The Effects of Parenting Style on College Drinking Habits
Molly Mescher
Hanover College

Abstract
This study was designed to study the effects of parenting styles on college drinking habits. The purpose was to examine whether students who experienced strict (authoritarian) parenting styles were more likely to have rebellious drinking habits compared to those who experienced less strict parenting styles (authoritative and permissive). Students at a small Midwestern college completed an online survey containing two questionnaires with items concerning the parenting style they experienced growing up along with their current drinking habits. The study concluded that the correlation between authoritarian parenting styles and alcohol consumption was not strong and the overall findings suggest that there is no significant effect of parenting style on college drinking habits.

Introduction
College is a whole new world of freedom and new encounters for students. These young adults are no longer living at home where the rules of their household don’t necessarily apply to them while they are living on campus and parents are not around to enforce rules or prohibit certain behaviors. Students are free to stay up all night, skip class, and party.

One of the most common parts of the college experience is drinking. Individuals may have drunk prior to coming to an institution of higher learning but this is a different story. While the legal drinking age is 21, alcohol is accessible to anyone and it is fairly easy to obtain. People are no longer sided their parents’ liquor cabinet or begging an older sibling to buy them a six-pack. Nowadays, simply going to a house or frat party is an opportunity to drink.

There are several possible factors that may contribute to a student’s alcohol consumption. Peer pressure and high levels of stress as well as personality type and living environments may influence an individual’s drinking habits. But what about parents? While raising their now college aged child, did they ever talk about alcohol? Did they permit drinking under their roof or did they completely prohibit it anywhere? Did the parents, themselves, model healthy drinking behaviors? These indicators may influence an individual’s choice to either drink or abstain as well as how much and often they drink in college. A 2013 study conducted by Rob Turrisi (10) acknowledged that parental behaviors can serve as both protective and risk factors in relation to who and how much they drink in college. A 2013 study conducted by Rob Turrisi (10) acknowledged that parental behaviors can serve as both protective and risk factors in relation to who and how much they drink in college. A 2013 study conducted by Rob Turrisi (10) acknowledged that parental behaviors can serve as both protective and risk factors in relation to who and how much they drink in college.

There are several possible factors that may contribute to a student’s alcohol consumption. Peer pressure and high levels of stress as well as personality type and living environments may influence an individual’s drinking habits. But what about parents? While raising their now college aged child, did they ever talk about alcohol? Did they permit drinking under their roof or did they completely prohibit it anywhere? Did the parents, themselves, model healthy drinking behaviors? These indicators may influence an individual’s choice to either drink or abstain as well as how much and often they drink in college. A 2013 study conducted by Rob Turrisi (10) acknowledged that parental behaviors can serve as both protective and risk factors in relation to who and how much they drink in college.

Participants
Twenty-two students enrolled at a small private liberal arts college in the Midwest were recruited via email to participate in the study. Of the fully completed data collection instruments, there were eight men and twelve women. The participants were 75% White, 10% Black, 10% mixed race/Hispanic, and 5% Asian. Ages ranged from 18 to 22 with the average age being 20.55.

Materials
There was a brief section concerning demographics (six items) and two questionnaires (30 and 12 items) participants completed. Demographics included: age, gender, race/ethnicity, residence (on or off campus), class, and Greek affiliation (if active in any). Upon completing the demographics section, participants were presented an online informed consent form. They were then asked to read the consent form and indicate their consent by clicking on a button labeled “I consent” located toward the bottom of the page.

The alcohol study questionnaire was developed by Bahr, S. & Hoffmann, J. (10) and was based on Baumrind’s (1966) research. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items that asked participants to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with statements about different parenting styles. Each item had a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Procedure
All participants were informed that the study was designed to examine family and college attitudes as well as habits and behavior that occur at school and at home.

Participants were given the following instructions: “The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You will be asked to rate your agreement with statements about different parenting styles. Each item has a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).”

Results
To compute the alcohol consumption composite score, we used Cronbach’s alpha to test the reliability of the twelve questions administered in the alcohol questionnaire. The reliability for the score was .57 and a total of four items were removed. Three scores for each participant were calculated, one for each parenting style and each was graphed on a scatterplot along with the alcohol consumption score (see Figures 1-3). Permission parenting resulted in a negative correlation (r18 = -.160, p = .978) as well as Authoritative parenting (r18 = -.221, p = .349). However, Authoritarian parenting showed no significant correlation at all (r18 = -.007, p = .978). Unfortunately, this study did not support my hypothesis as there was no strong correlation between authoritarian parenting styles and college drinking habits.

Discussion
The results did not support my hypothesis where authoritarian parenting styles would result in rebellious drinking habits, specifically heavy drinking. I was surprised that there was no significant correlation at all when compared to my own personal experience. I assumed that most individuals experiencing strict parenting styles would take advantage of the newfound freedom college provides but obviously, according to this data, that is not always the case. I expected permissive parenting to have a significant correlation as parents practicing this style may have approved of drinking and allowed their children to do so growing up but according to these results, there was actually a slightly negative correlation. Authoritative parenting is thought to be the most effective in preventing risky behavior, such as drinking, later on in life (Bahr & Hoffmann, 10) and these results, too, yielded a slightly negative correlation. My study did support that previous research even though it did not confirm my own suspicions.

There were a few limitations to my research, one being the sample size. With only twenty-two participants, it is difficult to determine if there would be significant links between parenting styles and college drinking habits, even if the sample had been much larger. There was also very little racial diversity.

The amount of questions concerning drinking habits that came from the second questionnaire were also limited and probably not as in-depth as they could have been. As an administration tool but ended up utilizing only eight, it is questionable if the alcohol consumption composite score truly reflected the participants’ actual drinking habits.

Finally, it is possible that participants may have misjudged their own parents’ parenting style. Perhaps an outside observer could more accurately define the actual style used in each household. The author does claim that the questionnaire used to determine Baumrind’s parenting style scores has been frequently cited for it’s clarity and efficacy (Buri, 1991).

Further research could involve larger samples and more diversity as well as looking at different locations and cultures. Perhaps those factors play a role in parenting styles as well as alcohol consumption. I would also recommend using a longer, more in-depth college alcohol survey as that would probably provide more accurate depictions of participants’ drinking habits. I would be curious to see more research conducted concerning these topics.

References