

Fall 12-15-2011

# Attending College Influences the Perception of Parenting more than Young Adults or Students that do not Attend College

Brian Harrison  
*Coastal Carolina University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Harrison, Brian, "Attending College Influences the Perception of Parenting more than Young Adults or Students that do not Attend College" (2011). *Honors Theses*. 99.  
<https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/honors-theses/99>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College and Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [commons@coastal.edu](mailto:commons@coastal.edu).

Attending College Influences the Perception of Parenting More Than Young Adults or Students  
That Do Not Attend College.

BY

Brian Harrison

Communication

---

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
In the Honors Program at  
Coastal Carolina University

December 2011

## Introduction

College has the ability to bring the best out of any individual. It is time consuming, difficult, and often far away from home. Going to college can be a remarkable experience. Moreover, the tools and knowledge one gains from college are invaluable. Most of what a student learns is taught just by going to college and experiencing it first-hand. Whether studying the night before an exam, taking notes during class, or reading for hours on end, everything a student does is a learning experience. But not all lessons are taught out of a textbook and not all lessons apply just to college. The question here is whether or not attending college influences parenting skills. The thesis is attending college influences the perception of parenting more than young adults or students that do not attend college.

Some tools students develop are ones that they will use for the rest of their lives. They can use these tools for their career or for family purposes. Fortunate students walk away from college having developed character traits such as understanding, supportiveness, attentiveness, and personal organization. All these traits are ones that will serve them as parents as well. The hypothesis for this experiment was students that are in college will answer the questions with more rational answers; while the students that are not in college will answer questions with more aggressive answers.

## Literature Review

Researchers are discussing everything that college offers to students other than academic endeavors. Some authors use surveys in the field to develop their findings while others use focus groups. Researchers agree that college is beneficial to students because of all the other life skills that students cultivate while in college, like relationship skills, financial literacy, and learning

how to reach their full potential as students and people. A few authors compare the parenting techniques that are needed to raise a family effectively versus techniques that have negative outcomes, some of which relate to skills developed in college. They examine how parents are evaluated and what determines if a parent raises their child properly. Several researchers also discuss the perception of parenting from a young adult's perspective. They examine how college students view and acquire different parenting techniques.

One such researcher, Mary Fischer, examines the impact of the college experience, social distance felt toward other groups, and precollege friendships have on diverse interracial friendships in the first year of college. Fischer surveyed close to 4,000 white, black, and Hispanic students. Her research showed that minorities have more diverse friendships than whites. Fischer included interpersonal skills in her findings when she surveyed all of her students. This affected her results because it showed pre-college experiences and initial attitudes have an impact on the formation of interracial friendships in college, but racial and ethnic diversity on campus is also important in predicting friendship and relationships. Minorities have higher predicted friendship diversity than whites (Fischer 2008). She strongly believes that college students should not be afraid of making friends that are different from themselves. She believes that college sometimes forces people to make friends outside of their comfort zone.

Some researchers looked at the college lifestyle from a different angle. This group of researchers conducted a research study on a college campus using students as survey participants (Lawrence, Harrison, and Stone 2009). They discovered what the life of a male college athlete entails. They measured students' perceptions of college athletes by asking what they thought about student-athletes and how they thought they spent their time. They argued that student-

athletes have a heavy load of assignments and they do not have as much time to get their school work done as a regular college student. However, a student-athlete cannot use that as an excuse if they do not turn their assignments in on time. They acquire time management skills because they have the same amount of work due, but they have less time to complete that same work.

Other scholars examine how college students view grades and use visualization techniques. These researchers look at how college students view the importance of goal setting and classroom performance (Hoyert & O'Dell 2009). Scholars conducted their research on 440 undergraduate students ranging from age 18-23. Research revealed that with age, college students learn how to prepare for the future and set goals; there is a process of maturation. They believe this because the younger the participants were, the lower their scores were on the goal setting survey. However, older students scored significantly higher on the same survey. They conducted research for a full semester and came to the conclusion that students learn how to set goals in college the longer they are enrolled. Students learn that they have to focus on "what is important now" (Cain 2011) to succeed and graduate from college.

Other scholars examine reasons why one should invest their time in college because of the effect it can have on their family. Scholars argue that college is worth the time and effort because it helps people later in life with health, avoiding crime, and staying off welfare (Belfield and Bailey 2011). If someone attends college, they are more likely to obtain a degree, which enables them to get a good job with good benefits, which leads directly to good healthcare for their family. They determined that college affects people through a causal chain. When someone attends college, they are less likely to receive welfare later in life because they will possess a

higher education, which means that they are more likely to obtain a well-paying job that will allow them to live comfortably.

In addition to investigating the aforementioned relationship between cause and effect regarding college and long term well-being, scholars also examine how students use credit cards. They wanted to understand how college students finance their education through the frequency of credit card use (Robb & Pinto 2010). They examined the financial aspects of college and made a correlation between the lessons that college students learn about finance and credit. Scholars conducted an online survey of over 3,000 students and analyzed their purchasing and spending habits. They distributed surveys to two major universities in the nation. Results showed students spend most of their money on eating out, electronics, entertainment, and traveling. Results also showed that college students spend too freely and irresponsibly.

With students attending college and leaving loved ones behind, some scholars examined how females handle long distance relationships while in college. Researchers questioned if long distance relationships increase stress levels on female students and the association between communication and stress levels (Maguire and Kinney 2010). To get the most accurate results possible, the authors surveyed couples who had long distance relationships while attending college. Examiners concluded that geographic distance provides a serious challenge to college students because they are not accustomed to it. Therefore, female students involved in long distance relationships are more susceptible to higher volumes of stress.

In addition to measuring levels and causes of stress, scholars have also examined and analyzed vital skills that college teaches students. Relationship skills, time management, financial literacy, the importance of social diversity, and athletics are all aspects of the

knowledge that students develop while attending a college or university. Each skill is just as important as the next because one cannot reach their full potential until they have grown into a well-rounded individual. Each person must know their abilities and limitations. Once students understand that idea they will be able to learn everything that college has to offer. They will listen and do their best to acquire as much information as possible from people of authority as well as their peers. One area that all these skills converge in is parenting.

One aspect of parenting that researchers examine is the generalization of parenting skills during parent-child interaction therapy (Naik-Polan, A. T., & Budd, K. S. 2008). The research examines how parents provide their children with positive attention and parent-child relationship and interaction at home. This research was conducted on four urban and low-income single mothers who were at risk for child maltreatment because of substance abuse, homelessness, or psychiatric problems. Examiners observed parents from their home and issued a baseline test for their initial meeting. Research revealed that parent training can help at risk parents by helping them release stress and gain knowledge about parenting techniques. The research implied that some parents are not great because they were not exposed to great parenting techniques themselves. They raise their children the best way they know how.

Other scholars were intrigued by parenting classes as well. However, several still want to see what impact it has on the parents' behavior and children cognitive outcomes. Researchers analyze three variables or factors: parental language and cognitive stimulation, parent-child interactive activities, and the Bayley Mental Development Index of children (Chang, M., Park, B., & Kim, S. 2009). The researchers use Early Head Start Research and Evaluation database, which enables investigators to implement the longitudinal effects of parenting classes on

parenting behaviors and children's cognitive development. Studies confirm that the children of parents that are exposed to parenting classes responded and interacted more than those that did not. The study implies that parenting classes also help the children because with the knowledge and skills the parent learns in class are then passed on to their children when they are home. Scholars believe that parent-child interaction is vital in any family because it can lead to the growth of trust, loyalty, and obedient behavior.

The effects of parent-child interaction linger well into adulthood. In 2004, Chris Segrin searched for ways to determine if young adults' social skills are influenced by their parents' styles and their own social skills. Social skills were evaluated by how students interacted with classmates on campus and with each other in the classroom. About 140 students were evaluated and observed by participating in a six minute conversation with a person that they had never met before. All of the students' mothers and fathers' social and parenting skills were measured as well with a questionnaire sent by mail (Segrin 2004). Research revealed that the process of parent modeling and the passage of skills do not influence a child's social skills in relation to their peers.

Scholars also examine how parents influence a child's academic success. One researcher used the Social Cognitive Theory as the foundation of his experiment, which also relied on a questionnaire to determine if parents are being good role models at home. The study was titled, "Parental Inducement of Academic Self-Regulation" (Martinez-Pons 2002). The questionnaire asked elementary students, grades five to eight, to rate how often their parents reward, encourage, or facilitate academic effort while at home. A second questionnaire asked students how they thought they performed at home with the same topics. The researcher also recorded

what students scored on standardized tests to determine if students are living in a learning environment. The study showed that some students benefit from “hidden curriculum”, which is when a student is learning at home as well as at school. Those students that do not have “hidden curriculum” at their disposal are at a huge disadvantage because their learning stops at school.

Because only so much can be done through parenting, other researchers examine psychological links between parenting styles, impulsiveness, drinking control, and alcohol consumption (Peckham and Lopez 2011). Researchers wanted to discover if there was any correlation between the general behaviors of young adults and the attitudes of their parents. Scholars distributed a parental authority questionnaire to 83 college students that did not have children and admitted to occasionally drinking alcohol. Their results revealed that men are more impulsive than authoritative and that women were more impulsive than permissive.

Scholars examine the effect of perceptions of mothers' and fathers' parenting behavior on their college-aged daughter's gender role development (Arditti et al 1991). A parenting questionnaire was distributed to 215 students. While only 163 of the students were female, the rest were omitted, mainly because their research was conducted on a predominantly female college campus, and researchers wanted to confine their findings to a single gender. The questionnaire was titled “Parenting behavior form.” It consisted of two sets of 117 items that gauge each parent's behavior from the perspective of the child, ranging from like to dislike. The questionnaire measured three dimensions of parenting, all independent of each other: warmth, control, and cognitive involvement. Research revealed that perceptions of parenting behavior were only weakly associated with daughters' gender role preferences.

Some limitations that were noticed were from previous scholars and researchers. A group of researchers examined the background characteristics of why students succeed in college and others do not (ASHE 2005). High school grade point average, socioeconomic status, Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, and parental education were used to predict persistence of college GPA. To make a more compressive study, researchers could have included the students' current living situation. They could have also asked what type of environment the child is going home to and the type of school as well. This makes a difference because if a student is enrolled in a school that encourages smart students to perform at their best academically then the student will perform better. However, if they are enrolled in a school that provides students with a learning environment that is not conducive to academic achievement students will perform poorly.

Other researchers have limitations on their study because they did not use every aspect or resource available. Several authors examined why students drop out of college. Authors looked to find factors that relate to college students quitting college (Kim, Newton, Downey, & Benton 2010). This experiment examines some of the roadblocks and underlying factors that college students experience while in school. Authors reach the conclusion that there are six reasons why students drop out of college: academic self-efficacy, organization and attention to study, stress and time press, involvement with college activity, emotional satisfaction, and class communication. Authors failed to interview or offer focus groups to participants to determine exactly why they quit school. They did not take into consideration that it could have been for financial purposes, family issues, or desire to pursue other endeavors. Scholars seemed to have overlooked several possibilities.

## Method

I surveyed 22 college students and 8 students that were not in college or never attended college. I issued surveys to college students on Coastal Carolina University's campus; I distributed the surveys in a classroom setting to all participants. To receive the non-college students or young adults answers to the survey I issued surveys in a home environment and at the Coastal Grand Mall. I informed participants that their answers were completely confidential. I provided each participant with an informed consent document inspired by California State University (2007). I asked five questions to both groups and each question had three choices to choose from. Each possible choice represented a characteristic trait of a parent; such as rational, aggressive, and accommodating. The participants did not know that, all they saw were answers to the scenario/question I asked them. They did not realize that each question represented a theme (rational, aggressive, and accommodating).

I conducted the survey in that way so I could analyze data efficiently. I also included a demographics section in the questionnaire as well. The questions I asked related to their sex, their age group (18-22 or 23-26), whether they attended college, and if they have children. I then analyzed the data by documenting all the answers and factoring in whether they attended college or whether they were in a certain age to see if there were any comparisons. I did not want to survey any student that already has children because that would have changed their perspective on parenting. I asked questions to determine how students viewed disciplining children or how they would respond if they had children of their own and their child misbehaved in a public setting.

### Findings/Conclusion

Several scholars attempted to find a correlation between attending college and developing parenting skills. They look at characteristics that parents have and that college students obtain while in college. Some skills are acquired, oddly enough, from the experiences of partying, tailgating, and forming and dissolving friendships; while others gained from studying, attending classes regularly, and learning to respect authority. No matter how students obtain their life skills, and through them, parenting skills in college, each one shapes who they really are.

One of the problems that is noticeable throughout all of the aforementioned studies is the limitation of the research pool; only one of them includes student-athletes. Authors performed a detailed survey of student-athletes and received informative feedback (Lawrence, Harrison, and Stone 2009). If the majority of these surveys were to be done again researchers may want to consider specifically surveying student-athletes as well as regular college students. There is a possibility that their experiments could have been more accurate if they would have found a way to examine both student-athletes and regular college students and compare the two. Skills that students pick up from participating in collegiate athletics easily translate to parenting skills. Skills such as: teamwork, fellowship, social skills, ability to adapt to diverse people in diverse situations, composure, leadership training, patience, and regimented lifestyle habits.

One specific scholar, Brian Kelly, looks into the cost of college to determine whether or not the experience is worth the cost, which includes potentially going into debt (2010). While the researcher believes college is definitely worth the time and money (Kelly 2010), he left the way open for speculation about the impact of financial cost on a student's parenting skills. There is a possibility that a parent's college experience affects if they send their own children to college.

This is because if a parent is too far in debt, they are less likely to possess the resources to send or force their children to attend college. On a similar note, if a parent encountered a bad experience with college, they may be less likely to subject their children to the same situation. This affects parenting skills because of the perspective of a potential student's parent.

On a related note, while Kelly neglected to mention the powerful influence parents have on their children as prospective students, several other authors addressed the topic in 2010. Jennie Brand and Xie Yu argue that students who are forced into college do not perform well because they are not driven to succeed for their own sake (Brand and Yu 2010). Their conclusion was misleading because there was an unspecified amount of participants in their study. Authors left out an in-depth explanation of how they came to their conclusion. Their evidence seemed to be weak and should be more developed because of the lack of supporting details they provide in their findings. This study relates to parenting skills influenced by attending college because several of the participants' parents attended college. So they use their expertise to inform their children of what they should or should not do. They implement an aggressive or authoritarian approach.

With the research that I conducted, my sample size was too small to represent the general population. This was due to time constraints and availability of the sample population. I intended to randomly survey 45-50 people. I wanted to survey 25 participants that were college students and 25 participants that were not college students. Although I found some startling statistics and information, it would be incorrect for me to make a statement about the general population with the number of participants that were included in the survey questionnaire I issued. No statistical difference was found upon taking the small sample size into consideration. That is one of the

reasons why my responses were inconsistent. I did not have enough participants to account for any inconsistencies with responses. Because of this I can only make statements regarding the thirty participants that I surveyed and can only compare and contrast within that particular group.

My experiment did not support my hypothesis in that I thought that college students would give more of a “rational” response and non-college students would give more of an “authoritarian” response. Although my hypothesis was partially correct, mainly because the non-college participants did give authoritarian answers on the majority of their responses, college students did not answer rationally on most of their responses. I also broke down and analyzed the comparisons of participants in age groups and their sex. As can be seen there are many conclusions that a prospective researcher could draw from this information.

The “Q” represents the question and the different colors represent the responses as far as authoritarian, rational, and accommodating. The biggest difference is between the male versus female responses. See graphs below tilted Figure one and two:

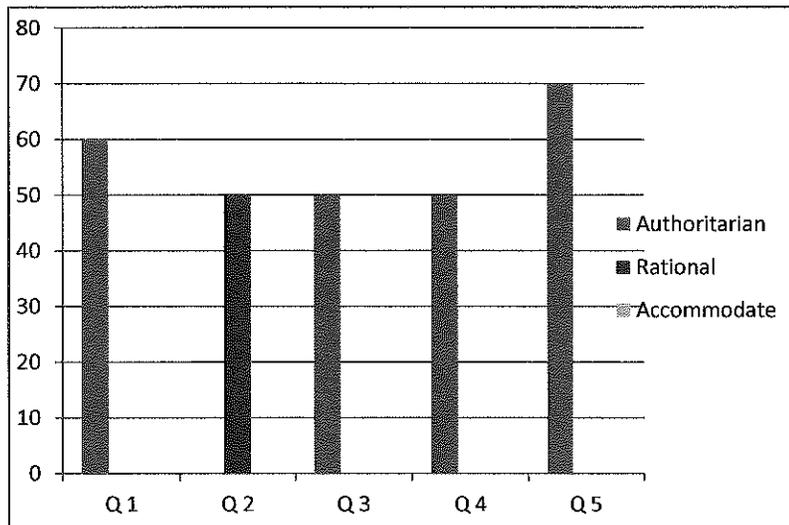


Figure 1

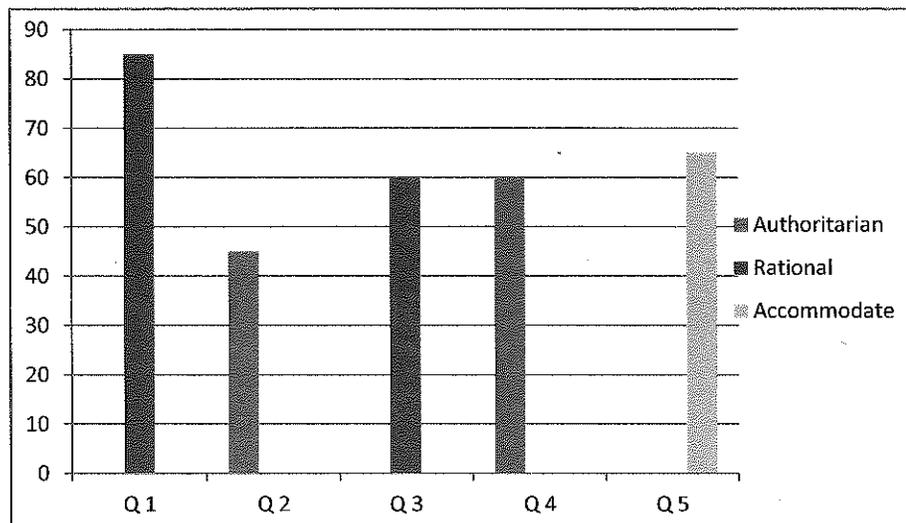


Figure 2

The males answered mostly the authoritarian way of handling situations with their children; they wanted to have command in disciplining their child. The females answered with mixed responses to the questions and scenarios. The common answers for females were authoritarian and rational. After breaking down the age group category I noticed that both age groups (18-22 and 23-26) answered very closely to each other. They both decided they would take the authoritarian approach. The second popular response was the rational way of disciplining one's child. See graphs below titled Figures three and four:

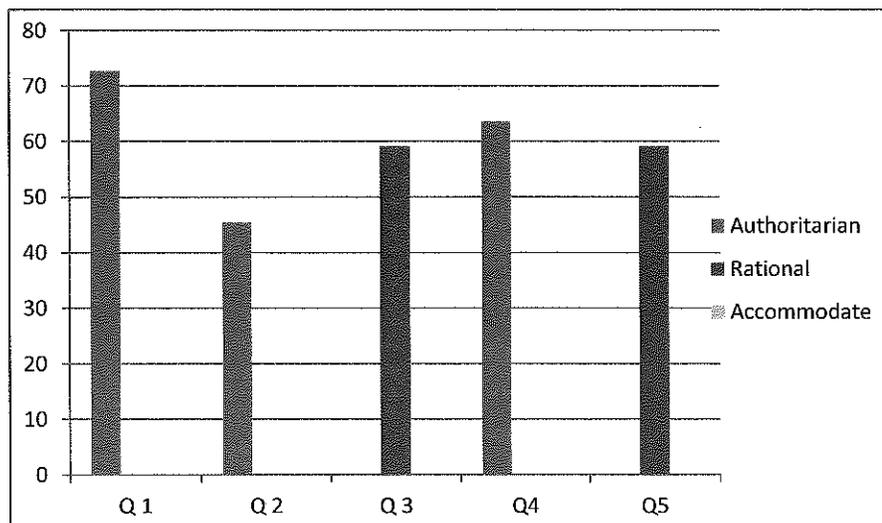


Figure 3

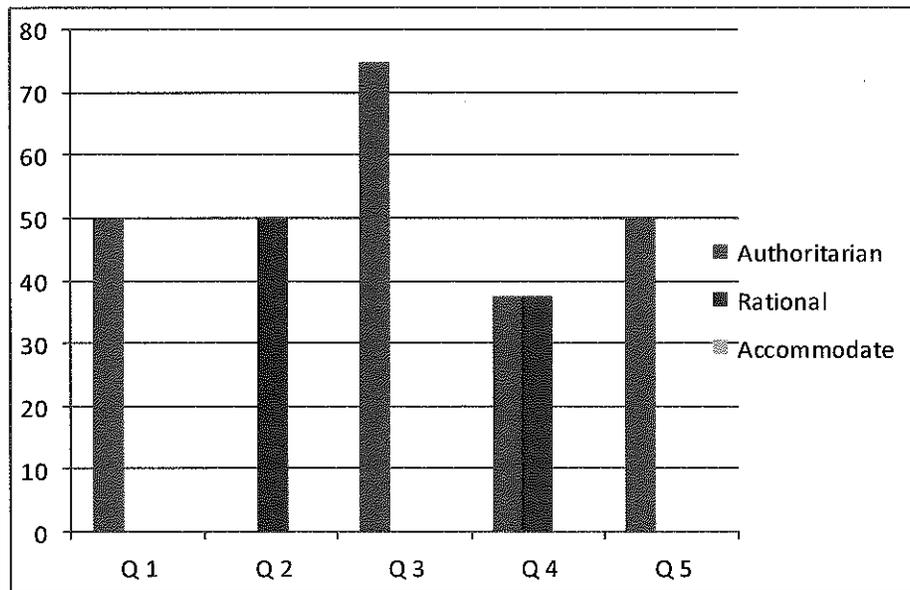


Figure 4

While breaking down the age group bracket I noticed that neither group decided to “accommodate” their children while disciplining them. If they did choose accommodate, it was too small to make any relevant conclusions.

It seems that my thesis statement would be slightly correct because the participants that attended college did answer the survey questions differently than the non-college participants. However, there was not enough data to conclude that college does influence the perception of parenting because of the inadequate amount of participants. Conversely, I managed to answer a question that I did not intend to ask or consider while analyzing the data: college students seem to have a particular perspective of parenting, although we do not know if that is due to college or not. Furthermore, even with my relatively small sample size I can say that college does alter or slightly influences the perception of students because participants answered the questions differently. On some questions college students’ answers were very different from non-college

students'. But, at the end of the survey the most common answer was the authoritarian response.

See graphs titled Figure five and six:

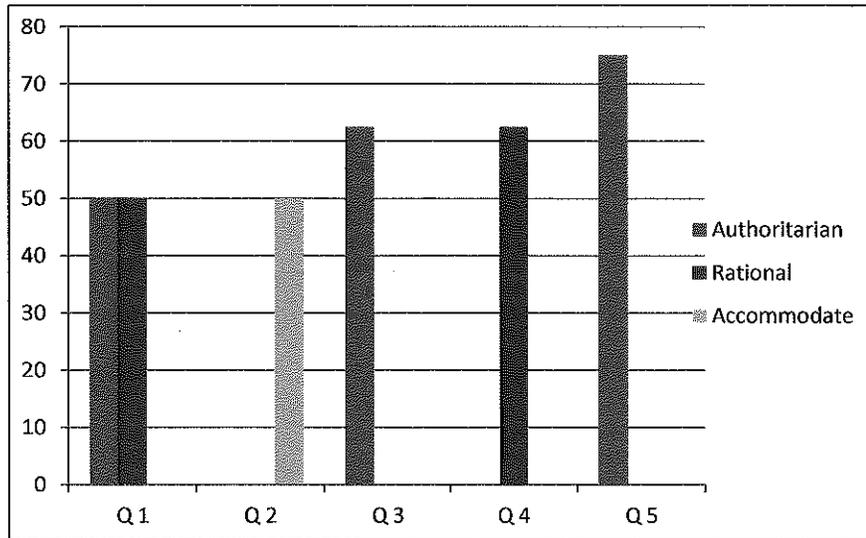


Figure 5

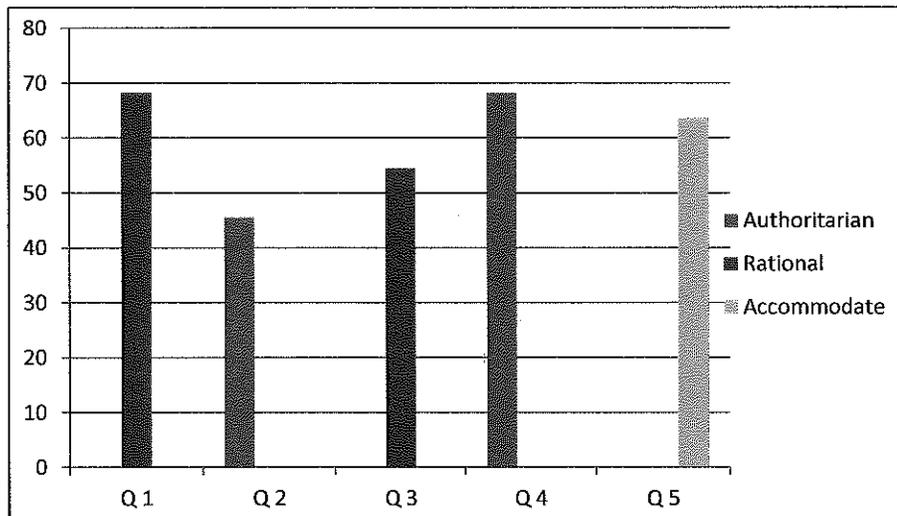


Figure 6

The thesis statement of “attending college influences the perception of parenting more than young adults or students that do not attend college.” is original because it brings about a different perspective on college. When most people think about college, they think about partying and getting a degree; things that the media portrays as a wild, free time, implying on a routine basis that college is a great big party. For some, however, their only concern is that they want to get into a certain profession that requires them to have a degree, or in some cases, several degrees.

Some argue there are lessons and aspects of college that get lost in the broader discussion about what it can do and what it is good for, its current state and future. This experiment looks at college differently and examines characteristics one learns while attending college.

In the future researchers should consider enlarging or increasing the sample size of their participant population. With too small of a sample size one will not be able to make a consensus statement about the general population. A limitation of this experiment was the number of participants. With only thirty participants, the experiment can only be compared to itself. The experiment cannot be compared to researchers that performed similar research because of the sample size.

Future researchers should aim for 200 participants because that would leave more room to make more comparisons. They would be able to compare if how male college students that are between the ages of 18-22 view parenting. The more comparisons and more participants one has in their experiment, the more accurate the experiment is. It would also give researchers enough data and evidence to make a general statement about the general population. Future scholars should also consider asking more survey questions as well to encourage more consistency in answers. With small sample sizes researchers may encounter people answering authoritarian, rationally, and accommodating in the survey; they may not be able to make a statement as far as to say this person "views" parenting from an accommodating standpoint because they do not have enough demographic information and consistency in answers.

In future research, scholars should continue to examine parenting skills and its relation to attending college. Researchers may consider conducting studies that allow participants to get involved in focus groups, surveys, and observations. There are still questions that are not answered on this topic such as: are college students good parents, how do the children of college graduates view their parents, and are college graduates more likely to have more children than adults that did not attend college. Scholars have the opportunity to redefine and improve the

topic by incorporating thorough experiments with limited extraneous variables and attempt to provide the most accurate information possible. Scholars can also look at the nations' college attendance rates and compare them to the amount of college graduates, to better see if students who attend college are obtaining a degree. Lastly, they can conduct experiments by examining freshmen and their lifestyles. They can provide freshmen with a baseline test to see what skills they already have and what they want to gain while in college. This can give those same students a similar test prior to graduation to determine if those students did in fact learn something or gain skills while attending college.

## References

ASHE Higher Education Report (2005). *The Role of Student Characteristics*. 31(1), 21-24.

ASHE Higher Education Report. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Belfield, C. R., & Bailey, T. (2011). The Benefits of Attending Community College: A Review of the Evidence. *Community College Review*, 39(1), 46-68.

doi:10.1177/0091552110395575

Brand, J. E., & Yu, X. (2010). Who Benefits Most from College? Evidence for Negative Selection in Heterogeneous Economic Returns to Higher Education. *American Sociological Review*, 75(2), 273-302. Kelly, B. (2010). Is College Still Worth It? *U.S. News & World Report*, 147(8), 6-12. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Cain, B (2011). Peak Performance Seminar, August 16, 2011.

California State University, (2007). Sample Informed Consent. Retrieved from://

[http://www.csufresno.edu/humansubjects/resources/informed\\_consent.shtml](http://www.csufresno.edu/humansubjects/resources/informed_consent.shtml)

Chang, M., Park, B., & Kim, S. (2009). Parenting Classes, Parenting Behavior, and Child Cognitive Development in Early Head Start: A Longitudinal Model. *School Community Journal*, 19(1), 155-174.

Dietz, J. (2010). The Myth That College And Major Choice Decides Johnny's Future. *College Student Journal*, 44(2), 234-249. Retrieved from EBSCOhost. Fischer, M. J. (2008). Does Campus Diversity Promote Friendship Diversity? A Look at Interracial Friendships in

College. *Social Science Quarterly (Blackwell Publishing Limited)*, 89(3), 631-655.

doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2008.00552.x

Engberg, M., & Wolniak, G. (2010). Examining the Effects of High School Contexts on Postsecondary Enrollment. *Research in Higher Education*, 51(2), 132-153.

doi:10.1007/s11162-009-9150-y

Gilardi, S., & Guglielmetti, C. (2011). University Life of Non-Traditional Students: Engagement Styles and Impact on Attrition. *Journal of Higher Education*, 82(1), 33-53. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Hoyert, M., & D. O'Dell, C. (2009). Goal Orientation And Academic Failure In Traditional And Nontraditional Aged College Students. *College Student Journal*, 43(4), 1052-1061.

Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Kessler, B. (2010). When College is a Means to an End. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, 27(21), 20. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Kim, E., Newton, F. B., Downey, R. G., & Benton, S. L. (2010). Personal Factors Impacting College Student Success: Constructing College Learning Effectiveness Inventory (CLEI). *College Student Journal*, 44(1), 112-125. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Lawrence, S., Harrison, C., & Stone, J. (2009). A Day in the Life of a Male College Athlete: A Public Perception and Qualitative Campus Investigation. *Journal of Sport Management*, 23(5), 591-614. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

- Maguire, K. C., & Kinney, T. A. (2010). When Distance is Problematic: Communication, Coping, and Relational Satisfaction in Female College Students' Long-Distance Dating Relationships. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 38(1), 27-46.
- Martinez-Pons, M. (2002). Parental Influences on Children's Academic Self-Regulatory Development. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(2), 126
- Naik-Polan, A. T., & Budd, K. S. (2008). Stimulus Generalization of Parenting Skills during Parent-Child Interaction Therapy. *Journal Of Early And Intensive Behavior Intervention*, 5(3), 71-92.
- Robb, C. A., & Pinto, M. (2010). College Students And Credit Card Use: An Analysis Of Financially At-Risk Students. *College Student Journal*, 44(4), 823-835. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Roksa, J., & Levey, T. (2010). What Can You Do with That Degree? College Major and Occupational Status of College Graduates over Time. *Social Forces*, 89(2), 389-415. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Taylor, M., & Segrin, C. (2010). Perceptions of Parental Gender Roles and Conflict Styles and Their Association With Young Adults' Relational and Psychological Well-Being. *Communication Research Reports*, 27(3), 230-242. doi:10.1080/08824096.2010.496326