

**THE PREDICTIVE NATURE OF HUMOR,  
AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING STYLE, AND  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT ON INDICES OF  
INITIAL ADJUSTMENT AND COMMITMENT  
TO COLLEGE AMONG COLLEGE FRESHMEN**

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**ABSTRACT**

Through the administration of self-report surveys, this study examined the relationships among a) parenting styles, b) family structure, c) academic achievement, d) birth order, e) gender, and f) humor on the initial personal-emotional, social, academic, and commitment to college adjustment among 257 first-quarter college freshmen. Multiple regression models demonstrated that humor, academic achievement, and authoritative parenting were positively related to students' college adjustment. Implications were drawn for post-secondary educational institutions as well as parents.

**INTRODUCTION**

Departing for college personifies a new developmental stage of life as many adolescent youth face a level of independence, uncertainty, and anxiety not previously experienced (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Larsen, & Jacobs, 1997). How do first-year college students cope with such a new environment? Research reports that approximately 60% of entering college freshmen leave higher education without obtaining a degree, and most do so during the first two years of college (Tinto, 2000). With such high attrition rates, researchers have

attempted to explain why some adolescents terminate their college endeavors even though they may have the academic preparation and ability (Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000).

Traditionally, explaining college success or failure has focused on academic factors such as high school rank, GPA, and SAT/ACT scores (Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000). However, a current thrust in the literature suggests that psychosocial factors (i.e., family background, self-esteem, and parenting styles) may play an equally important role in predicting such rates (Hickman et al., 2000; Rice & Dellwo, 2002; Tross, Harper, Osher, & Kneidinger, 2000). Although the literature has examined these psychosocial factors, the role of humor in relation to various indices of initial college adjustment has been understudied.

Given that incoming college freshmen are exposed to new surroundings indicative of increased freedom and responsibility (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1997), it seems natural that college students might experience some levels of stress and emotional turmoil previously not encountered in their lives. Therefore, it seems plausible that humor may play a role as a coping mechanism on the initial adjustment of college freshmen. This study attempts to extend previous research by the first author (e.g., Hickman & Andrews, 2003; Hickman et al., 2000; Hickman, Toews, & Andrews, 2001), which examined familial factors (i.e., parenting styles and family structure) and academic achievement as predictors of college adjustment. Moreover, this study attempts to add to the literature by examining the relationships among familial factors, academic achievement, and the coping role of humor as predictors of initial personal-emotional, social, academic, and commitment to college adjustments among male and female college freshmen.

### **Humor and College Adjustment**

Overall, the body of literature examining humor and college adjustment is scarce. Indeed, the majority of research examining humor and academic achievement and adjustment is aimed at the primary and secondary educational levels (Pellegrini, Masten, Garmezy, & Ferrarese, 1987) or at examining the role of humor in pedagogical methods (Berk & Nanda, 1998). Ziv (1988) found that when educators employed humor in the classroom upper level (i.e., 11th and 12th grade) high school students actually performed better and achieved higher grades. However, in a study of college students, Prerost (1983) found that classroom humor did not improve exam scores, although it did influence overall attitudes toward the course. Berk and Nanda (1998) examined the effects of humor as an educational teaching strategy to reduce tension and anxiety and increase achievement among college students. Results found that those students in the experimental group (i.e., humor group) demonstrated better attitudes toward the course and held less anxiety (Berk & Nanda, 1998). In addition, Adair and Sieger (1984)

found that college students who demonstrated higher levels of humor actually performed better on classroom task performances. Moreover, recent research has found humor to be a protective factor of academic achievement and adjustments among aggressive and emotionally disturbed at-risk youth (Vance, Fernandez, & Biber, 1998).

Recent research by the first author examined the predictive nature of humor toward initial overall college adjustment among male and female college freshmen. Using multiple regression models, the authors sought to examine the predictive nature of humor and the unique variance accounted for by humor toward initial overall college adjustment (Hickman & Andrews, 2003). Results demonstrated that humor accounted for the majority of the overall model variance for male college freshmen and was the second most predictive variable in the model for female college freshmen (Hickman & Andrews, 2003). However, humor, authoritative parenting styles, birth order, and academic achievement in relation to other indices of adjustments (i.e., personal-emotional, social, academic, and commitment) to college has remained unexplored.

### **Academic Achievement and College Adjustment**

Past research surrounding the predictive nature of academic achievement on college adjustment has been everything but new or consistent. Over 50 years ago, Travers (1949) demonstrated that academic achievement in high school was considered the single greatest predictor of academic achievement of students enrolled in college. Today, high school grade point average (GPA) is still considered a key discriminate predictor of college success and retention (Tross et al., 2000). In an extensive study of over 13,000 college students, Christensen (2001) found that high school GPA was among the best predictors of college academic success and retention. On the contrary, other popular literature has contended a high GPA in high school and college is not always necessarily predictive of overall college adjustment and retention (Rice & Dellwo, 2002; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 1994). Still, others claim academic success has some influence, but tends not to be the strongest predictor of college adjustment and retention (Tross et al., 2000).

Recent research by the first author has found that GPA is predictive of initial college adjustment; however, more so for females than males (Hickman & Andrews, 2003). Further, research has demonstrated that GPA is a consistent predictor of initial overall college adjustment; however, psychosocial factors such as parenting styles and humor were equally predictive if not more predictive than GPA (Hickman & Andrews, 2003). The present study will seek to clarify the relationship between academic achievement and other indices of initial adjustment.

### **Familial Factors and College Adjustment**

Is one's order of birth into a family associated with a particular style of coping and academic achievement? While popular literature has asserted that firstborn children (and only children) are more academically inclined than laterborns (Leman, 1985), the scientific literature has reported few consistencies (Falbo, 1981). Even murkier is the relationship between humor and birth order, with popular literature stating that lastborns have a better sense of humor (Leman, 1985), and scientific literature again reporting inconsistent results. In a recent study by the first author, birth order was examined as a predictor variable for initial overall college adjustment among male and female college freshmen. Results failed to yield significant findings (Hickman & Andrews, 2003). However, birth order as it relates to other indices of college adjustment and commitment has yet to be explored. Given the confusion in the literature surrounding birth order, the present study will examine firstborns and laterborns in conjunction with humorous coping skills to determine if birth order is associated with initial indices of college adjustment.

Does one's family structure influence college adjustment? An estimated one million children experience parental divorce on a yearly basis (Eshleman, 2003). Researchers have demonstrated that children who encounter changes in family structure often experience severe consequences such as lower academic attainment and adjustment (Cherlin et al., 1991; Kunz & Kunz, 1995; Weiner, Harlow, Adams, & Grebstein, 1995). Moreover, research suggests that adjustment problems continue beyond adolescence well into young adulthood as children of divorce often exhibit heightened difficulties with college, marriage, employment stability, and a host of problematic behaviors (Abelsohn & Sayman, 1991; Aro & Palosaari, 1992; Brody & Neubaum, 1996; Sampson & Laub, 1995).

A central tenet of this research is the integral role of family and the relationship that humor serves as an adjustment and coping mechanism among college freshmen. As noted by Manke (1998) it appears logical that family relationships should have an impact on the development of children's humor. Indeed, Manke (1998) found that when parents modeled humor to their children, such children were more likely to use humor in various life domains. Francisco (1990) examined family functioning and the use of humor in various family situations. Findings indicated that family communication, problem solving, involvement, and behavior control were positively associated with humor. Moreover, family adaptation and humor accounted for 70% of the variance of family functioning (Francisco, 1990).

In a previous article by the first author, Baumrind's parenting typology was discussed in depth, and research was presented that showed the efficacy of authoritative parenting, especially as it pertained to predicting academic achievement and college adjustment (Hickman et al., 2000). Briefly, authoritarian

parenting refers to a child rearing approach characterized by harsh discipline, rejection, submission, and rigid boundaries expressed physically, emotionally, and psychologically toward children. Permissive parenting refers to child rearing practices that place few, if any rules upon children, freedom for children to make life choices without consulting their parents, and communication between parents and children are minimal to nonexistent. Finally, authoritative parenting refers to a child rearing approach in which parents exert firm, yet fair discipline, warmth and loving emotions, use reasoning as a disciplinary technique, and participate in bidirectional communication exchanges with their children (Baumrind, 1968).

Still, the issue of whether or not parenting styles are related to humorous coping and other indices of initial college adjustment other than “overall” adjustment has received little attention in the arena of college development and family psychology. Given that parenting styles and humorous coping strategies are based on emotional climates (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Freud, 1905), it seems appropriate to examine the relationship between such variables in relation to initial indices of college adjustment among male and female college freshmen.

Finally, given that research has demonstrated relationships between GPA and college adjustment (Hickman & Andrews, 2003), GPA and family structure (Boyce-Rodgers & Rose, 2001), GPA and birth order (Barber, 1998), GPA and parenting styles (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987), GPA and humor (Hickman & Andrews, 2003), family structure and college adjustment (Amato, 1991; Hickman et al., 2000), family structure and parenting styles (Hickman et al., 2000), family structure and humor (Zink, 2000), parenting styles and humor (Manke, 1998), parenting styles and college adjustment (Hickman et al., 2000, Hickman & Andrews, 2003), birth order and college adjustment (Hickman & Andrews, 2003), birth order and humor (Leman, 1985) it is expected that these variables will act in concert in predicting the transition to college among male and female first-quarter college freshmen.

## **Objectives**

The researchers proposed that humorous coping skills would be predictive of initial college adjustment among male and female college freshmen. Moreover, it was proposed that humorous coping skills would be predictive of initial indices of college adjustments when controlling for the variables of birth order, family structure, GPA, gender, and authoritative parenting style. The primary goal of the study was to examine the unique variance accounted for by humorous coping skills in predicting initial personal-emotional, social, academic, and commitment to college adjustments among male and female college freshmen.

## METHOD

### Participants

Questionnaire data were provided to an accessible sample of 553 first-quarter freshmen enrolled in Introductory Survey courses at a large Midwestern university. Of the sample, 257 students responded and provided complete surveys creating a data sample that resulted in a 46.4% response rate. Female participants constituted 52.5% of the sample. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 23 years, with a mean age of 19.03 years. The sample was mostly Caucasian (65.4%), consistent with the ethnic distribution of the university. Asian (20.6%), African-American (6.6%), and other (7.4%) students comprised the remainder of the sample. A majority of participants were from intact two-parent families (73.5%), and the remaining participants were from divorced and/or blended families (12.4%), single-parent families (11.3%), adopted families (1.6%), and relatives/guardians (1.2%). See Table 1 for complete summary.

### Procedures

Permission to solicit incoming first-quarter freshmen was obtained. To participate, students were administered questionnaires during the eighth week of their 10-week Introductory Survey class. The procedure of waiting until the end of the quarter was thought to increase student accuracy of estimated academic achievement. To ensure that the participants were all first-quarter freshmen enrolled for their initial college experience, the researchers instructed the participants as to the requirements involved for this study. After clarifying the conditions of the study, the researchers instructed the participants to complete and return the questionnaires to their next class for collection. To increase participation of eligible students, extra credit was awarded only for a complete returned packet. In an attempt to further increase participation, two \$25.00 gift certificates for a popular campus establishment were raffled as well as six tickets to a local comedy club. To avoid ineligible participation of students other than first-quarter freshmen, instructors were encouraged to award similar extra credit to those who were ineligible to participate in this research study. This procedure was effective as only first-quarter freshmen completed and returned survey data.

### Measures

#### *Family Structure*

Family structure was determined from nine possible categories. Response categories were dichotomously recoded to reflect either biologically intact two-parent families or other types of families (i.e., single parent, step families,

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Background Characteristics

Variable	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	122	47.5
Female	135	52.5
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Caucasian	168	65.4
Asian	53	20.6
African-American	17	6.6
Other	19	7.4
<b>Family Structure</b>		
Biologically intact	189	73.5
All others	68	26.5
<b>Birth Order</b>		
Firstborns	103	40.1
Laterborns	154	59.9
<b>Mother's Education</b>		
High school or less	134	52.1
2-year college/technical	39	15.2
Bachelor degree or higher	84	32.7
<b>Father's Education</b>		
High school or less	117	45.5
2-year college/technical	25	9.7
Bachelor degree or higher	115	44.8

blended families, adopted families, and guardians/relatives). For the analyses, a value of "0" represented biologically intact family structures and a value of "1" represented all other family structures.

#### *Birth Order*

Birth order was determined from six possible categories. Response categories ranged from only child through other. Response categories were dichotomously recoded to reflect either only born or first-born positions of birth order and second-born positions of birth order or greater. For the analyses, a value of "0" represented "firstborns" and a value of "1" represented "laterborns."

### *Achievement*

Achievement, measured as academic performance, was based on the student's reporting his/her expected college grade point average (GPA). Respondents were asked to self-report their GPA according to the standard 4-point scale and were asked to be as specific as possible (i.e., 3.7-4.0, 3.3-3.69, 3.0-3.29, etc.) expected during their first quarter of college. Response categories were recoded into five dummy variables according to a standard A (4.0) to F (0.0) grading scale.

### *Adjustment*

The 67-item Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was used to assess how well a student was adapting to the demands of a college environment (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Designed for college freshmen, this measure has four subscales: Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Personal-Emotional Adjustment, and Goal Commitment-Institutional Adjustment. On a 9-point scale that ranged from 1 (*applies very closely to me*) to 9 (*doesn't apply to me at all*), respondents indicated how a statement applied to them at the time (within the past few days). Sample items included, "I have been keeping up to date on my academic work" (academic adjustment), "I am meeting as many people, and making as many friends as I would like at college" (social adjustment), "I have been feeling tense or nervous lately (personal-emotional adjustment), "I know why I'm in college and what I want out of it" (goal commitment-institutional adjustment). Adjustment dimensions were constructed by summing scores of all subscale items and calculating a mean value for each participant. Internal reliability for indices of adjustments was high with data yielding Cronbach's Alpha of .81 (personal-emotional adjustment), .77 (social adjustment), .76 (academic adjustment), and .81 (goal-commitment-institutional adjustment) respectively.

### *Humor*

The Coping Humor Scale (CHS) was used to assess the role of humor as a coping mechanism from which to reduce stressful events that individuals encounter in their lives (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). Each participant indicated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) their level of agreement with statements about how they use humor in stressful situations. This seven-item scale contains such items as "I often lose my sense of humor when I'm having problems," and "I can usually find something to laugh or joke about even in trying situations." Humor dimensions were constructed by summing scores of the seven items and calculating a mean value for each participant. Similar to their original findings, the internal reliability was moderate with a Cronbach's Alpha of .68.

### Parenting Style

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) was used to assess authoritative dimensions of parenting style (Buri, 1991). For each parent, participants indicated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), their level of agreement with statements about the manner in which they were reared by their mother and father. Authoritative parenting style dimensions were constructed by summing separate mother and father scores and taking the means of these items to derive a mother and father authoritative parenting style score. The Authoritative subscale, based on 10 items, characterizes a parent as very demanding and very responsive, yet warm and supportive (e.g., “As I was growing up, if my mother/father made a decision that hurt me, she/he was willing to discuss that decision with me and admit it if she/he had made a mistake”). The reliability of this subscale was high, with data yielding a Cronbach’s Alpha of .80 for mothers and .81 for fathers.

## RESULTS

Participants provided self-report data that included demographic information, as well as measures of: a) academic achievement; b) birth order; c) family structure; d) gender; e) humor, f) perceptions of authoritative parenting style; and g) student adaptation to college. See Table 2 for means and standard deviations of variables. Because prior research has demonstrated that these variables tend to be correlated with one another as opposed to isolated from one another, the aforementioned independent variables were used to create a predictive model

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Predictor and Outcome Variables

Variable	M	SD
Predictor variables		
Mother’s authoritative parenting style	3.42	.63
Father’s authoritative parenting style	3.32	.65
Current academic achievement (GPA)	2.66	.70
Humor	2.85	.52
Outcome variables		
Personal-emotional adjustment	5.58	1.48
Social adjustment	5.63	1.18
Academic adjustment	5.79	1.02
Goal-commitment adjustment	6.52	1.36

of indices of initial college adjustment among male and female first-quarter college freshmen.

The primary goal of this study was to examine the unique variance of humor as a predictor on college adjustment while controlling for the variables of parenting styles, family structure, birth order, and GPA for male and female first-quarter college freshmen. Stepwise multiple regression was used to accomplish this goal. Since humor was the main independent variable of study, it was solely inserted into the model as block one. Block two consisted of inserting the other independent variables of parenting styles, family structure, birth order, and GPA into the model. These independent variables created the predictor variables for each model. Each indicator of initial college adjustment (i.e., personal-emotional, social, academic, and commitment to college) was inserted independently as a dependent variable against the aforementioned predictor variables. This resulted in four separate stepwise regression models. Finally, each model was examined by gender. As a result, eight multivariate stepwise regression models were constructed that examined the independent variable humorous coping skills of both male and female college freshmen while holding constant the independent variables of birth order, family structure, humor, and parenting styles on the dependent variables of college adjustments (i.e., personal-emotional, social, academic, and commitment to college). See Table 3 for intercorrelations among variables for both male and female college freshmen.

The authors hypothesized that birth order, family structure, humorous coping skills, GPA, and authoritative parenting styles would be significantly associated with the initial indices of college adjustment of male and female college freshmen. Support for birth order and family structure failed to yield significant results. However, support for humorous coping skills, GPA, and authoritative parenting styles hypotheses were found according to each model (i.e., male and female). For example, for both males ( $F = 5.76$ ,  $R^2 = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and females ( $F = 14.80$ ,  $R^2 = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ) GPA and humor predicted initial academic adjustment to college. For females, GPA and humor were predictive for initial social adjustment to college ( $F = 10.31$ ,  $R^2 = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, for males, humor and mothers authoritative parenting style were predictive of initial social adjustment to college ( $F = 9.27$ ,  $R^2 = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For females, humor and fathers authoritative parenting style was predictive of initial personal-emotional adjustment to college ( $F = 4.28$ ,  $R^2 = .11$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, for males, only humor was predictive of initial personal-emotional adjustment to college ( $F = 11.45$ ,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, for females, GPA, humor, and fathers authoritative parenting style was predictive of initial commitment to college ( $F = 4.04$ ,  $R^2 = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, for males, humor and mothers authoritative parenting style was predictive of initial commitment to college ( $F = 5.96$ ,  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ). See Tables 4 (male) and 5 (female) for complete summary of regression models.

## DISCUSSION

There were several inherent limitations regarding this study. First, the methodology of this study consisted of using a purposive sampling procedure as opposed to a random sampling procedure. Second, given the correlational nature of this study, caution should be preceded when drawing casual conclusions between humor and college adjustment. Third, this study only examined college freshmen at one point in time. Perhaps a longitudinal methodological approach may have yielded developmental findings regarding long-term college adjustment and retention. Lastly, this study was conducted using self-report data. It is possible that a social bias of perceiving oneself as humorous, or even a bias of having authoritative parents was present within this study. Research by Pascarella (2001) has noted that one should proceed with caution when using self-report data from college students. However, research by Donovan & Jessor (1985) has noted that student's perceptions of himself or herself and their parents are often a more accurate perception than perceptions held by others.

Despite such limitations, the results of this study suggest the importance of humor in helping college students positively adjust to university life. For both males and females humor was a significant factor in each regression model for predicting indices of initial college adjustment. For females, humor accounted for 9% of the 23% model variance of academic adjustment, 4.3% of the 15% model variance of commitment to college adjustment, 8% of the 11% model variance of personal-emotional adjustment, and 6.3% of the 15% model variance of social adjustment. For males, humor accounted for 4% of the 14% model variance of academic adjustment, 12.5% of the 17% model variance of commitment to college, all 9% of the model variance for personal-emotional adjustment, and 12% of the 18% model variance of social adjustment.

Although familial factors such as birth order and family structure were not predictive of initial college adjustment, both mother's and father's authoritative parenting styles were predictive of college adjustment. For females, father's authoritative parenting style accounted for 3% of the 11% model variance of personal-emotional adjustment and 3% of the 15% model variance of commitment to college. For females, mother's authoritative parenting style was not predictive of any indices of initial college adjustment. For males, mother's authoritative parenting style accounted for 6.4% of the 18% model variance of social adjustment and 4.2% of the 17% model variance of commitment to college.

Interestingly, the authoritative parenting style of the opposite-sexed parent was more influential for college adjustment than the authoritative parenting style of the same-sexed parent. For female students, this study found that when they perceive their fathers as communicative and responsive they tend to adjust positively to college life. Traditionally, fathers have been viewed as the disciplinary, instrumental, and authoritarian figure of the family, whereas mothers



Females (n = 135)

SACQPE	—	.49	.61	.49	.16	.18	.15	.07	-.10	.28
SACQS	—	—	.55	.83	.18	.18	.29	-.07	-.05	.25
SACQA	—	—	—	.57	.12	.14	.38	-.01	-.07	.28
SACQGC	—	—	—	—	.19	.20	.27	-.06	-.02	.20
MDEM	—	—	—	—	—	.59	.02	.09	-.01	.11
DDEM	—	—	—	—	—	—	.11	.18	.02	.02
GPA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.15	-.08	-.04
Family	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.06	-.17
Birth	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.00
Humor	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

**Note:** SACQPE = Personal-Emotional Adjustment, SACQS = Social Adjustment, SACQA = Academic Adjustment, SACQGC = Goal Commitment Adjustment, MDEM/DDEM = Mother and Father Authoritative Parenting Style, GPA = Grade Point Average, Family = Family Structure, Birth = Birth Order, Humor = Humorous Coping Skills.

Table 4. Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Male College Adjustment ( $n = 257$ )

Variables	$R^2$	$R^2$ Change	$b$	$t$	$p$
<b>Personal-Emotional Adjustment</b>					
Humor	.087	.087	.729	3.384	.001
Constant			3.640		
Standard Error = 1.23					
Adjusted $R^2 = .080$					
For Model: $F = 11.453$ ; $p = .001$					
<b>Social Adjustment</b>					
Humor	.120	.120	.633	3.397	.001
Authoritative Mom	.184	.064	.481	3.045	.003
Constant			2.155		
Standard Error = 1.04					
Adjusted $R^2 = .170$					
For Model: $F = 9.271$ ; $p = .003$					
<b>Academic Adjustment</b>					
GPA	.100	.100	.432	3.578	<.001
Humor	.142	.042	.392	2.400	.018
Constant			3.393		
Standard Error = .94					
Adjusted $R^2 = .127$					
For Model: $F = 5.758$ ; $p = .018$					
<b>Goal-Commitment Adjustment</b>					
Humor	.125	.125	.773	3.580	<.001
Authoritative Mom	.167	.042	.447	2.242	.016
Constant			2.674		
Standard Error = 1.21					
Adjusted $R^2 = .153$					
For Model: $F = 5.962$ ; $p = .016$					

have been viewed as the nurturing, expressive, and authoritative figure of the family (Stearns, 1991). Perhaps, if females perceive their fathers in a similar authoritative manner to that of their mothers, they may perceive a sense of balance or adjustment in their lives. Indeed, research demonstrates that children and adolescents achieve higher academic marks when they experience two parents who are equally communicative and open (authoritative) as opposed to one dominant parent (authoritarian) and one submissive parent (permissive) (Dornbusch et al., 1987).

Table 5. Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Female College Adjustment ( $n = 135$ )

Variables	$R^2$	$R^2$ Change	$b$	$t$	$p$
<b>Personal-Emotional Adjustment</b>					
Humor	.079	.079	.892	3.391	.001
Authoritative Dad	.108	.029	.429	2.068	.041
Constant			1.495		
Standard Error = 1.54					
Adjusted $R^2 = .095$					
For Model: $F = 4.278$ ; $p = .041$					
<b>Social Adjustment</b>					
GPA	.083	.083	.544	3.699	<.001
Humor	.149	.066	.619	3.211	.002
Constant			2.433		
Standard Error = 1.13					
Adjusted $R^2 = .136$					
For Model: $F = 10.311$ ; $p = .002$					
<b>Academic Adjustment</b>					
GPA	.144	.144	.601	5.111	<.001
Humor	.231	.087	.593	3.846	<.001
Constant			2.628		
Standard Error = .90					
Adjusted $R^2 = .219$					
For Model: $F = 14.795$ ; $p = .001$					
<b>Goal-Commitment Adjustment</b>					
GPA	.075	.075	.558	3.227	.002
Humor	.118	.043	.570	2.534	.012
Authoritative Dad	.145	.026	.359	2.009	.047
Constant			2.309		
Standard Error = 1.32					
Adjusted $R^2 = .125$					
For Model: $F = 4.035$ ; $p = .047$					

Conversely, for male students, this study found that when male college freshmen perceived their mothers as open and responsive their sons had a tendency to positively adjust to college life. Traditionally, fathers have socialized their sons toward instrumental behavior roles, whereas mothers have socialized their sons toward expressive behavior roles (Easley, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Garside & Klimes, 2002). Consequently, male college freshmen may seek their mothers for emotional support required for expressive and emotional behavioral (i.e.,

personal-emotional and social) adjustment to college life. While these results are intriguing, it is unknown whether such findings are simply an artifact, or whether the authoritative parenting style of the opposite-sexed parent truly plays an integral role in facilitating initial college adjustment.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Although humor was more predictive of college adjustment and commitment for male college freshmen compared to female college freshmen, this study has shown that the ability for male and female college freshmen to use humor to cope with stressful situations is an important factor in predicting initial indices of college adjustment. Such findings may be related to the females being more open with their emotions than their male counterparts (Brebner, 2003). In accordance with such findings, the authors believe male students may be using humor as a stress reliever or as a method to project their emotions more so than females. Perhaps the findings of this study are based on the types of students embedded within gender. For example, Astin (1993) discovered that a typology of students exists and that each of these seven types (i.e., Scholar, Social Activist, Artist, Hedonist, Leader, Status Striver, and Uncommitted) of students might require a differential college environment according to their typology. Future research might want to examine humor in relation to this typology of students as to which of these types of students utilize and benefit from humor in terms of retention rates.

Given that approximately 60% of college students fail to graduate from their collegiate educational endeavors (e.g., Tinto, 2000), initial adjustment to college should not be looked upon lightly and should be explored more in-depth as a possible means for student retention. Indeed, research on college retention has shown that college students are not a "one size fits all" phenomena (e.g., Astin, 1993) as students interact with a variety of peers (Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999), gain employment for financial reasons (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1998b), attend community colleges and traditional four-year universities (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1998a, and encounter differential out-of-classroom experiences (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). For some students, these differential experiences might create unwanted anxiety and stress that is too difficult to overcome. Although the findings of this study would suggest that college students might benefit from employing humor as coping mechanism for stress and anxiety associated with their initial college transition, the factors behind which they employ this humor remains unanswered. Untangling when, where, how, and why college students employ humor as a coping mechanism for initial adjustment to college life is warranted. Further studies may want to focus efforts on the long-term effects of humor on various indices of college adjustment, college experiences, college commitment, and graduation rates as opposed to initial college adjustment.

Universities and colleges may want to consider incorporating humor into academic pedagogy in an attempt to improve educational success. Perhaps, universities and colleges could hold seminars, colloquiums, and other methods of teaching and training faculty members the importance of incorporating humor into the classroom setting. Although many universities and colleges are currently employing various strategies to improve student retention rates (e.g., Berger, 2001-2002; Braxton, 2001-2002; Dale & Zych, 1996), more emphasis addressing the importance of parenting college students and the importance of emotional stress and relief needed for college success is warranted (Gardner & Jewler, 1997). Research by Astin (1999) has demonstrated that getting students involved early on in their college endeavors may be related to retention rates. If this holds true, then perhaps involving both students and parents by holding parent-student conferences and a variety of parent-student orientations prior to and after the matriculation of college could increase retention rates.

Initial adjustment to college should be considered an important agenda for those researching and predicting college adjustment, retention, and graduation. The rationale behind initial college adjustment is based on learning principles, namely, self-efficacy. If college freshmen do not adjust and commit early during their collegiate endeavors they may be less likely to return in ensuing quarters/semesters and graduate from college as they may develop learned and conditioned negative perceptions based on their initial experiences of college life. Research by Coffman and Gilligan (2002-2003) supports the notion of self-efficacy and initial college adjustment. More specifically, they found that college freshmen who had heightened levels of social support (i.e., parents) and self-efficacy were more satisfied and adjusted to the new surroundings of their college environment.

In closing, future studies may want to examine if humor and authoritative parenting are related to long-term adjustment to college, retention rates, and graduation rates or if such variables are strictly related to initial indices of adjustment to college. In other words, does the unique variance of humor in relation to indices of college adjustment increase or decrease over time? Finding ways of increasing and implementing humor and authoritative parenting therefore seems to be instrumental in improving initial adjustment, retention, and increasing the chances of student graduation.

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