



Resources utilized by parent in child rearing and knowledge of infant development
by Billie Lynn Warford

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE
in Home Economics

Montana State University

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Abstract:

Parents knowledge of infant development and resources utilized were investigated in a sampling of parents of preschool children in Bozeman, Montana. Respondents were 45 married couples age 20 through 45 with children enrolled in preschool programs in Bozeman. The survey instrument included demographic information and a knowledge of infant development section.

Primary resources listed by mothers included instincts, followed by extended family, spouse, books, and friends. Instincts were also listed by fathers as the primary resource followed by spouse, family, books, and friends. Age of parents, level and area of education, preparation in child development, and degree of parental confidence had no significant relationship to parents' knowledge. Mothers in general had more knowledge of infant development, revealed more" preparation in child development, and utilized more resources than fathers.

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Date May 25, 1977

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AND KNOWLEDGE OF INFANT DEVELOPMENT

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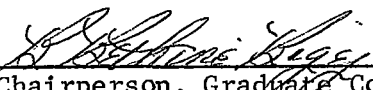
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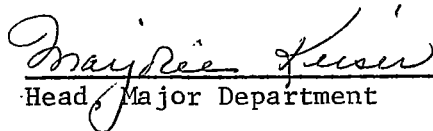
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ABSTRACT

Parents knowledge of infant development and resources utilized were investigated in a sampling of parents of preschool children in Bozeman, Montana. Respondents were 45 married couples age 20 through 45 with children enrolled in preschool programs in Bozeman. The survey instrument included demographic information and a knowledge of infant development section.

Primary resources listed by mothers included instincts, followed by extended family, spouse, books, and friends. Instincts were also listed by fathers as the primary resource followed by spouse, family, books, and friends. Age of parents, level and area of education, preparation in child development, and degree of parental confidence had no significant relationship to parents' knowledge. Mothers in general had more knowledge of infant development, revealed more preparation in child development, and utilized more resources than fathers.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

New research points to the importance of the first three years of life for the development of the child. With more emphasis being placed on the importance of these early years, the role of the parents takes on increased significance. The job that parents do in raising their children will have more of an impact on our society than any other profession.

This year six million Americans will take the step that will significantly change their own lives and profoundly change the next generation: they will have children. How they raise these children will have a greater impact on American society than the way they vote, the technologies they produce, the wars they wage or the art they create. And yet, perhaps never before in U. S. history have parents faced more choices, felt more pressures, or sought more professional help in the rearing of their children (Newsweek, September 1975, p. 48).

American society places the responsibility of raising children on teachers and parents, with the home playing a more responsible role (Hawkins, 1972). This occurs because most of the first five years of life is spent at home. As "Many of the child's behaviors, including his perceptions, skills, values, and even attitudes are formed before the child ever enters school". In fact:

Most mental health efforts to change the home environment are too little and too late. Child-guidance clinics, juvenile courts, family service clinics, and other agencies spend vast amounts of time, money, and energy correcting problems that incompetent parents create (Hawkins, 1972, p. 30).

Since problems which occur at the school level have their foundations earlier in the child's development, the time between birth and

and three years of age is crucial (White, 1975; Gordon, 1975).

In this brief span of time how the mother or primary caretaker interacts with the child can do more to influence the child's competence in later life than at any other time before or after. Yet nobody warns her of the dangers of this period, nor of its promise. She makes her daily decisions purely on instinct, because until recently even the professionals were unaware of it (Pines, 1975, p. 88).

Foundations for the idea that infancy is crucial for development were laid back in 1762, when Jean Rousseau recommended that education begin in the cradle. New research suggests that in the next ten years we may see the elimination of terms such as 'preschool' and the recognition that learning begins at birth (Gordon, 1975, p. 6).

Importance of the Study

Marriage used to be relatively simple in our society, but the changes which are now occurring are deeply affecting the family system (Swerdloff, 1975). Women are seeking more autonomy in both family and non-family roles. There is decreased frequency of inter-generational family relations as most newly-wed couples live apart from parental homes. This tends to contribute either to isolation of the new parents from their cultural traditions of child training, or to their exposure to different ways of child rearing which present a challenge to them (Brim, 1959, p. 17).

Where then do new parents seek help with child rearing? Do new parents still rely on the knowledge or advice of their own parents, or do they take advantage of the wide variety of available community

resources, such as parenting classes sponsored by a public agency, professionals in the field or health agencies, or lectures? Also widely available are the enormous number of child rearing books. Millions of copies of Spock's Baby and Child Care have been sold. Other child development professionals have written best sellers (Ginott, Ilg & Ames, 1955).

Need of the Study

Even with so many available resources, authorities believe that parents today are not prepared for parenting. American society places more restrictions on driving a car than raising a child. The vast majority of educated women in this country do not know the ramifications of child rearing (Pines, 1975, p. 88).

Until we know the ways in which parents prepare themselves for parenthood--where they turn to find help in raising their children--which resources are used, and how often, as well as the level of parenting knowledge, we cannot use our resources wisely.

Statement of the Problem

It is important therefore to identify resources parents utilize when they need help raising their children as well as to obtain a measure of parents' knowledge of infant development.

The following assumptions were made:

1. Parents utilize resources when they need help in raising their children.

2. Infant development follows a sequential developmental pattern which can be utilized for measuring parents' knowledge.

Questions to be Answered

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What resources are parents utilizing to obtain information on raising their children?
 - a. Is the extended family important?
 - b. How widely used are community resources?
 - c. Are books on child rearing an important source of information?
 - d. Are mothers and fathers utilizing the same resources?
 - e. Which resources are more primary or secondary?
2. What is the relationship between parents knowledge of infant development and their
 - a. level of education
 - b. area of education
 - c. previous preparation in Child Development
 - d. age
 - e. number of children
 - f. degree of parental confidence
 - g. age considered crucial for intellectual development
3. How do mothers compare with fathers in knowledge of infant development?

Definition of Terms

Many of the terms used throughout this paper have a wide variety of interpretations. For purposes of this paper, the following terms were operationally defined:

Infancy was limited to the period of time from birth until two years of age.

Parents were limited to married couples, residing together, with at least one preschool aged child enrolled in a day care center or preschool in Bozeman, Montana.

Preschool child is generally defined as a child between the ages of two through five years of age. In Bozeman, Montana five year olds are eligible to attend kindergarden. The term preschool child in this paper refers to children aged two through four years of age.

Day Care Programs fall into two main types: the day care center or day care home. Both these facilities are licensed to care for children while the mother or father are unable to do so during the day. The term day care program refers to both types of day care situations.

Preschool was used to refer to any program which provides a variety of experiences concerned with the development of the child aged three to five.

Limitations of the Study

The parents involved in this study were married couples residing together with children enrolled in a preschool or day care program in

Bozeman, Montana. These parents may not be representative of single parents or those parents who did not volunteer to participate.

The sample was restricted to 45 couples because of time and money limitations. The small sample size will limit any conclusions which might be made.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of parents and the role they play in raising their children is crucial for the development of the child. This review of literature covers research in child development related to these areas:

1. Infancy, the period of time from birth to three years of age
2. Environmental influences on the development of a child
3. Parents, the primary teachers of their children, controlling these environmental factors
4. Programs aimed at preparation for parenthood
5. Parents utilizing resources to help them in raising their children

Importance of Infancy

Few would dissent from the proposition that infancy is the most critical period of human development, the period in which the basic framework for later development is established. Despite this, it is only recently that we have been able to investigate what goes on during infancy (Bower, 1977, p. viii).

The critical nature of development during infancy has been supported by the work of Burton White. As a result of extensive research into the lives of preschool children, White came to the conclusion that by the age of three most of a child's potential has been developed and that the period of eight to eighteen months seems to be the critical learning time in a child's life.

Bower's (1977) investigations of the period of infancy were aided

by the development of new techniques and showed that the newborn infant was an extremely competent social, learning, and perceiving organism.

"The newborn's ability to learn is so astonishing that it would need only the slightest exposure (to a stimuli) for any connection to be learned" (p. 17). Newborn infants are capable of grasping an object, imitating other people, and recognizing their mothers, according to Bower, and this is contradictory to earlier research concerning the abilities of newborn infants.

The critical nature of infancy is synthesized by Gordon (1975) as follows:

1. The infant is a far more capable being in terms of ability to experience the outside world than was thought a decade ago.
2. The infant influences his environment, and the development of his capabilities is related to the responses his environment makes to him.
3. Infants survive in a variety of caretaking situations--the limits of good caretaking are not yet known.
4. Although early deprivation may be reversible, the infant period is a crucial one for setting the stage for adequate growth--both physically and psychologically. "Therefore, what we know should be applied now, even while we continue to develop our knowledge" (p. 3).

Parenthood

Parents are the primary teachers of their children and parents largely control the environmental factors that influence the child's development (Pickart & Fargo, 1971). While this reflects the current view, there was a time when parents were told there was little connection between development and learning:

If you were a parent you were supposed to buy (Gesell (1941), which was the standard 'bible'. If you had a two-year old you turned to the right page in Gesell and checked out your child. If he or she was behaving like a two-year old, you sighed with relief; if the child was behaving like a one-year old, you locked the child in the backroom. But you did not do anything about it (Gordon, 1975, p. 173).

Importance of Environment

Today the parents' role as an environmental influence on their child's development is significant, since parents "are and create the major portion of the growing child's environment" (Pickart & Fargo, 1971).

During the 1960's research conducted by Hunt (1961) and Bloom (1964) supported the view that a child's development is profoundly influenced by his environment. Both theories strengthened the belief that the period of early childhood is a time when the environment can have a large effect on the development of a person.

It is important, therefore, that parents have an understanding of the way children grow in order to be able to structure as stimulating an environment as possible (Conney, 1974). Ilg & Ames (1962) urge

parents to learn all they can about child behavior to enable them to use their knowledge to "provide the best possible environment for the child" (p. 12). This is further emphasized by three recent studies.

Kilbride, Johnson, and Streissguth's (1971) study of thirty-two full-term two-week old infants and their mothers showed that mothers' knowledge of infant development influenced their verbal interaction with their infants. Significant social class differences appeared. Seventy percent of the middle-class mothers thought their infants could see and learn at birth, but only 24 percent of the lower-class mothers believed their infants could do so. The amount of verbal interaction between mothers and their infants seemed to be related to maternal beliefs about the way infants see and learn.

In Seegmiller and King's (1975) investigation, infants scoring higher on the Bayley Mental Scale at 22 months of age had mothers who were more highly involved with their child's achievement. These mothers were more knowledgeable about child development and were generally more able to meet and to understand the needs of the child (Liley, 1969).

Elardo, Bradley, and Caldwell (1975) observed a number of children six months old and later when they were three tested them using the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test. They reported many ways in which what they saw in the home at six months of age could be related to the performance of the children at three years of age.

Need for Preparation

Given the importance of the parental role in early childhood, it is ironic that so few parents are properly prepared for parenthood...Our society does not educate its citizens to assume the parental role (White, 1975, p. 5).

LeMasters (1970) cites a variety of problems faced by parents in modern America and states that poor preparation for the parenthood role magnifies the problem. He further charges that males in particular are not adequately prepared for their roles as fathers, "Girls have dolls and buggies, later, home economics and child development; women's magazines feature articles on child rearing, men's magazines feature sports and girls in scanty outfits" (p. 145). Benson (1967) argues that mothers may receive socialization for the mother role but this socialization is not equivalent to the training and knowledge they will need to perform their duties.

Authorities suggest the birth of the first baby is a crisis for many couples (LeMasters, 1957; Dyer, 1965; Jaccoby, 1969). This transition to parenthood is made difficult for both mothers and fathers by a lack of guidelines to successful parenthood (Rossi, 1968). However, researchers suggest preparation for parenthood can be an effective means for lessening the crisis which often accompanies parenthood and should be emphasized for all couples contemplating having children (Dyer, 1963; LeMasters, 1957).

Methods for Improvement

The accumulating evidence suggests that parents have great

influence upon the behavior of their children, particularly their intellectual and academic achievement, and that programs which teach parents skills in educating their children are effective supplements or alternatives for preschool education (Schafer, 1972, p. 227).

Combining the new research which points to the importance of the first few years of life and the realization that parents are the prime educators of the child during this time, new programs have emerged around the country in an effort to prepare parents for these responsibilities.

Brookline Early Education Project. The Brookline Early Education Project (BEEP) is a publically operated program aimed at parents with babies. All families living in the Boston suburb of Brookline were invited to join in the experiment which provides an intensive series of medical and psychological examinations devised to detect any problems in the child at key periods of development. A teacher visits the home on a regular basis and works with the parents to teach them how to respond to their children's needs according to their developmental stage.

BEEP has clearly built the foundations of a totally new type of public school system for babies and young children—a system in which parents do the actual teaching, but receive extraordinary technical support: masses of information, home visits, training, consultants, books, toys, highly specific tests of the baby's physical, intellectual and emotional state, occasional child care, referrals and strong advocacy whenever necessary. Nothing like it has ever been tried before (Pines, 1975, p. 88).

Other Programs. Toledo, Ohio has a parent-infant enrichment program for women between twelve and nineteen. Its' goal is to help

these young women assume their role as parent and educator of the child, provide necessary parenting skills, and help to strengthen the family (Wagner, 1976).

Another pilot program in Des Moines, Iowa focuses on the use of schools as a hub of community activities. It offers parent training programs, discussion groups, and other programs as a part of the public schools and community college system, encouraging community support for family life programs.

In addition to programs offered by schools and colleges, other community organizations offer classes for parents. These include the American National Red Cross, hospitals that offer instructions to expectant mothers to help develop skills to care for the infant, Public Health Departments, churches which offer classes in parenting skills, and pediatricians who give advice concerning the social and emotional health of the child (Spock, 1974).

Education of Parenthood Project (EPP). Supported by the Office of Child Development in HEW and the National Institute of Mental Health. The purpose of the project was to assist in the design and implementation of parenthood education curricula by local school systems. The approach of this program varies from the other programs mentioned in that it is aimed at children and youth rather than parents. The Exploring Childhood Program is an outgrowth of EPP. Nationally operated, it focuses on helping high school students view childhood

and adolescence as an important time for becoming a person. Its aim is to prepare students to become aware of the importance of the family and the responsibilities of parents (Schaefer, 1972).

Resources Used by Parents

Traditional supports for parenting are changing:

Parents do not have the support that was once generally available. The extended family is rare in contemporary society, and with its demise the new parent lost the wisdom and daily support of older family members. The increased mobility and new housing patterns of American families have all too often deprived the family of a variety of community activities that supported parenting and family life (Zigler, 1975, p. 41).

These changes which are occurring in American society are affecting parents and the resources to which they can turn when they need help or information in rearing their children.

Instincts

Whether or not there is an innate instinct for parenting is an ongoing argument among researchers. Some research indicates there may well be an inherited potential for parenting (Barash, 1977). Dr. Spock advises: "Trust yourself...You know more than you think you do" (1968, p. 3) and continually urges parents to trust their common sense. He concludes "what good mothers and fathers instinctively feel like doing for their baby is usually best after all" (p. 5).

Drs. Salk (1969) and Dodson (1971) also favor the use of instinct over external resources for parents. The latter advises parents to trust their hearts above theory. In an unsure situation, "science may

tell you one thing, but your heart tells you another--trust your own heart" (p. 232). Love seems more important than scientific information. Both Dodson and Salk agree that after all is said and done instinctive parental feeling is the most trustworthy guide.

On the other hand, Drs. Ginott (1971) and Gordon (1970) believe that love is not enough and instinct is insufficient. Good parents need skills. Love which is not communicated or which is communicated in harmful ways, will not be effective and may be counterproductive. Therefore, parents need to learn skills in communication. Dr. Ginott does not believe that common sense and instincts are to be trusted over knowledge and skills. Skinner reflects an extreme position, preferring to turn the task of child raising over to specialists, and believes that an ordinary parent cannot do a good job (LeShan, 1970, p. 10).

Callahan (1973) does not think there is any innate parental instinct, or any common sense or even any heart which has not been socially learned:

Also, unfortunately, parental instinct, common sense, and heart can all be wrong. Particularly when a culture such as ours is undergoing rapid change and is so unsatisfactory to many of its members. We may need change in child rearing practices when past instincts and common sense endorsed physical punishment, racism, social injustice, aggression, and apathy. Family breakdown, alcoholism, drug use, and child abuse increase may be telling us something about the state of our hearts. When things are falling apart or changing, and parents are reading how-to books because they are searching for a better way, relying on a concept of common sense will not do...I would rather parents trust their head and thereby be open to new information and

better ways of doing things (p. 73).

Extended Family

LeMasters (1970) sees the switch from a primarily rural to a primarily urban society as a source of many problems for today's family. It reduces the assistance from the extended family. In addition, mobility has forced a decline in large family units and industrialization, in whatever form it develops, is seen by some as undermining the extended family system (Benson, 1968). Since the nuclear family is much more independent from the kin group, three developments in particular have been noted: 1) the responsibilities of the extended family have been altered; 2) other social agencies have emerged to handle various matters formerly handled by the extended family; and 3) the nuclear family has become the focal point for both expressive and instrumental family interaction (Benson, 1968, p. 85).

Researchers have called the assistance and communication between parents and grandparents the "lifeline of the modern kin network" (Sussman & Burchinal, 1962, p. 24). Research showed that the nuclear family still plays an important role, although in modified form. Services include care of children, advice giving, counseling, and cooperating with social agencies. Social activities are principal functions of the kin family network (Sussman, 1953; Sussman & Burchinal, 1963; Babchuk, 1965).

Quarantelli's 1960 study of disaster victims reported the

extended family was used most often as a source of help. He concluded that the extended family was protective and supportive and that the kin group is the preferred, sought, and major source of short and long-run help in time of crisis.

Books

Millions of how-to parent books are sold each year in America.

Parents are feeling over-whelmed and inadequate:

In their distrust of their own experiences, more and more parents are turning to experts for advice. The market for how-to parent books is booming with new treatises on "Father Power" and "The Myth of the Hyper-Active Child" joining the more traditional works of Dr. Spock (Newsweek, Sept. 1975, p. 48).

Books are an effective way to reach parents. Readers of how-to parent books may not be able to find their way through the works of Frued, Montessori, Gesell, Piaget, or many other researchers. "Parenting manuals help to disseminate important ideas" (Callahan, 1973, p. 66).

The phenomenon of how-to parent books reflects one important aspect of American society: a typically American desire to do better-- the desire to do better than one has been doing, better than the neighbor and kinfolk, or better than his own parents.

It is no surprise that a guide book such as Dr. Spock's book on baby and child care continually nudges the Bible on the best-seller lists, for more parents than ever have the faith. They believe that parenting can be improved, should be improved, and will be improved with informed parents (Callahan, 1973, p. 65).

CHAPTER III.

PROCEDURES

The problem of this study was to identify those resources utilized by parents for rearing children as well as understanding extent of parents' knowledge about their development.

Population

Parents of preschool children living in Bozeman, Montana were selected as the population for this study. Since parents with children enrolled in preschool or day care programs in the city were: 1) accessible; 2) would in general be young and might rely on some type of resources; and 3) live within a two mile radius of Bozeman, they were selected as the sample.

Information concerning fathers was particularly important because there is little understanding of what fathers know about child development or the resources they employ. Both parents were asked to complete the questionnaire so comparisons could be made between mothers and fathers.

A list of local preschools and licensed day care programs secured from the Director of the Community Coordinated Child Care Services showed 10 programs in which a total of 329 children were enrolled. Although an attempt was made to contact each program director, two were unavailable. Of those that remained, one refused to participate, and another was deemed inappropriate due to limited enrollment. Directors of six programs agreed to help gather data explaining the study and

distributing letters to parents at their centers, inviting them to participate in the study. Parents were asked to sign their name, address, and phone and return the form to their center if they were willing to participate in the study. They could then be contacted to participate in the study (Appendix A).

Enrolled in these six programs were 184 children, or 55% of those known to be registered in preschool or day care programs in Bozeman, Montana.

Instrument

The questionnaire was designed to obtain a measure of parent's knowledge of child development with particular emphasis on infant development. Although several scales were available (Bayley, 1969; Uzigiris & Hunt, 1975; Gesell & Ilg, 1949; Cratty, 1970; Caplan, 1970; Stone & Church, 1973) each was geared for use by child development professionals rather than parents.

Behavioral milestones or landmarks considered to be the most significant during the period of birth to two years of age and which could be easily recognized by parents were selected for use. These included items of physical, social, language, intellectual, and general development. A total of 48 items composed the first listing. They permitted a fill-in response model so that parents would supply the correct age at which this behavior normally occurred.

The questionnaire was then presented to a panel of child develop-

ment professionals to determine if these items were: 1) important in developmental sequence; 2) important to parents; 3) accurate; and 4) expressed clearly.

Following this evaluation, minor changes were made concerning the length of the instrument and the type of response. The number of items was reduced to 40 and the fill-in response was changed to tabular columns, although age at which the behavior occurred was still required.

In order to gather information with regard to the respondent's background, a general information section was devised. It included sex, age, level and area of education, number of children, resources utilized, books used, degree of parental confidence, and age considered crucial for intellectual development.

To further refine the instrument, the questionnaire was completed by 10 married couples whose children were enrolled in the MSU Day Care Program, Bozeman, Montana. After parents completed the questionnaire they were asked:

- 1) Were the directions clear?
- 2) Was the form arranged so that it was easy to complete?
- 3) Was the language easy to understand?
- 4) How did you feel about the information requested?

All respondents completed the general information section and felt the information was pertinent. Six fathers and three mothers refused to complete the knowledge section of the instrument because the

language was too specialized and the nature of the response was threatening.

The instrument was again revised. To reduce the threatening response a Likert-type scale of Agree, Disagree, or Undecided was substituted for the age at which the behavior occurred. The statements contained the age at which the behavior should occur and parents were to respond whether they agreed with the age supplied in the statement.

Instrument Validity. To determine if the questionnaire was measuring knowledge of infant development, the revised questionnaire was administered to 20 students enrolled in a beginning level Child Development class which had just completed a unit on infant development. Student scores ranged from 22 to 35 out of a possible score of 40.

Reliability. To measure the reliability of the instrument the scores of the Child Development students were tested using Split-Halves Reliability. Using the Spearman-Brown formula (Tuckman, 1972) a reliability of .80 was found.

Item Analysis. An item analysis was calculated using the scores of the Child Development students. Items with a difficulty index between .33 and .67 were retained as being adequately difficult. Five items with an index below .33 were reworded. Items with an index of discrimination above .60 were retained as being adequately discriminating. Five items were eliminated (Tuckman, 1972).

The final questionnaire had two sections, the general background

information section about the participants and a second section which contained 35 items on infant development (Appendix B).

Method of Collecting Data

The most effective means for distributing the questionnaire was determined to be the U. S. mail. Parents who had indicated a desire to participate were contacted either in person or by phone. Married couples residing together and living within a two mile radius of Bozeman, Montana were mailed questionnaires. A total of 60 pairs of questionnaires was mailed.

To motivate participants to return questionnaires, in the initial phone contact parents were told the purpose of the study and encouraged to complete and return the questionnaire quickly. Included with each pair of questionnaires was a cover letter which explained the study, stressed the importance of completing them, and where to return them. If a questionnaire was not returned, the parents were reminded at their center with a written note. Parents were also instructed how to obtain a second instrument if for some reason the first one was lost.

Analysis of Data

Items on the knowledge of infant development section were scored so that higher scores reflected a higher level of knowledge. Each correct response received one point making the highest possible score 35. If the response was marked Undecided, it was marked zero and considered incorrect.

Means and variances were estimated for each respondent. Data were stratified according to the characteristics included as part of the background information: sex, age, number of children, level and area of education, resources utilized, degree of parental confidence, and age considered crucial for intellectual development. Means and variances were estimated for each stratum.

Mean comparisons were made using a standard t-test. Statistical significance was assumed at p.05 or less.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine resources parents utilize when they need help in raising their children and to obtain a measure of parents' knowledge of infant development.

Description of Sample

A total of 171 parents of preschool children were invited to participate in the study. Of the 55 couples who confirmed their desire to participate, 45 couples (88%) actually completed and returned the survey.

The 45 couples who participated in the study were predominantly college educated (70%). The sample leaned toward younger adults, with the median age being in the 30-35 age group. The ages ranged from 20 to 45 with fathers being slightly older than mothers. There appears to be a trend toward smaller families in the educated segments of our society (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1976). This study would tend to agree with this trend as nearly three-fourths of the respondents have one or two children and only one-fourth have three or more children (Table 1).

Over 93% of the respondents had some education beyond high school. Only four mothers and two fathers did not have some college. More fathers had degrees above the Bachelor's than did mothers. Of the mothers, 51% had a Bachelor's Degree, 11% had a Master's Degree. For the fathers, 26% had a Bachelor's, 13% a Master's and 38% listed

