This study examined the relationship between parental perceptions and child maltreatment indicators as moderated by plan complexity. One hundred three parents in the Athens, GA area completed questionnaires measuring parental competence, trait verbal aggressiveness, social support, plan complexity, and likelihood to maltreat. Results indicated a significant impact for the moderation of plan complexity between perceived parental competence and corporal punishment as well as power independence. Implications for planning theory as well as suggestions for a curriculum in constructive management of child difficulty are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Child Maltreatment, Parental Competence, Plan Complexity, Social Support, Trait Verbal Aggressiveness
UNDERSTANDING CHILD MALTREATMENT FROM A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF PLANNING PROCESSES

by

AMANDA L. STRICKLAND

A.B., University of Georgia, 2008

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2011
UNDERSTANDING CHILD MALTREATMENT FROM A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF PLANNING PROCESSES

by

AMANDA L. STRICKLAND

Major Professor:       Jennifer A. Samp
Committee:             Tina M. Harris
                       Jennifer L. Monahan

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2011
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Milton and Hilda, for giving me the support and encouragement to accomplish my goals; their enduring love and faith in me transpired even when I doubted myself.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all persons who helped me in completing this thesis. To start, my sister Allison: My heart fills with joy when our laughter rings loudly. Our sisterly bond is uniquely great! I hope you always know how much I love and appreciate you.

Next, I would like to thank my colleagues and friends at the University of Georgia. To Christin: Thank you for your uncanny support! Your positive spirit and glowing energy is unbeatable. To Emily: Words cannot express how much I appreciate you as a person and as a friend. It is an understatement to say that your support is unfaltering. I will always cherish you as a dear friend and I hope to beat you in Scrabble one day. To Shawna: You are one of a kind. Your ability to forgo judgment provides a unique type of support that only the kindest person can offer. You contribute thoughtful advice and help me in processing concepts related to academic and personal issues. Thank you! To Dr. Hale: I did not expect to find a mentor and a friend as enlightening as you so early in my life. Your genuine positive regard for and belief in me is inspiring. I would not have completed this project without your insight and friendship. Finally, I would like to give special thanks to my thesis committee: Dr. Tina M. Harris, Dr. Jennifer L. Monahan, and Dr. Jennifer A. Samp. I thank you for pushing me to be a better student, scholar, and individual. To Dr. Samp: I have worked with you since my second year as an undergraduate student at UGA. You have significantly impacted my collegiate experience and understanding of communication studies. In advancing me as a professional, you challenged me in necessary ways. I appreciate your patience and guidance in forcing me to think critically about research!

My acknowledgements would not be complete without recognizing my friends beyond those at UGA. To Allen, Danny, Drew, Gina, Jennifer, Jenny, Laura, Luke, Mollie, Rahul,
Sarah, and Whitney: Thank you for your love and support! I am honored to have you as friends! You helped me relieve tension associated with endless hours of work, and you reminded me that life exists beyond the office. You are my core and you keep me strong!

Most importantly, I acknowledge Grace Arthur, Pat Berger, Mary Hood [Prevent Child Abuse Athens; (PCAA)], Beverly Grant [Athens Day Reporting Center; (ADRC)] and Pat Nielsen [Full Bloom Parenting Center; (FBPC)] for welcoming my research in their community organizations! This project would not have been possible without your encouragement and assistance. Thank you! Lastly, I extend sincere gratitude to the parents of this study for their willingness to participate in research that aims to advance the exploration of thoughts related to management of child difficulty. My experience with the parents of this study through PCAA, ADRC, and FBPC reinforced my compassion for working with parent populations to advance knowledge in parental attributes that positively impact parent-child interaction.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PLANS AND PLANNING: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS AND</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHILD MALTREATMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child Maltreatment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning Processes and Parenting Practices</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>METHOD</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>ANALYSES AND RESULTS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preliminary Analyses</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tests of Hypotheses</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant Indicators of Planning</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions and Child Maltreatment Indicators</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Correlations Between Independent and Dependent Variables</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hierarchical Linear Regression of Parental Competence on Plan Complexity</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Inappropriate Expectations for Parental Competence</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Empathy for Parental Competence</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Corporal Punishment for Parental Competence</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Significant Moderation Effects on Corporal Punishment for Parental Competence</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Role Reversal for Parental Competence</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Power Independence for Parental Competence</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Significant Moderation Effects on Power Independence for Parental Competence</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hierarchical Linear Regression of Trait Verbal Aggressiveness on Plan Complexity</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Inappropriate Expectations for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Empathy for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Corporal Punishment for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14: Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Role Reversal for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness

Table 15: Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Power Independence for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness

Table 16: Hierarchical Linear Regression of Social Support on Plan Complexity

Table 17: Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Inappropriate Expectation for Social Support

Table 18: Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Empathy for Social Support

Table 19: Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Corporal Punishment for Social Support

Table 20: Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Role Reversal for Social Support

Table 21: Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Power Independence for Social Support
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Parenting is a role often filled with advantages such as satisfaction, happiness, and a sense of accomplishment. However, parenting is often perceived as wearisome, challenging, and stressful, leaving troubled parents and helpless children in potentially harmful environments. A lack of skills or knowledge about parenting, compounded with child maltreatment risk factors, may transform a satisfactory parent into an abusive or neglectful parent when faced with a child’s negative, unplanned, and/or frustrating behavior (Carter & Myers, 2007; Gaudin, Polansky, Kilpatrick, Shilton, 1996).

Child maltreatment occurs at alarming rates in the United States. According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010), 702,000 children experienced child maltreatment in 2009. Of these cases, 78.3% were associated with neglect, 17.8% were associated with physical abuse, 9.5% were associated with sexual abuse, and 7.6% were associated with psychological abuse. The most tragic, irreparable repercussion of child maltreatment is death. There were an estimated 1,770 child fatalities in 2009, four-fifths (80.8%) of which were younger than four years of age (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Broadly construed, child maltreatment refers to neglect and abuse directed toward a child. The types of maltreatment are often further defined into four categories: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. While the definitions of the behaviors within each subcategory differ depending on the social norms about appropriate childrearing (see Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005), children who can be considered as maltreated suffer
from immediate harm at the time of infliction, as well as later in life with psychological and behavioral problems including depression (e.g., Harkness, Bruce, & Lumley, 2006), low self-esteem (e.g., Liem & Boudewyn, 1999), delinquency, and low academic performance (e.g., Eckenrode, Laird, & Doris, 1993).

Psychologists and sociologists have examined familial and individual factors associated with an increased likelihood of child maltreatment, such as parental predispositions to maltreat (e.g., Thompson, Christiansen, Jackson, Wyatt, Coleman, Peterson, Wilcox, & Buckendahl, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1990), psychological and behavioral outcomes of maltreatment (e.g., Johnson, Kotch, Catellier, Winsor, Dufort, Hunter, & Amaya-Jackson, 2002), and circumstances under which maltreatment is likely to occur (e.g., Belsky, 1993; Drake & Pandy, 1996). Communication scholars have considered the influence of communication behaviors in the parent-child relationship on outcomes and practices related to child maltreatment (e.g., Morgan & Wilson, 2005; Wilson, 2000; Wilson, Hayes, Bylund, Rack, Herman, 2006; Wilson, Morgan, Hayes, Bylund, Herman, 2004; Wilson, Rack, Shi, Norris, 2008; Wilson & Whipple, 1995). For instance, researchers have examined how child maltreatment affects later life social competency and loneliness (e.g., LaPierre, Maloney, Pears, & Cornetto, 2006) as well as how to identify children of neglect and abuse through verbal and nonverbal behaviors (e.g., Vissing, Straus, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991). However, communication research has not empirically considered how parents’ thoughts about how to manage a child’s behavior influence communicative choices with that child. In particular, research has not examined the link between parental characteristics associated with an increased child abuse risk and parental thoughts about how to communicatively manage child misbehavior.
Accordingly, the focus of this project is to investigate the influence of parental perceptions and communication-related processes on a parent’s propensity to maltreat a child. Wilson (2000) suggested that an examination of how parents plan for child behavior may help to provide insight into the relationship between parent-child interaction and physically abusive familial environments. In particular, Wilson argued that compared to nonabusive parents, abusive parents may not possess clear or detailed plans about how to handle child misbehavior before it occurs. However, to date a study has yet to be conducted that examines the association of plan complexity and child maltreatment. Thus, this project seeks to advance the study of child maltreatment by applying principles of planning theory to a non-student sample potentially at a higher risk for child abuse and neglect due to demographic and situational characteristics. To begin, Chapter 2 reviews prior research on child maltreatment processes and then considers how planning processes may serve as an explanatory mechanism related to predicting a parent’s likelihood to maltreat. I then turn to argue that a consideration of three parenting-related perceptions is important in an examination of planning and the potential to maltreat: parental competence, trait verbal aggressiveness, and social support. Predictions linking these variables to planning and the likelihood of child maltreatment are advanced. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in this study and Chapter 4 follows with a description of the analyses and results. Chapter 5 reviews the results, limitations, and implications of this study with a focus on the particular ways in which the results may influence a heightened understanding of the impact of parental perceptions and planning on the use of disciplinary behavior and the potential for child maltreatment.
CHAPTER 2

PLANS AND PLANNING: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS AND CHILDMALTREATMENT

Chapter 1 identified that child maltreatment is a significant social problem that has recently drawn the attention of communication scholars. In this chapter, I advance a model that suggests the propensity to engage in child abuse or child neglect is in part associated with a parent’s capability to plan for how to manage difficult child behaviors. In particular, I argue that the influence of perceived parenting competence, trait verbal aggressiveness, and perceived social support on the likelihood of child maltreatment may be moderated by a parent’s ability to generate a variety and diversity of plans for managing a child’s behavior. To introduce this model, I first turn to the phenomenon of child maltreatment.

Child Maltreatment

In a colloquial sense, child maltreatment is challenging to discuss because it is difficult for most individuals to imagine harming a child. In an academic sense, child maltreatment is often avoided due to the difficulty associated with defining and assessing the phenomenon. No matter the context in which child maltreatment is explored, most agree child maltreatment is not part of a positive family environment.

The family environment and parenting behaviors. Positive familial environments are characterized by nurturing caregivers who seek to adequately meet the needs of a child. Basic child needs include commodities such as food, shelter, education, or medicine. Another basic child need is a healthy, nurturing environment where a child feels loved, supported, and cared for. A nurturing and supportive relationship between a parent and child is important for healthy
child growth and development, as it promotes healthy brain growth and advance good socio-emotional development (English, Thompson, Graham, & Briggs, 2005).

Appropriate child rearing methods that are characteristic of a healthy environment transition across time, thus the idea of a positive environment is adaptive. For example, in previous decades it was appropriate and common to discipline children with corporal punishment (e.g., spanking, slapping, pinching, shaking). Although approximately 94% of parents still discipline their child(ren) using forms of corporal punishment (Straus & Paschall, 2009), research consistently reports that corporal punishment negatively impacts a child’s adjustment through developmental stages (e.g., Rohner, Bourque, Elordi, 1996; Whiteside-Mansell, Bradley, & McKelvey, 2009). This harsh disciplinary technique is associated with inhibited cognitive ability in children (Straus & Paschall, 2009) as well as with a parent’s potential to abuse or neglect a child (e.g., Crouch & Behl, 2001).

Despite the fluctuation in the definition of positive parenting behaviors, prior research indicates that the use of negative parenting behaviors is representative of abusive parents, far more than for nonabusive parents (Kerr, Lopez, Olson, & Sameroff, 2003; Larzelere, Schneider, Larson, & Pike, 1996; Trickett & Kuczynski, 1986). Based on a review of prior research, Wilson and Whipple (1995) observed that abusive parents engage in negative parenting behaviors more frequently, more intensely, and for longer periods of time compared to nonabusive peers. For example, in response to child misbehavior, abusive parents resort to physical punishment more often and more quickly than nonabusive parents who tend to employ verbal requests or reasoning (see Milner & Chilamkurti, 1991). Whipple and Webster-Stratton (1991) reported that abusive parents recall spanking their child more often than nonabusive parents. Further, Dolz, Cerezo, and Milner’s (1997) study of mother-child interactional patterns in parents at high- and low-risk
for abuse found that high-risk mothers display behaviors observed more in physically abusive mothers than nonabusive mothers. Also, Trickett and Kuczynski (1986) observed that abusive mothers reported using severe forms of physical discipline (e.g., striking with an object or hitting in the face) at least once over a five-day reporting period. It is important to note that most research compares abusive and nonabusive parents based on physical discipline behaviors. A parent’s use of physical discipline typically includes parenting behaviors that cause pain to a child (e.g., pinching, slapping, spanking, or the like)\(^1\). However, it is likely that child maltreatment also occurs psychologically, through verbal put-downs, insults, and degradation (Morgan & Wilson, 2005).

No matter what the particular form, the incidence of maltreatment has been linked to demographic and situational risk factors such as poor childhood experiences, a lack of parenting skills, unrealistic expectations, parental/caregiver immaturity, frequent crises, social isolation, drug or alcohol problems, and mental illness (Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Salzinger, 1998). A prevalent risk factor linked to child maltreatment, but not directly noted by most intervention programs, is poverty. Researchers note that poverty does not cause a parent to neglect or abuse a child. Rather, the stressors associated with an impoverished lifestyle are associated with a higher risk of child maltreatment. Stressors correlated with poverty include heightened parental stress, poor health, single parenting, early child bearing, and residence in a dangerous neighborhood (Carter & Myers, 2007; Eamon, 2001; Freisthler, 2004; Kotch, Browne, Ringwalt, Stewart, Ruina, Holt, Lowman, & Jung, 1995).

\(^1\) Notably, definitions of physical discipline vary from study to study. It is difficult to classify types of parents (i.e., abusive or nonabusive) based upon use of physical discipline primarily because most parents employ corporal punishment (Wilson & Whipple, 1995).
Some of the poverty-related parental stressors may be associated with a lack of resources such as transportation, employment, and insurance (Scannapieco & Connell-Clarrick, 2005). For example, a parent may not be able to afford an appropriate caretaker when he or she needs to be away from home. In turn, this parent might result to an inexperienced sibling caretaker or an overwhelmed neighbor caretaker, or the parent may leave a child unattended. Further, a low educational level paired with being a young parent is common in poverty-affected persons and may contribute to a lack of child-related knowledge including behaviors appropriate for particular developmental stages. Thus, a parent may react to a child’s misbehavior with neglect or abuse out of a lack of awareness of the developmental appropriateness of the child’s behavior. Lastly, parents living in poverty may experience a lack of support from friends and family members; a mother or family may feel isolated and experience emotional stress and depression (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005). These individuals may feel stigmatized and/or unsupported in society. While there are more examples, the connection between situational stressors and parenting choices illustrated above suggest that child maltreatment is not necessarily the result of malicious intent, but rather reflective of the parent’s lack of perceived options about how to parent a child.

I argue that the stressors associated with a low income environment may also influence the degree to which parents are aware of, and can anticipate, utilizing a variety of positive parenting behaviors in response to a child’s problematic behavior. Specifically, when met with child resistance, I believe that a parent’s ability to plan for managing child misbehavior may be confounded by heightened stress levels. For example, a parent concerned with transportation to and from work, finding a caretaker while at work, as well as preparing meals for his or her children may have less time and energy to generate plans for handling child misbehavior;
however, the role of plans and planning in parent-child interactions deemed difficult may further explain the relationships between particular parental characteristics (e.g., income) and an individual’s likelihood to maltreat. Accordingly, I now turn to consider research on planning processes as a mean to link planning to parental perceptions and the likelihood of child maltreatment.

**Planning Processes and Parenting Practices**

Message production scholars have identified the process of planning as an important element in explaining why and how individuals communicate in a particular manner during social interaction (see Samp, 2009 for a review). Research on plans and planning operates under the assumption that individuals are purposeful and goal-directed in their communication with others. *Goals* are future states of affairs that we hope to achieve or maintain through talk (Wilson, 1997). In order to achieve such goals we utilize *plans*, which are cognitive representations of step-by-step action sequences that may be enacted to attain a particular goal (Berger, 1997a; Dillard, 2004; Wilson, 2000). In comparison, *planning* is the process that produces the plan sequence. In other words, during the planning process an individual constructs and selects a course of action aimed to attain a particular goal. The goals pursued via plans may reflect short or long-term desires, or may reflect typical or unique concerns. Nonetheless, no matter what the particular goal, it is assumed that individuals engage in planning as a means to achieve a goal (Berger, 1997a; Dillard 2004).

Goal attainment, by way of plans and planning, is achieved through interaction (Dillard, 2004). Research typically examines an individual’s ability to employ verbal and nonverbal skills while trying to attain a goal in an effort to explore the effects of plans and planning on plan performance. Berger (1994; 1997a) argued that better plan performance is associated with a
higher likelihood of goal attainment. His work has largely focused on the notion of action fluidity, as defined by a reduced frequency and duration of vocalized pauses and conversational false starts. While particular conversational behaviors are not the focus of this investigation, research outside of the communication discipline suggests that planning impacts individuals’ typical approach to goal pursuit (Emmons, 1997).

Goals, plans, and planning are important to consider in regard to managing child difficulty. Indeed, Wilson (2000) suggested that a parent met with child resistance may possess a variety of goals about how to manage the situation. For example, a parent may focus on the goal of persuading a child to stop misbehaving. As well, a parent may emphasize the enforcement of a disciplinary style he or she believes will teach his or her child a lesson and as a result prevent the behavior from reoccurring. Such goals may be independent or of dual concern. While it is generally assumed that parents will have some sort of goal in response to child misbehavior, research suggests that the features of a parent’s plans may vary (Wilson, 2000). In particular, the nature of a parent’s plans may differ according to how detailed, or complex, they are. I now turn to explore the nature of plan complexity.

**Plan complexity.** Plan complexity refers to the detail or contingencies in a communication plan. Plan detail reflects the number of steps in a plan, and if the steps are representative of abstract or concrete actions. Detailed plans with concrete actions are more complex than less detailed and more abstract plans (Berger, 1988; 1997a; Berger & Bell, 1988). For example, a parent faced with a child who does not want to hold his or her hand while crossing a street may enact the following detailed plan sequence: (1) I will explain to my child that it is important to hold my hand to ensure safety (i.e., that you won’t be hit by an oncoming car); (2) if my son/daughter still resists compliance, I will tell him/her that we will not cross the
street until he/she holds my hand; (3) if my son/daughter still resists compliance, I will tell him/her that timeout punishment will be a consequence of continued noncompliance; and (4) as a last resort, I will pick up my son/daughter and carry him/her across the street and require timeout punishment when we return home. In contrast, another parent may enact the following less detailed and more abstract plan in response to child difficulty while trying to cross a street: (1) I will tell my child that he/she must hold my hand; (2) if my son/daughter does not hold my hand, I will yank my child by the arm and drag him/her across the street; and, (3) I will spank my child for not complying to my demand. Previous research consistently reports that plan detail is positively associated with plan effectiveness (Berger, 1988; Cegala & Waldron, 1992; Edgar, Fitzpatrick, & Freimuth, 1992; Waldron & Applegate, 1994). I argue that a parent’s ability to generate more detailed plans may be associated with more effective and positive parenting behaviors, which would suggest less potential to maltreat.

Plan complexity has also been defined as the number of contingent plans that reflect if-then actions to be utilized in the event of plan failure (Berger, 1997a; Berger & Bell, 1988). For example, a parent faced with a child who does not accept the offer of ice cream for good behavior may instead suggest other alternatives to get the child to comply, such as a toy or game. It is important to note that plans can be complex in terms of detail or contingency, such that detailed plans may or may not include contingent actions and vice versa (Berger, 1997b).

Prior research implies that a lack of plan contingencies in the face of plan failure may lead a parent to resort to power-assertion tactics (e.g., yelling, threatening, slapping,spanking, etc.) that are characteristic of maltreating parents (Wilson, 2002). However, prior research has found limited support for the positive effects of plan complexity, defined as plan contingency. Knowlton and Berger (1997) observed a curvilinear relationship between the number of
contingent plans and action fluidity, such that participants who prepared a few alternative plans in advance of failing to attain his or her goal experienced a small cognitive load than participants who prepared only one alternative plan or many alternative plans (i.e., six). A small cognitive load is associated with better action fluidity (Berger, Karol, & Jordan, 1989). Considering the notion of action fluidity, it may be possible that goal performance is linked to the interplay of plan detail and plan contingency (i.e., plan complexity) for parents. That is, as Wilson (2000) proposed, a parent’s inability to attain his or her goal through performance (e.g., via rough communication with a child) may be representative of his or her possession of plans limited in detail and in contingency. A parent having more complex plans may positively influence his or her ability to achieve a goal (e.g., control child resistance) which would deter high levels of stress and reduce the risk of child maltreatment.

As argued above, a parent’s ability to plan for a variety of responses to a child’s behavior should impact the parent’s likelihood of engaging in child maltreatment. To integrate a study of planning processes into a better understanding of the phenomenon of child maltreatment, I also consider three parental characteristics that have a demonstrated association with child maltreatment: perceived parenting competence, trait verbal aggressiveness, and perceived social support. In particular, I suggest that the nature of a parent’s plans should moderate the association of the three parental characteristics and a parent’s potential to maltreat. I now turn to review perceived parenting competence, trait verbal aggressiveness, and perceived social support as a means to articulate proposed relationships to planning and the likelihood of child maltreatment.

**Perceived parenting competence.** Thoughts and judgments about one’s parenting abilities can influence the nature and quality of interactions that one has with his or her child
Parental competence reflects a parent’s contentment, liking, satisfaction, and/or perceived effectiveness as a parent (Ohan, Leung, & Johnson, 2000). Low parental competence is associated with both negative perceptions (e.g., Johnston & Mash, 1989; Lovejoy, Verda, & Hays, 1997) and negative reactions to child misbehavior (Donovan, Leavitt, & Walsh, 1990). In contrast, high parental competence has been linked with more warm, stable, and satisfactory parent-child relationships (Lovejoy et al., 1997).

Donovan (1981; Donovan & Leavitt, 1978; 1989; Donovan et al., 1990) suggested that perceptions of parenting competence contribute to how challenging situations are managed. In fact, some parent training programs aim to increase parental competence in an effort to reduce risk factors associated with negative parenting behaviors (Webster-Stratton, 1998). Prior research indicates that parents with higher levels of parental competence may perceive child difficulty as a positive challenge, thus motivating the parent to apply more effort in correcting or managing child difficulty (e.g., Oldershaw, Walters, & Hall, 1986). In contrast, parents with lower levels of parental competence may perceive child difficulty as a threat to their image or parental role resulting in less effort to control or manage child difficulty (Donovan et al., 1990). Parents with low perceived parental competence may also attempt to regulate child misbehavior by asserting power over the child through means such as threatening or punishing the child, as opposed to providing explanations for the consequences of bad behavior. I believe that in such circumstances, an assertion of power is more likely to result in instances of child maltreatment. In comparison, those with a higher perceived parental competence should be more willing to employ more inductive strategies when met with child resistance, including providing explanations for the consequences of behavior.
Wilson (2000) argued that parental patterns of behavior may be explained by their ability to plan for child difficulty. It is plausible that a parent’s thoughts about his or her competence in parenting may influence his or her ability to plan for a child’s (mis)behavior. In other words, the tendency to regulate child misbehavior in ways indicative of child maltreatment may be the result of possessing simple plans, as opposed to complex plans that provide alternatives for disciplining a child. This pattern may be especially apparent among those with low parental competence who perceive their parental image or role to be threatened by child difficulty. If one lacks satisfaction and efficacy in his or her ability to parent (i.e., low parenting competence), it is likely the case that he or she possesses less complex plans. Thus, a parent having complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low parental competence and a higher likelihood of maltreatment. It is therefore hypothesized that:

H1: Perceived parental competence will be positively associated with plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors.

H2: The relationship between perceived parental competence and the likelihood of engaging in child maltreatment will be moderated by plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors.

**Trait verbal aggressiveness.** Verbal aggression is the act of negatively impacting another’s self-concept by use of voice or harsh words (Infante, 1987; Infante & Rancer, 1996). While verbal aggression may be occasionally used by anyone or in a particular circumstance, individuals with *trait* verbal aggressiveness are predisposed to be verbally aggressive in a variety of situations.

A parent’s use of verbal aggression has been linked to detrimental effects on child development, particularly a child’s self-concept, as well as how children advance to adolescence.
and adulthood (Bolger, Patterson, & Kupersmidt, 1998; Dekovic & Meeus, 1997; Solomon & Serres, 1999). Prior research indicates that parents are more likely to be verbally aggressive when faced with a child’s uncertain or challenging behavior and/or they perceive lack of control (Bayer & Cegala, 1992). A parent’s likelihood to use verbal aggression has also been associated with the use of physical disciplinary punishment techniques (Kassing, Infante, Pearce, & Pyles, 1999; Roberto, Carlyle, & McClure, 2006). Further, Wilson et al. (2006) observed an association between trait verbal aggressiveness and abuse potential. In particular, parents high in trait verbal aggressiveness also reported three characteristics commonly associated with physically abusive parents: feelings of distress, rigid expectations about children and home life, and problems relating to others. In turn, Wilson et al. (2006) suggested that verbal aggressiveness is an important indicator of child maltreatment.

A possible explanation for the relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and a parent’s potential to maltreat is the parent’s capability of planning for management of child difficulty. If a parent is predisposed to become verbally aggressive when faced with uncertain events like child misbehavior, it may be the case that the capability to generate complex plans allows a parent to better handle the situation which perhaps decreases the likelihood of maltreatment indicative of verbal aggression. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Trait verbal aggressiveness will be negatively associated with plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors.

H4: The relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and the likelihood of engaging in child maltreatment will be moderated by plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors.
**Social support.** Social networks provide individuals with a sense of being loved and cared for as well as a resource in times of uncertainty (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Kornblith et al., 2001). Parenting can be unpredictable and stressful especially when the parent may have a lack of resources or little knowledge about child development. A sense of support from friends or family members may ease the uncertainty associated with parenting that some parents experience. Indeed, perceptions of social support have been shown to “buffer” the stress associated with parenting.

In Cutrona’s (1984) study of 85 women who had only borne one child, participants completed a social support scale, among others, at three different times (during the third trimester, two weeks postpartum, and eight weeks postpartum). While all participants experienced pregnancy and childbearing stress, additional parenting stress occurred due to health, infant temperament, and inadequacy of financial resources. However, the results of this study indicated that women who had access to resources (e.g., friends) did not perceive uncertain or ambiguous events as negatively as those who did not have accessible resources of information. In addition, the women in this study reported lower levels of depression if they perceived high levels of social support. Relatedly, Cutrona and Troutman (1986) reported that pregnant women who reported high levels of social support during pregnancy also reported higher levels of self-efficacy and lower levels of depression following delivery, compared to those women who reported lower levels of social support. More recently, Albrecht and Goldsmith (2003) found in an investigation of pregnant women from a low-income population, that supportive interactions increased level of information, knowledge, experience, feelings, and perceptions about themselves and their pregnancy. Research continues to explore social support
in women during pregnancy and postpartum (e.g., Elsenbruch et al., 2006; Surkan, Peterson, Hughes, & Gottlieb, 2006).

For situations that create stress, such as child misbehavior, it is likely that a deterrent to overwhelming stress levels is social support. Parents who handle child misbehavior in ways representative of positive parenting (e.g., positive reinforcement and encouragement of good behavior; implementation of clear rules that are consistently enforced) may possess skills that deter the stress associated with regulating child resistance. Specific parenting skills are learned in multiple ways: intuition, previous experience, instruction, observation, etc. Similarly, a parent’s ability to generate plans for child resistance may be intuitive, learned, or observed. Given the context of social support, a parent’s ability to problem solve in situations where a child misbehaves may be influenced by observing others in one’s social support network combat child difficulty, which would increase a parent’s ability to generate a variety and diversity of plans for managing a child’s behavior. When a parent is faced with such a situation but feels unprepared to manage his or her child’s behavior, the parent may contact members in a social network to seek advice or guidance. To receive parental advice, perceived as effective, of ways to correct or discipline child misbehavior may increase a parent’s ability to generate plans by adding to his or her “plan bank.” Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H5: Perceptions of social support will be positively associated with plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors.

H6: The relationship between perceptions of social support and the likelihood of engaging in child maltreatment will be moderated by plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors.
Summary

This chapter introduced a model linking planning behavior to the likelihood of child maltreatment. Parental planning capability was advanced to moderate the relationship between three parent-related perceptions and a parent’s likelihood to maltreat his or her child. Chapter 3 turns to review the study method, including sample information, procedures, and instrument details.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Sample

One hundred and three parents (43 men and 56 women) solicited from the Athens, Georgia community completed a survey about parenting practices.\(^2\) Participants ranged in age from 19 to 63 years \((M = 39.67, SD = 10.26; 2 \text{ parents did not indicate age})\). The majority of participants \((n = 54; 54.5\%)\) were Caucasian, with the remaining indicating ethnicity as African American \((n = 38; 38.4\%\), Asian \((n = 1; 1\%\), American Indian \((n = 1, 1\%\), Hispanic \((n = 1; 1\%\), or multiracial \((n = 4; 4\%\). Two participants \((2\%)\) chose not to report their race. Ethnicity percentages suggested a reasonable dichotomy for the purposes of analysis: white \((n = 54; 53.5\%)\) and nonwhite \((n = 45; 45.5\%)\). Of participants, 63.6\% \((n = 63)\) were married, 25.3\% \((n = 25)\) were single, 6.1\% \((n = 6)\) were divorced, 2\% \((n = 2)\) were unmarried to their current partner, 3\% \((n = 3)\) described themselves as other, and two participants \((2\% \text{ of the total sample})\) did not report their relational status. Relationship status percentages revealed how it could be explored as a dichotomy: married \((n = 63; 63.6\%)\) and not married \((n = 36; 36.4\%)\). Participants reported having between one and more than four children: 31\% had one child \((n = 26)\), 42.9\% had two children \((n = 36)\), 20.2\% had three children \((n = 17)\), 2.4\% had four children \((n = 2)\), and 3.6\% had more than four children \((n = 3)\). Seventeen participants \((16.8\% \text{ of the total sample})\) did not report having children in the questionnaire; however, they did verbally confirm their parental

\(^2\) Two participant questionnaires were dismissed from analyses because it was clear the participants did not provide honest and thoughtful responses; thus 101 participant surveys were included in analyses.
role before beginning the questionnaire. The education level of participants is as follows: 1% \((n = 1)\) completed 8th grade, 3.1% \((n = 3)\) completed 9th grade, 10.3% \((n = 10)\) completed 10th grade, 14.4% \((n = 14)\) completed 11th grade, 14.4% \((n = 14)\) completed high school, 20.6% \((n = 20)\) took some college courses while 12.4% \((n = 12)\) graduated from college, and 23.7% \((n = 23)\) completed a post-graduate degree or obtained a certificate beyond college. Four participants (4% of the total sample) did not report their education level. The annual household income of the sample was: under $15,000, \(n = 23\) (24.5%); $15,001 to $25,000, \(n = 7\) (7.4%); $25,001 to $40,000, \(n = 12\) (12.8%); $40,001 to $60,000, \(n = 8\) (8.5%); over $60,000, \(n = 31\) (33%); 13 participants (13.8%) did not know, and seven participants (6.95% of the total sample) did not report their annual household income.\(^3\) Disparities in household income existed in that persons from a particular population (Athens Day Reporting Center; see below) did not have immediate income to report due to their recent incarceration; thus, income was not examined further as a potential influence on the dependent demographic variables in this sample.

Although participants in this study were not required to be residents of Clarke County and given the income breakdown of the sample, it is important to note poverty statistics for the area. In 2008, Census Data estimated that 30.8% of Clarke County residents lived below poverty level. This percentage is significantly higher than the percentage of persons in Georgia that lived below poverty level in 2008 (14.7%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a) as well as in the U.S. (13.2%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). In addition, it is important to include inmate statistics since participants of this study may have been recently incarcerated. The Georgia Department of Corrections (2011) reported a total of 20,213 inmates for 2010. Of those inmates, 6,996

\(^3\) The measurement of annual household income does not represent income as it relates to poverty since poverty thresholds are indicated by family size, which was not assessed.
(34.61%) of were white and 12,288 (60.79%) were black. Gender differences for inmates were as follows: 18,015 males and 2,198 females. Of male inmates, 5,801 (32.20%) were white and 11,325 (62.86%) were black. Of female inmates, 1,195 (54.37%) were white and 963 (43.81%) were black.

Participants were a guardian of at least one child and were recruited through three organizations to increase the potential sample variance in economic status: Prevent Child Abuse Athens, Athens Day Reporting Center, and Full Bloom Parenting Center.

**Prevent Child Abuse Athens (PCAA).** PCAA is a community-based nonprofit organization in Athens, Georgia that has a regional connection to Prevent Child Abuse Georgia. The focus of all Prevent Child Abuse America programs is to prevent child abuse of all forms (physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect). PCAA aims to prevent child abuse through parent education, community support, and public awareness in four specific Georgia counties: Clarke, Madison, Oconee, and Oglethorpe. This organization has served Athens since 1986 and is funded by state and local grants, foundations, and private donations. PCAA directs four different programs that function differently in order to prevent child abuse in the Athens area: Healthy Families (HF), First Steps (FS), community education, and parenting education.

To be offered the HF or FS program, a mother must live in one of the four counties listed above. HF is offered to first-time mothers; this program provides in-home visitation by family support workers that are not included in FS. To participate, a mother must also meet particular requirements (e.g., single, late prenatal care that began after 12 weeks of pregnancy, unstable housing, history of substance abuse, depression, or familial problems). The mother is recommended to the FS program if she does not meet the requirements.
The FS program provides services that decrease the prevalence of risk factors for child maltreatment among new mothers. Services provided by FS volunteers include support and education to new parents about community resources and child maltreatment. The added support system is designed to prevent families from reaching stress levels at which child maltreatment may occur. Other educational opportunities are provided by PCAA within the Clarke County area. Community education occurs in the form of informative presentations by staff and volunteers in an effort to inform and recognize the rates of child abuse and neglect.

For this project, data was collected during each available PCAA parenting education series. The primary goal of the PCAA parenting education course is to increase the knowledge of child development, infant safety, and care among new mothers and fathers in hope of reducing the risk of child maltreatment. The parenting course successfully instructs approximately 75 mothers yearly who are primarily recruited through the Department of Family and Child Services (P. Berger, personal communication, 2007).

**Athens Day Reporting Center.** As part of Georgia Department of Corrections, the Athens Day Reporting Center (ADRC) offers substance abuse treatment to convicted felons as a way of assisting and correcting drug offenders beyond prison. The six- to nine-month program includes components such as substance abuse counseling, cognitive restructuring, adult basic education, employment enhancement, intensive supervision, and community service. The ADRC counsels between 80 to 100 men and women per year (B. Grant, personal communication, 2010). This project was offered to all persons present at ADRC who were guardian of at least one child.

**Full Bloom Parenting Center.** FBPC offers a variety of classes and group support sessions for parents including preparing for birth, cloth diapering 101, new mama’s group,
Saturday parent’s group, and other postpartum series. Data was conducted at the new mama’s group and the Saturday parent’s group. The first aim is to bring mothers together in hope of providing a safe and warm environment that fosters non-judgmental support from others. To include fathers, the FBPC offers Saturday parent’s group where parents can gather and discuss child rearing strengths and difficulties (P. Nielsen, personal communication, 2009). The number of parents included in each group fluctuates. The current study was offered to all parents present at each class the researcher attended.

**Procedures**

Participants were recruited at each of the locations described above and the study was introduced following the solicitation script provided in Appendix A. Participants were first asked to verbally confirm their role as a parental guardian of at least one child before being able to proceed with the study. Then, those who were eligible and wished to participate provided consent by raising a hand, after which the parent received a letter of informed consent (see Appendix B) that was read aloud. Eligible persons were not coerced to participate in any way, nor did they receive direct benefits for participation (e.g., monetary reimbursement). After answering questions related to the study’s purpose or participation, participants received the questionnaire (see Appendix C). It is important to note that the researcher offered to read the survey aloud and record answers if a participant wished for assistance due to low literacy level. Two participants requested this service. Upon completion, the questionnaires were returned to a box with other completed questionnaires, located at the entry/exit, to ensure anonymity, and the parent was presented with a debriefing statement (see Appendix D).
Measures

**Scenario manipulation.** After receiving introductory and consent instructions, participants completed a scenario-based assessment of plan complexity. Two scenarios were employed to provide variance in potential planning responses to child difficulty. Participants were asked to write about how they would correct child difficulty as described in two scenarios that represent situations of child difficulty. A four-year-old child’s behavior was of focus in the scenarios because at this age a child is more likely to have reasoning skills than those of a younger age, which may potentially result in more planning options:

1. Imagine that you are at your home. It is close to your four-year-old’s bedtime. Before going to bed, you want your child to take a bath but he or she does not want to.
2. Imagine that you are eating dinner at a restaurant. This is a “family favorite” place to eat. All of a sudden, your four-year-old child starts throwing napkins in the air. Your child throws the napkins off and on through dinner.

Scenario realism was measured with two Likert-type items ranging from (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree*: (1) “I could see something like this happening” (bath time scenario: $M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.31$; restaurant scenario: $M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.07$) and (2) “this situation seems fake” (bath time scenario: $M = 4.21$, $SD = .85$; restaurant scenario: $M = 4.08$, $SD = .94$). Participant responses suggest that the scenarios depict instances of child difficulty that may occur in reality. The order of scenarios presented was randomly determined. Participants wrote out their response to each scenario on a lined page.

**Plan complexity.** The content of the open-ended descriptions was examined for plan complexity using coding procedures specified by Berger and Bell (1988). Written responses were partitioned according to individual plans (i.e., action units), as specified by sentences or clauses that depicted action units ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.36$, range = 0-8.50). For example, in
response to the restaurant scenario, “I would ask him nicely to stop throwing napkins.” Then, a plan conditional was noted as an alternative action evident in a description, suggested by an if-then statement ($M = 1.11; SD = .63; range = 0-3.50$). For example, “If he continued to throw napkins, I would tell him that when we get home, there will be a punishment; like, no more dinners at his favorite place to eat or no toys, etc.” The resultant measure of plan complexity was based upon a ratio of the number of plan conditionals divided by the total number of generated action units for each participant ($M = .42; SD = .16; range = 0.75$).

Two trained undergraduate research assistants coded a subset (42.5%) of the plans for each scenario. For the bath time scenario, the research assistants agreed 67% of the time for judgments about plan length and 81% with regard to the identification of conditional points. In addition, Guetzkow’s (1950) $U$ was calculated for each scenario according to action units (bath time scenario: $U = .04$; restaurant scenario: $U = .05$) and plan conditionals (bath time scenario: $U = .08$; restaurant scenario: $U = 0.13$) to address the reliability of the unitizing process as indicated in coder responses. Guetzkow’s $U$ suggests that reliability is acceptable as the statistic nears zero; thus, the reliability of the planning scenarios employed in this study were acceptable.

After reading the two scenarios focused on difficult parenting situations, participants were asked to complete items assessing parenting competence, trait verbal aggressiveness, social support, and the likelihood to maltreat.
Instruments

The measures described below were adapted from the original versions in order to accommodate the reading-level of the participants and the length of the questionnaire. The adapted items were subjected to two reading-level analyses: the Flesch Reading Ease Test (FRET) and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Test (FGLT). The FRET scale ranges from 0 to 100. The higher the number the easier a document is to read. Typically, a number between 60 and 70 is desired. This thesis survey was scored at 69.8. The FGLT scored this survey’s reading level at a 6.3 grade level. The scale endpoints for all items were also standardized to a 5-point scale (1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree) in order to facilitate the ease of completion. Some items were reverse coded to adequately calculate statistics for each measure. Unless otherwise noted, scale responses were summed and divided by the number of scale items to form an average response statistic per participant.

Perceived parenting competence. The Parenting Sense of Competence scale (PSOC; Johnston & Mash, 1989; Ohan, Leung, & Johnston, 2000; see Appendix C) is a 17-item measure consisting of two dimensions: (a) a parent’s contentment (e.g., “Even though being a parent could be rewarding, I am frustrated now while my child is at his/her present age”; “I go to bed the same way I wake up in the morning, feeling I have not accomplished a whole lot”) and (b) a parent’s perceived effectiveness (e.g., “Considering how long I’ve been a mother/father, I feel thoroughly familiar with this role”; “I honestly believe I have all the skills necessary to be a good mother/father to my child.”) The items listed for effectiveness were reverse coded so that for all

---

4 The Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory items were not adjusted from the original version as they were written at the fifth grade level.
items higher scores indicated greater parental competence. The average response was 3.62 ($SD = .46$, range $= 2.35 – 4.82$, $\alpha = .75$).

**Trait verbal aggressiveness.** Infante and Wigley’s (1986) Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (VAS) was used to assess a parent’s propensity to engage in verbal aggression. All questions were reverse coded so higher scores indicated that an individual is more inclined to employ verbally aggressive messages. Previous research (Beatty, Rudd, & Valencic, 1999; Levine, Beatty, Limon, Hamilton, Buck, & Chory-Assad, 2004; Wilson et al., 2006) reports that the VAS tends to measure two dimensions (aggressiveness and benevolence); thus, as recommended by Levine et al., 2004 and Wilson et al., 2006, trait verbal aggressiveness was scored based upon the 10 items that measure aggressiveness since benevolence is not the focus of this research project. The 10 negatively worded items (see Appendix C) assessed the propensity of one to use verbally aggressive messages (e.g., “When nothing seems to work in trying to influence others, I yell and scream in order to get some movement from them”). The average response for trait verbal aggressiveness items among participants was 2.12 ($SD = .65$, range $= 1 – 3.80$, $\alpha = .86$).

**Perceptions of social support.** Social support was assessed with 14 items of the Social Provisions Scale (SPS; Russell & Cutrona, 1987). Participants were instructed to indicate to what extent each statement described the social support they received by others. The average response was 4.22 ($SD = .51$, range $= 2.79 – 5.00$, $\alpha = .88$).

**Likelihood to maltreat.** A parent’s potential to maltreat was assessed with the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory: Form A (AAPI-2; Bovolek & Keene, 1999). This 40-item

---

5 The Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2) is copyrighted material by Family Development Resources, Inc. Access to the inventory’s items and measurement procedures can be inquired about at (800) 688-5822.
instrument aims to explore the use of specific parenting behaviors that indicate risk for maltreatment. Scoring stencils were used to calculate raw scores for each participant per the five constructs of the AAPI-2. Next, Standard Ten Scores were designated (1-10) based upon raw scores in conjunction with norm tables. For all subscales, higher Standard Ten Scores indicated more appropriate, nurturing, parenting attitudes (see Bavolek & Keene, 1999). The averages and standard deviations for this study’s population for each AAPI-2 construct is as follows: (1) inappropriate expectations of children ($M = 4.48, SD = 1.76$, range $1 – 10$, $\alpha = .70$), (2) parental lack of empathy toward children’s needs ($M = 3.29, SD = 1.64$, range $1 – 7$, $\alpha = .92$), (3) strong belief in the use of corporal punishment as a means of discipline ($M = 4.63, SD = 1.71$, range $1 – 8$, $\alpha = .79$), (4) reversing parent-child role responsibilities ($M = 5.02, SD = 2.12$, range $1 – 10$, $\alpha = .85$), (5) oppressing children’s power and independence ($M = 5.84, SD = 2.20$, range $1 – 10$, $\alpha = .65$).
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

The distributions of all variables were examined; all were normal. Next, colinearity diagnostics were examined to assess similarity among independent variables. The diagnostics were based on the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which identifies multicolinearity among predictor variables that may impact regression coefficients. Multicolinearity is problematic when the VIF becomes too large for one or more of the predictor variables. A VIF close to one is desirable; however, the critical threshold is usually five or ten (Haan, 2002; Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004). Independent variables of this project that exceeded a VIF statistic of five were centered to guard against multicolinearity concerns as per Aiken and West (1991). Then, zero-order correlations were computed between all independent and dependent variables. The results are reported in Table 1.
Table 1

*Correlations Between Independent and Dependent Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>TVA*a</th>
<th>Social Support</th>
<th>Plan Length</th>
<th>Plan Conditionals</th>
<th>Plan Complexity</th>
<th>Inappropriate Expectations</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Corporal Punishment</th>
<th>Role Reversal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA</td>
<td>-22*</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>-30**</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Length</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-20*</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Conditionals</td>
<td>-09</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Complexity</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-20*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate Expectations</td>
<td>-18</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td>-04</td>
<td>-03</td>
<td>-06</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporal Punishment</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-30**</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Reversal</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-30**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.53**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, two-tailed. **p < .01, two-tailed.

*aTrait Verbal Aggressiveness.
**Associations among independent variables.** Competent persons may feel more satisfied in their interpersonal relationships in which case they may feel more support; thus, it was expected that parents who perceive more competence in their roles would also perceive more social support ($r = .35$). Preliminary analyses also indicated a negative association between perceived parental competence and trait verbal aggressiveness ($r = -.22$). This negative association indicated that more competent parents may be less inclined to employ verbal aggression. That is, perceived parental competence may reduce a parent’s need to employ verbally aggressive messages when they encounter child resistance.

As expected, trait verbal aggressiveness negatively associated with most independent variables. Preliminary analyses indicated that this variable had a significant association with perceived parental competence, as previously mentioned, as well as with perceptions of social support ($r = -.20$). The negative association between trait verbal aggressiveness and social support demonstrates that those who reported a higher propensity to engage verbally aggressive messages may have a reduced number of interpersonal relationships, in which case they may feel less support.

**Planning indicators and associations.** No independent variables were associated with plan complexity; however, independent variables did predict plan length and plan conditionals. Competence was the only independent variable that was not significantly associated with planning; however, preliminary analyses reported significant associations of trait verbal aggressiveness and perceptions of social support between plan length or plan conditionals. A negative association was found between trait verbal aggressiveness and plan length ($r = -.20$), which may suggest that persons who have a higher propensity to engage verbally aggressive messages may possess fewer plans; however, the intricacies of this association are explored
further in the test of hypotheses. Further, a positive association was found between perceptions of social support and plan length (r = .31). This relationship suggests that perceptions of support increase with plans. That is, more perceptions of social support are associated with more plans when managing child difficulty. Significant results also indicated a positive association between perceptions of social support and plan conditionals (r = .22). This relationship suggests that more perceptions of social support are associated with more alternative plans in the case of plan failure.

Preliminary analyses also indicated significant associations between planning variables. That is, a significant positive association was found between plan length and plan conditionals (r = .60). This relationship expresses the idea that if one has more plans then he or she is likely to have more plan contingencies in case of plan failure. Further, a significant positive association existed between plan conditionals and plan complexity (r = .63).

**Child maltreatment indicators and associations among dependent variables.** It was expected that perceived parental competence would significantly associate with indicators of child maltreatment; however, this was not the case. In regard to trait verbal aggressiveness, preliminary analyses indicated negative associations with inappropriate expectations (r = -.20), empathy (r = -.33), role reversal (r = -.30), and power independence (r = -.30). These associations were expected as they suggest how more nurturing parents are less likely to employ verbal aggression; however, the absence of a significant association between trait verbal aggressiveness and corporal punishment (r = -.16) was not expected.

Perceptions of social support significantly associated with two indicators of child maltreatment: role reversal (r = .23) and power independence (r = .38). The positive associations found suggest that positive perceptions of social support are associated with more appropriate
parenting attitudes in regard to role reversal and power independence. The positive impact of social support on child maltreatment indicators was expected (see Hypothesis 5).

Two planning variables, plan length and plan conditionals, significantly associated with one indicator of child maltreatment: power independence (r = .22, r = .24). These positive associations suggest that the presence of more plans and more plan conditionals is associated with more appropriate parenting attitudes in regard to power independence.

Given the multidimensional nature of the AAPI-2, it was expected that the variables comprising a parent’s likelihood to maltreat would be significantly associated with one another (see Table 1). The significant associations found in this study further support the construct validity of the AAPI-2; however, it is surprising that the association between corporal punishment and role reversal, r = .17, was not significant.

**Demographic indicators of planning and maltreatment.** Many demographics were assessed in this study (i.e., gender, age, race, number of children, marital status, educational attainment, and annual household income). Analyses did not suggest any significant differences in independent or dependent variables for participant age. Marital status had measurement problems in assessment. That is, the questions that assessed relationship status did not clearly inquire about parents’ relationship with the mother or father of their target child for the scenarios or about parents’ current romantic relationship. As this was the case, numerous participants declined to answer one or both item(s) related to marital status or reported “other”; thus, marital status was omitted for further consideration. Education and income also had measurement problems in assessment that did not allow for ample variance in comparison groups; thus, they were eliminated from analyses. As a result, gender and race were examined in preliminary analyses. Gender only predicted differences in the independent variables; thus, it was removed.
as a demographic predictor. As a result, race was the only demographic predictor explored in the analyses; however, most of the nonwhite participants were solicited from the Athens Day Reporting Center (ADRC).\textsuperscript{6} Persons at the ADRC were incarcerated potentially for child abuse or neglect. That being the case, the significant racial differences present in this study were not necessarily attributable to race but perhaps incarceration. Given the nature of race demographics present in this study, it was eliminated from analyses reported in Test of Hypotheses.

**Scenario differences.** Differences between the two scenarios were examined before testing hypotheses. A paired samples t-test indicated no significant differences between the scenarios in regard to the three measurements of planning processes; thus, planning variables were computed as averages across both scenarios: plan length ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.36$), plan conditionals ($M = 1.11$, $SD = .63$), and plan complexity ($M = .42$, $SD = .16$). It is important to note that plan complexity was the measure employed to assess planning as a moderation variable between independent and dependent variables.

**Tests of Hypotheses**

All hypotheses were tested using hierarchical linear regression analyses unless otherwise noted. The specific steps for each hypothesis are indicated in the following results.

**Hypothesis one.** The first hypothesis predicted that perceived parental competence would be positively associated with plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors. The results are reported in Table 3. In step one of the regression, perceived parental competence

---

\textsuperscript{6} Education and income were included in regression analyses with race to assess their impact on dependent variables; however, race remained the significant contributor for variance in indicators of child maltreatment.
was entered into the analysis. Analyses indicated no significant effect for perceived parental competence on plan complexity. Thus, H1 was not supported.

Table 2

Hierarchical Linear Regression of Parental Competence on Plan Complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis two.** The second hypothesis predicted that the relationship between perceived parental competence and the likelihood of engaging in child maltreatment would be moderated by plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors. In step one of the regressions, perceived parental competence and plan complexity were entered into the analysis. On step two, the interaction term was entered to assess significant results of moderation: perceived parental competence by plan complexity. Separate analyses were conducted on each subscale of likelihood to maltreat (i.e., AAPI-2). Analyses indicated significant results for moderation of plan complexity between perceived parental competence and corporal punishment (see Table 5) as well as power independence (see Table 7).

**Inappropriate expectations.** Perceived parental competence depicts a parent’s contentment, liking, satisfaction, and/or perceived effectiveness as a parent. In this study, an inverse relationship between parental competence and maltreatment was expected. In regard to the inappropriate expectations subscale of the AAPI-2, less competence was expected to be associated with inappropriate perceptions of a child’s capability to perform certain tasks or engage in particular behaviors and vice versa. Further, it was expected that a parent having more
complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low parental competence and inappropriate expectations. Results for the test for moderation of plan complexity on inappropriate expectations for perceived parental competence are reported in Table 3.

Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceived parental competence and inappropriate expectations.

Table 3

**Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Inappropriate Expectations for Parental Competence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>-.97</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence X Complexity</td>
<td>-1.87</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Empathy.** In regard to the empathy subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that less competence would be associated with a parent’s lack of awareness of his or her child’s needs or desires and vice versa. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low parental competence and parental empathy.

Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on perceived parental competence for empathy are reported in Table 4. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceived parental competence and empathy.
Table 4

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Empathy for Parental Competence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>-.70</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence X Complexity</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Approach significance at p = .06.

*Corporal punishment.* In regard to the corporal punishment subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that less competence would be associated with a parent’s strong belief in the use and effectiveness of corporal punishment as a disciplinary technique. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low parental competence and belief in corporal punishment. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on perceived parental competence for corporal punishment are reported in Table 5. Analyses indicated significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceived parental competence and corporal punishment.
A main effect existed for the interaction variable of perceived parental competence by plan complexity on belief in corporal punishment. The significant interaction term suggest that plan complexity moderates the relationship between perceived parental competence and belief in corporal punishment. To interpret the form of the interaction, additional regression analyses were conducted to assess the relationship between parental competence and corporal punishment as moderated by plan complexity at different levels of competence and complexity (see Table 6). The results suggest that a curvilinear relationship exists between perceived parental competence and plan complexity. That is, low and high levels of plan complexity associated more strongly with belief in the use and effectiveness of corporal punishment.
### Table 6

**Significant Moderation Effects on Corporal Punishment for Parental Competence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Competence</th>
<th>Plan Complexity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low (β)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (β)</td>
<td>-.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>-.34*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>-.41*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, two-tailed.

**Role reversal.** In regard to the role reversal subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that less competence would be associated with a parent’s tendency to reverse parent-child responsibilities. For example, the parent may expect the child to engage in traditional parent roles such as taking care of others. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low parental competence and role reversal. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on perceived parental competence for role reversal are reported in Table 7. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceived parental competence and role reversal.
Table 7

Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Role Reversal for Parental Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R^2Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence X Complexity</td>
<td>-.79</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Power independence.** In regard to the power independence subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that less competence would be associated with a parent’s oppression of independence in his or her children. This most often results in parental enforcement of conformity to his or her expectations. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low parental competence and power independence. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on perceived parental competence for power independence are reported in Table 8. Analyses indicated significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceived parental competence and power independence.
Table 8

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Power Independence for Parental Competence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence X Complexity</td>
<td>-5.03</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, two-tailed.

The significant interaction term of perceived parental competence by plan complexity suggest that plan complexity moderates the relationship between competence and parental attitudes of power independence. To interpret the form of the interaction, additional regression analyses were conducted to assess the relationship between perceived parental competence and power independence as moderated by plan complexity at different levels of competence and complexity (see Table 9). The results suggest that a curvilinear relationship exists between perceived parental competence and plan complexity. That is, low and high levels of plan complexity associated more strongly with attitudes of power independence.
Table 9

**Significant Moderation Effects on Power Independence for Parental Competence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan Complexity</th>
<th>Low (β)</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low (β)</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
<td>-.34*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, two-tailed.

**Hypothesis three.** The third hypothesis predicted that trait verbal aggressiveness would be negatively associated with plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors. In step one of the regression, trait verbal aggressiveness was entered into the analyses. As reported in Table 10, analyses indicated no significant main effect for the association between trait verbal aggressiveness and plan complexity. Thus, H3 was not supported.

Table 10

**Hierarchical Linear Regression of Trait Verbal Aggressiveness on Plan Complexity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis four.** The fourth hypothesis predicted that the relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and the likelihood of engaging in child maltreatment would be moderated by plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors. In step one of the regression, trait
verbal aggressiveness and plan complexity were entered in the analysis. On step two, interaction term was entered to assess significant results of moderation: trait verbal aggressiveness by plan complexity. Separate analyses were conducted on each subscale of likelihood to maltreat (i.e., AAPI-2). Analyses indicated no significant results for moderation of plan complexity between trait verbal aggressiveness and a parent’s likelihood to maltreat.

**Inappropriate expectations.** Trait verbal aggressiveness is characteristic of persons who are predisposed to be verbally aggressive in a variety of situations. As noted in research (Wilson et al., 2006), trait verbal aggressiveness is considered an important indicator of child maltreatment; thus, trait verbal aggressiveness was expected to increase as a parent’s likelihood to maltreat increased as suggested by the five subscales of the AAPI-2. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and inappropriate expectations. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on trait verbal aggressiveness for inappropriate expectations are reported in Table 11. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceived trait verbal aggressiveness and inappropriate expectations.
Table 11

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Inappropriate Expectations for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>-.20(^a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>-.49</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA X Complexity</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) approached significance at \(p = .06\).

**Empathy.** As noted, it was expected that trait verbal aggressiveness would negatively associate with indicators of maltreatment. In regard to the empathy subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that trait verbal aggressiveness would be associated with a parent’s lack of awareness of his or her child’s needs or desires and vice versa. A parent’s propensity to be verbally aggressive may inhibit his or her ability to empathize with a child. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between verbal aggression and parental empathy. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on trait verbal aggressiveness for empathy are reported in Table 12. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between trait verbal aggressiveness and empathy.
Table 12

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Empathy for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA</td>
<td>-.80</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA X Complexity</td>
<td>-3.39</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>-.21\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*\* p < .01, two-tailed.
\textsuperscript{a} approached significance at p = .06.

**Corporal punishment.** In regard to the corporal punishment subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that trait verbal aggressiveness would be associated with a parent’s strong belief in the use and effectiveness of corporal punishment as a disciplinary technique and vice versa. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and belief in corporal punishment. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on trait verbal aggressiveness for corporal punishment are reported in Table 13. Analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between trait verbal aggressiveness and corporal punishment.
Table 13

Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Corporal Punishment for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>-.71</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA X Complexity</td>
<td>-1.08</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Role reversal.** In regard to the role reversal subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that trait verbal aggressiveness would be associated with a parent’s tendency to reverse parent-child responsibilities. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and role reversal. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on trait verbal aggressiveness for role reversal are reported in Table 14. Analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between trait verbal aggressiveness and role reversal.
Table 14

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Role Reversal for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>$R^2$Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA</td>
<td>-0.99</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.31**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2*a</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA X Complexity</td>
<td>-4.45</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>-0.21a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, two-tailed. **p < .01, two-tailed. 
a approached significance at $p = .05$.

*Power independence.* In regard to the power independence subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that trait verbal aggressiveness would be associated with a parent’s oppression of independence in his or her children and vice versa. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between verbal aggression and power independence. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on trait verbal aggressiveness for power independence are reported in Table 15. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between trait verbal aggressiveness and power independence.
Table 15

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Power Independence for Trait Verbal Aggressiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA</td>
<td>-1.04</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVA X Complexity</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .01, two-tailed.**

**Hypothesis five.** The fifth hypothesis predicted that perceptions of social support would be positively associated with plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors. In step one of the regression, social support was entered to look for a main effect on plan complexity. Results for the regression analyzing the association between social support and plan complexity are provided in Table 16. Analyses indicated no significant main effects for a positive association between social support and plan complexity; thus, H5 was not supported.

Table 16

*Hierarchical Linear Regression of Social Support on Plan Complexity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis six. The sixth hypothesis predicted that the relationship between perceptions of social support and the likelihood of engaging in child maltreatment would be moderated by plan complexity, in response to difficult child behaviors. In step one of the regression, perceptions of social support and plan complexity were entered into the analysis. On step two, interaction term was entered to assess significant results of moderation: social support by plan complexity. Separate analyses were conducted on each subscale of likelihood to maltreat (i.e., AAPI-2). Analyses indicated no significant results for moderation of plan complexity between perceptions of social support and a parent’s likelihood to maltreat.

Inappropriate expectations. Perceptions of social support depict a parent’s sense of support from individuals in his or her social network. A sense of support from family members or friends has shown to “buffer” the stress associated with parenting. As a positive buffer, perceptions of social support were expected to decrease a parent’s likelihood to maltreat; thus, social support should negatively associate with indicators of maltreatment (e.g., inappropriate expectations). Specifically, less social support would be associated with inappropriate perceptions of a child’s capability to perform certain tasks or engage in particular behaviors and vice versa. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low perceptions of social support and inappropriate expectations. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on social support for inappropriate expectations are reported in Table 17. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceived parental competence and social support.
Table 17

Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Inappropriate Expectations for Social Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>-.76</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support X Complexity</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Empathy.** As noted, it was expected that perceptions of social support would negatively associate with indicators of maltreatment. In regard to the empathy subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that less perceptions of social support would be associated with a parent’s lack of awareness of his or her child’s needs or desires and vice versa. A sense of a lack of support for oneself may inhibit a parent’s support of others (e.g., a child). Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low perceptions of social support and parental empathy. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on social support for empathy are reported in Table 18. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceptions of social support and empathy.
Table 18

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Empathy for Social Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support X Complexity</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Corporal punishment.** In regard to the corporal punishment subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that less perceptions of social support would be associated with a parent’s strong belief in the use and effectiveness of corporal punishment as a disciplinary technique and vice versa. A parent who does not feel supported may experience higher levels of stress which result in the likelihood of employing corporal punishment. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low perceptions of social support and belief in corporal punishment. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on social support for corporal punishment are reported in Table 19. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceptions of social support and corporal punishment.
Table 19

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Corporal Punishment for Social Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R^2Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>-.89</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Step 2                          |     |      |     | .11 | .00  |
| Social Support X Complexity     | -.46| 2.17 | -.02|     |      |

**Role reversal.** In regard to the role reversal subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that less perceptions of social support would be associated with a parent’s tendency to reverse parent-child responsibilities. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low perceptions of social support and role reversal. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on role reversal for social support are reported in Table 20. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceptions of social support and role reversal.
Table 20

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Role Reversal for Social Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R^2 Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support X Complexity</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, two-tailed.

**Power independence.** In regard to the power independence subscale of the AAPI-2, it was expected that less perceptions of social support would be associated with a parent’s oppression of independence in his or her children and vice versa. Further, it was expected that a parent having more complex plans may positively impact the relationship between low perceptions of social support and power independence. Results for the test of moderation of plan complexity on social support for power independence are reported in Table 21. Unfortunately, analyses indicated no significant results for the moderation of plan complexity between perceptions of social support and power independence.
Table 21

*Plan Complexity Moderation Effects on Power Independence for Social Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Step 1</em>**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Step 2</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support X Complexity</td>
<td>-2.19</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .01, two-tailed.**
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Wilson (2000) suggested that planning processes may explain the relationship between abusive/neglectful parenting and management of child difficulty. This thesis assessed how planning processes, in response to difficult child behavior, affect the relationship between parental perceptions and likelihood to maltreat. Although the parental perceptions of perceived parental competence, trait verbal aggressiveness, and social support did not significantly predict plan complexity, significant associations existed for trait verbal aggressiveness and social support with plan length and/or plan conditionals. Further, plan complexity did affect the relationship between competence and parental belief in corporal punishment as well as attitudes of power independence; yet, the influence of plan complexity was not as predicted.

Significant Indicators of Planning

To investigate planning abilities of parents, three important parenting related perceptions were chosen that tend to associate with parenting styles in particular ways: parental competence, trait verbal aggressiveness, and social support. It was thought that parental perceptions would influence plan complexity, if planning is a differentiating characteristic between abusive and nonabusive parents; thus, nonabusive parents representative of more competence, a lower tendency to be verbally aggressive, and more support would possess more complex plans. As noted, none of the parental perceptions predicted plan complexity, but trait verbal aggressiveness and perceptions of social support significantly associated with plan length and/or plan conditionals.
**Trait verbal aggressiveness and plan length.** A parent’s propensity to engage verbally aggressive messages was significantly negatively correlated with plan length (i.e., number of action units) in response to child difficulty. Therefore, as trait verbal aggressiveness increased the number of plans for managing child difficulty decreased. This significant correlation provides partial support for the impact of verbal aggression on planning for child difficulty (H3).

Previous research has rarely examined the individual difference of trait verbal aggressiveness on planning processes; however, Beatty, Burant, Dobos, and Rudd (1996) found a significant impact of fathers’ trait verbal aggressiveness on perceived appropriateness as well as perceived effectiveness of generated plans for countering their sons’ resistance. In their study, fathers answered Infante and Wigley’s (1986) Verbal Aggression Scale (VAS) and generated responses to five scenarios indicative of child resistance. Once responses were coded for plan themes (e.g., threaten to spank, spank, yell, do nothing), sons answered items measuring appropriateness and effectiveness for each plan theme. Results indicated that plans of trait verbally aggressive fathers were perceived as less appropriate and less effective than plans generated by fathers who reported lowers scores in their propensity to engage verbally aggressive messages. Beatty et al. (1996) focused on the perceptions of plans developed by trait verbally aggressive fathers; however the current investigation is the first to explore the relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and plan development. A potential explanation for fewer plans observed in participants that reported higher levels of trait verbal aggressiveness could be the tendency for trait verbally aggressive persons to engage the behavior more quickly than persons not trait verbally aggressive. A quick turn to verbal aggression may hinder a parent’s ability to generate more plans in managing child difficulty. Future research should continue to explore how verbal aggression impacts planning processes as well as the perceptions
of appropriateness/effectiveness of plans developed by trait verbally aggressiveness parents. Specifically, how parents with a higher propensity to engage verbally aggressive messages consider their plans to be appropriate and/or effective.

Although a significant prediction for the relationship between verbal aggression and plan complexity was not present in this study, the relationship between trait verbal aggression and plan complexity is clear. A lack of results in a significant prediction may be due to limited variance in trait verbal aggressiveness in the parent population of this study. That is, most parents reported low levels of trait verbal aggressiveness. Another potential influence on results for trait verbal aggressiveness may be in the way assessment items were phrased. Verbal aggression has been explored in the context of the family (Infante & Rancer, 1996), the father-son relationship (Beatty et al., 1996; Beatty & Dobbs, 1992), and the marital relationship (Sabourin & Stamp, 1995). In a study of verbal aggression between siblings, the VAS was adapted to reflect the particular relationship explored (see Martin, Anderson, Burant, & Weber, 1997). The VAS employed in this study included the original items (see Infante & Wigley, 1986) representative of verbal aggression for interactions not indicative of a particular relationship. Future research should adjust the VAS to reflect verbal aggression in the relationship(s) of focus. Further, adjustment of the VAS scale for specific parent-child relationships (e.g., mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, and father-son) would provide better insight in exploration of parent-child interactions.

**Perceptions of support, plan length, and plan conditionals.** Parental perceptions of support were significantly correlated with plan length and plan conditionals. That is, as perceptions of support increased the amount of plans increased as well as the number of plan conditionals in case of plan failure. A potential explanation for this finding may be related to the
idea of a larger “plan bank” as discussed in Chapter 2. Specifically, a parent that perceives support may have more opportunities to observe reactions to child difficulty; thus, he or she would have more options and alternatives in case of plan failure. These significant correlations provide partial support for the impact of social support on planning for child difficulty (H5). Future research should continue to explore the impact of social support on parental planning through exploration of the impact of different types of support on plan complexity. Weiss (1974), notably known as one of the first to frame social support based on specific functions, identified “relational provisions” including attachment, social integration, opportunity for nurturance, reassurance of worth, sense of reliable alliance, and obtaining guidance.

Two provisions are particularly relevant to the current context: social integration and obtaining guidance. Social integration provides an individual a sense of belonging to a group or to a network in which he or she shares concerns, experiences, and ideas. Further, Weiss (1974) suggested that relationships of social integration provide opportunities to exchange services as well as social engagement through events and activities. As noted, it was thought that parent planning skills may be influenced by discussing, receiving advice for ways to, or observing others combat child difficulty. The idea that more friendships and family relationships would allow for more opportunities to learn or observe multiple plans for managing child difficulty was supported in this study; however, it is important to measure and test the social integration function of social support related to planning processes to confirm results here.

The function of support for obtaining guidance reflects having an authoritative confidant in which an individual receives instructions for ways to achieve goals as well as emotional support. To feel integrated and to receive advice, perceived as effective, of ways to parent a misbehaving child was thought to increase plan complexity by adding plans to his or her thought
processes. Although, results did not support a prediction between perceptions of social support and plan complexity, a relationship between social support and planning is clear. Research has explored and adapted Weiss’ social provisions indicative of support functions in multiple contexts including new mothers (Cutrona & Russell, 1987) and the family system (Pierce et al., 1996), but few empirical studies have explored the nature of social provisions on parenting outcomes in parent-child interaction. Specifically, in consideration of the results in this study, future research should explore social support functions in parent populations related to the ability to generate plans for child resistance. The exploration of types of support would advance an understanding in how the intricacies of support impact planning ability for child difficulty as well as parenting style.

Perceptions and Child Maltreatment Indicators

Of the parental perceptions measured in this study, two significantly associated with indicators of child maltreatment: trait verbal aggressiveness and perceptions of social support. An individual’s predisposition to be verbally aggressive in a variety of situations (Infante, 1987; Infante & Rance, 1996), has been associated with the use of physical disciplinary punishment techniques (Kassing et al., 1999; Roberto, Carlyle, & Goodall, 2007; Roberto et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2006) as well as with detrimental effects on child development (Bolger et al., 1998; Dekovic & Meeus, 1997; Solomon & Serres, 1999); thus, the communication behavior of verbal aggression has been consistently related to negative parenting behaviors. The results of this study confirm trait verbal aggressiveness’ negative impact on parental attitudes that associate more strongly with child abuse and neglect. That is, higher levels of trait verbal aggressiveness associated strongly with more harmful parenting attitudes; specifically, related to the attitudes of inappropriate expectations, lack of parental empathy for children’s needs, role reversal, and
power independence. The depicted associations between a parent’s propensity to be verbally aggressive and plan length as well as indicators of child maltreatment indicate the continued need for research to explore the links between aggression, planning, and maltreatment beyond correlational analyses.

The second parental perception that significantly correlated with child maltreatment indicators was perceptions of social support. Results indicated positive correlations between social support and role reversal as well as attitudes of power independence. The first positive correlation (i.e., perceptions of support and role reversal) suggests that as parents’ perceptions of support increased, parents’ belief in role reversal decreased. That is, increased perceptions of support parents’ reported lessened enforcement of the belief in assuming parental responsibilities of children. When a parent reverses traditional behaviors between a parent and a child, he or she expects a child to behave in ways that are not developmentally appropriate. A child victim of role reversal acts as a caretaker (e.g., cook or take care of younger siblings) for his or her parent who does not protect and guide as expected of a caregiver (Mayseless, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2004). Role reversal negatively impacts the process of child development as well as a child’s self-worth (Bavolek & Keene, 1999), and contributes to later life depression and anxiety (Wells & Jones, 2000). The significant impact of social support on the parenting behavior of role reversal should be duly noted and explored in future research. The second positive correlation (i.e., perceptions of support and power independence) suggests that as parents’ perceptions of support increased, parents’ belief in oppressing children’s independence decreased. When a parent oppresses a child’s power and independence, he or she believes

Note: For all AAPI-2 variables, higher scores indicated more appropriate, nurturing, parenting attitudes.
behaviors such as probing questions is indicative of a disrespectful challenge to authority. Obedience and conformity is expected and demanded by parents of attitude/belief in power independence (Bavolek & Keene, 1999). Children of such parents may often hear the statement: “Because I said so!” Further, the child maltreatment indicator of power independence closely resembles the conformity orientation of family types (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997; Ritchie, 1990) that focuses on similarity in attitudes and beliefs between family members as a sign of respect that reinforces obedience. Future research should combine the two conceptual frameworks to explore the outcomes of communicative and behavioral forms of parents and children. These significant associations reinforce the impact of social support on parenting (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Crnic et al., 1983; Hashima & Amato, 1994; Whipple & Webster-Statton, 1991). The depicted associations between a parent’s perceptions of social support, plan length, and plan conditionals as well as indicators of child maltreatment indicate the continued need for research to explore the links between support, planning, and maltreatment beyond correlational analyses. The results in this study confirm the needs for research to explore the relationships of perceptions of support to the conceptual framework of planning theory as well as to role reversal and power independence. To reinforce the importance of “relational provisions” (Weiss, 1974), the exploration of types of support would advance an understanding in how the intricacies of support impact planning ability as well as parenting attitudes/beliefs (e.g., role reversal and power independence).

**Moderation effects of plan complexity.** Additional hypotheses in this study explored the moderation effects of plan complexity between the parental perceptions measured and attitudes/beliefs of effective parenting indicative of abusive/neglectful individuals. It was hoped that planning would weaken the relationship between particular levels of parental perceptions
related to a higher likelihood of maltreatment. For example, plan complexity would weaken the relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and a higher likelihood to maltreat. Although the aforementioned hope related to verbal aggression approached significance for empathy and role reversal subcategories of child maltreatment, plan complexity significantly moderated the relationship between perceived parental competence and child maltreatment for corporal punishment and power independence.

As noted, parental competence reflects a parent’s contentment, liking, satisfaction, and/or perceived effectiveness as a parent (Ohan et al., 2000). Perceptions of parental competence have been linked with more warm, stable, and satisfactory parent-child relationships (Lovejoy et al., 1997); whereas, low parental competence has been linked to negative perceptions (e.g., Johnston & Mash, 1989; Lovejoy et al., 1997) and negative reactions to child misbehavior (Donovan et al., 1990). Although perceived parental competence did not significantly associate with planning variables or indicators of child maltreatment, results reflected the significant moderating impact of plan complexity between competence and two indicators of child maltreatment: belief in corporal punishment as well as attitudes of power independence.

It is important for the continued exploration of corporal punishment in research due to findings that suggest its potential long-term effects on children (Gershoff, 2002; Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2007). In regard to parental competence, competent parents have been shown to employ physical disciplinary techniques less (Peterson & Rollins, 1987), and one study used a model of parental competence to explain parental predictors for engaging corporal punishment (Day, Peterson, & McCracken, 1998). The results of this study express the significant impact of planning on the relationship between perceived parental competence and belief in corporal punishment. The same significant impact was observed for attitudes of power independence. As
noted when the relationship between social support and power independence was discussed, when a parent oppresses a child’s power and independence, a parent believes behaviors such as probing questions is indicative of a disrespectful challenge to authority. This attitude may be particularly relevant to parents with low competence in his or her role due to an already inhibited confidence level. That is, too much freedom and exploration of a child may scare a parent with low parental competence due to a fear of less control. This fear may enforce a parent’s attitude of power independence. The positive impact of planning was observed between perceived parental competence and attitudes of power independence.

**Plans – Not too simple and not too complex.** In assessing the significant relationships between perceived parenting competence and child maltreatment indicators as moderated by plan complexity, results indicated that low and high levels of plan complexity associated more strongly with stronger beliefs in the effectiveness and use of corporal punishment as well as attitudes of power independence. This curvilinear relationship was not hypothesized; however, it supports previous research in the influence of plan complexity. Knowlton and Berger (1997) found that one alternative plan and many alternative plans inhibit goal attainment. This study confirms the positive impact of moderate amounts of plans in effectively influencing the relationship between competence on corporal punishment as well as attitudes of power independence.

Knowlton and Berger (1997) reported that a moderate amount of plans (approximately three) is the best indicator of action fluidity in interactions. Future research should continue to explore the influence of plan complexity among parents as this study indicates the importance of planning by parents. Specifically, future investigations should explore the impact of moderate amounts of plan complexity on managing difficult child behaviors. Other explorations of
competence may also examine the combined impact of parental competence and cognitive complexity. Cognitive complexity has shown to predict plan complexity (Waldron & Applegate, 1994) and it considers individual competence related to communicative behavior as well as the behavior of a fellow interlocutor (Chen, 1996; Leighty & Applegate, 1991; O’Keefe & Shepherd, 1989). Whether or not a parent considers his or her child’s needs, wants, and goals may impact planning ability for child difficulty, because a desire to achieve communication goals has shown to increase plan complexity (see Berger, 1997).

While this study was the first application of planning theory to a parent population, exploring planning processes of an underrepresented population presents unique considerations. Measurement techniques designed by Berger and Bell (1988) were used in this study. That is, participants wrote about how they would correct child difficulty as described in two scenarios that represented situations of child difficulty. This is an effective measurement technique for plan complexity; however, it may not be the best measurement technique for assessing planning processes for child misbehavior of a parent population. The measurement technique of plan complexity is especially important in consideration of participants with limited reading and writing abilities. Future research may explore creativity related to how to develop or employ a measurement technique of planning processes among parents. Further, two independent variables (i.e., trait verbal aggressiveness and perceptions of social support) significantly correlated with plan length and/or plan conditionals but not plan complexity. This distinction suggests the need for future research to examine the validity of the concepts separately as well as the relationship between plan length and plan conditionals in consideration of plan complexity. The significant correlations between planning variables also suggest problematic similarity
between plan distinctions. Berger (1997) has expressed concern for construct validity of planning processes as well.

**Limitations**

When considering the findings of this study, it is also important to consider limitations. Participants in this study were primarily Caucasian and Black parents from the Athens, Georgia area. Such demographics limit the generalizability of this study’s findings and reduce external validity.

Further, the reading and writing abilities of some participants in this study were extremely low due to low educational achievement. Although the survey items in this study were adapted from original versions in order to accommodate the reading-level of the participants and the length of the questionnaire, some participants may have experienced difficulty in comprehending survey instructions and/or items. It is important to note that the research offered to read the survey aloud and record answers if desired by a participant due to low literacy level. This service was requested by two participants; however, other participants may not have felt comfortable requesting this service due to fear or shame associated with requested assistance due to their limited reading/writing ability. In exploring creative ways to assess planning processing of parents with low literacy levels, researchers may opt to employ an interview format in which they can explain questionnaire details in more depth. Another notable limitation of this study was questionnaire length. The questionnaire was administered in one sitting and consisted of approximately 100 items as well as two written responses. Participants’ responses may be of less quality due to factors associated with lengthy surveys: for example, decreased levels of motivation near completion or random responding. This is particularly important for participants with low literacy as they may be inclined to randomly respond due to
lack of comprehension, no matter survey length; however, research is contradictory in the support of decreased response rate of lengthier surveys (Bogen, 1996). Yet, as noted, it may be beneficial future research to explore interview format data collection over multiple sittings to decrease the potential effects of survey length on participant response.

Literacy is one variable tied to other characteristics associated with vulnerable populations: for example, financial insecurity, social isolation, and mental illness (see Aday, 2001). The characteristics mentioned also represent persons at a higher risk of arrest for nonviolent and violent crime (see Freudenberg, 2001). Participants in this study solicited from the Athens Day Reporting Center (ADRC) and Prevent Child Abuse Athens (PCAA) parenting education courses experience circumstances related to those of vulnerable populations. Individuals at the ADRC may have been recently incarcerated and participants of the PCAA parenting education course are often mandated to attend and receive a completion certificate to satisfy sentencing. This investigation’s sample demographics are important to consider given the nature of questionnaire items. It is important to consider that a participant may have been incarcerated or mandated to attend parenting education due to domestic violence or child abuse. Although participants were ensured that their responses were anonymous, some may have felt reluctant to provide truthful statements in regard to individual behavior related to verbal aggression or parenting practices. Such participants may anticipate negative repercussions related to the disclosure of particular interpersonal and/or parenting behaviors: for example, regular attendance at ADRC or parenting education at PCAA. An interview format for data collection, beyond the venue of solicitation, may also benefit research with vulnerable populations. That is, the researcher may have the opportunity to develop a comforting environment in which the participant is more likely to provide truthful responses.
Limitations of this study primarily concern 1) the generalizability of results, 2) the potential impact of literacy levels as well as questionnaire length, and 3) how study demographics (i.e., vulnerable population) in conjunction with the nature of survey items potentially impacted results. It is crucial for continued research of vulnerable populations; however, it is of utmost importance to consider the best practices in conducting investigations for such populations as well as to avoid harm at all costs.

**Conclusions**

In closing, this investigation was successful as the first empirical exploration of planning processes among a parent population. The impact of trait verbal aggressiveness and perceptions of social support on planning was highlighted and suggestions for future research were noted. In the test for moderation of plan complexity, the results of this study suggest the importance of examining perceived parental competence in conjunction with communication competence to explore the relationship on planning abilities for child resistance. Significant results for the impact of plan complexity confirmed Knowlton and Berger’s (1997) curvilinear relationship for plan complexity outcomes. That is, a moderate amount of plans significantly influenced the relationship between parental competence and thoughts about corporal punishment as well as attitudes of power independence. Most importantly, results of this study suggest the importance for creating a *planner* curriculum in how to constructively manage child difficulty that will improve the quality of parent-child interaction to be instructed by practitioners.

**Curriculum in constructive management of child difficulty.** Pregnancy is a period for which parents prepare for the birth of a child or children. This can include developing a birth plan, suitcase packing for delivery day, creating a nursery, etc. In post-delivery, parents are
overwhelmed with information regarding personal care (e.g., physical recuperation) as well as infant care (e.g., proper feeding of infant and frequency). Other information provided regards topics such as second-hand smoke, Shaken Baby Syndrome, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Less instruction is focused on how to manage child difficulty: for example, unstoppable crying, irritability when sleepy, or child’s resistance to take a bath. Instruction in planning how to constructively manage child difficulty may greatly benefit parent-child interactions.

The results of this study express the importance of planning for child difficulty as a parent. Parenting education courses should provide instruction for how to manage child difficulty. A section of the course should be dedicated to exploration of and to engagement in planning for child resistance. Such a section should focus on three primary objectives: 1) develop goals for correcting child misbehavior, 2) increase parental confidence in planning, and 3) instruct and practice in how to develop and employ plans for managing child resistance. A desire to achieve goals has been shown to influence planning abilities (see Berger, 1997). The first focus of a section in panning should be to increase awareness of and development of goals for managing child resistance. An initial session should begin by exploring ways in which a child may be difficult. Specifically, an instructor should request relatable, real-life, examples in an effort to enhance participant discussion and group cohesion through shared situations of child difficulty. Potential responses for the most common instances of child resistance should be explored (e.g., rock, time-out, ignore, spank, etc.). All reactions can be analyzed for benefits and risks to children. Lessons in how to manage child misbehavior should explore goals a parent may have for challenging behaviors. For example, it may be useful to ask a parent to think of a behavior his or her child typically engages in that he or she considers difficult. Instruct the
parent to write down three goals for an interaction with his or her child as they engage in the
typical difficult behavior. Next, a section should focus on increasing parents’ confidence in the
effectiveness of plans in attaining a goal. Research indicates that confidence in planning
influences the employment of plans in interaction contexts (see Berger, 1997). Ask the parents
of the course their thoughts about how planning effects his or her daily activities. Once the
thoughts are processed, explain the importance of planning to manage child difficulty. Next, ask
the participants to develop plans to attain their goals for managing the typical difficult behavior
of their child(ren) and to compare his or her plans to the beneficial parental responses explored at
the beginning of the session. Lastly, instruct on how to consider and develop particular plans for
unexpected instances of child resistance while experiencing high stress levels. Particular
soothing techniques should be explored to aide in the uncertainty and frustrated associated with
some child resistance behaviors. Planning curriculum lessons and activities should focus upon
building a skill set for planning to include in a parent’s “toolbox.” Such skills can be used when
a parent anticipates or experiences child difficulty.

The results of this study indicate that too little and too many plans did not influence
parental thoughts; however, a moderate amount of plans did influence parental thoughts. The
closing of a course section focused on planning should highlight the appropriate way to assess
the usefulness of particular skills (e.g., plans) in one’s toolbox. That is, instruct parents to
consider the plans that are most likely to attain his or her goal (i.e., no more than three).
Considering all plans in a toolbox may not influence the parent-child interaction because one
would not have any plan alternatives in case of plan failure. Instead, teach a parent to consider
the plans that will most likely attain the parental goal. That is, the plans that likely manage child
difficulty while maintaining a positive parent-child interaction. An effective curriculum for parent education sections on planning will provide participants with potential plans for difficulty as well as skills in how to moderately plan for child difficulty.
REFERENCES


Profile_inmate_admissions_CY2010.pdf


Mayseless, O., Bartholomew, K., Henderson, A., & Trinke, S. (2004) “I was more her mom than she was mine:” Role reversal in a community sample. *Family Relations, 53*(1), 78-86.


APPENDIX A

SOLICITATION SCRIPT

Hi, my name is Amanda Strickland. I am a graduate student at the University of Georgia. I am doing a study about parenting. This study involves completing a questionnaire. If you are willing to help me out, you can complete the questionnaire. In it, you will be asked to:

- Answer questions about yourself (e.g., age, race, gender),
- your thoughts about being a parent,
- how you talk to your children and others,
- and your support network.

It should not take more than an hour to do the questionnaire. Your name will not be connected to any of the information you give me. I also will not share your answers with anyone except the researchers on this project. No one will know your name or who you are. Are there any questions or concerns?

Pause for questions or concerns.

Please raise your hand if you would like to participate in the study. If you do not want to participate, you can visit the ________ room for coffee, soda, or water as well as a small snack. If you do the study, you can still have drinks and snacks.

At this time, please give potential participants the letter of informed consent.

Does everyone who wants to participate in the study have a consent letter?

Pause.

Now, I will read the consent letter aloud.

Read the letter of informed consent aloud.

Are there any questions or concerns?

Pause for questions or concerns.

Please give potential participants the “Parenting Practices” questionnaire. Remind participants that they can ask a question or stop at any time.

Feel free to ask questions at any time. You can also stop doing the questionnaire if you want.

Read the survey instructions and ask participants to begin the questionnaire. Remind participants to help themselves to coffee, soda, or snack at any time.
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

June 14, 2010

Dear Participant:
I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Samp in the Department of Speech Communication at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study titled “Parenting Practices.” The purpose of this study is to look at what mothers and fathers think about parenting. Participation in this study should take one hour or less. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Answer questions about yourself (e.g., age, race, gender),
- your thoughts about being a parent,
- how you talk to your children and others,
- and your support network.

Your involvement in the study is voluntary. You can choose not to do the study or stop at any time without penalty. No identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared with others without your written permission or if required by law.

The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. All information will be presented in summary form only. No one will be able to identify your responses.

There are benefits for participating in this study. You may have time to think about being a parent. You may feel good about being a parent.

Also, the information that you provide for this study is important. Your feedback may influence what is covered in future parenting education courses.

We do not think there will be any risks or trouble for you in doing the study. But, depending upon your experiences, you may have bad thoughts about being a parent. If you do, you can stop at any time.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to call or send an e-mail to: Amanda Strickland, telephone 706-583-0952, email address als219@uga.edu; Dr. Jennifer Samp, telephone 706-542-4893, email address jasamp@uga.edu.
Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing and returning this questionnaire in the envelope provided, you are agreeing to be part of the research project.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

**Amanda Strickland**

Name of Researcher __________________________ Signature __________________________ Date ______________

**Dr. Jennifer Samp**

Name of Researcher __________________________ Signature __________________________ Date ______________
APPENDIX C

PARENTING PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of Speech Communication
University of Georgia

Research Title:
Parenting Practices

In the following set of papers, you will be asked questions about being a parent, your parenting experience, family relationships, and how you talk with others. Please answer the questions honestly. Keep in mind there are no “right” or “wrong” answers; just be honest.

Your participation is VOLUNTARY. If you would rather not do the survey, give the survey back to the researcher.

Do not write your name on these papers – your answers are ANONYMOUS. Your answers cannot be linked to your identity.

Instructions

A. Before you begin the questionnaire, be sure to read the consent letter.

B. Don’t talk to others about the survey.

C. Read each item carefully and answer it the best you can using these options:

   **Strongly Agree** – Circle SA if you strongly support the statement, or feel the statement is true most of the time.
   **Agree** – Circle A if you support the statement, or feel this statement is true some of the time.
   **Uncertain** – Circle U only when it is impossible to decide on one of the other choices.
   **Disagree** – Circle D if you feel you cannot support the statement or that the statement is not true some of the time.
   **Strongly Disagree** – Circle SD if you feel strongly against the statement, or feel the statement is not true.

D. If you would like to say anything else, write your thoughts next to the questions.

E. **BE HONEST AND TRUTHFUL IN YOUR ANSWERS.**

F. After finishing the questionnaire, please return your survey to the researcher.

Now turn the page.....
To start off, we would like you to read about a pretty common child behavior.

Imagine that you are eating dinner at a restaurant. This is a “family favorite” place to eat. All of a sudden, your four-year-old child starts tossing napkins in the air. Your child tosses the napkins off and on through dinner.

Now tell us your thoughts about this situation.

1. Would you try to stop your child from throwing the napkins? Circle one:
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. If you circled “yes” what would you do to stop your child? What steps would you go through? Write what you would do on the lines below:

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

PLEASE TURN THE PAGE
3. Now imagine that your child is **still** throwing napkins. What would you do next? Write what you would do on the lines below:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Think about the restaurant situation as you answer the next two questions:

4. I could see something like this happening.

   *Strongly Agree*   *Agree*   *Uncertain*   *Disagree*   *Strongly Disagree*

5. This situation seems fake.

   *Strongly Agree*   *Agree*   *Uncertain*   *Disagree*   *Strongly Disagree*

**PLEASE TURN THE PAGE**
Now, we would like to ask you some questions about you and your ideas about being a parent. Please complete the following portion of the questionnaire thinking about your child(ren).

**Raise your hand if you come across a word you do not know. The researcher will help you.**

6. The problems of taking care of a child are easy to solve once you know how your actions affect your child.

   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Uncertain
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

7. Even though being a parent could be rewarding, I am frustrated.

   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Uncertain
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

8. I go to bed the same way I wake up in the morning, feeling I have not accomplished a whole lot.

   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Uncertain
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

9. I do not know why it is, but sometimes when I’m supposed to be in control, I feel more like the one being controlled by my child.

   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Uncertain
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

10. My mother/father was better prepared to be a good mother/father than I am.

    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Uncertain
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

11. I would make a fine model parent for a new mother/father. I could show someone how to be a good parent.

    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Uncertain
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

12. Being a parent is not hard. Any problem is easily solved.

    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Uncertain
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

13. A problem in being a parent is not knowing if you’re doing a good job.

    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Uncertain
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

14. Sometimes I feel like I’m not getting anything done.

    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Uncertain
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
15. I meet my own goals in caring for my child.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

16. If anyone can find the answer to what is troubling my child, I am the one.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

17. My talents and interests are in other areas, not in being a parent.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

18. Considering how long I’ve been a mother/father, I feel familiar with this role.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

19. If being a mother/father of a child were only more interesting, I would do a better job.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

20. I have all the skills necessary to be a good mother/father to my child.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

21. Being a parent makes me tense and anxious.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

22. Being a good mother/father is a reward in itself.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

PLEASE TURN THE PAGE
Now, we would like you to read about another pretty common child behavior.

Imagine that you are at your home. It is close to your four-year-old’s bedtime. Before going to bed, you want your child to take a bath but he or she does not want to.

23. Would you make your child take a bath? Circle one:
   a. Yes
   b. No

24. If you circled “yes” how would you get your child to take a bath? What would you say? What steps would you go through? Write what you would do on the lines below:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

PLEASE TURN THE PAGE
25. Now imagine that your child is still avoiding bath time. What would you do next? Write what you would do on the lines below:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Think about the bath time situation as you answer the next two questions:

26. I could see something like this happening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

27. This situation seems fake.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

PLEASE TURN THE PAGE
Now we would like you to tell us how you talk with other people when you want to get your way.

Raise your hand if you come across a word you do not know. The researcher will help you.

28. When people are very stubborn, I insult them.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

29. When people refuse to do something I know is important, I tell them they are unreasonable.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

30. I attack a person’s character, if he or she deserves it.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

31. When people behave in ways that are in poor taste, I insult them.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

32. When people simply will not budge on something I lose my temper and say strong things to them.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

33. When people insult me, I like really telling them off.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

34. I like poking fun at people who do stupid things.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

35. When people do things which are mean or cruel, I attack who they are.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

36. When nothing seems to work in getting my way, I yell and scream.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

37. When I can’t put down other peoples’ ideas, I make them feel threatened.

Strongly Agree    Agree    Uncertain    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
These questions are about how your family and friends support you.

38. There are people I can depend on to help me if I really need it.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

39. I don’t have close relationships with other people.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

40. There is no one I can turn to when I am stressed.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

41. There are people who depend on me for help.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

42. There are people who enjoy the same social activities I do.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

43. Other people do not view me as skilled.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

44. I feel responsible for the well-being of another person.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

45. I feel part of a group of people who share my attitudes and beliefs.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

46. I do not think other people respect my skills and abilities.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

47. If something went wrong, no one would help me.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
48. I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well-being.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Uncertain | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

49. There is someone I could talk to about important decisions in my life.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Uncertain | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

50. I have relationships where my talents and skills are recognized.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Uncertain | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

51. There is no one who shares my interests and concerns.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Uncertain | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

PLEASE TURN THE PAGE

---

8 The remaining items of the questionnaire consisted of the AAPI-2 scale. The Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2) is copyrighted material by Family Development Resources, Inc. Access to the inventory’s items and measurement procedures can be inquired about at (800) 688-5822.
Demographic Data:
Please indicate the choice that best describes you by placing an “X” in the blank.

I am

Male ______  
Female ______

What is your age?

______

What is your race?

White ______  Pacific Islander ______  Other ______  
Black ______  American Indian ______
Asian ______  Hispanic ______

What is your marital status:

Divorced ______  Unmarried to current partner ______  
Married ______  Other ______  
Single ______
How many children live in your household? Please list their ages.

One ______ Age ______
Two ______ Age ______ ______
Three ______ Age ______ ______ ______
Four ______ Age ______ ______ ______ ______
More than four ______ Ages ______ ______ ______ ______ ______

Are you currently involved with the parent of your youngest child? That is, do you live with or speak to the parent at least once a day?

Yes ______

If yes, check or more of the following:

I live with him/her ______
I talk a lot with him/her, but we do not live together ______
I don’t talk a lot with him/her, and we do not live together ______
We have sex often ______
We have sex every now and then ______

No ______

What is the highest grade you completed in school:

Grade School ______ 11th Grade ______
7th Grade ______ High School Graduate ______
8th Grade ______ Some College ______
9th Grade ______ College Graduate ______
10th Grade ______ Post-Graduate or Above ______
What is your annual household income?

Under $15,000 ______

$15,001 - $25,000 ______

$25,001 - $40,000 ______

$40,001 – $60,000 ______

Over $60,000 ______

I do not know ______

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.
Appendix D

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Parenting Practices

Thank you for your participation in the “Parenting Practices” study. We know that telling us your ideas about parenting may be tiring, but please remember that your feedback is very important. A lot of research focuses on how parents’ thoughts influence how they handle their child(ren). The point of this study was to better understand how your personality, experiences, and thoughts about parenting influence how you think about taking care of your child.

As communication researchers, we are also especially interested in how your thoughts about parenting influence how you think about talking to your child.

If you have any questions about the study, we would be happy to discuss them with you now.

If you experience any mental discomfort after completing this survey or if you and your family are in need of counseling services, please contact one of the following organizations:

**Family Counseling Services of Athens** 706-549-7755
Offers a variety of counseling services on a sliding fee scale on Monday to Friday from 9:00-5:00 p.m. Six o’clock appointments are available.

**Georgia Crisis & Access Line** 1-800-715-4225
Staffed with professional social workers and counselors 24 hours a day, every day, to assist those with urgent and emergency needs. Those callers who need more routine services are directly connected with the agency of their choice and given a scheduled appointment. To search the provider resource base go to [http://www.mygcal.com](http://www.mygcal.com).

**Samaritan Counseling Center** 706-369-7911 or 1-800-490-7911
Offers counseling on a sliding fee scale. Flexible services but not for intensive therapy.

**UGA Psychology Center** 706-542-1173 (general line), 706-542-4265 (children), and 706-542-4589 (adults)
Counseling offered on a sliding fee scale.
THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY!

Sincerely,

__________________________  __________________________  __________
Amanda Strickland  Signature  Date  
Telephone: 706-583-0952  
Email: als219@uga.edu

__________________________  __________________________  __________
Dr. Jennifer Samp  Signature  Date  
Telephone: 706-542-4893  
Email: jasamp@uga.edu