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# Positive Parenting in Adolescence and Its Association with Future Hopes and Fears in Adulthood: A Longitudinal Analysis

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Positive Parenting in Adolescence and Its Association with Future Hopes and Fears in  
Adulthood: A Longitudinal Analysis

by

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THESIS

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## Abstract

During young adulthood (ages 20-39), individuals begin to develop a future orientation by thinking about their possible selves. In this longitudinal study, young adults' future hopes and fears were examined in relation to their perceptions of the parenting style they experienced in adolescence. An interview was conducted with participants at age 26 and 32 to assess their future possible selves. Participants discussed both hoped-for and feared selves. The long-term impact of parenting on future hopes and fears was examined by exploring the possible impact of perceived parenting styles experienced in adolescence. Interviews were conducted in 2005 and 2011 with 26 year old participants ( $N = 100$ ; 69% women) and 32 year old participants ( $N = 114$ ; 71% women), respectively. At both ages, the top three hopes discussed by participants included work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood. At age 26, the top three fears discussed by participants included marriage/relationship, work/career, and mental health, however, at age 32, participants identified physical health and parenthood in addition to marriage/relationship fears. Perceived parenting style at adolescence did not generally have any association with hopes and fears at ages 26 and 32. However, participants who scored higher on the perceived parenting measure at age 17 discussed more parenthood hopes at age 32 compared to the participants who reported lower perceptions of the parenting styles they experienced. The results of the current study show how young adults are defining their future, with frequent consideration of work/career, marriage/relationships, and parenthood. These findings may inform the design of career interventions and therapy setting for young adults.

*Keywords:* possible selves, future narratives, positive parenting, hopes, fears, young adults

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Positive Parenting in Adolescence and Its Association with Future Hopes and Fears in  
Adulthood: A Longitudinal Analysis

One of the most important tasks during young adulthood, ages 20-39 years, is to look ahead in life and develop future goals. According to Erikson's (1968) model of psychosocial development, once adolescents have successfully developed an identity, they began to think about their future as they enter the emerging young adulthood phase. In the literature, Markus and Nurius (1986) refer to envisions of the future as 'possible selves'. Possible selves are representations of individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become (hoped-for self), and what they fear becoming (feared self). Possible selves can be distant future selves (e.g., what I want to become in 10 years), or short-term (e.g., what I hope to become next year). Although individuals are potentially free to create any imagined future self, possible selves tend to be more limited than all potential variations and are instead based on one's own past experiences of success and failure, one's own values, ideals, and the social context around them (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The goal of the current thesis is to examine the association between parenting styles experienced in adolescence and perceptions of possible selves of emerging adults as they transition to young adults.

### **Roadmap**

Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory regarding agentic perspective will be used to explore young adults' possible selves. Given the expected longitudinal changes in selves, the past research on possible selves and aging is reviewed. The research on possible selves in adolescence is summarized along with the association between parenting styles and vocational development, romantic relationships, and parenthood at this stage. From these theoretical and



empirical summaries, the rationale for proposing to explore possible selves in young adults and their relation to perceived parenting perspectives from adolescence is discussed.

### **Possible Selves and Social Cognitive Theory**

Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory proposes that human behaviour is influenced by three factors; personal, behavioral, and environmental. In *Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective*, he claims that human beings are active agents in the developmental changes across the lifespan (Bandura, 2001). When viewed from this perspective, individuals are seen as proactive, self-organized, able to self-regulate, and self-reflect. Furthermore, Bandura also highlighted four core features of human agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Intentionality refers to an individual's ability to form plans and have proactive commitment to bring about desired outcomes. Forethought includes individuals setting goals and anticipating outcomes to motivate and guide their behaviour. Individuals also monitor their progress and regulate their actions as they do or avoid things to feel satisfied. In addition to planning, organizing, and regulating, individuals also think about and reflect upon their thoughts, motives, actions, and life goals.

The agentic perspective of social cognitive theory guides our conceptualization of possible selves. By thinking about possible selves, individuals set goals of what they may become or what they strive to avoid in the future. Since the orientation of possible selves is personal and individualized, goals also have a personal meaning (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). Thinking about possible selves also offers an evaluation and interpretation of the present. From this perspective, a person gains self-knowledge and motivation to explore his or her current view of self in order to address an imagined future self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Additionally, when the perceptions of possible selves are found to be more concrete, vivid, and elaborated, an

individual's motivation for future-self becomes more salient (Strauss, Griffin, & Parker, 2012). Strauss and colleagues (2012) claim that with a more salient future-self, individuals may start thinking about the expected affective experiences linked with the imagined future, which in turn also serves as a motivation to work towards the future self. Similarly, Oyserman and Markus (1990) found that when a future orientation is balanced with both hopes and fears, individuals are more motivated to achieve his/her hoped-for self and to avoid their feared-self. Together, the construct of possible selves overlaps with Bandura's (2001) four core features of human agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness.

### **Possible Selves and Aging**

Cross and Markus (1991) explored the perceptions of possible selves in depth through a cross-sectional study across the adult lifespan. They asked participants in four age groups, 18-24, 25-39, 40-59, and 60-89, to list their hoped-for and feared possible selves. The study identified changes in the number of hopes expressed over the adult lifespan. Among the four age groups, the youngest group reported having the highest number of hopes and fears about their future and the oldest participants discussed the least. However, older adults were more likely than the younger participants to engage in activities to make their possible selves come true. Perhaps, younger adults are still exploring various possibilities for their future, while older adults have already developed a good understanding of their present and future selves. Looking at the content of hopes and fears discussed by older adults, physical and health issues were the most salient domains among older adults, as one might expect as a result of increasing age (Cross & Markus, 1991).

The continuity and consistency of thinking about health domains in relation to possible selves was more recently examined by Frazier, Hooker, Johnson, and Kraus (2000). As sense of

self is influenced by the changing developmental context of different life phases, their five-year longitudinal study looked at the continuity and change in possible selves in older adults between the ages of 55 and 89. They found stability for most domains over a period of five years. Specifically, independence, physical, and lifestyle domains remained stable hoped-for selves, and stable feared selves included categories related to family. However, the prevalence of health and physical-related categories became more important possible selves over time. Given the increased potential for health thereafter with advancing age, these results coincide with realities facing many aging adults. Frazier, Johnson, Gonzalez, and Kafka (2002) replicated these outcomes with adults in their 60s, 70s, and 80s and older. Once again, health was most frequently mentioned by the oldest age group as a hoped-for self and dependence on others as a feared self. The increased prevalence of health related categories with advancing age suggest the senior adults recognize the potential threats and limitations that health difficulties could place on their ability to realize life goals.

Looking at the physical and health domain across a wider age range, Ryff (1991) studied young ( $M_{age}= 19.3$  years), middle-aged ( $M_{age}= 46.0$  years), and older-aged ( $M_{age}= 73.4$  years) adults. Individuals were asked to evaluate themselves on six dimensions of psychological well-being in relation to their past, present, future, and ideal selves. The older-aged adults rated their well-being as stable from past to present and saw a decline for the future. They also rated their present-self and ideal-self much closer than young and middle age participants did. Perhaps young adults have high hopes about their future as they perceive it being “far”, whereas, older adults have more realistic expectations as they do not consider the “future” as distant as do young adults. This study highlights the self-reflective nature of individuals across the lifespan,

and in particular, shows that individuals are able to reflect on their present self in order to have realistic expectations of the future especially as they age.

Research with older adults has also looked at the influence of possible selves on well-being. A study conducted in Taiwan examined the relationship between older adults' ( $M_{age}=70$ ) physical activity participation and possible selves. The results of the study found construction of possible selves promoting physical activity/exercise behaviors and psychological well-being (Hsu, Lu, & Lin, 2014). Therefore, thinking about possible selves seems to be one mechanism that can motivate individuals to change their lifestyle.

To summarize, research has consistently found health-related hopes and fears to become more salient over time with increasing age, as changes in physical and functional health start to become the main concern (e.g., Frazier et al., 2000; Frazier et al., 2002; Hooker & Kaus, 1994; Smith & Freund, 2002). In aggregate, these findings indicate that an individual's hopes about the future mirror the challenges which arise within particular developmental stages of older adults. Whereas older adults appear to be primarily concerned with health-related components of possible selves, research indicates that adolescents (ages 13–19 years, as defined by Erikson (1968)) are more focused on identity development (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Hicks, 1996).

### **Possible Selves and Adolescents**

Even though identity development is complex and changes throughout life, it is during the adolescence stage when individuals begin to explore who they are and who they can become (Erikson, 1968). In line with this claim, decades of developmental research have indicated that younger individuals express a variety of possible selves. For example, Gillies (1989) conducted a longitudinal study in England and found that teenagers (11- and 14 year-olds) expressed future hopes of employment, happy marriage, money, and a pleasant home. When participants were

asked about future concerns, unemployment, war, own death, poor health, and marriage were the most salient at age 11. However, at age 14 years, in 1987, unemployment, war, own death, money, and AIDS became the most prevalent future concerns. This study highlights the diversity of hopes and fears of adolescents. It is interesting to note the impact of the time period and media exposure on individuals' hopes and fears. This is evident in the participants' reports of their concerns regarding contracting AIDS in the future. The results of this study not only highlight the hopes and concerns adolescents had in 1980s, but also speak to the importance of time period and cohort effects and its impact on the types of hopes and fears expressed by individuals.

Moreover, Shepard and Marshall (1999) investigated the hopes and fears of young adolescents in British Columbia (ages 11 to 13 years old) for implications in personal and career counseling. The results indicated that having a good occupation, having materialistic possessions (e.g., owning a computer, having pets, or having a house), and being able to engage in leisure activities (e.g., visiting Australia, drawing, or showing horses) were the three most frequently identified future hopes. On the other hand, safety (e.g., serious accident, being near spiders, or being kidnapped), relationships (e.g., family member's death, or never getting married) and not following societal ideals (e.g., doing drugs, teen pregnancy, or being greedy) were the main future concerns. Consistent with the findings of Gillies (1989), Shepard and Marshall (1999) also clearly highlight the impact of historical context and location on self-perceptions. Specifically, one of the concerns, being near a spider was found only for the participants in 1999 in British Columbia, possibly due to the mountain pine beetle epidemic happening at the time, whereas, war and death were the top concerns of participants in 1989 in England as threats of nuclear war were present around this time.

Research conducted by Hicks (1996) with 398 participants of 7 to 18 years of age looked deeper into the future-self by examining three domains related to individuals' future: personal, local, and global. The study found personal hopes were related to education, work, relationships, and achieving a good life, and future concerns were related to work, health, money, and family. Personal future categories all increased in importance with age until age 14, with 'doing well in education' becoming most important at age 14 and after. All personal fears increased with age, with concern about health and family problems being the greatest at age 14. When asked about the future of their local community, participants discussed hopes for greater prosperity, less crime, better amenities, and less pollution, with fears of increase in crime, unemployment, pollution, and a worsening environment. Hoping for a community with greater prosperity and less crime and fear of unemployment and more crime increased with participants' age. Lastly, when discussing global future hopes, participants discussed hopes for world peace, an end to poverty, good international relationships, and less pollution, while having future fears of war, pollution, poverty/hunger, and disasters. For global hopes and concerns, war was the biggest concern for participants of 14 and 18 years of age, while disasters were the biggest fear for participants of 7 years of age. The study shows diversity across different domains of future selves and across age with respect to hopes and concerns. In addition, the results also identify hopes and fears related to future selves and indicate the self-reflection of younger populations.

Self-reflection, or looking ahead at the personal level future self, can promote self-regulation in adolescence. Having expectations or concerns for the future such as "I may not be doing well in school this year, but I will next year" can promote a self-regulatory strategy such as "I am not doing well this year, so I will take summer school and improve my marks". Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, and Hart-Johnson (2004) asked Grade 8 students about their expectations and

concerns for the upcoming year and the strategies they had developed to work towards their hopes and to avoid their fears. These authors found that academic possible selves served as roadmaps for these eighth graders. Participants who discussed self-regulatory strategies in their future possible selves showed improvement in grades, spent more time on homework, were more involved in the class, and were less likely to be referred to take summer school. Therefore, self-regulation seems to be another function of possible selves.

In summary, adolescence is a stage of exploration where thinking about possible selves may serve to benefit academic and career outcome. Importantly, perceptions of possible selves are a product of an individual's sociocultural context (e.g., time period, historical context, surrounding environment, etc.) and influence various levels of an individual's life (e.g., personal, local, and global). A fundamental component of the sociocultural context that one experiences is that of the home environment. In fact, parents and families have long been considered to be among the most influential contributors to individual development across the lifespan (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

### **Role of Parenting Styles**

In adolescence, this development involves a great deal of exploration and an individual's sociocultural context (e.g., parents, teachers, friends, etc.) plays a critical role in this process. As parents often serve as significant role models from whom children first learn how to interpret the world around them, a positive interaction between parent-child is crucial. According to Baumrind's work (1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983), parenting styles are comprised of an interaction between two dimensions: warmth-hostility and controlling-uncontrolling. While the dimension of warmth-hostility refer to parents' responsiveness and affection, the controlling-uncontrolling dimension refers to the degree of parental supervision. From these two dimensions,

the following parenting styles have been proposed: authoritative (balance between warmth and control), authoritarian (low on warmth and high levels of control), permissive (high on warmth and low levels of control), and neglectful (low on warmth and low on levels of control). Studies have looked at the relationship between parenting styles and children's development from childhood to late adulthood and found authoritative parenting, also known as positive or secure parenting, to have a positive influence on individuals' vocational development, romantic relationship, and future desire to have children (e.g., Keller & Whiston, 2008; Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Kiessinger, 2001; Scharf and Mayseless, 2011).

**Parenting styles and vocational development.** Parenting styles have been previously shown to influence vocational development of adolescents and young adults (e.g., Cenkseven-Onder, Kirdok, & Isik, 2010). Specifically, it has been demonstrated that parental support is an influential factor with career exploration, formation of clear and stable career goals, career decision-making, and promoting self-confidence to complete career planning activities (e.g., Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Hargrove, Creagh, Burgess, 2002; Keller & Whiston, 2008). Furthermore, Cenkseven-Onder and colleagues (2010) found differences in career decision-making patterns across parenting styles experienced among high school students. Participants who experienced authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles as compared to those who experienced either permissive or neglectful parenting, scored low on all five categories of career decision inventory: internal conflicts, lack of self-knowledge, lack of occupation and field knowledge, irrational beliefs about career choice, and external conflicts. This study highlights the positive influence of authoritative parenting and shows authoritarian parenting to be beneficial. Perhaps, participants from authoritarian families perceived high control from parents as support for vocational development or the career decisions may have been made on behalf of



the participants by their parents. In sum, the relationship between positive parenting and vocational development indicates the important long-term impact of parenting styles on career development of adolescents.

**Parenting styles and romantic relationships.** Numerous studies have examined the influence of parenting styles on intimacy in romantic relationships (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer, 2004). Research has shown that parenting consisting of warmth and support later helps individuals in their development of healthy romantic relationships in emerging adulthood (e.g., Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2011; Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Kiessinger, 2001). Simpson (1990) found positive parenting to be associated with greater relationship interdependence, commitment, trust, and satisfaction in later romantic relationship. Furthermore, Del Toro (2012) examined the importance of parenting styles and its relation to reports of romantic relationship anxiety. The study results indicate that authoritative parenting was predictive of absence of anxiety in a current or most recent relationship. In conjunction, these studies demonstrate the long-term influence parenting style can have on an individual's later romantic life.

**Parenting styles and parenthood.** As individuals plan for their future career and think about romantic relationships, they often envision their future role as a parent as well. Although there is limited research on the influence of parenting styles and individuals' desire to have children in the future, the existing literature indicates that positive parenting style is associated with positive expectations of future parenthood and a higher desire to have children when compared to less positive parenting styles (e.g., Nathanson & Monohar, 2012; Rholes, Simpson, Blakely, Lanigan, & Allen, 1997).

In a study conducted by Rholes, Simpson, and Blakely (1995), nonparent college females and males were asked report their desire to have children and the degree to which they were concerned about being a good parent. Both females and males who grew up experiencing parenting consisting of cooperative attitude and gentle persuasion rather assertive control from parents reported having more desire to have children and expressed less concerns about raising them. To replicate these results, Rholes, Simpson, Blakely, and Lanigan (1997) conducted another study with unmarried college students and asked them about their future plans about parenthood. Once again, positive parenting style was positively associated with greater desire to have children relative to desire reported by those who experienced less positive parenting. Moreover, participants reported feeling more negative beliefs and expectations of themselves as a good parent (i.e., using stricter and harsher discipline strategies and having a colder relationship with their child). Combined, these findings suggest the role of experienced parental style and its long-term influence on future perceptions of being a parent.

Future perceptions of being a parent may also be influenced by the quality of the relationship between parents and their children. For example, Scharf and Mayseless (2011) conducted a longitudinal study following 60 men from adolescence to emerging adulthood to investigate the impact of quality of relationship with parents and five factors associated with later parenthood (i.e., desire to have children, perceived parenting capacity, satisfaction with future parenting, self-as-a-parent, and future-child perceptions). It was found that less positive parenting in adolescence (e.g., distance from mother, rejection from mother, angry mother, angry father, etc.) was associated with lower desire to have children, lower perceived ability to take care of children, less satisfaction with future parenting, and negative perceptions of future-child characteristics (e.g., impatient, distant, etc.). When participants were assessed as emerging adults

(9 years later), conflict and support from mother and father and its resulting impact on the five aforementioned factors was reassessed. The results indicated that a supportive relationship with mother and father was significantly positively correlated with a desire to have children, perceived parenting capacity, satisfaction from future parenting, and perceptions of self-as a parent. In addition, conflict with both parents was inversely related to all five factors, with significant negative association between conflicts with mother and positive self-perceptions as a parent in the future. These findings, although from a somewhat limited body of research, suggest that perceptions of parenting styles experienced in adolescence and young adulthood may be strongly linked to perceptions of future parenthood.

### **Possible Selves and Parenting styles**

Perceptions of experienced parenting styles may also contribute to the possible selves that individuals might envision. Jambori and Sallay (2003) advanced the possible selves literature by looking at the sociocultural influences (i.e., parental relationship) on adolescents' ( $M_{age}=16.6$  years) and young adults' ( $M_{age}=21.6$  years) future-self narratives. Results of this study demonstrated that adolescents and young adults mentioned hopes in the domains of education, work, family and self-related issues and fears related to education, work, family, own health and health of their parents. Adolescents reported higher future education hopes while more family related hopes were formulated by young adults, as consistent with the main developmental tasks of the stages. In addition, type of relationship with parents was also identified as an influence on future hopes and fears. Adolescents with supportive mothers discussed more future family hopes, in contrast to young adults with less supportive mothers who discussed more family hopes. Jambori and Sallay (2003) believe that by adulthood, individuals value more autonomy and perhaps feel like they need less support from their mothers to formulate future goals. Moreover,

a striking finding in this research is that participants from rule-oriented families (i.e., clear expectations and consequences for actions) were less fearful about future work. The authors argue that family climates with clear rules (e.g., consistent reward and punishment system) and supportive environment allows adolescents and young adults to confidently set goals for their future education and successfully cope with fears related to future work. Overall, the findings of this study support the effects of quality of parental relationship and family climate on young adolescents and young adults future goals. This study has not been followed up by other research, and therefore, provides an opportunity for the proposed study to explore similar questions.

### **Possible Selves and Gender**

Available research on possible selves, although limited, exists from as early as the 1990s; however, not many studies have focused on gender-related aspects of possible selves.

Greene and Wheatley (1992) conducted 90-minute interviews with 19 and 20 year olds to study gender differences, anticipation and projected timing of possible selves. Females discussed more family related events in their future narratives. Also, females anticipated marriage and parenthood more than males and anticipated these events to be happening at younger ages than males. There was no gender difference in the occupation domain. The study results highlight the importance of marriage, parenthood, and family for females in 1992.

Hicks (1996) found some clear differences between discussion of future possible selves of boys and girls of 7 to 18 years of age. The study looked at individuals' future hopes and fears regarding personal (e.g., occupation, education, health, good life, etc.), local (e.g., crime in community, pollution, environment, etc.), and global (e.g., war, pollution, poverty, hunger, etc.) futures. Girls discussed their hopes and fears for all three types of futures more than boys. In

addition, girls were also more likely to talk about personal and global future with each other. When looking at the three subscales of futures, for personal future, girls mentioned more concerns regarding education, while boys were more worried about having a good life. Also, girls discussed relationship categories more than boys, but only up until age 14. At the global level, boys were more worried about pollution, while girls expressed more concerns regarding the relationship between countries. The future views of these children and adolescents reflect the sociopolitical concerns of the time.

Besides Green and Wheatley (1992) and Hicks (1996) showing some gender differences in the future orientation of adolescents, most studies have found females focusing on education, career choice, marriage, and children in their future orientation (Greene & DeBacker, 2004; Kalakosli and Nurmi, 1998; Kerpelman, Shoffner, Ross-Griffin, 2002; Knox, Funk, Elliott, & Bush, 2000; Segal, Demeis, Wood, & Smith, 2001). Looking at the categories mentioned in possible selves of females, it seems that females' future hopes and fears have become more similar to those of men. Perhaps, the sociocultural context (e.g., school, family, friends, etc.) is encouraging both males and females to envision their future similarly and females are expanding their future beyond family related hopes and fears and including career and occupation.

### **Why Study Young Adults?**

Young adulthood is defined as ranging from 20 to 40 years of age, according to Erikson's stages of human development (Erikson, 1968). According to Arnett (2000), individuals from age 18 to 28 are defined by five essential qualities: identity exploration, instability, self-focused, feeling in-between, and possibilities. As identity development takes time, individuals are continuing the exploration during emerging adulthood. They start clarifying their identities and learn about who they are and who they want to be. This stage gives them the ideal opportunity to

explore various roles and opportunities as they are not committed to long-term jobs, marriage, or parenthood. While exploring their identity during this phase, it is natural to feel unstable as they try various different possibilities. Plans for present and future-self are made at this stage.

However, plans often need revisions with time and at this stage of human development, individuals have the opportunity to focus on discovering their true self. By focusing on one's self, individuals develop skills to become independent adults, discover who they are and develop goals for their future. And, while focusing on the self by exploring and feeling unstable, there is also a feeling of being in-between the phase of adolescence and adulthood during this phase as individuals have not fully committed to adult roles, yet do not feel like an adolescent. As a result, exploring different possibilities is central during this phase as it provides an opportunity to clarify one's true self. Taken together, this stage of human development is particularly insightful for studying individuals' narratives of possible selves as individuals are clarifying their identities, exploring their current self, and planning for their future at this stage.

In the cross-sectional study of Cross and Markus (1991), participants in the age group of 25-39 discussed hopes related to personal self (e.g., to be more loving and caring), occupation, leisure, and education. Physical health (e.g., being overweight), family (e.g., too old to have children), and relationship concerns (e.g., not finding a spouse) were the top three fears expressed by participants in this age group. These findings are in line with Erikson's (1968) psychosocial model and the developmental expectations of young adulthood. The present study examines these same issues in a current sample, allowing for a replication but using a longitudinal study design.

Despite the extant research looking at the future-self in multiple domains, little research has focused on young adults. In addition, other than Jambori and Sallay (2003), no other

research, to my knowledge, has looked at the potential association between perceived parenting style in adolescence and later image of future-self in young adulthood. The current research will follow up on Cross and Markus's (1991) research and expand on Jambori and Sallay (2003) research by using a longitudinal research design with ages 26 and 32, as these two ages fall in the critical time period of young adulthood.

### **The Present Study**

The current study uses a longitudinal design to examine the association between parenting styles in adolescence and possible selves of individuals of ages 26 and 32. Six hypotheses and three exploratory questions were considered.

1 a) It was hypothesized that categories related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood would be the most discussed hopes across all participants at both ages 26 and 32.

1 b) It was hypothesized that categories related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood would be the most discussed fears across all participants at both ages 26 and 32.

2 a) Presence of stability of categories (i.e., categories are discussed at both, time 1 and time 2) of hopes related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood for individual participants at each of the two ages was also predicted based on the research of Frazier et al. (2000).

2 b) Presence of stability of categories (i.e., categories are discussed at both, time 1 and time 2) of fears related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood for individual participants at each of the two ages was also predicted based on the research of Frazier et al. (2000).

3 a) Participants who perceived themselves as being recipients of more positive parenting at age 17 were hypothesized to be more likely to discuss work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood in their future hopes narratives at age 26 and 32 as compared to participants who perceived themselves as being recipients of less positive parenting.

3 b) Participants who perceived themselves as being recipients of less positive parenting at age 17 were hypothesized to be more likely to discuss work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood in their future fears narratives at age 26 and 32 as compared to participants who perceived themselves as being recipients of more positive parenting.

In addition to these hypotheses, the present study explored the following three questions.

- 1) What additional categories emerged in the hopes and fears narratives of individuals at age 26 and 32?
- 2) Were there any gender differences in the frequency of the top three categories mentioned across participants in hopes and fears (work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood) narratives at age 26 and 32?
- 3) Which demographic variables (i.e., employment status, relationship status, and parental status) were associated with hopes and fears at each of the two ages?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

In the current study, data were collected from a larger longitudinal study referred to as the “Futures Study” (Dumas, Lawford, Tieu, & Pratt, 2009). Participants were originally recruited on a voluntary basis from 16 high schools in a region of central Ontario, Canada, in 1997. The original sample consisted of 896 predominantly White adolescents (544 female adolescents, 61%) most of whom were born in Canada (88%) and who came from unilingual, English-speaking homes (82%). Participants were initially assessed at a mean age of 17.4 years ( $SD = 0.80$ ) and were subsequently examined at ages 19, 23, 26, and 32. The current study will be focusing on future narratives from ages 26 and 32 and their longitudinal relationship with age 17 reports of parenting.



At age 26, in 2005, 100 participants (69% women) and at age 32, in 2011, 114 participants (71% women) completed an extensive interview lasting approximately 2 hours. After the 2005 data collection, 32 participants dropped out of the study. Participants who dropped out were compared to those who remained in the study and no gender, employment, and relationship status differences were found. However, participants who reported having higher education at age 26 were more likely to participate in the study at age 32 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### Measures

**Demographic Measures.** Although additional demographic measures were part of the larger data, only the following demographic measures were used in the current study: gender, current employment status (i.e., not employed, part-time employed, or full time employed), current romantic relationship status (i.e., are they currently in a romantic relationship?), and current parental status (i.e., are they currently a primary caregiver for a child?) as these variables are relevant to the hypotheses and exploratory questions.

**Future Self Narratives.** Possible future selves were assessed with an open-ended questionnaire modeled closely after the measure used by Cross and Markus (1991). Participants were first asked to list three hoped-for and then three feared possible selves.

The open-ended future self narratives were transcribed. They were then read in their entirety and were coded for presence or absence of each of the following 9 pre-determined categories: work/career, marriage/relationship, parenthood, friendships/peer relationships, own parent/family relationships, physical health, mental health, financial matters, and other(s), see Appendix A. The categories were coded for 0 (absence) or 1 (presence), with the participant receiving a minimum of 0 and a maximum score of 1 for mentioning each category. A coding scheme was established between the first author and a research assistant by coding the first 20

narratives together (see Appendix B for an example of narrative coding). Reliability between the two coders was established by coding the narratives independently and then matching the results at the end. Inter-rater reliability of 90% was achieved between the two coders on 20 narratives from each age group. Any inconsistency or disagreement about the participants' score was discussed and resolved by both coders. The rest of the transcripts were coded by the first author.

**Positive parenting index.** For the measure of positive parenting, participants completed three questionnaires at age 17. Dumas et al. (2009) standardized scores on the Family Assessment Device (Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983), the authoritative parenting scale (Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991), and the Parent Interaction Inventory (Dumas et al., 2009) were combined to produce an overall measure of good parenting for their study (see Appendix C for the questionnaires). The Family Assessment Device (FAD) provided global assessment of family health and cohesion in terms of issues such as relationship functioning and emotional communication in the family. An example of FAD is “We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems. Authoritative parenting scale measured the authoritative parenting within the families. An example of authoritative parenting scale is “My parents spend time just talking to me”. In the “Parent Interaction Inventory” participants were asked the following three questions pertaining to parent interaction in six areas of the participants' lives (academics, family issues, future career plans, religion, moral values, and politics): “How much do you discuss this topic with your parent(s)?” “How much do you enjoy discussing this topic with your parent(s)?” and “How much influence do you feel your parent(s) have on you in this area?” These measures were substantially intercorrelated, and Cronbach's alpha for all three scales combined to produce an overall positive parenting measure was .84. Therefore, this measure was also used for the present study.

## Procedure

During the initial research session, Grade 12 students (*Mage* = 17.4 years) from 16 different high schools completed questionnaire packages within their classrooms. The questionnaire packages consisted of measures of parenting as well as a number of other measures. Classrooms received a \$2 honorarium for each participating student.

At ages 26 and 32, research assistants contacted participants by phone, and reintroduced the study using a standard script. Participants were invited to participate in a 2-hour research session at a University in Central Ontario, Canada. During an audiotaped, interview section, conducted by one of four different interviewers, participants were asked to provide brief descriptions regarding their future (among other narratives). The interviews were conducted by research assistants, who were blind to the hypotheses of this study.

Participants were compensated for their participation with a cheque for \$50 at each time of data collection.

During the interview, participants were asked to tell narratives about their future. The exact prompt used by interviewers was as follows:

“So this part of the interview addresses how you see yourself in the future. We all think about our futures to some extent. When doing so, we usually think about the kinds of experiences that are in store for us and the kinds of people we might possibly become. Sometimes we think about what we hope we will be like. Researchers talk about this in terms of “hoped-for possible selves” – selves we hope to become in the future. Some hoped-for selves seem quite likely, like becoming a homeowner, or achieving higher status at work. Other future selves seem quite far-fetched but are still possible, for example, winning the lottery and becoming a millionaire. Please take a few minutes and

think about all of your hoped-for possible selves – you may have just a few or you may have several. Please describe briefly for me the three hoped for selves that are currently most important to you.”

A similar prompt was repeated for “feared future self” narrative:

“So in addition to having hoped-for possible selves, we may have images of ourselves in the future that we fear, dread, or don’t want to happen. Some of these feared possible selves may seem quite likely, like fear of dependency on another person. Other feared possible selves may seem quite unlikely, for example, becoming a homeless person. Some of us may have a large number of feared possible selves in mind, while others may have only a few. Take a few minutes and think about all of your feared possible selves. Please describe three feared selves which are currently most dreaded for you.”

The interviewer did not interrupt the answer, but rather asked for additional information at the end if the participant did not provide three hopes and fears.

### **Results**

This longitudinal study examined young adults’ future hopes and fears at ages 26 and 32 and their association with perceived parenting style assessed at age 17 on future orientations in young adulthood. Two aspects: open-ended responses to the interview questions (future self narratives) and relationship between these narratives and perceived parenting survey measure were examined.

The open-ended future self narratives were transcribed. They were, then, read in their entirety and were coded for presence or absence of each of the following pre-determined categories: work/career, marriage/relationship, parenthood, friendships/peer relationships, own parent/family relationships, physical health, mental health, financial matters, and other(s), see

Appendix A. The categories were coded for 0 (absence) or 1 (presence), with the participant receiving a minimum of 0 and a maximum score of 1 for mentioning each category. Although participants were asked for three hopes and three fears, some participants exceeded three and received a score as high as 9 for discussing each category.

The results for the hoped-for categories and feared categories are presented in Table 1 and 2 respectively.

### **Description of Narrative Categories**

**Future hopes.** In total, at age 26, 99 transcripts and at age 32, 114 transcripts were coded for future hopes. Hypothesis 1 a) stated categories related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood would be the most discussed hopes across all participants at both ages 26 and 32. The findings show the top three categories discussed by participants to be parenthood, work/career, other(s), see Table 1. The category of other(s) included participants discussing categories such as travelling, house ownership, and growing faith in God, etc. However, if looking at specific categories only, marriage/relationship was the third most mentioned category. See Figure D1 in Appendix D for a bar graph representation of the top three categories as discussed by participants at ages 26 and 32. Overall, hypothesis 1 a) was supported when examining specific categories (i.e., excluding the other(s) category).

Table 1

*Percentage of participants expressing each hope category at ages 26 and 32*

Category	Age 26 (n= 99)	Age 32 (n= 114)
Work/Career	65.7	60.2
Marriage/Relationship	35.4	24.8
Parenthood	67.7	71.7
Friendships/Peer Relationships	3.0	1.4
Own Parent/Family Relationships	10.1	4.1
Physical Health	6.1	6.1
Mental Health	13.1	14.2
Financial Matters	16.2	17.7
Other(s)	53.5	58.4

**Future fears.** In total, at age 26, 98 transcripts and at age 32, 113 transcripts were coded for future fears. Mixed results were found for hypothesis 1 b) which predicted the top three fears discussed by participants at ages 26 and 32 to be related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood, see Table 2. Overall, at age 26, participants discussed marriage/relationship, work/career, and other(s). However, when looking at specific categories, the third most mentioned fear would be related to mental health. At age 32, participants discussed fears related to marriage/relationship, physical health, and other(s). Once again looking at the specific categories, the third most mentioned fear would be related to parenthood. See Figure D2 in

Appendix D for a bar graph representation of the top three categories as discussed by participants at ages 26 and 32.

Table 2

*Percentage of participants expressing each fear category at ages 26 and 32*

Category	Age 26 (n= 98)	Age 32 (n= 113)
Work/Career	30.6	36.3
Marriage/Relationship	50.0	43.4
Parenthood	19.4	38.1
Friendships/Peer Relationships	4.1	2.7
Own Parent/Family Relationships	20.4	25.7
Physical Health	24.5	41.6
Mental Health	27.6	18.6
Financial Matters	24.5	16.8
Other(s)	48.0	39.8

**Exploring additional categories in narratives.** Additional categories that were not hypothesized but emerged in the hopes and fears narratives of individuals at age 26 and 32 were also explored. Overall, financial matters, mental health, family relations, physical health, and friendship/peers relationships were discussed in the hopes and fears. See Table 1 for a full summary of all hoped-for categories.

The trend of feared future self categories differed over time for individuals. In the feared future self narratives at age 26, fears related to financial matters, physical health, family

relationships, and friendships/peer relationships were mentioned. At age 32, financial matters, mental health, family relationships, and friendships/peer relationships, see Table 2 for full summary of all feared-self categories.

### **Continuity and Change of Future Narratives Categories**

In total, 69 coded transcripts were compared to assess individual's continuity and change of hopes from ages 26 to 32, because in total, 69 participants were present in both the age 26 and age 32 samples, allowing me to analyze continuity and change over these two times. Since the narrative categories were dichotomous variables, McNemar's test was used to determine whether there is stability or change from age 26 to 32 for each individual for the three hypothesized categories: work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood. A series of six McNemar's tests (2 categories: hoped-for at age 26 vs. 32 and feared categories at age 26 vs. 32 x 3 categories within each category: work/career, marriage/relationship, parenthood) were conducted.

**Continuity and change of hopes over time.** According to hypothesis 2 a) presence of stability of categories (i.e., categories are discussed at both, time 1 and time 2) of hopes related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood for individual participants at each of the two ages was predicted based on the research of Frazier et al. (2000). Hypothesis 2 a) was supported as McNemar's analyses of the hoped self categories showed stability between individual's hopes at age 26 and 32. Table 3 shows the percentage of individuals that consistently expressed a hope in the same category (i.e., indicating stability from age 26 to 32) and percentage of individuals that changed from time 1 to time 2, and the exact p-values.

Overall, higher percentages of participants were consistent with expressing future hopes in the top three predicted hopes of work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood from time 1 to time 2.



Table 3

*Individual's Stability of Hopes from Age 26 to 32*

Category ( $n = 69, df = 1$ )	Stability (%)	Change (%)	<i>p</i> -value (2-sided)
Work/Career	62	37	.56
Marriage/Relationship	55	31	.15
Parenthood	68	32	1.00

**Continuity and change of fears over time.** According to hypothesis 2 b) presence of stability of categories (i.e., categories are discussed at both, time 1 and time 2) of fears related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood for individual participants at each of the two ages was predicted based on the research of Frazier et al. (2000). Hypothesis 2 b) was partially supported as McNemar's test analyses of the feared self categories indicates stability in the individual's response for categories of work/career and marriage/relationship. However, results for the category of parenthood fears ( $p = .036$ ) indicates change in individual's response from time 1 to time 2. Table 4 shows the percentage of individuals that consistently expressed a fear in the same category (i.e., indicating stability from age 26 to 32) and percentage of individuals that changed from time 1 to time 2, and the exact p-values.

Table 4

*Individual's Stability of Fears from Age 26 to 32*

Category ( $n = 69, df = 1$ )	Stability (%)	Change (%)	$p$ -value (2-sided)
Work/Career	58	42	1.00
Marriage/Relationship	57	43	.36
Parenthood	59	41	.04*

Note. \* Significant at  $p < .05$  level.

### Perceived Parenting and Future Narratives

In order to measure the strength of association between perceived parenting styles at age 17 and future hopes and fears at age 26 and then again at age 32, a point-biserial correlation coefficient was computed; with the parenting measure being a continuous variable and narrative categories being the dichotomous variables. Hence, a series of 12 point-biserial correlation coefficients were computed between the perceived parenting measure and three future narrative categories (i.e., work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood) at both ages.

**Association between perceived parenting and future hopes at ages 26 and 32.** Mixed results were found for hypothesis 3 a) as participants who perceived themselves as being recipients of more positive parenting at age 17 were not more likely to discuss work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood in their future hopes narratives at age 26 and 32 (with the exception of parenthood) as compared to participants who perceived themselves as being recipients of less positive parenting. Overall, a significant correlation was found only between perceived parenting styles at age 17 and hopes related to parenthood at age 32,  $r = .20, p = .04$ .

There was no significant association of parenting style and future hopes related to the three categories at age 26, see Appendix E, Table E1.

### **Association between perceived parenting and future fears at ages 26 and 32.**

Hypothesis 3 b) was not supported as participants who perceived themselves as being recipients of less positive parenting at age 17 did not discuss work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood in their future fears narratives at age 26 and 32 as compared to participants who perceived themselves as being recipients of more positive parenting. Overall, no significant association was found between parenting style on the future fears related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood categories at both ages 26 and 32, see Appendix E, Table E2.

### **Exploring the Association between Gender and Future Narratives**

A series of 12 Pearson chi-squares (Gender: Female versus Male x 2 categories: Hoped-for and Feared-self x 3 categories within each category: work/career, marriage/relationship, parenthood x Age: 26, 32) were computed to explore gender differences at the 2 ages.

**Gender and future hopes.** At age 26, out of 98 participants, 67 (68.4%) were females. Pearson chi-squares were computed and there was no significant relationship found between gender and the hope categories at age 26. See Appendix F, Table F1, for a full summary of frequencies for each category mentioned across gender and correlation values.

At age 32, out of 114 participants, 81 (72.3%) were females. Pearson chi-squares were computed and there was no significant relationship found between gender and the hope categories at age 32. See Appendix F, Table F1, for a full summary of frequency of percentage for each category mentioned across gender and correlation values.

**Gender and future fears.** At age 26, out of 98 participants, 67 (68.4%) were females. Pearson chi-squares were computed and there was no significant relationship found between gender and the fear categories at age 26. See Appendix F, Table F2, for a full summary of frequency of percentage of each category mentioned across gender and correlation values.

At age 32, Pearson chi square results were only significant for work/career,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 112) = 9.326, p = .002$ . Males were significantly more likely than females to discuss fears related to work/career. Specifically, 58.1% of the males discussed fears related to work/career, whereas 27.2% of females discussed work/career fears, see Appendix F, Table F2, for full summary of frequency of percentage for each category mentioned across gender and correlation values.

### **Exploring the Association between Demographics and Future Narratives**

Association between demographic variables (employment status, relationship status, and parental status) and top three predicted future narrative categories (i.e., work/career, marriage/relationship, parenthood) was explored using Pearson Chi Squares. One interesting finding was the association between relationship status at age 32 and hopes regarding marriage/relationship and parenthood. At age 32, out of 108 participants, 89 participants (82.4%) were in a committed relationship. A Pearson Chi square statistic was computed and participants currently in a relationship were significantly less likely to express hopes regarding marriage/relationship,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 108) = 9.39, p = .002$ , and more likely to express parenthood hopes,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 108) = 12.43, p < 0.001$ .

### **Discussion**

During young adulthood (20-40 years of age), individuals often question their future and develop ideas about the life that lies ahead of them (Erikson, 1968). The central focus of this stage is to develop intimate relationships. Although the current study's participants age range

falls in the period of young adulthood, it is important to know the stage and tasks that precede and follow young adulthood. During the adolescence stage (12 to 20 years of age), identity development is the central theme, when an individual tries to achieve a sense of identity through understanding self and developing social relationships. During the stage after young adulthood, adults (40 to 65 years of age) continue to build relationships at work and at home, while thinking about the future generation. Thinking about or becoming a parent is expected to be one of the primary concerns of this stage. Although Erikson's (1968) model seems to predict changes throughout the lifespan in a hierarchical pattern, the stages and tasks are flexible and do not occur in a strict chronological fashion.

In this longitudinal study, the central question investigated hopes and fears of young adults of ages 26 and 32 and examined the relation between perceived parenting style from age 17 and future self orientation in young adulthood. Open-ended responses and the survey measures were analyzed to answer three hypotheses and explore three questions. Overall, mixed results were found for the hypotheses. The following section discusses findings for all hypotheses and for each of the explored question.

### **Hypothesis 1 a: Hopes related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood**

It was hypothesized that work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood would be the most discussed categories across participants in hoped-for narratives at both ages 26 and 32. This hypothesis was supported. At both ages, participants discussed parenthood the most, followed by work/career and marriage/relationship (excluding other(s) category).

Consistent with Erikson's (1968) model of psychosocial development, the hopes discussed at ages 26 and 32 included categories of marriage/relationship at both age groups. Interestingly, the categories of work/career and parenthood were also discussed at both ages 26

and 32. This finding falls within the expectations of Erikson's (1968) model as thoughts regarding work/career are part of individuals' identity development occurring during the stage preceding young adulthood and parenthood falls in the stage after young adulthood. Hence this study highlights inclusion of thinking about future generation (i.e., thoughts about parenthood) as early as age 26. Presence of future thoughts regarding parenthood (e.g., becoming a parent or being a good parent) at age 32 shows transition to adulthood being delayed and elongated.

In contrast to Cross and Markus (1991) which shows young adults most frequently discussing hopes related to perceptions of being more loved and cared for, work/career, and leisure domains of life, this study's findings show individuals focusing more on categories of work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood. Interestingly, marriage/relationship and parenthood related categories were discussed by participants in the 18-24 and 40-59 years of age groups, in the Cross and Markus (1991) study. The hoped-for selves of 18-24 years of age included hopes of finding a spouse and becoming a parent in the future. In contrast, the 40-59 years of age group discussed hopes related to being a good husband and a good parent. Marriage/relationship or parenthood hopes were not salient in the 25-39 years of age range and Cross and Markus (1991) point to this phase to be a "settling down" phase as an explanation for the absence of the two categories. This interesting difference highlights possible cohort effects as Cross and Markus's study was done in 1991 and the current study shows individual's including hopes related to marriage/relationship and parenthood at age 26 and as late as 32. One of the most apparent reasons for the current findings could be due to individuals' focus on work/career, postponing marriage/relationship and parenthood. Alternatively, perhaps young adults' focus on being loved or cared for includes more aspects of life now, such as relationship and family, in contrast to the findings of Cross and Markus (1991). Regardless of being "settled down" during

young adulthood, the current findings show individuals' future aspirations moving towards focusing on staying a good spouse or a good parent, highlighting the developmentally changing nature of the same hopes and fears.

**Hypothesis 1 b: Individuals' changing fears of marriage/relationship, work/career, mental health, and physical health**

It was hypothesized that work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood would be the most discussed categories by participants in feared-self narratives at both ages 26 and 32. Mixed results were found for this hypothesis. At age 26, participants discussed marriage/relationship the most, followed by work/career and mental health. At age 32, participants discussed marriage/relationship the most followed by physical health and parenthood.

The current study found individuals at ages 26 and 32 discussing fears related to marriage/relationship, work/career, parenthood, physical health, and mental health, which are somewhat in line with the findings of Cross and Markus (1991). When asked about future fears, it is common for an individual to think about losing or not finding a job, facing decrements in physical health or mental health, not finding a significant other or losing them. In addition, fear of not becoming a parent or not being a good parent also reflects developmental future concerns in line with individuals' stage of life. Put together, these fears are in line with the stage of young adulthood in Erikson's (1968) model of psychosocial development.

**Hypothesis 2 a: Stability in hopes from age 26 to 32**

It was hypothesized that the hoped-for narratives would include individuals discussing categories related to work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood at both ages 26 and 32, indicating stability of hopes over time. This hypothesis was supported.

In line with the findings of Frazier et al. (2000) study which showed stability in older adults expressing future hopes of independence, physical, and lifestyle domains over 5 years, the current study also found stability in individuals' hopes with the current sample of ages 26 to 32, however, in categories of work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood. Presence of stability over time yet in such different domains indicates age normative tasks being incorporated into perceptions of the future. As young adulthood is prolonged with more education causing a delay in finding a job and settling down with family, these results come as no surprise.

This finding may seem to be contradictory to Arnett's (2000) perceptions of emerging young adulthood as he predicts young adults to be flexible at this stage of life; however, that conclusion should not be drawn from the results. It must be pointed out that results of stability in the categories do not take into account the context in which the hopes were expressed within each category. For example, at age 26, an individual may have expressed hopes of working at a particular company, and at age 32, they may have expressed hopes of wanting a promotion at this company. At both times, the coding scheme indicates the presence of hopes regarding work/career, but does not capture the flexibility, adaptability, and reevaluation of future vision over time. Future research can focus on the context of narratives and unfold further valuable information from the narratives.

### **Hypothesis 2 b: Stability in fears from age 26 to 32**

It was hypothesized that the feared-self narratives would include participants discussing work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood at both ages 26 and 32, indicating stability of fears over time. Partial support was found for this hypothesis as individuals consistently expressed fears of work/career and marriage/relationship, but not parenthood.



The results are in line with the findings of Frazier et al. (2000) study, which showed older adults indicating stability in future fears regarding health, independence, family, and lifestyle. Once again, similar to the reasoning behind stability in hopes, stability in fears regarding work/career and marriage/relationship are in line with age normative tasks. And, as mentioned previously, it is important to note the context of the narratives, which would indicate flexibility and adaptability at this stage of life (Arnett, 2000). For example, at age 26, individuals may be concerned about not finding a spouse, whereas at age 32, they may be concerned about the marriage falling apart or death of their spouse.

Looking at the category of parenthood fears, the result indicates that individuals were more likely to change their response from time 1 to 2. The reason for this change may be potentially explained by looking at the demographics of the study sample. At age 26, only 15% of the sample had children, whereas at age 32, 50% of the sample had children. Since such a small number of percentage of participants had children at age 26, there may be more future parenthood fears expressed at this age and perhaps once individuals had children, they did not mention parenthood related fears at age 32.

### **Hypothesis 3 a & b: Significant association between positive parenting and parenthood hopes at age 32**

It was hypothesized that participants scoring higher on the perceived parenting styles at age 17 will be more likely to discuss categories of work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood in their hoped-for narratives. In addition, it was also hypothesized that participants scoring lower on the perceived parenting styles at age 17 will be more likely to discuss categories of work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood in their feared-self narratives.

The results of this study indicate participants' parenting perceptions from age 17 had no association with young adults' future hopes and fears of work/career, marriage/relationship at both ages. There was, however, a relationship between participants who scored high on the parenting measure at age 17 and discussing parenthood hopes at age 32, specifically those who rated their family parenting as higher at 17 were more likely to express hopes about parenthood at 32. This association was not found for parenthood hopes or fears at age 26 or on parenthood fears at age 32. One of the most apparent reasons for not finding this relationship at age 32 and not at age 26 could be due to the work/career aspect of life being delayed causing relationships and parenthood to be postponed.

This finding is also inconsistent with positive parenting and relationship literature (e.g., Dinero et al., 2011; Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Kiessinger, 2001) which shows an association between parental relationships consisting of warmth and support and healthy romantic relationship in young adulthood. In addition, Simpson (1990) and Del Toro's (2012) studies also indicate the influence of positive parenting on positive qualities (e.g., secure attachment, interdependence, commitment, trust, absence of anxiety etc.) in a relationship; however, it may not impact whether individuals would like to have a romantic partner in the future, explaining the reasoning behind no significant relationship between the variables in the current study. Perhaps, when thinking about possible selves regarding future relationships, other sociocultural factors (e.g., friends, work) influence the decision to form an intimate relationship and experienced parental style is not as strong an influence.

As parenthood hopes at age 32 were found to be related to perceived positive parenting from age 17, this finding is somewhat consistent with several of the studies discussed in the literature review (e.g., Nathanson & Monohar, 2012; Rholes, Simpson, and Blakely, 1995;

Rholes et al., 1997; Simpson et al., 1997). Specifically, Rholes, Simpson, and Blakely (1995) and Rholes et al. (1997) found a relationship between positive parenting and the desire to have children in a sample of unmarried nonparent college students. The current study extends the two studies by showing a similar relationship between the two variables at age 32. As aforementioned, perhaps the relationship is seen at age 32 and not in early young adulthood similar to the discussed studies due to individuals' postponing parenthood now.

The rationale behind the current study was based on the study of Jambori and Sallay (2003). Regardless of not finding a relationship between parental relationship and future orientation at age 26 as Jambori and Sallay had found with participants of 21 years of age, the current findings do extend Jambori and Sallay's results by showing a similar relationship existing at age 32. It is also noteworthy that Jambori and Sallay's study was conducted in Hungary and perhaps there is a difference in parenting styles and their influences in North American culture as compared to the culture in Hungary.

Overall, the finding of a relationship between perceived positive parenting at age 17 and parenthood hopes at age 32 may be due to individuals' hopes regarding parenthood being more salient at this age, as according to Erikson's (1968) model of psychosocial development.

#### **Gender: Males express more fears related to work/career**

No significant differences were found in the hoped-for narrative categories of work/career, marriage/relationship and parenthood discussed by females and males. This finding is in line with past literature, which shows females and males sharing similar future hopes for the future at both ages 26 and 32. This finding indicates females placing importance on work/career aspect of life and men discussing marriage/relationship and parenthood just as much as work/career. Hence, the current study found future orientation of both genders to include features

of both femininity (e.g., looking forward to parenthood) and masculinity (e.g., to be more career oriented), consistent with past studies (Greene & DeBacker, 2004; Kalakosli and Nurmi, 1998; Kerpelman, Shoffner, Ross-Griffin, 2002; Knox et al., 2000; Segal et al., 2001).

When feared-self narratives were compared between females and males, there was a significant relationship between gender and discussion of work/career issues. Specifically, males were more likely to express fears related to work/career issues at age 32 than were females. Perhaps, by age 32 females try to dedicate and commit to the role within the family as a partner and a mother, and work/career concerns may not be one of the primary concerns. In contrast, men may be working towards a promotion or settling down in their career around the age of 32, hence discussing fears in that domain.

#### **Demographics: Association between relationship status and marriage/relationship and parenthood hopes**

When the demographic variables were examined, there was a significant relationship between participant's marriage/relationship status and relationships and parenting. Specifically, participants in a committed relationship at age 32 were less likely to mention marriage/relationship hopes, but more likely to mention parenthood hopes. This finding comes as no surprise as many individuals are settling down and planning parenthood by age 32; hence, if one is already in a relationship he or she is more likely to think about the next life task, parenthood.

#### **Summary**

Taken together, the findings of future hopes at ages 26 and 32 include participants mentioning work/career, marriage/relationship, and parenthood. Participants were found to consistently mention hopes in the same top three categories at both ages. Future hopes at both

ages did not seem to be influenced by perceived parenting from age 17, with the exception of participants mentioning more parenthood hopes at age 32 if they perceived themselves being recipients of more positive parenting than those who did not.

The findings of future fears include participants mentioning marriage/relationship, work/career, parenthood, physical health, and mental health. From age 26 to 32, participants were found to consistently mention fears related to work/career and marriage/relationship. Perceptions of positive parenting from age 17 did not seem to have an association with individual's future fears. Lastly, males were more likely to express concerns regarding work/career at age 32 than females.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

One limitation of this study is the lack of diversity among the participants. Participants were primarily white, with 71% reporting their background religion as Christian. Having a diverse sample would, perhaps, show whether future orientation can be envisioned differently depending on the background. For example, North American culture tends to be more individualistic, where people mostly focus on their personal aspirations (e.g., I hope I get a promotion) rather giving priority to in-group goals (as seen from the results of the current study). Perhaps, individuals from collectivist cultural background (e.g., China, Korea, Japan) would discuss more communal goals (e.g., I hope I can make enough for a family vacation) in their future orientation (Triandis, 2001).

Further, only the presence or absence of the categories was coded for the current study. Valuable information can be gained if the context of the narratives was studied. For example: an individual discussing the fear of not becoming a parent was given a code of 1 similar to another individual who discussed fears of not spending enough time with their child. Hence, future

studies should consider the context in which each of the categories is mentioned as it could enhance the understanding of future orientation.

Another limitation of the study was that participants' past selves, present selves, intentions, motivations, or plans regarding the hopes and fears discussed were not questioned. This information could be beneficial in understanding how individuals' plan for the future and the mechanisms they may have to cope with future fears. This additional data could be insightful to understand the process behind how future orientation is developed.

Lastly, for a mixed method study with an extensive interview, the sample size at both ages was moderate. However, having a larger sample size could result in significant results as some of the groups in the cross-tabulations showed large differences; however, due to small sample size in each group, the results were non-significant. Therefore, future studies would benefit from having a larger sample size providing a higher power to detect significant results between variables.

### **Conclusion**

The current study used a mixed method longitudinal approach to provide support for tasks predicted by Erikson's (1968) psychosocial model for the stage of young adulthood. As young adulthood is a time for exploration and flexibility, examining perceptions of possible selves during young adulthood provides insights for how individuals envision his/her future (Arnett, 2000). The results of the current study highlight how young adults define themselves and their future over time from age 26 to 32, an age group that has not been the focus of past literature. Past literature has mainly focused on adolescents and aging population, which allows the current study to fill in a literature gap with findings regarding perceptions of possible selves in young adulthood.

The longitudinal findings of this study highlight the lifespan development of future orientation by showing an integration of normative developmental tasks (e.g., marriage, parenthood, etc.) of young adulthood with thinking about possible selves. While thinking about positive future selves may be motivating, negative thinking about the future can be detrimental, so learning about individuals' future orientation can help identify those who are at risk and provide an opportunity to intervene to promote positive self. Thus, providing practical implications in counseling/therapy settings.

Evidence for Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective is also present in the results of the current study. Bandura's (2001) theory claims that human beings are active agents with four core features: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. The findings from this study showed young adults thinking about the future and anticipating desired outcomes, which is in line with 'intentionality' as a core feature of human agency. Future studies can address the other three core human agency features by asking individuals about their plans and goals to bring about desired outcomes (i.e., forethought), examining how individuals monitor and regulate their behaviour (i.e., self-reactiveness), and with a longitudinal design, individuals can be asked to think and reflect on their past goals and their progress (i.e., self-reflectiveness). Together, studying different aspects of core features of human agency can potentially broaden the literature on possible selves.

The current study also indicates an association between sociocultural factors (i.e., parenting perceptions and gender) and future orientation. Positive parenting perceptions and gender both had a relationship with future orientation of young adults, although with the limited number of hopes and fears, so strong conclusions can not be drawn. Future studies should focus on the relationship between future orientations and sociocultural factors in order to further

understand the importance of socialization, in addition to individualization, and how the interaction between the two shapes individual's growth, change, motivation, mood, cognition, and behaviour.

In addition to the benefits for others, this study provided participants with an opportunity to explore and evaluate their present, and envision their future. As the drive for improvement, in work, relationships, or personal development, is one of the most influential motivators one could have, envisioning hopes and fears that one may have regarding the future allows individuals to assess their current self and develop a plan toward developing a desired future self. The people that we become are ultimately shaped by thought processes such as this.



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## Appendix A – Narratives Coding Scheme

1. Work/Career: included all references to work, career, education, or occupation, e.g., getting a job after finishing school, being successful at the job
2. Marriage/Relationship: included all references to intimate relationships, e.g., want to find someone, looking forward to being a good wife, scared of spouse's death
3. Parenthood: included all references to being a parent, e.g., looking forward to having children, hoping children turn out good
4. Friendships/Peer Relationships: included all references to friendship, e.g., hoping to stay in touch with friends, making more friends
5. Own Parent/Family Relationships: included all reference to own parents, grandparents and family, e.g., concerned about parents health, hoping to stay in touch with family
6. Physical Health: included all references to physical health, e.g., scared of not being able to stay active, hoping to stay physically fit, concerned about depending on others
7. Mental Health: included all references to mental health, e.g., not being happy, feeling regrets, doing drugs or becoming an alcoholic
8. Financial Matters: included all references to finances, e.g., hoping to be financially stable, scared of being in debt
9. Other(s): included references to all other hopes and fears that did not fit the 8 categories, e.g., leisure (travel, vacation), own death, spiritual issues



## Appendix B – Example of Narrative Coding

## Example of narrative coding for the hoped for self

“Hm, I hope to be successful [*umhum*], you know, um, a successful career, [...] I want to be career oriented ... Hm, I don't want any children [*umhum*], I do eventually want to marry, you know, so I want to be successful, and I sort of want family life, just not the kids ... And thirdly, I want to be happy [*okay*], you know, just happy in general with anything I choose, you know, whether or not I'm completely successful or whether or not I'm married, I just want to be happy.”

Categories coded: work/career, marriage/romantic relationship, mental health

## Example of narrative coding for feared self

“Hmm, well the first one would be, being stuck at the job I'm at for the rest of my life. I mean, with everything being so variable, if anything goes wrong then it's all on to you, or anyone in your position to, pick up the slack. [...] Umm, another one, is uh, you know having, like uh, working really hard and getting investments and finally to the point where you don't have to work very much, and then you know something happening where all this investments going away, or, you know, something's wrong with the government and they have to take your money to pay for whatever else. And then you're stuck at where you were and you know, instead of working hard to make yourself a better person, you're working hard to get all that money know that it's gone. (I: And is there one more, at least, any another feared self, that's something?) Umm, I don't know, not being close to God and just, you know, not believing in anything.”

Categories coded: work/career, financial matters, other(s)

Appendix C – Parenting index

Family Assessment Device (FAD)

The next section is made up of statements that apply to families. Please rate how these statements apply to your family.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ In times of crisis, we can turn to each other for support.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ We cannot talk to each other about the sadness we feel.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Individuals are accepted for what they are.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ We avoid discussing our fears and concerns.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ We can express feelings to each other.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ There are lots of bad feelings in the family.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ We feel accepted for what we are.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Making decisions is a problem for our family.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ We don't get along well together.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ We confide in each other.

Parent & Family (The Authoritative Parenting Scale)

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements as applied to your parent (s) or (adult(s) you are living with)?

- |                                |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| -4 = very strongly disagree    | +4 = very strongly agree |
| -3 = strongly disagree         | +3 = strongly agree      |
| -2 = moderately disagree       | +2 = moderately agree    |
| -1 = slightly disagree         | +1 = slightly agree      |
| 0 = neither agree nor disagree |                          |

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I can count on them to help me out, if I have some kind of problem.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ They keep pushing me to do my best in whatever I do.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ They keep pushing me to think independently.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ They help me with my school work if there is something I didn't understand.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ When they want me to do something, they explain why.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ When I get a poor grade in school, my parents encourage me to try harder.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ When I get a poor grade in school, my parents praise me.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ My parents really know who my friends are.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ My parents spend time just talking with me.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ My family do fun active things together.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ My parents TRY to know where I go at night.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ My parents REALLY know where I go at night.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ My parents TRY to know what I do with my free time.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ My parents REALLY know what I do with my free time.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ My parents TRY to know where I am most afternoons after school.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ My parents REALLY know where I am most afternoons after school.

Parent Interaction Inventory

For each topic listed across the top of the following table indicate your response to each of the four questions by writing in the rating from the scale below that best expresses your view.

When the table is complete, you should have a rating in each box.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4  
 none                  a little                  a moderate amount                  quite a bit                  a great deal

	Topics					
	Academics, Course Work	Family Issues	Future Career Plans	Religion	Moral Values	Politics
1. How much do you <i>discuss</i> this topic with your <i>parents(s)</i> (or adults you live with)?						
2. How much do you <i>enjoy</i> discussing this topic with your <i>parent(s)</i> ?						
3. How much <i>influence</i> do you feel your parent(s) have on you in this area?						
4. How much do you <i>discuss</i> this topic with your <i>friends</i> ?						
5. How much do you <i>enjoy</i> discussing this topic with your <i>friends</i> ?						
6. How much <i>influence</i> do you feel your <i>friends</i> have on you in this area?						

Appendix D – Hoped-for and Feared-Self Categories at ages 26 and 32

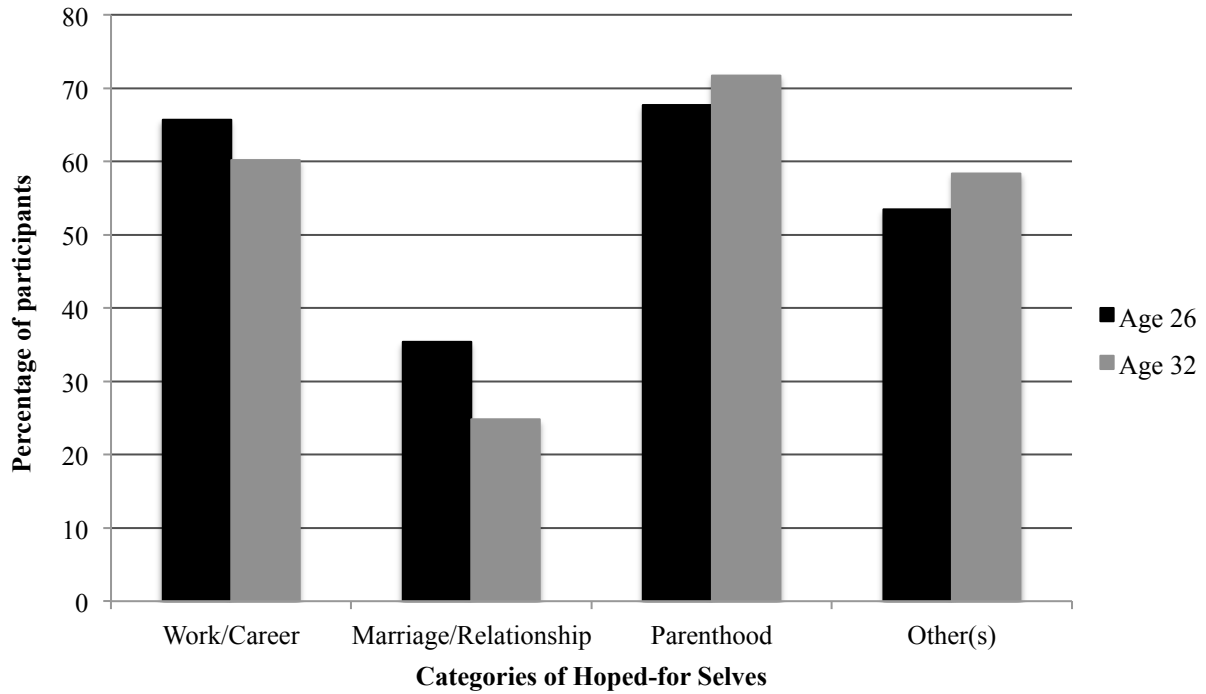


Figure D1. Bar graph showing percentage of participants expressing each hope category at ages 26 and 32.

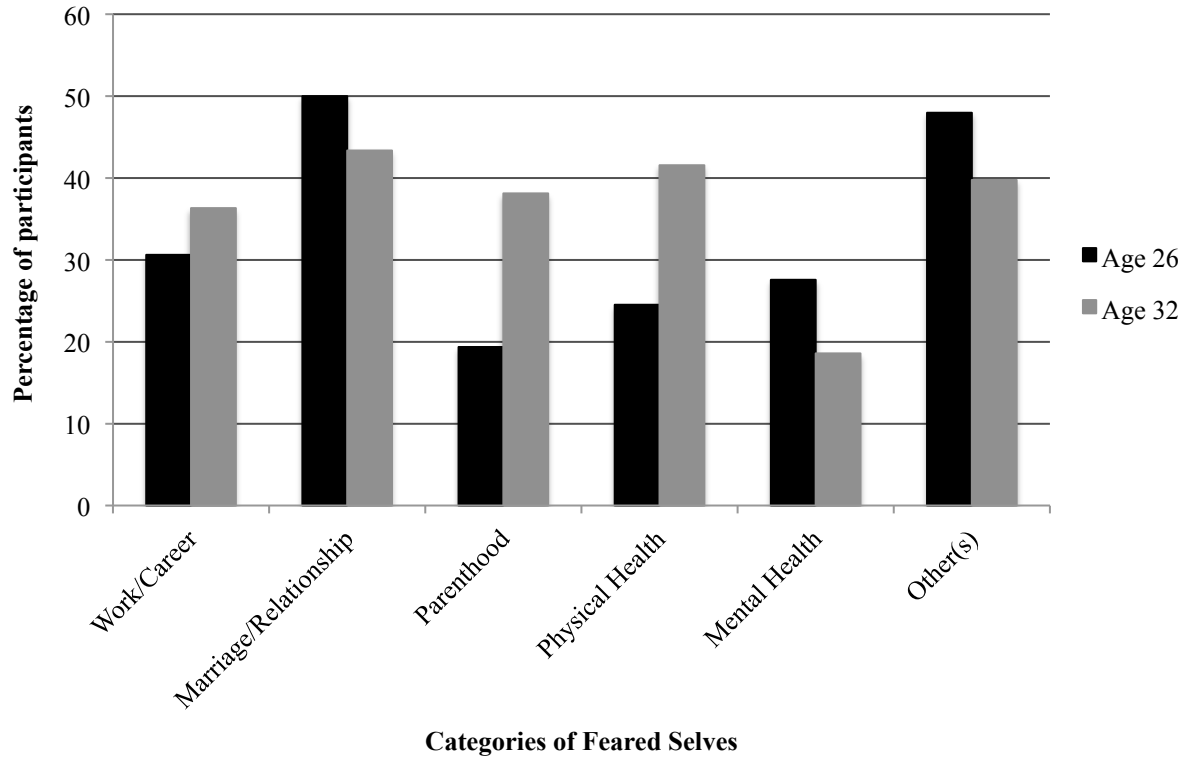


Figure D2. Bar graph showing percentage of participants expressing each fear category at ages 26 and 32.

## Appendix E – Relationship between Parenting Perceptions and Narratives

Table E1

*Point-biserial Correlations Among Parenting Perceptions and Hoped-for Categories*

Category	Parenting Perceptions at age 17
<u>Age 26 (n= 97)</u>	
Work/Career	-.07
Marriage/Relationship	1.00
Parenthood	-.03
<u>Age 32 (n= 111)</u>	
Work/Career	-.03
Marriage/Relationship	-.03
Parenthood	.20*

*Note.* \*Correlation is significant at  $p < .05$  level (2-tailed).

Table E2

*Point-biserial Correlations Among Parenting Perceptions and Feared Categories*

Category	Parenting Perceptions at age 17
<u>Age 26 (n= 96)</u>	
Work/Career	-.09
Marriage/Relationship	.06
Parenthood	-.07
<u>Age 32 (n= 111)</u>	
Work/Career	-.10
Marriage/Relationship	-.01
Parenthood	.12

## Appendix F – Gender Differences and Future Narratives

Table F1

*Frequency percentage of hoped-for categories across gender and Pearson Chi-Square Value for Gender Differences*

Category	Females (%)	Males (%)	Pearson Chi-Square Value
<u>Age 26 (n= 98)</u>			
Work/Career	65.7	64.5	.01
Marriage/Relationship	31.3	45.2	1.80
Parenthood	65.7	71.0	.27
<u>Age 32 (n= 112)</u>			
Work/Career	56.3	66.7	2.22
Marriage/Relationship	25.0	24.2	.02
Parenthood	70.0	69.7	.00



Table F2

*Frequency percentage of feared self categories across gender and Pearson Chi-Square Value for Gender Differences*

Category	Females (%)	Males (%)	Pearson Chi-Square Value
<u>Age 26 (n= 98)</u>			
Work/Career	25.4	43.3	3.13
Marriage/Relationship	55.2	40.0	1.92
Parenthood	19.4	16.7	.10
<u>Age 32 (n= 112)</u>			
Work/Career	27.2	58.1	9.33*
Marriage/Relationship	46.9	32.3	2.00
Parenthood	40.7	32.3	.68

*Note.* \* Significant at  $p < .05$  level.