In-law conflicts on television: A content analysis of "Everybody Loves Raymond"

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IN-LAW CONFLICT ON TELEVISION:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
EVERYBODY LOVES
RAYMOND

by

Dawn Elise Nicol
Bachelor of Science
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

In-Law Conflict on Television: A Content Analysis of *Everybody Loves Raymond*

by

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Conflict is a relevant theme within in-law relationships and amongst family members; however, only a small amount of research deals with conflict between in-laws. In addition, television reflects social norms families can use television to understand the way they interact within interpersonal relationships. Viewing behaviors on television enable people to increase their understanding of others and how they might behave in similar situations. Research should be conducted to expand our knowledge about in-law relationships and conflict on television.

The purpose of this study was to examine in-law relationships and conflict on television. This study performed a quantitative content analysis of *Everybody Loves Raymond* (ELR) to understand trends about in-law conflict on television. The results indicated that the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law have more conflict than the daughter-in-law and father-in-law, the parents-in-law initiate conflict the most, and the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law used integrative communication whereas the father-in-law used distributive communication.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Conflict within in-law relationships has always been a relevant issue among family members. "The term family, as used in census reporting, refers to a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption and who reside together in a household" (Eshleman, 2003, p. 109). The term in-law refers to people who are related by marriage and not through blood relation. However, little is known about in-law relationships and their structure because there is a scarcity of studies examining in-law relationships in contemporary society (Goetting, 1990; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). Due to there being a small amount of research conducted on in-law relations, little is known about the stress that is created by unresolved conflict between in-laws and the social roles in-laws fulfill within the family. In addition, media, particularly television, may provide further insight into in-law relationships and conflict because of their ability to impact audiences. This is due to the prevalence of television in audience’s homes and the social function of television.

Family members can learn about their social roles through media. Television is one of the most influential instruments in people’s lives and is one of the most popular means of entertainment. Currently, there are over 110 million television households in the United States or 98% of households with television (Nielsen Media Research-NTI, 2006). The number of television sets also continues to increase. Families use television
for an extensive portion of their day for several purposes, one of which is learning social roles.

Television serves various social roles for people such as for information, entertainment, and to understand their own social roles (Albada, 2000; Lull, 1980; Pistole & Marson, 2005). These roles can be classified as structural or relational and may also be used as background noise or to establish routines and activities of an individual’s day. Television reflects social norms, values, and meanings, including that of family members. Family members use television to interpret their own lives and can use television for social learning, which allows individuals to further understand their role within society (Albada, 2000; Lull, 1980; Pistole & Marson, 2005). Family members can use television for role enactment, role reinforcement, and role portrayal. These social uses of television by family members impact the way in which they interact within their interpersonal relationships. For instance, Comstock and Strzyzewski (1990) found that people use television as a source to view interpersonal behaviors and reactions. Being able to view interpersonal behaviors on television enables people to increase their understanding of others’ perceptions and how they might behave in similar situations that occur in real life.

Specifically, television shows can teach and reinforce the roles and interactions that family members assume. “Researchers argue that by shaping our family-related cultural norms—and thereby our individual ideas, attitudes, and values about what kind of family life is desirable—TV families influence ‘real-life’ families” (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995, p. 366). Depictions of families on television have an impact on our society and the ways in which we interact with each other because of television’s capabilities to affect society’s views. The meaning of family has also changed within society over the decades and this
has been reflected on television. People turn to television programs for explanation of their own family difficulties and conflict (Pistole & Marson, 2005). Television can thus provide individuals with a further understanding of what conflict is and how it can be managed.

Comstock and Strzyzewski (1990) suggest that conflict occurs because of incompatible goals and violations of relational expectations. The way in which families deal with conflict can affect family members' self-esteem and their relationships with one another. Family members can learn about their social roles through television; however, there are no clearly depicted roles for in-laws within the family. This has caused role appropriate behaviors to be undefined for in-law relationships, which may also fuel conflict (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Fischer, 1983b; Goetting, 1990; Johnson, 1989b; Serovich & Price, 1994). In addition, conflict may occur within in-law relationships because of varying gender roles.

Previous studies have shown that gender differences exist in relationships with in-laws. In general, women tend to have more conflict than men and the conflict tends to last longer between women than men (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Willson et al., 2003). However, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship has been found to be a neglected issue among researchers and society even though it has been found to be the most conflicted in-law relationship (Duvall, 1954; Fischer, 1983a, b; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987). This conflict occurs because of the mother-in-law losing close ties to her son when he gets married and the daughter-in-law trying to strive for success with issues dealing with household duties (Fischer, 1983a; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987). Child raising issues and living within close proximity of

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in-laws also has been found to increase the possibility of conflict to occur. Thus, previous research suggests that conflict is greater within the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship than in the father-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship (Bryant et al., 2001; Duvall, 1954; Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990; Willson et al., 2003).

Conflict between in-laws creates stress and a tendency to attempt to avoid each other. The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is one of the least focused on type of family relationship, but at the same time one of the most conflicted. Jackson and Berg-Cross (1988) explain that in addition to being a major area of conflict, it is also one of the most important relationships within the family structure because women tend to maintain the kinship of the family. For this reason, research should be conducted to expand our knowledge about in-law relationships and conflict.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to further examine and understand in-law relationships and expression of conflict. This will be explored by understanding the role television serves as an outlet for society to learn and reinforce family social roles including in-law relationships. More specifically, this study will perform a quantitative content analysis of the television show Everybody Loves Raymond (ELR) to further understand today's trends about in-law conflict on television. ELR was selected as a unit of analysis because of its relevance to in-law conflict and its continued success as a television program within the entertainment community. ELR ran for nine years, topped its time slot in the ratings many times, was nominated for and won numerous Emmys, and is currently one of the top ten syndicated programs (Bannan, 2005; Dudsic, 2001; Grego, 2003; Helmes, 2005; Nielsen Media Research, 2005a). For these reasons, ELR is
an innovative artifact that can be used to further understand in-law relationships and the
conflict that persists between in-law members.

This study will first examine in-law relationships from an interpersonal perspective
by exploring conflict and gender differences within in-law relationships. In addition,
conflict strategies that can occur between in-law members will be identified and
explained. This study will also explore research about television as a social function and
the message television presents about family communication and in-law conflict.
Relevant literature will be reviewed on this topic followed by a content analysis of *ELR*
to determine the message that is presented about conflict occurrences, conflict initiation,
and the use of conflict tactics between a daughter-in-law and each of her parents-in-law.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The area of communication and in-law relationships has been a neglected issue. There is an absence of literature on the topic and only a small amount of research has been conducted about the interpersonal interactions between in-law members (e.g., Fischer, 1983a, b; Goetting, 1990; Horsley, 1996, 1997; Lopata, 1999; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990; Willson et al., 2003). There are usually more questions about in-law relationships than there are definite answers. However, in-law relationships still impact the social structure of the family.

In-Law Relationships and Conflict

Social networks, such as the family unit, affect the satisfaction of marital relationships (Bryant et al., 2001). In-law relationships can have a major impact on whether the marriage is successful because this type of relationship is a major area of stress and conflict within couples’ lives (Bryant et al., 2001; Silverstein, 1990). Conflict can arise because there is a lack of clear boundaries with the family of origin regarding how the newly married couple will establish their independence while remaining connected to the original family. If the couple does not separate emotionally from the family of origin, this can create tension within the new family. Newly married couples that remain in a childlike role with their parents may create conflict within their own
marriage if they are not successful in balancing the transition of roles (Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990). When people get married, their roles within the family change and a redefinition of the family social structure takes place. This social structure shift causes most couples to find themselves interacting less with their original family after marriage. The extended family sees each other less than the new family, which slows the process of the in-laws getting to know one another (Johnson, 1989a; Kivett, 1989). Little interaction between in-law members can also cause them to be less close than one’s own family and the relationship has a potential for emotional intensity and conflict (Willson et al., 2003). The lack of clarity of in-law roles also creates conflict.

Roles evolve and change when the family structure changes. For example, when a couple marries, the family members’ roles are redefined. However, in-law roles are not clearly delineated in American society, which means that in-law conflict may be due to ambiguous and vague in-law role definitions (Bryant et al., 2001; Fischer, 1983b; Goetting, 1990; Johnson, 1989b; Serovich & Price, 1994). Although nuclear families may be shrinking, extended families are growing larger and more complicated due to people divorcing and remarrying as well as living longer. Family roles, including roles of in-law relationships, continue to change as milestones such as marriages, deaths, and births occur within the family (Duvall, 1954; Horsley, 1996; Silverstein, 1990).

The birth of a child specifically alters the role definition for in-law relationships. In-laws may become more supportive of each other because of the birth of the child. Grandchildren can help parents-in-law define their roles because the transition of becoming a grandparent encompasses familiar qualities and takes attention away from existing conflicts (Goetting, 1990; Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990).
addition, the mother-in-law must attempt to establish a bond with her daughter-in-law if
she wants to interact with her grandchildren. However, children can also create conflict
between in-laws because of disagreements about values, lifestyles, and child raising
issues (Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1989). The birth of a child can cause more relational
strain with a mother-in-law than one's own mother because daughters are likely to ask
their own mothers for help about childcare (Fischer, 1983a; Marotz-Baden & Cowan,
1987). This creates less interaction between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law as
opposed to a mother and daughter, which can cause the mother-in-law and daughter-in-
law relationship to become even more ambiguous after the birth of a child than it was
before (Kivett, 1989).

Gender Differences Between In-Laws

Child-raising issues are thus one of the main reasons that the mother-in-law and
daughter-in-law relationship is a major area of conflict. In addition, females are the
center for maintaining the kinship of the family because they must take two different
family cultures and unite them (Fischer, 1983a; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988). Since
women are more involved with kinship than men, they are the more common gender for
instigating conflict within the family (Johnson, 1989a). As such, there are gender
differences when it comes to in-law conflict.

Specifically, if the daughter-in-law is unhappy within the family, this can create
tension. The daughter-in-law tends to have a higher level of stress than any other in-law
member because of her desire to be integrated into the extended family structure in order
to maintain the kinship (Marotz-Baden & Mattheis, 1994). However, the mother-in-law
and daughter-in-law relationship has received little attention in modern society and
scholarly literature even though it has been found to be the dyad with the most conflict within the in-law structure.

There are gender differences regarding communication within in-law relationships and conflict with one’s parent of the same gender occurs more than the parent of the opposite gender, particularly with females (Bryant et al., 2001; Duvall, 1954; Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990; Willson et al., 2003). Such a difference may be due to men being less involved in interactions with relatives than women. Men also might be more satisfied with in-laws than women because there is more conflict surrounding the husband’s parents with adult children than the wife’s parents (Fischer, 1983a; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Serovich & Price, 1994).

Research has also shown that gender differences occur later in life within in-law relationships because it is becoming increasingly common for women to provide for both sets of parents as opposed for each person caring for their own set of parents. Women feel that they have an obligation to take care of both set of parents more than men and research has shown that the daughter-in-law plays a central role in the care of her husband’s parents later in life (Globerman, 1996; Kivett, 1989; Merrill, 1993; Stein, 1993). However, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship still remains the most conflicted in-law relationship even when the daughter-in-law becomes a caregiver. “When the caregiver is a daughter-in-law, the relationship may become especially strained because it brings in close contact the most difficult of all in-law relationships, which is the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law” (Serovich & Price, 1994, p. 132). In addition, the decisions made by an in-law caregiver can also be one of the major topic areas of conflict between in-law members.
Overall, there are various issues that can arise between in-law members that create tension and conflict. Some of the common areas of conflict between in-laws include a lack of marital approval, in-law blaming, loyalty issues, holding grudges, care and financial support for elderly in-laws, life cycle stresses, holiday planning, differences of values and needs, living in close proximity to one another, and undefined roles (Horsley, 1997; Marotz-Baden & Cowen; 1987). The way that in-laws interact when solving or minimizing their areas of conflicts depends on the type of conflict strategy that they select.

Conflict Strategies

There are three conflict strategies established by Sillars (1980; Sillars, Coletti, Parry, & Rogers, 1982) that can be utilized by individuals during moments of conflict. Though research has not yet been conducted, individuals could use these strategies in in-law conflict episodes. In addition, these conflict strategies were used by Comstock and Strzyzewski (1990) to examine family conflict on television. These conflict strategies are integrative communication, distributive communication, and avoidance.

Integrative conflict strategies are positive in nature and promote personal growth and maintenance. They also provide a neutral or positive climate and include verbally cooperative behaviors, which lead to favorable resolution for conflicts (Sillars, 1980; Sillars et al., 1982). Examples of this strategy can include emphasizing commonalities, accepting responsibility, initiating problem solving, showing empathy or support, and soliciting and disclosing information relevant to the conflict (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Sillars et al., 1982).
Distributive conflict strategies deal with more negative actions and behaviors than integrative communication. These strategies include negative evaluations of one’s partner, which can be verbally competitive or individualist behaviors such as insults, criticism, and concession seeking (Sillars, 1980; Sillars et al., 1982). This can also include hostile questioning and joking, avoiding responsibility for the conflict, making prescriptions for the other’s behavior, and rejection (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Sillars et al., 1982).

Avoidance conflict strategies attempt to minimize communication and explicit discussion about the conflict. Examples of avoidance include ignoring or denying the presence of conflict, shifting the focus of conversations, or communicating about conflicts indirectly or ambiguously (Sillars, 1980; Sillars et al., 1982). This strategy also encompasses people pretending to be hurt by others, postponing the issue, shifting the topic, denying that the conflict is present, and focusing on the meaning or appropriateness of words used by others (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Sillars et al., 1982).

In-law pairs can potentially use all of these strategies when interacting with each other and their choice of strategy can change at any given time. For example, research has found that in-laws commonly use an avoidance strategy and that in-laws attempt to keep some distance when dealing with each other in hopes of acquiring a more satisfying relationship (Adler et al., 1989; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988; Jorgenson, 1994). Even though in-laws have a high amount of conflict and at times try to avoid each other, family ties are central and enduring forms of social connections. Interpersonal conflict is important in shaping family relationships and how people deal with conflict greatly impacts relationship satisfaction (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997; Stein, 1993). Thus, it is
important to understand and examine how in-laws interact with each other during conflicts because children can adopt these strategies and use them in their own families as they evolve. In addition, there is no known research that has systematically examined in-law relationships in conjunction with these three conflict strategies or from an interpersonal communication perspective.

One useful context through which people can further understand interpersonal relationships and in-law conflict is television. Television can be used as a learning tool to examine interpersonal relationships and is useful when analyzing the family structure (Albada, 2000; Lull, 1980; Pistole & Marson, 2005). Further, television is a predominant medium and source for information, which can be used by families and various social units to view interaction and social roles.

Television as a Social Function

In today's society, it has become difficult to find a family that does not own at least one television set. The number of television sets owned by families has also been increasing (Brody & Stoneman, 1983). There were 2.62 television sets per household in 2005 and, in 2003, people spent approximately 8 hours per day viewing television (Nielsen Media Research, 2003, 2005b). Therefore, television is a primary source for society to gather information. Television's primary audience is the family unit and watching television is a convenient family behavior (Lull, 1980; Wilson, 2004). By owning a television, people can watch programs that may impact their views and reinforce their understanding about social roles, including their roles within the family. Social learning theory and cultivation theory support the concept that people viewing
interpersonal interactions on television may impact viewers' role learning, aggression, and worldviews (Bandura, 1977, 2002; Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002).

Media are an integral part of families' daily routine and life. Mass communication technologies, such as television sets, permeate many homes in society (Lull, 1980; Wilson, 2004). Television programs have the potential to socialize viewers about family roles and expectations. People develop their own ideas from what they view on television. For example, a study conducted by Albada (2000) found that most participants believed that family portrayals affect expectations for family life, family values, and communication between family members. There is also consistent evidence that heavy exposure to television is associated with individual's views about marriage and family (Wilson, 2004).

Children and adults are both impacted by what they view on television in relation to family roles. A study conducted by Buerkel-Rothfuss, Greenberg, Atkin, and Neuendorf (1982) compared children’s exposure to televised portrayal of communication behaviors and the participants’ beliefs about real life family behaviors. They found that children who watch family shows appear to believe that families in real life illustrate support and concern for each other because of the support and concern they viewed between family members on television.

Parents can thus use television as an educational tool for their children (Lull, 1980). Dail and Way (1985) explain what parents can learn from television:

Viewers who are parents as well as those who may become parents are receiving information about the parental role from television which may contribute to their
expectations about what the role is or should be, as well as how others solve the common problems of every day parental life. (p. 491)

Television programs can thus be used as a social tool for parents and children to learn their social roles within the family structure. People can view shows to further understand real life situations.

Portrayal of Families on Television

Since television shows are constantly portraying society, family members may learn about their roles within the family through television programs. These televised portrayals can confirm similar roles that are undertaken by family members. “When behavior by an actor or actress on television resembles the way in which the viewer behaves under similar circumstances, the experience may be useful to the viewer as a means for demonstrating role competence to the other audience members” (Lull, 1980, p. 205). Television can thus be used by a family member to learn their acceptable role and to imitate this behavior. This is because television is used as a social function and can impact the views of an individual (Bandura, 1977, 2002; Lull, 1980). Many television programs display families and the issues relevant to family members. Further, television families model real life families in some respects such as in their relationships, situations, and the use of deception (Mazur & Kalbfleisch, 2003; Wilson, 2004).

Family portrayals on television have been illustrated through specific television shows. A study by Pistole and Marson (2005) examined four different television shows to determine the issues relevant to families. The results found that Golden Girls dealt with family issues that portrayed retirement, life savings, and aging. Further, Friends discussed topics about career, searching for love, marriage, death, single parenthood, and
the complication of trying to stay connected to the characters’ original families while constructing a new one (Pistole & Marson, 2005). The series *Frasier* dealt with issues involving transition in family life, divorced members trying to re-enter the dating scene, career and retirement issues, and parent-adult child relationships. *Seventh Heaven*, on the other hand, was found to portray a 1950s style family with seven children. However, the parents adopted different roles than the traditional 1950s family because the *Seventh Heaven* family adopted modern roles and illustrated that there are diverse family structures represented in modern television series (Pistole & Marson, 2005). Therefore, there are various types of portrayals of families on television. Further, there are also differences within these families based on gender.

**Gender Differences on Television**

There have been portrayals of families on television that have depicted differences in the discussion of family issues and the portrayal of men and women (Albada, 2000; Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Studies have shown that men outnumber women on television and that males are represented three times more on television than females. Specifically, men outnumbered women considerably in action adventure shows and Saturday morning cartoons. In contrast, an equal number of men and women are represented in situation comedies, family dramas, and soap operas (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

A study conducted by Kaufman (1999) also found differences between the portrayal of men and women on television commercials. Women without children appeared in commercials during daytime more than during football commercials. However, men appeared in commercials during football more than any other time (Kaufman, 1999).
Women with children and without children had similar results. However, men with children were more likely to appear in daytime commercials than men without children. Women also advertised more body products and home products than men. Men without children were more likely to advertise food, computers, and electronics than women (Kaufman, 1999). Gender differences thus exist both on television and between in-law family members. This means that gender differences in conflict might exist between in-laws on television, which will be addressed within this study.

There have also been studies conducted that have found differences between men and women and the jobs that they occupy on television. Lowery and DeFleur (1995) found that men occupy a greater variety of jobs than women:

The late 1970s brought the appearance of a few new programs in which females had difficult and demanding jobs. The women, however, were usually single, sophisticated, often divorced, and their work glamorous. Some analysts observe that such new roles were really not very different from past roles because the women usually depended on men, they were portrayed as more emotional than men, and there was more concern for their safety. (p. 368)

In addition, males were also portrayed to be more rational, intelligent, independent, powerful, tolerant, and stable than females, whereas females appeared warmer, more sociable, more attractive, more peaceful, and less competent (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Personality characteristics between genders differ on television and so do occupational roles.

The occupation portrayals of men and women have differed on television. However, even the job responsibilities in the home have been shown to differ by gender on
television as well. The study conducted by Kaufman (1999) found that housework is rarely performed in commercials by either sex. However, women were more frequently shown to perform housework in commercials than men. Men and children were also commonly shown being waited on by women. Men and women were portrayed equally in their representation of doing yard work and home maintenance. However, there were differences between men and women’s involvement with children. Men were more likely to be shown playing and teaching the child, whereas women were more likely to be shown with the children and taking care of them (Kaufman, 1999). A gender difference between the portrayal of men and women on television and their interaction with their children exists. Thus, there is also a possibility that there are gender differences within in-law conflict interactions on television. This possibility will be addressed within this study by examining the differences between interactions that daughter-in-laws have with each of their parents-in-law.

Parents’ and Children’s Roles on Television

In a study conducted by Larson (1993), two television families were compared to further understand parents and children’s interaction with each other. The study looked at two television programs, The Cosby Show and The Simpsons. The study found that the Huxtable family on The Cosby Show had more parent and child interaction and spousal interaction than sibling interaction. The Huxtable family structure also encouraged open expression of communication between family members. The Simpson family had far less parent and child interactions compared with interactions between the two spouses, Homer and Marge. Both programs also had characters that were giving and seeking information
as well as providing support for other family members within the household (Larson, 1993).

In addition, the parents' level of involvement with their children varied between shows. In the Huxtable family, Cliff was the more active parent than Clair. Cliff tended to be the parent providing advice and support. These findings varied from previous research in which the mother had the more active role. Also, both Cliff and Clair did not do much directing to their children within the program. In the Simpson family, both parents gave about an equal amount of support and guidance to their children. However, Homer gave more direction or orders to the children than did Marge (Larson, 1993).

Lying and deception is prevalent on television shows and was also examined by Mazur and Kalbfleisch (2003). This study looked at the television shows Home Improvement, King of the Hill, The Simpsons, and Mad About You. It was found that no deception interactions took place between the mother and her child or between siblings. Instead, the husband or father was the character that was found to lie the most often. In addition, lies that spared another character were the most frequently used as opposed to lies that harm another or protect the self (Mazur & Kalbfleisch, 2003).

The portrayal of parents and children on television has also been examined by Dail and Way (1985) in a study that found single parent families were portrayed more than dual parent families. These families were mostly headed by males. The authors found that there were 955 behaviors reflecting the parental role, 833 reflecting child-rearing patterns, and 820 and 508 reflecting child responses, respectively. In addition, about 20 parenting behaviors per program and 30 per hour of programming were illustrated.
Further, fathers were more expressive, nurturing, and active parents than mothers (Dail & Way, 1985; Larson, 1993).

As the above evidence illustrates, family members can learn about their roles within the family unit from watching television. Even the portrayal of children on television can influence how children interact with their own families (Buerkel-Rothfuss et al., 1982). Dail and Way (1985) found that the most prevalent role of the parent and child was the expressive parental role performance and authoritative child rearing patterns. The expressive parenting role includes behaviors that are nurturing, provide security, supportive, enrich the environment, flexible, and accepting. The authoritative child-rearing pattern encourages the child to obtain individuality and encourages the parent to have discussion with the child. Positive child responses were also more prevalent than negative responses on television.

There were also more parenting behaviors observed for males than females (Dail & Way, 1985). The researchers found that more child responses occurred between a father and child than a mother and child. There were also no differences in the child’s responses with the role of the father. However, there were differences in how the child responded to the mother depending on her role. Specifically, the child acted more favorably to his or her mother when she expressed an instrumental or neutral role as opposed to an expressive role, which included the dominant disciplinary role or a role in which the mother gave directions by a polite request. The child did not act as favorably to the mother when she was adopting an expressive role, which includes behaviors that are nurturing and supportive (Dail & Way, 1985; Larson, 1993). Family interactions therefore vary on prime-time television depending on the role each member assumes.
Parents and children have been portrayed on prime-time television fulfilling different roles and attributes. Skill, Wallace, and Cassata (1990) explain the varying aspects of fathers, mothers, and children:

Parents, fathers in particular, have been found to be more likely to initiate interactions and children are most likely to be recipients of those communications. Women are more likely to be presented as successful when placed in a traditional role. Mothers tend to communicate more often in the expressive role than do fathers. (p. 137)

The roles of men and women as well as parents and children illustrate differences in their portrayals on television shows. Television shows provide models that are socially useful for understanding family roles. "The symbolic portrayal of roles by television characters may confirm similar roles which are undertaken by audience members" (Lull, 1980, p. 205).

In sum, television plays an important role in shaping our beliefs and expectations about family life. Our views about society, such as family relationships, come from a variety of sources of information, including personal experience and what we watch on television. Relational schemas are then built over time and influence how people interpret and interact with members of their family (Wilson, 2004). Therefore, what people view on television may impact their views about social norms and interactions with in-laws.
In-Laws on Television

There has only been a small amount of research conducted about in-laws and currently none of this research deals with the social function of television within in-law relationships. Family conflicts are common on primetime television and current television families are engaging in more conflict than in the past (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Wilson, 2004). In addition, individuals can learn about their interpersonal communication patterns within the family by viewing television sitcoms. “Since television families are beginning to reflect real life families, this creates an opportunity for communication scholars to utilize interpersonal research to explore the ways in which family communication and marital relationships are portrayed on television” (Mazur & Kalbfleisch, 2003, p. 205). Thus, this study attempts to extend this research by examining in-laws’ conflict as depicted on the popular television sitcom.

Everybody Loves Raymond (ELR)

Television situation comedies are a good source for social lessons about human interactions. People learn about social roles and are impacted by the interpersonal interactions that they view on television (Bandura, 1977, 2002; Gerbner et al., 2002; Lull 1980). Situation comedies are extremely relevant to family conflict and are a good source for viewing social interactions because of their popularity within families and because situation comedies may have a higher likelihood to affect viewers because of their realistic storylines (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Wilson, 2004). Situation comedies are a good source for social learning even though there is speculation about the quality of these messages in relation to the appropriate and effective behaviors by characters during interpersonal interactions on television (e.g., Comstock & Strzyzewski,
Because characters' interactions on television are scripted and essentially artificial, a television series is not viewed as a substantial tool for analysis to further understand real life interpersonal interactions; however, these interactions on television still impact viewers' perceptions of their own communication in interpersonal relationships and for this reason, character portrayals and interactions on television deserve significant attention. Thus, it is important to examine the differences between scripted interpersonal communication on television and real life interactions as well as the various emotions and messages being conveyed on television series.

Conflict on situation comedies may be more than only conflict. There are times when what appears to be conflict may also be humor, love, sarcasm, and the like. It is important to address that these types of situations can be embedded within conflict occurrences or also interpreted as conflict. For the purpose of this study, these occurrences will not be ignored but also coded as conflict because conflict can still persist during times of love, humor, and sarcasm. Even though characters' dialogue may convey love, at the same time it can include conflict. Conflict episodes are not always negative vindictive behaviors, but instead can also be positive for the relationship (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Cupach & Canary, 2000). Overall, despite the focus on the television context, it is important to remember that interpersonal interactions in real life and interpersonal interactions on television vary from one another.

Television series can be used for individuals to further understand family roles and viewing television content can reflect our real life experiences (Butler, 2002; Lull, 1980; Wilson, 2004). People have a tendency to believe that television characters are real
people affected by the concept of time; however, they are really controlled, developed, and follow a certain set of rules. "The television series is a narrative form that presents weekly episodes with a defined set of recurring characters" (Butler, 2002, p. 23).

Television series, such as ELR, follow specific narrative strategies. Butler (2002) outlined seven narrative strategies that are part of television series, which include multiple protagonists, exposition, motivation, narrative problematic, cause-effect chain, climax, and resolution/denouement.

Television series contain multiple protagonists. This means that there are two or more characters that fulfill this role. Television series use multiple protagonists in order to develop multiple plots (Butler, 2002). This is the case for the series ELR. There are times that any of the main characters could be the protagonist in a particular episode. In the occurrence of in-law conflict, there may be instances when the mother-in-law is the protagonist and other times that the daughter-in-law is the protagonist. This can also be true for real life interpersonal interactions. There can be multiple protagonists; however, it is more common for someone reporting on their own in-law conflicts to report oneself as fulfilling the protagonist role as opposed to an antagonist role.

Exposition is also part of the narrative scheme of television series. Instead of knowing about characters' past, television episodes live in the present with problems contained to a single episode and, if more information is needed, it typically exists in the theme song (Butler, 2002). This is also true for ELR. Most specific conflicts happen and are resolved in one episode. In addition, the background information needed to understand the characters' roles are included in the theme song. Thus, exposition in a television series is very different than in interpersonal interactions that occur in real life.
Typically, in real life, it is necessary to know about a person’s background to understand the conflict interaction.

Motivation during a television series is in a state of balance in the beginning of an episode but must be shaken to put the story in motion (Butler, 2002). Thus, at the beginning of an episode, the situation between characters is static or without conflict and tension; however, for the audience to remain interested in the program, something needs to occur to create drama, conflict, and/or opposition between characters. This varies from interpersonal interactions that occur in real life because the state of balance may or may not ever become shaken within an interaction. In addition, there may be a continuous imbalance within interpersonal interactions. It is possible that a conflict has occurred and was never resolved.

Television series must also have a counterforce to prevent instant resolutions. The narrative may change its focus from one episode to the next but there must always be a dilemma even if it is not the exact problem in order for the series to continue (Butler, 2002). This holds true for ELR because in-law conflict is prevalent; however, the specific issue or topic that conflict surrounds can vary. Interpersonal interactions in real life do not necessarily have a counterforce and resolution can occur at any given time as opposed to by the end of the episode.

In real life, most events happen randomly. People decide how they want to react to others. In a television series, there is a cause-effect chain where one scene leads to the next and so on and is broken up by commercials after a small climax (Butler, 2002). There is also a main climax in which the episode peaks and some sort of resolution occurs. In real life, interpersonal conflict resolution may never occur and Vuchinich
(1987) found that most family conflicts end without resolution. In contrast, television series have resolution/denouement, which means that no ultimate resolution occurs because this would result in the end of the series; however, there is resolution to the conflict and/or dilemma that occurs in an episode (Butler, 2002). For example, in the case of *ELR*, there will always be in-law conflict at some point, but in one episode it may be about cooking, and in another, about raising children. The general in-law conflict pattern in this television series should never be resolved based on this narrative structure, but the specific conflict about cooking is typically resolved by the end of the episode.

Differences between interpersonal interactions on television and interpersonal interactions within real life relationships vary; however, television sitcoms are still a helpful device for further understanding family roles and in-law conflict.

Television sitcoms are an instrumental tool for examining family roles. Situation comedies may have more potential to affect viewers than other outlets because storylines often reflect common relational experiences. Furthermore, family conflicts are extremely prevalent in family situation comedies (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990). Even though interpersonal interactions follow a different set of rules on television compared to real life situations, it is still appropriate to use a dyadic typology system developed for coding real life interpersonal situations for coding interpersonal interactions that occur on television. People are impacted by the recurring messages on television, view and gather information about family roles from television, and even though characters are fictional, still perceive characters as real life tangible individuals affected by the past, present, and future (Bandura, 1977; Butler, 2002; Lull, 1980).
This coding scheme is acceptable for coding conflict that occurs on television because of the social role of television. In addition, the conflict strategies to be used in this study have previously been used by Comstock and Strzyzewski (1990) to code general family conflict between sitcom characters. Therefore, this study will conduct a content analysis of the family television sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond* (ELR) to further understand family conflict on television and to provide initial information regarding in-law conflict.

All methods for doing research, including content analysis, have limitations. In addition, using an interpersonal coding strategy developed for real life interactions also creates some limitations when it is used for situated interactions because of a television series scripted setting; however, these types of interactions still have value, impact viewers, and play a role within their own lives. For these reasons, in-law conflict on television deserves some level of attention and *ELR* is an acceptable source for doing so. In addition, *ELR* was selected because it is one of the clearest forms of in-law relationships on television regardless of its genre. Also, there are very few series on television with main characters that are involved in in-law relationships; thus, by selecting other genres or television series, this would limit the possibility to randomly select episodes that will likely contain in-law conflict.

*ELR* is especially relevant to in-law conflict on television. It is one of the few series that consistently deals with in-law relationships and the occurrence of conflict between these types of family members. In addition, *ELR* had millions of viewers and viewership continuously increased over its primetime run. Viewership peaked during the 2001-2002 season at the same time it went into syndication, which has been just as successful as its run during primetime (Nielsen Media Research, 2005a). This study will examine in-law
relationship conflict and possible gender differences to begin to understand today’s trends about depictions of in-law conflict on television. *ELR* will be examined to gain knowledge about the frequency of conflict between genders, to understand who initiates more conflict within these relationships, and to establish which conflict strategies are utilized more by particular in-law members. This will be done by comparing the character Debra, the daughter-in-law, with each of her parents-in-law, Marie and Frank, because it has been suggested that the daughter-in-law has higher levels of stress than any other in-law member (Marotz-Baden & Mattheis, 1994). In addition, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship has been shown to have the greatest risk for developing conflict within the in-law system (Duvall, 1954; Fischer, 1983a; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987). Therefore, it is beneficial to compare Debra’s relationship with her mother-in-law to the partnership she has with her father-in-law.

Gender differences occur within in-law relationships and conflict with the parent of the same gender, particularly females, occurs more than with the parent of the opposite gender (Bryant et al., 2001; Duvall, 1954; Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990; Willson et al., 2003). Thus, there may be more frequency of conflict between in-laws depending on the gender dyad. In addition, gender differences are prevalent within televised interaction patterns (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990). Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: The daughter-in-law and mother-in-law pair will have greater conflict frequency than the daughter-in-law and father-in-law pair.

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Conflict can frequently occur between in-laws. However, no research at this point has determined which in-law members are initiating more conflict. Consequently, the following research question was devised:

RQ1: Who initiates more conflict within (a) the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law pair and (b) the daughter-in-law and father-in-law pair?

Conflict frequency and conflict initiation are two important aspects surrounding conflict interactions. However, the way conflict is managed is more important than frequency and initiation (Cupach & Canary, 2000). Thus, it is significant to attempt to understand how in-laws are managing conflict through the use of their conflict strategies. Research has been conducted to understand individual’s use of the conflict strategies of integrative, distributive, and avoidance; however, there is presently no known research about how the use of these conflict strategies may vary due to in-law relationship types. Vuchinich (1987) found that mothers within a family are most likely to close off conflicts or to avoid them, but this may not hold true for in-law relationships. In addition, there is no research about how gender dyads of in-laws may affect the use of these conflict strategies. Therefore, the following research questions are presented:

RQ2: Which conflict strategy is most prevalent between (a) the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law pair and (b) the daughter-in-law and father-in-law pair?

RQ3: How does the use of conflict strategies vary between (a) the mother-in-law and (b) the father-in-law when they each engage in conflict with the daughter-in-law?
Summary

In-law relationships are a major area for family conflict but have previously been understudied by researchers, especially when examining the social function of television on the issue. Television is a tool that allows individuals to view content and to further understand family conflict, including conflict between in-laws. Research has shown that gender differences are prevalent within in-law relationships. However, there is no research about the initiation of conflict and occurrence of conflict strategies between in-law members, particularly when it comes to the social function of television viewing on these relationships. This study is thus designed to investigate further into in-law conflict relationships by examining the message presented by a family sitcom on television.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Content analysis (CA) was selected for this study because it allows researchers to study communication messages in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987). Using CA will enable people to understand what is presented on television with regard to in-law conflict.

Sample

The sample consisted of episodes of ELR recorded from a national cable network and a regional FOX affiliate in Las Vegas, Nevada: TBS and KVVU Channel 5. The programs were recorded between December 19, 2005 and January 27, 2006 in an attempt to not sample during any ratings sweeps months. The episodes were recorded on TBS Monday through Friday at 7:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. and on FOX Monday through Friday at 11:00 p.m. The sample only included syndicated programs because of the current ongoing success of ELR in syndication and because the show no longer airs as a first-run series on network television during prime time. Each taped episode was assigned a number and then 60 random numbers were selected from a random number table. The entire taped sample consisted of 60 episodes or 30 hours of programming consistent with programming hours examined in previous research (e.g., Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990).
Measures

Conflict. Conflict occurs when there are incompatible goals and/or violated expectations (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990). For this study, conflict was observed when there were behaviors or expressions that communicate that the individuals had contradictory goals or that their expectations in some form were violated. This occurred either verbally, nonverbally, or a combination of the two.

Unit of analysis. The unit of analysis for this study was a talk turn. Once it was established that a conflict occurred between the character of Debra and either her mother-in-law and/or father-in-law, every time someone spoke or nonverbally expressed his or her conflict until the end of this expression (i.e., another character begins speaking) was categorized as a talk turn. When another individual spoke or nonverbally expressed his or her conflict, even when the conflict situation continues about the same topic, this was counted as a different talk turn. In addition, talk turns between in-laws were separated out by each sentence or thought completion to illustrate multiplicity, whereas consecutive talk turns by other characters or talk turns by in-laws to other characters other than relevant in-laws, were grouped as one talk turn. For example, if the daughter-in-law (Debra) used five sentences or complete thought units during the conflict towards her mother-in-law (Marie), this was counted as five talk turns. However, if during the conflict episode Debra used three sentences to speak to her husband (Ray), Ray used two sentences to speak to Marie, and then Marie used seven sentences to speak to Debra, this was counted as eight talk turns; one talk turn grouping Debra and Ray because their interactions were not part of relevant in-law conflict interactions, and seven used by Marie since she spoke directly to Debra.
Initiation of conflict. The initiation of conflict deals with whoever began the conflict episode on one given topic situation. Conflict situations may or may not become resolved before the next initiation of conflict. Another initiation of conflict transpired when the conflict topic changed or when the conflict expression returned to the same topic after there was a period of harmony. The initiation of conflict occurred with the talk turn that allowed the audience to know that conflict was present and that a character was attempting to confront another. The initiation of conflict also happened when someone was reactive to a comment or nonverbal action.

The important factor in determining the initiation of conflict was when someone viewing the conflict episode could become aware that conflict was present due to incompatible goals or violated expectations and that a character was obviously attempting to confront another character in an effort to have a direct conflict. For example, if Marie said to Debra, “Why are you talking behind my back and not talking to me directly?” this would be an initiation of conflict by Marie. On the other hand, if Marie said to Debra, “I love your lemon pepper chicken” and Debra responded with “Why do you always criticize my cooking?” the initiation of conflict was performed by Debra because Marie may have meant her statement as a sincere comment. However, if Marie said it in a manner that was sarcastic and condescending, then Marie initiated the conflict.

Length of conflict. The length of conflict can vary from one conflict situation to the next. Conflict began when someone initiated the conflict. The conflict ended when the conflict was brought to resolution or when there was movement to another topic. The total number of talk turns for each conflict episode represents conflict length.
Conflict Strategies

There are various responses to conflict that people can utilize. The use of these conflict strategies can vary depending on the conflict situations. For this study, the three conflict strategies that were documented are integrative, distributive, and avoidance. An example of when integrative communication occurred was when Debra used disclosing statements such as “I should have just talk to you face to face instead of writing a letter.” An example of distributive communication used by Debra was when she yelled “You always do this to me!” Avoidance was used when a character attempted to change the topic or tried to pretend that they weren’t upset.

Integrative. Integrative strategies are verbally cooperative and disclosing statements. These statements can attribute responsibility for the conflict onto oneself or onto other involved parties. Integrative statements can initiate mutual considerations of solutions to conflict; they may refer to common interests, goals and compatibilities as well as statements that express understanding, acceptance, or positive regard for the others, despite the prevalence of conflict. Integrative strategies also include people initiating problem solving, showing empathy or support, and soliciting and disclosing information relevant to the conflict (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Sillars et al., 1982).

Distributive. Distributive strategies are verbally competitive. These statements may illustrate disagreement, directly criticize personal characteristics of others, and show personal resentment towards someone else. Distributive strategies include joking, teasing, and leading questions that fault another. These statements deny or minimize personal responsibility for the conflict. Distributive strategies also include making prescriptions for others by using requests, demands, arguments, or threats that seek
change in the other person's behavior to resolve the conflict (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Sillars et al., 1982).

Avoidance. Avoidance strategies minimize any explicit discussion about the conflict. These statements deny that conflict is present or are unconstructive statements that reduce the conversation about the conflict. People using these strategies change topics in order to conclude discussion in regards to the conflict. Avoidance strategies also include people pretending to be hurt by others, postponing the issue, and focusing on the meaning or appropriateness of words used by others (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Sillars et al., 1982).

Coding

Two coders, one of whom was the principal investigator, trained and pre-tested a randomly selected sample of taped ELR episodes that were not used in the sample for the main study. Training lasted approximately three hours. Coders viewed the episodes to determine and understand when conflict occurred, the unit of analysis of the talk turn, who initiated conflict, the length of the conflict, and which conflict strategies were being used. Their preliminary analyses were then compared. Following training and pre-testing, nine episodes separate from the 60-episode sample were independently coded by both the principal investigator and a second coder to determine inter-coder reliability, which was calculated using Cohen's Kappa. Reliability was calculated for each category with all categories but conflict strategies equaling 1.0. Reliability for the conflict strategy category equaled .91. Because the pre-established minimum reliability (κ=.70) values were reached for each category, the primary investigator then coded the actual sample.
Analysis Plan

The data were entered into SPSS and the chi-square analysis technique was used to determine the results of the hypothesis and research questions. The results of the analysis are discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

General Description

The sample for this study consisted of 60 episodes of ELR or 30 hours of programming recorded from a national cable network and a regional FOX affiliate. Seventy-two in-law conflict episodes were observed in this sample. Table 1 illustrates the total number of talk turns observed and the mean number of talk turns for the length of entire conflict and the length of conflict between in-laws.

Table 1  Number of Talk Turns (TT) and Means for Conflict Episodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Entire Conflict</th>
<th>Length of Conflict Between In-Laws</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Episodes</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of TT</td>
<td>813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Number of TT</td>
<td>11.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis One

The findings for this study provided support for hypothesis one, which predicted that the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law would have greater conflict frequency than
the daughter-in-law and father-in-law. The findings revealed that, out of 72 conflict episodes, 51 (70.8%) were conflicts between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, 16 (22.2%) were conflicts between the daughter-in-law and father-in-law, and five (6.9%) were conflicts between the daughter-in-law and both her mother-in-law and father-in-law. Chi-square results revealed that the daughter-in-law had significantly more conflict with her mother-in-law than her father-in-law $\chi^2(2, N = 72) = 40.08, p < .001$ as Table 2 illustrates. Cramer's phi measured the strength of the association between the two nominal variables of in-law role and conflict occurrence ($\Phi = .58$), which means that there is a strong relationship between in-law role and conflict occurrence.

Table 2  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Occurrence</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Residual</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L and M-I-L</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L and F-I-L</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>-8.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L and Both</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>-19.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-I-L and F-I-L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2(2, N = 72) = 40.08, p < .001$

Research Question One

Research question one asked who initiates more conflict within (a) the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law pair and (b) the daughter-in-law and father-in-law pair. The results found that both parents-in-law initiated more conflict than the daughter-in-law,
particularly for the mother-in-law. Fourteen of 72 conflict episodes (19.4%) were
initiated by the daughter-in-law toward her mother-in-law, 33 (45.8%) were initiated by
the mother-in-law toward her daughter-in-law, five (6.9%) were initiated by the daughter-
in-law toward her father-in-law, eight (11.1%) were initiated by the father-in-law toward
his daughter-in-law, and one (1.4%) was initiated by the daughter-in-law toward both
parents-in-law. There were also 11 (15.3%) instances where other characters initiated the
conflict. Chi-square results revealed that the mother-in-law initiated significantly more
conflict than the daughter-in-law and the daughter-in-law initiated significantly less
conflict with both in-laws than expected $\chi^2(5, N = 72) = 52.67, p < .001$. Table 3
illustrates these findings. Cramer's $\Phi$ equalled .38, which represents a moderate-to-strong
relationship between these two variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th><em>Initiation of Conflict</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L with M-I-L</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-I-L with D-I-L</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L with F-I-L</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-I-L with D-I-L</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L and Both M-I-L and F-I-L</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Characters</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2(5, N = 72) = 52.67, p < .001$
Research Question Two

Research question two asked which conflict strategy is most prevalent between (a) the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law pair and (b) the daughter-in-law and father-in-law pair. Chi-square results found that the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law used integrative as the most frequent conflict strategy whereas the father-in-law used distributive as the most frequent conflict strategy $\chi^2 (18, N=813) = 1039.21, p < .001$. Cramer’s phi was calculated to measure the association between in-law role and conflict strategy ($\Phi = .27$), meaning that there is a small-to-moderate relationship between these two variables. Within the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law pair, there were 478 talk turns, with the daughter-in-law using 115 (14.2%) integrative, 62 (7.6%) distributive, 29 (3.6%) avoidance, and one (0.1%) other conflict strategies, whereas the mother-in-law used 149 (18.3%) integrative, 99 (12.2%) distributive, 22 (2.7%) avoidance, and one (0.1%) other conflict strategies.

Within the daughter-in-law and father-in-law pair, the daughter-in-law mainly used integrative communication; however, distributive communication was close behind in frequency. In contrast, the father-in-law used distributive communication most frequently towards the daughter-in-law. Between the daughter-in-law and father-in-law pair, there were 142 talk turns with the daughter-in-law using 28 (3.4%) integrative, 25 (3.1%) distributive, six (0.7%) avoidance, and one (0.1%) other conflict strategies, whereas the father-in-law used 22 (2.7%) integrative, 48 (5.9%) distributive, 11 (1.4%) avoidance, and one (0.1%) other conflict strategies.

Conflict between the daughter-in-law and both of her parents-in-law was also coded. The daughter-in-law used 39 talk turns total for these conflicts, 23 (2.8%) of which were
integrative, and 16 (2.0%) were distributive. In addition, there were 154 (18.9%) talk
turns used by other characters involved in the conflict episodes. The daughter-in-law’s
use of conflict strategies are illustrated in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Conflict Strategies for Daughter-In-Law</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Residual</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Integrative towards M-I-L</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Distributive towards M-I-L</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Avoidance towards M-I-L</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-13.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Other towards M-I-L</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-41.8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Integrative towards F-I-L</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-14.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Distributive towards F-I-L</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-17.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Avoidance towards F-I-L</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-36.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Other towards F-I-L</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-41.8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Integrative towards M-I-L and F-I-L</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-19.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-I-L using Distributive towards M-I-L and F-I-L</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-26.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Research Question Three

Research question three asked how the use of conflict strategies varies by (a) the mother-in-law and (b) the father-in-law when they each engage in conflict with the daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law was found to use integrative communication the most, whereas the father-in-law used distributive communication the most. Table 5 illustrates the use of conflict strategies for the parents-in-law towards their daughter-in-law.

Table 5 Use of Conflict Strategies for Mother-In-Law and Father-In-Law

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Residual</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>M-I-L using Integrative</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>106.2</td>
<td>18.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>M-I-L using Distributive</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-I-L using Avoidance</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-20.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-I-L using Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-41.8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-I-L using Integrative</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-20.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-I-L using Distributive</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
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<td>F-I-L using Avoidance</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-31.8</td>
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<td>-41.8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview and General Discussion

The area of in-law relationships within the field of communication has been a neglected issue. There is a lack of literature on the topic and very little research has been conducted about the interpersonal interactions between in-laws (e.g., Fischer, 1983a, b; Goetting, 1990; Horsley, 1996, 1997; Lopata, 1999; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990; Willson et al., 2003). This research oversight has resulted in there being more questions about in-law relationships and the interactions between in-law pairs than distinct answers. In addition, in-law roles have not been clearly determined in American society, causing the opportunity for in-law conflict to occur because of ambiguous and vague in-law role definitions (Bryant et al., 2001; Fischer, 1983b; Goetting, 1990; Johnson, 1989b; Serovich & Price, 1994). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to further explore and understand in-law relationships from a communication perspective.

The review of the sparse in-law scholarship that was available revealed gender differences within in-law relationships. Because females are the key component in maintaining the kinship of the family, there are additional pressures in trying to take two contrasting family cultures and bonding them (Fischer, 1983a; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988). Gender differences exist within in-law relationships because conflict occurs more
with one's in-law parent of the same gender than of the opposite gender, particularly with females (Bryant et al., 2001; Duvall, 1954; Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990; Willson et al., 2003). Research has found that, because women are more involved with family interactions than men, they are thus more likely to prompt conflict within the family (Johnson, 1989a). However, even though women within the in-law structure have been found to be the pair engaging in the most conflict, there still has been little attention paid in modern society and in the scholarly literature to this area. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to continue to understand the dynamic of in-law relationships and the interaction therein. One useful way to do this was through the use of television.

Television can be used as a learning instrument to examine interpersonal relationships and is valuable when evaluating the family structure (Albada, 2000; Lull, 1980; Pistole & Marson, 2005). In addition, television is a leading medium and source for information, which people can use to further understand interpersonal relationships and in-law conflict. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine and understand in-law relationships and the expression of conflict. Specifically, this study performed a quantitative content analysis of the television show *ELR (Everybody Loves Raymond)* to understand in-law conflict on television. This content analysis helped to determine the messages that are presented to television viewers about conflict occurrences, conflict initiation, and the use of conflict strategies between a daughter-in-law and each of her parents-in-law.

**Interpretation and Implications of Results**

**Conflict occurrence.** Hypothesis one of this study was supported. The findings revealed that the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law pair had significantly more conflict
frequency than the daughter-in-law and father-in-law pair. Out of 72 conflict episodes, 51 (70.8%) were conflicts between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, 16 (22.2%) were conflicts between the daughter-in-law and father-in-law, and five (6.9%) were conflicts between the daughter-in-law and both her mother-in-law and father-in-law. These findings are consistent with previous research examining the gender differences between in-law members in society (e.g., Bryant et al., 2001; Duvall, 1954; Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990; Willson et al., 2003) and gender differences on television (e.g., Albada, 2000; Kaufman, 1999; Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

Previous research has found that gender differences in conflict exist between in-law members because individuals have more conflict with the in-law parent of the same gender than of the opposite gender, particularly for women (Bryant et al., 2001; Duvall, 1954; Serovich & Price, 1994; Silverstein, 1990; Willson et al., 2003). The main reason researchers believe this to be true is because women are the central element in maintaining the kinship of the family, which causes added demands for them in attempting to combine two family cultures (Fischer, 1983a; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988). Further, women are more involved with family interactions than men and this has caused women to be the more likely gender to start conflict within the family (Johnson, 1989a). In addition, amongst the female in-law roles, it is the daughter-in-law who has the most stress surrounding them (Marotz-Baden & Mattheis, 1994). Therefore, this body of research findings may explain why the current study found that the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law engaged in more conflict than the daughter-in-law and father-in-law.
In addition to there being gender differences within in-law relationships, there have also been gender differences on television in general, including gender roles within the family (e.g., Albada, 2000; Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). This study encompasses both of these elements, in-law relationships and television, and thus further supports both bodies of research. Findings of these studies have illustrated that men outnumber women on television and that males are represented three times more on television than females (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Further, research conducted by Kaufman (1999) found differences between the portrayal of men and women on television commercials. The current study also found that the portrayal of men and women on television differed because women in-law members were found to have more conflict with each other than if the conflict was between a man and a woman. In addition, there have been studies that have found gender differences specifically within families.

For example, research conducted by Larson (1993), compared two television families, The Cosby Show and The Simpsons, to further understand parents’ and children’s interactions with each other. Parents’ level of involvement with their children varied between shows and these findings differed from previous research in which the mother had the more active role than the father. Further, Dail and Way (1985) found that families were mostly headed by males as opposed to females and positive child responses were more prevalent than negative responses on television. In addition, fathers have been found to be more expressive, nurturing, and active parents than mothers (Dail & Way, 1985; Larson, 1993). Comstock and Strzyzewski (1990) found on family conflict on television that female characters engaged in more and longer conflicts than males. Therefore, family interactions vary on prime-time television depending on the role of
each member. Similarly, the present study also found that family interactions varied on television depending on the role of the family member.

Family members can understand their roles within the family structure from viewing television. The portrayal of children on television can influence how children interact within their own families (Buerkel-Rothfuss et al., 1982). Gender differences exist both on television and between in-law family members. Thus, gender differences in conflict can also exist between in-laws on television, which was observed in this study. The findings of this study also support the claim that gender differences exist on television because gender differences for conflict frequency between in-law members were found.

The roles of men and women as well as parents and children illustrate differences in their portrayals on television shows. Television shows such as *ELR* provide models that are socially useful for understanding family roles. Television plays an important role in shaping our beliefs and expectations about family relationships and understandings about society. These views come from a variety of sources, which can influence how people interpret and interact with members of their own family (Lull, 1980; Wilson, 2004). Thus, what people watch on television may impact their views about social norms and interactions with in-laws. Therefore, the findings of this study are significant to society because they help us to further understand gender differences and family roles, both on television and within in-law relationships.

*Initiation of conflict.* The results for research question one found that both parents-in-law initiated more conflict than the daughter-in-law. In particular, the mother-in-law was most likely to initiate conflict. Fourteen of 72 conflict episodes (19.4%) were initiated by the daughter-in-law toward her mother-in-law, 33 (45.8%) were initiated by the mother-
in-law toward her daughter-in-law, five (6.9%) were initiated by the daughter-in-law toward her father-in-law, eight (11.1%) were initiated by the father-in-law toward his daughter-in-law, one (1.4%) was initiated by the daughter-in-law toward both parents-in-law, and 11 (15.3%) were initiated by others. The results showed that the mother-in-law initiated significantly more conflict than the daughter-in-law and the daughter-in-law initiated significantly less conflict with both in-laws than expected.

There has been no known research about in-law roles and conflict initiation; however, there have been studies that have looked at nuclear family roles and conflict initiation. For example, Vuchinich (1987) examined how family roles impact how conflicts are initiated and ended; however, differences were not found based on the role or gender of the family member when initiating conflict overall, meaning taking into account conflicts with all family members. Instead, differences occurred when examining whom the family member was specifically initiating conflict toward. Mothers initiated conflict to sons more than to daughters and fathers initiated conflict to daughters more than to sons (Vuchinich, 1987). The present study also found differences for conflict initiation by generational role and sex. The parents-in-law were most likely to initiate conflict with the daughter-in-law, particularly the mother-in-law. Therefore, it is possible that once conflict is initiated, generational role and sex have an effect on the conflict as it unfolds.

Research has also found that mothers and daughters have a high involvement in conflict, which may be due to their stronger involvement within family interactions than men (Johnson, 1989a; Vuchinich, 1987). The current study also found that the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law engaged in more conflict than the father-in-law and daughter-in-law, and the mother-in-law initiated conflict the most. Vuchinich (1987) did not find
differences between role and initiation when considering the family as a whole, but did find differences when examining whom the family member initiated conflict toward. Consistencies between Vuchinich (1987) study and the current study are that there are generational role and gender differences when examining the specific dyads involved during conflict initiation. Further, the current study found that the parents-in-law initiated more conflict than the daughter-in-law. The presence of power within families as accorded by generational role may help to explain why this occurs.

Skill and Wallace (1990) examined the role of the family member and the use of power. They found that mothers are the most likely to use assertive power, which is the sum of all power acts. In addition, fathers were the next most likely to use assertive power. Children, sons and daughters, were the least likely to use assertive power. In addition, daughters within intact families and families where couples lived in the same household as their children, were found to have the largest percentage of their communicative acts being used for neutral ones. Neutral acts are comments not intended to be directive, which include acts that are not conforming, rejecting, or power acts (Skill & Wallace, 1990).

The above findings help to explain those of the current study because the parents-in-law were the dominant role in initiating conflict as opposed to the daughter-in-law. This may be due to the dynamic of power between parent-child relationships. In addition, the daughter was the least likely to initiate conflicts, which may be due to the use of neutral communicative acts.

*Conflict strategies.* Research questions two and three examined the conflict strategies that were used by in-law members. There were a total of 813 talk turns used and the
daughter-in-law and mother-in-law used integrative communication the most, whereas the father-in-law used distributive communication the most. Within the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law pair, there were 478 talk turns, with the daughter-in-law using 115 (14.2%) integrative strategies, 62 (7.6%) distributive strategies, 29 (3.6%) avoidance strategies, and one (0.1%) other strategy, whereas the mother-in-law used 149 (18.3%) integrative strategies, 99 (12.2%) distributive strategies, 22 (2.7%) avoidance strategies, and one (0.1%) other strategy. Between the daughter-in-law and father-in-law, there were 142 talk turns with the daughter-in-law using 28 (3.4%) integrative strategies, 25 (3.1%) distributive strategies, six (0.7%) avoidance strategies, and one (0.1%) other strategy, whereas the father-in-law used 22 (2.7%) integrative strategies, 48 (5.9%) distributive strategies, 11 (1.4%) avoidance strategies, and one (0.1%) other strategy. In addition, conflict between the daughter-in-law and both of her parents-in-law was coded. The daughter-in-law used 39 talk turns total for these conflicts, 23 (2.8%) for integrative and 16 (2.0%) for distributive.

The area of conflict strategies was approached via research questions for the present study due to the lack of research present about in-law conflict both on an interpersonal and mediated basis; however, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research examining family communication. For example, Dail and Way (1985) found that positive child responses to their parents were more prevalent than negative responses on television. This also held true for ELR because the daughter-in-law used the positive conflict strategy of integrative communication the most with both of her parents-in-law. Even though the daughter-in-law examined in ELR is a daughter through marriage and an adult child, the daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationship and the daughter-in-
law/father-in-law relationship are still parent-child relationships with a power differential, and thus the Dail and Way (1985) study helps to explain the findings of the present study. The present study also extends these findings because the daughter-in-law used integrative communication the most with the parents-in-law, which provides new information regarding how a daughter-in-law might respond in in-law conflict situations.

The findings for parents-in-law conflict strategies within the current study are also consistent with previous research conducted on family communication on television. Comstock and Strzyzewski (1990) found that mothers used integrative conflict strategies most frequently with their children when initiating conflict. In contrast, fathers were found to use distributive conflict strategies the most when initiating conflict. The present study did not analyze the type of strategy used when initiating conflict; however, within the entire conflict, the mother-in-law used integrative communication the most toward the daughter-in-law, whereas the father-in-law used distributive communication the most toward the daughter-in-law. The present study’s findings are thus consistent with both previous research that analyzed family communication and conflict on television and research conducted on family communication from an interpersonal perspective.

Sillars and Wilmot (1994) explained that conflict strategies are classified by valence and engagement, meaning that conflict strategies are positive or negative and direct or indirect. Integrative strategies are considered positive, distributive strategies are considered negative, and avoidance can be considered either positive or negative depending on the situation. Direct strategies include integrative and distributive, whereas avoidance is viewed as indirect (Canary et al., 1995; Sillars & Wilmot, 1994). However,
the engagement of the strategy is more important than the valence when dealing with family communication (Canary et al., 1995).

Further, Canary et al. (1995) explained that family members prefer direct conflict strategies to indirect. This preference may explain why the current study found that the relevant in-law family members used the direct conflict strategies of integrative and distributive the most, as opposed to the indirect conflict strategy of avoidance. These findings are important because people might think it is best to “sweep it under the rug” even though most family members seem to prefer “having it on the table.” Therefore, family members seem to favor direct conflict strategies regardless of whether these strategies are positive or negative. The findings of the current study also illustrate that television is presenting the message that direct conflict strategies are the most prevalent and might be more desirable within family conflict episodes and in-law relationships.

Cramer’s phi was also calculated for the hypothesis and research questions to understand the relationship between the variables being tested. There was a strong relationship between in-law role and conflict occurrence, which was tested in hypothesis one. The relationship between the variables tested in the research questions resulted in a Cramer’s phi of moderate-to-strong and small-to-moderate relationships. A possible explanation for why there was a stronger relationship between the variables tested in the hypothesis compared to those examined in the research questions might be because even though there is a lack of research dealing with in-law relationships, one of the consistent findings in prior research studies is that the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law have more conflict frequency than other in-law pairs. In addition, the variables of conflict initiation and conflict strategies have almost never been examined in in-law research.
Strengths of Study

There has been a limited amount of research conducted on in-law relationships and no known research about in-laws and conflict on television. Thus, one strength of this study is that it is innovative in the field of communication. The findings of the current study contribute to the knowledge about in-law relationships and create a starting basis for examining this relationship from a communication perspective.

The present study is also strong in its description of measures. Namely, inter-coder reliability was high, with each coding category, excluding conflict strategies, having a Cohen’s kappa of 1.0. The reliability for conflict strategies equaled .91. Thus, the operational definitions were clear and concise and should be easily replicated in future research. This is significant because of the limited amount of research present about in-law relationships and because the current study is the first known to use this coding scheme exclusively in the context of in-law relationships. This coding scheme was developed by Sillars (1980; Sillars et al., 1982) and the current study has expanded the scope of these conflict strategy category’s usefulness in interpersonal relationships. Thus, the present study provides future researchers with a foundation for expanding research in the area of in-law conflict, particularly in the fields of interpersonal communication and media studies.

Limitations of Study

As with any social scientific project, the methodology used for this study does create some limitations. Content analysis is helpful in systematically understanding what about a particular field of study is being presented on television. However, this study used television to code interpersonal conflict messages in in-law relationships by using a
coding strategy developed for real life interactions. Examining a television series does not allow for coding interactions that take place in real life; however, self-report and observation also have their drawbacks, such as artificiality (Vuchinich, 1987). Overall, interactions on television are artificial and constructed within a specific set of rules, thus limiting the generalizability of the current study's findings to other settings.

There has been a lack of scholarly research about in-law relationships in the realm of interpersonal communication and television, which has contributed limitations to this study. Since the current study is innovative in its approach of examining in-law relationships on television, this focus has limited the generalizations that can be made from these findings. Research dealing with family communication has provided a preliminary basis for understanding the findings of the current study, but even research in the area of family communication lacks studies dealing with adult children’s communication with their parents. The findings of this study are informative; however, it is difficult to tie these findings to previous research in order to illustrate consistencies and differences. In addition, the availability of research regarding in-law communication is extremely limited. Most articles about in-law relationships come from a sociology, psychology, or family studies viewpoint. Therefore, future research should continue to analyze in-law relationships from a communication perspective.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In-law relationships have rarely been studied from a communication aspect, thus, future research should continue analyzing interactions within these interpersonal relationships. The only currently known studies examining in-law communication are Jorgenson (1994), who observed how individuals address their in-laws, and Serewicz,
Ballard, Bruflat, and Griffin (2006), who examined how disclosure received from in-laws impact the quality of the in-law relationship and how this quality was associated with marital satisfaction. Our family experiences are important factors in shaping our viewpoints and how we interact and communicate with one another. In addition, the family structure has been changing over time; however, it is possible that our understanding of family communication has not adapted along with the modifications to the family structure (Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, Soukup, & Turman, 2001; Vangelisti, 1993). Even the communication style can differ based on the type of family relationship.

Natural families and in-law families each have similarities and differences with one another. Similarities between both family types are that they each contain elements of interdependence and involuntariness. Interdependence means that each family member’s decisions impact all other family members involved. Natural families and in-law families are also involuntary because people cannot choose their biological parents, and to some degree the same goes for one’s parents-in-law. These two types of families are similar, but at the same time can be viewed very differently. Jorgenson (1994) researched the use of the terms “mom” and “dad” in relation to one’s biological parents and one’s parents-in-law, finding that some people use these terms for both sets of parents to indicate a sense of kinship and unity; however, others reject using these terms for their parents-in-law to create a clear distinction between the natural family and the in-law family. Thus, natural families and in-law families have similarities and differences with one another and it is important to continue in-law communication research because of the distinction between these types of families.
Another type of family, which has received an increasing amount of research attention, is the blended family or stepfamily. Braithwaite et al. (2001) explained that our family helps shape our identity and in recent years the types of families present in American society has been changing due to divorces and remarriages, causing a societal need to better understand these forms of family. Research dealing with stepfamilies found differences between the types of parent-child relationships regarding topic avoidance (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Research has even been examining the differences between strong stepfamilies and stepfamilies that are having difficulty (Golish, 2003). Stepfamily communication is similar to in-law relationships because these types of family members are both related to one another through marriage, thus in-law relationships seem similarly deserving of increased communication research attention.

The present study on in-law relationships suggests that conflict is a central theme and the dynamic of conflict situations between in-law family members should continue to be studied. The length of conflict and the responses to conflict within in-law relationships are two communicative elements that could use further investigation. For example, there are very few studies that have researched how many consecutive talk turns are used per conflict episode based on family member role. In addition, studies should analyze responses to conflict strategies within these conflict episodes. Typically, people mirror conflict strategies (Canary et al., 1995; Sillars & Wilmot, 1994); thus, it is possible that if one in-law family member uses a particular conflict strategy, then the other in-law family member involved in the conflict episode will respond with the same or a similar strategy. Previous research examining how individuals respond to hurtful messages suggests that studies should further analyze how the type of relationship (i.e., romantic partners, family
This type of study could be approached as a qualitative conversation analysis to further understand family conflict management.

Initiation of conflict in general and the type of conflict when initiated between in-law family members is also an area that deserves some attention. There is a scarcity of information regarding conflict initiation even within family communication, let alone in in-law relationships. Therefore, initiation of conflict, particular in relation to sex and family role, should be approached further. In addition, the type of conflict strategy used when initiating the conflict should also be examined. Future research should look at what conflict strategy an in-law family member is using to initiate conflict and to whom they are using this strategy toward. It would be of interest to see if the daughter-in-law used different conflict strategies to initiate conflict toward the mother-in-law as opposed to the father-in-law.

Intergenerational roles may also have an impact within in-law relationships. The current study found that sex and the generational roles of parent and child were related to differences within the conflict situation. Future research could examine the differences within a female-female in-law pair and a male-male in-law pair in conflict. Same sex versus cross sex pairs could also use more attention in the area of in-law relationships. In general, more research is needed in the field of interpersonal communication on the topic of in-law relationships as well as within media studies. Future research in the area of media studies might be interested in comparing and contrasting messages regarding in-law relationships that were presented on television from two different generations, such as All in the Family versus ELR.
The current and previous studies have found that sex has an impact on the conflict situation. An interesting angle for future research within the area of media studies and gender communication could take is to analyze whether the gender of the writer of sitcom episodes influences the product of the mediated conflict situation. It would be interesting to examine whether female sitcom writers develop conflict situations in a more favorable atmosphere for female characters than male writers and whether male writers play into more stereotypical mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships than female writers. Currently, there is no known research that has ever explored this angle. Future research could also focus on the ethnography of sitcom writers and the sitcom writing process.

There is the possibility that writers struggle for punch lines in episodes later in the season and later in the run of the series. This could provide an explanation for why certain mediated conflict situations result in stereotypical portrayals, even those between in-law members.

The source of the message may also be why the writing of conflict situations within sitcom episodes occurs in the manner that it does. The writers, networks, ratings, and the intended demographic may all influence the specific interactions that take place within mediated conflicts. The writers may play into stereotypes or their own personal experiences. The networks may want specific occurrences within sitcom episodes because of money and ratings. The intended demographic may also impact the expected mediated interactions because of the age and sex of the viewer. All of these message sources may in some way impact the dialogue that is presented within sitcom episodes and future research could further analyze this relationship. This study and future media research dealing with the sources of the message could aid programmers in determining
who to target and how to broaden their audience by further understanding the relationship between the audience and the writing or content of the series.

In summary, the in-law relationship is an area of study that needs future research because this relationship is common in the family context but scarcely acknowledged in the scholarly literature. There are a limited amount of studies dealing with in-law relationships, even in the area of sociology, psychology, and family studies. The present study analyzed in-law relationships on television to further understand conflict frequency, conflict initiation, and conflict strategies within these types of relationships from a communication perspective. The present study provides future researchers with a basis for increasing research in the area of in-law conflict, particularly in the fields of interpersonal communication and media studies. Thus, future in-law research should continue to expand into the field of communication.
Conflict: Conflict occurs when there are incompatible goals and/or violated expectations (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990). Conflict is observed when there are behaviors or expressions that communicate that the individuals have contradictory goals or that their expectations in some form have been violated. Conflict is an expressed struggle between two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals. An expressed struggle is displayed through the communicative exchanges that make up the conflict. This can occur either verbally, nonverbally, or a combination of the two. Verbal expressions include remarks and disclosing of information that is contrary to the other person involved in the conflict. Verbal expressions can be in a rational tone or a raised voice. Nonverbal expressions can include hand gestures, slamming of doors, displacing frustration onto objects, and looks of confusion or disagreement by scrunching eyebrows, glaring, or crossing one's arms. The people involved in the conflict are interdependent because one party's choices impact the other party involved in the conflict. In addition, examples of possible scarce resources involved within the conflict are self-esteem and power because these are physical, economic, and/or social consequences. Interference occurs during conflict because the presence of another person gets in the way of someone trying to achieve their goals because of the incompatibility of the two parties involved.

COLUMN 1: Conflict Occurrence: Conflict occurrence refers to the entire conflict. The entire series of talk turns that take place during a conflict equals one conflict occurrence. One conflict occurrence is counted from the time conflict is initiated until the conflict ends by being brought to resolution or when there is movement to another topic. There can be any number of talk turns involved in one conflict occurrence. A second conflict occurrence takes place when conflict is once again initiated. Conflict occurrences will be documented when the daughter-in-law has conflict with her mother-in-law and/or father-in-law. This means that for a conflict occurrence to happen, the daughter-in-law and one or both of her parents-in-law have to be present.

1. Conflict between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law: This conflict occurrence is used when the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law have conflict with each other. This can occur when only the two of them are involved in the conflict or when others are involved in the conflict, except when the father-in-law is having conflict with the daughter-in-law by being on the mother-in-law's side of the conflict. If there are other people involved in the conflict, this conflict occurrence is documented when anyone,
including the father-in-law, is on the daughter-in-law's side of the conflict. This is also used when there are other people involved in the conflict that are on the mother-in-law's side, except when it is the father-in-law.

2. Conflict between the daughter-in-law and father-in-law: This conflict occurrence is used when the daughter-in-law and father-in-law have conflict with each other. This can occur when only the two of them are involved in the conflict or when others are involved in the conflict, except when the mother-in-law is having conflict with the daughter-in-law by being on the father-in-law's side of the conflict. If there are other people involved in the conflict, this conflict occurrence is documented when anyone, including the mother-in-law, is on the daughter-in-law's side of the conflict. This is also used when there are other people involved in the conflict that are on the father-in-law's side, except when it is the mother-in-law.

3. Conflict between the daughter-in-law and both the mother-in-law and father-in-law: This conflict occurrence is used when the daughter-in-law engages in conflict with both her mother-in-law and father-in-law on the same topic at the same time. This means that the daughter-in-law is on one side of the conflict and both her mother-in-law and father-in-law are on the other side of the conflict. Other people may or may not be involved in the conflict and they can be on either side.

COLUMNS 2: Initiation of Conflict: The initiation of conflict refers to whomever begins the conflict episode on one given topic situation. Conflict situations may or may not become resolved before the next initiation of conflict. Another initiation of conflict transpires when the conflict topic changes or when the conflict expression returns to the same topic after there was a period of harmony. The initiation of conflict occurs by whomever “gets the ball rolling” by saying or doing something; however, this must be initiation of a direct conflict. This can include someone disclosing information that creates the awareness of incompatible goals and/or violated expectations. Initiation of conflict can occur through nonverbal expressions by someone pushing another, making gestures, or performing an action that creates awareness that incompatible goals and/or violated expectations exist. The initiation of conflict can be performed by anyone present. The initiation of conflict occurs with the talk turn that allows the audience to know that conflict is present and that a character is attempting to confront another. This may occur when someone says or does something that allows the audience to immediately know that conflict exists. The initiation of conflict can also occur when someone is reactive to a comment or nonverbal action depending on the situation. The important factor in determining the initiation of conflict is when someone viewing the conflict episode becomes aware that conflict is present due to incompatible goals or violated expectations and that a character is attempting to confront another character in attempt to have a direct conflict.

1. Daughter-in-law initiates conflict with mother-in-law: This occurs when the daughter-in-law starts conflict with her mother-in-law. This can take place when it is the two of them or when there are other people involved on either side of the conflict, as long as the father-in-law is not on the side of the mother-in-law.
2. Daughter-in-law initiates conflict with father-in-law: This occurs when the daughter-in-law starts conflict with her father-in-law. This can take place when it is the two of them or when there are other people involved on either side of the conflict, as long as the mother-in-law is not on the side of the father-in-law.

3. Daughter-in-law initiates conflict with mother-in-law and father-in-law: This occurs when the daughter-in-law starts conflict with both her mother-in-law and father-in-law on the same topic at the same time. This can take place with or without other people involved on either side of the conflict.

4. Mother-in-law initiates conflict with daughter-in-law: This occurs when the mother-in-law starts conflict with her daughter-in-law. This can take place when it is the two of them or when there are other people involved in the conflict even when the father-in-law is on either side of the conflict.

5. Father-in-law initiates conflict with daughter-in-law: This occurs when the father-in-law starts conflict with her daughter-in-law. This can take place when it is the two of them or when there are other people involved in the conflict even when the mother-in-law is on either side of the conflict.

6. Other: This occurs when anyone, except in the above scenarios, starts the conflict. This is also used when the mother-in-law starts conflict that occurs between the daughter-in-law and father-in-law and when the father-in-law starts conflict that occurs between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law.

COLUMN 3: Length of Conflict within the Entire Conflict Occurrence: The length of conflict within the entire conflict occurrence refers to every talk turn present during the conflict episode including others that are not the daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, and father-in-law. The length of conflict within the entire conflict occurrence is equal to the number of talk turns that took place during the conflict. This can range from one talk turn to any number of talk turns as long as all of the talk turns took place before the conflict occurrence came to an end. The number of talk turns are counted from the time conflict is initiated until conflict is brought to resolution or when there is movement to another topic. For example, if there were five talk turns within one conflict occurrence, then the length of conflict within the entire conflict occurrence is equal to five. Talk turns include both verbal statement and nonverbal communication. For example, if the father-in-law makes a verbal statement, the daughter-in-law then reacts by throwing her arms in the air, and then the father-in-law makes another verbal statement, this is counted as three talk turns. In addition, any talk turns between in-laws are separated out by each sentence or thought completion to illustrate multiplicity, while talk turns by other characters or talk turns to other characters that are not part of the relevant in-laws are grouped as one talk turn.

COLUMN 4: Length of Conflict Between In-Laws: The length of conflict between in-laws refers to the number of talk turns that are only used by the daughter-in-law, mother-
in-law, and father-in-law that are involved in the conflict. This number may be equal to or less than the length of conflict within the entire conflict occurrence. This number can never exceed the number listed for the length of conflict within the entire conflict occurrence. For example, if 14 is listed for the length of conflict within the entire conflict occurrence or there are 14 talk turns involved in one conflict occurrence, three of which were talk turns used by the daughter-in-law, four by the mother-in-law, two by the father-in-law, five by another person other than the daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, or father-in-law, and the mother-in-law and father-in-law are on the same side of the conflict, then the length of conflict between in-laws is recorded as nine. However, if the mother-in-law is on the daughter-in-law’s side of conflict when the daughter-in-law is having conflict with the father-in-law, then the mother-in-law is not counted in the length of conflict between in-laws but only in the length of conflict within the entire conflict occurrence. In addition, if the father-in-law is on the daughter-in-law’s side of conflict when the daughter-in-law is having conflict with the mother-in-law, then the father-in-law is not counted in the length of conflict between in-laws but only in the length of conflict within the entire conflict occurrence.

COLUMN 5: Use of Conflict Strategies: Each category below lists who is using a conflict strategy, what conflict strategy, and who it is being used towards. There are three conflict strategies that are listed and one other category.

- Integrative: These strategies are verbally cooperative and disclosing statements. These statements can attribute responsibility for the conflict onto oneself or onto both parties involved. Integrative statements can initiate mutual considerations of solutions to conflict; they may refer to common interests, goals and compatibilities as well as statements that express understanding, feelings, acceptance, or positive regard for the others, despite the prevalence of conflict. These strategies can include nonverbal communication such as nodding head to acknowledge an understanding. Integrative strategies also include people initiating problem solving, showing empathy or support, and soliciting and disclosing information relevant to the conflict (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Sillars et al., 1982).

- Distributive: These strategies are direct, aggressive, and verbally competitive. These statements may illustrate disagreement, directly criticize personal characteristics of others, and show personal resentment towards someone else. These strategies include joking, teasing, yelling, cursing, being rude, and asking leading questions that fault another. These strategies include nonverbal gestures such as shaking head no, glaring, scrunching eyebrows, crossing arms, throwing arms up in the air, taking frustration out on objects, punching, hitting, kicking, and slamming doors. Distributive statements deny or minimize personal responsibility for the conflict. Distributive strategies also include making prescriptions for others by using requests, demands, arguments, or threats that seek change in the other person’s behavior to resolve the conflict (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Sillars et al., 1982).

- Avoidance: These strategies minimize any explicit discussion about the conflict. These statements deny that conflict is present or are unconstructive statements.
that reduce the conversation about the conflict. Nonverbal avoidance strategies include giving the silent treatment, exiting the situation, and ignoring the other party by turning one’s back and not making eye contact. People using these strategies change topics in order to conclude discussion in regards to the conflict. Avoidance strategies also include people pretending to be hurt by others, postponing the issue, and focusing on the meaning or appropriateness of words used by others (Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990; Sillars et al., 1982).

- **Other:** This category includes any strategy that is used that cannot be classified as integrative, distributive, or avoidance.

1. Daughter-in-law using integrative towards mother-in-law
2. Daughter-in-law using distributive towards mother-in-law
3. Daughter-in-law using avoidance towards mother-in-law
4. Daughter-in-law using other towards mother-in-law
5. Daughter-in-law using integrative towards father-in-law
7. Daughter-in-law using avoidance towards father-in-law
8. Daughter-in-law using other towards father-in-law
13. Mother-in-law using integrative towards daughter-in-law
14. Mother-in-law using distributive towards daughter-in-law
15. Mother-in-law using avoidance towards daughter-in-law
16. Mother-in-law using other towards daughter-in-law
17. Father-in-law using integrative towards daughter-in-law
18. Father-in-law using distributive towards daughter-in-law
19. Father-in-law using avoidance towards daughter-in-law

20. Father-in-law using other towards daughter-in-law

21. Other: This refers to any other person not mentioned above that is using any type of conflict strategy. This also includes when the mother-in-law is on the daughter-in-law’s side of conflict when the daughter-in-law and father-in-law are engaging in conflict. In addition, this also encompasses when the father-in-law is on the daughter-in-law’s side of conflict during conflict between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. This is used for coding the daughter-in-law, father-in-law, and mother-in-law’s talk turns when their talk turns are being directed at anyone other than the relevant in-law characters.

**COLUMN 6: Talk Turn Count:** This category is to keep track of all individual talk turns for reference purposes. Capital letters will be used to signify the conflict occurrence and numbers for each talk turn. Example: A1, A2, A3...B1, B2, B3, B4...C1, C2.

**COLUMN 7: Description:** This category is to keep track of the conflict occurrences for reference purposes. This is done with a brief summary of the setting and conflict.
<table>
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