

# Self-Affirmation and Parenting Programs

## Using Self-Affirmation to Buffer Threat of Engagement in Parenting Programs

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### Background

- Stigma, fear, judgement, and reluctance to signal deficiency are psychological barriers that interfere with engagement in parenting programs (Koerting et al., 2013, Mytton et al., 2014).
- Participation in parenting programs contributes to positive parenting practices, improved psychological well-being, and involvement with children's education that extends into later years (Dawson-McClure et al., 2015; Marcon, 1999; Puma et al., 2012; Webster-Stratton, 1998).
- Self-affirmation of core values can reduce defensive reactions to threatening information and lead to a more expansive view of self (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Yeager & Walton, 2011).
- Outcomes in domains as varied as education and health have shown favorable responsiveness to single-dose self-affirmations (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Ehret & Sherman, 2014; Yeager & Walton, 2011).

### Objectives

- To examine the feasibility of self-affirmation delivered via an online questionnaire platform to a general population of parents
- To examine the effect of self-affirmation in the context of engaging parents in a parenting program

### Contribution

- This is the first systematic examination of the use of self-affirmation designed to reduce psychological barriers that might interfere with parents' expressed interest in receiving parent education information or interest in attending parenting programs.

### Sample

- 290 U.S. mothers and fathers with at least one resident child under the age of 13 and household income ≤\$35,000
- Relationship to child: 73% mothers; 22% fathers
- Number of children: 47% have one child; 29% have two; 15% have three; 7% have four; 3% have five or more
- Race: 11.5% self-identified as Black; 78% White; 5% Asian; 3.5% Native American; 2.5% other
- Ethnicity: 12% self-identify as Hispanic or Latino; 16% identify their child has Hispanic or Latino
- Education: 5% less than high school; 32% high school graduates; 16% have a 2-year degree; 31% some college; 13% 4-year degree; 3% have a professional degree
- Employment: 17% are not working; not looking for work; 35% are not working, looking for work; 36% work full-time; 12% work part-time
- Primary language: 78% do not speak a language other than English at home; 17% do; 5% sometimes speak a language other than English at home

### Methods

- Eligible parents were recruited through PrimePanels. Individuals self-select into PrimePanels' market research platform, complete a profile of characteristics, and are matched with relevant studies.
- Participants completed a 15 minute online survey that included demographic and socioeconomic questions including age, child birthdates, race/ethnicity, marital and work status.
- A random half of participants were administered a series of reflective self-affirmations consistent with previous self-affirmation exercises where respondents rank values in order of importance to them and then engage in four written responses.

### Treatment

Below is a list of characteristics and values, some of which may be important to you, some of which may be unimportant.

Please **drag and drop** these values and qualities to rank them in order of their importance to you.

1 = most important item  
11 = least important item

- Relationships with friends/family
- Living life in the moment
- Artistic skills
- Sense of humor
- Social skills
- Athletics
- Musical ability
- Physical attractiveness
- Creativity
- Business/managerial skills
- Romantic values

In the following section, you will be asked to write about 3 different personal experiences related to your value of relationships with friends/family.

3x: EXPERIENCE 1: In 2-3 sentences, please describe a personal experience in which relationships with friends/family have been important to you and made you feel good about your self.

1x: Please select one of the experiences pertaining to your value of relationships with friends/family that you described above and write a short story (i.e., 5-6 sentences) describing in more detail the event and your feelings at the time.

### Outcome Measures

If your local community was offering a program addressing **How To Be A Better Parent...**

(0= Not Interested At All, 100 = Very Interested)

How interested would you be in LEARNING MORE ABOUT this program?

How interested would you be in ATTENDING this program?

If there was an app or website addressing **How To Be A Better Parent...**

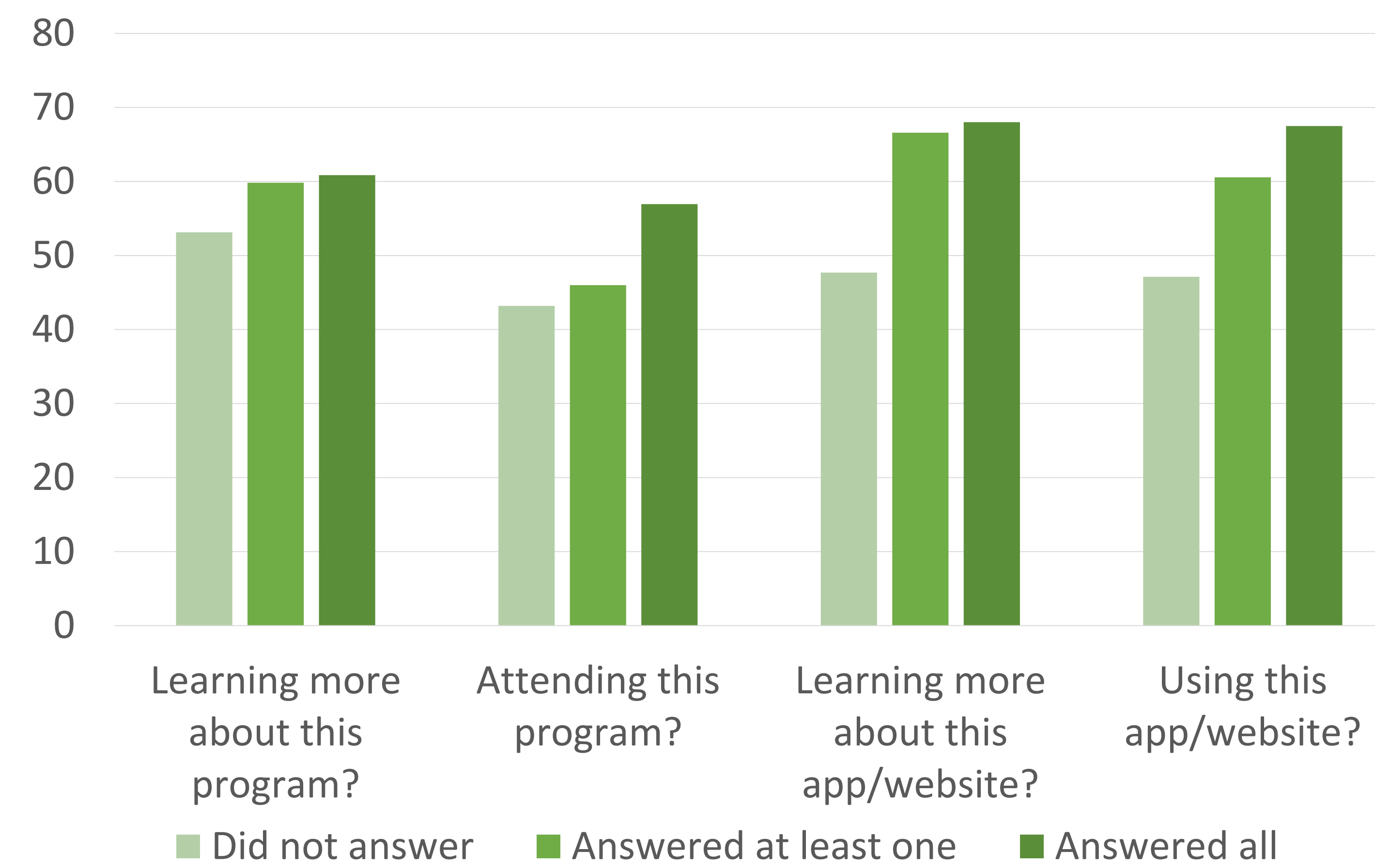
(0= Not Interested At All, 100 = Very Interested)

How interested would you be in LEARNING MORE ABOUT this app or website?

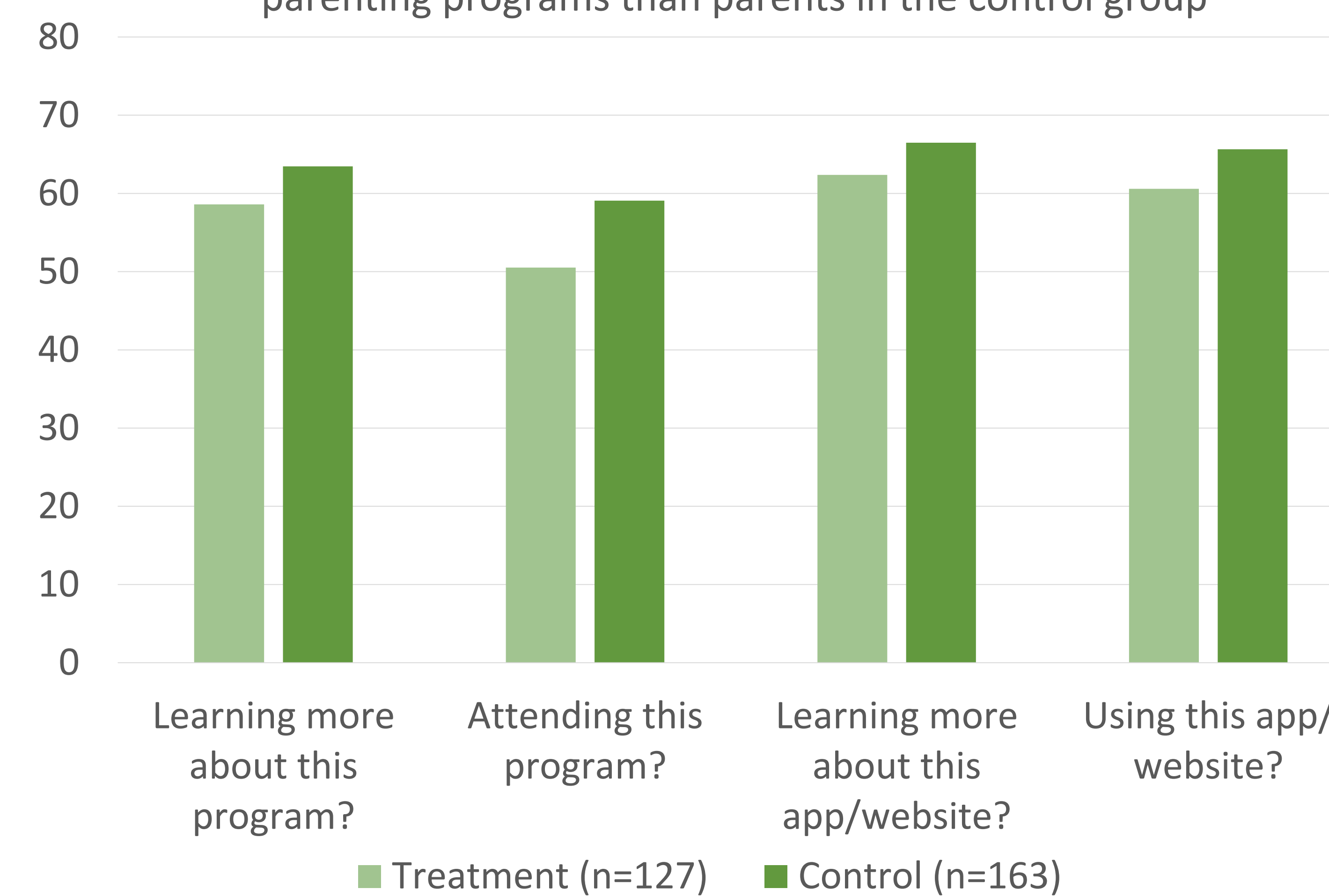
How interested would you be in USING this app or website?

### Results

Participants in the treatment group who completed all of the self-affirmation exercises were more likely to express interest in parenting programs, among n=127 in the treatment group



Parents in the experimental group who received the self-affirmation were no more likely to express interest in parenting programs than parents in the control group



- No impacts were found for the following examined subgroups: white vs. non-white, less than high schools vs. more than high school, working part-time or full-time vs. not working, mothers vs. fathers, respondent indicated that parents of children with developmental or behavioral challenges would benefit from a parenting program vs. did not indicate

### Conclusions

- The majority of respondents chose "relationships, family and friends" as their most important value or quality.
- Delivering self-affirmations through an online survey format is feasible, though quality and consistency in completing all self-affirmation tasks vary, with some respondents deciding to drop out.
- Descriptively, parents who completed all of the self-affirmation reflection items expressed higher levels of interest in parenting programs than those who did not complete all of the items.
- Parents in the self-affirmation treatment group did not statistically differ in their expressed interest in parenting education or parenting programs.
- Parents expressed statistically higher interest in learning more about, and using, an app/website parenting resource than attending an in-person program.

### Next Steps

- While our study shows that delivering a single dose self-affirmation to parents through an online survey platform is feasible, we plan to employ two different techniques to reduce differential attrition from the treatment group:
  - Employ a generic writing task for the control group so that the writing burden is similar across treatment and control participants.
  - Provide an extra financial incentive all written exercises.
- Most parents chose "relationships" as their most important value, which might carry over to the domain of parenting. Future work will present values that are external to the domain of focus.
- We will conduct further descriptive and experimental analyses for different subpopulations including by child age and birth order, parent work status, race/ethnicity, and perceptions of who benefits most from parenting programs.
- During the 2017-18 academic year, we aim to integrate self-affirmations to parents with children enrolled in NYC pre-K's who are eligible to participate in a parenting program.

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