

## Reconstructing "Involvement"

### Expanding Conceptualizations of Men's Caring in Contemporary Families

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#### *Deficit Models, Generative Fathering, and the Concept of Parental Involvement*

Variously called involvement, participation, engagement, investment, child care, and child rearing, the concept of parental involvement is defined, conceptualized, and measured in a variety of ways (Palkovitz, in press a). Even when there is agreement of terminology across theoretical or empirical papers, there is little consensus concerning just what involvement is, how to conceptualize it, how to measure it, and how to compare different people's engagement in it. In spite of this, we frequently hear statements to the effect that fathers perform a disproportionately small fraction of the child care in families and the overall conclusion that they are not as involved as mothers in the raising of their children.

The pitfalls of deficit models of fathering have been elaborated in Chapter 1. I believe that much of the thinking that fosters deficit models

of fathering stems from our limited, narrow, and short-sighted conceptualization of involvement. Clearly, where specific measures have been taken, men on average do lag behind women in providing direct child care and related housework. Is this all there is to involvement in parenting? Don't men make significant contributions to the raising of children in other ways beyond the purview of hands-on child care and housework? I am not saying that men have gotten a bad rap only because involvement is too narrowly defined and operationalized, but I am suggesting that as we come to understand the various dimensions of involvement, we may not be so quick to employ deficit models just because one parent outdoes the other on any given measurement of involvement. We need to look at the larger picture. We need to expand and reconstruct our understanding of the concept of involvement.

I am not convinced that it is possible, or even desirable, to generate a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories of involvement. It is necessary, however, to more fully conceptualize, describe, and devise measurement instruments for different types of involvement if we are to come to an understanding of intergenerational relationships, child development outcomes, adult development effects of "involvement" in child rearing, and methods of intervening in families that are not functioning well. There are important constructs concerning involvement that we have overlooked as professionals. But then, any parent could tell us that.

In Chapter 2, Dollahite et al. detail aspects of generative fathering that represent truly innovative scholarship. Borrowing from Sharey (1993) and, of course, Erikson (1950), they define *generative fathering* as fathering that meets the needs of children by working to create and maintain an ongoing ethical relationship between father and child. This conceptualization both parallels and advances work that I have done independently on the concept of *involvement* (Palkovitz, 1980, 1987, 1992, 1994, in press a, in press b). In many ways, generative fathering is similar to involved fathering. The idea is that optimal involvement occurs when both mothers and fathers assess their strengths and weaknesses, the developmental needs of the family, and the resources and deficits that they individually and corporately bring to the family (Palkovitz, 1987, in press b). An ethical investment in care and nurturance of the next generation is based on what is best for the child in the context of the overall family given its current state and history leading up to that point. What is best for a given child at Time 1 may be harmful to the child, the spouse, a sibling, society as a whole, or to the self at Time 2 or if continued for too long. A generative model of parenting would imply that voluntary

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investments in involvement supersede concerns about what the involvement may cost the individual (Palkovitz, in press b). A broader conceptualization of involvement is cast in the larger picture of how to optimally support, nurture, and bring maturity to others in the family, a characterization consistent with the construct of generative fathering presented in Chapter 2.

In contrast to the prescriptive focus of Chapter 2, the emphasis here is on descriptive synthesis, analysis, and evaluation of the involvement concept. A useful metaphor for the reconstruction of a construct such as involvement would be the remodeling and building of an addition onto a home. What I will do in this chapter is to survey the existing structure, lay out some plans, tear out some of the old walls, and begin to build the new structure. While the project is in progress, it can look overwhelmingly disarranged, and it may not be advisable to live there during the construction. Until the dust settles, it can make the rest of the house quite messy, too. When looking at the rubble and clutter of a construction project it takes some faith to trust that the finished structure will be worth inhabiting. The reader may experience the same kinds of doubts in this chapter. In my attempts to lead the reader through each of the components in the maze of factors required to reconstruct and expand a conceptualization of involvement (it eventually emerges in Figure 13.1), things may get a little messy. Ways for parents to be involved, the domains of involvement, various continua of involvement, and factors moderating levels of involvement overlap somewhat and the interrelatedness of any of these classifications with all of the others prohibits a neat and linear discussion. This is truly a construct under construction. At the end of the chapter, I advance a promising plan for the emerging structure, but one that still needs some finishing and perhaps further expansion and renovation. Nonetheless, it represents a roomier structure that can be inhabited by aspects of involvement that are currently homeless. Before the renovations begin, I offer a survey of the current structure.

### *Lamb's Topology of Paternal Involvement*

With few exceptions (e.g., Palkovitz, 1980, 1984) prior to 1986, paternal involvement was treated as a unidimensional construct. Most recent writers on paternal involvement employ Lamb's (1986) tripartite topology of involvement: *interaction* (parent and child interacting one on one), *accessibility* (parent psychologically and physically available to the child), and *responsibility* (parent oversees welfare or care of child). Partly be-

cause of the lack of consistent definitions in the literature (Lamb, 1986; McBride, 1989), Lamb set forth this three-part taxonomy "to identify and define the different processes that father involvement in childrearing might entail" (McBride, 1989, p. 15). According to McBride (1989), most father involvement is said to occur on the level of engagement or interaction, consisting of one-on-one interactions between the father and child in activities such as holding, playing with, or talking to. I believe that in reconstructing the concept of involvement we will see that this is a misstatement. This category merely represents what has been empirically observed and reported the most frequently. It is likely that when we consider an expanded conceptualization of involvement this will no longer appear to be the area of greatest paternal involvement.

A second level described by Lamb (1986) is accessibility, characterized by parental availability, but without direct parent-child involvement. McBride (1989) and others have interpreted this category to include activities such as preparing a meal, cleaning the child's room, or just being in the house while the child is in another room. The third of Lamb's categories, responsibility, includes awareness of the child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs. It also involves implementing strategies to meet these needs, such as making appointments with the pediatrician or arranging transportation to soccer practice. Responsibility may entail indirect involvement through parental anxiety and contingency planning.

This three-part categorization has become the standard of contemporary parenting literature. It offers conceptual advancement over older, less differentiated treatments, but the definitions employed leave many issues ambiguous, and the categories do not seem to allow a comprehensive consideration of involvement. Interviews with parents, observations, and reflections on my own parenting experiences suggest that there are multiple dimensions of parental involvement that have not been given serious and systematic attention in the professional literature.

Before I address those aspects of involvement, I feel it is important to state and refute some common misconceptions concerning parental involvement. To return to the reconstruction metaphor, now that we know something about what the existing structure looks like we need to tear out a few walls so that the renovations can begin.

### *Some Common Misconceptions About Involvement*

*Misconception 1: More Involvement Is Better.* Much of the literature implies that more involvement is better. This little-challenged misconception

may be a direct outgrowth of deficit models. In most discussions of family intervention strategies, it is assumed that fathers should always be more involved in child care than they are. Good fathering is assumed to be good enough when it reaches levels similar to mothering. It is difficult to read much of the involvement literature without getting the sense that greater involvement is necessarily better. This may be true for some parents and in some circumstances, but it is critical to note exceptions at either end of a parenting continuum. Parents with substantive deficits (e.g., a history of severe physical, emotional, or substance abuse) or histories of excess involvement (e.g., enmeshment or overprotectiveness) could inhibit the positive development of their children, who would be best served by limited as opposed to greater parental involvement in each of these examples. Although these examples generate a wealth of ethical issues and intervention concerns, the main point is that more involvement is not always better. Rather than assuming that more involvement is better, an advanced understanding of involvement suggests that appropriate involvement is better. There are multiple factors that could make more involvement inappropriate. Specifically, some involvement is probably ill timed or ill motivated (e.g., a burst of vocalization and physical jostling in an attempt to keep a fatigued infant from dozing off). Other actions may be poorly judged (e.g., attempting to suppress a child's expression of pain or fear due to an injury by diverting attention and exaggerated humor). Some attempts at involvement are developmentally inappropriate (either too advanced or too basic to stimulate the current or emerging capabilities of the child). There also may be other conditions that make greater degrees of involvement inappropriate, such as being out of synchrony with the child's interactional rhythms. Developmental and emotional needs or deficits on the part of any participant in an interaction affect the assessment of appropriateness. For example, children who are overly dependent or parents who are overly stressed out may not engage in inappropriate interactions.

For a better understanding of involvement, we should look beyond both more-is-better models and models based on appropriateness to "positive involvement" (Pleck, in press) or "generative involvement," as defined and described in Chapter 2. It should be obvious by this time that appropriate or generative involvement may or may not look like more involvement. It will, however, advance the development of the child and the parent (Palkovitz, in press a) more than a greater amount of inappropriate involvement.

*Misconception 2: Involvement Requires Proximity.* It is often assumed or stated that to be involved in a relationship you must be physi-

cally present, and conversely, that someone who is not physically present can't be involved. As I write this, my thoughts, affections, and some concerns frequently focus on my family, traveling in another state and returning home tonight. No one watching me at my computer would observe (or even suspect) this involvement. During the day, I have done some things because of the absence of family members (e.g., pet care) and made preparations for the family's return (e.g., cleaning, laundry, and "welcome home" surprises) that could be observed. I assert that both the unobservable and the observable activities represent a level of involvement, though my family is currently 200 miles away.

*Misconception 3: Involvement Can Always Be Observed or Counted.* A corollary misconception is that changes in involvement level are reflected by fluctuations in observable levels of involvement. Any parent can testify, however, that cognitive and affective involvement may not translate directly into observable changes. In fact, increases in involvement (e.g., through increased cognitive and affective activity such as monitoring, planning, and anxiety around the time of a child starting to drive) may be associated with apparent decreases in behavioral involvement (e.g., less chauffeuring). Another example would be where the parent has decided that it is in the best interest of the child to allow him or her to do something independently rather than providing the service for him or her. When the parent stops the overt activity it will appear as a decrease in involvement, but increased monitoring, structuring of the environment, and communication about the area of care may more than compensate for the previous involvement level. (All parents recognize that it is sometimes easier to just do things yourself rather than to delegate responsibility. When you stop doing the task for your child, it actually places greater demands on your time and energy, though it appears to be less involvement by standard ways of measuring involvement.)

*Misconception 4: Involvement Levels Are Static and Therefore Currently and Prospectively Predictive.* It is often assumed that once you measure a particular aspect of how involved a person is, you have a comprehensive view of how involved he or she is now and how involved he or she is likely to be at a later time. For example, a narrow measure (such as time spent in vocalization) is sometimes assumed to represent overall current levels of involvement. Moreover, such a measure is sometimes used to predict future involvement in the same or different categories. *Temporal fluctuations* may be experienced over the short term, however (Thursdays are a particularly busy day for me this semester, but

the rest of the week I have more time for family involvement) or over longer periods of time (e.g., a month of particularly demanding deadlines, a year of major commitments, travel, or other drains on resources that would allow greater investment in involvement). Some changes in observed involvement levels are due to change in *developmental status* of parent, child, or both. For example, it is commonly recognized that adolescent children need to establish independence. Parents intentionally alter patterns of involvement with adolescents to promote independence appropriate for their maturity level. Developmental changes in parents can alter involvement levels as well. For example, an aging parent may stop hiking with an adult child for health reasons, although such outdoor activity once constituted a significant proportion of their shared activity.

*Misconception 5: Patterns of Involvement Should Look the Same Regardless of Culture, Subculture, or Social Class.* Many family professionals still tend to assume that role prescriptions popularized in Western, middle-class, well-educated families are the model for what involved parenting should look like. Involved fathering can take on many forms, however, some of which will be difficult to see with Western eyes. Furthermore, in comparison to some cultures, many U.S. fathers are relatively uninvolved. For example, at the transition to parenthood, many U.S. males appear to be detached in comparison to Garifuna (Black Carib) men in Honduras (Chernela, 1991) and fathers in many less industrialized countries, because few Americans practice the *couvade* (see Elwood & Mason, 1994).

In other cultures, involved fathering looks distinctly different from anything we would define as involvement. Patriarchy is dominant in Middle Eastern religions and cultures, with some of the greatest extremes appearing among traditional Muslims in the Persian Gulf region (Sharifzadeh, 1992). Muslim fathers make major and minor decisions and are primarily disciplinary agents in their interactions with their children. As such, they would score high in responsibility. But Sharifzadeh (1992) characterizes them as having minimal contact, virtually no caregiving responsibility, and negligible awareness of their children's "intellectual and psychological development" (p. 337). Nhlapo (1993) points out that among African families there are very different definitions and forms of parenting that are customarily thought of in Western literature. Specifically, social parenthood is much more broadly recognized, practiced, and regulated. In this context, fathers demonstrate different norms of involvement than what is viewed to be appropriate in the United States. Miranda (1991) suggests

that African American and Latino fathers do not conform to "traditional portrayals found in the literature" (p. 63), a point also articulated well by Allen and Connor in Chapter 4. Some African American men have a different sense of "being there" for their children from that of Anglos (Palkovitz, 1994). Sanchez-Ayendez (1988) has documented that traditional Puerto Rican fathers value *machismo*, and strict discipline, engaging in little direct involvement in child care. Similarly, Asian American men appear to play a minimal role in child rearing (Suzuki, 1985). Shwaly, Imazuimi, and Nakazawa (1987) assert that the Japanese father exercises a weak role in the family in all areas except economic providing.

Clearly, this brief review is neither exhaustive nor representative of individual variations in the cultures discussed. Although it would be a mistake to stereotype individuals in different ethnic and cultural groupings, what can be clearly stated is that each man is displaying a pattern of involvement consistent with his interpretation of the "culture of fatherhood" (LaRossa, 1988) in his own culture and or subculture. To expect to observe the same levels and range of behaviors across cultures is unreasonable.

*Misconception 6: Women Are More Involved With Their Children Than Are Men.* The truth is that we don't know whether mothers or fathers are more involved with their children. As we move more toward an understanding of involvement in generative parenting and conceptualize involvement to encompass more than the narrow range of measures and concepts that have been employed in the past, we must admit that we don't really know the relative levels of men's and women's overall involvement in parenting. As categories, domains, continua, and moderating factors of involvement are elaborated, the value of overall involvement as a meaningful term comes into question. What we do know is that the genders are differently involved in different aspects of involvement to varying degrees.

Now that I have torn out some old walls, it is time to assemble the raw materials for the refurbishing. As we move toward a descriptive understanding of involvement, I will assemble components of the construct that need consideration and consolidation in the professional literature.

### *Dimensions of Involvement*

#### *Ways That Parents Can Be Involved in Child Rearing*

There are at least 15 major categories of involvement that I can generate (see Table 13.1). These categories are based on my own experiences,

qualitative data, and observations coupled with a content analysis of a listing of ways that parents care for children generated with the assistance of students in a graduate seminar. It should be stressed that there are many ways to group the individual examples of involvement listed in this table, and the category headings are intended to be neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. With further reflection and content analysis, there may be more appropriate ways to group these categories. The main point of Table 13.1 is to show that it is easy to generate many examples of parental involvement in child rearing that would not get credit in typical assessments of involvement, yet to the parent represent significant expenditures of time, affect, energy, and so forth. Laypersons do not think in terms of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. They tend to list and describe a wide array of ways to be involved without classifying them into categories. In studying the ways that parents view involvement, we will see that the professional literature is too sterile and circumscribed.

### Domains of Parental Involvement

Even a partial listing of the ways that parents can be involved in child rearing, such as presented in Table 13.1, makes it clear that parental involvement engages multiple domains of functioning: *cognitive, affective, and behavioral*. It is in these three domains that parents experience involvement with their children. These domains are summarized in Panel A of Table 13.2.

Of the three domains, the behavioral components are what usually get studied, especially the overtly observable behaviors that exhibit some type of involvement. As any parent can readily testify, however, there are numerous aspects of involvement that occupy the mind and require emotional or affective energy and investment, as well as an investment of the self, in ways that defy observation. Typically, because these things are not studied in empirical research, we do not have good descriptions of the ways that men and women are truly involved in parenting. Our conceptualizations of involvement need to be more inclusive of thought processes and other cognitive components. In interviewing fathers (Palkovitz, 1994), it becomes clear that much of their consciousness, planning, evaluation, and assessment of daily experiences is occupied or influenced by thoughts about their children. Parents' core identities are invested in the fact that they have offspring and that they perform particular functions and roles in carrying out their responsibilities toward their children (Erikson, 1950). The psychological presence of the child in the parent's

**Table 13.1** Ways to Be Involved in Parenting

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Talking</li> <li>• Writing notes</li> <li>• Making scrapbook</li> <li>• Calling on phone when away</li> <li>• Expressing love</li> <li>• Expressing concerns</li> <li>• Expressing forgiveness</li> <li>• Expressing valuing</li> <li>• Showing genuine interest in day, friends, interests, feelings, thoughts, aspirations, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dating partners</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Whereabouts</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Grooming</li> <li>• Schoolwork</li> <li>• Checking on sleeping child</li> <li>• Going to parent/teacher conferences</li> <li>• Overseeing TV or movie watching and music listening to</li> <li>• Rides to and from places</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared Interests</li> <li>• Developing expertise</li> <li>• Providing for instruction</li> <li>• Reading together</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching</li> <li>• Advising</li> <li>• Role modeling</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Disciplining</li> <li>• Commenting on child's or parent's progress</li> <li>• Teaching spiritual development, praying together, etc.</li> <li>• Fostering independence</li> <li>• Providing long-term perspective</li> <li>• Giving choices and respecting selections made</li> <li>• Assisting in gaining new skills (teach to ride bike, swim, drive, balance checkbook)</li> <li>• Scolding</li> <li>• Giving chores</li> <li>• Teaching responsibility</li> <li>• Teaching about own and other cultures</li> <li>• Answering questions</li> <li>• Encouraging interests, hobbies</li> <li>• Doing taxes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought Processes</li> <li>• Worrying</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Dreaming</li> <li>• Hoping</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> <li>• Praying for child</li> <li>• "Being there"</li> <li>• Errands</li> <li>• Driving</li> <li>• Picking up items</li> <li>• Making calls for</li> <li>• Caregiving</li> <li>• Feeding</li> <li>• Bathing</li> <li>• Clothing</li> <li>• Reaching things for children</li> <li>• Caring for sick child</li> <li>• Tucking into bed</li> <li>• Child-Related Maintenance</li> <li>• Cleaning</li> <li>• Repairing</li> <li>• Laundering</li> <li>• Ironing</li> <li>• Cooking</li> <li>• Pet care</li> <li>• Creating child-centered spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability</li> <li>• Attending events</li> <li>• Leading activities (scouting, PTA, etc.)</li> <li>• Spending time together</li> <li>• Allowing/encouraging child to enter into leisure activities</li> <li>• Being with child when he/she won't go alone</li> <li>• Baking cookies for child's activities</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Birthdays</li> <li>• Vacations</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Trips</li> <li>• Holidays</li> <li>• Saving for future</li> <li>• Appointments</li> <li>• Scheduling time with friends</li> <li>• Shared Activities</li> <li>• Exercising</li> <li>• Shopping</li> <li>• Picnicking</li> <li>• Movie going</li> <li>• Parks</li> <li>• Eating meals</li> <li>• Playing together</li> <li>• Building forts</li> <li>• Celebrating holidays</li> <li>• Working together</li> <li>• Dancing together</li> <li>• Chaperoning events</li> <li>• Providing</li> <li>• Financing</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring</li> <li>• Friendships</li> </ul>		

(continued)

**Table 13.1** Ways to Be Involved in Parenting (continued)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clothing</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Medical care</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Safe transportation</li> <li>• Needed documentation (birth certificates, social security, etc.)</li> <li>• Help in finding a job</li> <li>• Furnishings</li> <li>• Developmentally appropriate toys or equipment</li> <li>• Extracurricular activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative care</li> <li>• Insurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing patience</li> <li>• Praising</li> </ul>
	<p><i>Affection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loving</li> <li>• Hugging</li> <li>• Kissing</li> <li>• Cuddling</li> <li>• Ticking</li> <li>• Making eye contact</li> </ul>	<p><i>Protection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arranging environment</li> <li>• Monitoring safety</li> <li>• Providing bike helmets, life jackets, etc.</li> </ul>
		<p><i>Supporting Emotionally</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging</li> <li>• Developing interests</li> </ul>

cognitions is another dimension that needs to be represented in our conceptualizations of involvement. Parents are also affectively involved with their children. Many of parents' emotional experiences, expressions, and restraints are determined by their children's presence or absence and children's behaviors and affect.

Although research has tended to focus on behavioral components of involvement, it is readily apparent that any behavior that can be categorized as parental involvement has co-occurring cognitive and affective components that accompany them. In past research, scholars have primarily focused on the behavioral component when considering a measure of involvement. There are continual interactions taking place between all three domains, however, as parents enact various ways of being involved with their children. As Erikson (1964, p. 147) has observed, "Feelings, thoughts, and acts" are highly interrelated across the life span. More specifically, there are behavioral, affective, and cognitive components to every "way" to be involved, as Snarey (1993) has demonstrated in his seminal longitudinal research on fathering. For example, listening, the first listing under the communication category in Table 13.1, requires behavioral cues and attending and cognitive processing of the information being listened to and has associated affective responses.

**Continua of Parental Involvement**

Although it is relatively easy to categorize people as parents or nonparents based on a biological occurrence, parenting is not a dichotomous

**Table 13.2** An Expanded Conceptualization of Parent Involvement

<p><b>Panel A: Domains Of Involvement</b></p>	
<i>Domain</i>	<i>Definition/Examples</i>
COGNITIVE:	Reasoning, planning, evaluating, monitoring
AFFECTIVE:	Emotions, feelings, affection
BEHAVIORAL:	Overtly observable manifestations of involvement, such as feeding, talking to, teaching, etc.
<p><b>Panel B: Simultaneously Occurring Continua</b></p>	
<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Range</i>
APPROPRIATENESS:	Inappropriate-highly appropriate
OBSERVABILITY:	Covert-overt
DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT:	None, low, moderate, high
TIME INVESTED:	Low-high
SALIENCE OF INVOLVEMENT:	Low-high
PROXIMITY:	Far away-in same room/proximity-touching
DIRECTNESS:	Direct-indirect
<p><b>Panel C: Factors Moderating Involvement</b></p>	
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Description</i>
TEMPORAL FLUCTUATIONS:	Short term Long term
OVERALL CONTEXT:	Developmental status of child and parent Life course considerations Other ongoing priorities and commitments Macrosystem Individual strengths and deficits
SPECIFIC CONTEXT OF INVOLVEMENT:	Sole responsibility vs. shared responsibility
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES:	Style and personality Subjective experience/evaluation Sensitivity to reading signals Accumulated effects/history

variable. The parent function is not simply "on" or "off." Parents can be involved in myriad aspects of multifaceted roles to varying degrees at different points in their parenting careers (Palkovitz, in press a). We tend to categorize parents as being relatively involved or uninvolved in their children's lives in a global sense, however. Various dimensions of parental involvement can be conceptualized as existing along a series of continua, ranging from noninvolvement through low and moderate levels to high involvement. In fact, as a construct, beyond the sheer degree of participation in specific categories, involvement in an overall sense can be conceptualized to be influenced by a number of co-occurring continua. These are represented in Panel B of Table 13.2. As discussed above, *appropriateness* of involvement and the *observability* of involvement represent two of these continua. We now turn our attention to others.

Parents vary in the *degree* to which they are involved in different aspects of parenting. Time and effort invested in any given child care activity or task may be weakly related or completely unrelated to other areas or means of involvement. For example, it is relatively common for fathers to be more directly involved in play with infants and to share less caregiving responsibility than mothers (Jones, 1985). But the same father who is not directly providing a high degree of child care may in fact do a lot of planning for the child's well being, providing, monitoring, and so forth. In his own, and perhaps his spouse's, estimation, he may be equally involved overall.

Although time spent in particular functions or tasks (e.g., play) may far surpass *time invested* in others (e.g., caregiving), the less time consuming task may be more *salient* to the parent for any number of reasons. In addition, some tasks associated with parental involvement may be salient to the parent because they are aversive (e.g., coping with a toddler's tantrum) and others because they are pleasant (e.g., rocking the same toddler at bedtime). Thus, the subjective realities of involvement may be distinctly different from the overtly observable.

It is also the case that involvement can take place *proximally* or *distally*. Proximal modes of involvement include direct interaction, face-to-face communication, shared activities, and related events. Less directly, distal involvement can include communication by writing or telephone, various forms of child monitoring, or even thinking about or experiencing emotions in regard to children in their physical absence.

We need to recognize that in addition to proximal and distal involvement there are also *direct* and *indirect* types of involvement that affect the climate of the family and the development of both parents and children.

Sometimes involvement does not appear to be very direct. A common example would be working overtime to provide financially for needed or extra goods or services for a child. A less common example of indirect involvement would be that of a father who has moved out of the residence because of substance abuse, but who is actively involved in treatment and counseling and is looking forward to the day when he can engage in supervised visitation. Such a father may be involved in ways that supersede the investment of some coresident parents. Although the child's experience of involvement is different in these two contexts, the fathers are each investing what they can and what they believe to be necessary at that time.

Some events that occur at one time and may not be as directly observable as involvement (e.g., particular thoughts, plans, evaluations, and problem solving) may later be enacted as observable events of involvement. Thus, one type of involvement (mental problem solving) may serve as the antecedent to later observable bouts of involvement, a consequence. Some types of involvement (e.g., evaluation) may yield simultaneous increases in other categories (e.g., communication) and decreases in other categories (e.g., direct service provision).

#### Conditions Modifying Parental Involvement

It is important to recognize that parental involvement is likely to *vary across time, developmental periods* of both parents and children, and in relation to other components of the social ecology and life circumstances. The overall picture needs to be cast in the framework of *other ongoing priorities and commitments* such as participation in paid and unpaid work. Other moderating effects may be exerted by *life course considerations*, parental *strengths and weaknesses, developmental status*, and so forth. For example, a father's involvement with an infant may not appear to be extensive while the father is constructing a home or preparing to go through career hurdles (e.g., tenure decisions). As the individual's and the family's time, developmental status of father and child, priorities, commitments, and demands change, so will the observed levels of father involvement.

Previous research (e.g., Palkovitz, 1980, 1984) has documented that the *specific context* is important in moderating involvement patterns. There are noted differences in parental participation during times of *sole responsibility* versus *shared caregiving* contexts. In some families, there is only one caregiver available. In others, although there are two parents

in residence, both parents may not be present at the same time because of shift work or other considerations. Thus, both partners have a significant period of time when they are in charge by themselves—sole responsibility. Some dual-career families may experience less of this time because during the working hours the children are in alternate care. After working hours, both parents may be present, and the responsibilities and opportunities for caregiving are thus divided differently.

It is also the case that different types and levels of involvement are appropriate in different *settings* or contexts. For example, parents would be expected to interact differently with their children in an amusement park than they would in a religious ceremony.

Furthermore, we have not given serious consideration to the fact that there are significant differences between individuals. Although it may be possible to describe general patterns of development that are associated with different levels of parental involvement, it is important to recognize and respect *interindividual differences*. Effective and positive ways of expressing involvement with one child may be less effective or even repulsive to another. Furthermore, different parents construct the meaning and emphases of their roles differently. They enact involvement in parenting differently from others who may be "equally" invested in being an involved parent. In my qualitative work with fathers (Palkovitz, 1994), I address this issue directly and demonstrate that priorities vary widely among "involved" fathers. Even within groups of men who would state or endorse the statement that fathering is their highest priority, there is considerable variation in how they enact paternal behavior ("Fathering comes first, so I work all of the overtime I can get to be a good provider" versus "I have foregone promotions so that I would have more time to invest in relating to my child").

Some fathers may desire greater involvement with their children, but again, there is significant variability in how that involvement may be conceptualized. For some fathers, involvement is best exhibited in "doing stuff" together, with a minimum of conversation or physical contact. For example, a father and his child may go fishing "together," being in different parts of the stream at different times and even competing for the most or the biggest fish, and yet this is genuinely experienced as quality time. Other fathers may prefer to spend time sitting together sharing conversation, emotions, and thoughts over a quiet meal. Individual choice, style, personality attributes, expressiveness, priorities, characteristics of the child, and both parents' and children's desire for intimacy affect

observed levels of men's involvement. Individuals vary in their *subjective evaluations* of what is needed, appropriate, or best in any given circumstance. They vary in their *sensitivity* and ability to read interpersonal signals. All of this is moderated by the accumulated effects and *histories* of the individuals and their relationships to one another. The various modifying conditions are summarized in Panel C of Table 13.2.

Few of the above dimensions have been considered in the existing literature, but these are real and salient factors for actual parents. Now that we have assembled the major materials for the reconstruction process, it is time to begin assembly of the component pieces.

### *Toward a New Conceptualization of Involvement*

Figure 13.1 is an attempt to provide a graphic representation (the beginning blueprints for reconstruction?) of the interactions of various components of involvement discussed in this chapter: *ways to be involved*, *domains* of involvement, *continua* affecting involvement, and the *moderating factors* exerting an influence. I do not claim that I have fully elaborated all of the components of involvement and their interactions. It is likely that this representation will evolve with further reflection, literature review, and quantitative and qualitative data analyses. It represents the beginning of a broader understanding, differentiation, and integration of the components of parental involvement. At this time, I am not prepared to elaborate on the implications for the measurement of parental involvement except to say that I am unaware of any measures that can account for the diversity and complexity of components of involvement represented here. It is my hope that this chapter stimulates discussion, reflection, further reconstruction, and empirical investigation of these issues.

No doubt my restructuring of the involvement concept leaves plenty of room for future remodeling. If we are to make significant progress in our ability to compare parental involvement across contexts (e.g., mothering vs. fathering; nonresident vs. coresident), to study the effects of parental involvement on child development outcomes or adult development (e.g., does greater parental involvement lead to greater developmental change in the parent?), and design effective interventions for at-risk or poorly functioning families, then this type of reconceptualization and further refinement is necessary.



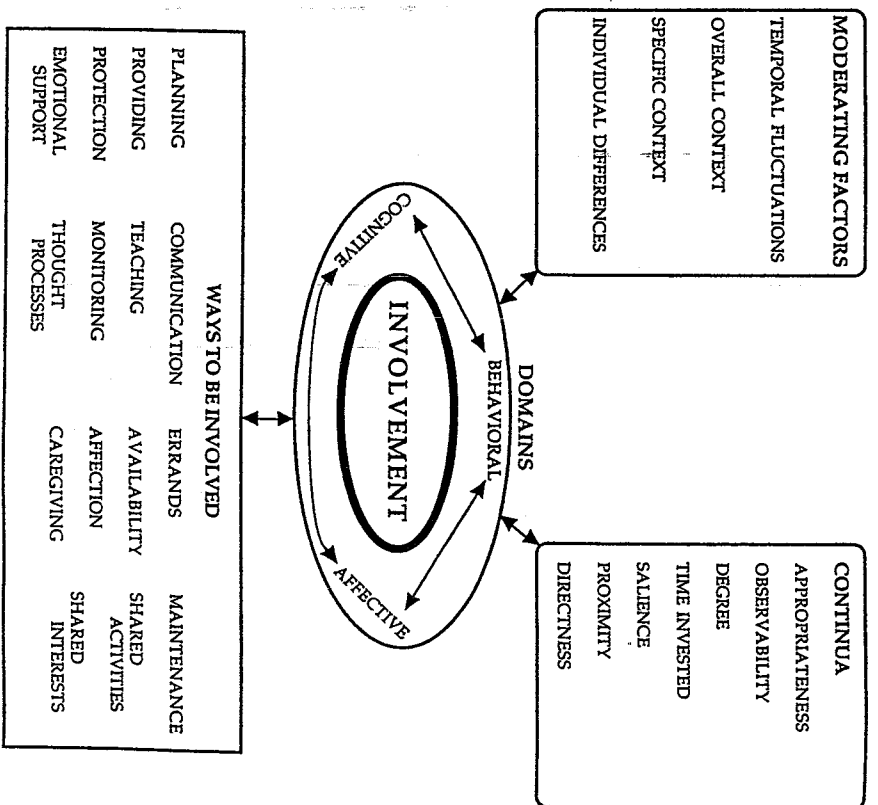


Figure 13.1: Toward a New Conceptualization of Involvement