

# A Comparative Study of Normative Parental Attitudes in Contemporary Students in Post Secondary Education

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## ***Abstract***

This study sought to answer two questions: 1) Is it possible to identify college students with attitudes that might lead to inadequate parenting, and 2) Are the students with these attitudes related to any particular set of demographic characteristics? The major hypothesis stated: It is not possible to identify college students with inadequate attitudes toward parenting. The secondary hypotheses stated: students with different demographic backgrounds will have no differences in attitudes toward parenting. The demographic factors included: age, sex, parenting status, religious preference, academic major, ethnic background and socio-economic background.

### ***Conclusions***

The Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI), developed by Stephen Bavolek, was sent to all 2,000 of the freshmen and senior students at the University of Denver. The student scores were totaled to give a total score of 32 to 160 (by giving a numerical value of 1 to all Strongly Agree answers and a value of 5 to all Strongly Disagree answers). A panel of 12 experts was asked to set a cut-off score below which intervention would be necessary. That score was 91, and 126 of the 761 students, fell below that score. Student scores were also analyzed according to the various items within each construct (i.e., Construct A: Inappropriate parental expectations of the child; Construct B: Inability of parent to be empathically aware of the child's needs; Construct C: Strong parental belief in the value of punishment, and Construct D: Role reversal.)

The AAPI did allow the study to make the distinction between college students with attitudes which might lead to inadequate parenting behavior and college students with attitudes which might lead to adequate parenting behavior. Freshmen scored lower (118) than seniors (121) which was significant at the  $p < .02$  level. The significant demographic variables were: age, class, sex, marital status, race and religion. Of the 16 students falling below the expert cut-off score of 91, ten students were freshmen, unmarried, males, one caring for a child now and only one non-white. The predominant religious preference was Catholicism and caring for a child now and the academic majors included biological science, business, undecided major, and music and speech communication. Six of the students were seniors, two females and four males, unmarried and with no children. Income levels were spread across the entire range from \$6,000 to over \$40,000. The demographic factors were grouped according to the four constructs. With the exception of sex and religious preference, the differences were more significant toward the Constructs C and D.

The implications of this study showed that the AAPI has a potential for being used as a screening device with college students. The test did identify certain college students showing inappropriate attitudes towards parenting and was able to discriminate the four areas of parenting which might improve with classroom work, individual counseling or therapy.