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THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PARENTING STYLE AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN
ADULTHOOD

BY

STEPHANIE CARAS

BS, University of New Hampshire, 2008

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Counseling

May, 2010

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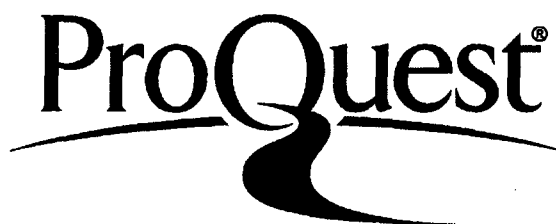
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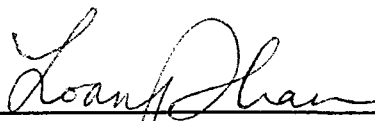
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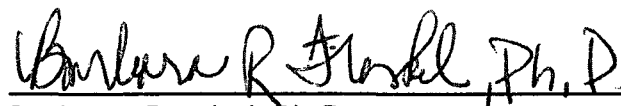
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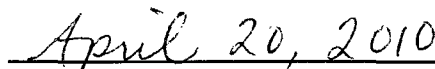
Thesis Director, Loan Phan, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Education



Corinna Jenkins Tucker, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Family Studies



Barbara Frankel, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Family Studies



Date

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ABSTRACT

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PARENTING STYLE AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN
ADULTHOOD

By

Stephanie Caras

University of New Hampshire, May, 2010

This research examined the association between parenting style and life satisfaction in adulthood ($N = 112$). Participants responded to an online survey, called the Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey, which included questions pertaining to parenting style experienced in childhood, parenting style used in adulthood, and levels of life satisfaction. A chi-square test was conducted to determine if there was a relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style. Analysis of variance tests were conducted to determine how parenting style experienced in childhood was connected to life satisfaction in adulthood and how the adult's parenting style was related to their life satisfaction. Correlations revealed that there were no statistically significant relationships between parenting style and life satisfaction. Results were interpreted and implications were discussed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every parent has a parenting style that is utilized to shape a child's behavior and temperament. Baumrind (1991) defines parenting style as a construct that describes normal variations in attempts by parents to socialize and control their children. Parenting style varies from parent to parent but falls among one of four approaches; authoritative, authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-neglectful. Parental demand and parental response are two dimensions on which parenting style is conceptualized (Wolfradt, Hempel, & Miles, 2003). Each style, whether controlling or warm, may impact the well-being of the parent as well as the child in one way or another and influence life satisfaction in adulthood for both.

According to Young, Miller, Norton, and Hill (1995), life satisfaction is defined as a feeling of well-being in relation to one's self and the circumstances encountered in life. The association between parenting style and life satisfaction in adulthood for parent and child may be strongly linked as a result of the differing effects of each parenting style. The parent-child relationship is primary and therefore a powerful influence on individual development.

Satisfaction is not always easily achievable and different levels are experienced by many individuals throughout life. The differing levels of life satisfaction may be connected to the parenting style employed. Val-Essen (2003) affirms, "Half the job of being a good parent is to look for and support the best within each child" (p. 5). This positive assistance, through a constructive parenting style, may create a safe environment in the eyes of the child as well as the parent, possibly playing a part in adult life satisfaction.

Thus, the parenting style used by the adult may be linked to measures of life satisfaction and may provide a basis for future levels of satisfaction. This study explored the relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style, how parenting style experienced in childhood is connected to life satisfaction in adulthood, and how the adult's parenting style is related to his or her life satisfaction.

Although a great deal of research has been conducted on parenting styles, the correlation of each parenting style to life satisfaction is unknown. The knowledge that will be gained from this study is beneficial to the literature on parenting style and life satisfaction. Therefore, the focus of this study is to examine the association between parenting style and life satisfaction in adulthood.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, parenting style has been studied extensively. Research has shown that life satisfaction, or subjective well-being, displays distinctive relation patterns with different variables (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). However, little is known about how life satisfaction in adulthood is linked to the parenting style experienced in childhood and the parenting style used in adulthood. Each parenting style is distinctive and is experienced differently from person to person. The patterns and associations that can be seen from different parenting styles make it worthwhile to explore this problem.

For example, according to a study conducted by Ornstein (1993), children who feel that they are disciplined more and receive less affection by their mothers are more likely to be anxious or depressed. This authoritarian parenting style may decrease life satisfaction in the future and the experience may correlate with how an individual chooses to parent. The possibility that the parent's level of life satisfaction will be changed is enhanced, as well, depending on the parenting style used to raise children. For example, if a parent is constantly demanding and expecting too much from children, personal stress and disappointment may become common experiences. Thus these experiences for adults may be linked to satisfaction in life.

Opinions have been offered and theories conjectured as to reasons for different levels of overall life satisfaction, yet the degree of differences between parenting style and subjective well-being is still questionable. There may be many contributing factors for findings related to parenting style and levels of satisfaction, yet one common feature is the existing differences in outcomes that are evident from the four parenting styles.

Theoretical Framework

Baumrind (1975) developed parenting styles and their relationship to children in her parenting style theory. The theory proposes that the differences among parenting style revolve around the amount of control and responsiveness displayed by parents . The use of the authoritative parenting style, which is associated with high demandingness and high responsiveness, is linked more so with positive outcomes for a child, compared to the authoritarian parenting style, which is associated with high demandingness and low responsiveness, and the permissive parenting style, which is associated with high responsiveness but no demandingness (Baumrind, 1995).

Baumrind, Sclafani, and other researchers have expanded, updated, and refined the parenting styles since Baumrind's original study conducted in 1961. Utilizing Baumrind's framework and the accumulation of studies and research, the purpose of this study was to investigate the

association between parenting style and life satisfaction in adulthood with the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style?
2. How is parenting style experienced in childhood connected to life satisfaction in adulthood?
3. How is the adult's parenting style related to their life satisfaction?

Scope and Locale

The study was conducted with male and female individuals between the ages of 18 and 50. In order to obtain a sample, individuals were invited to participate through the online site SurveyMonkey. The use of an online survey allowed for a great deal of responses, yet the age range was limited to a younger crowd as a result of the link being posted on the Internet. To improve this, an invitation to send the survey's link to other individuals was posted at the end of the survey. This gave participants the opportunity to recruit members of varying ages who fit the requirement to the site but may not have seen it otherwise.

Definition of Terms

Parent - Someone who promotes and encourages all aspects of the growth of their child by providing nourishment throughout development as well as protection and guidance (Brooks, 2008).

Parenting Styles - For the purposes of this study, Baumrind's definition of parenting style will be used. It is defined as a construct that describes normal variations in attempts by parents to socialize and control their children (Baumrind, 1991). Baumrind has updated her data on parenting since the 1961 study and others have expanded on her initial parenting styles by adding a fourth one and developing the following definitions (Sclafani, 2004).

Authoritative - parents take a child-centered approach; rules are set and explained and parents allow for open dialogue between parent and child; independence is encouraged but limits exist; parents are warm and nurturing.

Authoritarian - parents are strict; parents set rules and expect them to be followed; little explanation is given and dialogue between parent and child is rare; parents demand respect and can be unresponsive to the child's needs.

Permissive-indulgent - parents are laid-back and easy-going, as well as accepting and nurturing; parents are involved in child's life but have few behavioral expectations and very few demands are placed; discipline is inconsistent and parents are reluctant when it comes to setting rules and limits; parents allow children to make own decisions and support is given no matter the choice.

Permissive-neglectful - warmth and control are low and parents are not usually involved in child's life; basic needs are attended to but otherwise parents are unresponsive and unsupportive; parents do not place any demands on child and limits do not exist; parents are disengaged.

Life Satisfaction- a feeling of well-being in relation to one's self and the circumstances encountered in life (Young, Milller, Norton, & Halll, 1995).

Summary

Research on parenting style has been active and quickly growing. As stated earlier, previous studies are being expanded upon as new research is developing. Among these studies, it has been stated that, "These parenting style labels provide an important framework for a constellation of parenting behaviors and childrearing goals..." (Rodríguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, p. 1). Life satisfaction continues to be researched, as well, and may be associated with parenting style. Counselors, clinicians, and other professionals will be well informed and able to use this knowledge to meet the needs of clients who may be feeling a decrease in or little life satisfaction for unknown reasons.

Understanding the association between parenting style and life satisfaction can provide professionals with the background needed to educate clients on parenting and the possible reasons for decreased

satisfaction in life while guiding them towards improvement. Promoting a more thorough understanding of the impact parenting style has on life satisfaction will allow professionals to meet the needs of their clients. Additionally, the findings of this study will serve benefit to researchers by augmenting the literature on the topic of parenting style and life satisfaction in adulthood.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Brooks (2008) defines a parent as someone who promotes and encourages all aspects of the growth of their child by providing nourishment throughout development as well as protection and guidance. However, parents vary from family to family and not all meet Brooks' criteria of a parent. Parents often choose to raise children based on what they believe is best while others naturally fall into a parenting style as a result of previous experiences from childhood.

Diana Baumrind is well-known for her research on parenting styles and their relationship to differences in children growing up based on the parenting style experienced. Initially, permissive parenting was considered to be most beneficial when rearing children, yet this was challenged almost 40 years ago by Baumrind who researched families and categorized children's level of competence according to three parental behavioral patterns (Brooks, 2008).

Over the years Baumrind has developed parenting styles that she believes best describes how parents raise children and has depicted her observations of the perceived outcomes of these parenting styles when

used to raise children. These styles have been updated over time and expanded upon by Baumrind and other researchers, leading to four common parenting styles; authoritative, authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-neglectful (Sclafani, 2004). It is evident that parenting styles are in some way linked to satisfaction in life. The potential correlation between parenting style and life satisfaction lasts throughout childhood and continues into adulthood, possibly creating lasting impressions that may or may not interfere or alter overall life satisfaction in adulthood. Varying levels of satisfaction in adulthood may emerge depending on certain parenting styles experienced in childhood and utilized as an adult.

For the purposes of this thesis, parenting styles will be discussed first, followed by a presentation of life satisfaction. An examination of memory distortion and its applicability will follow as a brief overview. A summary of the relevancy of the literature to the proposed study will also be given at the conclusion of this chapter. In this review, the terms "eldest" and "first-born" are used interchangeably.

Parenting Style

Baumrind (1995) has been involved with extensive research concerning parenting, including focuses on prototypical behaviors categorized as specific parenting styles, characteristics of children as a possible result of parenting style, and intergenerational transmission of

abuse, to name a few. Competence, mental health, and character in children are engendered through the implementation of different parenting styles and varying levels of parenting approaches (Baumrind, 1995), all of which have been areas of exploration in her work. Baumrind's research provides a framework for understanding the many aspects of parenting.

The study of parenting styles has been a useful tool when attempting to understand the complexity of caregivers' behaviors and attitudes as well as their relations to child outcomes (Rodríguez et al., 2009). Research on parenting has recognized parenting as a predictor of offspring outcomes (Chen & Kaplan, 2001) and shows the influence that generational continuities in childrearing strategies have on parenting (Belsky, Jaffee, Sligo, Woodward, & Silva, 2005). The abundant amount of information relative to parenting has provided indications of its many different aspects, influential factors, and eventual possible outcomes.

When exploring the process of parenting, Brooks (2008) states, "It is a process of action and interaction between parent and child, a process in which both parties change each other as children grow to adulthood" (p. 7). Parent-child interaction varies depending on which parenting style is used. Years and years of research has shown the different tactics parents choose to communicate and interact with children, all of which

can be explained as a process that transforms child and parent in a variety of ways through the phases of life until adulthood is reached.

Accordingly, "...parents' behavior and efforts are the most important, though not the only, influences on children's growth and competence" (Brooks, p. 21). The way in which parenting is executed provides at least a significant basis for an individual's overall happiness. It is hypothesized that parenting style experienced in childhood is connected to life satisfaction in adulthood, yet the kind of connection is unknown. During this process of parenting, perception of well-being is assessed through interaction by parents and children and may prospectively result in a level of life satisfaction in adulthood.

Some researchers have found that parenting practices experienced during childhood are similarly used by the adult child later in life. Chen and Kaplan (2001) assert that, "Numerous research has documented the intergenerational continuity of parenting, demonstrating that present-day parents tend to use similar parenting strategies or practices that they themselves received in their childhood" (p. 17). After being raised a certain way, one may become accustomed to specific parenting strategies and techniques that are then implemented years later.

According to this research, Chen and Kaplan (2001) state, "Early experiences in the parental home may affect one's own parenting

behavior later through the engendering of general interaction styles in interpersonal relations" (p. 20). The way in which individuals interact with family members while growing up tends to be used in interactions as an adult. The intergenerational continuity of parenting study conducted by Chen and Kaplan (2001) found that there are many factors that can be examined in relation to predictions of parenting behavior, including psychological states being one such important predictor.

For example, maltreatment by a parent is believed by many to be the most important predictor of future destructive parenting by the child (Egeland, Jacobvitz, & Sroufe, 1988). Maltreatment can often trigger negative psychological states connected to childhood experiences and predict parenting style. Based on this information, it appears as though there is a relationship, more often than not, between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style, creating the first hypothesis in this thesis that there is a relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style.

Exploring the characteristics of first-time parents offers insight into ways in which certain parenting styles are implemented for the first time, as well. Leman (1999) describes new parents as being full of ambivalence, including being overprotective, tentative, anxious, and inconsistent as well as being demanding and strict, while always pushing

and encouraging performance. For eldest children, some of this ambivalence may still be present, therefore altering the parenting style used and how parents interact with eldest children compared to second-born children.

As parents are still learning and determining the desired parenting style, children might experience a variety of parenting techniques during the beginning years of life, some of which are forever implanted. Chen and Kaplan affirm (2001), "Early upbringing...translates into similar parenting styles later on" (p. 20). Again, parenting style creates a depiction of parenthood and its accompanying attributes; therefore providing children with a basis for future parenting skills and approaches.

Chen and Kaplan (2001) have also investigated other means of linking experiences of parenting during childhood to analogous approaches employed later in adult life, such as interpersonal relations, social participation, and role specific modeling. Although development is influenced by childhood experiences of parenting, research also shows that parents can create their own parenting behaviors after accepting their childhood experiences (Brooks, 2008). Thus, parenting style may not always be determined by the parenting experienced during childhood.

Research has also focused on behavior of children and its connection to the parenting style used. Neppel, Conger, Scaramella, & Ontai (2009) present the possibility that the type of parenting experienced

by children may be influenced by their behavior. Such behavior may elicit a constructive or harsh parenting style by parents. Conducted research has revealed that the way parents behave is a reaction to the exhibited behavior of their children (Kerr & Stattin, 2003). Hampson (2008) claims that, "...childhood traits have long-lasting effects on adult well-being" (p. 267).

Not only do childhood traits impact the child even in adulthood, this factor can also modify the parent's level of satisfaction in life. As stated by Brooks (2008), "...children's individual qualities-gender, temperament, physical health-affect parents' actions and the effects of these actions on children" (p. 7). Whether it is intergenerational continuity, reactions to child behavior, or another influential factor, the parenting style displayed is linked to various outcomes due to each style's existing and influential features.

Baumrind (1995) asserts that among families, affective warmth and parental responsiveness are beneficial for children. This authoritative parenting appears to be advantageous for both parents and children. However, depending on the amount of stress experienced, some parents may resort to a parenting style that can be described as low in warmth and affection, affecting their own level of satisfaction due to the outcomes of such parenting styles while impacting the children on the

receiving end. The following will discuss the primary parenting styles used in our society by parents today and the observed effects.

Authoritative

The authoritative parenting style is considered to be an engaged pattern of demandingness and responsiveness. Utilizing Baumrind's framework, it is safe to say that authoritative is a "balanced style of childrearing" that is associated with favorable proficiency (Baumrind, 1995). One researcher, Joseph Sclafani (2004), explains children of authoritative parents as well-behaved, self-assured, and goal-oriented. Baumrind (1995) finds these children to be socially responsible and socially agentic. Such assurance and goal-orientated behavior may very well assist in several aspects of life in a positive manner. For example, this kind of behavior may provide a friendly atmosphere in which connections can be made among adult individuals during a job interview or date. This may possibly make it easier to secure a desired job or engage in a happy, healthy relationship and therefore increase life satisfaction.

This parenting style has also been shown to correlate with child outcomes in a positive way, including social and cognitive functions (Baumrind, 1993) school achievement (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992), self-esteem (Carlson, Uppal, & Prosser, 2000), and social competence (Fagan, 2000). According to a number of studies, offspring are predicted to be developmentally healthy having received an

authoritative parenting style (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). Many of the approaches attributed to this style are congenial enough to satisfy the needs of parent and child. The experience of positive parenting can be linked to life satisfaction in adulthood. For the authoritative parent, using amiable methods of parenting on a consistent basis maintains happiness and possibly decreases stress due to the lack of constant frustration and overly high expectations, where discontent and disappointment will most likely result.

The stable control of authoritative parents offers children a secure base for the development of independence while the rational and flexible attitude provides a building block for self-reliance. Brooks (2008) maintains that children exposed to authoritative parenting gain more confidence and self-reliance while having the opportunity to experience excitement and pleasure through exploring life. The more positive experiences gained during childhood, the more likely satisfaction in adulthood will be attainable.

As said by Chen and Kaplan (2001) "...good experiences of early parental upbringing should lead to a development of healthy interpersonal styles, which tends to be carried over later in the form of constructive parenting practices toward their own children" (p. 21). The child will most likely be happier in life, creating an image of positive parenting that he/she may be drawn to use in adulthood. The

authoritative parent also may very well benefit from parenting in a positive manner and enjoy having an autonomous, well-behaved child, leading to more overall satisfaction through the years for all involved. To reiterate, taking an affirmative approach to parenting will allow the parents to feel happier and more satisfied and children of authoritative parents will be more satisfied.

As satisfaction is maintained in adulthood, parenting style will likely transpire as productive and continue to uphold life satisfaction. Whereas some research has shown the effects that several variables may have on children despite parenting style, it has also been revealed that, "...regardless of family structure (one or two parents, biological parent or stepparent, lesbian or gay parents), regardless of ethnic background or age or gender, children do well with authoritative parenting" (as cited by Brooks, p. 494).

Authoritarian

Authoritarian parents are thought to be highly demanding yet not responsive (Baumrind, 1995). The authoritarian parenting style is similar to authoritative in that firm control is employed by parents, yet the styles differ in that the control and authority is exerted in an illogical, power-oriented manner that disregards the child's uniqueness (Brooks, 2008). Stipulations are a common theme among this style where children are

expected to be seen and not heard and where compliance is expected in all situations, no questions asked.

Based on Baumrind's framework, internalizing problem behaviors are more likely to emerge in children as a result of this kind of childrearing, however, certain life situations require a more restrictive parenting style to help the child thrive in his/her environment (Baumrind, 1995). This is evidence that the *authoritarian parenting style* may not always be negative depending on the needs of the child and surrounding milieu.

Children of authoritarian parents are susceptible to stress as a result of limited coping skills (Sclafani, 2004). The inability to cope with stressful circumstances or situations productively as an adult can cause an array of unpleasant emotions and may affect other areas of one's life, possibly to the point of a decrease in overall satisfaction. More so, child psychopathology has been associated with, at an increased rate, authoritarian and permissive parenting (Rodríguez et al., 2009). The many demands placed on these children and the extremely high expectations of obedience can quickly damage one's chances of reaching a desired level of satisfaction as an adult.

Correspondingly, Chen and Kaplan (2001) state, "Perceptions of a lack of parental support and understanding, as well as parental devaluation and affectionless control, are associated with lower self-esteem or self-rejection" (p. 19). Baumrind (1995) states that children with

difficult temperaments are more likely to elicit responses from parents that are considered aversive and can lead to abuse, which in turn directs the child towards several other troubles and can decrease the likelihood of having a positive perception of personal life satisfaction. For those who experience such parenting, continuing through life feeling rejected and unloved may become a common trend; therefore possibly reducing satisfaction and making it difficult to parent constructively in adulthood. Brooks (2008) reports, "...regardless of family structure, children do poorly with authoritarian and harsh, demanding parenting" (p. 494).

Due to the high expectations held for children by authoritarian parents, it is likely that disappointment is frequent since these parents always want more and the best from their children. To act intrusive and restrictive on a consistent basis, as many authoritarian parents do, may lead to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction in life. Whereas a balanced style of childrearing, such as authoritative, offers parents satisfaction in life, this arduous style of parenting may decrease life satisfaction for adults.

Permissive-Indulgent

Baumrind was the first to coin the term permissive and identify it as a parenting style. Through her many observations of day care centers and family homes, permissive parenting style was explored and continually refined by Baumrind and other researchers in the field. Permissive

parenting style then evolved to permissive-indulgent parenting style by means of the updated research (Sclafani, 2004). Baumrind's framework provides researchers and professionals with the basic concept that permissive parenting creates more of a friend-child relationship as opposed to a parent-child relationship.

Those that are permissive-indulgent are very responsive as parents but not demanding (Baumrind, 1995). Rather than having limits set and rules established, children of permissive parents have very few limits set while growing up and are usually free to do as they please. Parents who are considered permissive accept the child's desires and drives while offering safety, yet also offer a great deal of freedom (Brooks, 2008). According to Brooks (2008), permissive parents, when raising their children, "appeared cool and uninvolved" (p. 74). Discipline is administered inconsistently, if at all, making it difficult for children to understand the rules (Sclafani, 2004). Traveling through life with little consistency foreshadows future circumstances that may mimic previous experiences where rules are absent and limits are nonexistent. For life to be so unclear and to have adapted to a lack of clarity in numerous situations, one may journey through the years with little ambition and limited satisfaction.

This parenting style is associated with little self-control in children (Sclafani, 2004). Additionally, in reference to children of permissive-indulgent parents, Sclafani (2004) states, "They are generally aimless, living

lives with no or unclear directions" (p. 47). A certain level of satisfaction can still be reached in adulthood, but it is more difficult to experience an increase when one is ambiguous as to where to go or what to do in life. The lack of balance between demandingness and responsiveness leads to adverse effects that are difficult to alter in adulthood where satisfaction becomes harder and harder to experience since situations do not always go as planned. These children do what they can to get what they want but do so without applying personal work or effort (Sclafani, 2004). A fulfilling adult life more often than not requires these attributes for success. Without them, life satisfaction is a mere happening never to be aspired or reached.

Remaining consistently responsive towards children's needs and accepting of children the way they are may facilitate happiness for permissive-indulgent parents. These parents' satisfaction in life is similar to that of authoritative parents. Likewise, due to an absence of rules and expectations, permissive-indulgent parents may experience very little distress and therefore feel satisfied in life.

Permissive-Neglectful

A fourth parenting style, permissive-neglectful, is described by Baumrind (1995) as parents who are low on both dimensions of demandingness and responsiveness. Effects of this parenting style seem to be the most negative and harmful for children and life satisfaction for

both parent and child appear to be low. Baumrind (1995) does not support this style of parenting and believes that prevention and intervention are necessary to diminish maltreatment, especially since, as she believes, parents are responsible for committing to the needs of their children for at least 20 years. Baumrind (1995) states, "Every child is entitled to be brought up by responsible parents who in turn are fully supported by a responsive community" (p. 88).

Permissive-neglectful parents raise children who develop low self-esteem and are insecurely attached. With this, these children do not have much of a self-image or self-confidence and are aimless and irresponsible (Sclafani, 2004). To have such low self-esteem and little direction in life makes it challenging to acquire a satisfying job or maintain a healthy relationship in adulthood. Moreover, family ties and social affiliations may be lacking and therefore modify one's perspective of personal well-being and satisfaction.

A factor leading to the implementation of permissive-neglectful approaches has been found to be economic stress, producing depression and discouragement in some parents, leading to conflict in marriage, cruel and inconsistent discipline, and adverse rejection or lack of involvement with children. The stress of poverty afflicts outcomes in children through what parents do or don't do (Baumrind, 1995). Chen and Kaplan (2001) have contributed to this list by adding that neglectful

parents tend to be less involved with “community church-related activities” (p. 21). Struggling alone with little support from a partner, extended family, or the community during parenthood appears to make the permissive-neglectful approach a more viable option when handling children. However, implementing this particular parenting style can decrease the parent’s well-being in the process of harming the child, leaving both with a reduced feeling of satisfaction and happiness in life.

It has been concluded that the taking on of parenting practices considered to be coercive is a result of exposure to harsh parenting practices that is then directed to one’s own children, which is regarded as a consistent predictor of the former (Steinmetz, 1987). Correspondingly, “Early experiences of parental rejection lead to the development of depressive affect, which in turn contributes to subsequent rejecting parental behavior toward one’s own children” (Chen & Kaplan, p. 19). Under these circumstances, it may be more difficult to experience pleasure and happiness in life for both parent and child, making overall satisfaction less prevalent.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is often a goal one strives to achieve. Experiences from childhood can cause lasting impressions that may proceed into adulthood and affect one’s overall level of happiness. Certain levels of involvement through parenting style by parents during one’s childhood

and how this parenting is perceived may modify one's satisfaction in life as an adult. Parents' experience may affect satisfaction, as well. With this, certain factors, for better or worse, can affect measures of life satisfaction that may be experienced at a young age. Parenting style is one of these factors.

Research associated with life satisfaction has grown in the past couple of decades. However, little research has been conducted on how life satisfaction is associated with parenting style. Previous research has discovered how important satisfaction is in indicating quality of life (Henry, 1994). In order to understand the differences in level of satisfaction, one must also understand the milieu in which differences are created.

It may be possible to relate parenting style to life satisfaction by exploring experiences in childhood and their potential lasting effects. Receiving negative parental care has been demonstrated to alter personality in adulthood. Chen and Kaplan (2001) allege, "...early experience of hostile and unaffectionate parental care contributes to the development of an unstable personality in adulthood, which in turn predicts marital tension and dysfunctional parenting behavior" (p. 21). This outcome of tension and dysfunctional parenting may impact how one views life, decreasing well-being as well as satisfaction in different areas of life.

Satisfaction in life can be modified for a variety of reasons. Varying temperaments of children and the reactions by parents as a result may have an effect on parenting techniques used as well as life satisfaction. For example, difficult temperaments in children make it more challenging for parents to interact gracefully with their children, altering level of satisfaction and the parenting style implemented.

As a parent life satisfaction may be achieved in adulthood despite the challenges of the role. Brooks (2008) states, "When parents successfully meet the demands of their new roles, they feel competent and effective" (p. 241). Overcoming obstacles and accomplishing a desired goal, such as becoming a proficient parent, can add a great deal to one's level of satisfaction in life. With this, perceptions of how capable one is as a parent can alter parenting and therefore result in varying levels of satisfaction experienced by adults later in life. As indicated by Brooks (2008), the parent, when more accepting of, as well as involved with and sensitive to, children's needs can assist the process of children becoming happy individuals who are satisfied with life.

Among this, personality traits (of which are products from childhood factors) displayed in adulthood take effect as well. Stephan (2009) has found that adults who harbor more openness to ideas and feelings are more likely to be satisfied in life. Remaining open allows for constructive parenting, more opportunities, positive interactions, and acceptance in

life. These traits assist individuals in benefiting from parenting and opportunities experienced which increases self-esteem and satisfies basic needs, resulting in higher positive life satisfaction (Stephan, 2009).

Based on the accumulated research on life satisfaction, it is hypothesized that adults who experienced an authoritative parenting style during childhood would be more satisfied in life than adults who experienced an authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-neglectful parenting style. It is also hypothesized that authoritative parents will be more satisfied with life than authoritarian or permissive-indulgent parents.

Memory Distortion

Memory distortion is explained as the remembrance of certain events that one believes to have happened in the past, yet the events either happened at a different time in one's life or not at all (Brainerd, Reyna, & Ceci, 2008). Many researchers state the importance of taking memory distortions into consideration when researching topics involving past experiences due to its strong impact that may skew results. Brainerd et al. (2008) explain, "False memories are quintessential episodic memory phenomena..." (p. 343). These common and typical memory distortions misrepresent the past, sometimes creating entirely new situations that never happened and leading to skepticism and uncertainty by researchers and professionals.

According to Baumrind (1995), thousands and thousands of stories have emerged from adult children who have retrieved “memories” during therapy revolving around childhood abuse, yet the abusive incidences may or may not have actually happened. Because it is not unusual, memory distortion must be acknowledged and handled appropriately when conducting studies involving past events so as not to carry out research under false pretenses.

Chen and Kaplan (2001) contend, “...recollections tend to be subject to distortion by current perceptions, emotional states, or behaviors” (p. 27). When thinking back to many years ago, there is bound to be some alteration to childhood experiences whether intentional or not. Reflection of the topic of parenting by adult children triggers both positive and negative memories while kindling common emotions from childhood that may be embellished by the mind. This study will take into account the fact that some memories from childhood related to parenting may be falsified in one way or another by the adult child.

Conclusions

The previously examined literature has provided a review of four kinds of parenting style, the possible effects each style has on life satisfaction in adulthood, and influential factors. Furthermore, the material directed attention towards some of the past and current theories and studies regarding parenting and life satisfaction. The facilitation of life

satisfaction in adulthood seems to be connected to parenting style. As indicated by Brooks (2008), "The most important aspect of the parent-child relationship for later well-being was the absence of harsh discipline" (p. 464). Avoiding a permissive-neglectful parenting style and relying more on a positive parenting style, like authoritative, is more useful for the outcome of life satisfaction in adulthood. The parent will be happier using a constructive style and the experience of its use will carry into the adult child's life, creating an increased level of satisfaction while maintaining the cycle.

The purpose of the current study is to expand on the above literature to facilitate further understanding of the associations between life satisfaction and parenting style experienced in childhood (and how it may be carried into adulthood) and parenting style used in adulthood. Following the framework provided by Baumrind's studies, this study will attempt to extend her findings and reveal the associations between parenting style and life satisfaction.

Baumrind's research is comprehensive in terms of the correlates of parenting, yet the link between life satisfaction and parenting has not been explored. Overall, the study of parenting style and life satisfaction will allow for the enhancement of research on parenting. Utilizing the accumulation of research, this study will attempt to expand such findings on parenting style and life satisfaction.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

This chapter outlines the methods used in conducting this research study. The association between parenting style (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-neglectful) and life satisfaction were examined. Given the nature of the study's design, causation was not determined.

Selection of Sample

This sample consisted of male and female adults. Demographic variables (see Appendix A) collected included age, gender, birth order, education attainment, and marital status. Screening criteria required participants to be 18 to 50 years of age and to have at least one sibling. Informed consent (see Appendix B) was obtained through the electronic signing of a description of the study explaining its intent.

Participants were invited to partake in an online study exploring the association between parenting style and life satisfaction. Invitations (see Appendix D) to the survey were posted on *Facebook* in an attempt to recruit subjects. The use of an online survey allowed for a number of responses, yet the age range may have been limited to a younger age

group who are more familiar with the Internet. To improve this, an invitation to send the survey's link to other individuals was posted at the end of the survey. This gave participants the opportunity to recruit members of varying ages to the site that may not have seen it otherwise. Additional invitations to participate were posted on a counseling listserv, COUNSGRADS (a listserv for graduate students in counselor education programs) and students in the Graduate Program in Counseling (GPC) received a hard copy invitation (see Appendix C) placed in their student mailboxes.

Selection of Instrument

The Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey used in this study was created as a measurement tool to collect participant data on the topic under study.

Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey - the Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey (see Appendix E) is an eight question survey designed to measure level of satisfaction and reveal an association between parenting style and life satisfaction. Questions regarding age, gender, birth order, level of education, and marital status were included. To discover parenting style, participants were asked to choose the parenting style that best describes the way in which they were raised in childhood as well as the parenting style that best matches the way they currently parent. To measure life satisfaction, a question was included

that required participants to indicate their degree of life satisfaction on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied). Higher numbers, such as 3 and 4, indicate higher levels of life satisfaction.

Administration of the Instrument

The survey was created based on the intent of this study, and was posted from December 5, 2009 until February 5, 2010 to a reputable online survey instrument (SurveyMonkey) after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix G). The data was collected on SurveyMonkey's encrypted server, thus ensuring confidentiality.

Individuals between the ages of 18 and 50 were invited to participate in the online study through an open invitation. This specific age range was chosen so as to receive responses from parents as well as young adults and increase the variety of responses in regards to parenting styles used and level of satisfaction in life. Open invitations were issued through Facebook, COUNSGRADS, GPC mailboxes, and participant referral.

Participants were then sent to an online invitation and consent form that had to be read and agreed to before beginning the study. While at the invitation page, participants were given the opportunity to refer others to the survey.

The survey was the only instrument used in this study. At the conclusion of the survey, a final web page appeared instructing participants to close their browser upon completion to ensure

confidentiality. Additionally, this final web page informed participants where to direct questions, concerns, and comments, if any. All data was collected through the web-based instrument, allowing for data to be imported into a statistical program for analysis.

Statement of Hypotheses

For the purposes of this study, the following hypotheses were tested.

1. There is a relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style.
2. Adults who experienced an authoritative parenting style during childhood would be more satisfied in life than adults who experience an authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-neglectful parenting style.
3. Authoritative parents will be more satisfied with life than authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-neglectful parents.

Procedure for Analyzing the Data

Step 1: The relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style was investigated to test hypothesis 1. A Pearson chi-square was computed to determine the relationship.

Step 2: The parenting style experienced in childhood and its connection to life satisfaction in adulthood was investigated

to test the hypothesis 2. A one-way analysis of variance was computed to determine the connection.

Step 3: The adult's parenting style and its relationship to life satisfaction was investigated to test hypothesis 3. A one-way analysis of variance was computed to determine the relationship.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents a discussion of the data and the findings generated from the statistical analysis procedures that investigated the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style?
2. How is parenting style experienced in childhood connected to life satisfaction in adulthood?
3. How is the adult's parenting style related to their life satisfaction?

Findings

The Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey was presented through an open online invitation to participate. One hundred twenty nine individuals responded to the invitation. Of these, 5 participants' responses were discarded because they did not match the age criteria of 18 to 50 years old. An additional 11 participants' responses were discarded because they were completed by only children. The literature on only children is quite extensive and could be its own study, therefore only children were not included in this current study so as to strengthen the focus. One participant entered the survey but did not answer any of

the questions; his/her responses were also discarded. A total of 112 participants (86.8%) were found to have met the requirements for participation.

This study was conducted with male and female adults ($N = 112$). Demographic variables (see Appendix A) collected included age, gender, birth order, educational attainment, and marital status. Participants included individuals who are parents ($n = 80$) and individuals who are not parents ($n = 32$) and fit the rest of the requirements. Inspection of the demographic information took place before the analysis of the final data for correct data entry and missing observations. No missing values were present after screening of the data.

Descriptive Statistics

Participants sampled were both male ($n = 36$) and female ($n = 76$) with the majority of participants listing their age range between 26-33 (35%) (see Table 1). Participants reported their birth order including: oldest (47%), youngest (39%), and middle (26%). Seventy-three percent of the participants reported having or currently attaining a Master's degree or above. Fourteen percent of participants reported having or currently attaining a Bachelor's degree, while 7% reported having or currently attaining a high school degree/GED and 7% an Associate's degree. The majority (77%) of participants reported their marital status as married.

Fourteen percent of participants indicated being a single parent, whereas 4% indicated being divorced and 3% reported being separated.

Respondents to the survey reported varying levels of life satisfaction on a scale from 1 (1 = very dissatisfied) to 4 (4 = very satisfied). Sixty percent specified feeling satisfied with life overall, all things considered (responding 3). Among the additional options, 33% reported feeling very satisfied, 4% reported feeling dissatisfied, and 0.9% reported feeling very dissatisfied. Forty-one percent of respondents reported being raised by the authoritative parenting style ($n = 46$), 31% reported authoritarian ($n = 35$), 19% reported permissive-indulgent ($n = 22$), and 8% reported permissive-neglectful ($n = 9$). The highest percentage of participants (81%) listed authoritative as the parenting style currently being used to raise their children, 15% reported using the permissive-indulgent parenting style, 3% percent reported using the authoritarian parenting style, and 0% reported using the permissive-neglectful parenting style.

Frequency statistics (i.e., frequency and percentages) were calculated for the Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey (see Table 2).

Table 1
 Participants' Demographic Information (N = 112)

Variable	N	%
<u>Age</u>		
18-25	28	25.0%
26-33	39	34.8%
34-41	22	19.6%
42-50	23	20.5%
<u>Gender</u>		
M	36	32.1%
F	76	67.9%
<u>Birth Order</u>		
Oldest	47	42.0%
Middle	26	23.2%
Youngest	39	34.8%
<u>Level of Education</u>		
High School/GED	7	6.3%
Associate's	7	6.3%
Bachelor's	16	14.4%
Master's or above	81	73.0%
<u>Marital Status</u>		
Single Parent	12	14.3%
Separated	3	3.6%
Divorced	4	4.8%
Married	65	77.4%

Table 2
 Frequency Statistics for the Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey
 (N = 112)

Instrument	Frequency	Percent
Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey		
Childhood Parenting Style		
Authoritative	46	41.1
Authoritarian	35	31.3
Permissive-indulgent	22	19.6
Permissive-neglectful	9	8.0
Current Parenting Style		
Authoritative	65	81.3
Authoritarian	3	3.8
Permissive-indulgent	12	15.0
Life Satisfaction		
Very Dissatisfied	1	.9
Dissatisfied	5	4.5
Satisfied	68	60.7
Very Satisfied	38	33.9

The frequency column represents the number of responses for each variable. The frequencies of the childhood parenting style sample indicate that most participants experienced the authoritative parenting style in childhood ($n = 46$) and the least experienced the permissive-neglectful parenting style ($n = 9$). The frequencies of the current parenting style reveal that the authoritative parenting style is the most common among this sample ($n = 65$) and that none of the participants use the permissive-neglectful style. Lastly, the frequencies of life

satisfaction show that most participants are satisfied with life ($n = 68$), with the least amount of participants feeling very dissatisfied with life ($n = 1$).

Analysis of the Data

Chi-Square

A chi-square was chosen to determine whether or not a relationship exists between parenting style experienced in childhood (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, or permissive-neglectful) and the adult's own parenting style (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, or permissive-neglectful).

One-Way Analysis of Variance

A one-way analysis of variance was chosen to test the second hypothesis that adults who experienced an authoritative parenting style during childhood would be more satisfied in life than adults who experienced an authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-neglectful parenting style. The third hypothesis that authoritative parents will be more satisfied with life than authoritarian and permissive-indulgent parents was also investigated through the use of a one-way analysis of variance.

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style.

To investigate whether there was a relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style, a chi-

square statistic was conducted (see Table 3). Non-parents were excluded from this test, as were participants who experienced the permissive-neglectful parenting style in childhood due to the very low number of responses for that particular style. Because the assumption that 80% of cells would have expected counts greater than five was not met, the Fisher's Exact Test was used to determine the significance level. Table 3 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style ($\chi^2 = .81, df = 1, N = 71, p > .05$); therefore, the first hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3

Summary of the Chi-Square for the Relationship between Parenting Style Experienced in Childhood and the Adult's Own Parenting Style ($N = 71$)

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.812 ^a	1	.368		
Continuity Correction ^b	.359	1	.549		
Likelihood Ratio	.841	1	.359		
Fisher's Exact Test				.548	.279
N of Valid Cases	71				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.49.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 3a

Raised Style Revised * Used Style Revised Crosstabulation

Count

	Used Style Revised		Total
	Authorit	Non-auth	
Raised Style Revised Authorit	22	4	26
Non-auth	34	11	45
Total	56	15	71

Note: Authorit = Authoritative. Non-auth = Non-authoritative (Authoritarian and permissive-indulgent).

Hypothesis 2: Adults who experienced an authoritative parenting style during childhood would be more satisfied in life than adults who experienced an authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-neglectful parenting style.

In order to test how parenting style experienced in childhood is connected to life satisfaction in adulthood, a one-way analysis of variance was utilized (see Table 4). A statistically significant relationship was not found between life satisfaction and the four parenting styles experienced in childhood, $F(3, 108) = 1.18, p = .32$, as can be seen in Table 4. The second hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Table 4

Summary of the One-Way Analysis of Variance Comparing Parenting Style Experienced in Childhood and Life Satisfaction in Adulthood ($N = 112$)

ANOVA

On a scale from 1-4 how satisfied are you with life overall as an adult, all things considered?

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.219	3	.406	1.180	.321
Within Groups	37.201	108	.344		
Total	38.420	111			

Table 4a

Descriptives

On a scale from 1-4 how satisfied are you with life overall as an adult, all things considered?

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Authoritarian	35	3.17	.707	.119	2.93	3.41	1	4
Authoritative	46	3.39	.537	.079	3.23	3.55	2	4
Permissive-indulgent	22	3.18	.501	.107	2.96	3.40	2	4
Permissive-neglectful	9	3.33	.500	.167	2.95	3.72	3	4
Total	112	3.28	.588	.056	3.17	3.39	1	4

Hypothesis 3: *Authoritative parents will be more satisfied with life than authoritarian and permissive-indulgent parents.*

A one-way analysis of variance was used to test how the adult's parenting style was related to their life satisfaction (see Table 5). Non-parents were excluded from this test. A statistically significant difference was not found among the adult's parenting style and their life satisfaction, $F(2, 77) = 1.85, p = .165$, as can be seen in Table 5. Therefore, the third hypothesis was rejected.

Table 5

Summary of the One-Way Analysis of Variance Comparing the Adult's Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction ($N = 80$)

ANOVA

On a scale from 1-4 how satisfied are you with life overall as an adult, all things considered?

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.120	2	.560	1.845	.165
Within Groups	23.368	77	.303		
Total	24.487	79			

Table 5a

Descriptives

On a scale from 1-4 how satisfied are you with life overall as an adult, all things considered?

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Authoritarian	3	2.33	.577	.333	.90	3.77	2	3
Authoritative	65	2.42	.556	.069	2.28	2.55	1	3
Permissive-indulgent	12	2.08	.515	.149	1.76	2.41	1	3
Total	80	2.36	.557	.062	2.24	2.49	1	3

Summary

In this chapter, the results of the analyses relating to demographic variables, parenting style experienced in childhood, current parenting style, and life satisfaction were presented. The following chapter will link these findings to the previously reviewed literature, examine implications, discuss limitations to the study, and identify areas for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This final chapter discusses the findings, connects them to the literature, delineates limitations, explores implications, and isolates areas for further research.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the association between parenting style and life satisfaction in adulthood. The study included 112 male and female adults. Participants responded to the Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey through the Internet which provided data to address the hypotheses posed in this thesis.

Outlined in the previous chapter were frequency statistics, including the frequency and percentage of each variable. The results indicated that a majority of individuals in the population sampled experienced the authoritative parenting style in childhood, currently use the authoritative parenting style, and are overall satisfied with life.

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style.

The hypothesis of a relationship existing between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style was

rejected. A significant relationship was not found between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's own parenting style. This result was contrary to Chen and Kaplan's (2001) findings regarding intergenerational continuity of parenting. This finding may suggest that due to the small sample size, a statistically significant relationship could not be seen after conducting the chi-square statistical test. This observation would have to be tested further with a larger sample size to increase statistical power.

Although parenting styles can be transferred from generation to generation, the cycle reportedly can be broken and changes can be made. Brooks (2008) reports, "Parents who worry about repeating other negative ways of relating learned in childhood can deal with their feelings about their parents' behavior and adopt new ways of relating" (p. 32). At the conclusion of a study associated with parenting style and conducted with a group of parents, relating to others in a different manner and problem-solving in new ways were found to be possible even after experiencing adversity with parents and difficult parent-child relationships while growing up. These parents were able to gain insight into their difficult childhoods, which resulted in acknowledgement and acceptance of the past. From this acknowledgement, a warm style of parenting, one of which was desired, emerged in parenthood (Phelps, Belsky, & Crnic, 1998). Accordingly, Brooks (2008) states that it is possible

to learn new behaviors as a parent. Through observation, education, and trial-and-error, the development of new, constructive means of relating to others can emerge in spite of interactions from the past.

Hypothesis 2: Adults who experienced an authoritative parenting style during childhood would be more satisfied in life than adults who experienced an authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, and permissive-neglectful parenting style.

A one-way analysis of variance rejected the hypothesis that adults who experienced an authoritative parenting style during childhood would be more satisfied with life. This conflicts with Baumrind's (1995) portrayal of the authoritative parenting style, which is described as having advantageous long-term effects on children more so than the other three styles of parenting. This also conflicts with Sclafani's (2004) findings of parenting styles and how, based on the parenting style experienced, children grow up very differently. After reviewing the literature, one may assume that the parenting style experienced in childhood would be associated with life satisfaction in adulthood.

Hypothesis 3: Authoritative parents will be more satisfied with life than authoritarian and permissive-indulgent parents.

A one-way analysis of variance rejected the hypothesis that authoritative parents will be more satisfied with life. As previously mentioned, the lack of a statistically significant difference may be due to

the small sample size used in this study. A larger sample size may be needed to increase the power of the test.

Implications

Based on the results of the study as well as previous research, it is apparent that implications can be presented regarding Baumrind's framework in reference to parenting style and its association to life satisfaction. The literature review offered material on parenting style and life satisfaction that can be considered explorative and informing, as well as conflicting. It is possible for the conflicting findings to be ascribed to the many differing variables that affect parenting style and life satisfaction. Differences noted in the lack of a relationship between parenting style experienced in childhood and the adult's parenting style in the current study would indicate that the small sample size may have contributed to the conflicting findings. The chance that important significant differences were not found was increased because of the small sample size in this study due to a lack of power to detect medium and small effects.

Nevertheless, this information can assist researchers, counselors, and educators in working with the parent population. Understanding how Baumrind's theory on the different parenting styles applies to life satisfaction in adulthood can contribute to the advancement of future research. This understanding can also contribute to future studies that are

designed to provide explanations for varying aspects of parenting and their influences while generating further research that is more specific regarding optimal parenting and levels of life satisfaction.

The examination of the link between life satisfaction and parenting style may provide counselors and educators with enhanced information pertaining to the association between parenting style and life satisfaction. This may facilitate the promoting of an understanding in relation to happiness and life satisfaction that goes beyond former available literature, while also fostering a foundation for future research related to parenting factors that influence satisfaction in life.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to this study included sampling strategies, instrumentation, and methodology. Due to the self-selective nature of the online invitation to participate in a survey regarding parenting style, female individuals were more likely to participate than male individuals, as can be seen from the descriptive statistics in the previous chapter (see Table 1), thus possibly skewing the results on the Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction Survey. The data also revealed that this is a highly educated sample, with a majority of participants having a master's degree or above. Therefore adults with a lower level of education were not as highly represented. This may have altered the results of the study, as well.

Another limitation was revealed through the use of online sampling. Due to the online invitation to participate, younger individuals were more likely to view and complete the survey than older individuals who are not as accustomed to the Internet, as can also be seen from the descriptive statistics in the previous chapter (see Table 1). To remedy for this, participants were invited to pass along the invitation to friends who may not have seen the survey otherwise. Furthermore, due to the fact that the survey's link was e-mailed to individuals through a listserv for graduate students, another potential limitation was how well the online sample represents the general parent population.

With this, the sample size in this study was very small. All 112 participants were used to test hypothesis 2, yet only 71 participants were used to test hypothesis 1 and only 80 participants met the requirements to test hypothesis 3. This small sample size made it difficult to find a significant relationship between the parenting styles.

The survey used in this study was created based on the literature. It may have been methodologically limited due to the definitions of parenting style. Participants may have determined the more socially desirable parenting style based on the definitions given in the survey. Due to perceived social standards, this may have led participants to choose the more optimal parenting style rather than the one that truly matches their parenting technique more so. Others may have used the definitions

to choose a parenting style that was experienced in childhood based on distorted memories, adding to the limitations of this study. More so, individuals may not have wanted to admit to raising their children using the permissive-neglectful parenting style due to the definition provided.

Future Research

Although parenting is a commonly researched topic, there are always additional areas and aspects to be researched and explored, including its relation to life satisfaction. Future research could expand on this study through the examination of variables that cause specific parenting styles to be utilized. Understanding the extent of influential factors and their relation to parenting style and life satisfaction may assist counselors and educators in gaining insight into consistent patterns and associations.

Including factors such as birth order, gender, and family structure in future research may reveal more associations between parenting style and life satisfaction. For example, birth order is defined as the numerical place of an individual among siblings (Ernst & Angst, 1983) and the impact of a child's place in the family can affect other factors such as personality, behavior, learning, and eventually earning power (Lorenz, 2008).

One's place in the family also influences how one is parented. An article titled "Why parents are stricter with older children" (Duke University,

2008) suggests parents are stricter with first-born children and parents' treatment of their children depended partially on birth order and whether or not there were younger siblings in the home. Furthermore, research conducted by Bedford (1998) suggests that sibling childhood experiences are connected to well-being in adulthood. This may be related to parenting style and life satisfaction in that children are parented differently based on their birth order, therefore possibly creating impending variations in levels of satisfaction.

Gender is a factor that impacts how one is parented as well, possibly creating differences between males and females in life satisfaction in adulthood. Some researchers have resorted to biology to explain the effects of gender on parenting style and satisfaction in life whereas others have focused on behavior and other varying aspects that appear between the two different genders. Hapworth, Hapworth, and Heilman (1993) have found that boys are favored over girls, boys are taken more seriously, and their success is perceived as more important. If children, especially girls in families with boys and girls, are able to recognize this difference in parenting style during childhood, the effects may lead to differences in overall life satisfaction between sons and daughters.

Among other research, Young et al. (1995) states, "...other literature has indicated not only that sons and daughters are treated differently by

their mothers and fathers, but also that they react differently to fathers' and mothers' parenting behaviors" (p. 814). It appears that the parenting style differs between girls and boys. For example, boys may experience a more lenient style of parenting whereas girls may experience a style that is stricter while growing up, or it could be the opposite. One may wonder, based on this specific research, if parenting style impacts satisfaction on a more positive level more so for boys in adulthood compared to girls, or vice versa.

The structure of a family that one is a part of may be related to the parenting style employed and the level of happiness endured. Family structure is defined as the organized pattern in which family members interact, which include multiple subsystems (such as parents, children, and siblings) through which various functions are carried out and formed by generation, gender, interest, or function (Minuchin, 1974). For example, there are multiple family structures which include intact families, blended, step-families, single-parent, and three generational families. Depending on whether a family is intact, blended, step, single-parent, or three generational, parenting style and satisfaction may vary during childhood and into adulthood.

Satisfaction can be considered a cycle. How satisfied one is with life from childhood can predict how satisfied one may be as an adult. The parenting style one chooses to use and its effects may also contribute

along with the exposure of satisfaction in the family. Brooks (2008) maintains, "Marital or partner satisfaction and intimacy contribute to parents' sense of well-being, their confidence, and their skills as parents" (p. 464). *The happier parents are, the more likely the parenting style will be warm and constructive, and thus the more likely children will be happier and more satisfied from childhood into adulthood, consequently continuing the cycle.* Therefore, the parenting style one experiences during childhood varies and can be quite different depending on different factors, possibly affecting parenting style and life satisfaction in adulthood.

Future research can also be directed towards the expansion of this study to include a longitudinal study. This would be beneficial not only for detecting how parenting style changes over time, but also how these changes interact with life satisfaction. With this, rather than providing participants with the definitions of parenting style and allowing them choose based on the definitions given, a series of questions could be used to determine how the individual was raised and how they currently parent. This would limit the participants' ability to choose the more socially desirable parenting style. Lastly, as previously mentioned, by increasing the sample size in future studies, the ability to reveal associations between parenting style and life satisfaction will be greatly strengthened.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS

How old are you?

I am a:

Male
Female

Please choose the one that corresponds to your birth order:

Oldest
Middle
Youngest
Only

What level of education have you attained, or are in the process of attaining?

High school/GED
Associate's
Bachelor's
Master's or above

What is your current marital status?

Single Parent
Separated
Divorced
Married

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Welcome to the survey on parenting style and life satisfaction. Before you begin, please review this page. It contains information on your rights as a participant.

- By clicking the "NEXT" button link below, you state that you are between the ages of 18 and 50 and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Stephanie Caras under the faculty advisement of Dr. Loan Phan in the Graduate Program in Counseling at the University of New Hampshire.
- The purpose of this research study is to investigate the association between parenting style and life satisfaction.
- If you choose to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a survey about parenting style and life satisfaction. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.
- The researcher plans to maintain confidentiality of information collected in this study. The information you provide will be grouped with information other people provide for reporting and presentation, and your name will not be used. Data will be stored on a private computer owned by the student researcher and will be password protected.
- Due to the public nature of the Internet, it is possible for your data to be intercepted, but it is highly unlikely. It is important that you exit your browser after you have submitted your survey so that your responses will not be viewed by someone that may use your computer at a later time.
- Please understand the survey questions may ask you to reflect on your childhood and may be sensitive in nature, which may result in some discomfort.
- Please understand your participation is voluntary.
- Please understand you do not have to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.
- The research is not designed to help you personally, but the benefits to participation include contributing to research on an interesting topic. This research may help us better understand the association between parenting style and life satisfaction.

APPENDIX B (continued)

- If you have any questions about participating in this project, please contact me (Stephanie Caras at srd4@unh.edu) or my faculty advisor (Dr. Loan Phan at loan.phan@unh.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of New Hampshire, Office of Sponsored Research, Durham, New Hampshire, 03824; (telephone) 603-862-2003.

APPENDIX C: HARD COPY INVITATION

Dear Friend,

You are invited to participate in a study on the association between parenting style and life satisfaction for my master's thesis. In order to participate in this study you must be between the ages of 18 and 50. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study, as it would expand on the topic of parenting style and life satisfaction. In order to begin the survey, please go to the link listed below by typing it into your Internet browser. Also, please feel free to invite anyone you know to participate in this survey by e-mailing them the link below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/29RY93W>

Once you are on the website you will see an informed consent form which will provide you with further information on the survey.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Stephanie Caras, at srd4@unh.edu. Should you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Julie Simpson in the UNH Office of Sponsored Research at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Information for my faculty advisor, Dr. Loan Phan, is also included below.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Stephanie Caras
University of New Hampshire
Candidate for Master's of Arts in Counseling, 2010
srd4@unh.edu

UNH Faculty Advisor
Loan Phan, Ph.D.
University of New Hampshire
Department of Education
Graduate Program in Counseling
Morrill Hall-Rm 111B
Durham, NH 03824
603-862-2701
loan.phan@unh.edu

APPENDIX D: ONLINE INVITATION

Dear Friend,

You are invited to participate in a study on the association between parenting style and life satisfaction for my master's thesis. In order to participate in this study you must be between the ages of 18 and 50. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study, as it would expand on the topic of parenting style and life satisfaction. In order to begin the survey, please click on the link below. Also, please feel free to invite anyone you know to participate in this survey by e-mailing them the link below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/29RY93W>

If you have difficulties connecting to the website, please copy and paste the link onto your browser. Once you are on the website you will see an informed consent form which will provide you with further information on the survey.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Stephanie Caras, at srd4@unh.edu. Should you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Julie Simpson in the UNH Office of Sponsored Research at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Information for my faculty advisor, Dr. Loan Phan, is also included below.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Stephanie Caras
University of New Hampshire
Candidate for Master's of Arts in Counseling, 2010
srd4@unh.edu

UNH Faculty Advisor
Loan Phan, Ph.D.
University of New Hampshire
Department of Education
Graduate Program in Counseling
Morrill Hall-Rm 111B
Durham, NH 03824
603-862-2701
loan.phan@unh.edu

APPENDIX E: SURVEY

Survey Directions: Please answer all the questions that apply to you by clicking a circle to the left of the word(s) and disregard the questions that do not apply to you.

1. How old are you? _____
2. I am a:
 - Male
 - Female
3. Please choose the one that corresponds to your birth order:
 - Oldest
 - Middle
 - Youngest
 - Only
4. What level of education have you attained, or are in the process of attaining?
 - High School/GED
 - Associate's
 - Bachelor's
 - Master's or above
5. What is your current marital status?
 - Single Parent
 - Separated
 - Divorced
 - Married
6. On a scale from 1-4 how satisfied are you with life overall as an adult, all things considered?
 - 1 *Very Dissatisfied*
 - 2 *Dissatisfied*
 - 3 *Satisfied*
 - 4 *Very Satisfied*

APPENDIX E (continued)

Survey Directions: Please use the definitions of parenting style given below to answer questions 7 and 8.

Definitions of Parenting Style:

Authoritative- parents take a child-centered approach; rules are set and explained and parents allow for open dialogue between parent and child; independence is encouraged but limits exist; parents are warm and nurturing.

Authoritarian- parents are strict; parents set rules and expect them to be followed; little explanation is given and dialogue between parent and child is rare; parents demand respect and can be unresponsive to child's needs.

Permissive-indulgent- parents are laid-back and easy-going, as well as accepting and nurturing; parents are involved in child's life but have few behavioral expectations and very few demands are placed; discipline is inconsistent and parents are reluctant when it comes to setting rules and limits; parents allow children to make own decisions and support is given no matter the choice.

Permissive-neglectful- warmth and control are low and parents are not usually involved in child's life; basic needs are attended to but otherwise parents are unresponsive and unsupportive; parents do not place any demands on child and limits do not exist; parents are disengaged.

7. Based on the definitions of parenting style given above, which parenting style reflects how you were raised?

- Authoritative
- Authoritarian
- Permissive-indulgent
- Permissive-neglectful

8. Based on the definitions of parenting style given above, which parenting style reflects the one you use currently?

- Authoritative
- Authoritarian
- Permissive-indulgent
- Permissive-neglectful

APPENDIX F: CLOSE BROWSER REMINDER

Your responses have been successfully submitted.

We would like to hear from you if you have any questions or concerns about this research study. Please feel free to contact us:

Stephanie Caras
University of New Hampshire
Candidate for Master's of Arts in Counseling, 2010
srd4@unh.edu

UNH Faculty Advisor
Loan Phan, Ph.D.
University of New Hampshire
Department of Education
Graduate Program in Counseling
Morrill Hall-Rm 111B
Durham, NH 03824
603-862-2701
loan.phan@unh.edu

Please remember to close or exit your Internet browser after clicking "DONE".

Thank you!

APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

University of New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

04-Dec-2009

Caras, Stephanie
Education, Morrill Hall
1223 Bennett Way
Newmarket, NH 03857

IRB #: 4725

Study: The Association Between Parenting Style and Life Satisfaction in Adulthood

Approval Date: 03-Dec-2009

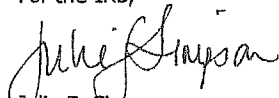
The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,


Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Phan, Loan