm doing. If I see them watching or listening to something bad, then I make them change it or turn it off, but other than that, I don't really monitor how they use digital media and digital technology at home.

In a follow-up question, the researcher asked Jessica, "Could you please tell me the names of some of the videos and music you might hear or see your children (specifically your Grade 5 son) watching, whether good or bad?" She replied:

Yes. He might watch *Justice League War World*, *Skull Island*, *Gremlins*, and *Spiderman*. For music, he mostly listens to dance music or whatever's popular with his friends, but I think he watches videos more than he listens to music. I know he likes some songs by Beyonce, The Chainsmokers, and old-school rap with me when we're in my car together. But, he's not a big music kid. He likes to watch prank videos on YouTube and TikTok.

The four codes gleaned from Jessica's responses included: productivity/creativity (p / c), monitoring/governing (m / g), concern (con), and expectations (ex). These codes suggest that, as a parent, Jessica allows her son to use digital media and/or digital technology based on his own discretionary autonomy, intervening only if he consumes digital media content that does not meet her expectations. These codes also suggest that Jessica feels concern for the manner in



which she has allowed her children to use digital technology. Additionally, she reported that her children's digital practices enable her to carry out tasks.

### ***Types of Digital Media Consumption***

The third interview question associated with RQ1 asked participants to share the types of digital media content that they consume (see Table 4). The research participants' answers to this question aided the researcher in understanding not only the digital media being consumed by participants but also their technological skills evidenced by their ability to access and use the technology. Moreover, answers to this question shed light on the frequency and amount of time spent by participants while consuming digital media content. One participant, Amanda, had this to say about the types of digital media she consumes:

When I'm with my daughter, I watch content that is more family-oriented, but when I'm not with her, I might watch suspense and horror movies. I also listen to R&B music, but some of it I listen to with my friends as opposed to with my daughter. I watch YouTube a lot, and I stream music on Amazon Music.

The seven codes gleaned from Amanda's responses included: technological skills (TS), personal development (pd), productivity/creativity (p/c), role model (RM), expectations (ex), parent-child closeness (pcc), and effectiveness (e). These codes suggest that Amanda moderates and governs the types of digital media content to which she exposes her daughter. Moreover, she sometimes spends time with her daughter while consuming digital media content.

Maurice appeared to have a more traditional perspective on digital media and digital technology usage in comparison to most of the other parent participants in this study. For example, Maurice explained that he doesn't integrate much digital technology into his daily routine besides using his smartphone to communicate with family and friends, or for business

matters. Maurice also explained that his free time is often spent playing soccer, watching movies, and reading weekly news highlights. In addition, Maurice reported to daily focus on working and resting so that he can best support his family's financial needs. Although he didn't explicitly state that he depends upon technology as a major part of his life, Maurice did explain that his children have a heavy reliance upon technology because they use it for education (e.g. completing their homework using Google Chromebooks issued by their school), entertainment (e.g. watching content on YouTube, TikTok, Hulu, and Netflix provided by Maurice), and communication purposes (e.g. talking with friends and family through smartphones and mobile communication apps like Google Duo and Facetime). While his older children use smartphones to keep in touch with him, Maurice reported to have adopted an overall hands-off approach to monitoring his children's digital media consumption and digital practices, citing his trust in them is sufficient enough for them to make decisions about their digital practices using the guidance he has provided.

The seven codes gleaned from Maurice's responses included: frequency/time (f/t), productivity/creativity (p/c), parent-child closeness (pcc), other relationships, expectations (ex), purpose (p), and communication (comm). These codes suggest that Maurice gives his children discretionary autonomy to consume digital media content and use digital technology based on his expressed and/or demonstrated expectations he has for their digital practices. Maurice also appeared to be content with the manner in which his children consume digital media content and use digital technology.

These codes gleaned also suggest that Maurice is content with the underlying "how" and "why" behind his children's digital practices. His responses indicate that using digital technology plays a role in the parent-child communication in his family, as he regularly communicates with

his children using digital technology (i.e. smartphones). Moreover, Maurice’s hands-off approach to monitoring his children’s digital practices appears to be based on the trust he has in them to engage in practices that align with his expressed expectations. Maurice’s digital management approach does not seem to be void of governance.

**Table 5**

*Types of Digital Media Content Consumed by Parents*

Media Content	Number of Parents	% of Parents	Average hours per day	Maximum Hours per day	Common Uses
Anime	8	23	1.5	3	Entertainment
Comic Books	2	6	2	3	Entertainment
Cartoons	7	20	2	4	Entertainment
Graphic Novels	1	3	.5	2.5	Entertainment
Movies	24	69	3	4	Entertainment
Reality Television	13	37	2	5	Entertainment
Illustrations / Drawings	0	0	0	0	N/A
Computer Generated Artwork	0	0	0	0	N/A
Music	28	80	2	6	Entertainment
Video Games	12	34	1.5	4	Entertainment
Social Media	26	74	2.5*	7*	Communication and Entertainment
Mobile Apps	27	77	1*	4*	Communication and Entertainment

*Note.* Data with an asterisk symbol (\*) denotes time actively using social media and mobile apps between tasks and for hours at a time during the 24-hour period.

*Perceptions of Personal Digital Media Consumption*

The fourth and final interview question associated with RQ1 asked participants to share their thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, and/or perspectives about the digital media

content that they consume. This question aimed to better understand the perceptions and values that parent participants held evidenced by, and in relation to, the types of digital media content that is consumed in their homes (e.g. music, videos, books). Participants' responses to this question played an influencing role in this study's understanding of the types of digital media content parents feel need monitoring, governing, or prohibiting in their homes, especially in relation to their children's access to the content. In addition, the responses to this question provided information about the amount of time parents spend consuming digital media content (which might be compared to the amount of time they spend engaged in other tasks). Moreover, participants' responses to this question provided qualitative data that could further represent the digital lives of families and the influencing role that digital media and technology play in the home, including any positive or negative impacts on parent-child communication and family closeness/bonding.

One of the participants, Craig, responded to this question and offering insights into his nuanced understanding of his family's digital practices. He reported that he and his children have a strong online presence. As a father, Craig takes a hands-off approach to monitoring and governing his children's digital practices, while their mother has a more proactive approach. According to Craig, she is very involved in ensuring that their children manage their academics and perform well in school, which is a concern that he shares. Craig discussed his busy schedule, which consists of working, transporting his children to and from school, and resting to restore himself from his demanding job. The latter priority takes up much of the time during which he would monitor his children's digital practices.

Craig shared that his children have a better understanding and utilization of digital technology than himself and their mother. He feels that this lack of technological savvy is a

threat to his ability to adequately monitor his children’s digital practices. He admitted that he perceives his children’s demonstrated collective dependency on their digital devices as a hinderance to their familial bonds. Craig explicitly stated, “I need to get a better hold on my family.” This statement suggests that Craig desires improvement in how he and his family interact with each other and consume digital media and technology.

The seven codes gleaned from Craig’s responses included: priority (pr), role model (RM), parent-child closeness (pcc), family closeness (fc), technology skills (TS), negative effect (Ne), and expectations (ex). These codes suggest that Craig generally allows his son to use digital technology as he desires, while his wife (who did not participate in the study) monitors and governs their son’s digital practices more than he does. These codes also suggest that Craig and his wife’s digital skills are inferior to those exhibited by their children. Moreover, these codes suggest that Craig perceives his family’s bond to be not as close as he desires and/or as it should be. Notably, he realizes the role that he plays in his family’s digital practices and the negative effects they (i.e. the digital practices) have on their communication and closeness. Craig’s responses to this question were noted by the researcher as helpful in also answering RQ2 and RQ3 of this study. Table 6 provides insight into the types of digital technology participants reported they use in response to RQ1.

**Table 6**

*Types of Digital Technology Used by Parents*

Digital Technology	Number of Parents	% of Parents	Average hours per day	Maximum Hours per day	Common Uses
Smartphone	35	100	4	7	Work, family contact, other personal use, play mobile phone app games, entertainment (during personal time and/or family time)

<b>Video Game Console</b>	12	34	3	6	Entertainment (during personal time and/or family time)
<b>Tablet</b>	18	51	2	4	Entertainment, family time, other personal use (e.g. paying bills, homework, etc.)
<b>Desktop Computer</b>	17	49	5	10	Work, personal use (e.g. paying bills, homework, etc.), entertainment
<b>Laptop Computer</b>	23	66	6	9	Work, personal use, entertainment
<b>Smart TV</b>	35	100	3	7	Entertainment (during personal time and/or family time)
<b>Smart Watch</b>	22	63	7	12	Telling time, communication, tracking health info
<b>Smart Speakers / Radio</b>	23	66	3	7	Entertainment (during personal time and/or family time)

### **Research Question Two**

A secondary research question in this study (RQ2) aimed to understand the perceptions that African American parents have about their children's use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media (in general and in the home environment). Six qualitative questions assigned to RQ2 were asked of the research participants (n = 35) to answer this secondary question (see Table 7). In response to these questions, seven participants reported that they were not interested in or concerned about their children's digital practices. Four reported that they had never thought about their children's digital practices, and 24 participants reported that they needed support to improve their own digital skills and knowledge so that they could better support those of their children. Sixteen participants shared that they were concerned that their children should or might need to improve their digital practices. Collectively, participants' responses to RQ2 indicated that the total number of hours that their children are spending consuming digital media content

and/or using digital technology exceeds the total number of hours they are spending engaging in non-digital activities (e.g. playing with non-electronic toys, board and card games, talking with parents, etc.). The following subsections present each of these six interview questions and participants' responses.

**Table 7**

*Interview Questions Associated with RQ2*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
<p>RQ2: What perceptions do African American parents have about their children's use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media (in general and in the home environment)?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In general, how do/does your child/children use digital media technology?</li> <li>2. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your child's digital media technology use?</li> <li>3. In general, what types of digital media content does your child consume?</li> <li>4. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your child's digital media content consumption?</li> <li>5. How you mediate, moderate, govern, or control your child's digital media technology use?</li> <li>6. How do you mediate, moderate, govern, or control your child's digital media content consumption?</li> </ol>

### *Children's Use of Digital Media Technology*

The first interview question associated with RQ2 asked participants to share how their children generally use digital media technology. The aim of this question was to shed light on the degree and array of the participants' children's use of digital media technology. One participant, Gregory, shared that his son has a penchant for digital art creation, using his phone and iPad as tools for this creative process. With his friends, his son photographs subjects of interest and then harnesses the capabilities of art apps to replicate and reinterpret the images. Gregory's son and his friend then share their creations with each other, exchanging insights and feedback. Despite Gregory's acknowledgment of his son's near-constant digital engagement, he appreciates its artistic inclination. The father and son maintain regular contact, primarily through texts and occasional phone calls. Gregory shared that he believes their mutual use of digital tools enhances their relationship rather than detracts from it. His son's digital interests are primarily focused on art websites where he seeks inspiration for his drawings, particularly in the realm of anime. Gregory admitted to being hands-off regarding his son's use of digital media and technology, allowing him considerable freedom without much oversight.

The 12 codes gleaned from Gregory's responses included: content (c), productivity/creativity (p/c), purpose (p), negative effect (Ne), positive effect (Pe), priority (pr), expectations (e), or, technical skills (TS), personal development (PD), parent-child closeness (pcc), and communication(comm). These codes suggest that, as a parent, Gregory allows his son to use digital media and technology to support a hobby. These codes also suggest that Gregory perceives that his son might be addicted to the use of digital media and technology. Gregory's responses were noted by the researcher as also helpful in answering the RQ3 and RQ4. Another participant, Cole, responded to this question:



I'm happy with the amount of time that my sons use digital media and digital technology. They use it for school, homework, communicating with me and their other relatives, and with friends. They have a curfew for bed that I enforce. They're pretty good with not using digital media and digital technology all day.

The seven codes gleaned from Cole's responses included: frequency/time (f/t), productivity/creativity (p/c), parent-child closeness (pcc), other relationships (or), purpose (p), positive effect (Pe), and communication (comm). These codes suggest that, as a parent, Cole is generally satisfied with his sons' consumption of digital media content and use of digital technology. The codes also suggest that his sons know and abide by Cole's boundaries and/or expectations for their digital practices. Moreover, these codes suggest that Cole's sons possess sufficient digital skills to use digital technology independently and in a manner that enables them to be productive (e.g. completing homework) and communicate with family (and others) as needed.

### ***Perceptions of Children's Digital Media Technology Usage***

The second interview question associated with RQ2 asked participants to share their thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about their children's digital media technology usage. The researcher assumed that the participants' responses to this question would help her to gain a general understanding of the participants' children's general uses and expectations for digital media content and technology. The researcher also hoped to learn about the children's general familiarity and skill set when accessing and using digital technology. In addition, participants' responses to this question shed light on the role and impact of digital media content and digital technology in the home, as the researcher was able to learn about how

the parents and their children interact with them (i.e. digital media and technology). One participant, Nadia, responded to this question:

I've noticed that my kids are addicted to digital media and to digital technology (especially watching other people play video games on YouTube), and I'm looking for the digital media filters that can help them to watch and listen to what I approve of without me having to intervene all the time.

The six codes gleaned from Nadia's responses included: negative effect (Ne), purpose (p), content (c), priority (pr), expectations (ex), and monitoring/governing (m/g). These codes suggest that, as a parent, Nadia is concerned about the negative effects that her children's consumption of digital media content and/or use of digital technology could have on her family. These codes also reflect Nadia's interest in monitoring and governing her children's digital practices in a manner that reflects her expectations and priorities for her family. The researcher found that Nadia's response to this question were helpful in also answering the third and fourth interview questions associated with RQ2. Another participant, Gregory, had this to say about his son's use of digital media and technology:

Well, I think he has an addiction to his devices, and that's my fault. I think he does a good job using his smartphone to stay in touch with me and his mom throughout the day. He's very responsible. He does his homework on his Chromebook from the school. He's pretty good about doing the things he needs to do with the devices. It's just that when he's in his free time, like when he uses his art apps, he goes overboard. That's my fault.

The 12 codes gleaned from Gregory's responses included: content (c), productivity and creativity (p/c), purpose (p), negative effect (Ne), positive effect (Pe), purpose (pr), effective (e), or, technical skills (TS), personal development (PD), parent-child closeness (pcc), and

communication (comm). These codes suggest that Gregory allows his son to use digital media and technology to support a hobby. These codes also suggest Gregory perceives that his son might be addicted to digital media and technology use. Gregory's responses to this question were noted by the researcher as helpful in answering the third and fourth interview questions associated with RQ2.

### ***Types of Digital Media Consumed by Children***

The third interview question associated with RQ2 asked participants to discuss the types of digital media content that their children generally consume at home and school (see Table 8). Participants' responses to this question helped the researcher to better understand their children's technological skills in relation to accessing and using digital technology to access the type of digital media content they desire. Moreover, the participants' responses to this question helped the researcher to understand three factors of children's access and consumption of digital media content including the frequency (i.e. how often), amount of time used (i.e. how much), and daily schedule (what time).

**Table 8**

#### *Parent Reporting of Children's Consumption of Digital Media Content*

Digital Media Content	Number of Children*	% of Children	Average hours per day	Maximum Hours per day	Common Uses
Anime	7	20	4	6	Entertainment
Comic Books	3	9	2.5	4	Entertainment
Cartoons	52	100	4.25	5	Entertainment
Graphic Novels	4	11	2	3.5	Entertainment
Movies	51	98	3.5	5	Entertainment
Reality Television	12	34	3	3	Entertainment
Illustrations / Drawings	3	9	4	4	Entertainment, and hobby

Computer Generated Artwork	4	11	2	3.25	Entertainment, Hobby, Education/ Professional Development
Music	52	100	4	6	Entertainment
Video Games	28	80	5	7	Entertainment
Social Media	33	94	4	6.5	Communication, Entertainment
Mobile Apps	52	100	8	8.25	Entertainment, Communication, Hobby (i.e., art)
Digital Textbooks	52	100	4	4.25	Education / Professional Development

*Note.* The number of children refers to the number of participants' middle school-aged children (Grade 5 through Grade 9 students) who consume digital media content.

One participant, Michelle, described her children's digital media preferences:

After we finish schoolwork, I let my kids use the computer and their video games how they want. They watch cartoons, movies, and listen to music. I just don't feel like it's something that's so serious for me to get involved with.

In a follow-up question, the researcher asked Michelle, "Could you please tell me some of the specific names of movies, videos, video games, and songs your children consume on their digital devices?" She replied:

This might be Disney+, Netflix, Hulu... I also use Amazon Prime Music, YouTube, and YouTube Music, to name a few. They like to watch *The Lion King*, *The Dragon Prince*, *Hilda*, and *The Owl House*. For music, I hear them playing songs like "Happy" by Pharrell, "Can't Stop the Feeling" by Justin Timberlake, old stuff by the Jackson 5, some of my music from the early 2000s (like the Backstreet Boys) and some R&B from the 90s.

The four codes gleaned from Michelle's responses included: priority (p), content (c), monitoring and governance (m/g), and technical skills (TS). These codes suggest that, as a parent, Michelle allows her children to freely consume digital media content (e.g. video games) and use digital technology, providing little to no monitoring or governance regarding their digital practices. Another participant in this study, Doniece, described her children's digital media content preferences:

I don't really monitor what my kids do online, or with any of what they watch, read, listen to, and so on. They basically listen to and watch whatever is popular on TV. They stream their music and watch a lot of TikTok videos. I can't really tell you the names of what they watch and listen to. I probably should do better.

In a follow-up question, the researcher asked Doniece to specifically list the names and topics of some of the TikTok videos and other media content her children consume. She replied, "They like 'I love You Too' by Ziggy Marley, 'Let It Go' by Demi Lovato, and they like songs by Bruno Mars, Beyonce, and Chloe x Halle." The two codes gleaned from Doniece's responses included content (c) and monitoring/governing (m/g), as she provided little to no governance of her children's digital content consumption and digital technology use.

### ***Perceptions of Children's Digital Media Consumption***

The fourth interview question associated with RQ2 asked participants to share their thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about their children's consumption of digital media content. The aim of this question was to provide a general understanding of the participants' children's preferences and values in relation to the types of digital media content (e.g. music, videos, books, etc.) they are allowed to consume in their homes with their parents. Responses to this question also provided insights about (1) the amount of time participants'

children spend consuming digital media content, (2) the amount of time parents spend engaged in other tasks, and (3) participants' familial digital life and the influential role that the consumption of digital media content plays in their home, including any positive or negative impacts on parent-child communication and family closeness/bonding.

One participant, Alexis, shared her perceptions of her children's digital media consumption by stating, "I let my children decide what they like to listen to and watch. I don't really monitor their media habits. I probably need to." The two codes gleaned from her responses included content (c) and monitoring/governance (m/g), as Alexis reported that she provides little to no monitoring/governance of the digital media content her children consume. Stanton, another participant in this study, described his children's digital media consumption:

I don't let my kids use any kind of media without my permission. They need to watch and listen to things that will make them better people all the time, and nothing else every time they watch or listen to music, read, and so on. I want them to be and sound smart, not stupid.

The second-most-popular code gleaned from participants' responses was content (c), as parents expressed their concerns about the specific types of digital media content their children are consuming. Notably, content (c) was identified 36 times during this study's qualitative interviews, where participants referenced it seven times answering RQ4, 14 times answering the RQ3, 10 times answering the RQ2, and five times answering the RQ1.

### ***Mediating Children's Digital Media Technology Usage***

The fifth interview question associated with RQ2 asked participants to share the ways in which they mediate, moderate, govern, or control their children's use of digital media and technology. This question aimed to unearth the methods or strategies African American parents

implement to best manage their children's digital practices. The strategies mentioned in participants' responses considered the frequency of use, time of day, type of content, type of technology, and purpose for usage. Moreover, participants' responses to this question helped the researcher to better understand the digital life and home environment (as they relate to parent-child communication) of each household that was represented in this study (see Table 9).

**Table 9**

*Parent Reporting of Children's Usage of Digital Technology*

Digital Technology	# of Children*	% of Children	Average hours per day	Maximum Hours per day	Common Uses
Smartphone	52	100	4	10	Communicating with parents and friends; playing games (via mobile apps), accessing social media
Video Game Console	34	65	3	6	Playing video games with friends or alone.
Tablet	49	94	2	7	For school-issued tablets, to complete schoolwork and study, and some use for entertainment if school allows. If home-issued tablet, then for entertainment.
Desktop Computer	36	69	4	9	Generally used if mobile devices are not working, available, or compatible with desired task: Education / studying, Entertainment and Communication
Laptop Computer	52	100	4	11	Generally used if mobile devices are not working, available, or compatible with desired task: Education / studying, Entertainment and Communication
Smart TV	46	88	3	7	Entertainment

<b>Smart Watch</b>	16	31	7	9	Telling time (self-organization), communicating (i.e., can make phone calls using the smartwatch)
<b>Smart Speakers/ Radio</b>	34	65	1	3	Entertainment

*Note.* The number of children is the number of the parents' middle school children who consume digital media content.

One participant, Deena, described how she mediates her children's usage of digital technology:

"I let my kids watch PG-13 content. If it's anything worse, then I let them watch it with me and make them cover their eyes if I have to. If the show, or whatever we're watching, is too bad, then I tell my kids to go do something else or go watch something else."

The three codes gleaned from Deena's responses included: content (c), monitoring/governance (m/g), and expectations (ex). These codes suggest that, as a parent, Deena allows her children to consume digital media content and use digital technology freely as long as the type of content meets her approval and the manner of usage satisfies her expectations. In addition, these codes suggest that Deena actively monitors and governs her children's digital practices.

Another participant, William, reported that he isn't overly concerned about mediating his son's interactions with technology due to his active and academically engaged lifestyle. As a father, he values ensuring that his son engages in ample physical activity and remains academically on track. During his interview, he emphasized the importance of balance in his son's life. In their household, priority is given to family time and William cultivates this value by consciously refraining from using his phone excessively. He shared how he sees his son's digital habits as mirroring of his own: purposeful and limited. Although his son is allowed some



liberties with technology, gaming apps aren't a focus. Instead, William instills in him a vision of being a top-performing athlete and possibly obtaining a scholarship in the future. These aspirations require discipline and balance. Consequently, if his son overindulges in technology, William intervenes by confiscating the device. Their daily routine is structured, where homework takes precedence after school and basketball practice. Once these responsibilities are met, his son is allowed to enjoy some free time. Either way, all electronic devices are switched off by 9 pm, which signals the end of the day.

The seven codes gleaned from William's responses included: expectation (ex), parent-child closeness, role model (RM), priority (pr), technical skills (TS), personal development (PD), and positive effect (Pe). These codes suggest that William demonstrates his expectations for his son's digital practices to his son, which include the amount of time he uses digital technology. The codes also suggest that William models to his son how to use digital technology, demonstrating that they share a degree of parent-child closeness and that a balanced approach to digital technology usage is prioritized in their household. William reported positive effects of digital technology usage in his household, acknowledging that his son's digital practices have positively affected his son.

### ***Mediating Children's Digital Media Consumption***

The final and sixth interview question associated with RQ2 asked participants to share the ways in which they mediate, moderate, govern, or control their children's consumption of digital media content. Similar to the previous interview question, this question aimed to identify the methods or strategies that African American parents implement to mediate their children's digital media consumption. The strategies mentioned in participants' responses once again considered the frequency of use, time of day, type of content, type of technology, and purpose

for consumption. Participants' answers played a key role in helping the researcher to understand the digital life and home environment of each household represented in this study, as they related to parent-child communication.

Christina, a participant in this study, described the mediation strategies she implements over her children's digital technology usage:

I disable the digital media and digital technology my kids like to use (like PlayStation 5), and Netflix as a punishment when they do things that they are not supposed to do because I know that they want to stare at those screens all day. So, I take it away from them to make sure that they do what they are supposed to do.

The two codes gleaned from Christina's responses included: monitoring/governing (m/g) and expectations (ex). These codes suggest that Christina monitors and governs her children's digital technology usage to ensure that they are meeting her expectations. These codes also suggest that Christina values teaching her expectations to her children for their digital practices, which include the usage of technology. Moreover, Christina's responses suggest she perceives that her children want to engage in their digital activities excessively.

### ***Research Question Three***

Another secondary research question in this study (RQ3) aimed to determine whether African American parents perceive that their digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with their children. Two qualitative questions assigned to RQ3 were asked of the research participants (n = 35) to answer this secondary question (see Table 10). Analysis of the responses to these questions revealed that participants did not provide explicit statements concerning whether they observed, knew, or believed that their children's worldviews (as they relate to the children's communication practices and relationship with their parents) were directly

impacted by their children's digital practices. However, participants collectively acknowledged that their children's digital practices have had a direct impact on parent-child communication in the home, which has impacted their parent-child relationship. The following subsections present participants' responses to these two interview questions.

**Table 10**

*Interview Questions Associated with RQ3*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
<p>RQ3: Do African American parents perceive that their digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with their children?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="873 730 1427 982">1. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your digital media practices affect how you communicate with your children.</li> <li data-bbox="873 1003 1427 1255">2. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your digital media practices affect your relationship with your children.</li> </ol>

***Perceived Effect of Parental Digital Practices on Parent-Child Communication***

The first interview question associated with RQ3 asked participants to share their perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how their digital media practices affect communication with their children. The aim of this question was to learn the general quality, amount, frequency, situations, and types of communication that occur in the family household, including those that pertain to any impact or influence that digital technology usage has on the family's communication dynamics. This information provided a better understanding of family communication patterns and how family members feel, understand, and observe their

communication experiences with each other. Participants' responses to this question also contributed to determining whether parents perceive that improvement (or some other form of support) is needed in their family units as it relates to their communication with one another as well as its impact on them as individuals.

During her qualitative interview, Michaela described a balanced approach to her use of digital media and technology. She described herself as a role model for her children's digital habits and digital diet. Since she herself actively uses digital media for practical purposes (e.g. school work and business-related tasks), Michaela demonstrated the benefits and utility of technology. Moreover, completing her own homework alongside her children was discussed as a shared activity that promotes disciplined usage of technology.

Although she expressed a general comfort with her children's digital practices, Michaela is continuing to impose limits on those practices. For example, she shared how she has set a curfew for her children's tech usage and requires them to hand over their phones at night. This practice signifies that while she trusts them, she also recognizes the importance of setting boundaries to prevent an overreliance or misuse of technology.

The four codes gleaned from Michaela's responses included: parent-child closeness (pcc), purpose (p), communication (comm), and positive effect (Pe). These codes suggest that because Michaela is concerned about her children's consumption of digital media and use of digital technology, she spends ample time monitoring and governing their digital practices. Her responses also suggest that she is concerned with parent-child closeness, which influences her decision to take the time to ensure that her children know how to use technology (e.g. using smartphones to communicate with each other while they are away from home and from each other). Michaela's comments also suggest she perceives that her children positively benefit from

digital practices because they use them for strategic purposes (e.g. education, communication, and entertainment). The researcher found that Michaela's response to the RQ1 also answered the RQ3 and RQ4.

Another participant, Tyrone, candidly admitted to consuming a significant amount of what he referred to as "crap" on television and acknowledged that his children share this habit. He shared how he views their collective screen time as verging on addictive. This media consumption has impacted the closeness of Tyrone's family relationships, where he feels a distinguishable distance between himself and his children. What's more, his tendency to engage in binge-watching sessions further exacerbates this divide. When immersed in a series, his focus shifts entirely to the screen, which limits communication with his family. Although he occasionally will take breaks, the dynamic of these interactions changes considerably during his binge-watching periods. Tyrone noted that such sessions occur several times annually, with a typical series taking him about two weeks to complete.

The three codes gleaned from Tyrone's responses included: content (c), parent-child closeness (pcc), and negative effect (Ne). These codes suggest that Tyrone has allowed his and his children's digital practices to adversely impact their family's ability to communicate in a manner that enables them to build close bonds. The researcher found that Tyrone's response to the RQ1 also answered the RQ3 and RQ4.

### ***Perceived Effect of Parental Digital Practices on Parent-Child Relationship***

The second interview question associated with RQ3 asked participants to share their perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how their digital practices impact their relationship with their children. This question similarly aimed to identify the general quality, amount, frequency, situations, and types of communication that occur in the family unit,

specifically in relation to any impact or influence that digital media consumption has on the family's communication dynamics. This information played a role in the researcher's ability to understand family communication patterns and how members of the family feel, know, and observe their communication experiences with each other. Participants' responses to this question also helped the researcher to understand whether parents perceive that improvement (or some other form of support) is needed in their family units as it relates to their communication with one another as well as its impact on them as individuals. One participant, Andrea, had this to say about how her digital practices affect her relationship with her children and family:

I try to ensure that we have a balance of family time, and I also like to have time for myself and with my husband. So, sometimes, I will watch the media with my children and husband. Other times, it's just me and my husband, and sometimes it's just me. I like to keep things balanced.

The six codes gleaned from Andrea's responses included: positive effect (Pe), priority (pr), expectations (ex), family closeness (fc), parent-child closeness (pcc), and frequency/time (f/t). These codes suggest that Andrea prioritizes and models to her children the expectations she has for how they consume digital media content and use digital technology. Her responses also suggest that she wants her children to experience positive effects from their digital media content consumption and technology usage. In addition, she aims to frequently spend time with her family while engaged in digital media consumption and technology usage, in addition to increasing parent-child closeness and overall family closeness.

Another participant, Carter, expressed confidence in his digital media usage and emphasized the convenience of monitoring a single child's online habits. He proudly mentioned his son's productive use of digital tools, particularly in learning coding and app development.

These habits suggest a future of financial potential to Carter. Notably, a significant aspect of Carter's digital connection with his son revolves around the smartphone, which Carter provided alongside other devices like an iPad. This device was reported to be central to their daily communication, keeping Carter informed about his son's activities and well-being. With the phone set up to mirror Carter's, his son readily receives calls, texts, and emails, reinforcing their bond. Carter shared that he values this consistent communication, believing it has deepened their relationship. The eight codes gleaned from Carter's responses included: purpose (P), content (c), priority (pr), effectiveness (e), technical skills (TS), personal development (PD), parent-child closeness, (PCC), and communication (comm). The researcher also noticed that Carter's response to RQ3 also answered RQ4.

#### **Research Question Four**

The final secondary research question in this study (RQ4) aimed to determine whether African American parents perceive that their children's digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with them as parents. Two qualitative questions assigned to RQ4 were asked of the research participants ( $n = 35$ ) to answer this secondary question (see Table 11). In response to these questions, 12 participants shared that they do perceive a link between their children's digital practices and their parent-child communication and relationship, while three participants expressed that they do not. Moreover, the analysis revealed that eight participants explicitly stated that they were concerned about their children's digital practices, four of whom reported that their children either did or might have an addiction to digital media and technology. Twenty five participants explicitly stated that they want their children's digital practices to support their personal, social, academic, and professional development. The following subsections present participants' responses to these two interview questions.

**Table 11***Interview Questions Associated with RQ4*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
RQ4: Do African American parents perceive that their children’s digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with them as parents?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="873 436 1393 688">1. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your child’s digital technology practices affect how they communicate with you.</li> <li data-bbox="873 709 1393 961">2. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your child’s digital media practices affect their relationship with you.</li> </ol>

### **Children’s Digital Practices and Parent-Child Communication**

The first interview question associated with RQ4 asked participants to share their perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how their children’s digital technology practices affect their communication with them as parents. The insights gained from this question helped the researcher to learn the general quality, amount, frequency, situations, and types of communication that occur in the family’s household, especially those pertaining to any impact or influence that digital media technology practices have on the family’s communication dynamics. These insights played a role in the researcher’s ability to understand family communication patterns and how members of the family feel, know, and observe their communication experiences with each other. Participants’ responses to this question also helped the researcher to understand whether parents perceive that improvement (or some other form of support) is needed



in their family units as it relates to the development and needs of their personal and social communication.

One participant, Briana, responded to this question by expressing concerns about her son's pervasive use of digital media, describing it as an addiction. She shared that his primary engagement revolves around consuming anime content, which ranges from animated shows to video games. While he does occasionally delve into anime comic books, she reported that his reading proficiency is notably lacking. This incessant digital engagement has led to disciplinary issues both at school, where he prioritizes gaming over academic tasks, and at home, where digital distractions impede his responsibilities. Briana also lamented that her son's digital practices have had a detrimental impact on his social skills and their parent-child bond.

The five codes gleaned from Brian's responses included: negative effect (Ne), family closeness (fc), other relationships (or), personal development (PD), and frequency/time (f/t). These codes suggest that, as a parent, Briana does not provide much monitoring or governance to her son's digital practices. These codes also suggest that her son may have an addiction to digital media and technology because she stated that "he basically uses it [i.e. digital technology] all day everyday as much as he can." Michaela, another participant, similarly reported negative effects of her son's digital practices and how they play an adverse role in (1) his relationship with her as parent and child, (2) his relationships with others (e.g. school leaders and classmates), and (3) his overall interpersonal and communication skills. The researcher found that Briana's response to the RQ1 also answered the RQ3 and RQ4.

A father participant in this study, James, described how his children's digital practices affect their parent-child communication:

If I wasn't so busy, then I'd spend more time with my kids whether it's using digital media, or just us playing board games or just being together without toys and media. I need to change my schedule so that I can do that. We don't communicate like a family should because I allow them to use the technology so much. We'd communicate better and be closer as a family if I change it up. I need to spend more time with them.

The seven codes gleaned from James' response included: frequency/time (f/t), purpose (p), family closeness (fc), parent-child closeness (pcc), negative effect (Ne), priority (pr), and communication (comm). The researcher posited that James does not feel that his children's digital practices are conducive to their closeness as a family unit, as they do not prioritize spending adequate time with each other and he allows his children to spend excessive time consuming digital media content and using digital technology. Moreover, James' comments suggest that if he and his children did spend more time together, they might communicate with each other more often and without distractions as parent and children as well as siblings.

### ***Children's Digital Practices and Parent-Child Relationship***

The second interview question associated with RQ4 asked participants to share their perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how their children's digital practices affect their relationship with them as parents. This question aimed to provide insights about the general quality, amount, frequency, situations, and types of communication that occur in the family's household, specifically in relation to any impact or influence that digital practices have on the family's communication dynamics. This information helped the researcher to better understand family communication patterns and how members of the family feel, know, and observe their communication experiences with each other. Participant's responses also shed light

on whether or not parents perceive that their children need improvement (or some other form of support) as it relates to their personal and social developmental needs.

One participant, Henry, conveyed contentment with his son's digital engagements, highlighting not only his consumption of visual and auditory content but also his reading of digital books and audio books. Henry shared that he especially values the development of digital proficiency in his son, recognizing its relevance in today's evolving world. The bond between them is further strengthened by their shared interactions through smartphones, where they are able to communicate using calls, texts, and emails. They frequently exchange entertaining content from platforms like YouTube and TikTok, which leads to shared moments of laughter. This pattern of interaction similarly extends to the relationship his son shares with his mother. For Henry, technology has played a pivotal role in enhancing familial closeness. The five codes gleaned from Henry's responses included: expectations (ex), content (c), positive effect (Pe), productivity and creativity (p/c), and communication (comm). These codes suggest that Henry is content with his son's digital practices. These codes also suggest that Henry's son is productive in school, as he keeps good grades.

Another participant, Jaylynn, expressed her belief in granting her children a measure of autonomy regarding their media choices, though this freedom is tempered by digital safeguards. These media filters not only prevent her children from accessing inappropriate content but also send her alerts when deviations do occur. While she wants her children to be entertained, Jaylynn shared that she prioritizes content that contributes to their intellectual and emotional growth. While she appreciates the efficacy of these safety tools, she's also aware that her children might occasionally consume unapproved content among their peers. This possible reality has led to the formation of clear boundaries about what content is permissible in her home. Interestingly, the

use of technology has prompted numerous discussions between Jaylynn and her children, deepening their bond. Questions about restrictions or scheduled viewing times have provided opportunities for dialogue. Their frequent interactions on smartphones have also further enhanced their connection, allowing Jaylynn to keep abreast of their activities and be available for support when needed.

The three codes gleaned from Jaylynn's response included: content (c), priority (p), and effectiveness (e) . The researcher posited that Jaylynn moderately governs her children's consumption of digital media and usage of digital technology. Moreover, based on her responses, the researcher posited that Jaylynn has told her children about her expectations for their digital practices and expects them to adhere to those expectations.

### **Themes and Codes**

A thematic analysis of the qualitative interview data was conducted. This process involved transcribing, analyzing, and coding each interview transcript (n = 35). This study's four research questions served as the themes. Moreover, the analysis identified a total of 19 codes (see Table 12). These codes represent the characteristics of the participants' responses to the qualitative interview questions and include standards, experiences, and/or expectations that relate to the impact of their digital practices on parent-child communication in their households.

The researcher found that parents expressed the most concern about the purpose and/or reason as to why digital media and technology was being consumed or used either by themselves or by their middle school-aged children. The code purpose (p) was identified 40 times from the participants' responses during interviews. Participants discussed the purpose for digital media consumption and digital technology use 10 times when responding to RQ1, eight times when responding to RQ2, 16 times when responding to RQ3, and six times when responding to RQ4.

Table 12 illustrates the number of times each code was identified in relation to each of the four research questions.

**Table 12**

*Codes Gleaned from Qualitative Interviews*

	Research Question #1	Research Question #2	Research Question #3	Research Question #4	Totals by Code
Concern (con)	4	2	2	0	8
Quality (q)	0	2	1	0	3
Effectiveness (e)	3	2	4	2	11
Productivity / Creativity (p/c)	7	4	9	2	22
Content (c)	5	10	14	7	36
Purpose (p)	10	8	16	6	40
Frequency / time (f/t)	4	5	9	3	21
Family Closeness (fc)	7	3	8	3	21
Other relationships (or)	2	0	4	3	9
Parent-child closeness (pcc)	8	2	14	8	32
Positive effect (Pe)	4	3	8	3	18
Negative effect (Ne)	4	5	12	7	28
Personal Development: Social Skills (PD:SK)	5	6	10	4	25
Monitoring / Governing (m/g)	3	9	11	1	24
Role Model (RM)	4	3	4	0	11
Priority (pr)	8	4	11	5	28
Expectations (ex)	6	7	12	1	26
Technological Skills	5	4	18	4	31
Communication (comm)	7	1	10	5	23
Totals by Research Question / Theme	92	78	175	64	409

Gregory is a 41-year-old married father of two children (one of whom is enrolled as a middle school-aged student at a public school). Gregory and his family live in Bowling, Green Kentucky where he works as a video editor. In response to RQ1, Gregory explained that although his son likes to create anime artwork with his friends using art apps on his iPad, he realizes that his son “goes overboard” in his free time and is addicted to his digital devices. That being said, Gregory shared that one positive benefit of his son’s digital technology use is how they stay in contact with each other using smartphones, which supports their parent-child relationship. The researcher found that Gregory's responses to RQ1 helped to answer RQ3 and RQ4.

The code quality (q) was identified the least number of times. This code referenced (1) the quality of communication received by either the parent or child and (2) the quality of communication produced by either the parent or child (especially in comparison to the general expectations for either the parents' or child's age group). Collectively, the code quality was identified three times in thematic analysis: two times when participants were responding to RQ2 and one time when they were responding to RQ3. Notably, quality was not identified among RQ1 and RQ4 responses.

Stanton is a 26-year-old single father and delivery driver who lives in the Northeastern United States where his middle school-aged child is enrolled in a charter school. During his qualitative interview, Stanton described his strict parenting style as it relates to his children’s digital practices which consists of five parts: (1) protective approach, (2) awareness of outside influences, (3) a focus on intelligence, (4) active monitoring, and (5) a potential for conflict. Stanton described himself as being very proactive about setting boundaries for his children’s digital practices. He manages what his children read, watch, listen to, and play (e.g. video game

consoles, mobile apps, etc.). The researcher surmised that this protective stance could simply be rooted in his fatherly love and desire for his children to be protected from potentially detrimental influences.

Stanton's awareness of outside influences and their potential to positively or negatively influence his children were reported to empower his protective approach to monitoring and guiding his children as they are exposed to digital media content (and other media) outside his home. Stanton explained that he regularly talks to his children about the digital content they consume at school, at their friends' houses, and when they are visiting other relatives and participating in community and extracurricular activities. Moreover, he shared that he challenges his children to consume alternative (i.e. positive) media content when they are exposed to content that is potentially harmful (e.g. sexually-charged, violent, nefarious, etc.).

Stanton also emphasized that his children "need to be intelligent, and watching stupid stuff will not help them." Upon being asked to elaborate on this statement in his interview, he went on to explain that the consumption of certain types of media content can deter intellectual growth and encourage negative and unproductive behaviors in children. Overall, it was surmised that Stanton's responses to this study's qualitative research questions highlight what appears to be the same concerns that many American parents share in this digital age (Auxier et al., 2020), especially those who lack familiarity with the technology their children use.

As was mentioned earlier, the second-most-popular code gleaned from participants' responses was content (c), as parents expressed their concerns about the specific types of digital media content their children are consuming. Notably, content (c) was identified 36 times during this study's qualitative interviews, where participants referenced it seven times answering RQ4 14 times answering RQ3, 10 times answering RQ2, and five times answering RQ1. Deena is 29-

year-old and unemployed single mother of two middle school-aged children who are enrolled at a charter school in Oceanside, California. In a segment from Deena's response to RQ2, she shared:

My oldest two kids usually help me monitor my younger kids when they watch shows on the tablet. But, I also have to watch my two oldest because sometimes they listen to songs I don't like. Some of the songs are sexually-charged. Kids don't need to hear that.

The third-most-popular code was parent-child closeness (pcc), with a total of 32 mentions despite which research questions were asked. Parent-child closeness was addressed eight times when responding to RQ1, twice when responding to RQ2, 14 times when responding to RQ3, and eight times when responding to RQ4. Jace is a 34-year-old and unemployed single mother living in Montgomery, Alabama, where her middle school-aged child is enrolled at a public school. In response to RQ1, Jace addressed parent-child closeness in her home by sharing, "I'm trying to keep good digital practices (as you put it) so that they can use all the digital stuff the right way. I've never really thought about how it affects our parent-child relationship."

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of this study, which were identified through a thematic analysis of 35 qualitative interviews conducted among African American parents of middle school-aged children. First, the demographics and qualitative profiles of the research participants were presented. Second, findings from the qualitative interviews were thoroughly reviewed according to the interview questions associated with each of the study's four research questions. Next, the themes and codes identified through the analysis were reviewed. Tables illustrating these findings were provided throughout each section. Chapter Five discusses these findings and their significance in more depth.





## CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION

### Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore African American parents' perceptions of how their digital media practices impact their communication with their children. This chapter presents a rich discussion of the findings and their significance. First, the overall findings are summarized according to the four research questions and theoretical framework that guided the study. Second, the findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical and empirical research literature. Next, implications of the findings are addressed. Finally, limitations and recommendations for future research are provided.

### Summary of Findings

This study addressed the problem of African Americans' digital practices and the adverse impact they are having on parent-child communication (e.g. communication quality, frequency, effectiveness, etc.). Through 35 qualitative interviews with African American parents of middle school-aged children, the researcher aimed to understand the reason(s) for what she posited was an excessive and often inappropriate use of digital media and digital technology among this community. Four research questions guided these interviews:

**RQ1:** What perceptions do African American parents have about their personal use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media and digital technology (in general and in the home environment)?

**RQ2:** What perceptions do African American parents have about their children's use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media and digital technology (in general and in the home environment)?

**RQ3:** Do African American parents perceive that their digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with their children?

**RQ4:** Do African American parents perceive that their children's digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with them as parents?

The first two research questions were addressed through the FCP theory. The cultivation theory was deemed as relevant to the latter two research questions. Finally, the validity of the uses and gratifications theory was demonstrated through RQ3 and RQ4. The following sections present these findings.

### **Family Communication Patterns Theory**

Research participants' responses to the qualitative interview questions successfully answered RQ1 and RQ2. In addition, their responses demonstrated the validity of Koerner and Fitzpatrick's (2002) FCP theory. FCP posits that "...to function optimally, families create a family shared social reality (FSSR), broadly defined as shared understanding of one another" (Samek & Rueter, 2011, p. 1015 – 1031 ). The first and second research questions explored parents' perceptions about their and their children's digital practices in general and in their home environment where they closely coexist as a family. The researcher wanted to discover whether there were any patterns of behavior, interactions, or usage among the parents and/or their children concerning how digital practices may be affecting parent-child communication.

Among the 35 participant interview responses that were presented in Chapter Four, 14 of them suggested that their family communication patterns are protective and characterized by low conversation and high conformity. Conversely, 15 participants suggested that their family communication patterns are laissez-faire and characterized by low conversation and low conformity. Furthermore, four participants suggested that their family communication patterns

are consensual and characterized by high conversation and high conformity. Lastly, one participant suggested that their family communication patterns are pluralistic and characterized by high conversation and low conformity.

**Table 13**

*Koerner and Fitzpatrick's Model of Family Communication Patterns Theory (Allen, 2016)*

		High	Low
		<i>Consensual</i>	<i>Protective</i>
Conformity Orientation	High	Strive for a combination of conformity and openness	Stress a relationship of obedience and conformity
	Low	<i>Pluralistic</i>	<i>Laissez-Faire</i>
		Ideas exchanged, but parents are not final authority	No consistent norms; little parent/child communication

Four participants in particular provided exemplar responses to RQ1 and RQ2, describing the digital practices and family communication patterns in their homes (see Table 14). Notably, the responses from participants Michelle, Jessica, and Doniece suggest that their family communication patterns fall closer to low conversation and low conformity, classifying their communication as laissez-faire because they reported to generally allow their children to use digital media technology and consume digital media content without much moderation or governance. Conversely, Christina's response suggests that the communication patterns within her family fall closer to low conversation and high conformity, classifying their communication as protective because she reported to disable her children's access to digital media as a form of

punishment when they disobey her, which aims to ensure that they consume content and use technology appropriately going forward and in accordance to her expectations.

**Table 14**

*Interview Segments Describing Digital Practices and Family Communication Patterns*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Interview Segment</b>
<b>Michelle</b>	“After we finish schoolwork, I let my kids use the computer and their video games how they want. They watch cartoons, movies, and listen to music. I just don’t feel like it’s something that’s so serious for me to get involved with.”
<b>Jessica</b>	“I admit that technology has been a babysitter from my youngest child when she was an infant to my oldest child when he was born. It helps me to keep them distracted so that I can do what I’m doing. If I see them watching or listening to something bad, then I make them change it or turn it off, but other than that, I don’t really monitor how they use digital media and digital technology at home.”
<b>Doniece</b>	“I don’t really monitor what my kids do online, or with any of what they watch, read, listen to, and so on. They basically listen to and watch whatever is popular on TV. They stream their music and watch a lot of TikTok videos. I can’t really tell you the names of what they watch and listen to. I probably should do better.”
<b>Christina</b>	“I disable the digital media and digital technology my kids like to use (like PlayStation 5), and Netflix as a punishment when they do things that they are not supposed to do because I know that they want to stare at those screens all

day. So, I take it away from them to make sure that they do what they are supposed to do.”

### ***Research Question One***

The primary research question of this study (RQ1) aimed to understand the perceptions that African American parents have regarding their personal use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media and digital technology. The interview data revealed a variety of perceptions held by African American parents of middle school-aged children. While some parents reported that they were satisfied with their consumption of digital media content and use of digital technology, others reported that they were not satisfied and knew they needed to improve their digital knowledge and skills. Moreover, some participants reported to have little concern or thought about their digital practices, while others shared how reflective they are when alone or with their peers. The latter group described how they modify or adapt their digital practices when they are with their children (e.g. watching family-oriented programming with their children during family time). During the interviews, some of the participants shared that their children are not greatly influenced by their own digital practices, while other parents reported that they believe their digital practices do impact their children to some degree. The latter group expressed concern about ensuring that they help their children to develop balanced (i.e. healthy) digital practices by establishing themselves as good role models of digital media for their children.

### ***Research Question Two***

The second research question of this study (RQ2) aimed to understand the perceptions that African American parents have regarding their children’s use, consumption, and/or practices of digital media. Most of the parent participants in this qualitative study reported that their

children may need to improve their digital practices. Given the number of hours the participants reported their children engage in digital activities (see Table 14), it appears that most of them allow their children to prioritize consuming digital media content and/or using digital technology over non-digital activities (e.g. being outside, playing with non-electric toys such as cards and board games, and socializing with family and friends). Other participants reported that they were not concerned about their children's digital practices, expressing that they either (1) were too busy to be concerned, (2) didn't care about their children's digital practices, (3) never thought about their children's digital practices in this manner, or (4) needed support to improve their own digital knowledge and skills so that they could better support their children.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Participants' responses to the qualitative interview questions successfully answered RQ3 and RQ4 of this study. In addition, they demonstrated the validity of the cultivation theory developed by George Gerbner (1943), which posits that any long-term exposure to digital media will influence one's perception of the world, personal self-concept, and conduct (Segrin et al., 2012). In this qualitative study, the researcher sought to understand African American parent's perceptions and experiences concerning how their digital practices influence their children's worldviews and perceptions of self. To explore this connection, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts (n = 35). This process yielded codes and shed light on the dynamics and characteristics of family communication in the research participants' relationships with their children. The researcher was specifically interested in understanding how these family communication dynamics shape the sociocultural reality of the research participants' children, thus (if there was any influence) influencing how they are being socialized to engage in certain behaviors to satisfy their desires (whether actual or perceived). Additionally,

she aimed to explore whether these dynamics have an adverse effect on the research participants' sociopsychological development (i.e. the development of their personal and social well-being). Therefore, this study focused on whether family communication dynamics have an adverse effect on parent-child communication.

The third and fourth research questions of this study (i.e., RQ3 and RQ4) aimed to determine whether African American parents perceive digital practices to impact their parent-child communication and parent-child relationship. These secondary questions and their associated interview questions were asked to assess whether participants have (and would share) lived experiences and observations that support the cultivation theory. Four participants provided key responses to RQ3 and RQ4, describing their children's conduct in relation to their long-term exposure to digital media and digital technology (see Table 15).

Participants Briana, Nadia, Gregory, and Tyrone each reported that they felt that their children were addicted to using digital technology and/or consuming digital media content. Notably, these participants were the only four (out of 35 participants) who explicitly reported that they knew or believed that their children's conduct was being influenced by their exposure to digital media. The most common types of digital media content participants reported that their children are consuming at home and at school included cartoons, movies, music, mobile apps, and digital textbooks (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Moreover, the most common types of digital technology participants reported that their children are using at home and at school included smartphones, laptop computers, smart TVs, and tablets (see Figure 5 and Figure 6).

### **Table 15**

#### *Interview Segments Validating the Cultivation Theory*

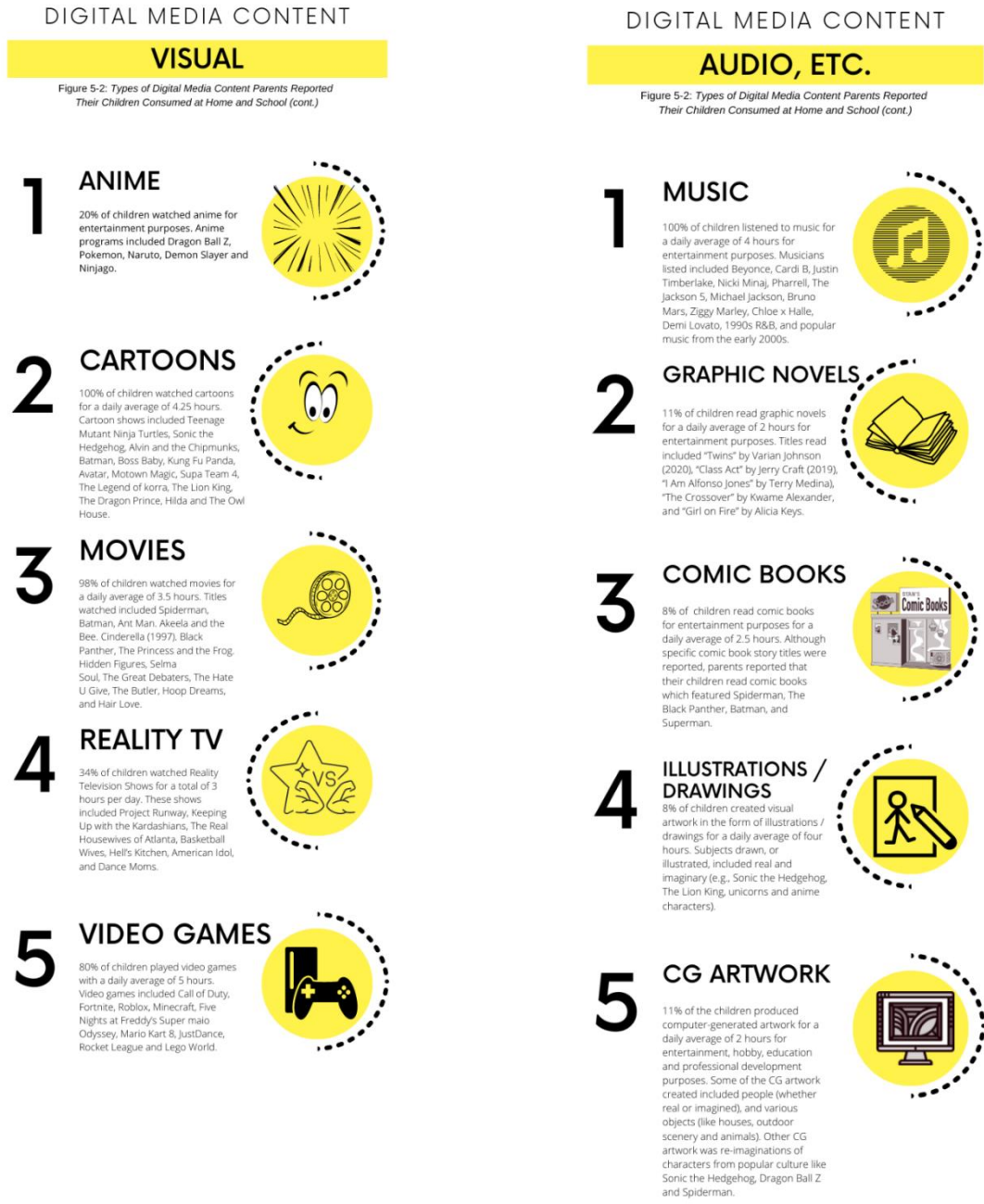
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Interview Segment</b>
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- Briana “I think it's safe to say that my son is addicted to digital media and digital technology. He basically uses it all day everyday as much as he can so he can watch anime stuff, like those cartoons and video games. Sometimes, he looks at the anime comic books, but, he doesn't read well. He gets in trouble at school because he uses the iPad to play games instead of doing his work. He gets in trouble at home because he keeps playing games or talking on the phone instead of doing his chores, and just taking a break from the digital stuff every once in a while. His social skills are bad because of this, and no, we're not that close like we could be in our relationship.”
- Nadia “I've noticed that my kids are addicted to digital media and to digital technology (especially watching other people play video games on YouTube), and I'm looking for the digital media filters that can help them to watch and listen to what I approve of without me having to intervene all the time.”
- Gregory “I know he's addicted to digital media and digital technology because he uses it all day, but I like how he uses it for art.”
- Tyrone “My binge-watching Netflix is probably an addiction, and my kids, well, like I said, they're addicted, too.”

**Figure 3**

*Visual and Auditory Content Parents Reported Their Children Consume*



**Figure 4**

*Social Media and Apps Parents Reported Their Children Consume*

DIGITAL MEDIA CONTENT  
**SOCIAL MEDIA AND APPS**

Figure 5-2: Types of Digital Media Content Parents Reported Their Children Consumed at Home and School (cont.)


**6 SOCIAL MEDIA**

94% of the children used social media for a daily average of 4 hours. These social media included: TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook for communicating with others (i.e., friends and family), and for entertainment (e.g., watching funny videos, like prank videos and watching other people play video games).




**7 MOBILE APPS**

100% of children used mobile apps for a daily average of 8 hours for entertainment, communication and hobbies related to illustrations / drawing and art.




**8 DIGITAL TEXTBOOKS**

100% of the children used digital devices (like school-issued Google Chromebooks and iPads) to access their digital textbooks for education and professional development purposes in school and for studying after school for a daily average of 4 hours.



**\* NOTICINGS**

The researcher notices that parents did not report whether their children consumed audio books. This makes the researcher ponder the popularity of audio book use among middle school children and the contexts (e.g., school, home, etc.) and reasons (e.g., education, entertainment, etc.) they might consume it.



**\* WONDERINGS**

The researcher wonders at what age children begin to access and listen to audio books. The researcher also wonders at what age do children generally begin to access audio books.



**Figure 5**

*Digital Devices Parents Reported Their Children Use*

DIGITAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGY  
**DEVICES (PART 1)**

Figure 5-3: Types of Digital Media Technology Parents Reported Their Children Used at Home and School

- 1 SMARTPHONE**  
100% of children used smartphones for a daily average of four hours to communicate with their parents and friends, play games (via mobile apps) and to access social media.


- 2 VIDEO GAME CONSOLE**  
65% of children used video game consoles for a daily average of 3 hours to play video games with friends or alone.


- 3 TABLET**  
94% of children used tablets for a daily average of 2 hours. Oftentimes, these tablets were school-issued and were used to complete schoolwork, and to study. Other times, the tablets (despite if they were school-issued, or non-school issued), were used for entertainment purposes.


- 4 DESKTOP COMPUTER**  
69% of the children used desktop computers for a daily average of 4 hours for entertainment, schoolwork and studying, and communication (via email and computer-based SMS, like Google Voice).


- 5 LAPTOP COMPUTER**  
100% of students used laptops for entertainment, schoolwork and study, and communication (via email and computer-based SMS, like Google Voice).



DIGITAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGY  
**DEVICES (PART 2)**

Figure 5-3: Types of Digital Media Technology Parents Reported Their Children Used at Home and School (cont.)

- 6 SMART TV**  
88% of the children used Smart TVs for entertainment purposes. The parents did not report any other use for this type of device.


- 7 SMART WATCH**  
30% of children used Smart Watches (i.e., Apple Watch, Gizmo and Samsung brands) for information-getting (i.e., to know the time), communication and entertainment.


- 8 SMART SPEAKERS / RADIO**  
65% of children used smart speakers / smart radios for entertainment and communication. Some respondents reported using their Smart speakers / smart radios when at home to make phone calls instead of using a handset, headphones, or earbuds.

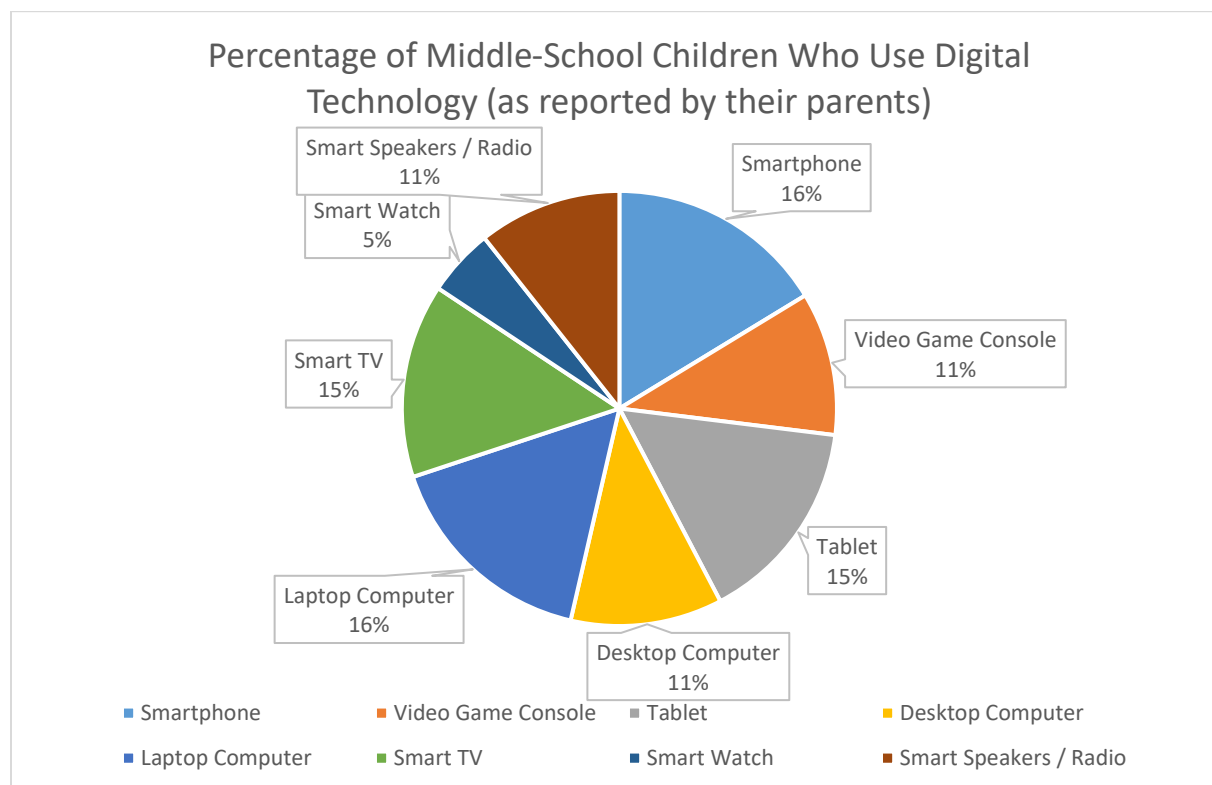

- \* RESEARCHER'S NOTICINGS**  
The researcher notices that fewer children use Smart Watches compared to all other devices.


- \* RESEARCHER'S WONDERINGS**  
Researcher wonders if children will increasingly use Smart Watches as they age. The researcher also wonders the average bedtime for each student given that the students spend many hours engaged in the use of digital technology or consuming digital media of some sort.



**Figure 6**

*Percentage of Middle School-Aged Children Who Use Digital Technology*



Although the participants identified and described their children's digital practices, little to no explicit statements were given concerning whether they observed that their children's digital practices directly impacted their children's worldviews. That being said, the researcher posited that the participants who reported that their children are/may be addicted to using digital technology and/or consuming digital media may have a cultivated reality in which their digital practices are necessary aspects of their well-being and identity. Additionally, although some participants' comments included their personal acknowledgement of the impact of digital media and technology on their families, none of them explicitly identified or described how their children's digital practices have shaped their children's worldviews, sociocultural realities, or perceptions of self.

Concerning addictions to the internet and social media, D'Arienzo et al. (2019) explained:

“Compared to other traditional forms of addiction, the internet is not a substance, and has therefore been conceptualized as a behavioral addiction ( (Griffiths, A ‘components’ model of addiction within a biopsychosocial framework, 2005). Its consumption, when excessive, may result in negative outcomes and become addictive (Griffiths, Kuss, Pontes, & Billieux, 2016), especially among adolescents and young adults (Ying Ying, et al., 2020). Such technological addictions, as noted by Soper and Miller (Soper & Miller, 1986)are “like any other behavioral addiction, and consisted of a compulsive behavioral involvement, a lack of interest in other activities and physical and mental symptoms when attempting to stop the behavior (Soper & Miller, 1986)”. In order to identify and define which types of behaviors may be considered as addictions, Brown (1993)used six criteria, which were later extended by (Where do gambling and internet 'addictions' belong? The status of 'other' addictions, 2016) and relate specifically to social media use:

- *Salience*: This term refers to social media use being the single most important thing in the individual’s life both cognitively and behaviorally.
- *Mood modification*: This term refers to social media use being used to consistently and reliably change an individual’s mood state.
- *Tolerance*: This term refers to the amount of social media use building up over time so that longer periods spent engaged in it are needed to get the desired mood-modifying effects.
- *Withdrawal symptoms*: This term refers to both physiological and psychological effects that occur when reducing or discontinuing use of social media.

- *Conflict*: This term refers to social media use compromising and damaging interpersonal relationships, negatively impacting on occupational and/or educational activities, and creating intrapsychic conflicts (e.g. subjective loss of control).
- *Relapse*: This term refers to “the tendency to reestablish addictive social media behaviors after a period of abstinence” (D'Arienzo et al., 2019, p. 1095).

The research data showed that participants Gregory, Briana, and Nadia explicitly stated that they either believed or knew that their children were addicted to digital media and digital technology. Upon analyzing this data, the criteria of salience, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, and conflict were identified in their interview transcripts. This evidence demonstrates that the findings of this qualitative study validate the cultivation theory.

### ***Research Question Three***

Considering RQ3, the findings confirmed that some African American parents do perceive that their own digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with their children, while others do not. Some participants reported to believe that their digital practices can positively and/or negatively impact the quality, frequency, and effectiveness of their parent-child communication and parent-child relationship, and therefore took various actions including monitoring and governing their children’s digital practices, consuming media content with their children, and providing their children with clearly defined expectations for consuming digital media content and using digital technology. The research data also demonstrated that some participants were not concerned about the impacts of their digital practices on their communication and relationships with their children. On the other hand, other participants reflected that their own digital practices were insufficient to meet the responsibilities they have as parents to manage the communicative and relational dynamics with their children.

### ***Research Question Four***

Considering RQ4, the findings similarly confirmed that some African American parents perceive that their children's digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with them as parents, while others do not. The interview transcripts demonstrated that four of the parents explicitly stated that they were concerned about their children's digital practices. Parents also expressed their concerns in relation to their children's digital practices and the impact those practices have on their children's communication quality, frequency, and effectiveness. Some parents explicitly stated that they want their children's digital practices to benefit them personally, academically, professionally, and socially. Interestingly, the data demonstrated that some parents were not concerned about whether their children's digital practices affected their communication and relationship with them as parents. Reasons for this position included that (1) they were too busy to be concerned about their children's digital practices, (2) they simply didn't think it was important enough for them to be concerned, and (3) they needed support to learn more about digital media and technology. Those citing the latter reason explicitly expressed interest in improving their digital knowledge and skills, as well as increasing their involvement in their children's digital practices.

### **Uses and Gratification Theory**

Participants' responses to RQ3 and RQ4 similarly demonstrated the validity of Elihu Katz's (1974) uses and gratification theory, which explores how people deliberately choose to consume media for various purposes and may or may not experience positive or negative effects because of that media consumption (Berelson, 1959). The theory posits that people consume digital media in order to gratify certain needs (The State of Communication Research, 1959). The researcher was interested in learning the reason(s) for what she posited was an excessive and



often inappropriate use of digital media and digital technology among African American parents and their children. Through the thematic analysis of participants' interview transcripts (n = 35), the findings revealed that while 18 parents gave explicitly positive reports about their personal and/or their children's digital practices, 28 parents gave explicitly negative reports. One positive report came from Cole, which validated the uses and gratification theory:

I'm happy with the amount of time that my sons use digital media and digital technology. They use it for school, homework, communicating with me and their other relatives, and with friends. They have a curfew for bed that I enforce. They're pretty good with not using digital media and digital technology all day.

Cole's experience is a concrete example of how the Uses and Gratification Theory can be practically applied. It demonstrates that when digital media is used intentionally and to fulfill specific needs, it can lead to positive outcomes. Cole's story also illustrates how consuming media can satisfy personal and social needs, as long as it is aligned with the principles of the uses and gratification theory. Overall, this practical example of Katz's theory confirms its relevance and applicability to understanding how African American families use digital media and reinforces its practicality. Conversely, William gave a report about the adverse effects of his family's use of digital media and technology:

I think my kids use digital media and digital technology too much, they really should be reading more. This hurts our relationship, but it's my fault. I watch too much Hulu and play too many video games, and sometimes I do these with my kids.

Another participant, George, shared a mixed report consisting of both positive and negative observations about his son's digital practices and specific needs that they appear to be satisfying. For example, George shared that his son not only produces digital art using apps and

drawing tools on his iPad, but he also sends and receives illustrations of various anime-themed characters and other art genres from his friends with whom he discusses their created works. This digital practice requires knowledge and skills, which suggests that George's son is having an informational need met through his usage and consumption of digital media and technology.

Moreover, George's response also suggests that his son's digital practices are meeting a social integrative need through his art project collaborations and creative discussions with his friends (e.g. shared drawing techniques and app preferences). A third need that the researcher recognized among George's son's digital practices was that of a personal identity need, where the very act of creating art can be considered an exploration of self. In this way, George's son may be using digital tools to express himself and participate in a shared and celebrated activity with his peers. One could also posit that by creating digital art, George's son and his friends are exploring their own identities, building self-confidence, and developing as artists and creative communicators. Finally, one could posit that an entertainment need is being met through the digital practices of George's son and his friends, as they may feel entertained by creating artwork and discussing the process together. In this way, the digital practice serves as a hobby for them.

Despite the fact that George acknowledged the positive work and benefits of his son's interactions with digital media and technology, he also expressed concern that his son has an overreliance and addiction to digital media and digital technology. George based this concern in the observation that his son "spends too much time making artwork and being online." This statement suggests that George is aware of his son's need for balance as a digital practitioner and as an individual. George also expressed that technology has brought him and his son closer in their parent-child relationship, as they are able to call each other when needed or desired. For example, they may check-in with each other throughout each day or to simply chat. George

explained that his smartphone interactions with his son are generally via text and phone calls. This shared digital practice between George and his son caters to their practical need to communicate and their emotional need to maintain their bond. In summary, George's perspective emphasized that the way digital media and technology are used (and not only the sheer amount of their use) plays a major role in determining their impact on people and relationships. According to Katz's (1974) uses and gratification theory, George's son actively seeks out specific media sources (e.g. art and communication apps) to satisfy his needs, which leads to both positive and negative outcomes.

### **Discussion**

This qualitative study was framed by the sociopsychological communication tradition, which explores how to influence others to change. This tradition views communication as a behavior-oriented phenomena that can be influenced through factors in one's contextual environment in which communication takes place (Theoretical Traditions, 2018; Craig & Mueller, 2007). Sociopsychological researchers posit that communication occurs as a result of the interactions between one's brain and one's behavior (Theoretical Traditions, 2018, p. 1762). Notably, they specifically explore how communication (i.e. interactions, expressions, and influence) is affected by attitudes, perceptions, cognition, emotions, and the other aspects of psychology (Manning, 2018, p. 1762).

In this present study, qualitative interviews explored African American parents' perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about their personal digital practices. Participants were asked to share how they understood the role and impact of these phenomena, as well as discuss the reasons, motivations, and uses that influence their digital media practices. The findings demonstrated that most of the parents who participated in this study believe and/or are

aware that their digital practices play a role in the development and ongoing application of their children's digital practices. Among these findings were parents who reported that their digital practices (or lack thereof) influence their children's digital practices and the manner in which they communicate with each other as parent and child (in and out of the home). In other words, these parents reported to understand that there is a connection between one's environment and one's ability to communicate and connect with others.

Elihu Katz's 1974 uses and gratification theory explored how people deliberately choose to consume media to satisfy various needs and may or may not experience positive or negative effects as a result (Berelson, 1959). This theory assumes that (1) people use media for specific purposes, (2) people use media to gratify their needs, (3) media compete for people's time and attention, (4) people are affected by media in different ways, and (5) people can accurately report their media consumption and motivations for it (Berelson, 1959).

This study's findings were identified through the lens of this theory, especially its fifth assumption. To determine whether African American parents can accurately report their digital practices and the motivation(s) underlying them, a thematic analysis of the study's interviews (n = 35) was conducted. Transcript segments addressing whether the participants felt that they were in control of their media consumption, could recount the media they consumed and could identify a specific reason for their media consumption were paid special attention. The following Figures 7–9 present these findings (see the associated tabular data in Tables 5–6 in Chapter Four). Figure 7 (on page 149) presents quantitative and qualitative data about the research participants' (i.e., parents) consumption of visual and auditory digital content. Figure 8 (on page 150) presents data about parents' use of social media platforms and other internet-based apps.

Figure 9 (on page 151) presents data about parents' digital technology use (for example, smartphone use, tablet use, etc.).

**Figure 7**

*Visual and Auditory Digital Media Content Consumed by Parents*

DIGITAL MEDIA CONTENT  
**VISUAL**

Figure 5-4: Types of Digital Media Content Parents Reported They Used



DIGITAL MEDIA CONTENT  
**AUDIO, ETC.**

Figure 5-4: Types of Digital Media Content Parents Reported They Used (cont.)



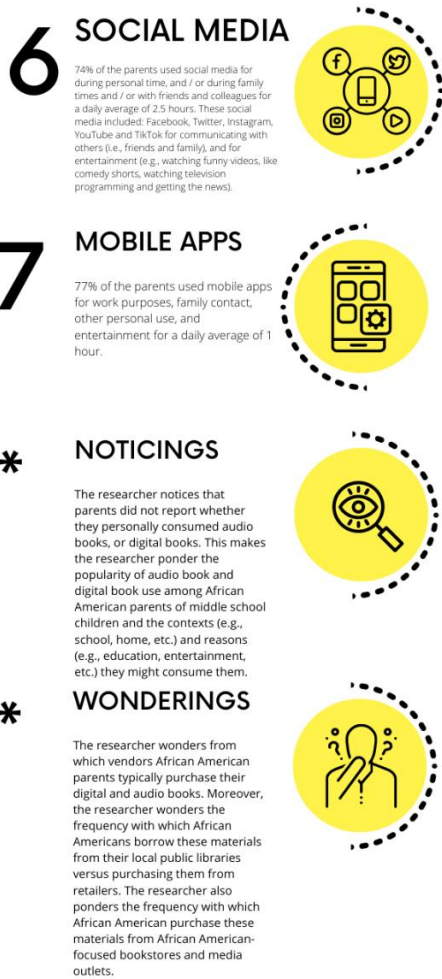
## Figure 8

### Social Media and Apps Used by Parents

#### DIGITAL MEDIA CONTENT

#### SOCIAL MEDIA AND APPS

Figure 5-4: Types of Digital Media Content Parents Reported They Used (cont.)



**Figure 9**

*Types of Digital Technology Used by Parents*



The data in figures 7, 8, and 9 summarize the digital practices of a people group tat use digital media and digital technology for various reason. As previously noted, some of the reasons for their digital media consumption and digital technology use is (as what seems to be



increasingly common among most Americans) is for purposes related to work and career, education, communication and entertainment. Hence, because the data shows that there are variables in the manner in which and timing with which individuals consume digital media and use digital technology (i.e., digital practices, or digital life), one might posit that the research participants' digital practices (to some degree) might be a reflection of whether they feel that they need to consume digital media content and/or use digital technology. Although this study did not analyze Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the researcher did state in Chapter Two how it might be similar to (or compatible with) the uses and gratification theory, since both theories posit that a person takes specific actions to satisfy specific needs. As mentioned earlier, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is divided into D-needs (i.e. deficiency needs), which relate to a person's physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem needs, and B-needs (i.e. growth or being needs), which relate to a person's self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). Further analysis of these two theories might lead one to posit that one consumes media to fulfill particular needs in order to achieve a specific experience, feeling, or satisfaction.

In this study, four research participants (i.e. Briana, Nadia, Gregory, and Tyrone) explicitly reported that they knew or believed that their children were addicted to using digital technology and/or consuming digital media content. In her commentary, Briana reported that her son generally has interpersonal conflicts with adults and peers when he is not using digital technology or consuming digital media content, regardless of whether he is at home or in school. Upon considering the role of a need as it pertains to communication, as well as the tenants of Katz's (1974) uses and gratification theory and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, one might posit that Briana's son has developed and regularly employs digital practices that may be satisfying a real or imagined social, emotional, communicative, or other kind of basic human

need that he lacks from either Briana or others. Hence, Briana's son is an example of someone who is addicted to using digital media and technology to fulfill a specific experience or satisfy a need (B-needs or D-needs), regardless of if they are even aware of it.

### **Family Communication Patterns**

The thematic analysis of this study revealed that among the 35 families represented in this study: 14 reported to have protective family communication patterns (i.e. low conversation and high conformity), four reported to have consensual family communication patterns (i.e. high conversation and high conformity), 15 reported to have laissez-faire family communication patterns (i.e. low conversation and low conformity), and one reported to have pluralistic family communication patterns (i.e. high conversation and low conformity). Thus, the 14 families with protective communication patterns demonstrated a monopoly style, the one family with pluralistic communication patterns demonstrated an equality style, the four families with consensual communication patterns demonstrated a balanced split style, and the 15 families with laissez-faire communication patterns demonstrated an unbalanced split style. These findings corroborate the tenants of the FCP theory.

### **Corroborating Existing Literature**

Before the start of this study, the researcher posited that she may collect data that supported three research studies conducted by McLoyd et al. (2019), the Pew Research Center (2015), and Wu and Qi (2005). McLoyd et al.'s study was published in the *Handbook of Parenting* and titled "African American Families and Digital Media". The Pew Research Center's study explored American parenting styles. Finally, Wu and Qi's study analyzed Asian American and African American parents. Although these existing studies and the present study share similarities (i.e. the analysis of African American digital practices and the influence of

digital media and technology on the family), the evidence collected in this study was deemed insufficient to demonstrate whether the findings support entirely or do not support the existing research of McLoyd et al., the Pew Research Center, and Wu and Qi. That being said, the findings of this study do corroborate Dworkin et al.'s (2018) study, which posited three things:

(1) Despite the widespread use of social media, scholars have recently begun to understand the impacts of social media on the family relationships, (2) there is little information available about how to best support parent and family online educational needs, (3) social media companies possess the information that scholars need to perform the academic studies needed to begin to support exploration of the impacts of social media use on family communication and relationships (The State of Family Research and Social Media, 2018, pp. 796-813).

This study supports Dworkin et al.'s research by examining how digital practices impact family dynamics. It also acknowledges the gap in academic literature and the difficulties researchers face when trying to access crucial data from social media companies. The Pew Research Center's (2015) study aimed to explore the ways in which American youth use digital media and why their usage practices and patterns came into being. The study specifically analyzed these uses and patterns among African Americans, White Americans, Hispanic and Latino Americans, and Asian Americans. In addition, other relevant characteristics like children's literacy were addressed in the research. This study was useful to the researcher, as it shed light onto how African American children gain access and use digital media and digital technology. Moreover, it provided greater insight to the researcher regarding the impact of digital media in the African American home in comparison to other factors (e.g. study time and family time). The findings of this present study demonstrated that the African American children

represented by the parent participants (n = 35) spend too much time using digital technology and/or consuming digital media content on average. These findings corroborate the Pew Research Center's (2015) findings:

Nine-in-ten parents with children ages 6 to 17 say their kids watch TV, movies, or videos on a typical day, and 79% say they play video games. Parents whose children get daily screen time are split about whether their children spend too much time on these activities (47%) or about the right amount of time (50%) (Pew Research Center, 2015)

A study conducted by Rideout et al. (2016) similarly explored the digital lives of African American youth and their parents. They found that, on average, non-white American youth (i.e. African American, Hispanic, and Asian) consume four-and-one-half more hours of media on a daily basis than White youth. Moreover, the findings revealed that African American and Hispanic youth devote more time to watching television. Tables 5 – 6 illustrate the average daily hours African American parents reported to spend consuming digital media content and using digital technology.

While Baker et al.'s (2011) study did not directly relate to the purpose of this qualitative study, their findings provided insight into how African American youth may understand and use digital media as a communication tool for self-expression and in various contexts. Moreover, the findings offered insights about the sorts of artistic expression that African American youth might use for self-expression as individuals and as members of the larger African American culture (Baker et al., 2011, p. 530). The findings of this present study corroborated Baker et al.'s study through participants' responses about their digital practices. One participant in particular, Gregory, shared insights that serve as a case in point.

Gregory described how his son and his friends utilize devices like phones and iPads as instruments of digital art and self-expression. His son enjoys capturing photographic inspirations and then using specialized apps to transform them into drawn images, which are then shared and discussed with his peers. Though Gregory is aware of his son's extensive screen time, he expressed approval of its artistic nature. Notably, he shared how their shared digital experience as father and son doesn't create distance. Instead, their bond is bolstered by regular text and phone call interactions. Gregory's parenting approach is one of trust, which allows his son considerable digital autonomy without stringent oversight. This finding supports Baker et al.'s (2011) assertion that African American youth use digital technology to create digital media content so that they can express themselves artistically. This corroboration of existing literature helps to satisfy the need for up-to-date research about the digital practices among African Americans.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand African American parents' perspectives about how their digital media practices impact parent-child communication in their family unit. The research was especially attuned to the convergence of culture and media with technology and society. The findings offer theoretical and spiritual implications for African American parents and youth. The following subsections review these implications.

### **Theoretical**

Nuances of George Gerbner's 1960s and 1970s era studies related to cultivation theory are worth addressing in relation to this study. The researcher posited that the cultivation theory should be updated to reflect the similar effects that media (e.g. social media like YouTube and digital media like Hulu) have on media consumers, despite whether the exposure is short-term or

long-term. As previously mentioned, Gerbner's theory falls within the sociocultural communication tradition and posits that long-term exposure to media influences one's worldview, conduct, and personal self-concept (Segrin et al., 2012). This study explored how these dynamics are shaping the sociocultural reality of African American children and how they are being socialized to engage in certain behaviors in order to satisfy their desires (actual or perceived).

The findings of this study demonstrate that there are many nuances to the idea that one's exposure to media shapes how one perceives reality. One such nuance is the fact that each person has a different experience, perception, knowledge, and understanding of the world in which s/he lives. Thus, how each person understands, accepts, rejects, or is influenced by media will likely differ. This is especially true when we consider media literacy, where literate individuals are less likely to be influenced by stereotypes and other messages to which they are exposed by media. Moreover, individuals who have less media literacy (e.g. children) or “fewer cognitive resources, including those ‘unmotivated, distracted, or otherwise less able to process information’”, are prone to accept media messages and images (Shrum et al., 1998, p. 447 – 445 ). While the participants in this study did not explicitly indicate whether their children's exposure to digital media positively or negatively impacts their children's worldviews or self-perceptions, participants did indicate that because their family regularly uses digital technology and consumes digital media content, the manner in which they communicate and relate to each other as a family has been impacted.

Another nuance to the phenomenon of cultivating the psyche through media exposure is whether actual cultivating is occurring or perhaps the creation of something else. For example, in response to RQ1, Jessica reported that she used technology as a babysitter for each of her

children in order to distract them from trying to get her attention so that she could continue doing whatever task she was doing at that moment. Some scholars might argue that this is an example of cultivating a child to seek her basic needs from technology instead of human affection. However, other scholars might argue that this is an example of how antisocial behavior is created in young people. Furthermore, other researchers might argue that this is an example of how to cultivate an individual's innate desires and propensities to lack social, emotional, relational, and communicative needs as they progress from childhood to adulthood. Either way, this is an example of society as a technopoly, which Neil Postman (1993) described in his book, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*.

To further discuss the nuances of cultivation theory, researchers should consider the online communities and online presence associated with a majority of the content that people currently watch on TV in comparison to content disseminated in the previous century. Do online communities related to televised content help to cultivate the media consumer's psyche about the world in which s/he lives? The researcher posits that these communities do cultivate consumers' psyches, since many of the same major messages of televised content serve as not only the center of these consumers' discussions but also as the center of the online communities to which they belong. Similar phenomena have been observed in studies conducted by Lacalle and Simelio (2016), Doughty et al. (2012), and Sillence and Baber (2004).

Tables 5 – 6 present tabular data for parent participants' digital practices and Tables 8 – 9 present tabular data for their reporting of their children's digital practices. There is a possibility that participants in this study may not have provided full disclosure to the researcher regarding the degree to which digital media are used in their homes and among their family members. For example, assuming some participants play Grand Theft Auto (a popular video game with violent

content) in their home, one must wonder how their children will be influenced by the content. This question could be extended to all forms of media to which children and parents are exposed and the associated implications. Moreover, the degree of media literacy among parents seems to hold implications for the media literacy of their households. For example, a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that parental participation in media literacy plays an important role in helping to develop media literacy competencies in their children (Turner, et al., 2017).

### **Spiritual**

Due to the secular nature of qualitative study, the implications of a Christian worldview were not woven into the earlier discussion of this chapter. That being said, there are Christian implications relevant to this study's findings that are worth addressing. Therefore, this section will briefly address these implications through a biblical lens.

In the holy Bible, there are biblical principles from which we can receive guidance for how to best communicate to and with others. Scripture clearly lays out the motivations regarding why certain individuals were the focus of positive or negative reinforcement, positive or negative punishments, and the stimuli for such phenomena. For example, negative reinforcement is demonstrated in Numbers 13 – 14 when the spies were punished after giving a fraudulent report. In this study, Christina reported that she uses negative reinforcement in the form of removing her children's access to digital technology and digital media content when they disobey her. Hence, parents might benefit from consulting the wisdom of Scripture to gain insight into how positive and negative reinforcement can help or hinder the discipline of their child.

Negative reinforcement is not necessarily a negative (i.e. bad) approach to disciplining children so that they are dissuaded from continued engagement in certain behaviors. Moreover,



the Bible presents a familial structure that prioritizes teaching children to conduct themselves in a manner that pleases God. This structure can be found in Genesis 18:19 (KJV):

For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised.

Ephesians 6:4 also speaks to this idea and reads, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (King James Version of the Holy Bible)”. These two passages support the implication that God expects parents to play a critical role in teaching their children how to live in the world, which includes teaching children how to communicate and manage their time as it relates to engaging in their digital practices.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

To define the boundaries of this qualitative study, the researcher chose to exclusively interview African American parents of middle school-aged children and preferred those who were at least 25 years of age. Non-African American parents raising an African American child were excluded from the study. Additionally, parents who culturally identified as African Americans were not eligible to participate in the study. These parameters allowed this study to collect data from people who are of the same cultural background, thus adding to the depth and quality of this ethnographic study. Moreover, the researcher posited that a study of this sort be conducted on a population-by-population basis to add to the homogeneity of responses, as members of one culture often have similar experiences, values, and worldviews. The researcher delimited this study to African Americans because her original desire to conduct this qualitative study as it relates to American parents of middle school students who use digital media and/or

technology is currently not feasible for her to conduct. Moreover, in her profession as an educator, most of the researcher's work has been with African Americans (including first, second, and third generation African Americans descended from African peoples who recently immigrated to the United States and are not natives of the United States of America). As a result, the researcher has observed various communication patterns and practices, and has been exposed to various ideas which appear to be characteristic of African Americans (though are not necessarily unique only to African Americans).

Potential limitations of this study include that its data set, which represents a people group of at least 41.6 million and who comprise 13.6% of the United States population, was small and consisted of 35 participants (United States Census Bureau, 2022). This sample size is hardly representative of the cultural characteristics, worldview, and collective experiences of a people group. Hence, the researcher posits that future similar studies should have sample sizes consisting of several thousands of the target demographic in order to provide representative and rich data to analyze.

Second, among this study's sample ( $n = 35$ ), only four of the participants (i.e. 11%) responded to the advertisements for this study in person and directly to the researcher. Moreover, the remaining 31 participants (i.e. 89% of the sample) responded to the social media posts via Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Upon reviewing the demographic data, the researcher learned that all of the participants were residents of the same few U.S. cities and states. To support the participants' anonymity, the researcher did not specify their locations of residence. However, the reader can refer to Table 3 in Chapter Four to learn about the U.S. Regions in which this study's participants reside. It is worth noting that although each region of the contiguous United States was represented by the participants in this study, only nine states were represented in this study.

The researcher decided to not interview children for this study because of the additional time and resources that would be needed to ensure that the legal and ethical requirements of such a study were met. In other words, this study was easier to conduct without the participation of children. Finally, it is important to note that participants were not asked whether they or their children consumed negative (or, harmful) digital media content and/or used digital technology in a negative (or, harmful) manner. Although this created a lack of information about the manner in which African American parents and their children consume digital media and use digital technology, this limitation did not decrease the validity of this study since its purpose was to understand this community's perceptions about their digital practices and their impact on parent-child communication.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Upon completing this study, there are five collective recommendations for future research worth mentioning. First, future studies exploring family communication patterns and digital practices should collaborate with experts of other social sciences, such as sociology and psychology. In this way, the research will provide either a psychological or sociopsychological lens instead of solely a communications and media lens, as was the case in this present study. These studies might use the following primary research question, which was initially drafted for this study: "Do American parents' digital practices adversely affect their children's personal and social development and well-being?"

Second, future research should consider strictly focusing on the FCP theory and its four types of family communication patterns (i.e. protective, consensual, laissez-faire, and pluralistic) in order to identify best practices for families to improve one or more of their communication dynamics. While this study addressed these patterns, they were not the sole focus. Next, other

family communication theories should frame future research efforts to support families who are interested in improving their parent-child communication dynamics.

The fourth recommendation pertains to the participant sample. Future research should conduct interviews with both parents and their children. This design would allow children participants to report their digital practices firsthand and address their own perspectives, feelings, thoughts, and experiences. As only parent participants were interviewed in this study, the data collected about their children's digital practices was secondhand. This was demonstrated when some parents did not know the names of the digital media content that their children regularly consume (e.g. television shows, video games, and YouTube and TikTok videos). More often than not, it appears that children within the age group discussed in this study (i.e. Grades 5 – 9 middle school students) are able to discuss their digital practices and their perceptions, thoughts, and experiences related to them in detail. While conducting the research interviews, the researcher arrived at this notion as she listened to the research participants discuss some of their conversations with their children about their digital practices, in addition to their discussions about their observations and interactions with their children as they engaged in their digital practices.

Finally, future research exploring family communication patterns should consider the five communication elements described in Kimberly Allen's (2016) study: (1) problem solving, (2) goals clarification, (3) exploring options, (4) action steps, and (5) results/evaluation (p. 141). The inclusion of these elements could help to improve the quality of research questions and, in doing so, the quality of participants' responses. Scholars may also consider taking a solutions-focused approach to supporting families who want to improve their communication dynamics (Allen,

2016, pp. 147-160). The following subsections present specific recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers.

### **For Parents**

The following three recommendations for parents were framed by RQ1 and RQ2 of this study. Their implementation could increase parents' awareness as it relates to their personal digital practices and those of their children. Additionally, these recommendations could inform parents' perceptions and understanding of their personal digital practices and the impact they have (if any) on their home environment, specifically in relation to parent-child communication.

First, local public libraries could be consulted to support parents who wish to improve their digital knowledge and digital skills. Libraries offer a range of information and resources relevant to parents who want to increase their digital literacy and support their children's digital literacy. For example, the Saint Louis County Library (which has several branches located throughout the Saint Louis County, Missouri area) offers free computer training classes in which parents can enroll to learn basic computer skills and develop other digital skills. Parents could consult their local county office, conduct an internet search on websites like CareerOneStop.org, or use the Library Finder feature to learn how to find and contact their local library.

Second, parents could consult their local County Extension Office to improve their digital literacy. This resource is often housed in one or more state university campuses. For example, while this study was being conducted, the University of Missouri's Extension Office was conducting a Missouri Internet Survey to determine which data driven strategies can be used to improve Missourian's digital access and productivity while using the internet for various purposes.

Lastly, parents could also consult their local public school districts or community centers to learn if there are any resources (e.g. training) available to help parents improve their digital knowledge and skills. The internet is also an excellent resource for learning how to increase one's digital literacy. There are a plethora of websites that can be accessed to support parents, which include CommonSense Media and the U.S. Department of Education's Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide.

### **For Educators**

The following three recommendations for educators were framed by each of the four research questions in this study. Educators have influential roles in the lives of their students and can impact the manner in which students develop and employ their digital practices as they relate to education, other school-related matters, as well as personal digital practices at home. First, it is recommended that educators survey parents to determine whether they have a need and/or desire to increase their digital knowledge and skills. This brief survey could be conducted at any time of the school year (e.g. at the beginning of the year). Survey questions could collect information (qualitative and quantitative) that informs educators about the kind of digital support parents need.

This recommendation is especially valuable to the researcher, as her work background is in education and she has frequently met parents and students with insufficient digital knowledge, digital skills, and digital resources. For example, from March 2020 until October 2020, she taught at an elementary school in a district that required all students to use iPads. During this time, the researcher frequently had meetings with parents to teach them how to use the hardware (i.e. iPads), the software (i.e. Microsoft Office for Mac), and the web-based learning platforms

that the school district was using to facilitate virtual learning (including KhanAcademy, IXL, NearPod, and Spelling City).

Second, education administrators should determine how they can prioritize the incorporation of steps needed to properly fund and satisfy parents who either need or desire to improve their digital literacy. Some school districts (including community colleges, universities, adult learning programs, and non-profits) offer an array of adult-focused classes on various topics. This is one avenue that educators could promote to parents and other adults who wish to improve their digital knowledge and skills.

Third, the digital practices of educators can similarly impact children's digital practices. For this reason, it is critical that educators are mindful of their digital practices as they relate to their students. For example, when escorting a class of 25 elementary school students from the classroom to the restroom, a Grade 1 teacher might use the mobile app version of ClassDojo as a behavior management tool to award good behavior in the hallway and restroom, as well as to punish bad behavior in the hallway and restroom (by taking away Dojo Points). This is in addition to the ability to instantly notify parents of their children's behavior as Dojo points are added or deducted from the individual students' ClassDojo profile.

As an elementary educator herself, the researcher suggests that teachers develop a quick and effective way to inform their students that they are using the cell phone to manage ClassDojo while the class is walking through the school. It is important to communicate to their students that they are not using the smartphone to call, text, or have fun. In this way, the impression that the teacher is using the smartphone for entertainment purposes can be mitigated in the students' minds. This could also set an expectation among the students that the teacher is looking for good behavior and has quick access to contact their parents, if needed.

Educators who use their smartphones (or other digital devices) in the presence of their students for non-work-related purposes (e.g. communicating with the school office or communicating with parents) or at an inappropriate time (e.g. communicating with parents during instructional time) could risk creating an impression among students that it is acceptable to employ their personal digital practices to carry out certain positive tasks at inappropriate times. Finally, classroom teachers should use their spheres of influence to support parents' digital practices as they partner with their school's administration to provide workshops, seminars, parent events, and parent-teacher conferences which distribute digital media and technology information and resources to parents.

### **For Policymakers**

The following three recommendations for policymakers were framed by each of the four research questions in this study. The ability of policymakers to influence the resources and information that institutions receive can have short-term and long-term societal consequences. These resources include whether a school is able to host parent education opportunities (e.g. computer classes and parent nights) as well as whether resources about digital literacy, digital practices, and digital education are available to parents. Hence, it is recommended that eligible voters elect policymakers who are able to and willing to support and address the digital matters that affect society by developing proper policies and funding in the communities that they lead and serve (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2016).

Second, policymakers should determine how they can prioritize support for families in their efforts to gain digital knowledge and skills. School boards, for example, could prioritize funding to ensure that the schools they govern are able to provide learning programs and resources through which parents, and other community members, can improve their digital



literacy. Occasionally, these programs are in the form of continuing education courses or are part of a school district's adult education division. School boards could support their elementary and secondary students' digital knowledge and skills by creating policies that ensure that the curricula used to teach students incorporate valuable and marketable digital knowledge that helps students to develop the necessary digital skills to enter the workforce. In this way, students will learn how to be productive members of society who have the basic digital knowledge and skills needed to do basic things (e.g. employment, education, manage finances, etc.)

Lastly, government leaders should ensure that monetary funding and other resources are provided to school boards, public libraries, and other public institutions that could and/or do provide digital education services to the public. Moreover, government leaders (e.g. the U.S. Congress) might consider requiring the U.S. Department of Education to require American public schools to incorporate digital literacy training as a part of their foundational curricula in mathematics, science, social studies, English language arts, as well as foreign language study. Government leaders could also ensure that funding is available to federal and state human services agencies who employ social workers, for example, to provide digital literacy resources and/or to assist their clients with enrollment in digital literacy training services.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand African American parents' perceptions, observations, and experiences concerning their digital practices and whether they believe that their digital practices have any impact on their communication practices with their children. This qualitative dissertation has explored the dynamics and nuances of African American parents' digital practices and the impacts of those digital practices on their children. Through this study, we have learned that digital media consumption and technology use can

significantly improve academic and social matters while simultaneously adversely impacting familial bonds (specifically parent-child communication).

Hence, these research findings support the researcher's position that the strategic and proactive implementation of media literacy concepts is needed to mitigate the adverse impacts of digital media consumption and technology on African American families. This study also underscores the idea that digital literacy and digital skills can help the African American family to navigate the digital world in a way that positively impacts it, including as it pertains to the self-concept, familial and other interpersonal communication, and relationships, in addition to matters related to vocation and career and education.

These research findings also speak to the resilience of African American families that are able to manage the influences of the digital world on their families and maintain familial cohesion: a recent phenomenon that seems to impact the entire American society as we live in a world in which digital media and digital technology were not as pervasive in past decades as they are today, and it seems to challenge all Americans and peoples of other nations, in general.

As this study concludes, it is my fervent hope that these research findings will inspire African Americans, and indeed all Americans, to prioritize the healthy cultivation and maintenance of relationships, including parent-child relationships. I hope that individuals will learn to use digital media and technology in a way that supports these relationships, rather than allowing them to be overshadowed. I also hope this study can serve as a catalyst for change to support and ultimately strengthen the African American family and the African American community. May this study also strengthen my native home, the United States of America.

In conclusion, this dissertation calls upon educators, community leaders, and policymakers to create, support, and lead initiatives that can strengthen the African American

community and American society as a whole through the strategic and dedicated provision of digital literacy to support the development and implementation of healthy digital practices in African American families. A media-literate population and a population that uses and consumes digital media and technology in a healthy way have the potential to live lives that are more balanced, literate, healthy, and enriched with positive and nourishing familial (and other interpersonal) relationships. Thus, they could enjoy a healthier and happier society and existence while thriving in the digital age.

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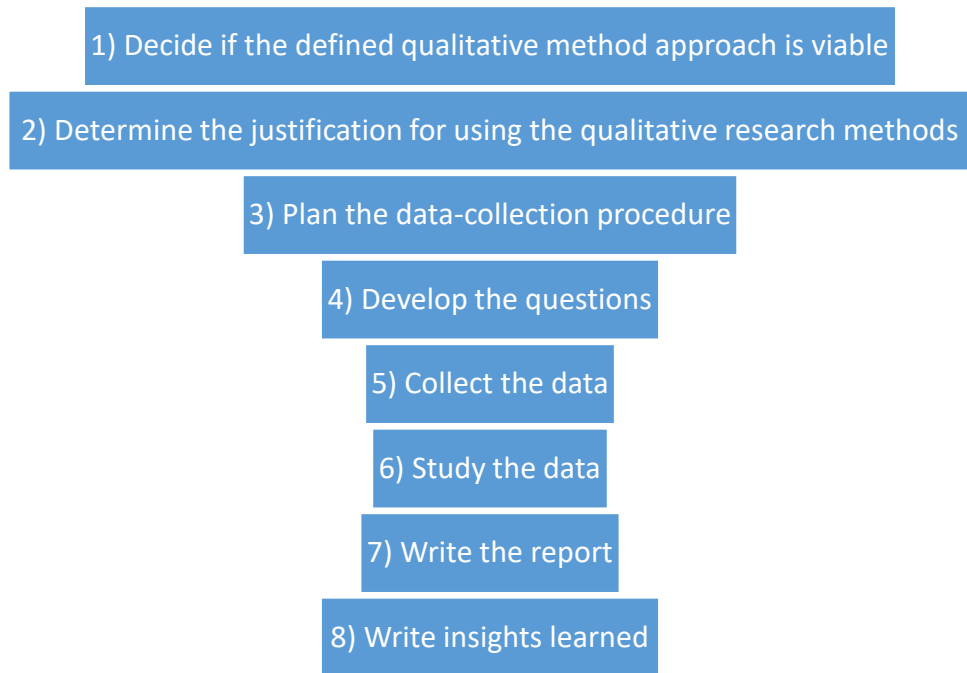
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### **Appendix A: Order of Research**



This order of research was adapted from Creswell (2012).

## Appendix B: Interview Transcript Template

### Interview Transcript #1

Date Interview Conducted: (Day, Month, Year)

Time started: \_ : \_ \_ (CST)

Time ended: \_ : \_ \_ (CST)

Location: Microsoft Teams

**Darris:** (This is the layout of how the transcribed audio will be formatted and stored after the interviews are completed for this study. The transcribed audio will simply be typed into this section following the corrective interview participant's name. "Darris" is the researcher's name, and Participant #1 is the participant's name. If two parents participate in the interview, then a second name "Participant #2" will be included in this section in conjunction with the order in which each person spoke during the interview.)

**Participant #1:**

**Participant #2:**

### Appendix C: Thematic Analysis Chart

<b>Interview Transcripts</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Quotations from interview participants' feedback to interview questions.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Codes will be gleaned from any similarities gleaned from interview quotations and listed in this column.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Themes of each code will be listed here.)</li> </ul>

#### Thematic Analysis Summary

(TEXT GOES HERE)

#### Thematic Analysis Findings

(TEXT GOES HERE)

#### Usefulness to this Study

(TEXT GOES HERE)

## Appendix D: Trustworthiness Measures During Thematic Analysis

(Sourced from Nowell et al., 2017)

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Means of Establishing Trustworthiness
<p><b>Phase 1:</b> Familiarize with the data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged engagement with the data (e.g. reading, and sorting)</li> <li>• Theory triangulation (i.e. researcher will use compare data collected to the three theories being evaluated in this study)</li> <li>• Document researcher's thoughts (e.g. theoretical, procedural, reflective)</li> <li>• Document thoughts about current and/or potential themes and codes that could extracted and organized as the interview transcripts are analyzed.</li> <li>• Store all raw data collected into well-organized archives (using Microsoft Word for transcripts, Excel for quantitative data extracted from the study, Otter.ai for audio recording of the interviews).</li> <li>• All records of field notes, transcripts, reflexive journals will be stored by the researcher and duplicate copies will be stored in multiple online (i.e. OneDrive and Google Drive), and physical spaces (i.e. home office and business office).</li> <li>• All data for this research study collected from the research</li> </ul>



	<p>participants and from the researcher will be stored in a Microsoft Access Database, entitled “AA Parents and Digital Media Study” with links to all the applicable files, audio, and any other information related to this study the researcher and the research participants. (This includes data collected via Microsoft Forms for the Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire.)</p>
<b>Phase 2:</b> Generate the Initial Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflexive journaling</li> <li>• Use of a coding framework</li> <li>• Documentation of all team dissertation committee meetings and peer briefings</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3:</b> Search for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher triangulation</li> <li>• Diagramming to make sense of theme connections.</li> <li>• Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 4:</b> Review themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher triangulation</li> <li>• Themes and subthemes vetted by Dissertation Committee</li> <li>• Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 5:</b> Define and name themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher triangulation</li> <li>• Dissertation Committee consensus on themes</li> <li>• Documentation of dissertation committee meetings regarding themes</li> <li>• Documentation of theme naming</li> </ul>

<p><b>Phase 6:</b> Produce the report</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Member checking</li><li>• Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details</li><li>• Thick descriptions of context</li><li>• Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study</li></ul>
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**Appendix E: Digital Media Research Interview Questionnaire Template**

**Directions:** The researcher will type each interviewee's responses in the spaces indicated below.

If two parents are responding to the interview questions, then the researcher will use "P1" and "P2", followed by each parent's responses to each question.

**Interview Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent Details:****Parent #1:**

**Name:**

**Alias:**

**Marital Status:**

**Gender: Male or Female**

**Occupation:**

**NOTES (if applicable):**

**Parent #2:**

**Name:**

**Alias:**

**Marital Status:**

**Gender: Male or Female**

**Occupation:**

**NOTES (if applicable):**

**Demographics & Technology Device Use (using Quantitative Interview Questions):**

Child's Name: Alias:	Child's Age:	Child's Grade:	Child's Gender:	Notes:
<b>1) Child is enrolled in (circle one):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Traditional Public School</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Charter School</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Private School</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Parochial School</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Homeschool</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other (Explain):</li> </ul>		<b>2) How much time does your child use media / technology for the following reasons?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Education:</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Entertainment:</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Communication:</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other (please specify reason and amount of time):</li> </ul>	<b>3) About how many hours per day does your child / children spend participating in the following activities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Sleeping</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Attending school</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Studying outside of school</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Physical activity (e.g., sports, dance, playing, etc.)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Talking with you (his/her/their parent)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other:</li> </ul>	
<b>4) Please rate your child's skill when using media and/or technology</b>	<b>5) Does one, or more of your children have any special education needs? Choose</b>	<b>6) Do your child / children read at or above their assigned</b>		

<p><b>devices:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Highly skilled, does not need help.</li> <li>○ Moderately skilled, generally does not need help.</li> <li>○ Somewhat skilled, sometimes requires help.</li> <li>○ Not skilled, always requires help</li> </ul>	<p><b>all that apply:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ No, my child / children do / does not have a special education need.</li> <li>○ Yes, one or more of my children have a special education need:</li> <li>○ (List of needs / parent selects all that apply)</li> </ul>	<p><b>grade level?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Yes</li> <li>○ No</li> <li>○ I don't know.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7) Does your child write at or above their assigned grade level?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Yes</li> <li>○ No</li> <li>○ I don't know</li> </ul>	<p><b>8) Is your child performing at or above grade level in mathematics?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Yes</li> <li>○ No</li> <li>○ I don't know.</li> </ul>	<p><b>9) Please check all the reasons for which you use media and/or technology with your child and the amount of time you and your child engaged in this use:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Homework / Study</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Entertainment</li> <li>○ Family Time</li> <li>○ Communication</li> <li>○ Other (please specify reason and amount of time)</li> </ul>
<p><b>10) Please list the media and technology devices that your child has access to at home:</b></p>	<p><b>11) Please list the media and technology device that your child has access to through his / her school, or other education program:</b></p>	<p><b>12) How many days each week does your child / children have access to one or more media and/or technology devices?</b></p>
<p><b>13) How many hours per day does your child spend using media and/or technology devices?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Less than one hour per day</li> <li>○ One to two hours</li> <li>○ Two to three hours</li> </ul>		

- Three to four hours
- Four to five hours
- Five or more hours per day

**Qualitative Interview Questions:**

**RQ1: What perceptions do African American parents have about their personal use/consumption/practices of digital media (in general and in the home environment)?**

1. In general, how do you use digital media technology?
2. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your digital media technology use?
3. In general, what types of digital media content do you consume?
4. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your digital media content consumption?

**Questions about your views and understanding of your and your children's digital media use**

**Secondary Research Questions:**

The following secondary research questions will be explored to produce data that will support the primary question:

**RQ2: What perceptions do African American parents have about their children's use use/consumption/practices of digital media (in general and in the home environment)?**

1. In general, how do / does your child / children use digital media technology?
2. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your child's / children's digital media technology use?

3. In general, what types of digital media content do / does child's / children consume?
4. What are your thoughts, feelings, experiences, observations, or perspectives about your child's / children's digital media content consumption?
5. Please tell me about how you mediate, moderate, govern or control your child's / children's digital media technology use.
6. Please tell me about how you mediate, moderate, govern or control your child's / children's digital media content consumption.

**RQ3: Do African American parents perceive that their digital media practices effect their communication and relationship with their children?**

1. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your digital media practices affect how you communicate with your child / children.
2. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your digital media practices affect your relationship with your child / children.

**RQ4: Do African American parents perceive that their children's digital media practices affect their communication and relationship with them as parents?**

1. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your child's / children's digital technology practices affect how they communicate with you.
2. Please tell me your perceptions, observations, thoughts, and feelings about how your child's / children's digital media practices affect their relationship with you.



## Appendix F: Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire

8/7/23, 10:18 PM

Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire: African American Parents & Digital Media Study



### Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire: African American Parents & Digital Media Study

The following is the Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire that will be used to determine participant eligibility in the African American Parents and Digital Media Dissertation Research Study. The information collected from this form will be used for research purposes only, and will be kept confidential.

For the purposes of this study, an African American is **a member of the Black race that descended from Africa and is a descendent of American slaves**. These people are also, **generally, members of the African American culture, or one of its sub-cultures**.

\* Required

8/7/23, 10:18 PM

Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire: African American Parents &amp; Digital Media Study

## Research Participant Information

Before completing the Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire, please provide you name and contact information.

1

Please enter your complete name. \*

2

Please enter your date of birth. \*

3

What is your phone number? \*

8/7/23, 10:18 PM

Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire: African American Parents & Digital Media Study

4

What is your email address? \*

5

What is your home address (i.e., Address, City, State and Zip Code)? \*

8/7/23, 10:18 PM

Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire: African American Parents &amp; Digital Media Study

## Pre-Qualifying Questions

Please answer these questions to determine your eligibility to participate in the research study.

6

Are you of African American ethnicity?

For the purposes of this study, an African American is a member of the Black race that descended from Africa and is a descendent of American slaves. These people are also, **generally, members of the African American culture, or one of its sub-cultures.**



\*

Yes

No

8/7/23, 10:18 PM

Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire: African American Parents &amp; Digital Media Study

7

Are you a parent of one or more children who are students between fifth and ninth grade? \*

Yes

No

8

Do you currently live in the United States of America and have lived in the United States of America for at least ten years leading up to today? \*

Yes

No

9

Do you and your child / children should use any form of digital media and/or digital technology for any reason? \*

Yes

No

8/7/23, 10:18 PM

Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire: African American Parents &amp; Digital Media Study

10

Are you willing and available to participate in a thirty-to-sixty minute confidential research interview that will be conducted via Microsoft Teams or via telephone during a weekday evening, or during the weekend. \*

 Yes No

---

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.

 Microsoft Forms

## Appendix G: Informed Consent Document

### Consent

**Title of the Project:** African American Parents' Perceptions About How Their Digital Media Practices Affect the Parent-Child Relationship

**Principal Investigator:** Teyuna Trynea Darris, Candidate for Ph.D. in Communication, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must:

1. Be an African American parent of one more African American middle-school children who are enrolled in school (or in an alternative education program) and in grades five through nine.
2. Have lived in the United States of America for at least ten years.
3. Both parent and child / children should use some form of digital media and/or digital technology for any reason.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand African American parents' perspectives about how their digital media uses and practices impact African American parent-child communication. A study of this kind will add to the current reach about African Americans (and Americans, in general) and their digital practices in the family unit, in addition to further enabling researchers to provide data that could be useful to professionals in various industries (including educators, social workers and policy makers) who support the interests and needs of African American families.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Sign-into Microsoft Teams using the link invite sent to you via email and complete an audio- and video-recorded, thirty-to sixty-minute interview that consists of twenty-seven questions.
2. Be willing to respond to follow-up communications from the researcher (e.g., answer a question about one of your interview responses, or other information you may have provided) that could help the researcher to ensure that the information you provided was accurately recorded.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants will not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include adding to the body of research that explores Americans and their digital media and technology use, and practices and their impacts on American society. (Especially studies that focus on African Americans, peoples of African descent and people of

color, in general). Additional benefits include new information that could enable research and industry professionals (like educators, social workers, and policymakers) to collaborate with African American parents and caregivers to create best practices that can help them to support African American families.

#### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Moreover, please be advised that because I am a mandated reporter, I am required to report any information that indicates or suggests that a child or elderly person is subject to abuse, neglect, or if you express an intent to harm yourself, or others.

#### **How will personal information be protected?**

Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted via an online platform (i.e., Microsoft Teams), or via phone. Hence, the research participant has the option to determine the privacy of the setting from which he, or she, will participate in the research study. The researcher will conduct these teleconferences (whether via Microsoft Teams or telephone) in a private office in which she will be the only person present. Moreover, these research interviews will not be broadcast to others.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer (using Microsoft Access) and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams and Otter.ai simultaneously. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

#### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Upon the completion of this study, the research participant will receive a \$5.00 VISA gift card. This monetary compensation will not be prorated for persons who do not complete the interview. Each research participant who completes an interview will receive the \$5.00 VISA gift card via email.

#### **Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?**

The researcher serves as an elementary school teacher at one of the public-school districts in the Greater St. Louis Region. Any persons who are the parents of the researcher's students are automatically disqualified from participating in this study. Moreover, to further limit potential or perceived conflicts, the researcher will ensure that all data is stripped of identifiers as the information is being recorded. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.



**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address and/or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Teyuna Darris. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED], or via email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED] at [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature & Date

## Appendix H: IRB – Approved Recruitment Flyer

# Research Participants Needed

### African American Parents and Digital Media Study

- Are you an African American parent of one, or more middle school children (grades 5 - 9)?
  - Do you and your children currently live in the United States of America?
- Have you and your children lived in the United States of American for at least ten years?
  - Do you and your children use digital media and/or technology for any purpose?

If you answered **yes** to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of the study is to understand African American parents' perspectives about how their digital media uses and practices impact African American parent-child communication. A study of this kind will add to the current reach about African Americans (and Americans, in general) and their digital practices in the family unit, in addition to further enabling researchers to provide data that could be useful to professionals in various industries (including educators, social workers and policy makers) who support the interests and needs of African American families.

Participants will be asked to:

1. Sign-into Microsoft Teams using the link invite sent to you via email and complete an audio- and video-recorded, thirty-to sixty-minute interview that consists of twenty-seven questions.
2. Be willing to respond to follow-up communications from the researcher (e.g., answer a question about one of your interview responses, or other information you may have provided) that could help the researcher to ensure that the information you provided was accurately recorded.

Participants will receive a \$5.00 Visa Gift Card for participating in this study.

If you would like to participate, please DM/email me confirming that you meet the inclusion criteria.

A consent document will be sent to you as a Word/PDF attachment one week before the scheduled interview.

Teyuna Darris, a doctoral candidate in the School of Communication & The Arts at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Please contact Teyuna Darris at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] for more information.**

## Appendix I: IRB – Approved Verbiage for Social Media Posts

### Recruitment Template: Social Media

ATTENTION AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Communication at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to understand African American parents' perspectives about how their digital media uses and practices impact African American parent-child communication. To participate, you must:

1. Be an African American parent of one more African American middle-school children who are enrolled in school (or in an alternative education program) in grades five through nine.
2. Have lived in the United States of America for at least ten years leading up to today.
3. Both parent and child / children must use some form of digital media and/or digital technology for any reason.

Participants will be asked to sign-into Microsoft Teams using the link invite sent to you via email and complete an audio- and video-recorded thirty-to sixty -minute interview that consists of twenty-seven questions. Participants may also be asked to respond to follow-up communications from the researcher (e.g., answer a question about one of your interview responses, or other information you may have provided) that could help the researcher to ensure that the information you provided was accurately recorded.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please DM the researcher (i.e., Teyuna Darris) to confirm your eligibility to participate in this research study. You can also call the researcher (i.e., Teyuna Darris) at [REDACTED] or email her at [REDACTED] for more information about the study, and/or to schedule a research interview.

A consent document will be emailed as a Word/PDF attachment to you a week before the interview. Participants will receive a \$5.00 VISA gift card upon completion of all the questions in the research interview.

#### Facebook

#### \*\*EXAMPLE 2\*\*

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in communication degree at Liberty University. The purpose of the study is to understand African American parents' perspectives about how their digital media uses and practices impact African American parent-child communication. To participate, you must be an African American parent of middle school children and use digital media. Participants will be interviewed (30-60 mins). If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please DM me to confirm your eligibility to participate in this study and so that you can learn more about this study. A consent document will be emailed to you one week before the interview, and you will need to sign and return it at the time of the interview. Participants will be given a \$5 Visa gift card as compensation.



See Twitter examples on the next page:

**Twitter**

**\*\*EXAMPLE 2\*\***

Are you an African American parent of middle school students? Direct message me for information about a research study on African American parents, their middle school children and digital media practices.