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Mollie Borer

*Concordia University, Saint Paul*

Nicholas Alexander

*Concordia University, Saint Paul*

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## Gender and Parenting

A Content Analysis of the American Sitcom

Mollie Borer and Nicholas Alexander

Concordia University, St. Paul MN

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was not only to get a better understanding of what types of gender and parenting norms exist in television sitcoms, but to see if the same gender and parenting norms that were displayed in the 20th century, would be displayed in a sitcom created 30 years later. This was done through a content analysis of the television sitcoms, *All In The Family* and *Modern Family*. The researchers found that traditional gender norms still existed in both, *All In The Family* and *Modern Family*, but that the gender roles and parenting norms were reversed in, *Modern Family*.

## Introduction

The television portrayal of the American family and gender has changed dramatically over time. This is important, because the continuous growth of televisions has elevated the medium to be a metric for what is considered normal in society (Barve, 2015). Despite the change, consistent themes of traditional parenting and gender norms still remain in the American sitcom. These themes are presented differently and by different genders in the two sitcoms studied from two separate eras. The reason the researchers set out to do this content analysis, was not only out of curiosity, but also in hopes that if more people can evaluate typical home lives on televisions, they will feel like they are more a part of the fabric that ties every human being together.

## Literature Review

One of the best ways to learn about a culture is through the media that is consumed in that particular country. The media of a culture not only reflect norms, but public opinion on a wide array of issues over time. The cornerstone of American culture is family, but the perception

of the “American Family” has changed and evolved over the years. As the “American Family” has changed, so has the television depiction of traditional family values. This change is most evident in American sitcoms like, *All in the Family* and *Modern Family*, which have been staples in the fabric of American television. The contrast between, *All in the Family* and *Modern Family*, is huge but the notable differences were found in how gender roles and parenting decisions and styles are communicated.

### **Gender Roles**

Traditional gender stereotypes suggest that men represent the ideal or norm against which women are judged (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). The blatant sexism has been perpetuated in media from the 1950’s all the way to present day (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). Women and men share the same capacity to be loving and nurturing, but it’s women who are expected to take on those characteristics. The reason for this double standard is that men have been viewed as the breadwinner and head of the household for generations, which has given them the freedom to be who they want to be, but in the process has taken that very same freedom away from women (Staricek, 2011). Women who are more economically dependent on their spouse have less bargaining power in the relationship, which can result in them sacrificing their individuality more than their male counterparts (Staricek, 2011).

In addition to performing a more subordinate role in relationships, women performed and dedicated more time on domestic tasks than men (Forste & Fox, 2012). In terms of domestic labor, women are generally responsible for daily tasks like cooking, whereas men are more likely to perform infrequent household maintenance (Forste & Fox, 2012). This discrepancy can be seen further when looking at childcare responsibilities between the two genders. Women are more

likely to do the planning, worrying, and decision making for their children, while men are more apt to spend “childcare” time playing with children (Doucet, 2006).

Attitudes regarding gender can be categorized in three segments: traditional, transitional, and egalitarian (Staricek, 2011). Traditional attitudes are when there’s a strong patriarchal figure, and a subordinate wife. Whereas transitional attitudes act as a bridge between gender roles and behavior that is not defined as either male or female (Nordenmark and Nyman, 2003). The final attitude towards gender is egalitarian, which are attitudes towards social status that are positively related towards equality towards women. Egalitarian attitudes tend to be held by those that are female, young, liberal, of higher social status, and educated (Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003). Television shows have acted as a blueprint for the All-American family, which has cemented a very black and white image when it comes to gender. Most American sitcoms have taken on a very traditional attitude when it comes to presenting what the American family looks like. In the television shows, *Leave It To Beaver*, the father figure was represented as a strong head of household (Staricek, 2011). Whereas the matriarchal figure acted in a subordinate role and lived in the shadow of her husband. The traditional view of gender can even be seen in what would be considered progressive sitcoms like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. In *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, traditional gender roles were still seen, because although Mary was an unmarried, independent woman, she nonetheless fulfilled gendered expectations within the workplace “family” by functioning as a daughter and mother (Staricek, 2011).

George F. Winter, describes gender as being a social construct. Sex is something that’s biologically determined from conception, but gender is a psychosocial construct determined by individual’s’ experience of being male or female that is learned largely from environmental and social cues (Winter, 2015). Children are able to ascribe gender to themselves by the time they are

around two (Yanof, 2000). It's to be noted that a child's concept of gender differs from a grown adults. A child can choose an anatomically correct doll as being 'like them', but are unable to label the doll correctly according to it's genitalia (Yanof, 2000). This can suggest that it's not necessary for a child understand the correlation between gender and genitals before identifying as a boy, girl, or other. As children grow into adults their attitudes about gender become less flexible, which is a result from social and environmental factors. One factor in this is gender-specific clothing, which puts limits on not only how children dress, but the attitudes and roles that are associated with them due to their clothing.

### **Parenting- Equal Decision Making**

TV may be one of the most influential forms of media, Nielsen (2016) estimates, there are 118.4 million television homes in the U.S. for the 2016-17 television season. Television families are often presented in ways that are realistic to their viewer's lives. Family sitcoms have been a staple in homes across America and as society has changed and so has the portrayal of how parents are viewed and depicted in the popular shows (Kutulas, 2005). Watching television is often considered mindless entertainment, but viewers are presented with important images of how fathers and mothers interact with their children and can influence the audience's perceptions of parenting and family dynamics. Since the 1950's, television families have been on the television screen with their endless plot possibilities (Kutulas, 2005). The television families have had experiences that are relatable to majority of the viewers (Kutulas, 2005). In the 1950's, television families were portrayed as the "traditional family" where the mother took care of the home, children, and cooking while the husband was away at work. A big shift in the parental television portrayals came in the 1970s, when women started to become primary characters

(Staricek, 2011). More modern day television depicts more mothers working out of the home, fathers doing more household chores, and less of the traditional family dynamic image (Staricek, 2011).

Shows in the 1950's and 1960's, limited wives and mothers to domestic tasks, while husbands and fathers reclaimed their role as family providers (Douglas, 1996). The 1950's modern husband occasionally helped with drying the dishes, yet always modeled appropriate gender roles for his sons (Kutulas, 2005). A typical dynamic in the traditional television families was, father knew best, mother understood, and the children obeyed (Kutulas, 2005). In the traditional families the parents always maintained authority over the children. In the 1970's, the younger generations began to steer clear of the traditional view of the American family. In the 70's one-third of American college students rejected marriage and having children. The baby boomers did not believe in father's' authority, as mothers had been authority figures when the fathers were absent (Kutulas, 2005). Comedies, which became popular trends, began showing both two parents and one-parent households (Cantor, 1992).

Another shift in the depiction of the television families happened in the 1980's. The family dynamics were changing in society and television shows were created that showcased different representations of family life. The ideal family changed into a married couple, with or without children, while alternative families began to appear on television regularly (Cantor, 1992). The depiction of spousal relationships also shifted into more sexualized relationship's. Shows began being less discreet around the children in the sexual side of the parent relationship. In an analysis of 80's television families, Douglas (1996) suggests that, the rights and responsibility in the family had become less gender specific, and television families portrayed have more modern family dynamics. The 1990s' brought a change to television families and

shows that were geared towards different target audiences. Family dynamics in the shows created to for teenagers as an audience differed greatly from the shows that were targeted towards adults. In the mid 90s', family comedies were likely to have given mom an occupation aside from child-rearing, but the scripts rarely stray far from domestic situations (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman, 1994). To make an impact on the viewers, the televisions families had to change as the roles of women in society were also changing.

From the 1990's to present day "we have seen a change in Television mothers over the years, fathers' roles have shifted less" (Coffin, 2013, p.15). It has become more common for the working class fathers to be goofy, have good intentions, loveable, and a bit immature. The middle-class men tend to be represented in a manner of being wise and hardworking. Compared to earlier generations, modern fathers are more frequently involved in domestic life, in general, childcare, and parenting (Douglas, 1996). More shared-parenting roles have been seen in more recent shows. Still today, "television families are still not representative of what an American Family looks like, yet shows are becoming more progressive and creative, changing with social change and viewers' demands" (Coffin, 2013, p.15).

## **Parenting Styles**

The parenting styles theory was created by Diana Baumrind in 1971. Baumrind developed her typology of the parenting styles based on systematic observations of parents' interactions with their children, mostly preschool-aged. The theory proposed three major styles of parenting, including authoritarian, authoritative and permissive-indulgent parents (Isaacs, 2008). Authoritarian parents have weak conversation orientation but strong conformity orientation. These types of parents emphasize obedience; they believe that as parents they should



be making decisions for their families and little is gained by discussing plans with the children (Deutsch, 2001). Authoritarian parenting styles enforce rigid rules and often withdrawal from showing affection toward their child to force them to conform to set guidelines (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008). Communication skills are neither valued nor practiced in authoritarian families. Family members may lack the ability to resolve differences and disagreements due to the lack of openness within the family structure (Deutsch, 2001). Children raised by authoritarian parents tend to be in more passive relationships, and tend to be followers instead of leaders. The children also tend to be less trusting in relationships, allowing people to walk all over them due to their parent's detachment (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008).

The authoritative parenting style is referred to the "ideal" parenting style and seems to produce children with a higher levels of self-esteem and independence (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008). This style of parenting encourages an open exchange of ideas and have unconstrained discussions involving all family members. Authoritative parents genuinely want to hear what the children have to say but also believe that as parents they should make decisions on behalf of the family (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 2008). Authoritative parents hold their children to high standards but not overwhelmingly. The parents monitor children's behavior, use discipline based on reasoning and reassure children to make smart decisions and to learn from their mistakes (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008). Children of authoritative parents are the most successful in terms of interacting with their peers and in other relationships (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008).

Permissive-indulgent parents are overwhelming open with their children and set few or no limits at all, even if the child's safety is at risk. (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008). The parent's interactions with their children are infrequent, uninvolved, and topically-restricted. Although these parents are very friendly they are considered to be emotionally separated from their

children (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 2008). Permissive-indulgent parents have few demands in regard to maturity or performance, and often enforce no consequences for bad behavior (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008). The children of permissive-indulgent parents are found to have problems controlling their impulses (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008); they tend to be influenced by external social groups, which could be potentially very harmful (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 2008).

### **Research Question & Hypothesis**

The reviewed bodies of literature clearly showed that gender roles and parenting norms existed in our everyday lives, and it should be expected that we see those same portrayals in television. However, the research to date has failed to explore if the same gender norms still exist in televisions, but are just being portrayed reversely. In the literature review there is evidence on the evolution of gender and parenting roles in the media, but there was little to no information on whether or not this “evolution” was simply just flipping the traits from one gender to the next.

**RQ:** How has the portrayal of the traditional American family evolved in media from the 1970's, in the sitcom, *All in the Family*, to modern day in television sitcom *Modern Family*?

**HO:** The researchers believe that the portrayal of traditional gender and parenting norms still exist in present day television, but the roles are just merely flipped in modern day sitcoms to seem progressive

### **Methodology**

In this study, a content analysis was utilized to investigate how the traditional American family evolved in television sitcoms from the 1970's to modern day. The television shows that were viewed during this content analysis were *All in the Family* and *Modern Family*. The pilot episodes of both *All in the Family* and *Modern Family* were analyzed, along with two other episodes in each sitcom. Outside of the pilot, the researchers chose to look at a random episode from season 4, and a "Thanksgiving" episode from each sitcom. This method was best suited for the study, because it allowed the researchers to collect scenarios and analyze changing character dynamics at different points in each show's respected narrative. This method allowed researchers some interpretation when they looked at how gender and parenting roles have been portrayed on American Television, which continues to open the dialog in the conversation about both. The data needed for analyzing the content of the episodes was qualitative in nature, as gender roles and parenting roles appeared throughout each narrative in various ways. Quantitative data would only reveal the number of times gender roles were represented in the television shows, but would not reveal the nuances of those representations in the way a qualitative content analysis would.

*All in the Family* and *Modern Family*, were selected because both television shows have been immensely popular network television shows. The television shows represented a stark difference of American attitudes from the 1970's to present day. *All in the Family's*, pilot episode aired on January 12th 1971, and it was on the air for a total of eight seasons ("*All in the Family*", 2017). The CBS network comedy tells the story of Archie Bunker, a bigoted working class man and his family living in what was then present day New York City. The show was met with conflict at every turn, because of Archie Bunker's worldview clashing with not only his family, but with the changing political and cultural climate of the 1970's. In contrast, *Modern Family's*, pilot episode aired on September 23, 2009 and has aired eight seasons and still airing

the ninth season ("*Modern Family*", 2017). This ABC network comedy features three related, yet very different, families and their triumphs and struggles through everyday life. The show tackles topics of homosexuality, divorce, adoption, and working moms.

For this study, the researchers coded both gender and parenting norms when analyzing , *All in the Family* and *Family Matters*. The researchers created two separate coding sheets for each sitcom. One coding sheet had categories for gender, and the other had categories for parenting. Having the predetermined categories allowed researchers to take note on when content from the categories occurred and when they were absent in the episodes. The parenting coding sheet had five different categories: provider, nurturer, authoritative, passive-indulgent, and authoritarian. In the provider category, the researchers made note of when either parent displayed signs of being the provider for the family in regards to financial being able to supply their family with necessities as well as non essential "wants". This ranged from being the "breadwinner" all the way to buying a new crib for the family. The second category we looked at was the nurturer category, which was when either parent showed emotional support or comfort to one of their children. The last category last three categories were the parenting styles authoritative, permissive-indulgent, and authoritarian. For each of the categories the researchers took note whenever a parent displayed one of the certain parenting styles.

The gender coding sheet consisted of four different coding categories: independence, submissiveness, assertiveness, and household chores. The researchers made note of independence, whenever a husband or wife acted independently of one another. This type of independence could be seen when either gender would make a decision without consulting the other. Submissive was viewed through acts of dependence, compliance, and agreement. Acts of assertiveness were recorded when displays of aggression, resolve, and willpower. The final

category was household chores, which the researchers recorded when every a character completed any household chore i.e cooking, cleaning, etc.

Once the researchers viewed and coded each sitcom once, the main focus quickly became intercoder reliability, which is the extent to which two or more coders agree on the coding of the content within the same coding scheme (Lavrakas, 2008). The researchers used an intercoder reliability formula to determine the accuracy of the data that was gathered. The researchers were able to see that they were within 78% accuracy with one another. After the researches completed the intercoder reliability formula, they then viewed each sitcom a second time. Once the researchers viewed each sitcom a second time, the researchers combined their individual data together in two separate coding sheets. One coding sheet had the data for *All In The Family*, and the other coding sheet had the combined data for *Modern Family*. After the researchers combined the data, they were able to get a holistic view of the gender and parenting roles that each sitcom displayed.

## Results

The television shows, *All in the Family* and *Modern Famil*, had inconsistencies in their representation of equally shared parenting. The researchers focused on three distinct themes related to parenting research: challenging gender expectations and roles, parent's equal power in decision-making and parenting styles. The research suggested that *All in the family* had a more conservative portrayal of gender expectations, sharing of household chores, and in equal decision making. Researchers found that, *Modern Family*, had a more liberal approach in their representation of challenging the gender roles, sharing household chores, and decision making. The study's results suggested that both of the television shows had representation of equal

parenting and decision making, gender roles, and parenting styles while still having inconsistent presentation of those themes in the episodes.

### *All in The Family*

The results suggested that all of the study's gender role categories were displayed throughout all three episodes of, *All in the Family*. Literature on gender roles shows that men have been viewed as the breadwinner and head of the household for generations, which has given them the freedom to be who they want to be, but in the process has taken that very same freedom away from women (Staricek, 2011). This was true to the 1970's hit television show *All in the Family*. The study's categories were portrayed by the expected gender, Edith and Gloria did most of the household chores, while Archie was portrayed as the patriarchal father who worked outside of the home to provide for his family. Michael, was going to college to get a degree to be able to provide for his family on his own. Independence was seen more by, Archie and Michael, while, Edith and Gloria, were more dependent upon the men for things. When communicating verbally and non-verbally throughout the show the women were more submissive while the men were more assertive. In the episode, "Meet The Bunkers", Edith, is very passive when she was trying to keep the peace between, Archie and Michael, which ultimately lead to her voice being canceled out by Archie's yelling.

Parenting literature showed that as the primary movers behind equal parenting, mothers have traditionally been viewed as the default primary care provider for children from the very beginning. (Deutsch, 2001). In sitcom, *All in the Family*, it is observed that the wife and mother, Edith, as the primary nurturing provider. She did not work outside the home, she was a nurturing mother that took care of her home and family. Archie, worked outside of the home and portrayed

the patriarch is the provider of the family. He constantly nagged his son-in-law, Michael, to quit college to instead go out to get a job that would allow him to provide for his own family. The studies researchers found that the two most commonly seen parenting styles displayed in the show were authoritarian parenting and authoritative parenting. Archie, believed that the parents should make decisions for their children, had assertive conversation skills and displayed little to no affection to Gloria, Edith, or Michael in the episodes that were evaluated. Edith, displayed authoritative parenting traits, encouraged Gloria and Michael was open in her communication with the kids and Archie. Archie, often overpowered Edith, in the decisions that were made as well as how he believed things were to be done.

### **Modern Family**

*Modern Family*, was aired during a time period when there was more of a crossover of the expected gender norms. The researchers found that, *Modern Family*, did portray the opposite gender completed tasks or took on roles that were considered for the opposite gender. The father, Phil, took on a more submissive communication style that would typically be displayed by a female character. Phil, wanted to communicate in a submissive way that allowed him to be considered the “cool dad”. Researchers observed that Claire, was more assertive in her communication with her husband and children. Claire, often did most of the disciplining of the children but depended on Phil to carry out the punishment or for his opinion on certain topics. Claire did a lot of the daily household chores such as cleaning, laundry, and cooking. Phil was also displayed doing some of the same household chores, although less frequently.

In *Modern Family*, Phil, worked outside of the home as a relator to provide for his family. In the episodes evaluated, Claire, was a stay at home mother who took on the nurturer

role. The results suggested that, Phil, also took on the more nurturing role that was typically portrayed by women. The researchers found that both, Phil and Claire, displayed both permissive-indulgent and authoritative parenting styles in the evaluated episodes. They have frequent interactions with their children, held the kids to the standard that they were in charge but the kids should have input. There was also permissive behaviors exhibited by Phil when following through with punishments to the children. Phil, wanted to maintain his “cool dad” status which lead him to oftentimes be more permissive than Claire. This could clearly be seen, when, Phil, was trying to relate to his daughter’s new boyfriend, because he opted to attempt to be hi friend, which caused him to look more like equal than a superior in terms of status. When comparing Phil (*Modern Family*) to Edith (*All in The Family*), there was no significant difference in gender roles ( $p = .78$ ). When comparing Claire (*Modern Family*) and Archie (*All in the Family*) there was not a significant difference in typical male expected roles ( $p = .37$ ).

## Discussion

### Gender Roles

The five gender role categories that the researchers evaluated were independence, submissive communication, assertive communication, and household chores. The categories were all present in the results of the observation of the shows. In *All in the Family*, the categories were filled by the “expected” gender. In *Modern Family*, the categories were sometimes filled by the “expected” gender, but there was more crossover displayed in the show by the opposite gender fulfilling roles typical to the other gender. The study observed parenting styles as well as equal decision making among the parents. Dr. Deborah Tannen’s, Genderlect theory was applied to evaluate the results of the gender categories. The results indicated that there was not much



progress in moving away from the traditional parenting styles and how decisions were made by the adults in *All in the Family* and *Modern Family*. The theory of Parenting Styles by, Dr. Diana Baumrind, was applied to the observed categories related to parenting norms and styles, to see which of the parenting styles were most present by the characters in both of the shows.

A concept developed by, Antonio Gramsci, is the idea of hegemony, that's referred to as the moral, philosophical, and political leadership of a social group, which wasn't gained by force but by consent of other social groups through taking control of culture and ideology (Briziarelli & Hoffmann, 2017). The concept provided a way to describe and explore the critical link between "power," culture, and communicative practices (Briziarelli & Hoffmann, 2017). A part of hegemony is, media hegemony, which means there is dominance in certain aspects of life and thoughts by penetrating dominant culture and values in social life. In other words, media hegemony serves as a crucial shaper of culture, values and ideology of society (Altheide, 1984).

The studies researchers to the "gender roles" findings applied the concept of hegemony. In, *All in the Family*, Archie portrayed the traditional gender roles in the show. Included in the traditional gender roles is that the idea that male provides for the family and the wife just follows his roll. Archie believed he should provide for the family and be in control. Archie was not forcing himself into that controlling role but it was common among the culture and women often consented to the males being in control. In the pilot episode of the series he was at church with his wife, Edith. He got upset at the service and wanted to leave before it ended. Instead of saying she wanted to stay for it to finish, she instead agreed to leave the church. Television families have been presented in ways that are realistic to their viewer's lives. These family sitcoms have been a staple in homes across America and as society has changed and so has the portrayal of how parents are viewed and depicted in the popular shows (Kutulas, 2005). Media hegemony

served as a crucial shaper of culture, values and ideology of society (Altheide, 1984). The viewers' of *All in the Family*, observed this idea of males being more dominant than women in the relationship dynamic between, Archie and Edith.

### **Genderlect Theory**

Linguistics scholar, Dr. Deborah Tannen, introduced the cross-cultural approach, genderlect theory. Tannen stated that a difference exist in the ways that genders communicate with each other. She described adult men and women as speaking “different words from different worlds” (Githens, 1991). Tannen (1990) first pointed out the idea that men and women were speaking different dialects in her book “You Just Don’t Understand”, she then extended that concept into the Genderlect theory. The theory stated that there are three communication differences between men and women that are referred to as genderlects. The three main genderlects that men and women have are different purposes of communicating, style of communicating, and language style. The goal of Tannen’s theory was for genders to come to a mutual respect and understanding for each gender’s varied communication styles. In this section Tannen’s genderlect theory was used to gauge any pushing of the gender role expectations and if there was any difference in the display of them in *All in the Family* and *Modern Family*.

Most American television sitcoms have taken on a very traditional attitude when it comes to presenting what the American family has looked like (Staricek, 2011). Traditional attitudes were described as when there was a strong patriarchal figure, and a subordinate wife (Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003). This traditional view of gender was seen in the hit television sitcom of the 1970’s, *All in the Family*. Reviewed literature about gender stereotypes stated that men had typically been seen as the breadwinner and head of the household for generations,

which has given them the freedom to be who they want to be. Women who are more economically dependent on their spouse have less bargaining power in the relationship, which can result in them sacrificing their individuality more than their male counterparts (Staricek, 2011). In *All in the Family*, Archie, is the proud provider of his family, while his wife, Edith, was a stay at home mother who took care of daily household duties, and her family. Archie, often vocalized his opinions that men should be the provider as well as being the families decision maker. Archie's, stubborn mindset did not leave, Edith, much room for independence from his "bigoted" tendencies. In addition to performing a more subordinate role in relationships, women not only dedicated more time, but also performed more domestic tasks than men (Forste & Fox, 2012). In all three of the evaluated episodes of, *All in the Family*, both Edith and Gloria were seen performing all household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and preparing for events. In the pilot episode of the series, Gloria had prepared a brunch meal and celebration for her parent's 22nd wedding anniversary. Michael arrived home from school, Gloria asked him to bring out the garbage for her. Instead of doing the simple household chore he blew off her request and instead asserted that they instead get intimate while her parents were away at church.

One of Tannen's genderlects is the style of language, the style typical of men is the instrumental approach, defined as talking to get things done. The typical female language style is the relational approach, which is considered talking to interact with others (Githens, 2015). The second of three episode evaluated was in the fourth season of the series, the Bunker's hosted a game night at their house for their friends. On the game night, the Bunker family finished up dinner, Gloria and Edith began to prepare for their friends to arrive. Archie did not like the idea of having friends over to play a game that they had to confront each other about whatever topic was on the card they drew. In typical Archie fashion, he yelled at everyone. Gloria pleaded for

him to stay but he left the house anyway to go to the bar instead. Their friends arrived at the house and the games began. As the game night progressed, the more upset Michael got at his family. He was screaming at everyone, pacing around the room, had to be calmed down by Gloria numerous times. He was especially upset with Archie about how he got treated by Archie. Edith was defending Archie, which made Michael more upset. Edith used a relational approach when she spoke with Michael to explain to him where Archie was coming from and why he believed in what he did.

Cooperative overlap was another concept in Tannen's theory is, defined as when a woman interrupts to show agreement, to give support to the speaker (Githens, 1991). In *All in the Family*, it was a regular occurrence for Archie to argue with his son-in-law Michael. When they would argue both Edith and Gloria would plead to them to just stop arguing, but as that would not work they began to insert their opinions. They began to interrupt the arguments to side with their husbands. In the pilot episode of the series, one of the arguments was about religion at the anniversary brunch between Archie and Michael. Michael stated that he did not believe in God, Archie was a Christian who did not agree with the stance Michael took. Gloria stood up, got everyone's attention and vocalized her agreement with Michael opinion. Gloria agreeing with Michael about his stance on religion made Archie more upset.

In Tannen's, genderlect theory it was said males and females' had different styles of communicating, report and rapport talk. The style typical to men is, report talk, which seeks to command attention, convey information, and win arguments (Githens, 1991). Men engage in more competitive, joking and assertive style of speech that often takes over a conversation. The speech style most associated with female communication is rapport talk, which seeks to establish

connections with others (Tannon, 1990). Phil and Claire from *Modern Family*, each displayed both report and rapport styles of talk.

In *Modern Family*, the typical communication styles for each gender were the opposite in Phil and Claire. Claire had a report style of talk, she was more assertive, informative, and often won argument. Tannen (1990) stated that women's purpose of conversation is to create an intimate connection with others. To gain the rapport with others, they would talk about people, relationships, or topical problems and issues, which they are facing (Gray, 1992). In all of the evaluated episodes, Phil, was seen numerous times using rapport talk to try to connect with the kids so that he maintained what he thought was his "cool dad" reputation. In the Thanksgiving episode that was evaluated of *Modern Family*, Phil wanted to take over the role of cooking the turkey for everyone. Phil wanted to make the holiday easier for Claire. Throughout the episode Claire checked in on him asserting that she did not have faith in Phil successfully cooking the Thanksgiving turkey. Phil was trying to show Claire that he had noticed in the past that she had been stressed out about making the meal. Another example evaluated was in the series pilot episode, their daughter Hailey was having a boy over for the first time. Claire asked, Phil, to go to the door in attempts to intimidate him a bit, instead Phil tried to form a connection with the boy. In contrast to rapport talk, Claire, displayed more report talk when she communicated with others. She independently took all three of their children on a roadtrip to their daughter, Alex's, decathlon. At the decathlon Claire bragged to other parent's about Alex and how well she would do because she had previously won the competition. Alex, was eliminated from the competition earlier than expected. Claire was outraged by the elimination and began yelling at the judges about what she thought. Alex, was horrified and upset with her mother due to her behavior. Claire, realized how she acted in front of everyone and had a conversation with, Alex, to explain

to the reason behind her outrageous behavior. Claire, spoke to her daughter afterwards so that, Alex, had the right information about her behavior.

### Theory of Parenting Styles

In the 1960s, psychologist Dr. Diana Baumrind conducted a study on over 100 preschool children using parental interviews and naturalistic observations. The analysis of the studies results identified four important dimensions of parenting; discipline strategies, warmth and nurturance, communication styles, and expectations of maturity and control (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008). Baumrind studied the four dimensions through four different parenting styles, authoritarian, authoritative, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-uninvolved. In 1971, Baumrind created the theory of parenting styles. In this study the researchers chose to observe three out of the four parenting styles. The conductors of the researcher evaluated three parenting styles, Authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive-indulgent. These three styles had the most prevalent occurrence in the three evaluated episodes. In this section we indicate how each of the parenting style were displayed in both *All in the Family* and *Modern Family*; based off of Dr. Diana Baumrind's theory of Parenting Styles. This study also evaluated if there was equally shared parenting decisions portrayed by the parents in each of the television sitcoms. The reviewed literature on equally shared parenting suggests that children respond best when parents support each other's parenting decisions and remain consistent with their parenting style (Allen, 1995).

The results suggested a prominent parenting theme that was found in both of the shows was the traditional matriarchal nurturing role, in *All in the Family*, Edith and Gloria were portrayed in that role. The data of the study showed that, Edith and Gloria, were frequently trying to take care of their husbands. Every time the men were in arguments, the women were

there to take care of them and help calm them back down. A typical dynamic in the traditional television families was, father knew best, mother understood, and the children obeyed (Kutulas, 2005). In the evaluated episodes, Edith, wanted the children to be able to have a say about a matter even if, Archie, did not agree with what they said. The unspoken rule of women going along with her husband's choice interfered with her having more of an authoritative parenting style. In the series pilot episode, Archie and Edith, go to church on the morning of their anniversary. Archie, didn't not want to stay any more after getting upset with the pastor and the message he was giving. Edith, left church with, Archie, because he was unhappy and decided he wanted to leave. Edith, did not feel the same as, Archie, about leaving church early but she did because that was what he wanted to do. In the "Thanksgiving" episode, Archie, was mad at, Michael and Gloria, for the approached they wanted to used when parenting their own children. He stormed out out of the house and left, Gloria's, first Thanksgiving dinner. Edith, again did not want to leave but let with, Archie, because that was what he wanted to do. Gloria, called her dad and convinced him to come back to their house for dinner. Archie, maintained his authoritarian parenting style, and commented that he would take the baby to church when it was in his care. Edith, disagreed with him about this and wanted him to respect the children's opinions on the matter but he did not care about her opinion on the topic.

Baumrind's, authoritarian parenting style enforce rigid rules and often withdrawal from showing affection toward their child, to force them to conform to set guidelines (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008). These kinds of parents put an emphasis on obedience; they believe that as parents they should be in charge of making decisions for their families and that little is gained by discussing plans with the children (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 2008). Archie Bunker portrayed an authoritative parenting style in the "Thanksgiving episode". In the episode, Gloria and Michael,

are moved out of her parent's home and were hosting her parents for Thanksgiving dinner for the first time. It was also revealed to the researcher's that, Gloria, was pregnant with their first child. Michael and Gloria, were much less traditional than, Archie, in most aspects and view of society, especially in how they had planned to raise their child. Gloria and Michael, believed in a more authoritative parenting style that they did not want to push religion on their child, instead wanted the child to be able to grow up and make their own life altering decisions. Archie's, authoritarian parenting style along with his traditional conservative values did not agree with this choice they were making and he made it known, he was so infuriated about the topic that he left their house.

The researchers found that in all three evaluated episodes of *Modern Family*, Phil and Claire, displayed two of Baumrind's, parenting styles, authoritative and permissive-indulgent styles of parenting in each of the evaluated episodes. Authoritative parenting style, has been referred to the "ideal" parenting style. Authoritative parenting style encouraged an open exchange of ideas as well to have any unconstrained discussions involve all family members (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008). In contrast, permissive-indulgent parents are overwhelming open and accepting of their children but are also more inconsistent (Isaacs & Koerner, 2008). Claire displayed authoritative parenting styles, while Phil displayed both authoritative and permissive-indulgent tendencies.

As the primary movers behind equal parenting, mothers have traditionally been viewed as the default primary care provider for children from the very beginning (Deutsch, 2001). The results of this study also showed the traditional parenting theme that the matriarchal figure is the nurturer was found in *Modern Family*, Claire, was a stay at home mother who took care of the home, kids, and her realtor husband Phil. Claire was represented as the matriarchal mother, a character type that S. Douglas (1996) discussed as being present in many television shows, yet



not always represented fairly as a strong woman. Theorist, Deutsch (2001) argued that equally shared parenting looked different for every family. It has been common on television for working-class fathers to be viewed as a buffoon. Commonly, the father was a well-intended man who is loveable but also inept, immature, and awkward (Cantor, 1992). Theorist, Richard Butsch (2011), believed that there was a “buffoon” character portrayed by the husband in almost every sitcom. Phil’s character represented the buffoon character in his relationships with his family. The Researchers of this study, found that a majority of the humor displayed in *Modern Family* stemmed predominantly from how, Phil, was portrayed as foolish and Claire, as having to “deal” with him. The representation of, Claire and Phil’s, parenting does not represent a cohesive relationship, although it did represent the mother’s struggle with shared parenting.

In the pilot episode of, *Modern Family*, Claire, who was making all of the parenting decisions displayed a authoritative parenting style. Phil, was more permissive-indulgent style. He was scripted to be the “cool” parent. The pilot episode opened with Claire, telling their daughter Hailey that her skirt is too short. Claire looked to Phil to support her thought, instead he does not listen to Claire and told Haley that her inappropriate skirt was cute. Later on in the same episode of the series their son Luke shoots their daughter Alex with a BB gun. Claire, made the decision with Luke that he would also have to be hit by a BB by his father. Phil, responded to the punishment in a childish manner. The family all gathered around their calendar to plan out when the punishment would take place. When the time came to carry out the punishment, Phil, could not do it because he wanted to maintain that “cool dad” relationship with, Luke. Phil, was permissive in his approach by wanting to be open with his kids so that they want to hangout with him, instead of disciplining them.

In the first evaluated episode of *Modern Family*, Phil and Claire's, daughter, Hailey, was having a boy over. When the boy arrived at the door, Claire, met him there to try to interrogate him so that he understood the parents were in charge as long as he behaved with, Hailey. Claire, noticed that the door was shut to the room the kids were in and she did not approve so she busted the door open to again make sure they were behaving. She explained to them that she was also once their age and was came into the room out of caution and concern not to be overbearing. In the second evaluated episode, Claire, was at their daughter, Alex's, decathlon and got outraged that she was disqualified. Claire, went on a rampage screaming at everyone, got mad at Alex, for not being as upset as her. Once she realized that her behavior was not appropriate she talked with explained the reason behind the behavior. Claire, was authoritative in that she wanted her children to all understand that the parents are overall in charge but the kids input is desired.

### **Conclusion**

The researchers of the study hypothesized that the depiction of traditional gender roles and parenting norms would still be present in modern day television but would be more progressive. Researcher, Samantha Coffin (2013) stated that still today, "television families are still not representative of what an American Family looks like, yet shows are becoming more progressive and creative, changing with social change and viewers' demands" (Coffin, 15). Genderlect theory and the theory of Parenting Styles were applied to the results of the study. Psychologist, Dr. Deborah Tannen, introduced the genderlect theory that stated there is a difference that exists in the ways that genders communicate with each other. In the 1960s, psychologist, Dr. Diana Baumrind, introduced her theory of Parenting Styles. The theory consisted of four different parenting styles, authoritarian, authoritative, permissive-indulgent,

and permissive-uninvolved. This particular study evaluated the three styles, authoritarian, authoritative, permissive-indulgent. This study concluded that, the television show *All in the Family*, portrayed the traditional gender roles and parenting styles. In, *Modern Family*, the same traditional roles and styles were present but had more of a gender crossover; meaning that the males and females displayed roles typical to the other gender.

### **Future Research Suggestions**

This particular study evaluated two sitcoms that were aired during different time eras, with different societal issues to see if the gender roles expectations were changed from the 1970's to 2017. This study could be expanded by comparing two shows that both aired in each of the two time periods to see if the shows have any variance in the portrayal of gender roles and parenting. The results could then also be compared to the other shows from the other time era to see if any progress has been made in pushing the gender expectations.

Another future research suggestion would be to pick certain episodes of two shows and have participants watch the episodes. Instead of evaluating the content of the study the researcher would observe and interview the participants who watched the content. The results of the study would stem from seeing how the viewers interpreted the content, seeing if the shows had an impact on them, and did they find it relatable to their own real lives, or if it changed their viewpoint on how the media portrays gender roles and parenting.

### **Limitations**

Studying how the traditional American family evolved in television will have limitations like anything else. First, the sample tv shows are both American sitcoms. This sample will only

tell the story of one culture, so the researchers might have missed out on how gender norms are portrayed across other cultures. Secondly, both television shows were sitcoms, which might have portrayed gender norms differently than a drama or a reality show; however, historically sitcoms provide the best cultural commentary out of the genres, which is why the researchers chose both *Modern Family* and *All in the Family*. Finally, both researchers are white college students with a similar upbringing, so their idea of family could have an ethnocentric spin on what a family is. That's not to say the researchers will be pushing any agenda, but it's likely that some bias of cultural norms might be brought out in this study.

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## Appendix

**Figure 1: Gender Roles Coding Sheet**

<i>All in the Family &amp; Modern Family - Gender Coding Sheet</i>				
<b>Characters</b>	<b>Independence</b>	<b>Submissivness</b>	<b>Assertiveness</b>	<b>Household Chores</b>
Phil Dunphy				
Claire Dunphy				

**Figure 2: Parenting Coding Sheet**

<i>All in the Family &amp; Modern Family - Parenting Coding Sheet</i>					
<b>Characters</b>	<b>Patriarch is Provider</b>	<b>Mother is Nurturer</b>	<b>Authoritative</b>	<b>Permissive-Indulgent</b>	<b>Authoritarian</b>
Archie Bunker					
Edith Bunker					
Michael Stivic					
Gloria Stivic					