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## **Becoming Our Parents: A Proposed Investigation into Family Influence in Consumer Behavior**

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Becoming Our Parents:

A Proposed Investigation into Family Influence in Consumer Behavior

by

Katie E. Bowman

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Submitted to the Honors College of  
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**Abstract**

Relationships between children and parents have been studied for years across multiple disciplines. Family ties affect countless decisions made throughout the world, making this study relevant to multiple researchers. The need to understand these family influences is particularly important within the business world. Because sales are the goal, being able to comprehend *why* a consumer purchases one product over the rest of its competition is crucial. This paper is focused specifically on the relationships between parents and their children and how that relationship affects the consumer behavior of the children. These relationships are being studied through intergenerational consumer patterns including consumer socialization, parental influence on the purchasing decisions of their children, and dynamics of the parent/child relationship.

Key Words: family, influence, consumer socialization, sales, relationship, parents, children, consumer behavior

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## **Introduction**

Some people cringe at the thought of visiting the marketplace, while others do so for pleasure during their leisure time. Every step within the consumption process involves decision making, from store preference to the choice of which goods or services are purchased. If a good is being purchased, brand selection adds more choices to the process. Because, traditionally, parents or guardians are the heads of the household, they are the ones making most of the purchasing decisions; this dynamic limits the power children have during the consumption process. As children grow up, they begin to progressively make more choices when shopping until, one day (around 18-23), they are deciding on everything they buy on their own. This phenomenon leads to the following research questions: 1) How do young adult consumers make their decisions? 2) What influences them to choose one product over its competition? 3) Where did their opinions about the marketplace originate?

In order to address these research questions, this study focuses on the influence of parents on the consumer decisions of their children. Traditional college age students (18 to 23) are realizing how similar their purchasing decisions are to those of their parents. Is this because tastes and preferences have been passed down through generations or because of familiarity with products exposed to these students as children? Perhaps it is a combination of both of these possibilities because they seemingly go hand in hand. This research was conducted to determine the answer. Through the study of consumer socialization, the role parents play in developing a child's thoughts and opinions on purchases made is looked at closely. This area of research is important because tracking purchasing decisions across generations helps researchers to better understand the

influence of family. Possibly the most frequently studied area in this domain, is the parent/child relationship itself. There are infinite possibilities for the dynamic of this relationship. There is no doubt that parents influence their children. Even parents who are not present in their children's lives contribute to the psychological and emotional development of their offspring. By researching these topics, inferences can be made as to how they relate to one another, and, ultimately, how they come together to create the consumer behavior of young adults. With the Millennial generation steadily taking control of the economy, it is important for companies to understand what drives their decision making. By examining how these consumers are influenced, products can be more effectively marketed.

In order to address the aforementioned research questions, this paper includes a review of the relevant literature to form several hypotheses. The hypotheses were tested via an experimental design approach using ANOVA to analyze the data. A discussion of the results along with managerial implications, study limitations, and future research possibilities are also included.

### **Literature Review**

Most patterns of adult purchasing behavior are acquired early in life (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). Children are exposed to the marketplace at an early age through their caregivers. Derived from traditional socialization theory, intergenerational research has emphasized childhood learning in recognition of the significant impact these early experiences may have in shaping patterns of thought and behavior later in life (Moore-Shay, 1997). In one existing research study, the mother-daughter shopping relationship was the primary investigation. A few respondents mentioned that earlier shopping experiences with their mothers still influence their values today, evidence that values are



transferred from one generation to the next (Minahan & Huddleston, 2003). Clearly, the family role in consumer socialization has stuck with these respondents throughout their lives. The influence of their mothers' helped shape the women in this study in their own shopping endeavors. The data reveal that the relationship between mother and daughter is critical to the shopping experience at all life stages (Minahan & Huddleston, 2003).

Family influence is also important for fathers and sons, but the role of fathers in relationship with their sons is less focused on the marketplace than that of mothers and daughters. Men expressed a great deal of appreciation when their fathers gave them time, when they attended their sporting events, went camping, shared family stories, worked on motors, or played catch (Long, Fish, Scheffler, & Hanert, 2014). Similarly, this study examined how the nature of children's relationships with their parents affects the way parents influence purchasing decisions.

It is believed that the adolescent years are when most consumer learning takes place and is an important time in the socialization process (Moschis, Prahato, & Mitchell, 1986). The key constructs of the consumer socialization process include cognition, attitudes, and value formation towards consumption (Haq & Rahman, 2008).

Socialization is crucial to determine a person's tastes and preferences and shapes an individual as a consumer. Family is the major context within which children are socialized about consumer behaviors (Carruth & Skinner, 2001).

Children are raised by their parents and are socialized throughout the process of growing up and interacting with their family. However, children are also influenced and socialized by society and their relationships with people outside of their family. These multiple influences play into the socialization process and affect consumer behavior.

Socialization happens naturally and often without much thought by the parties involved, so it may seem as though consumer behavior patterns are merely a coincidence.

Similarities in consumption behavior between generations also could arise even if parents do not actively influence their children (Waldkirch, Ng, & Cox, 2004). The construct of consumer interpersonal influence, operationalized through an individual difference measure, reflects the traditions of both social psychology and personality psychology (Schroeder, 1996). As such, this study was designed to determine how social psychology and personality psychology work together in purchasing decisions.

The Millennial generation plays a large role in today's society. Millennials now comprise the largest population group, having grabbed this position from the Baby Boomer generation. They represent 27.4 percent of the population while Boomers equal 23 percent according to the 2012 U.S. Census. Millennials are expected to make up 50 percent of the workforce by the end of 2014 and 75 percent by 2025, and be responsible for 30 percent of retail sales by 2020 (Knobler, 2015). Because of the huge influence that Millennials have on the economy, it is important to understand their purchasing decisions. By using traditional college age students, this study focused on the consumer behavior of Millennials who are just entering their prime spending years (Knobler, 2015). Much of the experimental research conducted in psychology and consumer behavior has used college students as respondents (Park & Lessig, 1977). This study of traditional college age students and their parents/guardians investigated the influences of the parent/child relationship on consumer behavior patterns within families.

In investigating the nature of interpersonal influence susceptibility, sociologists distinguish between normative and informative influences (Higby & Mascarenhas, 1993).

Both of these social influences are used by parents as they socialize their offspring.

Informative influence, sometimes referred to as informational influence, is conforming to others because of the belief that they are more knowledgeable than the individual alone (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Thus, an influence would be internalized if it were perceived as enhancing the individual's knowledge about his environment and/or his ability to cope with some aspect of it (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Normative influence, on the other hand, is an individual's conformation to others because of their perceived expectations of the individual. The individual is influenced by the hope for approval or the fear of disapproval; sometimes the influence comes from the hope for reward or the fear of punishment. Here the individual performs the behavior or adopts the belief due to its enhancing or supporting effect on his self-concept and the reward inherent in this enhancement or support (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Also, consistent with the motivation to turn to parents based on either legitimate family position or teen identification with parents, the role of parents in private and necessity purchases may be based on legitimate and referent power (Goodrich & Mangleburg, 2010). Mother-child co-shopping and mothers' role modelling are major means of teaching consumer goals/skills; mothers consciously consumer train their children. (Carruth & Skinner, 2001). Based on the aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H<sub>1a</sub>: Stronger mother/child relationships will have a greater normative influence than weaker relationships.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Stronger mother/child relationships will have a greater informative influence than weaker relationships.

H<sub>1c</sub>: Stronger father/child relationships will have a greater normative influence than weaker relationships.

H<sub>1d</sub>: Stronger father/child relationships will have a greater informative influence than weaker relationships.

In order to understand how students are influenced during the consumption process, it is important to understand the different types of products they are shopping for. Products are generally made up of two subcategories: hedonic and utilitarian. Utilitarian products are those that have many substitutes. Consumers choose utilitarian products based on the best price. Hedonic products, however, require more thought. With hedonic goods, product features become more important to the consumer than just the price. Examples of hedonic products include apparel, furniture, jewelry, home appliances, etc.

When purchasing risks are higher, more time and thought are put into the process. Specialty goods fall into this category. Specialty goods have particularly unique characteristics and brand identifications for which a significant group of buyers is willing to make a special purchasing effort (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2016). Examples of these are cars, homes, designer clothing, etc. In most purchase categories, the extent to which the purchase and/or usage of a product or service is seen by others does not relate directly to the functional benefits it delivers to the user, but may elicit judgments on the part of social observers (Lord, Lee, & Choong, 2001). However, specialty goods fall under a different purchasing category because of the high financial investment. Higher parent influences for special products are expected (Higby & Mascarenhas, 1993). In general, consumers are more conscious about purchasing higher risk goods. Thus,

someone high in public self-consciousness may be more susceptible to normative influence regarding consumer decisions, due to the links between public self-consciousness and conforming behaviors (Schroeder, 1996). Different product types result in different levels of influence from outside sources, including parents. Reference groups are those people whom one refers to, aspires to be like, and shares values with. Bourne assumed that reference groups influence many consumer decisions—and he expected reference group influence to vary from product to product (Schroeder, 1996). Hedonic purchases require thought and are purchased for enjoyment. Normative influence refers to following the norm to fit in (Schroeder, 1996). Utilitarian purchases are made due to necessity, so there should be less public self-consciousness involved, reducing the need to conform. All of this information leads to these hypotheses:

H<sub>2a</sub>: Normative influence will be stronger when children are shopping for hedonic products than when they are shopping for utilitarian products.

H<sub>2b</sub>: Informative influence will be stronger when children are shopping for utilitarian products than when they are shopping for hedonic products.

H<sub>2c</sub>: Normative influence will be strongest when children are shopping for specialty goods.

When assessing the types of influence parents have on students' purchasing decisions, it is important to understand which parent students think of when shopping. Mothers and daughters are an influential dyad seen in US shopping malls, and their purchasing power is critical to the success of the retail industry (Minahan & Huddleston, 2013). The mother/daughter relationship is present throughout society today. Little girls and their mothers wear matching princess costumes to Disney World; teenagers and their

mothers get manicures and pedicures together; brides to be and their mothers go wedding dress shopping together; the stereotypes go on and on. The partnership extends beyond the transfer of skills and knowledge to the construction of identity (Minahan & Huddleston, 2013). While the mother/daughter relationship is synonymous with retail, the father/son relationship has its own stereotype. Sports, cars, and fishing are just a few of these stereotypical interests that fathers and their sons bond over while mothers and daughters share knowledge of bargaining, seeking value and quality in merchandise and budgeting, and understanding the routines and rituals of retail shopping (Minahan & Huddleston, 2013). The previous research findings led to the following hypothesis for this study:

H<sub>3</sub>: Normative and informative influences will be most present between mothers and their daughters than any other parent/child dyad.

### **Methodology**

This research was conducted through an online survey via Qualtrics that was distributed through the social media outlet Facebook. The participant population is college students from ages 18 to 23. The criteria for selection was that participants must be college age students in order to see the results from the Millennial generation. 81 participants participated in one of three surveys. The subject population included both men and women and several ethnicities. No respondent was excluded for any reason other than not meeting the age requirement of 18 to 23 years old. Incomplete surveys were deleted from the final dataset. The survey began with standard demographic questions: age, gender, education level, etc. and also includes a “quality check” question

to minimize errors within the data collection process. There were no issues with the quality check.

An experimental design approach was used to develop the study. In an effort to manipulate the product type (utilitarian, hedonic, and specialty) there were three versions of this survey. They were all exactly the same except for the product included in the survey. One survey showed a hedonic product (cell phone), one showed a utilitarian product (laundry detergent), and one showed a specialty product (car). The questions representing the primary dependent variables (informative and normative influence) were based on questions asked in a previous research study conducted by Schroeder (1996). The sample products representing the three experimental conditions were chosen after reviewing several similar studies as well.

The constructs measured were the strength of the relationship students feel they have with their parent(s), the degree of informative and normative influence students feel their parent(s) have on their general purchasing decisions, and the degree of informative and normative influence students feel their parent(s) have on a specific purchasing decision. Eight survey questions were used to measure the nature and strength of relationships between students and their parents. Students were asked to indicate how strong they felt their relationship with each parent is (strong, moderate, weak, or not applicable). Then, students were asked which parent he or she feels the most similar to as well as which parent he or she feels closest to. A final open ended question was used for students to briefly explain their relationship with the parent they identified being closest to. To transition from relationships into influence, two questions regarding frequency of

communication between students and parents, both in general and regarding consumption intentions, were used.

In order to gauge parental influence on students' consumer decisions, seven questions from Schroeder's study were used twice, once generally and once regarding the purchase of a specific product. Three questions were asked about informative influence, and four questions were asked about normative influence. Students responded to these questions using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Depending on which variation of the survey students took, they were given a product and then asked the same seven questions about purchasing the specific product shown.

## **Results**

The data collected from Qualtrics was run through SPSS statistical software. All of the demographic data can be viewed in Appendix A. After running a reliability analysis on the constructs being measured, it was determined that all of the survey data was reliable. The questions about informative influence in general reported a Cronbach's Alpha value of .880, and the general normative influence questions had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .891. Questions about informative influence in relation to a specific product had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .942, and the normative influence questions about a specific product reported a Cronbach's Alpha value of .928. Because all of these values are greater than the acceptable value of .7, they are all reliable measures.

After determining that all of the survey measures were reliable, the values were summated for use in further analyses. In regards to hypothesis H<sub>1a</sub>, a one-way ANOVA test was used to analyze the data collected. First, Levene's Test was used to determine if



the data meets the assumption of equal variances. For general normative influence in regards to students' mothers ( $H_{1a}$ ), the Levene statistic F-value was .532 with a p-value of .468. Because the p-value is greater than the predetermined significance level of .05, it is not significant. This means that the data meets the assumption of equal variances. The ANOVA test for general normative influence regarding mothers had an F-value of 4.171 and an associated p-value of .044 between groups. This p-value is lower than the accepted significance level of .05. This means that the significant F-test indicates that there is a significant difference between the means. For students who ranked their relationship with their mother as "strong", the mean of the strength of general normative influence is 3.2192. The mean of the strength of general normative influence for students who classify their relationship with their mother as "moderate" is 2.6875.

General informative influence based on the strength of the student/mother relationship ( $H_{1b}$ ) reported a Levene statistic F-value of 3.789 with a p-value of .055. Because this value is larger than .05, it is not significant. This means that the data meets the assumption of equal variances. The ANOVA test results for this hypothesis were similar to those of  $H_{1a}$ . The p-value for general informative influence regarding mothers was .011 with an associated F-value of 6.732. Because p-value is lower than the accepted level of .05, the means between the two groups are significantly different. Students who categorized their relationship with their mother as "strong" reported a mean of the strength of general informative influence as 3.9436. The mean of the strength of general informative influence for students who classify their relationship with their mother as "moderate" is 3.3125.

Next, the father/student relationship's effect on general normative and informative influences was analyzed. The normative influence involving student/father relationships ( $H_{1c}$ ) reported a Levene statistic F-value of 3.980 with a p-value of .023. Since this value falls below the significance level of .05, it means that the data does not meet the assumption of equal variances. This results in a possible limitation of the data as discussed later. The ANOVA test for general normative influence regarding fathers had an F-value of 11.929 and an associated p-value of .000 between groups. This p-value is lower than the accepted significance level of .05. This means that the significant F-test indicates that there is a significant difference between at least one of the group means. For students who ranked their relationship with their fathers as "strong", the mean of the strength of general normative influence is 3.4333. The mean of the strength of general normative influence for students who classify their relationship with their fathers as "moderate" is 2.9239. In relation to students who defined their relationship with their fathers as "weak", the mean of the strength of general normative influence is 2.0250.

Then, a post-hoc analysis with the Tukey HSD test was conducted to determine which means were significantly different. This test determined that "strong" student/father relationships are significantly different than "weak" student/father relationships ( $p = .000$ ). "Moderate" relationships between students and their fathers are significantly different than "weak" student/father relationships ( $p = .018$ ). However, there is no significant difference between "strong" and "moderate" relationships between students and their fathers ( $p = .057$ ).

Father/student relationships and informative influence ( $H_{1d}$ ) has a Levene statistic F-value of .432 and a p-value of .651. Because the p-value is greater than .05, this data

meets the assumption of equal variances. The ANOVA test for general informative influence regarding fathers had an F-value of 4.969 and an associated p-value of .009 between groups. This p-value is lower than the accepted significance level of .05. This means that the significant F-test indicates that there is a significant difference between at least one of the group means. For students who ranked their relationship with their fathers as “strong”, the mean of the strength of general normative influence is 4.0148. The mean of the strength of general normative influence for students who classify their relationship with their fathers as “moderate” is 3.7246. In relation to students who defined their relationship with their fathers as “weak”, the mean of the strength of general normative influence is 3.0667.

Again, a post-hoc analysis with the Tukey HSD test was run to identify the significant difference(s). This test determined that “strong” student/father relationships are significantly different than “weak” student/father relationships ( $p = .007$ ). “Moderate” relationships between students and their fathers are not significantly different than “weak” student/father relationships ( $p = .122$ ). There is also no significant difference between “strong” and “moderate” relationships between students and their fathers ( $p = .402$ ).

When analyzing the data gathered in regards to parent/student relationship strength, students generally reported stronger relationships with their mothers. Out of the 81 respondents, 65 rated their relationship with their mother “strong”, and the remaining 16 labeled it “moderate”. No respondents described their relationship with their mother as “weak”.

Relationships between students and their fathers was more complex. Three individuals answered “not applicable” in regards to the strength of the relationship they have with their fathers, so these respondents were screened out of this analysis. Out of the 78 remaining respondents, only 45 described their relationship with their fathers as “strong”. 23 students reported their relationships with their fathers to be “moderate”, and 10 people described the relationship with their fathers as “weak”. Regarding the hypotheses, stronger relationships were all significantly different than at least one of the weaker (“moderate” or “weak”) relationships for both informative and normative influences. Thus, the first four hypotheses were supported.

For hypotheses  $H_{2a}$ ,  $H_{2b}$ , and  $H_{2c}$ , a one-way ANOVA test was used again. This analysis compared the three product types to determine the impact of normative and informative influences. For each hypothesis, the homogeneity of variance assumption was tested with the Levene’s test. Next, the ANOVA results for each hypothesis were studied, followed by an examination of the group means.

In regards to  $H_{2a}$ , the Levene statistic F-value for normative influence on specific products was .552 with a p-value of .578. This means that the data meets the assumption of equal variances. The ANOVA test for parent normative influence on specific product purchases has an F-value of 3.592 with an associated p-value of .032. Because this p-value is less than the accepted significance level of .05, it indicates a significant difference in at least one of the group means. The mean for parent normative influence on the purchase of hedonic products is 2.5185. Parent normative influence on students buying utilitarian products has a mean of 2.9400. Normative influence from parents on specialty goods that students purchase has a mean of 3.2679. In order to determine which

means are significantly different from each other, a post-hoc analysis through the Tukey HSD test was conducted. Normative influence on hedonic purchases is significantly different than specialty products ( $p = .024$ ). No significant difference exists between normative influence on hedonic and utilitarian products ( $p = .315$ ). There is also no significant difference between normative influence on utilitarian and specialty products ( $p = .488$ ).

In regards to  $H_{2b}$ , the Levene statistic F-value for informative influence on specific products was .293 with a p-value of .747. Since this value is greater than the significance level of .05, the data collected meets the assumption of equal variances. The ANOVA test for parent informative influence on specific product purchases has an F-value of 16.234 with an associated p-value of .000. Since this p-value is lower than the accepted significance level of .05, there is a significant difference in at least one of the group means. The mean for parent informative influence on the purchase of hedonic products is 2.4321. Parent informative influence on students buying utilitarian products has a mean of 3.5333. Informative influence from parents on specialty goods that students purchase has a mean of 4.0119. A post-hoc analysis with the Tukey HSD test was run to determine which groups had different means. Informative influence on hedonic products is significantly different than utilitarian products ( $p = .001$ ). Significant difference between means also exists between informative influence on hedonic products and specialty products ( $p = .000$ ). However, there is no significant difference between informative influence on utilitarian products and specialty products ( $p = .229$ ).

The data collected through this part of the survey used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”, to assess how strongly students

feel a specific purchasing decision is influenced by their parent(s). Due to this, the means of the data are analyzed to determine the strength/presence of the influence; the higher the mean, the stronger the influence.  $H_{2a}$  states that parent normative influence will be stronger when students are purchasing hedonic products as opposed to utilitarian products. The means recorded for normative influence are 2.5185 for hedonic products and 2.9400 for utilitarian products. The means for informative influence are 2.4321 for hedonic products and 3.5333 for utilitarian products. This data disproves  $H_{2a}$  because the utilitarian mean was higher in both informative influence and normative influence. This same data proves  $H_{2b}$  because students reported feeling stronger informative influences from their parents regarding both hedonic and utilitarian products.

To analyze  $H_{2c}$ , an ANOVA test was used. Once again, studying the means of the data is how to determine the strength of parental influence. The means for products regarding normative influence are 2.5185 for hedonic products, 2.9400 for utilitarian products, and 3.2679 for specialty products. This data supports  $H_{2c}$  because the mean of specialty purchases data in this category is clearly higher than hedonic and/or utilitarian purchases. This ANOVA test shows that informative influence is also the strongest when students are purchasing specialty products.

The last hypothesis looked at the individual combinations of parent/student dyads and analyzed both the strength of the relationships and the amount of each influence felt by the student. First, a one-way ANOVA test was run to analyze the data in regards to normative influence. The Levene statistic F-value for normative influence is .579 with a p-value of .630. Because the p-value is greater than .05, the data meets the assumption of equal variances. The ANOVA test for normative influence has an F-value of 2.474 with

an associated p-value of .068. Since this p-value is greater than the pre-stated significance level of .05, there are no significant differences between any of the group means. To test this hypothesis, the survey data had to be coded to classify students and their parent(s) into dyads to analyze. Dyads were coded through an analysis of gender and student reported parent closeness. For general normative influence, the mother/daughter dyad has a mean of 3.1920, the father/daughter dyad has a mean of 3.4500, the mother/son dyad has a mean of 2.3438, and the father/son dyad has a mean of 3.0833.

The second analysis considered informative influence. The Levene statistic F-value regarding informative influence is 1.350 with a p-value of .265. Since the p-value is greater than the pre-stated significance level of .05, the data meets the assumption of equal variances. The ANOVA test for informative influence has an F-value of 2.338 and an associated p-value of .081. Because this p-value is greater than the significance level of .05, there are no significant differences within the group means of this data. For general informative influence, the mother/daughter dyad has a mean of 3.9345, the father/daughter dyad has a mean of 4.0000, the mother/son dyad has a mean of 3.2500, and the father/son dyad has a mean of 3.1111.

By looking at the means, it can be determined which dyad is influenced the most strongly. Although 56 respondents out of 77 identified as part of the mother/daughter dyad, neither the normative nor informative influence means were the highest. 10 students reported being a part of the father/daughter dyad, 8 people fell into the mother/son dyad, and 3 respondents claimed to be within the father/son dyad. The highest mean values were reported under the father/daughter dyad regarding both informative and normative influence; the mother/daughter dyad was in second place in both

categories. This data disproves H<sub>3</sub> because normative and informative influences are both the most present within the father/daughter dyad.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study provide a deeper insight into the role parents play in the purchasing decisions of their college age students. This study also determined how the nature of the relationship between parents and their children plays a role in consumer behavior. The data showed that the majority of respondents communicate with their parent(s) more than five times a week, with only four respondents reporting communicating with their parents less than two or three times per week. However, students did not report communicating with their parents about their purchasing intentions nearly as often. 46 out of the 81 respondents indicated feeling the most similar to their mothers. 31 students reported being more similar to their fathers, and four respondents said that they feel most similar to another person who plays the parental role in their life. 64 students stated that they feel the closest to their mothers, and only 13 respondents reported feeling closest to their fathers. Again, four students said that they feel closest to another person besides their mothers or fathers. The open-ended question that asked respondents to briefly explain their relationship with the parent they indicated being the closest to provided a lot of insight into why students felt the way that they did. It was surprising how many people reported being most similar to their fathers, but the number who indicated being closest to their fathers was much lower. One of the most used phrases within the description of students' relationship with the parent they are closest to was "best friend". Mothers were often described as being respondents' best friends who they can talk about anything with. Several students described talking to their



fathers about money or logical decision making. This provides an answer as to why students were vastly more connected to their mothers, but were not necessarily the most heavily influenced by them.

Looking back at hypotheses H<sub>1a</sub>, H<sub>1b</sub>, H<sub>1c</sub>, and H<sub>1d</sub>, it was interesting that out of the 81 respondents, none of them reported having a weak relationship with their mother. What is even more interesting is that there was a significant difference between the means of students with a “strong” relationship with their mother and students with a “moderate” relationship with their mother. Furthermore, this significant difference was present in both normative and informative influence. This means that stronger relationships between students and their mothers are significantly more influential on students’ purchasing decisions.

With such a large portion of respondents reporting a strong relationship with their mother, it was surprising to see that the same feelings did not carry over to fathers. While strong relationships with fathers were still the majority, almost half of those surveyed described their relationship with their fathers to be moderate or weak. All demographic information can be viewed in Appendix A.

Looking at H<sub>2a</sub>, H<sub>2b</sub>, and H<sub>2c</sub>, there were some unexpected results. A stronger normative influence when shopping for hedonic goods rather than utilitarian goods (H<sub>2a</sub>) was disproved because informative influence was stronger, though not significantly, than normative influence in every kind of purchase. Parental influences on specialty purchases, as expected, consistently reported the highest mean. However, there was only a significant difference between specialty purchases and hedonic purchases, which was unexpected.

The final hypothesis researched through this study was the most complex and offered very interesting results. After all student relationships with mothers were classified as strong or moderate while relationships with fathers seemed to be significantly weaker, the father/daughter dyad actually offered the highest levels of influence, both normative and informative. Mothers and daughters were the second strongest dyad, but the fathers and daughters have them beat, although not significantly. After the results of the research were reviewed, extra literature about the father/daughter dyad was examined to see if other studies found similar relationships. Respect, support, willingness to learn, and a collaborative relationship were evident in these father–daughter relationships (Smythe & Sardeshmukh, 2013). My findings support this literature. Daughters reflect the feelings listed towards their fathers through the heavy influence fathers have on their purchasing decisions.

After all of these findings, marketers should be able to see how to target Millennials through their parents. Because normative influence is not as prominent as informative influence, Millennials are seeking information and knowledge from their parents when making purchasing decisions, so marketing should adjust accordingly. College age shoppers who are close to their parents are significantly more likely to be influenced by them when making purchasing decisions. Companies need to use this to their advantage, possibly marketing products to Millennials through their parents. Also, mothers and daughters are not the stand alone parent/child dyad to target. Fathers and daughters have a more influential relationship when it comes to purchasing decisions, and should not be forgotten about by marketers.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although the study featured significant findings, this research does feature several limitations. I would have preferred for my survey respondents to have not been so skewed with one gender over the other. I also wish that I had had a larger number of respondents in general. The ethnicity representation was also very heavily Caucasian with few other races represented. I believe that I faced these issues because of how this survey was distributed. Facebook is a great tool to gain a survey sample, but the outlets of Facebook used are important. By using a sorority Facebook outlet, in general, most of the survey respondents were Caucasian females from similar demographic backgrounds. However, by also posting the link on my personal Facebook page, multiple diverse respondents participated in the survey as well. Limitations within this research were likely due to the similarities within the sample. For example, general normative influence between students and fathers ( $H_{1c}$ ), did not meet the assumption of equal variances. This is likely due to issues with the survey sample size.

This research project provides information about how Millennial college age students view their parents and make their purchasing decisions, but there is still a lot of information to be gathered on the subject of this rapidly growing generation. Future research could delve deeper into the family dyads and how and why gender roles play into parental influence. The consumption arena is an excellent forum to study basic issues of influence processes (Schroeder, 1996). With constantly changing trends in marketing and consumption in general, the possibilities for research are seemingly endless. Through advertising, individuals are subject to a staggering array of social messages every day (Schroeder, 1996). Advertisements need to be created to effectively reach and engage the

target audience, and that cannot be done without a firm understanding of the target audience as consumers. This study identified some of the ways Millennials are influenced when making purchasing decisions. Many other influences besides parents exist and need to be studied in the future for a better understanding of the consumer behavior of the generation that is rapidly gaining control of the marketplace.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A: Participant Data**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
18	4
19	7
20	13
21	28
22	21
23	7

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Male	12
Female	69

<b>Race</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
White/Caucasian	76
African American	0
Hispanic	1
Asian	1
Native American	1
Pacific Islander	1
Other	1

<b>Highest Level of Education Completed</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Less than High School	0
High School/GED	4
Some College	54
2-year College Degree	4
4-year College Degree	19
Masters Degree	0

<b>Parental Situation</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Married parents	55
Divorced parents, remarried	10
Divorced parents, single	9
Single parent, mother	2
Single parent, father	0
Other	5



## Appendix B: Survey

### Thesis Survey

Q1 I am a Marketing major at the University of Southern Mississippi. The following research study is designed to better understand the dynamic and strength of the relationships between college-age students and their parents and how this relationship affects the students' purchasing decisions. You must be between 18 and 23 years old to participate in this survey, but your participation is purely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice. Your participation in this survey should take approximately fifteen minutes. Your responses will remain confidential and only aggregated results of the research will be published with individual participants unidentified. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential by being combined with others, and used only for research purposes. This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820. Thank you so much for your participation!

Q2 Instructions: Please provide some basic information about yourself by answering the following questions.

Q3 How old are you?

Q4 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q5 What is your race?

- White/Caucasian (1)
- African American (2)
- Hispanic (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native American (5)
- Pacific Islander (6)
- Other (7)

Q6 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than High School (1)
- High School / GED (2)
- Some College (3)
- 2-year College Degree (4)
- 4-year College Degree (5)
- Masters Degree (6)

Q7 Instructions: Please provide some information about your relationship status with your parents by answering the following questions.

Q8 Which of the following categories best describes your parental situation?

- Married parents (1)
- Divorced parents, remarried (2)
- Divorced parents, single (3)
- Single parent, mother (4)
- Single parent, father (5)
- Other (please describe in the blank below) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q9 How would you describe your relationship with your mother?

- Strong (1)
- Moderate (2)
- Weak (3)
- N/A (4)

Q10 How would you describe your relationship with your father?

- Strong (1)
- Moderate (2)
- Weak (3)
- N/A (4)

Q11 Which parent do you feel you are the most similar to?

- Mother (1)
- Father (2)
- Other (3)

Q12 Which parent do you feel you are the closest to?

- Mother (1)
- Father (2)
- Other (3)

Q13 Briefly describe the relationship between you and the parent you are closest to. Please provide examples to illustrate how you are close to this parent.

Q14 How often do you communicate with at least one of your parents?

- Never (1)
- Once a month (2)
- 2-3 times a month (3)
- Once a week (4)
- 2-3 times a week (5)
- 4-5 times a week (6)
- More than 5 times a week (7)

Q15 How often do you communicate with at least one of your parents about your consumption intentions and/or habits?

- Never (1)
- Once a month (2)
- 1-3 times a month (3)
- Once a week (4)
- 2-3 times a week (5)
- 4-5 times a week (6)
- More than 5 times a week (7)

Q16 Instructions: Please provide some information about how your parents influence your purchase decisions by answering the following questions.

Q17 If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my parent(s) about the product.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q18 I frequently gather information from my parent(s) about a product before I buy.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q19 For this question, please simply select "C".

- A (1)
- B (2)
- C (3)
- D (4)
- E (5)

Q20 To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often ask my parent(s) about the product.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q21 When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think my parent(s) will approve of.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q22 I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that my parent(s) purchase.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q23 If my parent(s) can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q24 It is important to me that my parent(s) like the products and brands I buy.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q25 Instructions: Please think about the type of product featured below as you answer the following questions. (A picture of either cell phones, laundry detergent, or cars would be shown here depending on which version of the survey was being taken.)

Q26 If I have little experience with this product (featured above), I often ask my parent(s) about this product.

- Strongly Disagree (4)
- Disagree (5)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (6)
- Agree (7)
- Strongly Agree (8)

Q27 I frequently gather information from my parent(s) about this product (featured above) before I buy.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q28 To make sure I buy the right product or brand when purchasing the product featured above, I often ask my parent(s) about this product.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q29 When buying this product (featured above), I generally purchase those brands that I think my parent(s) would approve of.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q30 I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing this same product (featured above) and brands that my parent(s) purchase.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q31 If my parent(s) can see me using the product featured above, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q32 In relation to the product shown above, it is important to me that my parent(s) like the products and brands I buy.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q33 Thank you for your participation in this survey!



## Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | [www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board](http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board)

### NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.  
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 16033007

PROJECT TITLE: Becoming our Parents: A Proposed Investigation into Family Influence in Consumer Behavior

PROJECT TYPE: New Project

RESEARCHER(S): Katie Bowman

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Business

DEPARTMENT: Marketing

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 03/31/2016 to 03/30/2017

**Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.**

**Institutional Review Board**