THE PERCEPTION OF THE EFFECTS OF SPOILING
HELD BY MOTHERS OF INFANTS SIX MONTHS AND YOUNGER

by

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ABSTRACT

Spoiling is a concern among parents and others who care for young children. Information about the concept of spoiling has been prevalent in the popular literature since the beginning of the twentieth century. Over time, the concept has maintained its popularity, as many authors have presented controversial arguments about spoiling. Empirically, however, the concept of spoiling as it relates to young infants has been studied rarely. Extensive empirical exploration of the concept is pertinent since it has been shown that parents who believe that young infants could be spoiled are less likely to perform essential parenting behaviors, believing such behaviors will result in a spoiled child.

The intention behind this study was to contribute to the existing empirical data on the concept of spoiling and examine the possibility that an infant’s sex impacts the perception that his or her mother holds regarding spoiling. Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory and Bowlby and Ainsworth’s attachment theory were used to frame and guide this study in order to present the cognitive abilities of young infants as well as the significance of secure relationships between infants and their parents. A survey was given to 55 mothers of young infants who were asked to respond to various questions about parenting behaviors. Responses were examined for important patterns. Some of the findings showed that among the sample participants, the belief in the possibility of spoiling young infants was prevalent. Other findings demonstrated demographic variations between the mothers who perceived spoiling young infants as
possible and those who did not. Clear differences in the perceptions of essential parenting behaviors between these two groups of mothers were also observed. More empirical studies and continued exploration of spoiling are necessary for the well-being and healthy development of infants.
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

“I pick him up all the time. He always wants to be held. I spoil him!” These words were overheard in a meeting of new mothers, and the baby in question was three months old. While it is clear that this mother had a well-developed sense of how her parenting strategies will influence her child, one must question whether or not her understanding of the impact of her behaviors on her child’s development is accurate. Is it possible to spoil a baby?

Parents’ perception of “spoiling” is one area of the “parental agenda” that may have an impact on an infant’s development but has not been widely researched. The popular literature offers a plethora of information about the concept of spoiling to parents, pediatricians, and other related professionals dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Spoiling has been presented in the popular literature as a controversial concept, and the thinking about spoiling has changed over time. At one point, authors were adamant about the dangers of spoiling children right from infancy (e.g., Scott, 1915); later, others were firm in their position that spoiling newborns and young infants should not be a matter of concern (e.g., Aldrich, 1945). These differing views were no doubt influenced by the leading developmental theories of that particular time.

Despite the abundance of information regarding spoiling in the popular literature, unfortunately there is a lack of empirical research in which the primary aim is exploring the concept of spoiling as it relates to young infants (e.g., Smyke, Boris,
Alexander, 2002; Solomon, Martin, & Cottington, 1993). Even though there is a lack of empirical literature on spoiling and child development, research on parenting beliefs (e.g., Beaumont & Bloom, 1993; Feldman & Reznick, 1996; Willatts, 1984; Zeedyk, 1997) can be used to understand both the developmental capacity for infants to become spoiled as well as the influence of parenting beliefs regarding parenting strategies. For example, Feldman and Reznick (1996) claimed that exploring parental perception of infants’ intentionality is extremely important for the infants’ development because it implies the agenda that parents are using for raising their children. In other words, by knowing the parents’ perception regarding the mental ability of their infants (level of intentionality), parental childrearing strategies (or agenda) may be revealed. Unfortunately, in the area of spoiling, parents’ understanding of their children’s mental abilities may not be consistent with child development research (e.g., Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1959; Piaget, 1955).

The current study was designed to contribute to the empirical data on the issue of spoiling by describing the relationships and patterns of parental beliefs as well as behaviors regarding spoiling young infants. At the same time, this research explored a new realm of spoiling perceptions by examining the relationship between an infant’s sex and the perceptions that parents (mothers in particular) hold regarding spoiling.

In the following sections, the concept of spoiling is thoroughly discussed and its socially constructed nature is demonstrated. Additionally, findings from the current study are presented and important suggestions for future implications of the concept are included. Despite the exhaustive nature of this literature review it must be noted that the research and writing included come from works published in the United
States during this and the last century. Given the lack of cultural diversity present in social science research in the United States, the limited nature of these works must be understood. This lack of diversity in cultural and ethnic representation in the area of research on and writing about spoiling is important, because spoiling was and continues to be a socially constructed phenomenon that has yet to be empirically defined and validated. It is likely that there are a variety of different understandings regarding the causes and consequences of spoiling a child. It is a term widely used, however, and if asked, most people could describe how a “spoiled child” acts.

Therefore the principal goal of this study was to investigate this commonly held, but rarely researched concept of spoiling in order to add to the limited empirical information available to date. The overall goal was to gain more information about the behaviors that parents believe will lead to spoiling in very young children, to look for patterns in these beliefs based on demographic markers, and to investigate how the sex of the infant influences the perceptions of spoiling held by the mother.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Spoiling – What Does It Mean?

According to the American Heritage College Dictionary (2004), to spoil means: “1.a. To impair the value or quality of. b. To damage irreparably; ruin. 2. To impair the completeness, perfection, or unity of; flaw grievously. 3. To harm the character, nature, or attitude of by oversolicitude, overindulgence, or excessive praise.”

The third meaning is probably the one most commonly associated with spoiling as it relates to children. But what is the meaning behind this definition, and what precisely do people mean when they say: “You are spoiling the baby”? Empirically there is very little data on spoiling; however, there is an abundance of information from the popular literature on this topic. Among the popular and empirical literature over the last century a unanimous definition of spoiling was almost impossible to find. By presenting and reporting on the concept of spoiling from their own perspective, different authors throughout the twentieth century have attempted to answer the question of what it means to spoil a baby. These perspectives, however, are clearly influenced by the major child development researchers of that time. The attempts to operationalize the concept of spoiling have continued into the new millennium. The following information was taken from the popular magazines such as Hygeia, Good HouseKeeping, and Parenting as well as from books and empirical journals closely related to the field of child development. These articles provide a history of the opinions and the controversies engendered by the issue of spoiling beginning almost a century ago.
The Concept of Spoiling over the Last Century (Historical Review)

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century marked the launch of the child development field. Psychologists began devising theories on how children develop based on observations and earlier evolutionary ideas regarding development. G. Stanly Hall and Arnold Gesell were inspired by Charles Darwin’s evolutionary work. Hall and Gesell believed that the development of children was determined by their genes and occurred automatically in accordance with nature (Berk, 2005). Around the same time, Sigmund Freud constructed his psychoanalytic theory of emotional development. This theory is based on the premise that the way children are treated in the first few years of life, as they struggle to control their inborn tendencies and urges, is critical to the formation of the child’s personality and adult relationships (Berk, 2005).

In sharp contrast to the theories of Hall, Gesell, and Freud, was the theory of John B. Watson, another child development expert of the early twentieth century. He rejected developmental ideas based on biological assertions and ideas related to the psychoanalytic theory presented by Sigmund Freud (Bee & Boyd, 2007). Believing that a child’s behavior is learned solely from the child’s environment and surroundings, he coined the term behaviorism as the foundation for his beliefs regarding development (Watson, 1913). The history of spoiling as a concept reflects the two paradigms of child development—behaviorism and the maturational/emotional approach—which were vying for control in the popular literature.

An examination of publications related to the concept of spoiling revealed that many authors were greatly influenced by John B. Watson’s ideas. For example, in 1915, Miriam Finn Scott claimed in her article “Unspoiling the spoiled child” that
the major cause of a spoiled child is his or her mother’s behavior. According to Scott (1915), “Perhaps the greatest cause behind the spoiled child is the mothers’ unthinking indulgence during the earliest years of the child’s growth, when his habits are forming” (p. 567). Scott (1915) also emphasized the importance of “training” a child to reach his or her “highest capabilities” from early infancy to prevent spoiling.

In his own writings, Watson emphasized that the root of spoiling was mother love, or more precisely “Too much mother love” (p. 69). In his book *Psychological care of infant and child* (1928), Watson explicitly described how interactions between mothers and their infants should take place. According to Watson:

> There is a sensible way of treating children. Treat them as though they were young adults. Dress them, bathe them with care and circumspection. Let your behavior always be objective and kindly firm. Never hug and kiss them, never let them sit in your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say good night. Shake hands with them in the morning. Give them a pat on the head if they have made an extraordinarily good job of a difficult task. Try it out. In a week’s time you will find how easy it is to be perfectly objective with your child and at the same time kindly. You will be utterly ashamed of the mawkish, sentimental way you have been handling it. (pp. 81–82)

Giving mothers more advice on how to raise the perfect child, Watson (1928) continued:

> Certainly a mother, when necessary, ought to leave her child for a long enough period for over-conditioning to die down. If you haven’t a nurse and cannot leave the child, put it out in the back yard a large part of the day. Build a fence around the yard so that you are sure no harm can come to it. Do this from the time it is born. When the child can crawl, give it a sandpile and be sure to dig some small holes in the yard so it has to crawl in and out of them. Let it learn to overcome difficulties almost from the moment of birth. The child should learn to conquer difficulties away from your watchful eye. No child should get commendation and notice and petting every time it does something it
ought to be doing anyway. If your heart is too tender and you must watch the child, make yourself a peephole so that you can see it without being seen, or use a periscope. But above all when anything does happen don’t let your child see your own trepidation, handle the situation as a trained nurse or a doctor would and, finally, learn not to talk in endearing and coddling term. (pp. 84–85)

Beginning in the 1930s, and more definitively in the 1940s, there was a visible shift in the thinking regarding the development of young children with an emphasis on personality evolvement. Parents showed much more concern about their children’s inner psychological and emotional growth than merely behavioral training (Berk, 2005). This shift in the child development field may have been connected to occurrences in the United States at the same time. As many families dealt with the return of fathers from World War II, parents inevitably needed to learn more about the healthy psychological and emotional development of their children. In addition, Freud’s writings about a psychoanalytic perspective, which emphasized the role of parents in the shaping of the child’s personality, were being translated into English. When compared to Watson, Freud had dramatically different ideas about how children should be treated and his writings were interpreted as giving parental guidance with respect to spoiling.

For example, in Katherine Brownell Oettinger’s (1935) article “How to spoil a child,” she reported that the cause of the spoiling problem is in the recovery of a child from an acute illness. According to Oettinger, the mother’s belief that her child still needs a great deal of attention although the child has completely recovered from an illness is at the heart of spoiling. Oettinger (1935) opined that mothers are terrified of the idea that their children will get sick again and so, irrationally, they treat and cater to them as if they remained sick. As a result, the children become spoiled
and therefore incompetent: “The birth of the neurotic is frequently traced to convalescence” (p. 832).

Likewise, in his article “The spoiled child,” Anderson Aldrich (1945) reported that the “popular” cause of spoiling was unfounded. By “popular,” Aldrich meant blaming the overindulgent parents. According to Aldrich, a spoiled child was created by parents who were asked by a physician to be strict with their child by enforcing rigid regimes for eating, sleeping, and even for controlling the bowels of infants younger than two months. Aldrich claimed that by being so firm with the infant, the parents did the exact opposite of what needed to be done to create a “well-behaved” child. He thought that the parents should treat the infant with respect, considering the infant’s own schedule, as well as give the infant genuine affection at all times. In his article, Aldrich repeatedly emphasized the importance of meeting the infant’s basic needs immediately after birth. He also stated that “The future effect of mistakes made in early babyhood has never been sufficiently emphasized” (p.897).

Similar to Aldrich (1945), Phyllis Heller claimed in her article “Do you spoil your children?” (1947) that spoiled children become that way because they do not feel loved. According to Heller, in order to prevent a child from becoming spoiled, the parents should make the child feel loved, wanted, and enjoyed. She also stated that “a child who is loved knows it” (p. 93). Heller believed that parents create the foundation for their children’s life to either become well-adjusted and productive mutual trust and affection, or spoiled and maladjusted by withholding affection, care, and understanding.

From the 1960s, the field of child development experienced yet another major shift when the work of Jean Piaget became well-known. Although Piaget’s
work was around since the 1930s, it did not receive much attention since his theory contradicted behaviorism, the accepted theory of the time (Berk, 2005). In contrast to John B. Watson and his colleagues who claimed that children learn only from their environment through training and reinforcements, Piaget believed that learning was biologically based and driven but that the child needed to interact with the environment in order to learn. He theorized that children were born with certain brain structures that allowed them to actively explore the world and construct knowledge. This new approach to learning was labeled *constructivism*. Piaget’s main assertion was that children’s knowledge about the world changes as they grow older and develop cognitively (Miller, 2002). Piaget’s writings influenced other authors, such as Mary Hoover (1967) and Dr. Benjamin Spock (1957, 1992, 1998) who considered the concept of spoiling based on Piaget’s stages of cognitive development.

In the article “Are we spoiling our kids?” (1967), the Mary Hoover claimed that many young mothers are concerned and worry about spoiling their children. She emphasized that she did not believe an infant could be spoiled by loving the infant and by providing all the basic needs to support the infant’s development. Hoover however, also believed parents’ demands of their child should match their child’s stage of development. So while one cannot spoil a young infant, parents can spoil a child if they continue “babying” their child too much and in turn not letting the child behave in accordance to his or her age. As a result, the child grows to believe that she deserves everything she wants when she wants it, and if she does not get what she asks for, she may behave inappropriately (e.g., throw a temper tantrum). Overall, Hoover (1967) concluded that the effects of spoiling will not last if the parents realize in time that they need to make some changes in their child’s life. She also believed
that by retraining the child with willingness and patience, the parents could turn the
spoiled child into a well-adjusted one (Hoover, 1967).

Throughout his lifetime Dr. Benjamin Spock provided information for
parents about raising their children, including how they should approach the issue of
spoiling. Notably, as Dr. Spock’s *Baby and Child Care* book was reproduced and
revised for newer editions (1957, 1992, 1998), his position regarding the issue of
spoiling changed. Early on, Dr. Spock wrote that parents should not worry in the first
month or two about spoiling; later he revised his timeline to three months, and later he
even explained to parents that they should not worry much about spoiling before the
age of four to six months. In addition to specifying the age when babies might be
spoiled, Dr. Spock provided other information regarding infants and spoiling. For
example, he writes,

If a baby is fussing a lot between feedings instead of sleeping
peacefully. You pick him up and walk him around and he stops crying,
at least for the time being. Lay him down, and he starts all over again.
I don’t think you need to worry much about spoiling in the first month
or even the first six months. The chances are great that such a young
baby is feeling miserable. . . .

It is unlikely that they are capable of learning to expect their every
whim to be attended to twenty-four hours a day. That’s what being
spoiled would mean. But we know that young infant can’t anticipate
the future; they live entirely in the here and now. They also can’t
formulate this thought: “well I’m going to make life miserable for these
people until they give me everything I want”—another key component
of the spoiled child. (Spock, 1998, pp .217–218)

This review of the popular and scholarly literature clearly shows that
spoiling has been a serious concern of parents as well as professionals. It was
important to trace the concept of spoiling from as early as possible in order to
illustrate the ongoing controversy and evolvement of the concept across time and context. The conflicting information from the published literature presented in this thesis may contribute to some understanding of various perceptions parents hold regarding the issue of spoiling. Empirically, the perception of spoiling has not been widely examined. There are some core studies, however, that offer information on this issue (McIntosh, 1989; Pascoe & Solomon, 1994; Smyke et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 1993; Wilson et al., 1981). It is important to note that these studies most likely represent the entire empirical literature available to date on this concept as it relates to young infants.

The Concept of Spoiling in Empirical Research

In the latter decades of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the new millennium, it is apparent that Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory has remained very influential in the field of child development (Berk, 2005; Miller, 2002). Stemming from the work of Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis, attachment theory developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth also became very influential. Attachment researchers emphasize the importance of developing a strong and positive relationship between infants and their caregivers for promoting the infants’ healthy growth for years to come (Bee & Boyd, 2007). The impact of these two theories is also evident in the research studies on the topic of spoiling.

In 1989, the first empirical overview about the topic of spoiling was written by McIntosh. Although McIntosh himself did not conduct an empirical study, he cited other studies that dealt with behaviors that provoked concerns about spoiling. McIntosh discussed a study by Brazelton (1962) about crying behavior in typical infants. Brazelton (1962), who learned about the crying behaviors of eighty typical
infants, found that some infants naturally cried more and he believed that this crying was attributed to a homeostatic mechanism, a mechanism that helps relieve tension in the infant. He hypothesized that:

The repeated assurance that a certain amount of crying is common and even necessary to a normal infant in the first few months may dispel some of the anxiety in earnest young parents and eliminate unnecessary tension in the newborn infant. (p. 580)

Brazelton then concluded:

that a certain amount of crying is necessary. The reassuring aspect of this incidence of crying in “normal”, emotionally secure, well-fed infants can be stressed by pediatricians for earnest parents who become anxious about a normal amount of unsatisfiable crying in their own neonate. (p. 588)

McIntosh (1989) cited Brazelton’s study in order to demonstrate that crying behavior in infants is considered common and is not a sign of being spoiled. McIntosh (1989) also addressed the concern held by some parents that holding a fussy baby would spoil the baby and cause her to become overwhelmingly demanding and difficult. To refute this concern, McIntosh (1989) cited a study by Taubman (1984).

Taubman (1984) conducted a study to learn about colicky babies. His sample was comprised of his own patients and included 30 infants, three-months-old or younger. All parents were asked to keep a diary of their infants’ crying behavior. Of the 30 parents in the sample, Taubman instructed six parents not to hold their infants when they cried. He specifically asked those parents to allow their infants to cry for half an hour, and if the infants still cried, he then asked the parents to pick the infants up for one minute and put them back down in their crib for another half an hour. He asked those parents to repeat this cycle until the infants fell asleep or until three hours had passed. After three hours, Taubman asked the parents to feed their
infants. The other parents in the study were instructed to try not to let their infant cry at any time. In particular, Taubman asked the parents to and discover why their infants might be crying; explicitly in his instruction he wrote, “Don’t be concerned about spoiling your baby. This also will not happen” (p. 999). (Taubmen requested the first group of parents to discontinue the study after 72 hours).

In his overall results, Taubman (1984) showed that increased parent-infant interaction coupled with effective responses of parents toward their crying infants actually reduced the amount of excessive crying of unknown cause (by as much as 70%). McIntosh (1989) concluded that such results should help refute the fear that parents may have of holding their young, fussy infant. If holding a young infant would cause him to become spoiled, the crying and the fussiness should increase with more holding and not decrease as Taubman’s study shows (1984).

In addition to the studies described above, there were also several studies that focused primarily on the concept of spoiling as it relates to young infants. From a review of this literature it is clear that a well-developed definition of the concept of spoiling does not exist. However, all research studies that have examined this concept empirically discussed “spoiling behaviors” or “indicators of spoiling.” These studies (e.g., Pascoe & Solomon, 1994; Smyke et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 1993; Wilson et al., 1981) presented the participants with questions, asking them to rate, according to their opinion, a certain behavior as a spoiling behavior (i.e., from strongly agree that this particular behavior is a spoiling behavior to strongly disagree that such behavior is a spoiling behavior). In many cases, these “spoiling behaviors” were in fact parenting behaviors that according to various child development researchers are appropriate as well as important to the well-being and healthy development of the
young child (e.g., Nelms, 1983; Zero to Three, 2000). These behaviors may include picking up a crying infant, allowing an infant to feed on demand, and cuddling a young infant, just to name a few.

The lack of a clear definition of spoiling may have limited the researchers’ ability to find results; nonetheless, patterns of parental beliefs regarding spoiling were discovered and further developed in several studies (Pascoe & Solomon, 1994; Smyke et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 1993; Wilson et al., 1981). In general, the researchers found that parents who identified as non-white, had a lower level of education, as well as lower economic status were more likely to perceive the behaviors discussed above as spoiling behaviors; however, parents who identified as Caucasian, had a higher level of education, and a higher economic status were less likely to perceive these behaviors as related to spoiling.

The first major research study on the perception of spoiling was done by Wilson, Witzke and Volin (1981). These researchers found that when presenting parents with the Webster dictionary definition of “spoiling,” parents believed that an infant under a year old could be spoiled. Wilson and her colleagues (1981) conducted a study in a rural Midwestern city, and reported that 79% of fathers and 66% of mothers believed that certain behaviors, such as picking up the baby when she cries or letting the baby have what she wants can result in a spoiled infant. These parents also described the “spoiled” infant as “difficult to control,” “demanding” and “obnoxious.” Additional findings suggested that younger mothers and fathers as well as those with less education hold negative perceptions of spoiled babies. These young, less educated parents also reported concerns regarding spoiling more often and had received more warnings about the issue from friends and family members.
Solomon, Martin, and Cottington (1993) furthered the research conducted by Wilson and her colleagues (1981) and augmented the available data by examining possible relations between the perception of spoiling and the demographics of the participants. The authors believed that it was important to conduct such a study in order to understand parents’ perceptions and in turn to help early intervention professionals identify families at risk for misunderstanding their infants’ developmental needs. The authors reported that “it became clear” after observing newborns and their parents in a hospital nursery that there were three separate subtypes of beliefs regarding spoiling. Those three types included the “Disbelievers” (who did not believe a young infant could be spoiled), the “Happy spoilers” (who believed a young infant could be spoiled, and thought it was a positive thing), and the “Believers” (who believed a young infant could be spoiled, and thought it was a negative thing).

Solomon and his colleagues’ (1993) main findings showed that Type 1, the “Disbelievers,” tended to have higher incomes, were more educated, and were Caucasian. On the other hand, Type 2, the “Happy Spoilers,” and Type 3, the “Believers,” tended to have lower incomes, were less educated, and were African Americans or “other” ethnic racial groups. When the beliefs about spoiling of all three subtypes were compared, Type 1 parents felt the defined “spoiling behaviors” (i.e., picking up a crying infant or rocking an infant) were beneficial for adequate development of the infant. In contrast, Type 3 parents felt those behaviors were non-beneficial and likely to contribute to poor development of the child. The authors reported that Type 2, the “Happy Spoilers,” “had belief patterns that fell statistically between Type 1 and Type 3” (p. 181).
A year after the introduction of the Spoiling Index by Solomon and his colleagues (1993), Pasco and Solomon (1994) conducted a study that concentrated once again on the concept of spoiling and further utilized the Spoiling Index. In this study, Pasco and Solomon (1994) studied if prenatal factors were linked to mothers’ attitudes about spoiling their young infants (the mothers in this study were considered impoverished and received Medicaid and WIC services). The authors conducted a longitudinal study assessing maternal prenatal factors (more specifically depressive symptoms and perceptions of social support) and the mothers’ postnatal attitudes regarding spoiling their young infants. Initially, the women were asked to fill out two questionnaires when they were approximately 15 weeks pregnant in order to evaluate their depressive symptoms and their social support level. When their infants were about four weeks old, the mothers were asked to fill out a Spoiling Index in order to assess their spoiling perception in terms of subtypes into subtypes (based on the study by Solomon et al., 1993). The main findings of this study showed that about 60% of the mothers believed that infants age five months old or younger could be spoiled. In addition, it was reported that the prenatal depression score of mothers who believed that infants younger than five months could be spoiled was higher when compared to the mothers who did not believe it was possible to spoil infants at that age.

The most recent study concerning spoiling was done by Smyke, Boris, and Alexander in 2002. Based on the studies discussed above (Pascoe & Solomon, 1994; Solomon et al., 1993; Wilson et al., 1981), the main goal of these researchers was to conduct a study that would assess the fear of spoiling in African American mothers who Smyke, Boris, and Alexander defined as being “at-risk” for either low social economic status or homelessness. The researchers reported that parental educational
levels and economic status were negatively related to the belief that young infants could be spoiled. They also stated that their findings support the notion that a fear of spoiling reflects certain childrearing beliefs, and that these beliefs in turn influence the parental responsiveness to the child’s needs (or the lack thereof). Smyke and her colleagues (2002) reported that the majority of the mothers in their sample were worried that a young infant could be spoiled as a result of the mother’s actions. Higher levels of concern regarding spoiling were associated more often with mothers who reported depressive symptoms, unsuitable developmental expectations, and lower maternal empathy.

**Gaps in the Literature**

Despite wide scale discussions of spoiling in lay publications, the research on this concept as it pertains to young infants is limited. As noted, only one study (Wilson et al., 1981) attempted to operationalize the behaviors that led to being spoiled as well as the behaviors displayed by being spoiled. It is their operationalization of spoiling behaviors, and the resulting behaviors of spoiled children that have been used in subsequent research aimed at understanding characteristics related to people with varying spoiling beliefs (Solomon et al., 1993), how these beliefs relate to mothers’ prenatal factors, such as depression and lack of social support (Pascoe & Solomon, 1994), and how these beliefs may also be related to risk factors of mothers, such as homelessness (Smyke et al., 2002).

However, it is important to note that the spoiling behaviors mentioned by parents in the studies above (Pascoe & Solomon, 1994; Smyke et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 1993; Wilson et al., 1981) are the very same behaviors that many child
development professionals believe to be beneficial for infants’ development and mental health (e.g., Ainsworth, 1973; Nelms, 1983; Spock & Rothenberg, 1985).

For instance, in 2000, Zero to Three, a national, nonprofit, multidisciplinary organization that supports the healthy development of infants and toddlers and their families, conducted a survey entitled What Grown-Ups Understand About Child Development: A National Benchmark Survey. This survey included 3,000 American adults, including 1,066 parents of children aged newborn to six. The goal behind this survey was to learn about the knowledge level of American adults regarding child development issues. Spoiling was one of the topics this survey inquired about. Specifically, the researchers asked parents: “Some people say that a six-month-old, because he is so young, cannot be spoiled, no matter how much attention his parents give him. Others say that a six month old can be spoiled. Which do you agree with more?” It was found that the majority of parents of young children (0 to 6 years) held misconceptions regarding spoiling of young infants, believing that six-month-old infants are not too young to be spoiled. Additionally, it was concluded that “it seems that many parents are misinformed regarding at what age any degree of spoiling can actually begin in the process of raising children” (p.100). The study found that future parents, parents with less education, and grandparents had the highest likelihood of believing that six-month-old infants are not too young to be spoiled. The survey also included activities that were to be rated by the respondents as “appropriate” or “likely spoil the child if done too often.” According to Zero to Three (2000), the activity chosen to be presented to the respondents in the survey was considered by child development research to be an appropriate, non-spoiling parental response (even if done often). The scenario for young infants was as follows:
Please tell me if you would rate the following behavior, on the part of the parent or caregiver, as appropriate OR as something that will likely spoil a child if done to often: Picking up a three-month-old every time she cries. (p. 103)

The responses for this scenario showed “a fairly significant information gap regarding spoiling” (p. 103). Of parents responding to this scenario, 44% labeled it as spoiling. This percentage was much higher for dads and parents with a high school degree or less (over 50%). The majority of grandparents (60%) viewed this response as spoiling behavior.

Clearly, the public’s beliefs about “spoiling” are not consistent with what researchers believe about the best practices to be used with babies (Lally, Lerner, & Lurie-Hurvitz, 2001). Therefore, a more unified understanding of the factors leading to these beliefs of parents is necessary. For instance, issues of baby characteristics, such as gender and age, need to be further examined, and studies that can compare across demographic groups in order to identify cultural commonalties of spoiling beliefs are warranted.

**The Impact of Infants’ Sex on Parental Perception and Beliefs**

Many expectant parents want to know if they are going to have a boy or a girl. The knowledge of the sex of the baby creates certain expectations and beliefs regarding role-appropriate socialization (e.g., Bell & Carver, 1980; Holman & Williamson, 1979; Karraker, Vogel, & Lake, 1995; Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974; Stern & Karraker, 1988). However, the expectations that may develop around spoiling behaviors as they relate to the sex of the infant have never been empirically examined. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate if any differences exist.
Many of the researchers who have studied the issue of gender socialization agreed that role socialization and gender role stereotyping starts when infants arrive in the world (e.g., Birns, 1976; Honig, 1983). Research has shown strong evidence that expectations held by parents about their infants’ sex act as an influence on the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors the parents will have toward their infants (Fagot, 1978; Fitzgerald, 1977; Rubin et al., 1974; Smith & Daglish, 1977).

Studies investigating the issue of sex stereotyping of infants pointed to significant differences between the views parents have depending on the sex of the child (Feldman & Reznick, 1996; Grant, 1994; Lewis & Weinraub, 1979; Reid, 1994; Rubin et al., 1974). Rubin and his colleagues (1974) found that parents labeled their infants differently depending on the sex of the child, even though the infants (newborns) participating in the study were all similar in their weight, length, and APGAR scores. They concluded that their findings showed that the socialization of a child depends on his or her sex, and that this socialization begins at birth. Lewis and Weinraub (1979) found that boys are touched more often and handled more roughly before they reached three months of age, while girls tended to be touched more often after six months. Reid (1994) found that first time mothers discriminated significantly between infant boys and infant girls on some physical characteristics (e.g., “my baby looks tall and large”) and on one emotional characteristic (“my baby is mostly serious, not smiling but not crying”). Reid (1994) stated that gender-based differences start very early in life, probably even before the actual birth.

In their study of maternal perception of infant intentionality, Feldman and Reznick (1996) concluded that mothers of girls perceived infants to be more intentional. They also found that mothers of girls in general showed more sensitivity
to infants’ signals. Feldman and Reznick (1996) were able to reach the above conclusions by observing videotapes of interactions between the mother and her infant as well as by conducting an infant intentionality interview with the mothers. In her review of nine studies focusing on mother-infant interaction, Grant (1994) concluded that mothers who interacted with boys showed more probing, stimulation, and initiation, whereas the mothers who interacted with girls were more responsive and maintained the interaction.

As discussed above, gender-based differences are often found in the research on parental behaviors and beliefs; however, the importance of these differences must be carefully considered. Stern and Karraker (1989) conducted a review of gender labeling studies and discovered that “labeling an infant male or female does, in some cases, elicit sex-stereotypic responses from adults and children. The effects of this manipulation are not very strong, however” (p. 517). Stern and Karraker (1989) concluded that care should be taken when one considers differences depending on the infant’s gender. Although Reid (1994) found some significant differences between labeling by first-time mothers of boys and first-time mothers of girls (as described above), she also concluded in her discussion that “an over-all significant difference in how mothers of newborn boys compared to mothers of newborn girls rated their infants on physical and emotional status did not appear” (p. 1449).

Although some ambiguity about infants’ sex stereotyping exists in the literature, it is still apparent that in some domains parental behaviors and perceptions are influenced by the sex of the infant. Reid (1994), who did not find “an-overall significant difference” between first-time mothers of boys and girls (as quoted above),
concluded at the end of her article that based on the perception differences she did find, the implication is that “infants are born into a world where they are prejudged on at least four characteristics judged either present or absent purely as a function of gender” (p. 1450). The four characteristics that Reid (1994) found to be significantly different included one emotional difference, my baby is mostly serious, not smiling but not crying and three physical differences, my baby looks tall and large, My baby has broad, wide hands, my baby looks athletic. Based on these and other findings that were stated above (Feldman & Reznick, 1996; Grant, 1994; Lewis & Weinraub, 1979; Rubin et al., 1974), the likelihood of finding differences in mothers’ beliefs about spoiling based on the child’s sex is compelling.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

To understand the capacity of an infant to become spoiled, it is crucial to recognize the cognitive capability of the human baby in the first few months. In order to appreciate the consequences of parenting behaviors that are less than responsive due to the parents’ concern about spoiling their young infants, it is necessary to understand the human baby’s biological drive to develop an attachment to a caregiver in order to meet dependency needs for survival. In the first case, Piaget’s cognitive development theory is used to explain the cognitive development and abilities of young infants. In the second, Bowlby and Ainsworth’s attachment theory is used to explain the importance of a securely attached relationship between an infant and a parent (or possibly other primary caregiver). The following is a detailed discussion of both theories starting with Piagetian cognitive theory and then addressing attachment theory. Both theories are germane to the discussion of spoiling as they provide an
understanding of babies’ abilities and needs and are instructive when one considers the possibility of spoiling a young infant.

**Piaget’s Cognitive Development Theory**

In the past research on spoiling (e.g., Pascoe & Solomon, 1994; Smyke et al., 2002), it was not uncommon to find mothers who indicated that they believed infants could be manipulative and intentional in their behaviors (i.e., crying) right after birth, and it was this sort of behavior that the parents deemed as being spoiled. However, according to Jean Piaget (1955), young infants are not capable of performing certain tasks, such as those necessary to being manipulative because they are not biologically capable of doing so. According to Piaget’s theory, from birth children progress through stages of development in which their cognitive abilities become more complex and sophisticated. Piaget’s first stage of cognitive development is called the sensorimotor stage and takes place between birth and two years. In this period of sensorimotor development, infants primarily learn about the world around them through physical actions that gradually progress from simple reflexes and bodily movements to more complex and intentional cognitive schemes.

Piaget (1955) believed that children are innately equipped with unique reflexes to help them interact with the world around them. He also believed, however, that they have limited ability to explore those surroundings initially, and only with time and experience do they construct their own cognitive abilities:

> Knowledge is not a copy of reality. To know an object, to know an event, is not simply to look at it and make a mental copy or image of it. To know is to modify, to transform the object, and to understand the process of this transformation, and as a consequence to understand the way the object is constructed. (Piaget, 1964, p. 176)
Piaget divided the sensorimotor stage into six substages in which the infant progresses and advances cognitively. The “reflexive schemes,” which occur between birth through the first month of life, is the first substage of the sensorimotor stage. In this initial substage, infants rely on their innate reflexes to interact and survive. Reflexes such as sucking, grasping, and crying are part of the initial schemas that most babies are equipped with upon birth. Around one month of age, infants enter the second substage which lasts until about four months, in which they develop “primary circular reactions.” In this substage, infants progressively gain voluntary control over their actions by repeating simple motor habits over and over again; through this repetition, they gain both motor control and a rudimentary understanding of their body and the world in which they live. Piaget believed that the demonstration of primary circular reactions begins with chance behaviors mainly related to basic needs; for example, repeatedly sucking their thumbs or their fists is a primary circular reaction largely motivated by the babies’ basic need for being soothed. The third substage of the sensorimotor stage is the “secondary circular reactions,” which lasts from about four to eight months. In this substage, infants become much more proficient in coordinating their sense of perception with motor movements as they attempt to repeat some event caused by their own actions (Berk, 2005). In this substage, a pleasant accidental behavior, such as the sensation of sucking on a toe, will be repeated on purpose as the baby learns that sucking on his or her toes is a pleasant experience. Although infants gradually come to know and understand their surroundings more efficiently, for these first few months of life, Piaget believed that they live in a world of the here and now without the ability of manifesting intentional behavior. The information the infants have about the world consists only of what they
are able to see or touch at those very moments. Young infants do not have the mental capability to infer objects that they are not able to see at that specific moment. For the infants, those objects simply do not exist. Piaget believed that around the age of eight months (six months at the earlist) after gradual mental and physical development, infants reach what he described as “object permanence” (clear manifestation of object permanence). It is at this point that, after repeated interactions with people and objects that appear and then disappear (e.g., a cup that is dropped from a high chair reappears on the tray after the caregiver picks it up) infants are capable of thinking about an object even though they are not able to see, hear, or smell it. The importance of this concept lies in the fact that infants can experience the world as a more stable and predictable place (Miller, 2002). In order to reach this level they need to hold a mental image of the person or object in mind.

The first is a sensory-motor, pre-verbal stage, lasting approximately the first 18 months of life. During this stage is developed the practical knowledge which constitutes the substructure of later representational knowledge. An example is the construction of schema of the permanent object. For an infant, during the first months, an object has no permanence. When it disappears from the perceptual field it no longer exists. No attempt is made to find it again. Later, the infant will try to find it, and he will find it by localizing it spatially. Consequently, along with the construction of the permanent object there comes the construction of practical or sensory-motor space. There is similarly the construction of temporal succession, and of elementary sensory-motor causality. In other words, there is a series of structures which are indispensable for the structures of later representational thought. (Piaget, 1964, p. 177)

Piaget’s explanations about the sensorimotor stage and especially the concept of “object permanence” clarify why it is very unlikely that parents can actually spoil very young infants. If young infants are not mentally capable of what
Piaget called “object permanence”—that is, they cannot imagine that a person or an object exists—then they are incapable of manipulating their caregivers. For in order to manipulate, one has to imagine the consequence of his/her action on another person, and if an infant is not even capable of imagining a person who is not there, imagining a person’s reaction to a premeditated act on the part of the infant is utterly impossible. Therefore, because it is cognitively impossible for young infants to be manipulative or demanding, there is no risk of spoiling inherent in attending responsively to babies’ basic needs.

**Bowlby and Ainsworth’s Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is based on the combined work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. In the late 1940s, Bowlby began constructing the attachment theory by relying on concepts from ethology, developmental psychology, information processing, and psychoanalysis. The main motivation behind the creation of the attachment theory stemmed from Bowlby’s exposure to the ideas proposed by Melanie Klein (a major figure in the psychoanalysis world in the 1930s). Bowlby rejected Klein’s notion that “children’s emotional problems are almost entirely due to fantasies generated from internal conflict between aggressive and libidinal drives rather than to events in the external world” (Bretherton, 1992, p. 760). From his postgraduate work, Bowlby came to believe that actual experiences within a family were of utmost important to the emotional development of a child, and so he believed that the fundamental cause behind emotional trouble of a child could be attributed to those family experiences. Proposing his ideas, Bowlby transformed the thinking about the child’s bond to the mother and the disturbance of such a bond through processes of separation and deprivation (Bretherton, 1992).
In the 1950s Ainsworth joined Bowlby and expanded the attachment theory by developing a novel methodology to empirically test some of Bowlby’s theoretical ideas. In her work on attachment theory, Ainsworth also formulated the concepts of “the attachment figure as a secure base” as well as the concept of “maternal sensitivity to infant signals and its role in the development of infant-mother attachment patterns” (Bretherton, 1992, p. 759).

Bowlby (1969, 1980) believed that attachment between infants and their parents is biologically rooted. He (1958, 1969, 1982) claimed that from birth, infants require warmth and love to survive, so they actively seek someone to meet their needs by sending biologically based signals, such as crying and clinging which then elicit biologically based responses such as protection and caregiving. Babies are driven to develop an attachment to a primary caregiver in order to ensure their survival. Bowlby asserted that this first relationship formed with the primary caregiver (usually with the mother) determines much of the infants’ future development, biologically, cognitively, and socially. Bowlby described attachment as a strong affectionate bond, which is supported by the infant’s increasingly cognitive and emotional capabilities on one hand and warm and sensitive caregiving by the parent on the other (Berk, 2005).

Bowlby proposed that attachment develops in four phases including “the preattachment phase” (birth to six weeks), “the attachment in the making” phase (6 weeks to 6 to 8 months), “the clear-cut attachment” phase (6 to 8 months to 18 to 2 years), and “formation of a reciprocal relationship (18 months to 2 years and older) (Berk, 2005). In the first two phases, infants gradually develop a sense of trust as a sensitive and attentive parent (caregiver) has responded to them. Bowlby asserted that infants who are experiencing “the attachment in the making” phase (phase two) will
recognize and respond differently to their parents than to a stranger; however, they will not protest when handed to an unfamiliar individual or if they get separated from their parents (Berk, 2005). According to Bowlby (1969, 1980), around the age of 6 to 8 months, an infants’ display of attachment to a main caregiver becomes clear. This attachment is evident in what Bowlby called “separation anxiety” (Bowlby, 1959). When a baby exhibits separation anxiety they become upset when the caregiver they know and trust leaves. The exhibition of separation anxiety by infants demonstrates that infants have obtained the cognitive ability, described by Piaget, of object permanence, and that in this case, the caregiver continues to exist even when they can not be immediately seen. In other words, infants who do not appear to have reached the understanding of object permanence are less likely to become upset and distressed when experiencing separation from their caregiver (Berk, 2005; Lester, Kotelchuck, Spelke, Sellers, & Klein, 1974).

According to Ainsworth (1964, 1973, 1978), before full attachment can occur, bonding takes place between the infant and the parent. Bonding is the first step of attachment in which the parent and the very young infant connect and build the base for the full attachment relationship. Ainsworth (1973) stated that two things have to happen for attachment to develop: (a) the child is able to distinguish the attachment figure from other individuals, and (b) the child must be able to comprehend that a person (or an object) still exists even though the person is not presently in the child’s sight—“object permanence.” Both of the conditions above, according to Ainsworth, require time, maturation of the brain, as well as cognitive development. Meanwhile, the bonding between the infant and the caregiver will strengthen if they spend time together if the caregiver is attentive and sensitive to the infant’s needs. As a result of
the strengthening bond, the infant’s cognitive development will be promoted and the process of attachment will be augmented (Nelms, 1983).

The participants in the empirical studies cited above regarding the concept of spoiling seemed to indicate that behaviors such as responding to an infant’s cry at all times, giving the infant a great deal of attention, holding and rocking the infant frequently, and being very affectionate toward the infant probably caused the infant to become demanding, dependent, and above all, spoiled. However, it is those very same behaviors that are recommended for promoting a secure attachment:

Early infancy is the ideal time for establishing the foundation for the parent-child relationship. The first six months are an important time for consistently responding to the infant’s attachment behaviors. This is a time when both parents and child are learning about each other’s individuality; the foundation of trust, attachment, and security are all being form. Consistency in meeting an infant’s needs at this stage of development is a major influence in attachment formation. (Nelms, 1983, pp. 50–51)

Ainsworth (1973) also found in her research that being an attuned and sensitive caregiver with an understanding of the importance of forming an attachment to a child during early infancy was associated with positive behaviors later in the child’s life. In other research, Ainsworth (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972) found that a prompt maternal response to a crying infant in the first few months of life was related to a decrease in crying behavior toward the end of the baby’s first year. Ainsworth also found that infants whose mothers did not react promptly to their cries were more irritable children. The above findings by Ainsworth serve as additional indicators that promoting what some consider “spoiling behaviors” in infancy actually contribute to happy and secure children instead of spoiled ones (Nelms, 1983).
Conclusion

This study was designed to find how the perception of spoiling by mothers is influenced by their infant’s sex. In addition, this study attempted to contribute to the (limited) existing data on the topic of spoiling. This study relied on Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory to explain the cognitive development and abilities of young infants, and Bowlby and Ainsworth’s attachment theory to explain the importance of valuable relationships between an infant and a parent. This study took concepts and behaviors that are consistent with responsive parenting, are likely to result in a strong infant caregiver attachment, and parenting behaviors and beliefs that reflect an understanding of children’s cognitive capacities, and examined the likelihood of mothers with children of different genders and mothers from different demographic backgrounds to espouse these beliefs.

HYPOTHESES

Four hypotheses are addressed in the current study. The first three hypotheses have been tested in previous research (Pascoe & Solomon, 1994; Solomon et al., 1993; Zero to Three, 2000), and this study aimed to replicate the existing findings. The fourth hypothesis is new to this research. The four hypotheses are:

1. The belief in spoiling a young baby exists in the general population, such that it is not unusual to find people that believe it is possible to spoil a baby six months old or younger.

2. Significant differences in the demographics of the participants will be found between those who believe infants younger than six months could be spoiled
and others who do not believe infants in that age range could be spoiled. The participants who believe infants six months and younger could be spoiled will tend to be non-Caucasian, have less education, and a lower SES; on the other hand, those who believe infants in that age range could not be spoiled will tend to be Caucasian, more educated, and have a higher SES.

3. Significant differences in the patterns of perceptions of spoiling will be found between participants who believe infants younger than six months could and should be spoiled (“Happy Spoilers”) and participants who believe infants younger than six months could but should not be spoiled (“Believers”). “Happy Spoilers” will tend to show less concern with what is considered “spoiling behaviors” and will choose to describe “spoiled” infants with more positive descriptors. On the contrary, the “Believers” will tend to show more concern about what is considered “spoiling behaviors” and will choose to describe “spoiled” infants with more negative descriptors.

4. Significant differences in the patterns of perceptions of spoiling will be found between participants whose infant is a girl and participants whose infant is a boy. Mothers of infant girls will tend to show less concern overall with what is considered “spoiling behaviors” when compared to mothers of infant boys.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, information regarding the research design and the research methods will be presented. The rationale for the study, sample, measures, validity, reliability, collection procedures, protection of human subject, and data management is discussed.

Research Design, Measure, and Rationale

This was a descriptive study. The research design involved the development of a survey regarding concepts of behaviors that one may believe lead to “spoiling,” and the opinions one may hold regarding “spoiled” infants. The survey was administered to mothers of young infants (six months and younger). The purpose of this study was to replicate previous studies on spoiling, as well as to add a new set of data to the very limited amount that exists on spoiling. Additionally, this descriptive study sought to examine the effects the sex of the infant may have on the perception of spoiling held by the mother.

Instrument

The benefit of using survey research was the ability to conduct the study in a relatively short amount of time while having the opportunity to elicit a significant amount of data. There is a need to create a wider set of data addressing the concept of spoiling and using survey research was deemed an appropriate and valuable method to
do so. In addition, for the specific purpose of this study using the survey method potentially allowed the researcher to quickly gather information from a group that has limited time to share with researchers (mothers of young infants).

The survey included items that assessed (a) perceptions and beliefs about spoiling as it relates to a young infant; (b) the level of agreement about statements that a baby might be spoiled; (c) opinions and beliefs regarding possible descriptions of a spoiled baby; (d) opinions regarding spoiling and the sex of the young baby; (e) general opinions regarding the possibility of spoiling a young infant (younger than six months); and (f) demographic and background characteristics. Each of the five constructs listed above were assessed using several different questions. In addition, the questions offered a Likert-type range of answers to choose from (when needed). Babbie (2004) emphasized the importance of a questionnaire’s items to be clear, relevant, not lengthy, and when possible not negative. Babbie (2004) also suggested avoiding biased items and terms that may lead a person to answer in a particular way; thus the order of the questions was purposely designed to help prevent any biases in thinking. The instruments chosen for this study closely fulfilled Babbie’s requirements for a good survey. In addition, the instructions of the survey were clear, simple, and relatively brief. The survey was designed as a booklet, offering a professional look as well as ease of use. The instrument was approved by the Human Subjects Committee Review as an expedited review.

**Specific Instrument Format**

The survey was comprised of 56 items and took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. It included five different sections encompassing various types of
questions and statements related to the participants’ opinions and beliefs about spoiling a young infant, with a sixth section on demographics.

The first section of the survey included commonly held opinions, which the participants were asked to rate on a six point Likert scale based on their level of agreement (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The items in this section contained beliefs regarding spoiling a young baby (i.e., *It is likely that you will spoil your young baby if you respond to most of his/her cries*), beliefs regarding floor freedom (i.e., *Children should learn as young babies that a parent’s desire to have a neat and orderly house must be respected*), beliefs regarding discipline and control (i.e., *Young babies, who are held to firm rules, grow up to be the best adults*), and beliefs regarding talking and reading to the young baby (i.e., *Talking to a young baby who can’t talk may keep the parent occupied, but it probably has no effect on the baby*).\(^1\)

The second section of the survey presented the participants with short statements about possible actions that a baby might have and asked participants to rate how much they agreed that these opportunities would likely result in spoiling a baby (i.e., *Allowing him/her to have his/her own way, Being allowed to alter his/her parent’s schedules*). The third section listed adjectives that could possibly be used to describe a spoiled baby (depending on the participant’s beliefs). The participants were asked to circle all descriptions (as many as they wished to) that they perceived as describing a spoiled baby. Those descriptors were both negative (i.e., *demanding, obnoxious, frustrated*) and positive (i.e., *outgoing, content, sociable*).

\(^1\) A detailed list of all questions that refer to those beliefs can be found in Appendix B.
The fourth section of the survey included four questions which elicited the participants’ opinions about spoiling as it related to the sex of the young baby. Participants were asked who they believed is easier to spoil, a baby boy or a baby girl and which is more likely to get spoiled, a baby girl or a baby boy. Also, the participants were asked to rate on a four point Likert scale their opinion as to how problematic it is to spoil a baby girl and a baby boy (from not at all a problem to very much a problem).

The fifth section of the survey included the Spoiling Index (Solomon et al., 1993) where the participants were asked three simple questions regarding their perception of spoiling a young infant. The first question was “Can you spoil an infant?”, the second question was “Should you spoil an infant?”, and the third question was “Do you or did you spoil your infant?”. The first two questions were used to place participants into one of three categories or “spoiling subtypes” (“Disbelievers,” “Happy Spoilers,” and “Believers”). If the first question was answered with a “No”—that infants cannot be spoiled—the respondent was labeled a “Disbeliever”—that is, the respondent did not believe young infants (under the age of six months) can be spoiled. If the first question was answered with a “Yes”—that infants can be spoiled, and the second question was answered with a “Yes”—that infants should be spoiled—the respondent was labeled a “Happy Spoiler”—that is, the respondent believed young infants can be spoiled but did not perceive spoiling as a problem. Lastly, if one answered “Yes” to the first question and “No” to the second question—the respondent was labeled a “Believer”—that is, the respondent believed young infants can be spoiled and perceived spoiling young infants as problematic. (It is important to note
that for this research an exact definition of the concept “spoiling” was not as important as identifying patterns of individuals who believe a young infant can be spoiled).

The sixth and final section of the survey addressed the demographics of the participants. In this section the participants were asked to indicate their infant’s age and sex, their own ethnicity, age, education level, if they have additional children (and how many), as well as their annual household income.

**Validity and Reliability**

Reliability and validity of a measurement are two fundamental issues in social science research. Reliability “is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, yields the same result each time” (Babbie, 2004, p. 141). Validity, on the other hand, “refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration” (Babbie, 2004, p. 143). The instrument developed to be used in this study was an adaptation made from a combination of three different instruments that were previously used (Luster et al., 1989; Solomon et al., 1993; Wilson et al., 1981). The author acquired permission to use one of the instruments (Luster et al., 1989). The other two instruments (Solomon et al., 1993; Wilson et al., 1981) were in the public domain. The reliability and the validity of these instruments were tested in the past; consequently, the researcher felt comfortable in using the items from these instruments.

The fourth section of the survey, regarding the ability to and problems with spoiling baby girls and baby boys was created by the researcher. To ensure the quality of this section, the researcher consulted with faculty members as well as fellow
graduate students to check the authenticity and the simplicity of these questions. The researcher incorporated any important feedback into the final form of the survey.

**Sample, Collection Procedures and Protection of Human Subjects**

A sample is defined as “a set of individuals selected from a population. A sample is intended to be representative of its population, and a sample should always be identified in terms of the population from which it was selected” (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2005, p. 4). Therefore, the aim was to draw a sample that would include all relevant and essential characteristics of the population, so it would be representative of that population.

The participants in the study included 55 mothers of young infants (six months and younger). The mothers were recruited from the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program located in Sussex County, Delaware; a pediatrician’s office located in Bucks County, Pennsylvania; New Directions Early Head Start (NDEHS) program in Delaware; and a daycare program in Wilmington, Delaware. The sampling method must be deemed a convenience sampling (non-probability sampling) because the participants were gathered from a readily available group. Additional mothers from Delaware and Pennsylvania were recruited by snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves recruiting participants based on referrals from other participants already in the sample. Given that there is a limited population of mothers with infants birth to six-months-old, a convenience sample and a snowball sample were deemed acceptable for gathering this descriptive data.

The researcher prepared packets that included the booklet of the questionnaire and two copies of the informed consent form. The researcher then distributed the packets to the directors of Parents as Teachers, New Directions Early
Head Start, and the daycare program. A colleague delivered the packets to the pediatrician’s office, and the other mothers received the packets either from the researcher or from the researcher’s associates.

**New Directions Early Head Start (NDEHS)**

NDEHS is a program which supports pregnant women and families with children between the ages of birth and 36 months. In order to participate in the program, families have to meet certain income qualifications (low income) and/or other eligibility guidelines (i.e., a child with a disability). NDEHS of Delaware was funded in 1997 and currently serves 135 children and their families. The program’s main mission is to provide qualified families with quality care and support through community partnerships in order to enhance families’ and children’s lives, so children’s healthy development and success as well as families’ self-sufficiency is promoted. In order to achieve the program’s goals, services are provided through high-quality child care in center-based and family child care homes, home visits, family education, health and nutrition education, prenatal education, and referral services.

**Parents as Teachers (PAT)**

PAT is an international early childhood parent education and family support program. The program serves families throughout pregnancy until the child enters kindergarten (around the age of five). PAT trains early childhood professionals and certifies parents to become parent educators who help other parents by providing them with support and information on the development of their child. In PAT, the vision is that all children are capable of learning and developing to achieve their full
potential. In order to reach their vision, PAT’s mission is to support and help parents with their children so that they develop optimally during the essential early years of life. PAT of Delaware serves 1,400 families. Sussex County, where the participants for this research were recruited from, provides services to 345 families. Families that qualify to receive services from PAT are first-time parents who may have one or more of the following risk factors: a premature baby, low income, drug or alcohol abuse, a twelfth grade education or less, being a single parent, teen parent, and health concerns for the baby or the mother (including mental health). It is important to note that first-time parents could qualify to receive services without having any risk factors; however, about 85% of the families who receive services from PAT in Sussex County have at least one of the above risk factors.

The directors of NDEHS and PAT were instructed directly by the researcher as to how the questionnaire should be presented to the mothers. The directors explained these instructions to their home visitors and specialists who distributed the questionnaires to the mothers. The researcher also met with the director and the assistant director of the daycare program and instructed them about the appropriate way to present the questionnaire to the mothers. The director and the assistant director were responsible for providing the questionnaires to the participants. The communication and the instructions for the pediatrician’s office were done primarily by letters to the clinic director. Specific instructions were written for the director to share with any staff members that were part of the distributing team in the clinic. The remaining participants received instructions from the researcher or her associates. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, each mother received a children’s book supplied by the researcher as a token of appreciation.
The questionnaires were returned to the researcher in several ways: PAT participants were supplied with a prepaid envelope and return mailing address, NDEHS and the daycare directors collected all questionnaires and the researcher collected them from the programs, and the pediatrician’s office sent all completed questionnaires with a colleague of the researcher. The remainder of the participants either handed the questionnaire directly to the researcher or delivered the questionnaire through an associate of the researcher.

Data collection occurred between March and August of 2005. On the informed consent form, which all participants completed, it was noted that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that there were no consequences to the mother if she did not wish to take part in the study. It was also made clear to the participants that all questionnaires would be kept in absolute confidentiality, meaning that the name of neither the mother nor the infant would be found anywhere on the completed questionnaire. In addition, the mothers were notified that they could withdraw at any time from the study without any consequences as a result of their decision. In order to avoid any harm to the participants’ feelings about the manner in which they choose to parent, they were told that no judgment would be made regarding their responses. It was also explained that the goal of the questionnaire was to learn their opinions, and that they were not being tested for being right or wrong.

**Data Management**

Careful treatment of the data is imperative for obtaining accurate results. It is necessary to be cautious and attentive when the data are coded and entered into the computer. Therefore, several steps were taken to ensure the data was handled appropriately. First, a preliminary coding of one questionnaire was done to create an
SPSS code book. This provided consistency in coding (validity) throughout the procedure of data entry. Second, a 10% data check was run by the researcher to determine accuracy. Additionally, the researcher kept a journal and noted any problematical data and resolved any coding anomalies through consultations with her advisor. Lastly, a person unaffiliated with the study helped to run an additional 10% data check to ensure accuracy.
Chapter IV

RESULTS

Demographic Analyses

A sample of 55 mothers of infants six months or younger was analyzed. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the demographic composition of the sample. More than half of the participants identified themselves as Caucasian (56.4%) and over 20% identified as African American (21.8%; See Table 1).

Table 1  Racial Identification of the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Latino/Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the mothers were between 18 and 29 years old (58.2%) followed by mothers who were between 30 and 39 years old (40%; See Table 2).
Table 2  
**Age Distribution of the Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Between 18 and 29</th>
<th>Between 30 and 39</th>
<th>Older than 40</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, mothers were asked to identify their level of education. Of the 55 mothers in the sample, 18 (32.7%) mothers had a high school education or less, and 37 (67.3%) had at least some college education (See Table 3). Mothers were also asked to choose an annual income category that described them most accurately. The majority of the mothers reported having an annual income less than $50,000 (63.6%) (See Table 4).

Table 3  
**Educational Level of the Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did not complete high school</th>
<th>High school or GED</th>
<th>Some college</th>
<th>Associate Degree</th>
<th>BA</th>
<th>Some graduate school</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4  Annual Household Income of the Sample

Please circle the one that describes you the most:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Below $15,000</th>
<th>Between $15,000 &amp; $33,000</th>
<th>Between $34,000 &amp; $50,000</th>
<th>Above $50,000</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample was divided between first time mothers (47.3%) and those who reported having other children (52.7%; See Table 5). There was an almost equal split between the mothers who reported having an infant boy (50.9%) and those who have an infant girl (49.1%; See Table 6).

Table 5  Other Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you have other Children?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6  The Baby’s Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis 1**

To test the hypothesis that *the belief in the ability to spoil a baby six months old or younger exists in the general population* a chi-square test was performed. The question of if it is possible to spoil a baby six-months-old or younger yielded a dichotomous result so a nonparametric test such as a chi-square needed to be performed. If the existence of the belief in the ability to spoil a young baby did not exist in the general public or existed in the public in small number, one would expect a significant chi-square to result. However, if it is just as likely to find an individual who believes in the possibility of spoiling young babies as it is to find an individual who does not, when a sample is randomly pulled from a population, then the expected results would be non-significant. In this case, 21 (38.2%) of the people queried believed that a young baby could be spoiled and 34 (61.8%) did not. The chi-square that resulted was \( \chi^2 = 3.073, p = .080 \). While the proportion of those who responded that a young infant cannot be spoiled is larger than those who claimed spoiling young infants was possible, the resulting chi-square did not reach the standard significance.
level of \( p < .05 \). This result means that one is just as likely to find an individual who believes in spoiling of young infants as to find one who does not.

**Hypothesis 2**

To test the hypothesis that *significant differences in the demographics of the participants will be found between those who believe infants younger than six months could be spoiled and others who do not believe infants in that range could be spoiled*, a series of chi-square tests and *t* tests were performed. The sample included 21 (38.2%) mothers who believed infants six months and younger could be spoiled and 34 (61.8%) mothers who did not. The following section examines the relationships between demographic variables and spoiling perception (“Spoilers” vs. “Non-Spoilers”).

**Mother’s Race Analysis**

A chi-square test was conducted to determine if the race of the mother was related to her perceptions of spoiling. Due to the small sample size, the racial division of the sample: Caucasian (\( n = 31; 56.4\% \)), African American (\( n = 12; 21.8\% \)), Asian (\( n = 1; 1.8\% \)), Latino/Hispanic (\( n = 9; 16.4\% \)), and Other (\( n = 3; 3.6\% \)) was condensed into three categories of Caucasian, African American, and Other. The results of the chi-square test indicated that \( \chi^2 = 5.469, p = .065 \), suggesting a non-significant difference in the perception of spoiling among mothers of different races. However, taking a closer look at the relationship between race and spoiling, it was apparent that
Caucasian mothers and African American mothers responded to this question differently (See Table 7).

### Table 7  Can You Spoil a Young Baby? By the Mother’s Race (Caucasian and African American)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Race</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indeed, when the data from African American mothers and Caucasian mothers were analyzed alone, a significant difference was found $\chi^2 = 4.209$, $p = .040$. Therefore, the race of a mother should be taken into account as a factor when perceptions of spoiling a young infant are under consideration.

**Mother’s Age Analysis**

A chi-square test was conducted to determine if the mother’s age was related to her perception of spoiling. The sample included 32 (58.2%) mothers between the ages 18 and 29; 22 (40%) mothers between the ages 30 and 39; and one (1.8%) mother older than 40. For statistical analysis purposes the one mother older than 40 was added to the group of mothers between the ages 30 and 39. Of the 55
mothers in the sample, 34 (61.8%) reported a disbelief in the possibility of spoiling a young infant (See Table 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8</th>
<th>Can You Spoil a Young Baby? By the Mother’s Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can You Spoil a Young Baby?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 18 and 29</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and Up</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square test of these data indicated a significant difference between these two groups with $\chi^2 = 4.528$, $p = .033$. Thus, the age of a mother was indeed a factor influencing perceptions regarding spoiling of a young infant, with older mothers being less likely to believe a young baby could be spoiled.

**Mother’s Annual Household Income Analysis**

A chi-square was also conducted to determine if annual household income was related to the mother’s views of spoiling a young infant. Table 9 summarizes the composition of the sample’s annual household income.
Table 9  Annual Household Income of Sample

Please circle the *one* that describes you the most:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Below 15,000</th>
<th>Between 15,000 &amp; 33,000</th>
<th>Between 34,000 &amp; 50,000</th>
<th>Above 50,000</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample was divided into two groups, those with income below $33,000 (n = 30) and those with income above $34,000 (n = 25; See Table 10). The amount of $33,000 was chosen as it is roughly 200% of the federal poverty line for a family of three (exact $32,180). This rate was chosen as the cut point because programs for working-class families often set eligibility at or below the 200% poverty point.
Table 10  Can You Spoil a Young Baby? By the Mother’s Annual Household Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Annual Household Income</th>
<th>Can You Spoil a Young Baby?</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below $33,000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above $34,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square test resulted in $\chi^2 = 6.419$, $p = .011$. This result indicated that annual household income of a mother was related to the mother’s perceptions about the issue of spoiling a young infant. The results suggested that higher income was negatively related to belief in the ability to spoil a young baby.

**Mother’s Education Analysis**

A chi-square test was performed to test if the mother’s level of education was related to the mother’s perception of spoiling. Table 11 summarizes the composition of the sample’s education level.
Table 11  Education of Sample

Please circle the *one* that describes you the most:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did not complete high-school</th>
<th>High-school or GED</th>
<th>Some college</th>
<th>Associate Degree</th>
<th>BA</th>
<th>Some graduate school</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For statistical analysis purposes, the above seven categories were condensed into the following four: did not complete high school, completed high school or has a GED, has a college education, and has some graduate school experience. Of the 21 (38.2%) mothers who believed spoiling was possible, 11 (52.4%) had at least some college education. Of the 34 (61.8%) mothers who did not believe spoiling was possible, 26 (76.5%) reported that they had attended college (See Table 12 for the results).
Table 12  Can You Spoil a Young Baby? By the Mother’s Educational Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Educational Level</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete HS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed HS or has GED</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the chi-square test did not indicate any significant differences between these groups, $\chi^2 = 5.415, p = .144$.

**Do Mothers’ Have Other Children?**

A chi-square test was conducted to determine if there were differences between first-time mothers and mothers with other children. The sample included 29 (52.7%) mothers who had other children and 26 (47.3%) who did not. Of the 21 mothers who believed it was possible to spoil a young baby, 13 (61.9%) were first-time mothers, while the majority of those who did not believe spoiling was possible reported having other children ($n=21; 61.8\%$) (See Table 13).
Despite these trends, the results of the chi-square test $\chi^2 = 2.918, p = .088$ did not meet the criteria for significant difference of $p<.05$.

It should also be noted that a chi-square test was conducted to examine if there was a relationship between the mother’s age and having other children. The results, $\chi^2 = 2.982, p = .225$, indicated that no relationship existed between those two variables, each is independent and unique.

**Spoilers versus Non-Spoilers: Would It Make a Difference?**

First, a comparison between the responses and the perceptions of the spoilers and the non-spoilers to various spoiling beliefs were examined (Section 1 of the questionnaire). To do so, a series of four $t$ tests were performed to determine if mothers who did and did not believe young infants could be spoiled responded differently to beliefs regarding spoiling (i.e., *A mother can spoil her young baby by giving him/her a great deal of attention*), floor freedom (i.e., *In order to keep a baby out of mischief, mothers should strictly limit the area of the house in which the baby is...*)
allowed to play), discipline and control (i.e., The most important task of parenting is disciplining the baby), and talking and reading (i.e., I believe that it is important to spend a lot of time talking to my young baby even before he/she can understand whatever it is I am saying) (See Table 14 for the results).

Table 14  Are There Any Differences in the Beliefs Depending on the Answer to—Can you spoil a Baby Six Months or Younger?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs regarding spoiling</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs regarding floor freedom</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>&lt;.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs regarding discipline and control</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>&lt;.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs regarding talking and reading</td>
<td>.997</td>
<td>.323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05

Mothers who believed young infants could be spoiled were more likely to believe that a variety of appropriate parenting behaviors were likely to result in a baby being spoiled (i.e., a mother can spoil her young baby by giving him/her a great deal of attention or the most important task of parenting is disciplining the baby).
Interestingly, the only category in which no significant difference was found between the responses of the two groups was the fourth category of beliefs regarding talking and reading. On average, mothers in both groups, regardless of their perception of spoiling, tended to disagree with statements such as *talking to a young baby who can’t talk may keep the parent occupied but it probably has not effect on the baby* and *reading to a baby who is six months or younger has little effect on the baby*. The mean of this category for the mothers who believed a young baby could be spoiled was $M = 1.56$, and for the mothers who did not believe a young baby could be spoiled, the mean was $M = 1.38$.

Furthermore, a $t$ test was conducted on the level of agreement regarding statements that a baby might be spoiled by (section 2 of the questionnaire). Responses to the statements, such as *being allowed to alter his/her parent’s schedules* and *receiving too much attention*, were compared for the two groups. The results indicated significant differences in the responses given by the spoilers and the non-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Believe in spoiling</th>
<th>Do not believe in spoiling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Means for beliefs regarding spoiling</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means for beliefs regarding floor freedom</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means for beliefs regarding discipline and control</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
spoilers, $t = 3.959$, $p = .000$. In general, mothers who were categorized as spoilers tended to perceive such statements above as spoiling behaviors more often than the non-spoilers ($M = 3.48$ versus $M = 2.38$).

**Descriptors Analysis (Positive and Negative)**

Next, an analysis of the descriptors was performed. The descriptors were a list of adjectives that could possibly be used to describe a spoiled baby (depending on the participant’s beliefs). There were 13 descriptors in all, comprised of five negative (i.e., demanding, obnoxious, frustrated) and eight positive (i.e., outgoing, content, sociable). The participants were asked to circle all descriptions (as many as they wished to) that they perceived as describing a spoiled baby.

Separate analysis was carried out for both the positive and the negative descriptors. The positive descriptors (i.e., content, happy, affectionate) were analyzed first ($n = 45$; missing data $n = 10$). The results indicated that 36 (80%) mothers—15 (75%) who perceived spoiling a young infant as possible and 21 (84%) who did not believe spoiling was possible—chose not to check any positive descriptors. The other nine (20%) mothers—five (25%) mothers who believed infants could be spoiled and four (16%) mothers who did not believe so—chose to check anywhere from one to eight positive descriptors (See Table 16).
Table 16  Choosing Positive Descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Positive Descriptors Chosen</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can You Spoil a Young Baby?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, the negative descriptors (i.e., difficult to control, frustrated, overindulged) were analyzed (n=45; missing data n=10). The results indicated that 12 (26.7%) mothers—one (5%) who perceived spoiling a young infant as possible and 11 (44%) who did not believe spoiling was possible—chose not to check any negative descriptors. The other 33 (73.3%) mothers—one (95%) spoilers and 14 (56%) non-spoilers—checked anywhere from one to five negative descriptors (See Table 17).

Table 17  Choosing Negative Descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Negative Descriptors Chosen</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can You Spoil a Young Baby?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A t test was conducted to check for selection differences in the pattern of positive and negative descriptors between the mothers who believed a young infant could be spoiled and those who did not think it was possible. The t test results indicated no significant difference between the two groups for the pattern of choosing positive descriptors with $t = -.880$, $p = .384$. However, a significant difference was found for the negative descriptors $t = 2.412$, $p = .020$. Mothers who believe infants six months and younger could be spoiled tended to choose negative descriptors (i.e., demanding, obnoxious, frustrated) more often than mothers who did not believe young infants could be spoiled.

**Conclusion**

On the whole, hypothesis two was supported. Numerous significant differences were found between mothers who perceived spoiling a young baby possible (“Spoilers”) and those who did not (“Non-spoilers”). Differences in the pattern of responses to questions and statements in the selection of negative descriptors and in overall spoiling perception were obvious across the analysis. Spoilers and non-spoilers differ not only in their perceptions about the possibility of spoiling a young infant but also in their perceptions regarding a variety of additional parenting behaviors throughout the survey.

**Hypothesis 3**

To test the hypothesis that significant differences in the patterns of perceptions of spoiling will be found between participants who believe infants younger than six months could and should be spoiled (“Happy Spoilers”) and participants who believe infants younger than six months could but should not be
spoiled ("Believers"), a series of chi-square tests and t tests were performed. The sample included 21 (38.2%) mothers who reported believing that a young infant could be spoiled. Of these 21 mothers, seven (33.3%) were identified as the “Happy Spoilers” since they not only believed a young infant could be spoiled, but they also did not see spoiling as a problem. Conversely, 14 mothers (66.7%) were identified as “Believers.” That is, they believed that it was possible to spoil a young infant and that doing so was problematic. The following section examines the relationships between demographic variables and spoiling classification (“Happy Spoilers” vs. “Believers”). In the results that follow, no significant differences were found. However, these results must be judged with caution as the small sample size greatly diminished the power of these analyses. This may have resulted in Type II errors throughout this section.

**Mother’s Race Analysis**

The relationship between race and spoiling attitudes was tested first. Of the 14 mothers who were classified as “Believers,” seven (50%) were Caucasian, five (35.7%) were African American, and two (14.3%) were identified as Other. Of the seven mothers who were classified as “Happy Spoilers,” three (42.9%) were Caucasian, three (42.9%) were African American, and one (14.3%) was identified as Other (See Table 18).
Table 18    Spoiler Type by the Mother’s Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Race</th>
<th>“Happy Spoilers”</th>
<th>“Believers”</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>47.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square test did not detect significant differences between these groups $\chi^2 = .113, p = .945.$

**Mother’s Age Analysis**

A chi-square test was conducted to determine if the mother’s age was related to her spoiler type classification. Of the 16 mothers between the ages 18 and 29 who believed spoiling was possible, five (31.2%) were identified as “Happy Spoilers” and 11 (68.8%) were “Believers.” Of the five mothers over the age of 30 who believed young infants could be spoiled, two mothers (40%) were “Happy Spoilers” and three (60%) were “Believers” (See Table 19).
Table 19  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Age</th>
<th>“Happy Spoilers”</th>
<th>“Believers”</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between 18 and 29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and Up</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square test did not indicate significant differences between these groups $\chi^2 = 1.031$, $p = .597$.

**Mother’s Annual Household Income Analysis**

A chi-square was also conducted to determine if the annual household income was related to the mother’s spoiler type classification. Table 20 presents the annual household income for the “Happy Spoilers” and the “Believers.”
Table 20  Spoiler Type by the Mother’s Annual Household Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Annual Household Income</th>
<th>“Happy Spoilers”</th>
<th>“Believers”</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below $15,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between $15,000 &amp; $33,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between $34,000 &amp; 50,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 50,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square test resulting in $\chi^2 = 1.05$, $p = .789$ indicated that no significant difference was found.

Mother’s Education Analysis

A chi-square test was conducted to determine if the mother’s educational level was related to her spoiler type classification. Table 21 presents the educational level of the “Happy Spoilers” and the “Believers.”
Table 21  Spoiler Type by the Mother’s Educational Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Educational Level</th>
<th>“Happy Spoilers”</th>
<th>“Believers”</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete HS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed HS or has GED</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No significant differences were determined from the results of the chi-square test, $\chi^2 = 7.688$, $p = .104$.

**Do Mothers Have Other Children?**

A chi-square test was conducted to determine if there were differences in spoiler type between first-time mothers and mothers with other children. Of the 21 mothers that were classified as either “Happy Spoilers” or “Believers,” eight (38.1%)
had other children and 13 (61.9%) did not. Of the 14 (66.7%) “Believers,” six mothers (42.9%) had other children and eight (57.1%) did not (See Table 22).

Table 22  Spoiler Type - Do You Have Other Children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoiler Type</th>
<th>“Happy Spoilers”</th>
<th>“Believers”</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do You Have Other Children?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square test did not detect significant differences between these groups $\chi^2 = .404, p = .525$.

“Happy Spoilers” versus “Believers”: Would It Make a Difference?

First, a comparison between the responses and the perceptions of the “Happy Spoilers” and the “Believers” to various spoiling beliefs was conducted (Section 1 of the questionnaire). To do so, a series of four $t$ tests were performed to determine if “Happy Spoilers” and “Believers” responded differently to beliefs regarding spoiling (i.e., *A young baby is spoiled when he/she gets into the habit of being held and rocked frequently*), floor freedom (i.e., *Children should learn as young babies that a parent’s desire to have a neat and orderly house must be respected*), discipline and control (i.e., *Young babies, who are held to firm rules, grow up to be*
the best adults), and talking and reading (i.e., Reading to a young baby who is six
months or younger has little effect on the baby) (See Table 23 for the results).

Table 23 Are There Any Differences in the Beliefs Depending on the Spoiler
Type?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs regarding spoiling</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs regarding floor freedom</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>.817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs regarding discipline and control</td>
<td>-.460</td>
<td>.650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs regarding talking and reading</td>
<td>-2.772</td>
<td>.012*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05

These results indicated that there were no significant differences between
the two groups for the first three categories, suggesting that generally “Happy
Spoilers” and “Believers” perceived spoiling, floor freedom, and discipline and
control similarly. In other words, being considered a spoiler (answering Yes to the
question—Can you spoil a young baby?) had a stronger impact on the mother’s
perceptions and beliefs than being considered a “Happy Spoiler” or as a “Believer”
(answering Yes or No to the question—Should you spoil a young baby?). The last
category tested, beliefs regarding talking and reading, was found to be significantly
different for the two groups, t = -2.772, p = .012. In this analysis, the “Happy
Spoilers” tended to disagree more often with statements such as talking to a young
baby who can't talk may keep the parent occupied but it probably has not effect on the baby than the “Believers” did (“Happy Spoilers”, M = 1.05 and the “Believers”, M = 1.81).

Furthermore, a t test was conducted on the level of agreement regarding statements that a baby might be spoiled (section 2 of the questionnaire). Responses to the statements, such as allowing him/her to have his/her own way and not setting limits for him/her, were compared for the two groups. The results indicated no significant differences in the answering pattern of the “Happy Spoilers” and the “Believers,” t = -.177, p = .861.

**Descriptor Analysis (Positive and Negative)**

Next, an analysis of the descriptors was performed. The descriptors included both positive and negative adjectives that could possibly be used to describe a spoiled baby (depending on the participant’s beliefs). The participants were asked to circle all descriptions (as many as they wished to) that they perceived as describing a spoiled baby.

The positive descriptors (i.e., well-adjusted, sociable, outgoing) were analyzed first (n=20; missing data n=1). The results indicated that 15 (75%) mothers, five (71.43%) of the “Happy Spoilers” and 10 (76.92%) of the “Believers” chose not to check any positive descriptors. The other five (25%) mothers, two (28.57%) “Happy Spoilers” and three (23.08%) “Believers,” chose to check anywhere between one to four positive descriptors (See Table 24).
Next, the negative descriptors (i.e., overindulged, difficult to control, obnoxious) were analyzed (n=20; missing data n=1). The results indicated that only one (5%) mother, a “Happy Spoiler,” chose not to check any negative descriptors. The other 19 (95%) mothers, six (75%) “Happy Spoilers” and 13 (100%) “Believers” checked anywhere between one to five negative descriptors (See Table 25).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Spoiler</th>
<th>Number of Negative Descriptors Chosen</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Happy Spoilers”</td>
<td>1 1 3 1 0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Believers”</td>
<td>0 2 5 1 1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1 3 6 4 5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24 Choosing Positive Descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Positive Descriptors Chosen</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 1 2 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Spoiler</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Happy Spoilers”</td>
<td>5 0 1 1 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Believers”</td>
<td>10 2 1 0 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15 2 2 1 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25 Choosing Negative Descriptors
A $t$ test was conducted to check for significant differences on the pattern of choosing positive and negative descriptors between the “Happy Spoilers” and the “Believers.” The $t$ test results indicated no significant difference between the two groups for either patterns of choosing positive descriptors $t = 1.122, p = .276$, or for the patterns of choosing negative descriptors $t = -.777, p = .447$.

**Conclusion**

Overall, hypothesis three was not supported. Significant differences were not found between the pattern of responses for the “Happy Spoilers” and for the “Believers.” However, as stated above, these results should be taken with caution, as the small size of the sample impacts the power of the statistical analyses performed.

**Hypothesis 4**

In order to test the hypothesis that *significant differences in the patterns of perception of spoiling will be found between participants whose infant is a girl and participants whose infant is a boy*, a series of chi-square tests and $t$ tests were performed. The sample included 28 (50.9%) mothers of infant boys and 27 (49.1%) mothers of infant girls. Of the 28 mothers of infant boys, 17 (60.7%) were Caucasian, 16 (57.1%) were between 18 and 29 years old, 10 (35.7%) had an annual income above $50,000, 10 (35.7%) had some college education, and 17 (60.7%) were first-time mothers (See Tables 26 to 30). Of the 27 mothers of infant girls, 14 (51.9%) were Caucasian, 16 (59.3%) were between 18 and 29 years old, 10 (37%) had an annual income above $50,000, eight (29.6%) had completed high school or obtained their GED, and 18 (66.7%) had other children (See Tables 26 to 30).
### Table 26  Mother’s Race for Infant Boys and Infant Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby’s Sex</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 27  Mother’s Age for Infant Boys and Infant Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby’s Sex</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between</td>
<td>Between</td>
<td>Older than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18 &amp; 29</td>
<td>30 &amp; 39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 28  Mother’s Annual Income for Infant Boys and Infant Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby’s Sex</th>
<th>Mother’s Annual Income</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below $15,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between $15,000 &amp; $33,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between $34,000 &amp; $50,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Above $50,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby’s Sex</th>
<th>Did not complete HS</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 29  Mother’s Educational Level for Infant Boys and Infant Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby’s Sex</th>
<th>Mother’s Educational Level</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did not complete HS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HS graduate or GED</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some graduate school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby’s Sex</th>
<th>Did not complete HS</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70
Table 30  Do Mothers of Infant Boys and Infant Girls Have Other Children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do You Have Other Children?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Baby’s Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Does the Sex of the Baby Matter?

First, a crosstabulation was conducted to examine the percentages of mothers in both groups who believed young infants either could or could not be spoiled. This crosstabulation showed that the majority of the mothers in the two groups (64.3% mothers of infant boys; 59.3% mothers of infant girls; see Table 31) did not believe a baby six months or younger could be spoiled. The results of the chi-square test $\chi^2 = .147$, $p = .701$ confirmed no difference in the perception of spoiling among mothers of infant boys and mothers of infant girls.
Table 31  Does the Sex of the Baby Matter?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby’s Sex</th>
<th>Can You Spoil a Baby?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yes: 10 (35.7%)</td>
<td>No: 18 (64.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yes: 11 (40.7%)</td>
<td>No: 16 (59.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, a series of four $t$ tests were performed to determine if mothers of infant boys and mothers of infant girls responded differently to beliefs regarding spoiling (i.e., *It is likely that you will spoil your young baby if you respond to most of his/her cries*), floor freedom (i.e., *Since young babies cannot be trusted to do the right thing, their chances to misbehave must be limited*), discipline and control (i.e., *Parents should be strict with their young babies or they will be difficult to manage later on*), and talking and reading (i.e., *Talking to a young baby who can’t talk may keep parent occupied but it probably has no effect on the baby*) (See Table 32 for the results).
Table 32  Are There Any Differences in the Beliefs Depending on the Baby’s Sex?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs regarding</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>spoiling</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>floor freedom</td>
<td>-1.141</td>
<td>.259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discipline and control</td>
<td>-.731</td>
<td>.468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talking and reading</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td>.539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results indicated that there were no significant differences between the two groups for these categories, suggesting that mothers of infant boys and mothers of infant girls perceived the above beliefs similarly. In other words, the sex of the baby was not a catalyst for the mother’s perception regarding certain beliefs that relate to spoiling.

Furthermore, a $t$ test was conducted on the level of agreement regarding statements that a young baby might be spoiled (section 2 of the questionnaire). Responses to the statements, such as being rocked and held and receiving lots of affection, were compared for the two groups. The results indicated no significant differences in the responding pattern of the mothers of infant boys and mothers of infant girls, $t = -.965$, $p = .339$. 

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Descriptor Analysis (Positive and Negative)

Next, an analysis of the descriptors was performed. The positive descriptors (i.e., pleasant, happy, alert) were analyzed first (n = 45; missing data n = 10). The results indicated that 36 (80%) mothers, 17 (60.7%) mothers of infant boys and 19 (70.4%) mothers of infant girls, chose not to check any positive descriptors. The other nine (20%) mothers, four (14.3%) mothers of infant boys and five (18.5%) mothers of infant girls, chose to check anywhere between one to eight positive descriptors (See Table 33). The $t$ test results, $t = .464$, $p = .645$, resulted in no significant difference in the choice of positive descriptors made by the two groups of mothers.

Table 33 Choosing Positive Descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby’s Sex</th>
<th>Number of Positive Descriptors Chosen</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 7 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17 1 0 0 1 1 1 1 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19 1 2 1 0 0 0 1 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36 2 2 1 1 1 2 2 45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The negative descriptors (i.e., demanding, frustrated, obnoxious) were analyzed next (n = 45; missing data n = 10). The results indicated that 12 (26.7%) mothers, 7 (25%) mothers of infant boys and 5 (18.5%) mothers of infant girls, chose not to check any negative descriptors. The other 33 (73.3%) mothers, 14 (50%)
mothers of infant boys and 19 (70.4%) mothers of infant girls, chose to check anywhere from one to five negative descriptors (See Table 34). Further analysis using the \( t \) test, \( t = -1.203, p = .235 \), indicated no significant difference in the choice of negative descriptors made by the two groups of mothers.

### Table 34 Choosing Negative Descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Negative Descriptors Chosen</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Happy Spoilers”</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Believers”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, chi-square tests were performed to determine the mothers’ responses to the following questions: 1) Which one is easier to spoil—a young baby girl or a young baby boy? and 2) Which one is more likely to get spoiled—a young baby girl or a young baby boy? Both groups of mothers responded that infant girls are easier to spoil as well as more likely to get spoiled (See Table 16 for the results). Of the 20 mothers of infant girls who responded to the first question above, 18 (90%) mothers believed infant girls are easier to spoil, and 12 (63.2%) of the 19 mothers of infant boys believed so as well. For the second question, about the likelihood of getting spoiled, all mothers of infant girls who responded to the question (100%; \( n = 21 \))
believed infant girls are more likely to get spoiled, and 16 (76.2%) of the 21 mothers of infant boys chose the infant girls as well. Therefore, in this case, the infant’s sex influenced the perception of the mothers regarding spoiling.

Table 35  Who is Easier to Spoil? Who is More Likely to Get Spoiled—An Infant Boy or an Infant Girl?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>( P )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which one is easier to spoil—a young baby girl or a young baby boy?</td>
<td>3.955</td>
<td>.047*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which one is more likely to get spoil—a young baby girl or a young baby boy?</td>
<td>5.676</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( p < .05 \)

It should be noted that \( t \) tests were performed for the mothers’ responses to the questions: Is it a problem to spoil a young baby girl? and Is it a problem to spoil a young baby boy? However, significant findings were not observed (\( t = .506, p = .615 \), and \( t = -.429, p = .670 \), respectively).

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, hypothesis four was not supported. Mothers of infant girls and mothers of infant boys were found to believe and think in a comparable fashion regarding spoiling risks and spoiling consequences for girls and boys. The only significant finding was with regard to the mothers’ perceptions of ease and likelihood of spoiling.
SUMMARY

This chapter examined each of the four proposed hypotheses with various statistical analysis techniques. The first hypothesis explored the prevalence among the sample participants of the belief that it is possible to spoil a young infant. A nonparametric chi-square test was conducted to test this prevalence. The second and the third hypotheses focused on differences in the mothers’ perceptions regarding spoiling young infants. A series of chi-square tests and $t$ tests were performed to check for significant differences among the demographics of the mothers as well as their perceptions of essential parenting behaviors. The fourth hypothesis explored if any significant differences existed in the perceptions of the mothers regarding spoiling as it relates to the sex of the infant; these differences were also examined with a series of chi-square tests and $t$ tests. The results obtained from these analyses will be discussed extensively in the following chapter.
Spoiling is a concern for parents and those who care for young children. There is an abundance of advice from pediatricians and child care experts in popular literature on the causes and consequences of spoiling. However, there has been little empirical work done on this emotionally charged concept. Therefore, the current study was designed to contribute to the limited empirical data on the topic of spoiling, in particular how mothers view the likelihood of their young infants being spoiled. Moreover, this study was intended to investigate a new dimension in beliefs about spoiling by investigating how infants’ sex is related to mothers’ beliefs regarding spoiling. The current study used Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory to establish the developmental parameters currently ascribed to infants’ cognitive capacity to engage in manipulative, purposeful behavior, a component of being spoiled, and Bowlby and Ainsworth’s attachment theory to explain the value of engaging in responsive, attentive caregiving as a necessity in establishing a strong bond between an infant and a parent, behavior which can be regarded as spoiling.

Once these parameters were established, this study then tested four hypotheses. The first hypothesis sought to determine how common it is to find people who believe it is possible to spoil a baby six-months-old or younger. The second hypothesis examined differences in the pattern of demographics between mothers who believed young infants could be spoiled and those who did not. The third hypothesis examined differences in the pattern of demographics between mothers who believed
young infants could be spoiled but did not view it to be problematic and those who also believed in spoiling, but perceived it to be a problem. Lastly, the fourth hypothesis considered the effect an infant’s sex had on the perception of spoiling held by his or her mother.

Regarding the first hypothesis, concerning the prevalence of the belief that young infants can be spoiled, these results confirmed those found in previous research (e.g., Zero to Three, 2000). It appears that, despite the inconsistency with child development research, there is a widespread belief in, and concern regarding, spoiling.

Everyone, however, does not hold the same beliefs about spoiling. Wilson and her colleagues (1981) as well as Solomon and his colleagues (1993) observed demographic differences between those who believed young infants could be spoiled (“Spoilers”) and those who did not believe so (“Non-Spoilers”); this study demonstrated these significant differences as well. The current study found that mothers who believe infants six months and younger could be spoiled were more likely to be younger, African American, and with less financial means. On the other hand, those who did not believe infants six months and younger could be spoiled were more likely to be older, Caucasian, and with a higher annual income.

As reported in previous studies conducted on the concept of spoiling (Pascoe & Solomon, 1994; Smyke et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 1993; Wilson et al. 1981), mothers who believed young infants could be spoiled, perceived parenting behaviors—considered by many child development experts as essential to healthy development—as being the very same behaviors that spoil children. The current study also found differences between the spoilers and the non-spoilers regarding the inherent risk of rearing a spoiled child as the result of various parenting practices. The two
groups responded differently to beliefs regarding floor freedom, discipline, and control. Mothers who reported believing that young infants could be spoiled were more likely to agree with statements such as *a mother can spoil her young baby by giving him/her a great deal of attention or the most important task of parenting is disciplining the baby.* Furthermore, mothers who were categorized as spoilers responded to statements such as *Being rocked and held* and *Receiving lots of affection* as likely to result in a baby being spoiled more often than the non-spoilers. Additionally, those who believed in spoiling tended to choose negative adjectives (i.e., *demanding, obnoxious, frustrated*) to describe a spoiled baby more often than the non-spoilers. The negative characterizations ascribed by “spoiling believers” to children who are “spoiled” clearly demonstrate the negative outcomes they wish to avoid by being proactive and limiting indulgent and responsive behavior. It is clear that these mothers believe “spoiling behaviors” (appropriate parenting behaviors) would result in babies who display negative qualities.

Interestingly, despite the differences found in the beliefs between the spoilers and the non-spoilers regarding the risk of various parenting practices leading to a child being spoiled, mothers in both groups responded similarly regarding talking and reading. Both groups agreed that it is important to *spend a lot of time talking to my young baby even before he/she can understand whatever it is I am saying,* and disagreed that *talking to a young baby who can’t talk may keep the parent occupied, but it probably has no effect on the baby.* Therefore, regardless of the mothers’ perception of spoiling, they believed in the importance of talking and reading even to a young baby. The agreement on this particular issue may be the result of several national campaigns (such as Reading Is Fundamental and I Am Your Child) regarding
the significance of early literacy and reading. The success of this type of campaign can serve as evidence for the fact that, when important child development information is transmitted adequately to all groups of parents, it can have a powerful effect on shaping beliefs and, potentially, practices.

Not only did Solomon and his colleagues (1993), find that there were “spoilers” and “non-spoilers,” they also concluded that the group of mothers who were categorized as spoilers consisted of two subgroups. Mothers who believed young infants could be spoiled, but who did not see spoiling as a problem, were dubbed—“Happy Spoilers.” The other group included mothers who believed young infants could be spoiled, and that being spoiled is problematic (“Believers”). One of the purposes of the current study was to examine if parents categorized as “Happy Spoilers” had different perceptions than the “Believers” about the types of parenting behaviors that lead to a child becoming spoiled. This study also examined the differences in the modifiers ascribed to spoiled children chosen by these two groups. In the present study, no significant differences between these groups were found. The small sample size makes this result hard to interpret. The lack of differences may be accurate, or it may be due to the small sample size that resulted in a lack of statistical power, which led to a Type II error.

The current study also explored a new dimension in the spoiling literature by looking for differences in spoiling beliefs as they relate to the infants’ sex. Since differences in spoiling attitudes as they relate to infants’ sex have never been investigated before, the literature concerning infants’ gender socialization and gender role stereotyping was examined. This literature clearly demonstrates that expectations held by parents about their infant’s sex have an impact on the perceptions, beliefs, and
behaviors the parents will have toward their infants (e.g., Fagot, 1978; Fitzgerald, 1977; Mondschein, Adolph, Tamis-LeMonda, 2000; Peterson, 2004; Rubin et al., 1974). Examination of the literature on the effects of sex on parental perceptions and behavior created a compelling need for studying this topic in relation to spoiling.

Despite the compelling evidence that an infant’s sex makes a difference in parenting attitudes and beliefs, mothers of both boys and girls responded similarly to the parenting behaviors presented in the questionnaire. Moreover, the sex of a mother’s particular infant was not found to be associated with her response to the question *Can you spoil a young baby?*

However, an infant’s sex, in general, did have an affect on the mother’s perceptions of who is easier to spoil (infant boy or infant girl) as well as who is more likely to get spoiled. Mothers of infant girls almost exclusively believed that infant girls are easier to spoil and that infant girls are more likely to get spoiled. Likewise, the majority of mothers of infant boys believed that infant girls are easier to spoil and are also more likely to get spoiled. The reactions of both groups seem to indicate a connection between the perception of behaviors that are likely to lead to spoiling and popular notions about gendered socialization and parenting practices as they are widely conceived of in the United States at this time.

**Limitations**

Several limitations were observed during the process of conducting the study. These limitations may have influenced the results of the current study, but also have some important implications for future studies on the concept of spoiling.

One of the limitations of this study was the lack of a widely recognized and validated operational definition for the concept of spoiling. This lack of a
definition could be partially attributed to the limited empirical literature on this topic. It could also be a result of difficulties in operationalizing all aspects of this complex construct. The development of a complete and acceptable definition would entail a thorough and lengthy process in which only the definition of the concept is examined. Such a process was beyond the scope of the current study. Consequently, this study used a previously constructed Spoiling Index (Solomon et al., 1993) to divide the participants into groups according to their spoiling beliefs and to indirectly define their spoiling perceptions. It is possible that the results of this study were impacted by the lack of a more precise definition.

Another major limitation was the sample size obtained for the study. Although great effort was made to reach qualified participants, it was difficult to recruit mothers of young infants. Having a relatively small sample size most likely influenced the results of the study, especially the results of the third hypothesis (comparing the responses of the “Happy Spoilers” and the “Believers”). The lack of diversity in the sample was also an unfortunate result of the sample size.

Additionally, the questionnaire might not have been as clear as it was intended to be. The descriptors section, in particular, should have had clearer instructions, asking only those who believed young infants could be spoiled to respond to this section, and instructing the rest to skip to the next part of the questionnaire. Moreover, it would have been valuable to include some open-ended questions to receive written feedback from the mothers regarding their perceptions and thoughts on spoiling. Doing so might have helped determine how mothers define spoiling, the similarities and the differences, which would have been beneficial not only for this
study, but also for future research on spoiling by collecting initial data for devising an adequate definition of the concept.

**Future Directions for Research**

The lack of an operational definition for the concept of spoiling has been mentioned and the need to develop an adequate and reliable definition for this concept is called for. Exploring and investigating the concept of spoiling from the perspective of individuals from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the concept and is essential for learning and comparing the perceptions of parents across cultural backgrounds regarding the concept of spoiling. It is likely that a cross-cultural examination of the concept of spoiling would result in important differences regarding the relationship between the gender of the child and the gender of the parent in understanding how parents conceptualize the causes and consequences of spoiling. However, it is likely that people from various cultural backgrounds would perceive the concept of spoiling differently, and therefore define what it means to be a “spoiled child” in different ways.

The current study relied on Piaget’s cognitive development theory as well as Bowlby/Ainsworth’s attachment theory to emphasize both the cognitive abilities of infants as well as the importance of the parent responding sensitively to the infant in order to build a strong attachment between the parent and the infant. These two theories were also used in previous studies on the concept of spoiling (e.g., Smyke et al., 2002; Solomon et al, 1993). In the last few years, the attachment theory has been extended to examine how attachment representations in adulthood impact adults’ attachment to their children. Such studies have demonstrated that a parent’s own
attachment history with his or her caregiver is in some ways re-created in the attachment that they develop with their children (e.g., Benoit & Parker, 1994; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Pederson, Gleason, Moran, & Bento, 1998). Future studies on the concept of spoiling should consider examining how the mother’s (as well as the father’s) memories of their relationships with their parents and the way that they remember their “attachments,” and their current ideas and opinions of attachment, influence their beliefs, attitudes, and actions toward their infants. Moreover, these studies on spoiling should investigate how the mother’s own attachment specifically influences her perception of spoiling.

Another important venue to explore is the origin of inaccurate understandings about infants, their abilities and their needs. It is likely that many of the beliefs about parenting come from parents’ own experiences within families and communities. Those beliefs about what motivates infants, what infants need, and how best to rear them are often the genesis for many parenting beliefs. In addition, a powerful influence on parenting behaviors is the value that parenting has as well as the value that the baby holds for the parent. Studying the concept of spoiling from the perspective of the symbolic interaction framework would allow for this sort of exploration. Would mothers (parents) who believe the interactions with their child should be based on rigidity and respect for authority beginning at birth perceive spoiling differently than mothers who believe the interactions with their child should be gentle and mostly directed by the needs of their infant? Probably. But what if in the first instance the baby in question was the first born to an older mother? What if in the second instance the baby was the result of a short-term relationship with an abusive partner? How would this further influence the parents’ behaviors and the
subsequent bond? A more nuanced understanding of the causes and consequences of various parenting beliefs and styles will help tailor interventions designed to support optimal growth and development.

Finally, the present study specifically examined spoiling perceptions held by mothers of young infants. However, in order to learn about the possible broader implications of the concept on child development, it is necessary to empirically investigate the spoiling beliefs and behaviors held by other caregivers of infants. It is critically important that the beliefs and understandings of fathers regarding spoiling are examined. Likewise, the perceptions of child care teachers/providers regarding the concept of spoiling and whether these are consistent or inconsistent with parents’ perceptions may be critical to understanding the effects of infants’ child care quality on their development. Furthermore, it is important to research spoiling perceptions longitudinally across genders and cultures and learn how spoiling perceptions may affect development throughout childhood.

**Concluding Comments**

The concept of spoiling has been discussed among parents and families, pediatricians, and other professionals for many years, and, apparently, it will be discussed for many years to come. There is a need to inform parents about spoiling, suitable parenting behaviors, and age-appropriate development. Furthermore, it is vital for the information concerning spoiling to be grounded in comprehensive empirical studies conducted on the concept so that the information distributed to parents, grandparents, caregivers and others who care for young infants is research-based. Such information should be presented sensitively on occasions where parents receive other imperative information regarding their infant. Moreover,
it is important to ensure that the empirical information transmitted to parents is appropriately written and explained in such a way that parents will understand and be able to apply that information.

In conclusion, it is vital to help parents understand their infant’s capabilities and needs right from birth. Concern with spoiling and a misunderstanding of what sorts of behaviors will result in spoiling are widespread. The fear of spoiling based on inaccurate information about a young child’s development can potentially result in young babies not being attended to appropriately or not having their basic needs met. The present study examined spoiling from a perspective that was not previously investigated (infants’ sex), and it also added some supportive data to the limited data available on the topic. This study also raised important issues that should be addressed in the future in order to further develop this very important concept, which was found to greatly influence parenting behaviors. Further examination and additional exploration of the concept of spoiling is essential for the healthy development and the well-being of young infants.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

PARENTS’ OPINION SURVEY: WHAT OPINIONS DO MOTHERS OF YOUNG INFANTS HAVE ABOUT SPOILING?
PARENTS’ OPINION SURVEY: WHAT OPINIONS DO MOTHERS OF YOUNG INFANTS HAVE ABOUT SPOILING?
Instructions

The following statements are commonly held opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. You will probably agree with some items and disagree with others. We would appreciate your honest opinions as a mother on these matters. Your insights as a mother will be very helpful to us.

Read each statement carefully. Then indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement by circling one of the possible answers listed below the statement.

First impressions are usually best. Read each statement, decide if you agree or disagree and the strength of your opinion, and then circle the appropriate response.

Please pay attention to the instructions provided before each segment of the survey.

Give your opinion on every statement (remember there are no right or wrong answers).

If you find that the responses to be used in answering do not adequately reflect your own opinion, select the one closest to the way you feel.

Always think about your own young baby (six months or younger) when answering!

– Thank you.
** Remember: all statements are about babies six months or younger!

For the following statements, please circle whatever you believe is the appropriate response. Responses range from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

1. It is likely that you will spoil your young baby if you respond to most of his/her cries.
   - □ □ □ □ □ □
   - strongly disagree disagree slightly slightly strongly disagree disagree agree agree agree

2. Young babies need to learn to play by themselves and therefore should spend a few hours each day in the playpen with little adult interruption.
   - □ □ □ □ □ □
   - strongly disagree disagree slightly slightly strongly disagree disagree agree agree agree

3. Parents should be strict with their young babies or they will be difficult to manage later on.
   - □ □ □ □ □ □
   - strongly disagree disagree slightly slightly strongly disagree disagree agree agree agree

4. A mother can spoil her young baby by giving him/her a great deal of attention.
   - □ □ □ □ □ □
   - strongly disagree disagree slightly slightly strongly disagree disagree agree agree agree

5. As long as the baby is safe and the object will not be damaged, he/she should be allowed to play with almost any object in the home that interests him/her.
   - □ □ □ □ □ □
   - strongly disagree disagree slightly slightly strongly disagree disagree agree agree agree

6. The most important task of parenting is disciplining the baby.
   - □ □ □ □ □ □
   - strongly disagree disagree slightly slightly strongly disagree disagree agree agree agree
** Remember: all statements are about babies six months or younger!

7. A young baby is spoiled when he/she gets into the habit of being held and rocked frequently.
   □   □   □   □   □   □
   strongly slightly slightly strongly
   disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree

8. Responding quickly to the baby’s cries encourages him/her to be demanding.
   □   □   □   □   □   □   □
   strongly slightly slightly strongly
   disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree

9. In order to keep a baby out of mischief (that is, pulling things out of their proper places, playing with things that aren’t toys, etc.) mothers should strictly limit the area of the house in which the baby is allowed to play.
   □   □   □   □   □   □   □
   strongly slightly slightly strongly
   disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree

10. I worry about spoiling my young baby by being an attentive mother.
    □   □   □   □   □   □   □
    strongly slightly slightly strongly
    disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree

11. Children should learn as young babies that a parent’s desire to have a neat and orderly house must be respected.
    □   □   □   □   □   □   □
    strongly slightly slightly strongly
    disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree

12. Young babies will learn more if they do not spend much time in a playpen.
    □   □   □   □   □   □   □
    strongly slightly slightly strongly
    disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree
** Remember: all statements are about babies six months or younger!

13. Since young babies cannot be trusted to do the right thing, their chances to misbehave must be limited.

strongly disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree

14. I believe that it is important to spend a lot of time talking to my young baby even before he/she can understand whatever it is I am saying.

strongly disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree

15. Young babies, who are held to firm rules, grow up to be the best adults.

strongly disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree

16. Talking to a young baby who cannot talk may keep the parent occupied but it probably has no effect on the baby.

strongly disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree

17. One of the best ways to prepare a young baby to be a good student in the future is to teach him/her to be obedient

strongly disagree disagree disagree agree agree agree
** Remember: all statements are about babies six months or younger!

18. Mothers who are very affectionate toward their young babies are likely to have children who grow up being overly dependent on the mother.

   □  □  □  □  □  □  □  
   strongly  slightly  slightly  strongly  
   disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree

19. Reading to a baby who is six months or younger has little effect on the baby.

   □  □  □  □  □  □  □  
   strongly  slightly  slightly  strongly  
   disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree

20. Parents should limit how much they express the affection they feel towards their young baby by limiting the amount of rocking, cuddling and holding.

   □  □  □  □  □  □  □  
   strongly  slightly  slightly  strongly  
   disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree

For the following statements, please circle whatever you believe a baby might be spoiled by. Responses range from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

21. Allowing him/her to have his/her own way.

   □  □  □  □  □  □  □  
   strongly  slightly  slightly  strongly  
   disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree

22. Not setting limits for him/her.

   □  □  □  □  □  □  □  
   strongly  slightly  slightly  strongly  
   disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree
** Remember: all statements are about babies six months or younger!

23. Being allowed to alter his/her parents’ schedules.
   
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |

   strongly  disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree

24. Receiving lots of material possessions.
   
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |

   strongly  disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree

25. Receiving too much attention.
   
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |

   strongly  disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree

26. Being rocked and held.
   
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |

   strongly  disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree

27. Receiving lots of affection.
   
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |
   |      |

   strongly  disagree  disagree  disagree  agree  agree  agree
** Remember: all statements are about babies six months or younger!

Please choose as many of the following that you believe may describe a spoiled baby (six months or younger):

28. Difficult to control □ 29. Well-adjusted □
30. Outgoing □ 31. Overindulged □
32. Demanding □ 33. Pleasant □
34. Content □ 35. Frustrated □
36. Obnoxious □ 37. Happy □
38. Sociable □ 39. Alert □
40. Affectionate □ 41. Other, Please specify: ______

For the following four questions, please circle the best option that describes your opinion.

42. In your opinion, which one is easier to spoil?
   □ A young baby girl   □ A young baby boy

43. In your opinion, which one is more likely to get spoiled?
   □ A young baby girl   □ A young baby boy

44. Is it a problem to spoil a young baby girl?
   □ Not at all   □ somewhat a problem   □ a problem   □ very much a problem

45. Is it a problem to spoil a young baby boy?
   □ Not at all   □ somewhat a problem   □ a problem   □ very much a problem
** Remember: all statements are about babies six months or younger!

For the following three questions, please circle either Yes or NO, depending on your opinion.

46. Can you spoil a young baby (six months or younger)?
   □ Yes    □ No

47. Should you spoil a baby (six months or younger)?
   □ Yes    □ No

48. Do you or did you spoil your baby (six months or younger)?
   □ Yes    □ No

Please provide the following information or circle the best choice that describes you. Do not write your name anywhere.

49. Your baby’s age is _____ months.

50. Your baby’s sex is:
    (1) Male
    (2) Female

51. Do you have other children?
    1. Yes          2. No

52. If you have other children, how many do you have? ______
** Remember: all statements are about babies six months or younger!

53. Please circle the one that describes you the most:
   (1) Caucasian
   (2) African American
   (3) Asian
   (4) Latino/ Hispanic
   (5) Other, Specify_______

54. Please circle the one that describes you the most:
   (1) Between 18 and 29 years of age
   (2) Between 30 to 39 years of age
   (3) Older than 40 years of age

55. Please circle the one that describes you the most:
   (1) Did not complete high school
   (2) High school graduate or equivalent (GED)
   (3) Some college
   (4) Associate degree (2 years of college)
   (5) Bachelor’s degree Undergraduate degree (4 years of college)
   (6) Some graduate school
   (7) Master’s degree
   (8) PhD or equivalent (PsyD, Ed.D., M.D.)

56. Please circle the one that describes you the most:
   (1) Annual household income is below $15,000
   (2) Annual household income is between $15,000 and $33,000
   (3) Annual household income is between $34,000 and $50,000
   (4) Annual household income is above $50,000
APPENDIX B

PARENTING BELIEFS QUESTIONS FROM SECTION 1 OF THE SURVEY
PARENTING BELIEFS QUESTIONS FROM SECTION 1 OF THE SURVEY

Beliefs Regarding Spoiling

- “It is likely that you will spoil your young baby if you respond to most of his/her cries.” (Q1)

- “A mother can spoil her young baby by giving him/her great deal of attention.” (Q4)

- “A young baby is spoiled when he/she gets into the habit of being held and rocked frequently.” (Q7)

- “Responding quickly to the baby’s cries encourages him/her to be demanding.” (Q8)

- “I worry about spoiling my young baby by being an attentive mother.” (Q10)

- “Mothers who are very affectionate toward their young babies are likely to have children who grow up being overly dependent on the mother.” (Q18)

- “Parents should limit how much they express the affection they feel toward their young baby by limiting the amount of rocking, cuddling and holding.” (Q20)

Beliefs Regarding Floor Freedom

- “Young babies need to learn to play by themselves and therefore should spend a few hours each day in the playpen with little adult interruption.” (Q2)
- “A long as the baby is safe and the object will not be damaged, he/she should be allowed to play with almost any object in the home that interests him/her.” (Q5)

- “In order to keep a baby out of mischief (that is, pulling things out of their proper places, playing with things that aren’t toys, etc.) mothers should strictly limit the area of the house in which the baby is allowed to play.” (Q9)

- “Children should learn as young babies that a parent’s desire to have a neat and orderly house must be respected.” (Q11)

- “Young babies will learn more if they do not spend much time in a playpen.” (Q12)

- “Since young babies cannot be trusted to do the right thing, their chances to misbehave must be limited.” (Q13)

*Beliefs Regarding Discipline and Control*

- “Parents should be strict with their young babies or they will be difficult to manage later on.” (Q3)

- “The most important task of parenting is disciplining the baby.” (Q6)

- “Young babies, who are held to firm rules, grow up to be the best adult.”(Q15)

- “One of the best ways to prepare a young baby to be a good student in the future is to teach him/her to be obedient.”(Q17)
Beliefs Regarding Talking and Reading

- “I believe that it is important to spend a lot of time talking to my young baby even before he/she can understand whatever it is I am saying.” (Q14)

- “Talking to a young baby who can’t talk may keep the parent occupied but it probably has no effect on the baby.” (Q16)

- “Reading to a baby who is six months or younger has little effect on the baby.” (Q19)
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Informed Consent Form

This study explores mothers’ perceptions of spoiling young infants (six months or younger). The purpose of this study is to learn about mother’s perceptions about spoiling as well as to identify possible implications for working with mothers and their infants. The study is being carried out as a part of Dorit Radnai-Griffin’s graduate program at the Department of Individual and Family Studies at the University of Delaware.

Participants in this study will be recruited from various childcare facilities and child-parent programs. Approximately fifty mothers will participate in this study. Participation in the study is voluntary, and it will be require answering questions from a survey that will take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time. These questions will ask you to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with different opinions regarding spoiling of young infants (six months or younger). It is hoped that the information collected from this study will help programs working with infants to better meet the needs of mothers and their children. As a “Thank You” for your participation, you will receive a children’s book. Other than the book and providing a chance for you to think about spoiling behaviors and your child, there will be no direct benefits to you as a result of your participation.

Please be assured that all information provided by you will remain confidential. At no time will your name be reported with your responses. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the University of Delaware, and will be kept for a maximum of five years at which time it will be destroyed. Essentially your participation poses no known risks to you. You can refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without being penalized in any way. Your participation in this study will not affect your involvement in any services that you are receiving. Finally, although no questions in the survey ask about child abuse, if you provided additional information that indicated a child was being abused, I am required, as an education professional, to report such information to the proper authorities.

If you have questions about the study you may contact Dorit Radnai-Griffin at (302/897-5470). If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board, Office of the Vice-Provost for Research, 124 Hullihen Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware 19716 (302/831-2136).

By your signature below, you agree to participate in the study. You will be given a copy of this form.

_____________________                     ___________
Participant signature                   Date