Negotiating the Life Course

Measuring parental involvement in couple families in Australia: What is parental involvement and how should we measure it?

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Abstract

This paper reviews recent investigations into parental involvement. It explores factors that should be considered for measurement, including the measurement of father involvement. It is found that current directions of research on parenting focus on parental identity, division of labour and parenting styles. These directions in research are reviewed.

Introduction

Parental involvement is important for children, parents and society. Ongoing psychological and sociological research on parental involvement examines the impact of a particular measure or measures of involvement on a vast range of child progress indicators. These indicators are usually within the broad topics of child wellbeing, health, education and behaviour. A closer examination of this research shows that the concept of parental involvement has been used to investigate a seemingly endless stream of child outcomes. These topics encompass a diverse range, spanning sexual behaviour (Taris and Semin, 1988), sun-screen use (Donavan and Singh, 1999), behaviour problems (Gardner et al., 1999), educational attainment and achievement (McNeal, 1999; Steinberg et al., 1992), and alcohol and other drug use (Swadi, 1999) to present but a small sample.

As well as sociological investigations of parental involvement, there are attempts from researchers in the demographic field to quantify the extent of parenting. This research is typically based on population-level data, and is presented using many different indicators. The types of investigation range from examinations of the level of fertility to the proportion of households with children present, or to the proportion of people who never have children. More innovative research may examine the number of years people spend with a child in their household, or the time spent by children in households with two parents or a single parent. Due to the many different family types and theoretical perspectives, a range of methods is needed to provide a comprehensive picture of parenting in Australia today.

These different disciplinary interests provide the foundation for exploring parental involvement. But the question is, given these many disciplinary measures, how should parental involvement be quantified? The aim of this discussion paper is to overview the

measures of involvement that are employed in different disciplines of research, and to outline some methods would could be given consideration in research on parental involvement in Australia.

As introduced, the following sections discuss suitable methods for measuring 'parenting'. The first section, on quantitative measures, suggests that an examination of population-level data needs an analysis of cross-sectional measures that provide a descriptive analysis of parenting, and also cohort measures, which describe changes over the lifecourse and between generations. The second section, focussing on subjective measures of parenting, suggests that it is important to consider how people feel they are performing in parental roles, and the third section titled objective measures of parenting, defines what measures may be useful to determine what types of childrearing tasks people are involved in. Finally, the last section discusses the importance of investigating parenting styles when measuring parental involvement.

The discussion then is about determining the ways parenting can be measured in terms of who is parenting, how they feel they are parenting, and what it is that parents with child responsibilities are doing.

Obtaining information about what parents do

When investigating what parents do, there is a range of sources from which data may be collected. In order to assess parental involvement, you may want to ask the child, the parent, a teacher, a grandparent or a neighbour. Although each of these sources will be able to answer questions about the parent, it is important to determine who will provide the most meaningful information for the questions under investigation.

This is of primary concern to collectors of social data. It is important to collect data that represents what is being measured, and an essential component is gaining information from a reliable source.

Further, the research conducted in different disciplines measures parental involvement in various ways, which means different interviewees may be used. This section covers the people who may be interviewed about a person's parenting behaviours, critiquing past uses of respondent information, and determining the benefits and disadvantages of using one respondent over another to gain useful information on parenting.

Obtaining information from children

One source of information is the child of the parent, although getting information on parental involvement in this way is often done for the purpose of finding out information about the child itself.

In the psychological parental involvement literature the child of parents is quite often the source of information. In examining aggression in adolescents, Carlo, Raffaelli, Laible and Meyer (1999) used the adolescent's accounts of parental support and monitoring to explain adolescent physical aggression levels. So too, did Taris and Bok (1996) in investigating young people's psychological wellbeing. The researchers interviewed young adults aged 18–26 about their parents' behaviours prior to the interviewees' sixteenth birthday.

A considerable amount of research uses the child as the source of information. However as in these examples, often the child has at least reached the teenage years (see also Steinberg et al., 1992; Sputa and Paulson, 1995). This is not to suggest that younger children are not used as sources of information, but certainly the information collected may need to be gathered in different forms.

Quite often information is gathered by means of observations, or play-based activities. An example of play-based activities was research conducted by Funder who asked children to place figurines on boards to assess family situations and relationships (Funder, 1991). Cataldo and Geismar (1983) used drawings to supplement information given by questionnaire information. Drawings have also been used in Australia by Russell et al. (1999) to report on fatherhood as it is experienced by children. Although this method was used to get information from children, this project also elicited information from a range of other sources, such as the men themselves, professionals such as teachers and health-care providers, and also from the program providers of men's services (Russell et al., 1999).

This is not to say that younger children need to provide information in less conventional ways. Primary school children and adolescents were asked their views of their parents' behaviours in a study conducted in Victoria by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Amato, 1987). In that study, interviews with over 400 children provided a substantial amount of qualitative and quantitative information. Interviewers reported

that most of the younger children were co-operative and although close to one third had problems understanding some questions, these questions varied from child to child (Amato, 1987).

Obtaining information from the parents

The people most commonly used to collect information for investigating parental involvement are the parents themselves (for examples see Furstenburg, 1995; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995). Although children can provide information on their perceptions of what parents do—which may be an important component for analysing reasons for children's behaviour—more complex parental behaviours, attitudes, feelings or decisions may be difficult for children to interpret correctly. With regard to children's perceptions of parent's decision-making, Bryson suggests that children are unable to provide an accurate picture (Bryson, 1975:220–221).

Obtaining information from other sources

There are a number of other sources from which information on aspects of a parent's behaviour can be obtained. Among others, potential sources could be a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, a health worker, teacher, or other person who has contact with the person whose parenting skills are of interest. The problem with collecting information from these types of informants is that information may be piecemeal.

In order to gain more comprehensive information a multilevel approach to collecting information may be used, that is, a number of sources may be used for obtaining information. This approach has been used for a variety of reasons, often by those who are interested in improving service delivery for programs aimed at children and parents. In these cases, it is useful to collect information from a wide range of perspectives. Russell et al. (1999) obtained information from a large number of parties in order to determine how services should cater to men as fathers. Similarly, Grolnick et al. (1997) gained information from children, mothers, and teachers in order to find the best ways to involve parents in schooling.

It is also appropriate to interview a number of respondents where it is important to consider the interaction between children, parents, and professionals. In this way the needs of the different parties can be addressed.

Operationalising parental involvement

How to measure parental involvement in quantitative research has received substantial interest and critique in the last decade. There are several disciplinary influences which are conceptualising how to measure involvement, but there is no unifying perspective. Recently there has been much debate on measuring father (or paternal) involvement. Contemporary fatherhood literature, particularly from the US, has greatly influenced the use of new measures for conducting fatherhood research. The following reviews the recent directions of parental involvement research, with a view to determining what may be useful to understand in the Australian context.

Measuring parental involvement through quantitative analysis

Family demographers measure the prevalence of family types, and changes over time, and between, populations. They do not explicitly measure 'parenting', but many of the measures used are in fact proxy measures of just that. In the account of different family types there is an implicit measurement of who is a parent. In this way, we know the level of parenting in Australia, that is, what proportion of the population is a parent, what types of parent families they form, and the number and ages of the children.

Quantitatively, parenting can be measured in numerous ways. In the following discussion of the quantitative measures of parenting, both biological and social measures of parenting will be addressed. Some measures, such as the number of children ever born, will only be applicable to biological parents, whereas other measures, such as living arrangement will be applicable to biological and social parents.

Further, there are two important concepts in the analysis of family demography. These are analysis based on cross-sectional data and analysis based on cohort data. Cross-sectional analysis (or calendar year analysis) measures the experiences of all age groups in a given year. These data are useful for determining levels at a given time in a population, and can be used to compare between different time periods, and between populations. Cohort analysis (or life-cycle analysis) measures the experience of a given cohort over time. Although this analysis gives measures of actual experiences, a large amount of data is needed and, unless the cohort has completed the behaviour under examination, assumptions will need to be made to determine expected outcomes. The

family life-cycle methodology is attributed to Glick (1957) and a comprehensive overview of family life-cycle literature can be found in Young (1977).

Measuring biological reproduction (children ever born and total fertility rates)

The most obvious way of measuring parenting in a sample or population is to determine the proportion that have ever had a child. In reality, this is difficult to quantify, particularly for men.

Greene and Biddlecom (2000) in critiquing the research tools of the demographic trade suggested that male fertility has been largely avoided in demographic measurement. They suggest that as demography is concerned with accurate measurement, demographers have collected information from women, as they are most likely to remember reproductive events (Greene and Biddlecom, 2000:85). Greene and Biddlecom also note that it is difficult to collect reproductive information on men because men have longer reproductive spans, inaccurately report abortions, or may not even know about their paternity (2000:85–86). Additionally, Cherlin and Griffith (1998) suggest that men's reproductive careers have the potential to be more complex than women's; that men are more likely to have children with multiple partners than women; and that they may under-report children of previous relationships.

Fertility rates then, are normally collected from women. In Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) compiles information from census and birth-registration to present information on current and past fertility rates for women. These data will be used in the following ways to examine women's involvement in reproduction:

1. To provide an historical account of fertility levels in Australia using cross-sectional analyses;

2. To examine the number of children ever born to women by cohort; and

3. To examine changes in the timing of births.

These types of analysis can be supplemented by using survey data to examine men's reports of the number of children ever born, using survival analysis to determine the proportion who have never had children.

Social reproduction (co-residential parenting)

The main problem with the representation of parenting used above is that it does not include social parents. That is, it does not include people who step-parent, adopt or foster a child, or who live in a household with a partner's child.

One way to present information about people who are involved in the social reproduction of children is to analyse who lives with children. This is a measure of co-residential parenting, and has been used by many demographers (see for example Ravanera and Rajulton, 1998; Oláh et al., 1998). Note these parents are termed social parents in this paper, although there are a number of other terms, including those which encompass parents with no legal tie such as 'informal', 'pretend' and 'household' (see Oláh et al., 1998).

For the purpose of measuring social parenting, a cross-sectional analysis based on survey data can be used. Co-residential parenting defined in this way provides for comparison at a cross-sectional level, and may be useful for national data comparisons. However, it is not useful for describing a person's experience over his or her lifetime. In this way it is merely a discussion of who lives with children and what the situation is like in a population at the time measured.

Non-residential parenting

The use of the above measure should not suggest that people cannot effectively parent from a distance, or in fact, that they are not truly 'parenting'. However, the meaning of parenting surely does change when a parent no longer resides with the child. Among others, Furstenburg and Cherlin (1991) found that following divorce it is difficult for parents to 'co-parent', fathers see their children less and the contact is of lower quality. However, it is difficult and probably unfair, given the unequal playing field, to compare parents who live with their children to parents who do not. As Amato and Rivera note, 'Relations between children and non-resident fathers are sufficiently different to justify a separate review and analysis' (1999:376). This surely can be extended to all non-residential parents. In comparing what parents do, it is unreasonable to compare resident and non-resident parents; however, a percentage distribution of living arrangements of parents is useful to represent the situation in a population.

Other household measures of families

Many other quantitative measures based on household distributions provide a descriptive representation of the ways people are involved in parenting at the population level. These include percentage distribution of household sizes and members, mean size of households, median ages of parents, and the age composition of children at home.

Measuring parental involvement through a life-cycle approach

Except for the cohort measures of fertility experiences, the measures outlined above use cross-sectional data. Analyses such as a proportional distribution by family type, or measures of average sizes of households are of limited use. A more descriptive approach is to use a life-cycle or lifecourse approach (Glick, 1957). Hill and Rodgers (1964) describe the life cycle as one of moving from the family home to a partnership (marriage). This partnership extends to include new family members, then contracts and finally dissolves through the death of a spouse[1].

In order to determine what differences are evident between different cohorts of parents a life-cycle approach is an appropriate method to use. Demographers using a life-cycle approach can assess change over generations, and speculate on possible future experiences. Various measures may be available using a life-cycle approach. These include age at start and end of parenting for different cohorts; the amount of time lived with children co-resident by different cohorts; and, the proportion of parents who finish living with their children through residence changes by cohort. Demographers have continued to advance the uses of the life-cycle approach, with innovative examples such as that of Ravanera and Rajulton who have examined the lifecourse trajectories and timing of transitions among different cohorts of Canadian men (1998:2).

One problem with this method is that the cohorts who have finished living with their children will be older, hence the experiences of younger cohorts will be incomplete. The other issue is that complex information on respondents is needed. This includes dates of many lifecourse events. These are not usually available with regard to information on both respondent's and their children's life events.

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[1] For an overview of the changing models of the family life cycle see Carter and McGoldrick (1989).

Using cross-sectional and cohort data analysis

Cross-sectional and cohort data analyses provide different information for different purposes. Further, cross-sectional data are the most readily accessible data, while cohort data may be difficult to collect. For these reasons, it is important to include both cross-sectional and cohort styles of measuring quantitative parental involvement, that is, assessing current living experience and lived experience where possible.

Subjective measures of parental involvement

It has been determined in social research that the way people feel about themselves can impact on their behaviour. Measures of self-concept, self-worth, identification, and self-efficacy have all been used to investigate their relationship with behavioural outcomes. This is true of the relationship between parenting identification and childrearing behaviours. Baumrind (1993) suggests that the way parents perceive their effectiveness enhances their care-giving, and Swick and Broadway (1997) proposed that parental efficacy can be used to understand competent parenting. That is, 'efficacy is the synchrony between one's belief in their ability and one's real performance in relation to carrying out specific tasks required in a given life process' (Swick and Broadway, 1997:69). Self-image, locus of control, one's developmental status, and interpersonal support are all elements of parental efficacy. The purpose of using parental identity as a measure of parenting, is to determine how parents in Australia identify with parental roles, to investigate factors which may enhance or restrict perception of parenting identity, and to explore the relationship between identity and parenting behaviours.

In investigations of men's parenting roles, Marsiglio (1995) suggested that the application of father-role identities is useful for explaining differential participation of men in childrearing activities. In fact, much current research on father involvement investigates the impact of parental identification. Ihinger-Tallman et al. created a theoretical model of the paths through which paternal involvement in childrearing affect child wellbeing (1995:58). They hypothesised that men's identification with the parental role determines their involvement, which in turn influences child wellbeing. They also tested the relationship between identity and involvement with a group of non-resident fathers.

This direction of research, comparing identification with the parental role with men's involvement in childrearing, is influenced by the lack of understanding about why some men are more involved than others. However, identification with the parental role has also been used to investigate cultural variations in parenting behaviours (MacPhee et al., 1996) and the influences on maternal self-perceptions (MacPhee et al., 1986).

Measuring subjective responses to parenting

An instrument titled 'Self-Perceptions of the Parental Role Scale' (SPPR), which was developed by MacPhee, Benson and Bullock, has been used to measure identification with the parental role. The scale's development and psychometric measures are described in *Influences on Maternal Self-Perceptions* (MacPhee et al., 1986). The scale was originally tested on mothers with children aged less than four years, but has been used by the primary researcher in studies of parents with two to five year-olds (MacPhee et al., 1996), and by other researchers with different subjects, such as non-resident fathers of children aged eighteen and younger (Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995).

The SPPR is used to examine how parents feel they perform on four dimensions of the parental role, namely satisfaction, competence, investment and integration. The satisfaction dimension is a representation of whether respondents are satisfied as opposed to resentful or regretful about their parenting role, whilst the competence dimension, indicates perceived competence, or confidence in the parenting role. Investment is an indication of the importance of the parental role, and integration measures the integration of parent, spouse, career and friend roles (role salience) (MacPhee et al., 1986).

The SPPR is a self-completion scale and features paired statements with contrasting endpoints. The respondent decides which of the statements best describes them, and then answers whether that statement is sort of true for them, or really true for them. The researchers assert that the benefit of using this type of response option is that the choice of two statements suggests to the respondent that half the population are like one, while the other half are like the other (MacPhee et al., 1986:3). The respondent can then choose how much they are like one or the other, giving an increased range of scores (MacPhee et al., 1986:3).

Parenting identity is a new research direction in parenting research. Research that

utilises parental identity, could provide an overview of the parental identity of Australian parents, a topic which at this time has not been addressed in quantitative explorations of parenting in Australia.

Objective measures of parental involvement

This section briefly discusses the gendered division of labour, and the division of household labour. The gendered division of labour refers to men's involvement in the public sphere of paid employment, and women's involvement in the private sphere of unpaid household labour. This discussion merely provides a background as to who has the primary role of caring for children and maintaining a household. The division of household labour refers to tasks that are predominantly seen as men's jobs or women's jobs in the home. Throughout, terminology may refer to household labour or to domestic labour, which will be used interchangeably. The purpose of overviewing dominant roles of men and women is to determine ways of measuring responsibility for childrearing tasks and child-related household work.

A brief overview of the division of labour

The gendered division of labour that is evident in Australia today is a creation of very recent attitudes and developments. By the mid nineteenth century, considerable changes in attitudes towards working mothers had occurred (see Barrett and McIntosh, 1982; Gittins, 1985; Baxter, 1993). The shift reflected the ideals of family life. By this ideology, there was a division between men's and women's work, where 'men were defined as breadwinners and women as full-time mothers and home managers' (Baxter, 1993:24). Gittins further suggests that the shift was not just about family ideology, but gender ideology:

> It was not just a family ideology, but also a *gender* ideology, a careful and deliberate attempt to reorganise the relations between the sexes according to middle-class ways and values, and then defining the new division as 'natural', 'biological' and eternal.
>
> (Gittins, 1985:31)

Much scholarly research assumed the supposed 'natural' roles that are inherent in this model, that is, it is natural for a woman to do housework and to be a mother. This is evident in the work of the functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons (Parsons and Bales, 1955).

This division, with women involved in the private sphere of the home, and men in the public sphere of paid employment is known as the male breadwinner model of work and family life. Intrinsic to this model is the concept of the family wage, that is, a wage that is 'sufficient to support a husband, wife and three children' (Harvester case of 1907, cited in O'Donnell and Hall, 1988). For an overview of the family wage model see Zaretsky (1982). McDonald notes that this labour wage, known as the 'basic wage', was implemented in 1907 and remained intact until 1973 (McDonald, 1997:5).

The breadwinner model encapsulates a reproduction *versus* production view of what women and men do. However, the dichotomous nature of this model fails to encapsulate the many varied ways men and women have negotiated work and family life. Some have argued that this model needs to be broken down to better understand the processes men and women face. Gatens has argued against the dichotomy of the private and public spheres, emphasising that the family should be recognised as a social institution that is subject to regulatory constraints (Gatens, 1998:4). Further, the model fails to recognise household work as legitimate work. The importance of home production in a market economy has been contended (Brown, 1982), and yet it continues to be omitted from national accounts.

Due to changes in men's and women's involvement in both the home and in market work, the division of labour, supported by marketplace structure, can no longer be legitimized (Brown, 1982). It is a source of some confusion therefore that although women are actively involved in the labour force, and levels of education are increasing for younger cohorts of women that the responsibility for childrearing and household work predominantly remains a woman's domain (Hochschild, 1989).

Studies continue to find that women and men have different experiences of work and family life. This section evaluates the role of typically sociological measures of the household division of labour. Under examination are childrearing activities and child-related housework that may be useful in order to measure parental involvement.

An examination of the division of household labour

The organisation of domestic labour has been empirically examined. Australian studies examining the division of labour in the home show that women are responsible for a substantially greater share of household labour—including childrearing—than men

(Baxter, 1993). Further, there is consistent evidence that there is a definite gender difference in the types of housework performed (Baxter, 1993; Wolcott and Glezer, 1995).

'Indoor' work and 'Outdoor' work

The study of housework, and subsequently, the division of labour in the home, was barely investigated by sociologists until the 1960s. In 1974 Oakley wrote:

> The conventional sociological approach to housework could be termed 'sexist': it has treated housework merely as an aspect of the feminine role in the family—as a part of women's role in marriage, or as a dimension of child-rearing—not as a work role. The study of housework as *work* is a topic entirely missing from sociology.
>
> (Oakley, 1974a:2)

Oakley exposed the myths of the division of labour by sex, and motherhood (Oakley, 1974b). In her work in the early 1970s, reviewing the disciplinary perspectives of ethnology, anthropology and sociology with regard to the division of labour by sex, she overturned the 'natural' arguments used by many researchers regarding housework and childrearing. In the sociological field, the work of Talcott Parsons dominated the sociological theorising of the division of household labour and childrearing (Gilding, 1997). In terms of the sociological arguments used by Parsons and Bales (1955), there was an emphasis on the division of household labour based on biological grounds. This is firmly rejected in Oakley's work, which states:

> The sociological myth, like the ethological and anthropological ones, is underpinned by the assumption that biology necessarily determines the place of women in society—and thus, by derivation, the place of women in the family. Parsons 'presumes' that biology establishes primary and that social sex-roles are founded on this. …The myth is that *someone* has to take care of the children, and since fathers have to work, *mothers* must do the childrearing. …The truth of the matter is the reverse of the myth: *because* women take care of children men are free to be away from the home, involved in their employment work.
>
> (Oakley, 1974b:180)

The domestic division of labour by sex suggests that women are largely responsible for housework and childrearing tasks, whilst men are responsible for household maintenance type tasks. Other terms such as 'instrumental' and 'expressive', have been used to describe the work that men and women do (Zelditch, 1955). More recently, the

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division of household labour has been discussed in terms of 'inside' and 'outside' jobs (Baxter, 1993; Baxter, 1998). This division consists of men being largely responsible for 'outside' jobs such as taking out the rubbish, mowing the lawns, and driving the car when travelling with their partner, and women do more of the 'inside' jobs such as cleaning and vacuuming, doing the laundry and shopping for food. However, most sociological studies since the work of Oakley have not emphasised a biological basis for the division of domestic labour, recognising instead the gendered division of labour[1].

Determinants of the division of household labour

In investigating the division of labour in the home, Oakley theorised what might determine the husband's involvement in housework (Oakley, 1974a:137–61). She investigated the relationship between social class, and beliefs and attitudes toward male and female roles. Since that time, many reasons for the division of household labour and determinants of participation by men have been put forward.

The effects of many predictors on the responsibility for household labour have been investigated. Examples of relationships between household labour and variables such as marital status (South and Spitze, 1994; Blair, 1994; Denmark et al., 1985), education (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991), work hours (Presland and Antill, 1987), available time (Presser, 1994), work autonomy and supervision (Seccombe, 1986), and number of children (Kamo, 1991) abound.

Baxter suggests that much research is concentrated on the three areas of 'sex role attitudes, women's time spent in paid employment and economic power in the household' (Baxter. 1998:62). These predictors will be examined in greater detail in the chapter examining who does these types of jobs to determine an analytical model for investigating the objective measures of parenting.

How is the measurement of household labour related to measuring parental involvement?

Childrearing and household labour are inextricably linked. As is evident in the work of Oakley (1974a), and many other researchers since (e.g. Baxter, 1998), childrearing is

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[1] A more recent article refers to the division of labour as 'Sociocultural norms and structural constraints remain such that couples may continue to experience the transition to parenthood in deeply gendered ways, women continuing to have primary responsibility for home and children, men for earning income' (Sanchez and Thomson, 1997:748).

seen as part of household-based tasks. For example, Goldsheider and Waite discuss what they term the 'traditional division of labour' as such:

> In most families today, responsibility for various tasks is divided clearly by sex, with the wife responsible for most home-based tasks. She cares for the children, makes sure the house (and everything in it) is clean, sees that the family is fed, and maintains contact with most of their friends and relatives (di Leonardo, 1987, Robinson, 1988). The husband's major contribution to the family economy is to support it through his waged labor. In some families, he may, in addition, make household repairs, maintain the car, take care of the yard, do the paperwork, and take out the trash.
>
> (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991:110)

In this passage, it is clear that when considering the division of household labour in households where children are present, it is impossible to look at housework without examining child-based tasks and vice versa. For this reason, childrearing, childcare and other household tasks will all be investigated.

The measurement of household tasks

In the analyses above, there is a broad discussion of the division of household labour, but little mention of the actual tasks that are examined. The following describes what is measured in accounts of the division of household labour, and how it is being measured.

The measurement of common household tasks

There is a wide range of tasks that have been measured in analyses of the division of household labour. A seemingly endless number of tasks can be assessed with regard to household maintenance. These include daily tasks such as dishwashing, cooking, cleaning, caring for children, to less frequent tasks such as taking out the garbage, vacuuming, ironing, to irregular tasks such as paperwork, or weeding the garden. Of course, there is variation in how frequently these tasks are reported, which will depend on the respondent's own personal situation.

While early studies asked broad questions about 'housework' or 'childcare' participation (Oakley, 1974a), research on the division of household labour since then, has investigated the separate tasks involved. This is evident in surveys today. In the US, the *National Longitudinal Studies of Young Men, Young Women, and Mature Women* included questions on 'cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare, dishes, yard work, grocery

shopping, and paperwork' (as reported in Goldscheider and Waite, 1991). In Australia, the *Negotiating the Life Course Survey 1997 (NLC)*, asked 17 separate questions about household labour.

The benefit of using separate questions is that investigations can determine the way individual tasks are divided up, and investigate why. As Goldscheider and Waite note:

> how they in fact divide up these responsibilities, then, reflects what mix of tasks and responsibilities fits their needs best, balancing in some fashion their joint and personal preferences, their ideas of equity and social appropriateness, as well as their skills and the need to get the work done.
>
> (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991:113)

Further, these tasks can be grouped based on the underlying correlations between them, that is, the similar patterns of particular types of tasks. This means that certain tasks may represent a dimension of housework, while other tasks represent another dimension of housework.

The measurement of childcare and childrearing tasks

Goldscheider and Waite report that the task that is most shared by husbands is parenthood, that is, the caring of children (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991:113). This broad category certainly has a wide and varied number of tasks associated with it—some of which are associated with the caring of children, and some of which are associated with the rearing of children—but the differentiation between the two is a difficult one to make. For the purposes of this investigation, all parental involvement activities will be discussed together.

The nature of household tasks is somewhat different when there are children present in a household. There are additional tasks that are solely related to children, and tasks that may become more or less important with children present. This section determines what day-to-day tasks are important in assessing involvement in childrearing. It is not an effort to determine what behaviours are important socially or developmentally.

Like the tasks used to measure the division of household labour, there are many tasks which are related to childrearing. Kalmijn measured parents' involvement with a set of fourteen questions, which he then reduced to scales to measure father involvement (Kalmijn, 1999:414–15). The questions covered four broad topics. These were: physical

care (such as changing diapers (nappies), washing and bathing, taking child to doctor, staying home with sick child); school-related activities (talking to school teachers, participating in school-related activities); leisure activities (buying presents for child's birthday, going on outings with child; and, talking with the child (about cleaning room, manners, bedtimes, school).

How should these tasks be measured?

In measuring what men and women do in the home, there are two main ways of collecting data: (1) by determining how the division is shared, that is, how it is divided; and (2) by analysing the amount of time spent on tasks.

Goldscheider and Waite suggest that if the interest is on how the labour is shared, then the information required is about who does what proportion. They argue that gathering information on the time spent on a task by a respondent does not tell you how much is done by other people (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991:111–12). Although time-use data may be useful at the population level to compare how much time women and men spend on various tasks, and how that changes over time, it may be difficult to reconcile at the couple level.

The debate over the advantages and disadvantages of time-use data is complicated. One of the main difficulties when using reports of time-use data is the inconsistency between couple reports. It has been argued in scale-based studies of who does more, that there is general agreement in spouses' reports (Berk and Shih, 1980), with Ross and Mirowsky (1984) finding that there was greater correlation on the objective measure of housework, than decision making which is a more subjective measure. In comparison Winkler (2000), using time-report data, found that spouse's reports differ significantly from respondent's reports.

Some reports have shown that irrespective of the measurement, whether it be time-use or survey method, that reports are similar at the aggregate level (Gershuny et al., 1994). Others like Winkler (2000) have criticised that approach. She notes that other research has not found differences between reports, but criticised the use of aggregate findings to measure involvement. One method to avoid differences between spousal reports has been to only use the self-reports of respondents, not reports of partner's involvement.

The limitations of self-report and spousal report can be minimised by the use of time

diaries. However, data would need to be collected from both partners which is an immense commitment to expect from one household.

Documenting men's involvement in childrearing — criticisms and directions

It has been widely found that what men do as fathers is different to what women do as mothers (see Marsiglio, 1995:7). Men are much more likely to be involved in play-based activities, reading to children, and spending time on leisure with children. Edgar notes that play is men's doorway to children (Edgar, 1997:262). To get an accurate description then of men's roles, these activities must be investigated.

Marsiglio, et al. (1998) in a working group report on conceptualising male parenting ask the question 'What dimensions or domains define the core and ancillary aspects to men's roles as fathers?' They found that defining paternal involvement was a difficult task:

> Efforts to develop a theoretically meaningful and tidy categorization scheme for the varied forms of paternal involvement is fraught with difficulties. Fathers' assorted forms of involvement can be grouped together in various ways.
>
> (Marsiglio et al., 1998)

They documented: nurturance and provision of care; moral and ethical guidance; emotional, practical, and psychosocial support of female partners; and, economic provisioning, or breadwinning as the four key themes associated with paternal involvement (Marsiglio et al., 1998).

Other investigators of men's parental involvement have noted methodological issues of measurement. Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) suggest that to get a more accurate picture of what men do, a separation of tasks by housework and child-based tasks is needed, as men are more likely to be involved in child-based activities. Lamb, et al. (1987), who proposed a three-part model of paternal involvement, suggest that important components are interaction, availability, and responsibility (see also McBride and Rane, 1998). The importance of interaction is further highlighted by Edgar (1997), who notes that the investigation of leisure time and play-based interaction is important when researching what men do as fathers. This includes determining whether men watch television, eat meals, and generally spend time with children (Edgar, 1997:268).

In an effort to more accurately quantify men's involvement in childrearing, a wide range of parental activities are examined. These include household jobs and childrearing tasks as noted previously. These tasks should not necessarily be analysed together, but as separate dimensions of parental involvement.

Parenting styles as measures of parental involvement

Paul Amato (1998; Amato and Rivera, 1999) has argued that one of the most important measures of parenting is the extent to which parents engage in authoritative parenting styles. Parenting styles as developed by Diana Baumrind (1966; 1968; 1971) have been used extensively in psychological research. This research indicates that there are three main factors or styles involved in parenting, or as Darling and Steinberg (1993) note, the underlying styles that a parent holds. These styles are known as authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting.

Dimensions of these parenting styles are able to be quantified using scales derived and tested by developmental psychologists. In the 1960s, Baumrind identified the three major patterns of parental authority or control, which are now known as parenting styles. These styles have distinct childrearing behaviours, which are associated with child outcomes.

A two-dimensional framework?

More recent conceptualisations of parenting styles suggest that there are two orthogonal dimensions of parenting styles. These are *responsiveness* and *demandingness*, and when different levels of both are combined they reflect parenting style typologies (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). This approach is reflected in Baumrind's later work. In Baumrind's words, the control enacted by the authoritative parent is highly demanding, but also highly responsive (1993:1308). By this she means that authoritative parents require that their child becomes integrated with the family, and that the parents are responsive to the child's needs (Baumrind, 1993:1308).

Maccoby and Martin (1983) in investigating the dimensions of parenting behaviour noted a fourth parenting style which reflects low levels of demandingness and responsiveness. This parenting style is generally termed the neglectful or indifferent-uninvolved pattern (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Some researchers have not found the

neglectful dimension in their samples (Robinson et al., 1995; Brenner and Fox, 1999), which is probably due to recruitment of samples (Brenner and Fox, 1999).

Many authors have simply used a two-dimensional approach which characterises authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles (Kochanska et al., 1989).

A description of the three major parenting styles

The following outlines the main behaviours that Baumrind originally conceptualised as characteristic of the different parenting styles, together with the interpretation of subsequent researchers.

Authoritative parenting style

> Parents of the children who were the most self-reliant, self-controlled, explorative, and content were themselves controlling and demanding; but they were also warm, rational, and receptive to the child's communication. This unique combination of high control and positive encouragement of the child's autonomous and independent strivings was called authoritative parental behavior.
>
> (summary by Baumrind, 1971:1–2)

Baumrind, in her work on child development, was the first to define the concept of control as 'parents' attempts to integrate the child into the family and society by demanding behavioral compliance' (Darling and Steinberg, 1993:489, see also Baumrind, 1978). Authoritative parents use styles such as communication and nurturance, whilst exerting firm control.

It is widely believed by development psychologists that young children need rules to learn the components of socialization (Baumrind, 1978:182). This theme is familiar of Piaget who found that the relations between parents and children include 'spontaneous mutual affection, which from the first prompts the child to acts of generosity and even of self-sacrifice, to very touching demonstrations which are in no way prescribed' (Piaget, 1965:193).

It has been widely found that the styles used by authoritative parents are believed to be appropriate to provide these socialisation tasks to young children (Gray and Steinberg, 1999).

Authoritarian parenting style

> Parents of child who, relative to the others, were discontent, withdrawn, and distrustful, were themselves detached and controlling, and somewhat less warm than other parents. These were called authoritarian parents.
>
> (summary by Baumrind, 1971:2)

Authoritarian parents demand obedience from their children. The authoritarian style uses punishment and forceful measures to regulate child behaviour.

The type of controls that authoritarian parenting styles provide are not conducive to children's psychological development. Authoriarian parenting styles tend to have higher components of restrictiveness and hostility than other parenting styles. This type of parenting style is related to fearful, dependent, and submissive behaviours in children, and may affect motivation (Becker, 1964).

Permissive parenting style

> Parents of the least self-reliant, explorative, and self-controlled children were themselves noncontrolling, nondemanding, and relatively warm. These were called permissive parents.
>
> (summary by Baumrind, 1971:2)

Permissive parenting encapsulates the same ideas that are evident in the laissez-faire management style. Parents who use a permissive parenting style allow the child to make decisions for itself and regulate its own behaviour. The parent provides explanations and information to the child so that the child has a framework from which to base decisions.

The main problem with permissive parenting styles is that the self-determination methods used are not suitable for young children (under age seven) according to some social and developmental psychologists (see also Baumrind, 1968; Baumrind, 1978:185). Children at that age, coined by developmental psychologists as children at the pre-operational level, have limited ability for self-determination (Baumrind, 1978:185).

Sub-styles

Whether a three-dimensional or two-dimensional conceptualisation is used, there are sub-styles evident. Using the three-dimension model, the sub-styles that have been tested and extracted in analysis reflect different constructs within each global dimension (typology).

Robinson, et al. (1995) empirically tested a parenting questionnaire to determine the major dimensions, and the sub-factors. The questionnaire had 133 items, 53 original ones and 80 from a *Child-Rearing Practices Report* developed by Block in 1965. In extracting three dimensions that correspond to Baumrind's model, Robinson et al. (1995) reduced the questions to a 62-item questionnaire. Within this 62-item questionnaire the authors were able to determine sub-styles which were dimensions of the larger typology constructs.

The sub-styles (or factors) were labelled to reflect the content of each construct. The authors found four factors that represented dimensions of the authoritative parenting typology, four factors that represented dimensions of the authoritarian parenting typology, and three factors that represented dimensions of the permissive parenting typology (Robinson et al., 1995).

The authoritative factors were titled 'Warmth and Involvement', 'Reasoning/Induction', 'Democratic Participation', and 'Good Natured/Easy Going'. The authoritarian factors were labelled 'Verbal Hostility', 'Corporal Punishment', 'Nonreasoning, Punitive Strategies', and 'Directiveness'. The three permissive factors were called 'Lack of Follow Through', 'Ignoring Misbehavior', and 'Self-confidence'.

The questionnaire developed by Robinson et al. (1995) has been used in studies of Australian parents. Russell, et al. (1998) used the questionnaire to examine sex differences in parenting styles. They found approximately the same factors within the three main parenting style patterns, although there were some differences. An additional factor called 'Short Fuse', representing a dimension of authoritarian parenting was found, and only two permissive factors were extracted. It appears that this conceptualisation of parenting styles is appropriate for use in Australian samples.

Measuring parenting styles

In using a survey to attain information on parenting style, a parenting styles scale is required. The purpose of using a parenting styles scale is to assess whether parents use parenting styles that are typically authoritative, authoritarian or permissive and to indicate the use of particular sub- styles within these major dimensions.

Issues in research on parenting styles

As noted, Amato suggested that authoritative parenting is an important dimension of parental involvement:

> Authoritative parents provide a high level of support to their children, as reflected in warmth, responsiveness, everyday assistance, and instruction. (and) These behaviours facilitate children's development by conveying a basic sense of trust and security, reinforcing self-concepts of worth and competence, and promoting the learning of practical skills
>
> (Amato, 1998:2)

These effects of parenting style on the socialisation process noted by Amato (1998) are consistently found in research using white middle-class United States populations (Baumrind, 1993:1302; Darling and Steinberg, 1993:487). It has been noted that the attitudes associated with the dominant factors are cultural and that people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds may not value the same styles (Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Jambunathan et al., 2000). This suggests that, although the parenting scale has been used in an Australian sample (Russell et al., 1998) and is used in cross-national research by that research team, it may be culturally specific.

Another criticism on the use of parenting styles was addressed by Darling and Steinberg (1993). They question why little is known about how parenting style influences child development, or why little is known about why different parents use different parenting styles. Further, they suggest that there are many factors that may determine parenting styles, but they are not usually investigated (Darling and Steinberg, 1993:494–95). However it is suggested that one predictor, sex of the parent, is being more widely considered in recent psychological literature (Russell et al., 1998:89).

Any investigation of parenting styles in Australian parental research should be aware of potential cultural issues.

Measuring parental involvement: an overview

Four distinct methods of examining parental involvement have been outlined in this discussion paper. The purpose of using these varying methods in parenting research in Australia would be to give a comprehensive picture of the ways men and women are involved in the social reproduction of children in Australia today.

Demographic information provides a picture of who are parents in Australia, and how parenting trends have changed over time. Subjective measures of parenting indicates how people feel they are performing in their parenting roles, while the objective measures will document what they are doing. Finally, the styles people use to parent is a further point for investigation, as this measurement of parental involvement is an important predictor of child development.

*This background paper has been used to assist in the development of a survey of parents, the **Parenting Survey 1999**. Parents from the Negotiating the Life Course survey were asked to participate in this survey. Copies of the survey instrument are available from the author on request.*

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