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Baby Mama – Baby Daddy Drama

An Ethnography of Communication on Black Co-parenting Talk on YouTube

Rosalyn C. Whickum

Bowling Green State University
My daughter’s father and I had an extremely rocky start to our co-parenting relationship. We still, and probably will always, tend to bicker about things sometimes. And yes, on rare occasions (well lately the occasion is rare), we have full blown arguments. Typically, through text messages.

I have excluded my daughter and my co-parent’s name, as well as his text messages. However, here are some of the receipts of messages I’m responsible for sending him.

Text Message A

Lol my environment is questionable 💀. That’s hilarious. But I’m about to vent real quick, kus I have time today.

How do I fail to realize something that I’m responsible for? Let’s get something straight, you’re in life to the extent that you are because I ALLOW YOU TO BE. Because I see the benefits of you being an involved father.

Since Day 1 (which of course you weren’t there for) I’ve been doing everything in my power to make sure that had a relationship with you, even when you were too ignorant to accept it. You are the MOST ungrateful person I have yet to come across when it comes to parenting. I don’t need you to kiss my ass, but stop mistaking me being a responsible parent for someone “coming for you”. If that’s coming for you, then don’t expect it to stop anytime soon. “StOp WoRryIng AbOuT Me”. I’m worried about my daughter. Get your ducks in a row and keep them there.

PLEASE EXCUSE MY LANGUAGE... but

You’re so fucking insecure that you mistake me parenting for “down playing others”. NO ONE FEELS DOWNPLAYED BUT YOU! You always have said that stupid shit. Sometimes I regret begging you to get a DNA test. Because this shit is for the birds.

You want me to be a bitter baby mama so bad, you complain about everything that I fucking do or say to you. People pray that their child’s mother is half of what I am.

Meanwhile Your sorry ass couldn’t even tell me Happy Mother’s Day.

Let me VERY clear; Everything I do, everything I say to you, every action I take, is not because of You, it is because of ! If it wasn’t for her, I could care less if you fell off of the face of the earth RIGHT NOW. But because you are her father, I’m going to tolerate you. She didn’t ask to be here, and she didn’t ask for us to be her parents. But she’s here, and we are, and WE ARE GOING TO WORK TOGETHER to parent. So put your ego aside, and work with me, like I try so damn hard to work with you.

Text Message B
Hey! Hope all is well. Quick question, does the daycare schedule for next week need to change at all?

These text messages were only around a month apart. Does this mean my co-parenting relationship is in shambles? Am I emotionally unstable? Is my co-parent a dead-beat dad? The answer to every single one of these questions is “absolutely not”. Conflict is natural in any relationship. A relationship that requires you to raise a human being, will likely require conflict. This also means that it requires healthy communication. As I reflect on these text messages, I am not ashamed of what I said, nor do I regret the way I felt. In both text messages, I mention my child, and she is the motivation behind pressing the send button. However, in text message A, my frustrations with her father are revealed.

This is noteworthy. Much of co-parenting research focuses on the benefits and disadvantages the relationship between parents, poses for children. But what about the parents? In text message A, I was fed up, I wanted my feelings to be validated. My co-parent wanted the same for himself. Without text message A, the “hope all is well”, in text message B, may have never happened, and may not have been sincere.

I wish for all co-parenting partners to be able to go from text message A to text message B. Although all co-parenting relationships are important, all are not created equal. The way we interact with one another is based on several factors, one being our cultural backgrounds.

As a Black woman, it is so easy for me to gravitate towards the Black single mother narrative. That ease is a result of the overshadowed narrative of Black fathers.
To better understand the co-parenting relationships and strategies that exist for Black parents and gain perspective on the experiences of Black fathers, I performed an ethnography of communication EOC using YouTube videos created by members of the Black speech community.

**Literature Review**

Ethnography is a qualitative method that historically attempts to gain a thorough understanding of native cultures. Critical, classical, and auto-ethnography all have specific definitions, but all describe social and cultural life. All variations of ethnographic study share a common goal of studying and recording human interactions that help to define a culture (Saville-Troike, 2003). Hymes posits that speaking is a system of communication that allows an insider to possess knowledge that those outside of the speech community, neither share nor understand (1962). An ethnographer of communication aims to learn these shared codes, which leads to understanding the knowledge necessary for being competent in a particular speech community (Hymes, 1972) (Saville-Troike, 2003). “EOC assumes that communication simultaneously uses multiple channels (e.g., verbal and nonverbal) and codes to create meaningful interaction.” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p.61). For someone who studies the ethnography of communication, the focus lies on cultural codes within speech communities (Fitch, 1994). Speech communities rely on communication, and the speech codes that exist within it, to facilitate significant matters (Saville-Troike, 2003) (Carbaugh, 2015). EOC situates communicative practices, within the broader social context, helping researchers unveil what it means to be a member of the society (Phillipsen, 2005). Speech codes refer to “historically enacted socially constructed system of terms, meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct” (Bella & Mody, 2002, p.56).
EOC is not to be confused with the simple linguistic study. Hymes ultimately argues that language, informed by communication, offers a context for culture (1964). How and why language use occurs tells us more about a culture than the language itself (Saville-Troike, 2003).

The family structure, as diverse as it ranges, can connect people genetically, socially, and culturally. The shared genes, cultures, and beliefs about social support, families being considered speech communities in and of themselves. A group is regarded as a speech community when they share the use, value, and interpretation of language (Saville-Troike, 2003). This definition is helpful because it does not limit speech communities to geographic regions or a specific language. Speech communities can exist in several different geographic locations and virtually (Boellstorff, 2008). They can exist on both very grand, and microscopic scales, being bound by geographical, social, or political boundaries.

The family structure of primary focus in this ethnography of communication are families in the Black community. The Black community is already a speech community, identifying by race residing in mostly urban geographic locations, communicative practices such as code-switching (Koch et al., 2001), and speaking Black Vernacular English (Smitherman, 1986). As well as the Black community using a specific variety of the English language, Black families are also historically and structurally unique. Single Black mothers lead many households, and the fathers are assumed to be missing or uninvolved (Reynolds, 2009). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, more than 70% of Black children were born out of wed-lock (Bureau of Census 2010).

For most Black mothers and fathers, co-parenting is ideal (McLanahan and Carlson 2002) (Roy and Burton 2007). Co-parenting is when two people make a mutual agreement to be
equally responsible for a child (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). McHale and colleagues define co-parenting as:

“the extent to which mothers and fathers work together in the tasks of childrearing, including supporting one another in their parenting roles, backing up one another in their childrearing decisions and disciplinary practices, and conveying consistent socialization messages to their offspring” (2006, p.1391).

Co-parenting communication is the communicative interaction between co-parents. Through dialogue, co-parents can either support or undermine one another. Adamson & Pasley posit that co-parenting is distinct from other interparental relationships (2006) because it solely focuses on parenting matters (McHale et al., 2002). There are co-parent communication studies on marital families (McHale et al., 2002), post-divorce families, and step-families (Schrodt, 2006). Although co-parent communication should be child-centered, interparental conflict, associated with non-co-parenting matters may arise when family roles change, due to factors such as divorce or remarriage.

The topic of co-parenting is a steadily growing body of research. As it develops, it is vital that the perspectives and experiences of different kinds of families, such as those with non-marital co-parents and Black families, are considered and included (Jones et al., 2019). While adding Black families in the research, non-custodial Black fathers must have a platform to share their experiences (McHale and Phares 2015). The more represented Black fathers are in research, the more likely it is for effective programming and resources to take shape that will be beneficial for them, and the holistic Black family (McHale and Phares 2015).
Social media and other online resources can help to locate the narratives of Black co-parenting experiences from both mothers and fathers. Ethnographic work in online environments is legitimate as those that o physical areas (Sumiala & Tikka, 2013); (Boellstorff, 2008). YouTube offers a vast amount of narrative data on a digital platform explicitly, through vlogging, making it an ideal place to do ethnography online, especially being that community and culture are recreated in online spaces, (Tolson, 2010); (Sumiala & Tikka, 2013); (Kozinets, 2010). Performing an ethnography of communication online, specifically on YouTube, will allow the application of participant observation (Boellstorff, 2008). Lindlof and Taylor suggest that this means “becoming an active and involved” member of a group, and interacting with the speech community in a manner that is “non-threatening” (2019,p3). YouTube is a public video-sharing platform (Arthurs et al., 2018), which will allow me easy, and welcomed access to examine the communicative patterns of Black people who share their co-parenting experiences.

Speech Community

The speech community that is studied in this EOC, is the Black community. This speech community identifies by race, resides mostly in urban geographic locations, and uses communicative practices such as code-switching (Koch et al., 2001) and speaking Black Vernacular English (Smitherman, 1986). The Black community was selected because it is a speech community that I am a member of\(^1\). From the time my child was conceived, and still today, I constantly am searching for solutions and recommendations for being a better parent to

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\(^1\) I am a Black woman who is a mother to a wonderful three year old little girl. Her father is also Black. He and I were not in a romantic relationship when she was conceived, and decided not to attempt one once she was born. We consider ourselves to be co-parenting partners.
her, and a better co-parent for her father. I typically seek this advice on platforms such as YouTube. Studying the Black speech community’s codes and patterns can help me to better understand the best practices for co-parenting communication, and how conflict and tension can be limited or avoided.

Communicative Site

For ethnography, researchers typically spend a lot of time in the field unless they are analyzing a single event. Being that this is an ethnography of communication, using YouTube as the ethnographic site offers unique benefits. YouTube is a well-known American video-sharing platform, that is free for the public. It is distinct because the plethora of videos the platform showcases, represents a wide range of speech communities. Although the wide range may seem to present itself as a challenge to good ethnographic research, there are specific qualities that supported my choice to select YouTube as the ethnographic site. The first feature is the large majority of videos created by amateurs. This was key to my ethnography. Although these individuals may be amateurs at video production, they are able to provide the authenticity necessary for learning about the speech community. The second key quality is the visual and auditory components. Without seeing and hearing the members in the speech community, it would be difficult to identify whether they truly belong to the community or not. On a majority of social sharing platforms, people can identify themselves with pictures, as well as revealing their identity through text. However, it is still uncertain that this is the person’s true identity. In addition to people revealing their identities verbally, having the ability to see videos of the

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2 “Classical ethnographers spend weeks, months, or years living in and among cultures in order to resist colonialism and the reach of imperialism.” (Hepburn, 2016, p.51)
people on the screen, I am able to quickly identify their racial background. The audio component assists in hearing the key in which they speak, and helps me to better analyze message content and form. The combinations of these factors are extremely important because it contributes to a more holistic communicative awareness.

**Method**

Due to time constraints, I could only watch a limited number of videos. The number of videos I selected to watch was 100. The average length of these videos were 15 minutes. The total length of the playlist was 25 hours and 8 minutes. These videos were either produced by or featured members of the speech community. I used common knowledge of the speech community\(^3\) to search for relevant content. I aimed to find videos that discussed co-parenting conflict, mediation, and communication.

I used Google to search for the videos. In the search bar I typed in “youtube.com:[insert term/phrase]” (Figure 1). I searched for the following words: ‘baby mama”, “baby daddy”, “drama”, “co-parenting”, “Black”, “dead beat”, and “bitter”.

I then wrote down the total number of results yielded (Figure 2). After searching the terms I made sure I filtered for videos only, as opposed to movies, or playlists. I sorted the videos by upload date, and watched them from oldest to newest. Millions of results generated when searching these terms. However, I initially chose videos to put on the playlist based on thumbnails and video titles. If the thumbnails had a Black person pictured who appeared to be an

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\(^3\) My common knowledge is a product of my experience being a member of the black speech community. These are terms that I have used in the past, or even use presently when describing interactions I have with my co-parent.
adult, and the title, written in English, fell in alignment with the searched terms, it was added to the playlist titled “Co-parenting research” (Whickum, 2020).

I wanted to add videos to the playlist that the Black community are likely to seek out. Members of the speech community are more likely to seek videos that provide information from people who look like them, or appear to be able to relate to them, hence making the source and information more credible.

I watched all the videos once, as if I were a member of the speech community. Being that these videos were not tutorials, it is unlikely that people would watch them multiple times. I
watched each video and completed the analysis of 9 of the 11 salient components suggested by Hymes (1967). Against the recommendation of Saville-Troike, I did not prepare a list of genres or topics, or other salient features, prior to watching the videos (2003). As I watched the videos, I did take informal notes in addition to briefly covering the components. In an effort to be fully immersed in the content I did not watch the videos in one sitting. I watched two hours of content each day. If I started a video that would go past the two-hour mark, I would finish watching the video. I followed this method until the video playlist was watched completely.

**Analyzed Components**

1. The **genre**, or type of event (e.g. joke, story, lecture, greeting, conversation)

2. The **topic**, or referential focus

3. The **purpose** or function, both of the event in general and in terms of the interaction goals of individual participants

4. The **setting**, including location, time of day, season of year, and physical aspects of the situation (e.g. size of room, arrangement of furniture)

5. The **key**, or emotional tone of the event (e.g. serious, sarcastic, jocular)

6. The **participants**, including their age, sex, ethnicity, social status, or other relevant categories, and their relationship to one another

7. The **message form**, including both vocal and nonvocal channels, and the nature of the code which is used (e.g. which language, and which variety)

8. The **message content**, or surface level denotative references; what is communicated about
9. The act ordering communicative/speech acts, including turn-taking and overlap phenomena

(Figure 1)

**Searched Terms and Results** (Figure 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term/Phrase Searched</th>
<th>Results Yielded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>term not searched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>term not searched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitter</td>
<td>term not searched</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term/Phrase Searched</th>
<th>Results Yielded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>term not searched</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Genre

The co-parenting talk that I observed on YouTube overwhelmingly consisted of two main genres; ranting and advice. Although in my note taking, I originally labeled a wider variety of genres, I recognized that many of those could be considered sub-genres of rant and advice. The less popular genres that were also observed during this EOC included discussion, and what I consider to be sketch genre.

_Rant_ The rant genre can be identified by the spontaneous nature of the video, the highly emotional tone of the participants, and the fast rate of articulation. Many of the videos had a high emotional content and were usually created by someone who regularly vlogged ([Monzzz Zzz], 2019) (Brown, K. [Karamo Brown], 2015) ([MyLife As Taryn], 2019). In these videos...
there was only one participant, sharing their undisputed opinions about their co-parenting experiences.

**Advice** The advice genre focuses on telling viewers “how to” deal with certain issues pertaining to their co-parent. A large majority of these videos were created by amateurs, but there also were videos in this genre created by professionals, such as family law attorneys, or co-parenting counselors (Coleman, [Taquila Coleman],2019) (Grayson, [Merissa V. Grayson, Esq.], 2015) (Herron, [Terri Herron Law], 2019) (Joseph, M. [The Joseph Firm, P.A., 2019].

**Discussion** The discussion genre, unlike advice and rant, always had more than one participant offering their perspective in the YouTube video ([MadameNoire],2015) ([dadasphere], 2019).

Usually the discussion genre was framed by questions or statements about topics related to co-parenting. For example, “do Black women value fathers?” ([MadameNoire],2015)

**Sketch** The sketch genre consisted of brief videos that focused on a plot centered around common issues that co-parenting partners may face ([CoParent Drama], 2019, 2020).

**Topics**

An important note to make is that all observed videos had the same topic: co-parenting. Therefore, this section will focus on sub-topics of these videos. The range of subtopics, pertained
to people or circumstances that can be barriers to successful co-parenting. These sub-topics appeared across all genres. These barriers included step parents ([CoParent Drama],2020a) ([313 meets 215],2017), ex-partners ([Little Lullaby],2017), new partners ([Fallon Favors], 2019b), long distance ([Blended and Black],2018), child support ([Celebrity Life],2020), custody ([ALL FATHERS MATTER!],2016), and absent parents([Cameo and baby],2015).

Setting

The setting of many videos took place inside the homes of the video creator. There were some videos however that captured candid footage of co-parenting conflict ([MRSDROZARIO]. 2020), and were in cars, or public places such as restaurants or airports.

When the setting is in the home of the creator of the video, they are sitting, and are directly in front of the camera ([Smart Suzan], 2017). This was common for videos in the rant and advice genre. If the creator of the video was taping the environment around them, they were usually standing, and the camera was facing away from them[RedWillsDIY ChargedUpVideo], 2018,2020. In some instances the video creator would flip the camera towards and away from them, as they commented on the situation taking place in their setting ([BeautifulxLover], 2015). The participants in the discussion genre videos typically were seated as well. But these participants were usually sitting around a centered object, typically a table ([The House of Commons, 2015) . The sketch genre videos, although fictional, also took place in the homes of the participants ([This Is itv],2018). The setting of the videos taking place in homes, or in real time, can support the transparency that the participants want to communicate.

Purpose & Key
The purpose of the communication that occurred in a video, usually was reflected in the key of the communication. The key of communication describes the tone of the participant speaking. Here are some of the main purposes that were revealed during my observation:

- **To encourage**

Videos made to encourage people who were watching usually told stories or offered tips on how to co-parent. The videos usually shared the belief that anyone can attain a healthy co-parenting relationship. The key in these videos were usually sincere and energetic ([TorahCents], 2011).

- **To educate**

The communication that functioned as education for viewers also gave tips and advice, but in these, the key was usually professional (Gregory, 2011). Communication with a purpose to educate rarely had a high emotional content.

- **To vent**

Videos made to vent, were most common for the rant genre. Communication was intense and emotional ([Valencia’s Life], 2016). The key was typically frustration. Sometimes this frustration was not with the participant’s co-parent, but maybe with the viewing audience (Porter, 2013a).

- **To explain**

Those videos in which the communication functioned to explain something, were usually advice videos, but provided the participants’ theory on why or how things are the way they are. These
“theories” either explained circumstances of the video creator, or that of viewers ([Mocha’s CafeDeParis], 2017). These videos often communicated with a candid or contemplative key.

● To offer perspective

The communication that functioned to offer perspective was exclusive to those from the discussion genre. The key in this communication varied on the perspective of the participants. Some participants communicated in a matter-of-fact key, just attempting to be straightforward, yet respectful ([SoulPancake], 2015). Others communicated in a persuasive key, attempting to get other participants to agree with them, or see their side of things ([HLN], 2012).

● To present

Communication in videos from the sketch genre, exclusively functioned to present. They presented plots that featured situations that are likely to occur in a co-parenting relationship. Unlike other videos, they did not offer solutions, but more looked for viewers to respond with their opinions. These videos communicated in a satirical and many times light-hearted key ([CoParent Drama], 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h).

Participants

Participants in the videos were all from the Black speech community. All but one of the video participants was a parent themselves ([msjigga05], 2011). All others were mothers, fathers, step-mothers, or step-fathers. Those participants who were mothers or fathers varied in the structure and status of relationships they had with their co-parents. Some biological co-parents were married ([The Jay&Kay Show], 2018), or re-married (Ballat, 2018), while a majority were unmarried (Bozeman, 2016), or divorced (Johnson, 2016). All step-parents were
married (Noel, 2019). Participants were mainly communicating from or about their experiences, although there were few who were communicating based on observation of others. Those who participated in discussion videos were primarily men, and men only ([HLN],2012). Those discussion videos that had both men and women, either had a majority of women, or an equal number of men and women. It is also important to note that although there was a lot of advice given, only few videos included participants who were professionals in the areas of co-parenting or family law.

**Message Form & Message Content**

Message form is related to vocal and non-vocal channels used to communicate. Message content refers to the meanings conveyed by the message form. These two components will be analyzed together as Saville-Troike makes clear that, “Message form and message content are closely interrelated, and the two components often cannot be separated in description and analysis” (2003, p 120). For visual aid I will use a similar table to that of Saville-Troike to explain the codes that were used in figure 3 (2003,p.116).

Nearly all videos used a combination of standard and non-standard American English.

**Vocal Channels** When non-standard American English was spoken, it was always Black Vernacular English. Some of the common words used to refer to a co-parent were “co-parent”, “baby daddy”, “baby mama”, “child’s mother”, “child’s father”, and “ex”.

- “Hey YouTube. So I’m coming at you guys with a video. This video is going to talk about how to get over your ex, your baby daddy, your situationship, any dead relationship that’s been holding you back.” ([MissExclusive4],2018, 0:00-0:14)
Words that were used to refer to the audience as a group included, “guys”, “ladies”, “men”,
“women” and “y’all” or “we”.

“For any of y’all that are doing co-parenting, y’all know how it is.” ([TellEm TBo, 2020, 2:33-2:36]

When the participant was referring to the audience as a single person words such as “girl”, “dog”,
“sis”, and “bruh”.

“.. he has the audacity, to sit here and say for a couple extra hours. Youuu need a couple extra hours!
(laughing). Lord, lord help me. Girl, girl, I just bypassed all that, because I wasn’t about to go
into all that. He just don’t get it girl.” (Moran, 2018, 12:18-12:38)

These words form a connection between the participant and their audience. The terms
that were used for individual groups were used by those who were both professionals and non-
professionals.

Nonverbal codes communicated through vocal channels varied. Sighs, grunts, lip
smacking, teeth sucking were all used to communicate an annoyance, or displeasure.

Clapping, snapping, one-syllable rhythm, and smacking one’s fist into an open hand while
nodding the head up and down, all were used when participants were being aggressive, or trying
to place emphasis on the serious nature of their message.

**Nonvocal Channels** Verbal codes through nonvocal channels included text, as well as song
instrumentals. Periodically, text would be flashed across the screen, to offer a disclaimer, or a
special note for the audience. Text, also should be considered when looking at the titles of the
videos. In one instance, a participant made a video to vent, and before she began to speak, she
played the instrumental for “Knuck if You Buck” by Crime Mob ([MRSDROZARIO], 2020,
2:30-2:58). This song is well known in the Black community as a fighting song, and is associated with violence. The participant in this video wanted to communicate her frustration with her step-children’s biological mother.

Nonverbal codes though nonvocal channels consisted of silence, camera zooms, and eye motions. In nearly all videos where silence was used, it communicated that a very serious or heavy topic or story was about to be told or talked about. Camera’s usually zoomed inward during a video to capture the audience’s attention, to either focus on details of the physical environment, or details of the participant’s message. Side-eyes were used when participants disagreed with someone else’s actions ([Shantae Latrece], 2017, 0:16-0:18), while eye-rolls were used to communicate annoyance.

Figure 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOCAL</th>
<th>NONVOCAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VERBAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>TEXT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Standard English</td>
<td>- Text displayed across the screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Nonstandard English</td>
<td>- “Disclaimer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Black Vernacular English</td>
<td>- “(Name, Position/title)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Several regions throughout the U.S.</td>
<td>- Titles of videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>”sis“</td>
<td>- “Baby daddy“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>”bru“</td>
<td>- “Baby mama“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>”Y’all“</td>
<td>- “Co-parent“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>”we“</td>
<td>- Song instrumentals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sighs</td>
<td>- “Knuck if you Buck“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The last component that was analyzed was the act sequence. Even with 100 videos, the act sequences between the rant and advice genre videos, remained fairly constant. Videos would begin with a greeting where the participant(s) would introduce themselves. Following the introduction of the participant, the topic that would be discussed in the video was introduced. The participant would then give some background information on why that topic would be discussed. The story would then be told, argument presented, or information disseminated. Lastly, the participant would present the key takeaway and/or present their audience with a call to action.

A. Greeting
B. Introduction of Topic
C. Purpose of talking about the topic
D. Story, Argument or Information
E. Key take away or call to action
For videos from the skit genre. The sequence changed in that it gave no greeting. Rather it began with an introduction of the topic or the scene. Skit genre, also did not present any call to action. Instead it ended with a screen with text, asking viewers for their opinions.

A. Introduction to the topic or scene  
B. Skit or sketch  
C. Asks viewers for their thoughts through text on screen

The act sequence for videos from the discussion genre included a repetition component. This sequence varies on the number of participants taking part in the discussion.

A. Introduction of question  
B. Participants take turns to discuss (turn taking varies based on number of participants)  
C. Repeat steps A&B until there are no more questions  
D. Offers key takeaways  
E. Farewell greeting

**Recommendations**

**A New Definition of Co-parenting**

Being a co-parent doesn’t mean not being in a relationship with a child’s parent. It also does not necessarily mean sharing an equal responsibility for the child. As I watched the different YouTube videos, I simultaneously took information and applied it to my own co-parenting relationship. What I surmised is that we need a new definition for understanding co-parenting.
Co-parenting seems to in fact be a relationship that consists of contributing a meaningful and balanced amount of love, discipline, finances, and whatever else co-parents agree to be significant factors in producing a well-rounded & productive human being.

Co-parenting is typically discussed as a relationship that occurs after the decline or ending of a romantic relationship. I recommend co-parenting from conception. I believe this will result in the most productive, civil, and even loving familial relationship. In addition to productivity, and civility, the transition from a romantic relationship to solely co-parenting relationship will be a much smoother process.

It is important that co-parents attempt to identify with one of the communication roles.

**Your Co-parent As A Partner**

The manner in which people view their co-parenting partner greatly influences the way they communicate with them. I recognize that the communication in my own co-parenting relationship made significant improvements once I ceased to view my co-parent as my ex-boyfriend. My observations of the YouTube videos support this recommendation. Many mothers and fathers that were giving advice on how to limit conflict or confrontation called viewers to refer to their co-parent as something that reflects the true nature of their relationship such as “co-parent” or “mother/father of my child”. I would take this recommendation further by suggesting that co-parenting partners select a name that references the connection between them. Neglecting to refer to a co-parent as “my child’s mother/father” either causes them to be viewed as, or reflects a view that they are only connected to the child. Just as the way disconnection can be reflected in the name of reference, disconnection can also be displayed in the communicative
interactions, which could ultimately manifest itself as relational disconnect, resulting in increased conflict. Hence, viewing and referring to a co-parent as a “co-parent” or a “parent-partner”, will increase civility during conflict and will set the foundation for positive outcomes. This recommendation extends to that of step-parents, because they become a co-parent as well. Step-parents, when viewed as additional co-parenting partners, are capable of optimizing the relationship between the biological co-parents.

**Child-centered Co-parenting**

The final recommendation is that co-parenting should be focused on the child. Even in marginal matters, the child should remain the priority. Disputes such as child support, visitation, and residential custody are never easy matters to solve, but co-parents can come to a solution more quickly. This was a high regarded sentiment among the YouTube videos rather they were asking/disseminating advice, having a discussion, or simply vlogging.

The videos that displayed communication between co-parents in a satirical key, revealed the petty and unnecessary quarrels co-parenting partners go through when they focus on being right or in control rather than on what would be best decisions for their child. I was able to identify with a lot of the petty arguments.

**Co-parenting Communication Roles**

In addition to the recommendations, from my analysis of the communicative events of the YouTube videos, I was able to formulate four co-parent communication roles. There is the aggressor, the cooperator, the supervisor, and the shifter. The reason that I have considered these as roles, and not as categories, is because these roles can change depending upon the content, the purpose, or the other participants involved in the communicative interaction.
Roles are described by the tone and type of communication the co-parent uses with their co-parenting partner, the manner in which the co-parent views their co-parenting partner, and the co-parent’s goal of the communicative interaction.

It is important to identify the roles that one assumes when communicating with their co-parent. It will assist in preparing to communicate, as well as self-reflection once the communicative interaction has ended. Knowing the roles in general can be helpful, because parents can then choose which role is most conducive for optimal civility and productivity. Furthermore, it assists in determining the resources co-parent partners may consider seeking, such as counseling, or mediation.

**Aggressor**

When a co-parent assumes the role of the aggressor, that co-parent uses communication that is very antagonistic towards the other. This communication role is likely to escalate minor conflicts into major conflicts. In an aggressor role, a co-parent will oftentimes view their co-parent(s), as their opponent rather than a teammate or partner. The aggressor wants to be in control, but the co-parent in this role oftentimes communicates irrationally to and about their co-parent based on an emotional response.

**Cooperator**

When a co-parent undertakes the role of the cooperator, this co-parent uses communication that is inclusive. This co-parenting communication role functions to encourage collaboration. A cooperator views their co-parent(s) as their partner, and wants to work with
them. The cooperator strives to find solutions that work for the entire family, but places the child’s needs first. A co-parent assuming the cooperator role will set their emotions and personal conflict to the side or even behind them, for the

**Supervisor**

When a co-parent assumes the role of the supervisor, they use communication that is inclusive, yet direct. This communication role is likely to adopt a business-professional approach to co-parenting to limit conflict. The co-parent views their co-parenting partner as a co-worker, or possibly even a subordinate. In the supervisor role the co-parent does not seek to have control, but for the communicative interactions with the co-parent to remain civil. A co-parent in the supervisor role will typically communicate and make decisions based on rationale and excludes emotion while navigating co-parenting confrontation.

**Shifter**

The shifter is one of the most unique of the co-parenting communication roles. This is because the shifter role is a range of the other roles in one communicative interaction. When a co-parent assumes the role of the shifter the communication can begin with the goal of collaboration, but if during the interaction the co-parent begins to feel they are being disrespected, or their rights are being violated, they may shift to the role of the supervisor or aggressor. Although no co-parenting communication role is constant and unchanging, the shifter specifically changes their goal and tone within the communicative interaction. The shifter role, although unique, is not uncommon. This role can especially be observed in new co-parenting pairs, or when a new circumstance arises in the co-parenting relationship, such as the introduction of a step-parent.

**Discussion**
Advocating for Black Fathers & Calling for Black Mother Maturity.

Many videos by both Black women and Black men seem to advocate for Black fathers’ involvement in the raising of their children. Furthermore, when a Black father is uninvolved many YouTube videos are calling for Black mothers to be the more mature parent in the relationship. They are asked to let go of the past and to move on. They are also in a way held accountable for the father not being involved. When Black mothers or Black fathers discuss women in the YouTube videos being angry with the father of their children, and adjusting the co-parenting relationship based on that anger, they are then categorized as “bitter”.

In one video, a man describes the difference between “bitter baby mama”, and the mother of your child.”

“A baby mama come run down time to put yo fuckin’ ass on child support for no reason. You understand me? You may be doing fa ya kids but she on’t like that shit. That you done moved on. She thinkin’ you supposed to be der wid her. She mad! That’s the baby mama bitch. But the mother yo child accept the fact that y’all not workin’ out no mo. So she got to move on and you go to move on.” (Brown, 2016a,0:32 -0:57)

I recognized a difference in tone when the participant is talking to angry mothers as opposed to uninvolved fathers. Youtubers appear to have more patience in their tone with fathers. The message is functioning to be persuasive. Conversely, when YouTubers are speaking to specifically women, who they consider to be “bitter baby mamas”, the tone is one of reprimand, and functions to chastise them for poor behavior. Yet, when Black mothers make videos to describe negative feelings about their co-parenting relationships, they do so in addition
to apologies and clarifications. They do not want to sound like they are complaining, or being difficult, out of fear of criticism.

“like as a mom having to watch that is like devastating. You know, like it breaks my heart to have to see my child be treated like that, and it puts you in a really hard place. Y’all I’m finna be like really honest like it puts you in a really hard place (on the verge of tears) because it's like when you say something, like you say something, it’s ‘awww you're bitter, you still want him’. Like no. I’m just done with my child being treated like crap. Like what kind of human disappears for months with no explanation and just pops back up. Where do they do that at?!” ([MyLife As Taryn], 2019, 2:16-3:05)

Fathers, when expressing their displeasure with their co-parent are confident while filming. I believe that participants have more patience for fathers than mothers because a father's perspective is often overshadowed during co-parenting conflict. Mothers are held accountable because they are often the gatekeepers of children, having the ability to limit the father’s involvement in the child’s life. This patience that is shown for fathers, is rare in the legal system, making YouTube a safe place for fathers to seek parenting advice, or to share or vent about the struggles they face as fathers.

**Experienced Professionals**

This persuasion and chastisement element change when the YouTuber is a professional. The legal family attorneys, and co-parenting counselors gave great sound advice. Although it may have initially appeared to be advice based on knowledge and professional experience, it was revealed that these individuals had personal experiences with co-parenting as well. When
families seek out mediation or legal assistance, this is a component they should consider when selecting professional help. Based on experience the professional would have an immediate connection to the family they are assisting.

So Much Advice!

Although I did not search specifically for advice when looking for videos, a majority of the results yielded tips and advice for successful co-parenting. I found this interesting, because it reveals that this speech community sees the need for an improvement in co-parenting relationships. Furthermore, it uncovers that the Black community views co-parenting as a significant factor in child-rearing.

Limitations

One of the key limitations to this ethnography of communication is the number of videos used to yield results. This is not as exhaustive as it should be, nor is it as exhaustive as I would like it to be. Another limitation is the proof of authenticity. When these participants are on camera are they being their truest selves? Or is this them playing a role? A third limitation to be noted is the two salient components excluded from my analysis: Norms of interpretation and rules of interaction. I excluded these, because I knew the variation would be too large for me to cover in one project. These components deserve attention as they add to an understanding of co-parenting communication.

Conclusion

“The system”, as many participants used to refer to the family court process, favors mothers and is a revolving door for generations of “broken” families. There ought to be an
adjustment in the way co-parenting is discussed, so that parents take the necessary steps to begin co-parenting from conception. Research about co-parenting communication can of course help those who work with families, but it should more importantly directly benefit the families themselves. Ideally, a formulation of self-help strategies, for co-parenting partners, as well as for people they choose as mediators, may serve as more useful than waiting for implementation of legal action. Black co-parents deserve attention in research. Not as a means to reveal phenomena, but as a means to finding practical solutions for improving the communication, and furthermore the lives of Black families.

Appendix A

List of YouTube Video Titles & Links

1. AVOID BABY DADDY DRAMA ... 10 TIPS

2. BABY DADDY DRAMA

3. HOW TO IGNORE YOUR BABY DADDY | RICHSMOMMAS.COM

4. TYRESE: THERE’S A BLACK FATHERHOOD CRISIS

5. BABY MAMA DRAMA!! LET THAT MAN BE A FATHER TO HIS KIDS!!

6. HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY CO PARENT YOUR KIDS W/ TOMMY SOTOMAYOR! PT 1

7. HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY CO PARENT YOUR KIDS W/ TOMMY SOTOMAYOR! PT 3

8. HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY CO PARENT YOUR KIDS W/ TOMMY SOTOMAYOR! PT 4

9. HOW TO DEAL WITH THE BABY MAMA/BABY DADDY DRAMA PART 1, A MUST SEE!

10. WORSE THAN A CRAZY BABY MOMMA

11. HONESTEA EP.1 | BABY(DADDY) DRAMAS ??
12. **DO BLACK WOMEN VALUE FATHERS? | ASK A BLACK MAN | MADAMENOIRE**

13. **CO-PARENTING - WHEN YOU HATE YOUR CHILD'S FATHER (OR MOTHER)**

14. **BABY DADDY, BABY MAMA!? DRAMA.. - AUGUST 7, 2015**

15. **MESSAGE TO FATHERS | STOP DISRESPECTING YOUR CHILDS MOTHER**

16. **BABY DADDY, BABY MAMA VS CHILD SUPPORT**

17. **STOP COMPLAINING YOU PICKED YOUR BABY DADDY! !**

18. **PARENTS TELL STEPPARENTS WHAT THEY REALLY THINK**

19. **CO-PARENTING - WHEN THE STEPMOM (OR STEPDAD) STARTS RUNNING THE SHOW.**

20. **BABYMAMA VS. THE MOTHER OF YOUR CHILD**

21. **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS! BITTER BABY MAMA TRIED TO TAKE MY DAUGHTER AWAY**

22. **PSA DONT BE A BITTER BABY MOM**

23. **LONG DISTANCE CO-PARENTING**

24. **STORYTIME: DIVORCE, CO-PARENTING AND MOVING FORWARD**

25. **NO CONTACT: CAN YOU USE THE NO CONTACT METHOD AND CO-PARENT**

26. **NINO BROWN - DON'T HATE YOUR CHILD BECAUSE IT RESEMBLES THE FATHER**

27. **BITTER BABY MAMA'S**

28. **HOW I MAKE CO-PARENTING WORK WITH MY EX**

29. **BITTER BABY MAMA THEORY**

30. **“STEP-PARENTING”**

31. **I TRIED TO CO-PARENT | #VEDA DAY 18 | LIFE WITH VICKI**

32. **Stop the child support system , start co-parenting with your baby daddy**

33. **6 TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL CO-PARENTING**

34. **Just Ignore Baby Mama Drama**
35. **HOW I FORGAVE MY ABSENT CO-PARENT**

36. **HOW TO CO-PARENT DURING THE HOLIDAYS | ATLANTA FAMILY LAW ATTORNEY | MELANIECE BARDLEY MCKNIGHT**

37. **EFFECTIVE WAYS ON HOW TO CO-PARENT**

38. **CO-PARENTING WITH BITTER BABY MAMA**

39. **YOU CAN'T CO-PARENT WITH AN IDIOT**

40. **5 STEPS TO DEALING WITH A BITTER BABY DADDY**

41. **HOW TO COPARENT PEACEFULLY WHEN YOU HATE HIM/HER**

42. **HOW TO CO-PARENT WITH YOUR EX**

43. **Single Mother Manipulation Tactics**

44. **HOW TO CO-PARENT WITH A BAD EX AND PUT HIM IN HIS PLACE / SINGLE MUMS**

45. **HOW TO GET OVER YOUR BABY DADDY**

46. **CO-PARENTING VS. PARALLEL PARENTING**

47. **BITTER BABY MAMA STILL**

48. **WHAT IS A DEADBEAT FATHER? PARENTING ADVICE.**

49. **CO-PARENT: TALK TO YOUR KIDS MORE**

50. **HOW TO EASE LONG DISTANCE COPARENTING CONFLICT**

51. **LETS CHAT: SPILLING THE TEA! DEALING WITH AN IGNORANT BABY DADDY VLOG!**

52. **HOW TO SET UP A LONG DISTANCE PARENTING PLAN!**

53. **CO-PARENTS | EPISODE 1 - PARENTAL GUIDANCE | SHYTBEHAPPENING PRESENTS |**

54. **WHY I'M NO LONGER CO-PARENTING**

55. **TIPS FOR CO-PARENTING**

56. **WHY ARE SO MANY BLACK MEN DEADBEAT DADS? DEADBEAT DADS ON BLAST...**
57. **How to Talk to your Child About their Absent Father Without It Opening up Old Wounds - Part 1**

58. **Healthy Coparenting Tips ❤️**

59. **How Talking Parents Can Improve Your Co-Parent Relationship**

60. **How to Co Parent with Your Bitter Ex**

61. **How to Coparent with a Narcissist by RC Blakes**

62. **The Best Ways on How to Deal with a Deadbeat Dad Trust Me**

63. **Can You Co-Parent Successfully?**

64. **How to Co-Parent in the Summer | Florida Family Law Freebie**

65. **How to Handle Issues & Co-Parent | Florida Family Law Freebie**

66. **5 Tips to Get Over Your Baby Daddy!**

67. **Do You Find It Hard to Co-Parent With Your Ex? Sanity Saving Tips for Co-Parenting!**

68. **How to Co-Parent as a Step Parent**

69. **How to Co-Parent with a Toxic Ex**

70. **Relationship Advice: How to Co-Parent with an Emotionally Bitter Ex**

71. **Do We Co-Parent? Family? | Q&A Time**

72. **Storytime Series, My Deadbeat Baby Dad Pt.1**

73. **5 Tips to Deal with Your Baby Daddy's New Girlfriend!**

74. **Deadbeat Baby Dad Pt.2! (With Pictures)**

75. **How to Co-Parent After Separating.**

76. **Dead Beat Dad | Single Mom Rant**

77. **Give Me Back My Stuff!!!**

78. **Step Who Now?!?**
CUSTODY EXCHANGE...BUT DID YOU HAVE TO BRING THEM!?!

MEETING THE STEP-PARENT WHEN THEY DON'T WANT TO BE MET!

SETTING AND MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES W/ CO-PARENT | SINGLE PARENTING 2019

STEP-MOM SPANKED ME!

CO PARENTING WITH A TOXIC EX | THE REAL

WHAT'S WORSE SEPARATION WITH MARRIAGE OR WITH KIDS???

I NEED MORE MONEY!!

SHE IS NOT YOUR MOM!!! ***EXPLICIT***

[MOM TALKS] HOW TO CO PARENT IN TWO DIFFERENT STATES

I'M NOT ALLOWED TO EAT THAT!! *EXPLICIT*

YOU ARE NOT THE FATHER!

BABY MAMA, BABY DADDY DRAMA

HOW TO CO-PARENT WHEN IT'S NOT EASY

WELCOME TO COPARENT DRAMA! PLEASE: WATCH, COMMENT, LIKE, AND SUBSCRIBE!

HOW TO CO-PARENT WHEN YOU RESENT THE FATHER

STORYTIME | CUSTODY UPDATE PART 1 | STAY AT HOME MOM OF 4

EP.22 WHAT'S YOUR DEFINITION OF A "DEADBATE FATHER"? | THE MELANATED CONVO PODCAST

STEPHEN JACKSON KEEPS IT REAL ON HIS BITTER BABY MOMMAS "I'VE PAID MILLIONS IN CHILD SUPPORT!"

CO PARENTING

TOXIC FRIENDS/ FAMILY!

BITTER BABY MAMA PLAYING GAMES DURING A PANDEMIC, I THINK SHE GOT IT WANTS ME DEAD. SUSCRIBE SHARE

CONFESSIONS OF A COPARENT EPISODE 2: INFIDELITY (THE DEMISE OF THE RELATIONSHIP)
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