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Lasting Impressions: Parental Persuasion and Its Permanence in a Child's Development

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LASTING IMPRESSIONS:
PARENTAL PERSUASION AND ITS PERMANENCE
IN A CHILD’S DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis
Presented to
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Western Kentucky University
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Master of Arts

By
Kelcey Lynn Newton

May 2005
LASTING IMPRESSIONS:
PARENTAL PERSUASION AND ITS PERMANENCE
IN A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

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Most importantly, I am thankful to my parents who were the inspiration for my thesis—not written out of the negative experiences, as many things are, but written out of the blessed experiences that I had in my home growing up and continue to have as their daughter and friend. I also can’t forget my grandparents who helped to found our family in the values and parenting techniques that have created a positive familial cycle of love and support. God has truly blessed our family.
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The questions of parents are never fully answered due to the plethora of factors involved in raising children. However, a different angle of research has uncovered some new techniques that provide renewed hope for the longevity of parental impact. Many people understand that parents—and people in general—use and are daily impacted by persuasion. This research shows that if parents can more completely understand positive persuasive tactics, their values can potentially follow children from the bubble of the home to their adulthood. An important component of this parental persuasion is the use of inoculation techniques to help children not only live by but also understand and appreciate the moral code given to them by their parents. The qualitative interview process for this unique research project produced results that verified the need for further study on the use of persuasion and inoculation in parenting situations. It also unearthed some surprising results regarding the understanding of the parental persuasive influence from the parent and student perspective. Although only a beginning to the research needing to be done on the subject, this thesis sheds light on the validity and importance of understanding inoculation in the context of parenting.
Chapter One

Introduction

In today’s society, children are bombarded by multiple socialization factors. However, the socializing role of the parent still maintains prominence in a child’s development, despite the ever-changing and increasingly diverse elements of influence. Many studies have proven that the parenting in a child’s life retains the position of primary influence in the formation of worldviews, norms, and lifestyle. This being the case, numerous attempts have been made to pinpoint different factors of effective and ineffective parenting.

With the realization of the prominent role that parents have in their children's development, from birth to adulthood, comes the reality of the frustration that dominates the parenting realm. A person does not have to look far to find tired eyes, hopeless expressions, and screams of desperation to understand that many parents are at a loss. They are at a loss for ways to substantially and effectively impact their children—how to enable them to listen, to learn, and to behave. These individuals are not unintelligent or lazy; they simply do not know what to do next. Everything they have tried may have failed. Possibly a new-found realization of parenting objectives has made it so that all of their past parenting techniques now seem inadequate and they wonder how to do a 180-degree turn in their world of impact on the children.

Multiple forces—books, television shows, parenting classes—have attempted to find answers for parental frustration and hopelessness.
Despite the frequency and the universality with which it occurs, the experience of parenting remains challenging to all and perplexing to many. The abundance of literature written for the public audience that addresses parenting would indicate both a need and an interest in this area. (Jacobson 1999, p. 240)

With all of these resources, it would seem that the problems of parenting would have found resolution, but universal solutions for parenting dilemmas do not come often due to the diversity of parenting situations, children's personalities, and family dynamics.

The role of a parent is multifaceted; however, one of the main functions is communication—effective communication. As with any relationship, communication is the key to its success. Most problems that parents encounter are founded on communicative mishaps or misunderstandings. For this reason, it is essential that a deeper understanding is developed and an appreciation for this realm of the relationship is embraced. In an attempt to help with these crucial elements of the important relationship between parent and child, this thesis focuses on parental communication—specifically how persuasion can function as a tool in the success of raising a child.

**Rationale for Study**

This thesis will add to the abundance of literature concerned with finding answers for parental inability and ignorance. This addition is relevant for three main reasons. First, parents are still frustrated, and children are still out of control. A simple visit to the mall or grocery store, or one hour spent babysitting has proven to me that good parenting seems to be out of the struggling reach of many parents.
Second, every parenting situation contains unique variables; therefore, parenting questions will never be fully answered. Another piece of literature will add to the plentiful feast of parental advice, but it may also help a lackluster group of parents somewhere regain a sense of direction and hope. Third, this research concerns an area of parenting that has not received thorough research and analysis, and not much at all according to my research: the effective use of persuasion in parenting.

The use of the phrase “parental persuasion” might conjure up an image of harsh discipline. "I'll give them persuasion. One good swat should do it." This connotation of persuasion is not the direction that this thesis will head—thus the careful use of the word effective when describing the use of persuasion.

Most parents are concerned with the lasting persuasive effect on their children toward certain values and behaviors. However, many parents remain frustrated that while their teachings might induce temporary belief and action, their parental influence soon loses its impact in the whirlwind of influences that surrounds children each year . . . every day. So how can a parent keep from living the cliché “what I say goes in one ear and out the other?” I hypothesize that the answer lies in persuasion using inoculation tactics, that inoculation techniques can be used to produce the longevity of persuasion that is key to long-term positive parenting effect, perhaps giving parents a newfound sense that they matter.

The above hypothesis necessitates much further research; however, this thesis serves as a starting point, using the following three research questions as guides.
1. Do parents believe that it is part of their job to give the child a moral code by which to live?

2. What values do parents try to instill in their children?

3. Does parental persuasion incorporate elements of inoculation?

These questions help to set a context for the use of inoculation in parenting and a better understanding of the persuasion that occurs in many parenting situations. By answering the previous questions, it is hoped that there will be an inducement for others to further study and use inoculation techniques in the realm of parenting.

**Literature Review**

The following resources help answer this thesis’ overarching question, “How can the use of inoculation tactics help to instill lasting belief in shared parental values?” These resources, along with my own research, help to form the case for this project’s dilemma of inducing longevity of parental persuasion in a child’s life. Two of the literature sections also have one or two questions that the specific resources can help to answer in the quest to understanding the role of persuasion in parenting.

**Persuasion Literature**

This review of literature addresses two questions. What is persuasion, and what role does it play in parenting? What is inoculation theory, and how can it help to develop more lasting persuasive effects?

Fuegen and Brehm (2004) find that resistance to persuasion relates directly to the strength of one’s attitude and the affective motivation a person has in protecting his/her belief or value. The more cherished a certain view is to a person, the more
tightly he/she will cling to the preconceived notion and be able to resist persuasion more strongly. Something that Fuegen and Brehm find which seems somewhat counterintuitive is that weak arguments actually produce more persuasive effect than stronger arguments or persuasive efforts, due to the surprise attack effect. It is not expected that a weak argument will undermine a certain thought; therefore people let their resistance down and are more susceptible to the persuasive appeal. “It is argued that the most effective way to reduce an individual’s affectively based resistance to persuasion is to provide a weak deterrent that does not directly threaten a cherished value” (Fuegen and Brehm 2004, p. 62). With this being the case, the way to promote enhanced resistance ability is to strengthen a person’s affective desire to maintain a certain belief or value and to heighten his/her awareness of seemingly weak persuasive efforts.

Within the persuasion literature, resistance has also been examined as a psychological *process* (e.g., one can resist by counterarguing), a *motivation* (i.e., having the goal of not being persuaded), and a *quality* of an attitude or person (i.e., being resistant to persuasion). (Brinol, et al, p. 83)

An important element of these researchers’ study is that a person’s confidence in his/her ability to defend certain beliefs or values relates directly to his/her ability and willingness to encounter and argue counter-beliefs. Resistance to persuasion is enhanced when the person is confident that the held belief is correct; however, resistance decreases when the person feels that it is wrong to appear resistant in a certain situation.

A common misconception is that an absence of attitude change signals resistance. However, according to Quinn and Wood (2004), this perception is not
always true: “Resistance occurs when individuals face pressure to change their attitudes” (p. 208). In other words, true persuasive readiness and resistance cannot be developed unless counter-beliefs are encountered. Protection from opposing beliefs and values does not ready people for the persuasion that will inevitably occur. Therefore, it is essential for resistance practice to be allowed early in one’s life. This preparation forewarns of the reality of a lifetime of persuasion. The simplicity of forewarning does not equal complete readiness to resist all efforts. Quinn and Wood (2004) elaborate on this reality:

We have argued in this chapter that forewarned may indeed be forearmed, but that forearming does not always involve resistance. Warnings of impending influence can generate resistance when they orient recipients to consider the threat to their existing attitudes and undertake a cognitive defense, and when the warnings are presented in a context that does not distract people from careful thought. In contrast, forewarnings can increase susceptibility to persuasion when they focus recipients on the self-related implications of being influenced. That is, when recipients are concerned about being gullible and losing integrity, then they may preemptively agree with appeals in order to minimize eventual change. (p. 210)

In order for effective persuasion preparation to take place, there must be not only an education as to specific arguments and answers but also an education about persuasion in general. Every person is the receiver of persuasion on a daily basis, whether it is known or unknown. For the receiver to be sufficiently prepared to wage the war against persuasion, he/she needs to understand how he/she is most often persuaded and thus how to avoid those situations and environmental factors. One way for this preparation to
occur is for the receiver to understand a persuader's potential tactics, as the next authors competently outline.

Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) offer hypotheses about the effectiveness of persuasion on different receivers. Overwhelmingly, their data concludes that persuasiveness stems from the persuader appearing trustworthy, credible, and representative of the information he/she purports as the truth. Besides showing that persuaders must use correct tactics while manifesting the correct image of self, these researchers also look at the foundational beliefs that cause human beings to follow certain arguments and not others, certain persuaders and not others.

Ultimately, Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) state that, "We hold our beliefs and attitudes in order to define and make sense of our selves" (p. 131). These beliefs and attitudes that individuals hold evolve with influence of others on their lives. However, worldviews become more firmly developed when these same individuals have put words and thoughts into action and learned how to counterargue the very beliefs they hold.

Therefore, although many tactics can help undermine a person's fundamentally held beliefs, the most important tools at a persuader's disposal remain his/her own role-modeling and open-mindedness to questions that the receiver may have before taking the persuader's belief as his/her own.

"Persuasion is the use of communication to change another's behavior, thoughts, or attitudes" (p. 156) argues Johnston (1994). Hsiung (2003) adds that persuasion is sometimes confused with influence; however, the foundation of the
difference remains in the strategy and intentionality used during persuasive appeals. There are multiple ways to persuade; however, all persuasion is coupled with power strategies. The interesting thing about power play is that the individuals involved have to allow the other person to have the power. If one person attempts to persuade, the receiver must subconsciously agree to hear the argument and then decide whether to give power to the persuader in the manner of agreeing with the communicated belief. If the receiver allows the persuader power in the relationship, there are four main power strategies that the persuader can use in order to gain effectiveness in the communication. These strategies follow: expectations and consequences, relational loyalty, values, and obligation.

Besides the use of power strategies, an underlying attitude that increases effectiveness of persuasion is that of open-minded listening. Hsiung (2003) notes the following:

A person can become even more influential by being open to the viewpoints and persuasive strategies of others, rather than by remaining intransigent in the face of such attempts. The reverse also applies, that a person can become less influential by eliciting fewer influence attempts from others. (p. 103)

If this is the case, then it becomes even more crucial that a persuader makes sure that he/she firmly believes his/her viewpoint and communicates it in a way that leads to long-term internalization by the receiver of the same viewpoint.

A persuader must make certain that his/her message elicits understanding, belief, and long-term internalization. Johnston reminds, "It is important to remember that the effects of source characteristics are short-lived. It is the merit of the message that persists to influence and maintain future attitude change" (p. 163).
McGuire (1999) proposes that the way to ensure that a message has a lasting effect on the receiver involves the use of inoculation tactics.

Inoculation theory assumes that pretreatments to make truisms resistant to subsequent persuasive attacks must overcome two deficiencies: the believer's being unpracticed in defending the belief because it has seldom been attacked and the believer's being unmotivated to develop a defense because the belief seems unassailable. (p. 53)

In order to overcome these deficiencies, McGuire suggests following three main steps. The persuader presents both his and the opponents' side of the argument in question. The persuader presents the opposition's side in an easily refutable manner. This solid presentation makes the opposition look weak. The persuader then allows the receiver to produce the counterarguments. This production of arguments diffuses the possible later effects of the opposition's arguments against their newly found belief. This third step also gives the receiver the feeling that he/she decided upon the new belief instead of the feeling of forced belief, which would produce a weak or nonexistent internalization of the new thought or attitude.

Despite the lack of research on the theory of inoculation in the parenting context, there have been several authors who have built on McGuire's Inoculation Theory. Although the use of this theory is not as prevalent as many other persuasion theories, as is evidenced by its use on a Communication 221 web site at West Virginia University, McGuire's theory is starting to gain more prominence as a necessary element of the study of persuasion. A West Virginia University professor published an article about inoculation in 1996 on the as.wvu.edu web site in order to help familiarize his students with the history and use of this theory, which stems
from medical use of a shot that uses a virus against itself. If a person receives a weak shot of a virus, it will jumpstart the immune system to recognize and fight a stronger virus that may present itself later. In the same way, persuasion tactics employed using the inoculation theory suggest that a weak attack on a person's attitudes or beliefs will induce him/her to build resistance to later, stronger attacks by thinking through possible counterarguments and strengthening his/her position. In order for this process effectively to take place, the persuader must follow three crucial steps. The receiver must be warned of the attack; the persuader must produce a weak attack; and the receiver must have the opportunity to actively defend against the attack. The entire process depends on the weak attack. This attack gets the whole process started, inducing a person to think for him/herself, which is the point of inoculation.

As Benoit (1991) reports, McGuire suggests that "resistance is created by altering how the audience processes the information in the persuasive attack: refutational defenses increase the auditors' motivation and ability to produce counterarguments to a subsequent attack" (p. 219). Benoit tested the effects of inoculation theory on receivers, specifically attempting to find whether the production of counterarguments facilitates resistance to future attacks on a held belief or attitude. His study found that involvement during persuasion influenced cognitive processing, but it did not lead to counterargument creation. However, it was most importantly "demonstrated that significant amounts of resistance can be created through refutational and supportive defensive messages on controversial
topics" (Benoit 1991, p. 227). In other words, inoculation theory does build resistance to future attacks on a person's previously established worldview.

Pfau et al. (2003) introduce another element of effective inoculation by suggesting that attitude accessibility confers resistance as do threat and refutational preemption. "Attitude accessibility refers to the ease of activating an attitude from memory" (p. 40). If information remains easily retrievable then it is deemed highly accessible and leads to attitude strength. "The results of this investigation indicate that inoculation treatments render attitudes more accessible and stronger and that [with] time, enhanced attitude strength fosters resistance to counterattitudinal attacks" (Pfau, et al. 2003, p. 47). Pfau, et al.'s research concludes that inoculation works.

As Lum (1997) finds, there are multiple factors involved in the persuasion process, including gender, self-esteem, personality, and dogmatism. However, "researchers suggested that 'inoculation tends to weaken or "wash out" the natural relationship between the personality traits and attitude change" (Lum 1997, p. 46). This data reveals the underlying strength of the inoculation argument. Persuasion surveys and research often focus on how to get a certain type of personality or mindset to change to a desired viewpoint or withstand undesirable viewpoints. The point has often been missed that people need to put aside the personality-driven data for the foundational elements of creating an atmosphere in which any person can receive the stimulus—moderate threat and counterarguing experience—in order to respond appropriately to various persuasive efforts.
Since McGuire's conception of the inoculation theory there have been many attempts to pinpoint specific parts of the inoculation that work better and longer than others. Two of the parts under analysis are those of \textit{refutational-same} and \textit{refutational-different} defensive procedures. According to Kiesler et al. (1969) "the \textit{refutational-same} defensive procedure [is] followed by an attack which use[s] the same arguments that had been previously refuted. The \textit{refutational-different} defense pretreatment was followed by an attack utilizing novel arguments" (p. 137). Both of these inoculation treatments lead to increased resistance; however, their effectiveness varies in terms of immediate versus delayed attacks. Kiesler et al. report that "the \textit{refutational-same} defense is almost as effective against an attack two days later as it is against an immediate attack, but the \textit{refutational-different} defense is even more effective against a delayed attack than it is against an immediate attack" (as cited in McGuire, 1962). "This latter finding, presumably, can be traced to the motivated rehearsal of defenses during the two day separation between defense and attack" (Kiesler, et al. 1969, p. 139).

\textbf{Parenting Literature *}

The answers to the following sub-questions can be found due to the following resources. What is parenting, why is it important, and what should be its main objectives? Should parents attempt to teach values to their children?

James (1969) reports on the probation system through which too many children go. He worries that the United States probation system has become part of the problem, not the solution. The probation process does not encourage long-term

\* Although there is much parenting literature, most of it is more contemporary and less academic in nature, especially in relation to the realm of communication in parenting. For this reason, many of the cited resources are of a more popular, media-based slant and less are from academic journals. This lack of academic research emphasizes the need for this thesis' research.
solutions to the behavioral and attitudinal problems present in so many of the young people who pass through the system. "Probation too often is used as a threat to make a child behave. . . . In time the threat wears off, and probably has not produced a meaningful change in a boy's way of thinking" (James 1969, p. 26). This short-term effect needs to be fought as children fight against the evils of society and their personal lives.

Although James does not deal directly with the issue of parenting as much as the judicial system, the foundational truths evidenced in the war this author has waged include many of the same founding facts of effective parental persuasion. As James discovers in his findings, two of the crucial elements to redevelopment or initial development of children, whether in the home or the judicial system, are that children need guidance—not pushing—to correct ways of thinking, and they need to be able to trust those who help them to learn the correct and healthy ways of living.

"Behavior is social, in the sense that we all behave as we do because of our experiences with other people and because of the social context in which we behave" (Lauer 1978, p. 14). In other words, an individual does not develop his/her beliefs independently. The creation of a person's worldview occurs through the use of bits and pieces of others' worldviews. The size of the influence of others depends on types of situations and the amount of authority others hold over the individual.

"Virtually everything we know is based on some authority. We know comparatively little from personal experience or personal research. The authority we necessarily rely on is someone else's experience or research or belief" (Lauer 1978, p. 64). Lauer
(1978) notes this truth and necessity, while making the case that the family founds the healthy development of an individual's belief and value set. Many different people and types of worldviews influence an individual during a lifetime, but the familial connection has been proven throughout multiple studies to play a crucial role in the development of an individual prepared to function well in society.

Gottman and Parker's book (1986) researches relational dependency. This dependency in relationships—relying on others for certain resources and the power that lies with those who hold the valued resources—has been studied using multiple theories. However, the following Gottman and Parker (1986) quotation encapsulates many of the ideas: "The ability to gain others' cooperation is a function of one's control over desired resources and one's ability and willingness to retaliate if the other does not obey" (p. 331). This control of resources only becomes effective if coupled with the knowledge that the individual who desires the resources must clearly understand his/her interdependency with the resource-holder and the possible outcomes from their interactions (i.e., rewards and punishments).

Eyre and Eyre (1993) argue the case for guiding children to correct morals and values using a quotation from Ronald Reagan, "'We don't expect children to discover the principle of calculus on their own, but some would give them no guidance when it comes to ethics, morality and values'" (p. 12). Over the years, questions have arisen as to the necessity and relevance of parents teaching morals and values in the home, since, as some would counter, children will create their own worldview; therefore, parents should not tell their children what to think and believe.
As the Eyres argue, if parents do not teach their children how and what to think, then it will not be the children who are developing their own worldview; instead, children will take on the worldviews of others around them, such as teachers, friends, and others in the community.

A person's developed attitudes and beliefs do not evolve in a vacuum. They always stem from some foundation; parents have the opportunity to give children a solid and correct starting point.

Children may grow up and ultimately develop values different from yours and different from what you tried to teach them; but at least they will do so consciously, and with a basis of comparison—with a foundation to start from. If children start from a values vacuum—with none taught, none learned—they will float at the mercy of circumstance and situation, and their lives will never be their own. (Eyre and Eyre 1993, p. 14)

A parent participant study done by Jacobson (1999) produced multiple results showing the differences in parenting styles but the congruity that underlies much of the foundational parenting value set. This study focused on adults who were considered effective parents but who used a variety of techniques to raise happy, hard-working, and respectful children. The various data led to a synthesized, unanimous finding stated as follows:

Considering all objectives of the study, the following hypothesis flows from the data analysis and reflects the experience of positive parenting by these participants in which parents (a) consistently communicate to their children the integrity of their values, (b) place the needs of their children and family foremost among their priorities, and (c) respond to their children in a manner that is congruent with their values and beliefs. (Jacobson 1999, p. 243)

Parenting has become so universally acknowledged as incorporating certain social norms and roles that sources such as the World Book Encyclopedia (2000)
dedicate a section to examining this role. "The role of parents is to provide care, love, and training for their children" (World Book Encyclopedia 2000, Vol. 15, p. 156). Although over the years many changes have occurred in parenting due to societal, technological, and other environmental evolutions, many of the founding parental objectives and values have remained the same. Multiple literary pieces suggest some of the same fundamental tips for effective parenting. A child needs and subconsciously wants boundaries and rules by which he/she can base expectations for their life (Newman 1950; Ginott 1956; West & West 2004). The goal of parenting should be to help children learn self-discipline (Newman 1950; Ginott 1956; Puner 1960; Gosiewski 1976)—not push discipline on them—through clear communication (parenting.org 1999), parental role-modeling (Ginott 1956; Puner 1960), and association of reasoning behind consequences (Crow 1999; parenting.org 1999).

Ellersick’s (2000) dissertation finds the following to be true:

The results of this study reiterates what people have been saying for years: parents must teach children values, beliefs, and attitudes. It also suggests that parents must set uncompromising standards and values so that their children may share the values of the parents and not learn what is important from outside sources. If parents can establish an uncompromising set of values, they may be giving their children a valuable and useful tool to resist persuasion. (p. 32)

Along with helping children to develop this strong sense of right and wrong, parents must also give children the opportunity of independence in order to learn coping mechanisms in the face of aversive situations. Ellersick reports that much of a child’s development relies on parental example and the freedom of trial and error. A
person's development of strength of conviction is closely tied with the opportunities to test his/her beliefs and values—while surrounded by parental love, encouragement, and support. Fortification of a worldview does not occur in a life completely devoid of aversive situations.

Parenting becomes frustrating, and the discipline incorrectly used, when parents do not see the positive behavioral responses from their children that they desire. Many experts, according to Cain (2003), say that discipline drama comes from one of two major problems: inconsistency (McGraw 2003) and unrealistic expectations placed on children. In terms of expectations, consequences and parenting tools must be age appropriate (McGraw 2003, 2004), according to their developmental—mental, physical, and emotional—level.

The acknowledgment of different levels of development and the transformation of expectations based on these levels remains crucial to effective parenting. This acknowledgment has to be coupled with a parental attitude of partial responsibility for a child's behavior (Gierer 2003). If a father or mother has unrealistic expectations, communicates incorrectly, or neglects to follow some of the other guiding principles, then he/she should accept at least partial responsibility for a child's misperception of correct behavior. Fundamental to this acceptance is the realization that parents—adults—act based on a different developmental plane than their children but they also hold different values and priorities than their children. Therefore, "adults and children comprehend basic concepts in separate ways" (Peterson 2003, par. 6). This aspect is one that makes teaching children more
difficult; however, the realization of this difference helps to make communication and guidance attainable.

Savage (2003) discusses the changes that occur when a child leaves for college and the many changes in the parent/child relationship and in the child him/herself. The main function of the book is to help parents to feel more at ease with the transition parenting from a distance—reaffirming their children while continuing to guide them to correct patterns of thinking and decision-making. Savage warns that parents will see what he/she would deem negative changes in their college student; however, they should remember that these changes often occur during an adjustment period that, as a pendulum swings, will most likely come to rest in a more balanced, centered position, closer to what the parent might expect. Children do not forget what their parents teach them, but they often test these lessons, in order to find their worldview incorporating parental, peer, teacher, and other advice.

This author suggests that the parent should consider him/herself a mentor from afar, continuing to give parental advice and opinions but not through lecturing, but rather through stated, unemotional facts with clear foundations of rationale. The child will at least respect that his/her parent has a clear reason for the particular belief set, whether he/she chooses to live by the parent’s belief set at the time or not. One way in which a parent can effectively communicate with a child during this period of adjustment and possible frustration is by asking questions with genuine interest and respect regarding why the college student has chosen a particular action.
or attitude. Foundationally, communication must continue based on respect, understanding, and patience.

Child Development Literature

According to Kinsman, Smucker, and Wildman (1999), one can find much research showing that family relationships have a major impact on whether a child becomes behaviorally and emotionally healthy. "Research has . . . indicated that parent and family psychological problems place children at risk for the development of behavioral and emotional disorders. . . ." (Kinsman et al., p. 342). This connection has significance in that it shows the importance that parental and familial health has on a child's development throughout every stage of his/her life.

Society today is a product of the lack of work and teaching in the home. Shaw (2003) argues that parenting has become excessively permissive, producing unhappy and hopeless children. He warns that adults must make a change now in order to avoid future destruction to homes, society, and the children themselves. Shaw's impatience with the reality of children today is closely followed by tools that he gives to parents which when used will help protect children from further damage.

In today's relativistic society, many parents have become uncertain, if not afraid, of guiding their children to correct morals and values, concerned that their function should not include teaching these lessons. Shaw (2003) firmly states that the role of a parent definitely includes the installation of a moral code in children.

We have to be very careful to protect our young children until we have instilled in them a sense of values, they have come to an understanding of the destructiveness of a great deal of what they see around them, and they are mature enough to hold their own and make wise choices. (Shaw 2003, p. 134)
Parental expectations and role modeling are paramount in this process. "The values you demonstrate in your day-to-day interactions will make all the difference in the outcome" (Shaw 2003, p. 140). Shaw (2003) gives the following steps in order to help children live effectively in the world: establish boundaries; maintain discipline; teach self-control; instill respect for others; inculcate moral values; promote a healthy degree of separation; and establish appropriate accountability, privacy, and trust. Permissiveness has reigned for too long; the time has come to take back control of the children surrounding us—taking control of the future of society.

Human development occurs continuously and incrementally. As Nixon (2004) describes, toddlers (ages 12-36 months old) have susceptibility to the molding powers around them. Toddlers do most of their learning by observing and imitating. This author reminds the reader that, due to a toddler's susceptibility and undeveloped language skills, adults must choose words carefully in teaching efforts. However, toddlers most effectively learn through experience and learning consequences related to certain behaviors.

During the toddler years (as well as any age under 8) close supervision plays a crucial part, especially as regards to media input. Mayer (2004) reports that children are really susceptible to persuasion at this age, not having a fully developed moral judgment and knowledge base from which to draw accurate perceptions of available information.

Not only is it important for a child to be carefully supervised at this age and taught carefully but they also must face challenges, managed appropriately and
patiently, to aid in their maturation. For example, Nixon (2004) notes that a toddler has an extremely short attention span. Acknowledgement of this fact does not negate the need to help the toddler develop into an older child level, where longer activities are the norm. "Attention span is like a muscle: The more it's used the stronger and longer it grows" (Nixon 2004, p. 105). As Nixon (2004) states here—and this statement is true not only for the attention span but also for other areas of development—an adult must not have unrealistic expectations of a child but continue to hold reasonable expectations for their development, improvement, and maturation.
Chapter Two

Methodology

Although a rich body of quantitative research on persuasion exists, the ethnographic/qualitative methodology of observation and interviews can further enhance the understanding of attitude change. Besides focusing on the research done through years of study by other individuals, interview tools were used as a case study by which to test my hypothesis—*inoculation techniques can be used to produce the longevity of persuasion that is key to long-term positive parenting effect*. Since the interview tool functioned as a centerpiece of this study, its use, development, and effectiveness necessitate more explanation.

**Choice of the Researched Subset**

As a means to achieve the objective of my research—attempting to associate parental persuasion with a child’s establishment of a value set—I believed that a study of the college-age individual would prove effective. This study could attempt to isolate the transition of beliefs inherited from parents and the strength of this parental influence when faced with the various influences present on a college campus. One school was chosen as the basis of this study. This sole emphasis eliminates the abundance of variables that would be present if examining viewpoints of multiple colleges. The school chosen was my alma mater, Greenville College, a small Christian liberal arts school located in Central Illinois. My past and present association with this school gave me extensive knowledge on the influence and objectives of this college. Although a Christian school is often assumed to be very
conservative in nature, Greenville has a unique environment in which conservatism and liberalism\(^1\) are both alive and somewhat divisive.

**Context of the Participants**

To many people, Greenville would seem socially and environmentally conservative. This conservatism spreads to new students even upon their admittance process. Each new student must sign a lifestyle statement saying that, while he/she is a student on campus, he/she will refrain from drinking, smoking, drug use, premarital sex, and more. These perspectives inundate the housing facilities and classrooms, as it is the purpose of many faculty and staff members to help students to live what would be considered a conservative value-driven life.

Paradoxically, this social conservatism exists with the ideologically more liberal-leaning teachings of Greenville departments, such as the Philosophy and Religion Department. It is not that the members of this department do not believe in some of the socially conservative perspectives that are communicated on campus, but these faculty members strive to allow for students to question and find answers that might be outside the realm of conservative thought. Over the past few years, the worldview of this department has caused rifts on campus between faculty and staff and between parents and students. There has been misunderstanding as to the

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\(^1\)For the purposes of this study, conservatism is defined as adherence to traditions and established values in order to lend to social stability and a society of moderation and caution, and liberalism is defined as freedom from traditional ways of thinking and living, and the right of the individual to choose what is right for him/her.
intentions of these faculty members, and the disequilibration objective of the
department has caused many people at Greenville, or parents of Greenville students,
to question the motives and tactics of what these educators would consider a more liberal philosophy.

Discomfort has arisen from the fact that the Philosophy and Religion faculty desire for students to question not only their faith but also the absolute truths that their parents and other influences have encouraged them to believe. This goal is for the students to attain what the faculty would consider a more open, enlightened state of thinking—not a disregard for pre-established values but a view that the best values are achieved not through simple acceptance but through careful questioning, analysis, and consequently action from belief.

Greenville College is a liberal arts institute—meaning that all students are required to take a course in most of the departments on campus, such as the Philosophy and Religion department. Since this requirement is in place, the Philosophy and Religion mentality is not solely limited to majors or minors in this area, but there is impact on all students who attend Greenville. This overarching impact of the pull between conservatism and liberalism makes Greenville College an excellent place for a case study. Parents send their children to this school—or children choose it—based on different aspects of the campus. Some parents and students appreciate the socially conservative environment and safety net that Greenville purports to offer. Some parents and students choose Greenville because of the famous, or infamous, philosophically questioning environment.
Case Study Development

The study of Greenville incorporates research of six families of Senior-level Philosophy and Religion majors. An interview tool was used in communicating with the student and then one of the parents of the student. (See Appendices I & II.) The objective in these conversations was to gain at least a partial understanding of the mental and moral development that has occurred since the students' arrivals on the campus of Greenville College. In order to achieve this type of understanding in a limited relational period, I structured the questions in a way that could allow the participant to ease into the interview session without being led in a certain responsive direction.

The interview period began with easily answerable questions and led up to questions that required more thought. The questions were intended to get an overall view of the students' and parents' values and relationships with one another. Ranging from questions about majors to preparation for college to liberality, my communication with the respondents allowed for a multifaceted view of their value sets, family life, and persuasion in general. Although this thesis is geared toward inoculation, interview questions did not include the word inoculation, since the term is, in the persuasive sense, foreign to many people. However, the wording of some of the questions was designed to determine whether the parents had used inoculation.

The development of the interview tools can be divided into one of four categories regarding the use and intention behind each of the questions: rapport-building, parenting context, persuasion use, and parenting outcome. Under these general headings, the questions were chosen with specific intentions. The
questions—although some resulting in more reportable data than others—were used as blocks on which the answers to this thesis’ research questions could be built. The following section will outline the reasoning behind the question choices and design. In order to observe the exact design of the parent and student interview schedules, see Appendices I and II.

The first two questions of the interview tools for the parents and students were developed mainly to establish a sense of rapport and as easily answerable to ease the participant into the data collection period. These questions also functioned to help determine whether the parents were well-informed about their children’s college careers. If they were not able to answer these questions, then the chances were much slimmer that the parents would have a good grasp on how well their children were succeeding in college in general. Although slight variations occurred depending on whether the participant was a parent or student, the following questions functioned as the rapport-building questions:

Question #1: What is your child’s year in school?

Question #2: What is your child’s major?

The next category of questions was parenting-context in nature. Two of the three questions were placed near the beginning of the data collection because parenting context sets the scene for more specific relational/persuasion questions. As with all of the questions in the data collection tools, a primary intention was the paralleling of answers between parent and student responses to observe whether parent communication functioned effectively enough that the student was aware of his/her parents’ intentions and objectives in their lives. If the student did not
comprehend what the parent tried to do in raising the child, then no matter how well the parent answered the questions or how good their intentions were, a breakdown in communication would have occurred. This observance of a breakdown would help to establish the necessity of encouraging parents to achieve a better understanding of effective communication with their children.

Question #3 functioned as a foundational question. If the parent could provide a clear outline of their ideas about this question, the response would help to show the stage that was set for their choices in other persuasion responses. The students’ responses helped to show if there was clear value-driven communication in the relationship. This question also served as a way to see what most parents saw as the objective for parenting.

Question #4 was asked next, because Question #3 was less leading than #4. However, after the primary objective was stated, this question was used to build onto it by leading more directly into whether the teaching of a moral code was a conscious decision made by the parents. The second part of this question started to help indicate the level of the use of inoculation, since inoculation is largely dependent on the use of reasons behind actions and consequences.

Although used later in the data collection period, Question #10 (for the parents) and Question #9 (for the students) helped to lead to observations more specific to the college age student. It was a rather open-ended question meant to leave room for parents and students to give a broad range of responses and to provide the opportunity to see where possible values laid. The following three questions,
although involving slightly different numbering and wording in the student interview, were as follows:

Question #3: What was your primary objective in parenting? Do you think you succeeded in accomplishing this objective? Why or why not?

Question #4: Did you see it as part of your parental responsibility to give your child a moral code by which to live his/her life? Did you discuss with your child reasons for your moral beliefs?

Question #10: How did you attempt to prepare your child for his/her college years and adulthood?

The persuasion use set of questions enabled observation of whether parents understood persuasion and their conscious and subconscious use of such techniques. Questions #5, 6, and 7 on the parent questionnaire were constructed with inoculation as the underlying point of analysis. Although in varying ways, each of these questions asked if the parents used inoculation techniques, with the main emphasis being explanation in the parental communication. Question #5 was aimed at seeing if the parents allowed for some freedom in the opportunities for the children to think through differences in worldviews. Questions #6 and 7 were focused on the parent’s desires for values that their children would incorporate into their own lives.

Inoculation theory states that a crucial component is the explanation as to why certain beliefs are held. These questions were constructed to see if the parents understood this concept and applied it in their relationship with their children.

On the parent questionnaire, Questions #8 and 9 incorporated more persuasion-general focal points. These more open-ended questions were created to
determine what the parents saw as persuasion and if they consciously employed
certain persuasive techniques in the raising of their children.

Questions #11, 14, and 15 helped provide insight into the parents’ views of
their children’s ability to deal with persuasion, specifically in the college
environment. They allowed for comparison with the student responses to see if the
parental perspectives were accurate.

The persuasion use questions were as follows on the parent questionnaires:
Question #5: Did you present your child with varying viewpoints of values
and ideas? If so, how did you do this? If not, what was your reason for not
doing so? If you presented varying viewpoints, did you give arguments for
and against these beliefs?
Question #6: What are the three primary values that you desired to instill in
your child? For these values, did you use certain methods to strengthen these
beliefs? If so, what methods did you use?
Question #7: In disciplining, did you couple explanation with consequences?
If so, what types of explanations would you use? If not, why did you choose
not to explain?
Question #8: Do you think persuasion was a part of your parenting
experience? If so, how so?
Question #9: Did you consciously use certain persuasion methods to guide
your child’s thoughts and beliefs? If so, what techniques did you use?
Question #11: Do you see your children as having been influenced or persuaded during their college years? If so, in what areas? How do you think this was accomplished?

Question #14: Do you think your child can resist inappropriate persuasion?

Question #15: In what way(s) do you think your child is most susceptible to persuasion (e.g. impression others have of them, desire to appear relativistic, logic of argument)?

The student interview questions, #5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13 and 14, enabled comparison and checkpoints for the parents’ responses. Although many parents gave solid responses, the accuracy of their influence in their children’s lives was a necessary analysis point. Therefore, the student questions, although numbered and worded a bit differently, were very similar in nature. To view these questions, see Appendix II.

Questions #12 and 13 on the Interview Schedule for the Parents and Questions #10 and 12 on the Interview Schedule for the Students were designed to have the participants evaluate their relationship with the child or parent. These questions allowed for reflection and possible expression of regret, which could possibly give increased insight into the parenting and persuasion experience in these relationships.

The last category includes questions that were asked mainly at or near the end of the interview schedule, since these questions contained some of the most crucial information in the analysis of whether the students had maintained the values that their parents hoped to instill in them. However, the preceding questions were integral
to the understanding of the possible reasons for the similarities and differences between the parents and students.

Although this thesis is qualitative in nature, there needed to be a few questions that could be somewhat quantifiable. Question #12 on the interview schedule for parents and Question #10 on the interview schedule for students served this purpose. They allowed for quantitative comparison between the parental and student perceptions of the child’s readiness to face college life. Questions #13 (for the parents) and #12 (for the students) provided more open-ended follow-up to find out where the participants thought the parenting had lacked in college preparation.

The final three questions of each of the interview schedules were designed to get to the core of the interview time—whether the students lived by the values the parents tried to give them. The last two questions asking for the assignment of the label liberal or conservative achieved a somewhat quantifiable comparison point. Although the participants were given definitions of liberalism and conservatism, it is realized that the responses could only be generalizations. However, another reason behind these questions was to observe how the students desired to see themselves—as liberal or conservative, as similar or different than their parents.

The specific questions used for the parenting outcome subset on the interview schedule for the parents are as follows:

Question #12: On a scale of one to ten (ten being the most prepared), rate how well prepared you think your child was to face the influences of college in testing the morals and values that you taught him/her (if you attempted to do so)?
Question #13: What would you have done differently to prepare your child for college, especially in the area of beliefs and thought processes?

Question #16: Do you see your child perpetuating the familial values that you tried to teach him/her (if you did so)? If so, which ones in particular would you say he/she has held to the strongest? Why do you think this is the case? If not, what do you see as different? Why do you think this is the case?

Question #17: Would you consider yourself more liberal or more conservative?

Question #18: Would you consider your child more liberal or more conservative?

(The questions used on the interview schedule for the students can be found in Appendix II.)

Overall, the goal was to determine how parents used persuasion in raising their children and whether their tactics were effective in helping their children to create a value set strong enough to withstand the multiple influences encountered during the formative college years. More specifically, the interviews tested the hypothesis that inoculation theory offers parents effective tactics for helping their children to maintain a strong value set throughout their lives.

Data Collection

Responses to questions in face-to-face interviews and from questionnaires comprised the data of the study. In October 2004, I traveled to Greenville College to conduct seven interviews with Junior/Senior student volunteers (mainly Religion majors). All of the interviews took place in the library on Greenville College's
campus. They lasted about thirty minutes. In this one-on-one setting, attention was well maintained, and communication seemed effective. After a majority of the interviews, I felt that I had achieved a good insight into the students' perceptions of their parents. Important to this process were the few rapport questions that I asked preliminarily to the interview period and the close attention given to the participants during the interviews.

E-mail correspondence and questionnaire responses comprised the communication with the parent respondents. Four of the six possible parent participants responded. (One of the parents represented two of the student participants—twins.)

**Analysis of the Responses**

The next step after the initial contacts with the participants was response analysis. The process for response analysis consisted of reviewing each question for the students, summarizing the results on a separate piece of paper, and then tabulating the results according to the overlapping and similar answers. For questions that required a more quantitative scale-related response, the average was calculated for all student respondents. For the questions that were more open-ended and qualitative in nature, the responses were written on a separate sheet of paper. Then if some responses were the same or very similar, I marked beside the original response as many times as necessary to indicate that one to seven respondents had the same answer. This same process was used for the parent responses.

After tabulating the student and parent responses separately, I cross-analyzed using the same process as described above in order to find similarity and difference
of thoughts and beliefs between the different respondent groups. Chapter Two reports the results found to be important to answering this thesis' questions.

Even before the analysis, during the data collection period, certain paralleling tendencies in the student and parent responses emerged. Some of the glaring differences between the parents’ perceptions and the students’ perceptions of home life became quite apparent. These differences of opinion and observations led to some interesting results. However, most of the analysis supported my presuppositions, continuing to encourage the belief that there needs to be more parental persuasion awareness.
Chapter Three

Interview Results & Analysis

One of the main objectives of this study was to get a sense of whether parents today believe that part of the parent's job is to give the child a moral code and value set by which to live, as addressed by Research Question #1: Do parents believe that it is part of their job to give the child a moral code by which to live? I also wanted to find some of the values that parents specifically desire to instill in their children.

Similar to much of the other research done on parenting, it was found that parents strongly desire to instill a moral code in their children and that the primary objectives of parents are overwhelmingly similar—to raise respectful, responsible citizens who value themselves, their families, and others. Since this study was conducted mainly among Christian families, three of the four parents also had the objective of raising their children to believe in and live for Jesus Christ and the teachings inherent in the faith of Christianity. The findings regarding giving children values by which to live were congruent with the study by Jacobson (1999) mentioned in the literature review of this thesis: Although parenting styles vary it seems that most parents sense that their job as a parent includes instilling a moral code and values by which their children will live. Specifically answering Research Question #2 (What values do parents try to instill in their children?), this study found that parents most desire to encourage the development of the following five values in their children: respect/love for others, honesty/integrity, love for God, responsibility to God and self, and love for family. (All of the parents mentioned respect/love for others, and three of the four parents responded honesty/integrity.)
Of course, it is one thing for the parents to understand the importance of giving their children a moral code by which to live and much more to find that the children actually appreciate and embrace these values. A positive result was that the children of the parents that were involved in this study seemed to have a good sense of the objectives that the parents had and the values that they desired to teach them. The cross-comparison of the parent/student responses in this area resulted in consistent perceptions. Most of the students seemed to understand the moral code the parents wanted to give them and believed that they were implementing many of the values—at least, the top priority values—in their own lives.

In response to Research Question #3 (Does parental persuasion incorporate elements of inoculation?), the findings were more varied. Overwhelmingly, both parents and students sensed that role modeling—living by example—by the parents determined much of this success. This finding reiterates the literature review research, in which I found frequently that parental role modeling is crucial to effective parenting (Ginott 1956; Puner 1960; Ellersick 2000). Another inferred element of the adherence to values was the reportedly stringent parental convictions that the students reported that the parents held. As Pfau et al. (2003) found that the more easily retrievable information remains, the stronger an attitude becomes. Since it seemed through the student interviews that the parents reiterated through words and actions certain fundamental beliefs and truths, it is very possible that the values that the parents especially desired to instill in their children were easily retrievable and strengthened the children’s ability to act on the values.
The similarities between the parental and student perceptions started to split when the questions veered toward the student readiness for college and the persuasive elements that have influenced their thoughts and actions since leaving home. When the parents answered questions about their children’s readiness for college, their responses ranged from 8 to 10, with the average being a 9.25 rating. On the other hand, the students rated the parental preparatory help from a 6 to 10, with the average being 7.8 rating. I would have expected the parents to have been harder on themselves, having seen some of the inevitable problems their children faced at college. The parents gave themselves ratings of near perfection, seemingly a little naïve in light of the student perceptions. Another important part of this finding came from the follow-up to the rating showing that the absence of persuasion preparation was a key factor in the students feeling unprepared in facing some of the challenges of college. The responses to this question of preparation (question #12 on parent interview schedule and question #10 on student interview schedule) started to unearth the problem of the absence of persuasion education and preparation.

Before getting to the more inoculation-centered persuasion questions, it should be mentioned that almost all of the respondents seemed to have trouble with the word “persuasion.” The word had a negative connotation for most of the interviewees. Unfortunately, “persuasion” is often not seen in its broader, potentially positive context. This viewpoint is particularly unfortunate since—as even most of the student respondents understood—persuasion is inevitable. This misunderstanding can lead to dangerous miscommunication. If persuasion cannot be correctly defined and pinpointed, then it cannot be protected against, making it more dangerous. This
insight verifies my intuition that persuasion deserves a closer look, especially in the influential realm of parenting.

Due to this misunderstanding of persuasion, if this study were redone, I would include a definition of persuasion (as I did with the often misunderstood terms of "liberalism" and "conservatism"), such as Johnston's (1994) definition, "Persuasion is the use of communication to change another's behavior, thoughts, or attitudes" (p. 156). In the beginning, this term was consciously avoided, because I wanted the participants to answer the questions based on their understanding of persuasion. As soon as the flaw in this thinking became apparent, I was able to define the term "persuasion" for the confused students; however, since the parents only received electronic questionnaires, persuasion remained undefined for them, possible skewing some of their answers to the persuasion-centered questions.

Three of the four parents responded that they had used some form of persuasion in raising their children. This use likely stemmed from, as one parent stated, "[trying] to help [our children] come to the right decision." Six of the seven students said that their parents used some form of persuasion. One student's response gives a reasonable explanation for this prominence, "It is hard for parents to not use persuasion, because parents' beliefs are always around the kids." So even though the connotation of persuasion was often misunderstood, over 80% of the respondents still sensed the use of persuasion. The parents mentioned using the following persuasive techniques with their children: words/conversations, spanking, taking away privileges, role modeling, rewards for compliance, and camouflaging rules in fun. Many of these examples overlap with the student responses, as the following
exhibit: guilt trips, purporting beliefs as the only truth, actions and consequences, silence to show anger, bribery, and provision equaling expectation. Although some of the student examples showed a more negative slant, many of the persuasive inducements were the same as those stated by the parents.

Beyond the interest in the role modeling and use of persuasion in the home, this study focuses especially on the tactics taught for confronting others’ persuasion. In general, I thought it was necessary to ask the parents if they thought their children were able to resist inappropriate persuasion (question #14). All four of the respondents answered “yes,” with two seeming confident and one giving a more tentative reply of “I hope and pray so.” Only two of the students believed they could resist inappropriate persuasion well. Five of the seven students believed they could resist only some of the time.

The parents seemed much more confident of their children’s readiness to confront persuasive challenges—again, possibly somewhat naively so. Possibly this slight ignorance was due to the fact that they had correct intentions and mindsets. For example, one parent stated, “We tried to help [our children] think through things for themselves and make the right decisions, not for us, but because they know it is right.” This quotation gets at the heart of inoculation; however, somehow the intentions missed in translation to actions, as can be seen in the continuing data analysis.

Finding that many of the students do not have the preparation to effectively or confidently face persuasive efforts (positive or negative) necessitates understanding more about how the students seem to be affected most by persuasion
and how the parents could have more effectively helped their children in this area.

Surprisingly, answers indicated that teachers/professors were the category of
persuaders with the main influence in the students' lives. Only one student
participant gave the answer of peers, and two mentioned parental influence as well.
Possibly the professorial persuasion held such a prominent place due to the types of
questions being asked during the interviews; however, since much of the students'
environment, Greenville College, heavily encourages academics, the students'
emphasis on academician influence makes sense. (Prior to the interviews, I would
have postulated that more of the responses would have included peer influence.)

The reasons given for the susceptibility to teachers included respect for their
study and experience, their convincing arguments, their role modeling, the personal
relationship established between the students and teachers, their personalities, and
the openness to discussion without absolute answers. These responses reiterate what
Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) found in their study. As stated in the literature review
of this thesis, their data concludes that persuasiveness stems from the persuader
appearing trustworthy, credible, and representative of the information he/she
purports as the truth. A student participant encapsulated this idea by stating, "[The
professors'] dialogues about their personal beliefs and certain teaching styles are
very attractive. . . . I respect that the professors let you come to your own
conclusions."

What students said about their susceptibility to professorial persuasion is not
much different from what they said about their relationship and communication with
their parents. However, two crucial elements often missing—which were included in
the list of respected professor traits—were respect for their study and experience and
the openness to discussion without absolute answers. Even though all seven students
believed they have perpetuated familial values, three of the seven claimed they have
a more liberal worldview than their parents. Therefore, although many of the values
maintained influence in the children’s lives, it seemed that many of the students had
experienced an increased openness to other ideas while in college. Many of the
students even seemed to feel more enlightened than their more conservative parents.
In fact, this perspective became clearer when studying the student responses to
question #12 (What could your parents have done better to prepare you for the
questioning and persuasion that you have encountered while in college?). Many of
the students wished that they had been allowed to question more and had been
exposed to ideas different from their parents’ beliefs. As one student put it
succinctly, “I wish that [my parents] could have presented me with information on
different worldviews, religions, or even denominational doctrines.” Several of the
responses alluded to desiring more religious freedom. Another student participant
stated that she thought that having been allowed to question earlier in life would
have resulted in less experimentation later.

Three main insights came from the data analysis of this study of Greenville
College students and their parents. These seemingly conscientious and caring parents
believed that they should have and did teach their children many crucial and
foundational values; they even helped their children to feel the need to live by a good
moral code and value set. They did not seem to always help their children to
understand logical reasons for living by the moral code. These parents and students
could have benefited from the use of inoculation techniques, such as questioning, increased logical understanding, and attitude strengthening, which will be discussed in the last chapter.

Fortunately, these students who had experienced some natural floundering and questioning had a caring and supportive parental foundation and a morally supportive Christian college atmosphere in which to experience the hard and crucial college years. My concern is especially for those children who are not given the tools to resist persuasion and then thrown into a destructive environment with more negative persuasive influences. Using these well cared for students and well-intentioned parents as examples emphasizes the need for effective inoculation and persuasion tools in the raising of children. This understanding and action will result in more responsible citizens who can effectively face the diverse influences and environments out of the more protected home bubble.
Chapter Four

Implications

Conclusions

Whether a parent is well-intentioned but a bit naïve, as were most of the parents studied, or frustrated by the seeming fruitlessness of their parental labors, a proper understanding and application of positive persuasion using inoculation tactics will prove helpful in the raising of responsible and respectful individuals. Before the use of inoculation can occur, the parents must embody an absolute commitment to the idea that they have the right—in fact, the responsibility—to impose a proper moral code on their children. Multiple researchers over the years have come to the same conclusion—no matter their difference in moral or religious beliefs—that the role of a parent includes helping children to know and follow a moral code (Shaw 2003, Eyre & Eyre 1993, Lauer 1978).

Although it has been argued by many who cling to a more relativistic worldview that children should find their own values and morals, research has proven that an individual never finds his or her own unique moral code. People always base their ideas and values on others’ worldviews, and although the belief set of a child may be constructed somewhat differently than their influencers’ views, they will still get every belief they have from a source somewhere. As Lauer (1978) states, “Virtually everything we know is based on some authority” (p. 64). So even the relativistic perspective cannot logically argue for the side of the parent not giving children a code by which to live due to the attempt to not box in their children. Inevitably, a child will find a moral code by which to live. It is in large part up to the
parent(s) to choose whether they will help their children to find a positive moral code or leave it up to chance to see where the environmental winds of morality take their children.

The relativistic culture that promotes the idea of letting everyone find his or her own way and worldview seems less predominant in the realm of parenting literature and research. As found in my study, most parents feel a huge sense of responsibility for their children's development in the areas of morality and values. If this first parental hurdle of accepting that he/she must take on the role as an important guide in the child's moral development is crossed, then the next step can be taken toward effectively influencing the child toward what the parent(s) have found as important morals and values.

No matter the parent's personal worldview or moral and religious alignment, there are some values that almost all parents desire to instill in their children, such as the ones mentioned by Shaw (2003)—discipline, self-control, and respect for others—and similar ones mentioned by this study's parent participants, such as respect for others and integrity. Before parenting begins, the mother and/or father must discover for him/herself what he/she holds as important values, and in determining this he/she must also come to an understanding about why these are important values. He/she can then move to persuade the children toward these same perspectives. However, if any apparent amount of indecision remains, effective persuasion cannot occur, and children will pick up on the uncertainty present in their influencers, thus missing the importance of the values. It is crucial for young people to receive persuasion by firm adherence to ways of living, through parental role
modeling. If children do not see actions put to the words given to them, the words will seem invalid.

However, with this parental adherence to beliefs, as was found in the student interviews, children need to see that the parents are open to questions and allow for some testing of values. A precarious balance between firmness and freedom is necessary in order for children to gain respect for the parents’ beliefs and their own incorporation of these beliefs into their lives. Inoculation techniques can help resolve some of the tension between firmness and freedom and lead to the results that many parents desire.

With an understanding of the necessity of parental moral guidance, a personal understanding of one’s own values and beliefs, and the balancing of the allowance of questioning, the parent can start to use the following inoculation techniques suggested by McGuire: the persuader presents both his/her and the opponents’ side of the argument in question; the persuader presents the opposition’s side in an easily refutable manner; and the persuader then allows the receiver to produce the counterarguments. This use of inoculation can be employed in varying manners at different points in a child’s development.

As with all parenting advice, stages of development need consideration. This realization is crucial for parents when dealing with the conversation and argumentation in relation to children. Even though development happens incrementally, it does not mean that parents must dumb-down or baby talk their kids through life.
An ethnographic view may help to amplify this point. I do not ever remember
my parents cooing and coaxing me through conversation. I always felt as if they
were relating to me as a person—an adult-to-be. In other words, our communication
was not as developed when I was younger, but they still had expectations that I
behave and communicate respectfully and responsibly no matter the level of
communication.

I also specifically remember that my dad has expressed several times how
nice it was when my sister and I got to the age when our conversation could be about
more than dolls and contained words with more than one or two syllables. It was not
that he did not enjoy us at our early ages, but my parents both enjoy communicating
with my sister and me as logical human beings.

I share this to clarify that although parents may wish to communicate with
their children at more advanced levels than possible at times, it is not always
developmentally possible, so they must find ways to develop the correct habits of
living, communicating, and thinking in their children at early ages, in age-
appropriate ways. In a child’s early years, verbal ability remains minimal, but mental
capacity develops quickly; however, before the age of five a human being forms
many of his/her crucial communication and living patterns, even if not outwardly
exhibited until later. These years are especially important in the area of parental role
modeling and communication about their particular views and beliefs. These
foundational years of a human being’s life must include solid training in the familial
values. This period is not the time to argue and share others’ worldviews. That stage
will come later when logic ability is more developed. At this point in a child’s life,
although it may not always seem apparent, he/she is eager to learn rules and boundaries in life. He/she is building a repertoire of knowledge in the especially broad aspects of life such as communication techniques and general conceptual values.

After the age of five, a child becomes more involved in outside environments, such as school and friendships. For this reason, at this age a parent can slowly begin to teach the child about others’ beliefs and possible differences in lifestyles. Again, gradual steps must be taken because the reasoning ability remains minimal. However, the more contact with outside influences—which is natural and can be good—the more that potential negative and positive persuasion will occur. The home must be an environment in which general ideas of honesty and respect for others are discussed and manners are taught. The parents must remain consistent and confident in the values that they want the child to live by and these must be expressed as non-negotiable at this stage of the child’s life.

Often junior high years (usually between the ages of 10 and 13) are seen as years of rebellion. At this age, young people start to understand that their parents’ ideas are not the only ones in the world. They see others behaving differently than themselves, and they wonder about the differences. This is the crucial stage when parents should take another step forward in openly asking their child questions about differences he/she sees in others and remaining open to the child asking them questions about the confusions and frustrations encountered while interacting with influences outside of the protective bubble of the home. In fact, the parents should not wait for the children to ask them about value and lifestyle questions; the parents
should initiate these types of conversational opportunities. Waiting may allow for too much time to pass and the child to already be overly influenced and persuaded by potential negative factors, whether in school, friendships, or other places. The influences will be broad, and many of them will be negative.

Although children will have asked many questions along the way, the after-the-age-of-ten stage becomes important for the use of inoculation techniques. Some people might be overwhelmed by the unfamiliar concept of inoculation in parenting—and in communication in general. Simply put, the point of inoculation is to induce a person to think for him/herself.

The more that parents make a concerted effort through their child’s high school years to ready them for the persuasive efforts they will continue to face throughout life, the more successful the parental efforts earlier in the child’s life will have been. Too often “high-school kids are unprepared and even unaware of the debates they might walk into on a college campus” (Dawson 2004, p. 35) and beyond. While a young person traverses his/her teenage years more protected within the influence and support of the parents, there actually should be much practice in the art and science of successfully navigating the world of persuasion. Again, the parent(s) should talk openly with their children about general values such as respect and honesty and values and beliefs more specific to their household, such as premarital sex, drunkenness, drug use, and more. As alluded to earlier, the child should also feel that the home is a comfortable environment in which to wrestle with the concerns and questions about the values and ideas held by him/herself, the family, and others. Parents must concretely and logically explain their reasons for
their worldview. They must also present some of the opposing ideas that will be introduced to potentially shake the established household belief system. The more opposing ideas that can be introduced, the less the children will have to newly encounter ideas which they do not know how to argue and thus potentially undermine the values and beliefs they hold.

As inoculation theory purports, with the presented opposing ideas, only weak arguments should be introduced, with the hope of making the opposition seem illogical and undesirable. If the accompanying arguments appear too strong, the parent may actually lead the child to adopt an opposing belief. Then, after the held and opposing arguments are given to a child, they must also be allowed to think through the issues, asking questions and creating their own arguments for and against the different ideas. As Ellersick (2000) stated, a child’s development relies on parental example and the freedom of trial and error. A person’s development of strength of conviction is closely tied with the opportunities to test his/her own beliefs and values. This was found to be the case in the student responses in my study. A couple of the students specifically mentioned that if they had been allowed to experiment a little more when they were younger, then there would not have been as much rebellion/experimentation during their college years, and out of the protected home environment.

This finding is in direct support of the use of inoculation techniques. As was found in the research for this thesis, worldviews become more firmly developed when individuals are given the opportunities to put words and thoughts into action
and to counterargue the beliefs they hold, using *inoculation techniques to produce the longevity of persuasion that is key to long-term parenting effect.*

**Limitations of Present Research**

This study has the typical limitations of ethnographic, exploratory studies. First, it would be impossible, of course, to generalize from a small and non-random sample to the larger population of college students and parents. Second, one cannot draw precise cause-and-effect relationships or even definite correlations based on this qualitative study. For example, students' inadequate resistance to counter-persuasion may result from a number of variables such as the absence of inoculation in persuasion by parents, a mismatch between parental teaching and parental living, and high credibility of counter-persuaders.

In addition to these limitations, the confusion encountered by the participants regarding the meaning of persuasion may have somewhat compromised the conclusions drawn. This problem relates to another limitation, the absence of face-to-face interviews with parents. Such interviews would have afforded the opportunity to make the type of adjustment made in the student interviews.

**Implications for Future Research**

Certainly, this research topic calls for quantitative, as well as qualitative studies. Statistical studies could include random and larger samples, control for several variables, and permit conclusions about interacting variables. Despite the limitations, this thesis suggests tentative conclusions that can serve as hypotheses for future studies, such as the following possibilities.
1. A child’s clearer understanding of reasons for his/her beliefs would produce a more strongly rooted moral code.

2. A parent’s understanding and effective use of persuasion would produce better overall communication and relational satisfaction between parent and child.

3. The use of inoculation techniques by parents starting during a child’s early years and going through their late teen years would increase their child’s success of morality maintenance during their college years.

However, the research done and conclusions drawn provide a solid starting point for future research in the vein of inoculation use by parents. This thesis has opened up the realm of parenting to the more conscious impact of persuasion.

In order for the hypothesis of the longevity of the use of inoculation techniques in parenting to be more solidly correlated and identified, some more in-depth studies need to be conducted. For example, a study could be done qualitatively or quantitatively observing the home life of a subset of children pinpointing certain persuasive parental habits. These observations could lead to some interesting conclusions if the student was then viewed in the college environment, over the period of four or five years, studying progressive value and worldview tendencies of the students.

It would also be helpful for an objective researcher to quantitatively identify persuasive techniques employed by parents within their home environments. This would lead to less biased results. Only an outsider can truly quantify what parenting
devices are persuasive in nature, because persuasion is so often unconscious and therefore improperly labeled.

A study of non-Christian homes versus Christian homes and the strength of values would be insightful. A possible limitation of this study was the fact that all of the participants came from seemingly devout Christian homes. Although there was some interesting analysis done through this study with less variables, it would be interesting to study homes in which parents had a more relativistic mindset. While it would possibly be found that some of the same parental goals would surface, there would most likely be differences in the persuasion used and the strength of the children’s value sets.

The limitations and afterthoughts of this study show that much more research can be done to test the hypotheses and the connections between inoculation use and parenting effectiveness. This study provides a starting point. Perhaps this research will lead to future interest and insights, because I truly believe that understanding inoculation can provide hope for parents and the impact they have in their children’s lives.

**Inoculation & Hope for Parenting**

As the parents and students in my study suggested, persuasion can come in many different forms. They gave the following examples: spanking, bribery, guilt trips, and more. However, as was evident, many of the students felt unprepared to face the persuasion of their college atmosphere. It can be inferred that this feeling of the lack of preparation is likely due to the absence of the introduction to other ideas different from their parents’ worldviews and the absence of questioning freedom in
many of their homes. Although persuasion was used, it was not utilized as effectively and enduringly as possible, as could have been the case with the more intentional use of inoculation techniques.

The best form of parenting comes through guidance, not the forced belief in certain ways of thinking and living. Every invested parent wants to guide a child to a life of respectful and responsible citizenry. Accomplishment of this goal will not come through the protective efforts that promote the absence of outside influences and persuasion. Accomplishment of this goal will come if there is effective teaching and utilization of persuasive tools such as those associated with the inoculation theory.

Undoubtedly, children will face negative and positive persuasion efforts that cannot, and should not, be completely avoided. The decision a parent must make is whether this fact will be acknowledged and embraced through the proper instruction in persuasion. Little doses of seemingly persuasive poison will lead to a healthier and more secure child and adult.
References


Appendix I

Interview Schedule for Parents

1. What is your child’s year in school?

2. What is your child’s major?

3. What was your primary objective in parenting? Do you think you succeeded in accomplishing this objective? Why or why not?

4. Did you see it as part of your parental responsibility to give your child a moral code by which to live his/her life? Did you discuss with your child reasons for your moral beliefs?

5. Did you present your child with varying viewpoints of values and ideas? If so, how did you do this? If not, what was your reason for not doing so? If you presented varying viewpoints, did you give arguments for and against these beliefs?

6. What are the three primary values that you desired to instill in your child? For these values, did you use certain methods to strengthen these beliefs? If so, what methods did you use?

7. In disciplining, did you couple explanation with consequences? If so, what types of explanations would you use? If not, why did you choose not to explain?

8. Do you think persuasion was a part of your parenting experience? If so, how so?

9. Did you consciously use certain persuasion methods to guide your child’s thoughts and beliefs? If so, what techniques did you use?
10. How did you attempt to prepare your child for his/her college years and adulthood?

11. Do you see your children as having been influenced or persuaded during their college years? If so, in what areas? How do you think this was accomplished?

12. On a scale of one to ten (ten being the most prepared), rate how well prepared you think your child was to face the influences of college in testing the morals and values that you taught him/her (if you attempted to do so)?

13. What would you have done differently to prepare your child for college, especially in the area of beliefs and thought processes?

14. Do you think your child can resist inappropriate persuasion?

15. In what way(s) do you think your child is most susceptible to persuasion (e.g. impression others have of them, desire to appear relativistic, logic of argument)?

16. Do you see your child perpetuating the familial values that you tried to teach him/her (if you did so)? If so, which ones in particular would you say he/she has held to the strongest? Why do you think this is the case? If not, what do you see as different? Why do you think this is the case?

17. Would you consider yourself more liberal or more conservative?¹?

18. Would you consider your child more liberal or more conservative?¹?

¹For the purposes of this study, conservatism is defined as adherence to traditions and established values in order to lend to social stability and a society of moderation and caution, and liberalism is defined as freedom from traditional ways of thinking and living, and the right of the individual to choose what is right for him/her.
Appendix II

Interview Schedule for Students

1. What year are you in school?

2. What is your major?

3. What would you say was your parents’ primary objective in raising you? Do you think they succeeded in accomplishing this objective? Why or why not?

4. Did you think your parents saw it as part of their responsibility to give you a moral code by which to live your life? If so, did they discuss with you the reasons for their moral code?

5. Did your parents present you with varying viewpoints of values and ideas? If so, how did they do this? If not, what do you think was their reason for not doing so? If they presented varying viewpoints, did they give arguments for and against these beliefs?

6. What are the three primary values that you believe your parents desired to instill in you? For these values, did they use certain methods to strengthen these beliefs? If so, what methods did they use?

7. In disciplining, did your parents couple explanation with consequences? If so, what types of explanations would they use?

8. Do you think your parents used persuasion in raising and teaching you? If so, in what ways?

9. Did you notice any direct attempts by your parents to prepare you for college and adulthood?
10. On a scale of one to ten (ten being the most prepared), rate how well prepared you think you were to face the influences of college in testing the morals and values that your parents taught you (if you think they attempted to do so)?

11. Do you see any specific areas or ways that conscious persuasion has taken place at Greenville? Have you felt uncomfortable at any time with certain persuasion that has taken place? If so, when and how did this occur?

12. What could your parents have done better to prepare you for the questioning and persuasion that you have encountered while in college?

13. Who do you think you are the most susceptible to when it comes to persuasion (e.g. peers, parents, teachers)? How? Why?

14. Do you think that you can resist persuasion? If not, why? If so, why do you think so?

15. Do you see you think you have perpetuated the familial values that your parents tried to teach you (if you think they did so)? If so, which ones in particular would you say you have held to the strongest? Why do you think this is the case? If not, what do you see as different? Why do you think this is the case?

16. Would you consider yourself more liberal or more conservative?  

17. Would you consider your parents more liberal or more conservative?

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1 For the purposes of this study, conservatism is defined as adherence to traditions and established values in order to lend to social stability and a society of moderation and caution, and liberalism is defined as freedom from traditional ways of thinking and living, and the right of the individual to choose what is right for him/her.