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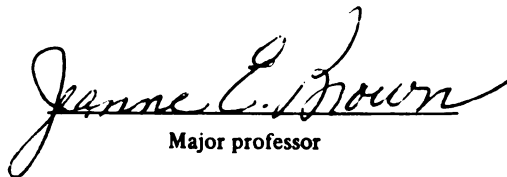
MOTHERS' AND FATHERS' IMAGES  
OF THEIR CHANGING PARENT ROLE:  
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

presented by

Elizabeth Ellen Grupe

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

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**MOTHERS' AND FATHERS' IMAGES  
OF THEIR CHANGING PARENT ROLE:  
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

By

Elizabeth Ellen Grupe

A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
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## ABSTRACT

### MOTHERS' AND FATHERS' IMAGES OF THEIR CHANGING PARENT ROLE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

By

Elizabeth Ellen Grupe

Parenting literature has focused on the transition to parenthood and child-rearing attitudes. Recent research includes psychological factors such as concepts of parent development and parents' perceptions of parenting. Images created by parents are mental representations and goals held about their parenting. The purpose of this research was to explore changes in parental images over time. Six mother-father dyads were randomly selected and interviewed using a researcher designed open ended questionnaire to obtain past, present and future images of parenting. Results indicated that images develop early, influenced by one's parents. Images incorporating the purpose of parenting are congruent, whereas images of how to parent show dissonance over time. Images change over time from past ideals to realistic to future ideals. A conceptual model was designed to visualize factors which influence and are influenced by parenting. Possible implications for parent education and implications from parental expectations for children are discussed.

*Dedicated to*

my family because their love  
and belief in me  
makes anything possible

Mom and Daddy  
for their lifetime of love and faith  
Susan and John  
for all their support and late night phone calls  
Gramma and GP  
for their encouragement  
Grams and Grampy  
for their eternal gift of love

and especially  
Randy  
for his patience and love  
so that my dream could come true

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Parenthood and parenting have become widely studied as the American family system moves and changes. The impact of the family system and the parent dyad on the child encompasses many aspects of development: social, cognitive, physical, and emotional (Lawton & Coleman, 1983; Miller, 1988). Viewing the family as a system through systems theory acknowledges that these influences are complex and that there are many variables which affect the parents, the child, and any interactions between them (Belsky, 1984; Salzinger, Antrobus & Glick, 1980).

Research has focused on variables of parenting such as transitions to parenthood (Hobbs & Cole, 1976; Rossi, 1968; Russell, 1974), parental beliefs (Goodnow, 1988; Holden & Edwards, 1989; Miller, 1988) and how beliefs relate to parenting behaviors (Lawton & Coleman, 1983; Miller, 1988). Previous research found that psychological and social factors of the parents are highlighted through their attitudes toward child rearing practices (parenting) (Belsky, 1984; Frank, Hole, Jacobson, Justkowski & Huyck, 1986; Galinsky, 1987; Lawton & Coleman, 1983).

The majority of studies on parents and parenting have focused on variables of child rearing practices, not variables related to parents. Recent research has included interest in the psychological processes and functioning of parents. These psychological factors have included feelings of confidence, control and gratification (Frank, Hole, Jacobson, Justkowski & Huyck, 1986), parents' perceptions of parenting (Lawton & Coleman, 1983) and the concept of parent growth and development (Galinsky, 1987). Research on parental images and ideas is very limited. Such research goes beyond parents' beliefs and focuses on their thoughts and expectations about themselves and their parenting role. Parental images are the mental representations parents have of themselves, their child and child-rearing issues (Galinsky, 1987).

The purpose of this research was to explore changes in parental images over time. Specifically, this study investigated the past, present and future images of parents of preschool children. An open-ended interview was used in this study. This technique enables professionals to work and communicate more effectively with the families they support. Results from this research will enable parent educators and professionals working with families to increase their knowledge of parents and the parents' ideas of their own parenting.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous research has investigated a variety of topics on parents and parenting. Traditionally, research on parents surveyed only women and the term "parent" was operationalized to mean "mother." In the past ten years, studies which include fathers have broadened parenting research. Parents have been studied in all phases of their parenting, from their entrance into the parent role to parenting grown children. Recently, research has begun to explore parents' thoughts and not just their actions.

The following review will highlight studies which focused on the transition to parenthood, the ideas and images of parents, and their expectations and aspirations. The discussion will conclude with a look at parent development models.

#### Parenthood: Transitions and Consequences

Adopting new social roles is an intrinsic part of human life. The process of incorporating new identities and assuming related social duties continues throughout our lives. Although no longer considered a crisis, becoming a parent has

been cited as a difficult and stressful role change adjustment (Boger, Richter & Weatherston, 1983; Hobbs & Cole, 1976; McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Newberger, 1980; Rossi, 1968; Russell, 1974). The impact of the parent role on new parents has been studied as a transition (Hobbs & Cole, 1976; Rossi, 1968; Russell, 1974). For example, some research suggests that this altered self identity has psychological consequences (Frank, Hole, Jacobson, Justkowski & Huych, 1986; Heath, 1976; McLanahan & Adams, 1987). Other research implies that women have more difficulty than men adapting to parenthood (Frank et al., 1986; Hobbs & Cole, 1976; McLanahan & Adams, 1987) due to role changes. Some studies have focused directly on fathers to discover their role changes and feelings of competence during the transition to parenthood (Cordell, Parke & Sawin, 1980; Heath, 1976).

Early research on parenthood found that becoming a parent created strain on the partner dyad. The addition of a child to the system causes a structural reorganization of the family system and was termed a "crisis" (Russell, 1974). This change does not contain only negative stressors as is indicated by the use of the term crisis (Hobbs & Cole, 1976). Current research has shifted from identifying parenthood as a crisis to understanding the transition issues of becoming a parent in the United States.

This transition to parenthood requires adjustment to new role requirements as well as changes in old roles (Boger, et al., 1983). Rossi (1968) believes "crisis" to be a misnomer

in this situation. Parenthood and its role changes can be seen as "successful and unsuccessful role transitions or positive and negative impact of parenthood" (p. 29). Success, however, is not well defined by Rossi (1968). Rossi reviewed cultural values as influential in the transition to parenthood, such as gender specific role expectations and the physical distance of relatives. Reviewers McLanahan & Adams (1987) describe societal changes since the 1950s which have affected becoming a parent in the United States, such as women in the labor force, increased marital stability and the decline of parenthood as a social identity.

For Rossi (1968), insufficient emphasis was given to positive components, resulting in too much research accentuating the negatives of becoming a parent. In research by Russell (1974) and Hobbs and Cole (1976), both replications of an earlier study by Hobbs, findings showed that the impact of parenthood was not crisis oriented. Using checklists assessing new parents' feelings and attitudes regarding their recently acquired role, the majority of intact dyads were categorized as having "none/slight" (Hobbs & Cole, 1976) to "moderate" crisis (Russell, 1974). Hobbs and Cole compared their data to the earlier 1965 Hobbs study consistently finding small amounts of transition difficulty reported by parents. The rewards and gratifications of the first year of parenthood were included in Russell's (1974) study, also providing no support for the view that a child negatively disrupts an intact, satisfied parent dyad.

Having children and becoming a parent is a procreative social responsibility which McLanahan and Adams (1976) believe should rank parenthood as a highly valued social position. Yet, the parent role and parenting experience result in dramatic changes easily associated with the "crisis" view unless seen as part of a "normal" role transition process. Gratifications (Frank, et al., 1986; Russell, 1974), satisfactions and advantages (Hoffman, Thornton & Manis, 1978), and enjoyment (Frank, et al., 1986) of parenthood and children combined with adjustments and distresses (Hobbs & Cole, 1976; McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Russell, 1974) give a more global view of the role and position of parenthood. Boger, Richter and Weatherston (1983) believe that new parents require support and information to counteract the rapid changes and adjustments of becoming a parent. Thus, parenthood is a social process of learning and integrating, especially during the transition phase.

A synthesis of the above research suggests a picture of parenthood where transition may be difficult. However, the rewards perceived by the parents can reduce the possibility of negative reactions to parenthood. Children are valued because they provide love, affection and are fun to be with (Hoffman, et al., 1978). Parenthood provides satisfaction for the needs of love and stimulation while being gratifying for the fulfillment of those same needs (Russell, 1974). Changes resulting from parenthood are: increased financial concerns, emotional changes, changes in daily routines, and the new

mothers' concern about her appearance (Hobbs & Cole, 1976; McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Russell, 1974). Hobbs and Cole, like Russell, report that marital satisfaction tended to stay the same or improve slightly after the birth of a first child. Better relationships between spouses (Frank, et al., 1986) and planned pregnancies (Russell, 1974) appear to help with positive attitudes and feelings toward parenting.

In contrast, however, McLanahan & Adams (1987) cite findings of decreased marital and life satisfaction, increased feelings of worry and unhappiness as well as greater financial strain in parents with children at home. Findings from different studies may show disparate results since the studies did not select parents with the same aged children. Transition into parenthood carries with it a powerful societal value, expected personal gratifications, plus challenging changes and adjustments in many phases of a new parent's life.

Women have been singled out of the parenting dyad as having more difficulty with the transition and changes inherent in the parental role. While some of their concerns about money and emotional adjustments are ranked the same as fathers' concerns, mothers' mean crisis scores and overall difficulty levels were higher (Hobbs & Cole, 1976; Russell, 1974). Negative effects of parenthood are revealed more often in mothers as decreased self-esteem and worth (McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Rossi, 1968), less perceived confidence for coping with the demands of parenting (Frank, et al., 1986), less subjective satisfaction with their lives (McLanahan &

Adams, 1987), and more personal/emotional concerns (Russell, 1974).

These issues have been hypothesized to be related to strains in accommodating additional roles (McLanahan & Adams, 1987), the social pressures of motherhood responsibilities (McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Rossi, 1968), and women's greater self-gratifications (opposed to child-focused gratifications) from parenthood (Frank, et al., 1986), as well as the tendency for females to acknowledge emotional and psychological factors more frequently than men (Russell, 1974). Traditional roles for mothers are still the expected norm, yet many women must now adjust to the competing roles of mother and laborer. The addition of role identities, responsibilities and societal norms appear to be difficult systemic influences on a woman's transition to parenthood.

Research on parenthood originally focused solely on mothers with little or no mention of fathers (Heath, 1976; Intons-Peterson, 1985). Recently, investigations into fatherhood have been important contributions to the body of knowledge on parents. Men's roles, like women's roles, have been changing in our society and fathers' involvement with childcare, child-rearing, and domestic responsibilities is slowly increasing (McLanahan & Adams, 1987). With these changing identities in mind, researchers are examining the male transitions to parenthood (Cordell, Parke & Sawin, 1980; Heath, 1976).

Men's concerns with their parenthood focus on external issues (financial problems, work required for care) while women's concerns are personal/emotional issues (self-esteem, concerns with appearance) (Russell, 1974). Frank and colleagues (1986) found that men have less overall psychological consequences as parents. These studies suggest that fathers may view their parent role as substantially different, thereby reinforcing the gender differences often found during the transition phase.

Cordell, et al. (1980) sought to explore male views of fatherhood with first-time fathers. In a comparable study, Heath (1976) explored the concept of competent fathering by using descriptions and definitions gathered from men and their wives. The ability to allocate time to the parenting role was seen as important in both studies. Fathers felt that their greatest function was to be available to their children (Cordell, et al., 1980) and that in order to be competent, a father should spend time with his children (Heath, 1976). It is possible that social trends have changed the fathers' role from sole breadwinner and disciplinarian to a partner sharing in the emotional and physical care of children. Men who viewed themselves as competent fathers generally viewed their wives as competent mothers (Heath, 1976) who also provided time, love and affection. Men see financial strain and changed habits (Hobbs & Cole, 1976; Russell, 1974) as difficulties which may be reflective of role commitment and time conflicts between traditional role expectations and the

emotional demands required of fathers in our changing social system.

The transitions and consequences of parenthood have been related to the adoption of new roles and identities for both men and women. Rossi (1968) saw the impact of parenthood as being either positive or negative. Change in role identity is reflected as both distress and satisfaction. One cannot assume a new role and identity without some feelings of worry and loss in conjunction with gratifications and rewards. Parenthood necessitates the loss of one's identity as a non-parent and the acceptance of a role with new and different fulfillments.

Perhaps due to the multiplicity of additional responsibilities and social ideals, women's transition to parenthood is psychologically more stressful. Men's transition, however, carries with it the same increasing demands and concerns but men perceive these as external, not personal, stressors. An ideal transition appears to result in parents whose marital relationship continues to be satisfying at the same level, who acknowledge personal and intrinsic joys and values of having children, who accommodate to new roles by assimilating old ones, and who are able to commit time to their role and to their child so as to perceive themselves as competent. Having become a parent, what mothers and fathers think about parenting begins to shape their behaviors and actions as parents (Belsky, 1984) and becomes another aspect of their parenthood.



### Parenting Ideas and Images

Parenthood, as discussed above, is composed of a number of social and personal roles and responsibilities. Adding to the complexity associated with parenthood transition, are the parents' own thoughts and expectations which they bring to the new role (Belsky, 1984; Galinsky, 1987). Research into the cognitive aspects of parenthood has developed from over 60 years of studies on parents' attitudes (Goodnow, 1988; Holden & Edwards, 1989; Miller, 1988). Problems with definitions, terminology and research methods has resulted in ambiguous, unreliable data due mainly to a narrow, cause-effect focus on beliefs as determinants of actions. A movement away from this limited scope extends research into arenas of social-cognition by exploring parents' thoughts on parenting (e.g. Galejs & Pease, 1986; Galinsky, 1987, Heath, 1976; Lawton & Coleman, 1983), children (e.g. Hoffman, Thornton & Manis, 1978), and child-rearing (e.g. Galinsky, 1987; Heath, 1976).

Many early studies proposed to link parents' beliefs and attitudes directly to their parenting behaviors (Holden & Edwards, 1989; Miller, 1988). It was assumed that parents' beliefs altered their child-rearing behaviors, which in turn would affect their child's development. Holden and Edwards (1989) and Belsky (1984) point out that this theoretical arrow assumed there was a direct, causal relationship between beliefs, behaviors and development. Results have not shown any statistical or reliable results to substantiate any

relationships (Holden & Edwards, 1989; Miller, 1988) unless used as hindsight with abusive adults (Belsky, 1984).

Current views are that parental attitudes and behaviors are affected as much by the child as they are by the parent. A systems view of this interaction increases the determinant variables to include cognitive processes, motivations, personalities of the parent and child, and social and cultural norms (Belsky, 1984; Holden & Edwards, 1989). In this way, the multiple factors and multidimensionality of parenting does not confine understanding to general, non-specific attitudes of parents and the limited relations between parental beliefs and behaviors (Goodnow, 1988; Miller, 1988). Goodnow proposes that research begin to focus on social cognition topics such as where parents' ideas come from, whether or not and how they change, and the role of emotion in parenting ideas. This potentially prosperous approach is encouraged by other researchers interested in parenting ( e.g. Belsky, 1984; Lawton, et al., 1983).

Conceptual terms and definitions used in research on parents are mixed and can be confusing (Holden & Edwards, 1989). Concepts used in previous research incorporated the following labels (listed alphabetically): attitudes, beliefs, concepts, self-perceptions, thoughts, and values. Definitions and meanings also vary among studies. It must be noted, however, that work in the above areas represents the variety of topic items needed to be examined under the concept of parents. Parent cognition is a complex, dynamic, flexible

and often conflicting phenomena (Galinsky, 1987; Goodnow, 1988; Holden & Edwards, 1989). In reference to parents' cognition and social-cognition, Goodnow (1988) proposes the term ideas and Galinsky (1987) uses images. For the remainder of this review, the terms ideas and images will be used interchangeably.

Social-cognitive emphasis on parents' ideas illuminates the variety of processes which occur when parents are asked to describe their parenting. Unfortunately, the use of self-report questionnaires in survey methods have collected data which is "insufficient" and "inadequate" due to problems and deficiencies in validity and reliability of the instruments (Holden & Edwards, 1989, p. 43-44). Using open-ended questions to tap parental images (Galinsky, 1974; Heath, 1976; Hoffman, Thornton & Manis, 1978) and instrumentation scales which identify parents' ideas (Galejs & Pease, 1986; Lawton, et al., 1983) are alternate methods. A review of some recent studies on parenting ideas will highlight the non-static, flexible and multiply determined variables used as constructs and elements of parenting.

Parents enter their parent role with images about themselves, their child and child-rearing issues (Galinsky, 1987; Holden & Edwards, 1989). Even before birth, most parents expect to love, care for and be involved with their child (Galinsky, 1987). Findings of other investigators are similar. In one study, the top three ideal characteristics for mothers and fathers included patience and understanding,

loves and shows love, and spends time with children (Snow, 1981 cited in Lawton & Coleman, 1983, p. 355). Studies focusing specifically on fathers and their ideas about parenting found that involvement with child care, time spent at home and ability to meet emotional needs were skills seen as necessary for fatherhood (Cordell, et al., 1980; Heath, 1976). Parents think that parenthood requires time, emotion and effort. These are all images of the good, perfect, ideal parent.

LeVine (1975) proposes that there are three universal desires held by all parents for their children despite cultural variables. LeVine believes that these encompass any and all concerns and priorities in their parenting. LeVine describes these goals as: (1) physical survival and health of the child, (2) the child's capability for economic independence in adulthood, and (3) the child's behavioral capacity within culturally distinct beliefs, values, norms and ideologies (LeVine, 1975, p. 230).

LeVine (1975) believes his proposed goals form a hierarchy and that any responses parents give about the desires they have for their children fit into this scheme. He also indicates that he believes the goals must be met at one level before parents can move to the next. For example, in order for a parent to hope that his child will become an independent adult, the basic health and physical survival of the child must be achievable. Parents who cannot be assured of their child's survival, such as those in underdeveloped

countries, have as their primary parenting goal, the child's health and survival. In countries like the United States where survival seems assured, parents can focus their goals at a higher level, on the child's independence and development of social norms.

Results from studies of parents in the United States have found that they hope for their child's personal happiness and success, and that they will grow to be a loving, friendly adult (e.g. Chilman, 1980; Intons-Peterson, 1985) seem to support Levine's (1985) hierarchy. When compared to these images, Levine's (1985) three categories could perhaps be utilized as an outline for parental ideas about parenting and children. However, more research will have to be done to assess the universality proposed by Levine (1975).

Investigations into parents' ideas about children have questioned the parent's knowledge about child development (Miller, 1988), or child behaviors as they relate to child-rearing (Holden & Edwards, 1989). New parents imagine their child as providing unconditional love, always being good and trying to please (Galinsky, 1987). As their children grow and change, these images often need to be reevaluated. But when asked about the advantages of having children, both parents and non parents indicated values of love and family life (Hoffman, et al., 1978). Hoffman, et al. (1978) found that children were imagined to satisfy parents' need for love, affection, stimulation and fun. Parenting is the provision and receipt of love, children provide and are objects of love.

Spending time with children is seen by parents as an important part of parenting since children are fun to be with.

However, researchers rely heavily on asking parents for their general ideas about children, not specifically their own children. Holden & Edwards (1989) caution against this technique as one can not be sure if the parent is responding with his own ideas, social norms, or some other image of childhood. Holden & Edwards (1989) suggest that the "quality of ownness" (p. 39), whether parents are asked specifically about their own children, will enable future research to specify and categorize parents' thinking about their own children while discriminating it from their general ideas about children.

Lawton and his colleagues (1983b) described a Q-sort approach to distinguishing between actual and ideal ideas of parents regarding their parenting. This task requires parents to rank order statements into categories representing those most similar to their actual parenting and those they feel are dissimilar. A second task, repeating the sort, assesses their ideas of the most ideal and least ideal parenting methods. In the 1984 pretest, Lawton, Schuler, Fowell and Madsen found that parents distinguish between their ideal and their actual parenting behaviors, however, the differences were not statistically significant.

Unfortunately, parents in the pilot study were not asked to compare their own behaviors against their ideal, nor were they asked to explain their choices, which could account for

the similarity. Responses of actual and ideal parenting behaviors were summarized into categories. The findings indicated that parents emphasized behaviors to stimulate their child's social and intellectual development (Lawton, et.al., 1984). Galinsky (1987) contends that the images and ideals that parents hold are used as measures of their success and/or failure in parenthood. Images of the ideal are ways of presenting their parenting "as they would like to think they are" (Galinsky, 1987, p. 7).

Galejs and Pease (1986) also used the Q-sort procedure to explore actual/ideal images and parents' locus of control. They found that images and perceived ideals were related to a parent's sense of power over their life. The types of ideal behaviors identified through the Q-sort were different for parents who saw themselves as having control and those who did not. Rural and urban parents' perceptions of parenting were part of the original Lawton Q-Sort studies. Results published in 1989 indicated that urban parents chose behaviors relating to their child's social development as "most like me", while rural parents chose behaviors reflecting intellectual and emotional development (Coleman, Ganong, Clark & Madsen, 1989).

Lawton & Coleman (1983) state that little is known about "what parents believe about parenting" (p. 352). Current focuses in parent research are attempts to learn more about the discrepancies and dilemmas in parents' thinking. Social-cognition theories can begin to analyze the complexity of the various factors mediating, causing or changing parents, their

parenting and the images they perceive about themselves and their children. The interaction of multiple internal and external components of parents' lives may influence them and the way they parent (Belsky, 1984).

### Expectations and Aspirations

One component of parental images which has not been studied extensively is the expectations parents hold for themselves and their children. Expectations can be seen as a sub-component of "ideal" images or as a parent's image of what the future could bring (Galinsky, 1987). Parental thinking is subject to change as it is influenced by societal images, the reality expressed by one's own child and the parent's changing personality in his parenting (and other) roles (Belsky, 1984, Galinsky, 1987; Goodnow, 1988; Holden & Edwards, 1989).

Researchers have explored parents' satisfactions and goals in their parenting (Chilman, 1980), aspirations for their children (Intons-Peterson, 1985; Rodman & Voydanoff, 1978), and their expectations for their children (Intons-Peterson, 1985; Rickard, Graziano & Forehand, 1984). Research on future expectations has looked primarily at what parents hope for their child's education (e.g. Rodman & Voydanoff, 1978). The following review will focus on parents' ideas about the future with implications for their current parenting.



Chilman's 1980 study described parental goals and the extent of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with regards to the burdens of parenthood. Parents responded to forced choice interview questions on topics about family life. Responses on child-rearing values and goals gave insight into what parents want for their children. The majority of parents in the study wished "personal happiness, independence and feelings of self-worth" for their children (Chilman, 1980, p. 342). However, they were not asked about their current level of satisfaction with regard to these goals. Chilman inferred that her subjects were currently satisfied with their lives in general and their role as parent, but no correlations were made to determine if their satisfaction could be related to the goals they hold for the future and the success they were having in the present to achieve them.

Rodman and Voydanoff (1978) considered parents' ideas as a range of images, instead of a single level of aspiration. Although their study gathered information on parents' educational and occupational aspirations for their children, the concept of range is worthy of discussion. Parents, the majority of whom had children between ages two and one half and five, were asked how happy they would be with a variety of possible outcomes for their child's future (on a 5-point scale from very happy to very unhappy). Responses were categorized into one of six dimensions depending not only on the level of aspiration, but also on the width of the range of aspirations at that level. This provided the researchers

with parents' highest desires plus the extent to which they could accept deviation in their aspirations.

Findings showed that middle and lower class parents have the same level of aspirations for their children, both hoping that their children attained a post-high school education (Rodman & Voydanoff, 1978). However, lower class parents were shown to perceive themselves as being happy with a wider range of possibilities. Parents were also asked what they thought the chances were of their child actually attaining each of the educational levels. Highest levels were compared with the parents perceived probability of achievement. Statistically, this narrowed the range of their aspirations. This is similar to the Lawton, et al. (1984) concept of what parents perceive as ideal vs. actual.

Research is needed which goes beyond analyses where mothers represent parents. Research which includes fathers solidifies the concept that parents must be studied as a dyad. Intons-Peterson (1985) replicated a study conducted in 1952 on the expectations and aspirations fathers had for their sons and daughters. Fathers in the replication study placed similar emphasis on college educations for both sons and daughters showing a decrease in the gender-stereotyped expectations found in the 1952 study. Fathers of all socio-economic backgrounds held similar ideas, regardless of whether they had sons, daughters or children of both sexes.

Specifically, Intons-Peterson (1985) found fathers' goals were to have loving, friendly, educated and self-determined

grown children (analogous to Chilman, 1980). Again, comparing real and ideal images, fathers were asked to describe their child in the present tense and then project into the future. Current depictions were more gender-stereotyped than projected images of both sons and daughters. Fathers had children ranging in age from 1 year to 40 years, yet their general images were alike. Such images may be created early in the parenting experience and continue throughout the child's development (Galinsky, 1987; Intons-Peterson, 1985; Rodman & Voydanoff, 1978).

Problems in parenting have also been related to parents' ideas (Belsky, 1984; Galinsky, 1987; Heath, 1976; Rickard, et al., 1984). Heath (1976) studied fathers and found that 74 per cent had felt inadequate at some point in their parenting. Competence was described by fathers as being available to one's children and showing love and affection. Feelings of inadequacy arose through guilt about giving "less time, love and care to their children than they believed they should" (Heath, 1976, pp. 31-32). Galinsky (1987) theorized that problems are often due to unmet expectations. Parents in a clinical setting were found to have problems due to unrealistic expectations about child-rearing and their child (Rickard, et al., 1984). Studies such as these represent heterogeneous populations of parents which limits comparisons, nevertheless, expectations and ideal images are explored in each.

The studies reviewed in this section highlight the thoughts and images parents hold for the future. Parents want their children to be happy above all else (Chilman, 1980; Intons-Peterson, 1985). How parents see themselves in this process has not been studied directly. Parents have ideas about what they expect from themselves as parents (Galinsky, 1987; Heath, 1976) and their children's future (Chilman, 1980; Intons-Peterson, 1985; Galinsky, 1987; Rodman & Voydanoff, 1978). Research has not been done to determine the extent to which these images change during parenthood and how they affect or are affected by the parents' parenting experience and the child-parent relationship. The next section will review models of parenthood which incorporate many of the variables discovered through research on parenting.

### Parent Development Models

It has been suggested that parenthood (Benedek, 1959; Boger, Richter & Weatherston, 1983; Galinsky, 1987; McLanahan & Adams, 1987) and parenting (Belsky, 1984; Coleman, Kris & Provence, 1953; Frank et al., 1986; Goodnow, 1988; Newberger, 1980) be viewed as developmental processes changing over time and influenced by internal and external systems. Issues outlined in previous sections disclose the impact of the transition to parenthood, the formation of ideas, and the expectations of parents. In this final section, models of parenting will be explored as a conceptualization combining the systemic factors of parenting, changes in parenting, and

parents' images and expectations.

Models of parenthood in the 1950s were developed from psychoanalytic, Freudian perspectives (Benedek, 1959; Coleman, Kris, & Provence, 1953). In both these studies, "parent"-child relationships were examined through observations of mothers and their children. The psycho-sexual personality development of the mother was seen as a key factor in the mother-child relationship, as well as the mother's parenting. Coleman, et al. (1953) present case studies describing the "underlying unconscious fantasies" (p. 45) promoting various attitudes towards one's child through the mechanisms of id and ego. Changes in mothers' attitudes (parenting relationships with their children) were seen as ego adaptability to changes in the child. The process of parenting was considered "a continuous chain of experiences which extends over time ... influenced by the child's growth and development" (p. 25).

Benedek (1959) concentrates on the sexual drive's (libido) impact on maturity and parenthood as an extension of personality development. The process of receiving gratification for instinctual needs through parenting is described as a developmental phase. Drives and needs gratifications are the Freudian motivators which bond the responses of both mother and child. Their relationship is seen as a bidirectionality of ego boundaries; the mother meets her needs by attending to those of her child, the child's needs are met through the mother which in turn gratifies her needs. These cyclical interactions are said to result in

"continual alternations between success and threatening failure of parenthood" (p. 416). Needs met are successes, needs unmet are failures. Like Coleman, et al. (1953), Benedek (1959) sees the personality development of parenthood as changes due to the developmental nature of parenting.

Change has been used as an indicator to confirm development. In 1980, Newberger proposed the use of a cognitive-developmental approach to the study of parenthood. The reasoning was that parents' thinking about their child and their role as parent goes through sequential stages similar to a child's progression through Piaget's levels of egocentric thought. The more flexible a parent is able to be by using more than one perspective, the higher their level of, what Newberger (1980) calls, "Parental Awareness." With experience, it was hypothesized that parents develop more mature concepts about children and parent-child relationships. Newberger's (1980) theory delineates four sequential levels of awareness, each representing a qualitatively different egocentric or decentered perspective. At the lowest level, the most egocentered, parents understand the child simply as a projection of themselves therefore serving only parent needs. At the highest level, parents are decentered and able to understand the child's individuality and the complex necessity of balancing both parent and child needs.

Studies by Galinsky (1987) and McLanahan and Adams (1987) extend the success/failure growth potential mentioned by Benedek (1959). McLanahan and Adams (1987) relate the

benefits of the parent role as successes in that role. Problems are described as resultants of role conflict in which "discordant expectations" (p. 252) exist. Successful parenting results when one meets their ideal expectation of the role. Galinsky (1987) emphasizes the idealistic and realistic images which parents use to measure their success and failure. Parenthood is seen as a series of stages marked by growth from change (Benedek, 1959; Coleman, et al., 1953; Galinsky, 1987). Growth is hypothesized to occur when images and expectations must be modified and molded to fit reality. Galinsky (1987) and Newberger (1980) differentiate stages by the specific issues and feelings being dealt with during particular time periods in parenting which parallel the child's changing development.

The concept of Image Theory was proposed by Beach and Mitchell (1987), not in specific reference to parenting but for the principles of adult decision making. The concepts are relevant to the parent models of Benedek (1959), Galinsky (1987) and Newberger (1980). Images in decision making represent the guiding principles from which success is measured, much like those described for parents. Beach and Mitchell's images are made up of goals which enable the pursuit of a plan. Plans for the future are considered "trajectory images." Actions are selected to represent "landmarks" which are used to evaluate progress toward a goal. Compared to models of parent development, trajectory images would be ideal images of parenting and parenthood. Actual

images and the reality of parenting reflect the landmarks and concrete behaviors implemented to see if the trajectory image was successful or if a new plan must be adopted.

Belsky (1984) has developed a model of parenting which summarizes and organizes the many variables attributed to parenting. The "Determinants of Parenting Model" (Belsky, 1984) presumes that parenting is influenced directly and indirectly by characteristics of the parent's world as well as the child's world (see figure 1).

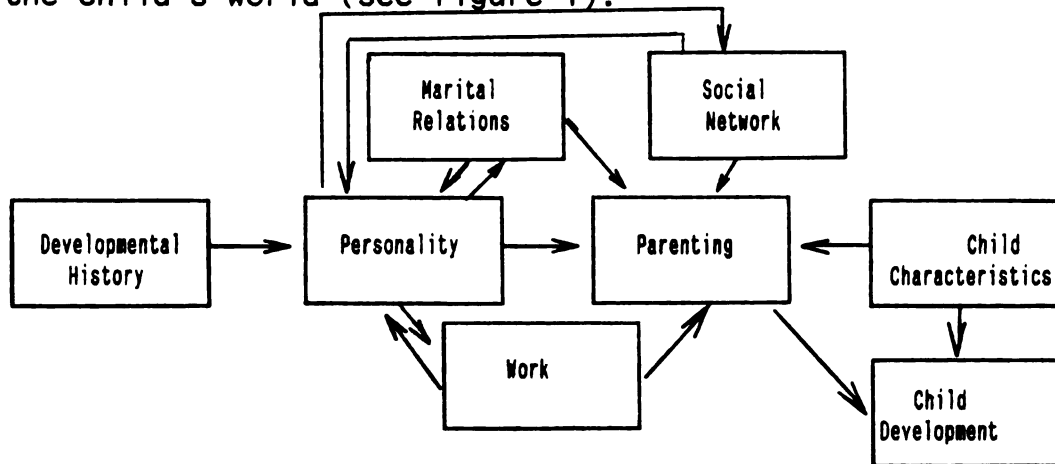


Figure 1

BELSKY'S DETERMINANTS OF PARENTING MODEL

The parent's upbringing (developmental history) is seen as a direct influence on his/her personality which, in turn, impacts marital relations, employment and the parent's social network. These forces create consequences on parent personality and parenting. The reciprocity of these forces is shown with two arrows. The parent-child relationship is depicted with triangular one way arrows where the child's characteristics affect both parenting and child development. Parenting is shown as directly influencing child development,



after exposure to the child's characteristics and the other interacting systems.

The Belsky (1984) model allows investigation into a variety of forces on parental functioning throughout parent development. When seen as a system, parenting results in multifactor complexities which cannot be easily explained by previous cause-effect studies. Studies which focus only on one aspect, such as beliefs, do not incorporate the contributions of the subsystems. Belsky advocates that individual differences in parenting receive more research attention so that the determinants may be illuminated.

### Ecological Perspective

The human ecological model, the study of human ecosystems, views the interactions of people within their total environment. The ecological approach views the individual or family within three interrelated environmental systems (Bubolz, Eicher & Sontag, 1979). The Human Environed Unit (HEU) is a term used to describe a single person or a group of persons who share a common identity and have similar goals and values. The HEU is primarily embedded in the Natural Environment (NE) which supports all life. Humans have altered the NE and added to it; these changes and creations are the second system, the Human Constructed Environment (HCE). The third environment is termed the Human Behavioral Environment (HBE) which includes other humans, the interactions among humans, and the behaviors inherent in

human-to-human relations. An ecological framework will allow expansion of this study's perspective to include both parents as they create environments which influence themselves and their child.

The Human Enviroined Unit (HEU) in this study is the mother-father parenting dyad. The parents are viewed as embedded in the Human Behavioral Environment (HBE) of the intergenerational family system and society through relationships and interactions. To ignore this ecological environment by focusing solely on one parent's images would overlook the influence of both parents in the parent-child relationship. The exclusion of fathers has been noted as a weakness in previous studies where responses by the mother have been incorrectly generalized to represent both parents' views. Also underlying the HBE are the social systems in which the parents have been or are involved. These systems include their own parents and family of origin, the social network, societal factors influencing parenting, such as the media, social norms, and direct or indirect advice given regarding the types of expectations a parent in this social system should or should not have. Society, in Kliman and Rosenfeld, is described as "an extended family" (1980, p. 285). The community at large, the availability of resources, and the concepts included in the research questionnaire are all components of the Human Constructed Environment (HCE).

This study explored changes in parental images over time focusing on the parent dyad (the HEU). Although influences

of the Human Behavioral Environment and the Human Constructed Environment were not measured directly in this study, their impact was reflected in parents' responses. By incorporating the ecological model, this research investigated the images of parents utilizing the concepts of interactions among human ecological systems.

### Conceptual Model

To facilitate the investigation of parental images over time, the following conceptual model was used (see figure 2). The Belsky model (1984), combined with the human ecological model (Bubolz, Eicher & Sontag, 1979) form the basic structure. The concepts of ideal images as posed by Galinsky (1987) are the focus of the present study.

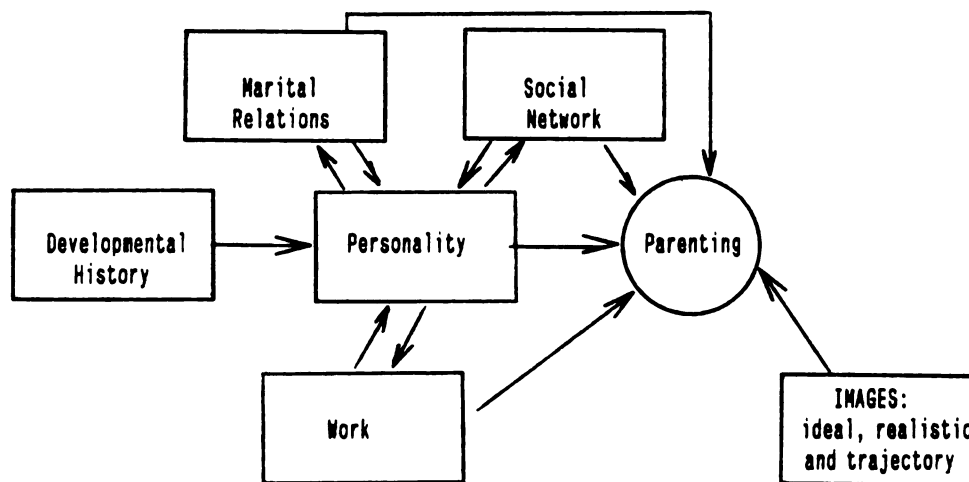


Figure 2 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In this model, the Human Envioned Unit (HEU) is the parents (their personalities and parenting). The Human Behavioral Environment (HBE) consists of the parents family

of origin and developmental history, the marital relationship, social networks and occupation of the parent. Parental images are depicted as being influential to parenting. The child's characteristics and child development which are part of Belsky's model (1984) are not included in this conceptual model since they were not directly addressed through this study.

### Chapter III

#### METHODOLOGY

##### Research Objectives

As previously stated, the purpose of the present study was to explore changes in parental images over time. To reach this goal, several objectives were developed to guide the research. Specifically, this study investigated:

1. Ideal Images: Mothers' and fathers' past images of parenting.
2. Realistic Images: Mothers' and fathers' present images of parenting.
3. Trajectory Images: Mothers' and fathers' future images of parenting.
4. Adjustment of Images: Dissonance or congruence between mothers' and fathers' past images to the reality of the present and changes they anticipate in the future.

More specifically, this descriptive study explored and compared changes in parental images across time; before the child's birth, now that the child is between two and three years old, and projections ten years into the future.

### Research Questions

In order to accomplish the objectives of this study, several specific research questions were addressed:

1. Ideal Images of Parenting: What are the past images mothers and fathers held prior to their child's birth related to their future children and their parenting? Are there differences between fathers' ideal images and mothers' ideal images?
2. Realistic Images of Parenting: What are the present images mothers and fathers hold regarding their first born child and their present parenting of this child? Are there differences between fathers' realistic images and mothers' realistic images?
3. Trajectory Images of Parenting: What are the trajectory images of mothers and fathers in reference to their first born child's future and their future parenting of this child? Are there differences between fathers' trajectory images and mothers' trajectory images?
4. Adjustment of Images: Dissonance or Congruence of Images over Time: Is there dissonance or congruence between parental ideal, realistic, and trajectory images as parents adjust to their parenting over time?

### Conceptual and Operational Definitions

The following section provides definitions for the concepts used in this study. Concepts used with the parents during the interview are identical except where noted. Where applicable, operational definitions follow conceptual definitions.

Parenthood is conceptually defined as the acquisition of the role and functions of being a parent.

Parenting is conceptually defined as the conscious and unconscious decisions and actions made regarding child-rearing during parenthood.

Images are conceptually defined as the mental pictures and representations of parents' expectations.

Ideal Images are conceptually defined as the images parents hold which represent their standards. These include images of what children are like, how parents should act, what their own child should be like and who they should be as a parent. These images are the ultimate aims of their parenting endeavors. Operationally, this will be measured by a series of interview questions concerned with the respondent's images before becoming a parent (see Appendix A, questions 1-8).

Realistic Images are conceptually defined as the images parents hold since entering parenthood. These include modified images (Galinsky, 1987) of what their child is like, how they act as a parent and how they have adapted to parenthood. These images are based in the experience of parenting their own child for two years. Operationally, this will be measured by a series of interview questions concerned with the respondent's images of his/her current parenting (see Appendix A, questions 9-17).

Trajectory Images are conceptually defined as ideal images which are now plans for the future (Beach & Mitchell, 1987). These include images of what their child will be like and how they will act in their future parenting. Operationally, this will be measured by a series of interview questions concerned with the respondent's images of his/her future parenting (see Appendix A, questions 18-22).

Ideas are conceptually defined as the mental pictures and thoughts of each parent. This term will be used with parents during the interview instead of ideal, realistic, and trajectory images in order to eliminate bias associated with the researcher's image terminology. The term "ideas" reflects an overall concept of images from which parents can interpret their own parenting.

### Instrumentation

A researcher-developed interview was constructed in order to obtain information on changes in parental images. This open format of methodology is suggested by Holden & Edwards (1989) due to the inadequacy of standard self-report questionnaires. Many of these instruments assess parental attitudes without regard to the saliency of the items to the parents in a given study. The instrument for this research (see Appendix A) was developed to alleviate some of the problems of categorizing parental attitudes. A separate self-report questionnaire (see Appendix B) was used to obtain demographic information.

The interview was formatted into three sections, each representing a stage of parental images: past, present and future. Questions one through eight were designed to have parents concentrate on the past and the images they held before they had children. Questions nine through 17 were directed at present aspects of parenting their first born child while questions 18 through 22 required parents to project their thoughts into the future. To achieve the study's purpose of exploring changes in parental images over time, questions in each section had counterparts in the other sections so that comparable issues are covered during each "time" period in the interview.

More specifically, question 4 was compared to the parent's actual age at first child's birth by subtracting child's birthdate from the parent's birthdate. Questions 3, 9, and



17 compared the family size images of parents. Questions 7, 8, and 22 asked parents to reflect on changes resulting from parenthood. Questions 1, 13, 14, and 19 compared images on parenthood and parenting. Questions 2, 12, and 18 compared images on children. Questions 6, 16, and 21 expanded the Lawton (1983b) Q-Sort technique by asking the parents for their thoughts on important parenting behaviors. Specifically, these questions go beyond the Q-Sort by asking parents why their chosen aspects of parenting are important to them. Questions 7, 15 and 20 allowed the parents to develop concepts surrounding their changing images. Question 5 expanded on Galinsky's (1987) concept that images are shaped by experiences and persons. Questions 10 and 11 elicit demographic data on the child. Comparisons were made which showed change over time for specific images such as: parent's age at first child's birth, family size, parenthood and parenting, children, important parenting behaviors, and the parents' perception of changes.

During the pre-test stage of this research, it was found that question 15 was ambiguous. Its meaning was very unclear and pilot parents were confused with the way it was worded. This particular question needed to be reworded several times. Also discovered during pre-testing was the need to add probes to questions 5 and 14. Other questions required only minor clarifications. It was determined that five randomly selected parents would be asked "How would you sum up and describe your role as a parent?" This was added following the pre-test when

one parent felt she would have liked to "wrap up" the interview with her overall thoughts. Three fathers and two mothers were asked this question at the end of their interview. The responses from this question were used to evaluate parents overall feelings toward their parenting.

The questionnaire was designed to allow the parents to develop issues pertinent to their own parenting, the Holden & Edwards (1989) concept of "ownness." Individual parents reflected on their parenting, thus exploring the components of Belsky's model (1984) of the determinants of parenting. The questionnaire does not focus solely on the outcomes of parenting, such as child development or child-rearing behaviors, but on possible influences and intermediary forces. Included in these forces are the images that parents see as ideal, how they have adjusted to the realities of their own parenting, and images of their future parenting.

### Sampling Procedures

In order to gain information on parental images, this research randomly sampled from a population of families who had attended a university affiliated infant-toddler program with their child in a mid-western U.S. city. None of the families selected were currently enrolled in the program during the time of the research. Previous work with this population (Grupe, 1989) found that the reason for enrollment was to provide social interaction for their child, the majority of whom are first born, and to increase parenting

skills. These families appear motivated to involve themselves and their children in semi-structured programming at an early age. The parents appear to feel that their parenting is an active process of interaction with their child plus skill building for themselves.

Specifically, parents of two year old first born children were selected. To increase the reliability of their responses, parents needed to be close enough in time to their pre-parenting stage as well as experiencing ample time parenting. Galinsky's (1987) Authority Stage approximates a child's preschool years. Parents have gone through the Image-Making stage before birth and the Nurturing Stage of the first two years of life. Galinsky believes that parents in the Nurturing Stage form attachments, reconcile images, redefine relationships and fit their images with reality (p. 48). By selecting parents who have entered the third stage of parenting (Authority Stage), this research tapped the ideas of parents who are adjusting to the process of changing images, and developing their role as an authority through their two years of parenting experience.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a small sub sample was selected to achieve the stated goals. The total population from the infant-toddler program was reduced within the following pre-defined parameters. Six pairs of mother/father dyads with a child born between June 1987 and April 1988 were randomly selected without replacement. Not included in the sampling frame were those families for whom

no address was recorded; those who withdrew from the program attending less than two classes; those who attended complimentary "sample" classes; those who attended classes sponsored via a public radio "auction"; and families which are not intact (do not contain both mother and father). Families currently enrolled in the program were not selected.

The sampling frame therefore, consisted of intact families whose child, now age two, previously attended at least three classes of a university affiliated infant-toddler program. Random probability sampling from this sample frame was implemented to select twelve parents (6 dyads) for the study. This sample is representative of parents who have chosen to enroll themselves and their child in a semi-structured program prior to the child's third birthday. The results cannot be generalized to all parents of preschool children but represents those parents motivated to be involved in an interactive family program dealing with parenting and child development.

### Data Collection

Data on parental images were collected using the researcher-designed, open-ended interview (see Appendix A), supplemented by demographic information obtained through self-report questionnaires (see Appendix B). Randomly selected families were contacted via the telephone by the researcher to ascertain their willingness to participate. Of the families contacted, only one refused to participate in the

research because they would be out of the country during the time of data collection. Sampling continued until six mother-father dyads had agreed to participate. Interviews were set up individually for the mother and the father, either for the same or separate days.

Prior to the interview date, families were mailed an information packet containing a letter outlining the purpose of the study, consent forms (see Appendix C), demographic questionnaires (one for the mother and one for the father) and instructions. Each parent was given a coded identification number which appears on all forms to aid the researcher in collating forms, consent, demographic and interview information. These forms (see Appendices B and C) were completed and returned to the researcher at the beginning of the interview. All forms were kept by the researcher. Lists of participant names and identifying codes were kept in a locked file in the researcher's home.

A re-confirmation telephone call was made to each family prior to the established interview. Interviews lasted 20 to 45 minutes with the majority requiring approximately 35 minutes. Interview questions (see Appendix A) were asked privately to each parent, without the other present. All of the mothers were interviewed in their homes. Four fathers were also interviewed in their home and two interviews were conducted in the father's business office.

Interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. This facilitated spontaneous responses by easing

the researcher's slow task of taking accurate notes. Some responses were written down by the researcher during interviews, but maintaining the flow of parent ideas was a priority. All questions and probes were identical for each parent and family. A parent could decide to withdraw from the study at any point in the interview by requesting the questioning cease whereby no further interview questions would be asked. No parents chose to withdrawn from the study. Following transcription of the interview, all tapes were erased. Interview forms containing transcribed responses were also kept in a locked file when not being used for data analysis.

### Description of the Sample

The sample for this study consisted of six fathers and six mothers whose first born child was between 2 years, 2 months and 2 years, 8 months of age. Due to an overall ratio of 2.5 boys to each girl attending the infant-toddler program at this age level, the first five families selected had sons. Therefore, the sixth family was randomly selected from a list of families with daughters. Four of the dyads had only one child, one dyad's second child was seven weeks old, and one dyad was expecting their second child in two months.

The parents ranged in age from 28 to 44 years. Fathers were between 29 and 44 years old while mothers were 28 to 38 years old. Five dyads were in their first marriage and the other dyad was a second marriage for both. Length of marriage

ranged from 5 years, 8 months to 9 years. Age at marriage ranged from 22 to 37 years for the fathers and 21 to 31 years for the mothers. Length of marriage at the time of the birth of their first child ranged from 3 years to 6 years, 7 months. At the time of their first child's birth, fathers ranged in age from 26 to 41 years old and mothers were 25 to 36 years old.

Five of the fathers and one mother worked full time. One father was a full time graduate student and worked part time. Three mothers worked part time and two were full time homemakers. All of the parents in this study had completed four year college degrees. Four fathers and one mother also held advanced graduate degrees (two at the PhD level). Two fathers were working on graduate degrees during the time of the study. Occupation levels were also high, with all six fathers and five mothers employed at the professional level prior to their first child's birth. One mother was a full time student prior to the birth of her first child. Following the birth, only one father changed occupation (return to school full time) and two of the mothers experienced a change in their occupation (change to full time homemaker). Of the four mothers not changing occupations, three changed from full time to part time employment. Family incomes for this sample ranged from \$20,000-\$29,999 to over \$70,000 during the past tax year.

An overall description of the sample would be highly educated, professional, middle class parents in their late 20s

and early 30s who established careers before beginning their families.

### Analysis of Data

Lawton & Coleman (1983) believe that research on parenting has been unable to ascertain what parents think about their parenting. Weaknesses in methodology have been cited as problems with current research (Goodnow, 1988; Holden & Edwards, 1989; Miller, 1988). This research followed suggestions that questionnaires are inadequate (Holden & Edwards, 1989), predetermined answer categories show only the researchers' issues (Goodnow, 1988), and that parents' selection of issues and responses requires exploratory studies with an open methodology (Miller, 1988).

Data analysis took place in two stages. The initial phase was concerned with the description of the sample. Data obtained from the demographic questions were used to determine the ranges of responses from the 12 parents. This provided an overall description of the sample population.

The second phase of data analysis involved categorizing the data obtained from the open-ended interviews. Goodnow (1988) states that open responses require content analysis. In order to synthesize the issues selected by the parents in this study, the Glaser & Strauss (1967) method of discovering grounded theory was followed. The purpose of this research was not to generate a theory of parenting images, but to gain knowledge of the images parents have developed. The



guidelines of grounded theory were followed in order to produce systematic data categories as outlined by Glaser & Strauss (1967).

The Glaser & Strauss (1967) method utilizes the data as the source of the researchers' analytic thought. In this manner, explanations are generated from data as opposed to logico-deductive methods in which theoretical explanations are simply verified through data. Hypotheses and theory are discovered through the simultaneous analysis and coding of collected data. This approach creates information which is "readily applicable" in the explanation of the concepts being studied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3).

Glaser & Strauss (1967) refer to this process as the "constant comparative method" (p. 103) which requires the researcher to examine the data in four concurrent stages which continuously overlap throughout analysis (see Appendix D). In the first stage, categories of the concepts under study must be discovered by scrutinizing the data during the collection period. Every response from a subject is then coded into all relevant categories. Responses within categories are compared to each other to formulate the elemental properties of each category.

The second stage of constant comparative methodology also emerges during data coding. However, the continual comparison of responses evolves into the comparison of each response to the category's properties, not just compared to other responses. This process allows the researcher to

systematically analyze data and begin combining properties. The patterns which have emerged while coding data also integrate the data across and between categories. At this point, the data have been diffusely extended and then, through constant comparison, is reintegrated into a smaller set of categories. The reduced number of categories are theoretically related via the comparisons done at the higher category and property analyses.

Reduction of categories helps the discovery of more generalized themes in the data. Comparisons during the third stage, the delimiting phase, begin to clarify terminology and the boundaries of the emerging theory. A framework of the regularities illustrated by coded data signify a theory which is grounded in the data. Stage 4 is the process of writing the theory and explanations based on the major themes and their connections. The analysis of data as it emerges into connected themes was used in this study to gain insight into the changing images parents have of their parenting.

#### Assumptions and Limitations

As with any research design, there are limitations to this study. Lacking a standardized tool to assess parental images, the researcher developed a series of open-ended interview questions. The questions and the interview technique were pre-tested with three parents prior to the study. This allowed the researcher to practice the interview procedures. The pre-test led to clarification of questions and probes to

convey to each parent as standard a meaning as possible.

It is assumed that through the use of the above procedures and the promise of confidentiality that the parents were able to reveal personal information about their own parenting. It is assumed that parents are aware of their own thoughts about parenting. It is impossible to know if parents provided their own ideas, or responses which they saw as "socially acceptable." This limitation has been addressed by Galinsky (1987) who incorporates this possibility as a way of acknowledging one's ideal images. Obtaining accurate information from memory is always difficult. By using parents who have been parenting for two years, their proximity to their pre-parent stage was assumed to increase the validity of their recollection.

Other limits to this research include the use of one time interviews which do not show actual changes over time, only perceived changes. A longitudinal study would have provided additional validity to the parents' responses, however this was not feasible for reasons of time and cost. Limitations in the generalizations obtained from the data are due to the similarities and differences of demographic variables of the parents used for this study. Parents were homogeneous on variables of child's age, number of children, length of marriage, educational background and employment status. Parents were dissimilar on variables of age and family income. The small sample size ( $n=12$ ) is also a limiting factor to this research since only six intact dyads were interviewed.

However, the use of a population whose children are all the same age is assumed to decrease the limitations of not repeating the study over time.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to explore the changes in parental images over time. In addition, this study investigated the differences between the images of parenting of fathers and those of mothers, the adjustment of images to the reality of their present parenting, and changes parents expect in their future parenting. The sample consisted of twelve parents (six dyads) who responded to open-ended interviews conducted by the researcher. The following chapter will describe the results of this study.

Four research questions were developed to meet the research objectives of discovering parents' past, present and future images of their own parenting. Images of the parents interviewed for this study are grouped into sections corresponding to the research questions: 1) Ideal Images: Past Images of Parenting; 2) Realistic Images: Present Images of Parenting; 3) Trajectory Images: Future Images of Parenting; and 4) Adjustment of Images: Dissonance or Congruence of Images over Time. The differences in responses from fathers and mothers are compared within each section.

The Glaser & Strauss (1967) analysis method of constant comparatives was utilized to discover themes from the data (see Appendix D). Responses were coded, integrated and combined into categories which were then reduced into the generalized themes presented in this chapter. Some interview questions elicited multiple responses from parents which accounts for some findings adding up to more than 12 responses.

### Ideal Images: Past Images of Parenting

#### Research Question 1: Ideal Images of Parenting

What are the past images mothers and fathers held prior to their child's birth related to their future children and their parenting? Are there differences between fathers' ideal images and mothers' ideal images?

#### Major Themes Identified from the Data:

- A. Parents expect to enjoy their parent role.
- B. Parents expect their children to be pleasant.
- C. Ideas about parenting are influenced by the parents' own family.
- D. Parents expect to love their child, "be there" in order to build child's self esteem.

Creating Images of Children. Over half the parents (7 out of 12) were aware of having images of their own future children. Five parents were not conscious of thinking about children or having images of what they would be like. When probed for images, all 12 mothers thought in terms of the child's behavior, stating that they imagined wonderful, good, perfect children. The 12 fathers tended to have physical images of children, such as having similar interests and common personality attributes of themselves and/or spouse.

The majority of mothers (4 out of 6) had thought about having three children. Only one mother expressed thinking about having four or more children, whereas four of the six fathers had thought they would have four or more children. No parents had anticipated having an only child. Past images of the number of children parents hoped to have ranged from 2 to 6. A little over half the mothers and fathers (7 out of 12) indicated that they imagined having that number of children because of their own family of origin, "that's how many kids in our family."

Fathers (5 out of 6) expected to begin parenthood in their late 20s and early 30s. One father stated that he knew he would start his family when he was older than 30 due his remarriage. All six of the mothers, however, anticipated having children in their 20s. Half of the mothers (3 out of 6) explicitly stated they had wanted to have a child "before I was 30."

Creating Images of Parenting. Prior to parenthood, ideas about parenting were described by all 12 parents in terms of fun, hard work and doing things or playing with a child. There were no differences in the ideas expressed by mothers and fathers. Parents stated that their ideas about parenting were influenced by "my own parents" (7 out of 12). Four of 12 parents specifically mentioned their mother or a sibling with children as influencing their ideas about parenting. Two mothers stated that their fathers played a less influential

role.

Half of the parents (6 out of 12) spontaneously described the impact of their own family on images of parenting with responses such as "Clearly my parents", "Very definitely my parents", and "My parents of course, my goodness!" One father said his ideas about parenting were influenced by his wife and her family, whereas the parents of close childhood friends were cited as important by another father. Other less influential factors reported by five parents were experiences with children (babysitting, nephews and nieces, work with children), teachers, and church.

Four parents stated that memories of going places with their parents, doing things, special treats, and the feelings associated with them influenced their own ideas of parenting. These responses indicated that the actions of their own parents during their childhood were influential to their images of parenting before becoming a parent. Six of the 12 parents matched their own parenting to the experience of being parented. Their responses suggested that they had thought about which qualities of their parents they found impacting their own thoughts about parenting: "I wanted to be a mom just like her"; "I hope that I will do that too"; "I really have always admired the way my mom raised all of us and I've thought more about how (she) did that (raised children)."

Three fathers and two mothers described similarities between the ways they were parented and how they see themselves parenting: "My parents did a fairly good job of



parenting and I think I've ended up being very similar to them"; "They were warm and obviously cared and I think that's how we are." One father, however, commented about the differences between his own parenting style and that of his parents saying, "I think our age group kinda' divorced everything that happened with their parents. We didn't want to be like them, too boring, too middle class."

Ideal Images of their own Parenting. The majority of mothers (5 out of 6) developed ideas about parenting during high school or before whereas the fathers (5 out of 6) began envisioning images of themselves as parents while in college or after marriage. Two mothers stated that as far back as they could remember they always wanted to be mothers. One father began thinking about parenting "since we were like 14" when he began dating his wife. Another exclaimed that he knew he always wanted children but didn't have images of himself as a father until he and his wife were planning their first child. One mother began imagining herself as a parent after she became pregnant.

Parents were asked, "Before you had children, what did you think was the most important part of being a parent?" Before having children, three fathers and five mothers believed that "loving" a child and/or showing love were important to parenting. One father and two mothers also were aware of images of "being there" as important to their parenting.

Parents were asked if they recalled why they previously felt these were important parts to parenting before becoming a parent. Seven parents responded that loving a child was important because it impacted the child's personality and was important to build self-esteem. "Being there" to spend time with a child was stated by four parents as important in order to provide a role model. One mother recalled thinking that the most important aspects of parenting were being ready to be a parent and having a strong marriage.

Five parents indicated similarities in their past images to their current parenting with thoughts such as, "That's why I try to be home as much as possible"; "That's why it was never a question that I wasn't going to work full time." Four parents made statements which appeared to relate to their own childhood and families like this father's: "From my parents I perceived that the key thing (in parenting) is they (parents) love you." One mother said she thought providing love was the most important part of parenting because, "It was just the way I was brought up - I have a real close family."

### Realistic Images: Present Images of Parenting

#### Research Question 2: Realistic Images of Parenting

What are the present images mothers and fathers hold regarding their first born child and their present parenting of this child? Are there differences between fathers' realistic images and mothers' realistic images.

#### Major Themes Indicated from the Data:

- A. Parents observe their child's developmental progress.
- B. Parents are having to include discipline in their parenting repertoire.
- C. Parents are adjusting to the emotional intensity of their parenting.

- D. Parents enjoy their parent role.
- E. Parents believe that their love, their time and their discipline with their child will build the child's self esteem.
- F. Parents see themselves as a role model for their child.

Having entered the parenting role, parents must adjust to the realities of having a child in the house and their abilities to parent in a way that they believe is appropriate. In this section, parents' ideas of their current parenting role with their first born child will be examined. For purposes of maintaining neutrality with regard to the gender of a child, all children will be referred to as "he."

Images of their First Born. Parents were asked to tell about their first child and what he/she has been doing. All but one of the mothers (5 out of 6) and only two of the fathers mentioned their child as having the stereotyped terrible two tantrums. However, two other fathers did describe their two year old as expressing some "independence." Two mothers also described expressions of independence but both also mentioned tantrums and did not relate the two behaviors, therefore, the description of "independence" was not considered equivalent to tantrums.

The most frequent response (all 12 parents) concerned their two year old's verbal skills, with comments like these from the fathers: "He's talking up a storm"; "He's able to put together 3, 4 and 5 word sentences"; "You can have a full conversation with him back and forth"; "I'm amazed at how

quick he picks up vocabulary"; "His vocabulary is growing, he's always asking questions about what 'this' is and what you're doing." And these statements from the mothers: "He communicates well and is vocal about his feelings"; "He's starting to talk in sentences"; "He's talking more - indicating his needs more"; "He has been non-stop talking"; "He's counting objects"; "He comes up with things all the time that I just can't believe."

Beyond describing developmental milestones of two year olds, parents described aspects of their child's physical, intellectual and/or personality. Four mothers and one father described their child's love of singing, while two mothers and one father talked about their child's memory capacity. Two mothers and one father also mentioned their children drawing or painting creatively. Three mothers talked about their child's imagination. Five fathers and one mother described their child as "active." Other attributes were the child's intelligence (2 fathers, 1 mother), and how "great", good or wonderful the child has been (3 fathers, 2 mothers). It should not be assumed that parents who did not mention that their child was great and intelligent felt the child was not, rather it was assumed that their spontaneous and brief response related more directly to the question, "what has your child been doing lately?"

When asked if they would like to have more children, all six fathers and four mothers responded positively. Two mothers, however, were unsure if they would like another

child. When asked why they would consider having another child, four mothers and two fathers believed that having siblings was important. Three fathers (but no mothers) commented that they would like more children because they enjoy parenting. All of the parents wanted only one or two more children citing financial resources as a concern: "I think I can pay for two"; "If I was independently wealthy I'd want to have more than that"; "Two is it, financially it's hard"; "If there's another child you have to consider the financial burden"; "I used to want more, I can't afford them financially." One mother felt that another child meant "I have to start the whole process again - losing sleep, feedings, finding a babysitter. I think right now I've gotten to a comfortable level."

Images of their own Parenting. When asked what it has been like being a father, all six replied with "great (3)", "fun (1)", "wonderful (1)" or "good (1)". All six mothers also found parenthood enjoyable, but in contrast, only three of the mothers began their description with fun or wonderful. Paired with three mothers' responses and one fathers' were clarifiers that it isn't always that way: "He's fun and he's hard work"; "I really enjoy it but it's hard work"; and "It's wonderful and it's been awful." The other three mothers described motherhood as watching their child's development and the "return" on their emotional investment.

Parents were asked what things have been difficult in their parenting. Half the mothers and half the fathers (6 parents) rephrased "difficult" and substituted terms such as frustrating, trying, hard and/or challenging. Of the twelve parents, only one, a father, responded that "nothing" was difficult in his parenting. The majority of the others (7 of the 12), after stating difficulties about their parenting, added remarks which seemed to refocus their thoughts on more positive comments. They stated: "That's a difficulty, but not very often"; "It's hard but those are just things you do sometimes"; "That's been trying and I'm learning as he's learning"; "Everybody has a bad day and he's entitled to his" and "If that's the biggest thing I have to complain about, I can handle that!"

Three fathers and two mothers mentioned "not knowing how to handle a situation" as a difficult component of their parenting. Discipline was a difficulty expressed by two mothers and two fathers. Related to discipline was the responses of two mothers that they need to be aware of being consistent in their decisions and to create consistency with their spouse. Dealing with the child's demands and/or temperament (bad days, opinionatedness, fussy, headstrong) was mentioned by three fathers and two mothers. Two parents of each gender related the frustration of dealing with a two year old's different logic abilities (or lack thereof). Three fathers found it difficult to be away from their children while travelling on business and/or while at work. Two

mothers found their parenting more difficult while their husband travelled overnight.

Parents were asked what things have been easier in their parenting than they expected. Comments implied that the easier aspects of parenting were either the emotional relationship or physical care of a child. Three mothers, but no fathers, felt that being able to separate from their child (leaving child with a babysitter) was easier than they expected. One father who takes his child to day care said that separation was often difficult.

Responses of the other three mothers indicated that they focused on emotional issues, such as enjoying simpler things with their child. Three fathers (and two mothers) found that the physical care of a child was not that bad (diapers, getting child to sleep, feeding). Two fathers believed that their parenting was made easier because of the amount of involvement and time their wives had with the child. One father thought his child was a quick learner and this became an easy aspect of his parenting. Half the fathers (3 out of 6) also mentioned their ease in relating to their child and playing with him.

Five parents recalled that they had been told they couldn't imagine the feelings of parenthood until they had experienced it. All of the fathers reported that they were surprised at either the intensity of their love for their child, or the amount of enjoyment they received from fatherhood. Mothers' responded that they were also surprised

by intensified emotions and enjoyment. However, the mothers were surprised by how the emotions affected them, not the emotions themselves. Their statements indicated, overall, a positive attitude toward being a parent.

One mother exclaimed, "How much I like being a mom and I don't miss work!" Another was surprised by "the whole thing of emotions, it (dealing with children) takes on a different perspective." These feelings were "overwhelming" to one mother who described "how strongly I can feel about this kid, how attached you become, that surprised me." One mother was caught "off guard" by realizing "his behavior often reflects my kind of mood. It's not always what he's doing that affects the outcome of an interaction, but it's often how I'm feeling." Another mother said she previously never thought about "each time they reach a milestone they do something that you don't expect." This same mother was also surprised by another powerful emotion, her anger (toward the child). She "never thought about that I would probably become angry."

The fathers (all 6) expressed surprise at their emotions with statements such as, "How much I enjoy it (parenting) and how much I'm dependent and into the relationship (with his child)"; "The two greatest things in my life have been meeting (my wife) and having (my child)"; "How much, how strongly I feel about him (his child)"; "I never realized how much you would love (a child), how much you enjoy being around children"; "I've been surprised at how attached I could get to a child." One father, in thinking how busy his life had



become with a child said, "I'm most happy doing a lot of things and I didn't think I'd ever be that way."

With two years of experience, parents responses indicated that they were much more sure of their ideas regarding the most important part of their parenting. Providing love and letting a child know he is loved was mentioned by five mothers and five fathers. Three mothers and four of the fathers responded that "being there" with the child and spending time with him was the most important part of parenting now that they are parents. These seven parents stated that showing love and spending time provided the child with role models and allowed the parent to set an example, teach, and explain. They thought this component of their parenting provided their child with a sense of security and self-esteem while building the child's confidence. Being consistent (one of the difficulties mentioned by four parents) and reinforcing discipline with a two year old was indicated by three fathers and four mothers as important. Three mothers also added that patience was a necessity in order to accomplish their important parenting skills.

### Trajectory Images: Future Images of Parenting

#### Research Question 3: Trajectory Images of Parenting

What are the trajectory images of mothers and fathers in reference to their first born child's future and their future parenting of this child? Are there differences between fathers' trajectory images and mothers' trajectory images?

Major Themes Indicated from the Data:

- A. Parents anticipate their child to become more independent in the future.
- B. Parents anticipate their child's increasing physical and mental abilities.
- C. Parents anticipate time for family togetherness.
- D. Parents anticipate themselves in a guidance role.
- E. Parents anticipate being involved in their child's activities.
- F. Parents anticipate being emotionally accessible to their child to build the child's self esteem.

Images of the Future for their Children. Parents were asked to describe what they thought their first born child will be doing at the age of twelve. Four parents (2 mothers, 2 fathers) used the word "hope" even though the question asked them for their thoughts. These responses indicate that parents seem uncertain of what the future will bring, but that by "hoping" they can imagine whatever they please.

All of the fathers and four of the mothers mentioned school and school related activities. Every father felt his child would be involved in sports, whereas four of the six mothers mentioned their child's athletic participation. Four fathers and three mothers mentioned a possible interest in music, art or theatre. Other attributes described were friendliness, intelligence and spending time with peers.

Ideas about future family size varied from household to household. Five parent dyads were in agreement as to the number of children they predicted in their future. One couple, however, had differing tabulations, the father predicted they would have two children while the wife predicted only one.

Images of their Future Parenting. Parents were asked to think about parenting a twelve year old and what they thought it was going to be like. Three fathers and one mother thought they would be friends with their child, however one mother felt that "you can't be their buddy and their parent at the same time." Three mothers and two fathers felt they would be challenged and that their role would become more difficult, however, one mother decided her future parenting would be easier. One father and one mother thought it would be the same as their current parenting.

Three fathers and two mothers saw the future as a time when they would be fostering independence and their child would spend more time away from the family. One father described a child who "might not want to be around his parents and is starting to develop his own independent personality from his family." Another father who enjoys his two year old's enjoyment of his company said, "I wonder if he'll be as interested in spending time with me as he is now."

When asked what would be the most important part of parenting a twelve year old, love and showing love was not mentioned as frequently as it was when parents reflected on their previous thoughts and current ideas. Five mothers and all six fathers stated they plan on staying involved with their child throughout the next ten years so that when their child is twelve, their most important role will be to "be there." However, instead of seeing this as spending time

together as it is while their child is two, the future definition of "being there" is to be emotionally accessible to help guide their child. In the future, parents see themselves as assessing their parenting rather than actively pursuing it. One father described this as, "you just hope that in those first 12 years you've done all the right things."

Parents' statements implied that involvement with their child is the way they imagine they will show their love and foster the security and self-esteem they believe is important now. This emotional availability is indicated in their statements: "You want them to know they can bring anything to you - questions, concerns"; "Y'know, just being able to listen to him and reassure him, just being there the whole time"; "Let them know someone's behind them"; "I just hope I make the time to listen in an unpressured way"; "Being willing to listen and take suggestions from him."

When asked what they thought their family would be like in ten years, many parents (10 out of 12) stated that they hoped very few changes would take place. Five of the mothers predicted their families would be close and very loving. None of the fathers mentioned "closeness", but, three stated this theme in terms of "being a family"; "the importance of family"; and "family time." Five fathers and three mothers anticipated doing things together as a family and sharing interests. One mother exclaimed that she could "see him (her child) taking me out to things that I don't want to go to."

Seven parents envisioned active, busy lifestyles with time leftover to be together as a family (two mothers and two fathers specifically mentioned having dinner together). Five parents reported knowing where their family would be living in ten years (4 out of 12 wanted to stay in Michigan).

#### Adjustment of Images: Dissonance or Congruence of Images over Time

Research Question 4: Adjustment of Images: Dissonance or congruence of Images over Time Is there dissonance or congruence between parental ideal, realistic and trajectory images as parents adjust to parenting over time?

#### Major Themes Indicated from the Data:

Parents are adjusting to:  
 less time for other relationships;  
 being tolerant of other parents;  
 having fewer children than hoped for;  
 the child's misbehavior;  
 the inclusion of discipline in their parenting;  
 the amount of love they have for their child.

#### Major Findings Indicated from the Data:

- A. There is congruence across time for the purpose of parenting.
- B. There is dissonance across time of parenting images of how to parent.

To achieve the study's purpose of exploring parental images over time, questions in each section of the interview had counterparts in the other sections. This provided the ability to compare past, present and future responses to parenting issues. Three questions specifically asked the parents for their perception of change in their own images of parenting. The findings in this section will begin with the questions which asked parents about changes and will then look

into dissonance over time through comparison of counterpart questions (see Appendix A for reference to questions).

Past Images of Changes. Question 7 asked, "Did you think a child would change your personal relationships?" Three mothers believed there would be no change. Four fathers and two mothers thought changes would be minor, such as making relationships stronger. These responses imply that the difference between mothers' and fathers' images is due to the fact that mothers tended to think of parenthood while they were much younger. One mother indicated this process as, "Y'know when you're in high school you think perfect relationships." Fathers and mothers (3 of each) reported anticipating changes such as having less time or freedom. Three fathers hinted at actual changes in their ideas with responses like: "(I expected a child would change things) but not to the extent it has" or "but I didn't understand how much (change there would be)" or "I was surprised at the amount of change."

Actual Changes. Question 8 asked parents about actual changes they experienced in relationships after their first child's birth. All 12 parents described the actual changes in terms of having less time with their spouse (5) and friends (7), making friends with others who have children (5), or more demands and responsibility (4). Some examples of their responses are: "You can't just do what you want anymore, you

have to make plans"; "having to share different things at home"; "We don't travel as much"; "We don't do nearly as many (social) things as we used to."

Changes were rephrased by five parents as a positive aspect of their parenthood: "You become much better organized"; "It didn't change as drastically as it could"; "We found that we were resourceful"; "(The changes) weren't as negative as I had anticipated"; "It made us more patient with each other." The responses of these five parents imply that adjusting to the dissonance between ideal and realistic images was not a problem for them.

When reflecting on changes in relationships with their own parents, those who felt they had experienced some change (2 mothers and 3 fathers) expressed an increased understanding of what their parents did and why. Four mentioned that a bond developed with their own parents even in previously close relationships. One father described this as "kids are the glue that holds people together." A mother stated that "there's that connection that makes us keep in touch more often, when they (grandparents) come to visit they stay longer which is really nice."

Changes in Thoughts about Parenting. The changes parents have noticed in their thoughts about parenting were gathered through question 15. All of the mothers (6) mentioned noticing a change in their thoughts about parenting. In contrast, three fathers felt that their thoughts had not

changed very much, instead, they felt their lifestyle was different (changed responsibilities and/or priorities). Two mothers found parenting to be more fulfilling and themselves more able to handle their role than they thought. Two fathers stated they feel more responsible being a parent.

The greatest changes in thoughts about parenting were told by one father and three mothers who found that their first hand experience of parenting no longer allowed them to look at other parents or children in the same way; they found themselves more "tolerant" of others. Previous feelings when seeing children with dirty faces or misbehaving were described as "this is a horrible parent" and "if I had a child, I would never allow them to do that." One mother believed she thinks differently because "now I realize! And it's not as easy as it looks!" Another mother echoed the same changes, "when you don't have kids you think, 'can't those parents control their kid?' Now as a parent I'm more understanding and I realize sometimes you can't control them!" Still another mother found that "there is no right or wrong as far as raising a child." The one father found this tolerance to "extend into the rest of my life. Now I realize you may think you know what other people are going through, but you really don't."

Future Images of Changes. Question 20 had parents think about changes they expected in their future parenting. Staying involved and incorporating a new guidance role was anticipated by four fathers and five of the mothers. Some



parents (4 mothers and 1 father) envisioned themselves adjusting to having less control or less direct parenting because of their child's increased independence. However, one mother felt she would have more structure and would "have him on a good schedule" and two parents thought they would need to increase their discipline in the future. Other changes were worrying about the social climate and trying to keep abreast of the issues (4 fathers and 3 mothers).

Four parents reflected on needing to provide discipline without being "overbearing" so that they would "let this child make his own mistakes and learn from them." One mother jokingly said, "Well, I probably wouldn't say, 'Be careful, you'll get a boo-boo'!" One father believed he would need to work on keeping an "open mind" so that he could be more willing to understand that "things are going to be different." Peer pressure and social issues such as drugs and sexuality were mentioned by four fathers and one mother as a change they needed to prepare for in their parenting.

Changes Across Time. Five comparisons were made to examine change over time in images of: parent's age at first child's birth, family size, parenthood, children, and important parenting behaviors.

Age at First Child's Birth. Question 4 was compared to the parent's actual age at first child's birth by subtracting the child's birthdate from the parent's birthdate. For

fathers, the differences between their actual age and their anticipated age were very small. Five of the fathers had their first child before their 32nd birthday and they had anticipated fatherhood in their late 20s to early 30s.

Mothers had been more specific about the onset of parenthood, many anticipating it before turning 30 years of age. Five gave birth before their 29th birthday. Findings from this comparison show little to no dissonance between idealistic and realistic images.

Family Size. Questions 3, 9 and 17 compared the family size images of parents. Four fathers previously envisioned family size that ranged from 4 to 6 children, while only one mother wanted more than three children.

Now that they are parents, ten believed they would like more children. Two mothers were unsure if they would like to have another child.

Of the four families who now have only one child, all stated they were considering families of one to three children. The dyad expecting their second child anticipated no more additions. The couple who had just given birth to their second child expected adding a third. Financial concerns (5 parents) were the most often cited reason for changing ideas about having larger families.

Dissonance exists between the idealistic images of large families hoped for by five parents. Realistic images of number of children are lower due to the financial constraints

indicated by the five parents. When idealistic images are compared to trajectory images, more changes appear. None of the parents had images of having an only child before becoming a parent, however, two mothers and one father now envisioned their child having no siblings.

Of the nine parents who had idealistically wanted 3 or more children, four projected having only 2 children, four predicted having three children and one parent anticipated having an only child. Four parents showed no change between their idealistic, realistic and trajectory images of family size: three maintained images of 3 children, and one maintained an image of 2 children.

Parenthood and Parenting. Questions 1, 13, 14 and 19 compared images on parenthood and parenting. Idealistic images of parenthood focused on themes of having fun or easy aspects of parenting (4 mothers and 4 fathers). One father and two mothers had past images of parenthood as being only hard work. Two mothers and two fathers who recalled thinking they would enjoy their anticipated parenthood also had thoughts of the work and responsibility involved.

Realistic images of what being a parent is like showed no changes over time. All of the 12 parents' responses indicated that they felt that overall, their parenthood and parenting was fun and they enjoy it. They made statements like: "Overall it's (parenting) 99 per cent positive."; "I would recommend kids whole heartedly to anybody."; "It's

(parenthood) been so positive for us."

Dissonance between images appears when parents are asked to describe any present difficulties. Only one father felt that there was nothing difficult about parenting. The other eleven parents discussed difficulties in themes about the kind of things parents have to do (for example: discipline, balancing/scheduling time) as opposed to themes about what parenthood and parenting could be like (for example: drudgery).

The future images indicate that parents expect their child to change and therefore, the way they parent will change. Eleven of the 12 parents stated that they expected to stay involved with their child to provide direction and guidance. Three fathers and three mothers mentioned they expected to be with and enjoy their pre-teen child. Six parents felt their parenting would be more difficult or challenging.

Parents' idealistic and realistic images of parenthood and parenting show dissonance when parents indicate that they have difficulties. Parents did not have images of disciplining or having difficulty with their child. However, this dissonance is weakened by thoughts which imply that parents override the difficulties by continuing their theme that parenting is enjoyable and positive. This theme of enjoyment is congruent across time in ideal, realistic and trajectory images.

Children. Questions 2, 12 and 18 compared the parents' images of children to their own child. Before having children, 7 of the 12 parents reported that they had fairly clear images of what their child would be like. These parents thought in terms of children who behaved well and were wonderful. Five parents did not have clear images of what they thought children would be like. However, all 12 parents reported having at least some vague images of children.

After becoming a parent, five of the parents continued their image of a wonderful child with comments such as: "He's just great."; "He's such a joy." Their statements suggest that they have great pride and enjoyment in talking about their child. Images of a child's realistic behavior were mentioned by seven parents who described their child's two year old tantrums or that they are not always perfectly behaved.

Expectations for their child's future indicated that parents trajectory images were as difficult to think about as the past images. Three parents responded that they were worried about the future and couldn't imagine what their child might be like. However, ten parents said they had images of their child in school and participating in activities such as sports (10 parents) or the arts (7 parents).

Images of their children show some change over time. Idealistic images were of good, wonderful children with interests and personalities similar to their parents. Realistic images allow the parents to identify their child's

individuality and developmental milestones. Dissonance occurred between idealistic and realistic images when parents identified discrepant images of children's behavior. Seven remarked that their child is not always good nor perfect as they had imagined. Trajectory images are congruent with idealistic images since no parents indicated thinking that their child would be difficult and 11 parents anticipated maintaining a close parent-child relationship. Congruence between realistic and trajectory images of their child was indicated by responses which suggested that present personality traits were expected in the future.

Important Parenting Behaviors. Questions 6, 16 and 21 asked parents why they felt certain aspects of parenting were important to them at different points in time. Before having children, the 12 parents in this study reported that they expected to love and spend time with their children so that they could encourage them to be confident and build self esteem.

Now that they are parents, five mothers and five fathers said that loving and showing love to their child was the most important to build the child's self esteem and confidence. Spending time with their child was important to four mothers and three fathers to set examples and build confidence and security. Five parents responded that discipline and consistency with their child is also important in their present parenting to help their child with control.

In the future, four parents thought loving and showing love would be important. However, six fathers and five mothers indicated that being available to talk with and listen to their child would be the most important of their parenting behaviors to build their child's self esteem and security. One mother felt that instilling morals would be her most important parenting behavior in the future. Two mothers and one father stated that they would encourage their child's freedom and decision making. They also indicated that it would be difficult for them to watch and let their child make his own mistakes in order to learn from them.

Dissonance occurs between idealistic and realistic images. Realistically, showing love and being a role model is not enough, parents indicate that they must also discipline and coordinate between themselves. The predominant theme of loving their child is congruent between ideal, realistic and trajectory images for only one mother and one father. Idealistic images of love are dissonant with the realistic images of discipline. Future images are dissonant with idealistic and realistic images as five mothers and six fathers have images of themselves being available to talk and listen to their child compared to past and present images of spending active time with their child. Four parents indicate that their basic love and care of their child remain important in the future but they imply that the way they will express this will change over time as they become a source of support and guidance.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore changes in parental images over time. The sample was composed of 12 parents (6 intact dyads) whose first born child was between the ages of 2 and 3 years. The goals of the research were to compare images before the child's birth, now that the child is 2 years old, and projections 10 years into the future. Four research questions were addressed:

1. Ideal Images of Parenting: What are the past images mothers and fathers held prior to their child's birth related to their future children and their parenting? Are there differences between fathers' ideal images and mothers' ideal images?
2. Realistic Images of Parenting: What are the present images mothers and fathers hold regarding their first born child and their present parenting of this child? Are there differences between fathers' realistic images and mothers' realistic images?
3. Trajectory Images of Parenting: What are the trajectory images of mothers and fathers in reference to their first born child's future and their future parenting of this child? Are there differences between fathers' trajectory images and mothers' trajectory images?
4. Adjustment of Images: Dissonance or Congruence of Images over Time: Is there dissonance or congruence between parental ideal, realistic and trajectory images as parents adjust to parenting over time?



Parents were interviewed using a researcher-developed instrument consisting of a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The Glaser & Strauss (1967) analysis method of constant comparatives was utilized to discover general themes from the data (see Appendix D). Responses were coded, integrated and combined into categories which were then reduced into themes. The themes guided the analysis of change over time in parental images.

Four main conclusions were developed from the data findings and analysis of adjustment and change over time. They are:

1. Parents' ideal images are adapted to more realistic images after parenting for two years. However, realistic images become idealistic as trajectory images are formed.
2. The most change occurs in parental images of how they should perform perceived responsibilities over time, but there is no change in why they feel these parenting functions are important.
3. There is very little change between the expected and the actual age of becoming a parent but expectations of family size change over time.
4. The relationships between the components of Belsky's Determinants of Parenting Model (1984) appear too limited.

A brief summary of the results from the first three research questions will be followed by a discussion of the main conclusions stemming from research question four.

## Conclusions

As discussed by Galinsky (1984), before the birth of a child parents develop images about their child and their role as parents to that child. Such images help create the parent's own set of personal standards and expectations (Galinsky, 1984). Beach and Mitchell's Image Theory (1987) sees images as the specific or abstract goals which become a blueprint or a guide for future actions. They believe that the major influence on image development is the "examples set by other people (p. 210)." According to Beach and Mitchell (1987), possible results of any plan must be anticipated so as to evaluate the progress toward a goal. Galinsky (1984) emphasizes that parents use their idealistic images and compare them to their realistic images to measure their parenting success and/or failure.

## Ideal Images

Parents in this study were asked to reflect on the images they had prior to the birth of their first child. In general, they began developing images of their own child and their parenting through their experiences of being parented by their parents and watching others parent. The majority had created images 10 years prior to their parenthood. Their family of origin was seen as most influential to their ideas about children and parenting. This supports Belsky's Determinants of Parenting Model (1984) which shows developmental history as an indirect determinant to parenting. However, the parents

in this study saw their developmental history as a direct influence on their thoughts prior to parenthood as well as their actual parenting.

In Beach and Mitchell's Image Theory (1987), actions of others are evaluated so that those actions which relate to one's goals can be selected or abandoned. Parents saw their images as similar or different from those of their own parents. The actions they select in their own parenting are based on ideas they developed prior to their parenthood by watching their parents parenting. This supports Beach and Mitchell's (1987) concept that images are formed by observing other's examples. Parents in this study saw their parenting emerge from previous images which are now one of the guiding principles to their own parenting.

Like the parents interviewed by Galinsky (1987), these mothers and fathers expected to love their children, have fun with them, spend time with them, and for parenthood to be enjoyable. This supports studies done by Hoffman, Thornton & Manis (1978) where parents were found to value their children because of the mutual love and stimulation they provide. Mothers and fathers in the current study had the same ideal characteristics of parenting discovered by Snow (1981) of showing love and spending time with a child (cited in Lawton & Coleman, 1983, p. 355). Parents envisioned themselves providing love and time because they believe "being there" allows their children to develop self-esteem and positive personality traits (such as being well behaved and

enjoyable). These images are similar to those found by Cordell, et.al. (1980) and Heath (1976) who found that parents described the good parent as one who is involved, spends time and meets the emotional needs of a family.

Transitioning into the realities of parenthood has been cited as an adjustment to new roles while changing old roles (Boger, Richter & Weatherston, 1983). Many parents expected changes within the parent dyad but did not anticipate major adjustments. Before having children, the amount of change in their lives and relationships could not be anticipated. Therefore, most parents expected little or no change, forgetting that they had already anticipated additional time commitments for their new role and their child. Their ideal images did not allow for less time for other relationships.

In general, parents' ideal images were to enjoy their parenting and to love a child whom they expected to be enjoyable. They anticipated vague aspects of "hard work," but saw themselves as adjusting to this by being able to spend time with their child so as to show their love. Images were fairly abstract about children (fun, wonderful, like spouse/self) and parenting (fun, hard work, responsibility). However, images about what a parent is or is not were more specific (e.g. one who spends time, shows love). Their own parents were the major influence on these images which were created well before they became parents.

### Realistic Images

When asked about their current parenting, all of the parents in this study described it as a positive, rewarding experience. They believed they had met their expectation to enjoy parenting and their child. The difficulties they experienced are similar to those of parents in Galinsky's (1984) Authority Stage. Here the task of parenthood extends beyond establishing a bond with the child and enters a phase where parents must develop their authority and discipline techniques. The realities of parenthood and parenting as expressed by these parents are comparable to issues discussed by Galinsky (1984).

Not knowing how to handle a situation and needing to decide on a form of punishment were difficulties these parents had experienced. It is possible that expecting children to be lovable and respond to love makes the adjustment to their independence and demands challenging. Mothers, more than fathers, discussed images of an increased amount of work involved in being a parent. It is possible that this is due to the majority of mothers who work at least part time as homemakers and carry the bulk of the daily parenting responsibilities.

Parents saw the easy parts of being a parent consistent with their ideal image of enjoying their child and caring for him. For the most part, parents believed that being a parent lived up to their expectations. They found that the basic care of their child was manageable and that their child was,

for the most part, well behaved. They still believed that loving a child and spending time were important, but have realized that they must also provide discipline and consistent limits.

Although they anticipated the attachment to their child and the rewards of parenting, none had expected the intensity of these feelings. Perhaps their ideal images also carried a doubt that they might not enjoy parenting. Having become parents, they now fully appreciate why they were told you must experience it to believe it. The mothers in this study did not discuss negative transitional adjustments outlined by previous research (Frank, Hole, Jacobson, Justkowski & Huych, 1986; McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Rossi, 1968; Russell, 1974). These mothers appear to have been able to maintain their self-esteem and life satisfaction, at least two years post-transition. Being able to plan their children and become parents when they were ready, may have helped these mothers avoid a negative transition to parenthood.

The fathers in this study were very similar to those in Heath's 1976 study who believed they should spend time with their children. Half the fathers in this study found it discouraging that they were unable to spend the quantity of time they had hoped with their child. Fathers discussed changes in their long term planning and their need to set priorities to have time for their families.

Parents in this study saw changes in their lives since becoming parents. Time for themselves and their friends was

reduced and some parents related this to reinvesting that time in their child. Other researchers (Hobbs & Cole, 1976; McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Russell, 1974) have observed similar changes in new parents. Parents in this study also noted that they felt parenting had made their marriage stronger. Hobbs & Cole (1976) and Russell (1974) found that marital satisfaction stayed the same or improved slightly after the birth of a first child. Five of the six children in this study were planned which lends support to Russell's (1974) idea that planned pregnancies help with positive attitudes toward parenting.

It is interesting that even though parents have experienced changes in their lives as they accommodate their images to the realities of parenting, their basic image of loving their child and enjoying their parent role remain constant.

### Trajectory Images

Projecting into the future requires parents to envision their child, who they know so well at two, as a twelve year old. They must imagine what they will be doing in their own lives as well as in their role as a parent. This scenario was something most parents had not thought about. When asked to think ahead to the year 2000 when their first born would be twelve, parents responded with gasps, sighs, laughter and a variety of exclamations. They perceived that the future will bring changes in their child, their child's activities and in

themselves. However, the idealism they described prior to parenthood does not seem to fade with the realities of parenting a two year old child.

Parents imagine they will test themselves in the future and assess their present parenting. They believed that their parenting in the first decade of their child's life would be more important than their parenting after the child is 12 years old. When children approach adolescence, Galinsky (1987) finds parents in the Interdependent Stage where the parent-child relationship must be redefined. This relationship must address such issues such as new authority and the child's identity. This follows the Interpretive Stage where images of being a parent and learning about one's child allows parents to be more involved with their child's interpretation of the world.

Parents in this study predicted their children would be gaining independence and requiring less direct parenting as an adolescent. They anticipate becoming a guidance person to their child. They expect to be available to their children for questions and advice. Their goal is for a child who is involved in school, sports and activities, and who is confident. These images are similar to goals of parents in Chilman's (1980) study where parents hoped their children would be happy, independent and know their self worth. The present study expanded the Chilman study by asking parents how they felt these goals could be achieved. Parents indicated that staying involved with their child and his interests would



enable them to continue spending time with and showing love to their child.

These findings add to previous studies (e.g. Chilman, 1980; Intons-Peterson, 1985) which support LeVine's (1975) hierarchy of parental goals. LeVine has proposed that all parents have the same basic desires for their children. The first level is to assure the child's survival and basic health. When this has been achieved, parents move to the next level where they hope for the eventual economic independence of their child. Thus, having healthy, normally developing children allows the parents in this study to anticipate their child's independence. The future goals of these parents are similar to the third, and highest level, of LeVine's (1975) hierarchy, the child's development of culturally distinct behaviors and social norms. Those outlined by the parents in this study are the child's involvement in school and sports, and the acquisition of confidence and happiness.

The majority of parents hoped that changes would be minimal and that their family life would continue to be close. They expected few major changes making their trajectory images similar to their images prior to parenthood. Many parents mentioned having more time returned to themselves in the future, especially for careers. While imagining a future that they can not yet see, many parents found that their images were being created from the past. To envision one's child in the future brought back memories of their own childhood. Perhaps visions of the future are compiled through comparisons

of the self in the past with the child in the present. The unknown is projected through the known. Being able to remember one's self at 12 years old helped picture their child in the future: "That I can remember from my own life."

Their future images are oriented toward the family with expectations of 2-3 children, intact marriages, advancing careers, vacations and even pets. One mother described these visions as "rosy" and a father likened his images to a "happily ever after" fairy tale. Perhaps it is appropriate that parents who anticipate having to adjust to their child's independence and worry about societal issues such as drugs and sexuality, might need to maintain their idealistic images. If the future does not contain some of the pleasant feelings of the present and the dreams of the past, it would seem to be very disheartening to imagine.

The findings indicated that these parents expect healthy, active children, physically capable and mentally competent. They also anticipate trying to help build their child's confidence and self esteem by being emotionally available to provide guidance without being overbearing in their discipline. These parents also expect to love their child and have time available to spend with their child and family.

#### Adjustment: Change over Time

The findings of this study show change over time in the images parents have of their own parenting. Ideal images are adjusted to the realities of parenting a two year old child,

however the ideal images reform into trajectory images of the future. Parents show change in the way they see themselves performing specific parenting responsibilities, but show no change in why they feel these are important. Expectations of family size change over time, but the actual age of becoming a parent does not. In view of the changes found in this study, the determining factors in Belsky's Determinants of Parenting model may have more influence than previously described (Belsky, 1984).

#### Change in Images over Time

Parents' idealistic images predicted little or no change in their lives or relationships. Even parents who had commented that they thought they were prepared for parenthood found their images had changed. The ecological model predicts that a change in one system results in changes in the others. The increased need for time affects the availability of that resource for other systems such as one's spouse, friends and free time. The addition of another generation was seen by half the sample to impact the relationship between themselves and their own parents, bringing them closer, more aware and understanding of their own parents.

Adjusting to the present does not seem to make these parents anticipate further changes to their family system. Although they predict changes in their child and their parenting, none of the parents mentioned anticipating any change in the time they had available to spend with their

family. This dissonance between ideal and realistic images does not seem to keep these parents from pursuing their goal of spending time with their young child. Spending time together as a family was also the most frequent trajectory image, which is consistent with their idealistic images of the family system and the time they desired to invest.

It is possible that because these parents expected to spend time with their family, they reorganized and prioritized their schedules so as to make room for the realistic changes. Perhaps their enjoyment of parenting continues to reward them for the time they have had to reinvest and for time they no longer have. In actuality, the ideal images of physically being with one's child has been maintained in their current parenting even though there is dissonance with their images of the time available to themselves for other pursuits.

Galinsky (1987) believes that parents in the Authority Stage of Parent Development (when a child is between 2 and 4 years old) have already survived the initial shock of their 24 hour a day job. By staying committed to the image they created before parenthood, parents in this study, like those interviewed by Galinsky (1987), "have already outlined the way they use their time" (p. 152). This includes decisions such as staying home with children, changing work/school schedules and sharing responsibilities at home. Because they believe it is important for children to be with their parents, all of the mothers in this study stayed home full time or worked only part time during their child's first year. Most mentioned

that they were thankful they were financially able to keep this image of having parents at home. One father echoed the thoughts of many with his statement, "I just feel fortunate that we can afford to have (my wife) stay home. And there are a lot of couples who can't afford that."

In the future, parents expect to have some of their time returned and available for other, more personal pursuits. Trajectory images are of children who are more independent and spend less time with their family and parents who are more active in their own professional careers. This was especially true of the mothers, who for the most part, have put their careers on hold. However, the ideal image of spending time with the family continues; enjoying their family time whether that be over a dinner together, a shared sporting event or a family vacation. These parents appear to have committed themselves to their goal of allocating time for their family.

Images develop early and some are adjusted to reality. However, many images were maintained across time resulting in dissonance between ideal and realistic images. Trajectory images were most often similar to the ideal images thereby creating a cycle where parents downplay their reality and focus again on the ideal. They do not anticipate great changes in the future, but tend to base their images on who their child is now and what they themselves were like at the projected age. The ideal of being able to find time for their children is congruent with their trajectory images of minimal change to the family system, especially the parent-child

relationship.

### Changes in Parenting Behavior

In general, dissonance between images occurs with the "how" components of parenting, such as to show love and allocate time to "be there" for children and to role model. Congruence exists with the "why" components of parenting, such as building a child's self-esteem, confidence and sense of security.

Ideal images consist of showing love by being with a child physically, such as playing with him, holding, and providing basic needs. Realistic images include the physical care but must adapt to a child's need for discipline. Parents in this study found that dealing with their child's emotions and temperament required changes in their images. They organized their time so as to be able to play with their child, role model, teach and explain. In the future, trajectory images are of a loving parent who is available emotionally to talk, listen and guide. Trajectory images match ideal images through the expectation of finding time to share activities and interests.

Parents believe that showing love and being with their children, physically and emotionally help to build a child's self-esteem. These are seen as the important outcomes to a parent's responsibilities. Parents have ideal images of children who respond to love and are enjoyable. By spending time with a child, parents believe they are influential in the

child's personality development. With the realities of parenting comes the realization that children do not respond just to love but require discipline as well to build their self-esteem. By setting limits and working toward consistent discipline, parents' realistic images are of normally developing children who are learning a sense of well being and worth. In the future, parents expect their direct influence to be less and will try to encourage confidence and self-esteem through their emotional involvement and accessibility.

This change in outlook of parents toward their child and their parenting is similar to Newberger's (1980) concept of Parental Awareness. In this model, parent development is based on the parent's awareness of the child and the parent role. Newberger (1980) found that each level of awareness is qualitatively different and that parents move toward higher levels by understanding children and obtaining increased knowledge about children's reasoning. A developmental sequence was found in parents of one study where more years of parenting experience were related to higher levels of Parental Awareness (Newberger, 1980).

By learning more about children, parents become more aware of a child's responses and behavior toward parental actions. Newberger's (1980) first two levels are Egoistic Orientation and Conventional Orientation which are similar to the ideal images parents have of children and parenting. At these levels, parents see the child as an extension of themselves

where parenting behaviors are organized around the parent's needs and ideas the parent sees as socially responsible. The ideal images of parents in this study consisted of children who were seen as able to fulfill the needs of a parent's love and care.

The third level of Newberger's (1980) Parental Awareness is Subjective-individualistic Orientation. At this level, the parent can acknowledge the child's individuality and parenting is focused on the parent-child relationship, not just societal descriptions. The realistic images of parents consisted of children who were expressing their own personality separate from the parents. Parents were adjusting to the need to be authoritarians while also needing to meet the needs of their child. Newberger (1980) believes parents must deal with reasoning at the cause-effect level in understanding their child's behavior (specifically for discipline). Parents begin to focus on the cause of their child's behavior and realize they must be role models and need to teach and explain things to their child.

Newberger (1980) calls the highest level of Parental Awareness, Process or Interactional Orientation (level 4). At this level, the parent sees the child as a "complex and changing psychological self-system" (p. 50). The parent realizes that his needs, as well as those of his child, can be met and that a balance in the relationship must be found. The trajectory images of parents in this study are similar to the fourth level of awareness as parents realize that the



child's development and capabilities must be taken into account. Parents see their child as having more independence in the future and needing to rely on themselves more than relying on the parent. Parents see this as a period of being able to have some time back for themselves to pursue their own personal goals. By being available to their child, they acknowledge his individual "self-system" while continuing their need to provide love and spend time with their child.

Parents anticipate changes in the ways they will deal with their child by projecting changes they expect in their child's growth and development. The ways in which they will parent are anticipated to change, but their reasons for parenting in those ways show consistency across time. Parents seem to have anticipated going through stages of their own, comparable to Newberger's Levels of Parental Awareness (1980) which allow parents to grow, change and assess their concepts about children's reasoning as the child grows and changes.

#### Change in Age of Parenthood and Family Size

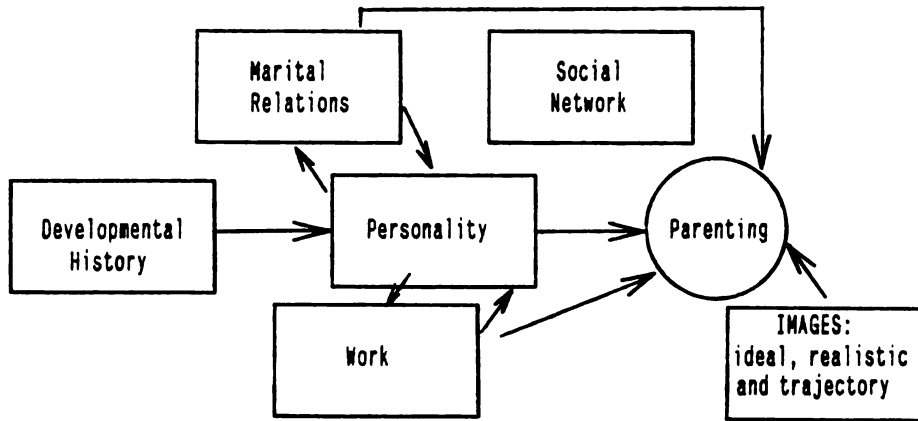
The age at which parents expected to have children differed from reality by no more than an average of 3-4 years. Where parents did not meet their ideal, it was due to the realization that their very early images were inconsistent with their life events. This was more true for the mothers who created images in high school of having children early and who found that college, career and their marriages used up their time. As their priorities changed in their late teens

and early 20s, so did their expectations for parenthood. Over half the parents differed in age by less than 2 years from their ideal image. The overall congruence of images may be due to the fact that their children were "planned" thus enabling the parents to achieve their expectations.

Dissonance of images of family size show marked change over time. Over half the parents realized their image of a larger family (4-6 children) was no longer possible. Being able to provide for their family financially was cited as the reason for altering these images. Most want more children because they enjoy parenting and would like their first born child to have at least one sibling. It appears that these parents have adjusted their plans in pursuit of their goal of being providers for their children (emotionally and physically).

#### Revision of Model

A conceptual model was designed to outline this research (see figure 3). It was developed from Belsky's Determinants of Parenting Model (1984) and the Human Ecosystems Model (Bubolz, Eicher & Sontag, 1979). The conceptual model included parental images as influencing factors to parenting.

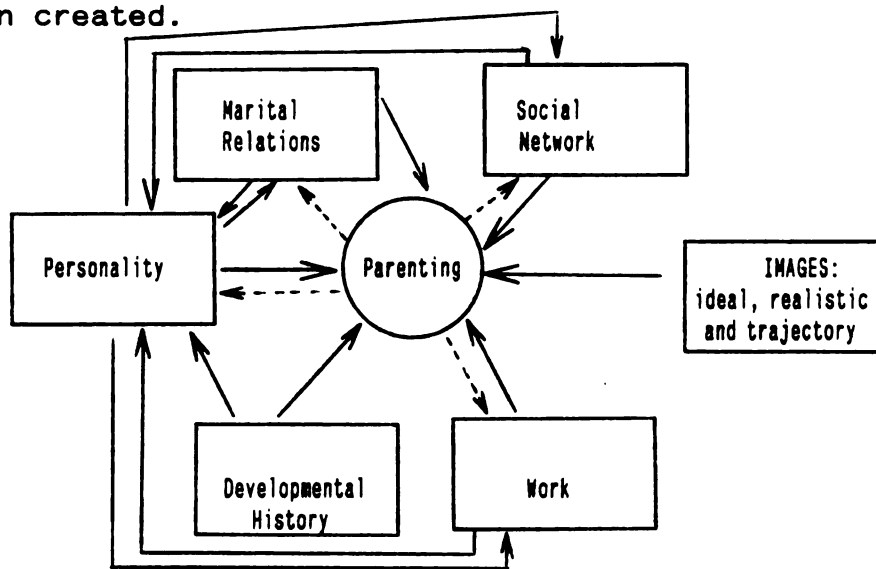


**Figure 3** CONCEPTUAL MODEL

As shown in this study, parents' images do influence their thoughts about their parenting, but their parenting does not seem to influence their images. Parenting affects many other aspects of a parent's life. They were not expecting parenthood to change the relationships they had with others. Time must be adjusted and reallocated causing their parenting to affect the time available for their marriage, social network and their careers. They found that parenthood changes not only the relationship with their spouse and family, but other interacting systems as well.

Parenting was also shown to change the parents themselves; the majority of parents found that their personalities had changed making them more patient and more tolerant people. Many parents did not anticipate the intensity of the emotional attachment they felt toward their child and their new role. This made them aware of their thoughts toward other parents, other people and other aspects of their life.

It seems reasonable to add two-way lines to the conceptual model used in this study (see Figure 4). These parents have shown that their parenting has affected their own personality and their relationships with the other social systems in their lives. Parenting does not seem to flow in one direction, but influences other systems as well as being influenced by them. Therefore, a new model which includes these influences has been created.



**Figure 4** CONCEPTUAL MODEL - REVISED

This revised model incorporates the changes parents in this study have experienced in parenthood. It is interesting that the parents discuss these influences in the present tense, but do not project any continued change from these factors in the future. Perhaps, once they have adjusted to the realistic influence parenting creates, they need time to gradually incorporate any more changes.

For the most part, these parents seem to feel a sense of control over their parenting and the choices they have made

in their lives, such as waiting for parenthood and postponing careers. This may be due to their socio-economic status and very high levels of education. Perhaps this enables these parents to make choices and follow through with longterm plans which other families may not be able to do. The expectation to provide for a child, emotionally and physically, requires an increased amount of time and energy which these parents have chosen to invest.

Their reactions to parenthood and parenting were overwhelmingly positive which could be accounted for by their involvement in their parenting or their expectation to enjoy their parenting. The expectation of enjoying parenthood has been realized with an intensity that they did not anticipated. It appears that these parents believe that the energy and time they devote to parenting is worthwhile not only for their children but for themselves as well. They see the benefit side of their cost-benefit ratio as out-weighting any costs. These parents feel they have gained on their investment.

### Implications

Due to the small sample size (n=12), the results of this study are not definitive. The information given by the parents in this study cannot be generalized to other parents of preschool children. However, the images these parents shared may represent ideas that many more parents have. The following discussion will highlight possible implications for parent education and implications based on the expectations

parents have for their children. Implications for future research are also indicated.

### Parent Education

It appears that parents develop their images of what their children will be like and how they will parent before they physiologically become parents. Because of this, parental images may not be affected by professional intervention if education occurs after parenthood. Parents in this study revealed that their images are solidly based on their experiences with their own family. In particular, their own parents were major influences to the images developed about parenting. These images begin to form while parents are themselves being parented. When they enter parenthood, the way their parents acted influenced the decisions regarding how they parent. Images are sustained over time and although realistic images replace a few components of ideal images, the ideal images are maintained and projected into the future.

Perhaps education with parents after they have become parents may not create noticeable changes in their parenting images. If they continually rely on their ideal images as guidelines (and goals), those of the professionals may or may not be integrated. It appears that education as early as high school, or earlier, could be appropriate in order to merge professional issues with developing personal issues about parenting.

Unfortunately, many parent education programs target people who have already become parents and are actively experiencing parenthood. At this point parents are adjusting their previous images to reality, but at the same time, are projecting those same images into the future. It is possible that parent education could help parents become aware of the realities of parenting. By helping them adjust their ideal images to real images, parent educators can facilitate parents' images to changes at future stages also.

Research which focuses on the formation of images and the implications for parent education would provide more information. Investigations on the images of young adults in junior high or high school could add to the findings of this study on the factors influencing parental images prior to parenthood. Research is also needed to define more precisely how these images change over time by following a study population longitudinally: before they become parents, after they become parents, and follow up at specific times in their parenting.

Such information could be used in the design and development of parent education programs. Findings from larger studies with populations of diverse demographic backgrounds will provide data from which subtle differences in images can be discovered. If images are different across different sub populations of parents, education geared toward those populations would need to address their unique images. Specifically, further research on the formation of parental

images will help to answer questions such as, when should parent education begin and what should it hope to change?

### Expectations for Children

The ideal images of the parents in this study were of well behaved, active children. Parents expected to love their child and were surprised by emotions, such as anger toward the child and the amount and intensity of love they felt. Parents also did not have prior images of themselves as disciplinarians and this caused them difficulty when their child broke their expectation of always minding and responding to love. Belsky (1984) has studied parents who abuse their children, showing that it is often their inability to understand their child's actions that leads to abuse. Longitudinal studies with these families would be beneficial to learning how abusive parents think about their parenting and their children, compared to those parents who do not abuse their children.

Parents expect their children to grow up physically and mentally capable. Only one of the parents in this study gave any indication that they think about their child dying or becoming disabled or ill (specifically, this parent said, "I just can't imagine it (my child dying)"). It is assumed that parents also anticipate continued health and well-being for themselves. This includes the physical, mental and emotional abilities to continue providing for their child.



It seems possible that if an event such as a child's chronic illness or death occurred, the parental images projected would not match this reality. Parents who anticipate their children to be healthy do not anticipate dealing with illness, handicapping conditions or death. Parents who anticipate themselves as providing emotional and financial support do not anticipate being unable to perform these roles. Professionals who work families in these situations should be aware of the possible impact of dissonant images.

As indicated in research on transition to parenthood and abusive families, crisis occurs when expectations are not met (Belsky, 1984; Galinsky, 1987). In Beach and Mitchell's Image Theory (1987), when new plans cannot be adopted, the incompatibility of images (e.g. ideal vs. realistic) implies ineffectiveness, which in broad terms could be seen as a parent's guilt and sense of loss in a crisis. Images that have been developed over the process of many years must be denied and thoughts about being a parent must begin all over again.

Parents in this study held goals for their children which are similar to Levine's (1975) hierarchy of parental desires. They are currently parenting healthy children whose survival seems assured (level 1). With this accomplished, parents can move to level 2 where their goals are to have their child obtain economic independence in adulthood. Although this study did not examine parents' images of their child in

adulthood, parents do anticipate their child to be more independent by age 12. Once they believe the goal of independence for their child is achievable, parents develop goals at the highest level (level 3). These represent desires for their child's ability to develop cultural values and norms. In this study, parents hoped for their child's future happiness, involvement in socially acceptable activities (e.g. sports instead of drugs), and a sense of self worth.

When these images (goals) are violated by a child's illness or disability, it would seem that parents can no longer be assured of their level 1 goals for the child. Therefore, a life threatening or chronic illness pushes parents back to level 1 where their primary goal is their child's health and physical survival. If a child is handicapped, parents cannot be assured of his financial independence in adulthood and parental goals remain at level 2. If something were to disable a parent, their basic goal of providing for their child's needs and survival could be incompatible with their ability to achieve this level 1 goal. The violation of an image may require a parent to begin again from a lower level of goals.

The images of parents and the findings of this research need to be confirmed by other studies. The images of other populations of parents, such as those with lower income, lower educational level and/or lower age at first child's birth, would add to the findings of this study. Are the images of parents the same across different demographic categories? Are

the goals of Levine's (1975) hierarchy "universal" for all parents as he proposes? Under what circumstances do parental goals move from level to level?

The results from this study imply that parent's developmental history and personality do affect parenting as outlined by Belsky (1984). In addition, parenting affects personality, the social relationships surrounding the parent, the marital relationship, and the parent's work and career. The impact of the parenting role on these factors could be a source of investigation for future research.

Studies using a more complex and longitudinal design would provide more definitive data on how parents' images change over time. Parent development issues need to be further explored to note the impact that images have on parenting. Also needed is further research to explore the concept that the parenting role affects multiple components of the parent's life and personality. This research provides a starting point from which to explore the ways parents think about their parenting.

**APPENDIX**

**A**

**Interview Form**

INTERVIEW FORMparent ID

(Interviewer: Prior to Interview - Fill in parent code on each page. Fill in child's name on all appropriate spaces. Circle *father* or *mother* as appropriate. During Interview - Introduce self to parent and review purpose of study. Answer any questions about consent form and confidentiality. Collect consent form and demographic questionnaire, placing both in an envelope. Set tape recorder on table between parent and yourself. Be sure that a 90 minute tape is inserted. Start the tape recorder. Take short notes while respondent is talking.)

[General Probes: *Can you tell me more about that? What might have influenced those thoughts? Is there anything else?*]

\*\*\*\*\*

I will be asking you a series of questions about being a parent. There are no right or wrong answers. If a question is unclear, please tell me. If at any time you are uncomfortable and wish to stop the interview, tell me. You are free to stop at any time.

[Ideal Images]

First, I would like you to think back before you had any children. Think about when you first realized you might someday become a parent.

1. What did you think being a parent would be like? When did you think that?  
(probe: anything else?)
2. What did you think your future children would be like?
3. How many children did you think you would have?  
(probe: why do you think you chose that number?)
4. When did you think you would start having children?  
(probe: why do you think you thought that?)

parent ID

*(provide parents with a longer pause to think about questions 5 & 6)*

5. What or who do you think shaped your early ideas about parenting? How did that influence your ideas of parenting?

*(probes: did you have any early experiences with children? do you think your own parents influenced you? how? do you think your own family was an influence? did you, for example, care for younger brothers/sisters?)*

6. Before you had children, what did you think was the most important part of being a parent?

*(probe: can you tell me more about why you thought that way?)*

7. Did you think a child would change your personal relationships?

*(probe: with your spouse/partner? your family? your friends? can you describe the changes you envisioned?)*

8. When (child's name) was born, did any of these changes happen?

*(probe: which ones?)*

parent ID[Realistic Images]

We've been talking about your thoughts before you were a parent. I'd like you to focus now about your thoughts since becoming a parent.

9. How many children do you have?  
     *(probe: could you tell me their names and age?*  
     *[record sex if apparent from name, if not apparent, ask sex of*  
     *child])*

*(If more than one child, SAY:*

*For all of the following questions, I'd like you to think specifically about (child's name).*

10. Is (child's name) your first child?  
     if no, *probe: where does (child's name) fit in the*  
     *order of your children? is she/he second? third?)*

11. What is (child's name) birthday? (*probe: month, day, year*)

\_\_\_\_\_

month	day	year
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12. Briefly tell me about (child's name). What has (he/she) been doing these days?  
     *(Note: this should be a relatively short, transition answer -*  
     *move fairly rapidly to question 13)*

13. What has it been like being a father/mother in the past few months?  
     *(probe: has it been difficult? in what ways? what are some things that have been easier than you thought they'd be?)*

(parent ID)

14. What are some of the things that have surprised you about being a father/mother?  
(*probe*: have you noticed any changes in yourself since becoming a parent?)
  
15. What changes have you noticed in the way you think about parenting now compared to what you thought before becoming a father/mother?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
16. Now that you are a parent, what do you feel is the most important part of parenting? Why do you feel it's important?  
(*probe*: can you tell me more about why? how do you try to do this in your parenting?)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
17. Now that you have been a parent, do you think you would like to have more children?  
(*probe*: can you tell me about your reasons why/why not?)



(parent ID)

[Trajectory Images]

We've talked about your thoughts before becoming a parent, and we've also talked about your thoughts as a parent. Now I'd like you to think ahead ten years to the year 2000.

(child's name) will be (12/13) years old.

18. What do you think (child's name) will be doing?
  
19. What do you think it will be like parenting a (12/13) year old?
  
20. What changes do you think you will have to make as a father/mother?  
 (probe: what do you think will be different in what you do now? how will you prepare yourself for these parenting changes?)
  
21. What do you think will be the most important part of your parenting when (child's name) is (12/13) years old? Why will that be important then?  
 (probe: can you tell me more about why you think this will be important?)
  
22. Now think about the family you have started. What do you think your family will be like ten years from now?  
 (probe: how many children do you think you'll have? what do you think your marriage be like? where do you think you will be living? what type of work do you think you might be doing?)

How would you sum up and describe your role as a parent?

**APPENDIX**

**B**

**Demographic Questionnaire**

**INFORMATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE**parent ID

To help this study about parents, I would like to ask a few questions about yourself for statistical purposes which help interpret the results.

Q-1 Your birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_ MONTH \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR

Q-2 Your gender: (Circle number)

1. Male
2. Female

Q-3 What is your present marital status? (Circle number)

1. Single (never been married)
2. Married (first marriage & living with spouse)
3. Remarried (married more than once &  
living with current spouse)  
Number of marriages \_\_\_\_\_
4. Divorced - Number of divorces \_\_\_\_\_
5. Widowed
6. Co-Habiting (living with partner  
but not married)

Q-4 If married, what is the date of your current marriage?  
\_\_\_\_\_MONTH \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR

-----  
-----

To obtain an accurate picture of the families in this study, I would like to know a little about your work, income and education.

Q-5 Which of the following describe your employment status?  
(Circle number of as many as apply)

1. EMPLOYED FULL-TIME (35+ hours/week) or with a job but not  
at work now because of temporary illness,  
vacation, strike or personal leave time.
2. EMPLOYED PART-TIME (less than 35 hours/week)
3. HOMEMAKER
4. UNEMPLOYED; LAID OFF; or LOOKING FOR WORK
5. IN SCHOOL
6. OTHER (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## INFORMATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE: PAGE 2

Q-6 Please describe your occupation before your first child was born.  
(for example: student, nurse, electrician, homemaker, accountant)

Main occupation or JOB TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

Kind of work you did \_\_\_\_\_

Type of business or industry \_\_\_\_\_

Q-7 Please describe your occupation NOW. (for example: student, nurse, electrician, homemaker, accountant) If same as Q-6, write "SAME."

Main occupation or JOB TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

Kind of work \_\_\_\_\_

Type of business or industry \_\_\_\_\_

Q-8 Do you have another job in addition to your main job described in Q-7? (Circle number)

1. NO
2. YES (please specify other job title)

\_\_\_\_\_

Q-9 What was your total family income for 1989? Please circle the number of the category which is closest.

- |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. \$10,000 or less  | 5. \$50,000-\$59,999 |
| 2. \$20,000-\$29,999 | 6. \$60,000-\$69,999 |
| 3. \$30,000-\$39,999 | 7. \$70,000 and up   |
| 4. \$40,000-\$49,999 |                      |

Q-10 Which is the highest level of education that you have completed? (Circle number)

1. SOME HIGH SCHOOL
2. COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL
3. SOME COLLEGE
4. COMPLETED COLLEGE (specify major) \_\_\_\_\_
5. SOME GRADUATE WORK (specify degree working toward) \_\_\_\_\_
6. A GRADUATE DEGREE (specify degree and major) \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!!

**APPENDIX**

**C**

**Informational Letter  
Consent Form**

May 21, 1990

Study Parents  
120 Main Street  
East Lansing, Michigan 48824

Dear John and Mary,

Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed for my study. Your participation is voluntary and you may decide to not participate at any time.

I am investigating what mothers and fathers think about being a parent. Specifically, I will be asking each of you, in a separate interview, questions about your thoughts on being a parent. I will spend approximately one hour with each of you. I will tape record our individual conversations so that I can spend more time listening than writing. After I transcribe the interviews, the tapes will be erased.

There is a code number for every person participating in the study. This is to help keep the data organized. Your names will not appear on any answer forms. Your thoughts during the interview will be kept confidential. No one else will have access to or be told about your thoughts and answers. You will not be identified through reports of the research as all responses will be anonymous. No one will be told about your participation in this study.

Enclosed you will find a consent form for each of you in which you volunteer to participate in this study. Also enclosed are short questionnaires for each of you. I will need the information from those questions for statistical purposes of the study. I will pick up the forms and completed questionnaires when I arrive for the interviews.

The results of this study will be used to help professionals working with parents learn more about being a parent. Input from parents such as yourselves will enable professionals to incorporate parent viewpoints into their programs. If you would like, a summary of the results will be sent to you.

If you have any questions regarding the enclosed materials or the upcoming interviews, please don't hesitate to call me. My phone number is 339-1723. If I am not home, please leave a message on the answering machine so I can return your call.

Thank you for your help. I look forward to seeing you both on Thursday, May 31 at 6:30 pm.

Sincerely,

Beth Grupe  
Department of Family and Child Ecology  
Michigan State University

**CONSENT FORM**

*for a study of parents and  
their thoughts of parenting*

I understand that the information I give will be used for a research study as part of a masters program at Michigan State University. I know that my name will not be connected to this information. I also understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time should I desire to do so.

I \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.  
wish, do not wish

\_\_\_\_\_  
signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

NOTE: if you would like a summary of the results,  
please check the box below

☐

**APPENDIX**

**D**

**Data Analysis**



DATA ANALYSIS

Glaser & Strauss Constant Comparative Method (1967)

Examples of Coding - Question 16

Question 16: Now that you are a parent what do you feel is the most important part of your parenting?  
Why do you feel it's important?

Step I: Verbatim responses coded into categories

Step II: Compare responses to the properties of the category

Examples of Responses:Category Codes

"Nurturing is real important for your child to know that he's loved and cared for and feel secure."	>	Nurture Love Security
"It's the loving. It's the self-esteem. But giving him limits, letting him know the security"	>	Loving Self-esteem Limits Security
"I think being consistent. If you're going to tell him "no" you have to say "no" across the board"	>	Consistency

Step III: Integrate related categories into themes

<u>Categories</u>		<u>Theme</u>		<u>Categories</u>		<u>Theme</u>		<u>Categories</u>		<u>Theme</u>
Nurture				Security				Limits		
Love	>	Love		Self-Esteem	>	Self-Esteem		Consistency	>	Discipline
Loving										

Step IV: Integrate themes into explanationsexample:

With the realities of parenting comes the realization that children do not respond just to love, but require discipline as well, to build their self-esteem.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

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