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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

PERCEIVED PARENTING STYLE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP  
TO HOPEFULNESS, HAPPINESS, AND OPTIMISM  
IN A COLLEGE STUDENT SAMPLE

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Psychology

Sarah J. Griess

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education  
Department of Counseling Psychology

December, 2010

## ABSTRACT

Griess, Sarah J. *Perceived Parenting Style and its Relationship to Hopefulness, Happiness, and Optimism in a College Student Sample*. Published Doctor of Psychology Dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2010.

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences among positive psychology traits of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, between three perceived parenting styles in 291 undergraduate college students. It was hypothesized that students identifying with the reared authoritative parenting style would endorse higher levels of hopefulness, happiness, and optimism than the permissive and authoritarian parenting styles. Multivariate and discriminant analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses. Data analysis in this study supported that the perceived authoritative parenting style contributed to higher levels of optimism than the authoritarian parenting style. The development of optimism or lack thereof can become a means of clinical intervention both individually and in providing parenting interventions. Based on the studies relating optimism to coping skills, identifying levels of optimism in students can help provide ideas for clinical intervention. The hypothesis that the perceived authoritative parenting style would contribute to the development of higher levels of optimism than the perceived permissive style were inconclusive due to the limitations of using multivariate analyses. The hypotheses suggesting that the perceived authoritative parenting style would also contribute to the development of higher levels of happiness and hopefulness were not supported in this study.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As new generations of students enter into college, universities find ways to adjust to the unique issues presented with each changing generation of students. Since the era of the baby boomers becoming parents, universities are finding themselves adjusting to the unique issues brought about by over involved parents that have earned themselves the name of “helicopter parents” through their constant hovering (Lum, 2006, White, 2005). The term “helicopter parents” evolved from the idea of a hovering helicopter being like many parents of college students that hover around their children, getting involved in every aspect of their children’s lives, and impacting the social development and independence of the students as they immerse themselves in the college experience. As a University staff working with students, it is often predictable to identify which students have been raised with helicopter parents and which students have not, by observing the way they adjust to college life and exert their new found independence as college students.

Helicopter parenting is just one style of parenting, displaying the same parenting characteristics of Baumrind’s authoritarian parenting style (1966, 1991). The study of parenting styles and their effects on child development and socialization has been a widely researched topic. Diana Baumrind is one of the most well established researchers in the area of parenting. She developed her own theory and categorization of parental

conduct and discussed four styles of parenting including the permissive, authoritative, authoritarian, and rejecting-neglecting parent. Baumrind's theory opened the door for a wide variety of research on the characteristics of each parenting style and how those characteristics contribute to the development of both desirable and less desirable traits in offspring.

According to Baumrind's model, parental behavior is measured in terms of demandingness and responsiveness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Baumrind (1991) stated that demandingness "refers to the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (p. 61-62). Responsiveness then "refers to the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands" (p. 62). These measurements facilitated Baumrind's development of the four models of parenting style (Baumrind, 1990). The authoritative parenting style is considered to produce the most well adjusted children as it focuses on both demandingness and responsiveness and allows for warmth, flexibility, and reason (Baumrind, 1990, Buri, 1991). The remaining styles of parenting behavior, including authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting-neglecting, are more likely to produce children who display behaviors that are likely to lead to lower levels of independent functioning. This is due to a variation in levels of demandingness and responsiveness that are either too high or too low for obtaining optimal child development.

Much of the research over the past three decades revolves around the impact of parenting styles on child and adolescent development. Recent studies have begun to look

at the effects of parenting style in college students as they transition into adulthood. The transition from adolescence into adulthood can be a great time of change and ambiguity for many college students as they are no longer an adolescent in high school, and are now entering into adulthood (Rindfuss, 1991). Students often find themselves feeling caught between adolescence and adulthood, not quite fitting into either category (Arnett, 2000). As they leave home, many for the first time, they are faced with challenges and choices that may either foster or inhibit their independence. Many students are being introduced to their first jobs, financial freedom, adult romantic relationships, and independent decision making. As new roles and freedoms are encountered, young people find themselves able to have greater freedom in responding to the changes taking place in their lives (Rindfuss, 1991). These roles tend to enhance the feelings of independence encountered upon entering into college. However, in addition to learning to be self sufficient, according to Arnett (1998), the greatest measure of independence is differentiation from others, especially their parents.

Baumrind (1991) discussed the significant role changes that take place in adolescence as the child begins to assert his or her independence. In relating to others, peer opinions are now being considered along with family. As the adolescent matures he or she is assigned new duties within the family and in association to the greater society that may or may not foster a greater level of independence that comes with moving into adolescence and emerging adulthood. Bednar and Fisher (2003) discuss the shift from relying totally on one's parents for social cues and behavioral guidelines, to referencing peers instead. Fuligni and Eccles (1993) found that the more the adolescent felt they were involved in the decision making with their parents (authoritative parenting style) the less

they referenced peers for advice. Ultimately, Bednar and Fisher found that adolescents were more likely to reference their peers in making decisions regarding social matters, and that adolescents in authoritative families tended to reference their parents in making moral decisions. This initial individuation that takes place in adolescence carries into young adulthood and as individuals reach college age.

There is research to suggest that the impact that one's parents have on them continues well into adulthood. van Wel, ter Bogt, and Raaijmakers (2002) found that the parental bond in young people ages 12 to 24 years had a significant effect on the overall welfare of the participants in the study. Results also showed that the effect of the parental bond was even more significant than that of a best friend or partner. By this time, a precedent has been set as to how much students will turn to their families in times of significant changes and important decision making.

Because the college experience is a time of independence in decision making and exploration, this opens the door for many researchers to focus on student engagement in negative behaviors such as drug and alcohol use and exploration, engagement in sexual exploration and unprotected sex, and the relation to issues of self-esteem and depression. There is research to support that these issues have been significantly related to parenting styles that are characterized with less warmth, extremely high or extremely low levels of parental demandingness, and little to no consideration of child input (Smetana, 1995). Studies are also looking at relationships between differing parenting styles of the mother and father and their effects on same sex and opposite sex offspring in regard to self-esteem, alcohol related behaviors, depression, adjustment, and rejection (Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2007; Zhou, Sandler, Millsap, Wolchik, & Dawson-McClure, 2008;

Crean, 2008). Parenting styles classified as neglectful are characterized by parental inaction and inattentiveness in raising the child; in essence this style is similar to the child having to rear one's self. Youth reared by neglectful parents are more likely to display maladaptive strategies to dealing with issues, are more reactive than proactive, and often display behaviors that take them off task (Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000). Knutson, DeGarmo, and Reid (2004) found that youth reared with the neglectful parenting style were often more aggressive, displayed a greater risk of being involved in delinquent behavior, and were more likely to struggle academically.

On the other end of the parenting spectrum is research on the parenting style that is likely to produce the most positive behaviors in children. Authoritative parents are more likely to display clear and concrete direction, leaving little ambiguity with the children, while providing a give and take atmosphere, allowing for the children to make choices and be responsible for the consequences (Buri, 1991). It is well researched that authoritative parents most likely rear children who are more independent, responsible, and goal oriented (Buri, 1991; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991; Baumrind, 1966). Steinberg et al. reported that kids reared authoritatively are also more likely to be successful academically and less involved in delinquent activity.

Although research suggests that children reared with authoritative parenting are likely to be the best adjusted behaviorally, there is little research to suggest that these children will also be well adjusted in more intrapersonal dimensions of positive psychology such as happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. In neglectful, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles, research shows a link to increased levels of depression, low-self esteem, and substance abuse in comparison to their peers reared by authoritative

parents (Baumrind, 1991; Berg-Nielsen, Vikan & Dahl, 2003; Dornbusch et al., 1987). Whether or not these parenting styles also produce some strengths in children and adolescents remains unclear.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) stress the importance of the need “for massive research on human strengths and virtues” (p. 8). They also stress that now that psychology has turned to recognizing the active agency of individuals in their life outcomes, practicing from the positive psychology “worldview may have the direct effect of preventing many of the major emotional disorders” while producing side effects of increased physical health due to the mind body connection and “making normal people stronger and more productive and making high human potential actual” (p. 8).

Positive psychology focuses on the strengths of people and how those strengths were acquired. Although positive psychology is not a new concept, recently it has received more attention by researchers (Foster & Lloyd, 2007). In fact, strength based conceptualization and intervention has been an emphasis of Counseling Psychology since its inception over 60 years ago (Gelso & Fretz, 2001). Gable and Haidt (2005) defined positive psychology as an examination of the circumstances and procedures that lead to individuals, groups, and systems functioning and thriving at their highest level or ability. Park, Peterson, & Seligman (2004) noted that positive psychology identifies strengths in character, and that these strengths are associated strongly with the amount of satisfaction one draws from life. Three traits of positive psychology include happiness, hopefulness, and optimism (Harris, Thoresen, & Lopez, 2007; Baldwin, McIntyre, & Hardaway, 2007). According to Gable and Haidt’s definition, these three traits of positive psychology will contribute to the functioning of individuals at their highest ability. The

contribution of these traits is an important consideration for research in looking at interventions focused on helping our college students to be successful. Identifying parenting styles that rear students with high levels of positive psychology may be an important step for both parents and students that can, according to Gable and Haidt's findings related to increased ability, maximize the opportunity a student has to be successful in his or her college career.

### Need for the Study

Much of the parenting style research focuses on behavioral outcomes of children reared with one of Baumrind's (1990) parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglecting-rejecting) such as academic adjustment, proneness to substance abuse, autonomy, self control, etc. However, few studies address the positive psychology, or intrapersonal traits and strengths, of college students in relation to parenting styles with which they were reared. In association with research done on the change and transition experienced during the college years, as well as the research that looks at the benefits of traits of positive psychology, research is warranted to begin to look at more intrapersonal displays of positive psychology traits versus negative behavioral displays of college students reared with a particular parenting style.

Because much of the prior research has been focused on negative behavioral displays, the authoritative parenting style, yielding the most positive displays of behavior, has been a focus of parenting books and parent training. However, it is currently unclear if authoritative parenting, versus authoritarian, permissive, and neglecting-rejecting, is also producing the most positive intrapersonal outcomes. The relationship between parenting styles and specific traits of positive psychology such as happiness, hopefulness,

and optimism, three traits that are suggested to contribute to optimal functioning, also remains unclear (Harris et al., 2007; Baldwin et al., 2007).

For the purpose of this study, only three of Baumrind's parenting styles will be used: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Because the neglecting-rejecting parenting style implies a lack of parenting techniques it is difficult to measure on a self-report instrument. This parenting style is also more likely to result in parents abandoning their children and less likely to produce children that attend college and therefore it was eliminated from the study. In fact, one of the most widely used parenting style questionnaires, the Perceived Parenting Style Survey (PPSS, Mclun & Merrell, 1998), also does not attempt to define the rejecting-neglecting parenting style.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences among positive psychology traits of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, between three perceived parenting styles in undergraduate college students.

#### *Research Questions*

Q1 Are there significant differences in happiness [as measured by the Short Depression-Happiness Scale (SDHS) Joseph, Linley, Harwood, Lewis, & McCollam, 2004) among Baumrind's (1991) three parenting styles, including Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive [as measured by the Perceived Parenting Styles Survey, (McClun & Merrell, 1998)?]

Q2 Are there significant differences in hopefulness [as measured by the Snyder Hope Scale, Snyder et al., 1991] among Baumrind's (1991) three parenting styles including Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive [as measured by the Perceived Parenting Styles Survey, (McClun & Merrell, 1998)?]

Q3 Are there significant differences in optimism [as measured by the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R), Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994] among Baumrind's (1991) three parenting styles including Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive [as measured by the Perceived Parenting Styles Survey, (McClun & Merrell, 1998)?]

### Definitions of Terms Used in this Study

*Parenting style:* “Four-fold classification of parenting behavior that describes how parents reconcile the joint needs of children for nurturance and limit-setting” (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62).

*Authoritative parenting:* This parenting style has been characterized by a high level of demandingness and a high level of responsiveness (Baumrind, 1991).

*Permissive parenting:* A parenting style that is “noncontrolling, nondemanding, and relatively warm” (Baumrind, 1971, p. 2).

*Authoritarian parenting:* The authoritarian parenting style is classified by high demandingness and low responsiveness (Baumrind, 1991).

*Helicopter parents:* “always hovering over their children (running interference for their kids, intimidating teachers and coaches) (Malley-Morrison, 2009, np).

*Demandingness:* “. . . the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys” (Baumrind, 1991, p. 61-62).

*Responsiveness:* “The extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children’s special needs and demands” (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62).

*Positive psychology:* “Positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104).

*Happiness:* “By real or genuine happiness we understand a durable state of balance between the individual’s wishes, goals, and needs, on the one hand, and the surroundings of the world on the other (Jacobsen, 2007).

*Hopefulness:* “a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed determination) and (b) pathways (planning of ways to meet goals)” (Snyder et al, 1991, p. 571).

*Optimism:* “Having a strong expectation that, in general, things will turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustrations” (Goleman, 1995, p. 88).

### Assumptions

Assumptions about this research include:

1. It is assumed that because this study looks at perceptions of parenting style that such perceptions affect the reality of the participant and therefore is assumed to be an approximate report of reared parenting style.
2. All participants participated in this study of their own free will.
3. The participants were honest in responses and represented accurate perceptions of self and perceived parenting style on the self-report questionnaires and demographic data.

### Delimitations of the Study

This study was designed to detect differences in three characteristics of positive psychology between three different perceived styles of parenting. Therefore, only differences between the groups will be discussed and no causal relationships will be inferred. The independent variable, parenting style, is measured by student self-report, identifying their perception of the parenting style with which they were reared. Therefore

any self-report measure is subject to personal bias by the reporter. This study also focuses on overall perceived parenting style. Therefore only the perceived parenting style of the primary caregiver will be considered, not allowing for effects of parenting inconsistency to be measured. Finally, this study is set within the boundaries of the undergraduate population at a mid-sized western university and therefore any results should only be considered with this delimitation in mind.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences among positive psychology traits of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, between three perceived parenting styles in undergraduate college students. This chapter will provide a literature review of the benefits of positive psychology and the traits of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. A review of research on parenting style will also be discussed, as well as Baumrind's three styles of parenting and findings associated with offspring reared from each style.

#### Positive Psychology

According to Dahlsgaard, Peterson, and Seligman (2005), psychology has ignored human potential for far too long. Part of this lack of attention is because we lack a solid definition of those traits and virtues that contribute to optimal human functioning as defined by positive psychology. The DSM-IV defines that which limits and contributes to dysfunctional human behavior and discussion of mental health rarely focuses on more than the deficiency or nonexistence of mental illness (Dahlsgaard et al.). The re-emergence of positive psychology pushes the field toward changing focus, toward a building of strengths and virtues that allow humans to focus on what is good and right within themselves. Gable and Haidt (2005) discussed over 20 conditions or traits of positive psychology that can be focused on to "contribute to the flourishing or optimal

functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (p. 104). Happiness, hopefulness, and optimism are three traits within the realm of positive psychology that make contributions to the positive functioning of individuals, helping people understand not what is wrong, but “what is right with people” (p. 105).

Positive psychology is, for the purpose of this study, defined as “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104). This term grew out of recognition that psychological research and focus was mostly geared toward mental illness, and the desire arose to focus less on psychopathology and more on areas that contribute to positive psychological growth and functioning. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) stressed the importance of the incorporation of positive psychology into current research and psychological practice. They suggested that there is a need for considerable amounts of research focusing on the strengths and virtues that humans possess so that environments within the profession of psychology can be created to cultivate these strengths. They reinforced the idea that humans are being seen now, more than ever, as active agents in their lives and that by practicing from the viewpoint of positive psychology prevention of mental and emotional dysfunction can take place versus continuous focus on the correction and treatment of mental disorders. Counseling Psychology has long focused on prevention as one of its defining features. Gelso and Fretz (2001) state that prevention is a role of the counseling psychologist that looks ahead and prepares for difficulties that may arise. This approach can help clients make appropriate changes in their lives so that the interruption that future struggles may cause in the client’s life can be minimized.

Although the term may be fairly new, the idea of positive psychology can be traced back to Aristotle. Hackney (2007) reviewed Aristotle's idea of *Eudaimonia* and *telos* being linked to the optimal functioning of humans. William James also discussed ideas that fit with the concept of positive psychology. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) James stated, "For practical life at any rate, the *chance* of salvation is enough. No fact in human nature is more characteristic than its willingness to live on chance. The existence of the chance makes the difference . . . between a life of which the keynote is resignation and a life of which the keynote is hope" (p. 526-527). This phrase perhaps captured the essence of positive psychology; a focus not on resignation to what is causing dysfunction or dissatisfaction, but instead "the existence of chance. . ." and a focus on "hope" (James, 1902, p. 526-527). Gable and Haidt (2005) stated that positive psychology is emerging after several years of fading into the background of psychopathology. Positive psychology has focused on several traits such as love, optimism, intrinsic motivation, inspiration, hope, forgiveness, happiness, and morality. Gable and Haidt reinforced the notion that although positive psychology focuses on positive traits of life, it does not automatically assume that the rest of psychology is negative. Positive psychology has come about to draw a "balance" between the focus on mental illness and mental health.

Dahlsgaard et al. (2005) discussed the idea that psychology has innumerable measures that look at the classification of "what is wrong with people," such as the DSM-IV TR and the ICD-10, however psychology lacks measurements for the classification of positive human virtues (p. 203). As a result, Dahlsgaard et al. researched the existence of virtues that are recognized across culture and history. They conducted a survey through a

review of literature that attempted to record “virtues crucial to human thriving” (p. 204). They also studied whether such records of virtues would converge when researching the works of “early thinkers” and if there were any particular virtues that extended across tradition and culture (p. 204). Dahlsgaard et al. examined the following cultural virtues: Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, Hindu, Athenian, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian. What they found was a list of six virtues including: courage, justice, humanity, temperance, wisdom, and transcendence. Although these virtues did not compare in an exact manner across cultures and traditions, what the researchers were looking for was for them to share “more features than not” and that they showed “coherent resemblance, that the higher order meaning behind a particular core virtue lined up better with its cross-cultural counterparts than with any other core virtue (e.g. examples of Confucian justice have more to do with those of Platonic justice than with those of Platonic wisdom)” (p. 204). These virtues are part of the view of positive psychology. Dahlsgaard et al. found that the general traits of the six virtues correspond well with other positive psychology traits that “predispose individuals to the (psychological) good life” such as happiness, hopefulness, and optimism (p. 210).

Martin E. P. Seligman is one of the current leading researchers in positive psychology. Seligman discussed what he termed positive psychotherapy, targeting the development of positive emotions, thoughts, and strengths versus decreasing psychopathology and its symptomology (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). Seligman et al. conducted experiential interventions to qualitatively examine the outcome of the implementation of positive psychology on students, colleagues, and clients. Seligman taught traits of positive psychotherapy to over 200 undergraduates, assigning them tasks

dealing with positive psychology and received feedback from the students. Such tasks included: writing down the good things that happened in each day and why they thought those things happened, writing an obituary for themselves according to what they would want to be remembered for, and taking time out once a day to truly enjoy something that was usually done in a rush (i.e. eating, walking, etc.) and write about how it felt to enjoy it versus hurry through it (Seligman et al.). These students described their experience with the exercises as “life-changing” (p. 775). He also trained over 500 mental health professionals who took what they had learned back to their practices and again Seligman et al. received astounding feedback at its efficacy in application to the workplace with patients and clients.

### *Happiness*

One of the most studied traits of positive psychology is that of happiness. According to Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005), research on well-being has told us that life qualities desired and valued by society are highly correlated with happiness. Many people and researchers will spend their lives in pursuit of what they believe happiness to be. Seligman (2002) predicted that happiness could be broken down into three sub-categories, including positive emotion (termed the pleasant life), engagement (termed the engaged life), and meaning (termed the meaningful life). Seligman et al. (2006) tested the lack of these three sub-categories and their correlation with depression, using 327 college students at the University of Pennsylvania (mean age= 23.51). Seligman et al. sampled clinically depressed (n=97), non-depressed psychiatric (n=46), and non-depressed non-psychiatric (n=184) students. What they found was that students who were classified as clinically depressed reported experiencing significantly fewer

positive emotions, less life meaning, and less engagement in life, than did non-depressed psychiatric ( $d=.037$ ) and non-depressed non-psychiatric students ( $d=1.17$ ). No data were reported on the differences between non-depressed psychiatric patients and controls. Overall results suggested that positive emotion, engagement and meaning, as described by Seligman et al., contributed to happiness, a trait of positive psychology.

According to Jacobsen (2007) happiness has two definitions, a dependant state definition, and an enduring state definition. In his brief definition Jacobsen referred to happiness as “a brief state of mind during which the individual feels that all essential needs have been fulfilled and that all essential goals have been reached” (p. 39). In describing the lasting happiness or “genuine happiness,” Jacobsen defined it as “a durable state of balance between the individual’s wishes, goals, and needs on the one hand, and the surroundings or the world on the other” (p. 39). In connection with Gable and Haidt’s (2005) definition of positive psychology contributing to the flourishing of people, happiness is the continuing or stable trait finding life balance for the individual in order to be able to flourish.

Because happiness can be brief or enduring, measurement of happiness is something that many researchers have strived to accomplish. Brief happiness has appeared to be easier to measure because it comes with experiential emotions related to feeling good and/or temporarily content. Overall happiness in a continuous state has been more difficult to discern, and therefore has often been measured in conjunction with, or as a lack of, depression. Joseph and Lewis (1998) developed the Depression-Happiness Scale (DHS), in order to assess depression and happiness in a quick manner. They defined happiness as not only the absence of depression, but included the presence of

positive emotions, cognitions, and somatic experiences, looking at depression and trait based happiness as being on opposite ends of a continuum.

Happiness has also been shown to contribute to overall quality of life ratings. Perneger, Hudelson, and Bovier (2004) looked at self-reported happiness with mental and physical health in Swiss adults. Students at a University in Geneva, Switzerland (N=1257) completed a self-report questionnaire that asked about feelings of happiness in the past month, as well as questions about mental and physical health. Pearson correlation coefficients were high for happiness and mental health (0.67) and low for happiness and physical health (0.09). Their study only used one item to measure happiness, scoring on a five point Likert scale, decreasing its reliability and lowering the strength of the correlation.

Abdel-Khalek (2006) completed a similar study looking at happiness, religiosity, and physical and mental health, while considering sex differences. Abdel-Khalek noted past research looking at the many theories that exist around what happiness is and how it is truly attained in conjunction with positive psychology and overall quality of life. He also noted that significant correlations have been found between attitudes toward religiosity and happiness. A sample of over 2,000 undergraduate Kuwaiti Muslim students from Kuwait University (1,056 males and 1,154 females) with a mean age of 20.7 years ( $SD=2.4$ ) were given four separate self-report questionnaires on happiness, religion, physical health, and mental health (Abdel-Khalek, 2006). Scales were rated on an 11 point Likert-type scale with word anchors at each end (0=No, 10=Excellent). Participants were asked to respond in an overall manner, representing a durable trait response versus brief state response. One week test-retest coefficients for the four areas

ranged from .77 to .89, indicating high test-retest reliability. Inter-correlations were highest for happiness and mental health ( $r=.66$ ) with the lowest correlation being between physical health and religiosity ( $r=.17$ ). Multiple regressions were completed with happiness as the dependent variable. Mental health appeared to be the greatest predictor of happiness accounting for 60% of variance for females and 61% of variance in happiness for males.

### *Hopefulness*

Another variable of positive psychology includes that of hope. Hope has often been considered in psychology by its opposite, hopelessness. Hopelessness, as we know, can contribute to many complications, most obviously depression. However, hope itself can open up the door to innumerable possibilities in life as it combines a want or desire with the realistic possibility of obtaining that desire (Clarke, 2003). Clarke has spoken to the mystery of hope as he stated that,

we know hope when we see it, and feel it intensely when it is gone. But it is hard to describe. It has an intangible quality, deeply personal, rooted within our unique experiences. But it is also, to some extent shared, dwelling in our communal experience and shared beliefs. It is expectant, and forward looking. Its very nature is to inspire, to draw forward, to bring vitality. Where there is loss of hope, there is loss of anticipation, desire, and conviction about the future; loss of vitality and loss of meaning and purpose in life (p. 146).

Gable and Haidt (2005) included hope as one of the areas of positive psychology that has been neglected in recent research. Snyder et al. (1991) defined hope as “a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-

directed determination) and (b) pathways (planning of ways to meet goals)” (p. 571).

Hope in this definition involved active agency by the person toward a goal and plans of how he/she is going to attain that goal. It is easy to see then why hope has been identified as one of the most important characteristics in working with mental illness.

A person must employ a sense of hopefulness that contains both components; 1) agency, or active participation in moving toward the goal and 2) pathways, which involves having a plan of how the goal will be achieved. According to Snyder et al. (1991), both parts of hope are not always present. It is often that a person has the desire to achieve a goal; however the road to success is not clear or is blocked. There are also times when the road is clear and the person is unable to initiate moving toward the goal, therefore lacking the agency defined in hope. Snyder et al. recognized the two components as necessary and worked to produce a measurement of these two components.

To determine the statistical reliability of agency and pathways in defining hope, the Hope Scale was administered to six different groups of students from the University of Kansas, and two groups of people in psychological treatment, including one inpatient and one outpatient sample (Snyder et al., 1991). The Hope Scale was administered to groups of students during an introductory psychology class over 6 semesters for a total sample (including sample in psychological treatment) of N=4,126. Cronbach’s alpha for the two components of hope together ranged from .74 to .84. For the subscale specifically measuring the agency component, Cronbach’s alpha ranged from .71 to .76 and for the pathways component ranged from .63 to .80. Because the recommendation for scales is .70 for research purposes, it appears that the scale overall qualifies as an acceptable

measure of hopefulness and that the two described components are adequate measures of hope as a trait of positive psychology.

It would stand to reason that if hopefulness looks at agency and pathways to change, then hopelessness would see change as unlikely and self as helpless to do anything about it. Needles and Abramson (1990) looked at hopefulness in association with positive life events and attributional style as a model of recovery from depression. They defined hopelessness as “the expectation that highly desirable outcomes will not occur or that highly aversive outcomes will occur, and that one is powerless to change this situation” (p. 156). They then looked at restoration of hopefulness in successfully treating depression. They hypothesized that when controlling for negative events in life, positive events in life will interact with “an enhancing attributional style (i.e. the tendency to make global and stable attributions for positive events)” to restore hopefulness in depressed subjects lacking hope (p. 156). Attributional style, depression, hopelessness, and negative and positive life events were measured over a 6 week period (N=42). Multiple regressions were used to test the hypothesis. Correlations between hopelessness and depression for the 6 weeks of study were significant  $p < .001$  ( $r = .61, .68, .67, .56, .71$ , and  $.56$ ). Secondary hypotheses were conducted examining decreases in negative events and recovery. No main effects were found for changes in negative events or for changes in attributional style for positive events. Significance was found when examining the interaction between these two variables as a predictor for changes in hopelessness ( $p < .02$ ). Overall the study found that neither positive events nor attributional style alone was enough to overcome hopelessness. However, it was found that when both were present, increased levels of hopefulness were present.

Chao and Good (2004) did a qualitative study which examined hopefulness in regards to college students who were of non-traditional age and how it related to their pursuit of a college education. Chao and Good wanted to examine the perspectives of nontraditional students and the issues that may separate them from younger more traditional college students. They conducted interviews with non-traditional-age students who were working on their undergraduate degrees (N=43). Participants ranged in age from 26-62 years (M=37.69, SD 8.43). Interviews were broken down into concepts, which were then transcribed; eliminating any concepts that appeared multiple times until a list had been created that covered all concepts discussed in the interviews. Concepts were then categorized. The interaction of several factors contributed to the perceptions of the non-traditional aged students pursuing their college degrees, which included career development, life transition, support system, motivation, and financial investment. At the center of those factors was hopefulness interacting with all five of the above listed factors. The non-traditional students actively pursued effective management of academics, family relationships, social relationships, and financial stability through work.

Using the definition of hopefulness as was earlier discussed by Gable and Haidt (2005), hopefulness contributed to the students being active agents in their education, as well as allowing them to find pathways to attaining their undergraduate degree while maintaining a balanced life. According to findings by Chao and Good (2004) “hopefulness provided the self-efficacy and resilience for them to believe they could overcome their difficulties” in these areas (p. 8).

Hopefulness has also been shown to contribute to optimal functioning of humans in other areas. Geurtsen (2005) looked at hope and its contribution to quality of life in

individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Cambodia. Cambodia, according to Geurtsen, has the fastest growing rate of people infected with HIV/AIDS in Asia with an estimated 170,000 people in a population of 13.4 million being infected. This reported number is thought to be grossly underestimated as the report rate for people living with AIDS is estimated to be as low as 8%. Geurtsen conducted a qualitative study using 15 women who were HIV-positive (mean age = 27.5) and 10 men who were HIV-positive (mean age 30.5). Guertsen recruited her participants from a local medical health care center that she was serving, which gained her access to this population. Qualitative data were collected over a six month period in an open-ended interview format that did not inquire about behaviors that would put the participant at risk, such as sexual practices or preference of gender for sexual partners, although according to Guertsen this information was often voluntarily disclosed.

In looking at the Cambodian participants, quality of life outcomes included “being able to meet basic needs, having a sense of belonging, and having a safe and caring connection with others” (Guertsen, 2005, p. 44). Contributing factors to these outcomes included “secrets and silence, selective disclosure, living in the present, and hopefulness” (p. 44). Participants with children also increased their quality of life through a focus on hope; hoping to live to see their children become adults, obtain an education, and find a marital partner. Other participants sustained their quality of life while living with HIV/AIDS by a focus on hope for the future. Ninety-two percent found hope in looking toward the future; that they would live long enough that a medicine would be found that would help them to sustain their current quality of life.

Clarke (2003) understood the importance of hope as he looked at patient and/or client outcomes. He discussed hopefulness in the context of using faith and hope within psychiatry as they are both “fundamental human concepts” (p. 164). Clarke reinforced that hope is not just something that occurs or results from a cognitive pattern or process, but it involves both emotion and willfulness. Hope, according to Clarke involved “desire accompanied by (reasonable) expectation” therefore although it is not guaranteed it is possible (p. 146). Clarke discussed the frequent use of hopelessness, within psychiatry and the importance of being able, as a psychiatrist to look at “issues of hope and faith with patients at times of life crises in order to facilitate adjustment” (p. 164). Clarke stated that helping to facilitate a patient to have “genuine hope” can free a person up to confront barriers to their healing with confidence and zeal, accomplishing and overcoming things they may have at one time thought to be impossible (p. 165). He went on to say that as long as psychiatrists are promoting genuine hope and not false hope, which includes the denial of reality, they are providing a true service to their clientele. Clarke believed that as a psychiatrist, dealing with issues of hope are just as important as dealing with issues of depression or other psychopathology where hope or hopelessness may be a contributing factor.

One area in which hopelessness has often been a common theme in being an obstacle to healing is amongst survivors of sexual abuse. Swanson, Nunn, Oates, Tebbutt, and O’Toole (1999) conducted a study where they looked at hope and coping in young survivors of sexual abuse. They defined hope, for the purposes of their study, as an “expectation of positive events” (p. 134). The study was conducted to create outcome predictors with youth who were sexually abused compared to peers who were not abused

as well as to examine predictors of hopefulness and despair, which in this study are not seen as lying on opposite ends of the spectrum, but instead may even co-occur. Out of a sample of 84 youth (taken from the Child Protection Units of two hospitals in Sydney, Australia), 28 qualified for the study based on age (to match normative data of assessment instruments), developmental ability, and including non-peer related sexual abuse. A control group of 32 youth who had not reported history of sexual abuse was also included. The young people from both groups were assessed at intake, 18 months after the intake, and after 5 years. The information presented by Swanston et al. is from the data collected at 5 years past intake.

Parental measures that were administered included the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) and the Family Assessment Device. Children completed the following assessments appropriate for their age range: Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) or the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; for depression and suicidal ideation), the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale or the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (for self-esteem), the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS; for anxiety), The Hunter Opinions and Personal Expectations Scale (HOPES-20) and other life event checklists as found by Swanston et al. (1999). The HOPES-20 focused on the Hopefulness scale and the Despair scale.

Overall, Swanston et al. (1999) found that hopefulness in young people with a history of sexual abuse was reported to be significantly less (mean = 25.50, SD 8.51) than in young people who had no history of abuse (mean = 31.17, SD 5, 61) with  $p < .001$ . No significant differences were found between the groups when despair was measured. However, measures of global personal hopefulness (as measured by the HOPES-20) were

found to be significantly lower amongst youth with reported abuse (mean = 55.55, SD = 16.45) when compared to youth who had no reported history of abuse (mean = 63.14, SD = 9.02)  $p < .05$  (Swanston et al.). Hopefulness was also found to be negatively correlated with depression for youth who had been abused ( $R = -0.66$ ,  $n = 22$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ). Significant positive correlations between personal despair and depression were found in the group of youth who had been abused and the control group. Personal hopefulness was not found to be significantly negatively correlated with anxiety in the experimental group or the control group, however it was found to be significantly negatively correlated when the groups were combined.

Swanston et al. (1999) reported that overall sexual abuse, when compared with other variables was not a significant outcome predictor. Suicidal ideation and attempts noted depression as a predictor, however when placed with general personal hopefulness (GPH), GPH was found to be the “sole significant predictor of suicide attempts in the last 12 months” (p. 140). Overall, Swanston et al. found that suicidal ideation and/or attempts in the young people within this study were linked more to depression and anxiety than to the history of sexual abuse. They also found that suicidal ideation in this study was linked more closely with depression whereas actual suicide attempts were suspected to have been linked more to GPH and anxiety. Swanston et al. used these data to suggest a refocus in treatment on increasing positive expectations in life versus a sole focus on the treatment of depression and anxiety. This research supported the idea that a focus on positive psychology can work toward prevention of disorder, or in this case suicidal ideation and attempts, as was suggested by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000).

Bland and Darlington (2002) also supported the idea of positive psychology contributing to mental health as they explored the importance and meaning of having hope in the daily lives of people who struggle with mental illness, as well as their family, caregivers, and professionals providing mental health services. Specifically, they looked at the following questions: “How do family members define hope? What do they hope for? What have been their sources of hope?” (p. 62). In this study, the researchers conducted 18 interviews with 16 family members of people who had some form of serious mental illness and were being treated. Participants had been recruited from community mental health services in Brisbane and an inpatient unit in Tasmania. Diagnoses included schizophrenia (n=9), bipolar disorder (n=4), drug-induced psychosis (n=1), and organic syndrome with major depressive symptoms (n=1). Two participants were caring for the same individual. Participants had been caregivers for a time range of 3 months to 42 years (mean = 10 years, median = 6 years).

When looking at the definition of hope, Bland and Darlington (2002) found that participants looked at hope from a positive and time based perspective. Participants’ “hope was grounded in the present, with a view to a future that enabled a shift from the difficult present to a better future” (p. 63). Hope, to the participants, was that which was going to keep them moving through their difficult times, a “thing” that they could hold on to so as not to give up, and to have something to look forward to regarding life and its future potential for regaining some sense of normalcy. Bland and Darlington also found a connection between hope and loss. Many participants experienced loss in caring for their loved one, whether that revolved around grieving the person their loved one used to be, the relationship that once was, or the loss of the potential their loved one once had.

Families talked about hope in a context dependant state, basing it “within the context of the ongoing struggle to come to terms with the impact of the illness on their family member and themselves” (p. 63). Hope increased and diminished with progress and/or regression in their loved one’s treatment, however remained an important factor in the caregiver’s ability to cope.

In looking at the researchers question regarding the source of hope for the caregivers, a range of sources were identified including family and friends, professionals, religious beliefs, and overall positive attitude. Other factors included sharing the care giving responsibility, new options for treatment, and noticeable improvement in the mental health of their loved one. In this study the caregivers “spoke powerfully about the importance of hope in their lives” (Bland and Darlington, 2002, p. 67). Overall their responses reflected what has been seen throughout this discussion pertaining to hope and an orientation toward the future, positive expectations, and an understanding of reality regarding those expectations (Bland and Darlington; Guertsen, 2005; Clarke, 2003).

### *Optimism*

Another trait of positive psychology is optimism. It is important to understand the difference between optimism and the previously discussed trait of hopefulness. Optimism relates more to general expectations of outcomes and is future oriented whereas hopefulness is defined more as a current cognitive state having dependency on the person for outcomes (active agency). Snyder et al. (1991) discussed the differences between optimism and hope stating that “optimism is construed as a stable personality trait that is not limited to a specific setting” (p. 571). Hopefulness is defined similarly, however is defined as a “stable cognitive set reflecting general rather than specific outcome

expectancies” (p. 571). Hopefulness involves a belief in the self, whereas optimism consists of a more general positive outlook toward the greater good. Goleman (1995) defined optimism as “having a strong expectation that, in general, things will turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustrations” (p. 88). Scheier and Carver (1985) supported the idea of optimism being a general expectation, stating that “optimists often appear to be optimistic ‘in general,’ in that their positive expectations are not limited to a particular behavioral domain or class of setting” (p. 220).

Optimism, like happiness, can be defined in two different ways. Some research suggested that optimism be defined in terms of expectations one has around outcomes and some research suggested that it is as simple as looking at life with the glass half full or half empty. Chang, D’Zurilla, and Maydeu-Olivares (1994) suggested using a multimeasure approach in defining and measuring optimism and pessimism. They brought about the point that because optimism does not have one objective agreed upon definition, it cannot be said as to what exactly it measures, and therefore cannot be assumed to just be the opposite of pessimism. Baldwin, McIntyre, and Hardaway (2007) supported this didactic way of defining optimism, suggesting that perhaps both definitions, one focusing on expectancies, and the other on common sense positivity, are one and the same.

Although optimism is defined as a more stable personality trait, studies have shown that it can be influenced by external circumstances and influences. Hasan and Power (2002) studied optimism and pessimism in children as a function of parenting. They gave 81 children ages 8-12 years and their mothers questionnaires to assess control, structure, support, and level of autonomy granted to the child. Multiple regressions were

conducted. Significant negative correlations were found between maternal structure and depressive symptoms ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ) displayed by the child. Autonomy also showed negative correlations with child symptoms of depression ( $r = -.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and pessimism ( $r = -.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and was positively correlated with child optimism ( $r = .25$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, and Roberts (1990), also supported the notion that optimism can be readily influenced by external factors.

Franklin et al. (1990) conducted two studies looking at the impact of divorce on optimism and trust within the family over time. In their first study, Franklin et al. utilized a sample of university students ( $N = 568$ ) to look at the impact of parental divorce on optimism and trust. ANOVAs were conducted and group differences were revealed between students who came from divorced families (PD) and students who still had families intact (IF). Students in the PD group reported that marital duration and success would be less likely for them ( $p < .02$ ), relationships with their fathers were poor when compared to IF ( $p < .001$ ) and thought of divorce in a more acceptable manner than IF ( $p < .001$ ). Optimism about future marital success was conducted using separate multiple regression analyses for both groups, using expected marital success as a criterion variable. Benevolence of people was the strongest predictor for marital optimism ( $B = .500$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in the PD group accounting for more than 15% of the variance.

Discussion by Franklin et al. (1990) suggested that although it is not concluded as such by this study, reflections of others success may contribute to the perception or optimism held in viewing our own futures. If no negative reflections (i.e. the intact families group) have been held around a certain event, then we may be more likely to focus on our own potential therefore being more optimistic about that event in our future.

Optimism has also been studied in many other areas. Rogers, Hansen, Levy, Tate, and Sikkema (2005) looked at optimism and its relationship to coping with loss in HIV-infected people. Rogers et al. looked at two primary hypotheses: 1) Participants with active coping behaviors will be more likely to display optimistic qualities, and 2) although several variables (i.e. grief, depression, support network, etc.) impact coping, it was believed that a significant association would occur between optimism/hopelessness and coping, even with the variables (i.e. grief, depression, support network, etc.) present. Participants (N= 264) were recruited over a 3 year period from media ads and clinic referrals in Wisconsin and New York.

Participants consisted of 172 men and 92 women from a diverse background including African Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, and other ethnic groups. Sexual orientation was also varied and most participants were of low socioeconomic status. Participants also had a history of psychiatric disorders ranging from substance abuse to Axis II disorders. Rogers et al. (2005) found that when looking at a diverse sample “of bereaved people living with HIV/AIDS, active coping is positively associated with optimism and negatively associated with hopelessness” (p. 353). They found that overall, the optimism and hopelessness of the participant could be predicted by the way in which the participant coped with their loss (active or avoidant), even with the other bereavement variables present. Rogers et al. also found that in the present studies both optimism and hopelessness influenced behavior and coping strategies in a similar manner. They discussed the implications of such findings including the importance of identifying coping skills of HIV/AIDS infected persons. Because such a strong relationship was found between optimism and coping, it was suggested that coping interventions could be

implemented to increase levels of optimism which may lead to increased physical and psychosocial health in the patient as optimism can assist in empowering the person to feel as though they can positively and actively affect an outcome.

Scheier, Weintraub, and Carver (1986) also looked at optimism in relation to strategies of coping. Scheier et al. wanted to explore the different strategies that optimists and pessimists use to cope with stressful situations. They discussed research that supported coping in a manner that desired to remove the source of the stress versus just addressing the stressful emotion and having a lack of control over the actual sources of the stress. Scheier et al. hypothesized that engaging in coping that focused on removing the source of the stress, or problem-focused coping, was more likely among optimistic people, or people who have expectations that are consistent with positive change. Problem-focused coping suggested, by removing the source of the stress, that the individual would have some control over removing the stress, versus the feeling of lack of control to do anything about the source and instead just adjusting the emotional response to the stress.

Scheier et al. (1986) recruited participants (N=291) that were given a stressful situation and then asked to complete questionnaires including the Life Orientation Test, and the Ways of Coping Checklist which measures a broad range of coping strategies. They used seven coping dimensions including problem-focused coping, denial/distancing, self-blame, acceptance/resignation, positive reinterpretation, escape through fantasy, and social support. Optimism was found to be significantly correlated with four of the seven dimensions including problem-focused coping, denial/distancing, acceptance/resignation, and positive reinterpretation. It was positively correlated with

problem-focused coping acceptance/resignation, and positive reinterpretation. It was negatively associated with denial/distancing. In men, optimism was also significantly positively related to seeking out social support.

In a second study by Scheier et al. (1986) participants (N=100) were asked to complete booklets that listed five hypothetical situations. They were then asked to record how they would actually respond to each situation with a focus on what they would do versus how they would think or feel. In the second study optimists also participated in problem-focused coping and were able to come up with detailed ideas for how they would cope. In this study pessimists tended to vent emotions rather than focus on action, which supported the idea of optimists feeling they have more influence on outcome.

### Parenting Styles

The study of parenting styles and their effects on child development and socialization has been a widely researched topic. Not only has parental behavior toward children been debated, but the view of children and a child's role within the family has changed over the years. Baumrind (1966) suggested that parental behaviors toward their children depend on their "predominant view of the child as a refractory savage, a small adult, or an angelic bundle from heaven" (p. 888). Parenting style has been related to child outcomes such as self-esteem, substance abuse, academic performance, peer group association, autonomy, and a number of other child development issues (Smetana, 1995; Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000; Furnham & Cheng, 2000).

Baumrind (1966) discussed three "prototypes of adult control, each of which has influenced greatly the child-rearing practices of educators, parents, and child-development experts" (p.889). The three prototypes discussed by Baumrind are the

permissive parent, the authoritarian parent, and the authoritative parent. These parenting styles are classified according to the amount of demandingness and responsiveness each style displays (Baumrind, 1991). Baumrind's definition of demandingness "refers to the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (p. 61-62). Responsiveness "refers to the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands" (p. 62). Smetana (1995) discussed that there is a difference between the parenting style that the parent believes is displayed versus the parenting style perceived by the child. Smetana found that parents tended to view themselves as more authoritative in style, whereas children depicted their reared parenting style as either more authoritarian or more permissive than was perceived by the parent. Because it is believed that the child's perceptions of parenting make up how the style contributes to their reality, child perceived parenting style is used within the current study.

#### *Permissive Parenting Style*

According to Baumrind (1966) the permissive parent allows the child self-regulation. The permissive parent does not choose to exert control, nor does the parent attempt to encourage the child to live and behave according to set standards. The parent acts as a bank of information to be used as the child wishes. Manipulation is used by the parent to coax the child into doing what the parent wants, however the choice belongs to the child and no parental power or control is ever exerted (Baumrind, 1966). The parent does not take responsibility for shaping the child's thoughts or actions and the child

therefore regulates self and has no conditions or restraints placed upon him or her. These parents are often overall “noncontrolling, nondemanding, and relatively warm” (Baumrind, 1971, p. 2). Smetana (1995) supported these ideas adding that permissive parents view rules around their child’s personal life as being somewhat unnecessary and that the boundaries around what the adolescent controls were much broader than other parenting styles.

Parental behaviors displaying differing levels of demandingness and responsiveness have been shown through research to foster particular characteristics within children reared with that particular parenting style. Children of permissive parents have tended to have the lowest level of self-reliance, exploration, and self control. Demandingness in this parenting style is low while responsiveness remains high (Baumrind, 1991). Berg-Nielsen, Vikan, and Dahl (2003) found that the lack of consistency in parenting, as well as other parenting factors contributed to the development of adolescent behavioral and emotional disorders.

Berg-Nielsen, Vikan, and Dahl (2003) reviewed studies finding that although warmth, which is usually high in permissive parenting, is important, it is often the parental control characteristics such as limit setting, monitoring, and discipline consistency that become more important to healthy adolescent adjustment. Berg-Nielsen et al. conducted a study of eighty-seven pairs of parents and adolescents to look at problems in parenting styles with children who have behavioral or emotional disorders. The adolescents were between 11-17 years of age (Mean=13.5) and were recruited from one of two Norwegian child psychiatric center wait lists for emotional or behavioral disorders. The study involved 55 mothers and 32 fathers (mean age for mothers =38.5,

fathers=43). Berg-Nielsen et al. administered the Child Assessment Schedule (CAS Norwegian version) to determine diagnoses according to the DSM III-R. Adolescents were then entered into one of four groups according to their CAS outcome: No disorder, not valid, emotional disorder, or behavioral disorder. A parenting assessment specifically designed for the Berg-Nielsen et al. study was administered to parents looking at four inclusive parenting domains: Warmth, Control, Autonomy Granting, and Commitment. Subgroup dimensions included contact, empathy, appreciation, setting limits, consistency, monitoring, autonomy granting, involvement, parental priorities, and negative attributions. After interviews were conducted mean differences were calculated using ANOVA. Pearson's correlation coefficients were then used to look for relationships between parenting dimensions and adolescent problem areas as identified by the CAS (Berg-Nielsen et al.).

Findings from the Berg-Nielsen et al. (2003) study found that parents whose adolescent struggled with a behavioral disorder as opposed to an emotional disorder tended to struggle more overall than parents whose children were diagnosed with an emotional disorder or no disorder at all. There were 5 problem areas suggested by these results that were consistent with problem areas identified in previously discussed studies related to the permissive parenting style. The first significant problem area associated with permissive parenting included contact, which included interaction and confidentiality held between parent and adolescents. Setting limits, the second identified problem area, included the implementation of age-appropriate limits in a manner that was friendly and relayed consequences. A third problem area was consistency, which involved consistent implementation of discipline strategies. The fourth area included

monitoring, which involved the parent in having an awareness of, interest in, and an active effort in knowing where the child was, what the child was doing, and with who they were associating. The fifth problem area included parenting priority, which involved the time spent talking and engaging with the adolescent. Appreciation was another problem area found in the study although it did not relate to the permissive parenting style. Berg-Nielsen et al. discussed that although this study did not conclude causality, it remains to be said that interventions around these parenting problem areas needed to be put in place to help parents more effectively parent their children.

Not all characteristics within the permissive parenting style are negative. Permissive parents display warmth toward their children, are often accepting of their child, and have a very child-centered attitude (Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000).

#### *Authoritarian Parenting Style*

On college campuses the “helicopter parent,” as discussed in Chapter 1, has many similar characteristics to the authoritarian parent. The description of the helicopter parent implies that the parent hovers around the child much like a helicopter and is often overly involved in every aspect of the student’s life (Lum, 2006; White, 2005). The over-involvement often includes behaviors such as the parent demanding to have access to the child’s e-mail, grade reports, financial expenditures, and often being in constant contact with either their child or campus authority figures to track the progress of their student. Although these parents are overly involved and appear to be overly attached to their children, helicopter parents often have an emotional detachment, being concerned more with the outward success than the intrapersonal wellbeing of their child.

The authoritarian parenting style is classified by high demandingness and low responsiveness (Baumrind, 1991). These parents display a lack of warmth and a sense of detachment from their children (Baumrind, 1971). Baumrind (1966) stated that the authoritarian parent had a fixed and unquestionable set of standards by which the child must abide. This parenting style also attempted to mold, dominate, and assess the child in accordance to a set standard. Obedience is stressed and punitive measures of discipline are often used to bend the child to the will of the parent. Autonomy is not encouraged as the parent demonstrates too much control over the child to allow for encouragement of self-development. Dependence on the parent is therefore fostered for the parent knows what is right and allows no room for questioning of the rules and standards set forth (Baumrind, 1966). Aunola, Stattin, and Nurmi (2000), supported Baumrind's description adding that there has been a lack of engagement and a lack of trust in dealing with the child. Aunola et al. also suggested that in the authoritarian style of parenting, open communication between parent and child is strongly discouraged contributing to increased levels of parental psychological control over the adolescent.

Ferrari and Olivette (1993) conducted a study that looked at parental control, a key characteristic of the authoritarian parenting style, and indecision in adolescent girls. They recruited female college students (N=86) from a small private college for their study. The Decisional Procrastination Scale and the Parental Authority Questionnaire were administered to each participant in their study. Findings suggested that in households classified as low or high authoritative and low or high permissive reared parenting style there was no difference in indecision. However, Ferrari and Olivette found that in households classified as highly authoritarian, the tendencies for "decisional

procrastination” were significantly different ( $p < .03$ ) from daughters from households classified as low authoritarian (p. 965). Ferrari and Olivette discussed the contributions of over control, inflexibility, and lack of warmth and support to the female child’s indecisiveness.

The authoritarian parenting style has also been shown to contribute to poor school performance (Dornbusch et al., 1987). Dornbusch et al. looked at reared parenting style in relation to how students performed academically. The study used data from a questionnaire constructed for the purposes of the study that included “student background characteristics, self-reported grades, perceptions of parental attitudes and behaviors, and family communication patterns” (p. 1245). The questionnaire was completed by 7,826 high school adolescents from six different high schools in the San Francisco Bay area. Parenting style indices for authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parenting were included in the questionnaire. Alpha coefficients for each index were .70 for authoritarian, .60 for permissive, and .66 for authoritative. After analyses, 50% of the families were identified as not having one unmixed parenting style, while 18% were classified as permissive, 17% as authoritative, and 15% authoritarian. Academic performance was measured through looking at self-reported grades and grade point averages for the students participating. Negative correlations were found between parenting style and grades for both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, while a positive correlation was found between grades and authoritative parenting styles for both pure and inconsistent parenting styles (Dornbusch et al.). Although the strongest negative correlations found between parenting style and grades included permissive and authoritarian parenting styles, Dornbusch et al. found that families with inconsistent

parenting, that integrated different styles at different times, were associated with the lowest grades. They hypothesize that such inconsistency in adhering to a particular parenting style created anxiety within the home when the children were unsure of what to expect. The anxiety then transferred to being displayed within the school environment.

### *Authoritative Parenting Style*

Since Alfred Adler's theory of Individual Psychology, research has supported that authoritative parenting, even from an individual psychology perspective, contributes greatly to the proper development of a child (Gfroerer, Kern, & Curlette, 2004). Adler's theory of allowing the child to develop self-discipline and responsibility has fit well into Baumrind's (1966) description of the authoritative parent. This parenting style has been characterized by a high level of demandingness and a high level of responsiveness (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritative parents direct the child while allowing for choice and responsibility. When direction is questioned, the parent allows for rational discussion, providing a reason for why standards are set as they are, while considerations regarding the child's own interests and desires are taken into consideration. The child is affirmed in his or her own development while standards are set for future behavior and development (Baumrind, 1966). This style is viewed as the give and take of the three styles.

Negotiating is allowed within this style however directives are given when necessary.

Smentana (1995) looked at parenting styles in relation to perceived parental authority during the children's adolescent years. Smentana sampled 110 sixth, eighth, and tenth graders and their families (108 mothers and 92 fathers). He looked at the legitimacy of parental authority in relation to hypothetical situations. He found that authoritarian parenting was used more in families with youth in eighth and tenth grades and

authoritative parenting was used more with youth in sixth grade. Main effects for parenting style were considered, and revealed that parents who used authoritative and authoritarian styles were more likely to have judged all acts to be subject to parental authority than did parents who identified themselves as permissive or who were undifferentiated ( $p < .05$ ). Smentana found this same result when he looked at a parenting style by grade by domain interaction ( $p < .01$ ), however parents of younger adolescents were not significantly different from parents of older adolescents when looking at this interaction. When parenting styles were examined in relation to making rules around moral, conventional, multifaceted, friendship, personal and prudential issues, Smentana found that authoritarian parents thought there was a greater obligation to make rules in areas of conventional, multifaceted, and friendship issues ( $p < .01$ ) when compared with all other parents. In this study authoritative parents appeared to display clear boundaries in regards to judgments around moral, conventional and personal issues. This study supported the view that authoritative parenting allowed for the most appropriate development of the child, setting clear boundaries that were not too rigid and not too diffuse, and that allowed for child negotiation and increased respect for the parent.

Steinberg et al. (1991) examined the relations between authoritative parenting and adolescent adjustment, while considering the makeup of the environmental context in which they lived. They found that authoritatively reared adolescents earned higher grades in school, were more self-reliant, reported less psychological distress, and were found to be less involved in activities considered to be acts of delinquency as compared to their peers who were not reared with the authoritative style. They utilized child perceptions of reared parenting style, and recognized that self reports of parental behavior are only

recognized as contributing to the child's development if the same behavior is also perceived by the child as such.

Blodgett et al. (2007) studied maternal parenting styles and maladaptive eating among adolescent girls. They found that authoritative parenting, which included greater acceptance and emotional support, predicted lower levels of dieting. Girls who described their parents as warm, supportive, and autonomy promoting described themselves as being less preoccupied with issues of weight and engaged in bulimic behaviors less frequently than did girls who described other parenting characteristics. Blodgett et al. also found that mothers who encouraged their children's psychological autonomy had children who were less likely to be described by their teachers as having internalizing behaviors.

Diana Baumrind (1991) looked at the influence of parenting style in relation to adolescent competence and the use of drugs and alcohol. Adolescents and their families (N=139) were followed over an 11 year period. Parenting styles were identified and the styles were broken down into six sub-categories of parenting: Authoritative, democratic, directive, good-enough, nondirective, and unengaged. Comparatively, both authoritative and democratic families produced children that were highly competent. Both groups displayed high levels of individuation, maturity, optimism, resiliency, and both perceived their parents as "loving and influential" (p. 72). In addition, authoritarian parents had greater behavioral problems within the family and had greater problems fostering interpersonal relationships with both their children and their spouse. Adolescents from nonauthoritarian-directive homes sought out the greatest amount of adult approval. The children that were classified as the heaviest users of substances had parents who exerted less direct assertive control, were disorganized, and even fairly non-supportive. Such

behavior would be typical of Baumrind's (1990) fourth parenting style that appeared in her later research, that of the rejecting-neglecting parent.

Perceived parental behavior is also related to the development, or lack thereof, of positive psychology traits such as self-esteem and happiness (Furnham & Cheng, 2000). As was previously mentioned, positive psychology has been defined as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104). Furnham and Cheng conducted a study to look at perceived parental behavior and how it has contributed to self-esteem and happiness, two traits "that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people. . ." (Gable & Haidt, p. 104). Furnham and Cheng used Buri's (1991) Parental Authority Questionnaire to measure parenting style, the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire to look at personality traits, the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale to measure self esteem, and the Oxford Happiness Inventory to measure happiness. Four-hundred and six adolescents (ages 14 to 28) participated in the study (Furnham & Cheng). Results found differences between perceived paternal and maternal parenting styles and the development of happiness and self-esteem in offspring. When mothers were perceived as authoritative, it showed to be a predictor of child happiness when paternal and maternal parenting styles were examined together. However, when examined individually, Furnham and Cheng found that maternal parenting styles had less impact on child happiness and more impact on self-esteem, although higher self esteem has assumed to predict higher levels of happiness. When reared parenting styles were examined individually, paternal authoritativeness was shown to be a predictor of child

happiness. The study also found the paternal authoritarian style to decrease happiness in the child as it was perceived as weakening the child's self-esteem (Furnham & Cheng).

### *Summary of Literature Review*

College has been seen as a time of great transition, where young adults have begun to explore their independence and have defined a new identity that separates them from their dependent youth. However, just because they have begun to transition into a greater level of adulthood independence has not meant that they have left the influence of their family and how they were raised behind. Reared parenting styles continue to influence people even after they have left the home. The purpose of this study was to look at that influence more in depth, regarding the way it has impacted the development of positive psychology traits in undergraduate college students.

Positive psychology is an area of growing interest in research. Positive psychology has focused not on discarding ideas of psychopathology but instead has looked at ideas that have contributed to people being able to function at their optimal level, and traits that have focused on the building of strength and positive characteristics. For the purposes of this study, positive psychology was looked at in relation to perceived parenting styles to determine what parenting characteristics contributed to the most advantageous opportunities for living a happy, hopeful, and optimistic life in undergraduate college students.

Although several studies have looked at reared parenting styles and their effects on the offspring of those styles, many focused on the negative attributes created by the authoritarian and permissive parenting styles and have failed to address many positive intrapersonal contributions of the three styles. The motivation behind this study was to

enhance an understanding of the perceived parenting characteristics that have contributed to college students having the maximum opportunity to develop positive traits of psychology that will contribute to opportunities for increased levels of life functioning. In the next chapter, a research project that looks at child-perceived parenting style and three traits of positive psychology including happiness, hopefulness, and optimism will be discussed.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences among positive psychology traits of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, between three perceived parenting styles in undergraduate college students. This chapter provides a description of procedures and methods that were used in conducting this study. Included are sections of research design, sample, data collection procedures, instrumentation, statistical analysis, and research hypotheses.

#### Research Design

An ex post facto, or after the fact, research design was used for this study. In relation to this research it refers to data being collected where the independent variable (parenting style) has already generated an effect on the participants prior to the study, therefore it is pre-existing and cannot be manipulated by the experimenter. Given that there was no manipulation of variables, and the study focused on “naturally occurring variations in the presumed independent and dependent variables,” ex post facto design was the most appropriate fit for the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 306). Because this design calls for looking at significant differences and includes multiple independent variables a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used for statistical analysis. The following assumptions of MANOVA needed to be met by the data set.

1. The dependent variables are collectively multivariate and normally distributed.
2. Samples are random and independent of one another.
3. Populations have equality of variance-covariance matrices.

The MANOVA was used to detect if significant differences existed. Discriminant analysis was then conducted on all three independent variables at the same time to identify where significant differences were found amongst the levels of the parenting styles.

### *Independent Variables*

The independent variable in this study was perceived parenting style. Parenting style was deconstructed into three categories of parenting, each category being based on differing levels of responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1990). The three categories consisted of authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (Baumrind, 1966, 1991). Categorical assignment of parenting style was measured by the Perceived Parenting Style Survey (PPSS, Mclun & Merrell, 1998). This measure introduced three different sets of descriptors; with each set corresponding to one of Baumrind's three parenting styles (rejecting-neglecting parenting style is not included on this measure). Participants were asked to identify their primary caregiver by selecting the appropriate descriptor (i.e. mother, father, grandmother, etc.) Each selection was gender specific with the option of selecting an "other" category in which the participant was asked to describe the nature of their primary caregiver as well as indicate gender. The measure was scored by the participants indicating which set of descriptors best fit the perceived parenting style of their primary caregiver. Each set of descriptors indicated correlation with a different style and only one set of descriptors per participant could be marked. For the

purposes of this study, participants were asked to select the set of descriptors that best described the style of parenting used by their primary caregiver. This researcher recognized that many participants may have been reared with only one caregiver and therefore only one measure of parenting style was collected. Because the measure offers multiple descriptors in each set, participants were asked to choose the set that best described an aggregate rating of their primary caregiver's parenting style, even if each descriptor did not specifically apply.

#### *Dependent variables*

The dependent variables in this study were three traits of positive psychology. The three traits included happiness, hopefulness, and optimism (Harris, Thoresen, & Lopez, 2007, Baldwin, McIntyre, & Hardaway, 2007). These traits were measured by self-report questionnaires including the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) (Scheier et al., 1994) for optimism, the Short Depression-Happiness Scale (SDHS) (Joseph et al., 2004) for happiness, and the Snyder Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) for hopefulness. All measures were reported on a Likert-type scale. Although permission was not formally obtained for use of these measures, all measures are available to the public without fee.

#### *Sample*

In order to investigate perceived parenting style on traits of positive psychology amongst undergraduate college students, a varied volunteer sample of students was recruited for this study. Each participant was enrolled as an undergraduate student at mid-sized western university during the 2009-2010 academic year and recruited from general education classes across various fields and a variety of campus activities. Because of the extensive research on the relationship between reared parenting style and traits associated

with the offspring of each style, a medium effect size was anticipated. When using MANOVA and expecting a medium effect size (.70) with  $\alpha=.05$ , a sample size of 42-54 participants per group (3 groups) (N=126 to 162) was chosen (Stevens, 2000, p. 247).

#### Data Collection Procedures

There are approximately 11,500 undergraduate students at the mid-sized western university used to collect data. Permission to recruit volunteers from this population and to conduct this research was obtained from the university Institutional Review Board.

All undergraduate students attending a mid-sized western university during the 2009-2010 academic school year that were at least 18 years of age were eligible to participate in the study. Opportunities to participate were presented in a variety of undergraduate classes and activities across several disciplines in order to get a varied representation of students (see Appendix A for a complete list of classes). Participants were asked not to complete the survey if they had already completed it in another class and/or setting to eliminate the possibility of duplicate data. All participants were volunteers and completed the survey packet of their own free will. Participants were informed about the nature of the study and that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and could be terminated at any time without repercussion. Participants were provided with a consent form (see Appendix B) and asked to complete the following packet of information in varied order:

1. Demographics Questionnaire (see Appendix C)
2. Perceived Parenting Style Survey (see Appendix D)
3. Short Depression-Happiness Scale (see Appendix E)
4. The Hope Scale (see Appendix F)
5. Life Orientation Test-revised (see Appendix G)

Packets were constructed beginning with the demographics questionnaire and containing all of the same information; however, questionnaires were assembled in varied order for each packet. Packets were then distributed to students choosing to participate in the study. No identifying data were required on the packet in order to maintain response anonymity; and upon completion, the participants placed the packet in a sealed box amongst other completed packets so there was no possibility of participant identification. Incentives were offered for participation in the study. Upon receiving the packet, the participants were given the option of entering their name into a drawing for one of four \$50 cash prizes that were drawn upon the completion of data collection. Participant information for incentive was collected separately from the packet as to continue response anonymity and placed by the participant in a sealed box. The entire packet took approximately 7-10 minutes to complete.

#### Instrumentation

The instruments used in conducting this study included a demographic questionnaire and four self-report measures. Along with the demographic questionnaire, participants completed a measure of perceived parenting style, happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. Measures were selected based on congruent definitions of the trait or construct with the experimenter's intentions for the study, brevity, and statistical properties.

##### *Perceived Parenting Styles Survey*

The Perceived Parenting Styles Survey (PPSS) (McClun & Merrell, 1998) was developed "based on behavioral definitions of the three parenting styles introduced by Baumrind (1966, 1971, 1978, 1991)" (p. 384). The survey was developed specifically for

the research that McClun and Merrell were doing in relation to perceived parenting styles, locus of control orientation, and self concept with junior high age students. The PPSS is a forced choice questionnaire that was developed due to a lack of published instruments that allow the measurement of perceived parenting styles amongst teenagers (McClun & Merrell). The instrument is made up of three groups of six statements which identify one of each of Baumrind's three parenting styles. The form carries the title "What My Parents are Like" (McClun & Merrell). Participants are asked to review each of the three sets of six statements and mark the box next to the set of statements that most accurately described the behaviors of their parents. While the reliability of this instrument is not compelling, there is some data to suggest consistency. According to McClun and Merrell (1998), "temporal consistency data" were collected to determine reliability. Twenty-five ninth grade students were administered the instrument twice with eleven days between administrations. One hundred percent of the students identified with the same statements they had previously chosen at the first administration. While not compelling, there is some data to suggest that perceptions of reared parenting style were reported in a consistent manner (McClun & Merrell).

This measure was chosen because of its brevity and ease in identifying perceived parenting styles. Limits to this measure include a lack of further supporting psychometric data outside the McClun and Merrell (1998) study. (See Appendix D).

#### *Short Depression-Happiness Scale (SDHS)*

The six-item SD-HS was developed as a shorter form of the Depression-Happiness Scale (D-HS) (McGreal & Lewis, 1993) to provide a quicker and briefer assessment of depression and happiness. The original D-HS, as described by Joseph and

Lewis (1998) is a self-report instrument that consists of 25-items that represent emotional, cognitive, and bodily experiences and are scored on a four point scale of (0) *never*, (1) *rarely*, (2) *sometimes*, and (3) *often*. Higher scores represent a higher level of positive thoughts representing happiness and lower scores represent increased levels of negative thinking and affect or depression. According to Joseph and Lewis, the D-HS was developed using a sample of 200 college students. It began as a 40-item instrument and based on factor loadings ( $\geq .50$ ) became a 25-item measure with 12-items focusing on positive thoughts, emotions, and experience and 13-items focused on negative thoughts, emotions and experience. The 13 negatively focused items were then reverse scored. Internal reliability with the student sample was good with a Cronbach's alpha of .93 and .90 with a non-student sample. In the student sample scores ranged from 3 to 69 ( $M=46.2$ ,  $SD\ 12.3$ ) indicating that it was good at detecting individual differences without hitting a floor or ceiling effect. Convergent validity has also been shown with the Beck Depression Inventory ( $r = -.75$ ).

In constructing the short form of the D-HS Joseph et al. (2004) wanted to select a few items that were the most representative of both happiness and depression. Items with factor loadings of greater than .55 were considered. Mean component loadings were figured across three different data sets to choose six items for the SD-HS. The six items that loaded at greater than .60 were included. Cronbach's alpha was .86, determining that internal consistency was evident, and the SD-HS was found to correlate highly ( $r=.93$ ) with the D-HS. Analyses were conducted to explore statistical properties of the SD-HS within three different studies. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .77 to .92 suggesting

adequate to high internal consistency. Test-retest reliability with one sample at a 2 week interval was found to correlate at  $r=.68$ .

This measure was chosen because of its brevity and its good statistical properties. The SD-HS was also chosen because it was based off of the D-HS which showed a high ability to account for individual differences without a ceiling/floor effect. Higher scores represent a higher level of positive thoughts representing happiness and lower scores represent increased levels of negative thinking and affect or depression. (See Appendix E).

### *The Hope Scale*

The Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) was developed in an attempt to create a self-report measure of individual differences of the construct of hope. Two elements of hope were considered: 1) agency and 2) pathways. Subscales were created to measure these two components of hope. The original scale consisted of 45 items which were administered to a group of participants ( $N= 384$ ) at a mid-western University. Participants read the items and rated them on a 4-point scale with 1= *definitely false*, 2=*mostly false*, 3= *mostly true*, and 4= *definitely true* (Snyder et al., 1991). Items were then reduced according to internal consistency to a 12-item scale. The eight items that were most representative of the two components in the definition of hope by Snyder et al. were the items chosen for the final scale. The Hope Scale therefore consists of four items measuring the component of agency and four items measuring the component of pathways. Four additional items were added as filler items (Snyder et al. 1991).

Outpatient and inpatient samples were used in testing statistical properties. Snyder et al. (1991) found that the inpatient sample scored lower on the hope scale than the

outpatient sample (consisting of college students), however were on the hopeful end of the scale. Internal consistency for the Hope Scale was adequate (Cronbach's alpha ranging from .74 to .84) for the total scale. For the agency scale Cronbach's alpha ranged from .71 to .76 and from .63 to .80 for the pathways scale. Scales with internal reliabilities of .70 or above are appropriate for research purposes and therefore The Hope Scale was found to be an appropriate measure. Test-retest reliabilities were .85 over 3 weeks, .73 over 8 weeks, and .76 and .82 over a 10 week period in 2 samples. Convergent validity with the Life-Orientation Test correlated at .60, .50, .55, and .54 ( $p$ -values  $< .005$ ) with the Generalized Expectancy for Success Scale (GESS). Inverse relationships were found with the Hope Scale and the Hopelessness Scale ( $r = -.51$ ) and the Beck Depression Inventory ( $r = -.42$ ) (Snyder et al., 1991).

This measure was chosen because of its statistical properties as well as the brevity of administration. The measure takes approximately 1 to 3 minutes to complete and provides a total score, as well as a score related to pathways and agency which can be helpful if used in a treatment setting. Items 3, 5, 7 and 11 are filler items and will not be scored. Items 1, 4, 6, and 8 represent the pathways component and items 2, 9, 10, and 12 represent the agency component of hopefulness. The combined score represents the total Hope score. Higher scores represent a higher level of hopefulness and lower scores represent decreased levels of hopefulness. Sub-scores for the two components of hope can assist in identifying the individual's level of agency and planning that contribute to their overall level of hopefulness. Again, high scores on these two components represent higher levels of active agency and pathways. (See Appendix F).

*Life Orientation Test- revised (LOT-R)*

The LOT-R (Scheier et al., 1994) was developed as a revision to the Life Orientation Test (LOT) (Scheier & Carver, 1985). The LOT-R was created through a re-evaluation of the LOT's "predictive validity of dispositional optimism" (p. 1071). The original scale consisted of 8 self report items with an additional four items intended to be used as "filler" items. The LOT-R consists of 10 total items, four of which are filler items and these items are numbers 2, 5, 6, and 8. The LOT-R was administered to a group of participants (N= 2,055) at Carnegie Mellon University (Scheier et al., 1994). Subjects read the items and were asked to identify their level of agreement: 0= *strongly disagree*, 1=*disagree*, 2= *neutral*, 3= *agree*, and 4= *strongly agree* (Scheier et al.). Testing took place over six consecutive semesters between the fall semester of 1990 and the spring semester of 1994.

Cronbach's alpha, a measurement of internal consistency, was at .78 for the six non-filler items on the scale, indicating that overall the LOT-R demonstrates an acceptable level of reliability. Test-retest reliability also suggests time stability within the scale demonstrating a range of .68 (4 months), .60 (12 months), .56 (24 months), and .79 (28 months) (Scheier et al. 1994). Discriminant validity studies were also done on the LOT-R. In a combined measure (622 women, 1,394 men) the LOT-R correlated -.36 with a measure of neuroticism (as assessed by items taken from Eysenck Personality Questionnaire), and -.43 with another measure of neuroticism (as assessed by items taken from the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey) (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975, Guilford & Zimmerman, 1949). Because neuroticism is a trait of maladjustment, and optimism has been researched as a trait of positive adjustment the negative correlations

derived from the discriminant validity analysis conducted between these two traits is further evidence for the appropriateness of the scale items in measuring optimism. This measure was chosen because of its statistical properties as well as the brevity of administration. This measure takes approximately 2 minutes to complete. Scoring range is from 0 to 24. Questions 2, 5, 6, and 8 are filler questions and are not scored; questions 3, 7, and 9 are reverse scored. Higher scores represent a higher level of optimism and optimistic outlook and lower scores represent decreased levels of optimism (See Appendix G).

### Research Hypotheses & Statistical Analysis

Research has shown that when using Baumrind's styles of parenting, behavioral differences in the children reared with a particular style are significant. The permissive style of parenting has been found to be linked to aggression in the child, antisocial behavior, poor academic achievement, affiliation with deviant peers, and impaired peer relationships (Knutson et al., 2004). Research also suggests that authoritative parenting produces children who have high adjustment to school, higher levels of performance, and lower levels of failure expectations (Smetana, 1995). Buri (1991) found that authoritative parents also rear children who are more independent, responsible and goal oriented.

To explore these differences, research questions were created and introduced in Chapter 1. Below are hypotheses related to each research question as well as the statistical analyses that will be used to test each hypothesis.

H1 Authoritative parenting style [as measured by the Perceived Parenting Styles Survey (McClun & Merrell, 1998)] will produce higher scores of perceived happiness [as measured by the Short Depression-Happiness Scale (SDHS) Joseph et al., 2004] when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles according to Baumrind's (1991) parenting styles [as measured by the Perceived Parenting Styles Survey (McClun & Merrell, 1998).]

H2 Authoritative parenting style [as measured by the Perceived Parenting Styles Survey (McClun & Merrell, 1998)] will produce higher scores of perceived hopefulness [as measured by The Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991)] when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles according to Baumrind's (1991) parenting styles [as measured by the Perceived Parenting Styles Survey (McClun & Merrell, 1998).]

H3 Authoritative parenting style [as measured by the Perceived Parenting Styles Survey (McClun & Merrell, 1998)] will produce higher scores of perceived optimism [as measured by the LOT-R, Scheier, Carver, & Bridges (1994)] when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles according to Baumrind's (1991) parenting styles [as measured by the Perceived Parenting Styles Survey (McClun & Merrell, 1998).]

A MANOVA will be conducted to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable will be the positive psychology measure of happiness, hopefulness, or optimism. Statistical significance will be determined based on an alpha level of .05. If statistical significance is found, Stepwise Discriminant Analysis will be conducted to determine which parenting style, the statistical significance was found within.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences among positive psychology traits of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, between three perceived parenting styles in undergraduate college students. Undergraduate college students from a mid-sized western university completed a set of questionnaires related to perceived parenting style, hopefulness, happiness, and optimism. This chapter includes an outline of the data collection procedures used in the study, a demographic description of the sample from which the data were collected, and the results of the statistical analyses used to test the hypotheses outlined in Chapter III.

Three hundred and eight packets were distributed amongst willing participants in seven different undergraduate classes and student events through the campus Student Activities Department. Packets were distributed by a research assistant and a script was read in order to provide instructions for completing the packets (See Appendix H). Packets contained copies of the consent form, the Demographic Questionnaire, and the following surveys in varied order: the Perceived Parenting Style Survey (PPSS), the Snyder Hope Scale, the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R), and the Short Depression-Happiness Survey (SDHS). Participants voluntarily completed and returned the packets in their respective classrooms. Seventeen of the collected packets were not complete (6%), and were therefore eliminated from the analysis. In order for a packet to

be considered complete and included in the study, the PPSS needed to be fully and accurately completed, according to the instructions, and each of the three positive psychology surveys administered needed to be at least 90% complete. A total of two hundred and ninety-one packets were determined appropriate for inclusion in this study.

When considering the total number of participants desired for this study, an attempt was made to recruit 42-54 participants in each of the three parenting styles in order to reach an appropriate overall sample size for MANOVA. After the first round of data collection 12 participants had identified permissive as their reared parenting style, 128 had identified authoritative, and 9 had identified authoritarian. Therefore a second round of data were collected, bringing the cell numbers to 28, 240, and 23, respectively. Equal sample size is not a requirement or an assumption for use of MANOVA or Discriminant Analyses. Since power is a function of overall sample size when using MANOVA, no effect was anticipated as a result of having a significantly lower number of participants in the authoritarian and permissive groups. Although it is difficult to determine the cause of the unequal distribution, research suggests that students who perceive to have been raised under the authoritative parenting style may display better adjustment, higher grades, higher self reliance, and less distress than other parenting styles (Steinberg et al., 1991). Therefore, it is possible that more students with authoritatively reared parenting styles are present in a college environment. Other factors could also influence this distribution such as demographic factors (i.e. culture), or the limitations of using a self-report instrument.

### Demographic Description of the Sample

All participants had to be classified as an undergraduate student and at least 18 years of age. During the fall semester 2009 and spring semester 2010, the researcher contacted eleven professors across a variety of academic fields, who taught introductory courses that would likely be attended by a diverse range of students. Four professors responded and permission was given not only to recruit participants from their respective classrooms, but also to permit surveys to be completed during class time. The researcher also contacted the campus student activities office that has access to a variety of undergraduate campus activities attended by students. Permission was obtained to also recruit participants from students attending these activities. A list of courses and campus activities utilized for participant recruitment can be found in Appendix A.

Students ranged in age from 18 to 47 years with a mean age of 20.20 years, and a median of 20 years, at the time of participation ( $SD=3.151$ ). Two participants chose not to report their demographics, however continued to be included in the study. Overall, the ethnic demographics of the greater campus population of the university used in this study were relatively similar to the demographics of the sample (See Table 1). Participants consisted of students from diverse backgrounds, gender, undergraduate status, living situations, relationship status, and parental environments in which they were raised (See Table 2).

Table 1

*Ethnic Percentages in Student Sample and University Population*

	Sample %	Population %
African American	6.5	3.7
Asian	3.8	2.5
Caucasian	71.5	72.1
Latino(a)	10.7	10.1
Native American	1.0	1.0
International Students (University population only)	—	1.5
Unknown (University population only)	—	9.1

Table 2

*Demographic Description of Participants (N=291)*

Demographic	%
Gender	
Female	54.3
Male	44.7
Transgender	0.7
Ethnicity	
African American	6.5
Asian	3.8
Caucasian	71.5
Latino(a)	10.7
Native American	1.0
Other	5.2
Year in School	
Freshman	37.8
Sophomore	25.8
Junior	25.4
Senior	10.3
Living Arrangement	
On-campus	47.4
Off-campus	47.1
Off-campus (with primary care giver)	4.8
Relationship Status	
Single	69.8
Partnered	26.5
Married	3.1
Environment Raised	
Two parent home (1 working)	23.7
Two parent home (2 working)	59.5
Single parent home	14.1
Foster care	1.4
Non-parent family member	.7

Demographics were also considered across parenting styles. Frequencies and percentages for participants across all parenting styles are reported in Table 3. Missing frequencies and percentages from the two participants who chose not to report demographics and others who selectively chose not to report specific demographics are also included.

Table 3

*Demographic Frequencies and Percentages Across Parenting Styles*

	<u>Permissive</u>		<u>Authoritative</u>		<u>Authoritarian</u>	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	15	53.6	132	55.0	11	47.8
Male	12	42.9	108	45.0	10	43.5
Transgender	1	3.6	0	0.0	1	4.3
Missing	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	4.3
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
African American	3	10.7	15	6.3	1	4.3
Asian	1	3.6	9	3.8	1	4.3
Caucasian	20	71.4	175	72.9	13	56.5
Latino(a)	3	10.7	25	10.4	3	13.0
Native American	0	0.0	3	1.3	0	0.0
Other	1	3.6	10	4.2	4	17.4
Missing	0	0.0	3	1.3	1	4.3
<b>Year in School</b>						
Freshman	8	28.6	91	37.9	11	47.8
Sophomore	8	28.6	59	24.6	8	34.8
Junior	6	21.4	23	9.6	1	4.3
Senior	6	21.4	23	9.6	1	4.3
Missing	0	0.0	1	0.4	1	4.3
<b>Living Arrangement</b>						
On-campus	12	42.9	112	46.7	14	60.9
Off-campus	15	53.6	116	48.3	6	26.1
Off-campus (with primary caregiver)	1	3.6	11	4.6	2	8.7
<b>Relationship Status</b>						
Single	19	67.9	168	70.0	16	69.6
Partnered	5	17.9	67	27.9	5	21.7
Married	4	14.3	4	1.7	1	4.3
Missing	0	0.0	1	0.4	1	4.3
<b>Raised Environment</b>						
Two parent home (one parent working)	10	35.7	52	21.7	7	30.4
Two parent home (two parents working)	9	32.1	154	64.2	10	43.5
Single parent home	7	25.0	32	13.3	2	8.7
Foster care	1	3.6	2	0.8	1	4.3
Non-parent family	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Missing	1	3.6	0	0.0	1	4.3

## Hypotheses and Statistical Analyses

Participants were categorized into perceived parenting styles based on the Perceived Parenting Style Survey (PPSS). The PPSS identifies three categories from which participants could choose regarding the reared parenting style with which they most identified. Frequencies and percentages of the three parenting styles are shown in Table 4. Of the 17 participants not included in the study, 13 were not included due either not filling out the PPSS or filling out the PPSS in an incorrect manner to which the parenting style could not be accurately determined. Of the four remaining participant packets not included, one of the three positive psychology surveys was not completed. All four of those participants endorsed authoritative parenting styles on the PPSS.

Table 4

*Frequencies and Percentages of Perceived Parenting Styles on the PPSS by Participants*

Perceived Parenting Style	<i>f</i>	%
Permissive	28	9.6
Authoritative	240	82.5
Authoritarian	23	7.9

Participants were also asked to identify which parent(s) or caregiver(s) was being rated on the PPSS. Although this information will not be used for this study, it may be relevant to opportunities for future research in this area (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Caregiver rated for Perceived Parenting Style Survey (PPSS)*

Caregiver Rated	%
Both Parents	38.1
Mother	43.6
Father	14.4
Both Grandparents	0.3
Grandmother	0.0
Grandfather	0.0
Aunt	0.0
Uncle	0.7
Sister	0.7
Brother	0.3
Other	1.7

Given that MANOVA and Stepwise Discriminant Analysis rely on the overall sample size the uneven cell numbers was not an issue of concern (See Table 4). The sample size of 291 participants was sufficient for the data analysis in this study. To minimize the impact of extreme scores on overall means for cells with lower participant numbers (authoritarian and permissive) two separate rounds of data were collected in attempt to increase the numbers in each of these respective groups.

Means for each factor of positive psychology across the three parenting styles are shown in Table 6. Scores for the Snyder Hope Scale range from 1 to 32 with scores closer to 32 representing higher levels of hope. Scores for the Life Orientation Test-Revised ranged from 0 to 24 with scores closer to 24 representing higher levels of optimism. Scores for the Short Depression-Happiness Scale range from 0 to 18 with scores closer to 18 representing higher levels of happiness.

Table 6

*Means and Standard Deviation Results for Hopefulness, Optimism, and Happiness, Across Parenting Styles.*

	<u>Permissive</u>		<u>Authoritative</u>		<u>Authoritarian</u>	
	$\bar{x}$	<i>S</i>	$\bar{x}$	<i>S</i>	$\bar{x}$	<i>S</i>
Snyder Hope Scale	26.04	3.09	26.13	2.76	23.83	4.61
Live Orientation Test-Revised	14.68	4.88	16.05	3.37	13.13	5.17
Short Depression- Happiness Scale	13.96	3.60	14.40	2.74	12.87	4.33

An  $\alpha=.05$  level of significance was used to test the following hypotheses:

H1 Perceived authoritative parenting style will result in higher scores of perceived happiness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

H2 Perceived authoritative parenting style will result in higher scores of perceived hopefulness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

H3 Perceived authoritative parenting will result in higher scores of perceived optimism when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed to analyze the relationship between the three dimensions of parenting style and the three positive psychology measures of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. In conducting the MANOVA, Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, and Hotelling's Trace all led to the same conclusion regarding the null hypothesis in comparing all three groups ( $p<.003$ ). This agreement suggests that there were no major violations of the MANOVA assumptions and therefore its use as an appropriate measure for the testing of these hypotheses is supported.

The results of the MANOVA were significant (Wilks' Lambda = 0.93,  $p < .003$ ).

This p-value suggests that at least one parenting style differs across the vector of the

dependent variable characteristics of happiness, hopefulness, or optimism. It is important to note that one of the limitations of using multivariate procedures is that the analyses cannot adequately answer whether or not there is a significant difference between all three independent variable groups. MANOVA results can only show that at least one significant difference exists. Based on the means (see Table 6), it is concluded that a significant difference exists between the authoritarian parenting styles and at least one of the other two parenting styles. In examining means, the authoritative parenting style had the highest mean scores across the three dependent variables, while authoritarian had the lowest means. Based on these results it can be concluded that a difference exists between the authoritative and the authoritarian parenting styles. It is unknown as to whether a significant difference exists between authoritative and permissive styles, due to the limitations of the MANOVA.

Stepwise Discriminant Analysis was used to determine which of the dependent variables was significantly different across the parenting styles. Results of the analysis showed that optimism appeared to be the only dependent variable that discriminates across the parenting styles  $F(2,288) = 7.7671, p = .001$ . The variables hope and happiness did not meet criteria of significance to be labeled as significant discriminators.

Based on the conclusions of both the MANOVA and the Discriminant Analysis, the following hypotheses were rejected at the  $\alpha = .05$  level:

H1 Perceived authoritative parenting style will produce higher scores of perceived happiness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

H2 Perceived authoritative parenting style will produce higher scores of perceived hopefulness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

The following hypothesis was partially accepted at the  $\alpha=.05$  level:

H3 Perceived authoritative parenting will produce higher scores of perceived optimism when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

Due to the limitations of the MANOVA, this hypothesis can only be partially accepted. A significant difference in optimism exists across groups, and the MANOVA concludes that the difference exists between the authoritative parenting style and at least one other parenting style. When examining means (see Table 5) it can be concluded that the perceived authoritative parenting style is related to higher scores of perceived optimism when compared to the authoritarian parenting style. It cannot be concluded that this also applies the perceived permissive parenting style.

#### *Chapter Summary*

Data completed by participants provided an opportunity to investigate the differences in traits of positive psychology across differing parenting styles. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to determine that a significant difference exists between the authoritative parenting style and at least one other parenting style, most conclusively the authoritarian parenting style. Discriminant Analysis provided an opportunity to examine which of the three traits of positive psychology, happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, differ across the parenting styles. Optimism was identified as a discriminator across parenting styles, while there was no evidence to suggest that happiness and hopefulness were also discriminating factors. H1 and H2 were both rejected while H3 remains partially supported. Due to the limitations of MANOVA, H3 was unable to be fully supported as it can only be concluded that the perceived authoritative parenting style significantly differs from the perceived authoritarian parenting style, with the perceived permissive parenting style remaining inconclusive.

Using multivariate analyses limits the ability to determine significant differences across groups because the analyses determine only whether a significant difference exists across at least one of the groups. If a significant difference is found, analyses can only support that the difference exists between groups with the highest and lowest means, which in this study is authoritative and permissive. Currently this area is ripe for research as there is no developed follow up measure addressing this problem in multivariate analyses.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was conducted to investigate differences among positive psychology traits of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, across three perceived parenting styles in undergraduate college students. This chapter reviews the purpose of the study, provides an interpretation of the data analyses, and highlights significant research findings. This chapter also discusses possible limitations of the study and possible areas for further research.

#### Discussion

College has been seen as a time of great transition, where young adults have begun to explore their independence and begin to individuate from their parents' influence. However, one's reared parenting style continues to have influence even after the child has left home. That influence can affect the overall development of traits that contribute to a student's ability to function in the most advantageous way. The motivation behind this study was to enhance an understanding of the perceived parenting styles that have contributed to the development of positive psychology traits in college students that will contribute to opportunities for optimal life functioning. The purpose of this study was to identify how different perceived parenting styles have impacted the development of positive psychology traits of happiness, hope, and optimism in undergraduate college students.

### *Sample and Methodology*

Participants in this study consisted of 291 undergraduate students, at least 18 years of age, attending a mid-sized, western university. The sample was 54.3% female, 44.7% male, and .7% transgendered with participants ranging in age from 18 to 47 years with a mean age of 20.2 years ( $SD=3.151$ ). Participants varied in undergraduate status, ethnicity, relationship status, living environment, and in the environment in which they were raised.

Three hundred and eight packets were distributed amongst willing participants in seven different undergraduate classes and two different student life activities at a mid-sized western university for a response rate of 88 percent. Participants voluntarily completed and returned the packets in their respective classrooms and/or during the attended activity. Seventeen of the collected packets were not complete, having had missing data on at least one of the four surveys and were therefore eliminated from the analysis. A total of two hundred and ninety-one packets were regarded appropriate for inclusion in this study.

### *Significant Findings*

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to test the following hypotheses at the  $\alpha=.05$ :

- H1 Perceived authoritative parenting style will produce higher scores of perceived happiness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.
- H2 Perceived authoritative parenting style will produce higher scores of perceived hopefulness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.
- H3 Perceived authoritative parenting will produce higher scores of perceived optimism when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

MANOVA and Discriminant Analysis were used to address these hypotheses. Evidence was found to support Hypothesis 3, although both Hypotheses 1 and 2 were not supported by the data. Results indicated that when students perceive that they were parented under the authoritative parenting style, having experienced high levels of both demandingness and responsiveness, they were more likely to develop higher levels of optimism than students who perceived they were raised through an authoritarian parenting style (high levels of demandingness, and low levels of responsiveness). Due to the limitations of using multivariate analyses, this study cannot conclude that the same results apply in looking at the authoritative and permissive perceived parenting styles. In examining overall mean scores the authoritative group, when compared to the permissive group, reflect a slightly higher development of optimism based on mean scores alone (see Table 5). This finding in support of the authoritative parenting style and the development of optimism is consistent with areas of Baumrind's research (1966, 1991). Baumrind suggested that authoritative parenting styles help to rear better adjusted children. As was congruent with the results of this study, optimism, which contributes to optimal functioning, was significantly linked with the perceived authoritative parenting style.

Research has made some suggestion as to how the authoritative style may be linked to optimism. Hasan and Power (2002), found the autonomy aspect of parenting is positively correlated with optimism ( $r=.25$ ) and negatively correlated with pessimism ( $r=-.28$ ). Baumrind (1966, 1991) has identified autonomy as one of the attributes of the authoritative parenting style. Stage and Brandt (1999) suggested that autonomy, when combined with developmentally appropriate tasks through authoritative parenting, may contribute to higher goal setting. They also suggested that the level of responsiveness

present in authoritative parenting may help to develop agency in the child which may lead to increased ability to seek out support and resources when needed. The higher goal setting and active ability to seek support may be contributors to the overall positive outlook that fosters the development of optimism.

Hypotheses 1 and 2, suggested that levels of happiness and hopefulness would be significantly higher in the authoritative group than in the permissive and authoritarian groups. These hypotheses were not supported by this study. Although equal cell size is not an assumption or requirement of utilizing MANOVA and Discriminant Analysis, it may be noteworthy to mention that the low number of participants in both the permissive and authoritarian groups may have impacted these results. Impacts could have resulted from small cell sizes or by the impact extreme scores can have when working with smaller cells. Extreme scores in small cells could have a potential impact by skewing the overall means, although this does not appear to be the case in this study. Although an attempt was made to collect more data in order to avoid this limitation, the cell sizes in these two respective groups represented only 10% of the sample for the permissive group and 8% of the sample for the authoritarian group. The authoritative group represented 82% of the overall sample and therefore means were less likely to be impacted by extremes.

When examining means, mean scores for both happiness and hopefulness were higher within the authoritative groups than the permissive and authoritarian groups across both variables (see Table 5). Evidence does not, however, support that the difference was large enough to be statistically significant. Research suggests that parenting styles consistent with authoritative parenting (high levels of responsiveness and

demandingness), encourage a skilled focus toward academia, which prepares students for the necessary requirements of college including self discipline, autonomy, and determination (Strage & Brandt, 1999). This is also congruent with other studies that have suggested a relationship between authoritative parenting and independence, responsibility, and goal orientation (Buri, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1991; Baumrind, 1966). The relationship suggested in these studies could account for the higher number of participants in the authoritative groups among this college student sample.

In this study, other traits that also have been shown to contribute to positive psychology, hope and happiness, were not significantly different across the parenting styles. These findings contradict other research that suggests parenting styles displaying practices consistent with the authoritarian style (high demandingness, low responsiveness), are related to decreased emotional regulation, maladaptive perfectionism, and higher levels of depression (Feng et al., 2009; Soenens, et al., 2008).

Scheier and Carver (1985) supported the idea of optimism being a positive, stable, personality trait that is “not limited to a particular behavioral domain or class of setting” (p. 220). Although other research would suggest that optimism can be influenced by external factors, it is generally agreed that optimism relates to the ability to expect positive outcomes in the future (Hasan & Power, 2002; Franklin et al., 1990). Clinically a client’s optimism has been linked to increased coping while struggling with illness, stressful life situations, and interpersonal struggles (Franklin et al., 1990; Rogers et al., 2005; Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). Therefore, the development of optimism or lack thereof can become a means of clinical intervention both individually and in providing parenting interventions. Based on the studies relating optimism to coping

skills, identifying levels of optimism in students can help provide ideas for clinical intervention. Scheier, et al. found that optimism was significantly correlated with problem-focused coping, acceptance/resignation, and positive reinterpretation, and negatively associated with denial/distancing. By providing a clinical focus on the development of optimism in students, according to the research, coping skills for typical stressors will likely increase.

When considering parenting interventions, this study has shown that perceived authoritative parenting is related to higher levels of optimism. Authoritative parents impart a high level of demandingness, self-discipline, and responsibility, as well as high levels of responsiveness, support, encouragement, and warmth. The child is affirmed in his or her own development while standards are set for future behavior and development (Baumrind, 1966). The child is able to develop autonomy in decision making while knowing support is available if needed. Optimism falls in line with this parenting style as it incorporates the development of positive expectations for outcome. By instilling autonomy and providing support to children, they learn that they can be empowered in affecting an outcome which leads to optimism.

Authoritarian parenting includes high levels of demandingness and low levels of warmth. Obedience is stressed and the child is molded to the will of the parent. Autonomy is not encouraged and dependence is fostered (Baumrind, 1966). Ferrari and Olivette (1993) found that overcontrol, inflexibility, and lack of warmth, characterized by the authoritarian parenting style contribute to child indecisiveness. Without the developed ability to be confident in one's decisions and/or experience warmth and support when facing difficult times, optimism appears less likely to develop. As was previously

discussed, optimism involves an ability to expect positive outcomes in the future. When dependency is created and little support provided, students are less likely to be confident in their ability to impact outcomes and/or have reason to expect that positive outcomes may occur as situations appear more out of their control. This may be a contributing factor to the perceived authoritarian style displaying significantly lower levels of optimism in this study.

Clinicians working with college students may find themselves facing increasing numbers of student struggles related to reared parenting style as colleges increase their programming and outreach to make college possible for a more diverse range of students. Identifying perceived parenting style in undergraduate students can provide clinical clues into possible interventions in working with developmentally appropriate struggles of transition in the undergraduate years. As research has shown, the development of positive psychology traits contributes to optimal functioning. The findings in this study suggest that optimism, one trait of positive psychology is significantly related to parenting style. By identifying perceived parenting style clinicians can gain insight into areas that may be underdeveloped within the students functioning. Examples include autonomy, responsibility, decision making, and parental support, all of which can be linked to the level of demandingness and responsiveness displayed in each parenting style. Knowing that a student had higher or lower levels of demandingness may allow the clinician opportunities to work with the student around issues linked with the lack of and/or over control in these areas. Subsequently, although a childhood marked by a lack of warmth cannot be easily atoned for, clinicians can work with the students to find ways in which they can feel affirmed and supported, regardless of life circumstance.

The development, or lack thereof, of a sense of autonomy and/or active agency due to perceived parenting style can also have an impact on the student's ability to choose a major and/or career path. As was previously mentioned overcontrol, inflexibility, and lack of warmth, characterized by the authoritarian parenting style are related to child indecisiveness (Ferrari & Olivette, 1993). Clinical interventions in academic advising and career counseling may also benefit from being able to identify perceived parenting style which may provide insight into a student's struggle to be confident in one's academic decisions. This could also be an area for future research.

The findings from this study also have implications for working with parents. The more research that is generated around the effects of perceived parenting style, the more empowerment there is for the parent(s) to learn through educational opportunities more adaptive ways of parenting. Helping parents to understand the positive and negative effects of differing parenting styles can help to increase motivation and application of parenting styles that are more likely to contribute to their child's overall wellbeing.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

There are a number of potential threats to the validity of this study. The first of which is related to the sample. Participation in the study was limited to students in classrooms in which the professor gave permission for data to be collected. Therefore students who were not in selected classes did not have the opportunity to participate in this study. Although the study included the recruitment of students from different environments, it was not a true random sample. Had each student had an equal chance of being recruited for the study, as in the case of true random sampling, results may be more easily generalized to a larger population. Due to the limitations in sampling

generalizations to populations dissimilar to the sample population in this study should be carefully and cautiously considered.

Another potential limitation to this study includes the use of self-report instruments. Although the surveys were collected anonymously and without repercussion for choosing not to engage in the study, most were collected in a classroom environment that holds evaluative power. Some students may have felt pressured to participate in the study and/or may have experienced external motivators to falsely report their perceived parenting style or actual level of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. Efforts were taken to minimize this potential source of error within the wording of the informed consent statement. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could terminate their participation at any time without repercussion. Several professors also inquired about the option to offer extra credit to students participating in this research. This request was denied by the researcher to uphold the statement in the informed consent stating that there would be no loss of entitled benefits as a result of not participating in the study. Results were collected anonymously so as to minimize any motivation for false reporting.

A third possible limitation was the difference in the number of participants in each parenting style cell. Permissive ( $n=28$ ) and Authoritarian ( $n=23$ ) styles had significantly lower numbers of participants than the Authoritative style ( $n=240$ ). Although parenting style cannot be randomly assigned, it is unknown as to whether this distribution of participants is actually representative of the greater population. According to research by Simons and Conger (2007), when utilizing a child report, two authoritative parents, two indulgent parents, and two uninvolved parents were the most prevalent

combinations of parenting found in their study. Reports by observers in the same study supported this, finding that two authoritative or two uninvolved parents were most prevalent. The study conducted by Simons and Conger can support the authoritative parenting style being more prevalent in this study (82.5 %) and permissive second in prevalence (9.6 %), according to child perception. The study does not, however, support the extreme difference in numbers by which parenting styles were identified within this study. In looking at the study by Simons and Conger, they expected that due to socialization, mothers would trend toward the more nurturing styles (permissive and authoritative) and fathers would trend toward the styles with more of a controlling element (authoritarian and authoritative). It is important to note that 43.6% of the sample ranked their mother as the primary caregiver, which according to Simons and Conger, may account for a higher number of participants in the perceived authoritative group.

#### *Future research*

This study offers insight into how perceived parenting styles can influence the development of positive psychology traits that may contribute to a student's overall levels of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. However, there is significant room for further exploration.

Participants in this study were recruited from an undergraduate student population at a mid-sized western university. Since the study was conducted at a university, it is likely that international students may have been recruited for participation, which was not accounted for on the demographic questionnaire. International participants, as well as many other English as second language students were not identified through demographics. ESL considerations may influence the way in which the directions and

questions on the surveys were understood. It is noteworthy to mention that many of the data packets not used in the study due to one of the surveys being incomplete had an ethnicity entered under the “other” category. Although it cannot be assumed that because the ethnicity claimed was that of a minority population, ESL considerations exist; however this may have contributed to the underrepresentation of certain minorities present on campus. Overall the demographics of the greater campus population were relatively similar to the demographics of the sample used in this study (see Table 1).

Parenting styles are determined based on a combination of responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1990). Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox (2000), suggested that how these two traits are perceived and expressed across cultures may vary. For example, the measure used in the study was the Parent Behavior Checklist (Fox, 1994, as cited in Cardona et al.). Cardona et al. noted that lower scores were obtained by Hispanic mothers for nurturing when compared to Caucasian mothers. They suggest that nurturing within Hispanic families may take on a different, more affective definition than what is considered on the nurturing subscale of the Parent Behavior Checklist. Cardona et al. also found that socio-economic status can also influence parenting style, which was not considered in the current study.

If the study were to be replicated it is recommended that a greater attempt be made to increase the number of participants in each cell. Although an attempt was made in this study to collect a second round of data with this goal in mind, the number of participants with perceived permissive and authoritarian parenting styles continued to be significantly lower than those in the authoritative category. As was previously mentioned, although this does not affect the overall analyses when using multivariate statistics,

extremes may affect the overall means when the group is smaller. This may be remedied in future research by pre-screening procedures that allow the researcher to pre-identify a pool of participants falling into each group in order to recruit a larger  $n$  for each cell.

One of the limitations of this study, as well as other studies utilizing multivariate analyses was that there was no follow up statistical procedure to specifically determine significant difference between all groups. As has been previously discussed, the MANOVA detects if at least one group significantly differs. To determine where this difference existed, overall group means were examined with the understanding that the difference had to exist between the group with the highest and lowest means. A significant contribution to research could be made to develop follow up procedures for multivariate analyses that can determine differences between remaining groups.

Another problem that was encountered during this study was that 6% of the total collected surveys were unable to be included due to one or more of the surveys having had no information recorded or in the case of the PPSS, having completed it incorrectly. When using the PPSS the entire survey must be completed and completed correctly in order to accurately determine parenting style. Thirteen of the 17 incomplete surveys were due to incorrect completion of the PPSS. Directions of the PPSS may need to be revised and/or verbally administered during data collection to ensure accurate understanding of how to complete the survey.

The Snyder Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) looks at two different facets of hope, pathways and agency. Future research may desire to look at these two facets of hope as potential discriminating factors across parenting styles. Agency looks into one's ability to be goal directed. Pathways measure one's ability to plan out objectives to reach the goal.

By identifying low scores in these areas, clinicians could implement interventions to specifically address low levels of hope by identifying which facet is under developed, goal direction or planning towards one's goal. Utilized in a university setting, developing these facets of hope could potentially contribute to increased transition into emerging adulthood as the student is able to identify future goals and objectively work toward achieving them.

When completing the PPSS, although not a part of the original survey, participants were asked to rate their primary caregiver and identify the caregiver they were rating by role (i.e. mother, aunt, brother). Although this study did not utilize these results, research has been conducted on the impact of caregiver gender in relation to parenting styles (Fromme, 2006; Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2007, Simons & Conger, 2007). Simons and Conger suggest that people tend to marry partners with similar dispositions. Due to the influence partners have on one another, Simons and Conger suggested that they are likely to gravitate toward similar parenting styles. Research could benefit from further exploration into how the development of positive psychology may be related to perceived parenting style and caregiver gender, as well as how differing parenting styles may be perceived when implemented from the opposite gendered and/or same gendered parent. This research could help to create clinical interventions for dual gender parenting, single parent families, and same sex parent families where only one caregiver gender may be present.

#### Implications

Although research suggests that children reared with authoritative parenting are likely to be better adjusted behaviorally, there has been little research to suggest that

these children are also better adjusted in more intrapersonal dimensions of positive psychology such as happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. In neglectful, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles, research shows a link to increased levels of depression, low-self esteem, and substance abuse in comparison to their peers reared by authoritative parents (Baumrind, 1991; Berg-Nielsen, Vikar, & Dahl, 2003; Dornbusch et al., 1987). Whether or not these parenting styles also produce strengths via positive psychology traits remains under researched. Research has been done on the change and transition experienced during the college years, as well as looking at how positive psychology can contribute to optimal functioning during these years. In association with these areas, research was warranted to begin to look at intrapersonal displays of positive psychology traits in college students and how these might be connected with perceived parenting styles.

In this study, the hypothesis that perceived authoritative parenting style would contribute to the development of higher levels of hopefulness and happiness in students than those who perceived having been reared with authoritarian or permissive styles was not supported. It was supported however that this link can be made when looking at levels of optimism. Goleman (1995) defined optimism as “having a strong expectation that, in general, things will turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustrations” (p. 88). Rogers, Hansen, Levy, Tate, and Sikkema (2005) also found that optimism influenced behavior and coping strategies in bereaved patients.

Rindfuss (1991) discussed the change and ambiguity that occurs for many college students as they transition into adulthood and a new experience. As students enter a new environment, many for the first time, they are faced with challenges and choices that can

be unsettling. As mentioned by Rogers et al. (2005), higher levels of optimism contribute to greater coping strategies. Coupled with the general life outlook that things will turn out well, despite trials, these students may have an easier time adjusting to college and maintaining a future outlook that the outcome of their college experience will be positive. As universities continually look for ways to support their students, minimize adjustment, and increase student retention, the identification of parenting style can possibly provide insight into different ways in which students may best be served. By identifying perceived parenting style, coupled with research findings such as the findings from this study, interventions can be created to provide students with the skills to more fully engage in their college, and ultimately, life experience.

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## APPENDIX A

### CLASSES AND ACTIVITES SELECTED FOR DATA COLLECTION

## CLASSES AND ACTIVITIES SELECTED FOR DATA COLLECTION

<b>COLLECTION ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>APPROXIMATE # OF STUDENTS</b>
Class: BAAC 221	Principles of Accounting	40
Class: BAAC 221	Principles of Accounting	40
Class: SOC 100	Principles of Sociology	60
Class: SOC 100	Principles of Sociology	35
Class: SOC 236	Sociology of Minorities	35
Class: SOC 237	Sociology of Minorities	35
Class: SOC 237	Sociology of Minorities	35
Student Life Activity	Greek Board Meeting	20
Student Life Activity	Student Activities Volunteers	10

## APPENDIX B

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION OF HUMAN  
SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN  
COLORADO**

Project Title: Perceived Parenting Style and its relationship to Hopefulness,  
Happiness, and Optimism in a College Student Sample.  
Researchers: Brian D. Johnson, Ph.D.  
Sarah Griess, MEd.  
University of Northern Colorado  
Telephone: (970) 351-1365

This study was designed to look at traits of college success and life satisfaction. Participation in this study entails filling out a demographic questionnaire as well as four questionnaires inquiring about your emotions, attitudes, and behaviors as a college student. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions and we ask that you attempt to answer all questions as honestly as possible. No identifying information will be collected other than that which is on the demographics questionnaire. If you choose to participate in the drawing for a pre-paid visa (see below), all identifying data will be kept separate from the questionnaires so that responses are kept anonymous at all times. If at anytime you become uncomfortable with your participation in the study, or no longer desire to participate, you may terminate your participation in the study without repercussion. You may do so by returning this packet to the examiner instead of placing it in the designated return area. Resigning your participation will not impact your eligibility for a cash reward. The total time of participation in this study will be approximately 10 minutes.

By participating in the study you may choose to become eligible for one of four \$50 pre-paid visas. Names will be drawn after the conclusion of data collection in the spring of 2010, and winning participants will be contacted at that time. Your contribution to this study will help us to contribute to research in the area of traits that contribute to college success and life satisfaction.

By completing this survey you are agreeing to participate in this research, you are at least 18 years of age, and that you have chosen to participate according to your own free will without violation of any human rights. You also agree that the responses you give are true to the best of your knowledge and that responses may be used in this study to generate data around the emotions, attitudes, and behaviors of college students. You acknowledge that all anonymous responses may be used in published materials pertaining to this specific study.

If I have any concerns about being in the study, the treatment of participants contributing to this study, or should you desire to see results of the study when concluded, you can contact the researcher Sarah Griess, M.S.Ed. at sarahgriess@gmail.com or Brian D. Johnson, Ph.D., research advisor, at (970) 351-2727.

## APPENDIX C

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

## DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

*Please complete all responses clearly*

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Transgender

2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Race/Ethnicity: ☐ African American ☐ Asian ☐ Caucasian ☐ Latino/Latina  
☐ Native American ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Year in School: ☐ Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior ☐ Senior

5. Living arrangements: ☐ On-campus ☐ Off-campus alone or w/roommate(s)  
☐ Off-campus w/primary caregiver(s)

6. Relationship status: ☐ Single ☐ Partnered ☐ Married

7. How would you best describe the environment you in which were raised? (check all that apply)

☐ Two parent home (with one parent working)

☐ Two parent home (with both parents working)

☐ Single parent home

☐ Foster care

☐ Non-parent family member as primary caregiver (i.e. grandparent, Aunt, Uncle)

☐ Other: (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### PERCEIVED PARENTAL STYLES SURVEY

## WHAT MY PARENTS ARE LIKE

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please read the following groups of sentences and make a checkmark next to the group of sentences that most closely describes your primary caregiver. You will choose only one group.

**Please indicate the relation of the primary caregiver you are rating.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Mother	<input type="checkbox"/> Grandmother	<input type="checkbox"/> Aunt	<input type="checkbox"/> Sister
<input type="checkbox"/> Father	<input type="checkbox"/> Grandfather	<input type="checkbox"/> Uncle	<input type="checkbox"/> Brother
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe and indicate gender) _____			

---

☐ **A**      My parent(s) allow me to do almost anything I want to do.  
                  My parent(s) give me just about everything I ask them for.  
                  I am expected to make all my own decisions.  
                  My parent(s) do not usually tell me if my choices are right or wrong.  
                  My parent(s) rarely give me rules.  
                  My parent(s) rarely punish or discipline me.

---

☐ **B**      My parent(s) is/are willing to listen to my ideas and viewpoints.  
                  My parent(s) is/are reasonable about discipline, and listen to my reasons if I have broken a rule.  
                  My parent(s) and I discuss decisions that I have to make, and usually let me make the final decision.  
                  My parent(s) have expectations for me that are realistic.  
                  My parent(s) encourage me to do things I am interested in and support the activities that I participate in.  
                  When I ask for things, my parents will help me, but they don't always give me everything.

---

☐ **C**      My parent(s) feel that I must obey them.  
                  My parent(s) do not allow me to make my own decisions very often.  
                  If I disagree with my parent(s), I am not allowed to discuss it with them.  
                  Whatever my parent(s) say is right, and I am expected to accept it.  
                  I am not allowed to talk back to my parent(s).  
                  My parent(s) punishments are harsh and often unjust.

---

## APPENDIX E

### SHORT DEPRESSION-HAPPINESS SCALE (SDHS)

A number of statements that people have made to describe how they feel are given below. Please read each one and check the box which best describes how frequently you felt that way in the past seven days, including today. Some statements describe positive feelings and some describe negative feelings. You may have experienced both positive and negative feelings at different times during the past seven days, including today.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
(1) I felt dissatisfied with my life				
(2) I felt happy				
(3) I felt cheerless				
(4) I felt pleased with the way I am				
(5) I felt that life was enjoyable				
(6) I felt that life was meaningless				

## APPENDIX F

### THE HOPE SCALE

Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the options shown below, please check the box that represents the extent of truth to which each item applies to you.

	<b>Definitely False</b>	<b>Mostly False</b>	<b>Mostly True</b>	<b>Definitely True</b>
<b>1)</b> I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.				
<b>2)</b> I energetically pursue my goals.				
<b>3)</b> I feel tired most of the time.				
<b>4)</b> There are lots of ways around any problem.				
<b>5)</b> I am easily downed in an argument.				
<b>6)</b> I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.				
<b>7)</b> I worry about my health.				
<b>8)</b> Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.				
<b>9)</b> My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.				
<b>10)</b> I've been pretty successful in life.				
<b>11)</b> I usually find myself worrying about something.				
<b>12)</b> I meet the goals that I set for myself.				

## APPENDIX G

### LIFE ORIENTATION TEST-REVISED (LOT-R)

Please check the appropriate box beside each statement below that corresponds to the extent of agreement or disagreement with each. Please be as honest as you can. There are no right and wrong answers just your judgment about you.

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
<b>1)</b> In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.					
<b>2)</b> It's easy for me to relax.					
<b>3)</b> If something can go wrong for me, it will.					
<b>4)</b> I'm always optimistic about my future.					
<b>5)</b> I enjoy my friends a lot.					
<b>6)</b> It's important for me to keep busy.					
<b>7)</b> I hardly ever expect things to go my way.					
<b>8)</b> I don't get upset too easily.					
<b>9)</b> I rarely count on good things happening to me.					
<b>10)</b> Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.					

## APPENDIX H

### RESEARCHER SCRIPT

“Data is being conducted to explore developing traits of positive psychology in undergraduate students. I am looking for undergraduate students who are at least 18 years of age who would be willing to help with this research. I’ll ask you to fill out some surveys that will take you approximately 5-7 minutes to complete. All information you provide will be collected anonymously and there will be no way of identifying who completed which survey. In addition, for your participation in the research you may choose to become eligible to win one of four \$50 pre-paid visas that will be randomly drawn at the conclusion of the total data collection by filling out a registration form. Information for the drawing will be collected separately from your survey to ensure anonymity in your survey responses. If you have already completed this survey you are not eligible to participate again.”

## APPENDIX I

### IRB APPROVAL STATEMENT

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)



August 4, 2009

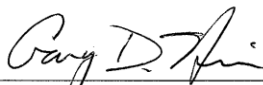
TO: Gary Heise  
School of Sport and Exercise Science

FROM: SPARC

RE: Exempt Review of *Perceived Parenting Style and its Relationship to Hopefulness, Happiness, and Optimism in a College Student Sample*, submitted by Sarah J. Griess (Research Advisor: Brian Johnson)

The above proposal is being submitted to you for exemption review. When approved, return the proposal to Sherry May in SPARC.

I recommend approval.

 1 Sept 2009  
Signature of Co-Chair Date

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project is exempt from further review.

IT IS THE ADVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO NOTIFY THE STUDENT OF THIS STATUS.

Comments: e-mailed 15 Aug 2009

25 Kepner Hall ~ Campus Box #143  
Greeley, Colorado 80639  
Ph: 970.351.1907 ~ Fax: 970.351.1934

## APPENDIX J

MANUSCRIPT FOR PEER REVIEW PUBLICATION

PERCEIVED PARENTING STYLE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO HOPEFULNESS,  
HAPPINESS, AND OPTIMISM IN A COLLEGE STUDENT SAMPLE

Sarah J. Griess

Brian D. Johnson

Daniel J. Mundfrom

Other authors to be determined at completion of manuscript

*University of Northern Colorado*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences among positive psychology traits of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, between three perceived parenting styles in 291 undergraduate college students. It was hypothesized that students identifying with the reared authoritative parenting style would endorse higher levels of hopefulness, happiness, and optimism than the permissive and authoritarian parenting styles. Multivariate and discriminant analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses. Data analysis in this study supported that the perceived authoritative parenting style contributed to higher levels of optimism than the authoritarian parenting style. The development of optimism or lack thereof can become a means of clinical intervention both individually and in providing parenting interventions. Based on the studies relating optimism to coping skills, identifying levels of optimism in students can help provide ideas for clinical intervention. The hypothesis that the perceived authoritative parenting style would contribute to the development of higher levels of optimism than the perceived permissive style were inconclusive due to the limitations of using multivariate analyses. The hypotheses suggesting that the perceived authoritative parenting style would also contribute to the development of higher levels of happiness and hopefulness were not supported in this study.

Introduction

As new generations of students enter into college, universities find ways to adjust to the unique issues presented with each changing generation of students. Since the era of the baby boomers becoming parents, universities are finding themselves adjusting to the unique issues brought about by over involved parents that have earned themselves the name of “helicopter parents” through their constant hovering (Lum, 2006, White, 2005). The term “helicopter parents” evolved from the idea of a hovering helicopter being like

many parents of college students that hover around their children, getting involved in every aspect of their children's lives, and impacting the social development and independence of the students as they immerse themselves in the college experience. As a University staff working with students, it is often predictable to identify which students have been raised with helicopter parents and which students have not, by observing the way they adjust to college life and exert their new found independence as college students.

Helicopter parenting is just one style of parenting, displaying the same parenting characteristics of Baumrind's authoritarian parenting style (1966, 1991). The study of parenting styles and their effects on child development and socialization has been a widely researched topic. According to Baumrind's model, parental behavior is measured in terms of demandingness and responsiveness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Baumrind (1991) stated that demandingness "refers to the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (p. 61-62). Responsiveness then "refers to the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands" (p. 62). These measurements facilitated Baumrind's development of the four models of parenting style, permissive, authoritative, authoritarian, and rejecting-neglecting (Baumrind, 1990).

Much of the research over the past three decades revolves around the impact of parenting styles on child and adolescent development. Recent studies have begun to look at the effects of parenting style in college students as they transition into adulthood. The

transition from adolescence into adulthood can be a great time of change and ambiguity for many college students as they are no longer an adolescent in high school, and are now entering into adulthood (Rindfuss, 1991). Students often find themselves feeling caught between adolescence and adulthood, not quite fitting into either category (Arnett, 2000). As they leave home, many for the first time, they are faced with challenges and choices that may either foster or inhibit their independence. Many students are being introduced to their first jobs, financial freedom, adult romantic relationships, and independent decision making. As new roles and freedoms are encountered, young people find themselves able to have greater freedom in responding to the changes taking place in their lives (Rindfuss). These roles tend to enhance the feelings of independence encountered upon entering into college. However, in addition to learning to be self sufficient, according to Arnett (1998), the greatest measure of independence is differentiation from others, especially their parents.

Baumrind (1991) discussed the significant role changes that take place in adolescence as the child begins to assert his or her independence. In relating to others, peer opinions are now being considered along with family. As the adolescent matures he or she is assigned new duties within the family and in association to the greater society that may or may not foster a greater level of independence that comes with moving into adolescence and emerging adulthood. Bednar and Fisher (2003) discuss the shift from relying totally on one's parents for social cues and behavioral guidelines, to referencing peers instead. Fuligni and Eccles (1993) found that the more the adolescent felt they were involved in the decision making with their parents (authoritative parenting style) the less they referenced peers for advice. Ultimately, Bednar and Fisher found that adolescents

were more likely to reference their peers in making decisions regarding social matters, and that adolescents in authoritative families tended to reference their parents in making moral decisions. This initial individuation that takes place in adolescence carries into young adulthood and as individuals reach college age.

Because the college experience is a time of independence in decision making and exploration, this opens the door for many researchers to focus on student engagement in negative behaviors such as drug and alcohol use and exploration, engagement in sexual exploration and unprotected sex, and the relation to issues of self-esteem and depression. There is research to support that these issues have been significantly related to parenting styles that are characterized with less warmth, extremely high or extremely low levels of parental demandingness, and little to no consideration of child input (Smetana, 1995). Studies are also looking at relationships between differing parenting styles of the mother and father and their effects on same sex and opposite sex offspring in regard to self-esteem, alcohol related behaviors, depression, adjustment, and rejection (Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2007; Zhou, Sandler, Millsap, Wolchik, & Dawson-McClure, 2008; Crean, 2008). Parenting styles classified as neglectful are characterized by parental inaction and inattentiveness in raising the child; in essence this style is similar to the child having to rear one's self. Youth reared by neglectful parents are more likely to display maladaptive strategies to dealing with issues, are more reactive than proactive, and often display behaviors that take them off task (Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000). Knutson, DeGarmo, and Reid (2004), found that youth reared with the neglectful parenting style were often more aggressive, displayed a greater risk of being involved in delinquent behavior, and were more likely to struggle academically.

On the other end of the parenting spectrum is research on the parenting style that is likely to produce the most positive behaviors in children. Authoritative parents are more likely to display clear and concrete direction, leaving little ambiguity with the children, while providing a give and take atmosphere, allowing for the children to make choices and be responsible for the consequences (Buri, 1991). It is well researched that authoritative parents most likely rear children who are more independent, responsible, and goal oriented (Buri, 1991; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991; Baumrind, 1966). Steinberg et al. reported that kids reared authoritatively are also more likely to be successful academically and less involved in delinquent activity.

Although research suggests that children reared with authoritative parenting are likely to be more behaviorally adjusted, there is little research to suggest that positive adjustment also carries over into more intrapersonal dimensions such as happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. In neglectful, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles, research shows a link to increased levels of depression, low-self esteem, and substance abuse in comparison to their peers reared by authoritative parents (Baumrind, 1991; Berg-Nielsen, Vikan & Dahl, 2003; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). Whether or not these parenting styles may be related to the development of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism remains unclear.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) stress the importance of the need “for massive research on human strengths and virtues” (p. 8). They also stress that now that psychology has turned to recognizing the active agency of individuals in their life outcomes, practicing from the positive psychology “worldview may have the direct effect of preventing many of the major emotional disorders” while producing side effects of

increased physical health due to the mind body connection and “making normal people stronger and more productive and making high human potential actual” (p. 8).

Positive psychology focuses on the strengths of people and how those strengths were acquired. Although positive psychology is not a new concept, recently it has received more attention by researchers (Foster & Lloyd, 2007). In fact, strength based conceptualization and intervention has been an emphasis of Counseling Psychology since its inception over 60 years ago (Gelso & Fretz, 2001). Gable and Haidt (2005) defined positive psychology as an examination of the circumstances and procedures that lead to individuals, groups, and systems functioning and thriving at their highest level or ability. Park, Peterson, & Seligman (2004) noted that positive psychology identifies strengths in character, and that these strengths are associated strongly with the amount of satisfaction one draws from life. Three traits of positive psychology include happiness, hopefulness, and optimism (Harris, Thoresen, & Lopez, 2007; Baldwin, McIntyre, & Hardaway, 2007). According to Gable and Haidt’s definition, these three traits of positive psychology will contribute to the functioning of individuals at their highest ability. The contribution of these traits is an important consideration for research in looking at interventions focused on helping our college students to be successful. Identifying parenting styles that rear students with high levels of positive psychology may be an important step for both parents and students that can, according to Gable and Haidt’s findings related to increased ability, maximize the opportunity a student has to be successful in his or her college career.

Much of the parenting style research focuses on behavioral outcomes of children reared with one of Baumrind’s (1990) parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian,

permissive, and neglecting-rejecting) such as academic adjustment, proneness to substance abuse, autonomy, self control, etc. However, few studies address the positive psychology, or intrapersonal traits and strengths, of college students in relation to parenting styles with which they were reared. In association with research done on the change and transition experienced during the college years, as well as the research that looks at the benefits of traits of positive psychology, research is warranted to begin to look at more intrapersonal displays of positive psychology traits versus negative behavioral displays of college students reared with a particular parenting style.

Because much of the prior research has been focused on negative behavioral displays, the authoritative parenting style, yielding the most positive displays of behavior, has been a focus of parenting books and parent training. However, it is currently unclear if authoritative parenting, versus authoritarian, permissive, and neglecting-rejecting, is also producing the most positive intrapersonal outcomes. The relationship between parenting styles and specific traits of positive psychology such as happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, three traits that are suggested to contribute to optimal functioning, also remains unclear (Harris et al., 2007; Baldwin et al., 2007).

For the purpose of this study, only three of Baumrind's parenting styles were used: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Because the neglecting-rejecting parenting style implies a lack of parenting techniques it is difficult to measure on a self-report instrument. This parenting style is also more likely to result in parents abandoning their children and less likely to produce children that attend college due to associated academic struggles, as found by DeGarmo, and Reid (2004). Therefore it was eliminated from the study. In fact, one of the most widely used parenting style questionnaires, the

Perceived Parenting Style Survey (PPSS, Mclun & Merrell, 1998), also does not attempt to define the rejecting-neglecting parenting style.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences among positive psychology traits of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism, between three perceived parenting styles in undergraduate college students. The following research questions were explored: Are there significant differences in happiness among Baumrind's three parenting styles, including Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive? Are there significant differences in hopefulness among Baumrind's three parenting styles, including Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive? Are there significant differences in optimism among Baumrind's three parenting styles, including Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive?

### *Assumptions*

In conducting this study, certain assumptions were made. It is assumed that because this study looks at perceptions of parenting style that such perceptions affect the reality of the participant and therefore is assumed to be an approximate report of reared parenting style. All participants participated in this study of their own free will. The participants were honest in responses and represented accurate perceptions of self and perceived parenting style on the self-report questionnaires and demographic data.

### *Delimitations of the Study*

This study was designed to detect differences in three characteristics of positive psychology between three different perceived styles of parenting. Therefore, only differences between the groups will be discussed and no causal relationships will be

inferred. The independent variable, parenting style, is measured by student self-report, identifying their perception of the parenting style with which they were reared. Therefore any self-report measure is subject to personal bias by the reporter. This study also focuses on overall perceived parenting style. Therefore only the perceived parenting style of the primary caregiver will be considered, not allowing for effects of parenting inconsistency to be measured. Finally, this study is set within the boundaries of the undergraduate population at a mid-sized western university and therefore any results should only be considered with this delimitation in mind.

### Research Design

An ex post facto, or after the fact, research design was used for this study. In relation to this research it refers to data being collected where the independent variable (parenting style) has already generated an effect on the participants prior to the study, therefore it is pre-existing and cannot be manipulated by the experimenter. Given that there was no manipulation of variables, and the study focused on “naturally occurring variations in the presumed independent and dependent variables,” ex post facto design was the most appropriate fit for the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 306).

Because this design calls for looking at significant differences and includes multiple independent variables a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used for statistical analysis. The MANOVA was used to detect if significant differences existed. Discriminant analysis was then conducted on all three independent variables at the same time to identify where significant differences were found amongst the levels of the parenting styles.

### *Independent Variables*

The independent variable in this study was perceived parenting style. Parenting style was deconstructed into three categories of parenting, each category being based on differing levels of responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1990). The three categories included authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (Baumrind, 1966, 1991). Categorical assignment of parenting style was measured by the Perceived Parenting Style Survey (PPSS, Mclun & Merrell, 1998). Each set of descriptors indicated correlation with a different style and only one set of descriptors per participant could be marked. For the purposes of this study, participants were asked to select the set of descriptors that best described the style of parenting used by their primary caregiver. It was recognized that many participants may have been reared with only one caregiver and therefore only one measure of parenting style was collected. Because the measure offers multiple descriptors in each set, participants were asked to choose the set that best described an aggregate rating of their primary caregiver's parenting style, even if each descriptor did not specifically apply.

### *Dependent variables*

The dependent variables in this study were three traits of positive psychology. The three traits included happiness, hopefulness, and optimism (Harris, Thoresen, & Lopez, 2007, Baldwin, McIntyre, & Hardaway, 2007). These traits were measured by self-report questionnaires including the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) (Scheier et al., 1994) for optimism, the Short Depression-Happiness Scale (SDHS) (Joseph et al., 2004) for happiness, and the Snyder Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) for hope. All measures were reported on a Likert-type scale.

### Sample

All participants had to be classified as an undergraduate student and at least 18 years of age. During the fall semester 2009 and spring semester 2010, the researcher contacted eleven professors across a variety of academic fields at a mid-sized western university, who taught introductory courses that would likely be attended by a diverse range of students. Four professors responded and permission was given not only to recruit participants from their respective classrooms, but also to permit surveys to be completed during class time. The campus student activities office that has access to a variety of undergraduate campus activities attended by students was also contacted. Permission was obtained to also recruit participants from students attending these activities.

Students ranged in age from 18 to 47 years with a mean age of 20.20 years, and a median of 20 years, at the time of participation ( $SD=3.151$ ). The sample was 54.3% female, 44.7% male, and .7% transgendered. Two participants chose not to report their demographics, however continued to be included in the study. Overall, the ethnic demographics of the greater campus population of the university used in this study were relatively similar to the demographics of the sample (See Table 1). Participants consisted of students from diverse backgrounds, gender, undergraduate status, living situations, relationship status, and parental environments in which they were raised.

Table 1

*Ethnic Percentages in Student Sample and University Population*

	Sample %	Population %
African American	6.5	3.7
Asian	3.8	2.5
Caucasian	71.5	72.1
Latino(a)	10.7	10.1
Native American	1.0	1.0
International Students (University population only)	—	1.5
Unknown (University population only)	—	9.1

All participants were volunteers and completed the survey packet of their own free will. Participants were informed about the nature of the study and that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and could be terminated at any time without repercussion. Participants were provided with a consent form and asked to complete the packet of information including the 4 surveys in varied order. Packets contained copies of the consent form, the Demographic Questionnaire, and the following surveys in varied order: the Perceived Parenting Style Survey (PPSS), the Snyder Hope Scale, the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R), and the Short Depression-Happiness Survey (SDHS). Packets were then distributed to students choosing to participate in the study. No identifying data were required on the packet in order to maintain response anonymity; and upon completion, the participants placed the packet in a sealed box amongst other

completed packets so there was no possibility of participant identification. Incentives were offered for participation in the study. Upon receiving the packet, the participants were given the option of entering their name into a drawing for one of four \$50 cash prizes that were drawn upon the completion of data collection. Participant information for incentive was collected separately from the packet as to continue response anonymity and placed by the participant in a sealed box. The entire packet took approximately 7-10 minutes to complete.

Three hundred and eight packets total were distributed amongst willing participants in seven different undergraduate classes and student events through the campus Student Activities Department. Packets were distributed by a research assistant and a script was read in order to provide instructions for completing the packets. Participants voluntarily completed and returned the packets in their respective classrooms. Seventeen of the collected packets were not complete (6%), and were therefore eliminated from the analysis. In order for a packet to be considered complete and included in the study, the PPSS needed to be fully and accurately completed, according to the instructions, and each of the three positive psychology surveys administered needed to be at least 90% complete. A total of two hundred and ninety-one packets were determined appropriate for inclusion in this study providing an 88% response rate.

When considering the total number of participants desired for this study a medium effect size was anticipated. When using MANOVA and expecting a medium effect size (.70) with  $\alpha=.05$ , a sample size of 42-54 participants per group (3 groups) (N=126 to 162) was chosen (Stevens, 2000, p. 247). After the first round of data collection 12

participants had identified permissive as their reared parenting style, 128 had identified authoritative, and 9 had identified authoritarian. Therefore a second round of data were collected, bringing the cell numbers to 28, 240, and 23, respectively. Equal sample size is not a requirement or an assumption for use of MANOVA or Discriminant Analyses. Since power is a function of overall sample size when using MANOVA, no effect was anticipated as a result of having a significantly lower number of participants in the authoritarian and permissive groups. Although it is difficult to determine the cause of the unequal distribution, research suggests that students who perceive to have been raised under the authoritative parenting style may display better adjustment, higher grades, higher self reliance, and less distress than other parenting styles (Steinberg et al., 1991). Therefore, it is likely that more students with authoritatively reared parenting styles are present in a college environment. Other factors could also influence this distribution such as demographic factors (i.e. culture), or the limitations of using a self-report instrument.

#### Research Hypotheses & Statistical Analysis

Research has shown that when using Baumrind's styles of parenting, behavioral differences in the children reared with a particular style are significant. The permissive style of parenting has been found to be linked to aggression in the child, antisocial behavior, poor academic achievement, affiliation with deviant peers, and impaired peer relationships (Knutson et al., 2004). Research also suggests that authoritative parenting produces children who have high adjustment to school, higher levels of performance, and lower levels of failure expectations (Smetana, 1995). Buri (1991) found that authoritative parents also rear children who are more independent, responsible and goal oriented. An  $\alpha=.05$  level of significance was used to test the following hypotheses:

H1 Perceived authoritative parenting style will result in higher scores of perceived happiness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

H2 Perceived authoritative parenting style will result in higher scores of perceived hopefulness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

H3 Perceived authoritative parenting will result in higher scores of perceived optimism when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

## Results

Participants were categorized into perceived parenting styles based on the Perceived Parenting Style Survey (PPSS). The PPSS identifies three categories from which participants could choose regarding the reared parenting style with which they most identified. Frequencies and percentages of the three parenting styles are shown in Table 2. Of the 17 participants not included in the study, 13 were not included due either not filling out the PPSS or filling out the PPSS in an incorrect manner to which the parenting style could not be accurately determined. Of the four remaining participant packets not included, one of the three positive psychology surveys was not completed. All four of those participants endorsed authoritative parenting styles on the PPSS.

Table 2

### *Frequencies and Percentages of Perceived Parenting Styles on the PPSS by Participants*

Perceived Parenting Style	<i>f</i>	%
Permissive	28	9.6
Authoritative	240	82.5
Authoritarian	23	7.9

Given that MANOVA and Stepwise Discriminant Analysis rely on the overall sample size the uneven cell numbers was not an issue of concern (See Table 2). The sample size of 291 participants was sufficient for the data analysis in this study. To minimize the impact of extreme scores on overall means for cells with lower participant

numbers (authoritarian and permissive) two separate rounds of data were collected in attempt to increase the numbers in each of these respective groups.

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed to analyze the relationship between the three dimensions of parenting style and the three positive psychology measures of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. In conducting the MANOVA, Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, and Hotelling's Trace all led to the same conclusion regarding the null hypothesis in comparing all three groups ( $p < .003$ ). This agreement suggests that there were no major violations of the MANOVA assumptions and therefore its use as an appropriate measure for the testing of these hypotheses is supported.

The results of the MANOVA were significant (Wilks' Lambda = 0.93,  $p < .003$ ). This p-value suggests that at least one parenting style differs across the vector of the dependent variable characteristics of happiness, hopefulness, or optimism. It is important to note that one of the limitations of using multivariate procedures is that the analyses cannot adequately answer if there is a significant difference between all three independent variable groups. MANOVA results can only show that at least one significant difference exists. Based on the means (see Table 3), it is concluded that a significant difference exists between the authoritarian parenting styles and at least one of the other two parenting styles. In examining means, the authoritative parenting style had the highest mean scores across the three dependent variables, while authoritarian had the lowest means. Based on these results it can be concluded that a difference exists between the authoritative and the authoritarian parenting styles. It is unknown as to whether a

significant difference exists between authoritative and permissive styles, due to the limitations of the MANOVA.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviation Results for Hopefulness, Optimism, and Happiness, Across Parenting Styles.*

	<u>Permissive</u>		<u>Authoritative</u>		<u>Authoritarian</u>	
	<u><math>\bar{x}</math></u>	<u>S</u>	<u><math>\bar{x}</math></u>	<u>S</u>	<u><math>\bar{x}</math></u>	<u>S</u>
Snyder Hope Scale	26.04	3.09	26.13	2.76	23.83	4.61
Live Orientation Test-Revised	14.68	4.88	16.05	3.37	13.13	5.17
Short Depression- Happiness Scale	13.96	3.60	14.40	2.74	12.87	4.33

Stepwise Discriminant Analysis was used to determine which of the dependent variables was significantly different across the parenting styles. Results of the analysis showed that optimism appeared to be the only dependent variable that discriminates across the parenting styles  $F(2,288) = 7.7671, p \leq .001$ . The variables hope and happiness did not meet criteria of significance to be labeled as significant discriminators. Based on the conclusions of both the MANOVA and the Discriminant Analysis, the following hypotheses were rejected at the  $\alpha=.05$  level:

H1 Perceived authoritative parenting style will result in higher scores of perceived happiness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

H2 Perceived authoritative parenting style will result in higher scores of perceived hopefulness when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

The following hypothesis was partially accepted at the  $\alpha=.05$  level:

H3 Perceived authoritative parenting will result in higher scores of perceived optimism when compared to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

Due to the limitations of the MANOVA, this hypothesis can only be partially accepted. A significant difference in optimism exists across groups, and the MANOVA concludes that the difference exists between the authoritative parenting style and at least one other parenting style. When examining means (see Table 3) it can be concluded that the perceived authoritative parenting style results in higher scores of perceived optimism when compared to the authoritarian parenting style. It cannot be concluded that this also applies the perceived permissive parenting style.

### Discussion

College has been seen as a time of great transition, where young adults have begun to explore their independence and begin to individuate from their parents' influence. However, one's reared parenting style continues to have influence even after the child has left home. That influence can affect the overall development of traits that contribute to a student's ability to function in the most advantageous way. The motivation behind this study was to enhance an understanding of the perceived parenting styles that have contributed to the development of positive psychology traits in college students that will contribute to opportunities for optimal life functioning. The purpose of this study was to identify how different perceived parenting styles have impacted the development of positive psychology traits of happiness, hope, and optimism in undergraduate college students.

Evidence was found to support Hypothesis 3, although both Hypotheses 1 and 2 were not supported by the data. Results indicated that when students perceive that they were parented under the authoritative parenting style, having experienced high levels of both demandingness and responsiveness, they were more likely to develop higher levels

of optimism than students who perceived they were raised through an authoritarian parenting style (high levels of demandingness, and low levels of responsiveness). Due to the limitations of using multivariate analyses, this study cannot conclude that the same results apply in looking at the authoritative and permissive perceived parenting styles. In examining overall mean scores the authoritative group, when compared to the permissive group, reflect a slightly higher development of optimism based on mean scores alone (see Table 2). This finding in support of the authoritative parenting style and the development of optimism is consistent with areas of Baumrind's research (1966, 1991). Baumrind suggested that authoritative parenting styles help to rear better adjusted children and as was congruent with the results of this study, optimism, which contributes to optimal functioning, was significantly linked with the perceived authoritative parenting style.

Researchers have made some suggestion as to how the authoritative style may be linked to optimism. Hasan and Power (2002), found the autonomy aspect of parenting, is positively correlated with optimism ( $r=.25$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and negatively correlated with pessimism ( $r= -.28$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Baumrind (1966, 1991) has identified autonomy as one of the attributes of the authoritative parenting style. Stage and Brandt (1999) suggested that autonomy, when combined with developmentally appropriate tasks through authoritative parenting, may contribute to higher goal setting. They also suggest that the level of responsiveness present in authoritative parenting may help to develop agency in the child which may lead to increased ability to seek out support and resources when needed. The higher goal setting and active ability to seek support may be contributors to the overall positive outlook that fosters the development of optimism.

Hypotheses 1 and 2, suggesting that levels of happiness and hopefulness in participants identifying in the authoritative group would be significantly higher than those in the permissive and authoritarian groups, were not supported by this study. It may be noteworthy to mention that the low number of participants in both the permissive and authoritarian groups may have impacted these results. Although equal cell size is not an assumption or requirement of utilizing MANOVA and Discriminant Analysis, the smaller cell size could have had a potential impact by skewing the overall means. With a smaller number of participants in the authoritarian and permissive cells, extreme scores could have had a greater impact on the skewness and overall means for the whole group. Although an attempt was made to collect more data in order to avoid this limitation, the cell sizes in these two respective groups represented only 10% of the sample for the permissive group and 8% of the sample for the authoritarian group. The authoritative group represented 82% of the overall sample and therefore means were less likely to be impacted by extremes.

When examining means, mean scores for both happiness and hopefulness were higher within the authoritative groups than the permissive and authoritarian groups across both variables (see Table 2). Evidence does not however support that the difference was large enough to be statistically significant. Research suggests that parenting styles consistent with authoritative parenting (high levels of responsiveness and demandingness), encourage a skilled focus toward academia, which prepares students for the necessary requirements of college including self discipline, autonomy, and determination (Strage & Brandt, 1999). This is also congruent with other studies that have suggested a relationship between authoritative parenting and independence,

responsibility, and goal orientation (Buri, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1991; Baumrind, 1966).

The relationship suggested in these studies could account for the higher number of participants in the authoritative groups among this college student sample.

In this study, other traits that also have been shown to contribute to positive psychology, hope and happiness, were not significantly different across the parenting styles. These findings contradict other research that suggests parenting styles displaying practices consistent with the authoritarian style (high demandingness, low responsiveness), are related to decreased emotional regulation, maladaptive perfectionism, and higher levels of depression (Feng et al., 2009; Soenens, et al., 2008).

Scheier and Carver (1985) supported the idea of optimism being a positive, stable, personality trait that is “not limited to a particular behavioral domain or class of setting” (p. 220). Although other research would suggest that optimism can be influenced by external factors, it is generally agreed that optimism relates to the ability to expect positive outcomes in the future (Hasan & Power, 2002; Franklin et al., 1990). Clinically a client’s optimism has been linked to increased coping while struggling with illness, stressful life situations, and interpersonal struggles (Franklin et al., 1990; Rogers et al., 2005; Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). Therefore the development of optimism or lack thereof can become a means of clinical intervention both individually and in providing parenting interventions. Based on the studies relating optimism to coping skills, identifying levels of optimism in students can help provide ideas for clinical intervention. Scheier, et al. found that optimism was significantly correlated with problem-focused coping, acceptance/resignation, and positive reinterpretation, and negatively associated with denial/distancing. By providing a clinical focus on the

development of optimism in students, according to the research, coping skills for typical stressors will likely increase.

When considering parenting interventions, this study has shown that perceived authoritative parenting is likely to result in higher levels of optimism. Authoritative parents impart a high level of demandingness, self-discipline, and responsibility, as well as high levels of support, encouragement, and warmth. The child is affirmed in his or her own development while standards are set for future behavior and development (Baumrind, 1966). The child is able to develop autonomy in decision making while knowing support is available if needed. Optimism falls in line with this parenting style as it incorporates the development of positive expectations for outcome. By instilling autonomy and providing support to children, they learn that they can be empowered in affecting an outcome which leads to optimism.

Authoritarian parenting includes high levels of demandingness and low levels of warmth. Obedience is stressed and the child is molded to the will of the parent. Autonomy is not encouraged and dependence is fostered (Baumrind, 1966). Ferrari and Olivette (1993) found that over control, inflexibility, and lack of warmth, characterized by the authoritarian parenting style contribute to child indecisiveness. Without the developed ability to be confident in one's decisions and/or experience warmth and support when facing difficult times, optimism appears less likely to develop. As was previously discussed, optimism involves an ability to expect positive outcomes in the future. When dependency is created and little support provided, students are less likely to be confident in their ability to impact outcomes and/or have reason to expect that positive outcomes may occur as situations appear more out of their control. This may be a

contributing factor to the perceived authoritarian style displaying significantly lower levels of optimism in this study.

Clinicians working with college students may find themselves facing increasing numbers of student struggles related to reared parenting style as colleges increase their programming and outreach to make college possible for a more diverse range of students. Identifying perceived parenting style in undergraduate students can provide clinical clues into possible interventions in working with developmentally appropriate struggles of transition in the undergraduate years. As research has shown, the development of positive psychology traits contributes to optimal functioning. This study has shown that optimism, one trait of positive psychology is significantly influenced by parenting style. By identifying perceived parenting style clinicians can gain insight into areas that may be underdeveloped within the students functioning. Examples include autonomy, responsibility, decision making, and parental support, all of which can be linked to the level of demandingness and responsiveness displayed in each parenting style. Knowing that a student had higher or lower levels of demandingness may allow the clinician opportunities to work with the student around issues linked with the lack of and/or over control in these areas. Subsequently, although a lifetime of perceived lack of warmth cannot be atoned for, clinicians can work with the students to find ways in which they can feel affirmed and supported, regardless of life circumstance.

The development or lack thereof of a sense of autonomy and/or active agency due to perceived parenting style can also have an impact on the student's ability to choose a major and/or career path. As was previously mentioned over control, inflexibility, and lack of warmth, characterized by the authoritarian parenting style contribute to child

indecisiveness (Ferrari & Olivette, 1993). Clinical interventions in academic advising and career counseling may also benefit from being able to identify perceived parenting style which may provide insight into a student's struggle to be confident in one's academic decisions. This could also be an area for future research.

The results of this study also have implications for working with parents. The more research that is generated around the effects of perceived parenting style, the more empowerment there is for the parent(s) to learn, through educational opportunities, more adaptive ways of parenting. Helping parents to understand the positive and negative effects of differing parenting styles can help to increase motivation and application of parenting styles that are more likely to contribute to their child's overall wellbeing.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

There are a number of potential threats to the validity of this study. The first of which is related to the sample. Participation in the study was limited to students in classrooms in which the professor gave permission for data to be collected. Therefore students who were not in selected classes did not have the opportunity to participate in this study. Although the study included the recruitment of students from different environments, it was not a true random sample. Had each student had an equal chance of being recruited for the study, as in the case of true random sampling, results may be more easily generalized to a larger population. Due to the limitations in sampling generalizations to populations dissimilar to the sample population in this study should be carefully and cautiously considered.

Another potential limitation to this study includes the use of self-report

instruments. Although the surveys were collected anonymously and without repercussion for choosing not to engage in the study, most were collected in a classroom environment that holds evaluative power. Some students may have felt pressured to participate in the study and/or may have experienced external motivators to falsely report their perceived parenting style or actual level of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. Efforts were taken to minimize this source of error within the wording of the informed consent statement. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could terminate their participation at any time without repercussion. Several professors also inquired about the option to offer extra credit to students participating in this research. This request was denied by the researcher to uphold the statement in the informed consent stating that there would be no loss of entitled benefits as a result of not participating in the study. Results were collected anonymously so as to minimize any motivation for false reporting.

A third possible limitation was the difference in the number of participants in each parenting style cell. Permissive ( $n=28$ ) and Authoritarian ( $n=23$ ) styles had significantly lower numbers of participants than the Authoritative style ( $n=240$ ). Although parenting style cannot be randomly assigned, it is unknown as to whether this distribution of participants is actually representative of the greater population. According to research by Simons and Conger (2007), when utilizing a child report, two authoritative parents, two indulgent parents, and two uninvolved parents were the most prevalent combinations of parenting found in their study. Reports by observers in the same study supported this, finding that two authoritative or two uninvolved parents were most prevalent. The study conducted by Simons and Conger can support the authoritative

parenting style being more prevalent in this study (82.5 %) and permissive second in prevalence (9.6 %), according to child perception. The study does not, however, support the extreme difference in numbers by which parenting styles were identified within this study. In looking at the study by Simons and Conger, they expected that due to socialization, mothers would trend toward the more nurturing styles (permissive and authoritative) and fathers would trend toward the styles with more of a controlling element (authoritarian and authoritative). It is important to note that 43.6% of the sample ranked their mother as the primary caregiver, which according to Simons and Conger, may account for a higher number of participants in the perceived authoritative group.

#### *Future research*

This study offers insight into how perceived parenting styles can influence the development of positive psychology traits that may contribute to a student's overall levels of happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. However, there is significant room for further exploration.

Participants in this study were recruited from an undergraduate student population at a mid-sized western university. Since the study was conducted at a university, it is likely that international students may have been recruited for participation, which was not accounted for on the demographic questionnaire. International participants, as well as many other English as second language students were not identified through demographics. ESL considerations may influence the way in which the directions and questions on the surveys were understood. It is noteworthy to mention that many of the data packets not used in the study due to one of the surveys being incomplete had an ethnicity entered under the "other" category. Although it cannot be assumed that because

the ethnicity claimed was that of a minority population, ESL considerations exist; however this may have contributed to the underrepresentation of certain minorities present on campus. Overall the demographics of the greater campus population were relatively similar to the demographics of the sample used in this study (see Table 1).

Parenting styles are determined based on a combination of responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1990). Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox (2000), suggested that how these two traits are perceived and expressed across cultures may vary. For example, the measure used in the study by Cardona et al. was the Parent Behavior Checklist. Cardona et al. noted that lower scores were obtained by Hispanic mothers for nurturing when compared to Caucasian mothers. They suggest that nurturing within Hispanic families may take on a different, more affective definition than what is considered on the nurturing subscale of the Parent Behavior Checklist. Cardona et al. also found that socio-economic status can also influence parenting style, which was not considered in the current study. It is unknown as to what cultural mismatches may be present in the PPSS, similarly to that of the Parent Behavior Checklist in the study by Cardona et al.

If the study were to be replicated it is recommended that a greater attempt be made to increase the number of participants in each cell. Although an attempt was made in this study to collect a second round of data with this goal in mind, the number of participants with perceived permissive and authoritarian parenting styles continued to be significantly lower than those in the authoritative category. As was previously mentioned, although this does not affect the overall analyses when using multivariate statistics, extremes may affect the overall means when the group is smaller. This may be remedied

in future research by pre-screening procedures that allow the researcher to pre-identify a pool of participants falling into each group in order to recruit a larger  $n$  for each cell.

One of the limitations of this study, as well as other studies utilizing multivariate analyses was that there was no follow up statistical procedure to specifically determine significant difference between all groups. As has been previously discussed, the MANOVA detects if at least one group significantly differs. To determine where this difference existed, overall group means were examined with the understanding that the difference had to exist between the group with the highest and lowest means. A significant contribution to research could be made to develop follow up procedures for multivariate analyses that can determine differences between remaining groups.

Another problem that was encountered during this study was that 6% of the total collected surveys were unable to be included due to one or more of the surveys having had no information recorded or in the case of the PPSS, having completed it incorrectly. When using the PPSS the entire survey must be completed and completed correctly in order to accurately determine parenting style. Thirteen of the 17 incomplete surveys were due to incorrect completion of the PPSS. Directions of the PPSS may need to be revised and/or verbally administered during data collection to ensure accurate understanding of how to complete the survey.

When completing the PPSS, although not a part of the original survey, participants were asked to rate their primary caregiver and identify the caregiver they were rating by role (i.e. mother, aunt, brother). Although this study did not utilize these results, research has been conducted on the impact of caregiver gender in relation to parenting styles (Fromme, 2006; Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2007, Simons &

Conger, 2007). Simons and Conger suggested that people tend to marry partners with similar dispositions. Due to the influence partners have on one another, Simons and Conger suggested that they are likely to gravitate toward similar parenting styles.

Research could benefit from further exploration into how the development of positive psychology may be related to perceived parenting style and caregiver gender, as well as how differing parenting styles may be perceived when implemented from the opposite gendered and/or same gendered parent. This research could help to create clinical interventions for dual gender parenting, single parent families, and same sex parent families where only one caregiver gender may be present.

The Snyder Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) looks at two different facets of hope, pathways and agency. Future research may desire to look at these two facets of hope as potential discriminating factors across parenting styles. Agency looks into one's ability to be goal directed. Pathways measure one's ability to plan out objectives to reach the goal. By identifying low scores in these areas, clinicians could implement interventions to specifically address low levels of hope by identifying which facet is under developed, goal direction or planning towards one's goal. Utilized in a university setting, developing these facets of hope could potentially contribute to increased transition into emerging adulthood as the student is able to identify future goals and objectively work toward achieving them.

### Implications

Although research suggests that children reared with authoritative parenting are likely to be better adjusted behaviorally, there has been little research to suggest that these children are also better adjusted in more intrapersonal dimensions of positive

psychology such as happiness, hopefulness, and optimism. In neglectful, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles, research shows a link to increased levels of depression, low-self esteem, and substance abuse in comparison to their peers reared by authoritative parents (Baumrind, 1991; Berg-Nielsen, Vikan, & Dahl, 2003; Dornbusch et al., 1987). Whether or not these parenting styles also produce strengths via positive psychology traits remains under researched. In association with research done on the change and transition experienced during the college years, as well as the research that looks at how positive psychology can contribute to optimal functioning during these years, research was warranted to begin to look at intrapersonal displays of positive psychology traits in college students and how these might be connected with perceived parenting styles.

In this study, the hypothesis that perceived authoritative parenting style would contribute to the development of higher levels of hopefulness and happiness in students than those who perceived having been reared with authoritarian or permissive styles was not supported. It was supported however that this link can be made when looking at levels of optimism. Goleman (1995) defined optimism as “having a strong expectation that, in general, things will turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustrations” (p. 88). Rogers, Hansen, Levy, Tate, and Sikkema (2005) also found that optimism influenced behavior and coping strategies in bereaved patients.

Rindfuss (1991) discussed the change and ambiguity that occurs for many college students as they transition into adulthood and a new experience. As students enter a new environment, many for the first time, they are faced with challenges and choices that can be unsettling. As mentioned by Rogers et al. (2005), higher levels of optimism contribute to greater coping strategies. Coupled with the general life outlook that things will turn

out, despite trials, these students may have an easier time adjusting to college and maintaining a future outlook that the outcome of their college experience will be positive. As universities continually look for ways to support their students, minimize adjustment, and increase student retention, the identification of parenting style can possibly provide insight into different ways in which students may best be served. By identifying perceived parenting style, coupled with research findings such as the findings from this study, interventions can be created to provide students with the skills to more fully engage in their college, and ultimately, life experience.