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## Co-parenting children survey : an investigation between separated and intact families

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Abigail R. Sushchyk  
Co-Parenting Children Survey:  
An Investigation Between  
Separated and Intact Families

## **ABSTRACT**

This study sought to investigate and test the newly designed Co-Parenting Children Survey (CPCS). As a preliminary examination of the CPCS, the study aimed to assess the psychometric properties of reliability and internal consistency of the measure and whether it could distinguish co-parenting differences between diverse family structures (intact and separated). A total of 252 participants completed the online CPCS containing 13 demographic questions, the 56-item co-parenting measure, and two open-ended questions. The findings revealed that initial testing of the CPCS demonstrated good overall internal consistency and reliability between items on the measure and the capacity to differentiate co-parenting between the two groups of co-parents under investigation. Although the principal component factor analysis indicated eight distinct components (dimensions) underlying co-parents responses on the CPCS, further analysis showed that four dimensions were more suitable for the measure. The study concluded that the CPCS is a valid and promising measure to evaluate co-parenting dynamics in both separated and intact families. Additionally, the study yielded both quantitative and qualitative information to improve the CPCS for future studies.

# **Co-Parenting Children Survey: An Investigation Between Separated and Intact Families**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2016

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

*Co-parenting* is defined as two or more adults engaging in the shared activities and responsibilities of raising a child (McHale & Lindahl, 2011). The importance of co-parenting on child development, specifically following separation and divorce, is well documented in scientific literature over the past twenty years. Research consistently indicates that ongoing marital discord is associated with both children's lower-subjective well-being and poorer quality parent-child relationships, and puts children at risk for behavioral and emotional issues (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Cummings & Merrilees, 2010; Grych, 2005). In addition, the literature detailing parental divorce identifies that the way parents and the legal system navigate divorce and the associated conflict, before and following separation, significantly determines children's risk of negative outcomes (Emery, Shim, & Horn, 2012). An increased understanding of cooperative and collaborative co-parenting across diverse family structures, provides an opportunity to develop constructive models of and effective interventions for co-parenting both for intact and separated families.

Despite the considerable growth in this valuable area of study, there remains a lack of consensus among researchers and professionals on how to comprehensively define and measure the essential dimensions of the complex co-parenting construct, explicitly pertaining to both separated and intact families. Thus, the research question posed in this current study asked, does the preliminary testing of the newly designed Co-Parenting Children Survey (CPCS) demonstrate strong psychometric properties and can it distinguish co-parenting differences between families that are separated and those that are intact?



To date, there are few individual measures that comprehensively assess the co-parenting construct in both intact and separated/divorced families with the capacity to identify important differences between these groups. For example, one of the most recent co-parenting measures, the Co-parenting Relationship Scale (CSR) (Feinberg, Brown & Kan, 2012) is a widely available, multi-domain self-report measure of coparenting designed to be a comprehensive tool that captures “an overarching specification of the coparenting relationship” (p. 2).

Although initial testing of the scale showed promising psychometric properties, the CSR demonstrates a major limitation that is characteristic of many other existing co-parenting measures identified in the following literature review. It is designed to assess married or intact/co-residing families exclusively. This instrument and many others are not directly applicable or useful in evaluating possible differences in co-parenting dimensions between separated and intact families. Thus, they are not best suited to further advance co-parenting literature, for as McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, and Rao (2004) highlight, “Co-parenting partners need not be married partners- and in fact, when we look globally, often are not” (p. 223).

The Co-parenting Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999) is one co-parenting measure that does in fact address co-parenting dimensions in post-divorce families. However, the CBQ assesses co-parenting from the viewpoint of the child, which limits applicableness and potentially generalizability. Furthermore, because the CBQ specifically measures co-parenting only in divorced families, it does not have the capability to measure important differences between separated and intact families. Other means of measurement such as observational and interview methods, fall short particularly in areas of accessibility and feasibility.

The purpose of the current study was to pilot test the efficacy of a newly designed instrument, the Co-Parenting Children Survey (CPCS) as a reliable measure to assess differences in co-parenting dimensions between intact and separated families. The pilot test also assessed the psychometric properties (stability, reliability, and internal consistency) of the Co-Parenting Children Survey to further establish whether it was a possible useful tool to evaluate the core dimensions of co-parenting. The CPCS was administered to over 100 living together/married and 100 separated/never lived together parents using the online anonymous survey website, SurveyMonkey. Participant parents were required to have a child under the age of 18 years of age and share parenting capacity with another parent, as self-identified, at the time of completing the survey. The CPCS consisted of a 56-item measure. The current study also included 13 demographic questions and required approximately 10-15 minutes for participants to complete. Additionally, participant recruitment emails and flyers were sent out to parents via established professional networks and posted in relevant settings.

The findings of the current study contribute to the field of social work by providing needed information involving the operationalization and measurement of co-parenting dimensions and dynamics, and in doing so establishes a reliable instrument for further research. Ultimately, the findings of this study can be used to conduct future studies to deliver a better understanding of how parents cooperate and share responsibilities of parenting a child when living separate compared to living together. Despite the well documented evidence that co-parenting after family separation is important to child outcomes (Emery, Shim, & Horn, 2012), there was not currently an instrument that comprehensively measures this essential construct under the context of divorce/separation. The information and instrument under examination can be used in future research to promote more comprehensive and in-depth co-parenting knowledge

across family structures and improve interventions for parents and children in such co-parenting environments.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

The objective of this literature review is to analyze and present past and present co-parenting research, and in doing so, formulate and critique the theoretical framework that supports the conceptualization and implementation of the purposed research question. Broadly, this review highlights the significance of 1) the development of the co-parenting construct and 2) co-parenting dimensions and functions as they impact distinct facets of child well-being. This chapter also investigates the need to recognize and measure co-parenting across diverse family structures, and the lack of valid and replicable instruments currently available for comprehensive research.

This literature review contains six major sections. The first section focuses on the historical development of the co-parenting construct and its emergence in scientific literature. Identified and critiqued next are the various co-parenting dimensions found in the existing research literature. Co-parenting as it relates to separated/divorced families is then detailed. The review continues with two sections that address how co-parenting impacts child well-being: the first in terms of intact/co-residing families; the second in specifically divorced/separated family structures. Then, the current research methods and instruments utilized for measuring co-parenting are detailed and evaluated. The chapter finishes with research implications and a statement of purpose for the current study.

#### **Foundations of Co-parenting Research**

The concept of co-parenting has grown and evolved since its origination during the family therapy movement of the late 1950's (McHale & Kuersten-Hogan, 2004). The early formulation of co-parenting can be traced back to principles of Minuchin's (1974) *structural*

*family theory*, which describes families as having internal structures, hierarchies, and subsystems. Structural theory purports that children's emotional and developmental well-being are bolstered in family systems where there is collaborative and supportive parental leadership. Furthermore, according to structural family theory, when parents embrace their authority and distinct roles as parents, natural generational boundaries form that hierarchically organize the family system and promote adaptive functioning (McHale & Lindahl, 2011).

By evaluating parenting within the family system as separate from dyadic parent-child interactions while still in relation to the child, the concept of co-parenting allowed for a more comprehensive conceptualization of child development within families. In 1985 a prominent article titled *Families and individual development: Provocations from the field of family therapy* by Patricia Minuchin, highlighted the need to expand the view of the dyadic mother-child bias that had long dominated research since Freud's early interpretations of the mother-child relationship (McHale & Lindahl, 2011). In her article, Minuchin argued for the importance of conceptualizing triadic relationships within the family, where children develop within the setting of multiperson relationship systems. She proposed that by focusing on family triads and subsystems, new research "may broaden understanding of the child's experience, such as the functioning of the parents vis-à-vis each other, and the relationship between parents and the several siblings as two interacting systems" (Minuchin, 1985, p. 300). This concept dramatically shifted the lens of future socialization research (McHale & Kuersten-Hogan, 2004). Today, modern co-parenting theory is based on the essential notion that children are nurtured and socialized within a family relationship system that is often comprised of multiple parenting figures (McHale & Lindahl, 2011).

Although co-parenting was first conceptualized within the intact, co-residing family framework, in the late 1970s and 1980s research began to focus on the millions of families raising children in postdivorce family systems (McHale & Lindahl, 2011). In addition to investigating child adjustment and well-being after divorce (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1985), the importance of the continued co-parenting relationship between separated parents became salient. The findings of early research by Ahrons (1981) showed that numerous separated/divorced spouses were in fact continuing to have parenting relationships after separation and that the quality of these relationships were important to child outcomes. By the early 1990's, there was consensus in co-parenting research that regardless of family structure, understanding and evaluating co-parenting dynamics provided crucial information about parental functioning that ultimately impacted child well-being and development.

Despite its fairly long history as a researched construct in the areas of family systems and child development, there exist differences within the literature and variation by research professionals of what exactly constitutes co-parenting, and further, how is it operationalized and consequently measured (McHale & Lindahl, 2011). In addition, Feinberg (2003) emphasized the need for “a comprehensive framework for understanding the co-parenting relationship and its links with parenting and child adjustment” (p. 1) before there can be effective integrated co-parenting interventions that focus both on the couple relationship and child outcomes. A review of the literature detailing co-parenting dimensions and the impact on child well-being follows, as well as current measures utilized to assess co-parenting across diverse family systems.

### **Co-Parenting Dimensions**

As previously stated, the term, *co-parenting* refers to the “shared activity undertaken by those adults responsible for the care and upbringing of children” (McHale, & Irace, 2011 p. 15).

The construct of co-parenting is by definition multidimensional. Although there is overall agreement about the definition of co-parenting in the literature, slight variation exists involving what dimensions should be included in the underlying conceptualization. According to Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004), the majority of co-parenting studies yield knowledge about the construct only through implementing one, and at most two, evaluative domain measures. In addition, the dimensions measured in these studies are often too restricted to capture the complexity of the construct. A review of the literature from recent years demonstrates an overall effort to move towards a more comprehensive yet precise description of co-parenting (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004; Feinberg, 2003).

**General dimensions.** Across numerous studies and several meta-analyses, there is consistent agreement that the underlying dimensions of co-parenting are distinct from the marital-relationship, the parent-child relationship, and the family system (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001; Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). As opposed to parenting styles, which often describe maternal or parental parenting practices in dyadic relation to the child, co-parenting aims to measure the triadic parental interplay in childrearing (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). It should be noted that conceptually, specific co-parenting processes might intersect with child-parent and/or marital relations (McConnell & Kerig 2002). And although co-parenting is fundamentally related to other aspects of the co-parents' overall relationship such as romantic, financial, emotional, and companionate, as Feinberg (2003) highlights it is important to uphold the conceptual differences created between coparenting dimensions that relate to parental role versus the other relationship components previously listed.

Using prior research that identified various components of the co-parenting relationship, Margolin, Gordis and John (2001) outlined three broad domains of co-parenting, which have

since been widely adapted. This model contains domains including: conflict surrounding parenting issues, parenting cooperation, and triangulation. Items under *conflict* largely refer to how much parents disagree with each other about childrearing choices, household rules and division of labor, and the degree of associated hostility. *Cooperation* involves the extent to which parents respect and value each other's choices as parents and the overall shared sense of parenting responsibilities. Lastly, *triangulation* refers to the amount in which parents form coalitions with the child that undermines the other parent or blurs parent-child boundaries. This last domain appears particularly salient in regards to co-parenting in divorced/separated families (Margolin et. al, 2001).

Similarly, in an attempt to describe in greater detail the components of co-parenting that relate to both parenting and child outcomes, Feinberg (2003) further investigated the domain specificity of the coparenting construct. Feinberg reviewed numerous co-parenting studies dating back to the 1980's in order to "integrate and synthesize disparate findings through coherent conceptual models" (p.1). The four major areas comprising his multi-domain model include: childrearing agreement/disagreement, division of labor in childrearing, support and undermining actions between co-parents, and joint family management of interactions. Feinberg (2003) purports that the key to understanding the significance of co-parenting for child adjustment and parenting is an outcome of specifying co-parenting domains. Because co-parenting relationships are more closely associated with child adjustment compared to other aspects of interparental relationships, it remains important to identify which components of the co-parenting relationship account for these findings.

A recent literature review of co-parenting research by Teubert and Pinqart (2010) proposed a comprehensive assessment of co-parenting based largely on both the domain models



of Margolin et al. (2001) and Feinberg (2003). Their categories included: parental cooperation, child rearing agreement, conflict, and triangulation. Prevalent in the research are several other linguistic variations of these dimensions (Pruett & Pruett, 2009; Van Egeren, 2001; Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004), however, the general underlying conceptualizations among them remain analogous. McHale and Irace (2011) noted that the domains crucial to positive and effective co-parenting structures are “mutual understanding, communication, and coordination between co-parenting adults about the child; trust, backing, and support of one another’s efforts; and the capacity to successfully resolve inevitable dissonance that will arise as decisions must be made about the child’s best interest”(p. 16).

It is possible that the lack of precise conceptualization of the co-parenting construct in past research has contributed to less standardized and valid measurements available for use. As previously mentioned, studies often focused on assessment of one particular co-parenting dimension, e.g., conflict. It should be noted that dimensions such as conflict and/or triangulation might be more difficult to assess in an artificial observation setting, which is one method in which co-parenting is measured. Furthermore, when assessing only one or two domains of co-parenting, numerous empirical studies often implement separate scales depending on the dimension being evaluated. These scales, questionnaires, and surveys are discussed later in this literature review; however, the majority of the instruments were not originally designed specifically to measure a domain of co-parenting and certainly not the construct comprehensively. For example, the Interparental Conflict Questionnaire developed outside the co-parenting research has been used to measure parenting conflict as it relates to the co-parenting construct.

## **Co-parenting and Family Separation/Divorce**

In the early decades of parenting research, the mother-child relationship received most, if not all, the attention when it came to investigating and evaluating child development (Pruett & Donsky, 2011). As time progressed, economic and social shifts and changes in family structure lead to an increasing awareness of the roles that fathers, in addition to mothers, played in childrearing and impacting the psychological well-being of children. Research detailing children's desires for more involvement with their fathers after marital separation and legal advancements in family law facilitated an increase in joint custody arraignments (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990; Pruett & Donsky, 2011). In turn by the late 1990's, there was an 18%-26% decrease in the number of children who lost contact with their fathers 2 to 3 years post-divorce (Pruett & Donsky, 2011). With an increase of father involvement in caregiving and shared custody between former spouses and the consistent rise of divorce rates, literature investigating the impact of various factors of family separation, marital conflict, and shared-parenting on child well-being advanced considerably (Emery, Shim, & Horn, 2012).

Aside from co-parenting dynamics, which will be addressed later in this review, research reveals that divorce impacts child adjustment and well-being in numerous ways. A meta-analysis of children's adjustment after divorce (Kelly & Emery, 2003) found that "children of divorce were significantly more likely to have behavioral, internalizing, social, and academic problems, when compared with children from continuously married families" (p. 335). Supporting these findings Emery, Shim, and Horn (2012) identified that divorce in the short-term is almost always stressful for children, minority children are most susceptible to risk, and externalizing problems pose the biggest threat to child and adolescent adjustment in divorced families. However, of importance, is the finding that the majority of children from divorced families have no greater

psychological problems than children from intact families (Emery, Shim, & Horn 2012). That being said, resilient, well-adjusted adults are likely to report painful childhood memories and ongoing concerns about family dynamics.

As detailed by Pruett and Donsky (2011), the combination of growing empirical research on child development in the context of separating families and the evidence that parental conflict is harmful to child outcomes facilitated a strong emphasis on investigating co-parenting dynamics and developing interventions. Due to the altered family structure that results from divorce, co-parenting in separated families often does not look identical to intact families. Due to the changes in the structure, co-parenting in separated families must navigate a slightly different course compared to intact families. Although, much is known theoretically about co-parenting differences between separated and intact families, the research is very limited in studies that empirically compare co-parenting in these distinct family structures, and subsequently, comprehensively evaluate how such differences mediate child well-being. Furthermore, the literature reviewed is often limited to a white, middle-class, and relatively homogenous sample, which impact the level of generalizability.

### **Impact of Co-Parenting on Child Well-being**

Despite its origination in the literature nearly 50 years ago, the empirical research investigating the association between co-parenting and child well-being is still working to gain size and depth in fields of family and developmental science. Current research strives to advance our understanding of possible connections between co-parenting and indicators of children's adaptive psychosocial functioning (McConnell & Kerig, 2002). A review of the literature indicates that irrespective of family structure, i.e., co-residing/married or separated/divorced, the impact of co-parenting dynamics on child well-being is statistically significant. Although, it

appears that specific domains of the construct hold slightly more significance when the data is analyzed collectively (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Co-parenting studies assessing the impact of the construct on child well-being within intact families are detailed first, followed by separated/divorces families.

**Intact/co-residing families.** Co-parenting dynamics and outcomes on child well-being have been studied across all ages of child development ranging from infancy to adolescents. In such studies, internalizing and externalizing behaviors commonly define child well-being and adjustment across these populations. *Internalizing behaviors* include anxious-fearful, depressive and/or withdrawal behaviors. *Externalizing behaviors* generally are characterized by aggression, disruptiveness, and/or defiance. These behaviors are often measured by means of a parent-report child behavior checklist and a teacher-report school behavior checklist.

As Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee (2011) illustrate, parents are constructing the quality and dynamics of their co-parenting relationship even before their first child has arrived. Discrepancies in parenting beliefs and attitudes prior to childbirth are related to coparenting adjustment and solidarity post-birth. Research by McHale and Rasmussen (1998) indicates that even co-parenting that occurs as early as infancy can impact child well-being at age 4. In a longitudinal study, high levels of hostile/competitive co-parenting and low levels of family harmony assessed during infancy were associated with higher levels of child aggression three years later even when controlling for marital quality. In addition, high amounts of disagreement involving co-parenting choices were associated with increased internalizing behavior (child anxiety) at age 4 (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). In pre-school age children, undermining and hostile co-parenting when children were 3 years-old was a predictor of externalizing child behavior at age 4 (Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001). In this study, supportive co-

parenting was also found to be associated with fewer externalizing behaviors at age 4. Lastly, a study by Belsky, Putnam, & Crnic (1996) revealed that co-parenting, specifically less supportive and more undermining with toddler age children, was associated with less inhibition at 3 years-old than was predicted in early temperament profiles.

Further research of co-parenting with intact/co-residing families in middle childhood and adolescence aligns with the previous findings of early childhood. In middle childhood, coparenting competitiveness and hostility correlated with higher scores for both anxiety and mother-reported externalizing and internalizing behaviors for boys. The same co-parenting dimensions were correlated with mother-reported internalizing behaviors for girls (McConnell, & Kerig, 2002). Stright and Neitzel (2003) conducted a study that examined the effect of co-parenting on 3<sup>rd</sup> graders' classroom problems while controlling for parental rejection. The study found that children of parents that demonstrated a supportive co-parenting style when observed the summer before their children entered 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, had fewer attention problems and decreased passivity/dependence during the school year. In adolescents, parent's perceptions of conflict in the co-parenting relationship predicted relative increases in adolescent risky behavior after two years (Baril, Crouter, & McHale, 2007).

In reviewing these findings, evidence of the impact of co-parenting from early toddlerhood well into adolescence is fairly abundant. It should be noted, however, that the influence of co-parenting on child well-being and adjustment can be domain-specific. Baril et al., 2007, identified that aspects of triangulation as opposed to conflict assessed in the co-parenting relationship was not a predictor of externalizing adolescent behavior. This finding further supports the need for comprehensive, multi-domain research of the construct. Additionally, a recent meta-analysis of co-parenting studies on child-wellbeing highlighted that although the co-

parenting construct is significantly related to child psychological adjustment, the effect sizes of the majority of studies examined have to be interpreted as small (Teubert, & Pinquart, 2010). Lastly, the current review of the intact/co-residing literature demonstrates the divide in the research between the two family structures. None of the studies reviewed contained a sample and methodological design to compare both intact and separated co-parenting structures.

**Separated/divorced families.** Given the shifting family structures that separating families face, the co-parenting relationship often contains additional challenges for divorcing families. As highlighted earlier in this review, in divorce and/or separation parents experience changing boundaries within their relationship, which can lead to ambiguity involving responsibility, communication, and the establishment of new boundaries. This confusion can undermine secure attachments and perceptions about who is included and excluded in the family, further complicating roles and expectations (Pruett, M. K., & Donsky, 2011).

Co-parenting studies assessing child well-being in separated families confirm the important link between co-parenting quality and child adjustment during and after divorce. Similar to research with intact families, conflict is the co-parenting dimension that appears most commonly assessed in divorced families during and after separation. This is logical given the increase in levels of conflict surrounding the dissolution of the marital and former childrearing relationship. In addition to grappling with establishing new boundaries, expectations, and roles, parents also might be navigating strong feelings of hurt, shame, anger, and loss.

Past research indicates that interparental conflict during and after divorce is strongly associated with children's psychological distress (Ahrons, 1981). An early longitudinal study by Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1985) investigated the continuity between child well-being in the first two years after divorce and a 6-year follow up after the divorce. The findings showed that

despite adjusting to new parenting structures over time, children of divorce exhibited more short-term psychological problems than children of nondivorced families. In a meta-analysis of children's adjustment following divorce, Kelly and Emery (2003) concluded that children of divorced parents who demonstrate co-parenting triangulation in the form of placing children in between parents to facilitate communication or disparaging the other parent in the presence of the child, show higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to high-conflict parents that did not involve their children in such interactions. In addition, the longer children are caught in-between extended conflict of their parents, the more likely it will have a harmful impact on well-being and adjustment.

A study by Camara and Resnick (1989) presented similar findings of the impact of co-parenting behavior on children in divorcing families. Divorced parents who demonstrated cooperative co-parenting surrounding new obstacles resulting from the separation were more likely to have children that engaged in positive play with other children during observations and had higher self-esteem ratings. Furthermore, the investigation revealed that "the overall amount of conflict present was not predicative of children's socioemotional behavior...The degree of parental cooperation, as well as the way in which former spouses resolved conflict, explained a significant amount of variance in children's adjustment to divorce" (p. 572). Teubert and Pinquart (2010) also highlight in their meta-analysis that the association between triangulation dynamics and internalizing symptoms for children were more significant in separated families.

Within the reviewed literature there exists mixed findings about the impact of postdivorce conflict on child adjustment compared to predivorce marital conflict. Findings of certain studies indicated predivorce conflict to be more associated with child adjustment issues, whereas other studies identified that postdivorce conflict was a stronger predictor of adverse effects for children

(Booth & Amato, 2001; Kelly & Emery, 2003). These incongruent findings may result from a combination of variation in measures of the constructs and/or the different amounts of exposure a child has to anger and conflict depending on the nature of the pre and postdivorce co-parenting relationship (Kelly & Emery, 2003). One unexpected finding revealed in the meta-analysis by Teubert and Pinquart (2010) was that separated families did not show stronger associations between co-parenting conflict and child outcomes compared to intact families. This finding might be explained by the fact that in separated families children are potentially more removed from conflict after divorce and are not forced to witness it as directly. Thus, it is not that the co-parenting relationship yields less conflict contributing to child outcomes in divorced families; it stands that in a separated family structure children are potentially more buffered and/or removed from the conflict. However, with significant empirical research supporting that separation increases risk of child adjustment issues (Kelly & Emery, 2003), it is interesting that co-parenting conflict and the connections to child outcomes are not more significant than in intact families. This finding suggests that the dimensions of the co-parenting construct are not as central in mediating effects of child well-being in divorce as other processes.

Although the literature of divorce and child outcomes is extensive, the studies that specifically assess the dynamics of co-parenting in divorced families on child well-being is relatively limited. Numerous studies that investigate postdivorce child adjustment look at many constructs and factors outside the co-parenting construct. For example, conflict may be evaluated in a study in addition to other factors such as diminished parenting capacity, re-partnering, economic opportunities, and stress of initial separation, which are obviously unrelated to the construct of co-parenting. As was discussed in the co-parenting dimensions portion of this literature review, the co-parenting relationship is truly multi-dimensional and cannot be reduced



for instance to only conflict or cooperation. Furthermore, as was also highlighted, even though conflict is an underlying domain of coparenting, marital conflict is distinct from the construct and this should be taken into consideration when reviewing research that generally addresses the marital conflict in divorced families. The findings and limitations previously described further illustrate the need for comprehensive assessment and measurement of the co-parenting construct specifically as it influences child well-being in diverse family structures.

### **Current Measures of Co-Parenting**

Evidenced by the growing co-parenting research detailed in this literature review, the impact of co-parenting on numerous aspects of child well-being is irrefutable. However, in order to advance understanding in this field, there is a need for valid and reliable co-parenting measures. Although, co-parenting has a relatively extensive research history, the field has struggled to create a measure that has strong psychometric properties, is widely accessible, and can be used to study both distinct intact and separated multi-domain co-parenting structures simultaneously. In the past, parent and child self-reports have been utilized, observational coding, and various scales to assess individual dimensions of the construct. Each measure undoubtedly carries specific strengths, however, for the purposes of this literature review the major limitations are the focus.

**Co-parenting parent self-report measures.** The literature reveals the development of four primary self-report measures used to comprehensively assess the co-parenting construct. These measures include: McHale's (1997) Coparenting Scale; Margolin's et al., (2001) Coparenting Questionnaire; Feinberg's et al. (2012) Co-parenting Relationship Scale (CSR); and the recently developed Teubert and Pinquart's (2011) Coparenting Inventory for Parents and Adolescents (CI-PA). McHale's (1997) Co-Parenting Scale, designed to capture both overt and

covert co-parenting processes, has been validated and replicated since its original preliminary study. However, the design is specifically tailored to measure co-parenting processes in intact, specifically, married co-parents. In the scale, “husband” and “wife” wording is used frequently and contains one section assessing marital satisfaction. Similarly, Margolin’s et al., (2001) Coparenting Questionnaire and Feinberg’s et al. (2012) CSR were also designed to evaluate various dimensions of co-parenting for parents currently living together. Finally, Teubert and Pinquart’s (2011) CI-PA is certainly a more comprehensive measure of the co-parenting construct that effectively integrates and advances previous measures and utilizes both parents and adolescent self-report. Once again, the instrument is designed to assess married/intact co-residing families. All of four of these measures contain language and items tailored to straight-identified couples, which further limits generalizability.

**Co-parting child self-report measures.** The Co-parenting Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999), unlike the previous instruments listed, assesses co-parenting behavior in post-divorced families. The CBQ is the first measure of its kind and demonstrated strong psychometric properties in preliminary studies. The measure has since been used to comprehensively study multi-dimensions of the coparenting construct, i.e., conflict, triangulation, parental respect/cooperation, and parental warmth/acceptance (Macie & Stolberg, 2003). Unfortunately, as was true of the previous co-parenting parent self-report measures, the CBQ is limited by its ability to assess both intact and separated co-parenting structures. The scale does not include subscales or items for family environments other than divorced/separated. In addition, the CBQ is a child self-report measure, which carries certain conditions and limitations in terms of objective reporting and biases due to developmental stage of children/adolescents.

**Observational and interview methods.** Observational methods of co-parenting are arguably the least prevalent in research literature. However, when implemented effectively they are proficient at delivering valuable data with reduced rater bias. In the empirical research, several coparenting rating and coding scales have been designed and implemented for observational use. These measures include: The Coparenting and Family Rating System (McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, & Lauretti, 2000), Coparenting Coding (Cowan & Cowan, 1996), and Coding Coparenting (Belsky, Crnic, & Gable, 1992). Observational methods require the co-parent and child triad to interact in an artificial laboratory setting. Furthermore, observational methods, such as the ones previously listed, have the capacity in principle to measure across diverse co-parenting structures, as well as provide comprehensive assessment of a multi-domain co-parenting model. The issue with such observational methods, as highlighted by Mchale (2011) is they “demand discipline and grounding to track the subtle but often very meaningful behaviors exhibited by three or more people in an interaction together, and there are also measurement and analysis issues to contend with”(p. 160). Observational methods are likely to be much more costly and labor intensive, and family interactions can prove difficult to code due to decrease levels of expressed conflict and self-disclosure given the contrived setting. It might also be difficult to recruit participants, who are co-parenting with a parent they are separated/divorced from, to interact in an observed setting, especially if there is high conflict or animosity within the relationship.

Interview methods have also been utilized and are valuable to the field of co-parenting research. For the sake of brevity, not all formal co-parenting interview instruments or protocols will be detailed in this literature review, and currently there is not one ideal interview measure that has been identified (McHale, 2011). The strengths and limitations closely parallel that of the

observational method. Interview instruments can be applied to diverse sample populations in terms of assessing both intact and separated family structures, however, as they are qualitative in nature they are considerably more time consuming and expensive.

**Dimension-specific measures.** Lastly, in terms of co-parenting measurement, a variety of scales, surveys, and questionnaires have been developed to measure specific domains comprising the co-parenting construct. One of the co-parenting dimensions most commonly studied is interparental conflict. Other frequently measured domains include communication, cooperation, and triangulation. A sample of these instruments include: Ahrons's (1991) Parenting Convergence Scale; Child-Rearing Disagreements Scale (Jouriles et al., 1991); Marital Satisfaction Inventory Scale; Conflict Over Childrearing (Snyder, 1979); and The Triangulation Scales of Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Questionnaire (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992). As indicated by the titles of these instruments, they primarily assess for a single dimension of co-parenting, which undermines their capacity to evaluate the construct comprehensively. Furthermore, it is relevant to note that some of these scales (e.g., Marital Satisfaction Inventory Scale: Conflict Over Childrearing) were not necessarily developed in reference to the empirical co-parenting framework. Lastly, as was prevalent in other self-report measures, language and implementation of these scales do not translate universally to both separated and intact co-parenting structures and/or same-gender partners.

## **Summary**

In summary, co-parenting scientific research of the last 50 years has contributed greatly to our current understandings and implications of the construct. The concept originally emerged in family and child development research as a means to understand more systematically the impact of parenting and childrearing dynamics that exist in triadic relationships. In an attempt to

increase validity and understanding of co-parenting, research has strived to advance the precision and comprehensives of the construct through conceptualizing a multi-dimensional framework. With shifts in legal system, by the 1990's fathers increased their roles as co-parents in divorced families. A review of the literature identifies that children in divorced families are at greater risk of having externalizing and adjustment issues. The research also illustrates that co-parenting specifically is a significant factor in child outcomes in both separated and intact families. However, co-parenting research investigating co-parenting across diverse family structures remains limited, as the divorced and intact families are consistently studied separately. Although there has been an effort to increase understanding of co-parenting in the non-dominant culture, often sample sizes in co-parenting studies remain small and homogenous. Additionally, further research would benefit from increased longitudinal assessment of the construct.

Finally, a review of the instruments available to assess the co-parenting construct sheds further light on limitations in the research. Although various measures have been developed and adapted to measure co-parenting, they cannot be universally applied to diverse family structures and often multiple measures are needed to measure the construct comprehensively. These gaps in the current literature are the basis for the current conceptualization and implementation of the present research study, which addresses whether the newly designed Co-Parenting Child Survey can comprehensively identify statistical differences of co-parenting between intact and separated families and demonstrate strong psychometric properties.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

In addition to evaluating the psychometric properties Co-Parenting Children Survey, the current research study addressed whether preliminary testing of this newly constructed instrument distinguished differences in co-parenting dimensions between separated and intact families. The research design of the study was a quantitative pilot study utilizing a survey method. A primarily quantitative design was appropriate due to the evaluative nature of the present study with the purpose of recording variation in terms of co-parenting dimensions (Engel & Schutt, 2013). Quantitative data from the instrument was gathered via an anonymous online survey containing the 56-item measure, 13 demographic questions, and two open-ended qualitative questions (Appendix B). The survey required 10 to 15 minutes of participant's time and no compensation or reward was given for completion or participation.

### **Sample**

A sample of over 100 intact (married, common law) parents and 100 separated parents were invited to complete the online anonymous survey via the website SurveyMonkey. Surveying both intact parents and separated parents allowed for the between group comparison of co-parenting dimensions. This minimum number of participants also allowed for accurate psychometric evaluation and statistical analysis to address the current research questions. Participants were recruited in primarily two ways: professional networks and online platforms. Initially, an invitation to participate was delivered through established professional networks (Appendix C). These included The Association of Family Conciliation Courts, an outpatient youth and family mental health agency, and a professional conference. The invitation to participate in the survey, containing information about the study and the link to complete the

survey, was sent out through electronic email networks and presented on a flyer distributed during the professional conference (Appendix C.1).

Lastly, information about the study was also posted on electronic community spaces such as Craigslist and Facebook (Appendix C.2). These online platforms had the capacity to reach a widespread and diverse eligible participant population. The researchers' personal Facebook pages were not used to promote the study. A separate account, unaffiliated with any of the researchers' personal social media networks, was created to promote the study. Facebook posts advertising the study were made from this separate account and posted in various parenting related Facebook groups.

Inclusion criteria of the sample required participants to have at least one child under 18 years of age at the time of completing the survey. The parent did not need to be the biological parent of the child (e.g. stepparent), however, s/he must have shared childcare in some capacity with another parent, as self-identified. Finally, the parent must have been able to read English in order to complete the survey. The ability to advertise the survey by means of targeting various geographic areas (Craigslist) encouraged the inclusion of diverse populations. Demographic questions on the survey provided important diversity information about gender, race, socioeconomic levels, and sexual preference.

The sampling procedure for the current study possessed good feasibility of securing the target number of participants (at least 100 participants in each group). The cost and risks to participants were little to none and the inclusion criteria was significantly broad, i.e., many adults have children under 18 years of age and share parenting responsibilities with another adult. Online participation in surveys is fairly common practice in research today, so the electronic interface was likely be familiar and easily navigated independently by participants.

## **Ethics and Safeguards**

**Consent form.** Before accessing the online survey, all participants were required to give “click” consent to participate in the study. The online consent form thoroughly detailed the nature, risks, and purposes of the study, and provided appropriate contact information if participants had any questions or concerns. Those participants, who took the survey on their own personal device, could save and print the consent form for their own personal records (Appendix B.1). If participants clicked that they did not consent to participate, the survey page promptly terminated, and would not permit them to complete the survey. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw their participation in the study at any time without consequence, simply by exiting out of the survey before final submission.

**Risks, benefit and resources.** There were no known risks, benefits or compensation for participants for engaging in this study. There existed some potential that completing the survey might raise uncomfortable feelings about participants’ co-parenting dynamic. However, the questions asked and any discomfort that followed was expected to be within the range of everyday experience. A list of co-parenting resources were provided to participants if they wished to learn more about the topic of co-parenting or their involvement in it (Appendix D). If participants completed the survey independently, as the majority did, they were instructed to contact the student investigator to receive the resource list.

**Confidentiality.** All participant survey responses were strictly anonymous, that is, participants’ names were not attached to their information and could not be connected to their responses. Participants were notified that the findings might be presented at professional conferences or published in a peer-reviewed journal. The disidentified data was stored in SurveyMonkey until it was downloaded into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences



(SPSS). At that time, all survey data was deleted from SurveyMonkey. Data from the survey although already anonymous, was stored electronically on an encrypted, password-protected computer in SPSS, accessible only to the researchers. Survey data will be maintained for three years per federal requirements for research.

### **Data Collection**

SurveyMonkey and the newly constructed Co-Parenting Child Survey were the primary tools used to collect the quantitative and qualitative data. The validity and reliability of this instrument have yet to be tested, as this is one of the objectives of the current pilot study. The CPCS quantifiably measures attitudes that can be ordered in terms of magnitude and any co-parenting dimensions that vary in amount between and within the two subject groups. The design instrument being tested and utilized in this study, the CPCS, was a 56-item measure developed for assessment and intervention purposes in co-parenting research between separated and intact families.

After identifying the need for an easily accessible instrument to capture co-parenting between and within distinct co-parenting family structures, Dr. Marsha Kline Pruett, Professor at Smith College School for Social Work and Dr. Michael Saini, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto, created the CPCS by collectively evaluating and synthesizing existing co-parenting dimensions and measures found in the empirical research. Overlap and dissimilarities between measures and their respective strengths and limitations were taken into account when designing the CPCS. In addition, the six dimensions of a working co-parenting relationship as identified by the lead researcher, K. Pruett and Pruett (2009) provided solid framework for the individual items to be developed within. Using these dimensions and input from previous co-parenting measures; all of the 56 items composing the measure fell into a

total of 9 established co-parenting categories. These dimensions included: team approach, communication, respecting boundaries, problem styles, gatekeeping, parenting synergy, comfort level in raising issues, cherishing the role of the other parent, and division of labor.

Individual items on the survey assessed for co-parenting constructs within these broader subgroups. For example, “I encourage my child to talk to the other parent directly if something is bothering him/her about their relationship ” addressed respecting boundaries. Whereas, “I know I can count on the other parent if I need help in parenting” is referenced with acting together as the “kid’s team.

The CPCS item measures were chosen based on their face validity and a priori theory and empirical research, which identified the larger co-parenting components previously mentioned. The lead researchers paid particular attention to question wording, respondent characteristics that could produce inaccurate answers, and the presentation of the questions to promote the greatest potential of accuracy and reliability in the data. The language and wording of the survey was revised to ensure that a broad range of reading comprehension levels could successfully participate in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Once downloaded into SPSS, an examination dimensions used to create the Co-Parenting Child Survey was conducted by running an Exploratory Principle Component Factor Analysis, as well as Cronbach’s Alpha to test the internal consistency and validity of the measure.

Differences in co-parenting dimensions between groups were analyzed using the SPSS software.

The next chapter presents findings from the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

This was a pilot study to test the newly designed Co-Parenting Children Survey using primarily quantitative methods. The purpose of the study was to determine if the CPCS demonstrated strong psychometric properties in early steps toward developing it as a reliable measure to assess co-parenting across diverse family structures. The study also aimed to assess whether the CPCS could distinguish differences in co-parenting dimensions between separated and intact co-parents.

The findings presented in this section begin with participant demographics, which include gender, race/ethnicity, education, employment status, household income, and co-parenting relationship status. Following this, the measure scores are presented in relation to co-parenting status. Next, the psychometric properties of reliability and internal consistency and the principal component factor analysis are detailed. The chapter concludes with the qualitative findings from the two open-ended questions featured at the end of the survey. The statistical analyses included in this findings section were completed and presented in collaboration with Dr. Michael Saini, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto. Dr. Saini collaborated with the lead researcher, Dr. Marsha Kline Pruett, Professor at Smith College School for Social Work to develop the CPCS measure that is under investigation in this study.

#### **Participant Demographics**

In total, 252 parents responded to the survey, 81.7 percent female, and 18.3 percent male. The majority of the participants self-identified their race/ethnicity as Caucasian or white. The majority of the participants had completed schooling beyond college (graduate school, professional school (64.3%), 25 percent completed college or technical training, 7.1 percent

completed some college or technical training after high school, 0.8 percent completed high school, .08 completed less high school and another 2 percent stated other (e.g. JD, PhD). The majority were involved in full-time employment (70.2%), while 13.1 percent were in part-time employment, 5.6 percent were not employed and not seeking work, 1.6 percent were not employed and seeking work, .04 percent were receiving state or government support and 9.1 percent stated other (e.g. disability, self-employed, graduate student). The household income reported by the participants was high, with 73 percent reporting that their income was \$80,000 or more. Of the participants, 12.3 percent indicated that their household income was between \$60,000 and \$79,000, 8.3 percent reported income between \$40,000 and \$59,000, 4.0 percent reported income between \$20,000 and 39,000, and 2.0 percent reported income to be less than \$20,000.

In terms of co-parenting relationships with their youngest child, the majority of the participants reported that they and the other parent were the child's biological parents of the child (88.5%). Two percent indicated that they were the step-parent, and 1.6 percent indicated that the other parent was the step-parent. There were also 7.5 percent of participants who indicated other co-parenting arrangements, and these included a grandmother, an adoptive parent, and a legal parent. Of the participants, 40.0 percent indicated that they had one child under the age of 18 from the relationship with the other parent, 36.1 percent had two children, 10.3 percent had 3 children, 2.4 percent had 4 children and 1.2 percent had 5 children.

The majority of the participants were living together with the other parent, either married or in a common law relationship (57.9%), a quarter were separated or divorced (33.3%), and a small minority were living together but not married or in a common law relationship (2.8%).

The majority of the participants had been in a relationship with the other parent for eight or more years (76.6%).

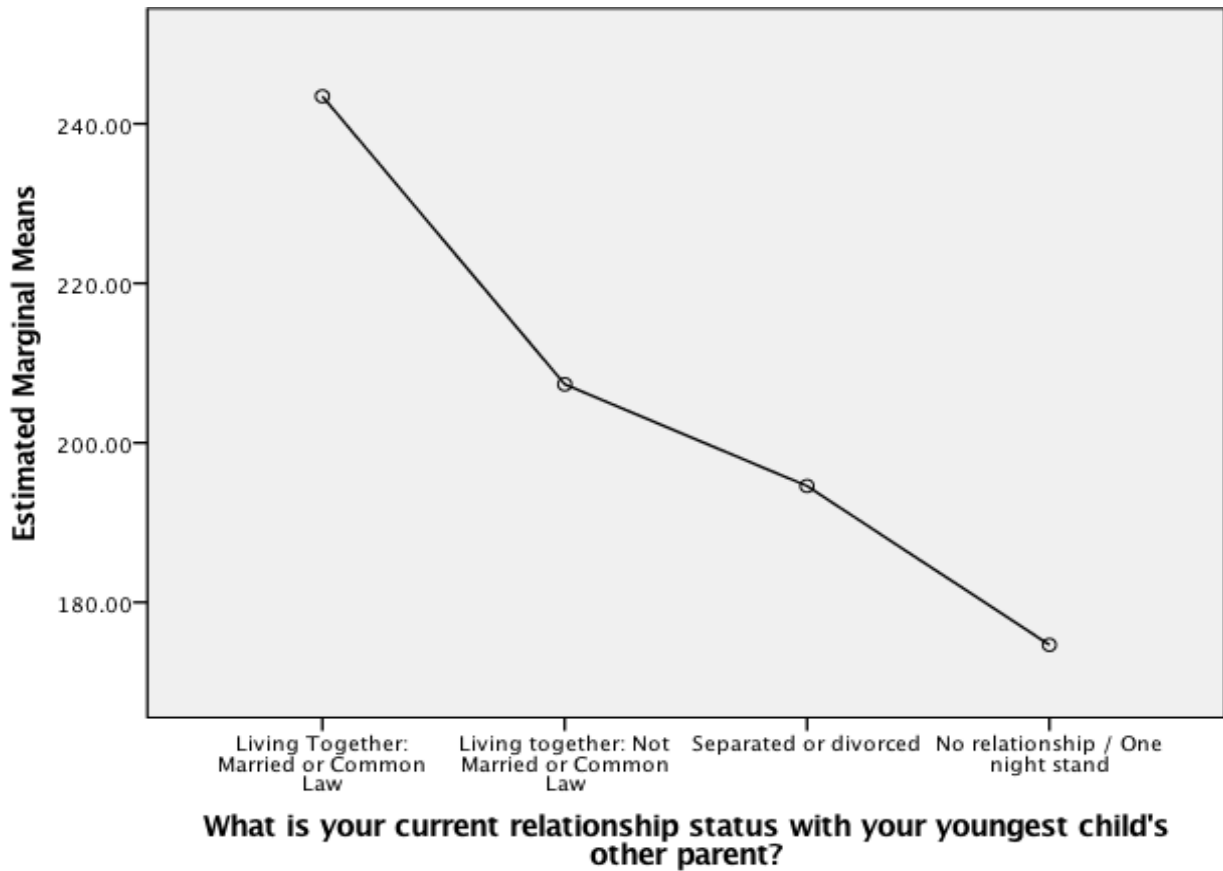
### **Co-Parenting Measure Scores**

Scores on the measure for each of the 56 items ranged from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). After reversing all scores to the positive and then recoding scores so that higher response indicated higher levels of co-parenting, total scores for the overall measure could range from 56 to 280. The mean score was 222.73 (standard deviation of 42.17) based on 219 participants who completed each item (completion rate of 87% for all items).

Participants living together (married or common law) scored the highest on the measure ( $M = 246$ ,  $SD = 26.06$ ), followed by those living together but not married or common law ( $M = 207$ ,  $SD = 41.68$ ), then separated or divorced ( $M = 194$ ,  $SD = 41.90$ ) and then those with no relationships (e.g. one night stands) ( $M = 174.66$ ,  $SD = 63.61$ ) (see Figure 1). As evidenced by the difference in means and standard deviations between intact and separated co-parents, the measure proved capable of assessing differences between these two groups.

Figure 1

*Type of Co-Parenting Relationship and Co-parenting Scores*



**Psychometric Properties: Reliability and Validity**

Results suggest that the co-parenting measure has good overall internal consistency (i.e., the dimensions are related well to one another) with a very high Cronbach’s Alpha = .98 for all 56 items. Table 1 shows the Cronbach’s Alpha if items were deleted, which indicates that each item included in the measure has good internal consistency since no items would change the internal consistency if removed from the measure.



Table 1

*Cronbach's alpha if items were deleted*

Items	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I am satisfied with how we share the work of parenting	.97
I usually just give in to the other parent so we do not argue	.97
We can usually find solutions about parenting that we are both happy with	.97
I feel comfortable in sharing my thoughts about parenting with the other	.97
I get annoyed easily about the mistakes that the other parent makes with our child	.97
The other parent undercuts my decisions	.97
The other parent gets in the way of my relationship with the child	.97
We both view our child's strengths and weaknesses in similar ways	.97
The other parent pressures me to parent differently	.97
I am careful about sharing my thoughts about parenting with the other parent in fear that my words will be used against me somehow	.97
I can talk easily with the other parent about activities I would like to do with our child	.97
When we meet face to face, the other parent and I are friendly or polite to each other	.97
We have similar hopes and dreams for our child	.97
We generally agree on how to discipline our child	.97
Although we don't always agree, we respect each other's differences as parents	.97
We share big decisions when it comes to parenting	.97
The other parent respects what I bring to parenting our child	.97
I find ways to help our child have a good relationship with the other parent	.97
I find it difficult to support the other parent's relationship with our child	.97
I have given up trying to cooperate with the other parent	.97
I try to involve the other parent but my efforts often go nowhere	.98
I value the other parent's parenting skills	.97
It is important that my child loves both parents	.97
I trust the other parent with our child	.97
It's important that the other parent is involved in our child's life	.97
I worry about my child while in the other parent's care	.97
It's important that our child does not hear us talking negatively about each other (in person, on the phone, or on video conference)	.97
I value the other parent's input about decisions that affect our child	.97
I feel out of control when speaking with the other parent	.97
I have trouble controlling my anger when around the other parent.	.97
I am hostile or biting in my conversations with the other parent	.97



I encourage my child to talk to the other parent directly if something is bothering him/her about their relationship	.97
I disagree with the choices that the other parent makes about our child	.97
I know I can count on the other parent if I need help in parenting	.97
The other parent asks my opinion on parenting issues	.97
I work well with the other parent when decisions need to be made about our child	.97
I get little support from the other parent to help out with the work of parenting	.97
When there is a problem with our child, we work on finding answers together	.97
When making decisions, we argue about who is right	.97
We don't make decisions about our child because we are unable to talk through what we both agree on	.97
We do not have a good way of dealing with our differences as parents	.97
I could parent better if the other parent stayed out of my business	.97
If the other parent needs to make a change in the parenting schedule, I go out of my way to make the change	.97
The more I try to involve the other parent in decision making, the more we get into conflict	.97
It is better to be away from, or uninvolved with, the other parent to make sure we don't argue	.97
I feel awkward when I am with the other parent	.97
The other parent tries to be a good parent but does not know enough about parenting to be the kind of parent our child needs	.97
It is part of my job as a parent to positively influence my child's relationship with the other parent	.97
My child would be better off seeing less of the other parent	.97
I pretend to support the other parent's decisions but in the end I do what I think is best for our child	.97
I don't think it is helpful to talk with the other parent about decisions that need to be made about our child	.97
I try to be more involved, but the other parent won't let me have an opinion	.97
The other parent pretends to get along with me but I know that it is just an act	.97
We parent better when we make decisions together	.97
I need to 'go behind' the other parent to fix the mess left behind	.97
We try not to disagree in front of our child	.97

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## Principal Component Factor Analysis

An exploratory Principal Component Factor Analysis was conducted to explore the number of independent components within the measure and to explore whether any items could

be eliminated to create a shorter survey without compromising the internal reliability of the measure. Principle components factor analysis was also used because the primary purpose was to identify and compute composite co-parenting scores for the factors underlying measure.

To test for the suitability of conducting Principal Component Factor Analysis, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was conducted. Results show that the sample is suitable for factor analysis (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = approximate chi-square is 12153.723 (df = 1540)  $p < .00$ ). To test for sampling adequacy, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was conducted and the result was .96 (on a scale of 0 to 1, a score above 0.6 is considered suitable). Next, a correlational matrix was performed. An inspection of the correlation matrix shows that the majority of correlations are above .30, which is needed in order to conduct factor analysis. The data were screened for univariate outliers. The minimum amount of data for factor analysis was satisfied, with a final sample size of 218 (using listwise deletion).

The next step was to explore the principal components within the measure. Three tests were performed to assess the components. First, the Keizler Criterion was used and the eigenvalue was set to 1.0 or greater (amount of total variance explained by that factor). The results show that there are 8 factors with eigenvalues above 1, accounting for the majority of the variance (71.78%). The initial eigenvalues over one showed that the first factor (Team approach) explained 51.84% of the variance, the second factor (Communication) 4.26% of the variance, the third factor (Respecting boundaries) 3.94% of the variance, the fourth factor (Problem styles) 3.45%, the fifth factor (Gatekeeping) 2.31%, the sixth factor (Parenting synergy) 2.12%, the seventh factor (Comfort level in raising issues) 2.03%, and the eighth factor (Cherishing the role of the other parent) 1.80%. Factors 9-56 were all under the eigen value (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Total Variance Explained based on Keizler Criterion of Eigenvalues over 1*

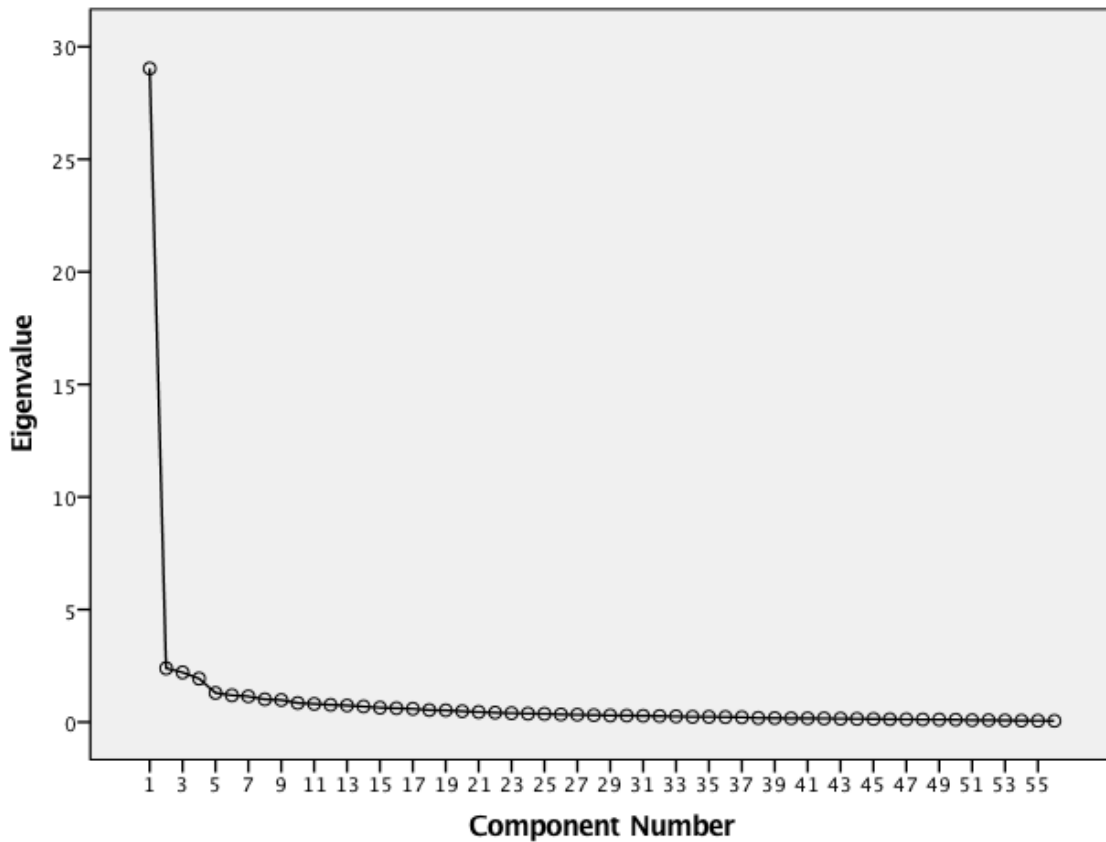
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	29.03	51.84	51.84	29.03	51.84	51.84
2	2.38	4.26	56.11	2.38	4.26	56.11
3	2.20	3.94	60.05	2.20	3.94	60.05
4	1.93	3.45	63.50	1.93	3.45	63.50
5	1.29	2.31	65.81	1.29	2.31	65.81
6	1.19	2.12	67.94	1.19	2.12	67.94
7	1.14	2.03	69.98	1.14	2.03	69.98
8	1.01	1.80	71.78	1.01	1.80	71.78
9	.98	1.75	73.53			
10	.84	1.51	75.05			
11	.81	1.44	76.50			
12	.76	1.36	77.86			
13	.74	1.32	79.18			
14	.69	1.23	80.42			
15	.64	1.14	81.57			
16	.61	1.10	82.67			
17	.59	1.05	83.72			
18	.53	.95	84.68			
19	.52	.93	85.61			
20	.48	.86	86.48			
21	.44	.79	87.28			
22	.42	.75	88.03			
23	.39	.71	88.74			
24	.37	.67	89.41			
25	.36	.65	90.06			
26	.34	.60	90.67			
27	.32	.58	91.25			
28	.31	.55	91.81			
29	.29	.52	92.33			
30	.28	.51	92.85			
31	.27	.49	93.34			
32	.26	.48	93.82			
33	.25	.45	94.28			
34	.23	.42	94.70			
35	.23	.41	95.11			
36	.22	.39	95.51			
37	.21	.38	95.89			
38	.18	.32	96.22			
39	.17	.32	96.54			
40	.16	.30	96.84			
41	.16	.29	97.14			
42	.16	.28	97.42			
43	.15	.27	97.70			
44	.14	.25	97.95			
45	.13	.24	98.19			
46	.12	.23	98.42			
47	.12	.21	98.64			
48	.11	.20	98.84			
49	.11	.20	99.04			

50	.10	.19	99.23			
51	.08	.15	99.38			
52	.08	.15	99.53			
53	.07	.14	99.68			
54	.06	.11	99.79			
55	.06	.10	99.90			
56	.05	.09	100.00			

Next, Scree plots for each of these eigenvalues were examined to see at what point these shapes become horizontal (see Figure 2). Although the Keizler Criterion showed 8 components, a visual of the Scree plots show that the majority of the variance is explained by the first factor with another small dip in the fourth factor.

Figure 2

*Scree Plot*





The third test to assess the components was the Parallel Analysis for quality control by comparing the eigenvalue against eigenvalues of a randomly generated dataset (comparing the Keizer Criterion eigenvalues to the null hypothesis that there is no difference among the factors). Based on Parallel Analysis, only the first four dimensions - team approach, communication, respecting boundaries and problem styles - should be retained. The next step was to perform a factor rotation on the four factors. Only factors with scores above .30 are included in the rotation. The Keizer Criterion was used and the eigenvalue was set to 1.0 or greater (amount of total variance explained by that factor). The results show that with 4 factors with eigenvalues above 1, the total variance explained remains high (63.50%).

### **Open-Ended Responses**

A total of 37 participants out of the final sample size of 218 (16.9%) responded to the first open-ended question and a total of 36 participants (16.5%) responded to the second open-ended question in the survey. The first open-ended question asked participants if they had any comments or questions about co-parenting topics featured in the survey. The responses were collected and arranged into two categories involving feedback about the survey specifically and feedback about the topic of co-parenting in general. Within these two categories several themes emerged.

**Question 1: Survey specific responses.** In terms of feedback related to the survey specifically, three themes emerged as most frequently reported. The first theme with an overall response rate of 3.2% (n=7) involved responses articulating that the survey “should address or account for other important factors that impact co-parenting.” Specifically, participants commented on addressing factors such as the mental, emotional, and financial stability of their other co-parent and the level of conflict/court involvement. The second two themes commonly

expressed, each with an overall response rate of 2.7 % (n=6), were that the survey “appeared more oriented and geared toward assessing co-parents that were separated and/or experiencing high conflict or dysfunction” and that participants were “unsure of how to respond to certain questions/items on the survey” either because of confusion in the way an item or question was worded or because items did not feel applicable to the participant’s co-parenting situation.

The last theme reported about the survey, with an overall response rate of 1.3% (n=3), included participants stating that their “co-parenting dynamics have changed over time”, particularly for co-parents in the separated group. Feedback under this theme described that separated co-parents felt they would have answered many of the questions differently, often stating that their co-parenting dynamics have improved, from when they were first separated from their other co-parent, and that the survey did not address learning to cope with and adjust to separation. Additionally, 1.3% of participants (n=3) reported it was “a great survey” and that the questions were thoughtful and applicable. Other relevant, albeit individual, responses to the first open-ended question about the survey that could not be categorized under a theme included that “some of the items on the measure appeared ‘loaded’ and should require the perspective of the other co-parent when interpreting validity.” Lastly, one participant commented that “the 5-point agreement rating scale was too limited in capturing perspectives accurately and recommended a 7-point scale.”

**Question 1: General Co-parenting Responses.** The other category identified in the responses to this first open-ended question involved feedback involving the topic of co-parenting in general. Only one theme emerged under this category with a low response rate of 0.9% (n=2). This theme identified that participants believed it was important that co-parents “do not disagree too much in front of the child.” Other individual responses in this category included that “co-

parents should demonstrate problem solving and working through simple disagreements in front of children”, “co-parenting can be really tough”, “stress and fatigue are detrimental to co-parenting behavior and the relationship” and “what works best is utilizing the different strengths of each co-parent and not undermining the other parent.” A total of 5 responses (2.2%) to the first open-ended question were deemed unrelated or inapplicable to the question.

**Question 2: Unaddressed co-parenting topics.** The second open-ended question asked participants if there was any co-parenting topic or question that was not addressed that they felt should be in the survey. Once again, a total of 36 participants (16.5%) provided a response to this question. Similarly to the first question, several themes emerged across the feedback of participants about what question or topic should be addressed that was not; however, there was a higher number of individual responses to this question that did not fall into a theme or category.

The three most prevalent themes identified in the responses to this question all had an overall response rate of 1.8 % (n= 4). Participants stated that the topics of “type and amount of court involvement”, “financial questions”, and “have co-parenting interventions been attempted” were all relevant topics that should be addressed. Participants shared that they thought the survey should assess for the how successful or harmful court involvement had been in parent’s co-parenting experiences and what has been the impact of financial difficulties in particular. Participants reported that information about the kinds of co-parenting interventions and whether they were successful or not was also relevant to this topic.

The next themes, each with an overall reporting rate of 1.3% (n=3), identified “parenting alienation of the other co-parent”, “change in co-parenting over time”, and “level of involvement of the other co-parent” as important topics that should be addressed in the survey. Responses under these themes highlighted how parenting alienation and shunning were a large source



contributing to co-parenting conflict and that the amount that the other co-parents wants to be and is involved impacts outcomes of co-parenting. Lastly, as was identified in the first open-ended question as a theme, participants once again identified that it was necessary that the survey addressed co-parenting changes over time and once children became older, specifically related to separated or divorced co-parents.

The last two themes reported with a low overall response rate of .9% (n=2) for each were “considerations involving the child being co-parented” and “considerations for co-parents with disabilities.” This theme appears related to the theme of “other important factors that impact co-parenting” that was identified in the first open-ended response. Feedback under these themes discussed how one or both of the co-parents’ mental or physical state, as well as the child’s needs and health, impact co-parenting dynamics regardless of family structure. One response falling into this category discussed the child’s age as being a relevant consideration to the topic of co-parenting, specifically in terms of co-parenting infants when separated.

Lastly, numerous individual responses were given for topics and/or questions that should be addressed, but could not be categorized by an overarching theme. These responses included “teamwork when disciplining”, “the importance of mealtime”, “how separation specifically has impacted co-parenting”, “family members that co-parent”, “unwillingness/unresolved anger in the co-parenting relationship”, “quality of parents nutritional choices”, “help with school work”, “assessing bias against fathers”, “perspectives from the children being co-parented”, “co-parenting differences among children in the same family,” and finally “differences in parenting styles.” Individual participants reported that they felt these topics previously mentioned were important to co-parenting and should be addressed in the survey. Lastly, a total of 3 responses (1.3%) to the second open-ended question were deemed unrelated or inapplicable to the question.

## **Summary**

To conclude, the study yielded a final sample size of 218 participants that completed the survey. When calculating the mean co-parenting measures, the survey identified between group differences for co-parents that were intact compared to those who were separated. Using Cronbach's alpha test, the survey demonstrated overall internal consistency and high reliability. The exploratory principal component factor analysis identified and computed composite co-parenting scores for the factors underlying measure and found that four dimensions accounted for 63.50 percent of total variance in the measure. Lastly, several themes emerged from open response questions describing participants' feedback about the survey and co-parenting in general. Participants shared that the survey should better assess other variables that impact co-parenting, specifically regarding the stability of the other co-parent, financial difficulties, and court intervention and involvement. The following discussion section details and extrapolates upon these findings.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

The present study aimed to address the following questions: 1) Does preliminary testing of the CPCS demonstrate strong psychometric properties of internal consistency and reliability of the measure? 2) Can the measure identify co-parenting differences between intact co-parents and separated co-parents? This chapter will discuss the findings presented in the previous chapter starting with addressing the previously listed research questions of this study. The chapter will also elaborate upon findings from the exploratory principal component factor analysis and draw connections to previous literature. Lastly, this section will provide the strengths and limitations of the study, implications for theory and social work practice, and recommendations for future research.

#### Quantitative Findings

**Internal reliability and validity.** Similar to existing self-report co-parenting measures (Margolin's et al. 2001 & Feinberg's et al. 2012) the CPCS under investigation in this study demonstrated strong internal consistency and reliability when tested statistically. This finding indicates that the inter-relatedness of individual items of the CPCS is well designed to measure the construct of co-parenting. Further, strong scores of internal consistency and reliability indicate that the measure can be replicated and used in future empirical studies of co-parenting between separated and intact families.

**Co-parenting differences between groups.** One of primary objectives of the current research study was to identify whether the CPCS could measure co-parenting differences between intact and separated co-parents. In a review of the literature, there is a lack of measures specifically designed to target this comparison between distinct co-parent relationships. Through

comparison of mean co-parenting scores between co-parents in various relationships (living together vs. separated), the CPCS identified varying levels of co-parenting between separated and intact co-parents. Specifically, co-parents that were living together (married or common law) showed the highest levels of co-parenting followed by those co-parents that were cohabitating but were not married. Co-parents in separated or divorced relationships reported lower levels of co-parenting compared to married or living together co-parents, however, the lowest levels of co-parenting were reported by co-parents with no previous relationship.

Preliminary testing of the CPCS demonstrates the capacity of a single measure to gather co-parenting data between distinct groups of co-parents. Through previous investigation of child outcomes impacted by co-parenting dynamics, it is evident that co-parents in diverse family structures (intact vs. separated) experience unique challenges to co-parenting and thus potentially engage differently and in varying amounts in their co-parenting relationships. The findings of this preliminary study support this notion and confirm that the CPCS can be used across distinct groups of co-parents to gather more useful information in this emerging area of research. It is relevant to mention that although statistical comparison found mean differences between co-parent groups (intact vs. separated), as will be detailed in the qualitative section, a portion of participants reported that the items of the measure felt more oriented to separated and divorced co-parents. This finding indicates some revision might be needed to the items in order to more evenly address and assess the experiences of intact co-parents.

**Evaluation of co-parenting dimensions.** The results from the principal component factor analysis indicated that the final sample size of 218 was appropriate for conducting the test. The factor analysis also indicated that 8 out of the 9 dimensions used to create the measure accounted for the majority of variance determined by the Keizler Criterion eigenvalues over 1.

However, further statistical analysis yielded by the Scree Plot and the Parallel Analysis, showed that the four components of team approach, communication, respecting boundaries and problem styles were more suitable for the measure.

Although the CPCS used nine theoretical constructs of co-parenting developed from the social science literature including: team approach; communication; respecting boundaries; problem styles; gatekeeping; parent synergy; comfort level in raising issues; cherishing the role of the other parent; and division of labor, the factor analysis revealed that these co-parenting components found in the literature may be too overlapping. For example, the findings indicate that the first dimension (team approach) captured most of the variance, which suggests that there may be too many items attempting to explain this first dimension, which then takes away from the weight of the variance of the other three components. As a result of overlap, it may prove challenging to carefully separate out these dimensions into distinct components within the factor-analysis model.

This finding aligns with previous research observations, which highlight that many of co-parenting measures “lack an overarching conceptual specification of the co-parenting relationship that has driven the development of the co-parenting dimension scales” (Feinberg, Brown, & Kan, 2012). The multi-dimensional aspect of the construct of co-parenting has created specific challenges surrounding measurement of this construct, including domain specificity. As was detailed in the literature review, across empirical studies the co-parenting domains have been conceptualized and operationalized somewhat differently (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Although, most of the self-report measures utilize a four-domain model, which correlates with the findings of this study, issues of overlap occur for domains such as cooperation, division of

labor, and support. For future use of the CPCS, increasing domain specificity and equaling the variance attributed to each dimension through revision of particular items will be beneficial.

### **Qualitative Recommendations for the Measure**

The qualitative findings of the measure yielded a variety of information related to participants' perceptions about co-parenting and their experiences completing the CPCS. The main themes that emerged in the qualitative data detailed feedback involving the structure and content of the survey. As previously mentioned, intact co-parenting couples observed that the items felt geared toward and oriented to co-parents in situations of high conflict or separation. The difficulty in constructing items that resonate with both types of co-parenting structures might be a potential explanation for why previous co-parenting measures have tended to assess separated and intact co-parents using different measures. Our findings indicate, as previous research suggests, that co-parenting is impacted by many variables, some of which may be unique to specific co-parenting configurations, i.e., divorced or separated parents.

Another common concern participants shared regarding the survey was that it needed to account for these important variables impacting the co-parenting relationship. These variables included the financial distress, disabilities of the other co-parent or the child, court involvement, and interventions received. Participants clearly, and often in detail, reported that these variables were crucial factors that impacted their co-parenting dynamic and scores on the individual item measures. They also highlighted that it was necessary to take these factors into account when drawing conclusions about their particular co-parenting outcomes on the survey, irrespective of family structure. This finding in particular highlights the limitation of using quantitative measure that limits participant's responses to an agreement scale. Through the qualitative feedback

participants were also able to report any confusion about particular questions or wording of the items, which is valuable information for revision of the survey in future use.

### **Study Strengths and Limitations**

**Strengths.** The current study utilized primarily quantitative methods to gather preliminary data on a newly designed co-parenting measure. The study yielded a large enough sample size to determine internal consistency and reliability of the measure, as well as provide insight about the domains used to assess the construct. The nature of the study was low cost and the electronic recruitment methods allowed researchers to promote the study to a large possible participant pool. Several responses on the qualitative portion of the survey indicated that participants felt the measure was applicable and well suited to assess their distinct co-parenting situation.

**Limitations.** Several limitations exist within the current study specifically in terms of the sample and study design. Although the final sample size of the study was large enough to conduct the necessary statistical tests, the relatively low number of participants, specifically in the separated group (n= 91) limits the amount of generalizability of the findings. In addition, the sample was predominantly homogenous with the majority of participants identifying a white, female, and in heterosexual relationships with a combined household income of \$80,000 or more. This greatly limits the generalizability of this pilot study.

The recruitment methodology of the study also limits the generalizability and may have contributed to participant bias. The CPCS was primarily administered through professional electronic networks such as the AFCC. These networks delivered the survey to professionals in the field of family research and co-parenting with prior experience and notions of the construct itself and existing research. This could have potentially biased responses from these participants

in particular. It is also important to note that the sample was self-selected. Participants with specific co-parenting experiences may have been more inclined to complete a survey about this topic. Although attempts were made to recruit participants in diverse geographic areas through specific online platforms such as Craigslist and Facebook, the demographics of the participant population indicate an overall lack of diversity. Lastly, the reliance on electronic recruitment excludes populations that do not have regular access to the Internet or who may feel uncomfortable completing a survey online.

Another limitation that was acknowledged by participants in the qualitative findings was that the measure could only assess co-parenting dynamics in a cross-sectional manner. The measure was not able to account for how co-parenting dynamics shift over time, particularly in terms of the separated group who reported that with adjustment and the passage of time their levels of co-parenting had improved. Lastly, participants also highlighted in the qualitative data, that the survey did not account for important extraneous variables that can dramatically impact co-parenting levels, such as financial stressors or court involvement. Information regarding these other variables appear important to understanding and evaluating co-parenting scores across diverse family structures.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice and Theory**

As scientific literature continues to emerge that links co-parenting to child outcomes and well-being, the need to effectively operationalize and measure this important construct in an efficient way becomes salient as well. Prior research has gravitated toward assessing co-parenting in intact and separated families independently, and currently there exists a lack of valid and reliable tools to measure the construct comprehensively between different types of co-parents. The ability to quantify and measure co-parenting levels across diverse family structures



will allow social science research to advance its understanding of the challenges that intact and separated co-parents experience.

As separation and divorce rates remain fairly constant, a significant amount of families are raising children outside of intact, cohabitating parent systems. Furthermore, positive relationships between co-parents regardless of family structure have been repeatedly shown to be important to child wellbeing and health outcomes (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Cummings & Merrilees, 2010; Grych, 2005). It will be beneficial to understand in greater specificity how distinct domains, i.e., team approach, communication, parent synergy, etc., of the co-parenting construct function similarly and dissimilarly between intact and separated co-parents. This data will help shape and develop informed co-parenting support and intervention for parents in whatever parenting relationships or structures they find themselves in. In addition, a valid and reliable co-parenting measure that is widely accessible and cost effective can be administered in greater frequency to co-parents with the hopes of gathering data pertinent to developing such intervention.

Lastly, this measure can be used in the future to understand more about gender differences that emerge in co-parenting relationships across distinct family structures. A review of the literature demonstrates the importance of father involvement on child well-being in post-divorce families, identifying that decreased involvement and time with fathers is one of the most negative effects of divorce experienced by children (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Future research that details the co-parenting experiences of fathers in particular could provide insight on the specific barriers or domains that contribute to greater or lower levels of co-parent father involvement specifically.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of the current study, several recommendations for future research have been identified. The results of the exploratory principal component factor analysis demonstrate that although the CPCS has good overall internal consistency, future research using the measure would benefit from revision of certain item measures. Specifically, items will need to be eliminated from the measure (while not reducing internal reliability) to ensure that there are fewer factors explaining the first dimension of team approach, which accounted for the majority of variance in this preliminary study. This will allow the measure to more accurately depict the various theoretical constructs identified in the literature that explain co-parenting relationships.

In addition to revising minor instances of confusing wording on the measure identified by participants, future studies using the CPCS will seek to improve the size and diversity of the sample population to enhance generalizability. Specifically, increased diversity in socioeconomic status, gender, and more balanced group size of separated and intact co-parents is needed for statistical comparison. With revision of items to reduce overlap between co-parenting dimensions and a larger, diverse sample population, future studies using the CPCS should seek to identify important between group differences and similarities pertaining to the amount and type of co-parenting that occurs for separated and intact co-parents. For example, are there specific dimensions of co-parenting such as problem styles or gatekeeping that are reported differently for separated co-parents compared to intact co-parents? This information would be valuable when constructing co-parenting interventions across diverse family structures. Overall, future use of the CPCS should aim at gathering generalizable co-parenting information across diverse families that will help researchers and policy-makers develop effective and targeted initiatives and interventions for co-parents.

## **Conclusion**

This research study detailed the preliminary testing of a newly constructed co-parenting measure that was designed to assess co-parenting in both intact and separated families. The findings of this study showed the CPCS to be an internally consistent and reliable measure with a capacity to distinguish differences across diverse family structures. With minor revisions to the survey in terms reducing item measures that account for the first domain of team approach, it can be used in future studies to gather information about co-parenting in unique family structures. Future studies will also require increased diversity and size in the sample population, specifically related to race and ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Information yielded in future studies will be beneficial to developing and improving interventions available to co-parents that present in unique family structures.

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## Appendix A

Smith College IRB Approval Letter



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### NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL FOR CHANGE OF PROTOCOL

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**TO: MARSHA PRUETT**

**FROM: PHIL PEAKE AND NNAMDI POLE, CO-CHAIRS, INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD, SMITH COLLEGE**

**SUBJECT: HUMAN SUBJECTS PROPOSAL**

**DATE: NOVEMBER 17, 2015**

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**PROPOSAL TITLE: "PRELIMINARY PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING OF THE CO-PARENTING CHILDREN QUESTIONNAIRE (CPCQ)"**

**REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED**

**PROJECT NUMBER: 1516-015**

**APPROVAL DATE: 17-NOV-2015 ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 14-OCT-2015**

The Institutional Review Board at Smith College has reviewed and approved the research protocol referenced above. **Please note the following requirements:**

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), you must submit these changes to the IRB by filling out and submitting a Change of Protocol form.

Adverse Event Reporting/Deviations from Approved Procedures: Should any adverse events occur during the conduct of your research, you should report them immediately to the chair of the IRB. Additionally, any procedural deviations from your approved proposal must be reported. Explanations of these events and related forms can be found on the IRB website.

Renewal: You must promptly return annual Research Project Continuation Forms sent by the IRB in order to continue to be authorized to conduct research.

Completion: When you have completed your study (i.e. data collection is finished), you are required inform the IRB by submitting a signed Research Project Continuation Form with appropriate box checked.

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form. If signed consent is to be collected, as noted in your proposal, you must retain signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.

Additional Requirements: None.

Be sure to use the project number provided above in all subsequent correspondence to the Institutional Review Board at Smith College. Please contact me at 413-585-3914 or ppeake@smith.edu, if you have any questions.

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For Committee Use Only:  Any and all requirements completed, final approval given:

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Phil Peake' and the signature on the right is 'Nnamdi Pole'. Both signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Phil Peake, Ph.D. Nnamdi Pole, Ph.D.

Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

## Appendix B

### Co-Parenting Children Survey

**\* 2. Do you have *at least one* child under the age of 18 living at home?**

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

**\* 3. Do you share parenting of *at least one* child with another adult?**

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

**4. What is your gender?** Female Male Other

**5. How old are you?** \_\_\_\_\_ Years

**6. What is the gender of the partner you are co-parenting with?** Female Male Other

**7. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?**

- ( ) Less than high school
- ( ) High school graduate
- ( ) Some college or technical training after high school
- ( ) College/technical training graduate
- ( ) Schooling beyond college (graduate school, professional school)
- ( ) Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. What best describes your employment during the past six months?**

- ( ) Full time
- ( ) Part time
- ( ) Not employed, seeking work
- ( ) Not employed, not seeking work
- ( ) State/government supported
- ( ) Other, please specify

**9. Race/Ethnicity:** \_\_\_\_\_

**10. How much income do all the people in your household combined make in a year, before taxes?**

- ( ) Less than \$20,000
  - ( ) \$20,000 to \$39,000
  - ( ) \$40,000 to \$59, 000
  - ( ) \$60,000 to \$79,000
  - ( ) \$80,000 or more

**11. Are you co-parenting your youngest child with...**

- ( ) The child's other biological parent, where you are also the biological parent

- ( ) The child's other biological parent, where you are the stepparent/partner
- ( ) The child's stepparent, where you are the biological parent
- ( ) Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

**12. What is your current relationship status with your youngest child's other parent?**

- ( ) Living Together: Married or Common Law
- ( ) Living Together: Not Married or Common Law
- ( ) Separated or divorced
- ( ) Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

**13. How long have you been or were you involved with your youngest child's other parent? (Please use the numbers below that best apply to you)**

Never	Less than a year	1 to 3 years	4 to 7 years	8 or more years	Not Applicable
1	2	3	4	5	9

**14. If the relationship with your youngest child's other parent has ended (e.g. separated), how long has it been since the relationship ended? \_\_\_\_\_ # of months**

**15. How many children under the age of 18 do you have from the relationship with that other parent? \_\_\_\_\_ # of children**

**16. Please provide the following information regarding all of your children under 18 years (If you have more than 4 children, please list the 4 youngest)**

Child's gender	Child's age	You are the child's...	Who the child lives with most of the time
<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	____ Years old	<input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Father <input type="checkbox"/> Other If Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Me <input type="checkbox"/> Other parent <input type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/> Neither
<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	____ Years old	<input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Father <input type="checkbox"/> Other If Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Me <input type="checkbox"/> Other parent <input type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/> Neither
<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	____ Years old	<input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Father <input type="checkbox"/> Other If Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Me <input type="checkbox"/> Other parent <input type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/> Neither
<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	____ Years old	<input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Father <input type="checkbox"/> Other If Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Me <input type="checkbox"/> Other parent <input type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/> Neither

**12. Rate the degree to which you agree/disagree with the following statements by checking the number that best describes your feeling.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

#	Item	Answer
1	I am satisfied with how we share the work of parenting	
2	I usually just give in to the other parent so we do not argue	

3	We can usually find solutions about parenting that we are both happy with	
4	I feel comfortable in sharing my thoughts about parenting with the other parent	
5	I get annoyed easily about the mistakes that the other parent makes with our child	
6	The other parent undercuts my decisions	
7	The other parent gets in the way of my relationship with our child	
8	We both view our child's strengths and weaknesses in similar ways	
9	The other parent pressures me to parent differently	
10	I am careful about sharing my thoughts about parenting with the other parent in fear that my words will be used against me somehow	
11	I can talk easily with the other parent about activities I would like to do with our child	
12	When we meet in person, the other parent and I are friendly or polite to each other	
13	We have similar hopes and dreams for our child	
14	We generally agree on how to discipline our child	
15	Although we don't always agree, we respect each other's differences as parents	
16	We share big decisions when it comes to parenting	
17	The other parent respects what I bring to parenting our child	
18	I find ways to help our child have a good relationship with the other parent	
19	I find it difficult to support the other parent's relationship with our child	
20	I have given up trying to cooperate with the other parent	
21	I try to involve the other parent but my efforts often go nowhere	
22	I value the other parent's parenting skills	
23	It is important that my child loves both parents	
24	I trust the other parent with our child	
25	It's important that the other parent is involved in our child's life	
26	I worry about my child while in the other parent's care	
27	It's important that our child does not hear us talking negatively about each other (in person, on the phone, or on videoconference)	
28	I value the other parent's input about decisions that affect our child	
29	I feel out of control when speaking with the other parent	
30	I have trouble controlling my anger when around the other parent.	
31	I am hostile or biting in my conversations with the other parent	
32	I encourage my child to talk to the other parent directly if something is bothering him/her about their relationship	
33	I disagree with the choices that the other parent makes about our child	
34	I know I can count on the other parent if I need help in parenting	
35	The other parent asks my opinion on parenting issues	
36	I work well with the other parent when decisions need to be made about our child	
37	I get little support from the other parent to help out with the work of parenting	

38	When there is a problem with our child, we work on finding answers together	
39	When making decisions, we argue about who is right	
40	We don't make decisions about our child because we are unable to talk through what we both agree on	
41	We do not have a good way of dealing with our differences as parents	
42	I could parent better if the other parent stayed out of my business	
43	If the other parent needs to make a change in the parenting schedule, I go out of my way to make the change	
44	The more I try to involve the other parent in decision making, the more we get into conflict	
45	It is better to be away from, or uninvolved with, the other parent to make sure we don't argue	
46	I feel awkward when I am with the other parent	
47	The other parent tries to be a good parent but does not know enough about parenting to be the kind of parent our child needs	
48	It is part of my job as a parent to positively influence my child's relationship with the other parent	
49	My child would be better off seeing less of the other parent	
50	I pretend to support the other parent's decisions but in the end I do what I think is best for our child	
51	I don't think it is helpful to talk with the other parent about decisions that need to be made about our child	
52	I try to be more involved, but the other parent won't let me have an opinion	
53	The other parent pretends to get along with me but I know that it is just an act	
54	We parent better when we make decisions together	
55	I need to 'go behind' the other parent to fix the mess left behind	
56	We try not to disagree in front of our child	

21. Do you have any comments or questions about the co-parenting topics and/or questions featured in this survey?

22. Was there any co-parenting question or topic that was not addressed that you feel should be?

*We sincerely thank you for your time and participation.*

**Appendix B.1**

Informed Consent Form

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**



**SMITH COLLEGE**

**Smith College • Northampton, MA**

.....  
**Title of Study:** Preliminary Psychometric Testing of the Co-Parenting Children Questionnaire (CPCS)

**Investigator(s):** Professor Marsha Kline Pruett, Smith College School for Social Work, Tel: xxxxxxxxxxx

Email: xxxxxxxxxxx MSW Student Abigail Sushchyk, Smith College School for Social Work, Tel:

xxxxxxxxxx, Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxx  
.....

You are being asked to be in a research study about how parents share parenting (co-parenting). The purpose of the study is to develop a new co-parenting measure to help us better understand how parents cooperate and support, or work against, each other in parenting their child(ren). Please read the following information before agreeing to be in the study. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey which should take about 10 minutes of your time. You can complete it at home or on a tablet we will provide with the survey on it.

The questions asked of you deal with everyday co-parenting behaviors and they are expected to cause little to mild distress or discomfort. Parents who realize they are not co-parenting as much or as well as they would like to could be uncomfortable, but the questions are not likely to be upsetting. A list of internet sites and books on the topic will be provided at the end of the study if you wish to learn more. While there are no financial benefits for participating in this study, you might learn about how you co-parent in your own family, which could lead you to take steps to support or improve the relationship.

Your responses will be strictly anonymous, that is, your name is not attached to your information and no one can connect your information to you. This research may be presented at professional conferences or published in a peer-reviewed journal.

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the



study at any time without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study or Smith College. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to exit out of the survey at any time before submitting it.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered before, during or after the research. If you have questions, feel free to contact Abigail Sushchik (Research Assistant) at Tel: (xxx) xxx-xxxx or [asushchik@smith.edu](mailto:asushchik@smith.edu) or the Lead Researcher, Professor Marsha Kline Pruett at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or [mpruett@smith.edu](mailto:mpruett@smith.edu). If you'd like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. Email Abigail Sushchik and provide your name and email address, and she will send you an electronic copy of results when we have completed the study. In doing so, the researchers will know you participated in the study, but your name will not be connected to your information. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered, or if you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you may contact Phil Peake, Co-chair of the Smith College Institutional Review Board at (413) 585-3914. Alternatively, concerns can be reported by completing a Participant Complaint Form, which can found on the IRB website at [www.smith.edu/irb/compliance.htm](http://www.smith.edu/irb/compliance.htm)

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**\*1. By clicking "yes" below to be taken to the survey, you indicate that you have read and understood the above and volunteer to participate in this study. Please print out a copy of this consent for your records. If you have met us in the courthouse, a blank hard copy will be provided to you.**

- Yes, I have read and understand the above and volunteer to participate in this study.
- No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

## Appendix C

### Invitation to Participate Email

Hello,

Dr. Marsha Kline Pruett (Professor, Smith College School for Social Work), Abby Sushchyk (MSW student at Smith College), and Dr. Michael Saini (Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto) are working together on a co-parenting tool, and we need your help to get it going. We are writing to you about this topic because you are involved in a profession related to the field of co-parenting and family research, and as a result may be interested in this study. **If you currently share parenting of a child under 18 with another adult**, please take 10 minutes to complete an online survey to help us gather important data on a new co-parenting measure. *(If this is not applicable to you, feel free to forward this email or delete it.)*

As professionals involved in helping parents collaborate in the raising of their children, we are developing a tool to quickly and efficiently learn more about co-parenting in different family situations. By doing this research we hope to learn more about how co-parenting looks whether parents live together or apart.

Your completion of the survey is completely confidential and anonymous – that is, we will not have your name, identifying information and cannot connect your answers to you in any way. A copy of results can be made available to you once the study is completed.

***If you are interested in participating, please use the following link:***

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Q97TLCG>

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Marsha Kline Pruett or Abby Sushchyk at a phone number or email address below. Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,



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Marsha Kline Pruett, Ph.D., M.S.L.  
Maconda Brown O'Connor Professor  
Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, MA 01063  
[REDACTED]

Abby Sushchyk, MSW Student  
Smith College School for Social Work  
[REDACTED]

## Appendix C.1

### Invitation to Participate Flyer

#### Co-Parenting Children Survey

#### WE WANT YOUR INPUT

#### **What is this research about?**

We are two Professors and a Master's level social work student involved in helping parents collaborate in the raising of their children. We are developing a tool to quickly and efficiently learn more about co-parenting in different family situations. By doing this research we hope to learn more about how co-parenting looks whether parents live together or apart.

#### **What we are asking of you**

*If you are a parent of minor children (married, separated, never cohabited, or divorced)*, we are asking that you complete an online survey that should take no longer than *10 minutes* to complete. You will be asked some questions about co-parenting with your child's other parent and some basic informational questions about yourself and your child.

Your completion of the survey is completely confidential and anonymous – that is, we will not have your name, identifying information and cannot connect your answers to you in any way. A copy of results can be made available to you once the study is completed.

#### **If you are interested in participating, please use the following link:**

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Q97TLCG>

If you have any questions, please contact one of the researchers at a phone number or email address below.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Marsha Kline Pruett, Ph.D., M.S.L.  
Maconda Brown O'Connor Professor  
Smith College School for Social Work

[REDACTED]

Michael Saini, Ph.D.  
Factor-Inwentash Chair in Law and Social Work

[REDACTED]

Abby Sushchuk, MSW Student  
Smith College School for Social Work

[REDACTED]

This research has been approved by the Smith College Institutional Review Board.

## Appendix C.2

### Invitation to Participate Craigslist and Facebook Post

Hello Everyone!

**Are you interested in helping advance the field of parenting and family research with your shared parenting observations?**

As an MSW candidate, I am part of a research team developing a tool to quickly and efficiently learn more about co-parenting in different family situations. Any parent (married or separated) who shares the parenting responsibilities of a child under 18 years of age can complete this survey. By doing this research we hope to learn more about how co-parenting looks whether parents live together or apart.

Your completion of the survey is completely confidential and anonymous – that is, we will not have your name, identifying information and cannot connect your answers to you in any way.

Here is the survey link, it requires about 10 mins to complete:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Q97TLCG>

More information about the survey and research is detailed on the study's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/CPCSresearch/>

Thank you greatly in advance for your consideration!

*\* This study has been approved by the Smith College IRB.*

## Appendix D

### Co-Parenting Resource List

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*Co-parenting is defined as two or more adults who share in the raising and care of a child. The following is a list of books and information for you if you wish to learn more about co-parenting.*



.....  
**Internet Information**

- ✚ Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. (2011). *Co-Parenting Communication Guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.afccnet.org/Resource-Center/Resources-for-Families/ProductID/10>
  - ✚ Emily Douglas. University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. (2006). *Co-Parenting After Divorce Guide*. Retrieved from [http://umassmed.edu/uploadedFiles/eap2/resources/Families\\_and\\_Parenting/Coparenting%20After%20Divorce.pdf](http://umassmed.edu/uploadedFiles/eap2/resources/Families_and_Parenting/Coparenting%20After%20Divorce.pdf)
  - ✚ Jocelyn Block and Melinda Smith. (September 2015). *Co-parenting Tips for Divorced Parents*. Retrieved from <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/family-divorce/co-parenting-tips-for-divorced-parents.htm>
  - ✚ James McHale, Jason Baker, and Heidi Liss Radunovich. (2015). *When People Parent Together: Let's Talk About Coparenting*. Retrieved from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1000>
- 

#### **Books For Parents Living Together**

- ✚ Carolyn Pape Cowan and Philip A. Cowan. (1993). *When partners become parents: The big life changes for couples*. New York: Basic Books.
- ✚ James P. McHale. (2007). *Charting the bumpy road of coparenthood: Understanding the challenges of family life*. Washington, DC: ZeroToThree: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and their Families.
- ✚ Kyle D. Pruett & Marsha Kline Pruett. (2009). *Partnership parenting: How men and women parent differently--why it helps your kids and can strengthen your marriage*. New York: Da Capo Press.

#### **Books For Parents Living Apart**

- ✚ Isolina Ricci. (2013). *Mom's house, Dad's house*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- ✚ Jill Burrett & Michael Green. (2009). *Shared Parenting: Raising Your Child Cooperatively After Separation*.

Marsha Kline Pruett, Ph.D., M.S.L.  
Maconda Brown O'Connor Professor  
Smith College School for Social Work



Abby Sushchuk, MSW Student  
Smith College School for Social Work

