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Creating and Piloting an Instrument to Measure the Relationship between Parenting Style and College Student Grit

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Abstract

Colleges and universities have seen an increase in parent involvement in the lives of college students (Arnett, 2014). Historical shifts in the relationship between parents and institutions of higher education has contributed to the change from student independence to the role of parent as co-educator and partner in student success (Cutright, 2008). Howe and Strauss (2007) identified that millennials, the generation of students on college campuses today, have come to both expect and enjoy parent involvement.

Recognizing that families are involved in the lives of college students, researchers have investigated the relationship between parenting style and student success variables such as academic achievement (DeDonno & Fagan, 2013; Miller & Speirs Neumeister, 2017; Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, 2009), wellness (Baldwin, McIntyre, & Hardaway, 2007; Barton & Hirsch, 2016; Coccia & Darling, 2017), and transition (Love & Thomas, 2014). Recent studies (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) have focused on the concept of grit and its relation to college student success; however, little research investigates the relationship between parenting style and college student grit.

The purpose of this investigation was to create and pilot an instrument to be used for a larger study to investigate if a relationship existed between college student grit (GRIT-S, Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and perceived parenting style (PAQ, Buri, 1991). Participants included incoming traditional-aged, undergraduate students at a four-year private institution in New England. Data collection was completed through an online survey that assessed demographic information, grit, and parenting style.

The resulting actions filled a gap in the literature indicating that there is a relationship between parenting style and college student grit. The study may help college administrators understand how the parenting styles of the students who enroll at their campuses may relate to how students approach academic and career goals. The study may also help K-12 administrators structure conversations and programming on how parents can support their children for passion and perseverance towards long-term goals.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to create and pilot an instrument to be used for a larger study investigating if a relationship between parenting style and college student grit exists. The procedures explained in this paper include the identification of a gap in the literature, the creation, piloting, and modification of the instrument.

Instrument – First Iteration

After a literature review on parenting and student success variables, a gap arose on the investigation of relationships between a student's experienced parenting style and grit. A quantitative instrument was created to survey respondents about grit and parenting style. The instrument pilot included five demographic questions: anticipated year of graduation, class year, college of study, gender, and parenting unit. Based on the response regarding parent unit, the survey branched to questions about grit and parenting style.

The survey included items on Duckworth and Quinn's (2009) Short-S Grit Scale. The eight items ask respondents to select statements measuring a person's self-interpretation of passion and perseverance for long-term goals. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) used Cronbach's Alpha and reported an internal consistency of alphas ranging from .73 to .83 across four samples in their study. Participants respond to statements addressing passion and perseverance ranging from *not like me at all* (1) to *very much like me* (5).

The survey included all 30 items per parent in Buri's (1991) Parent Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) which measures Baumrind's (1971, 1991) parenting style in three prototypes: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. Respondents answer statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The instrument produces six scores for each participant: father and mother's permissiveness, authoritarianism,

and authoritativeness. Scores per variable range from 10 – 50; “the higher the score, the greater the appraised level of the parent authority prototype measured” (Buri, 1991, p. 112). Buri (1991) found Cronbach alphas for each scale: .74 for father’s permissiveness, .87 for father’s authoritarianism, .85 for father’s authoritativeness, .75 for mother’s permissiveness, .85 for mother’s authoritarianism, and .82 for mother’s authoritativeness.

A total of 12 survey responses were collected. Some felt the survey was simple and experienced no issues; others felt questions were confusing or redundant and the survey was too long in the parenting style section. Respondents indicated it took anywhere from five to 20 minutes to complete. The researcher found a shorter version of the PAQ. Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Kazem, Alzubiadi, and Al-Bahrani (2011) developed and validated a shorter scale based on Buri’s (1991) PAQ. They found the deletion of 10 questions from Buri’s (1991) instrument produced concurrent validity with “an identical pattern of correlations for the father and the mother parenting styles: Permissiveness = .84, authoritarianism = .94, and authoritativeness = .94” (Alkharusi et al., 2011). The researcher created a table of the 20 original questions, the parenting style associated with the question, the essence of the question, and then suggestions to reword for modern-day; the modernized questions were included in the next pilot (Appendix A).

Instrument – Second Iteration

The second version of the instrument was distributed collecting 32 responses. The same grit questions were asked. It included six updated demographic questions asking: 1) freshman, sophomore, junior, senior; 2) gender, 3) hometown, state, and zip code growing up; 4) racial background 5) did either of your parents graduate from college: yes, no, I don’t know: and 6) I grew up with one parent/guardian, I grew up with two parents/guardians, I grew up with no parents/guardians. The updated survey included fewer and more modernized PAQ questions

(Appendix A), and a question asking the respondent to identify parent's gender, as well as a check-box section for respondents to click synonyms related to the parent. The rearranged instrument asked grit questions first to create less branching.

Feedback on this version was more positive compared with the split from the first version of the instrument. Respondent times became shorter and ranged from four minutes to 15 minutes. Some respondents felt uneasy sharing their zip code questioning why it was necessary. While less questions were associated with parenting style, some felt the survey still asked redundant parenting questions. Most didn't enjoy the section asking respondents to select synonyms related to their parent; the feedback indicated the definitions were subjective and that there were more 'negative' synonyms listed than positive. Respondents suggested a change to the five-labeled options in the grit scale: *Not like me at all*, *not much like me*, *somewhat like me*, *mostly like me*, and *very much like me* and instead offer a scale with the two extreme options and non-labeled bubble options in the middle. These respondents felt the language used in the five labels wasn't different enough so by creating a five-point scale with only the extreme labels, better responses may arise. Multiple respondents found the question "setbacks don't discourage me" to be a double-negative and confusing. After reviewing this feedback against the instrument, it was identified that the second portion of this statement was left off by accident which read "I don't give up easily." The next pilot version included "I don't give up easily."

Instrument – Third Iteration

A third version of the instrument was created. The grit question associated with setbacks was updated. The scale of each question associated with grit went from a five-point scale from *not like me at all* (1) to *very much like me* (5) with no word label for bubble 2, 3, and 4. The

demographic questions about class year, gender, racial background, parent education and parent unit were kept with the removal of zip code.

The parent/guardian synonym section was removed completely and replaced with one question that asks the respondent to select the parenting style definition - without the word labeling the definition - that most closely resembles the description of that parent/guardian. SPSS scale reliability analysis was used to determine what questions to keep and eliminate. Four questions per parenting style were kept equaling 12 questions per parent/guardian with a reliability score of .94 for authoritativeness, .72 for authoritarianism, and .71 for permissiveness.

The third iteration of the instrument received 34 responses. Respondents felt the survey took little time to complete and questions were clear and concise. The feedback on this pilot helped the researcher confirm the plan to use these questions on the final instrument. The final instrument was reduced to 39 questions from the original instrument which included 73 questions. The final instrument included eight grit questions, five demographic questions, and 13 parenting questions per parent. Pending conversation in this roundtable, this instrument will most likely be used in dissertation research.

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Appendix A

Parent Authority Questionnaire Modernized Questions

	Original Question on Short PAQ	Style	Essence of Statement	Reworded Statement for Modern Consumption
1	Once family policy had been established, my father/mother discussed the reasoning behind the policy with the children.	Authoritative	Parents explained policies to children.	When my parent/guardian established policies, the reason behind the policy was explained.*
2	My father/mother directed the activities and decisions of the children through reasoning and discipline.	Authoritative	Parents directed child experiences through reason and discipline.	My parent/guardian used reason and discipline to direct my activities and decisions.*
3	As the children in my family were growing up, my father/mother consistently gave us direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.	Authoritative	Parents were rational and objective in giving direction and guidance to their children.	My parent/guardian consistently gave me direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.*
4	My father/mother had clear standards of behavior for the children in our home, but he/she was willing to adjust those standards to the needs of each of the individual children in the family.	Authoritative	Clear standards were established, but those standards were adjustable depending on individual child needs	My parent/guardian had clear behavior standards but would adjust these standards to my individual needs.*

5	My father/mother gave me direction for my behavior and activities as I was growing up and he/she expected me to follow his/her direction, but he/she was always willing to listen to my concerns and to discuss that direction with me.	Authoritative	Parent gave guidance and wanted child to follow but listened and discussed when child had concerns about behavior/direction	My parent/guardian gave direction for my behavior and activities that I was expected to follow but was always willing to listen to my concerns and discuss them with me.
6	As I was growing up, my father/mother gave me clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but he/she was also understanding when I disagreed with him/her.	Authoritative	Parent gave clear direction for behaviors and activities but understood when child disagreed with parent directions	My parent/guardian gave me clear direction for my behavior and activities but also understood when I disagreed.
7	As I was growing up, if my father/mother made a decision in the family that hurt me, he/she was willing to discuss that decision with me and to admit it if he/she had made a mistake.	Authoritative	Parent made decisions but would admit if the decision was harmful.	If my parent/guardian made a decision that hurt me, my parent was willing to talk about the decision and admit if the decision was a mistake.
8	Even if his/her children didn't agree with him/her, my father/mother felt that it was for our	Authoritarian	Parent thought kid should listen to parent even if the kid doesn't agree	My parent/guardian felt it was for my own good to follow what s/he thought was right even if I didn't agree.*

	own good if we were forced to conform to what he/she thought was right.			
9	Whenever my father/mother told me to do something as I was growing up, he/she expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions.	Authoritarian	Parent expected kids to listen and obey directions without question.	When my parent/guardian told me to do something, s/he expected me to do it immediately without asking questions.*
10	My father/mother has always felt that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to.	Authoritarian	Parent feels they should use force to get children to behave.	My parent/guardian felt force should be used to get me to behave the way I was supposed to.*
11	My father/mother felt that wise parents should teach their children early who is the boss in the family.	Authoritarian	Parent felt kids should know who is boss.	My parent/guardian believed that smart parents teach their kids early who is boss.
12	As I was growing up, my father/mother would get very upset if I tried to disagree with him/her.	Authoritarian	Parent gets mad if kid disagrees.	My parent/guardian got upset if I disagreed with him/her.
13	As I was growing up, my father/mother let me know what behavior he/she expected of me,	Authoritarian	Parent made expectations clear and punished if expectations weren't met.	My parent/guardian had behavior expectations and punished me if I didn't follow them.*

	and if I didn't meet those expectations, he/she punished me.			
14	My father/mother has always felt that most problems in society would be solved if parents strictly and forcibly dealt with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to.	Authoritarian	Parents think society would be better if kids were dealt with forcibly.	My parent/guardian felt society would be better if children who misbehaved were dealt with strictly and forcibly by their parents.
15	My father/mother has always felt that children need to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want.	Permissive	Parent wants child to make up their own minds	My parent/guardian let me make my own decisions even if my decision did not agree with what my parent wanted.
16	As I was growing up, my father/mother did not feel that I needed to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority has established them.	Permissive	Parent felt blindly following authority is not necessary.	My parent/guardian felt I did not need to follow rules just because someone in authority established them.*
17	As I was growing up, my father/mother seldom gave me	Permissive	Parent didn't give expectations for behavior	My parent/guardian rarely gave expectations for my behavior.

	expectations and guidelines for my behavior.			
18	My father/mother feels that most problems in society would be solved if parents did not restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires.	Permissive	Parents feel society would be better if parent didn't restrict their children.	My parent/guardian felt society would be better if all parents did not restrict their children's behaviors or activities. *
19	My father/mother did not view herself as responsible for directing and guiding my behavior as I was growing up.	Permissive	Parent did not feel responsible for guiding child behavior	My parent/guardian did not feel responsible for directing and guiding my behavior.*
20	My father/mother did not direct the behaviors, activities, and desires of the children in the family.	Permissive	Parent did not direct child behavior.	My parent/guardian did not give me direction on my behaviors or activities. *

*Questions used on the final instrument