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PARENTAL EXPERIENCES OF DIFFICULTY:  
A STUDY OF HOW PARENTS PERCEIVE  
AND RESPOND TO THEIR CHILD'S  
TEMPERAMENT

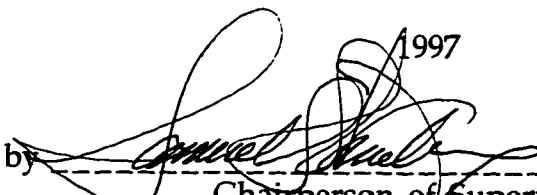
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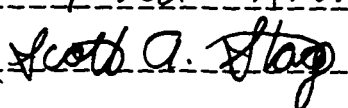
Stephanie Sarantos

A dissertation submitted in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

Approved by  1997  
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Chairperson of Supervisory Committee

  
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## **Doctoral Dissertation**

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**University of Washington**

**Abstract**

**Parental Experiences of Difficulty:  
A Study of How Parents Perceive and Respond  
to their Child's Temperament**

**by Stephanie Sarantos**

**Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee  
Professor Samuel S. Wineburg  
Department of Education**

This study addresses two central questions: How do parents form perceptions of their child's temperament? And, how do these perceptions influence their parenting? Qualitative research methodology was employed in order to explore multiple factors and processes that contribute to parental perceptions and responses. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and observations of parent-child interactions. Transcripts of interviews and field notes were analyzed to address the following clusters of questions:

1. How do parents form perceptions of their children's temperaments? What characteristics of children's temperaments are especially salient? How do parents' own temperaments influence judgments about their children? What other factors influence judgments about children's temperaments? How are judgments about the "goodness" or "badness" of temperament characteristics assigned? How do

**"informal" judgments of temperament compare to standardized measurements?**

**2. How do perceptions of children's temperaments influence parenting decisions? Do parents consider their children's temperaments when making decisions and forming parenting strategies?**

**3. How do parents feel about parenting a child with a more difficult temperament? How do their feelings influence parenting and how are feelings managed? What kind of support is helpful?**

**The results of this study suggest that parental perceptions of their child's difficult temperament reflect characteristics of the child as well as characteristics of the child's physical and social environment. The specific factors that influenced parents' perceptions and responses varied across families but included: parents' histories, especially in their families of origin; current environmental stressors and supports; cultural perspectives; and parents' personalities, psychological states, and philosophical views. The euphemistic concept of the "spirited child," popular through parenting books and workshops, influenced several parents' views of their child's temperament.**

**Parents differed in their response to perceived difficult temperament. Two parenting styles emerged in response to perceptions of difficult temperament: parenting based on control and parenting based on containment. These parenting styles led to differences in parenting goals, interventions, and definitions of difficulty. This study has implications for family assessment, counseling, and parent education. Recommendations are**

offered that broaden the focus on difficult temperament to include attention to family and environmental factors.

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Finally, I am indebted to the five families who participated in this research. I feel privileged to have entered their lives—learning of their challenges and joys as parents. I thank them for their willingness to share their stories for this project.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Lucas, Corey, and Tom Campbell, the most important people in my life. Thank you for being my family, for growing, playing, and learning together.

## INTRODUCTION

*Intense,  
strong-willed,  
a perpetual go machine,  
he can go ballistic,  
too much,  
can't distract him,  
he becomes very explosive,  
just loses it and can't control himself  
his upset is so intense  
one of the loudest people in the world*

These are the words parents in this study chose to describe their child. These parents often felt challenged by their child's behaviors and puzzled by their child's temperament. All of the parents described their child as unique and most described their child as "difficult" or "spirited." Those who had read the popular parenting book, *Raising your Spirited Child*, believed Kurcinka's (1990) description of the "spirited" child fit their child:

The word that distinguishes spirited children from other children is more. They are normal children who are more intense, persistent, sensitive, perceptive, and uncomfortable with change than other children. All children possess these characteristics, but spirited kids possess them with a depth and range not available to other children. Spirited kids are the Super Ball in a room full of rubber balls. Other

kids bounce three feet off the ground. Every bounce for a spirited child hits the ceiling. (Kurcinka, 1991, p. 7)

Evidence from a growing body of research tells us that parents' perceptions of their child's temperament can influence their child's development. Children perceived to have difficult temperaments are treated differently from children perceived to have easier temperaments. And children with difficult temperaments are at higher risk for developing behavioral and adjustment problems. We know that parents' perceptions of their children's temperament are important. Yet, we know little about how parents form perceptions of their child's temperament or how those perceptions influence their parenting.

Do parents come to perceive their child to have a difficult temperament through comparisons with other children of the same age? Do different parents interpret the same child's behaviors in different ways and make different judgments about temperament? Are parents' perceptions biased by their own expectations and values? Can parents perceive neurobiological differences within their children that determine behavioral style? Do parents interpret behaviors that may be situational as reflections of temperament?

How do parents respond to their children's temperament? Do they shape parenting strategies to meet their children's temperaments? Do they try to change their children to conform to their parenting style? What are their feelings as they struggle with difficulties? And how do these feelings influence their parenting? Can a child's "difficult" temperament be accepted

and valued for the positive sides? Will a "difficult" child be perceived as (and become) a problem child? What processes allow some families to accommodate and appreciate children with difficult temperaments? This study begins to address these questions. Through a qualitative research approach, I examined how parents form perceptions of their child's temperament and how these perceptions influence their parenting practices.

## CHAPTER 1

### GUIDING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Miles and Huberman (1984) advocate the use of conceptual frameworks to guide the research process. "A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main dimensions to be studied—the key factors, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them" (p.28). The development of this study was influenced by findings in the research literature on temperament and family systems, interactions with families with young children and pilot work on this topic with two families. The information presented in this framework is historical in the sense that it reflects the theories that guided the conception of this study. In this chapter I review relevant aspects of the literature about temperament and family systems theories, discuss the role of experience and stress in parenting, provide a graphic illustration of the conceptual framework and explain the purpose of this study.

#### Review of the Literature

#### What is Temperament?

Temperament can be thought of as a child's behavioral style, or how an individual generally tends to react and respond to the challenges and opportunities encountered in the environment (Thomas, Chess & Birch, 1968). Characteristics of a child's mood, tendency to approach or withdraw from situations, intensity and reactivity are especially salient aspects of

temperament. While the idea of temperament has served as a means for understanding human nature for centuries, it has been during the last thirty years that temperament has gained the attention of clinicians and researchers in psychology and psychiatry (Kagan, 1994). This attention is widely credited to the pioneering work of psychiatrists Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas (Carey & McDevitt, 1994).

Thomas and Chess began research in temperament at a time when psychiatric practice and psychological thinking were influenced largely by psychoanalytic and behavioral theories. In contrast, they believed that children reacted in individual ways, even as infants, and that many of the problems they encountered in their practice were the result of the children's personal styles and their interactions with important persons in their lives (Hassibi, 1994). In 1956, they began the New York Longitudinal Study (NYLS) that followed the behavioral development of 133 children from infancy into early adult life. The findings of the NYLS yielded a conceptualization of the following nine dimensions of temperament that are widely used in research, clinical and lay applications:

1. *Activity level* —the extent to which a motor component exists during bathing, eating, playing, dressing, and handling; information on the sleep-wake cycle, reaching, crawling, and walking.
2. *Rhythmicity* —the predictability and/or unpredictability over time of any function, such as the sleep-wake cycle, hunger, feeding and elimination.
3. *Approach or Withdrawal* —the nature of the initial response to a new stimulus (food, toy, or person). Approach refers to positive

responses such as smiling, reaching, verbalizations, or play.

Withdrawal refers to negative responses such as crying, fussing, moving away or pushing away.

4. *Adaptability* —the ease with which an individual is able to change their response to new or altered situations in positive ways.

5. *Threshold of Responsiveness* —the intensity level of stimulation needed to evoke a response including reactions to sensory stimuli, environmental objects and social contacts.

6. *Intensity of Reaction* —the energy level of response.

7. *Quality of mood*—the amount of pleasant, joyful, and friendly behavior, as contrasted with unpleasant, crying and unfriendly behavior.

8. *Distractibility* —the effectiveness of extraneous stimuli in interfering with or altering the ongoing behavior.

9. *Attention Span and Persistence*—these are two related categories. Attention concerns the length of time a particular activity is pursued by the child. Persistence refers to the continuation of an activity in the face of obstacles. (from Thomas, Chess & Birch, 1968)

Three temperament types based on different clusters of the nine dimensions were also identified: easy, difficult, and slow-to-warm-up. These three types are thought of as a continuum of more easy to more difficult temperaments. The difficult child is characterized by:

. . . irregularity in biological functions, a preponderance of negative (withdrawal) responses to new stimuli, slowness in adapting to changes in the environment, a relatively high frequency of expression

of negative mood, and a predominance of high intensity in mood expression. (Thomas, Chess & Korn, 1982, p. 4)

### The Difficult Child

The concept of the difficult child has gained clinical and lay popularity as a useful framework to assist parents to understand (and interact with) their children (Carey & McDevitt, 1994). Several popular parenting books focus on "difficult" temperament (Chess & Thomas, 1987; Kurcinka, 1983; Turecki, 1989). Screening instruments have been developed for use by health care professionals to identify children who have more difficult (sometimes euphemistically called "spirited") temperaments and to focus anticipatory guidance and counseling that is specific to child temperament (Cameron, Rice, Hansen & Rosen, 1994; Carey & McDevitt, 1994). Parent support and education programs based on the Thomas and Chess model have been developed to educate parents about how a child's temperament can influence development (Smith, 1994, Goodnow, 1995).

While the idea of the difficult child has clearly become popular among parents, educators, clinicians and book sellers, it has also been the subject of considerable academic controversy among theorists. A series of articles published in the Merrill-Palmer Quarterly (Bates, 1980; Kagan, 1982; Plomin, 1982; Rothbart, 1982; Thomas, Chess & Korn, 1982) presented contrasting views of leading temperament researchers about the conceptual validity of the difficult temperament construct. The debate raised more questions than answers, but is important because the questions raised have been central to ongoing inquiry in the field. These questions included:

Is difficult temperament found in the child or in the parent's perceptions?

Is the concept (and label) of difficult useful?

What is the definition of temperament?

How valid are parental reports?

Jerome Kagan's (1982) view on this debate gave credit to Thomas and Chess' concept. He stated that the concept of difficult temperament "represents a stable set of characteristics that have a basis in the child's biology and thus qualify as a temperament construct" (p. 24). Kagan predicted that "further research will determine if that classification has to be changed, sharpened, or polished, as I am sure Thomas, Chess, and Korn expect. No category lasts forever" (p. 24). In the years since this debate, the concept of difficult temperament has been the focus of a significant body of research.

Several recent research findings suggest ways that temperament can influence development. Children with difficult temperaments are at greater risk for negative developmental outcomes such as behavioral problems, school problems and psychological pathologies (Thomas, Chess & Korn, 1982; Lee & Bates, 1985; Lerner, 1984 1985, Thomas & Chess, 1986). Children of different temperaments can elicit different interactions from caregivers as early as the second day of life (Breitmeyer & Ricciuti, 1988). Parents who perceive their child as difficult use different parenting strategies from parents who perceive their child as less difficult (Pettit & Bates, 1989). For example, Lee and Bates (1985) found that mothers of "difficult" 2-year-olds used more control, gave in more often after initially saying no, and offered fewer choices

than mothers of "easier" children. In turn, more "difficult" children reacted with greater resistance to their mother's attempts of control.

Yet, some (even many) "difficult" children do not develop problems, and may even become less difficult over time (Thomas & Chess, 1986). Why is this? It is generally believed that the quality of adaptation for a given child is determined by the match, or goodness of fit, between the child's temperament and the demands and supports encountered in the environment (Goldsmith et al, 1987).

#### Goodness of Fit

Goodness of fit between a child's temperament and the environment is believed to be determined through a transactional process (Thomas, Chess & Birch, 1968). Environmental stimuli and demands will be perceived and reacted to in different ways by children of different temperaments. At the same time, differences in the child's temperament will elicit different responses from the environment (Breitmayer & Ricciuti, 1988; Goldsmith et al, 1987; Kagan, 1989). Multiple factors in the family and community influence the child's world. For young children the parenting environment is especially critical. The quality of the parenting environment is believed to be determined by parent personality characteristics and parenting strategies (Frankel & Bates, 1990).

To this point, much of the temperament research addressing goodness of fit has been concerned with studying developmental outcomes (Goldsmith et al, 1987). Goodness or poorness of fit has primarily been determined after the fact; a child who shows positive adaptation is thought to have a good fit with the environment, while a child who experiences psychological or

behavioral problems is thought to have a poor fit. Studies that examine developmental outcomes allow us to develop predictions about which temperament types are at increased risk, and what kinds of parenting styles are more or less helpful (or harmful). These studies give us indirect information about the goodness of fit that has occurred but do not tell us what actually happens between parents and children. We need to learn more about the aspects of the child's world that are especially important determinants of goodness of fit.

Lerner (1984) suggests a conceptualization of goodness of fit that outlines three kinds of environmental demands. These included: (1) attitudes and values held by others about the child's characteristics, (2) behavioral attributes of others in the environment, and (3) physical characteristics of the environment. The demands of a given environment are likely to vary from the demands of other environments the child encounters. Further, the child's temperament characteristics are likely to match some environments better than others. The work of Lerner and her colleagues has focused on school age and adolescent children. Several of their studies provide support for the importance of adult attitudes in determining the goodness of fit for children in different environments. Findings from a series of studies (Lerner, 1984) suggest that a poor fit between parent (and teacher) expectations about temperament and a child's actual temperament may be a factor in school performance, school adjustment, peer relations and behavior problems. Lerner's studies suggest that parent attitudes are important determinates of goodness of fit, and point to the need to learn more about the relationship between parent attitudes and parent practices.

There is a strong focus on the role of goodness of fit in determining the quality of a child's adaptation. Researchers believe that certain kinds of environments and parenting practices will be more supportive than others for children with difficult temperaments. For example, recent research suggests that children with more difficult temperaments will do better if parents use positive and responsive parenting strategies rather than control style parenting strategies (Frankel & Bates 1990). However, it is not clear how positive parenting styles influence the quality of a child's adaptation. What happens between parent and child when goodness of fit occurs? Do parents continuously provide a supportive environment that matches the child's temperament? Do children gradually expand their ability to cope with more challenging environments? Or do children raised in well matched environments actually change their temperament over time? Is the role of goodness of fit simply to create a supportive environment, or is the nature of the environment a factor that contributes to the development of temperament? These questions are central to our understanding the stability and change of temperament over time.

#### Stability of Temperament

Historically, temperament has been thought of as the constitutional makeup of the child. Most theorists have agreed that temperament characteristics "are manifest early in life, are strongly heritable, and are stable over time." (Rutter, 1994, p. 24) The defining characteristics of temperament were expressed in slightly different language during a round table discussion involving temperament researchers Arnold Bus, Stella Chess, H.Hill Goldsmith, Robert Plomin, Mary Rothbart, and Alexander Thomas

(Goldsmith et al, 1987). The round table identified the following areas of consensus:

- a) "Temperamental dimensions reflect behavioral tendencies rather than map directly onto discrete behavioral acts" (p.507);
- b) There is an emphasis on biological underpinnings;
- c) Temperamental traits display a degree of continuity over time relative to other aspects of behavior;
- d) There is a focus on infancy, as temperament is felt to be most directly expressed during this period of development; and,
- e) The focus is on individual differences rather than species-general characteristics.

In the years since this discussion, thinking about temperament has continued to evolve and change as research findings point in new directions. There are still central questions about the nature of temperament that are not yet well understood (Panel Discussion, Occasional Temperament Conference, October, 1994). There are ongoing debates about how temperament should be defined, the boundaries of temperament, relative to other characteristics (such as personality or cognitive development), what assessment and measurement methods should be used, and what role the environment plays in the development of temperament. And, while temperament was once expected to show stability by definition, researchers now believe that temperament changes and develops over time.

Recently there has been a shift in research focus towards understanding the development and change of temperament characteristics. Rutter (1994)

offers the following explanation about how a constitutional characteristic can change:

The expectation that temperament should be stable over time reflects the view that constitutional features should not alter over the course of development. Although, on the face of it, that sounds reasonable, it ignores the fact that development is necessarily concerned with change in the constitution, as well as in behavioral functioning.

Development, of course, involves continuities as well as discontinuities, so that some sort of consistency is to be expected. (p. 25)

Robert McCall (1986) has long argued that the behavioral factors influencing temperament may not always result in continuity of individual characteristics, but may also be expressed through patterns of developmental change. In fact, research during the time of infancy has revealed variable and conflicting patterns of stability and change (Koniak-Griffin & Rummel, 1988; Peters, Martin & Wachs, 1984; Sanson, Prior, Garino, Oberklaid & Sewell, 1987). Some of the observed instability has been attributed to problems with instrumentation. Overall, the body of literature suggests that temperament displays some stability of individual differences, and undergoes developmental change relative to other maturational processes of infancy. Different patterns of stability and change have been observed for different temperament dimensions and clusters, ages, and times. Since the infancy period is thought to reflect a minimal influence of environmental factors, these findings are often interpreted to suggest the presence of internal developmental processes. Conversely, the variable patterns of early stability

and change of temperament characteristics may be an indication of our lack of understanding of the power of environmental effects during infancy.

Mary Rothbart (1985, 1988) has examined ways in which specific dimensions and clusters of temperament develop during the early months of life. Rothbart (1985) has observed that individual differences in temperament dimensions of reactivity, smiling, and activity are stable from 3 to 9 months, but there is an accompanying developmental change in the level of these characteristics. That is, infants become more active, exhibit more smiling and laughter and increase vocal activity with increasing age. This finding suggests continuity in individual rank order (individual differences) on these dimensions and provides evidence that developmental change occurs. Rothbart has also found evidence that some temperament traits may show little stability over time.

The temperament dimension inhibited approach shows little stability over the ages of 6 to 13 months (Rothbart, 1988). Inhibited approach was examined in terms of the observed latency between infant's seeing and grasping a high-intensity toy. Latency between seeing and grasping increased between 6 to 13 months, even though the motor skills required to quickly grasp an interesting toy were present at 6 months. Further, individual differences were unstable during this time period suggesting differences in the rate of development. These findings suggest that different dimensions of temperament undergo different patterns of development and change. Rothbart believes the expression of temperament is related to an increase in the ability to integrate affective and motoric behaviors. She suggests that

periods of maturation may be marked by lack of stability in temperament characteristics.

### Temperament Clusters

The stability of temperament looks different when less specific and more global measures of temperament have been examined. Aggregate measures of temperament decrease the contextual and situational influences that may be present in ratings of single dimensions of temperament. Yet, can the concept of temperament be adequately explained by global dimensions? The specificity of individual characteristics are lost when clusters of temperament are expressed through a single measure. On the other hand, a cluster of temperament characteristics offers a richer and more meaningful picture of the individual.

Greater stability of temperament clusters versus dimensions was observed in the NYLS. Working with the NYLS data, Carey and McDevitt (1978) observed stability in clusters of easy-difficult temperament from 4-8 months to 3-7 years; 20% of children retained the difficult-easy classification to 7 years, 40% to 5 years. Thomas and Chess (1986) found stability of the cluster of "difficult-easy" lasting into early adulthood, but lack of stability of individual dimensions of temperament. They believe that change and stability of temperament is highly influenced by goodness of fit between an individual's temperament and the environment. Chess (1994) is currently examining the original NYLS data to identify factors that result in changes in an individual's temperament over time. She is especially interested in identifying factors that lead to positive developmental outcomes.

Jerone Kagan (1989, 1994) believes that temperament should be thought of as a qualitative category captured by a cluster of characteristics, rather than a set of individual differences on specific and continuous dimensions. From his view a specific characteristic loses meaning when taken out of the context of the total picture of the individual. He has focused his work on temperament clusters describing inhibited and uninhibited children. His work suggests that children who are likely to be described as shy have a distinct and biologically different temperament than out-going and average children.

Kagan's (1989, 1994) findings provide strong support for the stability of temperament types. He found that very shy and very out-going children (but not average children) were likely to retain the same temperament classification between 21 months and 7 years. His research on temperament categories employs multivariate methods including a battery of physiologic, behavioral, and observational measures. The use of multivariate methods provides an alternative to the widespread use of parental reports to measure temperament, and offers promise for a deeper and more detailed understanding of the basis of temperament.

### Perceptions of Temperament

There has been considerable theoretical debate about the validity of parents' perceptions of their children's temperaments. The original NYLS was based on parent reports and clinical evaluations (Thomas, Chess & Birch, 1968). Several questionnaires have been developed that rely on parent report as the sole measure of temperament (Rothbart & Goldsmith, 1985). The obvious question has been raised (and argued): Does temperament reside in

the child or in the eye of the beholder? (See series of articles in Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1980, vol. 26 and 1982, vol. 28) Parents are thought to be a desirable source of temperament ratings because they are most familiar with their child's typical behavior. However, parental reports of temperament may be influenced by their own personality and background characteristics (Bates & Bayles, 1984). In fact, temperament ratings by fathers and mothers show only moderate correlations, indicating a substantial difference in the ways mothers and fathers view the same child's temperament (Bates & Bayles, 1982; Kagan, 1989). Even when parents agree in their descriptions of their child's temperament, they can differ on their feelings about and reactions to their child's temperament (Thomas, Chess & Korn, 1982).

Recent research suggests that the expression of temperament is significantly influenced by parental perceptions and characteristics at a very early age (Allen, Affleck, McGrade & McQueeney, 1984; Kronstadt, Oberklaid, Ferb & Swartz, 1979; Peters-Martin & Wachs, 1984; Zeanah, Keener, Anders, & Vieira-Baker, 1987). Field, Vega-Lahr, Scafidi and Goldstein (1987) found significant, moderate relationships between characteristics of parents' temperament and infant temperament ratings at four months. Zeanah et al. (1987) observed relationships between maternal anxiety and ratings of infant difficultness. Depressed mothers have been shown to have children with less optimal temperament ratings, and single mothers were found to rate babies more negatively than mothers from two parent families (Allen et al., 1984). These findings suggest there may be sources of parental bias in temperament ratings, that prenatal factors may influence temperament, or that the child's temperament may have an early influence on the parent.

Kagan (1994) believes that when parent reports are used, scientists are limited in the kinds of categories that they can study. If descriptions of temperament are based only on categories and words that parents can understand and observe, then physiologic markers cannot be used. Kagan believes physiological measures are necessary to supplement behavioral indicators and create a more complete picture of temperament. Many of the measures used in his research program are indicators of biological reactivity that are "invisible" to parents (and other observers). Kagan's approach promises to expand our understanding and definition of temperament by revealing the biological differences that exist between individuals. However, the inclusion of biological measures of temperament should not result in the exclusion of parent reports of temperament.

Parental perceptions can provide important information about how children characteristically behave that is not available to the researcher through any other means. Parents are in the position of observing their child across different contexts for extended periods of time. They have experienced the stability and change of their child's temperament since birth. Further, parents' perceptions of their child are central to the job of parenting, and these perceptions are expected to influence the match between parenting and temperament. Conversations with parents suggest that perceptions of their child's temperament influence how they interact with their child. One parent "chooses her battles" with an especially active and intense boy, letting certain behaviors go but holding firm on really important issues. Another mother takes temperament into account by providing food through out the day, having observed that her children have irregular hunger schedules.

### Family Systems

The family comprises the most immediate environment a young child experiences. Family systems theory suggests that the way parents perceive and respond to their child is influenced by the context of their family. According to family systems theory, individuals are interdependent, contributing members of a family system that controls their behavior (Minuchin, 1985). The behavior of any individual family member is shaped by their relationships with other family members, and the behavior of any individual family member influences all members of the family (Steinglass, 1984). The well being or health of the family is determined by the nature of interactions that occur between family members.

Family systems theorists believe that the interactions that occur within the family serve to maintain balance (or homeostasis) of the whole system (Becvar & Stroh-Becvar, 1982; Minuchin, 1985; Steinglass, 1984). The family system is most stable (and individuals are most comfortable) when existing patterns of interaction are maintained. All things being equal, the family system is more likely to resist change than to exert the energy necessary to promote change. This tendency to maintain balance can be a negative or a positive influence, depending on whether existing patterns of interaction are healthy or unhealthy.

Many family patterns and relationships are maintained across generations, and family systems theorists believe that intergenerational patterns are one of the strongest influences on parenting style (Becvar & Stroh-Becvar, 1982; McFarlane, 1988). Parents are likely to adopt the style and strategies used by their parents. Studies of the transmission of parenting

across generations provide evidence that parents' childhood experiences relate to care-giving, and to marital harmony which can also affect parental behavior toward children (Minuchin, 1985). Bowen's theory and family of origin theory identify several characteristics from one's family of origin that can influence current relationships. These characteristics include birth order, parental relationships, rules of conduct, and communication styles. (Crouch, 1987; Richardson, 1984). Family systems theorists believe that assessment of the extended family system is necessary in order to understand how a child's behavior fits in the family context. Family assessment includes examining how communication occurs, how differences are tolerated and handled, what behavioral expectations exist, how individuals are similar or different in their interpersonal style, what rules guide the family, and what kinds of intergenerational patterns influence family functioning.

### Experience

Previous experience caring for young children and knowledge of child development are likely to influence parents' perceptions of their children's temperament and parenting decisions. Knowledge of parenting and child development can be gained through books, classes, support groups, personal observations, and conversations with relatives and friends. Parents often discuss their children with others and draw comparisons between their child and other children in order to judge whether their child's behaviors are more typical or unique. Knowledge of developmental capabilities and stages can provide a framework to help make sense of why children act the way they do. Parents' knowledge of and experience with children are likely to influence

their abilities to distinguish behaviors typical of certain developmental stages from expressions of temperament.

Mary Sheedy Kurcinka (1991), parent educator and author of *Raising Your Spirited Child*, reports that parents of children with difficult temperaments can become frustrated when the knowledge they gain about child development and parenting does not address the problems they face. Kurcinka believes that much of the parenting information that is widely available does not fit the needs of children with difficult temperaments. She advocates education programs to provide parents of children with more difficult temperaments with specialized knowledge about their children's temperament.

### Stress

The effects of stress on family functioning have been well documented (McCubbin, 1989; Melito, 1985; Patterson, 1988). The ways in which family stress influences parents' interactions with children's temperaments are less well understood. Parents with different social and cultural backgrounds show differences in perceptions and reactions to their child's temperament (Thomas, Chess & Korn, 1982, Thomas & Chess, 1986). These sociocultural differences imply different levels of stress, but do not directly examine stress as a factor. Lewis (1986) presents a theoretical framework for viewing ways in which family structure affects the family's response to stress. He believes that several factors are influential: the family's level of competence, the nature of the stress encountered, the family's definition of an event, available resources, and post-crisis behavior. Becvar and Stroh-Becvar (1982) emphasize the importance of "family interpretive systems" in determining

how families function in the face of stress. They believe that the ways that families perceive and interpret events will influence their definitions of stress and their abilities to cope with stress.

This study was designed to minimize the presence of major stressors related to socioeconomic class. I selected intact two-parent families, who were college educated and considered members of middle socioeconomic class. Yet, many other stressors occur in the lives of families. Parenting in itself is considered stressful by many. The interviews were designed to explore the kinds of stress each family experienced.

### Summary

In summary, temperament can be thought of as a child's behavioral style, how an individual generally tends to react and respond to the challenges and opportunities presented in the environment. Most theorists agree that temperament characteristics have a biological basis, show some degree of continuity over time and influence the course of a child's development. The quality of a given child's development is believed to be influenced by the goodness of fit between the environments encountered and the child's temperament.

The most widely used model of temperament was developed by Thomas and Chess (1978). They identified nine dimensions of temperament and three clusters of temperament characteristics, easy, slow to warm up, and difficult. Although there is considerable controversy among leading theorists about the conceptual and clinical use of the easy to difficult typology, a growing body of research has found that children with difficult temperaments are at greater risk for negative developmental outcomes.

Research suggests that children with more difficult temperaments will do better if parents use more positive and responsive parenting strategies rather than control style parenting strategies (Frankel & Bates, 1990). Yet parents whose children have difficult temperaments are more likely to use controlling parenting strategies than parents whose children have easier temperaments (Lee & Bates, 1985).

Several questions remain unanswered in our understanding of how temperament influences parenting. How do parents come to use different kinds of parenting strategies? Do some parents use control strategies because it is all they know? Do others believe control strategies will be most effective for dealing with a "difficult" child? Are parents aware of alternative approaches? Do they choose between different parenting approaches in order to fit their child's temperament and the situation at hand? We do not know if parents form conscious perceptions of their child's temperament, or whether perceptions of temperament are used when making parenting decisions. Further, it is not clear whether parent's perceptions of their child's temperament reflect the child's true temperament or are reflections of parental characteristics. What other factors may influence the ways parents view and respond to their child?

Family systems theory holds that individuals are best understood in light of their family context. The family is seen as a whole, comprised of interdependent members who are constantly interacting. The behaviors of adults and children all serve a function and are given meaning within their family. The relationships and history of the family are believed to make sense of current behaviors. Family systems theorists believe that

intergenerational family patterns influence parenting styles, communication patterns, and even the kinds of people one feels comfortable with. The family system as a whole is expected to have a strong influence on the goodness or poorness of fit that develops between a child's temperament and the environment. It is likely that the kinds of experiences parents have had in their families of origin shape the perceptions they form of their child's temperament.

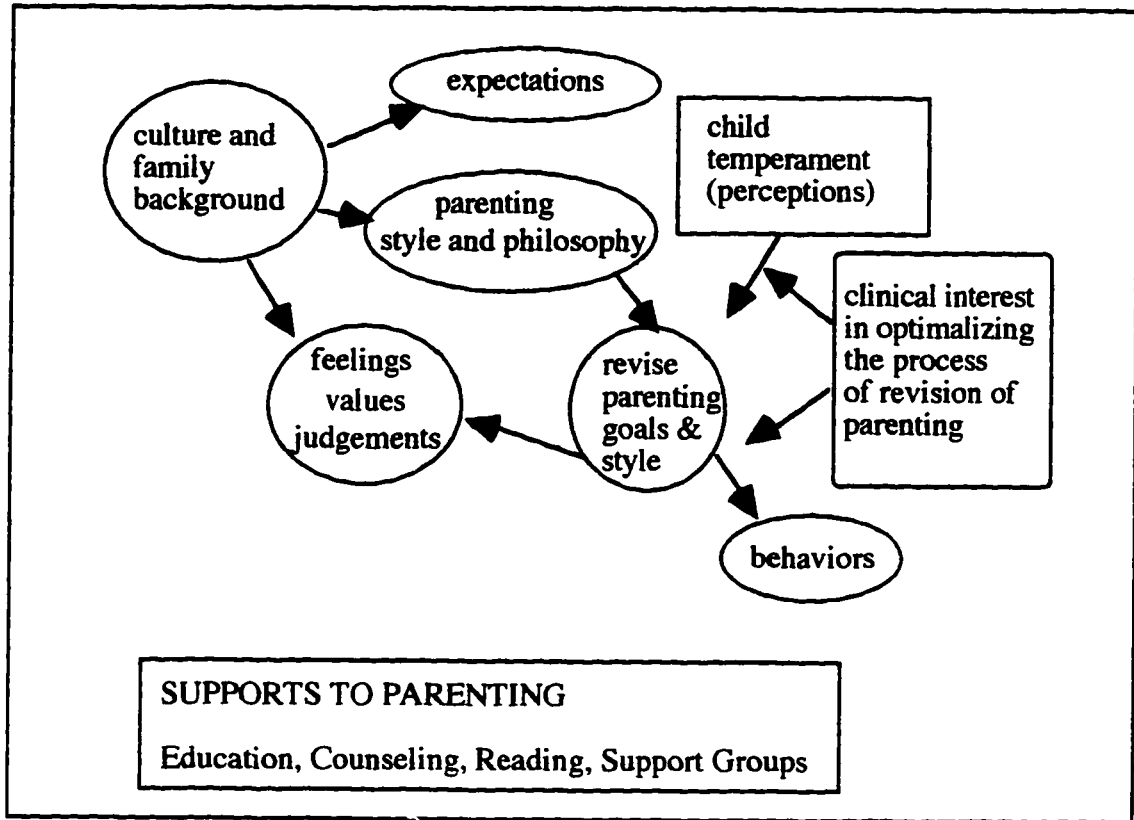
### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of a qualitative study provides a focus and guides the development of the research strategy, but it is expected to change as data are collected (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The conceptual framework presented here represents my initial conceptualization of how parents come to form perceptions that their child has a difficult temperament, and how these perceptions may influence parenting. The conceptual frameworks presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 should be viewed as the starting point of this study. I believed that there were connections between the concepts gained from temperament and family systems literature, and the actual experiences of families. Some of the connections I hypothesized are acknowledged in the literature, some are suggested by the experience of parents, and some are intuitive. Some of the connections were vague when I first started this research, more like shadows than pathways. Nevertheless, these early frameworks served to organize my work and guide the collection of data.

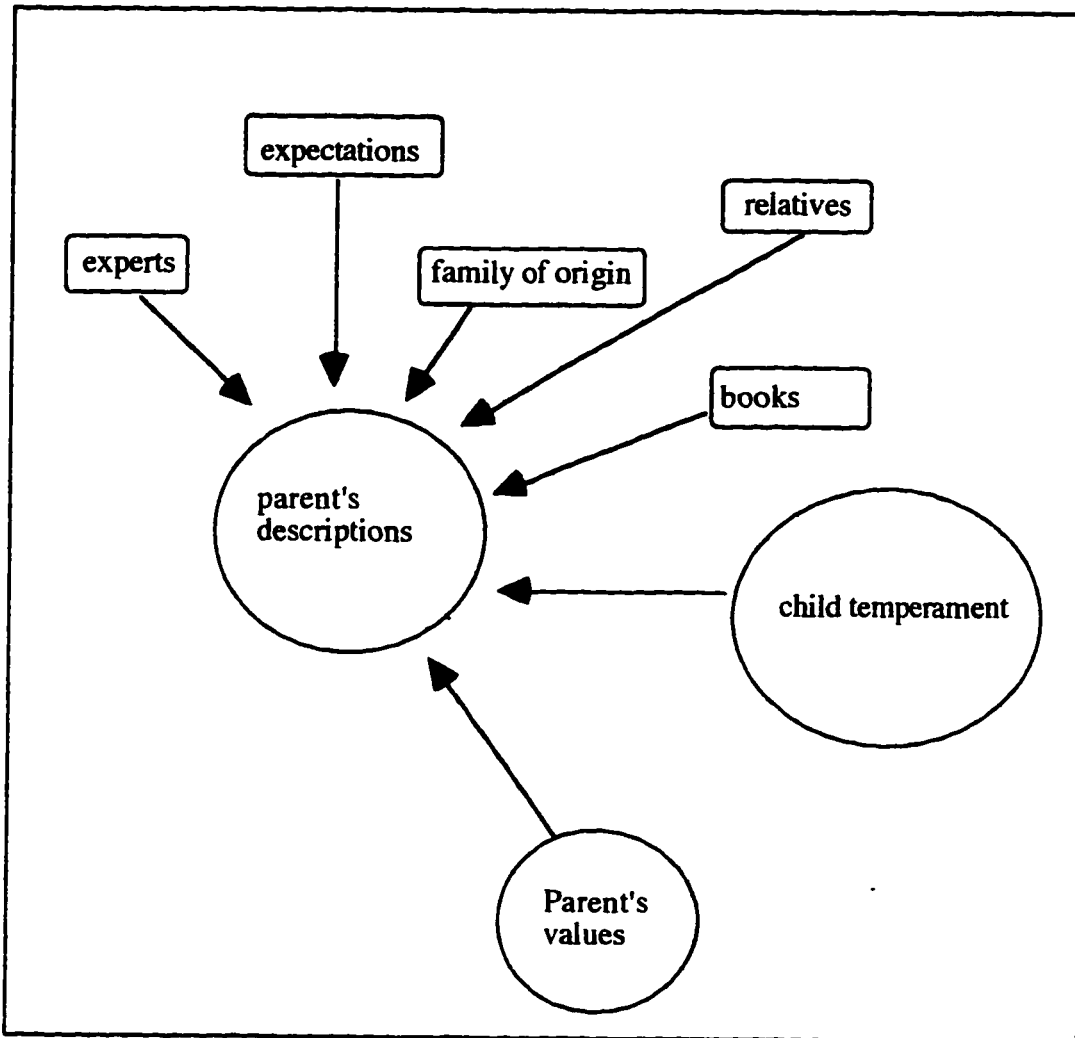
Conceptual Framework 1 (see Figure 1) illustrates the ways that a child's temperament and family background may interact to influence

parenting behaviors. I expected that the parents' family backgrounds and cultures would influence their expectations, feelings, values, and in turn their parenting philosophies and styles. I thought that parents' perceptions of their children's temperaments would lead parents to revise their natural parenting styles and goals. I expected that parenting styles and goals were directly related to parents' behaviors and strategies. I also believed that the process of revising parenting goals and parenting styles would affect parents' values, feelings, and judgments about their children and their parenting. I expected that more positive parenting would result if parents revised their strategies to match the needs of their children's temperaments. I also identified several external supports to parenting including education, counseling, reading, and support groups.

Conceptual Framework 2 (see Figure 2) illustrates my early conceptions of how parents form perceptions of their children's temperaments. Parents' perceptions of their children's temperaments are shown as separate from the children's actual temperaments. The way that parents interpret their children's actual temperaments may be influenced by several factors including expectations, family of origin experiences, opinions of experts such as pediatricians, books, and the views of relatives. I expected parents' values to temper their interpretations of their children's behaviors and to influence whether they saw their children in a positive or negative light. These conceptual frameworks were created during the early stages of data collection. They document my thinking during that phase of the research and provide a graphic representation of the initial focus of the study.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework 1: Factors that Influence Parent Behavior



**Figure 2.** Conceptual Framework 2: Parents' Perceptions of Temperament

### Purpose of this Study

The existing literature suggests that the ways in which parents perceive and respond to their children's temperament can shape their children's development, and that children's temperaments can influence their parents and families. We know that children with difficult temperaments illicit different kinds of reactions from adults than their more easy going peers. Further, some kinds of parenting strategies are better suited for children with difficult temperaments and lead to more positive developmental outcomes. We can identify certain parental strategies that are more positive than others, but we do not know what leads parents to use certain parenting strategies and not others. We do not understand how parents come to form perceptions of their child's temperament or why fathers and mothers frequently disagree in their ratings of the same child's temperament. It is not clear how perceptions of temperament influence parenting actions.

As I began this study I hoped to learn more about the underlying processes that influence parents' perceptions and actions. The purpose of this study was to explore how parents come to perceive their child as having a difficult temperament and how these perceptions influence parenting. The following clusters of questions were addressed:

1. How do parents form perceptions of their children's temperaments? What characteristics of their children's temperaments are especially salient? How does the parent's own temperament influence judgments about the child? What other factors influence judgments of temperament (knowledge of child development, family pressures, exposure to other children)? How are judgments about the "goodness"

or "badness" of temperament characteristics assigned? How do these "informal" judgments of temperament compare to formal measurements?

2. How do perceptions of children's temperaments influence parenting decisions? Do parents consider their children's temperaments when making decisions and forming parenting strategies?

3. How do parents feel about parenting a child with a more difficult temperament? How do their feelings influence parenting and how are feelings managed? What kind of support is helpful?

#### Organization of Chapters

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The content of each of the following chapters is briefly summarized here:

*Chapter 2:* In this chapter, the qualitative methods used in this study are discussed. I address the rationale for the methods selected and describe the procedures used for data collection and analysis.

*Chapter 3:* Five case studies are presented to introduce the families who participated in this study. The content included in the case studies is related to the focus of the study presented in the conceptual framework.

*Chapter 4:* This chapter presents the findings of the study. The results of the data analysis are presented to address the questions guiding this inquiry. The concepts presented in Chapter 4 reflect the early conceptual framework as well as new concepts that emerged during the process of analysis.

*Chapter 5:* This chapter presents a discussion of the findings. The results are discussed in relation to current literature in the field. Limitations and implications for further study and educational applications are discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### Qualitative Research Methods

The purpose of this study is to explore the underlying processes involved in parenting a child with a difficult temperament—to learn how and why parents come to perceive their child's temperament as difficult and how their perceptions influence their actions. Qualitative research methods provide a means to answer questions concerned with underlying processes. Qualitative research methods are well suited when one hopes to answer questions about what happens in a given setting, what actions mean from the perspectives of those involved, and how what happens in a specific setting is related to the larger context of that setting (Erickson, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Erickson (1986) identified three characteristics of qualitative research: (a) an intensive participation in the setting, (b) detailed recording of what happens in the setting through field notes and other forms of documentation, and (c) analytic reflection of the data and reports that provide detailed descriptions including narratives and quotes from the data. Beyond these common characteristics shared by different qualitative approaches, there are many ways to conduct qualitative data collection, analysis, theorizing and reporting. My approach is eclectic, influenced in large part by Erickson (1986)

and Miles and Huberman (1984). They advocate a more structured approach than the "grounded theory approach" pioneered by Glaser and Strauss.

One of the ways that Miles and Huberman (1984) differ from the grounded theory approach is their emphasis on pre-existing theory to guide the research endeavor. Grounded theory stresses discovery and theory development and emphasizes the need to have theory emerge from the data (Charmaz, 1983). Grounded theorists "do not rely directly on the literature to shape their ideas, since they believe that they should develop their own analyses independently" (p. 110). Miles and Huberman believe that qualitative researchers need to bound and focus qualitative studies beginning during the design and data collection stages. They advocate using pre-existing theories to focus data collection and analysis and encourage the use of conceptual frameworks to guide all research activities. The conceptual framework is not a rigid mold, however. During the process of data collection the original conceptual framework is expected to change as new questions and theories emerge. Erickson (1986) advocates the use of theoretical frameworks to guide qualitative research in education. He believes the grounded theory approach is "extremely romantic":

There is no warrant, in contemporary philosophy of science and cognitive psychology, for the romantic conception of fieldwork, in which the fieldworker arrives in the setting with a tabula rasa mind, carrying only a toothbrush and hunting knife. One can argue that there are no pure inductions. We always bring to experience frames of interpretation, or schemata. From this point of view the task of fieldwork is to become more and more

reflectively aware of the frame of interpretation of those we observe, and of our own culturally learned frames of interpretation we brought with us to the setting. (p. 140)

Erickson (1986) has stated "the central issue of method is to bring research questions and data collection into a consistent relationship, albeit an evolving one" (p. 140). The conceptual framework, the theory, and questions addressed in the research project guide the activities of research design, data collection, and analysis. Erickson describes the research process as one of "progressive problem solving, in which issues of sampling, hypothesis generation, and hypothesis testing go hand in hand." The decisions that researchers make about how to collect and analyze data should be related to the questions and theories they are investigating. Erickson also acknowledges a role for intuition in qualitative research. He states, "Fieldworkers' daily presence in the setting is guided by deliberate decisions about sampling and by intuitive reactions as well. . . . Framing research questions explicitly and seeking relevant data deliberately enable and empower intuition, rather than stifle it" (p.140).

The conceptual framework for this study, as described in Chapter 1, attempts to document my pre-existing theories and frame of reference. An important part of my work during data collection and analysis was to continually compare what I saw and heard to my preconceived theoretical explanations. One of the ways that I was able to step outside of my frame of reference was to approach each interview with the intention of paying attention to the parents' understanding of their own experiences. I listened to their ideas about child development and parenting. I listened to their life

experiences and learned about the events and ideas that have influenced them. As I learned more about each family, I continuously asked how their experiences related to the theories I believed in. At times, my pre-existing theories were validated, and at other times, contradicted. At times, I needed to suspend or revise theories in order to understand the experiences and perspectives of the study participants.

The reliability and validity of qualitative research endeavors is determined by the researchers' skills and the means they employ to collect and analyze data. Miles and Huberman (1984) say it is essential for the researcher to "evolve a set of valid and verifiable methods" (p. 20) of research and to be precisely clear about how data collection and analysis are conducted. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the importance of what they call an "audit trail" to confirm the findings of a qualitative study. They strongly advocate maintaining records and reporting details of "both the process and the product of the inquiry" (p. 283).

In order for others to evaluate a qualitative study they must be able to understand how the study was conducted, including conceptualization, design, data collection, and data analysis. In this chapter, I describe in detail the methods used in this study, and provide the rationale for my choice of qualitative methods. I describe sampling and generalization in qualitative studies, the sampling procedures and participants in this study, the concept of triangulation, and the methods of data collection, and analytic procedures.

#### Sampling and Generalizing

Miles and Huberman (1984) stress the importance of bounding the collection of data through sampling decisions. Samples are typically small

rather than large and often focus on case studies. The case study approach allows us to gain a rich understanding of the experiences of individuals in a particular context. Sampling in qualitative research is determined through theoretical and purposeful decisions rather than statistical and random means (Miles & Huberman, 1984, Denzin, 1978). Several purposes of sampling have been identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) including: sampling to maximize variation, sampling critical cases, sampling extreme cases, and sampling typical cases. The sampling decisions employed should insure that the participants represent the theoretical interests of the study.

The task in sampling is to address the variables that are essential to the theory being studied. Purposive sampling is a tool to maximize the likelihood that the cases share essential variables. Yet, individuals who are all members of the same group or classification can vary significantly in other aspects of their lives. Sampling decisions are also used to maximize the degree of variation between individuals who belong to the same group. When individual cases share essential characteristics but vary on other characteristics the findings of the study provide richer and more detailed information (Lincoln & Guba, 1988).

The decisions made about sampling are closely related to the kinds of generalizations that can be drawn from qualitative research findings. Since smaller samples are studied, findings from a qualitative study cannot be generalized to predict the behaviors of large populations of people. Qualitative research examines the experiences of particular individuals in particular settings. The findings can reveal not only what happens, but how and why something happens in a given setting. However, the findings of

qualitative research are not only limited to description. Erickson (1984) explained the ways that interpretive research in education contributes to the discovery of universals.

The search is not for *abstract universals* arrived at by statistical generalization from a sample to a population, but for *concrete universals*, arrived at by studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing with other cases studied in equally great detail. The assumption is that when we see a particular instance of a teacher teaching, some aspects of what occurs are absolutely generic, that is, they apply cross-culturally and across human history to all teaching situations. . . . Despite this variation some aspects of what occurs in any human teaching situation will generalize to all other situations of teaching. (p. 130)

The task of the qualitative researcher is to identify what is "broadly universal, what generalizes to other similar situations, [and] what is unique to the given instance" (Erickson, 1995, p. 130). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that the role of qualitative research is to generate a working hypothesis, a theory generated by a specific study or case. The hypothesis is subject to continuous revision as new situations and people are studied. These perspectives speak to the need to place boundaries on research findings and theories. Cronbach (1982) has emphasized the importance of this point for research in the social sciences:

All this begins to suggest that general, lasting, definite "laws" are in principle beyond the reach of social science, that sheer empirical generalization is doomed as a research strategy. Extrapolation to new

circumstances apparently has to rest on a rhetorical argument, one that relies on qualitative beliefs about the processes at work in the old and new situations (p. 70).

The larger task of qualitative research is to link the generalizations from a given study to theory, explaining how a given case fits or disconfirms existing theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 228). A single case study can suggest new theories by revealing universals that apply to an entire group of individuals, as well as negate existing theories by proving an exception to claims that an entire group of individuals shares universal characteristics. When existing theories are disconfirmed, new hypotheses can be developed to account for the variation present in a given study.

#### Sampling Procedures and Participants

The sampling procedures used in the present study were designed to select individuals who shared certain characteristics and varied on others. Sampling decisions were guided by the purpose of the study—to understand the experiences of families who identified their child as having a difficult or spirited temperament. Five families in which one or both of the parents believed their child had a spirited or difficult temperament participated in this study. I recruited the families from three different sources. One family responded to a letter that I mailed to parents who had participated in a workshop given by a local parent educator on *Spirited Children*. Three families responded to flyers posted at a child care center at a local gym that is frequented by mothers of young children. The fifth family was referred by a mutual friend who was also a therapist and knowledgeable about the study.

Examples of the letters and fliers used to recruit participants are provided in Appendix A.

The families were screened through an initial telephone conversation with mothers who responded to one of my recruitment strategies. (There were several families who inquired about the study that I was not able to work with.) During that conversation I gave a detailed description of the study, answered the mothers' questions and inquired about their families. During the screening conversation, I tried to determine whether the mothers' ideas about their child's temperament matched my expectations about difficult temperament. When I talked to mothers from families that met my selection criteria, I sent a packet of information about the study, including copies of the consent form (see Appendix B), so that both parents could have an opportunity to discuss whether they wanted to participate. Willingness to participate was confirmed by a follow-up phone call, and an initial interview appointment was set.

The criteria that guided the sample selection are grounded in the conceptual framework. I knew from the literature that parents respond differently to boys and girls and to children of different birth orders (Dunn & Plomin, 1991). Further, boys and girls with similar temperaments can be perceived and treated differently by their parents (Frankel & Bates, 1990; Thomas, Chess & Korn, 1982; Lee & Bates, 1985). I decided to limit this study to first-born boys in order to minimize gender and birth order as sources of potential variance in parent-child interactions. I also limited the study to families whose difficult child was between the ages of 4 to 7 years so that the developmental issues parents faced would be more similar. I sought families

who came from different family backgrounds because I was interested in how the family context might influence the perception of a child's temperament and the parenting style.

Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive characteristics of the participants. This table shows some of the more salient similarities and differences that existed between the families. In general, the parents were similar in that they all identified their first born boy as having a difficult temperament, had a college education, considered themselves relatively older parents, had a strong motivation for being good parents and improving their parenting, and had professional careers. The parents differed in the age of their child, ethnicity and culture, family background, child care arrangements, employment status, and the presence of another sibling.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

<b>Family</b>	<b>Lori &amp; Eric</b>	<b>Alicia &amp; John</b>	<b>Ellen &amp; Barry</b>	<b>Maria &amp; Jeff</b>	<b>Chris &amp; Greg</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	white	Filipino	white	M: Korean, J: white	white
<b>Social Status</b>	middle class	middle class	middle class	middle class	middle class
<b>Career and Child Care</b>	share child care, switching roles over the years	share child care, switching roles over the years	both work full-time; full-time child care	share child care, switching roles over the years	share child care; both work part time
<b>Family History</b>	Eric's parents divorced	John born in the Philippines Alicia's mother lives with family	Ellen's parents divorced, both parents deceased Barry's mother deceased	Maria born in Korea Jeff's father deceased	Chris' parents divorced, father deceased

Triangulation

One of the ways that qualitative researchers increase the likelihood that their findings are valid is through "triangulation". Miles and Huberman (1984) compare triangulation to the term "concurrent validity" used in quantitative research. It is a way of ensuring the dependability of qualitative findings. Triangulation involves "compiling different sources of evidence, using different methods and operating at different levels" (Miles & Huberman, p. 235) of a setting to test a finding. Triangulation is a way of building a verification system into the data-gathering phase and allows the

researcher to validate information from one source against another source (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although each data source may be imperfect or subject to error, the use of multiple sources increases confidence in the findings. Lincoln and Guba provide this metaphor: "It is as though a fisherman were to use multiple nets, each of which had a complement of holes, but placed together so that the holes in one net were covered by intact portions of other nets" (p. 306).

### Data Collection

Data collection procedures that include sources of triangulation strengthen the findings of a qualitative study. When multiple sources of evidence are available, the researcher can search for "corroborative, contrasting, and causally linked information" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 235). In this study I attempted to triangulate my findings by drawing on data from 3 sources: interviews, observations and a standardized questionnaire.

### Interviews

Each family participated in four semi-structured interviews. With the exception of one family, I began by interviewing the father and mother individually. I then interviewed both parents together for the next two interviews. The one exception to this pattern was with the third family. I had planned to interview the mother alone but the father unexpectedly came home from work, so we held a joint interview at that time to take advantage of their baby-sitting arrangement. All of the interviews were recorded on audio tape. Each interview lasted about one and one half hours and the home visits usually lasted two hours.

The interviews were scheduled at the most convenient times and locations possible for the families. Locations for the interviews included the families' homes, their offices, and my home office. The general content of the interviews was developed before the study began. Parents were informed before they consented to the study that we would discuss the following issues: their perceptions of their child's temperament, their experiences in their own families of origin, their ideas about the tasks of parenting, the resources they found helpful and their approaches to different parenting challenges. I used the interview protocols during the interviews to make sure that I covered specific questions of interest with each family. But the questions changed during the process of interviewing, as the families revealed information I had not expected and raised new questions of their own. The original protocols were altered many times during the study. The interviews are all documented in verbatim transcripts and the interview protocol is presented in Appendix C.

My interview style was semi-structured. I generally began the first interview by asking the parents to describe their child to me. Often this question was enough to stimulate ten or fifteen minutes of information. When parents lost steam in their own thoughts I would interject a question that I wanted to cover. Many of the interviews went in spirals, as one thought spurred another thought that may be related to the present question or to something we had talked about a while back. More often than not the parent's stories addressed the questions in my protocols long before I had a chance to ask the questions. My role was most often to acknowledge what I heard and assure the parents that what they were talking about was of interest

to the study. Occasionally I would divert a long unrelated tangent of conversation (for example an interest in organic farming) in order to return to the topic of the study. On rare occasions I took a more active approach asking more questions to draw out the parents' thoughts. Most of the parents expressed an appreciation of participating in the interviews; they enjoyed the questions and the opportunity to talk about their child and the process of being a parent. The interviews took place over the course of one to four months. Some of the interviews were scheduled a week apart while others were scheduled three weeks apart.<sup>1</sup>

### Observations

Each family also participated in observation sessions, providing an opportunity for me to meet the children and observe parent-child interactions. The observation sessions occurred at the family's home at a time when all of the family members were together. We visited informally as I observed the routines of the family and spent time talking and playing. During these sessions I took brief notes about the child's behaviors and the interactions that occurred, and in the car or immediately following each session I expanded these notes to record my impressions of the children and families. The observation sessions gave me a sense of how the family functioned and served to triangulate the data obtained through the interviews.

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<sup>1</sup>There was a value in seeing the families over the course of a few months. I was able to verify the consistency of the parent's views over the course of time and observe changes that occurred in their child's behavior, their family life, and their parenting approach.

The total time spent observing children varied for each family. I interviewed two families at times when their child was in child care or attending school. I was only able to meet their child during the scheduled observation session that lasted 1 to 1 1/2 hours. My personal impressions of the children in these two families were limited to behaviors that occurred during that specific visit.

For two of the families their children were present during the interviews that were conducted at their homes. One of these families had the children play, nap and watch videos during the two joint interviews. The other family traded child care during the individual interviews and had their children watch television and videos during the joint interviews. With these families I was able to see how parents responded when their children needed attention during the sessions, when sibling conflicts occurred, and when children had heightened needs. I also gained a sense of how the child responded to me, a stranger, over the course of time.

I conducted interviews in the home of the fifth family during the mornings. Their child was usually leaving home for preschool or arriving home after preschool during the visits. These transitional times offered an opportunity for me to observe parent-child interactions during a time of moderate stress.

It is important to note that the observations served primarily to triangulate the data gained during the interviews. The observation sessions were limited to a short period of time and my presence in the home undoubtedly altered the nature of the interactions that occurred between parent and child. The observations I made during the interview sessions

provided a more "natural" context, as the children were often engaged in their own activities and interrupted our sessions when they needed something from their parents. The interruptions were sometimes a source of stress to the parents who were trying to talk to me. For my purposes, it was helpful to see how the parents and children interacted under these slightly stressful circumstances.

### Behavioral Style Questionnaire

At the end of the four interviews I administered the *Behavioral Style Questionnaire* (BSQ; McDevitt, & Carey, 1975), a widely-used measure of temperament for children aged 4 to 7 years. The BSQ is based on nine conceptual dimensions of temperament defined by Thomas and Chess (1977). It consists of 100 questions that can be completed by parents in 20 to 30 minutes. The BSQ yields a score in each of nine dimensions of temperament and a composite score or category of temperament: easy, low intermediate (close to easy), difficult, high intermediate (close to difficult), or slow to warm up. Five dimensions of temperament characterize the diagnostic cluster difficult: irregularity in biological functions, tendency to withdraw from new stimuli, slow to adapt to changes, expressive of negative mood, and intensity.

The BSQ was standardized on a sample of 350 children from a private pediatric practice (McDevitt & Carey, 1978). Test-retest reliabilities for the nine scales ranged from .67 to .94, with a median of .81; total score test-retest reliability was .89. Scores of individual children on the BSQ are compared to the means of the standardized sample and categorized accordingly. The questions are answered with a likert type scale—rating the frequency of child behaviors from *almost never* to *almost always*. Parents are instructed to rate

the frequency of their child's recent behaviors during the last 4 to 6 weeks.

Examples of questions are:

5. The child laughs or smiles while playing.
  43. The child approaches children his/her age that he/she doesn't know.
  73. The child is reluctant to give up when trying to do a difficult task.
- (McDevitt, & Carey, 1975)

I administered this questionnaire after the four interviews were completed because I wanted to learn first about the parent's perceptions of their child's temperament in their own words. I did not want the parents' discussions to be influenced by the kinds of information asked for in the questionnaire. Three of the five families chose to schedule a follow-up interview with me to review the results of the temperament questionnaire and discuss the questions they had about the study. During these interviews I assumed a more interactive role, responding to questions the parents raised about temperament and the study.

#### Analytic Procedures

The process of analysis of a qualitative study begins during the data collection phase and continues throughout the research endeavor (Charmaz, 1983; Miles & Huberman, 1984). The early phases of analysis for this study involved asking how the information gained from the participants related to the theoretical questions I hoped to address. This question served to both expand and narrow my realm of inquiry when I noticed either that something was missing or that too many divergent tangents were presented.

After each interview I reviewed my field notes and made notes about questions I wanted to ask during the next interview. Sometimes the information I gained from one family caused me to alter my questions for another family. For example one father wondered aloud what it meant to be a great parent, and I later included this question in my interviews. I also wrote memos to capture important ideas, note contrasts and similarities between parents, and record themes that began to emerge from the data. I occasionally made journal entries to record my perspectives about my role as a researcher. These early analytical activities helped me keep track of divergent information and, over time, enabled me to see patterns and connections in the data. The activities of preliminary analysis resulted in changes, from my original study proposal, to the interview protocols and the study design.

#### Coding of Interview Transcripts

Coding is a central activity of qualitative research that serves to categorize and sort the data (Charmaz, 1983). The process of coding assures that all the data is systematically reviewed, and guards against a tendency to focus only on the most vivid information (see Nisbett & Ross, 1980). All of the interview data for this study were systematically reviewed and coded using the following procedure.

All of the interviews were recorded on audio cassettes and later transcribed verbatim. Data collection resulted in 5 to 6 hours of interviews for each family and produced close to 800 pages of transcripts. I reviewed each of the transcripts while listening to the audio cassettes to correct any typing

errors. During this initial reading I also underlined portions of the data, wrote marginal notes, and composed extensive memos about the data.

I reread each transcript two or three more times during the coding process. During the first readings I assigned some codes to the data, more often wrote down a word from the data, or underlined a word or section. During subsequent readings I assigned codes to all of the data. The length of a passage included in a given code varied. A single code was sometimes assigned to a few words, a single line, or more often, a paragraph of text. I adopted a series of decision rules about how much text to code based on the content of the passage. When a passage described a cohesive event or idea I assigned a code to the entire passage. When the content changed, I assigned a new code. When a passage referred to more than one event or theme I assigned multiple codes. Often a paragraph or even a page of text described a single event or setting that could be captured with a single code, but within the passage multiple codes were assigned to smaller themes or events. During the final reading of the coding phase, I carefully reviewed each transcript to assure that all the data had been assigned a code. To check the reliability of the coding categories, a second rater independently coded a sample of the transcripts. Interrater agreement of 88% was achieved. Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

The codes I used were derived both from the data and the conceptual framework for this study. During the first several readings, I looked for codes that emerged from the data—codes that described what was said or what was happening. I tried during these initial readings to suspend my own theories and ideas. Many of the emerging codes were taken from the words of the

participants. For example the code *do different from parents* came from parents' statements that they wanted to raise their children differently from the way they had been raised. This code reflects the original language of two parents and was applicable to the transcripts of the other families. As the coding process progressed, I began to identify and name codes by drawing from the conceptual framework, ideas I had written in early memos, and characteristics that were of special interest to the study. My aim in coding was to identify both the content of the data and how the data connected to the questions guiding this study.

Code List. The code list was revised several times during the process of analysis. During this process, some codes were combined to decrease redundancy and increase conceptual coherence. The final code list includes six major categories: (1) *About the Child*, (2) *About the Parent*, (3) *Process of Parenting*, (4) *Figuring it Out*, (5) *Family of Origin*, and (6) *Larger Context*. The number of specific codes within each category ranged from 9 to 25. Examples of the data representing the specific codes *characteristics*, from the category *About the Child*, and interventions, from the category *Process of Parenting*, are presented below. The complete list of coding categories, specific codes and code definitions used in this study is provided in Appendix D.

*Characteristics* is a code from the category *About the Child* that identifies parents' perceptions of their child's characteristics—how the child is. These statements most often include adjectives such as outgoing, emotional, dramatic, demanding, curious, positive, persistent, and loud. This code can also refer to a characteristic way of responding like "he just doesn't

know when to stop." The following passages about Connor were coded as characteristics:

**Lori:** He's got a lot of energy and a lot of enthusiasm, and also he has more of things like—he can get out of control . . . he's never hesitant to try a new thing. (F1:A:1)

**Eric:** Connor's a very fascinated, very active, perpetual go machine, he goes and he goes, and he goes. He goes until he crashes. (F1:B:1)

*Interventions* is a code from the category *Process of Parenting*. It identifies statements about what parents do and say—strategies used for discipline, management and caring for a child. It includes preventive measures such as avoiding problematic situations. *Interventions* may or may not be punitive. Spanking, time out, and talking are examples of *interventions* that parents used. For example the code *interventions* was assigned to Barry's response to the question, "How long does time out last?":

Depends. If he quiets down quickly, a minute or two. If he continues, if he persists in throwing tantrums, time out doesn't end until he settles down, and it's not so much to punish, it's to give him a chance to compose himself. I think he's beginning to understand that now. Because when he kicks and screams and does all those things, we just keep telling him—you're not coming down until you compose yourself, till you calm down and relax. I think to the point where I just tell him, I'm not going to put up with this behavior. (F3:C:46)

General theoretical themes. During the final phases of coding and analysis I developed general theoretical themes. These themes can be thought of as overarching codes that encompass multiple specific codes

already assigned to a given passage. Theoretical themes provide a bridge from the specific content of the data to the theoretical questions of the study. The themes identified in this study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Coding Themes

<b>Coding Theme</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Parenting Sources	Identifies passages that describe elements that influence parenting. These passages reveal factors that influence why parents use specific interactions and adopt general styles of interacting with their children. The kinds of <i>parenting sources</i> described in the passages were given labels such as the child's temperament, family of origin influence, philosophy, and parent's needs.
Temperament Sources	Identifies passages that illustrate how parents come to form perceptions of their child's temperament. As with <i>parenting sources</i> , temperament sources were given labels to describe the content of the passage. Examples are compare to other children, relatives' views, experts' views, and feelings.
Family of Origin	Identifies ways that the parents' family of origin experiences influence their life course, feelings, and actions. Closely related to <i>temperament sources</i> and <i>parenting sources</i> .
Interactions	Identifies passages that describe how the child's temperament, parenting, and behaviors are influenced by different environments. Also how these three elements influence each other.
Figure it Out	This theme is drawn from the coding category, <i>figure it out</i> , and identifies passages that describe processes through which parents try to understand their child's behaviors and determine how to respond to behaviors and situations.
Control	This theme was developed late in the analytic process. It describes a parenting style based on efforts to control the ways children express their inner states.
Containment	This theme contrasts the theme <i>control</i> . The term comes from object relations theories and emerged from the words of participants in the study. It describes a parenting style based on providing holding or space for children's emotional experiences and intensity.

Process of coding. Over time the nature of coding changed. The process of moving from specific codes to more conceptual codes to themes reflects an internal and temporal evolution of thought that resulted in new ways of organizing the data. I began by coding all the transcripts from one family before beginning coding for the next family and discovered that the nature of coding changed as I moved from family to family. Coding for the first family occurred slowly. The task of discovering codes and systematically reviewing the data required all of my focus. Over time, I found that I could attend to more dimensions of the data at once, and the quality of analysis deepened. This memo, written while I was coding the transcripts from the fourth family, reveals how the process changed:

The process has changed. Now I still code for the same specificity, what my advisor calls "keeping it honest"—that is that all the data are accounted for. But I am making more links from a code, say, family of origin, to how I can use this information. How does it relate to the whole picture . . . or larger links with the research questions?

The processes of coding and analysis are interactive, simultaneous activities. I found that I became more fluid in my ability to jump from the abstract to the concrete and back again. During the coding process I wrote numerous memos about each family, temperament themes, and theory development.

### Analytic Activities

Miles and Huberman (1984) identify three concurrent activities of qualitative data analysis: data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. These activities are engaged in concurrently for the

purpose of generating meaning from the data. Many techniques were used during the final stages of analysis including summarizing, creating matrices, listing words, generating memos and developing metaphors. Some techniques, like coding, serve primarily to reduce or display data. Yet, during the process of coding, memos are written that lead to theories and larger conceptual categories that explain the data. In this way the discrete activities of qualitative analysis are intertwined and contribute to the generation of meaning.

The specific techniques used in this study are presented sequentially, to give a sense of the flow of the research process. Although this order presents the general progression of research activities, many activities overlapped, and earlier activities were revisited during later phases of analysis. Qualitative analysis involves moving from specific data to generate general propositions, then returning to the specific data to search for confirming and disconfirming cases (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Different techniques for organizing the data create different opportunities to engage in this process.

Case summaries. Following the coding phase of analysis, I created case summaries that detailed information about parents' perceptions of their child's temperament, arrangements for child care, parents' careers, parents' families of origin, and concerns and challenges. The topics addressed in the case studies were determined by the guiding conceptual framework of the study. While writing the summaries I reread the transcripts and analytic memos several times. I concurrently wrote margin notes and annotated overarching codes for passages of data.

Conceptual memos. The data was sorted into three categories that represented the theoretical interests of the study: parenting, temperament, and family of origin. From these categories of data, I wrote detailed memos on perceptions of temperament and parenting practices for each family. These memos served to reduce the data to the theoretical focus of the study and generate theoretical propositions. Propositions were tested by searching the data for confirming and disconfirming cases. When disconfirming cases were found, new propositions were generated in accordance with Miles and Huberman's (1984) view that hypotheses should be revised to account for discrepant cases. Erickson (1986) proposed that conclusions that are supported throughout the data increase confidence in the validity of qualitative findings. He said, "The best case for validity, it would seem rests with assertions that account for patterns found across both frequent and rare events. . . . the researcher's aim is not proof, in a causal sense, but the demonstration of plausibility" (p. 49).

Listing words. The technique of listing words served to reduce and display data. Word lists were used to analyze the parents' spontaneous descriptions of their child and create displays of data presented in the case summaries (see Tables 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5).

Metaphors. Metaphors were identified through the parents' own language and through analytic memos. For example, the metaphor "containment" was drawn directly from the parents' language and became a major analytic theme. This metaphor led to hypotheses that generated meaning from the data. The metaphor of containment was examined

through matrix displays of the data, and by searching through memos and transcripts for confirming and disconfirming cases.

Matrices. Matrices were useful for examining similarities and differences across families. For example, parenting responses were analyzed using a matrix. Summaries of relevant data from each parent were displayed in a matrix that included categories such as capacity for containment, resources, and parenting goals. The matrix display of this data helped to compare parenting patterns across different individuals. Some matrices used to analyze data were also used to display the findings in the final document (see Table 23). The patterns discovered from the matrices provided a source for generating and confirming propositions and hypotheses.

Writing. Examples of different analytic techniques reflect the interweaving quality of quantitative analysis. Analytic activities continued through the writing phase of this study. The writing phase provides a final opportunity to reexamine the data and revise hypotheses. I discovered instances when propositions needed clarification and revision. Qualitative analysis involves an ongoing process of finding and questioning patterns and themes. Miles and Huberman (1984) caution that:

Patterns just "happen," almost too quickly. The important thing is to be able to a) see real added evidence of the same pattern; b) remain open to disconfirming evidence when it appears." . . . Beliefs (in this case in the existence of a pattern) are remarkably resistant to new evidence. (p.216)

The writing phase involves communicating evidence that supports the findings. Through this process, discrepant cases can become apparent and

lead to new analyses and revisions of hypotheses. The ability to successfully communicate findings rests on the completeness of higher level analyses and the author's ability to synthesize findings. Synthesis of the findings requires the researcher to clarify relationships between variables, "subsume particulars into the general," and create conceptual coherence (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Through this final phase of the analytic process, the specific findings of the study are linked to larger theoretical constructs.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I present the results of the analytic process. In Chapter 3, I present case studies that introduce the five families who participated in this study. In Chapter 4, I present the results of data analysis, drawing connections between the findings and the conceptual concerns of the study.

## CHAPTER 3

### CASE SUMMARIES

#### Overview

Five families participated in this study. In this chapter I introduce each family and describe the parents' family backgrounds, current work situations, child care arrangements, and perceptions of their child's temperament. This information relates to factors identified in the conceptual framework guiding this study. These factors were expected to influence parental perceptions of and responses to their child. As the case summaries reveal, different factors from the conceptual framework proved to be most salient for different families. When possible, I present these narratives in the parents' own words in order to convey the tone as well as the content of the interviews.

In each summary I include a table identifying the parents' perceptions of their child's temperament. The perceptions included in this table were drawn from the parents' responses to my question, "How would you describe your child?" This question was asked during interviews conducted with each parent individually, to gain an understanding of the differences and similarities that might be present in the perceptions of fathers and mothers. During subsequent joint interviews, parents gave additional descriptors of their child that were used for other aspects of the analysis, but not included in these tables.

Lori, Eric, and Connor

Lori (42-years-old) and Eric (32-years-old) had two children, Connor (4-years-old) and Tommy (2-years-old). Lori and Eric had long felt that Connor was a "unique" child and since Tommy's birth they had observed how his temperament differed from his brother's temperament. During his first interview, Eric described Connor as a "perpetual go machine." (F1:B:1)<sup>2</sup>

His level of drive is unmatched by anybody I know. If he's into something, he just goes and he goes and he goes and he goes, he doesn't like to stop. I think Tommy is steerable, Connor is—the best you can do is try to create bumpers on both sides of him, sort of channel him out in the direction you need him to go. He's certainly the most perpetual little person I know. (F1:B:1)

Lori felt both of her children were active, but she observed differences between Connor and her younger child, Tommy, that helped her understand why she found Connor to be a more time-consuming and difficult child. She said:

Kids are different, you know. Tommy is also very active, but the one thing I noticed about Tommy that is so different than Connor is

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<sup>2</sup>The parents' quotations sited in this study are referenced according to the following convention: Family code:Interview Code:Page Number. F1 refers to Lori and Eric; F2 refers to Alicia and John; F3 refers to Ellen and Barry; F4 refers to Maria and Jeff; F5 refers to Chris and Greg. A refers to the mother's individual interview; B refers to the father's individual interview; C refers to the first joint interview; D refers to the final joint interview. For example, F1:B:1 refers to family 1, page 1 of the father's individual interview.

Tommy knows how to calm himself down. And that's always blown me away. (F1:A:3)

Connor's inability to calm himself down was one of the more difficult aspects of his personality for both Lori and Eric. They found that he often became loud and fast and frantic, and he just did not "know when to stop." Lori and Eric characterized him as very energetic, very enthusiastic, loud, extroverted and social. He was curious and fascinated by his many interests ranging from bugs to dinosaurs to physical activities. Both his parents believed he was different from other children they knew. Eric said:

Yeah, Connor's unique. Well, he's unique to us. . . . I just don't know anybody else who has a kid that's quite as active as he is. But is not destructive and doesn't know—have a way to turn it off. I pity the poor parents who do! (F1:B:24)

Lori and Eric believed that Connor tended to behave in ways that were more extreme than other children. Lori described a recent experience when her children had their blood drawn at a medical clinic as a "typical example" of Connor's temperament. She said:

Connor is screaming, "I'm not going to do it, I'm not going to do it," he tries to run out the door. I grab him, he runs in the bathroom, slams the door. I looked at them, like, can he lock himself in there? And they said no, but he wouldn't come out. I had to force the door—this is like the most absurd situation I've ever seen. God forbid it was a real—you know, they really had to have something horrible done. Because this was just a finger prick. I finally got the door open, got Connor out, he's kicking and screaming. I tried to hold him on my lap, and he's

kicking his legs out like this—at the tech person so she couldn't even get near. So we pick him up and lay him on the table, and I had to lay my whole body over him and talk to him while the tech sticks his arm out like this, gets his finger and jabs it. And the whole thing took about 15 minutes. (F1:D:29-30)

Connor approached most of his experiences with the same level of intensity that was evident when his blood was drawn. Much of the time, Eric and Lori appreciated his enthusiasm for life and his willingness to go ahead and try things. Lori said that he never hesitated or withdrew from new situations. Eric especially enjoyed Connor's enthusiasm for learning—the way he poured over books at the library, developed fascination for a topic and stayed with it, learning all he could.

#### Career and Child Care

Lori and Eric both worked outside of the home to earn enough income to support their family. For the first year of Connor's life Lori stayed home to care for him. When he was 1-year-old she returned to work and put Connor in full-time child care. She described her experience with child care as, "a miserable situation" because Connor would "just cry for two hours to defuse." (F1:A:7) After about 4 months of this arrangement she changed her work schedule and found that Connor was "less frazzled" and more accepting of child care. When Connor grew older, Eric and Lori scheduled their work hours so that they could avoid using any child care outside the home. This decision was made in part to save money, but predominately because they were concerned about Connor's response to the full-time child care center. Lori said:

I stopped doing [the child care center] . . . financially, but also it was just very unpleasant for me in some ways. . . . He'd have this wild time with these wild kids . . . I'd pick him up, he'd just be out of control and he would have sucked up all the behavior problems they had. (F1:A:24)

Lori and Eric's work schedule did not allow much time for the whole family to be together. Lori explained:

Eric has a business that he's just—I mean, it's been around for a long time . . . but not until he got out of school . . . did he start doing it more . . . and about a year ago he started doing it full-time and right now it's a real hard time. Finally things are beginning to kick in a bit, but it means a lot of long hours for him, and then since the kind of trade-off I have is I really am uncomfortable with the daycare thing. . . . I work in the evening so Eric has them in the evenings and time together is usually in the mornings and in the evenings I'm not working. . . . Usually if I'm home on the weekend, he takes advantage of that to work. . . . So we don't do a whole lot of things as a family and I do miss that. (F1:A:17)]

Lori described a range of career interests and an eclectic background. She majored in dance in college and worked for many years as a performer. After she stopped performing she worked at many different jobs ranging from theater manager, to radio announcer, to advertising work. Lori imagined many different possibilities for her future career, but her focus was on her role as a mother. She described her current part-time job at a local athletic club as a fairly easy and enjoyable way to earn extra income for her family. She enjoyed the benefits of club membership, the work was not very stressful

and the responsibilities ended when she went home. However, during the course of our interview sessions, her job responsibilities and job stress increased because she assumed the role of assistant manager at the club.

Eric finished a graduate degree in industrial design when Connor was 2-years-old, right before their second child was born. When Connor was born he was attending school, and working part-time at several jobs including his business in computer-graphics technology. He gradually cut back the other jobs as his business grew into "more than full-time" work. He went to work early in the mornings so that he could come home in the late afternoon to care for the boys while Lori worked evenings. Eric tried to do additional work after the boys went to bed, and spent some time working on weekends as well.

Eric's high level of involvement in his work had a history in his family of origin. His parents both worked a lot as he was growing up and he began working early in his life. He described a parallel between his current lifestyle and his teenage years:

I moved up here when I was about 15 1/2. The other part of that is that when I moved up here, for all intents and purposes I was nearly an adult. When I wasn't at school I was working. I got my first job at 15 1/2 and I was working 25, 30 hours a week then. It isn't that much different than the last 10 years. (F1:C:8)

Lori and Eric identified their financial situation as a source of stress. They felt they both needed to work in order to support their family and establish Eric's business. Because they put all their available money into Eric's business, many of the decisions they made about their lifestyle were based on what they could afford.

### Family of Origin

Lori's mother and father lived in a different state. Lori had a younger sister who lived near her parents, was married, but had not yet had children.

Lori initially described her parents:

They were very, very caring as parents. I think they were, in some ways, a little over protective. But I was always loved. . . . Now as grandparents they are as involved as they can be considering that they live in [another state]. (F1:C:1)

As Lori continued to talk about her childhood, she revealed ambivalent feelings about the parenting she received. She said she was a lot like Connor as a child and thought that her parents did not know how to respond to her. She remembered feeling stifled and knew that her parents found her to be "pretty challenging." She remembered that her parents took her to a counselor when she was 5-years-old and as a result decided to "be firmer" with her. Lori thought that her parents did not understand her feelings as a child. She said:

Just a lot of things I see in Connor, I know I had as a child and sometimes still struggle with different feelings. . . . I wish I could help him more. I understand kind of what he's going through, but I don't always have the solution to it. My parents were very different than me, so I don't think they could really understand what I was showing. (F1:A:6)

Lori believed that the way her parents responded to her temperament was not helpful to her. She remembered how she felt when she was punished as a child. She said:

My parents used to shut me in my room and ignore me, and I used to get more angry and more angry and more angry and throw things, because I thought for sure now that I—I felt bad that I'd been bad and then I felt unloved because I was bad. I was a horrible person—you know, the whole thing like now I'm being bad and they don't love me and I can't stop the cycle because I'm mad at myself for being bad. And that's a hard one. I don't really know the answer to—but that's what I'm trying with Connor, to let him cry it out a bit and then go into him before he gets to the point where he's just out of control, and sort of comfort him down, because I think if maybe my parents had done that to me more, it would have been helpful. (F1:A:27)

Eric also identified ways he wanted to be different from his parents. He currently enjoyed a "fairly close relationship" with his parents, but felt more distant during his childhood. He said:

Growing up in the household with them I'd say was a little bit different. They were both very driven by work. We moved very frequently, every year and a half, every 2 years. It's an ugly term but it fits very well, it was a very dysfunctional house in the sense that there was not a lot of communication between my parents, there was not a great deal of communication between my parents and me as an adolescent. . . . There was not a lot of touching, there wasn't much in the way of I love yous or anything like that. (F1:C:2)

Eric's parent's were separated when he was 13 and divorced when he was 16. His mother and father both remarried, but his mother's husband died when Connor was 2-years-old. His mother currently had a boyfriend. The

grandparents and step-grandparents are all involved in Connor's life. Eric's father lived in a different city in the same state and visited a few times a year. His mother lived in the same city and saw her grandchildren a few times a month. Eric also had a younger brother who was married; he lived near by and often saw Connor.

Eric described his adolescence as rebellious, and himself as "sort of a latch key kid." (F1:C:5) When his parents divorced he moved away to live with his dad for about a year and a half. He believed that the move was a positive influence because it forced a separation from his teen age friends.

My friends and I were bored and destructive and we grew up blowing things up . . . . And we were smoking enormous amounts of marijuana, dabbling with some of the harder drugs, and [my parent's] separation indirectly forced me into a different set of peers and a different situation. (F1:C:5)

Even though Eric felt his early childhood was dysfunctional in many ways, he also identified positive aspects of his relationship with his parents that he believed shaped his life. He said:

The only thing . . . that I would try to carry over from my relationship with my parents is that we regarded each other as kind of as friends, I was never treated as a kid. It was always more a small adult. . . . They let me make my decisions, they always let me learn by mistakes . . . .

And I think it's made me more sure of myself as an adult. (F1:C:6-7)

### Challenges and Concerns

The most challenging aspect of Connor's temperament for Lori and Eric was his level of intensity and expressiveness. Lori said:

It just seems like his temperament is such that it can take so much and then it just goes too far and I need to—that's when it's hardest for me to deal with it . . . he's frantically doing things too loud and too much and can't focus very well, and that's when it sort of just goes too far. . . . And I haven't yet found a way to really help him deal with that. I mean, we try things, but really the only thing is to leave the situation most of the time. (F1:A:2)

Eric said that going to adult social events was especially difficult. They often experienced problems when they took Connor to parties and get-togethers with their relatives. Even though social settings were difficult, Connor's social life was very important. Lori described Connor as a very social person, and she voiced concerns that he needed better social skills. He did not always know how to join a group of children and his actions sometimes alienated him from other children. One of Lori's long range goals and hopes for Connor was that he be able to "fit in" socially.

I want him to be socially accepted and I think the only reason I feel so strongly about that is that Connor—ever since he was very tiny has always wanted that. He wants to be with people. He wants them to like him and he wants to like them. (F1:C:30)

Lori said she did not have very much support or understanding for the kinds of challenges she faced with Connor. She had friends who she could talk to about the typical concerns of parents of boys (like violent play and guns), but her friends did not experience many of the problems she faced with Connor. She said, "I wish I knew other people who have children who were really as spirited like that, and I don't." (F1:A:20) She had looked into parent

education classes about spirited children, but had only found classes geared to parents of younger children.

Lori felt the same way about many parenting books. She found that the advice in books seemed to work for her younger son, Tommy, but did not really fit for Connor. She said, "I'd read and then I'd go, okay, well then, how come he's been having the "terrible twos" since he was 1, and he's 3 1/2— what's going on?" (F1:A19)

When asked what they would like to change in their family, Lori and Eric both said they wanted to find a way to dampen Connor's intensity. they said:

**Lori:** I guess what I would like is to have a better response when I feel I'm trying to react to whatever is going on in a very objective way, and to have him respond in a way that I can actually relate to. Because lately he just often responds by gibberish or growling at me or tuning out or something, and that gets me more angry and then usually after several hours of this I tend to just lose it. . . . I'd just like to see that he could tune out whatever is making him answer me with gibberish or tune me out or whatever. It's like static or something. I just want to wipe it out and get through to the Connor that I know can talk to me. (F1:D:44)

**Eric:** I want to find the button that turns Connor's intensity down, or seems to make it so that he will know quite when to turn it off. (F1:D:42)

Table 3 presents the words Lori and Eric used to describe their perceptions of Connor's temperament. Similar characteristics mentioned by

both parents during separate interviews are presented in the first half of the table. Characteristics that were mentioned by only one parent are presented in the second part of the table. Lori and Eric emphasized Connor's exuberance, high activity level, and emotional intensity.

Table 3

Spontaneous Parental Perceptions of Connor

<b>Similar Characteristics</b>	
<b>Lori</b>	<b>Eric</b>
Lot of energy	Very active His level of drive is unmatched. Perpetual go machine, Connor's a runner, he has always been a runner
Sometimes he can get—it's too much. He's frantically doing things, too loud and too much and he can't focus. Sometimes that just goes—all of a sudden goes too far and he won't listen to reason. He goes until he just , something happens , he's a mess and he's crying.	He goes and he goes and he goes and he goes, he doesn't like to stop. Active to a fault, he was like that in utero. Grabbing and not knowing quite when to stop Very fidgety So ballistic, so off the deep end
Can get out of control. He can not calm himself down.	He's hyper at times. He goes off the deep end at times and he has a really difficult time calming himself down sometimes. He doesn't know quite when to shut it off sometimes, he doesn't know quite when to shut it off He's like a yappy little dog constantly running at your feet

Table 3 (continued)

<b>Similar Characteristics</b>	
<b>Lori</b>	<b>Eric</b>
His ability to be around people, he'll say hi to everyone.	Very engaging personality
He's very extroverted, usually in a good way.	Very extroverted
Very curious	Very fascinated Almost obsessive level of fascination he has with whatever his fascination is at the moment.
Interests: loves to read; loves projects - scissors, glue, paper, crayons; water play; anything tactile; big motor movement; run; play outside; dig for bugs; play with trucks; watch videos; music; dancing	Interests: likes to make things; cooking; he likes making art; creative things; he likes putting things together; sort of a tinkerer; reading; outdoor activities; running; jumping

<b>Unique Characteristics</b>	
<b>Lori</b>	<b>Eric</b>
He eats while he's swinging his chair back and forth and moving and then doing this and talking with his mouth full. You know, as much as we work on it, it just never seems to really get better. Dramatic	Food is almost incidental to him. When he's really hungry he'll sit down and he'll scarf it all down and he'll want to get down and play.  He's very bright. . . . smarter than his age, He seems to pick up a great deal of information. . . .He is busy constantly inside of his head working it out.

Table 3 (continued)

<b>Unique Characteristics</b>	
<b>Lori</b>	<b>Eric</b>
Positive	It's very important to him what people think of him. . . . important that people have a real high opinion of him.
Lots of enthusiasm	He's very conscious of how he's being perceived and how he's coming across.
Very giving	I've seen him show just impeccable manners.
	When he's rested and confident and calm he's a very gracious and mature little boy.
Very kind	Very introspective He thinks a lot.
Very good conscience he's beginning to develop.	He knows how to read people really well.
Everything he does he likes you to do with him	Perceptive of emotion, Very emotional boy, He likes to say I love you.
He's never hesitant to try a new thing never do I have. . . this kind of withdrawal	About 18 months he started throwing just lulu tantrums. He seemed precocious in the way that he could throw a tantrum.
Very open to new things	

Table 3 (continued)

<b>Unique Characteristics</b>	
<b>Lori</b>	<b>Eric</b>
<p>As an infant: he would demand my attention.            He cried a lot            He was happiest when he was out.            He liked closeness and I wore him in the front pack.</p> <p>Sometimes he'll get too loud</p> <p>He comes on too strong</p> <p>Has always been a more time consuming child</p>	<p>As an infant he had his own schedule, he would wake us up ever two hours . . . feed whenever he felt like it.</p> <p>He smiled early, they were big smiles, flirtatious smiles</p> <p>He crawled on time, walked a little early</p> <p>He had a really sweet disposition.</p> <p>He was a great baby, very sweet, very happy, very pleasant.</p> <p>Very tactile</p> <p>He was colicky somewhat at night.</p> <p>He was fussy as a very tiny baby, but once he got past that, he's always had a really pleasant outgoing demeanor.</p> <p>He gets very frustrated when he's about to conquer something.</p>

Alicia, John, and Michael

Alicia and John were the 34-year-old parents of Michael who turned 4 during the course of our interviews. When I asked John to describe Michael, he said, "I think first and foremost would be he is smart. . . . Even when he was younger [he] could take things, would hear things and be able to use them in the same context." (F2:B:1) Michael started reading a few months before our interviews began and started attending a school for academically gifted children on the day of Alicia's first interview. She explained how she came to see him as gifted:

I was reading a book or something and they led me to believe . . . in comparison to other children his age, he was ahead . . . for example at two he knew all of his ABCs and he could recognize them. He knew all of his numbers and he could recognize them, up to number 20. And this was a little bit before two. (F2:A:6)

John was struck by Michael's early demonstrations of his intelligence. He said he began to think "this kid's something" (F2:B:3) when Michael was about 1-year-old. Once, when he was taking Michael for a walk along a neighborhood route, John realized that Michael was able to recognize landmarks he had only seen from the car before. Another time Michael looked at three things hanging in the garage and said, "Papa, three." (F2:B:3) John was also impressed by Michael's motor skills. He said, "We found out for his age I think physically he's very coordinated. He was able to ride a bike, he wasn't even three. . . . I got surprised." (F2:B:15) John really enjoyed watching Michael learn new things:

I love bringing him to new situations and watching him learn. Watching, and see his questions and trying to explain. . . . This latest school he's going to is supposedly for advanced kids. We don't know how advanced he is, but I guess . . . . I take it for granted that he'll pick it up right away. Which is wrong, I mean he's only a kid. (F2:B:18)

John said Michael's abilities sometimes created problems for him: "I, a lot of times, catch myself expecting him to be older. Forgetting that he's not even 4 yet. And so I'm kind of hard with him." (F2:B:4)

John and Alicia also described several other dimensions of Michael's individuality. John said, "He's extremely active. I mean, he doesn't stop, he's like a top. And the moment you get him started, it doesn't—he just goes. He's extremely active. I mean extremely." (F2:B:30) Alicia found Michael was a demanding infant. She said:

It was a big adjustment for me that much I could tell you. I—I used to think, you know just getting ready to bring him out when he was young, it was like a 2-hour process. Plus he was breast-fed so it's not like you could just, you—you could not just give him a bottle. He never took a bottle, never took a pacifier. Just absolutely hated those things. Which is fine, I mean it worked out because I wasn't really working as much. . . . so I just spent all that time with him. (F2:A:10)

### Family History

John and Alicia believed being raised in a different culture influenced their lifestyle. They are both Filipino. John was born in the Philippines and moved to this country when he was 28-years old, two years before Michael's birth. Alicia's parents were born in the Philippines, but she was born in this

country. Her father and mother had both lived with them until about eight months before the interviews, when her father died. Their family still felt the effects of this loss. Michael had been very close to his grandfather and he continued to miss him. He was also very close to his grandmother, who still lived with their family. Alicia said that when her mom was gone on vacation, Michael "didn't feel like he was whole." John spoke of the value of living with extended family:

We live—we're different like, you know—his grandmother, ourselves and him, and his grandfather before he passed away. . . . I think the big thing here is that a lot of children don't grow up with older people and . . . I feel that's wrong. So we felt that even if space-wise, the personal space would be nicer to be on our own, for him it's an opportunity. I mean, he loves older people and I don't think he'd be that way as much if not for the fact that he grew up with his grandfather and grandmother. (F2:B:13)

Alicia and John also described negative aspects of their Asian culture. They remembered that, as children, they were most often told not to do things or try things. Nor were they encouraged to explore their own interests. John said:

We were not encouraged to do anything. . . . We always knew what not to do. . . . Don't do this, don't do that, we don't do this, we don't do that. . . . We never got any encouragement. (F2:B:46-47)

Alicia believed her parents were not to be faulted for the way they raised her. Rather, they were acting in ways that were consistent with their generation and Asian culture. John thought his childhood was influenced

partially by cultural differences, but also by his unusual family situation. He said in the Philippines he was raised by maids, "There's no real interaction between you and your parents." (F2:B:18)

I don't ever want to be the kind of parent—like the parent I had. I say parent because I was also in a weird situation because my mother was separated—there's no divorce in the Philippines, but when you are separated you're . . . like a pariah. And I grew up in that. . . . I never had my father. (F2:B:46)

John was the youngest boy of two older sisters. His parents were separated when he was very young—he thought about 1-year-old. Their marriage was annulled by the Catholic church because his father had been abusive to his mother. He had no contact with his father until years later when his father was dying. He and his sisters lived with their mother in the home of his grandmother and two uncles. The children were raised by nannies and did not experience much parental interaction. John said he only heard from his mother or his uncles when he did something wrong.

John began smoking and drinking as a young adolescent. He stopped drinking for a short while at age 18, after he got in a serious automobile accident. When he met Alicia he had been drinking heavily, but quit both smoking and heavy drinking when they married, about a year before Michael was born.

John's family did not approve of his relationship with Alicia. Because of their marriage, his family disowned him shortly after he moved to the United States. John and Alicia had maintained only minimal contact with his family during the past few years, but at the time of our interviews, they

were making an attempt to re-establish contact. John believed his childhood had a dramatic negative effect on his life and his feelings about himself. He said:

I'm still trying to figure out how screwed up I am. No, seriously. I mean, it's been quite a journey and I think this last two years I mentally—not a breakdown . . . just overload. Too much. I've really in a lot of ways gone back to ground zero. . . . I finally got so low I couldn't even . . . do my job. . . . I just gave up. The only thing I did right was watch Michael. . . . I think it was a combination more than anything, like too many years of having to fight everyone. . . . The hardest part is really being told you're not worth anything and when you achieve something, like I was an honors student, I was this, I was that—so what. It didn't matter. (F2:C:36)

Alicia grew up as the only sister of two older brothers and she felt that in many ways she grew up as an only child. She said:

I'm the youngest and only girl—big age differences between my two older brothers, so for the majority I always felt like I was the only child. Because I don't remember really interacting with them other than my one brother terrorizing me. (F2:C:26)

Alicia did not feel close to either of her brothers as an adult. She felt that being the only girl in an Asian family was a significant part of her childhood. She said that her brothers were encouraged to develop careers and pursue their interests, but she was raised to "go to college and to graduate and then just get married and have kids." (F2:C:31) She was never encouraged to

develop her own interests, activities or hobbies. She hoped as a parent to be able to encourage Michael to develop his skills and interests. She said:

I mean, we definitely want him to grow up differently than the way we were brought up. And I think part of it—and I'm not blaming my parents for it or anything, but a lot of it has to just do with that generation where you were just told to follow and you follow, and you don't question and you know, just graduate from college, we don't care what you graduate in. (F2:A:15)

### Career and Child Care

Alicia became pregnant with Michael during her first year working as a real estate agent. During her pregnancy she and John decided she would stay at home to raise Michael. She said:

But there was a point there, where we strongly considered that I would just stay home and you know, raise Michael and just be a stay-at home mom. And that lasted for actually a couple years. I stayed home for a couple years. . . . I just kind of did real estate on the side. If I had business . . . he would come with me everywhere I went because he wouldn't take a bottle, so I would either bring my husband or my mom with me to help me. (F2:A:11)

Alicia and John wanted Michael to be cared for by family members while he was young. Alicia said, "For the first almost three years of his life it was either my husband, me or my mom that watched him." (F2:A:13) Over time Alicia's business grew, as former clients returned to work with her. When Alicia's business increased, John was in a position to stay home and he

assumed many of the household duties of cooking and child care. John talked about how their jobs and child care roles changed:

My business slowed down, my wife's really picked up, so we just shifted, I became Mr. Mom. Again it's funny because in the Philippines we—men don't take care of children. It's just, men don't cook. . . . I don't mind it. I used to be scared of children, of babies, I think. I mean literally scared to hold them. I might break em. Until Michael got born and I realized I love children. I mean, I get a blast going to the playground. (F2:B:23)

John described his own career as being in a "state of change." He experienced a significant cultural change when he first moved to this country and tried to find a job. He had grown up in a wealthy family and his experiences in the Philippines did not prepare him for the difficulty he had finding work in this country:

It's a different way of finding work. I used to be a bank officer back home and when I got here, I started out as a copy boy, I had people asking me if I could speak English . . . it's like they go up to you real close and speak real slow. (F2:B:35)

I grew up with maids and 10,000 square foot home and Mercedes-Benzes, and you know? I grew up with that. And you become a certain way. . . . Then I moved here and suddenly you're just, you're less than. (F2:B:37)

John worked for a few years for a large company doing a job he did not enjoy with people he did not like. John's situation eventually became so frustrating that he quit his job. He explained his feelings during that time:

"A lot of self doubt. . . . So I hid from the rejection by getting stuck in a job . . . until finally I couldn't take it any more and so I realized, how am I going to change?" (F2:B:38)

He decided that he wanted to go into business for himself because he wanted to be in charge of what he did and not have someone tell him what to do. He entered a career as a mortgage broker. He said that was one of the hardest things he ever did, but he felt it was important, both for his livelihood, and for his son to see him succeed at something difficult. He explained what it was like to make this change:

There's one thing I 'm scared of and it's . . . even just asking for information on the phone . . . . For me it's just not done, I tell other people to do it, that's the way I grew up . . . . It took me three weeks to make my first phone call, I mean three weeks of four hours a night faking it. I'd just kind of sit in front of the phone. . . . It's a big hang-up. . . . and so into this Michael was born . . . and it's an environment of change right now (F2:B:39)

At the time of the interviews, John was working at his office at home, and over the past year his business had increased. He explained that he used to spend a lot more time hanging around with Michael, taking him to parks, throwing stones at water, playing with trains, but lately he had to work during times Michael was with him and Michael had to play independently. He said:

Lately, for the last maybe year, my time with him hasn't been as event-filled, unfortunately, a lot of times it's like well here are your trains, I can set them up for you, but you got to play on your own because I

have to work. Even if I'm at home I have to do things. . . . I remember at first he had a big problem with that because he was so used to playing with one of us. (F3:B:15)

Alicia and John found that working at home had a major drawback. The work never ended and often took time away from being together as a family. John said,

Yes, we have a flexible schedule, but a lot of times our time is not ours. You cannot say, tomorrow is our weekend and we're not going to work. No, because if someone calls us on our pager—sorry, time to work. (F2:B:19)

John said it was difficult to balance the demands of his job with his desire to interact with Michael:

The biggest detractor right now is always being with him and having to think that you have to do something else. . . . A lot of times it's been that way, and that is so wrong. And I've finally tried to realize that so that now I consciously ask myself, do I want to be with him or not? I want to be with him, okay, let's enjoy it. You know. Put whatever I have to do aside. And when we do that—oh the things we do!  
(F3:B:17)

### Challenges and Concerns

John and Alicia began to think that Michael was a spirited or difficult child before he was 1-year-old. Alicia said:

Sometimes you have these babies who . . . just real mellow, and ours was not one of them! And I actually purchased that book about how to raise your strong-willed child but at that point I thought he's too young

to fit into this. . . . He was just always a very active child, I mean, just wouldn't give up. (F2:C:41)

John and Alicia expressed a range of concerns about Michael's temperament and behavior, and about their parenting techniques and skills. Alicia and John found that their daily routine activities seemed to be difficult with Michael.

Just things like going to the bathroom or getting dressed—you know, there's some children I know that'll stand still or they'll help themselves get dressed. He's squiggling and moving around constantly. . . . Where we are at right now, because of the fact that he doesn't take a nap, and getting him ready for bed, he's like Jekyll and Hyde. One minute he's okay, the next minute he's throwing a royal fit, and those are the moments it's like—I have to deal with this. And it makes going to bed not very fun, not very pleasant, and I end up being angry and he ends up being angry and I don't like for him to go to bed with that unresolved. (F2:A:18)

Alicia and John were trying to understand the reasons why Michael acted as he did and how they should respond as parents. As they discussed the problems they experienced with Michael, they often questioned their own expectations and behaviors. They were concerned that their expectations might be too high for a child his age and that their discipline style might be too threatening, too strict, and at other times not strict enough. At the time of our interviews, they were especially challenged by Michael's tendency to not listen to them nor follow what they said.

**Alicia:** He's strong—willed in the way that he likes to do things his own way and sometimes there comes a point where he's just like constantly testing us. And I'll notice he'll do that more when he doesn't see me as much. It's like a power trip. It drives me crazy sometimes. . . . And it gets to the point where it's like, do you want negative attention, you know, before you'll listen to me? . . . That's kind of where we're at right now, and I don't know if it's just a stage or the age, you know, of showing that he's growing up or what not. But there are times where—and I'll ask him very nicely and . . . he just refuses to either listen or to obey and it gets to the point where I have to give him a time-out. So those are one of our biggest problem areas right now. (F2:A:3)

**John:** He's not pliable. . . . He's got a mind of his own. And maybe I expect too much, too. You know there is that too. Getting him to do things sometimes. Or there's always this constant testing, battle of the wills. He'll do it, eventually. It's like having to go through the getting mad, the—and it's like after a while it gets tiring, that gets really tiring. sometimes . . . I'd just like for him to just do it. (F2:B:30)

Alicia was especially troubled that he often wouldn't eat and ambivalent about how to address the problem. While a part of her wished she could just let him eat when he was hungry and not push him to eat at meal times, she worried about the consequences of doing that:

This morning he didn't want to eat yogurt and so he was throwing up. So his new thing is throwing up. And what I should do is just say, okay, if you're not hungry, then just—that's fine, you're excused from

the table. And just let him go. But it just hits a nerve in me, its like, he's not eating . . . it becomes a power play. . . . But the thing is if I let him leave the table, then he'll walk away and he'll get hungry later and then he gets ballistic if he doesn't get fed. So who ends up having to bear the consequence of that? You know and its kind of like a double edged sword. (F2:A:17)

John said there were also positive challenges he faced with Michael and that these concerns were of equal importance to more problematic issues. "The positive that's very challenging is trying to figure out how to stimulate his capabilities, or stimulate his mental facilities—his physical, I mean, how to make him grow." (F2:B:30)

Alicia and John acknowledged differences in their parenting styles. John believed he encouraged Michael to try more things and take more physical risks, while Alicia was more cautious. They both said that Alicia was more permissive while John was more strict, and they expressed concern that John might be so strict that he would drive Michael away from him. Even though they identified ways they wanted to change, overall, John and Alicia felt they were good parents and that Michael knew he was loved. John said:

I think kids can feel when they're just like a big hassle to a person's life. With him he knows, I mean no matter what, I think he knows we love him, and we'd much rather he be in the world . . . . So because of that, he's lucky. (F2:B:34)

John and Alicia's perceptions of Michael are presented in Table 4. Some of their most salient descriptors were out-going, friendly, strong-willed, persistent, curious and having a temper.

Table 4

Spontaneous Parental Perceptions of Michael

<b>Similar Characteristics</b>	
<b>Alicia</b>	<b>John</b>
He understands concepts very easily and quickly. He's a fast learner.	First and foremost would be he is smart. Even when he was younger he could take things and be able to use them in the same context.
He's strong-willed He's just constantly testing us.	He's not pliable. He's got a mind of his own. Constant testing, battle of the wills.
Very outgoing Extremely friendly It's easy for him to make friends.	When he plays he's a leader. He loves other children. He's nice.
He has a temper. He just goes ballistic. His temper can consist of throwing things or right now it's spitting.	He's very loving, but he's got a temper.
He gets very frustrated with himself.	He gets frustrated really easily.
His imagination	He has imagination.
He is extremely persistent.	He's persistent. He's not a quitter. As a baby, no matter how much crying he would do, he wouldn't quit until he got it done.
Not easily distracted	He's fixed on something, whether it's to play or to see how something works or to want something—can't distract him.
Interests: trains, trains and more trains; computer; working with sand and water; cause and effect things; books; mazes; puzzles; anything athletically oriented	Interests: He loves trains. He's got a one track mind with trains; riding bikes; loves books; hobby shop; slot cars; cooking; making up stories;
He doesn't want to eat.	He doesn't like to eat. One day he'll eat a lot for one or two meals, then for two days he won't eat much.
He's always busy, he's a very, very busy child.	He's always been extremely active. He doesn't stop, he's like a top. He just goes.
Very talkative Rarely ever quiet Even when he's playing quietly, he's talking or he's singing. He'll talk until he falls asleep.	Strong language skills

Table 4 (continued)

<b>Similar Characteristics</b>	
<b>Alicia</b>	<b>John</b>
<p>As an infant: He was a demanding child. He never took a bottle, never took a pacifier. He was 18 months before he slept through the night.</p>	<p>As an infant: Persistency He was a baby who loved to cry, I mean when he cried, he cried. Very expressive He was very affectionate. He never took long naps.</p>

<b>Unique Characteristics</b>	
<b>Alicia</b>	<b>John</b>
<p>Inquisitive Precocious When he's in a good mood he's just constantly singing and just really happy go lucky. He does always question. He doesn't easily accept what-ever's just told to him, he has to find out the reasons. When he does get in trouble we usually talk about it.</p> <p>He's able to actually negotiate fairly well We have to work on his listening ability and his following instructions.</p> <p>He is not cautious. He's always been a child who just goes for it, regardless.</p>	<p>He's got the memory of an elephant. He's so intense. Doesn't like to be dirty He doesn't like to fingerprint. He's very loving.</p> <p>He's also very generous, in that he sees somebody hurting he says are you okay? If he's only got two pieces of candy, he'll say do you want one? He's got a funny sense of humor. He has extremes. He has swings—he swings from extremely happy to extremely angry or sad. You might call him a perfectionist.</p> <p>He's strong, he's kind of physical. Physically he's very coordinated. He has a predisposition towards being aggressive.</p>

Barry, Ellen and Lucas

Barry (41-years-old) and Ellen (44-years-old) adopted Lucas from Columbia when he was 4-months-old. Lucas turned 4, two months after the first interview. Ellen described her first impressions of him:

At the age of 4-months, he was sitting up, that's how strong he was. . . . He was very intent. . . . He was [a] very cuddly, very happy little baby. . . . Hated to go to sleep, hated it, even at 4-months—to go to sleep at night. And really . . . wouldn't go down for a nap. (F3:A:15)

Barry described Lucas as "high energy, more than anything else, that describes him. . . . From the minute he shakes the sleep out of his head in the morning until he goes to sleep at night, he doesn't stop." (F3:B:1) Ellen, in a separate interview, said almost the same thing, "You know, he was always busy, busy, busy from the moment he woke up to the moment he fell asleep . . . he always is active. Never sits still." (F3:A:25) Barry and Ellen both observed that Lucas was often engaged in more than one activity at a time.

**Ellen:** He just goes, goes, goes, goes, whether it's drawing—he'll draw, he'll sit and draw all the time, or play with Legos or do something, but he's got to go. And he'll [do] two, three things at one time. (F3:C:51)

**Barry:** He is not capable sometimes . . . of doing just one thing at a time. It's like if he's really busy playing with his toys, he needs to have something else to take a little bit of his attention, like he'll have some music on, or the television or something. Or play with two or three toys at once. (F3:C:51)

Lucas' ability to engage in several things at once was juxtaposed by his strong ability to stick with things he was interested in. Ellen described him as tenacious:

If he gets on a subject or an activity, he'll stick with it. If he's interested in a movie, really interested, he'll stay with it, to the very end . . . if he wants to play . . . trains . . . . He'll stay for hours—for a long long time, and play with his trains. . . . If he has an opinion he'll stay with that opinion. If he thinks he's right . . . nothing can change his mind.

(F3:A:1)

Lucas showed focus and a strong attention span from an early age. Barry described Lucas' behavior the first time he watched a video:

I remember when he was 11-months-old, the first movie we bought was *101 Dalmatians*. The first time we put that movie in the machine and showed him, he watched that movie from start to finish without a break . . . it's an hour and 15 minutes. And he didn't break his attention span. . . . I couldn't believe the way he watched that movie and that's typical of the way he does a lot of things. He gets really focused on what he's doing. And time doesn't matter to him. (F3:C:34)

Lucas had health problems since birth. Ellen said, "Ever since he came up he has had a cough. It's lessened now. Now that he's growing, it's getting lesser and lesser." (F3:A:20) Lucas also had symptomatic asthma and allergies. He was on medication for his asthma and administered his own inhalator treatments. Ellen wondered if some of Lucas' current allergies were caused by medications he received in Columbia to treat a suspected toxoplasmosis infection. Lucas had received treatment in Columbia for an asymptomatic

toxoplasmosis infection, while he was 2-months-old, but the treatment was discontinued at 4-months-old, because repeat blood tests were negative. Barry and Ellen believed the first blood test had been a false positive.

Even though Lucas had health problems, he was not a frail child. In fact, he had always been physically strong and coordinated. Ellen said he attained many developmental milestones earlier than most children:

His strength has always followed him through. He's always been strong. Sitting up—I think he was sitting up earlier than most.

Always, his upper body strength has always been good, being able to pull himself up. And . . . his leg muscles followed and by 9-months he was basically walking around, trying to walk on his own. 10-months he was literally walking. (F3:A:17)

Lucas had sleep problems through-out his life. He did not sleep through the night until he was 18-months-old and he often woke up at night crying inconsolably. Ellen believed his night crying was related to frustrations he experienced as he mastered developmental milestones like crawling and walking. She said:

Through his development he was always frustrated in terms of when he wanted to crawl, he'd cry because he couldn't walk, he had to crawl. . . . We always knew when he was going through another development phase because at night he'd wake up screaming at times, just sobbing uncontrollably, and you couldn't console him. And we were never sure whether he was fully awake or just that the pressures of the day just eased up and he just was crying to get out the frustrations in the middle of the night. And he'd cry for 15, 20 minutes, just cry and cry

and cry. We tried everything . . . . And then it would be over, he'd be asleep, he'd go back to sleep. (F3:A:15-16)

Barry and Ellen both believed Lucas had strong social skills and had always been outgoing and friendly with children and adults. They said:

**Ellen:** He loves kids. . . . He's very good socializing and with adults. He's a little bit shy to begin with, and that's only been the past year, year and a half. Up until 2, 2 1/2-years-old . . . he would go to anybody, anybody that showed him any kind of attention. . . . That was our biggest fear. (F3:A:9)

**Barry:** He's pretty gregarious. When he was an infant I used to say that he had star quality. And the reason I used to say that was because people were drawn to him and he really played to his audience. . . I think he has a very charismatic personality. (F3:D:32)

Lucas was sensitive to many different sensations and emotions. He was sensitive to other people's emotions, and he expressed his own feelings in strong ways. He did not like to fingerpaint because he did not want his fingers to get dirty, and he was sensitive to the way his clothes felt on his body. Barry and Ellen said:

**Barry:** We've had to cut all the labels out of his clothes. . . . He started pointing to the labels and he started pulling at the back of his shirt. . . . And he seems to be real sensitive to certain types of noise. He doesn't like loud noise. . . . When he hears a really loud noise, it impairs him physically to the point where he just kind of stops doing what he's doing. (F3:B:15)

**Ellen:** Sensitive, real sensitive. Highs and lows. When he's sad, he's really sad, and when he's happy, the sky is always blue no matter what. And sunny, you know? (F3:A:2)

### Career

Barry and Ellen both worked outside of the home during most of Lucas' life. Barry worked as an attorney and Ellen worked as a computer analyst when they adopted Lucas. They both took time off during the adoption process. They visited Columbia when Lucas was four months old then returned to this country without him because they expected it to take six to eight weeks to finalize the adoption. As it turned out, his adoption was finalized quickly. They returned to Columbia three weeks later and stayed for two weeks before bringing Lucas home. Because she used part of her leave of absence to go to Columbia, Ellen was able to take only an eight week leave to care for Lucas when they first came home. During her leave, she occasionally left Lucas with her sister or a friend for 2 to 4 hours while she went to work. When she went back to work full-time, Lucas went to a family day care setting. The child care provider told Ellen, "I've never had such an active kid in my life in child care." (F3:A:25)

Ellen's career had changed during the last four years. When she was in the computer industry she often worked 40 to 60 hours a week, and felt exhausted because she did not get enough rest. When Lucas was about 2-years-old she was laid off from her computer job. She stayed at home while determining her next career move, but kept Lucas in full-time child care so that he would not have to experience a transition when she went back to work. She decided not to go back to full-time work, but took on part-time

projects including the accounting for Barry's business. Two months after the first interview, she returned to school, full-time, in a teacher training program.

Barry had been pursuing the same career as a lawyer for 15 years, but during the years since adopting Lucas, he moved his office and changed his affiliation with firms. When Lucas was 1-year-old he began working at a firm that he found especially stressful. He left that firm when Lucas was 3, to work independently out of his own private office and stayed there. Barry believed the whole family experienced reverberations when he felt stressed. He was happier with his current work situation and believed Lucas sensed the difference.

I was under a lot of stress . . . and I unfortunately brought that home with me every day. But since I've been on my own, actually things have been—I've felt a lot better about what I do. And so when I come home I'm not as wound up as I was. And that helps because he's very sensitive to our moods, and he really feeds off of our emotions and so forth. (F3:B:25)

Barry usually worked a standard 5-day work week, except when a case required extra travel time. His schedule was determined by the type of cases he had at a given time, but he made a conscious effort to limit his work and protect time with his family. He said:

I made a pretty deliberate decision that I didn't want to be the kind of father who was sitting in his son's high school graduation wondering when he got out of diapers. I know too many people who have done that and as a good friend of mine said, I don't know anybody who on

his death bed said, boy, if I could have just spent more time at the office. And I take that advice to heart because—when you have one child, you only get one whack at watching them grow and I don't want to miss it. (F3:B:27)

### Child Care

Barry and Ellen were the only parents in the study who used full-time child care outside of their home. Lucas had been in full-time care, eight hours a day, since he was 8-months-old. Barry and Ellen shared the responsibility for managing child care. They both participated in decision making with child care providers, as well as transportation to and from child care. Activities related to finding and maintaining child care arrangements consumed much of their time and attention. They said it was difficult to find child care providers who had the skills and experience necessary to care for a child like Lucas. At the time of the first interview, Lucas had recently been sent home from his Montessori preschool because he bit another child. Ellen and Barry believed this behavior occurred because he was scared during a fire drill they had that morning, as well as hungry and tired. They were angry at the way the staff handled the experience and Lucas was so upset he did not want to return. They decided to remove him from that school and were looking for a new setting for him. Barry explained how the experience affected Lucas:

Rather than working with him there, by sending him home the problem was they humiliated him. They didn't give him any other opportunity that day to get back in the group and be reassured that he was welcome there. And as a result, by Saturday, he had made up his

mind: I'm not going back to that place. And so Monday morning came around and I asked him what he wanted to do, what he wanted for lunch and he just got a really worried look on his face and he said, I don't want to go to school today. (F3:C:38)

Lucas entered a new school during the course of the interviews and quickly adjusted to the new environment. Barry described the new teachers' response to Lucas' behaviors. He said:

The teachers there, they're real interesting—the difference between them and the teacher at Montessori. When I dropped Lucas off this morning I asked one of the teachers how he did yesterday and she said, he did fine. You know he kicked and he bit and he hit, but he's 4-years-old, that's normal. And she said we just told all the other kids not to respond. . . . And she said, by 9:30 that was all done. . . . But apparently he really likes the kids there and is trying very hard to fit in and become part of the school. (F3:B:17)

### Family of Origin

Barry and Ellen shared several characteristics of their family of origin. They were both the youngest child, lived on the East coast, and had working mothers. They both had close relationships with one of their parents but distant relationships with the other. They both perceived the parent they felt close to as a role model for parenting Lucas.

Ellen's parents were separated many times during her childhood and finally divorced when she was 15-years-old. Ellen's mother stayed at home with her daughters when they were very young, but worked full-time by the time Ellen was 5-years-old. Ellen described her family:

We were a very, very politically minded family and my father was very conservative and my mother was very liberal. . . . My father was a John Bircher. I mean he just reveled in their theories. My mother was basically . . . very much . . . a beatnik. And she was heavily involved in the McCarthy hearings. She was brought up before the McCarthy, and pleaded the Fifth, fifty times. She was asked to testify against her friends. So she was very politically liberal. She told me she was never a card-carrying Communist, but she basically did a lot for the cause, I think. And she knew a lot of her friends were card-carrying Communists and that's why they had her before the McCarthy hearings. And she made front page headlines . . . . I admired her quite a bit. She was a very, very admirable person, very independent, was always on her own. She was, I would call her the quintessential women's libber back then. (F3:C:5)

Ellen was never close to her father and even when her parents were living together, she felt she was raised by her mother. She described her relationship with her father as distant and said that the less of him she dealt with the happier she was. Both her parents had been dead for just over 10 years. She had two older sisters who lived on the East coast, but the only family member she saw very often was a cousin who lived in a nearby state.

Ellen had a close relationship with her mother and felt she was always a positive influence for her. Even though her mother was not alive to offer advice, Ellen still identified her as a strong resource for her parenting. Ellen often tried to imagine how her mother would handle some of the child

rearing challenges that she faced. She said she often thought about a situation she had with Lucas and asked herself:

Well, what did my mother do? What did my mother do with me? I think back. And what worked with me? . . . So I just try and figure out what my mother would do. Would that be appropriate? No or yes.

(F3:A:36)

Barry was the youngest child in his family with two sisters, 7 and 10-years older than him. His parents lived on the East coast until his mother's death, 2 years ago. His father lived in a nearby retirement apartment building. Although his parents were married for 51 years, Barry believed their marriage was not "really good." He said they lacked mutual respect and often found fault with each other.

Barry's mother (like Ellen's) worked and his grandmother helped care for him. He described his mother as, "pretty dictatorial, she never hit me or anything, but it was sort of—do this and do it now." Barry did not feel close to either his mother or grandmother, but he had a strong relationship with his father. He said:

On weekends my dad and I would always go off and do stuff and I have very few memories of my mom being involved in that kind of stuff. I mean, Saturday was a special day for Dad and me. (F3:B:32)

Barry respected the way his father raised him and tried to parent Lucas with a similar philosophy. He explained his father's philosophy:

My dad always allowed me to pretty much make important decisions and then he sort of just let me know that you're going to be responsible for it. . . . I think he sort of figured, well you know the kid's got to learn

how to use judgment, and you don't develop that skill by doing it for him. And I've always respected that he was always able to just stand back and do what ever he had to curb his tongue, to let me make the wrong moves. And then he was always there to pick me up if I fell down too hard. And I think that's a good way to raise kids. (F3:C:11)

### Concerns and Challenges

Barry and Ellen found it most challenging to balance the needs of all three members of their family. Barry said, "I think one of the problems we have in this house is that we have at least two, if not three spirited children living here." (F3:C:19) They were both surprised at how much energy it required to care for Lucas and often found the task exhausting. Barry said:

I really had no idea what having a child was going to be like. And having a child that's like my son, a high energy, demanding kid, at times it's really strained our marriage. And it's really made me feel totally crowded in. There's no time left for Barry. And there are times when I really resent that. (F3:B:2)

Although Ellen believed Lucas' intelligence and ability to reason was a strength, she also found it challenging. She said:

You have to be smart—it's very difficult to stay one up on him. I find it difficult—you know you always have to stay on top of the subject. . . . We've always reasoned with him, even at a very, very, young age. . . . You can talk to him and reason with him, which I find unique . . . it's better if you reason with him than demand him. And it gets tiring, unfortunately. (F3:A:3-4)

Barry expressed a desire that Lucas become more independent. He found that Lucas' desire for interaction created a conflict with his own need for quiet and solitude after a day at work. He said:

At seven o'clock . . . I'd rather just be left alone to watch the news, read a newspaper, read my mail, write a check—whatever it is I need to do. . . . And so there are times when that just becomes really frustrating. I enjoy reading to him at night and things of that sort, but sitting on the floor playing with his trains and his Legos and things, it just doesn't cut it with me. And I think that he should be able to play with those toys by himself. Especially now that he's in school, he's with kids all day long, so it's not as if he's lacking for social interaction. And I just think that we should be disciplining him more to learn how to play by himself and amuse himself, and not depend on Mom and Dad to be his playmates. And maybe that's naive on my part, thinking that a 4-year-old is capable of that. (F3:B:4)

Although Barry voiced a question of whether it was a realistic expectation for a 4-year-old to be able to entertain himself, he also expressed resentment of the time Lucas demanded. He said, "At this point I really want to kind of push him away and let him become more self-reliant." (F3:B:28)

Barry and Ellen identified differences in the ways they interacted with Lucas and the ways Lucas responded to them. Barry explained some of the ways they differed:

Ellen's a lot softer . . . if he whines, she'll give into him. If he whines with me, I just tell him, it doesn't cut it with me. Knock it off. And he's smart enough to know that it doesn't cut it with me and he

knocks it off. So he can get away with more with her in certain things, and he can get away with more with me in other things. And he's become a master of knowing which is which. (F3:B:5)

Barry explained that he was more tolerant of "obnoxious behavior" and crying than Ellen. Barry interpreted "obnoxious behavior" as a sign that something else was going on for Lucas.

He's either really tired or he's hungry or he's just not feeling quite right and . . . that doesn't bother me as much, because I kind of realize that there's something going on that's making him behave the way he is. The crying really gets under Ellen's skin and she has a hard time dealing with it. (F3:B:5)

Ellen is much more tenacious in holding him to the line that she's drawn. I'm more much more—especially at the end of the day, when I'm tired, the last thing I want to do is get into a long fight with my kid. And so I'm more pragmatic. I'll pick my battles with him, and if it's something that needs to be fought over, then I'll do it. But otherwise I'm much more flexible in just letting it pass than she is. And that's where I'm softer than she is, on discipline. On play, she'll always give in to him. (F3:B:8)

Barry and Ellen identified ways their own personality styles affected Lucas' actions. Barry observed that when Ellen got upset, Lucas often got more upset and the two of them would "escalate" and "butt heads." He said:

And when those things happen, I try to get in the middle of it, to just kind of give them both time-outs. Because at that point they both need it. She gets really worked up and he gets worked up because he feeds

off of that, and left alone they'll just go at it, until I don't know when.

(F3:B:6)

Ellen said that sometimes when she felt upset, Lucas asked her to calm down. She believed he was right to ask her to change her behavior and respected his ability to articulate his thoughts and feelings.

He now tells me, Mom, calm down, calm down, cool it, Mom. . . . He's right, I need to calm down, I need to stop and figure out, you know, and cool it for a little bit. . . . I get wound up too. And so does he. So we both—if he can recognize that I'm wound up, that's—I have to recognize that he's recognized that in me. I accept that. (F3:C:19)

Barry and Ellen had very few rules in their family. They had rules that provided for safety, and they did not allow hitting, or hurting in other ways, but overall they allowed Lucas a lot of freedom. Barry said they were able to avoid many conflicts by avoiding many rules.

We've eliminated a lot of the traditional conflict grounds by just deciding they weren't important enough to fight over. . . . Eating is not a problem with him . . . because we don't make it a problem. If he's not hungry, he doesn't eat. . . . I don't believe in forcing him to eat when he's not hungry. . . . Wearing clothing isn't a problem. There have been times when he's wanted to wear his pajama tops to school. Fine I don't care. . . . I said fine. If you want to look like you're ready for bed in the middle of the day, that's your business. (F3:B:35)

Barry and Ellen believed they could avoid problems with Lucas by avoiding environments that were too demanding for his abilities and coping

skills. One environment they tried to avoid was restaurants. Barry explained his thoughts:

We went to the Italian Spaghetti House last week for dinner and he's not ready for it yet. He just can't deal with being in a restaurant and having to sit in his seat and having to wait for the food and everything else. And so the best thing to do in a case like that is not impose upon him behavioral standards that he can't deal with. He's not ready for it. . . . And so periodically we try to see where he is and whether he copes with it, and generally our experiences so far haven't been positive.

(F3:B:38)

Barry and Ellen also enjoyed many aspects of Lucas' temperament. They felt many of the characteristics they found challenging in Lucas, like his tenacity, his reasoning ability and his high energy would become assets when he grew older. Barry especially enjoyed spending time talking with Lucas, while Ellen enjoyed his happy nature.

**Barry:** I get a real kick when we sit down and start talking about stuff, whatever it is. I just—I'm just so, I'm so amazed at the language learning process that I'm in awe of the things he comes up with and the ways he invents—the inventions of expression that he comes up with. And it's just a real kick. (F3:B:33)

**Ellen:** His laugh. He's always laughed, really a belly laugh. I mean not just a giggle—hee hee hee—I mean a real HA HA HA. And he'll laugh, he's always laughed at something, even when he was less than a year old. I think that's unique . . . . But he's always smiling—he's not a serious child. He's a happy—he's a fun child. (F3:A:3)

Table 5 presents Barry and Ellen's perceptions of Lucas' temperament. They both found him to be an active, happy, high energy child who developed physical skills early in his development.

Table 5

Spontaneous Parental Perceptions of Lucas

<b>Similar Characteristics</b>	
<b>Ellen</b>	<b>Barry</b>
<p><b>Very active</b> He was always busy busy busy from the moment he woke up to the moment he fell asleep, whether it was nap time or asleep, he always is active.</p>	<p><b>High energy</b> From the minute he shakes the sleep out of his head in the morning until he goes to sleep at night, he doesn't stop.</p>
<p>He's very well-coordinated—has always been and has always been very strong.</p>	<p>He's a strong little boy and there have been times we've played on the floor and he's knocked me down.</p>
<p>Sitting up—I think he was sitting up earlier than most. By 9-months he was basically walking around, trying to walk on his own. 10-months he was literally walking.</p>	<p>He was sitting up at four months, he was crawling up the steps at six months and walking at ten months. His physical development has always been very advanced.</p>
<p>A very happy child He's fun. He's got a real good laugh. He loves to joke and play. He likes to do pranks, he teases a lot. His laugh. He's always laughed, really a belly laugh.</p>	<p>Happy-go-lucky child</p>
<p>Sensitive, real sensitive. Highs and lows. When he's sad, he's really sad, and when he's happy, the sky is always blue no matter what. He is sensitive to other children's feelings.</p>	<p>He is sensitive to noise. We've had to cut all the labels out of his clothes.</p>
<p>He loves kids. He's very good socializing and with adults.</p>	<p>He loves kids. He's very gregarious.</p>

Table 5 (continued)

<b>Similar Characteristics</b>	
<b>Ellen</b>	<b>Barry</b>
<p>As an infant: He was very cuddly, very happy little baby. Wouldn't sleep. Hated to go to sleep. He was very intent. He was very strong. At the age of four months he was sitting up.</p>	<p>As an infant: He was always quick with a smile.</p>
Very tenacious	Tenacious and focused

<b>Unique Characteristics</b>	
<b>Ellen</b>	<b>Barry</b>
<p>Interests: Trains; gymnastics; read books; paint</p> <p>You can reason with this child. We've always reasoned with him, even at a very very young age. He's very very smart, very logical. Self-assured He's got to be doing something, whether it's reading, or playing with his toys or coloring, or even watching TV.</p>	<p>Interests: Legos; trains He doesn't like finger paints; he just can't stand the thought of getting his fingers all dirty.</p> <p>Intense</p> <p>Very demanding kid</p>

Jeff, Maria, Corey and Jason

Jeff and Maria (both 38-years-old) had two children, Corey who was 7-years-old, and Jason who was 3. Corey was in the first grade at a neighborhood school a few blocks away, and Jason attended a morning preschool. Maria believed that Corey had a difficult temperament, but Jeff disagreed. During the first individual interview with Jeff, he said:

I don't know what your definition of a difficult child is, but I wouldn't necessarily agree that he's a difficult child now. I think my wife has had difficulty since—two children, and Corey . . . has things he's trying to figure out, his own place in the family and that kind of thing. . . . I think he's pretty smart and he has always been more aware of his environment and surroundings and seems to be very sensitive to light and sound and color. He just notices a lot more, he's very visual and hearing is a lot more acute. (F4:B:2)

Corey was sensitive to many foods. He had multiple allergies as a baby that he had outgrown, but he still had a severe allergy to peanuts. Jeff believed that Corey's sensitivity to food might be related to his behavior. He said:

When he has very obvious reactions [to food] we can say yeah, he's allergic to something, let's give him some medication, antihistamine. So I think there's a lot of things that he ingests that don't really create the same kind of symptoms but make him more agitated. (F4:B:3)

Jeff thinks some of the difficulty Maria experienced with Corey was related to the birth of their youngest son, Jason. Jeff said the first two years after Jason was born were very difficult.

I think the toughest time is just him adjusting to sharing his parents with his little brother and not getting enough time. But the year before Jason was born, Maria was home with Corey the whole time, full-time—he wasn't going to sitters or anything and that was probably his favorite year. I don't think he remembers, but the year he was three. And then right before he turned four his little brother was born, so I think maybe that was even more traumatic because the year prior to that, Mom was there the whole time, Dad was working but not that much. That was a good year for everybody, which made the following year more tough. (F4:B:16)

Jeff was working full-time after Jason was born and said many of the difficulties Maria experienced occurred when he wasn't home. He said Corey was "clingy and kind of surly" during that time, but he thinks that Maria and he interpreted the same behavior in different ways.

I don't know how much of that was her adjusting to a whole new experience. I think she's probably more—she has a harder time figuring out people than me, and just why would he do that and so her interpretation is a little more severe than mine. (F4:B:4)

Maria agreed that she interpreted Corey's behavior in different ways from Jeff, but she still thought Corey's temperament was more difficult than other children. In fact, she thought Corey's difficulty coping with change was an aspect of his temperament. She agreed that Jason's birth was an especially difficult time, and she believed the adjustment was probably more difficult because Corey had started a new preschool at the same time.

The first half year of preschool he was physically aggressive with other kids. He wasn't aggressive with Jason, but it was as if he was taking out on other kids his hostile feelings. And of course before Jason was born he was the center of the universe, first grandchild, and he had a lot of attention. (F4:A:23)

Maria said it was important for her to remember that "Corey was always slow to warm up to change" She believed that some of the problems she had been experiencing when she first called to join the study were related to Corey's response to remodeling their home over the past summer and his anticipation of starting a new grade at school. She said:

In the past few months, couple months, I should say, he actually seems to have matured more and some of the issues that I was really concerned about have actually become less of a concern and . . . just lately he's become quite pleasant to be around most of the time. This summer, . . . we lived outside of the home, we had a different place. And there were enough changes because he's slow to warm up to a change anyway, with his temperament, and even though he came back to his own house, which really didn't look like his own house—he liked it but it was a big change. . . . I think he gets anxious about the new situation that he was going to face, like school, first grade—different teacher, different kids. So he was becoming more anxious about that, I think. And so I think once school started and we settled down in our own home, he . . . started settling down and became more comfortable and not anxious like he was in the past. (F4:A:5)

Maria and Jeff both characterized Corey as a creative, intelligent, serious and focused child. Maria said many of those characteristics were evident since he was a baby.

When he was a baby he was very focused. . . . His eyes were always very shiny and bright and just always focusing and just looking around, and you knew there was a lot going on out there. And he was very intense then too. (F4:A:20)

Corey's intense focus was evident in his involvement in play and art activities. Jeff said that Corey gets "almost obsessed" by his interests. For example, Corey usually spent two hours, each day, working on origami at home, in addition to the time he spent working on it at school. Corey sometimes worked on origami in the midst of other children who were engaged in more athletic play. Jeff explained:

He has had friends who are very athletic and highly skilled and he has not really tried to compete with them. He'd just sort of stop and pull out his paper and do a project while everybody else was playing, he liked being with the group. That's what he did this past summer when he went on a family vacation with three other families, and all the kids were out playing and he just sat in the driveway and folded paper . . . I don't know if it's necessarily an obsession, maybe when it gets like that it might be, but he just likes doing it. (F4:B:8)

Jeff and Maria's perceptions of Corey's intelligence led them to have his academic abilities tested and they found that he qualified for a gifted program offered by the public schools. Maria said, " He is bright and very creative and of course we felt that as parents—we got him tested and I guess

in a way it validated our perception of what he's like." (F4:A:4) They were considering entering him in a gifted program for second grade, but sent him to his neighborhood school for kindergarten and first grade.

Corey was a quiet child around adults he did not know. He did not initiate conversations with me during the entire time of our interviews. In fact, he rarely spoke to me, except to respond to my questions with a very short answer, usually at his parent's urging. Maria said this behavior was characteristic of his response to new people. She said:

He can be very serious especially around people. He's very aware of people that he doesn't know very well, so it's like when people first meet him, he's very serious. But of course there's a very light side of him, but they don't get to see that. (F4:A:26)

Maria was concerned that Corey was not easily understood by the people around him. She said:

I think people, a lot of times, react to Corey in very strong ways because he's not an average child. He doesn't relate to people very well unless—especially grownups [who don't] talk to him enough or [in a] grownup way. He just doesn't like being coddled. Or some grownups who have good intentions and they just want to go hi Corey! Try to be real sociable with him, he just gets really turned off and ignores them or something. And I cringe because I know what this grownup's trying to do and I know what Corey is saying too, in his manner. (F3:A:9)

Maria and Jeff both observed that Corey needed time to make transitions. They gave him warnings about bedtime, times for leaving the

house, and times for ending activities. Maria described how her knowledge of Corey's temperament guided many of her routines. She said:

I guess just knowing that he has difficulty with change and transition. I'm always aware how after school I really need to give him some time alone and just do things on his own. . . . I give him snack right away because food affects him, he needs enough food to feel good, the basic needs—it's more intensified with him. . . . He likes routine, he really prefers routine—knowing what's going to happen is very important to him. And . . . control is a real big issue with him, ever since he was little. . . . I just make sure that in our routine he's got regular food coming to him, . . . and enough rest, alone time, and just that transition time where he needs to decompress or something. (F4:A:19)

#### Career and Child Care

Maria and Jeff met in college and moved to this city to attend graduate school. Jeff completed his degree in architecture, but Maria decided instead of graduate school to change careers. She said, "I remember looking for a job in landscape architecture and always finding that accountants got the most jobs; I thought, this is what I think I'd better get into." (F4:C:9)

Maria was working full time as an accountant when Corey was born. She returned to work part-time, 6 weeks after his birth, and increased to full-time when he was 2 or 3-months-old. During that time, Corey was cared for by his grandparents three days a week and a neighbor two days a week. When Corey was 18-months-old, Jeff decided to quit his job as an architect to stay home with Corey, in part because his grandparents were "getting worn out." Jeff explained:

Our jobs were both going fine. The decision to stay home was partly because I was ready to leave where I was and just relative to having to go out and find daycare or nannies or whatever. That whole hassle. And Maria had a good job and was making enough money to support us. And I was interested in doing more of my own work, so it was just a good combination, good time. (F4:B:19)

Jeff cared for Corey three days a week, and worked at home two days a week while Corey continued to go to the neighbors' for child care. When Corey was 3, Maria quit her job to stay home for the year before Jason's birth and Jeff began to work full-time for an architect firm. Jeff continued to work on some independent projects and hoped to eventually increase his own business to form a partnership with a colleague. Maria began to work part-time when Jason was 10-months-old, at a job she still held. Jeff felt positive about staying home with Corey. He said, "I enjoyed being home with him. I didn't choose to go back to work necessarily, so during that time my experience was very positive." (F4:B:1)

### Family of Origin

Maria and Jeff both felt their childhood experiences influenced their parenting, but in different ways. Jeff reported a close relationship with his father, who he saw as a role model for his own parenting. Maria "got along" with her parents as adults, but rejected the parenting she experienced as a child. She said:

I really have kind of thrown away—I'm trying to not raise my kids the way my parents have raised us, for the most part—not all of it, but I feel like I'm kind of starting new, on my own. (F4:A:32)

Maria was born in Korea and lived there until she was 12-years-old. Her early childhood was influenced, even dictated by Korean culture. Her mother stayed at home to raise the children; her father worked as a physician to support them financially, but was less involved in family life. Maria described her feelings about her family:

I think I felt like my parents loved me, and I was sure my mom loved me, but my dad wasn't around very much, and when he was around he was not—he always wanted us to be quiet and not make any disturbances and so we always had to watch ourselves and not get rambunctious, because I remember being punished for being very loud at one time. And so he wasn't that endearing to me when I was growing up. And my mother, she probably was the strongest influence on all of us, she raised us, you know, whereas my dad was the breadwinner and not really participated in parenting. And that's typical with a Korean family. (F4:C:2)

Maria remembered her school years in Korea as especially difficult and restrictive. She said:

Before I went to school I guess it was carefree, but after I started school . . . life changed dramatically for me. Not just for me, but that's how it is there, where we have to study probably ten hours or more a day. You go to school and then you come home and have dinner, whatever, and then go to private tutor and then study till late night. So it's study, sleep and eat schedule. . . . And so as far as parenting was concerned, once we started school my mom became—she was a driving force to make sure we get our studying done and we get good grades and all

that. . . I don't feel like that was really a normal childhood. But of course . . . that's just the Korean culture. (F4:C:2-3)

Maria felt her family life changed in a positive way when she was 12 and moved away from Korea. Her family moved to Africa, then to the United States. Maria enjoyed the influence of Western culture and gained confidence in her ability to adjust to challenges. She said:

We ended up in Africa because of [my father's] whim, but it was actually the best thing that happened because in Africa it was just us. The family really had to be cohesive, so it was probably the most family time we had together basically and things went pretty well. And I would say because of that experience and because I had to learn different languages and I had to go through many different kinds of different adjustments, but I feel like I always did fine and gained some confidence through that, that what I got was, I can manage, I can adapt. (F4:C:6)

Maria's memories of her childhood were laced with paradox. She explained how her parents' Korean values shifted when they discovered the American value of independence. She said:

They raised us to value family life and family comes first and blood is thicker than water, that's been really driven into me ever since I was little. . . . Since we came to America, they have emphasized in all of us the necessity of being financially independent. . . . My dad used to say the most important thing to a woman is to have a good marriage, but yet there is another thing they say—well actually now that we're here, you need to be financially independent. (F4:C:1-2)

Maria rejected the traditional Korean values she experienced during her early childhood. She described negative impressions about the way she was raised that she thought influenced her parenting views.

I would say my mom was the disciplinarian and we were pretty much raised to be seen and not heard, and a lot of guilt trip stuff. We do this for you and you don't appreciate it or you do this to disappoint us, that kind of message. . . . It seems like there is a paradoxical message, because the family's important and children are important, but on the other hand it's like children have no rights. I guess we were brought up to, not to be so creative. . . . I didn't feel like I was brought up to think for myself—you don't really develop independent thinking, you just kind of do what's laid out for you. (F4:C:3-4)

Maria's parents moved to this city the year Corey was born, and her three sisters had moved to the area over the past seven years. Maria's negative feelings about childhood flavored her ongoing relationship with her family, and her feelings about being a parent. Maria said:

Probably because of my parents' influence and also just my background, . . . I was goal oriented, striving toward success because that was important to them and that had been something that they always instilled in us. On the other hand, [I] did not enjoy . . . [my] parents overall. And I never felt that being a parent was a joy. It almost seemed a burden. (F4:C:7)

Maria contrasted her hopes for her children with her experiences in her own family of origin. She hoped that her children would not grow up to feel that "being a parent [was] a burden."

My first goal would be that my kids feel good about being parents when they get older. . . . I don't think the authoritative style works. . . . I think I was brought up to do things that I need to do and not always do what I wanted. I want my kids to . . . accomplish what they want to accomplish. But I think that the most basic thing is I want them to feel good about themselves, just feel like they're loved unconditionally.

When Maria described her hopes for her children she began to cry, overcome with her feelings about the difficulties in her own childhood and her ongoing relationship with her parents. She said she did not experience unconditional love from her parents, and she feared that her parents' relationships with their grandchildren would hold similar expectations and conditions. She said:

The saddest thing for me is that my kids—I think they love their grandparents. My parents were like doting grandparents when they were little, . . . but as the kids get older, I'm starting to see them do the same thing, conditions, like my mom, she would say to my son, you know, oh I've done all this for you and you don't even appreciate it. I hear the same thing. . . . I can see the effect that's going to have.

(F4:C:25)

Jeff saw his experience in his family of origin as a guide for his own parenting. He grew up in a large midwestern family with four siblings. He had one older brother, one older sister, one younger sister, and another older brother who died at age 5 of cerebral palsy complications, two weeks after Jeff's birth. Jeff said,

I think my parents went through quite a bit of emotional stress just living with a severely retarded child for 5 years. . . . They had three kids in diapers at one time and the third one was never really out of diapers. . . . I think that had a pretty profound influence on my parents and how they felt about each other and their children growing up. . . . My two older siblings were more affected by the whole thing—I think their lives since then have been not the smoothest. Both my parents have felt bad about that just because there wasn't enough attention to go around. (F4:C:12)

Jeff said that while his family appeared "normal to everybody," he believed his parents "didn't have a very loving relationship." His father was a doctor and his mother a housewife. Jeff's parents got divorced when he was 19-years-old, and he believed they had always planned to split up after the kids grew up. Jeff had a close relationship with his father, but said his mother was not very warm or relaxed, "not a comfortable person in her skin." Jeff said his mother was the disciplinarian in the family: "It was mostly through fear and intimidation. I watched my older brother get wailed on. . . . I didn't misbehave because I knew the results of misbehavior without having to experience it." (F4:C:14) Jeff said he was primarily raised by his father and described the flavor of his childhood:

It was just a pretty normal vanilla upbringing. Nice neighborhood, comfortable existence. . . . We never wanted for anything, but I never felt like we had too many luxuries. . . . My father had a lot of hobbies and he . . . was very devoted to family. . . . He was around but I don't really feel like there was a lot of direct attention necessarily. He was

doing hobbies and he played piano and woodworking and I learned a lot of things like that from him. (F4:C:15)

Jeff's father died a year before the interviews. Corey and Jason did not know him well, as they only saw him once or twice a year. Jeff's mother was still living and they saw her about once a year when they visited the midwest. Jeff felt his relationship with his mother was better as an adult than as a child. He missed his father and wished his own sons had had an opportunity to know their grandfather. He described some of the ways his father influenced his life:

One of the things I really appreciate about my upbringing—my father, his approach to it, was having just exposure to a lot of different things and fitting in with a lot of social situations. . . . We used to go to the symphonies once a month, go out to nice restaurants . . . . And I appreciate that kind of education that I don't think that many people have. I felt a lot of trust and he wouldn't hesitate to give me a lot of responsibility for things. . . . We lived on a five acre place with horses and animals and . . . . I think having a place and the freedom to kind of go out and dig in the dirt or climb trees was just something I wish I could give more of to my children. . . . It seemed there were a lot of opportunities that he made available to me and I think that's the kind of thing I'd like to carry on with my children. (F4:C:20-21)

### Challenges and Concerns

Jeff and Maria shared concerns about Corey's serious nature. They hoped he would learn to be more relaxed, in the standards he set for himself and in the tone of his interactions. They said:

**Maria:** I would like to help him figure out how to relax his standards sometimes and just be a little bit more easier-going about what he can do. . . . It's good to have high standards, but sometimes he goes overboard. I'd like to really help him tone that down. I think he'll just be a happier person. And . . . a real strong issue for me is his ability to have . . . happy or healthy social interactions with people. Help him acquire good social skills, and I think that's a challenge with him.

(F4:A:16)

**Jeff:** I think getting him to loosen up a little bit. Trying not to take things too seriously and to get him to try new things, not worry so much about whether he can do it well the first time. . . . Help him figure out social situations and give him some clues as to how to behave in new situations. (F4:B:15)

Maria and Jeff both wanted Corey to learn to calm himself. Maria found he became especially moody when he was tired or hungry. She explained:

There's some predictability that I know if he's tired and he's hungry and he wants food his mood will definitely shift, he becomes very irritable and grumpy. And of course in transition time too he becomes a lot more irritable. And he becomes just very explosive . . . and sometimes he loses it so much that he can't even control himself, it's like far beyond what he can actually do. And I remember when he was little he would say oh help me stop crying, help me stop crying or help me feel better. (F4:A:27)

When Corey became upset he was very vocal, but he did not lose control of his actions to the point of being destructive. Maria said:

He's probably screaming and crying and he wasn't destructive in the sense that he would throw things, that's not in his nature because he would care about whether the things break, so he wouldn't do that, but he would just be very vocal and he has this loud voice. (F3:A:28)

Jeff found that he could help Corey calm down by talking to him and distracting him and he hoped to help Corey learn to calm himself. He described a recent experience when Corey ended up in "uncontrolled crying" because he didn't want to stop what he was doing at bedtime.

This was one of those where he kind of loses control and just started spiraling out of—he knows he's in trouble and he's—'Can't s-stop c-crying,' he's just lost it. And it was actually very easy just to bring him back—and just hyperventilating—he was in bad shape, but after about two minutes of talking to him, I had him kind of listening to a story, I started to talk about something that happened to me, and . . . within a couple of minutes he was just fine. . . . So getting him to be able to do that himself, or at least recognize when he's losing it, trying to give him some techniques for self control. (F4:D:6)

Maria believed that in addition to learning how to calm himself, Corey also needed to learn to express his feelings in effective ways. She said:

And I think that's where I'd like to really help him learn to kind of know what's going on inside and be able to verbalize, to meet his needs, before he explodes like that, because . . . that scares people. Not just me but all the others. (F3:A:28)

Maria believed she was especially sensitive to Corey's behavior because he was the oldest child. She thought she might be less concerned if he was an only child, but because his little brother followed him as a role model, she worried that Jason would pick up Corey's bad habits.

I remember feeling worried about . . . Jason picking up his way of dealing with things . . . and just the thought of that would worry me, that Jason would pick up the bad things. . . . I 'm finding that I have even more motivation to want to do something to take care of some of these issues early on and I think it would just be better if we take care of it. (F4:A:30)

Although Jeff and Maria disagreed about whether Corey was difficult, they both valued positive aspects of his temperament. They said:

**Maria:** With all this information I've given you, I know I tend to be more negative, but . . . overall, I would still say I would rather have him than—I can't imagine wishing for somebody else. And I do think he's pretty unique, I mean he's pretty unique in many ways. (F4:A:31)

**Jeff:** Well, I guess I'd put it in a point of view that if I had to trade Corey, you know trade away his intelligence and his spark for somebody more manageable, I would say I would rather not. I 'd just as soon take him the way he is and enjoy the good things of his intelligence and energy level. I wouldn't trade that away for somebody that's more docile. (F4:D:9)

Maria and Jeff's perceptions of Corey are presented in Table 6. They characterized Corey as a serious, focused, intense child who was slow to adapt

to change and shy around new people. They both mentioned his sensitivities and food allergies.

Table 6

Spontaneous Parental Perceptions of Corey

<b>Similar Characteristics</b>	
<b>Maria</b>	<b>Jeff</b>
Serious	He is at times silly, but generally he's a serious kid.
Very focused	He can concentrate very well.
Very intense	He's sometimes too intense.
He has many allergies.	He has food allergies. He probably has a deadly reaction to peanuts.
He doesn't relate to people very well.	He's kind of shy meeting new people. We have to prompt him.
He's very affectionate with his family.	He's getting more affectionate.
Bright mind	I think he's pretty smart—above average intelligence.
He's got to know a lot of things and be competent.	He has some highly developed skills that he does really well.
Interests: Science, natural science— insects, plants, animals; how everything works; origami; pottery; Legos, Duplos; soccer; art; books	Interests: origami; art projects; soccer; legos; dinosaurs; helping in the garden; nature books; bugs
As a baby, he was very focused and his eyes were always very shiny and bright and just always focusing and just looking around.	He was a pretty happy baby—had enough attention.
He's always been a good sleeper.	Slept pretty well.
He sucked his thumb since he was an infant. He stopped sucking just a month ago.	He sucked his thumb since he was one or so.
He's a real perfectionist.	He has some very highly developed skills. He really works those things and does them really well.

Table 6 (continued)

<b>Unique Characteristics</b>	
<b>Maria</b>	<b>Jeff</b>
<p>He's moody</p> <p>He's pretty unique in many ways.</p> <p>He's not comfortable sharing his feelings</p> <p>He isn't destructive, he wouldn't throw things, that's not in his nature because he would care about whether the things break.</p> <p>He becomes very explosive, just loses it and can't even control himself.</p> <p>He's slow to warm up to change.</p> <p>He has difficulty with transitions.</p> <p>He can be very logical.</p> <p>He likes to be very exact.</p> <p>He has a lot of pressure on himself.</p> <p>He has a strong need to finish what he starts out.</p> <p>He's strong willed</p> <p>Very prideful—if he thinks people are making fun of him, he may be offended. He might think that somebody's making fun of him just because that person is laughing.</p> <p>Very Creative, just comes up with ideas that surprise me.</p> <p>Thoughtful</p>	<p>When he gets into something , he's really into it—he goes very deeply into it.</p> <p>He has always been more aware of his environment and surroundings.</p> <p>Very sensitive to light and sound and color</p> <p>He tends to shy away from things that he might not be successful at.</p> <p>He has a very good memory.</p> <p>He's pretty patient.</p> <p>Very straightforward</p> <p>He wakes up in a good mood. He's nice to be around most of the time.</p>

Chris, Greg and Nicki

Chris (39-years-old) and Greg (45-years-old) considered themselves "older parents" who waited a long time to have a child. Nicki (5-years-old) was their only child, although they still thought about maybe having another. Nicki's parents described him as tiny, energetic, wiry, physically very skilled, strong, very intense, very social, charming, intelligent, bright, generous and empathic. He was very sensitive in his body; he got rashes easily, was very particular about his food, and ate very little.

Career and Child Care

Chris and Greg were both self employed as psychotherapists. They saw individual clients and also worked as co-therapists to provide couples-therapy. Chris also spent time writing and taught a course in a masters level counseling program. During our initial interview, Greg explained how they arranged their careers in order to share Nicki's child care. He said:

We, working as we do for ourselves, have always arranged our schedules to minimize child care, you know, from outside. We've done, tried to do most of it. . . . We would work opposite schedules, and pretty much other than the breast-feeding we've shared—and I've done more of the child care. (p.34)

Greg estimated that he provided about 60% and Chris provided about 40% of the child care. Over the years they had gradually increased the amount of time Nicki spent in outside child care. At the time of the interviews, he attended a Montessori style preschool each morning and had a baby sitter a couple of afternoons each week when his parents saw clients together as co-therapists.

### Family History

Chris and Greg expressed negative feelings about their childhoods. When I asked them to tell me about the families they grew up in, Greg described his family first. When Chris began to tell her story she said, "I just think, I've got to try and think of some positive things here. It's as equal, different, but as equal in its messiness. I just think, whatever possessed us to have a child!" (5:C:14)

Greg grew up in the same city they currently lived in. His mother's parents were Italian immigrants and he grew up with the influence of a large Italian family in an Italian neighborhood. He said, "the main theme of my family of origin is, everything that anyone considers unpleasant is hidden." (F5:C:3) Greg first learned about many difficult things that happened during his childhood because his older sister told him when he was a young adult. The information he learned from his sister revealed the level of secrecy his parents maintained. His sister was actually a half sister from his mother's previous marriage. His mother was divorced after his older sister was born and because of her divorce, she was excommunicated from the Catholic church. Yet she raised her children as Catholics. Greg's sister was sexually abused when she was 10 through 13-years-old by a gang of young men in the neighborhood. When she finally told her parents about the abuse, all the children were abruptly taken out of school and moved to another part of the city. His sister just disappeared for a while and the children did not know where she had been or what had happened to her. When she was 18-years-old, she became pregnant and was sent away to another state to have the child, "basically abandoned" by her parents.

Greg said, "[my] mother's attitude towards life is . . . summarized in the song, *Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag and Smile, Smile, Smile.*" He described her as "very . . . devouring," and his father as "very depressive," "distant" and "absent in a certain way" (F5:C:3). Greg separated from his family during adolescence: "I spent my late teens and twenties just trying to cut off from them and just get away from what I considered a really bad influence in my life." (F5:C:8) He believed growing up in his family contributed to significant problems that he and his siblings faced:

All of us children are alcoholic and drug addicts and my sister's been clean and sober for 19 years, and I have been for 16 years. My brother Ed—he was able to be very functional and so's my brother Jim, actually, quite functional in a lot of ways. But they have pretty serious drinking [problems] and they both started really young . . . grade school . . . and . . . junior high. (5:C:7)

His brother Ed died at age 33 from colorectal cancer. During his brother's illness, the family came back together and Greg maintained active relationships with the members of his family. He said he had a "really good relationship" with his father who had changed a lot, and "manages" his relationship with his mother so that he doesn't feel "devoured" by her. He felt sadness about the kind of family he had, and he wished Nicki had more time and more of a sense of involvement with his extended family. Greg believed his childhood experiences influenced his parenting. He said:

I've always wanted to have children, but most of my life I thought I would not, because I worried about those influences. There's lot of destructive stuff in my family, and . . . what made it possible for me to

consider having a child was that first of all I'd done a lot of work on a lot of that stuff . . . tons of psychotherapy and other work. (F5:B:43)

Chris was born on the east coast and spent her early years there. Her parents were divorced right after she turned five and both quickly remarried. She had one sister who was four years older, one half sister by her biological father's first marriage, and one step-sister from her stepfather's previous marriage. She also had two step-brothers from her father's third marriage, but she had very little interaction with them. Most of her childhood was spent with her mother, her sister and her step-father. She saw her father once every couple months right after the divorce, less frequently as time went on, and when she moved to the west coast, only once a year. A good part of her childhood was spent traveling:

We moved all the time . . . we'd live in hotels a lot. . . . My [step] father did auctions and he did sort of "fringy" kinds of businesses, a lot of resort towns, he'd kind of blow in and do something and then he'd blow out of there, you know.(F5:C:17)

Chris described herself as a very independent child. She appreciated that she was able to do a lot of things and see a lot of places. Her lifestyle was comfortable:

My parents lived as though they had a lot of money. I don't really think they did, but they weren't poor either . . . we were going out to fancy restaurants a lot and we were staying in nice hotels. . . . I never felt like there wasn't enough, I always had the sense that if you want something you can get it. (F5:C:19)

When Chris was 10 they moved to the west coast and stayed in the same apartment until she left home, a couple of days after turning 18. Chris described her biological father as "fast and wild. . . . He messed around with women, he drank a lot, he smoked a lot." (F5:C:21) Her father had a heart condition, and did not like children, so during her early childhood Chris was not allowed to be around him much. She was happy to find that her stepfather enjoyed her company and spent a lot of time playing with her, but she also saw him as "a bit of a sleaze . . . a bit of a pedophile." (F5:D:24). Her stepfather was also an alcoholic. Chris said:

I don't know if he was an alcoholic when my mom married him, but he was quite a drinker and then, as now, no mistaking that he's an alcoholic. So that was kind of rough, growing up in that environment. Lot of fighting, lot of kind of the opposite of Greg's family. There were fights at the dinner table every night, big fights, throwing glasses at each other . . . They'd throw each other on the floor and my dad would be shaking her and she'd be screaming. It was very intense. (F5:C:21)

Chris was cared for by maids when they moved to the west coast. She described herself as self-sufficient. She did not have a close relationship with her mother, but relied on her sister. That relationship was very important to her:

I actually think now—I mean of course I'm very psychologically oriented, but I really think I would have gone crazy if I hadn't had my sister. I think I would have gotten very psychotic or schizophrenic, I mean I . . . felt very alone as a kid. (F5:C:22)

Chris felt scared of her mother, but also felt that her mother loved her. She saw her as both "very tender . . . and very rejecting and very cold . . . and you never quite knew which one." (F5:C:23) Her relationship with her mother had recently changed quite a bit, so that now Chris more strongly felt the love that existed between them. Her parents did not live in the same city and they saw Nicki a couple times a year. Her sister recently moved to the same area. Chris was glad Nicki had the opportunity to spend time with his cousins and get to know her family.

#### Challenges and Concerns

Chris and Greg began to find Nicki's temperament difficult and challenging during his infancy. They both said that as an infant he was very stiff, wiry, kicking, not cuddly, and screaming all the time. Chris said he had a "huge frown on his face, he was not very comfortable," and he was a "colicky person, dissatisfied and cranky." She summarized her description as a "tiny, energetic, bound-up, sort of thing." (F5:A:2) Greg explained how difficult his infancy had been:

You know I was prepared to be up at night and to have lots of work to do and all that, but I was expecting cuddling and you know, chubby goo-goo baby, and I had this screaming, wiry, kicking . . . it was really a loss for me. I mean he was an only child and I feel like I missed out on infancy or something." (F5:B:25)

Chris and Greg continued to be challenged by parenting Nicki. Many of the day to day activities of caring for him were difficult. Nicki had difficulties with eating, sleeping and toilet training. During infancy he had troubles with nursing and had never been a good eater. He ate only small amounts of a few

kinds of foods. When he was sick or stressed he ate even less. Following a recent incident of choking on some food, he wouldn't eat solid foods for weeks. He preferred to drink and his parents gave him nutritional and caloric liquid supplements like ensure, polycose, and liquid breakfast. He had been late to toilet train—the process had been very difficult and full of power struggles, and even at age five he continued to have frequent accidents. As an infant he had difficulties sleeping, a problem his parents identified fairly quickly and were able to remedy with the aid of a book on sleep problems.

Nicki's sensitivity was another challenging aspect of his temperament. His parents spoke of this in a physical sense, an example was his sensitivity to sounds:

If there's a group of people in the room and there's conversation or laughter, he will put his hands over his ears, and go, it's too loud! He's screaming that it's too loud, it's like too much input or something.(F5:A:21)

Chris and Greg attributed this reaction to his sensitivity to sensory input. His body was sensitive in other ways as well, he often got rashes from unknown causes, tags and labels often bothered him, and only certain kinds of clothes (like soft sweat pants) felt comfortable.

The intensity of Nicki's emotional reactions was especially difficult for his parents. When he got really upset or angry he would scream and throw himself on the floor, or hit or kick things. Greg said: "It sort of frightens me when he gets that intense because . . . it seems . . . like it's going to be so self-destructive . . . but . . . it doesn't seem like that's really a problem for him."

(F5:B:4) While both Greg and Chris had a difficult time experiencing Nicki's

intensity, they believed his actions were effective ways for him to experience and work with his emotions. Greg described the way they tried to respond to Nicki's intense emotions. He said, "If we just say things like, it's not okay to hit yourself, it's not okay to hit me or whatever, but don't try to stop him, it seems like it's a good process for him." (F5:B:4)

Chris and Greg expressed concerns throughout Nicki's life that he might have some kind of developmental problem like hyperactivity or autism. They often turned to outside resources like pediatricians and therapists for advice and treatment. Greg summarized his view on their style of worrying about and responding to Nicki's problems:

The doctors just always say he's fine! But we can't stop worrying. . . . Still, yeah we worry, but I don't think we're justified in worrying about it. It's just kind of neurotic. Being older parents, I think, adds to our being—in some ways I think we're over-concerned." (F5:B:26-27)

Chris and Greg believed many of Nicki's temperament characteristics they viewed as difficult had a positive side. Chris said:

I enjoy his independence and his freedom and his sort of tenacity to do what he wants to do, how he wants to do it. You know, it drives me crazy too, but—and I think that developed out of being so independent as a kid. And I think that's a strength. (F5:C:27)

At times Chris spoke of Nicki's strengths with awe:

He's a visionary, I mean he really—he thinks in big ways, he wants to go to outer space and he wants to talk about outer space a lot, and he wants to go there. You know he just has a larger vision than I would think someone his age might have. I mean I don't know other kids as

intimately, so I don't know how to compare them. So I think those are some of his strengths. (F5:A:20)

Greg marveled at how Nicki could at times "just be spitting and hitting", and at other times totally enthralled by art, and expressive of his intuitive life. Greg valued Nicki's presence in his life. He felt Nicki had a very strong spiritual and emotional life and that he was a teacher to him. He said:

Being a parent is mostly about learning. And my own development. I mean, it's not like I've come to it with this great knowledge that I'm going to impart to him, it's more like by being who he is, he's going to teach me where all my weak spots are and all that. . . . I think of [parenting] as a process of discovery—discovering who he is and discovering who I am, what kind of person, finding out how that's right in the world in some way. (C5:C:33)

Table 7 presents a comprehensive list of Greg and Chris' perceptions of Nicki. Some of the most salient characteristics include intense, wiry, strong, willful, stubborn, sensitive, and needing a lot.

Table 7

Spontaneous Parental Perceptions of Nicki

<b>Similar Characteristics</b>	
<b>Chris</b>	<b>Greg</b>
Wiry	Very wiry
Strong, physically very strong	Very strong, muscular, very coordinated in his body
He's a little guy, he's like in the 10th percentile in height, 5th percentile in weight.	He's tiny. He's weight-wise in the 5th percentile, height-wise in the 10th percentile. He's probably the smallest kid his age at his preschool.
He's one of the loudest people in the world. He will put his hands over his ears, and go, it's too loud! He's screaming that it's too loud, it's like too much input or something.	If we're in a group of people, like three people, and we're having a conversation, everyone laughs at once? He'll shout, stop it! That hurts my ears.
Intense His upset is so intense that that's really hard for me.	Very intense about learning He'll get very—he gets intense and gets quite angry at his learning process. . . That's just how he does it. He gets very intense and angry and then pushes through and he learns it.
I didn't think of him as a very contented baby—not very comfortable, colicky. Cried almost constantly Colicky person, dissatisfied and cranky Huge frown on his face, wasn't very happy	As an infant he was very stiff, crying and nothing could comfort him. He would cry for hours.
Lots of crying jags and screaming and shrieking, really loud kid	He was extremely hyper, screaming all the time, wiry, kicking.
So social, extroverted type of person	He has lots of friends, he loves children of all ages, he just engages very readily.

Table 7 (continued)

<b>Similar Characteristics</b>	
<b>Chris</b>	<b>Greg</b>
Sometimes he's very shy, but that usually doesn't last.	30% of the time when he is meeting someone he is shy, the other 70% of the time he just engages.
Needs a lot of attention	He needs containment a lot, you know, he'll go off and play by himself but it's a rare thing. Not an easy child at all. He needs a lot.
Willful	Stubborn, very persevering He doesn't like things pushed on him.
Sensitivity, emotionally The depth of his emotional understanding is really, I think, quite profound	Very engaging on an emotional level. If someone is upset, he's very interested and concerned and wants to know what they're going through. He asks lots of questions and offers comfort. He really cares about...he's very relational....He cares too much...it just overwhelms him.

Table 7 (continued)

<b>Unique Characteristics</b>	
<b>Chris</b>	<b>Greg</b>
<p>Tiny energetic bound-up sort of thing Never looked like a baby, never got chubby, never a full-bodied baby. Basically he only wanted to drink, he didn't really want food. There is nothing predictable.</p> <p>High energy A very energetic baby, very energetic, walking when he was ten months old.</p> <p>Interests: cook, bake, get money, ride bike, roller-skating, swim, swords, skill in his body, nature, listen to (chapter) books</p> <p>Transitions were really really hard Ecstatic This laugh would come out of him that was just this thrill to life you know, this incredible deep laugh. So much energy</p> <p>Generous, not a mean kid, not temperamentally mean at all. Bright, very intelligent</p> <p>Good sense of humor</p>	<p>He's tremendously competitive. Very intense about learning</p> <p>He's totally resistant to any kind of control from the outside. His body is very sensitive, he gets rashes really easily. . . he'll sometimes have you cut tags out of his clothing because it bothers him.</p> <p>You can never guide him to get engaged with anything, he's totally not trackable. And he's just interested in what he's interested in.</p> <p>Interests: totally engaged by entertainment very interested in how things work in the body, imaginative play, insects, science questions, how things work, nature</p> <p>Focused He's very charming when he's charming. He melts everybody's heart. When he gets engaged in something, he'll stick with it for a long time. He tells. . . me his dreams.</p> <p>He has a very kind of—oh, brightness about him, I don't mean intelligent brightness, but a very kind of sparkly personality. Openness to his imagination and his dreams</p>

Table 7 (continued)

<b>Unique Characteristics</b>	
<b>Chris</b>	<b>Greg</b>
<p>Very loving</p> <p>Incredible memory</p> <p>Not impulsive...he would never run out into the street.</p> <p>He's a visionary. He thinks in big ways.</p>	<p>Curiosity and wondering about things</p> <p>Enthralled by beauty</p> <p>The way he can express his sort of intuitive life or something about that is quite special, through his dreams and through what he thinks is going on relationally.</p> <p>He has a real sense of himself...he isn't hesitant to fight for what he believes.</p> <p>I mean he will tell you, this is what I think, I won't be dissuaded.</p>

## CHAPTER 4

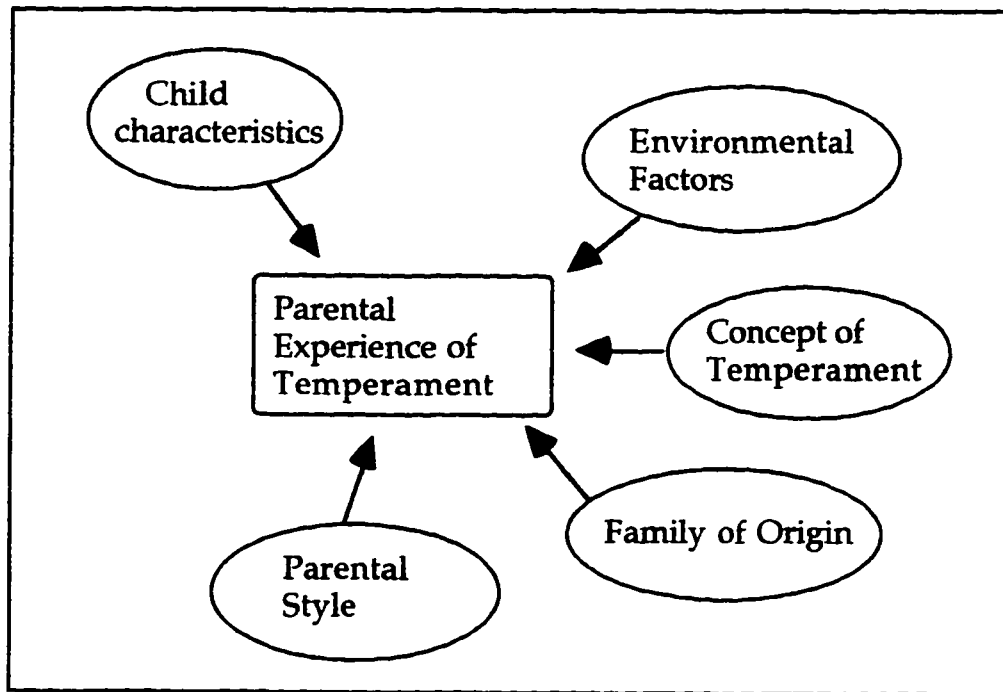
### FINDINGS

#### Focus and Overview

The focus of the study centers on two research questions: how do parents perceive their child's temperament, and how do parents respond to their child's temperament. During the early phases of inquiry, parental perceptions of their child's temperament were conceptualized as separate from and primary to parental responses to their child's temperament. Over the course of data collection and analysis, it became clear that parental responses could not be separated from parental perceptions of temperament. Although perceptions did influence actions, actions also influenced perceptions. Likewise, the factors that influenced parental perceptions of temperament also influenced parental actions. The parents' narratives reflected this state of mutual influence—discussions of perceptions were linked to discussions of parental characteristics and actions.

This chapter is organized in five sections: (a) Parental Perceptions of Child Characteristics, (b) Environmental Factors, (c) Concept of Temperament, (d) Family of Origin, and (e) Parenting Style. Each of these sections address factors that influence both parental perceptions and parental actions. The first section, Child Characteristics, presents findings that illustrate parents' observations of salient child characteristics, as well as the process of forming perceptions of difficult temperament. Section two

discusses the influence of environmental factors, conceptualized as an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) with different levels or systems influencing the child and family. The third section discusses how the concept of temperament influences child rearing views. Section four discusses ways that parents' experiences of their families of origin affect their parenting and perceptions of their child. The fifth section, Parenting Style, examines differences in parental perspectives and described actions. The factors discussed in this chapter are depicted in Figure 3 and the ways that these factors influence each other are discussed in this chapter.



**Figure 3.** Influential Factors on Experience of Temperament

Briefly, Figure 3 illustrates a set of relationships that together influence parents' experiences of their children's temperament. *Child characteristics*

represents factors about the child's biological make-up that influence the expression of temperament. These within child characteristics are perceived in the context of multiple external factors. *Parental style* represents the parents' characteristic ways of seeing and responding to their children and reflects the influence of their own childhoods, personalities, and beliefs about child rearing. *Environmental factors* include stressors and supports that are present in the surrounding community. Families have encounters with diverse physical environments, ranging from work settings to child care centers to supermarkets, that influence child behaviors and parent-child interactions. *Environmental factors* also include the nature of interpersonal environments the family experiences, such as social expectations and individual personalities encountered in different settings. *Concept of temperament* refers to a culturally constructed set of ideas about children and their development that influences parents' perceptions of their own children. Although Figure 3 presents a set of separate circles, in actuality these circles represent overlapping interactive forces.

#### Parental Perceptions of Child Characteristics

Data to identify the temperament characteristics of children in this study were obtained through the parents' spontaneous descriptions, ratings on the Behavior Style Questionnaire (BSQ), and observations. The spontaneous descriptions given by each parent during their individual interviews (presented in the case studies) are compared across the five families in Table 8. Many of the descriptions corresponded to temperament dimensions measured by the BSQ, as indicated in the first column of Table 8, but some spontaneous descriptions, like bright or intelligent, did not

correspond to temperament dimensions. Many of the characteristics were described by several parents in this study, and some characteristics were unique to one child. Data from parents' spontaneous descriptions and BSQ ratings are discussed and compared in this section.

Table 8

Comparison of Parent Descriptors of their Child to BSO Dimensions

<b>BSQ Rating Temperament Dimension</b>	<b>Connor</b>	<b>Michael</b>	<b>Lucas</b>	<b>Corey</b>	<b>Nicki</b>
<b>high activity</b>	very active goes and goes	active, very busy	active, busy, physical strength, early to walk		active
	physical	athletic			physical strength
<b>low activity</b>				enjoys soccer, but often engaged in less physical activities	
	bright	bright, intelligent	very smart	bright, intelligent	bright intelligent
<b>intensity</b>	intense goes ballistic	goes ballistic	intense	intense	intense
<b>intensity</b>		strong willed always testing	strong willed	strong willed	willful, stubborn
<b>rhythmicity</b>	sleep problems as an infant	never slept through the night until 18 months, never took long naps	sleep problems when going through transitions	has always slept well	sleep problems
	very engaging personality likes people	extremely friendly easy to make friends	very good socializing, very gregarious	shy with people doesn't relate well to people	has lots of friends, loves children of all ages
<b>mood</b>	happy enthusiastic positive		happy go lucky	serious	
<b>threshold</b>			sensitive	sensitive	sensitive
	perceptive of emotion				depth of emotional under- standing
<b>distractible</b>		not easily distracted	focused	very focused, concentrated	

Table 8 (continued)

<b>BSQ Rating Temperament Dimension</b>	<b>Connor</b>	<b>Michael</b>	<b>Lucas</b>	<b>Corey</b>	<b>Nicki</b>
<b>persistence</b>		persistent	tenacious		very persevering
	he likes to say I love you	affectionate with mother	cuddly infant	only affectionate with family	stiff infant, wiry, not content
			allergies	allergies	allergies
<b>mood</b>	demanding infant	demanding infant			needs a lot of attention
<b>intensity</b>	goes too far	strong temper			intense upset
	talkative, talks gibberish at times, loud	always talking, not quiet			very loud
<b>rhythmicity</b>		does not want to eat			doesn't eat
	curious very fascinated	he has imagination			
		gets frustrated with self		perfectionist	
	Can't calm himself down				
					tiny wiry

Note. The characteristics include only descriptors agreed on by both parents in the family.

### Parent Spontaneous Descriptions

The parents, with the exception of Jeff, shared the belief that their child had a difficult temperament and identified several common characteristics they found challenging in raising their child. Ironically, in some cases the very characteristics that parents valued were also perceived as difficult. For example, intelligence was viewed as a desirable attribute, but contributed to difficulties that parents experienced with their children.

The most common spontaneous descriptions used by parents to characterize difficult aspects of their child are summarized in Table 9. All five children were described as intense, demanding, and bright. Four children were described as social, active, physically strong, and having problems sleeping. Corey, the exception, was described as shy with people, tending to engage in quiet activities over more active ones, and having always slept well. Four children (with the exception of Connor) were described as strong-willed. Lucas, Corey and Nicki were described as sensitive and having allergies<sup>3</sup>; Michael, Lucas and Corey were described as focused; and Connor, Michael and Nicki were described as loud. The parents also described their children's style of affection: Connor and Lucas were very affectionate, Corey was only affectionate with his family, Michael was generally only affectionate with his mother, and Nicki was wiry—not cuddly or affectionate.

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<sup>3</sup>It is interesting that the three children who were perceived as sensitive also had allergies. Greg, Jeff and Barry said their child was sensitive to foods, susceptible to rashes, or sensitive to sound or visual input. The links between physiological, and emotional and psychological processes have been an emerging focus in temperament research. For example, Jerome Kagan (1994) has explored connections between behavioral and neurobiological indices of temperament in his research on inhibited and uninhibited children.

Table 9

Comparison of Common Spontaneous Descriptions across Families.

<b>Description</b>	<b>Connor</b>	<b>Michael</b>	<b>Lucas</b>	<b>Corey</b>	<b>Nicki</b>
Active	yes	yes	yes	less	yes
Intense	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Physical Strength	yes	yes	yes	less	yes
Bright	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Demands Attention	yes	yes	yes	yes, but changing	yes
Strong willed		yes	yes	yes	yes
Sleep	problems	problems	problems	sleeps well	problems
Social, lots of friends	yes	yes	yes	shy with people	yes
Sensitive			yes	yes	yes
Focused		yes	yes	yes	
Affection	very	mostly with mom	very	only with family	wiry, not cuddly
Allergies			yes	yes	yes
Loud	yes	yes			yes

Note. The characteristics include only descriptors agreed on by both parents in the family.

Different parents voiced concerns about different temperament characteristics. For example Lori and Eric were concerned about Connor's extremely outgoing, extroverted personality, and Maria and Jeff were concerned about Corey's introverted tendency to withdraw from new people and situations. Both these children had extreme scores (in different directions) on the BSQ temperament dimension approach/withdrawal. Although Corey and Connor had different temperament profiles and social styles, their parents shared a concern that their child would experience difficulty fitting into social situations. Lori and Eric said:

**Eric:** A big fear of mine is because of Connor's abundance of energy and imagination . . . he will find it difficult to integrate into social environments as he grows up, especially when he gets to be about 6 or 8-years-old. (F1:C:25)

**Lori:** I always kind of felt that he was more curious and just more intense in his reactions to things and it was always reinforced whenever I was with other—well when I'd visit someone else's house, he would not stop touching and looking and interacting and makes himself perfectly at home in this total stranger's house, you know, whether he knew the person or not. And people would always go, how do you—does he ever stop? (F1:D:6)

Maria was concerned about Corey's introversion and development of social skills. She recognized ways that Corey's temperament affected other people. She said:

I've always thought he was an introvert, and I think he is because he's very internally motivated and he does much better one on one and he gets tired of a crowd after a while. (F4:A:9)

I think people, a lot of times, react to Corey in very strong ways because he's not an average child. He doesn't relate to people very well unless—like especially when grownups don't talk to him in enough [of a] grownup way. He just doesn't like being coddled. Or some grownups who have good intentions and they just want to go hi Corey—try to be real sociable with him. He just gets really turned off and ignores them or something and I cringe because I know what this

grownup's trying to do and I know what Corey is saying too, in his manner. (F3:A:9)

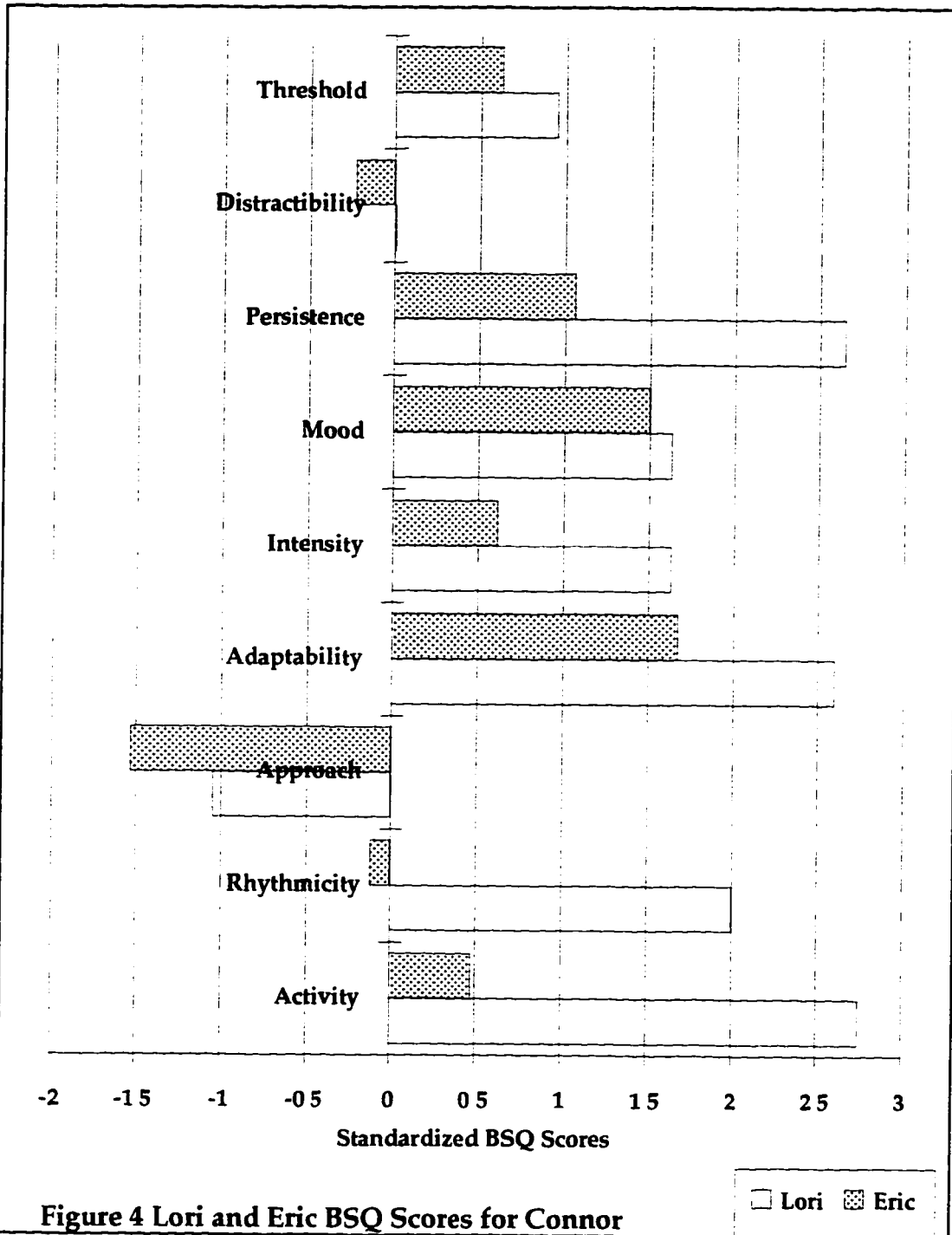
Corey and Connor's parents shared a concern that their child's temperament was extreme and, in a significant way, different from other children. Maria, Lori and Eric believed that their job as parents was more difficult because of these perceived differences. Eric said:

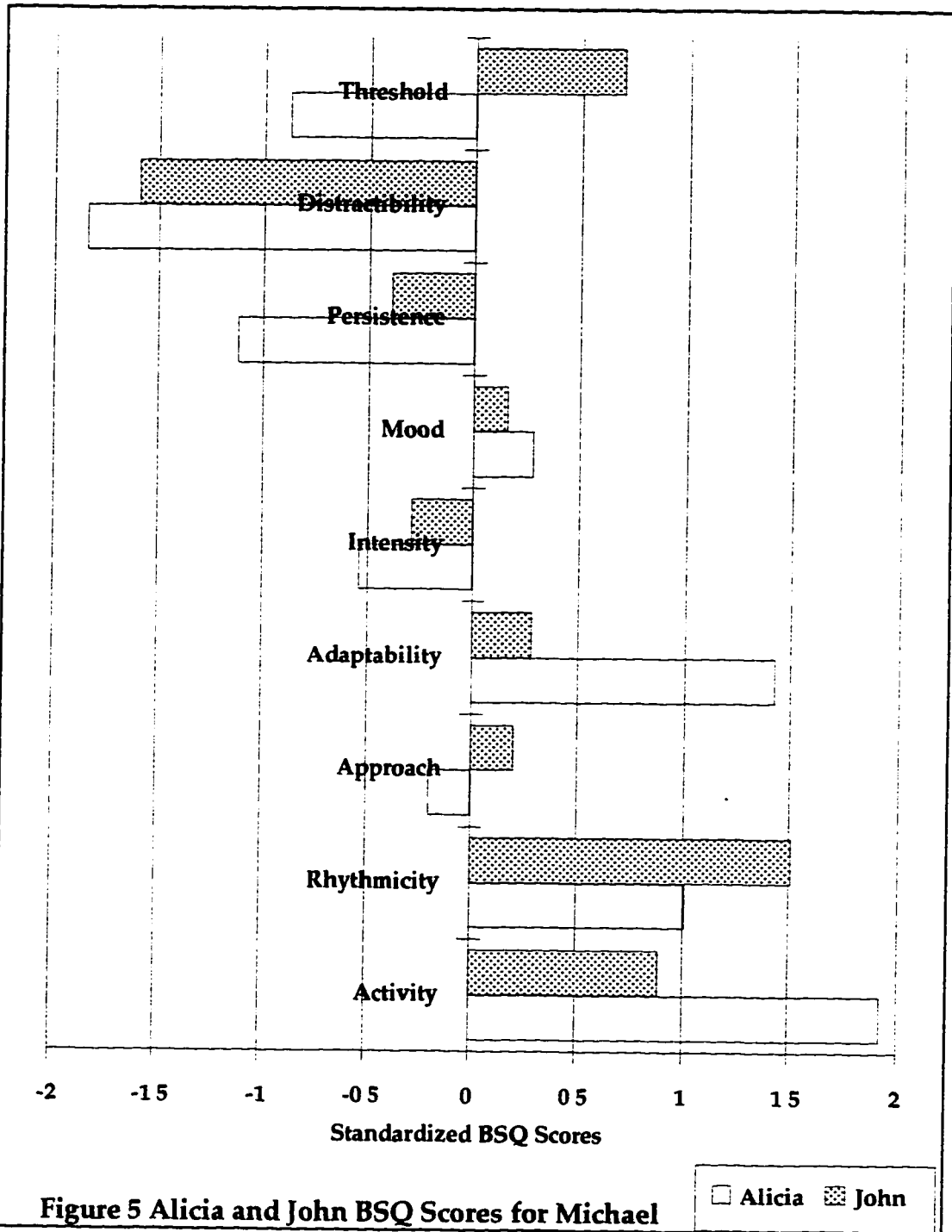
Yeah, Connor's unique. Well, he's unique to us . . . . I just don't know anybody else who has a kid that's quite as active as he is. But is not destructive and doesn't know—have a way to turn it off. I pity the poor parents who do. (F1:B:24)

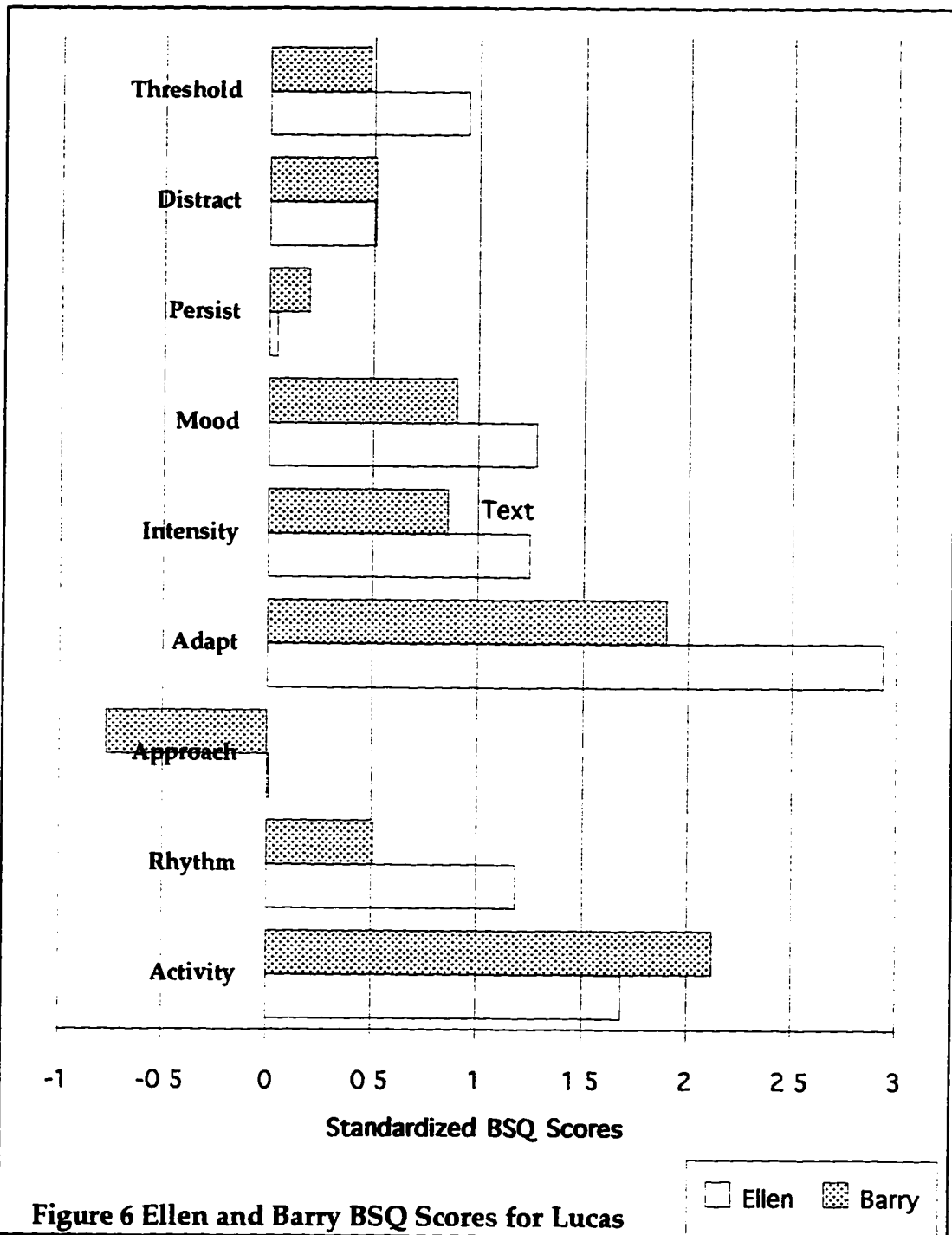
#### Behavior Style Questionnaire (BSQ) Ratings

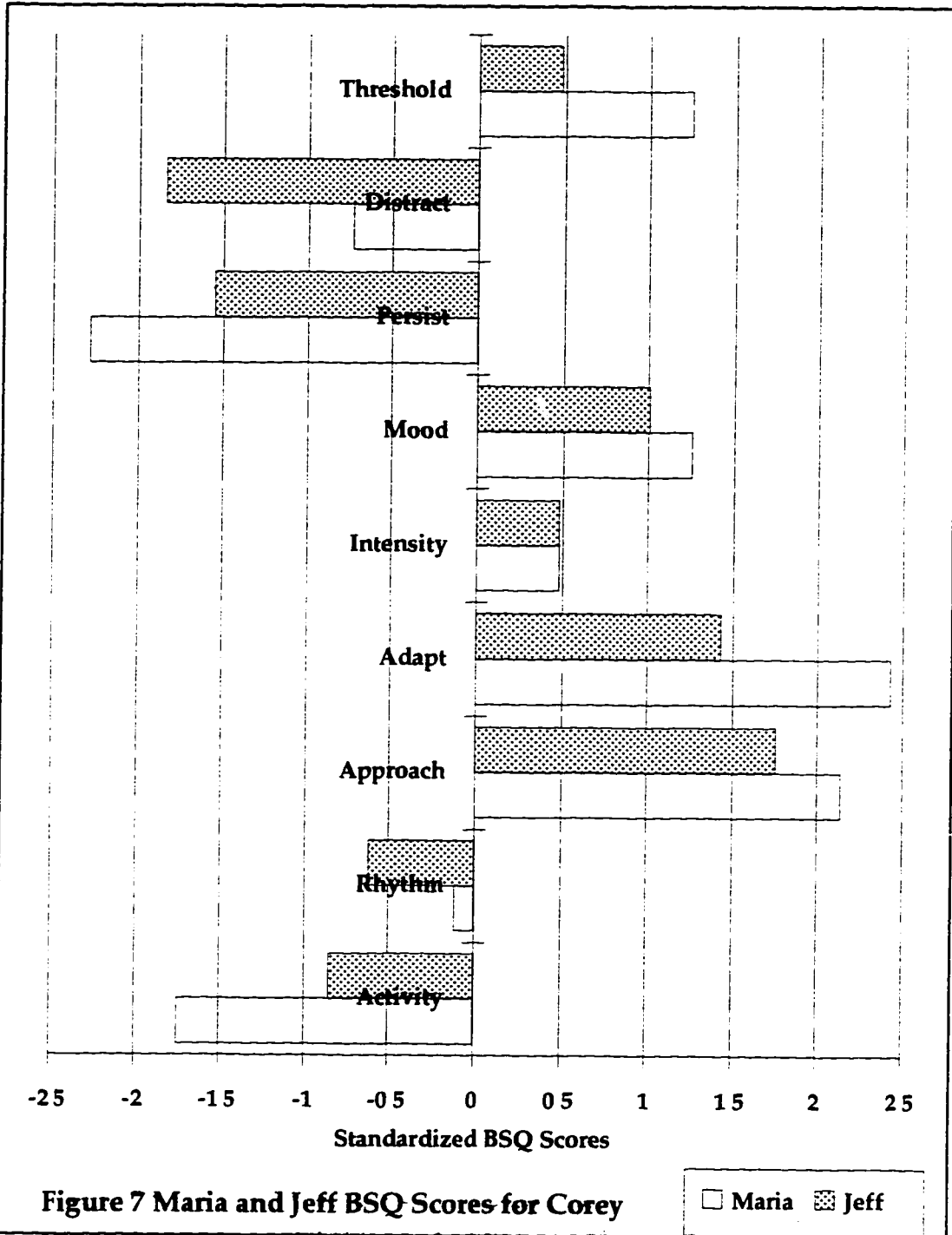
The BSQ ratings provided standardized measures of the children's temperament to supplement the parents' spontaneous descriptors. The BSQ was developed for clinical use to rate children on nine dimensions and four categories (easy, slow-to-warm, difficult, and intermediate) of temperament. Scores on the BSQ allow comparisons between the parents' ratings of their child's temperament and a standard range of temperament ratings found in general populations of children. A child's temperament is categorized as difficult if their ratings meet three conditions: (a) intensity is greater than the mean, (b) three or four scores in the dimensions of activity, rhythmicity, approach, adaptability, or mood are greater than the mean, and (c) at least two scores are greater than one standard deviation above the mean. The ratings of all the parents are presented graphically and briefly summarized. Figures 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 present temperament

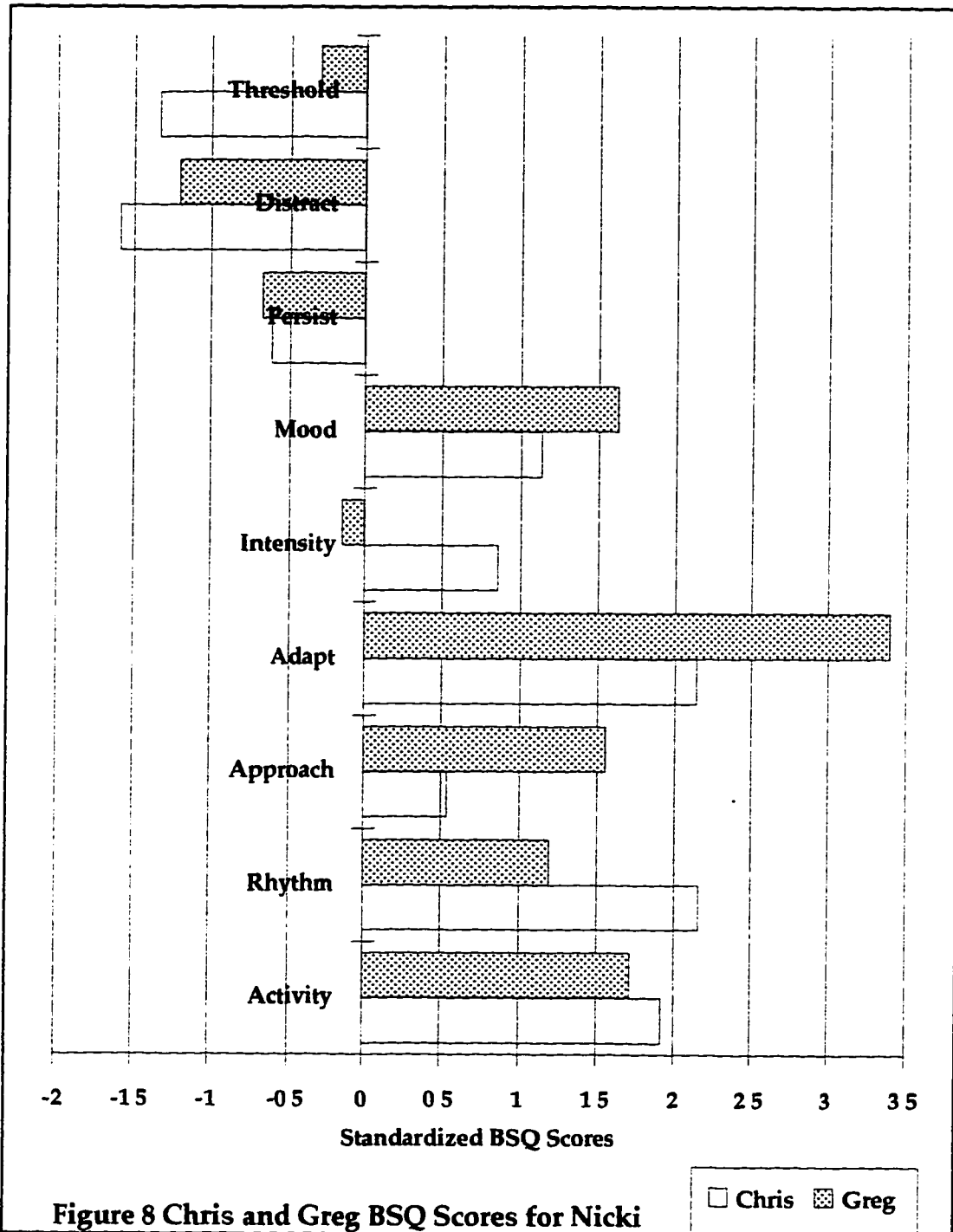
profiles for each child based on standardized scores for the nine dimensions of temperament measured on standardized scores for the nine dimensions of temperament measured on the BSQ. Each figure compares mothers' and fathers' ratings of their child. Positive scores represent: active, arrhythmic, tendency to withdraw, slow to adapt, intense, negative mood, nonresistant, distractible and low sensory threshold (sensitive).











### Summary of BSQ Scores.

Lori and Eric. Lori and Eric's BSQ ratings for Connor resulted in different diagnostic clusters. Lori's ratings of Connor fell into the difficult cluster. Her ratings for active, arrhythmic in daily activities, tendency to approach new situations, slow to adapt, intense, negative in mood, and non-persistent were greater than average. Her ratings for distractibility and low sensory threshold were within the range of average children. Eric's ratings of Connor's temperament fell into the diagnostic cluster high intermediate. His ratings for approach, slow to adapt, negative mood, and persistence were all greater than average (though not as high as Lori's). Eric's rating of activity, rhythmically, intensity, distractible, and sensory threshold were within the range of average children. Their ratings are displayed in Figure 4.

Alicia and John. Alicia and John's ratings of Michael's temperament on the BSQ placed him in the high intermediate diagnostic cluster. Alicia and John gave Michael ratings indicating: high activity, arrhythmicity in daily habits, and non distractible. They both gave ratings close to average for intensity and negative mood. John's rating of withdrawing in new situations contrasted Alicia's rating of approaching in new situations, but both scores were within the range of average children. Alicia rated Michael as slower to adapt and more persistent than most children, while John rated him as close to average. Alicia rated Michael as having a high sensory threshold and John rated him as having a low sensory threshold, but both scores were within 1 standard deviation of the mean. Their ratings are presented in Figure 5.

Barry and Ellen. Barry and Ellen's BSQ ratings of Lucas followed a similar pattern. Because Ellen tended to rate Lucas' characteristics as more

extreme than Barry, her ratings fell in the diagnostic cluster of difficult, while his fell in the high intermediate cluster. Barry and Ellen both rated Lucas as more active and slower to adapt than most children. They also rated Lucas as less rhythmic in daily patterns, more intense, and more negative in mood than most children, but Barry's ratings fell closer to the mean in those categories. Ellen rated Lucas as close to the mean on the tendency to approach new situations, and Barry rated him as slightly more likely to approach new situations. Both Barry and Ellen rated Lucas close to the mean on less persistent and distractible.<sup>4</sup> Both rated him as having a low sensory threshold, but their ratings were within the average range. Their BSQ ratings are presented in Figure 6.

Jeff and Maria. Jeff and Maria's ratings of Corey's temperament on the BSQ followed a similar pattern, with differences only in the value of their ratings.<sup>5</sup> Their ratings fell in the diagnostic cluster of difficult. Jeff and Maria agreed on ratings that indicate greater than average ratings for tendency to withdraw from new situations, slow to adapt, negative mood and persistent. Their ratings for intensity were above, but close to the mean. Their ratings for rhythmic in daily activities were below (more rhythmic) but close to the mean. Maria and Jeff's ratings indicated a low sensory threshold, low activity

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<sup>4</sup>It is interesting that their scores of average persistence contradict their spontaneous descriptions of Lucas' tenacity and his ability to focus for long periods of time on activities he is interested in.

<sup>5</sup> It is striking that Jeff and Maria agreed on their ratings of temperament, as well as their descriptions of Corey, yet disagreed about whether his temperament should be called difficult.

level and non-distractible, but Jeff's ratings for low sensory threshold and activity, and Maria's rating for non-distractible fell closer to the mean. Their ratings are presented Figure 7.

Chris and Greg. Chris and Greg's BSQ ratings of Nicki's temperament followed a similar pattern. Chris' ratings placed Nicki in the diagnostic cluster of difficult. Greg's ratings matched the profile for the difficult diagnostic cluster except that his intensity ratings fell just below the mean. This placed Greg's ratings in the category of high intermediate and indicated that Nicki's intensity was about average.<sup>6</sup> Chris and Greg were in agreement on ratings that indicated high activity, arrhythmicity in daily habits, slow to adapt, negative expression of mood, and non-distractible. Chris also rated Nicki as having a tendency to withdraw from new situations. Greg's rating for tendency to withdraw, and both their ratings for persistent fell close to the mean. Greg rated Nicki's intensity as close to the mean. Chris rated Nicki as slightly more intense, but within average range. They both rated Nicki as having a high sensory threshold, but Greg's rating was closer to average. Their ratings on the BSQ are presented in Figure 8.

#### Comparisons of BSQ Ratings

The categorical ratings of each child on the BSQ are compared in Table 10. All of the children received ratings that placed them in the difficult or, closely related, high intermediate diagnostic clusters. Many children received

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<sup>6</sup>This is interesting as Greg described Nicki's intensity as very difficult for him. He was uncomfortable with the level of emotion Nicki expressed when he was upset about something.

similar ratings in the nine temperament dimensions measured by the BSQ. For example, all parents rated their child negative in mood and slow to adapt. Variability across the five children was evident when individual patterns of BSQ ratings were examined. No two children shared the same pattern of temperament ratings across all 9 dimensions. Both of Corey's parents rated his activity level low, while the other eight parents rated their child's activity high. Both of Lucas' parents rated him distractible, while the other eight parents rated their child non-distractible. Seven parents rated their child arrhythmic, low sensory threshold, and intense. Six parents rated their child non-persistent. Five parents rated their child tending to approach new situations, while the other five parents rated their child tending to withdraw from new situations.

Table 10

Behavior Style Questionnaire: Temperament Profiles

Temperament Dimension	Connor	Michael	Lucas	Nicki	Corey
Activity	high	high	high	high	low
Rhythmicity	arrhythmic rhythmic (f)	arrhythmic	arrhythmic	arrhythmic	rhythmic
Approach/ Withdrawal	approach	approach withdrawal (f)	withdrawal approach(f)	withdrawal	withdrawal
Adaptability	slow	slow	slow	slow	slow
Intensity	intense	less intense	intense	intense less intense(f)	intense
Mood	negative	negative	negative	negative	negative
Persistence	non- persistence	high persistence	non- persistence	non- persistence	high persistence
Distractible	non- distractible	non- distractible	distractible	non- distractible	non- distractible
Threshold	low	high low(f)	low	high	low

Note. (f) Identifies father's rating when it differs from mother's rating.

In summary, parents within each family agreed in the direction of many of the BSQ ratings for their child. Connor, Lucas and Nicki's parents agreed on eight of nine dimensions of temperament ratings; Michael's parents agreed on seven ratings; and Corey's parents agreed on all nine ratings. Mothers and fathers disagreed on the directions of only five specific ratings of temperament. Michael's and Lucas' parents disagreed about ratings for tendency to approach or withdraw from new situations. Michael's parents also disagreed about ratings for sensory threshold. Connor's parents disagreed about rhythmicity. Nicki's parents disagreed about ratings for intensity. In each of the remaining categories of temperament both parents agreed with each other about their child's ratings. The parents within each family also agreed about many of their spontaneous descriptions of their child as described in the case summaries.

#### Comparisons of Parental Perceptions and BSQ Ratings

Many of the characteristics and phrases parents spontaneously used to describe their child corresponded to temperament dimensions identified on the BSQ (see Table 8). Table 11 summarizes the correspondence between the nine dimensional ratings on the BSQ and parents' spontaneous descriptions for each child. Blank cells indicate instances when parents did not identify all nine BSQ temperament dimensions in their spontaneous descriptions of their children. Parents' descriptions of their child also contradicted some of the BSQ ratings. In the following section I address the implications of contradictions and correspondence between BSQ ratings and parent descriptions.

Table 11

Correspondence between BSQ Ratings and Parents' Descriptions for Each Child

<b>BSQ Temp. Dimension</b>	<b>Connor</b>	<b>Michael</b>	<b>Lucas</b>	<b>Corey</b>	<b>Nicki</b>
Activity	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Rhythmic		yes	yes	yes	yes
Approach/ Withdraw	yes	m=yes f=no		yes	yes
Adaptable		yes		yes	yes
Intensity	yes	no	yes	yes	m=yes f=no
Mood	no	no	no	no	no
Persistence		yes	no	yes	
Distractible		yes	no	yes	yes
Threshold	yes		yes	yes	yes

Note. yes indicates correspondence between BSQ ratings and descriptions

Note. no indicates contradictions between BSQ ratings and descriptions

Note. blank space indicates that parents did not spontaneously describe that dimension

Correspondence between BSQ ratings and parent descriptions. Many parents' spontaneous descriptions of their child were consistent with temperament categories in the BSQ. The BSQ ratings of activity were consistent with all the parent's descriptions of their children's level of activity. BSQ ratings for intensity were consistent with descriptions of Connor, Lucas, Corey and Nicki (by his mother). Although parents did not spontaneously describe how regular they found their children's daily habits, their BSQ ratings for rhythmicity/arrhythmicity coincided with descriptions of their children's sleep and eating habits. For example, Corey was the only child rated as rhythmic in daily habits and the only child perceived to sleep well. Michael and Corey were both described as very focused and not easily

distracted, consistent with BSQ scores of high persistence and non-distractible. Lucas and Corey were both described as sensitive, corresponding to BSQ scores for low sensory threshold. Several parents described their child as demanding attention and strong-willed, corresponding to BSQ ratings of intensity or persistence.

The consistencies between parents' perceptions of their child's temperament (within families and across BSQ ratings and spontaneous descriptors) suggests that parents' observations reflect, at least in part, within child characteristics. However, some of the parents' spontaneous descriptions of their child contradicted their BSQ ratings, suggesting that parent's perceptions and interpretations of temperament were also influenced by other factors.

Contradictions between BSO ratings and parent descriptions. Table 11 revealed several contrasts between BSQ ratings and parents' spontaneous descriptions of temperament. For example, Barry and Ellen described Lucas as very focused, but their BSQ ratings indicated non-persistence and non-distractible. Chris and Greg described Nicki as highly sensitive but gave BSQ ratings of high sensory threshold (indicating less sensitivity). All the children in this study were rated negative in mood, but were described by their parents as having pleasant, happy, or bright moods.

Some of the contradictions between parent descriptions and BSQ ratings may be explained by personal characteristics of the parents. Alicia, John, and Greg rated Michael and Nicki low intensity, in contrast to their spontaneous descriptions of high intensity. This contradiction may indicate parental feelings of discomfort associated with their child's expressions of

emotional intensity. John and Alicia were both raised in families where they were not allowed to show emotional intensity, rather they were expected to be "seen and not heard." They may have been more sensitive to emotional intensity than other parents, and may have interpreted behaviors as intense that the BSQ interprets as average.

Greg was especially articulate about how difficult it was for him to witness Nicki's intense emotions. He revealed how his experience of Nicki's intensity reflected his own discomfort with emotional expression. He attributed his discomfort to experiences in his family of origin. He said:

It sort of frightens me when he gets that intense because he seems—it seems to me like it's going to be so self-destructive, like he's going to get so angry at himself, and it kind of frightens me. But anyway, it doesn't seem like that's really a problem for him. I'm kind of mixing his personality and mine up, I think. That's just how he does it. He gets very intense and angry and then pushes through and he learns it.

Greg's judgments of Nicki revealed his level of self awareness about ways that his history and personality influenced his perceptions.

Parents also identified characteristics that did not correspond to any of the temperament categories listed in the BSQ, including physical strength, bright or intelligent, social, affectionate, and allergies (see Table 11). Some of these characteristics correspond to traits that researchers have recently identified as related to temperament. For example, sociability was not a category identified in temperament scales modeled on the Thomas and Chess (1978) dimensions of temperament, but other researchers have included a measure of sociability in their temperament models. Sociability is identified

as a temperament trait in Rothbart's (1985, 1988) model. Kagan's (1994) work has focused on two temperament typologies—inhibited and uninhibited children.

The discrepancies between parent descriptions and BSQ ratings, as well as discrepancies between parents' perceptions of the same child may reflect differences in interpretations of child behaviors. For example, during a review of Connor's BSQ ratings at a follow-up meeting, Lori and Eric discussed the discrepancy between their perceptions that Connor had a positive, happy mood and their ratings of negative mood. The BSQ items for the negative mood category included questions such as:

The child is moody for more than a few minutes when corrected or disciplined.

The child is annoyed at interrupting play to comply with a parental request. (items 1 & 34, McDevitt & Carey, 1975)

Eric believed Connor displayed the behaviors addressed by the negative mood questions frequently, but he interpreted those behaviors as indications that Connor expressed his mood (whether negative or positive) intensely. Eric believed that Connor was characteristically happy not negative.

#### Parent Perceptions and the Difficult Child Concept

Parents in this study also identified several characteristics that differed from the New York Longitudinal Study (Thomas and Chess, 1977) profile of the difficult child (NYLS profile) or were unique to one child. Four children in this study were described as very social and outgoing. These characteristics differed from the NYLS tendency to withdraw from new situations, but the tendency to approach new situations with exuberance was a source of

difficulty for some of the parents. Lori's descriptions of the difficulties she experienced with Connor illustrate how a seemingly desirable characteristic can be perceived as a source of difficulty. She said:

Never do I have—which I see with other children, this kind of withdrawal, like I'm not sure I want to do that. . . . I love his enthusiasm and his ability to be around people. If we go down the street, he'll say hi to everyone. He never hesitates . . . . It's just when it gets out of control that it's hard. Like I said, holidays, family things, stuff like that. Birthday parties, anything like that. They usually seem to turn into semi-disasters. . . . He's frantically running around the house, he's talking too loud, he's giving too much, and not an enjoyable person to be around. I mean, spaz is the word that comes to mind. (F1:A:4)

Corey presented a temperament profile that was consistent with the NYLS profile, but differed from the other children in this study in significant ways. Although his parents perceived him as intense, he was described as more interested in quiet activities and shy with people. His parents were concerned that he was not able to relate well to people in social situations. He had a more quiet and introverted style of intensity that differed from the other children, and from a cultural expectation that intensity is loud and boisterous. Corey's parents perceived him as slow to adapt to changes in his life (consistent with the NYLS profile) and Maria identified this characteristic as a cause of many of the difficulties she experienced with Corey. She said:

Looking back I've realized a couple things about this summer, besides change of house, because we lived outside of the home . . . . And there

were enough changes because he's slow to warm up to a change anyway, with his temperament, and even though he came back to his own house which really didn't look like his own house, he liked it but it was a big change. . . . I think he gets anxious about the new situation that he was going to face, like school, first grade—different teacher, different kids. So he was becoming more anxious about that. (F4:A:5)

Parents' judgments of difficult temperament reflected perceptions of shared temperament characteristics that corresponded to the NYLS profile, as well as unique personal characteristics, and characteristics that differed from the NYLS profile. The variation in parents' perceptions of difficult temperament across families suggests that the way parents interpret characteristics of their child's temperament may be as influential a factor in parent's perceptions of difficulty as the presence or absence of specific temperament characteristics. Maria and Jeff's judgments of Corey's temperament illustrate ways that differences in parental characteristics may lead to differences in parents' interpretations of the same child's behaviors.

Maria and Jeff: Difference in Perceptions of Temperament

Even parental agreement about descriptions of the same child did not always lead to shared interpretations or perceptions of difficulty. Jeff and Maria presented a striking case. Although Jeff and Maria were consistent in their BSQ ratings and verbal descriptions of Corey, they disagreed about whether Corey's temperament should be called difficult. Throughout the interviews, Jeff expressed his opinion that Corey's temperament should not be interpreted as difficult. During the first interview he said, "I don't know what your definition of a difficult child is, but I wouldn't necessarily agree

that he's a difficult child now." (F4:B:2) Jeff agreed with Maria's descriptions of Corey, but he believed her perceptions of difficulty reflected her own personal characteristics and interpretations. The following quotes from two different interviews summarize Jeff's perspective.

We can predict and our predictions would be about the same. We recognize the same thing, it's just Maria experiences a higher frustration level than I do. I have more patience than she does in the same situations. But Corey and Maria are more similar in temperament, and I think that's a problem. (F4:D:13)

I think my wife has had difficulty since—two children, and Corey has adjusted to the younger brother—being to a point where he has things he's trying to figure out, his own place in the family and that kind of thing. . . . I think he's pretty smart and he has always been more aware of his environment and surroundings and seems to be very sensitive to light and sound and color. He just notices a lot more, he's very visual and hearing is a lot more acute. (F4:B:2)

Jeff believed many of the difficulties Maria attributed to temperament were due to situational factors. For example, Maria and Jeff both believed the birth of Corey's brother, Jason, was especially difficult for Corey. Maria believed Corey's difficulties reflected continuity in his temperament expressed during a stressful time, while Jeff believed the stressful event led to the difficulties.

**Maria:** I would say there wasn't a big change in his temperament, I just didn't know—there were a lot of things of course that really didn't surface until he was older, but I think for a while he was very sociable

before he was four. I know the big change came when he was four because Jason was born, that was a very very tough time. Very difficult transition for all of us. Because of the way Alex behaved and it was a very difficult transition for Alex to have a brother. . . . He just became real sulky and whiney and needy and just misbehaving, having tantrums. (F4:A:22)

**Jeff:** I think the toughest time is just him adjusting to sharing his parents with his little brother and not getting enough time. But the year before Jason was born, Maria was home with Corey the whole time, full-time—he wasn't going to sitters or anything and that was probably his favorite year. I don't think he remembers, but the year he was three. And then right before he turned four his little brother was born, so I think maybe that was even more traumatic because the year prior to that, Mom was there the whole time, Dad was working but not that much. That was a good year for everybody, which made the following year more tough. But I think since he turned five, turned six, probably, when he started kindergarten, things have been pretty steadily improving and easier on everybody. (F4:B:16-17)

Jeff and Maria shared similar observations about the characteristics that described Corey, but they differed in their judgments about whether Corey was a difficult child. Their observations most likely reflected characteristics of their child's biological makeup, but their judgments most likely reflected differences between them: their own histories, their expectations about children, and their personalities. Maria described factors she thought

contributed to differences in their judgments of Corey's temperament. She said:

I think that because I have to spend more time with him than Jeff, I've probably run into a lot more difficult situations and of course I know that Jeff has a higher threshold than I do as far as just being tolerant of what happens. He's just more patient. (F4:D:9)

There are some differences in our personalities that I think of course shape the way we see things." (F4:D:11)

Maria and Jeff believed they formed different judgments about Corey's temperament, in part, because they had been Corey's primary caregiver during different times of his life. Jeff had spent the toddler years staying home as primary caregiver. Maria stayed home during the years surrounding the birth of Corey's younger brother, and currently worked part time. They faced different challenges related to developmental changes and the birth of a sibling. They agreed that differences in their personalities and backgrounds affected how they interpreted and responded to Corey. Maria and Jeff also had different experiences during their own childhood and, as a result, different models for child behavior. Both parents believed specific aspects of the other parents' family of origin influenced perceptions of Corey. Maria thought Jeff probably felt more comfortable with Corey's behaviors because his temperament was similar to Jeff's father's personality. Jeff thought Maria found Corey difficult because his behaviors were so different from Maria's own childhood behaviors. Maria agreed that her children experienced more freedom than she had as a child. She said, addressing her husband:

Jeff, you do have a point. I know that when we were growing up . . . we just had to obey, that's what we did. We obeyed and toed the line and didn't—we weren't difficult at all. But it's a different situation. . . . I don't expect my boys to be like I was. (F4:D:14)

Maria and Jeff recognized ways that multiple factors influenced their interpretations of Corey's temperament. They acknowledged similarities in their observations and differences in their perspectives, yet they did not change their own opinions about Corey's temperament in response to their partner's interpretations. The difference in Jeff and Maria's perceptions illustrates a difference between parental observations and interpretations of their child. Their perceptions of Corey's temperament were formed through a complex interpretative process.

#### Process of Perceiving Difficult Temperament

All the parents engaged in a process of interpreting and giving meaning to observations of their child's behavior. Many parents questioned whether the behaviors they observed reflected characteristics of their child, consequences of their parenting, or the influence of their particular circumstances or lifestyle. Parents believed that personal and situational factors influenced both their perceptions of their child, and their child's behaviors.

A model of the interpretive process parents engaged in to form perceptions of their child's temperament is shown in Figure 9. The interpretive process depicts parents' attempts to understand their child and to figure out why their experiences felt so difficult. Parents in this study began to form perceptions of their child's temperament during infancy. They

experienced a mismatch between their expectations about infancy and their experiences with their own child that led them to make comparisons and consult with others in order to form judgments about the relative difficulty of their child rearing experience.

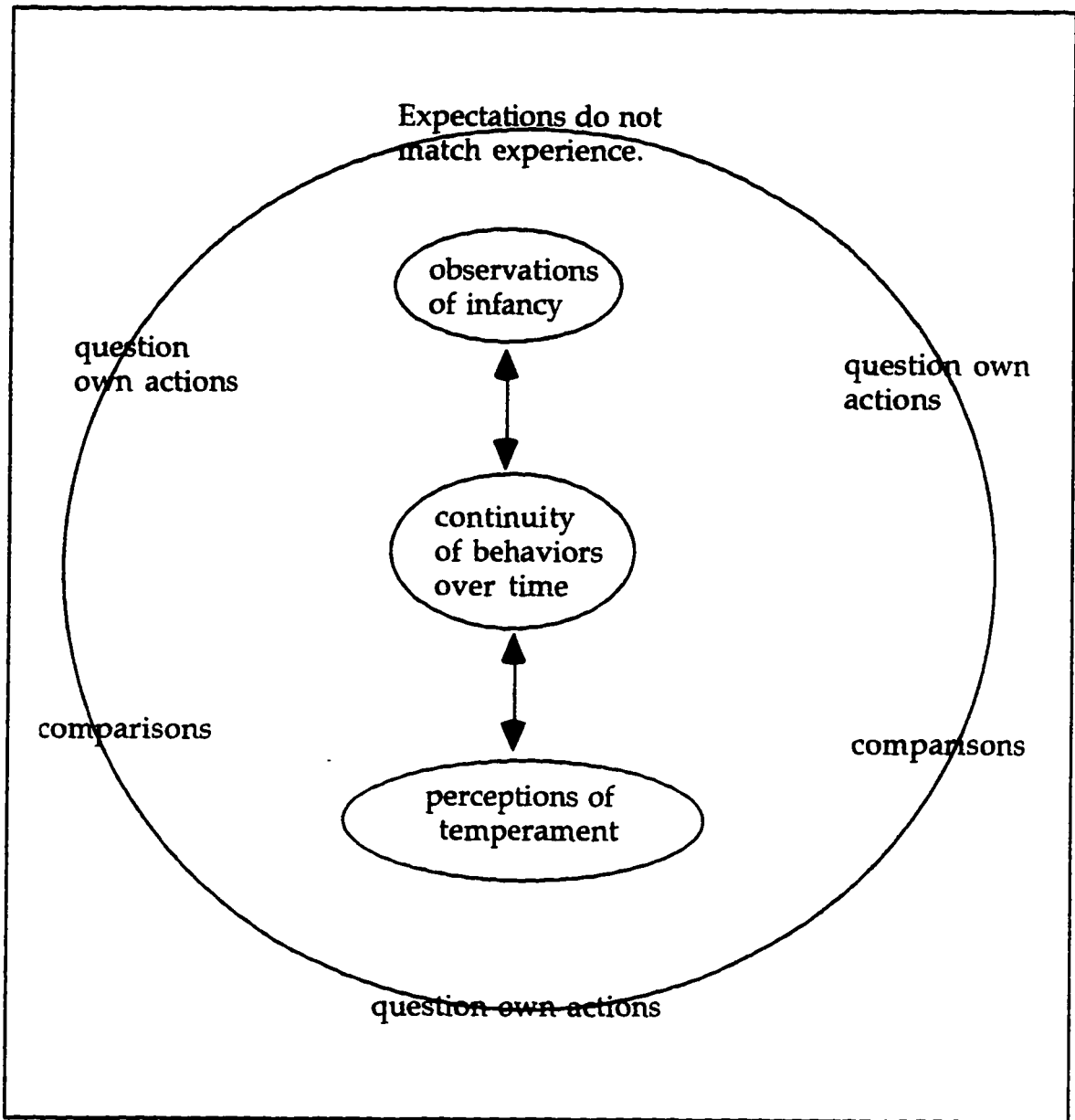


Figure 9. Process of Forming Perceptions of Temperament.

The activities and observations of the interpretive process were cyclic and interconnected. The processes of questioning and comparisons were repeated over time and new behaviors were perceived to be consistent with infant behaviors, eventually leading parents to form perceptions of their child's difficult temperament. New observations tended to reinforce parents' previous interpretations about temperament. The perceived consistency of new observations may reflect the continuity of their child's behavioral style over time or, as in the case of Maria and Jeff, a tendency for parents to attend to evidence that supports their own interpretations of behaviors. In this section I discuss the dynamics of the interpretive process. Examples are provided that illustrate three dimensions of this process: a) parents' experiences during infancy, (b) the observed continuity of behaviors over time, and (c) comparisons. I also address ways that parents' past experiences with children influenced their perceptions of temperament.

Experiences during infancy. Although the parents found their child's infancy difficult, they did not at first believe they had a difficult baby, rather they believed the whole experience of parenting was difficult. Their experiences contradicted their expectations about child rearing and prompted them to question their parenting actions, gather advice, and compare their child to other children. The following quotes reflect parents' early memories of difficulties experienced with their child. Lori formed an impression that Connor seemed very different from other children and questioned her role in why that might be so. She said:

And that's when I feel that he's so different than other children sometimes. I guess I've felt that ever since he was really young. I

remember—it's hard, because I don't know how much of it's me, and him, always that interaction you know? I'm not particularly—I'm kind of high strung myself so sometimes I think we egg each other on, but when he was very young I'd do things with friends who had very young children, and they always would seem to have it so easy. (F1:A:2)

Chris identified difficulties she experienced when Nicki was an infant and related her unsuccessful attempts to make him happy:

He cried almost constantly when he was awake, he just wasn't very happy. I tried changing my diet for nursing, thinking that would change things. It didn't really seem to matter. But he wasn't awake and content. All the things that babies are supposed to like, you know, like the little rocking things and bouncy seats and the swings and all that stuff, he hated all the stuff. And if I held him, he cried, if I put him down, he cried, I mean he just cried and cried and cried. It was very difficult. It just wasn't easy, that part, there wasn't that sweetness. (F5:A:3)

Greg expressed disappointment that his expectations about parenting were so different from his experiences with Nicki. He said:

His infancy was very difficult. Nothing had prepared me for a baby that was like that . . . . I was prepared to be up at night and to have lots of work to do and all of that, but I was expecting cuddling and you know, chubby goo-goo baby, and I had this screaming, wiry, kicking. . . . it was really a loss for me.

The experience of difficulty, that contradicted previously held expectations, prompted a process of questioning and comparing. Parents attempted to

understand whether they were "doing something wrong" or whether their child was especially difficult. They were trying to make sense of their experiences, essentially constructing their own theories about their child's nature and their role in shaping development. For example, Alicia's experience of difficulty led her to make comparisons and question her parenting skills. She said:

I was comparing him to other children who were of the same age and I thought geez, why are they so different. Is there something wrong with me or whatever, I just didn't know. I bought one of the books on spirited children but it didn't apply to him at that point because that was written for more older children. It wasn't written for infants. I actually talked to some—I don't know if it was like a child psychologist or whatever. But what it kind of came up to was maybe I needed to develop more of my parenting skills and he was just always a child who was more demanding, had a stronger will and was extremely stubborn and set in his ways. (F2:D:12)

Alicia's belief that her parenting and Michael's temperament contributed to the difficulty she experienced was characteristic of other parents as well. Although parents experienced difficulty during infancy they did not immediately judge the baby's temperament as difficult, rather they questioned their actions and searched for explanations. The questioning that began during infancy continued as the child grew older. As parents observed consistent patterns of behavior (or what they perceived to be consistency) over time, perceptions of difficulty strengthened.

Continuity. The parents all observed characteristics of their child's behavior that had enduring qualities. They believed their child's temperament showed continuity over time. Barry and Ellen expressed their belief that the problems they experienced with Lucas reflected consistency in his temperament.

**Barry:** He needs to do things on his own, his way, on his terms. And then at some point I guess he just reaches a level of resignation where he realizes that he needs help. But he's been that way—he's been that way since he was an infant. I mean that's just his personality, I mean I don't think a lot of his personality's changed very much since he was an infant. A lot of the traits he can verbalize now were there in a non-verbal fashion when he was an infant. (F3:D:35)

**Ellen :** Lucas is Lucas is Lucas is Lucas. He will always . . . have, I would think, night problems and frustrations like that. Lucas will always be emotional, and . . . There will always be this stubbornness . . . because this is Lucas. . . . I don't think it's going to change. (F3:D:52)

Comparisons. The parents in this study compared their child to themselves, to books, to relatives' views, to siblings and to other children outside the family. Through these comparisons the parents began to form impressions about their child's individuality. They drew several conclusions including: (a) their child was more difficult than other children, (b) their child's temperament was similar to aspects of their own or relatives' personalities, (c) their child did not fit the expectations their relatives held about how children should be, and (d) their child was different from typical children presented in popular parenting books. All the parents perceived

their child was different from other children, and nine parents (with the exception of Jeff), perceived their child was more difficult than other children. Examples of comparisons made by Lori, Jeff, and Maria illustrate different judgments parents can make by comparing their child to other children.

Lori felt the advice in books rarely seemed applicable or effective for her questions about Connor. She was especially struck by the differences between Connor and his younger brother, Tommy. She said:

With Tommy I can see how when reading those books that he was more the child they were talking about in some ways . . . the behavior he has is described more by the books, where as the behavior Connor had never seemed to be described by the books. . . . with Connor it never seemed to fit. (F1:A:19)

She recognized a difference between Connor and other children in general, and over time began to frame the difficulty she experienced as a reflection of Connor's individual style and needs.

It's just always seemed like it was harder somehow, and I never could understand. I thought, oh, that's just me, I'm not doing a very good job. But I realize as he's gotten older that he just has always been a more time consuming child in that way, than some other children. Kids are different you know. (F1:A:3)

Jeff, in contrast, did not judge Corey to be more difficult than other children. His comparisons led him to believe that his experience was not so different than other parents. He said:

I know when you [Maria] said you were setting this up and you [Stephanie] were doing a study on difficult children, I thought, this is a

bright kid with a lot of energy—I don't really know what the norm is that you're judging this against. A lot of parents experience what we're experiencing, so it's relative. I didn't see him as a difficult child. There are situations that are difficult and he's got more temperament than some kids, but he's smarter than other kids. Has to have something to do with that. (F4:D:7)

Maria disagreed with Jeff's interpretations—an illustration of the strength of their respective interpretive frameworks. She perceived Corey as more difficult than his friends. She responded to Jeff's comments:

Well . . . I considered his temperament being more difficult than an average kid. Where have I compared him? I guess I compared him to his friends who come over here and play. (F4:D:8)

Parents also compared their child to themselves or other members of their family. Table 12 provides examples of comparisons parents drew between their child's temperament and other family members.

Table 12

Comparisons between Perceived Temperaments of Child and Family Members

<b>Child</b>	<b>Parents' comparisons to other family members</b>
<b>Connor</b>	<b>Eric:</b> perceived differences between siblings' temperaments. <b>Lori:</b> perceived differences between siblings' temperaments; perceived similarities to her own temperament.
<b>Michael</b>	<b>John:</b> perceived similarities to his own temperament characteristics of slow to warm up and aggressive. <b>Alicia:</b> perceived similarities to a tendency to be "particular," especially about sensory input.
<b>Lucas</b>	<b>Barry:</b> perceived similarities to both parents' spirited natures. <b>Ellen:</b> perceived similarities to her own tendencies for getting "wound up," explosive, and expressive of anger.
<b>Corey</b>	<b>Jeff:</b> perceived differences between Maria's childhood temperament and Corey's temperament; perceived differences between siblings' temperaments. <b>Maria:</b> perceived differences between her personality and Corey's temperament; perceived similarities between Jeff's father's temperament and Corey's temperament; perceived differences between siblings' temperaments.
<b>Nicki</b>	<b>Greg:</b> perceived similarities to his own intense feelings, perceived differences in his own tendency to withdraw silently and Nicki's tendency to intensely express emotions. <b>Chris:</b> perceived differences between herself and Nicki in most aspects of temperament.

Lori, Alicia, John, Barry, Ellen, Maria, and Greg all identified with some aspects of their child's temperament. Barry and Ellen believed they both shared Lucas' level of intensity. Ellen said, "I get wound up too. And so does he." (F3:C:19). Barry added, "I think one of the problems we have in this house is that we have at least two, if not three, spirited children living here." (F3: C:19). John described how he and Michael were both slow to warm up to new situations. He said:

I remember when he was younger . . . he would be shy at first because he's not used to . . . an environment where there are a lot of other children. It would take him a while. He's like me, I think in that sense. It kind of takes me a while to warm up. (F2:B:6)

Parents often found that shared temperament characteristics were a source of difficulty, but there was also evidence that similarity between child and parent temperament increased acceptance of the child. Lori said:

A lot of things I see in Connor, I know I had as a child and sometimes still struggle with. Just different feelings. . . Just getting angry. And sometimes not knowing how to—as an adult you have to think, of course you can't hit. Losing all ability to verbally say it and I know that's what goes on with Connor and I see it. I wish I could help him more. I understand kind of what he's going through. (F1:C:6)

Maria observed similarities between Corey and his paternal grandfather. She believed this similarity was a factor in Jeff's perception that Corey was not a difficult child. She said:

Corey reminds me a lot of Jeff's dad. . . . And Jeff's dad really, as you've heard, he's a man of many talents and all his hobbies are all oriented just by himself. . . . Solitary. And I think that . . . temperament wise and other things too—there's just a lot of things that remind me of his dad. (F4:C:34)

### Experience with Children

Parents also compared their child to their past experiences with children. Some of the parents in this study gained experience interacting with young children in their families of origin or as young adults. These

experiences contributed to their knowledge about children and their confidence in their ability to care for their own children. Table 13 depicts the experience parents had with young children before their own children were born.

Table 13

Experience with Children Prior to Birth of First Child

Past Experience	Lack Experience
Eric	Lori
	Alicia and John
Ellen	Barry
Jeff	Maria
Greg	Chris

With the exception of Alicia and John, each family had one parent with experience and one parent without experience. All the parents believed previous experience with young children affected their perceptions of difficulty. The parents who lacked experience believed their perceptions of difficulty were in part a reflection of the newness of becoming parents. For example, Chris expressed her feelings of self doubt related to inexperience with children. She described early experiences when she felt incapable of meeting the demands of her new infant.

At 35, when I had him, I had sort of developed this sense of competence in the world that was completely destroyed. I just felt utterly like I didn't know what to do. . . . and Greg had been around babies and kids all his life, so he did a lot of that and kind of showed me a lot of all those things. But it took me a while to get confidence. And then of course Nicki being so upset all the time just made it—

exacerbated that feeling for me. I mean it's hard to say who was hitting off of who, if I was feeling so distressed I'm sure he was picking up on it. (F5:A:36)

The amount of experience contributed to parents' perceptions of their child's difficult temperament, but experience did not differentiate between partner's perceptions of difficulty. All the "inexperienced" parents attributed their perceptions of difficulty in part to their lack of experience, but three of the four "experienced" parents also perceived their child as difficult. The correspondence between experienced and inexperienced parents' perceptions of the same child's difficult temperament may indicate that part of the perceived difficulty reflected child characteristics.

There were also ways that experience contributed to parents' perceptions of difficulty. Some parents' perceptions of their child's difficult temperament were strengthened when they compared experiences with their own child to past experiences with other children. "Experienced" parents may have felt greater disappointment when their expectations about the nature of child rearing did not match their actual experiences.

Parent involvement in the processes described above—experiencing difficulty during infancy, observing continuity of behaviors over time, questioning, and comparing—contributed to an overall perception of their child's temperament. The parents acknowledged awareness of multiple factors that influenced perceptions of temperament. In their efforts to understand their child, parents reached beyond beliefs about their child's characteristics to examine their own personal characteristics and actions. Parents also believed contextual influences from the surrounding

environment influenced their child's behaviors. The ways environmental factors influenced parents' perceptions of difficult temperament are discussed next.

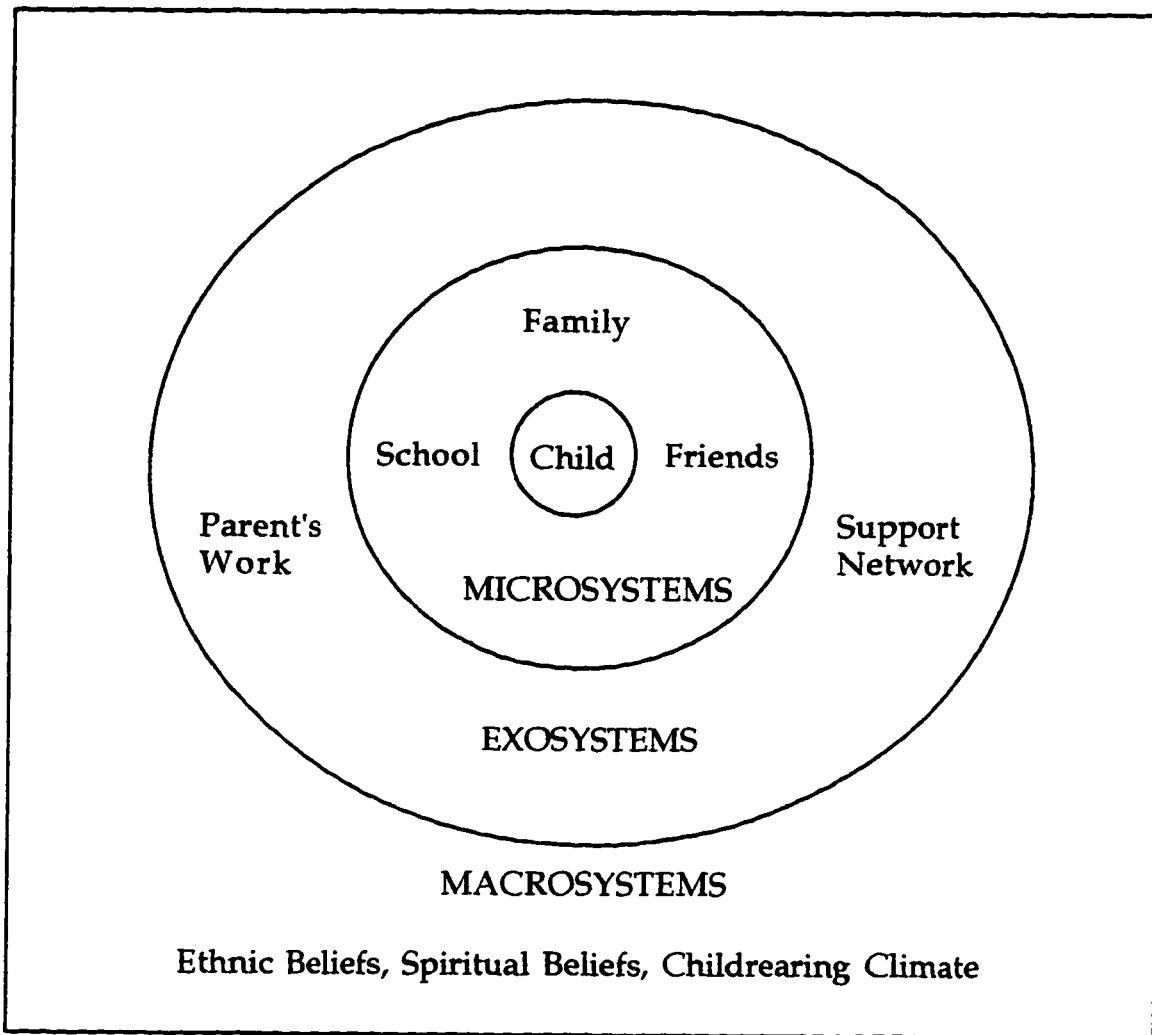
### Environmental Factors

The theory of "goodness of fit" has remained central to temperament theory. It is widely believed that development is strongly influenced by the relationships and interactions that occur between an individual's temperament and "environmental stresses and opportunities." Thomas and Chess (1977) stressed the importance of consonance between the individual and the environment in their delineation of "goodness of fit." They stated:

Goodness of fit results when the properties of the environment and its expectations and demands are in accord with the organism's own capacities, characteristics, and style of behaving. When this consonance between organism and environment is present, optimal development in a progressive direction is possible. (p. 11)

The most influential environment experienced by the young child is the family, including the interpersonal and physical environment. The child is also influenced by environments outside the family as conceptualized in Bronfenbrenner's (1986; cf. Garbarino, 1982) ecological model. In the ecological model, the environment is thought of as several levels of interconnected systems that influence the child's development, including: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems. Three ecological systems, the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, provide a useful framework to analyze the kinds of environmental factors identified by parents in this study. These three systems are nested. The child

is in the center of the microsystem, surrounded by the exosystem, and embedded in the macrosystem as depicted in Figure 10.



**Figure 10.** Ecological Systems Model

The microsystem consists of the most immediate environments the child experiences. These are the places and people the child interacts with on a daily basis, such as family, relatives, school and child care settings. The characteristics of different settings and people determine the nature of interactions, and influence development in different ways. The exosystem consists of environments that affect the child even though the child is not

directly involved in those settings. Exosystems include the parents' work and support networks. The macrosystem consists of "broad ideological and institutional patterns" of cultures that the family identifies with (Garbarino, 1982). Examples of macrosystems pertinent to this study include ethnicity, trends in parent education that are reflected in the culture at large, and spiritual beliefs.

The parents in this study believed many environmental factors influenced their perceptions of their child's behaviors. The most salient factors, grouped according to micro-, exo- and macrosystems are summarized in Table 14. Examples of the ways each of these systems influenced parents' perceptions of their child's behaviors are discussed.

Table 14

Environmental Influences at Three System Levels

<b>Microsystem</b>	<b>Exosystem</b>	<b>Macrosystem</b>
Sensory stimulation of environments. Interactions with parents. Child care and school settings. Family stress related to marital tension.	Parental stress related to work demands. Financial constraints. Support systems. Educational resources.	Concept of difficult child. Ethnicity. Spiritual belief systems.

Microsystem

Parents identified several ways that settings and people in the microsystem influenced their perceptions and their child's behavior. For example, parents identified ways their child behaved differently in different kinds of environments, and questioned whether their perceptions of

difficulty reflected their child's response to challenging situations rather than their child's temperament. Parents observed variations in their children's behaviors in response to changes in the level of sensory stimulation of settings such as stores, schools and home. Four kinds of environmental influences experienced at the microsystem level were especially salient in this study: (a) high sensory stimulation, (b) interactions with adult personalities, (c) child care and school settings, and (d) stressful life events.

Sensory stimulation of environments. The parents of Connor, Lucas, Corey, and Nicki believed environments with high levels of sensory stimulation influenced their child's behavior. Highly stimulating environments—lots of noise, lights, very large or very small crowded spaces—seemed to exacerbate difficult behaviors. For example, Chris and Greg observed that when Nicki was in noisy environments he screamed loudly and said he couldn't hear. Lori and Eric found Connor to be highly sensitive to crowds, lights, and noise. Lori believed all kids were sometimes over-stimulated, but characterized Connor's response as more immediate and more dramatic—"too much." Lori and Eric found that Connor became over-stimulated during large family gatherings. If they took Connor out for a walk he would calm down, but his behavior escalated soon after he returned. Eric explained what happened:

He just feeds on the energy at a party or in a social environment and he'll just wind up going ballistic and sooner or later Lori or I will end up having to take him out of the situation, go for a walk or something. And he's been that way ever since he was fairly—really quite young. He just—the energy just keeps going and going. (F1:C:23)

School and child care settings. Experiences at school and child care settings influenced all five families in stressful ways. Yet, the nature of stress associated with child care varied across families. For example, Lori, Eric, Alicia, and John experienced stress because they did not use outside child care and at times had to bring their child to business settings. Maria, Jeff, Ellen, Barry, Chris, and Greg experienced stress associated with making arrangements and assuring quality for child care outside the home.

Parents who used child care or school settings believed their children experienced stress when the environmental demands at schools differed from their home life. For example, John believed some of Michael's difficult behaviors were the result of differences between the expectations for behavior at school and the expectations at home. He said:

I think he was getting confused and so he was trying to act out that behavior here, because he'd seen it at school. . . . Some of the kids kick their parents, or hit them. I've seen one or two tantrums bringing, dropping him off. For us that's not acceptable. . . . I've been trying to stress that the rules here at home are the most important. . . . the school rules don't matter, the most important are the rules at home.

(F2:D:8)

Maria observed that when Corey's brother was born, Corey became aggressive with other children at preschool, but not at home. Several parents observed that their child's temperament did not match some of the qualities of the physical environment, the educational focus, or the personal characteristics of staff. Brief summaries of the parents' perceptions of their child's experience in child care and school settings are presented in Table 15.

Table 15

Parent's Perceptions of their Child's Experience of Child Care Settings

<b>Child</b>	<b>Parent reporting</b>	<b>Parent perceptions of child care and school experiences</b>
Nicki	Greg & Chris	<p>Mismatch between demands of the preschool setting and child's temperament.</p> <p>Nicki was more social and the school's emphasis was on individual activities.</p>
Lucas	Barry & Ellen	<p>Mismatch between skills of caregivers and child temperament.</p> <p>Caregivers were inexperienced in caring for children with Lucas' temperament.</p> <p>Attended multiple settings in search of higher quality care.</p>
Corey	Maria	<p>Displayed aggression to other children at child care setting when sibling was born.</p>
Corey	Maria & Jeff	<p>Corey felt anxious about the transition to public school with new children and teacher.</p>
Connor	Lori	<p>Mismatch between demands of setting and child temperament.</p> <p>Unable to attend preschool for financial reasons.</p>
Connor	Lori & Eric	<p>Connor would benefit from more social experiences.</p>
Michael	Alicia & John	<p>Child care provided only by family members.</p> <p>Sometimes stressful to work at home with Michael, or take him on work related errands.</p> <p>Exposed to values at school that conflicted with parental values.</p>

Interactions with parent personality characteristics. All the parents identified ways interactions with adult personalities influenced their child's behaviors. The parents believed that their child behaved differently when surrounded by different adults, and that their child's behaviors changed when parents felt tense or experienced stress. The influence of parental stress was perceived as negative. Parents felt less effective and observed that their child's difficult behaviors increased. Lori and Ellen described how their own feeling states affected interactions with their children:

**Ellen:** Dealing with a trio is very very difficult. . . . especially when we're all tired. . . . When I get tired and he gets tired and when Barry gets tired, its one of the most explosive times around." (F:3:D:22)

**Lori:** I need so much more patience than I have with him. . . . A bad day is when we're both just grrr! . . . because I'm just jumping on him and the more I jump on him, the more he just goes off the board and that's hard. (F:1:A:26)

Parents identified positive and negative aspects of their child's ability to alter behavior with different adults. All the parents believed they experienced different behaviors with their child, and subsequently engaged in different parenting interactions than their partners. Maria and Jeff attributed differences in their perceptions of Corey, in part to differences in his behavior towards them. John and Barry found their children's abilities to modify their behaviors with different adults both skillful and manipulative. John described Michael's interactions with adults at home, and Barry described Lucas' interactions with child care providers.

**John:** At this young age he knows how to manipulate. . . . You can see it now, his interaction with kids, his interaction with his mother, his grandmother—he has different styles for everyone, but he knows what works . . . crying, start crying, and then he'd turn it off when he was with me, because he knew it didn't work. But the moment they [grandmother and mother] came back into the house, oh boy—turn up the volume. I mean, just like that—real good. It's funny, but it's impressive too. (F2:C:4-5)

**Barry:** He can size somebody up . . . size anybody up . . . if he can detect a weak point, he'll go right for that. And it doesn't take him very long to size up an adult and to go after the adult's weakest point. . . . And he's that way with daycare workers. If he finds someone who's unsure of him or herself in dealing with children, he's impossible. And he just will push and shove and make life miserable. But on the other hand, if the daycare or preschool teachers really understand not just children, but children like him, he's fine. (F3:C:17)

Parent tension and family stress. Parents believed their own tense feelings contributed to their child's difficult behaviors. Parents experienced tension stemming from their inner feeling states and energy levels, as well as from external sources of stress in their lives. Some parents identified characteristics of their own personality, such as "high strung," "strong willed" or "explosive," that contributed to difficult interactions with their children. All the parents identified specific stressful situations, in addition to generalized sources of family stress, that affected their child's behavior and the difficulties they experienced.

The most salient stressors identified by each family are summarized in Table 16. Although several common sources of stress were identified, many stressful situations and events were unique to one family. Some sources of family stress were directly experienced by the child, such as remodeling a house or the death of a relative, other sources of stress were associated with factors from the macrosystem, such as financial difficulties and demands of work, that the child did not directly experience.

Table 16

Sources of Family Stress

	<b>Lori&amp;Eric</b>	<b>Alicia&amp;John</b>	<b>Barry&amp;Ellen</b>	<b>Maria&amp;Jeff</b>	<b>Chris&amp;Greg</b>
<b>Work</b>	Scheduling difficulties Demands on time and energy	Scheduling difficulties Demands on time and energy Career changes	Demands on time and energy Change in job setting for Barry Career change for Ellen	Scheduling difficulties	
<b>Child care</b>	Arrangements for care Mismatch with infant care setting	Arrangements for care	Difficulties with many different settings Search for higher quality care	Start new school	Arrangements for care Mismatch with focus of setting
<b>Family transitions</b>	Birth of sibling	Death of grandfather		Birth of sibling Remodel house	
<b>Financial</b>	Concern about making ends meet	Concern about income producing work			
<b>Parent psychological state</b>		Parent self esteem issues			Post-partum depression
<b>Family relationships</b>		Strained relationship with extended family	Marital difficulties		Marital difficulties
<b>Prenatal stress</b>		Difficult pregnancy	Adoption process stressful		Difficult pregnancy and birth experience
<b>Health concerns</b>			Asthma Allergies	Allergies	Allergies and biological sensitivities Sensory integration

All the parents observed behavioral changes in their child related to times when they were not getting along as a couple. Two families that were involved in counseling for ongoing marital difficulties believed their child's behaviors fluctuated with the tension in their marriages. For example, Greg and Chris believed Nicki was very sensitive to stress in their marriage. They thought Nicki's most recent difficulty with toilet training was associated with his experience of stress—that he was "pooping his pants" as an expression of his anger at them. Greg said:

We think it's because we're having a difficult time in our marriage right now, he's been pretty clear that he's angry about that. I mean he can verbalize it as well, but I kind of think he's saying "shit on you" in a way. (F5:B:10)

Children in the study experienced some family stressors directly at the microsystem level, such as stress associated with school, child care settings, and birth of a sibling. They experienced other stressors indirectly, like marital difficulties at the microsystem level, and parental work demands at the exosystem level.

### Exosystem

Parents identified factors from the exosystem that influenced their experiences of their child's temperament in both positive and negative ways. Sources of exosystem stress are presented in Table 16. When parents experienced stress from external demands, they felt less effective in their parenting abilities and less available to their child. These conditions were believed to increase their child's difficult behaviors. The most salient exosystem stressors identified were demands related to the parents' work.

Barry and Alicia provided examples of ways that work-related stress influenced perceptions of difficulty. They said:

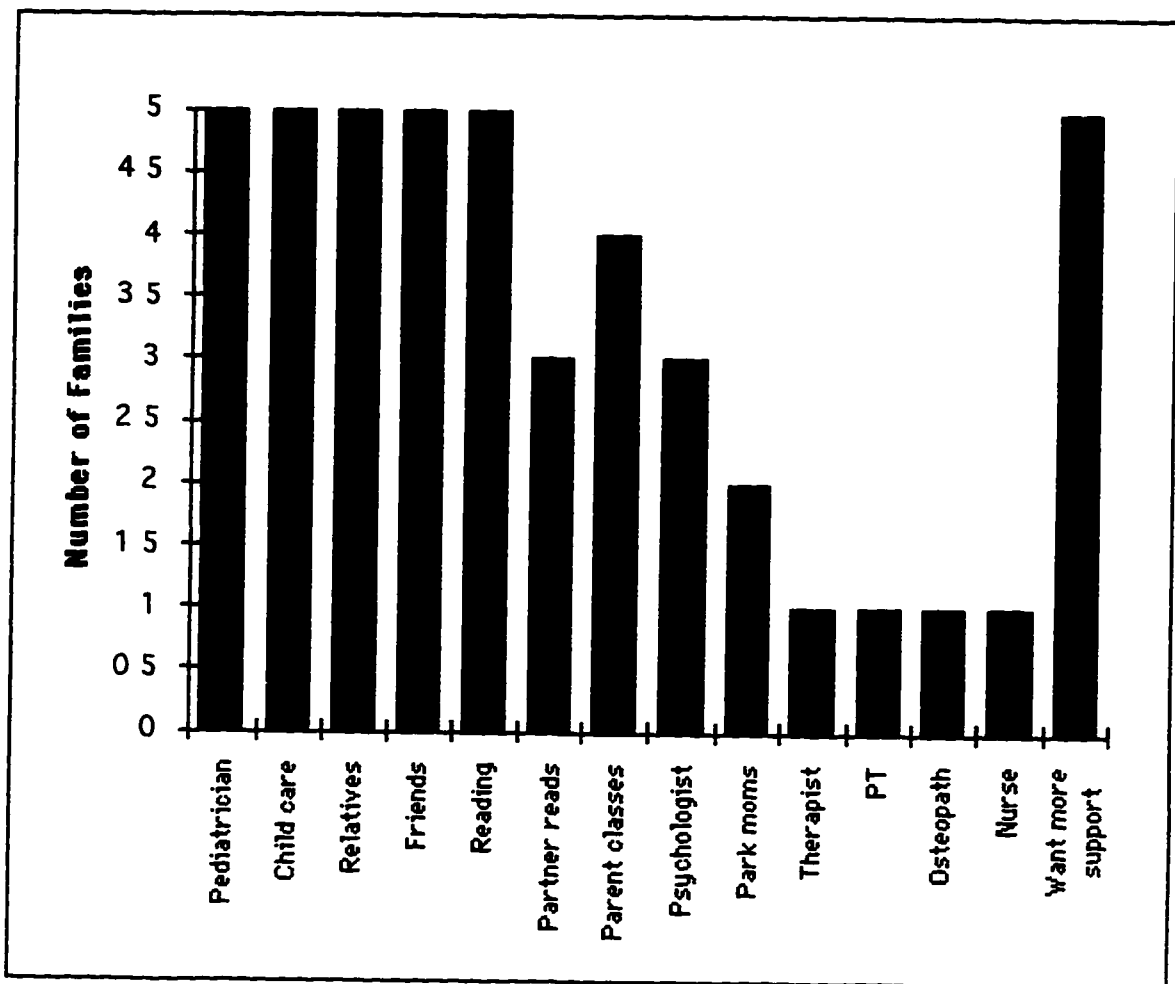
**Barry:** I joined a different firm and that didn't work out, and I was under a lot of stress while I was there, and I unfortunately brought that home with me every day. But since I've been on my own, actually things have been—I've felt a lot better about what I do. And so when I come home I'm not as wound up as I was. And that helps because he's very sensitive to our moods, and he really feeds off of our emotions and so forth. You know, if Ellen and I are having a rough time, he becomes a very difficult kid. Because he senses the frustration, the hostility, whatever it is at that moment, and he starts mimicking that, and that's his way of coping with it, and it doesn't happen as much as it did. Thank goodness, things are beginning to really sort themselves out between Ellen and me, and it makes life a lot easier, especially for us and also for him. (F3:B:25)

**Alicia:** Well I think I'm interacting with him for the better. . . . Work has slowed down for me in such a way as I've been able to spend evening nights with him. And I'm not as, I've got transactions going but I'm not as stressed, as I was earlier. And I think he can sense that. (F2:D:11)

Alicia and Barry illustrated how factors from the exosystem (their work) influenced interactions in the microsystem between themselves and their children.

Factors in the exosystem were not always stressful. The ecological model stresses the importance of creating supports in the exosystem that can

enhance family functioning. Education and support networks can serve as external resources that influence general parenting abilities and specific parent-child interactions. Several factors in the exosystem served as sources of support for the families in this study. The resources parents most often utilized for support and education are summarized in Figure 11 and Table 17.



**Figure 11.** Resources Utilized by Families

Table 17

Parents Who Identified Resources

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Parents who identified</b>
Pediatrician	Lori, John, Alicia, Barry, Ellen, Maria, Chris, Greg
Child care providers	All
Relatives	All
Friends	All
Read books, magazines	Lori, John, Alicia, Barry, Ellen, Maria, Chris, Greg
Hear about books from partner	Eric, Jeff, John
Parenting class, support group	Eric, Lori, Barry, Ellen, Maria, Chris
Psychologist	Alicia, Maria, Greg, Chris
Parents in the park	Lori, Barry, Ellen
Parents' therapist	Greg, Chris
Physical therapist	Greg, Chris
Osteopathic physician	Greg, Chris
Consulting nurse	Lori
Wished for more support related to child's temperament.	Eric, Lori, Alicia, Barry, Ellen, Maria, Chris

The most widely utilized sources of support and education were accessed through consultation. All of the parents consulted with friends and professionals such as pediatricians, psychologists, therapists, physical therapists or child care providers for advice about their child and their parenting. The parents in this study used consultation to gain a comparison between their perceptions of their child's temperament and more objective information about other children. The parents often sought advice in order to determine if their child's behaviors were considered normal. Advice was also available, though not necessarily sought, from relatives.

Parents also participated in parent education classes or support groups. Most parents either read books or magazines about parenting or heard about books from their partners. Parents from four families wished that they had more support available that specifically addressed issues related to their child's temperament. Eric said, "It's very frustrating as a parent of an active child to not have more sympathetic pieces out there [so] that you can see that there are other people in the world [like you]." (F:1:A:22)

Parents identified many ways that sources of stress and support in the environment influenced their perceptions, their child's behaviors and their family lives. Yet recognition of environmental factors did not diminish the parents' perceptions of their child's difficult temperament. They believed their child's temperament influenced how their child responded to the environment. From early in their child's life, the parents in this study questioned their actions and their child's behaviors. Through education and consultation they compared their child to others. Their comparisons led nine parents to form perceptions that their child was more difficult than most other children.

### Macrosystem Influences

Why did the parents attribute the difficulty they experienced to their child's temperament, when they also believed multiple environmental factors influenced their child's behavior? Factors in the macrosystem help to address this question. The macrosystem refers to the "broad ideological and institutional patterns of a given culture, . . . the general organization of the world as it is and might be" (Garbarino, 1982). The cultural beliefs and values determined by the macrosystem influence the quality of family life and the

ways society perceives children. Beliefs about parenting as well as activities associated with parenting are prescribed through the macrosystem. Different cultural views about families and children are expected to contribute to different interpretations of children and different parenting practices.

The families in this study were members of several different social worlds, including: families of origin, ethnic backgrounds, involvement in different professions, identification as fathers and mothers, and religious or spiritual practices. The parents also shared membership in one aspect of culture—all the families were aware of a parenting culture that included a concept of child temperament. Different ways that aspects of the macrosystem can influence parental interpretations and judgments about their child are discussed in the final sections of this chapter: "Concept of Child Temperament," "Family of Origin," and "Parenting Style."

#### Concept of Child Temperament

The longitudinal research project conducted by Thomas and Chess that launched the current conceptualization of temperament occurred in a culture that embraced the belief that behaviors were shaped by the parental relationship, notably the maternal relationship. In the introduction to a recent book on early prevention and intervention approaches based on temperament research, Sean McDevitt (1994b) wrote a tribute to the work of Thomas and Chess:

Behavioral development in the 1950s was understood either as a function of environmental contingencies a la B.F. Skinner or from the psychodynamic perspective of Freud and his disciples. . . . The focus of treatment [prior to 1980] was based on the notion that children

developed psychopathology because of how they were mishandled by their parents, teachers, families, and so on. The goal of many a treatment plan was to identify and help the mother work through her unconscious conflicts about the child. *Mal de mere* was so prevalent that even infantile autism was thought to have been caused by "refrigerator mothers"! (p.3)

In contrast, today's parenting and psychological zeitgeist is influenced by over 30 years of temperament research. The topic of temperament has been conveyed to today's parents through books, articles, classes, and workshops. Several popular parenting books focus on the challenges of raising the difficult child, the spirited child, and the strong-willed child. The current parenting culture emphasizes the importance of child-environment interactions and has popularized the concept of temperament. Parents are encouraged to examine and understand their child's individuality. Parent educators and helping professionals believe that knowledge of temperament can assist parents to develop more effective parenting strategies to meet the individualized needs of children with different temperaments, as well as provide support to parents who are raising especially challenging children.

The fathers and mothers in this study parented in a culture that acknowledged temperament. Over time, they became familiar with the concept of the difficult child and began to identify their child as difficult. At least one parent from each family had read a book about difficult, strong willed, or spirited children, and parents from three families had read the book, *Raising your Spirited Child* (Kurcinka, 1991). One family had attended a "Spirited Child" workshop.

The concept of the spirited child has become increasingly popular in parent education since the publication of *Raising your Spirited Child* (Kurcinka, 1991). Kurcinka explained nine temperament dimensions based on the Thomas and Chess model and provided simple exercises parents can use to rate their child's temperament. Her book addresses the relationship between various behavioral problems and temperament traits and provides some child management tips geared to specific temperament types. The book accurately presents information about temperament gained from current temperament research coupled with techniques for child management developed through Kurcinka's work in parent education.<sup>7</sup>

The parents in this study had all heard of the concept of child temperament, but varied in their exposure and knowledge. Some of the parents identified strongly with the conceptualization of the spirited child, and used information gained from this model as an anchor for their parenting experience, while others were less familiar with the concepts. The different sources of formal information about temperament utilized by the parents in this study are summarized in Table 18, and the salience of temperament concepts across families is discussed below.

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<sup>7</sup>Clinical application of temperament research has been embraced by some, and criticized by other researchers. Researchers have expressed concerns that clinical applications cannot be supported with research findings and that assessment of temperament through simple tools will not be reliable. Clinicians who advocate temperament-based education cite clinical efficacy as evidence of its applicability. (Roundtable presentation, Occasional Temperament Conference XI, 1994)

Table 18

Sources of Information about Temperament

Source	Parents
<i>Raising your Spirited Child</i>	Lori & Eric Ellen & Barry Chris & Greg
<i>The Difficult Child</i>	Ellen Alicia Maria
<i>Meyers-Briggs Typology</i>	Maria
Attend Spirited Child Workshop	Ellen & Barry
<i>Your Strong Willed Child</i>	Alicia

The concept of temperament influenced different parents' perceptions of their child in different ways. Although John and Alicia believed they had a difficult child, they were less familiar with concepts of temperament than other families in this study. Alicia had read one book about strong willed children when Michael was very young, but at the time she did not find it helpful. She had not read other books or attended workshops on difficult or spirited children. Neither Alicia nor John identified books or frameworks that helped them understand Michael's temperament. They felt the problems they experienced with Michael were not effectively addressed by most of the parenting books they had read. Alicia said:

I used to read these books and there aren't a lot of strong-willed children books out there, I think there's only one. But I used to read these books as to—like they were saying, . . . if you do this with a child at this age, he should be easily—you should easily distract him if they go into a tantrum. He was never that way. You have to sit down and

explain to him. I read *Your Strong Willed Child*, but I read that when he was much younger, so it didn't quite apply at that time, and somehow or another I never got back to it. (F2:A:4)

John and Alicia presented a disconfirming case in their lack of knowledge about temperament concepts. They talked about the difficult (or strong-willed) child and perceived Michael as difficult, but had not educated themselves about the concept.

In contrast, Maria had read extensively about child development and her description of Corey during our initial interview was anchored in her understanding of temperament. She described how *The Difficult Child* (Turecki, 1988) and the Myers Briggs Typology related to Corey. She said:

I've read the book *The Difficult Child*, and I think that book also mentioned something about somehow the kids with allergies may have temperaments that are difficult. And I agree with that, with my child. (F4:A:4)

He just seems to feel that he's got to know a lot of things and his need to know things and to be competent . . . . I did read *Myers-Briggs Temperament Types* . . . and I found that the description of . . . the introvert, thinking, intuitive and judging—that child' temperament closely describes Corey. (F4:A:5)

Barry and Ellen were recruited for this study after they attended a "Spirited Child" Workshop conducted by a local parent educator. Barry embraced the culture of the spirited child; it provided a frame-work he used to understand and appreciate Lucas's temperament. He described how he came to identify with the concepts presented in *Raising your Spirited Child*:

Penny Leach's advice didn't work.<sup>8</sup> No, seriously, that was the first book—"The Owner's Manual" just didn't apply to this kid. . . . . To me, that was the first tip-off that her advice on dealing—you know, the mainstream advice kind of stuff didn't work and there was something else we had to take a look at. (F3:D:33-34)

And then when Ellen finally bought the book, "The Spirited Child"<sup>9</sup> and I sat down and read that, I mean I think just reading the first two chapters, I just said, "This is the Owner's Manual for this child."

There's no doubt about it. This child's personality traits fit within a lot of what's being discussed in this book. . . . But the good thing about "The Spirited Child" book was that it . . . it gave me a source that I could go to that, more often than not, would either give me the answer or give me some insights so I could find the answer. And that's the only—I rely on that book more than anything else. (F3:D:38-39)

Ellen was relieved to finally find a book that addressed the individuality of the child. She said:

It was a relief, because you know something? You read every other book, this child development book, from Leach to a few others . . . they kept saying, your child should be doing this, your child—and I kept saying to Barry, you got to look at the child first. . . . That book is better

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<sup>8</sup>Penelope Leach is the author of several popular parenting books including *Your Baby and Child* and *The First Six Months*. Her books provide information about typical child development and advice on child care and behavioral management. She advocates a child led approach, responding to babies' needs with nurturing but also setting clear limits. Her writing does not address differences in temperament or problem behaviors in detail.

<sup>9</sup>Barry is referring to *Raising your Spirited Child*, by Kurcinka.

than "The Difficult Child" book which "The Spirited Child" is basically based on, I think. I don't like his terms. They're pejorative. I don't like the title. (F3:D:39)

Eric expressed disdain for the euphemism, "spirited child," but he found the framework presented in *Raising your Spirited Child* fit his perceptions of Connor. He said:

We have a really hard time sort of pigeon-holing Connor. He doesn't fit any mold of anywhere. The thing that's been nicest is that—and I hate the title of the book, "The Spirited Child," but that's neat, because there are a lot of sympathetic examples, you know—your child is just far more active than the other kids on the playground, your child has some of these problems, has some of these issues to conquer or to confront. (F1:B:15)

Lori and Eric both expressed frustration that they did not have more resources that addressed their experience as parents. Eric said, "It's very frustrating as a parent of an active child to not have more sympathetic pieces out there that you can see that there are other people in the world" (F1:B:16) Lori was enthusiastic when she learned about the model of the spirited child. Reading Kurcinka's book countered her feelings of isolation that grew from raising a child that seemed so different from her friend's children. She said:

The book, the one book I've read that was the most helpful to me was the book on spirited children. And that is about the only book I've read since Connor was born that I read it and I went, oh wow, oh great, you know and other kids are like that, and that's what you do, and oh! I can't believe that other children—and they're talking about me! This

is me, this is me here, you know and I mean , over and over again I read that book and I just kept thinking, God, I wish I'd had this book before. (F1:A:18)

Greg and Chris worried that the characteristics they observed in Nicki were signs of some serious pathology. At different times in Nicki's life they had worried that he might be hyperactive or autistic. The concept of the spirited child, offered a healthier view that framed Nicki's behaviors in terms of his temperament. Greg explained how his therapist provided a perspective that helped alleviate some of his concerns about pathology:

I think a way that I came to see him, and I didn't have the term spirited, but because my therapist really thought that way, he didn't see it as—you know, we were really scared about things like autism. And hyperactive, because he has all those symptoms. And he is sort of autistic in a way at times. But my therapist could see it in a more whole way. He didn't go into the pathology. So that was—then the term "spirited child" came later from that book or something. But we kind of had the concept that, in my mind it was that he's just got all of this—actually I thought of it at the time in terms of shakti, you know? Shakti just rushing through this tiny little body and he doesn't know what to do with it and he doesn't have an ego yet to cope with it . . . And then we got the term from that book when he was maybe two or something. (F5:D:35)

Seven parents in this study found that the concept of the spirited or difficult child provided them with a way to understand their child's individuality. Beyond understanding, several parents believed they gained

helpful advice about how to interact with their child. Chris, Greg and Maria, expressed similar views that knowledge of their child's temperament helped them make sense of difficult behaviors. Barry, Ellen, Lori and Eric all believed the book, *Raising your Spirited Child*, was one of the few resources that provided advice applicable to their child. Lori explained how reading that book countered feelings of isolation and inadequacy.

Because you begin to think like you're the only person, you know, dealing with a child with that kind of energy and like I said, people keep kind of looking at you, I mean if they don't have children they kind of think you're a bad mother because you can't control your child, and if they do, you know sometimes they understand. (F1:A:19)

The concept of child temperament influenced most parents in this study, but in different ways. For example, Maria, used the model to increase her understanding of their child's individuality, Barry and Ellen, used the model as a guide for parenting interactions, and Lori gained emotional support from knowing that other children had intense temperaments. Even John and Alicia, who knew very little about temperament were influenced by the existence of the concept and the label "difficult child." The concept of child temperament is an example of a parenting influence that exists at the macrosystem level. If this concept was not popular and accessible, parents would most likely interpret their child's behaviors in very different ways. Theoretical implications of the influence of temperament ideologies on perceptions and parenting practice are further discussed in Chapter Five.

### Family of Origin

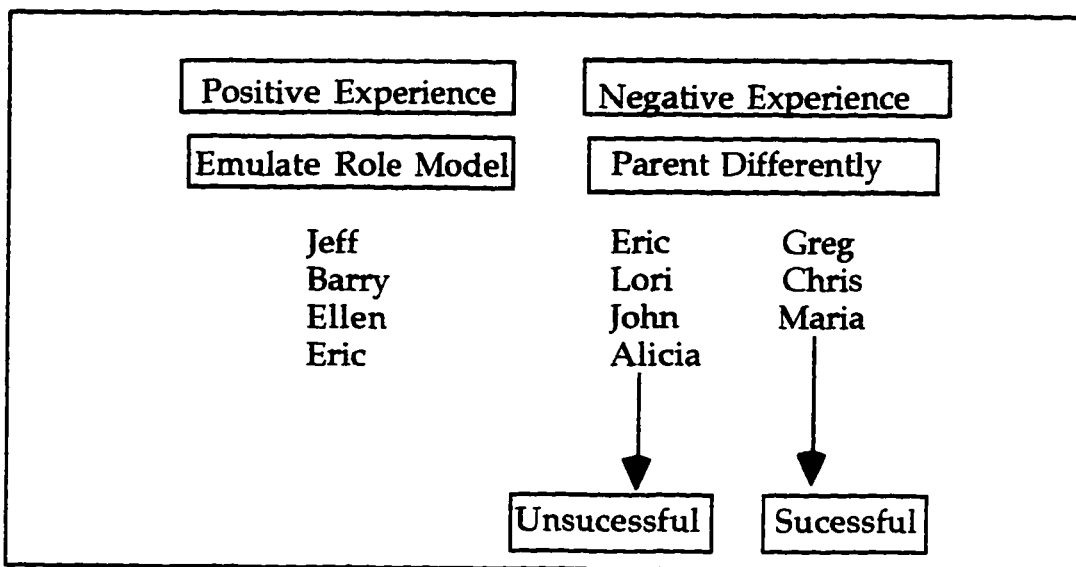
Family of origin experiences can influence parenting from multiple levels of the ecosystem. For many children, the parent's family of origin has a microsystem influence on their development because they interact with their extended families frequently. The family of origin may have an exosystem influence if interactions with extended family members have an indirect influence on how parents perceive and respond to their children. The family of origin can also have a chronological influence if parents learned skills or had experiences before their child's birth, that influenced their parenting abilities. Finally, the family of origin can have a macrosystem influence if adults are influenced by the values and ideologies they experienced during their childhood. In this section I discuss the ideological, cultural, and stylistic influences of family of origin.

All the parents in this study believed experiences in their families of origin influenced their judgments about their child's temperament and their parenting styles.<sup>10</sup> Most of the parents described both positive and negative experiences, but identified the influence of their family of origin experiences as primarily positive or negative. The parents' predominant experiences in their families of origin are summarized in Figure 12. Three parents, Barry, Ellen, and Jeff perceived at least one of their parents to be a positive role model and tried to emulate aspects of their parenting styles. In contrast, six parents, Lori, Eric, John, Alicia, Maria, Greg, and Chris perceived their parents

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<sup>10</sup>Some ways that family of origin experiences influence parent's perceptions of their child's temperament were discussed in the comparison section of this chapter.

as negative role models and tried to parent in ways that were different from the parenting they received. Eric identified primarily negative characteristics of his family of origin, yet drew on specific experiences to guide his parenting. John identified only negative influences from his family of origin.



**Figure 12.** Predominant Experience in Family of Origin

Experiences in the family of origin influenced parents' general parenting philosophies as well as specific interactions with their child. The parents who experienced a positive relationship with at least one parent identified their family of origin as a central guide for their parenting. They identified their parents as role models and adopted elements of the parenting styles they witnessed as children. These parents emulated specific interactions they enjoyed with their parents and used memories of their parents to guide interactions with their child. For example, Ellen often asked

herself, "What did my mother do with me?" to help evaluate her actions with Lucas.

In contrast, parents who remembered negative experiences in their families of origin tried to parent differently from their parents. They perceived their own parents as negative models of parenting, and described specific aspects of their parents styles that they hoped to counter. For example, John and Alicia said their parents rarely encouraged them as children and were quick to say no. They hoped their own parenting would be more positive and encouraging. Different ways the family of origin influenced parenting philosophies and specific interactions are illustrated in Table 19.

Table 19

Family of Origin Influence on Parenting Philosophy and Interactions

<b>Family of Origin Influence on Parenting Philosophy</b>
<b>Positive Influence:</b>
<b>Jeff:</b> I had a very good father who I try to model behavior on. So what I do is more gut feeling than careful research. (F4:B:21)
<b>Barry:</b> I try to do what my dad did with me. I think my dad was a great father. Basically his philosophy was—let your kids make their own decisions, guide them but don't direct them, and be there to pick them up when they fall down. And I think that's the best way to raise a child because the only way you can learn how to make decisions is by making decisions. (F3:B:31)
<b>Eric:</b> The only thing . . . that I would try to carry over from my relationship with my parents is that we regarded each other as . . . friends . . . . They let me make my decisions, they always let me learn by mistakes . . . . And I think its made me more sure of myself as an adult. (F1:C:6-7)
<b>Negative Influence</b>
<b>John:</b> Basically, whatever the minuses were [in my family of origin], try and combat it. That's all. I think it's real important that we both recognize the minuses and we're both trying—hey nobody's saying we're perfect, but we're trying at least. (F2:C:39)
<b>Greg:</b> I know what's the most challenging is that we really supported him that it's okay to have whatever emotion he has and to express it, and that's so contrary to how I was treated at that age. (F5:D:14)
<b>Maria:</b> I really have kind of thrown away—I'm trying to not raise my kids the way my parents have raised us, for the most part—not all of it, but I feel like I'm kind of starting new, on my own. (F4:A:32)
<b>Family of Origin Influence on Specific Parenting Interactions</b>
<b>Positive Influence</b>
<b>Barry:</b> On weekends my dad and I would always go off and do stuff . . . Saturday was a special day for Dad and me. And maybe I've picked that up with Lucas and that's why we spend time together on weekends. (F3:B:32)
<b>Negative Influence</b>
<b>Chris:</b> It's tense for me, I get very tense. . . . I think that's more of my history, around meals and my mother always wanting me to eat and I didn't want to eat. And my real father couldn't stand to be around me so I wasn't allowed to eat with the family. (F5:C:48)

Parents evaluated their parenting by comparing themselves to their own parents. Ellen, Barry, Eric, and Jeff felt successful when they identified personal characteristics that matched their parental role models. Four parents with negative childhood experiences felt unsuccessful when their own parenting styles reflected their families of origin. Lori, Eric, John, and Alicia identified negative influences from their family of origin, expressed their desires to overcome those influences, but found themselves "sounding like their own parents." Although they identified specific aspects of their families of origin they wanted to overcome, they sometimes felt unsuccessful in their efforts to parent in a different way. Alicia and Lori provided examples of this dynamic.

**Alicia:** One thing we've determined is that we didn't grow up in environments where we were encouraged. . . . And we've determined that in raising Michael we would definitely not be that type of parent, of always a don't—and sometimes it comes into play, because that's the way we were raised—don't do this or don't do that—you know, you really have to stop and re-examine and try to look for another way to say, why don't you try this, or let's sit down and talk about this. . . . We've really decided as parents that we would follow a course of trying to be as positive and try to be as supportive as possible. And sometimes it gets smacked in our face because I've caught myself saying, don't do this. It's easier just to say no than it is to say, well, why don't you try doing this. So it's like you have to reprogram yourself as an individual. (F2:A:15)

**Lori:** I always swore that I would do things . . . different because I remember feeling . . . stifled. . . . but I do remember hearing things a lot [as a child] that I actually end up saying to Connor. (F1:C:5)

Alicia acknowledged the difficulty of trying to "reprogram" herself in order to parent differently from her own parents. The parents who wanted their parenting to be different from their families of origin often framed their goals in the negative. They identified ways they did not want to parent but lacked positive models to replace their own negative experiences.

In contrast, Maria, Greg, and Chris believed their parenting differed from their families of origin in healthy ways. They identified ways their own general parenting styles and specific interactions differed from parenting they received. Maria and Greg compared their own parenting to the negative parenting they remembered from their childhood. They said:

**Maria:** I really feel like I'm a good parent, but I suppose I think of that when something comes up where—if I did see my parents, I would think, well, I'm a better parent than they are. (F4:D:2)

**Greg:** I know what's the most challenging is that we really supported him that it's okay to have whatever emotion he has and to express it, and that's so contrary to how I was treated at that age. (F5:D:14)

How is it that some parents feel they successfully adopted parenting practices that differed from the influence of their family of origin, while others did not? Maria, Chris, and Greg all believed their abilities to separate from the influence of their parents were important to their own adult development. Maria believed she gained independence and self confidence when her family moved away from Korea and eventually came to the United

States. Chris and Greg believed psychological and spiritual work was instrumental to their adult development and their parenting abilities. Greg described factors that influenced his parenting. He said:

What influences my parenting . . . there's conscious influences and there's unconscious influences. . . . I think I'm really influenced, in an unconscious way, by how I was parented. And my ongoing relationship to my parents has had a tremendous influence for good and bad. And much of it is unconscious and therefore I can't really describe it, but I know it's there. . . . I've always wanted to have children, but most of my life I thought I would not, because I worried about those influences. There's a lot of destructive stuff in my family, and I thought I would not—and kind of what made it possible for me to consider having a child was that—first of all I'd done a lot of work on a lot of that stuff, you know tons of psychotherapy and other work, but also, I kind of knew before Nicki was born that parenting would be a learning process and it would be kind of a karmic process, that there was something that . . . I could be released from some kind of karmic debt or something. It sounds really woo-woo, I don't mean it quite as vague as that, but it's like that in a certain way, the baby . . . would be a teacher to me, by putting me through experiences that would cause me to have to grow. B:43

The parents in this study identified ways their families of origin influenced most aspects of parenting including, for some, the decision to become parents. Some parents experienced their families of origin as positive influences. Others experienced their families of origin as negative influences.

Yet all believed the influence was strong. Some parents, like Alicia and John struggled to parent differently from their own parents. Other parents, like Greg and Chris identified many ways they had worked to overcome the influence of their families of origin. Figure 13 depicts the influence family of origin may exert on parenting and mediating factors that may counteract that influence. These factors reflect the environmental context that surrounds the family as well as internal characteristics and resources of the parents.

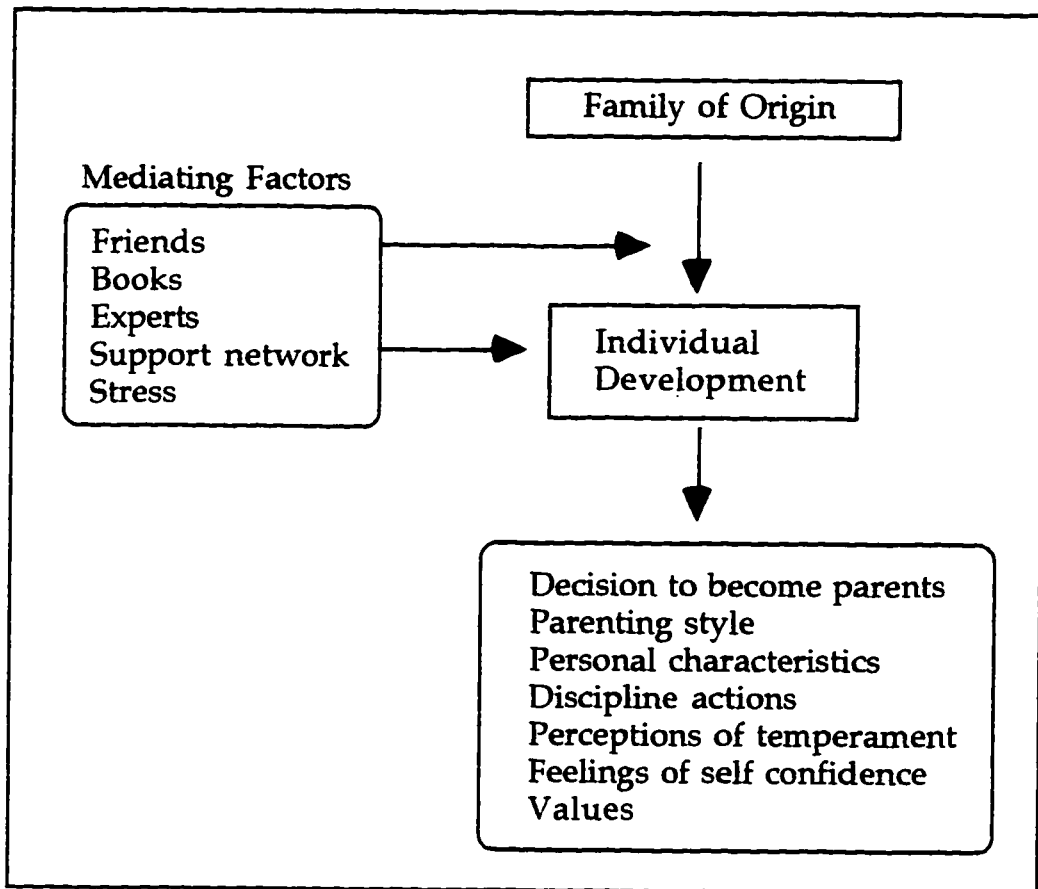


Figure 13. Family of Origin Influence on Parenting

The conceptual framework that guided the early phases of this study was based on theories that emphasize transactions between the child's temperament and the environment. Characteristics of the parental contribution to the child's environment were expected to have a major influence on perceptions of temperament and parental actions. The importance of historical and concurrent environmental factors were described in the ecological systems model and family of origin sections of this chapter.

One factor related to the parental environment emerged unexpectedly during the course of this study and is discussed in the final section of this chapter. This factor was not found in an external ecological system of the environment, but in the parents' internal experiences. An "environment" of inner experiences and resources influenced how parents perceived their child, their situations, their parenting philosophies, and their actions. The parents' feelings and thought processes were important determinants of their parenting styles. These styles fell into two general patterns—parenting based on containment and parenting based on control. Contrasts between these styles and their influence on parental perceptions and actions are discussed.

### Parenting Styles

#### Object Relations Theory

The psychological theory of object relations, introduced by Greg and Chris to explain their parenting philosophy, provides a way to analyze inner processes that may influence parental perceptions of temperament, parenting styles and interactions. Greg and Chris introduced the psychological term "containment" to define their parenting role. They often used the word

"holding" to explain their parenting philosophy and actions. Chris explained her meaning for the term:

Holding? It's a way of talking about getting a big enough container to feel like there's room for all this pain and all this difficulty and that we're still okay. Like there's something bigger than just this pain. . . . So that's a way of saying it. To get enough holding, to get enough—it's an object relations [concept]. (F5:A:44)

Shuttleworth (1993) presented a concise review of object relations theories that relate to healthy parenting. She explained the object relations term "containment" as a dynamic relationship between the child and parent, that provides attention, support and interpretation of the child's states of being. During infancy, healthy development is facilitated through the parents' abilities to support the infant's behavior in "attentive receptive states" and attend to the infant in distressed states by helping "him to gather himself together after them." (p.27) Although object relations theory describes the origins of psychological life that occur during the earliest relationships between infant and mother, the dynamics experienced during infancy are believed to continue throughout development.<sup>11</sup> Shuttleworth's discussion of Bion's concept of *container-contained* illustrates the ongoing nature of this dynamic.

It was Bion's thesis that the way in which a mother is able to get in contact with her baby's state of mind, and through her attention and

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<sup>11</sup>Object relations theorists speak of the "mother"-child relationship. I have retained this terminology when necessary to preserve the continuity of discussion sections and quotations. Whenever possible I have included gender neutral pronouns and discussions that reflect mothers and fathers.

support enable the baby to grow psychologically, constitutes a form of relationship in which the mother's mind acts as a container for the baby. He called this relationship *container-contained* and he used it as a model both for thinking about the development of the mind and also as an analog for other emotional relationships. In Bion's terms, this kind of receptivity to being stirred up emotionally is the basis of our capacity to be responsible in all those occasions throughout life when we are brought into intimate contact with someone else's state of mind. (p27)

Shuttleworth (1993) emphasized the importance of the mother's internal capacity to tolerate painful emotions that arise in response to their baby's fluctuating states and needs. She said the mother must be able to "bear the pain" of her "predicament," including the pain of caring for a colicky, inconsolable or demanding infant. In order for the mother to provide containment, she must be able to separate her feelings about the infant's behaviors from the infant's feelings and needs. Containment requires acceptance of the child's emotional state. The parents' role is not to control an inconsolable infant, but to serve as a container that is large enough to hold all the child's bad feelings. Shuttleworth said:

Comforting is not conceived of solely in terms of the removal of the source of the distress or the distraction of the baby's attention. It is conceived in terms of the impulse within the baby to project his distress into others and the mother's capacity to receive and tolerate the distress. (p.35)

Winnicott (1971) defined the parent's early role as "active adaptation to the infant's needs." Over time the need for "active adaptation . . . gradually lessens, according to the infant's growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration." (Winnicott, p.10) With maturation, the child gains abilities for adapting to varied environments and coping with emotional tension. This does not imply that the need for containment ends. Shuttleworth (1993) stated, "the need for someone else to perform . . . the function of a mental container for unsettling feelings is a situation which can recur throughout adult life." (p.28) With development, the parental role shifts to match the child's increased capacity for self regulation. The parents continue to provide a space for their growing child's emotional experience, support the child's emerging coping skills and, less frequently, "gather the child together" when coping efforts fail.

Greg provided an example of how difficult it can be to provide containment for an infant's intense emotions. He described an experience when he brought Nicki with him to a therapy appointment. Nicki was inconsolable and his therapist encouraged him to just sit and hold him as he cried. He said:

I realize now that his screaming probably sounded like five times as loud to me as it did to anybody else, but at the time I didn't know. And he just encouraged me to let him scream and to just hold him while he screamed. And he screamed and then finally fell asleep, and by then I was in tears. (F5:D:5)

Greg identified his own therapist as a supportive influence for his parenting efforts. In the situation described above, the therapist provided

containment for Greg to experience his own pain. Greg's therapist created a context that allowed Greg to accept the emotions that were evoked in him by Nicki's crying. The therapist conveyed his willingness to witness and accept the crying of the infant. In this setting, Greg was able to physically hold and mentally contain the intensity of Nicki's emotions. Through this holding, Greg experienced his own pain that he expressed through tears. Objects relations theory holds that the capacity to provide containment for an infant is dependent on the parents' own inner experiences of containment. This concept was conveyed by Bion's term "container-contained."

Shuttleworth(1993) believed the capacity for containment is dependent on four conditions. These are:

1. The infant needs the capacity to arouse feelings in the mother. This capacity is dependent on the infant's temperament and general health.
2. The mother needs a sufficiently strong yet flexible sense of adult identity to enable her to experience the sorts of feelings which the care of the newborn infant arouses without feeling endangered by them.
3. The existence of sufficient external supports in the shape of partner, family and friends.
4. A limit to the number of other demands on the mother. (p.29-30)

These conditions emphasize the importance of the fit between the child's characteristics and the mother's capacities, as well as the availability of external supports. According to Shuttleworth, many parents' may have only partial capacities to provide containment. Parents are generally able to notice, accept and understand some aspects of their child's experience more easily than others. The fit between parent and child is determined in part by "the

mother's capacity to cope with the particular constellation of feelings evoked by a particular baby." (p.29) The parents in this study perceived as difficult those aspects of their child's temperament they had trouble accepting, understanding or coping with, indicating a relationship between their perceptions of temperament and their capacity for containment.

### Capacity for Containment

Although Chris and Greg were the only parents who discussed containment in psychological terms, other parents described experiences that illustrated their capacities for containment. When parents witnessed their child's difficult behaviors they experienced their own negative emotions and questioned their capacity for containment. For example, Eric identified difficulty with Connor's intensity and reactivity: "When he loses control that's the hardest thing for us to deal with as parents." (F1:C:17) Barry provided insight into specific feelings triggered by Lucas' behaviors. He said, "Having a child that's like my son, a high energy, demanding kid, really made me feel totally crowded in. There's no time left for Barry and there are times when I really resent that." (F3:B:2)

The parents varied in the confidence they felt about their capacity to provide containment for their child's experiences. Four parents expressed confidence, and six parents expressed doubts. The degree of confidence parents felt about their capacities for containment were linked to their perceptions of their child's temperament, the nature of their internal and external resources, and other limiting factors in their lives. Table 20 describes resources and limiting factors parents identified that influenced their confidence in their capacity to provide containment.

Table 20

Confidence in Capacity to Provide Containment

<b>High Confidence</b>	<b>Limiting Factors</b>	<b>Resources Identified</b>
Chris	Negative experience in family of origin Perceived difficulty of child's temperament Perceived differences between own personality and child Little experience with children	Spiritual practice Psychological framework Intuition Community resources: professionals, friends, neighbors Writing in journals
Greg	Negative experience in family of origin. Perceived difficulty of child's temperament	Spiritual practice Psychological framework Intuition Community resources: friends, professionals, neighbors
Jeff	Not enough time for everyone in family	Positive role model from family of origin. Parenting beliefs Observations & reflections of actions Intuition
Maria	Perceived difficulty of child's temperament Little experience with children	Books Parenting classes Community resources: professionals, Psychological framework based on temperament model

Table 20 (continued)

<b>Low Confidence</b>	<b>Limiting Factors</b>	<b>Resources Identified</b>
Lori	Perceived difficulty of child's temperament Negative experience in family of origin. Similar personality as child Lack of social support Financial stress Demands of work Low self confidence Little experience with children Lack of parenting education that applied to problems experienced	Books Parenting classes Community resources: professionals, friends, relatives
Eric	Perceived difficulty of child's temperament Negative experience in family of origin. Financial stress Demands of work Lack of parenting education that applied to problems experienced	Intuition Parenting classes

Table 20 (continued)

Low Confidence	Limiting Factors	Resources Identified
Alicia	Perceived difficulty of child's temperament Negative experience in family of origin. Lack effective parenting skills Parenting books that did not apply to problems experienced Demands of work Little experience with children	Community resources: professionals, friends Parenting books
John	Perceived difficulty of child's temperament Negative experience in family of origin Estrangement from family of origin Low self esteem Demands of work Little experience with children	Religious readings and beliefs Book on self esteem Intuition
Barry	Perceived difficulty of child's temperament Lack of time for self Lack coping skills Lack of energy Little experience with children	Spirited Child Model (Kurcinka) Positive role model from own father Parenting classes Parenting books
Ellen	Perceived difficulty of child's temperament Own temperament explosive Lack of energy Lack of patience	Spirited Child Model (Kurcinka) Positive role model from own mother Parenting classes Parenting books

As presented in Table 20, many factors influenced the parents' capacities for containment including: resources, stress, experiences in their family of origin, psychological and spiritual perspectives, and perceptions of their child's temperament. All the parents found it most difficult to accept, understand, or contain their child's emotional experiences when the emotions were perceived as especially intense or negative. The specific factors exerting the strongest influence on containment varied across the ten parents, reflecting differences in their backgrounds and personal styles. Examples of parents who experienced high and low confidence in their capacity for containment are presented here.

Confidence in capacity for containment. The parents who felt confident in their ability to provide containment attributed their parenting effectiveness to different resources. For example, Jeff modeled his parenting on positive experiences in his family of origin. It is likely that through his positive relationships with his parents Jeff developed an internal sense of containment that influenced his ability to provide containment for Corey. Maria, Chris and Greg all experienced negative experiences in their family of origin, but drew on other resources to overcome the limitations they identified. They utilized external resources to gain role models, education, and support for their parenting. They also identified inner resources related to parenting. For example, Maria believed that she had "become a better person . . . more patient [and] more compassionate" (F4:D:11) since becoming a parent.

Chris and Greg were especially articulate about how their inner resources influenced their ability to parent Nicki. They believed their ability

to provide containment for Nicki was directly related to the sense of containment they experienced from their spiritual life. Through spiritual practice, they identified with a larger context that created meaning for the difficulties they experienced parenting Nicki, and influenced their interpretations of Nicki's temperament and their parenting responses. They explained:

**Chris:** My spiritual foundation [is a parenting influence], but it's not rooted in religion. It's more kind of that trusting in the self and trusting in the self of him and of me. A:39

I've seen my spiritual life fitting into my life, and how connected and alive it feels to me that there really is something bigger here. And yes there's all the suffering and there's all the stuff you have to go through, but there's this bigger thing that's operating, and there is healing and there is holding and in the end none of this really is going to matter. . . . I feel like parenting's been like a spiritual journey in itself . . . having a connection to something that I know exists—is bigger—was very helpful. F5:A:41-42

**Greg:** I think what influences me is the idea that there's something tremendously right about whoever Nicki is. And I can open to that and find out what it is that's trying to be actualized through him. And I guess I think of it as a spiritual process—parenting—an opening to God, basically. That I see Nicki is probably the one in the family who's most, got the best, the clearest channel to that. That we're probably more confused than he is in that realm. (F5:B:44)

"Spiritual practice" is used here in a different sense from "religious practice." "Religious practice" connotes adherence to a specific set of religious beliefs or membership in a religious group. "Spiritual practice" involves finding an inner meaning for one's life and living in accordance with that meaning. Levey (1987) described spiritual practice as "the investigation and cultivation of the potential for the full development and maturation of the human capacity for power, wisdom and compassionate love." (p.89) "Spiritual practice" may be aligned with religious practice, but is not limited to a particular religious ideology. At the heart of spiritual practice is the cultivation of awareness and the capacity to "pay attention" to one's inner and outer worlds.

Through their spiritual practice, Chris and Greg experienced containment for their own emotional lives. They drew from their inner containment to provide containment for Nicki's emotional life. Greg's statement about opening to "whoever Nicki is" reflects a central aim of containment—to accept, understand and allow the whole of the child's emotional experience. The concept of containment reflected in their philosophy was also reflected in their parenting actions. Chris and Greg's response to Nicki's tantrums provides an example of their belief that providing containment for Nicki would help him internalize the ability to eventually calm (and contain) himself. They discussed their response to tantrums:

**Chris:** Yeah, I used to physically have to hold him because he'd be thrashing and kicking and just wrecking things, you know, just completely going apeshit. And I'd say, you're really out of control and

I'm going to hold you until you calm down, which would then of course escalate everything and then he'd finally calm down and it'd seem like he'd feel a lot better, like God, somebody stop me, you know. (F5:D:22)

**Greg:** But not a punishment. It's a containment. I don't think punishment would ever have worked with him because he's so strong willed. (F5:D:22)

Low confidence in capacity for containment. The parents who questioned their capacity for containment, felt their parenting effectiveness was limited by the absence of external resources and the perceived difficulty of their child's temperament. Their capacities to provide containment were also limited by their own inner experiences of containment. The experiences of Lori and John provide examples of how parent's inner feelings may influence their interactions with their child.

Lori often felt ineffective in her parenting interactions. She said, "I wish I could say I was doing things the way I wanted to, but I'm not." (F1:D:7) Lori's feelings about parenting effectiveness were related to her feelings of stress associated with demands outside the home. She said:

We say it builds in Connor, it goes on and on, and of course it has a reciprocal reaction on us and sometimes after a while I just don't have any patience anymore and that's not working. But if I am feeling I've gotten a good rest or something and I've just decided I'm not going to fall into the trap again, usually what'll work is if I . . . just tell him, then go to your room and come out when you're dressed and if he's screaming I'm able to ignore [it]. If he gets out of control then I'll go

talk to him . . . . And if I don't have something I have to do, I don't have to meet someone, don't have to go grocery shopping because we're out of something, don't have to take the car somewhere to be fixed—because I have to do so many things with them. (F1:D:22)

Lori believed her parenting (and capacity to provide containment) was influenced by job demands, financial difficulties, and the intensity of her own feelings. She often felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of the challenges she faced, and although she identified effects of the stress she experienced, she lacked resources to make her life less stressful. In addition to external sources of stress, Lori believed her internal response to stress influenced her parenting. She said her feelings were often as intense as Connor's and she recognized a link between her inner feelings and her ability to comfort Connor. For example, her efforts to calm Connor were related to efforts to calm herself. She said:

What really works best for him always is just to take him and hold him, the kind of hands-on thing. . . . I know innately that's all that will slow him down. . . . As a baby he would just cry himself silly unless I would hold him and calm him down and sing to him. With Connor sometimes the only thing that would work is just I would sing . . . and I'm sure that half of it was to calm myself down. But it would help him calm down. (F1:A:22)

Although Lori's actions were not consciously guided by the concept of psychological containment, her intuitive efforts to comfort Connor provided containment in the physical sense. Even as she observed the calming effects of holding Connor, she questioned whether her intuitive response was

ultimately the best thing. Lori wondered if Connor would gain the capacity to control his own emotions if she continued to hold and comfort him. She said:

I worry sometimes because, you know, what does work seems like often what they say you shouldn't do. Sometimes I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing. Like if Connor's having a horrible temper tantrum . . . . the only thing that works is to take him and hold him on my lap like he's just a little baby. . . . He's got to learn to get over it himself at some point, to get through the temper tantrum himself. . . . I just worry sometimes if what I'm doing is ultimately the right thing, but it works for him now. . . . My worry is that I'm encouraging him not to [learn to calm himself down], but I can't just watch him cry forever. (F1:A:21)

Lori recognized ways that her capacity to provide containment and comfort to Connor was dependent on her ability to calm herself. At times her capacity to contain Connor's emotions was limited by her inability to separate her own feelings of distress from Connor's feelings and needs. At other times, her capacity for containment was enhanced by her ability to recognize and calm her own distress. The discomfort Lori experienced when she witnessed Connor's intense emotions led to efforts to comfort him and provide containment. She worried that the way she tried to comfort Connor contradicted "expert" advice that advocated letting children "cry things out," yet she could not bear to witness the distress of his crying "forever." Lori often felt confused about her parenting. Torn between the wisdom of expert

opinion and the wisdom of her intuitions, she had no central philosophy to evaluate the options she identified.

The frustration and confusion Lori experienced about her parenting reflects her capacity to provide containment. By questioning the wisdom of parenting actions that were different from "what they say" Lori was trying to be a conscientious parent. Yet, her lack of trust in her own intuitive response to Connor's distress may reflect a lack of confidence in her capacity to contain her own experiences, without outside approval. It is likely that Lori's capacity to provide containment for Connor's emotional intensity was limited by her inner experiences. When confronted with the intensity of Connor's emotions, Lori may not have known how to contain the intense feelings evoked in her.

John was also conflicted about his parenting abilities. He provides a case of a parent who lacked an internal sense of containment, related to negative experiences in the family of origin. John believed his parenting of Michael was much better than the parenting he experienced as a child, yet, he also believed his expectations of Michael were too high and his parenting too strict. His intention was to nurture Michael, but he believed he was often too strict and too quick to say no. John said his parenting style was like "Hitler." He believed his effectiveness as a parent was limited by personal pain associated with experiences in his family of origin. His interactions often reflected the parenting he experienced as a child, rather than the parenting he wanted Michael to experience. He described the pain he experienced:

I guess growing up it was always like you're never going to amount to anything. That's what I heard from my uncles. . . . I'm still trying to

figure out how screwed up I am. No, seriously. I mean, it's been quite a journey and I think this last two years I mentally—not a breakdown . . . I just—overload. Too much. I've really in a lot of ways gone back to ground zero, in a lot of ways. . . Every which way you can figure. . . . I finally got so low I couldn't even—I wasn't doing my job, I wasn't trying to find any business. Nothing, I just gave up. The only thing I did right was watch Michael. . . . That's the only thing I did right. I was pretty good at it. And I became the mom. (F2:C:35)

John recognized, but was unable to overcome, the limiting influence of his history and inner pain on his ability to provide containment (through acceptance and understanding) for Michael. His feelings about parenting, as well as his actions, were marked by contradictions. He wanted to be nurturing, but felt he was too strict. He felt he was a better parent than his own parents, but not as good a parent as he should be. He believed Michael was very difficult to raise, but felt parenting Michael was the most positive part of his life.

During the final interview, John described an uncharacteristic consistency between his parenting intentions and actions. He reported he had been less strict with Michael over the past two weeks because he had read a religious passage that emphasized the importance of love from the father. He explained:

A religious passage. . . . A passage in the Bible. . . . No it was from this book, by this religious author. . . . He was talking more about God's relation to man, . . . what you [are] looking for in the father. So it might be someone who even if you've done wrong, you can turn to

him and he'll always love you. . . . And its basically, I figured out its like, geez I'm Hitler. I mean I was consistent but I was too hard, I mean, the kid's only four. . . . He sees that now I don't blow up . . . Michael don't do this, don't do that, don't. I was starting to become a parent just like my parents were. All the don'ts. All the don'ts. Never had much time to have the dos. And now I'm trying to make a real conscious effort to do it. (F2:D:4)

The religious reading that inspired John to be less strict with Michael provided a source of containment for John's conflicted feelings about parenting. He recognized a connection between the relationship he wanted with God and the relationship he wanted with his son. It is likely that John experienced containment for his own inner experiences through his religious beliefs (in contrast to the lack of containment he experienced in his family of origin). The reading helped John gain a new perspective, try a different style of parenting, and expand his capacity for containment.

In summary, parents' capacities to provide containment were related to their own inner experiences of containment. Parents were most able to provide containment when they were able to separate the feelings their child's behaviors evoked in them, from their interpretations of (and responses to) their child. The capacity for containment was also influenced by external factors in the environment. Chris and Greg identified the importance of their neighbors and their therapists in providing containment for Nicki and containment for themselves. Lori and Barry identified ways that stress in their environments limited their abilities to be available or responsive to their child's emotional state.

All the parents felt it was most difficult to contain those aspects of their child's temperament they perceived as difficult. This may indicate that the parents had especially strong feelings in response to certain kinds of temperament characteristics, like intensity and negative mood, that limited their ability to provide containment. Conversely, the parents may have perceived their child's temperament as difficult, in part, because of their own inability to separate their painful feelings from their perceptions of their child's behaviors. Most likely, their perceptions of difficult temperament and their parenting responses reflected both child characteristics and the parents' capacities for containment.

#### Parenting Control

The aim of containment to guide parenting philosophies and actions, was countered by the belief that some aspects of a child's emotional experiences should not be contained. Many parents in this study believed that one important way to support their child's development was by providing control and guidance. They described parenting efforts aimed at control that were inconsistent with the aim of containment. The characteristics of parenting based on control are contrasted with the characteristics of parenting based on containment in Table 21.

Table 21

Contrast between Parenting based on Containment and Control

<b>Containment</b>	<b>Control</b>
Define parental role to create a space to accept the child's emotional state.	Define parental role to alter child's emotional state.
Find inner capacity to accept the pain experienced in parenting.	Find effective techniques to change the child's behavior.
Parenting goals aimed at increasing capacity to cope with manifestations of child temperament.	Parenting goals aimed at changing characteristics of child temperament.
Parenting philosophy to witness unfolding of the child's attributes, while providing limits for socially acceptable behaviors.	Parenting philosophy to influence child's future by developing personal attributes that are socially (culturally) valued and rewarded.

Parenting efforts based on control were motivated by parents' intentions to limit specific behaviors, to change the nature of their child's emotional experiences, and to influence their child's temperament characteristics.<sup>12</sup> For example, Lori and Eric shared a concern that Connor's temperament created problems during social situations. They felt his behaviors were annoying to many adults, and feared Connor would have difficulty fitting in with his peers if he couldn't tone down his intensity. Their parenting goals reflected a desire to find ways to change Connor. As Eric said, "The changes I want to make are behavioral. . . . I want to find the

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<sup>12</sup>Some parents described efforts to control specific behaviors in ways that were consistent with the aim of containment. In these efforts, the parents' intention was to set a limit for the child with acceptance for the child's emotional response to that limit.

button that turns Connor's intensity down, or seems to make it so that he will know quite when to turn it off." (F1:D:42)

Parents hoped that through control based parenting they would be able to influence their child to develop desirable characteristics because they were concerned that aspects of their child's temperament might lead to problems in social adjustment. For example, Maria and Jeff wanted Corey to be less serious and more social, and John and Alicia wanted Michael to be less intense and more responsive. Parents sought to control their child, and influence development because they hoped their child would grow up to be happy and successful.

The parents' stated philosophies, goals and management styles illustrated different ways parents hoped to influence or control their child's behavior and development. Eric, Alicia, and Maria described philosophies and goals based on control that were aimed at developing socially valued personal attributes in their child, and changing difficult characteristics of their child's temperament. They said:

**Eric:** I think the thing I feel strong, more strongly about is that I want him to be really passionate about the things that are important to him, without hurting other people. (F1:C:29)

**Alicia:** I would like to raise Michael to be a very confident individual. I'd like him to grow up having a lot of self esteem. To have direction you know, goal setting coupled, of course with being also a very kind person. (F2:A:15)

**Maria:** I'd like to . . . help him get over this perfectionist attitude and help him enjoy the process more. And . . . to acquire social skills and

help him, I hope to help him get warmer to people in general. . . . I'd like to help Corey become better engaging what's happening emotionally and help him—help him express his emotions in a constructive way instead of blowing up, and having a fit. (F4:D:5)

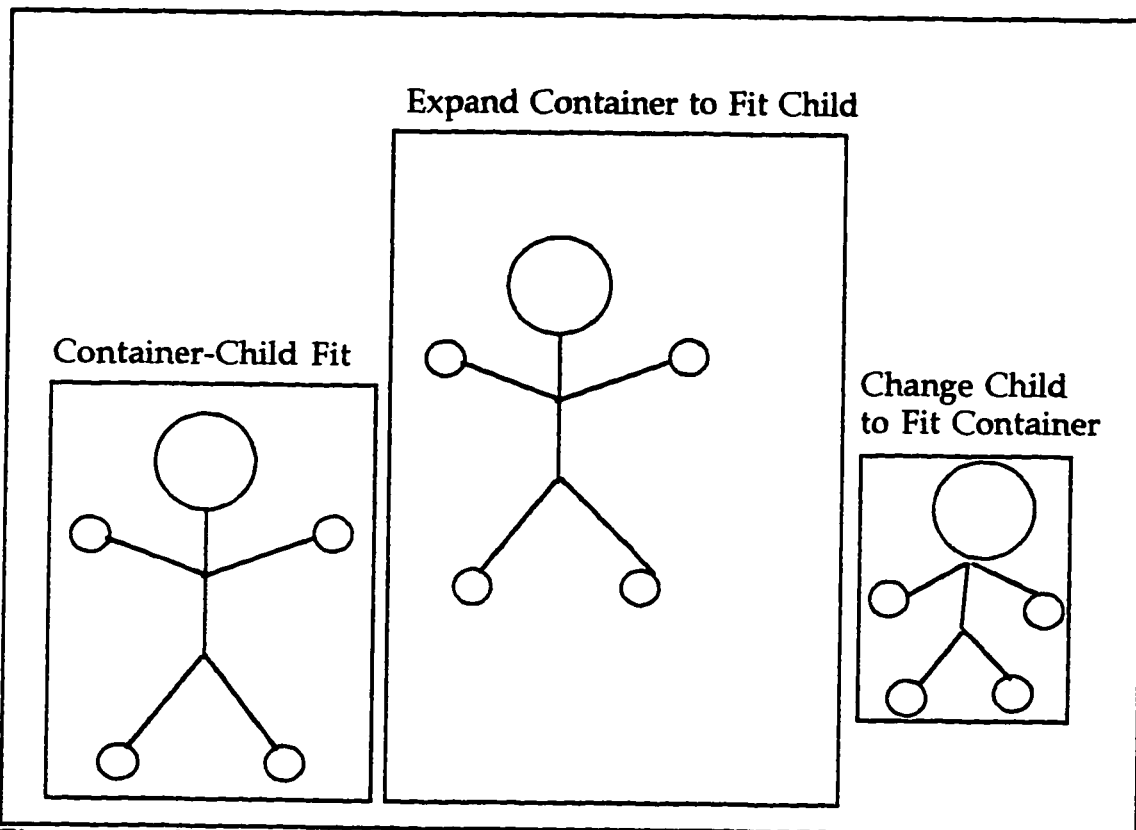
Lori and Alicia both hoped to gain skills or identify parenting interventions that would change or control their child's emotional reactions and behaviors.

**Lori:** I guess what I would like is to have a better response when I feel I'm trying to react to what ever's going on in a very objective way. . . . To have him respond in a way that I can actually relate to. Because lately he just often responds by gibberish or growling at me or tuning out or something, and that gets me more angry and then usually after several hours of this I tend to just lose it. Because when I'm first trying, I'll talk to him about this and that and if I could just get to a point where we could respond to each other, with words or something. (F1:D:44)

**Alicia:** Listening. I would like to find more effective ways for him to listen. Listen and follow is more like it. I'm sure he hears me but he doesn't follow. . . . You know he understands because he'll look at you and then he'll just continue doing it. It's like—didn't you hear me? (F2:C:23)

The contrast between parenting efforts aimed at control and those aimed at containment can be illustrated metaphorically. Parenting may be viewed as a dynamic relationship between a child and a container of flexible size, shape and function. The fit between child and container is dynamic;

both have the potential for change throughout the course of development. The dynamic relationship between container and child is depicted in Figure 14.



**Figure 14.** Dynamic Relationship of Containment

If difficulty is experienced the relationship between child and container may change in different ways that reflect the influence of parental aims of control and containment. Parents may interpret difficulty as a problem that is located in the child, the container, or both. Likewise, efforts to remedy problems may be aimed at changing the container, the child or both. If the parenting style emphasizes containment, parents are likely to focus on changing the nature of the container; if the parenting style emphasizes

control and guidance, the parents are likely to focus on changing the child. The link between these two parenting styles and specific interactions is not rigid. At times parents who aim for containment may try to change their child's behaviors, and parents who aim for control may try to change their own behaviors.

Although some parents in this study characteristically used parenting strategies based on either control or containment, other parents adopted strategies of both parenting styles. These parents aimed to provide containment some of the time, for certain kinds of behaviors, and to provide control other times, for other kinds of behaviors. Table 22 presents the characteristic parenting focus of each parent. Chris and Greg characteristically focused on containment, solving problems by efforts to expand the container or change their response to their child. Eric and Lori characteristically focused on efforts at control, solving problems through efforts to change Connor. John, Alicia, Barry, Ellen, Jeff, and Maria described parenting practices that reflected efforts to expand the container and change the child.

Table 22

Characteristic Focus of Parental Solutions for Perceived Difficulty

<b>Expand the container</b>	<b>Elements of both</b>	<b>Change the child</b>
Chris	Ellen	Eric
Greg	Barry	Lori
	Maria	
	Jeff	
	Alicia	
	John	

The kinds of parenting goals and interactions adopted by parents varied greatly, reflecting their diverse backgrounds and personalities. Summaries of parenting patterns for all the parents, including capacities for containment, parenting philosophies, goals and actions are presented in Table 23. Case illustrations of Lori and Eric, Ellen and Barry, and Chris and Greg present examples of different ways parenting based on control and containment influenced parenting philosophies, goals, and interactions.

Table 23

Summary of Parenting Patterns

Parent	Capacity for Containment	Parenting Philosophy and Goals	Reported Parenting Actions
Lori	Connor's temperament perceived as too difficult to contain. Lacked confidence in parenting skills and often felt ineffective.	Lacked underlying philosophy, guidance from research on different parenting approaches. Goals: Develop good values, character and self esteem.	Parenting actions inconsistent with stated values. Confused by conflicting parenting advice and uncertain about best course of action. Effectiveness of parenting influenced by personal experience of stress.
Eric	Felt confidence in capacity for containment in some areas of parenting. Lacked confidence in the effectiveness and consistency of discipline approach. Believed Connor's temperament sometimes exceeded his capabilities.	Tried to raise Connor according to strongly held beliefs and values. Wanted children to be able to explore and pursue their passions. Wanted children to grow up with good values and character.	Aware of Inconsistencies. Parenting actions did not always reflect values. Recognizes inconsistencies between values and actions; for example spanking was inconsistent with value against violence.

Table 23 (continued)

Parent	Capacity for Containment	Parenting Philosophy and Goals	Reported Parenting Actions
John	<p>Conflicted. Felt he was a good father and caregiver. Believed his expectations were too high. Parenting increased awareness of his own low self esteem. Believed Michael's temperament made parenting more difficult.</p>	<p>Hoped to teach Michael four principles: accountability, self confidence, be gentle, stand up for yourself. Tried to provide a role model about how to live. Tried to parent differently from his own family of origin experience.</p>	<p>Aware of inconsistencies. Conflict between wanting to provide nurturing, but acting authoritarian. Was trying to change parenting so that he would be more nurturing and less strict.</p>
Alicia	<p>Conflicted. Believed Michael's temperament made parenting more difficult. Believed she needed more parenting skills.</p>	<p>Philosophy stated as specific goals about how to parent. No underlying principles or guidelines. Tried to parent differently from her own family of origin experience—to be positive and encouraging.</p>	<p>Aware of inconsistencies. Believed her parenting was too lenient. Tried to be more consistent. Observed that her parenting improved when her stress decreased.</p>
Barry	<p>Conflicted. Believed Corey's temperament made parenting very difficult. Believed his capacity to meet Corey's needs was limited by his energy level and availability. Believed he should suffer through Corey's temperament. Believed parents should be in control.</p>	<p>Contradictory philosophy. Barry believed Corey should be controlled by his parents, but that control of children's behavior was not possible. Influenced by spirited child model.</p>	<p>Actions inconsistent. Discipline based on trial and error. Unsure of why interventions were effective. Actions were arbitrary. The choice of interventions was often determined by Barry's willingness to enter into conflict or by his energy state.</p>
Ellen	<p>Conflicted. Confident in own ability to provide for Lucas. Identified problems with child care providers who lacked skill at managing Lucas' temperament.</p>	<p>Philosophy reflected belief that individuality of child should guide parenting actions. Influenced by "Spirited Child" concept. Felt conflicted between providing freedom and control.</p>	<p>Actions inconsistent. Efforts at controlling Lucas' behavior led to conflict. Disciplinary efforts were often arbitrarily determined by Ellen's patience level.</p>

Table 23 (continued)

Parent	Capacity for Containment	Parenting Philosophy and Goals	Reported Parenting Actions
Jeff	<p>Confident. Did not perceive Corey's temperament as difficult. Felt confident in his abilities to nurture, guide and manage.</p>	<p>Philosophy was based on his own experience as a child. Identified his father as a role model. Hoped to provide opportunities for exploration, exposure, and the experience of emotional stability.</p>	<p>Actions consistent with beliefs and values. Reflected on his actions and Corey's behaviors. Tried to provide proactive interventions to prevent problem behaviors.</p>
Maria	<p>Felt capable of providing for Corey's needs. Focus on providing unconditional love.</p>	<p>Philosophy was not clearly articulated. Hoped to parent differently from family of origin. Wanted Corey to feel positive about parenting and develop self direction.</p>	<p>Used knowledge of temperament to understand Corey and determine parenting approach. Experienced difficulty setting limits.</p>
Chris	<p>Capacity to parent based on spiritual philosophy and practice. Experienced parenting as exhausting and difficult. Managed difficulty through personal growth.</p>	<p>Parenting based on spiritual philosophy and psychological concept of containment.</p>	<p>Parenting approach consistent with philosophy. Actions aimed at containing Nicki.</p>
Greg	<p>Capacity to parent based on spiritual philosophy and practice. Experienced parenting as exhausting and difficult. Managed difficulty through personal growth.</p>	<p>Parenting based on spiritual philosophy and psychological concept of containment.</p>	<p>Parenting approach consistent with philosophy. Focus on containment, not punishment.</p>

### Case Illustrations

Case examples from three families are presented to examine contrasts between parenting based on control and parenting based on containment. Chris and Greg's parenting goals and interactions were consistent with their philosophy of providing containment. They viewed limits as ways to contain Nicki's impulses, not to punish. The difficulty they experienced was expressed as the difficulty of managing their own feelings. Their response to problems was to find new ways to learn and grow as individuals so that they could more effectively cope with Nicki's behaviors. In contrast, Ellen, Barry, Lori and Eric lacked central philosophies to guide their parenting actions. Their parenting perceptions and intentions reflected both control and containment, but their actions were primarily based on control. They perceived their child's temperament as the source of the difficulty they experienced and their parenting efforts were most often aimed at controlling behaviors.

#### Eric and Lori

Eric and Lori conveyed a sense that Connor's difficult temperament determined their actions. Although they both believed environmental factors, like stress, influenced their parenting effectiveness in negative ways, they perceived Connor's difficult temperament as the primary source of the difficulty they experienced. Their parenting goals reflected their desire to impart values and teach appropriate behaviors to their children. Their parenting style was eclectic. Eric modeled some of his behaviors after his father, and used his intuition as a guide. Lori read parenting books and sought expert advice to guide her actions. Their parenting interactions were

often inconsistent with their stated goals, as well as with previous actions. Some of their discipline techniques even contradicted deeply held values.

Lori and Eric both described ways Connor's behaviors affected their coping abilities—especially when his more trying behaviors caused them to "loose it." Even though they recognized ways their own personalities and actions contributed to the difficulties they experienced, they did not identify ways to expand their capacity to cope or respond differently to these challenges. They focused on efforts to control or change Connor's most trying behaviors, and their efforts were often ineffective. Lori's belief that Connor's behavior directly contributed to her feelings of frustration and loss of temper is illustrated in her response to an incident when Connor began to speak in "gibberish." She said:

Like the situation where I said, don't bite Tommy, and he bit me. The other day I said, don't hit Tommy—and 30 seconds later he hit Tommy, and as soon as I said, Connor, he said, 'ooh, I'm in trouble.' And it was like all my—I could feel all this steam coming out of my head. I just told him no, he knew no, he did it anyway, and then he's kind of mimicking—'I'm in trouble.' It's hard because he's very smart and he does know. . . . I'd just like to see that he could tune out whatever is making him answer me with gibberish or tune me out or whatever. It's like static or something. I just want to wipe it out and get through to the Connor that I know can talk to me. So I can know the problem! You know, like what is the problem? Are you feeling da-da-da? But I can't even get an answer, and that's very frustrating to me. (F1:D:44)

Lori was aware of the intensity of her own emotions in response to Connor's behaviors. She discussed her ability to respond more effectively on "good days," than on days when she felt stressed. Yet, Lori did not discuss ways that she could alter her response when she felt stressed, nor did she discuss ways to increase her capacity to cope. The option of expanding the container—or expanding her coping capacity—was not available. Her problem-solving focused on finding ways to limit Connor's behaviors, exemplified in her efforts to stop his biting. She also focused on ways to change his emotional response, exemplified by her desire to stop his gibberish.

Lori and Eric expressed frustration that their parenting efforts failed to control Connor. They both felt that Connor's behaviors led them to adopt parenting practices that were ineffective and inconsistent with their values. Their use of the intervention of spanking provides an example. Eric and Lori said they spanked Connor, even though it was against their values, because no other interventions were as effective. Eric recognized the short term benefit of increased compliance after spanking, but said he felt opposed to the inherent violence of the act. He said:

I was spanked as a kid and I still remember how deeply I resented it. . . . It's really sort of a violation, it's a physical, cruel way of saying that you were wrong and this is your punishment. . . . the hardest part is that it does work in the short term. It works remarkably well for the short term. It's not a long term solution at all. It doesn't teach them anything, other than I'm a lot bigger than you and I can swat your butt if you get out of line. . . . The swat usually resets his clock or knocks

him down a few notches so that he's not—it makes him sort of subdued. In effect, I guess it's sort of like a terrible thing to equate it with, but it's almost like electric shock therapy. You know, it's just, there's that calm period afterwards. . . . But I'm so violently opposed to using that form of punishment . . . we've been trying to find other ways . . . I don't like that solution, it's not a good solution. I don't know, we don't have a really solid form of discipline. (F1:C:16-17)

Eric was "violently opposed" to spanking, yet he spanked Connor because he believed spanking was effective in the short term and he perceived no other alternatives existed. His views about spanking revealed irony, as Eric forbid gun play and other forms of violence for his children. Lori recognized the inconsistency between their parenting views and their use of spanking. She believed spanking was a violent act, but felt Connor's difficult temperament and behaviors compelled her actions. She said:

It's hard with Connor, I don't know maybe it's all 4-year-olds, but sometimes it just seems like nothing else is going to work. We try time outs, and talking, everything—What else is new, what else is there? What could you possibly think of more? And on top of this of course we are with him so much. I'm with him all day then I go to work—no breaks. We don't have a lot of relatives that live real close to us to help out. . . . You know, you read things that say when you get to that point take a break. . . . Excuse me but it's not always possible. . . . What else is there? What else do you do? And that's when we thought we would implement [spanking] and I don't know, I don't like it. . . . Oh we were so sure we would never use [spanking]. . . . we are

trying to incorporate this whole nonviolence thing into our lives and that means no hitting . . . and then it's so hard to say, but it's OK if I get really mad and you've been really bad for me to [spank]. You know, it doesn't feel right inside and yet we were sort of pushed into it. (F1:C:15-16)

Lori and Eric believed Connor's temperament called for them to respond in uncharacteristic ways that "didn't feel right inside." They used a discipline technique they did not believe in, because they could not find another alternative. Lori and Eric recognized ways their parental actions were influenced by their skill level, their experiences of stress, and their need for additional sources of support. These external factors illustrate influences from their family's ecological system of supports and stressors. Lori and Eric felt limited in their ability to modulate their inner experiences. They did not identify ways to alter their internal capacity for containment, their own emotional responses to Connor's behaviors, or their abilities to cope with difficulty. Their actions focused on trying (unsuccessfully) to control Connor's behaviors.

### Barry and Ellen

The case of Barry and Ellen provides an example of parenting that reflected elements of both containment and control. They interpreted difficulties as located in both the container and the child, but their interactions were most often aimed at controlling (or changing) Lucas. Barry and Ellen were influenced by Kurcinka's (1991) view that parenting interactions should be individualized to fit the needs of the child's temperament. Kurcinka views "difficult" temperament characteristics as both liabilities and assets that, over time, can mature into personality traits characteristic of strong and capable adults. Adopting this perspective, Barry believed he should tolerate Lucas' temperament and support his development without "breaking" his spirit. He said:

You know, as hard as it is dealing with a child who's tenacious and focused and everything else, in a child you call it a problem child. In an adult, you call those traits that are to be admired. And so my thought is, suffer through the childhood so you come out with an adult who is able to hold his own in a pretty hard world.

Barry's intention to "suffer through childhood" conveyed a level of acceptance of Lucas' temperament that was consistent with the concept of containment. Yet his perspective grew from the desire to influence the kind of person Lucas would grow up to become. He wanted to avoid breaking Lucas' spirit, because he believed Lucas' most trying behaviors reflected positive traits. Barry hoped his parenting would provide guidance and control in order to influence the development of specific personality

characteristics. Barry hoped positive character traits would contribute to Lucas' later success in life. He said:

I think on balance I would much rather have a child who is self-confident and tenacious and focused to a kid who is sniveling and afraid of his own shadow and always rolling over to please Mom and Dad. Because that's the kind of kid who's going to be a follower throughout his life or her life. (F3:B:22)

Barry and Ellen's parenting goals and actions contained elements of both containment and control. They believed the best way to live with difficult aspects of Lucas' temperament was to manage the physical environments he experienced. They tried to set expectations that Lucas could meet and create situations that Lucas could succeed at. Ellen said they emphasized exposing Lucas to child-friendly environments and avoided settings like "restaurants and grocery stores" that demanded more mature behaviors. Barry believed it was important to act on expectations that were age appropriate. He summarized the kinds of expectations he tried to cultivate as a parent:

I guess that's the hardest thing for me to have learned as a parent is—you're kidding yourself if you think you're the master of your child's behavior. You're not. What you really need, to succeed with a kid like Lucas is, you need to understand his behavior, anticipate what he can achieve, and then not impose burdens on him that he can't overcome. And if your expectations are in keeping with what he can do, then you won't be disappointed and he won't be disappointed and you won't be

frustrated. And to me, that's the key to dealing with a kid like Lucas—having expectations and objectives that are attainable. (F3:B:37)

Barry and Ellen's desire to create age-appropriate environments could be interpreted as a way to provide containment, if they created a space in which Lucas could be himself. Controlling environments and establishing reasonable expectations were ways that they were changing the nature of the metaphoric container. But in another sense, through control of the external environment, Barry and Ellen found ways to avoid entering situations that called for emotional containment. If they controlled the physical environment, they were able to minimize conflicts and avoid encountering aspects of Lucas' temperament they found most difficult. Barry and Ellen conveyed a desire to avoid conflicts altogether. Barry explained:

So I think we, Ellen and I both, we've eliminated a lot of the traditional conflict grounds by just deciding they weren't important enough to fight over. And *The Spirited Child* book makes that point. You know, draw your battle lines real carefully. And don't make a war over everything. Because bottom line is, very few things are really worth the anxiety and the difficulty of waging armed combat with your kid. (F3:B:36)

Ellen gave specific examples of ways they tried to structure environments so that Lucas could be successful. She said:

What we've done is we figured out what settings and what time he could be obnoxious or he could tolerate. . . . And when we feel like grocery shopping we know that you don't go grocery shopping with him at five o'clock in the evening. Unless he has had a snack of

whatever before you go grocery shopping, because he's obnoxious. . . . We can—I feel that any parent should be able to rearrange—I mean your kid should be able to do that. And we do. We just don't take him grocery shopping. I mean, one of us goes grocery shopping if anything at ten o'clock at night, when he's asleep. And that's what we've tried to do. Not put him in a situation that he can't handle. . . . He can be very spirited. I mean he can go to the extremes. . . . And why set him off? (F3:C:26)

The structuring of the environment Ellen described served as a kind of "physical holding" for Lucas, but did not provide "emotional containment." By avoiding situations that were difficult for Lucas, Ellen also avoided situations that required her to provide emotional containment when Lucas experienced frustration.

Ellen and Barry were skilled in predicting Lucas' response to certain kinds of settings, but less skilled in their internal capacity to respond when Lucas experienced distress. When Lucas did experience frustration, Barry and Ellen's interactions were characterized by efforts to establish or maintain control. Barry explained his views about discipline and control, as he reflected on "battles" he observed between Ellen and Lucas. He said:

And I don't know whether that discipline is effective. I think it is because she has to establish the high ground and she's resolved that she's going to do what it takes to establish the high ground so that when she tells him something, he does it. And they don't constantly go through this—this struggle. . . . Control. They're about control. It doesn't matter what the particular subject is, the bottom line in the

battles between Ellen and Lucas are their control battles. And she properly has taken the position that I am not going to allow him to control. Period. (F3:B:7-8)

Barry held two seemingly contradictory expectations—that parents cannot "master their child's behavior," and that parents should rightly control their child. His parenting interactions reflected internal contradictions and at times surprised him. He described an uncharacteristic response to Lucas' screaming tantrum in a grocery store.

He got down on the floor and he had a tantrum. And initially I told him, I said, come on, Lucas, let's go. We've got to get going, let's get up. Wouldn't do it. So what I did was, I got down on the floor and I had a tantrum with him. I mean, people looked at me like I was nuts. As soon as he saw what I was doing, he stopped and got up. And then we finished shopping and we left. He's never had a tantrum in public since. It worked. . . . When I got up, I couldn't believe what I had done. I just couldn't believe what I had done. I mean, I don't know what possessed me to do that. I mean, I'm not that uninhibited that I will in public get on the floor and kick and scream like a two-year-old, but I did that day. It worked. F3:B:36

This intervention reflected Barry's attempt to exert parental control, and as Barry said, it worked. But why? What happened in this interaction that allowed Lucas to (in Shuttleworth's words) draw himself together? Perhaps Lucas had been able to see himself through Barry's behavior. He may have felt Barry joined in his experience and felt understood at an emotional level. He may have gained an ability to calm himself, related to seeing his

father act out the same emotions. Perhaps, Lucas felt stopped in his own emotional experience when he saw his father act out the tantrum. Perhaps Lucas stopped screaming because he felt he had to, in some way, take care of his father's feelings. Perhaps Lucas was embarrassed. There are many possible explanations for the efficacy of Barry's actions, but Barry did not ponder these questions, he seemed satisfied that his actions "worked." The "it works" criteria was reflected in another disciplinary measure Barry employed. He said:

We had one instance, this is probably about 6 months ago where he wouldn't go to sleep. And finally Ellen got exasperated and said, I'm going downstairs, so she went downstairs, and I stayed with him for a few minutes and he kept horsing around, and I finally told him, I said, okay, look. This is nuts. If you don't want to go to sleep, fine, you don't have to go to sleep. You just stay in bed, you can take some books, look at the books, you can even put on the TV for all I care. I said, but I want you upstairs, in bed, out of the way. And I said, I'm going—he said, where are you going? I said, I'm going downstairs. So I went downstairs—and this was about 10:30, quarter to 11. And a couple minutes later I heard him coming down the steps and he said, I don't want to be upstairs, I want to be downstairs. And so I said, all right, fine. You want to be downstairs? Here's where you're going to be. You go in the hallway and you stand by the front door. I said, I don't want to see you sit down: you stand. You stand by that door until you're ready to go upstairs. And so I went back into the family room and he kind of snuck into the family room, and I said, uh-uh. By the

door. You go by the door and I don't want to see you sit down, you stand up. And he went back, with a pout on his face, he went back to the door and he stood there, and after about—well, maybe 5 minutes, he was ready to go upstairs and go to bed. Since that time we have not had a problem. It worked. (F3:B20-21)

Barry's parenting was guided by trial and error—a successful interaction was defined by whether "it worked" to control Lucas behavior and minimize conflict. Barry did not examine how his actions related to his stated parenting goals. When Lucas encountered environments that were difficult to cope with, Barry responded with arbitrary interventions aimed at exerting control. Barry described ways to successfully avoid conflicts, but he had not developed many strategies to effectively deal with conflict or assist Lucas to manage stressful situations.

During the final interview, Ellen and Barry discussed their pattern of avoiding or walking away from conflicts. They recognized the value of teaching Lucas skills to cope with conflicts rather than avoid them, and voiced the need to increase their own skills in resolving conflicts. They discussed the consequences of "walking away" in relation to a recent interaction between Barry and Lucas. They said:

**Ellen:** It's not giving him tools in learning to cope. It's okay—he's realizing that, yeah, I can walk away, but I think we need to give him something else besides just walking away.

**Barry:** I guess I need to get the tools to teach him how to cope. . . . because I mean I kind of lose it too.

**Ellen:** Yeah, you're tired, we're all tired at the end of the day and I'm beginning to realize that we have to affirm to him that it's okay to be tired. . . .

**Barry:** And it's okay to lose it when you're tired. (F1:D:13)

During this conversation, Barry and Ellen acknowledged a connection between their own personalities and skills, and their interactions with Lucas. Yet they seldom drew from this knowledge to guide their parenting actions. They did not examine the inconsistencies present in their stated parenting goals nor did they discuss ways they might change their interactions or gain new skills. Barry and Ellen identified Lucas' difficult temperament as a reason that parenting was difficult, but did not examine their own capacity to experience the painful emotions evoked by Lucas' actions. Barry and Ellen perceived of their difficulty as residing in their child. They thought about ways to alter the container by controlling the environment or developing more effective parenting strategies, but with an underlying intention to change or control Lucas. They did not respond to Lucas' perceived difficulties with attempts to expand the container by altering their internal capacity for containment.

### Greg and Chris

Greg and Chris provide a contrast to Ellen and Barry's parenting approach. Their parenting was characterized by their focus on expanding their capacity to cope with the difficulties they perceived. They used the metaphor of containment to describe their parenting role, and worked on their own development in order to change their responses to Nicki's behaviors and temperament. They shared many of the feelings about their

child's temperament that were expressed by other parents in this study. For example they were concerned, troubled, or exhausted by the intensity of Nicki's behaviors. Yet, they defined parenting as discovering who Nicki was and learning how to be with him, rather than finding ways to change him. Greg's description of the meaning parenting offered for his life emphasized the importance he placed on his own development as a person and a parent. He said:

Being a parent is mostly about learning. And my own development. I mean, it's not like I've come to it with this great knowledge that I'm going to impart to him, it's more like by being who he is, he's going to teach me where all my weak spots are and all that. . . . I think of [parenting] as a process of discovery—discovering who he is and discovering who I am, what kind of person, finding out how that's right in the world in some way. (C5:C:33)

Chris and Greg used the concept of containment to guide their responses to specific problems they encountered. When they had trouble accepting or understanding Nicki's behaviors, they focused on finding ways to increase their capacity to cope with their own emotions. Although they wished they could change aspects of their child's temperament, Greg and Chris believed they had little power to do so. A concrete example of their perspective was expressed in their concerns about Nicki's eating habits. They said:

**Chris:** I wish he'd eat more. I wish I could get him to eat more. That's actually a change I think we're in the middle of, is letting go of that. . . . I've been way over-involved in his eating. I know it's totally like what

you're not supposed to do. But I . . . haven't been able to help myself. I am trying to manage [my] behavior. (F5:D:29)

**Greg:** I wish that I could change my behavior, but I really wish I could change his, you know? I wish he would just eat a lot, damn it and eat good food! . . . I really wish we could be un-obsessed about it. (F5:D:29)

Chris and Greg perceived limits in their abilities to control their child's most basic behaviors. Even though they were often concerned about how little Nicki ate, they believed they couldn't make him eat more. When they experienced frustration about eating and other aspects of Nicki's behaviors, they did not focus on getting Nicki to change, but on finding ways to alter their response. Greg defined his parenting role in terms of expanding his capacity to cope with his own feelings. He said:

Our job is about helping him function in the body and in the society. . . . I have to deal with my unconscious stuff, it seems to me that that's the main thing I have to do as a parent—is notice how I'm unconscious and have more awareness. And have more openness and honesty with him. I don't see parenting as I'm supposed to protect him from knowing something that's too scary or too difficult, but that my work as a parent is to help him cope with the emotions, not get away from them. (F5:B:44)

Greg's parenting philosophy reflects Shuttleworth's (1993) view that comforting involves more than avoiding or removing the source of distress. In contrast with Barry and Ellen, Greg wanted to create a parenting environment that would support Nicki's capacity to experience, and cope with, a wide range of emotions. Chris and Greg's aim was not to mold the

kind of person Nicki would grow to become, but to provide support for Nicki to be himself and express his range of emotions. Chris said:

To be a part of his coming into his own life, you know, and taking it as fully as he can, whatever that ends up being and witnessing that and being a part of it. . . . I think that what we do with him is pretty much what we're working on doing with ourselves. And we encourage him to express how he feels and give him a lot of room and a lot of latitude for having the feelings he has, even though we've worked with how to express those, how to be okay, like if you're angry you can't tear the house apart, but you can stomp your feet or punch pillows or scream or whatever you need to do that's within certain bounds. (F5:C:29)

Chris described ways that she at times provided control for Nicki's behaviors within the larger aim of providing containment. She accepted Nicki's emotional expression, and supported him by controlling the safety of his actions. Chris and Greg believed their discipline approach provided containment rather than punishment. Greg explained:

**Greg:** I think how I would summarize it would be that we try to face into it really authentically and not just pull rank. Although at the same time, I think that he sometimes needs to be physically constrained because he doesn't have the ego strength to make those choices himself. . . . But not a punishment. It's a containment. I don't think punishment would ever have worked with him because he's so strong willed. (F5:D:21-22)

Chris and Greg's definition of parenting as providing containment influenced their goals and their responses to Nicki's tantrums. At times, they

actively intervened to stop Nicki's behaviors when they perceived Nicki could not safely manage his own behaviors. Even though they physically controlled Nicki's actions they viewed these kinds of interactions as a form of containment. Their intention was to provide safety, acceptance and support for the breadth of his emotional experience. They believed they should provide control when Nicki could not provide his own.

Chris and Greg's actions were grounded in their own spiritual beliefs, knowledge of psychological theories, and their efforts to view their own feelings as separate from Nicki's experience. They described the difficulties they experienced in their active efforts to become capable parents. They engaged in years of personal work that included psychotherapy. They continued to face ongoing struggles and to work on their own development. This kind of personal work is not often identified in parenting literature or addressed in clinical settings. Yet, this inner work formed the core of Chris and Greg's parenting capacities. Although other parents did not identify similar inner resources, all of the parents identified ways that parenting changed their lives and challenged their own development.

The parenting experiences of Lori and Eric, Ellen and Barry, and Chris and Greg, revealed some similarities. They all shared intentions to be conscientious and effective parents. They all perceived their child to have a difficult temperament, characterized by intensity, activity, and strong expression of negative emotions. They all shared the hope that their parenting would help their child grow into a happy and successful adult. Their shared intentions were contrasted by differences in their perspectives of

how best to support their child's development and thus define their parenting roles.

The contrasts between the parenting styles of Lori and Eric, Ellen and Barry, and Chris and Greg, served to illustrate differences between parenting based on control and parenting based on containment. Parenting based on the aim of control led to different interactions, different parenting goals and different ways of experiencing difficulty than parenting based on containment. The intentions, actions, and experiences of difficulty described by these parents are briefly summarized.

Lori and Eric were sincerely concerned that Connor's temperament would present problems throughout his development and limit his social adjustment and ability to "fit in" with peers. They believed their parenting should help shape his personality in socially appropriate ways and they hoped to change the more difficult aspects of his temperament. Their parenting was motivated by their desire to help Connor develop positive personality characteristics and adopt values they believed in. Lori and Eric experienced difficulty finding ways to live with Connor's temperament. They often felt frustrated that their parenting efforts to control and influence Connor were ineffective, and led to actions that contradicted their values. Their parenting efforts were also perceived as more difficult because of stress they experienced in their lives. They both felt they lacked sufficient supports for their parenting.

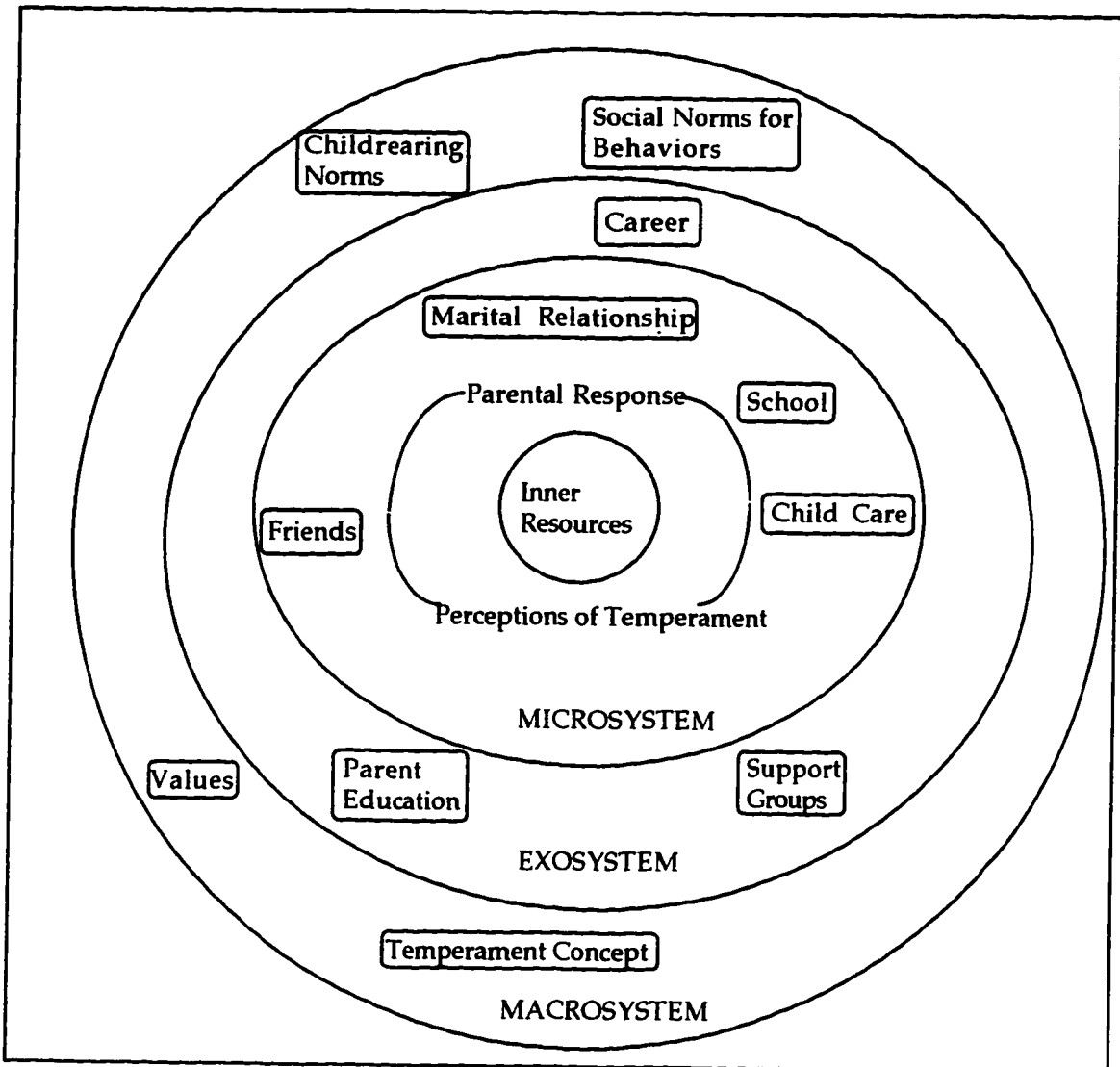
Chris and Greg defined parenting in terms of containing their child. They believed containment provided an environment in which Nicki would be able to "unfold" into his individuality and eventually develop an internal

sense of containment. They trusted in the "rightness" of who he was as a person and sought to learn from him, and understand more about his personality. Their aim was to increase their ability to accept and understand Nicki, not to change his nature. They drew from a wide network of supports to increase their own feelings of containment and expand the sources of containment for Nicki. They believed their parenting actions were consistent with their philosophy, but were troubled by the intense emotions they felt in response to Nicki. Greg and Chris experienced difficulty finding the internal resources they needed to provide containment for Nicki. Their efforts called for their own personal growth and willingness to cope with pain.

Barry and Ellen thought Lucas' temperament characteristics were assets in the long run. They believed that through the course of development, Lucas' temperament would develop into personality traits they would admire and respect. Yet, their actions were often aimed at finding ways to control Lucas' temperament. They hoped their parenting would influence Lucas' development of specific character traits. Their parenting actions were characterized by contradictions between efforts to control Lucas and efforts to accept that they could not control Lucas. Their actions reflected confusion between their hope that Lucas' personality would unfold in a healthy way and their concern that they should shape his development in more active ways. Barry and Ellen experienced difficulty adjusting their lives to the demands presented by Lucas' temperament. They found themselves in a dialectic between trying to control and trying to accept Lucas' behaviors.

Examination of the experiences of Chris, Greg, Ellen, Barry, Lori, and Eric revealed similarities in their perceptions of their children's difficult

temperament, but differences in how they defined and experienced difficulty. Their experiences were influenced by multiple factors including child characteristics, environmental factors and differences in parenting styles. The conceptual framework presented in Figure 15 illustrates the factors that influenced parents' perceptions of and responses to their child's temperament.



**Figure 15.** Ecological Model of Factors that Influence Parents' Experiences of their Children's Temperament

### Summary

The findings from this study were consistent with an ecological model of child development. Many factors in the micro-, exo-, and macrosystems of the environment influenced parents' perceptions of their child's difficult temperament and their parenting style. The specific environmental factors found to be most influential varied across the five families, but each family identified factors from different ecological levels. Parents were influenced by: (a) factors such as child care settings, peers, and parent-child interactions in the microsystem; (b) factors such as parental work, parent education, and support systems in the exosystem; (c) factors such as spiritual beliefs, values and cultural background in the macrosystem; and (d) factors such as experiences in the family of origin that spanned ecological systems.

The ecological model emphasizes the importance of context for understanding parents' experiences of their child's temperament. The conceptual model developed in this study (see Figure 14) depicts a series of concentric circles extending outward from the parent at the center. Each circle represents an environmental system that provides potential sources of stress and support for the family's well being and the child's development.

Another factor that shaped the child's family context emerged from this study, but is not conceptualized in Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological model. This factor is represented as the parents' inner resources and can be thought of as extending inward at the center of the ecological model. The families in this study identified different ways that internal factors influenced their parenting. Parental intuition, spiritual practices, and engagement in psychotherapy were believed to enhance parenting abilities. On the other

hand, low self esteem, anxiety, and feelings of isolation were believed to limit parenting effectiveness. The parents' inner resources provided a potential source of support for the child's development and the parents' well being. Inner resources mediated the ways parents responded to the stressors and supports they encountered in their environment, and influenced their capacity to provide psychological containment for their child.

These findings reveal processes through which environmental stressors and resources interact with internal vulnerabilities and resources to influence parents' perceptions and actions. Parents' inner resources have not been widely examined in ecological models or studies of child temperament, but played an influential role in the parents' perceptions of their child's temperament as well as their parenting actions. The nature of inner resources was influenced by factors in the ecological system including parents' histories (especially in the family of origin), values, and beliefs about parenting. In turn, inner responses influenced the parents' responses to their environments.

In the final chapter, I discuss the implications of these findings in light of the current research literature. The findings of this study contribute to theories about how parents form perceptions of their children's difficult temperament and how these perceptions influence their parenting. These findings have implications for theoretical issues about temperament that are relevant to the field of parent education.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### Overview

In this chapter, I review the findings of this study in relation to existing research. I address five conceptual areas: (a) parental perceptions of temperament, (b) temperament as a cultural concept, (c) temperament in the family and environmental context, (d) psychological factors influencing parenting capacities, and (e) effective parent education programs. Within these larger conceptual themes, I discuss the following points:

#### Parental Perceptions of Temperament

1. Parental perceptions of their children's temperament reflect multiple factors of parents and children, including children's behaviors and histories, and parents' personalities, histories, and beliefs.
2. Three points are discussed in relation to ongoing debate about the validity and meaning of parental reports of temperament:
  - a. Despite limited objectivity, parental reports of temperament continue to be used for clinical and research purposes.
  - b. Parental reports are valued because they provide information that can not be obtained from other sources.
  - c. Parents can have conscious awareness of factors that influence their perceptions of temperament.

### Temperament as a Cultural Concept

3. The concept of temperament can be thought of as a macrosystem ideology—a culturally valued explanatory system—that influences how parents perceive and respond to their children. Findings from cross-cultural research are discussed.

4. Cultural perspectives of children's temperament raise implications for the concept of "goodness of fit," suggesting the need for further examination of relationships and processes that occur between individuals and their environments.

### Temperament in the Family and Environmental Context

5. The findings of this study are consistent with theoretical models that identify family vulnerabilities and protective factors as mediators of stress. Parents' relationships with their children are influenced by their family contexts, factors from the environment, and parents' personal characteristics.

### Psychological Factors influencing Parenting Capacities

6. Object relations theory and recent findings about "neurobiological response patterns" associated with parent-child interactions are discussed in relation to this study. Aspects of parents' psychological health, including adult levels of "differentiation" and capacities for containment may provide protective factors that influence parental perceptions and responses, as well as child outcomes.

### Effective Parent Education Programs

7. Although temperament-based education and counseling programs are offered through community and medical settings, the efficacy of

these programs is not clear. Several factors emerged from this study that may increase understanding of the effectiveness of parent education programs.

This study has implications for educational and clinical applications of temperament theory. I discuss factors that influence parenting practices and offer recommendations for parent education programs. Finally, I discuss limitations of this study and suggest directions for further research.

### Parent Perceptions of Temperament

The case examples of the present study are consistent with findings from previous studies that have revealed relationships between parental factors and perceptions of difficult temperament. Parental perceptions of difficult temperament are related to maternal depression, maternal personality factors, maternal perceptions during pregnancy, and parental levels of education and economic status (Bates & Bayles, 1984; Noyes & Martin, 1996; Martin, Halverson, Duke, 1996). Typically, these past studies have examined relationships between discrete variables (e.g., maternal depression) and clusters of temperament characteristics (e.g., difficult temperament). The present study sheds light on the existing literature by examining parents' awareness of factors that influence their perceptions of temperament, and the processes they engage in to form these perceptions. Knowledge about how parents form perceptions of temperament has theoretical implications about the meaning and validity of parental reports of temperament.

### Validity and Meaning of Parental Reports

There has been ongoing debate over the appropriateness of using parent report instruments to measure childrens' temperament (Bates, 1980; Bates & Bayles, 1984; McDevitt, 1994b; Rothbart & Goldsmith, 1985). Do parents' perceptions of temperament reflect within-child characteristics or within-parent characteristics? Can parents judge their own child's temperament without bias? Can parents observe the complexity that constitutes temperament? These prominent questions have been met with divergent perspectives about the validity of parental perceptions of temperament. These perspectives can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Parents' perceptions of temperament cannot measure many of the biological markers of temperament, fail to capture the complexity of temperament, and are biased.
- 2) Parents' perceptions of temperament may be biased, but are valuable because they offer the most intimate observations of children's characteristic behaviors across diverse contexts.
- 3) Parents' perceptions of temperament are important because they influence the quality of parent-child interactions, shape the environments parents create for their children, and thus affect the course of development.

Limitations of parental reports. Most theorists agree that parental reports of temperament carry potential sources of bias, but give different weight to that potential. The degree to which parental reports of temperament are considered a useful measurement source depends on the purposes of assessment. For example, Cameron, Rice, and Chesterman (1996)

have conducted a longitudinal study of the efficacy of parent education about temperament in a managed health care setting. They have relied exclusively on parent reports and have been most concerned with the ways that parents perceive, understand and respond to their children's temperament. In contrast, Kagan (1989, 1994) is interested in the neuro-biological basis of temperament and has investigated biological markers of temperament. He relies on a battery of laboratory observations and biological assessments of temperament in his laboratory. Kagan (1994) has argued that parents cannot provide reliable measures of their child's temperament, in part because of inherent sources of bias, and in part because temperament is expressed through physiological processes, as well as behaviors. He has identified several problems with parent perceptions, that I have paraphrased as follows:

1. Each parent holds an abstract symbolic construction of the child that removes inconsistent facts.
2. Parents are not equally discerning in their observations or consistent in their interpretations of their children's behaviors.
3. Parents use different referents in their evaluations; as a result, they are vulnerable to contrast effects. That is, parents with more or less experience will see the same infant behavior in different ways, and as having different meanings.
4. When parent reports are used, scientists are limited in the kinds of categories (or words used to describe those categories) they can use. They can only use categories or words that parents can understand and observe. Parents can not observe or identify physiologic markers of temperament.

5. Rare reactions to specific events may be defining of temperament, but parents are unlikely to notice these.

6. Parents often impose different meanings on the same behavior.

One mother will regard shy behavior as an index of her child's sensitivity, another will interpret it as caution, and still another will regard it as an index of fearfulness. (Adapted from p.57-59)

The findings from the present study add to a body of research that supports Kagan's critique of the validity of parents' perceptions. For example, all the parents drew comparisons between their own child and other children, and their interpretations about temperament were limited by the nature of these comparisons. Parents like Jeff and Maria imposed different meanings on the same behaviors, and these meanings led to differences in their perceptions of temperament. Parents like Lori and Chris believed their lack of experience with children colored their perceptions of temperament. Parents' abilities to assess temperament were limited to the observations afforded by their senses—they lacked access to sophisticated biological assays.

Value of parental reports. Although theorists agree that parental perceptions have limited objectivity and comprehensiveness, parent reports of temperament continue to be widely used in both clinical and research applications. Many researchers now advocate the use of multidimensional assessments of temperament, and augment parent reports with observational and laboratory assessments, in order to increase the validity of temperament measures. Proponents of parental reports believe parents are in the best position to know and rate their child's behavioral style across different situations (McDevitt & Carey, 1978; Rothbart, 1985). Many researchers believe

parents provide information about their children that could not be obtained any other way. In concrete terms, parents have knowledge about how children are at bedtime, on awakening, and at breakfast, that independent observers may not have access to.

A recent study by Seifer (1996) provides new insights about the validity of parental ratings of children's temperament. Seifer asked mothers to rate the temperament characteristics of a "standard" child and their own child based on observations of video-taped vignettes of the children's behaviors. He compared mothers' ratings to those of independent observers and found strong correlations ( $r=.83$ ) between mothers' and observers' ratings of standard children, but much lower correlations ( $r=.32$ ) when the mothers rated their own children. Seifer proposed that mothers' ratings become less objective when the rated child is important to them.

Findings from the present study suggest parents' interpretations of their own child's behavior are influenced by past knowledge of their child, as well as their own values and feelings. These factors may help explain Seifer's (1996) findings, but it is not clear whether mothers' ratings in his study reflected greater or lesser accuracy than independent observers' ratings. Although parents' lack the objectivity of independent observers, they are privileged to intimate and comprehensive knowledge of their child. Mothers' ratings of their own child in Seifer's study may have been influenced by knowledge about their child that was not captured by video-taped vignettes. The mothers' ratings of standard children were based only on the same information as the observers' ratings. The parents in the present study revealed ways that prior knowledge of their child influenced their

interpretations of current behaviors. Does this past knowledge add a source of bias, or strengthen the validity of parental reports?

Parental awareness of perceptions. The answer to this question remains puzzling. The findings of this study suggest that parental reports of temperament are neither objective, nor "pure" reflections of within-child characteristics. Parents' perceptions of their child's temperament were influenced not only by past understanding of their child's behaviors, but also by parents' own personalities, backgrounds, and beliefs. Yet, these findings also reveal that parents can have conscious awareness about the subjectivity of their perceptions of their child's temperament. Unlike previous studies that have examined correlations between parent characteristics and perceptions of temperament, this study examined parents' own awareness of how multiple factors influenced their perceptions of temperament. The parents consciously wondered how much of their children's behaviors reflected biology and how much reflected environment. Further research that explores parents' awareness of interactions between their children's biological tendencies and aspects of the child-rearing environment is needed.

#### Temperament as a Cultural Concept

The concept of temperament can be viewed as a macrosystem ideology that influences parenting values and practices. Today, parents look for individual characteristics to explain behaviors that forty years ago might have been attributed to environmental influences. For example, Ellen believed Lucas' temperament was a prevalent determinant of his behavior and the source of many of her difficulties. She perceived continuity in Lucas' behaviors that she attributed to his temperament, saying, "Lucas is Lucas is

Lucas." Ellen's perspective was embedded in a wider cultural ideology that looks to individual characteristics to explain differences between people. For example, parents readily recognize children's individuality from birth, noting individual differences and similarities between siblings, cousins or close friends. Individual differences in temperament explain adult preferences for solitude or socializing, work styles, and relationships with friends and colleagues (Aron & Aron, in press). The concept of temperament can be thought of as an example of what Geertz (1983) identified as "cultural common sense." Geertz defined ways that common sense serves as a cultural system that dictates the ways individuals interpret events. He stated:

The unspoken premise from which common sense draws its authority—that it presents reality neat—is not intended to undermine that authority but to relocate it. If common sense is as much an interpretation of the immediacies of experience, a gloss on them, as are myth, painting, epistemology, or whatever, then it is, like them, historically constructed and, like them, subjected to historically defined standards of judgment. . . . It is, in short, a cultural system, though not usually a very tightly integrated one, and it rests on the same basis that any other such system rests; the conviction by those whose possession it is of its value and validity. Here, as elsewhere, things are what you make of them. (p.76)

As part of a cultural system of "common sense," the concept of temperament can influence how parents perceive their children even if they have not been directly exposed to temperament books or workshops. Geertz believes that "common sense" structures our belief systems, influencing ways

we perceive and interpret our experiences. Parents who are influenced by a widespread cultural belief in the "value and validity" of temperament, are likely to observe, interpret, and respond to their child's temperament. Cross-cultural research on child rearing patterns has revealed ways that ideas about parenting are culturally bound and subject to change with time. For example, ideas about when, how much, and with whom, children should sleep vary widely from culture to culture (New & Richman, 1985). Harkness and Super (1996) believe cultural belief systems influence parents' views about development and their interactions with their children. They state:

Parents' understanding about the nature of children, the structure of development, and the meaning of behavior are to a large extent shared by members of a cultural group or subgroup. These understandings are developed in the context of life in a particular cultural place and time, and they are related to understandings about other aspects of life as experienced by parents, including most immediately the nature and meaning of parenthood, the family, and the self in society. (p.2)

#### Cross-Cultural Variation in Temperament

Findings from the field of cultural psychology have revealed cross-cultural similarities and variations in conceptions of temperament that are relevant to the present study. The parents in the present study shared a cultural definition of "difficult" temperament that is not shared across all cultures. For example, the temperament characteristics defined as "difficult" in Western culture are valued and admired in Masai children (deVries, 1994). Case studies of infants with "difficult" temperaments (defined by Western measures) suggested that "difficult" Masai babies may be at an advantage for

survival during times of drought. Babies with active and fussy temperaments are more likely to receive attention and frequent breast-feedings. This can serve as a protective factor during times of drought and high infant mortality. Even though mothers perceive their infants as difficult across cultures, the traits considered difficult vary from culture to culture (deVries, 1988, 1994; Kagan, 1984).

Cross-cultural analyses suggest that cultural values may also shape the expression of certain temperament traits. Recently, Kohnstamm, Halverson, Havill and Mervielde (1996) examined the words parents use to describe their child in order to increase understanding of the development of personality across different cultures. They found that some dimensions of temperament are identified by parents across cultures, but other temperament dimensions appear to be influenced by cultural factors:

We propose that the traits parents come to see in their children depend partly on the saliency of those traits in their children, partly on what they expect to see based on their particular family history and partly on the prevailing belief systems about what traits are important for children in their particular culture. Just as different cultures make variable social distinctions, so may parents in specific cultures discern different personality traits in children. Constraints are made by the traditions of a culture, by the demands placed on children, and by the expectations a culture has for the future of its children. (p.29)

Kohnstamm et al. view temperament as a cultural phenomenon, rather than a distinctly "within" child set of characteristics. Findings from other cross-cultural research suggest that cultural differences influence the kinds of

temperament traits parents observe in their children (Okamoto & Rothbart, 1996), parents' interpretations of the relative difficulty of different traits (deVries, 1994), and parental practices related to temperament (Super et al. 1996).

Shwalb, Shwalb and Shoji's (1996) study of Japanese mothers suggests that cultural factors influence mother' spontaneous perceptions of their infants' temperament. They asked Japanese mothers of newborn, 3-month, and 6-month old babies to describe the temperaments of their own infants. Their findings revealed temperament dimensions that were analogous to seven of the dimensions identified in the New York Longitudinal Study (Thomas & Chess, 1978), plus several dimensions unique to their sample. Five dimensions identified by the Japanese mothers were different from temperament dimensions identified elsewhere in that they reflected the relationship between the mother and infant, rather than characteristics of the baby alone. The characteristics reflected the babies' social styles with their mothers, and were labeled: sociability, responsiveness to physical contact, self-assertiveness, indulgence/dependency, and willfulness. The authors believed these characteristics reflected perceptions of infants that were consistent with a cultural emphasis on relationships and social interactions.

The influence of widespread cultural views on parenting may not be apparent to members of that culture. The parents in the present study discussed ways that aspects of their social worlds, including, education, history and family of origin, influenced their perceptions and their parenting. They did not identify the prevailing views of the larger Western culture as an influence on their perceptions of child temperament or parenting practices.

Yet, the parents in the study who, as children, had been exposed to non-Western cultures described ways their childhood cultural values influenced their parenting views and perceptions of temperament. Alicia, John and Maria may have been more aware of cultural influences because their early experiences were so different from their experiences of Western culture. Cultural influences become more visible when contrasted with different practices.

When the findings from the present study are compared to the findings of Shwalb, Shwalb, and Shoji (1996), differences in cultural views about independence become apparent. The Japanese mothers identified five temperament dimensions that describe characteristics of the relationship between parent and child. In contrast, the parents in the present study often perceived characteristics that occurred during interactions with their child, but the concept of relational characteristics did not emerge from their spontaneous descriptions. The parents struggled to sort out what was "in their child" from what was "in them." For example, some parents identified similarities between their child's intensity and their own intensity. Other parents identified differences between their child's sensitivities and their own "easy-going" natures. Their explanations reflect Western cultural values that emphasize independence and view child characteristics as residing in the individual rather than reflecting interactions between parent and child (Kagan, 1984). Perhaps in another culture (like Japan), interpretations of similar children's temperaments would reflect interactions without an effort to separately assign causality to either child or situation.

### Implications for "Goodness of Fit"

The suggestion of relational temperament characteristics reported by Shwalb, Shwalb and Shoji (1996) resonates with the findings of the present study and has implications for the concept of "goodness of fit." "Goodness of fit" theory holds that transactions between children's temperament and their environment influence the course of development. Yet, research to explore these transactions has been limited by the difficulty of operationalizing separate components of "goodness of fit." From a measurement perspective, it has been difficult to separate contributions of the parent, child, and physical environment. If some temperament characteristics are perceived as elements of a relationship, boundaries between child and environment can be conceptualized as more fluid or permeable.

The findings of this study suggest that parents perceive their children's temperaments as intertwined with environmental factors. The meanings parents attached to their perceptions of temperament were influenced by the nature of their family lives, as well as larger cultural contexts. The parents' perspectives about the quality of fit between their children and the varied environments they faced, reflect shifts in cultural views about child development. Forty years ago, the idea of temperament represented a departure from prevalent beliefs about environmental determinants of child development. Now the influence of individual differences in temperament is an accepted concept, and the focus of research has shifted from proving the existence of temperament to examining transactions between individuals and their environments.

Understanding of "goodness of fit" may be strengthened by shifting research efforts away from examining separate components of complex transactions, and towards examining relationships and processes that occur between individuals and their environment. Paradoxically, increased understanding about how individual differences influence development can contribute to increased understanding of child rearing environments, as deVries (1994) stated:

The environmental factors . . . yield their meaning only when they are brought into relationship with individual, constitutional characteristics such as infant temperament. Temperament brings maternal activities, the cultural plan, and environmental effects into perspective. Without this focus on the individual characteristics of the infant over time . . . understanding the environment and developmental transactions would be impossible. Although Alex Thomas and Stella Chess originally offered the temperament concept as a reaction to environmentalism "run wild," it is now precisely the concept of temperament that allows us to illustrate and understand the complex environment-person interaction that had previously remained undetected. (p.138)

#### Temperament and the Family Context

Bronfenbrenner (1986) believes that children's development is influenced by the nature of their families and the supports and stressors present in their surrounding environment. The parents in the present study revealed ways that environmental and personal factors influenced their relationships with their children. These findings provide support for the

ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner, but also emphasize the importance of internal characteristics of parents. Interactions between multiple ecological systems influenced the parents' perceptions of and responses to their child, but parents' inner resources and past histories mediated how they responded to environmental factors.

### Family Vulnerabilities and Protective Factors

These findings are consistent with theoretical models that identify family vulnerabilities and protective factors as mediators of stress (Heiney, 1988; McCubbin, 1989; Patterson, 1988; Webster-Stratton 1990). Recent thinking about family stress has focused on the concept of "pile-up effects" (McCubbin, 1989; Webster-Stratton, 1990) to explain interactions between different sources of stress including environmental factors and child temperament. The "pile-up" theory suggests families experience multiple stressors in different aspects of their environments. These stressors influence family functioning through an additive effect. The impact of cumulated sources of stress on family functioning, is mediated by community supports, the health of family systems, parents' experiences in their families of origin, and parents' psychological factors. Webster-Stratton (1990) proposed that vulnerabilities and protective factors serve as amplifying rings that can temper the response to stress in positive or negative ways.

The parents in this study believed that stress influenced their parenting by "amplifying" negative aspects of their own responses and personalities. They experienced their child's difficult temperament as one source of stress within a larger context. The presence of additional sources of stress from work, family, and financial demands exacerbated problems they experienced

with their child. They associated subjective experiences of stress with parenting practices that were less patient, less effective, and, at times, inconsistent with their values. Some parents associated negative experiences during their own childhood with poorer parenting practices and negative feelings. These findings provide support for Webster-Stratton's (1990) theory about how stress influences family functioning. She stated:

Parents' level of psychological functioning can influence their perceptions of and behavioral interactions with their children. . . . Stressful events are more disruptive to those who have negative personality traits because stressors amplify their problems in adjustment. A further hypothesis is that these parents' early abusive childhood experiences contribute to a series of amplifying rings: parents' feeling less confident about their parenting practices and more negative about their child's behaviors and about life events in general. These attitudes and perceptions lead to increased criticism and spanking as well as to increased child maladjustment, confirming their negative thoughts and further increasing their stress and family disruption. (p. 307)

John's case exemplifies ways that parents' own early childhood experiences can increase family stress. He believed he was overly strict and held unrealistic expectations of his child, in part because of the ways he was treated as a child. He described his style of disciplining Michael as "wrong," and felt his actions often mirrored the parenting he received as a child. The power of his early experiences often exerted greater influence on his parenting than his current values and intentions. Yet John and other

families in this study were able to balance some of the negative influences they attributed to their families of origin, by drawing on external and internal resources. For example, John gained awareness of his own lack of self esteem from reading parenting books. He recognized ways his lack of confidence limited his effectiveness as a father. John gained support and inspiration to change his parenting actions from his wife, friends, and religious beliefs. John's case illustrates how individuals can address personal vulnerabilities that limit parenting effectiveness by drawing on external sources of support and inner resources. The influence of parents' inner resources and psychological factors on parenting is discussed next.

#### Influence of Psychological Factors

Parental psychological characteristics like depression, antisocial personality and history of abuse have been associated with negative perceptions and poor parenting practices in clinical populations of children with conduct disorders (Spitzer, Webster-Stratton, Hollinsworth, 1991). The present findings with relatively well-functioning families identified parenting perceptions and practices associated with parents' psychological difficulties, but also suggest that psychological health may serve as a positive influence that balances negative experiences in the family of origin. External sources of support, psychological well-being, and strong internal resources enhanced parents' abilities to navigate challenges they encountered in the environment.

#### Object Relations Theory

Object relations theories provided an analytic frame to examine ways that parents' psychological factors influenced their parenting. Object relations

theory proposes that healthy child development is enhanced by parents who can provide "containment" for their children's emotional experiences.

Mitrani (1996) identified several capacities that are necessary for parents to provide containment for their child. She stated:

The properties necessary to adequate containment are the capacities to receive and take in projected parts and feelings of the infant: to experience the full effect of these on the psyche-soma and to bear those effects; and to think about and understand these projections, gradually returning them to the infant in due time and in decontaminated form. This assumes the presence of a mother who has her own boundaries, internal space, a capacity to bear pain, to contemplate, to think, and to reflect back. A mother who is herself separate, intact, receptive, capable of "reverie," and appropriately giving is suitable for introjection as a good containing object. (p.119)

"Differentiation". The parental contribution to containment requires the parents' capacities to bear not only their own pain, but the introjected pain of their child. These capacities are enhanced by parents' own positive experiences as children, as well as through focused psychological work. Parents' capacities to be "separate, intact, and receptive" are indications of a healthy level of "differentiation" as identified in Bowen's family systems theory (Crouch & Roberts, 1987; Heiney, 1988; Whitfield, 1993). Bowen defined differentiation as a level of emotional maturity characterized by the ability to maintain healthy boundaries. Whitfield believes differentiation is necessary for individuals to maintain healthy adult relationships. He said:

Relating in a healthy way involves . . . each relationship having its own integrity and unique character . . . . By having a healthy self with boundaries, I am better able to sort out just what is mine and what is not mine, and not get involved in or take on [others'] conflicts. The ability to be in emotional contact with others, yet remain autonomous in one's own emotional functioning, is the essence of the concept of differentiation. (Whitfield, p.180).

Chris and Greg exemplified the adult capacity to maintain emotional contact while maintaining autonomy in their relationships with Nicki. They based their parenting on deeply held beliefs about spirituality and psychology, and worked to develop their personal capacities to provide containment for their child. Their experiences demonstrate ways that parents can change their perceptions and interpretations of their child (as well as their actions) through attention to their own personal development. Chris and Greg's parenting capacities were linked to their abilities to bear their own experiences of pain. Their capacities to separate their own feelings from their interpretations of Nicki's feelings and actions were gained and supported through participation in psychotherapy and spiritual practice.

In contrast, Lori exemplified an individual with a low level of differentiation. She often felt overwhelmed by painful feelings evoked by Connor's behaviors. Lori recognized connections between her own distress and her perceptions of Connor's difficult behaviors. She found it difficult to judge "how much was her child and how much was her," and to separate her own childhood experiences from her interpretations of Connor's experiences. She lacked the capacity to separate her own feelings from her child's feelings.

Aspects of parents' psychological health, including adult levels of differentiation and capacities for containment, may provide protective factors that influence parental perceptions of and responses to their children. It is likely that inner resources enhance parents' abilities to cope with external stressors, including stress associated with perceptions of their child's difficult temperament. The quality of parents' inner resources may prove to be especially important when a child's temperament is perceived as difficult, or when parents lack access to effective external supports.

#### Neurobiological Response Patterns

Recent research by Shore (1996) suggests that parents' psychological health may influence not only their perceptions of their children's temperament, but also the development of their child's temperament. Shore suggests that infants' neurological response patterns become solidified during the first two years of life, through face-to-face interactions with their mothers. He has examined innervation patterns of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems that are related to temperamental tendencies of excitation and inhibition (cf. Kagan, 1994). Shore believes the quality of early parent-infant interactions serves to "hard wire" temperamental tendencies of neurological activation during the first two years of life. He states:

I suggest that the origin of mixed patterns of sympathetic and parasympathetic dominance that are found in individuals originates in the first 2 years of life. The developing individual's particular socioaffective imprinting experiences fine tunes the final, mature distribution of the innervation pattern of orbitofrontal columns,

emphasizing either early practicing, sympathetic, excitatory, ventral tegmental dopaminergic inputs, or late practicing, inhibitory, parasympathetic, lateral tegmental, noradrenergic inputs, thereby influencing the final excitation-inhibition balance of a particular prefrontolimbic regulatory system. This dyadic psychoneurobiological mechanism ontogenetically sculpts the enduring temperamental features of the child's emerging personality. (p.75)

Shore's work identifies biological markers that point to the positive effects of parent-child relationships on the development of children's self-regulatory capacities. He believes the infant needs to experience a relationship that is "sensitive, responsive and emotionally approachable" and that the ability to provide such a relationship is dependent on the "caregiver's capacity to monitor and regulate her own affect." (1996, p.70). The parental characteristics Shore identifies are similar to the parental characteristics associated with the capacity to provide containment (Shuttleworth, 1993; Mitrani, 1996). Together with these views, the findings of this study suggest ways that parents' awareness of (and ability to manage) their own emotional responses, influences their abilities to care for their children.

#### Effective Parent Education Programs

Increasingly, temperament-concepts have been used as a basis for parent support groups (Anderson, 1994; Smith, 1994), guidance in managed health care settings (Cameron, Rice, Hansen & Rosen, 1994), and parent education programs (Kurcinka, 1991; Sheeber, Goldberg, Galvinhill, Hershberger & Sorensen 1996; Sheeber & Johnson, 1994; Turecki, 1988). While temperament-based parent education is widely available to parents

through pediatrician offices, community-based workshops, and popular books, the benefits of parent education programs are not known. Evaluations of counseling and education programs through controlled studies have yielded mixed findings about their efficacy.

#### Efficacy of Parent Education

Rice (1994) reported that parents who participated in a temperament guidance program (intervention parents) in a major health maintenance organization (HMO) requested fewer primary care and emergency room visits for their child than parents in a control group. Intervention parents identified as many behavioral issues as control group parents, but intervention parents experienced less difficulty managing those issues (Cameron, Rice, Hansen & Rosen, 1994). These findings provide support for the cost-saving benefits of temperament guidance programs for the HMO, but reveal less about the parents' experience of temperament education. The authors present anecdotal reports from parents and HMO staff that suggest parents requested fewer doctor visits because they had a better understanding of the reasons for their child's behaviors.

Two recent studies (Sheeber, Goldberg, Galvinhill, Hershberger & Sorensen, 1996; Sheeber & Johnson, 1994) provide more information about benefits associated with temperament education. Sheeber and Johnson examined several outcomes associated with participation in a 9-week parent training program about temperament. They found that parents who participated in the training program differed significantly from parents in a wait-list control group on post-treatment measures of comfort in the parenting role, positive maternal affect, family functioning, maternal

discipline practices, and maternal ratings of child behavior problems. These treatment gains were maintained at a 2-month follow-up.

A follow-up study (Sheeber, Goldberg, Galvinhill, Hershberger & Sorensen, 1996) of a similar parent training program revealed different findings. The second study found mothers in the training program reported fewer conduct problems, and greater attachment to their children than mothers in social support and wait-list control groups; and less depression, less family disruption and greater competence in parenting, than mothers in the social support control group. However, a twelve month follow-up revealed no differences between groups on any of the treatments gains. The authors suggest that individual differences among the mothers participating in the program and unknown mediating variables may explain their findings. They advocate the development of strategies for improving the maintenance of treatment gains.

#### Factors that Influence Efficacy of Parent Education

To what extent do the findings of this study shed light on questions raised about the efficacy of parent education? Temperament education alone may not lead to more positive parenting experiences. First, parents' perceptions of difficult temperament are influenced by several environmental and personal factors that also influence parenting practices. The parents I studied internalized the concept of temperament in ways that were consistent with their existing perceptions and interpretations. The case of Jeff and Maria illustrates the strength of parental perceptions. They often perceived the same behaviors as evidence that supported their different interpretations of Corey's temperament. The parents of Lucas and Connor

provide examples of how information about temperament can lead to different parenting goals. Barry and Ellen believed that Kurcinka's (1991) conception of the "spirited child" fit their experience of Lucas' temperament, and influenced Barry to believe that he should "suffer through childhood" in order to promote the development of Lucas' temperamental strengths. Lori and Eric also believed the "spirited child" concept fit Connor's temperament, but they hoped to alter the most difficult aspects of Connor's temperament so that he would develop social skills.

A second factor that may limit the efficacy of temperament education is that parents find different aspects of their child's temperament difficult and attach different meanings to the difficulties they experience. The parents in the present study described their children in similar ways, rated their children in similar categories on the Behavioral Style Questionnaire, and shared perceptions of difficulty that fit with the New York Longitudinal Study (Thomas & Chess, 1978) conception. Yet, the meaning of "difficult temperament" varied across families. Some parents found specific temperament characteristics more difficult than others. Some parents experienced the most difficulty finding effective parenting techniques. Other parents experienced the most difficulty coping with their own negative emotions evoked by their child. Parents with similar perceptions and ratings of their child's temperament might be presumed to face similar temperament-related issues. Yet these parents found different aspects of their interactions with their child difficult.

Another reason that temperament education may not be effective with some families is that the concept of temperament introduced in guidance and

training programs may be interpreted in different ways by different parents and lead to different kinds of parenting responses. The parents in this sample were motivated by different concerns and helped by different sources of support and kinds of information. Some of the most influential factors identified in this study, like history in the family of origin, psychological well-being, cultural beliefs, and spiritual practices, may not be addressed in temperament-based parent training programs.

Proponents of temperament-based education believe that parents will be more likely to learn effective strategies for coping with their children's problem behaviors if they understand the reasons for these behaviors (Rice, 1994; Cameron, Rice, Hansen & Rosen, 1994). Maria provided an example of this outcome when she described how temperament education helped her understand Corey's difficulty coping with transitions. That understanding helped her to develop methods to help him manage transitions. Parental knowledge of temperament may lead some parents to gain understanding that helps them accept and work with their child.

Yet, education about temperament may also lead to less positive parenting outcomes. Increased awareness and expectations about problem behaviors associated with temperament characteristics can contribute to self-fulfilling prophecies that lead parents to "discover" problems they may not otherwise notice. The case of Barry and Ellen provides an example of how beliefs about difficult temperament can lead parents to attribute problems to their children's temperament without looking for other environmental contributions. When temperament is identified as the cause of a problem, some parents may conclude they cannot influence their child's behaviors.

A final factor that may limit the effectiveness of parent education about temperament is linked to the finding that parents' perceptions of their children's temperament are linked to their own psychological health. Parents who identify healthy experiences in their families of origin, strong inner resources, and available sources of support are likely to be more effective than parents who identify negative experiences during their own childhood, and lack internal resources and external supports. Parents who have not identified ways to make internal changes for their own psychological health are likely to feel limited by the stressors in their environments, including stress associated with perceptions of their child's difficult temperament.

Object relations theory suggests that parents who can not bear their own pain are likely to perceive difficulty when their child expresses intense emotions. These parents are likely to take efforts to control those behaviors, so that they can avoid their own painful reactions. Their interventions reflect an unconscious attempt at self preservation by avoiding experiences that are too painful (or "too much") to bear. In contrast, parents who have developed the capacity to experience and cope with their own pain are more likely to be able to "contain" their child's intense negative emotions. Their interventions reflect an intention to allow their child to experience and express intense emotions within the bounds of safe and acceptable behaviors.

The present findings add to existing evidence that suggests psychological factors like parental depression and psychological distress contribute to perceptions of child difficulty and stress in the parent-child relationship. These findings also suggest that positive aspects of parents' psychological health influence parenting. Further studies with parents who

identify similar and different sources of inner strength are needed to better understand how parents' psychological well-being influences parent perceptions and actions. It may seem obvious that parents who attend to their own psychological health will experience a greater sense of acceptance and confidence of their parenting role. Yet, parent education programs often focus on parenting techniques and child behaviors, with little emphasis on parents' psychological states.

#### Implications and Recommendations

How might temperament screening, parent education and support programs help families like those in this study? Parent education based on temperament alone may provide too narrow a focus to be of assistance to some parents. The findings of the present study suggest that parental and environmental factors influence the ways that parents perceive of temperament, respond to their children, and interpret information about child temperament. I believe the effectiveness of parent education programs based on temperament can be increased by exploring environmental factors, family systems, cultural meaning systems, and by helping parents identify, develop, and strengthen their inner resources. This represents a more holistic approach that is consistent with the ways parents actually experience their children's temperament—in the context of different cultural values, influences from families of origin, and exposure to stressors in their daily lives.

#### Parenting Practice

All of the parents in this study were motivated to develop positive parenting practices—to be "good parents." Although there is a growing body

of knowledge suggesting the value of specific parenting techniques and qualities, it remains difficult, even in theoretical terms, to define "good" parenting. The current body of research about parenting practice yields divergent and, at times, contradictory findings.

In a recent review of the literature, Holden and Ritchie (1988) identified several parental characteristics associated with positive child outcomes. These characteristics include: being responsive, sensitive, consistent, warm, flexible, "affectionate but firm," supportive, involved, setting high standards, respecting the child, "allowing the child some freedom," and modeling desired behaviors. The authors recognized inherent contradictions in attempts to identify desirable parental attributes. They stated:

The reader may suspect that we subscribe to a "vessel" model of an intelligent parent: An intelligent parent is similar to an appropriately shaped container which contains the traits or abilities which lead to "intelligent acts." In different cultures of ethnic groups, the vessel may be shaped somewhat differently. . . . By and large, the available research supports such a model. Yet, upon closer examination, the analogy of the container cannot function. How can a parent be simultaneously gentle and firm, consistent and flexible, or empathetic while expecting mature behavior? At any one moment, a parent might be a paragon of one characteristic while being a parody of another! (p. 40)

Children may benefit from different parenting characteristics and styles during different stages of development or when involved in different situations. Recent research suggests that the developmental effects associated

with different parenting styles may vary for children with different temperament characteristics. For example, Kochanska (1996) reported that internalization of conscience may be facilitated through different pathways for fearless and fearful children. She found that fearless children benefited from maternal responsiveness, while fearful children benefited from gentle discipline. Bates (1996) found that children with difficult temperament characteristics characterized by resistance to control who experienced high levels of maternal control, were less likely to develop behavioral problems than children who experienced low levels of maternal control. These findings were surprising as they contradicted earlier findings (Frankel & Bates, 1990), and the kinds of maternal control observed included practices usually associated with behavioral problems, like punishing, scolding, criticizing and restraining. The conflicting nature of parenting advice and research findings perhaps reflects an inherent complexity of the parenting role.

The parents in the present study all wished they had access to information about raising children that was applicable to issues they associated with their child's temperament. Yet, the effectiveness of parent education efforts is limited by conflicting perspectives about what constitutes good or effective parenting. Further research employing qualitative and quantitative methods is needed to increase our understanding about parenting and education strategies. Qualitative studies are needed to examine processes that may influence the fit between children and their environments. Quantitative studies are needed to examine developmental

outcomes related to different styles of parent-child interactions, as well as outcomes associated with parent-training programs.

### Recommendations

The findings of the present study raise questions about the effectiveness of parent guidance programs that provide parents with recommendations about specific interventions and techniques based on standardized measures of their child's temperament. The parents in the present study revealed that information about new techniques may have little influence on parenting practices unless that information fits with parents' personal values, existing understandings of their children, and interpretive frameworks. The information gained from the present study about parental experiences and perceptions suggests several ways that temperament-based parent education and guidance can be enhanced. These recommendations are offered:

1. Parent education efforts should assess parent's existing beliefs about temperament. How do parents explain their child's behaviors? What are their beliefs about the causality of child behaviors?
2. Parent education will be strengthened by family assessments that address parents' family of origin and related histories, parenting goals and values, family strengths and vulnerabilities, and environmental sources of stress and support.
3. It is important that parent educators recognize that temperament is a culturally influenced concept. Cultural influences may be more visible if due to differences in ethnicity, or less visible if associated with

variation resulting from the influences of diverse social worlds within the dominant culture.

4. Parent education can be strengthened by helping parents increase their awareness of the diverse factors that influence their parenting, including their child's temperament, their own personalities and inner resources, and their interactions with the environment.

5. The results of the present study suggest that standardized assessments provide only partial information about parents' experiences of their child's temperament. Parent education can be enhanced through assessments that address the meaning that temperament holds for the family.

6. Parent education programs will be strengthened by evaluations of parenting outcomes, as well as information about parents' subjective experiences of programs. It is important to assess parents' understanding of temperament content and the ways they apply content to parenting actions.

### Limitations

The findings of this study are not intended to form generalizations or predictions about parents' experiences of their children's temperament. Rather, these findings present rich information about a set of particular parents' experiences. An analysis of these parents' experiences contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding about how parents perceive and respond to their children's temperament. Theories generated from this qualitative study suggest further areas for both qualitative and quantitative research. Several limitations of this study are discussed below.

The sample for this study consisted of middle class parents who perceived their first-born boys to have difficult temperaments. Further research with different sampling constellations is needed to explore how socio-economic status, gender, and birth order influence parents' perceptions of temperament. The focus of this study was limited to parental perceptions about their children's temperament and parenting practices. Although parents' reports of their perceptions were triangulated with a standardized questionnaire and observations of parent-child interactions, additional objective assessments of child temperament were not obtained. Research that examines parent perceptions of temperament in relation to observational and physiological measures would increase knowledge about the validity and meaning of parent reports.

This study examined differences in parenting practices related to perceptions of temperament, environmental factors, and parental characteristics. However, developmental outcomes associated with different parenting styles were not examined. Further research that examines relationships between parenting perceptions, parenting practices, and developmental outcomes will deepen understanding of how children with difficult temperaments respond to different parenting styles.

Qualitative research often leads to findings that were not expected during the conceptual phase of a study. The findings of this study suggest two interesting directions for future research that have not been addressed in temperament literature. First, several parents reported that their child's temperament compelled them to use parenting practices, like spanking, that contradicted their personal values. This finding suggests ways that

perceptions of children's difficult temperaments may influence the child rearing environment in negative ways. Further research that examines how parents, who perceive their child to have a difficult temperament, decide on discipline techniques would contribute to understanding of the development of "goodness of fit." Research that examines how parents' feelings and beliefs about discipline are related to the practices they employ would make a valuable contribution. A second unexpected finding of this study suggests that parents' inner resources, and specifically their spiritual lives, can influence parenting in positive ways. Further research with other parents who draw from inner resources and spiritual practices to guide their parenting may contribute to theories about family strengths and protective factors.

Finally, the choices that I made during the process of analysis limited the interpretation of these findings. The scope of this study was limited by the theories used to explain the findings. Theories from other conceptual frameworks, drawn from different bodies of knowledge, would lead to additional interpretations of this data. For example, Holden and Ritchie (1988) proposed that parenting involves a dialectical process through which parents choose between contradictory values, actions and consequences. It would be interesting to search for dialectical processes that influence how parents form perceptions of their children's temperament.

Kegan (1994) suggests yet a different theoretical lens that could expand understanding about the process of parenting. He believes that adults continue to develop new cognitive structures that determine how they make meaning out of their experiences. Different adults attain different stages of

cognitive development and evolve different conceptions of the self in relation to the world. How adults create meaning in their worlds influences parental perceptions, decisions and actions. Kegan believes that the development of many of the qualities that contribute to effective parenting (like the capacity for differentiation and the skill of maintaining boundaries) requires cognitive structures that some adults do not achieve. His theory raises questions about how parents form perceptions of temperament, suggests a need for further study, and raises relevant questions for the field of parent education.

### Conclusion

Many different conceptual models could potentially increase understanding of the findings of this study, as well as lead to new understandings of parenting processes. The scope of the present study was limited by choices I made, based on previous experiences and current interests. The potential for additional interpretations emphasizes the complexity of the parenting process. Holden and Ritchie (1988) claimed:

There will never be a satisfactory "cookbook" approach for effective parenting, because of the nature of the task. The reason that psychologists don't know the recipes for the optimal rearing of children is that there are no set ingredients. But knowledge about the ingredients is not enough. Successful rearing of children . . . involves a series of unique recipes accounting for the specific characteristics of the parent and child, given the particular time, situation, and cultural context. (p. 52)

In the present study, I have presented one way of examining the complexity of parenting. I have examined the experiences of a group of parents who share similar perceptions of their childrens' difficult temperaments. I have attempted to understand and explain these parents' experiences in the context of ecological environmental models, and temperament and object relations theories. I believe I have reached beneath the surface to examine complex processes between children, parents, and environments. This dissertation contributes to a body of knowledge that can increase conceptual understanding of how parents provide for their children in particular contexts. This dissertation also suggests a framework that can be used to assess parents' perceptions and actions across different contexts. I hope that this contribution adds to a growing collection of "unique recipes" for child-rearing that can enhance parents' capacities to meet the diverse needs of their children.

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## APPENDIX A

### Contact Letters for Study Participants

# RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY FOR PARENTS

***DO YOU HAVE A CHILD WHO IS MORE INTENSE, MORE ACTIVE, MORE EASILY FRUSTRATED, MORE SENSITIVE?***

***Please consider participating in a study about children's temperament. Family interviews and observation sessions will be scheduled at your convenience.***

To complete my doctoral program in Educational Psychology at the University of Washington I am conducting a study to learn more about the experience of parenting children who have more intense or difficult temperaments.

Temperament can be thought of as a style of behaving and interacting with the world. Research tells us that a child's temperament influences how that child responds to challenges in his or her environment and how adults respond to the child. We know less about parenting a child who has a more intense, spirited or difficult temperament. In this study I hope to learn more about the family experience of raising a more spirited child.

If you chose to participate in this study, you will be involved in approximately four interview sessions. During the interviews we will discuss your perceptions of your child's temperament, your ideas about the tasks of parenting, the resources you find helpful and your approaches to different challenges. I will also schedule sessions to observe parent child interactions during typical family activities such as meal or play time.

I hope your involvement in this study will be both enjoyable and lead to new insights about your child and parenting. In exchange for your participation, I will offer private consultations at the completion of the study to discuss any concerns or questions you may have about parenting your child. If you would like more information or are interested in being a part of this research project, please call Stephanie Sarantos at 525-0412.

## **RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY FOR FAMILIES WITH A SPIRITED CHILD**

Dear Parents,

I am a graduate student in Educational Psychology at the University of Washington. To complete my doctoral program I am conducting a study to learn more about the experience of parenting children who have more intense or difficult temperaments. Lee Mozena has been kind to share your name and address as a parent who recently attended a workshop on spirited children and may be interested in participating in a research project.

If you are raising a spirited child, you are probably keenly aware of your child's temperament. Temperament can be thought of as a style of behaving and interacting with the world. Research tells us that a child's temperament influences how that child responds to challenges in his or her environment and how adults respond to the child. Yet we know little about parent's experiences with children who have more intense temperaments. In this study I hope to learn more about the challenges of raising children with spirited or difficult temperaments.

If you participate in this study, you will be involved in approximately four interview sessions. During the interviews we will discuss your perceptions of your child's temperament, your ideas about the tasks of parenting, the resources you find helpful and your approaches to different challenges. Interview sessions will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient for you. I will also schedule sessions to observe parent child interactions during typical family activities such as meal or play time.

I hope your involvement in this study will be both enjoyable and lead to new insights about your child and your parenting. In exchange for your participation, I will offer private consultations to discuss any concerns or questions you may have about parenting your child.

If you would like more information or are interested in being a part of this research project, please call me at 525-0412. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Sarantos, RN, M.Ed.,  
Doctoral Candidate Educational Psychology  
University of Washington

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Form

#### UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98195

*College of Education  
Educational Psychology  
322 Miller Hall, DQ-12*

*(206) 543-1846  
Fax (206) 543-8439*

#### CONSENT FORM

#### PARENTING AND CHILD'S TEMPERAMENT STUDY

**INVESTIGATOR:** Stephanie Sarantos, Doctoral Student, Phone: 525-0412

The purpose of this study is to gain an increased understanding of parenting strategies for children with different temperaments. As parents you are aware of a wealth of information and different perspectives about how to raise children. In this study I am interested in learning about how you choose parenting strategies that work for your family. I have chosen to conduct this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree in education. Knowledge gained from this project will be of value to educators, health care professionals and parents.

As a participant in this study you will be involved in approximately four interview and observation sessions, each lasting one to two hours. The sessions will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient for your family. You should expect a time commitment of about six to eight hours over the course of four weeks.

The interviews will include questions about your family and your parenting such as: How would you describe your child? What outside resources influence your parenting? How do you handle conflicts with your child? What aspects of parenting do you find especially challenging? Observation sessions will focus on typical daily interactions. All sessions will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient for your family.

The sessions will be audio taped and recorded through written notes. The tapes will be used only by project staff, and will be destroyed 10 years after the completion of the project. You have the right to review the audio tapes; any portion of those tapes can be deleted at your request. You may also ask to turn off the tape recorder at any time.



## APPENDIX C:

### Study Protocol

**Session 1:** Session 1 consisted of individual interviews with the fathers and mothers. The focus was on information about parents' perceptions of their child, challenges they faced and the parents' recent histories and current careers.

**Session 2:** Session 2 involved joint interviews with fathers and mothers. Family genograms were completed with a focus on ways that family of origin experiences influenced parenting philosophies and practices.

**Session 3:** Observation session.

**Session 4:** Session 4 focused on parents' perspectives about specific challenges they faced with their child. Parents completed Behavioral Style Questionnaire (BSQ).

**Session 5:** Optional follow-up session. Parents had an opportunity to ask questions about the study and review the results of the BSQ.

## Interview Protocols

### Interview 1

The first interview was conducted separately for each parent. The following questions served to guide the content of each interview.

1. Give me a sense of what your child is like.
  - How would you describe \_\_\_\_\_?
  - What do you find unique about him?
  - What are his strengths?
  - What are his interests?
  - What do you find challenging about him?
  - How does he respond to change?
  - Does he follow a schedule? Regular naps, mealtimes?
  - How is he in social interactions? (shy, outgoing, reserved?)
  - What is his mood?
  - Is he impulsive? More thoughtful?
2. Describe your child as an infant. Have you noticed changes from how he was as a baby? Are there ways in which he is very similar to how he was as an infant?
3. What is your life like now? Are you working outside the home? What is your job? Your career? How old were you when you had children? How has your life changed since having children?
4. Tell me about your education or any plans for further education.
5. What kind of child care arrangements do you have? How much involvement does your partner have in child care?
6. Have you had other experiences with children, other than as a parent? Please describe them.
7. Do you care for children other than your own? Under what circumstances?
8. What would you say influences your parenting? Do you participate in any parent support or education groups? What kind of reading?

9. Do you have any strong memories from your own childhood that seem important in how your now parent?
10. Describe a typical day in your family. Are there things you try to accomplish with your child? Do you have a routine you follow? What do you especially enjoy? Are there parts of the day you especially dread? What is challenging?

Interview 2

Parents described their own family of origin experiences and their parenting philosophies and styles.

1. **Family Genogram**  
During the second interview session a genogram is completed of the current family and the family of origin. Information covered in the genogram includes: family structure, communication patterns, significant experiences, stressful experiences, feelings about family, impressions about parenting in family of origin, closeness or distance with family.
2. How would you describe your role or job as a parent? How would you describe your parenting style? What are your parenting goals—both in the short term and the long term?
3. What else is important to you as a parent?
4. What kind of rules or structures do you have in your family? Meal times, sleep, discipline techniques, limits? Overall, how do things go with your parenting? Are there differences between your two parenting styles?
5. When do you feel like a great parent?
6. When do you feel like things are not working as a parent?

Interview 3

During this joint interview, parents were asked to focus on specific concerns and challenges. We also discussed aspects of the observation sessions to confirm parents' perspectives on their child's behaviors. During this session we often discussed problems that were mentioned in early sessions, to hear how things had changed.

1. Are there any aspects of parenting that are especially challenging for you at this time?
2. Describe a recent conflict with your child. What happened? How did you feel about it? If you could relive that situation, would you change anything?
3. Do you have any questions about how to handle your children? Are you dissatisfied with any aspects of your parenting? Any problems or behavior patterns that keep happening over and over again?
4. How does your child respond to new situations? Do you have any routines or techniques to prepare your child to enter a new setting like a child care setting, class or doctor's appointment?
5. How do you handle aggression? Is that a problem for you?

### **The Behavioral Style Questionnaire**

The Behavioral Style Questionnaire is a standardized instrument developed by Sean C. McDevitt, Ph.D. and William B. Carey, M.D to assess temperament of 3-7 year old children. Copies of the questionnaire can be obtained from:

**Behavioral-Developmental Initiatives**

13802 North Scottsdale Road, Suite 104,

Scottsdale, AZ 85254

1-800-402-2313;

1-602-494-2688 fax;

<http://www.b-di.com>

## APPENDIX D

### Complete Coding Categories Coding Categories for Data Analysis

#### Theoretical Categories

The following categories were used during the final phases of coding and analysis. These categories were applied to passages that were already assigned one or many specific codes as a way to link the specific data to the theoretical questions of the study.

*Parenting sources:* Assigned to passages that identify factors that influence parenting. Parents may explain why they use a certain interaction or adopt a certain style. These passages tell why parents do what they do. Examples of parenting sources are: the child's temperament, family of origin influence, philosophy, ideas, situations and parent's needs.

*Temperament sources:* This code identifies passages that illustrate how parents come to form perceptions of their child's temperament. Examples include: compare to other children, relatives' views, experts' views and feelings.

*Interactions:* Passages that describe how the child's temperament, behavior, and/or parenting is influenced by different environments.

*Figure it out:* This applies to passages in which the parents describe their efforts to understand their child's behaviors and determine their response. Parents talk about what is happening with their child, how to

respond and what to do. As defined above under parenting, but may be applied over a longer passage, longer description, or situation.

*Family of origin influences:* More general code about family of origin. Refers to instances where the family of origin is an important factor in temperament judgments and parenting. It is closely related to the codes *parenting sources* and *temperament sources*.

*Control:* Refers to a parenting style based on efforts to control the ways children express their inner states. Contrasts with containment. Parents express an aim to help the child feel less intense and develop more control. Refers to an overall style or philosophy of parenting.

*Containment:* This term comes from object relations theories. It identifies a parenting style based on providing holding or space for children's emotional experiences and intensity. Parents provide physical and psychological space to allow the child to express feelings while providing safety and boundaries.

### Coding categories and specific codes.

#### About the Child

*Characteristics:* Parents' perceptions of their children's characteristics.

Descriptions of how the child is. These statements most often include adjectives as listed below. It can also respond to a characteristic way of responding, e.g. he just doesn't know when to stop. It is a descriptive statement about the child and about the parent's perceptions of the child's temperament. Many examples of the kinds of descriptions parents made of their children:

*affectionate*

*aggressive*

*ballistic*

*bright /intelligent*

*calm*

*cautious*

*curious: inquisitive*

*demanding*

*different*

*distractible/not distractible*

*dramatic: expressive*

*easily frustrated*

*emotional*

*enduring: some characteristic that the child has always or almost always had: always been like that, statements about how he was in infancy and is still like that now, see all the time.*

Characteristic present over different situations and across time.

*energy: activity level, goes and goes, drive.*

*enthusiastic*

*extreme*

*fascination*

*friendly*

*hyper*

*imaginative: creative*

*intense*

*introspective*

*leader*

*loud*

*out of control*

*outgoing*

*persistent*

*pleasant: happy, pleasant, sweet, kind, generous*

*positive: value about the characteristics*

*predictable: regular in internal rhythms, referring to physiological states like hunger and sleep and to moods*

*shy*

*strong: physical characteristics of strength, coordination, physical skills, tactile,*

*too much: too far, too strong*

*Abilities: skills*

*Behaviors: descriptions of actions, what happened. These can be about how the child acts and how adults act. These are statements that do not have value statements attached, just tell what happens.*

*Different: statements about how the child is different from others (that parents know or children described by books). Often referring to temperament: e.g. always been different, never that way; really something; unique.*

- Food/eating:** about meals, food habits, relationship of hunger to other experiences and behaviors.
- Health:** Descriptions of health conditions, concerns, history of health problems and issues. Includes illness and allergies.
- Hyper:** Statements that include this term—talking about this label and this characteristic.
- Infant:** descriptions of how the child was as a baby.
- Interests:** What child likes to do, activities and things that are of interest; statements about being interested in some kind of activity.
- Needs:** Statements of what child needs, what parents perceive as needs, or what child may identify.
- Nursing:** Breast feeding history.
- Problems:** Descriptions of behaviors and issues that were of concern to the parents.
- School:** Discussions about the child's preschool or school situation. What happens at school, the child's response to school, rules at school.
- Sleep:** Statements about sleep, good or poor sleeper, describing what the sleep pattern is like; referring to waking or nightmares; includes naps and night sleep.
- Social:** Referring to social style such as: likes people, likes to be alone, not want to be alone, outgoing. Referring to social interactions, how he relates to others. Friendly, or not friendly? How child is with other people.
- Strengths:** Statements about characteristics, interests, and activities that the parents identify as strengths.
- Tantrums:** referring to temper, tantrum behaviors, other behaviors that are acting out or expressions of frustrations and/or negativity.
- Tired:** Statements about how being tired influences behavior, expressions of feelings and coping.

### About the Parent.

- Education:** Parents education including history, present, and future plans.
- Experience with children:** Child care parents have done, experiences as a younger person, other experiences parents now have with other children.
- I am/I was:** Description of parent. Statements about how parents are or what they are like, descriptions of parents' personalities. The Parents' self descriptions of how they are as an adult or were as a child.
- My feelings:** Statements about how parents feel about experiences.

*My ideas:* Refers to the parents' opinions and views.

*My interests:* Discussions of what the parent likes to do, pastimes, activities and other areas of interest.

*Pregnancy/prenatal:* Description of pregnancy.

*Stress:* Used when the parents identify aspects of their life that are demanding, difficult or stressful.

*Career/Work:* Includes history of work experiences, thoughts about career or work status.

*Psychological State:* Descriptions about parents' own coping, struggles, what one is going through, issues, feelings, alcohol use, problems, and well being.

*Marriage:* Statements about the parents' marriage. Both historical facts and statements about how the marriage is doing. This can include problems in the marriage or wishes for the marriage or statements about the marriage relationship in relation to parenting.

### Process of Parenting

*Learning through children:* Parents talk about what and how they learn from their children.

*Future:* Talking about the future, how the child might be in the future, predictions about what the child needs for the future, questioning how things will be; statements about how present actions relate to the future, refers to long term future and short term future.

*Interventions* What parents do and say, strategies used, discipline; actions of caring for and managing the child. Includes a range from talking to spanking. Includes preventive measures such as avoiding certain situations and responses to transgressions. May or may not be punitive.

*Discipline*

*Spanking*

*Time out*

**Talking:** talking as a corrective or proactive measure, such as talking about some problem or some rule or some expectation; talking to prepare, give time warnings.

**Problems/challenges:** Talking about different issues that parents face with their child. Assigns a value judgment to behaviors.

**Rules:** Description and discussion of the rules, conventions and norms of the family.

**Skills:** This refers to abilities the parents may or may not have. Parents may say they need to be better at discipline, or they are pretty good at staying calm in the face of a problem.

**Consistent:** References to instances where there is consistency between parental actions and parenting style. This may refer to comparisons of mothers and fathers or the consistency of only one parent. Also include instances where there is not consistency.

**Expectations:** Parents ideas about what should happen or what is needed. Includes expectations about child behaviors, developmental norms, and the nature of child rearing.

**Guide:** encourage, stimulate, facilitate, promote.

**Change:** describing change in child, in parent, or in parenting approaches.

**View/Style:** beliefs, approaches, a more general way of being a parent.

**Routines:** Descriptions of activities that follow some sort of order, something that is generally consistent day by day, schedules. Includes information about these activities:

*Nap*

*Bed*

*Bath*

*Mealtimes*

**Lack of routine** Statements about not having routines, or not having some kinds of routines.

**Goals/Hopes/wishes/wants:** Statements about characteristics, skills, states of being—that parents want to see happen or want to see their child be like. Parents talk about what they are trying to accomplish in their

parenting with their children. Parents describe how they want child to grow up in a certain way.

*Self esteem/confidence:* Parents discuss these ideas in relation to parenting their child. Refers to supporting self esteem in child and not the parent's own feelings about confidence.

*Values:* Parents talk about what they believe in, principles they hold dear.

*Guns:* Talking about boys and guns. This code can also be used for other discussions of aggressive play and general discussions of the issue of exposure to violence.

*Fears:* Parents talk about what they fear.

*Communicate:* An activity that is not discipline oriented, but enjoyable, something we do together.

*Help:* A parenting action, such as helping a child to negotiate a social situation or control strong emotions.

*Teaching:* Refers to a parenting role and activity. Includes specific references to teaching a child about something like bugs or space, as well as defining the parental role as teaching about many things. Also refers to teaching about social skills or emotions.

*Foster:* Less direct than teaching. Refers to how parents support children to learn things on their own. An example would be fostering independence or the development of a moral sense. Related to teaching.

### Figuring it out

*Evaluating:* Discussing how something works (like an intervention). Discuss what 's good; bad about something; how to use a certain discipline method; parents assign a positive or negative judgment.

*Trade off:* weighing different actions and consequences against each other, talking about trade offs, discuss the positive and negative sides of situations. A way of making decisions; dialectic.

*Situations/incidents:* Passages that describe an event that happened.

*Age/stage:* Attribute behaviors to an age or stage of development. a kind of expectation.

*Dilemma:* Discussion of being stuck on or about something. Should do something, but can't . What's best versus what's possible. Sometimes refers to parent's desires versus how he is. There is no solution

*Explanations of inner world, includes what kids feel/think.* Parents' statements about what their child is experiencing inside.

*Explanations of why people do what they do:* Statements about what actions mean, or about why something happens, or why they do things that they do. Why parents and kids do what they do.

*Questioning:* not knowing what is happening, or whether something is the right choice/course; discussions where the parent is wondering about different things, or just doesn't seem to be able to figure it out. This is when parents are uncertain, do not know an answer

*Hard:* Describing how some things are really hard, attaches a weight or value to an experience.

*Easier:* Describes circumstances that make things go better, easier

*Compare:* Looking at differences and similarities between people, can be parents and children.

### Family of origin

*My experience: Memories:* Parents describe what happened when they were growing up, how that was for them.

*Location:* References to where family lives or lived during the parent's childhood.

*Style:* The general flavor of the family of origin. For example, a very warm family or our family was more distant.

*Abuse:* Reference to abusive relationships in the family of origin.

*Close/not close:* Parents describe the emotional tone of the family of origin. Related to the style.

**Grandparent:** Statements about the parent's parents—Involved/not involved.

**Do like parents:** Parents say they want to be a parent like the parents they had, or do something the way their parents did. For example, a reference to how one's own father spent a lot of time doing projects together and I want to do that as well. Or my father raised me to be independent and responsible, I hope I can do the same.

**Do different from parents:** Parents talk about how they do not want to raise their children in the same way that they were raised. For example remembering: my own parents were distant and I want to be a loving and involved parent.

**Relatives:** Information about relatives who may or may not be involved in the parents' or children's lives.

**Relatives' views:** Relatives' opinions of about the child or parenting.

**See in me:** describing characteristics that are in the parent and that the parent sees in their child; child is like me.

### Larger context

**Environment:** refers to how some aspect of the environment may effect the family or a member of the family. Describes the context that the child is in: settings, family, financial state. Factors that are outside of child's control but that effect him or her. Includes:

*family:* what the family is like, how many children, roles

*financial:* statements about financial state, how money may be limited

*social:* about different kinds of social situations, like an adult party, a playground, child care setting

*parent:* statements about the parent's state of being for example stressed versus rested

*situations*

*demands*

*culture*

**Demands:** things I have to do, especially things that are difficult to accomplish or feel stressful.

**Interactions:** How child's behavior is related to other things and people. Words like feeds off it, I know it is part me. Also can refer to how parent is effected by child. Includes interactions with:

*siblings*  
*parents*  
*environments*  
*sleep/rested*  
*state*  
*routine*  
*people: adults and children*

**TV.:** references to television and videos

**Resources:** Supports that the parent identifies as helpful and influential in their parenting. Can include:

*people/friends*  
*centers*  
*doctors*  
*teachers*  
*support groups*  
*religion/spirituality*  
*neighborhood*  
*classes*  
*magazines*  
*lack of*  
*intuition*

*books:* refers to any books that are helpful.

*temperament books:* special case when parents refer to a book about caring for spirited or difficult children.

**People's views:** These provide comparisons—ideas about how the child is relative to general expectations of other people.

**Expert's views:** Opinions of experts such as physicians, child care professionals, and therapists.

## Vita

Stephanie Sarantos

University of Washington

Doctor of Philosophy, College of Education, University of Washington,  
Seattle, Washington, 1997

Master of Education, College of Education, University of Washington,  
Seattle, Washington, 1988

BSN, University of Washington School of Nursing, Seattle,  
Washington, 1980

Stephanie Sarantos worked for eight years as a nurse caring for families and children with life-threatening illness. She has also studied and performed with a professional dance company and taught dance to children and their parents for over ten years. Her interests in children and families inspired her to pursue a graduate degree in Educational Psychology. Her studies have focused on child development; family coping; children and families with special needs; and social, ethical and political issues that influence the care of young children. She is the mother of two children, ages three and eight. Stephanie works as a founder and staff member of The Clearwater School.

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11748 Lakeside Avenue NE, Seattle, WA 98125.