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TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING? : AN INVESTIGATION INTO OVERPARENTING

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Abstract

The family unit is accepted as the foundation unit for children to function well in culture and society and the parental role in facilitating this is considered of high importance. 'Parenting' is now generally recognised by researchers not only to refer to the activity of raising a child but also to the quality of the outcomes for the child's social and emotional development. Recently, media attention has been focused on contemporary, popular parenting approaches by high-functioning and well-educated parents, who use substantial efforts in providing what they consider to be the best parenting with the most beneficial outcomes for their children. The popular press has invented expressions to describe these parenting approaches such as *helicopter parenting*, a term describing parents who constantly hover around their child to ensure their offspring experience success and come to no harm. Many authors and journalists have suggested the extreme efforts of these parents could be potentially harming their children. While the idea that intensive parenting efforts could be harmful to the child is receiving increasing support from commentators, there has been limited research conducted on the topic. There is no definitive designation of parenting actions considered to be excessive, nor has there been a comprehensive study of child or adolescent factors associated with intensive parenting.

This program of research therefore investigated the concept of parenting that is well intentioned, but potentially excessive (tentatively termed 'overparenting'). The investigation encompassed three main research questions: (1) *can we develop a conceptually coherent definition of overparenting, and identify examples of overparenting actions, based on expert opinion; (2) can an internally consistent measure of overparenting be created for parents of school-age children; (3) are*

particular parenting actions associated with this overparenting measure? These questions were explored via three studies, resulting in three papers, which are presented in this thesis. This thesis does not attempt to demonstrate whether ‘overparenting’ has negative impacts on the child – that is subject to further research.

Paper 1 used qualitative research to develop a more specific definition of overparenting actions. In this first study, parenting professionals (*N* = 84) responded to an online survey on their observations of overparenting and what types of actions they believed were behavioural examples of the term. The survey data highlighted extreme responsiveness to children, high demands of child success in a range of areas, and high parental assistance to the child, which minimises demands on them to face or overcome challenges in their life.

Paper 2 presents the development of an instrument to measure the beliefs, attitudes and behavioural goals that may encourage overparenting actions undertaken by parents of school-aged children. Three studies contributed to the development of this scale. At first, a 70-item list of parenting beliefs was created from the grey literature on high levels of parenting effort. Data from study 1 were used to identify the subset of particular parenting statements that professionals believed to be associated with overparenting actions. In Study 2, the resulting 38-item scale was given to 404 parents recruited from south-east Queensland schools, and an exploratory factor analysis was undertaken, which identified four factors. In Study 3, the modified scale was administered to a new sample of parents (*N* = 638) and a confirmatory factor analysis was undertaken. The four-factor structure did not provide an acceptable model fit. However, with omission of two factors, good fit was obtained. The resultant 8-item scale (The Locke Parenting Scale, LPS) comprised

Ensuring Constant Happiness (5 items), and Befriending (3 items), with a total score that retained acceptable internal consistency.

Paper 3 investigated whether overparenting beliefs were associated with particular parenting actions. The study used the LPS to investigate the association of overparenting and children's homework. Another set of parents recruited from an independent girls' school was added to the sample used in paper 2 ($N = 866$). This study investigated the link between the LPS and beliefs about responsibility for their child's homework (specifically, their own, their child's teacher's and their child's responsibility). Parents with higher LPS scores tended to take more personal responsibility for the completion of their child's homework than did other parents, and ascribed greater responsibility for homework completion to their child's teacher. However, increased perceived responsibility by parents and teachers was not accompanied by a commensurate reduction in the child's perceived responsibility. While retention of student responsibility may promote the development of self-management of academic work, the greater responsibility expected of parents themselves and of teachers implied behaviours that may undermine independence.

The evidence presented in this manuscript suggests a fundamental reframing of ideal parenting effort. Current popular belief suggests that ideal parenting is highly effortful and sacrificing and that this approach results in improved child outcomes. Taken together, the three studies and three papers presented in this manuscript suggest that there may be an optimum range of parenting efforts for children and adolescents, with parental labours both too low and too high potentially being problematic. Whilst these propositions require substantial further investigation and corroboration, this manuscript presents preliminary evidence that further research needs to be undertaken

to establish the work begun as a result of these investigations, and begin the potentially necessary education programs designed to inform parenting professionals and parents themselves of an optimum parenting approach.

Key words: Overparenting; helicopter parenting; children; measures; homework

Submitted Manuscripts and Publications from the PhD Research Program

Paper 1

Locke, J. Y., Campbell, M. A., & Kavanagh, D. (2012). Can a parent do too much for their child? An examination by parenting professionals of the concept of overparenting. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 22*, 27-263. doi: 10.1017/jgc.2012.29

Paper 2

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Paper 3

Locke, J. Y., Kavanagh, D. J., & Campbell, M. A. (to be submitted). Overparenting and homework: The student's task, but everyone's responsibility. *Journal of Educational Psychology.*

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The candidate is the first author on all published and submitted papers. The second and third authors are members of the candidate's supervisory team and their contribution to the papers has been of a supervisory nature. Permission has been granted by all co-authors for the inclusion of the papers in this manuscript.

Presentations of Research during the PhD Research Program

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed: QUT Verified Signature

Dated: 12.6.14

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

This chapter discusses a new concept in parenting, that of overparenting, and the research undertaken on the construct to date. For many years, a parent's parenting skill has been defined by how much effort they put into caring for their child and providing them the opportunity to develop maturity and life skills. Recently, it has been proposed that some parents might be putting too much effort into helping and caring for their child and that this might have some negative consequences for their offspring. This chapter discusses the emergence of this idea in the psychological community, through an examination of theories of parenting style and actions, the emergence of the concept of overparenting, the measures that have been created to research it, the child outcomes thought to be associated with the parenting approach, and the suspected influences on parents who adopt such an approach. As the idea of too much parenting is a relatively new one, gaps emerge in the investigations of the topic to date and this chapter will examine the areas of opportunity in the research.

Parenting approaches and child wellbeing

Parenting choices have a powerful influence on children's wellbeing (Baumrind, 1965, 1991) and different child-rearing practices have been shown to be associated with different child and adolescent adjustment (Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, & Mueller, 1988; Milevsky, Schlecter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007).

In an effort to determine the link between child outcomes and parenting, researchers have long focused on understanding and quantifying parental behaviours which enable children to thrive (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Diana Baumrind's seminal 1966 parenting research posited that differing combinations of parental warmth and discipline produced distinct parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian

and permissive. Baumrind's theory has strongly impacted on subsequent thinking about parenting styles (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Twenty years later, based on Baumrind's model, Maccoby and Martin (1983) further expanded these parenting styles based on combinations of high or low scores on two aspects of parenting Baumrind originally posited as most important – *parental responsiveness*, the amount the parent responds to the child's needs, and *parental demandingness*, the parent's tendency to have rules and demand responsible and mature behaviour from their child. Four parenting styles established were: Authoritarian (high responsiveness and high demandingness); Permissive (high responsiveness and low demandingness); Authoritative (low responsiveness and high demandingness); and Negligent/disengaged (low responsiveness and low demandingness).

These dimensions have dominated the research into the links between parents' parenting approach and child outcomes. The authoritative parenting approach, high in both demandingness and responsiveness, has been typically found to be the ideal parenting method, improving children's wellbeing in areas such as self-esteem (Milevsky et al., 2007), self-reliance and sense of security (Baumrind, 2005), and popularity (Buri et al., 1988; Wenar, 1994).

Because high-quality efforts in parental responsiveness and demandingness have been associated with ideal child wellbeing outcomes, many studies now focus on populations thought to be using insufficient parenting effort in these dimensions and the subsequent negative outcomes for their children. These include research on neglectful parents (e.g., Ballantine, 2001; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005) and parents thought to have difficulty in delivering appropriate parenting care and opportunities for their children, including those parents impacted

by low income (e.g., Shears, Whiteside-Mansell, McKelvey, & Selig, 2008), mental illness (e.g., Thomas & Kalucy, 2003), or health issues (Altschuler & Dale, 1999).

While quantifying parenting effort into two dimensions has made a great impact on parenting research, there have been other factors found to be important that have not been entirely captured through the responsiveness and demandingness dimensions proposed by Maccoby and Martin (Skinner, Johnson, & Snyder, 2005). A distinct third area, parental provision of autonomy support for the child, has been shown to be an important contributor to child wellbeing, particularly in the area of academic success (e.g., Grolnick, Gurland, Jacob, & DeCourcey, 2002). Autonomy support is defined as a parent's capacity and willingness to allow the child to have some freedom of choice, express respect for the child's opinion, and allow the child to discover and articulate their own views (Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009). The opposite parental action is assumed to be parent coercion (e.g., Skinner, Johnson, & Snyder, 2005) or control. Parental ego-involvement has been identified as a potential motivational factor that may affect a parent's levels of autonomy support vs. control (Grolnick, Gurland, Jacob, & DeCourcey, 2002). Baumrind had originally included parental autonomy support as part of the description of the Authoritative parent who she described as having "high warmth, autonomy support and behavioural control, and minimal use of psychological control" (Baumrind, 2005, p. 238).

High levels of autonomy support, involvement, and provision of structure by parents has been shown to be related to child achievement, with parental autonomy support associated with children's self-reports of autonomous self-regulation, teacher-rated competence and adjustment, and school grades and achievement (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Other authors have shown that, rather than classifying parenting as high or low on the three dimensions (responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy), a

better method is to investigate a parent's scores on six dimensions (warmth, rejection, structure, chaos, autonomy support, and coercion) as descriptions of parenting (Skinner et al., 2005). The authors of that study claimed that their measure uses a motivational model to assess parenting, appearing to suggest that the items measure what the parent wanted to do with their child, or their motivation; however, the use of the term motivation is somewhat misleading, as their items still measure a parent's actions and do not clarify what actual parental motivations are in undertaking these actions.

Indeed, many of the measures of parenting have a dearth of discussion of what goal or chosen child outcome drives parenting actions. Many studies appear to quantify parents' actions according to how successful they are in achieving what researchers see as a universal parental goal such as "a self-reliant child " (Baumrind, 1965), "(a child with) school success" (Grolnick et al., 2002), or "a healthy identity" (Aslan, 2011). However, it is not always clear that these are the goals parents have in mind when choosing their parenting actions. Research has shown that parent goals for their child have changed over the years and that the parental perception of the value of traits such as obedience has been steadily declining, with the perceived value of child autonomy steadily rising (Alwin, 1988). Socioeconomic (SES) and cultural factors have also been found to influence the choice of parental goals, due to influences of elements such as community norms (Dwairy, 2010). Thus, it is perhaps injudicious to judge parenting against perceived universal parenting goals.

A model of parenting that includes parental goals is offered by Darling and Steinberg (1993). In their model, parents' socialisation goals for their child are assumed to be critical to their choice of parenting style and attitudes, and to the specific parenting practices they employ. This model includes a child's willingness to

take on the parents' socialisation goal as an additional factor, and shows the influences each of the four factors have in determining adolescent outcomes (see Figure 1). This model proposes that parenting style (a parent's responsiveness and demandingness towards a child) has only an indirect impact on a child's outcomes, and that it is primarily moderating the relationship between parenting practices and specific child developmental outcomes. Specifically, parenting style is held to make particular parenting practices more (or less) effective (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The model also proposes that if parents place different levels of emphasis or value for particular child outcomes, then the parenting practices will alter and parental effort towards the child achieving those outcomes will rise or fall.

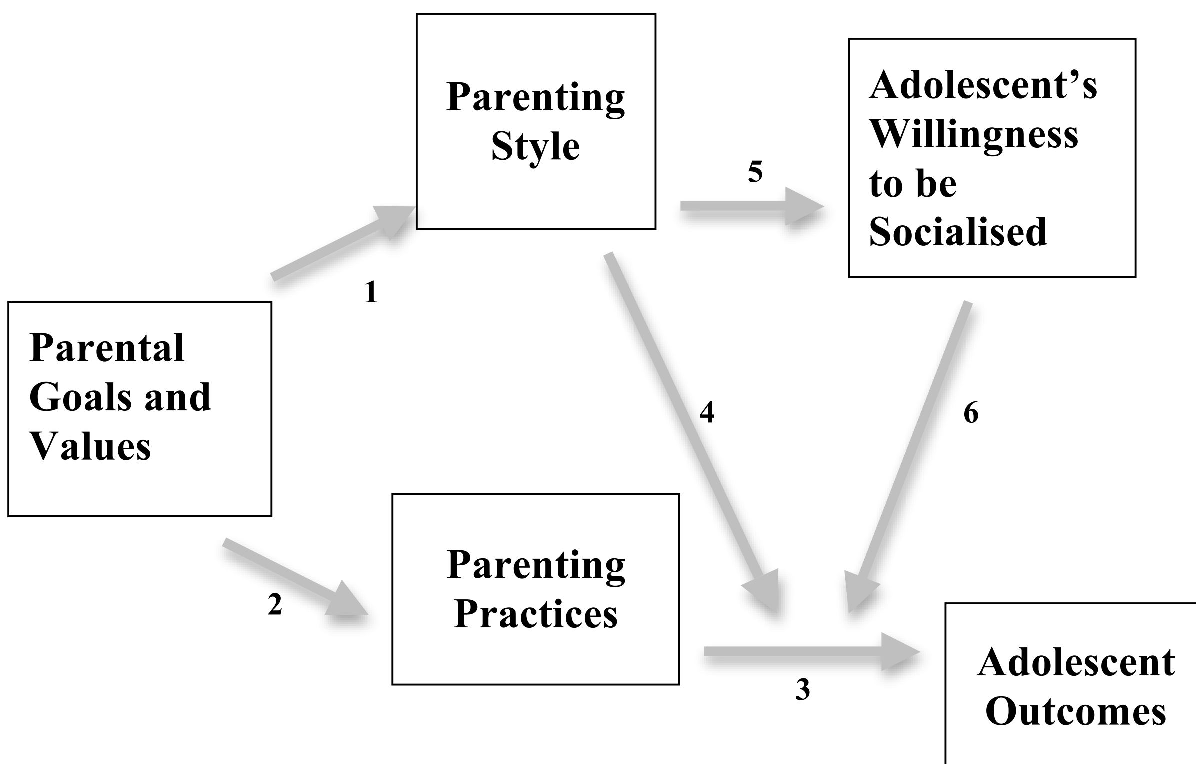

Figure 1.1 Contextual model of parenting style (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). "Parenting goals for socialisation influence both parenting style (Arrow 1) and parenting practices (Arrow 2). Parenting practices have a direct on specific child development outcomes (Arrow 3). In contrast, parenting style influences child development primarily through its moderating influence on the relationship between parenting practices and developmental outcomes (Arrow 4) and through its influence on the child's openness to parental socialisation (Arrow 5). The child's openness to socialisation also moderates the influence of parenting practice on the child's development (Arrow 6)." (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 493)

Unfortunately the dimension of autonomy support, while being acknowledged as being important during adolescence by the authors, is not specifically included in this model (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Another element, which is not specified in the model, but is also linked to autonomy granting, is psychological control. Psychological control has been described as a way of a parent controlling a child, by withdrawing warmth towards them, inducing guilt in the child, ignoring the child and personally attacking the child (Baumrind, 2005). Parental autonomy support and psychological control could be included in parenting style or could be considered a part of parenting practices that are the result of either a child's capacity to take on a parent's particular goal or a parent's ability to adjust their goals according to their child's altered evaluation of the desirability of certain traits or achievements. In the Darling and Steinberg model, it is perhaps in the feedback loop of the child communicating to the parent their willingness to take on the parent's goals, the parent's comfort in being open to this communication, or the parent's ability to negotiate the goal successfully with the child, that determines whether the parent remains authoritative in parenting practice or uses practices such as psychological control or coercion.

The proposal that parenting effort can be extreme

While the exact nature of parenting goals, parenting style, and parenting practice as they influence child outcomes may still not be entirely clear; high parental effort in parenting styles of responsiveness and demandingness are generally assumed to be parenting actions that ensure an upbringing in which children and young people will thrive (e.g., Baumrind, 1991). Baumrind (1993) has advocated that parents who provide higher levels of commitment and investment in their children will produce

higher levels of competence in their children, and that active shaping and manipulation of a child's environment will produce more competence and higher levels of self-esteem in the child. She has claimed authoritative parents use "exceptional effort" with their adolescents and that this results in "exceptionally competent" adolescents (Baumrind, 1993, p. 1308). Baumrind has matched "mediocre" effort from parents with "good enough" adolescent scores on competence and problem behaviour scales, and "minimal" effort from unengaged parents, resulting in "a pattern of adjustment inverse to that of authoritative homes" (Baumrind, 1993, p. 1308). Her primary conclusion on required parenting effort has been that parents should be placing high levels of engagement and effort into their parenting and "something more than 'good enough' parenting is called for" (Baumrind, 1993, p. 1309). The value of high effort had also been reinforced by studies demonstrating the link between high parental effort and better child outcomes including high motivation, achievement and time spent completing homework (e.g., Keith & Keith, 1993). Indeed, high levels of parental involvement in school activities such as homework has long been considered beneficial, with many teachers promoting parental involvement in children and adolescents' schooling (Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2008), and specific programs being created to encourage parents to interact more with their children when they are completing homework (e.g., Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001).

Recent media interest, however, has begun to challenge the idea that extreme parenting effort for their child will lead to even more desirable child wellbeing outcomes. Terms including 'helicopter parents' - "hover closely overhead, rarely out of reach, whether their children need them or not" ("Helicopter parent", 2011) and 'lawnmower parent' –"mothers and fathers who attempt to smooth out and mow

down all obstacles" in the way of the child's success ("Helicopter parent", 2011) have entered the popular lexicon of parenting approaches and are now used regularly by columnists and authors around the world (e.g., Gibbs, 2009; Nelson, 2010).

Helicopter parenting has been described as being "appropriate parenting characteristics taken to an inappropriate degree" (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011, p. 405). This overly effortful parenting approach (also known as 'overparenting', 'indulgent', or 'intensive parenting'; e.g. Hays, 1996) is generally hypothesised as being deliberately chosen by these parents in an attempt to improve their child's current and future personal and academic success (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Journalists writing about the phenomenon typically report immediate or eventual harm in this excessively cultivating parenting approach, positing it does not allow children to develop independence or become fully functioning or community-minded adults (e.g., Baird, 2010; Stevenson, 2010). While most of the discussion on the topic remains in the media, some emerging research seems to justify this popularist conception.

Terms used in this document

Currently there is a range of terms that indicate extreme or highly effortful parenting actions. These terms, *helicopter parenting, overparenting, over-involved parenting, indulgent parenting,* and *intensive parenting* are all terms generally referring to high levels of parental effort, developmentally inappropriate effort, or misdirected effort in parenting. The terms are often used interchangeably; however, there are some subtle differences in the use of the terms.

Overparenting has been described as "ostensibly well-intended parenting practices taken too far or not adjusted to be appropriate to the child's developmental stage" (e.g., Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, & Taylor Murphy, 2012, p. 238).

Helicopter parenting is one version of overparenting (Segrin et al., 2012), although some authors use the terms interchangeably. It refers to a parent *hovering* over their offspring and being highly involved in their school, university, work and social life to the point of enmeshment (Somers & Settle, 2010a). 'Helicopter parenting' is most often used about the behaviours of some parents of late adolescent or young adult children (Segrin et al., 2012), and most research using the term has focused on university-aged students (e.g., Somers & Settle, 2010b). *Over-involved parenting* is similar to helicopter parenting, in that it has been linked to a parent's high levels of involvement in their child's life by high levels of supervision and control over a child's life that is developmentally inappropriate and not granting autonomy to the child (e.g., LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011).

Indulgent parenting describes a parent's indulgence of a child by giving a child too much of particular resources (e.g., food or entertainment), assistance (by a parent doing too many things for their offspring) or too much leeway (by not setting rules or giving consequences for a child's behaviours) (Coccia, Darling, Rehm, Cui, & Sathe, 2012). Intensive parenting is parenting where parents provide children with ample one-on- one and undivided attention and is often used for parenting choices of parents with young children (e.g. Hays, 1996; Wall, 2010)

For the majority of this chapter, the more general term '*overparenting'* will be used, because it is not tied to particular elements of excessive parenting actions (e.g., as in the association of the term 'helicopter parenting' with excessive parental presence in an adult child's life). However, in the discussion of research on specific studies, the terms used by authors in their research will be used.

Definitions of overparenting or extreme parenting effort

As appropriate parenting efforts and actions designed to protect or care for a child are likely to vary across ages, child characteristics and situations, obtaining a clear definition of overparenting, and an assessment measure of it has been a complex task. Helicopter parenting and overparenting have therefore remained somewhat vague terms (Schiffrin et al., 2013).

When describing extreme or inappropriate parenting efforts most authors have primarily referenced specific parenting actions, not general parenting styles. These specific parenting actions are considered to be extreme because they do not enable the child to develop age appropriate autonomy (e.g., Segrin et al., 2012). Perhaps due to the manifest inappropriateness of intensive parenting of a young adult at developmental stages where they should be establishing independence from their parents' influence, the definitions of overparenting actions have often focused on extreme parenting actions involved with late adolescent or young adult children (e.g., Segrin et al., 2012).

Many of the definitions of extreme parenting practices undertaken with young adult children tend to focus on parenting actions which constitute overinvolvement in a young adult's life and do not grant them autonomy —for example, making decisions for an adult child (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012), or providing intensive emotional, financial, socialising or practical support (Fingerman et al., 2012). The proposal that parents can be overinvolved in their adult child's life to the detriment of the offspring' independence has been previously investigated in the context of Expressed Emotion (EE). EE is a term describing negative or intrusive attitudes that relatives, particularly parents, express about a person with psychiatric disorders. It is most often used in studies of the social and situational factors in relapse rates for people with schizophrenia (Kavanagh, 1992) but has also been shown to predict relapse rates in

patients with mood, anxiety, eating, personality, and substance use disorders (Hooley, 2007). EE has three key scores, critical comments, hostility and emotional over involvement. The third factor, emotional overinvolvement (EOI), describes an excessive level of parental responsiveness to their offspring's perceived needs, including self-sacrifice, overprotection and over identification with the offspring (Kavanagh, 1992). Caregivers high in EOI have been shown to perceive their ill relative as less capable of undertaking tasks necessary for recovery, and, because of this, tend to believe they need to step in and provide additional support or protection to them resulting in the ill relative having reduced autonomy (Breitborde, Lopez, Aguilera, & Kopelowicz, 2013). Unfortunately, there has been a negative reaction to EE as 'blaming' families for their offspring's issues and the concept has been criticised as being unnecessarily pejorative (Kavanagh, 1992), As a result of this, research on expressed emotion possibly has not been as prolific as it could have been given its promising early results.

Current definitions of overparenting of young adults often refer to parental over-involvement in their child's schooling. Helicopter parenting in an adult child's university years, similar to EOI, has been defined as shaping behaviours that are intrusive and controlling (LeMoyne & Buchanen, 2011). However, there remains an inadequate understanding of appropriate levels of parent contact and parental support in the school years, particularly amongst differing cultural and socio-economic groups (Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009), and norms for parental support of offspring in their early adult years are in flux (Fingerman et al., 2012). Indeed, high levels of academic involvement or support provided by parents for their university-aged child has sometimes been defined as 'normal' parenting actions and not 'hovering' behaviour

(Wolf et al., 2009). In consequence, inappropriate or extreme parental support in a child's university years is ill-defined.

Some research has defined different types of helicopter parents involved with university aged students through qualitative research with university personnel to come to an understanding of helicopter 'types' (Somers & Settle, 2010a). Five different helicopter parent types for adult children at university were identified: (1) a parent who reduces their child's university experience to a consumer experience and is primarily concerned with their child's rights; (2) a parent who demands fairness or preferential treatment for their child at all times; (3) a parent who wants to live college years vicariously through their adult child by being highly involved in their life, (4) a parent who is highly controlling of their child and 'toxic' and (5) a parent who is primarily concerned about safety (Somers & Settle, 2010a). Most of the actions described are through the parent being made known to the staff via their involvement in university activities or phone calls to the university, and the research takes the point of view that actions such as a parent advocating for the child are inappropriate. As this is third-person research, unfortunately it only focuses on the actions of the parent and not the parent's or child's expectations or goals, nor is it explicit on the parenting style in which a parent undertakes these actions, or whether the parental action, such as contact with the university, is warranted in the circumstances.

There have been relatively few studies that have focused on a definition of too much parenting effort when parenting younger or school-aged children. This is possibly because of changing community norms, which make high levels of parenting effort and protection of their child, somewhat ubiquitous activities in modern parenting (Ungar, 2009). Because of this, it appears that definitions of overparenting

in pre-school and school years tend to focus on actions that a parent is undertaking for their child which the child should be able to do for themselves. The studies of pre-school-aged children have tended to describe parental overinvolvement as a parent's overprotection of children through actions deemed as excessive and age-inappropriate, such as parent taking control of their child's friendships or not allowing them to undertake tasks such as dressing themselves (Hudson & Dodd, 2012).

Overprotective parenting of school-aged children has also been defined as a parent not allowing his/her child to experience 'normal rites of passage' such as walking to school, increased parental surveillance of children, giving children mobile phones because of safety concerns, and adults shadowing children in social situations, although these are also described as parenting actions which are becoming the norm with only experts in child development considering such protection to be extreme (Ungar, 2009). Likewise, SES or cultural norms of parenting could be impacting on other studies. For example, in a study of weight status of children, overindulgent parenting was defined as: *Giving Too Much* (e.g., where parents give clothes, jewellery, and other things the child does not need and has not requested), *Soft Structure* (e.g., allowing the child to interrupt adult conversation), and *Overnurturing* (e.g., being involved in everything the adolescent does and scheduling many of their activities) (Coccia et al., 2012). These parenting practices, such as financial decisions, may be simply the result of a parent's economic prosperity and community norms, and, as the SES status of the parents are not detailed in the study, it is unknown if these parenting activities could be considered to be inappropriate in their indulgence or are socially normative.

While much of the research has linked overparenting to specific parenting practices, such as detailed above, some definitions have referred to general parenting

style. Segrin et al. (2012) linked overparenting to two of Baumrind's parenting styles: likening it to authoritarian parenting when a parent is unable to "know when to back off and allow for some self-direction on the part of the child" (Segrin et al., 2012, p. 239); and to an extreme level of responsiveness to the child's needs as shown in permissive parenting (while being inconsistent with permissive parenting's low directiveness; Segrin et al., 2012). These definitions rest largely on the actions of a parent in being highly responsive towards and highly demanding of a child, while not allowing a child permission to be independent in their life. Thus, overparenting appears to be highly linked to a mismatch of parental goals with those of their adult child, and to those parent goals being inappropriate for the developmental level and wellbeing of the child.

It has been stressed that helicopter parenting with young adult offspring is not a new type of parenting style, but more a different way parenting dimensions are prioritised. It has been posited that in helicopter parenting, the parents consider high involvement, low autonomy granting and presence of emotional support to their child as being a priority, making the parenting style similar to 'oversolicitous parenting' often discussed in parenting young children (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

Some researchers have acknowledged parental goals in the parent's choice of overparenting actions. Nelson (2010), in her research on child parent communication in infant to university years, looked at parental use of technology such as mobile phones and baby monitors, describing such parenting as 'parenting out of control'. She found that parents' primary goals in these actions are to keep their child safe and secure their child's economic future and competitive advantage; thus attempting to stay in contact with their child through overt (mobile phones) or covert (spyware to monitor their child) means. Nelson posited these actions as being driven by parent

goals and that the ‘professional middle class’ parents she interviewed all saw their actions as essential caring and loving parenting actions that secured their child’s future (Nelson, 2010).

Indeed, the desirability of parent goals in overparenting is also not yet well defined. In their definition of overparenting, Segrin and colleagues operationalise overparenting as being the result of a parent’s “over zealous desires to ensure the success and happiness of their children, typically in a way that is construed largely in the parents’ terms” (Segrin et al., 2012, p. 238). Despite describing these goals as being parent-driven, Segrin et al., maintained the goals of a parent who overparent to be more benevolent than the goals of an intrusive parenting and that parents who overparented were not manipulating their adult child’s emotions (Segrin et al., 2012). Unfortunately, the benevolence of the parent’s intentions rests largely on the appropriateness of their goal to a child’s future success, which in turn relies on a parent’s ability to judge what is an appropriate goal for their adult child. For example, one of the factors used in Segrin et al.’s measure of overparenting is anticipatory problem solving for the child that is undertaken by the parent. Without explicit understanding of the specific problem or of the multiple perspectives about it, we cannot be sure if the problem identified by a parent would be shared by the child, or, indeed, by the general community.

In an era where community norms for parenting goals and practices are shifting (Alwin, 1988), it is understandable that most overparenting research focuses on actions when children are young adults – a stage associated with more independence, and an developmental stage when overparenting actions become more obvious. What remains a concern is that by primarily focusing the definition of too much or inappropriate levels of parenting effort on parenting young adults, the starting or

beginning point of a parent undertaking overparenting actions or approaches is not yet fully understood. It is difficult to imagine that a parent suddenly becomes over involved when a child almost becomes an adult: it is more likely that interactions in the earlier years set up a parent-child dynamic, parenting actions and/or child expectations that are carried on into the young adult years. Unfortunately, we lack a clear understanding of what might be appropriate or inappropriate levels of parenting efforts in the early or middle childhood years, to determine whether this contention is correct.

More importantly, by only defining and understanding the phenomenon of overparenting in a child's young adult years, a meaningful opportunity to change a potentially unhelpful parenting approach is precluded. Many studies and psychological textbooks are clear on the importance of parental intervention in a child's early or middle childhood years (e.g., Slee, Campbell, & Spears, 2012). It is known that some of the important characteristics such as a child's explanatory style are established in these years (Seligman, 1995). If overparenting actions cannot be defined in these ages and assessed for positive or negative impact on parents and children, there is no chance to intervene at a stage where professionals and clinicians could assist parents to potentially improve potentially problematic parenting actions and increase a child's chances of current and future wellbeing.

Thus, parenting attitudes, approaches, and behaviours that are excessive or age-inappropriate for a range of child developmental stages are an important but so far, a relatively neglected area in research. What is needed is a clear definition of overparenting, which can be applied to parenting actions delivered to children of all ages, not just the very young or almost adult children. This definition has to enable clear demarcation between sufficient and extreme parental involvement and effort.

Once decided, this definition would allow further research on the topic at a stage where research and intervention can have greatest positive impact.

Quantitative measures of overparenting

As already stated, there has been a lack of clarity about the term ‘helicopter parent’ or ‘overparenting’ (Schiffrin et al., 2013). In the absence of a clear definition of the term, many authors have developed their own definitions and subsequent measures of excessive or inappropriate parenting actions for the purposes of their particular study. Some studies of the concept have relied on qualitative research, such as interviews with academic staff about their perceptions of the behaviour, prevalence and types of helicopter parents at college (e.g., Somers & Settle, 2010a), interviews with mothers about the impact of intensive parenting advice (e.g. Guendouzi, 2005; Hayes, 1996; Wall, 2010), or parental overinvolvement found when parents discuss their 4-year-old child (e.g., Hudson & Dodd, 2012; Ladd & Kochenderfer Ladd, 1998) To date, however, most research on overparenting has been quantitative, relying on adolescent or adult child reporting measures (e.g., LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011) or parent report (e.g., Shirani, Henwood, & Coltart, 2012).

Child report.

As mentioned above, reports by offspring of parental over-involvement, or helicopter parenting have focused on young adult child-reported actions of their parents during their experience at an academic institution such as college or university (e.g., LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Schiffrin et al., 2013). These overparenting measures see high parental involvement as being excessive for college-aged or adult children, when it is assumed children should be freer of their parents’ influence and control, and capable of directing their own university experience. Thus, these instruments ask young adults about their parents’ involvement in their lives, such as

their parents' communication with them, intervening to resolve any of their issues, or contacting the university about their results or their university experience (e.g., LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011).

Some research on overparenting has used child-reported parenting actions undertaken with them at a younger age. These have often relied on retrospective measures of a child's perception of their parents' actions, which indicate extreme parental involvement in their life to the point of overprotection or failing to allow them independence through constant supervision and high levels of involvement in their activities (e.g., LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Overprotective parenting is often referenced in this parenting research, and several studies have used the overprotection sub-scale of the Parental Bonding Measure (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) as a measure of overparenting (e.g., Klein & Pierce, 2009). However, overprotection is only one type of extreme parent behaviour and may not fully capture the concept of overparenting.

In establishing typical levels from extreme levels of parental care and protection, researchers have sometimes used questions that posit a parent's motive. While somewhat logical at ages where extreme parental actions might be unclear, this approach has possibly influenced the outcomes of the research. One study asked adolescents about their perceptions of the goals or intentions of their parents rather than about the actions themselves, by including questions about the parent's care for the child (e.g., "(my parent) did things to make me love them" and "(my parent) hated to see me frustrated"; (Coccia et al., 2010, p. 217). Another measure asked students to judge their parents' intentions, e.g. "It was very important to my parents that I never failed in life" (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011, p. 406). The wording of these types of questions may influence results, and produce some of the seemingly paradoxical

results of research. For example, one study on child weight status found that child-reported parental indulgence was highly associated with increased child satisfaction, (Coccia et al., 2010). This finding may be the result of the wording questions being more of a measure of a child's perception of their parent's high levels of love and care for them: Parents who acquiesce to their child's wants are likely to be viewed as ideal parents who truly care about them. Thus, the outcomes of the research may be compromised by some correlation with a child's feelings about their parents' love for them, rather than an unambiguous measure of parenting actions that could be considered extreme by those outside the parent-child relationship.

Some child reports of overparenting appear to be defining overparenting to be narrowly related to the child outcome they are studying. For example, the same study of the relationship between indulgent parenting and the overweight status of adolescent girls also focused on a parent giving the child too many resources, such as food and entertainment, soft structure (such as not saying 'no' to a child), and a parent's unwillingness to disappoint a child (Coccia et al., 2010). A measure of too much parenting effort in giving the child things such as food, might understandably be related to a child being overweight. However, the measure created may only represent a subset of a myriad of parenting actions that may be in the category of overparenting.

Overparenting reported by parents.

Research on overparenting involving a parent's self-report of their actions is scant. Similar to child-reported parenting actions, most of the few overparenting measures completed by parents, typically focus on overparenting actions with university-aged students. One such study focused on parent-reported actions involved in overparenting, such as parental Anticipatory Problem Solving, Advice/Affect

management, Child Self Direction (reverse scored), and Tangible Assistance provided to the child (Segrin et al., 2012). These actions focused on a parent supporting a child at an age where it is assumed that parental support should be very minimal. As noted previously, that study did not specify either the type of problems being anticipated or solved, so it might represent somewhat appropriate levels of parental care rather than overparenting.

Parents' reports of extreme parenting involvement with younger children have been limited to a focus on overprotection. Items measuring overprotection have predominantly focused on high levels of parental supervision, parental difficulties with separation from the child, the child's dependence on the parent for undertaking tasks, and a parent's desire for and perception of control over their young child's actions (Thomasgard, Shonkoff, Metz, & Edelbrock, 1995). Overprotective parenting of a young child appears to be viewed as problematic because it does not enable the child to develop specific life skills. However, overprotection appears to represent a somewhat narrow definition of overparenting, and does not capture the full extent of parenting choices that may be developmentally inappropriate or extreme at this age.

In summary, no definitive measure of overparenting has been established that would enable researchers to assess a parent's tendency to overparent in childhood or adolescence – ages where the child still needs their parent's involvement in their life, at a level that suits their developmental needs and abilities and requirements to develop maturity and life skills. A psychometrically sound instrument for children and adolescents would provide a basis for further research on overparenting as a broad concept, and establish whether it results in problems for either the parent or their child or adolescent and in what particular areas.

Child Outcomes

Overparenting and helicopter parenting have had relatively little scholarly research on the impacts on offspring (Somers & Settle, 2010a). The majority of the research in the area has typically focused on young adult children and late adolescents; however, some research has been undertaken with younger children. Outcomes associated with overparenting actions for offspring include impacts on anxiety, satisfaction with life, sense of entitlement, sense of autonomy, and narcissism.

Anxiety.

Overparenting actions, particularly overprotective parenting actions, have been found to be associated with both adult and young children's anxiety. A study of college students' self-report of their parents' overprotection found that it was associated with increased self-report of social anxiety: The relationship was partially explained by the person's external locus of control (Spokas & Heimberg, 2009). The authors suggested that overprotective parenting of a child encouraged a cognitive style where outcomes were largely determined by factors external to the child (Spokas & Heimberg, 2009). Unfortunately, this study used two somewhat subjective measures of overparenting including the Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker et al., 1979), in which adult offspring judge their parents' actions as being inappropriately protective of them. The Parental Bonding Instrument was also used for another study of parental overprotection, which found that overprotection was related to poorer college adjustment in problem areas such as anxiety, depression, academic problems, family and self-esteem issues (Klein & Pierce, 2009). As already stated, positively or negatively slanted questions when judging parents' actions (as in the Parental Bonding Instrument), tend to be associated with similarly positive or negative

outcomes in the children who are making the retrospective judgment on their parents. It is perhaps not surprising that the socially anxious or depressed child might see themselves as being highly negatively influenced by external factors, and thus judge their parents' actions as unhelpful and controlling of their life.

Child anxiety has been associated with the over-involved parenting of 4-year-old children. Having an over-involved mother at that age is one of the significant predictor of a child's anxiety in middle childhood even when a child's baseline level of anxiety is controlled for (Hudson & Dodd, 2012). One of the strengths of Hudson and Dodd's (2012) study was that the parent's overinvolvement was judged by two differing methods: judgments of parent's overinvolvement through coding a 5-minute speech by the parent about their parenting, and a parent's responses on a scale of parent protection, which asks about activities they undertake for their child, such as dressing them (Hudson & Dodd, 2012). The focus on parental actions in the latter measure limited the effect of their subjective interpretations on their responses. However, the actions were specific to the age group and to their developmental ability: Different sets of items may be required for different age groups. On the other hand, the parent speech task is onerous, in requiring training of coders and significant time spent in coding. As a result, this method of assessing parental overprotection is likely to have limited applicability to routine clinical practice.

Reduced wellbeing.

Parental overinvolvement with adult children is associated with higher levels of depression in offspring, and with reduced life satisfaction. In a study of college undergraduates, their self-report of their parents' actions relating to college life, such as parental monitoring or intervention with their university professors, was associated with greater depression and less satisfaction with life for the students (Schiffrin et al.,

2013). This study created its own measure of helicopter parenting, based on parenting actions associated with the concept in the literature. The internal structure of the measure was tested using factor analysis, and two factors were identified: Helicopter Parenting Behaviours and Autonomy Supportive Behaviours. A strength of the study was its use of statements of parenting actions that omitted any judgment by the student. However, it only undertook an exploratory factor analysis. While it is a promising scale, its internal structure and other psychometric characteristics require further assessment.

An adult child's perception of helicopter parenting is related to their eudemonic wellbeing (autonomy, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, personal growth, life purpose and self-acceptance), their use of prescription pills for anxiety or depression, and their consumption of analgesic medication (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). In that study, helicopter parenting was measured by asking college-aged children questions about what they perceived as parental overinvolvement when they were growing up and, in this measure, the questions were, again, subjectively worded, (e.g., "I sometimes felt that my parents didn't feel I could make my own decisions"; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011, p. 406). A person with poorer eudemonic wellbeing in areas such as environmental mastery and self-acceptance may be more likely to judge that their parents did not believe them to be skilled in decision making. While parental actions in childhood may establish poorer adult functioning, it is difficult to prise apart the person's current self-belief and current wellbeing from their retrospective judgment of their parents' actions when they were growing up. Mood has been shown to impact on judgment of social situations, with negative moods making a person more critical (Forgas & Locke,

2005), and it may be that negative moods were affecting the attributional style of the adult child and biasing their report.

Narcissism and entitlement.

Overparenting is also related to higher levels of entitlement in college-aged students (Segrin et al., 2012). One strength of Segrin et al.'s study was that they recruited parent child dyads, asking the parents to report on their current parenting actions for their child and asking their adult-aged children to report on their wellbeing in measures assessing family satisfaction, entitlement, self-efficacy and emotional intelligence. This makes the study a stronger one, as the actions the parents reported were not subjective assessments of the suitability of parenting actions, but simply asked the parents to report on the type of actions they undertook. Unfortunately, many of the questions still remained a little problematic in that they were double-barrelled, such as "I try to stay one step ahead of what my child is doing so that I can help him/her minimise any obstacles that could be encountered" (Segrin et al., 2012, p. 243), so that it was unclear whether they were endorsing both the intention and the action or just one of those.

Another study of overparenting and college aged students, using parent child dyads and the same measure of overparenting (Segrin et al., 2012), found that overparenting was associated with higher levels of narcissism in their adult-aged children (Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, & Montgomery, 2013). A potential difficulty with the study of the parenting of college-aged students is that it remains unclear as to whether the parenting actions, such as overprotection, were extensions of parental practices adopted for the child's entire life, or if the parenting choices were only adopted in the child's university years. As a result, the ideal point of intervention to prevent potentially problematic parenting actions remains unclear in this research.

Positive outcomes associated with overparenting.

Not all studies have shown only negative child outcomes associated with overparenting. A study of intense parental support of adult aged children found that it was associated with positive outcomes, including the children having clearly defined goals and higher life satisfaction (Fingerman et al., 2012). That study measured intense parental support by parents' and children's reports of the parents providing more than six forms of support per week to the adult-aged child, in areas such as emotional, practical, socialising, advice, financial assistance and listening support. Demographic data showed that 29% of the offspring in the sample were still living with their parents, and 35% were full-time students. The provision of financial assistance to these participants is perhaps not surprising. It is also likely that if an adult child is living with his/her parents, it is probable that they are socially interacting with their parents or receiving advice from them as a matter of course from the sharing of living space. In addition, the children used in the sample ranged in age from 18 to 41, with 23% of the offspring having children of their own (Fingerman et al., 2012). It is possible that the study is not actually measuring intense support of offspring uniformly across the sample, given the broad range of participants considered to be 'children' in the study and the broad range of situations they represent. This makes the definition of overly intensive parenting potentially only accurate for a portion of the sample.

Another study of indulgent parenting has found that parental indulgence is associated with lower stress and higher life satisfaction in adolescents aged 15 to 16 (Coccia et al., 2012). That study assessed indulgent parenting by adolescents indicating the actions and privileges their parent gave them, (including freedom, material possessions, and attention) and actions the parent did not undertake (such as

telling the child 'no' or making them undertake chores). The study only used 198 students, casting doubt on its generalisability. In addition, the wording of the questions is not clear, so the reader is unsure as to whether the questions were asking the child to indicate if the parental indulgence was considered by the child to be extremely high, or simply sufficient for their needs. The correlations of what is termed as parental indulgence to adolescent life satisfaction may just indicate that the adolescent was satisfied with their life and satisfied with their parents' actions. In addition, children may see indulgence as producing a good life: as the authors note, "What adolescent would not want to be indulged?" (Coccia et al., 2012. p. 218).

Outcomes for child, adolescent or adult offspring that associated with overparenting or with associated actions such as overprotection and indulgence, have included a susceptibility to anxiety and depression, and to a greater sense of entitlement and narcissism. However, positive outcomes, such as greater satisfaction with life and more purposeful life goals, have also been shown. While these studies are promising in understanding what child factors might be associated with overparenting actions, nearly all struggle with subjective items of many overparenting assessment tools. Such items may be more a measure of the participant's mood or of their emotional response to their parents, than to their actual childhood and current experience. In addition, much of the research focuses on undergraduate populations, and has not yet gathered sufficient data for children in the years where their parental influence is greatest.

Parental Characteristics and Influences Associated with Overparenting

There has been some speculation in the literature on the types of parents who would be more likely to be intensive in their parenting approach, however, there have

been virtually no investigations into the traits and types of parents who have a tendency to overparent (Segrin et al., 2013). Some proposed influences that are thought to be involved include parents' education, income, gender, anxiety, enmeshment with their child, the influence of their children, and cultural norms (e.g. Hays, 1996).

Education and income.

Parents who possess high levels of education and an ability to earn a good income have been proposed to be more likely to parent with extremely high levels of effort (Nelson, 2010). In fact, well-educated parents would find it hard at present to avoid the message that significant emotional involvement and physical resources are required to parent well (Hays, 1996). While the idea of high effort being a superior parenting style was encouraged by Baumrind's research on parenting approaches, other popular parenting advice in popular parenting books has encouraged parents to use extreme exertion in manufacturing a child environment which would allow their child to reach their potential (Hays, 1996).

Indeed, over the past few decades, the idea that parents could have the ability to manage child risk and improve child outcomes through attentive parenting has been a seductive one for many parents, and has been speculated to have taken hold in society generally (Shirani et al., 2012). Post World War II, popular parenting manuals such as Dr Spock's Baby and Child Care (1946) advocated a parenting approach that required intensive effort and significant resources in raising their child, pressuring parents, particularly mothers, into dedicating "so much of themselves into childrearing" (Hays, 1996, p. *x*). The importance of parental effort in enabling a child to reach their potential was furthered by the 'Baby Mozart effect'— research

suggesting a child listening to classical music would improve their mental and cognitive skills, later debunked as only a temporary effect (Rauscher, 1993).

The idea that parents had a responsibility to invest a tremendous amount of energy, time and money to produce the most conducive environment for their child to experience future success, gained wider acceptance in the 1990s (Bernstein & Triger, 2011; Hays, 1996). Perceived parenting responsibilities to appropriately nurture children's skills and protect them from harm then extended to protective devices such as anti-bacterial home products, extravagant birthday parties, intensive early tutoring, enrolments in numerous extra-curricular activities, and other parenting practices that became to be considered basic minimum parenting efforts to support the child appropriately (Munich & Munich, 2009).

It has been suggested that as a result of the dissemination of these parenting standards, through popular media and literature, knowledgeable parents applied these in excess, to the point of possible harm. Neil Montgomery posits that overparenting approaches result from parents knowing what actions are good for their kids, via well-publicized research findings, and then applying them to an extreme level. He explained these parents' approach as, "OK we know what good parenting looks like, we're just going to ratchet it up to a new level, and our kids are going to be even better…The problem is, when they ratcheted it up, they went too far…" (Rettner, 2010, para. 5).

Popular definitions of 'Helicopter parenting' typically associate it with the middle and upper class, a demographic previously assumed to be associated with low risk for child issues. Parents who earn a high income, have been proposed to be more likely to parent with extremely high levels of effort (Levine, 2008; Nelson, 2010) and high amounts of organised activities for the child, an approach that has been defined

as *concerted cultivation* (Lareau, 2002). Previously, low income had been conventionally considered more of a risk to child wellbeing (Levine, 2008). More recently, children in high SES homes have been the focus of investigation into some potentially detrimental effects of affluence. Research on adjustment disturbances in "suburban" children in America has found the higher use of soft and hard drugs in high school students when compared to "inner-city", or lower SES, groups (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). The research also found a higher association of drug use in teens who were depressed or anxious, suggesting more self-medication in higher SES groups compared to inner-city peers (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). Research on privileged youth has suggested achievement pressure as being one potential antecedent of issues in these teens (Levine, 2008; Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). It is suggested that affluent parents treat their children as if they are an investment, and provide high levels of emotional and financial resources into them to protect the asset, resulting in intensive parenting (Anderegg, 2003). Research has confirmed that it is wealthy or upper middle-class parents who tend to be more engaged with their college students' academic lives—potentially to the point of harm (Wolf et al., 2009).

Research on high effort and indulgence of children has not only focused on high SES populations. The tendency to complete tasks the child should be responsible for, spend excessive amounts on children, or acquiesce to their demands to the point of the child being in charge of the family, has also been shown in families below the poverty line (Myrth-Ogilvie, 2006). However, low-income parents have been shown to be less influenced by an intensive parenting model, and are more likely to be confident in their parenting choices than are middle class parents (Romagnoli & Wall, 2012).

Some lay media has suggested intensive parenting to be mainly the domain of middle-class, Western parents, particularly in America (Levine, 2008). Other lay authors claim the phenomenon of intensive parenting is beginning to be noticed in other continents such as Asia and Europe (e.g., Somers & Settle, 2010b). Indeed, there has been some suggestion the phenomenon has begun to transcend income, culture or race (Honore, 2008).

Gender.

It has been proposed that mothers are more encouraged to be anxious about the quality of their parenting and to parent intensively than are fathers (Hays, 1996). Mothers with higher levels of education have been shown to have different experiences of parenting (Nomaguchi & Brown, 2011), and to be more actively involved in cultivating their child's talents (Cheadle & Amato, 2011). Fathers' intensive parenting efforts may be differently directed. There has been some research indicating that fathers' anxieties about the family's financial health may encourage more commitment to paid work as a measure of their high levels of effort and commitment to raising children with the greatest chance of success (Shirani et al., 2012).

Parental fears.

Another influence on the likelihood of a parent adopting an intensive approach has been an excessive parental fear about a child's capability or wellbeing. Certain child circumstances, where the parent perceives the child to be vulnerable, do appear to promote more hovering, commonly referred to as the 'nurture trap'. This has been demonstrated in families where children have chronic illness (Holmbeck et al., 2002) or when a child has a disability (Stokes, Mowery, Dean, & Hoffman, 1997). However, a parents' overprotection of a child is not always the result of their perception that the

child is vulnerable, with some research showing only 20% of overprotective parents perceiving actual vulnerabilities in their child (Thomasgard et al. 1995).

Fears about children's ability to cope do not appear to be limited to offspring who have issues assumed to make them more at risk. Parents who are anxious about their child or about the world around their child, are also thought to be more likely to parent in an intensive manner (Nelson, 2010). Fears about the perceived dangers of the outside world, or fears that that their child is unable to perform tasks independently, have been proposed to encourage parents to attempt to protect their child to an extent that is inappropriate for the child's age (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Nelson, 2010). The recent Longitudinal Study of Australian Children suggests that overprotective parenting is a common practice of Australian parents, which only slightly decreases with the age of the child. While noting the similarity of parenting practices across subgroups, the research does note the high incidence of overprotection in 'lone' and young mothers (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010).

The media have often reported on parental anxiety and its increase over time (e.g., Horin, 2010); however, there is limited research on the topic (Zubrick et al., 2010). Most of the relevant evidence is on declining rates of child activity across the community, such as walking to school or playing outdoors (Zubrick et al., 2010). Another indicator of increased fear in the population is its tendency to overestimate the incidence of crime (Tulloch, 2004) and to have a decreased trust in others (World Values Survey Online Data Analysis, 2010).

Enmeshment.

Parenting approaches that have parents constantly close and intervening in the child's life have sometimes attributed this behaviour to an attempt to ensure high self-

esteem in the child (Rutherford, 2011). Some authors have posited that enmeshment—a parent's tendency to be too close to a child—is involved in parenting actions that intrude on a child's autonomy (Barber & Harmon, 2002). Enmeshment has also been posited to be involved in overparenting, where parents are believed to be excessively over-involved and concerned about their child's mental state, to have difficulty with separation from the child (Munich & Munich, 2009), and to be disproportionately dependent on their children for their own validation and self-esteem (Jones, 1991). This high level of involvement has been thought to result from an exaggeration of a parent's normal narcissistic identification with their child to the point of excessive parental effort in ensuring the child succeeds, with no allowance for the child to develop character qualities and achieve successes autonomously (Munich & Munich, 2009). It is possible that if parents believe that their efforts are crucial in ensuring their child achieves success (according to the parent's terms of success), they would continue to be involved in their child's life, even as they reach adulthood.

Children's influence.

There has been some suggestion that children encourage their parents to be highly involved in their lives. Some research has shown that indulgent parenting is associated with higher levels of satisfaction with children and may indeed be encouraged by the children, noting that children are likely to want to be indulged (Coccia et al., 2010). Ostensibly, all of the indulgent actions parents undertake, such as solving a child's problems for them, would presumably be preferred by many offspring. Indeed, making a child happy seems the logical extreme outcome of child-centred parenting approaches such as those advocated by Dr Spock: if the child's immediate desires and happiness are placed at the heart of parenting choices, then

parents would be actively anticipating potential problems, giving children what they want, and constantly acquiescing to their wishes (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). It is difficult to imagine offspring not encouraging these types of parenting actions.

Over parenting as a cultural norm.

Parental over-involvement and other overparenting practices have been reported to resonate with many parents, because of universal heightened expectations of child success, a desire on the part of parents to be fulfilled through their child, a lengthening of childhood, a perception of lack of capacity in young adults, perceived threats to the autonomy of the family, and the increased sense of danger in the society already mentioned above (Ungar, 2009). It has been proposed that overparenting does not take sufficient account of emerging adulthood, a developmental stage distinct from adolescence and young adulthood in which independent exploration is critical despite the fact that offspring are often still living with their parents (Arnett, 2000). Overparenting, as a distinct parenting approach, has been described in the media as being the current norm (Marina, 2013) and researchers echo this belief (e.g. Hayes, 1996; Arendell, 2000).

Not only has an overparenting approach potentially been established as standard for some parents: there is a possibility it is starting to be encouraged by the legal system. Bernstein and Triger (2011) claim intensive parenting is becoming the favoured form of parenting during custody disputes. They claim that parents who spend more time with their children, have more contact with them through electronic media, and are overprotective, are more likely to be awarded custody than are less involved parents. Bernstein and Triger cite interviews with attorneys, who say they advise clients to become “as involved as possible in their child’s life” before a trial (Bernstein & Triger, 2011, p. 1244).

Conclusion

There has been strong evidence that parenting effort is associated with different child outcomes and that more effortful approaches are associated with better child outcomes. Recently it has begun to be posited that some parents may be putting such extreme effort into their parenting, that this effort may be associated with less positive child outcomes. Terms used for this approach include *helicopter parenting*, *intensive parenting* and *overparenting*. Research on this concept to date has suffered from a lack of a precise definition of extreme parenting actions, of an established measure of overparenting, and as a result, of a clear linkage between specific parental actions and outcomes of the offspring. Through a focus on overparenting actions for offspring in their young adult years, where over-involved parenting actions may be more easily identified, overparenting actions and their positive or negative impacts are only being assessed at the point where there is no possibility of early intervention to alter the trajectory, should such actions be warranted.

Thus, the research on intensive parenting is still in its infancy. It continues to lack sufficient methodological rigor, and is not sufficiently focused at a developmental point where intervention could have optimal impact. A better understanding of the actions that define overparenting together with improved measurement of it are required, if we are to obtain a deeper understanding of the concept, of specific parenting actions that are associated with it, and of its relationship to the outcomes of child and adult offspring.

Chapter 2: Overview of the Research Program by Publication

What is known – Establishing a Theoretical Platform

Chapter 1 described a concept that has been recently gaining increased attention – overparenting. Overparenting is considered to be parenting actions that are excessive and developmentally inappropriate for the offspring. These may be valued parenting practices, such as monitoring, protection or affection for a child that are delivered to a point of excess, provided at development stages where a child no longer needs such support, or supplied at the expense of a child learning important life skills. Much of the research in the area has focussed on a child's early adult years, where high levels of parental involvement in a child's life are clearly inappropriate. There has been limited investigation into overparenting of school-aged children, particularly into the types of parenting actions that could be considered excessive in the younger years—ages where children still require significant parental involvement in their lives. As appropriate parenting actions in protecting or caring for a child are likely to vary across ages, child characteristics and situations, developing a measure that acknowledges all of these differences has proved challenging. The absence of a broadly applicable measure may have had substantial impact on the ability to research the issue. Thus, while there is some emerging evidence of overparenting, the research is still in its infancy and is not yet methodologically rigorous.

What this Research seeks to Add

To address these gaps in the literature, three research questions were formulated, each building on the last in a logical sequence.

1. Can we develop a conceptually coherent definition of overparenting, and identify examples of overparenting actions, based on expert opinion?

Do parenting professionals working with children of all ages, believe there are actions parents undertake that may be too effortful and potentially ultimately harmful for a child? What types of parenting choices and actions do they see as indicators of overparenting? Can a clear definition of overparenting be created?

2. Can an internally consistent scale of overparenting be created for parents of school-age children?

Many of the measures previously used to assess overparenting have been created for university-aged children, and most measure parenting actions that are developmentally inappropriate for young adult offspring. Are there particular parenting beliefs or intentions which have been associated with overparenting in the literature, that can be used to create a scale that assist researchers measure overparenting tendencies in parents of all school-aged children aged 5 to 17?

3. *Do parents who agree with overparenting beliefs show different parenting actions to do with children and adolescents?*

Does a parent who endorses overparenting beliefs demonstrate different parenting actions? Specifically, in an activity such as homework that is undertaken throughout a child's schooling, do parents who overparent have differing expectations of teachers, themselves and their offspring about responsibility for homework, compared with parents who do not overparent?

Designing the Research Program

Three studies were conducted to answer these questions, and these resulted in three corresponding publications. Mapping of the research questions, studies and papers is provided in Figure 2.1.

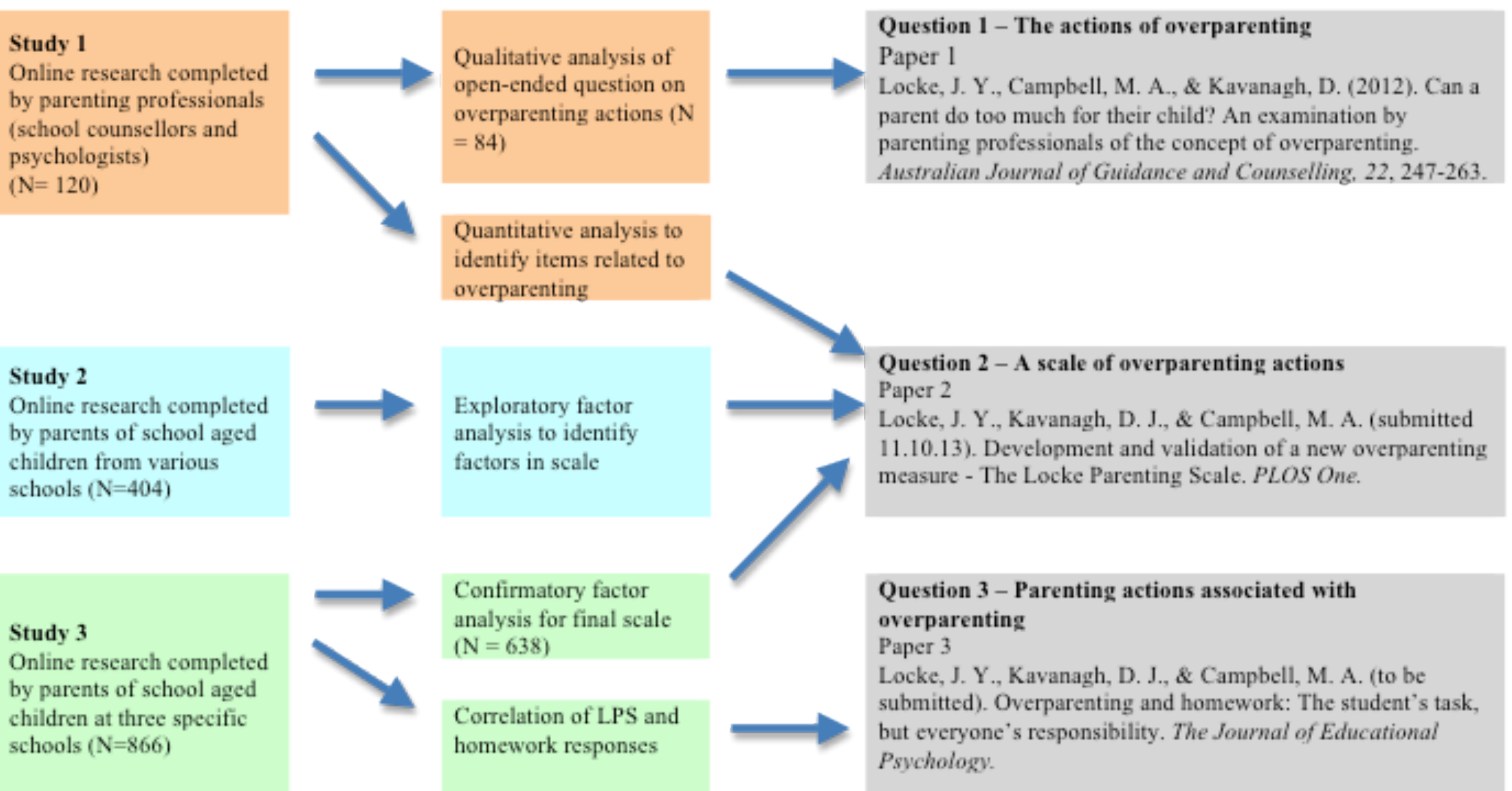

Figure 2.1. Mapping of linked research questions to study program.

Question 1 was addressed by qualitative analysis of responses from Study 1, producing paper 1. Question 2 used statistical analysis of data from Studies 1, 2, and 3 to produce the second paper. Question 3 was answered through statistical analysis of the data from Study 3, and resulted in the third paper.

Paper 1.

Previous research has suggested helicopter parenting (and overparenting) have remained somewhat vague terms (Schiffrin et al., 2013). Thus, to investigate the topic of extreme parenting effort, it is important to clearly define the term overparenting. **Study 1** surveyed parenting professionals (N = 84), school counsellors and psychologists, who were recruited through their professional associations. Participants were asked to indicate if they had any experience of *overparenting* - parenting that was well-intentioned but extreme or developmentally inappropriate. Participants were asked in an open-ended question about the actions they saw as being reflective of overparenting. Their responses were qualitatively analysed and reported in Paper 1.

Paper 2.

Defining what is sufficient and what is too much parenting care and protection is difficult if it is rooted in particular parenting actions, since these actions need to vary according to developmental and other child characteristics and to the context in which they are delivered. Thus, an important step is to create a quantitative measure of overparenting that is not is not subject to a child's developmental age or abilities. Identifying beliefs and intentions that underpin parenting actions which are relatively insensitive to the child's developmental needs was considered a critical step in refining research on overparenting. The parenting professionals recruited in **Study 1** were also given a list of 70 parenting beliefs that had been previously associated with

intensive parenting in the literature. They were asked, as experts in parenting, whether they believed strong agreement or strong disagreement with the individual beliefs and actions items could distinguish overparenting from typical parenting. The results of these judgements produced a list of 38 items considered to be associated with overparenting.

As the second stage of producing a scale of overparenting beliefs, **Study 2** recruited a sample of parents of school-aged children (*N* = 404) to undertake preliminary analyses of the set of parenting beliefs that the parenting professionals had associated with overparenting in Study 1. An exploratory factor analysis of the 38 items was undertaken using principal axis factoring, and four factors were identified in a 25-item scale. This analysis was included in Paper 2.

In order to undertake a confirmatory factor analysis of the 25-item scale, **Study 3** recruited parents from two Prep – Year 12 schools (*N* = 638). Parents were administered the scale, together with questions on specific parenting actions. A four-factor structure did not provide an acceptable model fit, but with omission of two of the factors, good fit was obtained. The resultant 8-item scale (The Locke Parenting Scale, LPS) comprised Ensuring Constant Happiness (5 items), and Befriending (3 items), and the total score retained acceptable internal consistency. This analysis provided the final section of Paper 2.

Paper 3.

The third paper investigated the parenting actions associated with the created overparenting scale. In order to do this, another year 8 – 12 school was added to the existing Study 3 data, giving an increased total of 866 parents. Responses on the LPS were correlated with their ratings of their own, their child’s teacher’s, and their child’s

responsibility for the child's homework. There were two types of questions for parents:

- the amount of homework responsibility ideally taken by themselves, their child's/adolescent's teachers, and their child/ adolescent, and
- the amount of responsibility currently taken by themselves, their child or adolescent's teachers, and their child/adolescent.

Participants' responses on items of LPS and their responses to do with homework were correlated and reported in Paper 3.

Conclusion

These studies and corresponding papers are discussed below in Chapter 7, the concluding chapter. The main findings from the research, implications of those findings, strengths and limitations of the studies, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Chapter 3: Can a parent do too much for their child? An examination by parenting professionals of the concept of overparenting

How this paper relates to the thesis topic.

Given that the topic of overparenting is relatively new and not yet clearly defined (Schiffrin et al., 2013), it was essential in the process of investigating overparenting, to clearly identify what sorts of actions are associated with the concept, and this paper is with that purpose. Thus, the first paper is an essential exploratory study of the topic of overparenting.

We recruited parenting professionals from two organisations to identify what they saw as overparenting. Our recruitment of parenting professionals from the Queensland Guidance and Counsellors Association, an association of primary and high school guidance counsellors, enabled us to obtain definitions that focused on overparenting of children and adolescents. In recruiting parenting professionals from the Australian Psychological Society, we also ensured that a broad range of parenting actions was obtained (including definitions that referred to overparenting of grown children). This resulted in a definition of overparenting that was applicable to a range of ages of offspring.

This is the first known article to cite parenting experts' perception of what type of actions delineate overparenting actions, and discuss what they believe is the accompanying impact on the wellbeing of offspring. We have analysed their responses and then added Baumrind's parenting theory to the overparenting concept. This produced a definition that narrows the actions to three main categories: actions showing high responsiveness to the child; actions which are highly demanding of

children achieving success and happiness; and low demands on the child/adolescent due to the parent undertaking the work to produce positive outcomes for the child.

Citation.

Locke, J. Y., Campbell, M. A., & Kavanagh, D. (2012). Can a parent do too much for their child? An examination by parenting professionals of the concept of overparenting. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 22*, 249-265. doi: 10.1017/jgc.2012.29

The percentage of authorship

Judith Locke - 60%

Marilyn Campbell – 30%

David Kavanagh – 10%

Why this journal was chosen for this publication.

To have real world impact, research has to reach the clinicians who treat people affected by the issue. The journal, the *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling,* was chosen as an Australian School Psychologists and Counsellors' journal, received by all members, many of whom completed the qualitative survey that produced the research. These are the frontline professionals in schools dealing with the impacts of overparenting, and this article was considered an opportunity to raise their awareness of the issue. This journal has an impact factor of 1.152.

The article has had significant real world impact for parents and parenting professionals worldwide, and has since been cited in mainstream national/international print, television, and radio.

Abstract

Is there a point where parental effort can be too much? While the link between parenting effort and the wellbeing of children has been firmly established, contemporary discussion has proposed that extreme levels of parental protection of and responsiveness to children could be counterproductive. Research has not yet addressed this phenomenon to ascertain if this kind of overparenting is a genuinely different type of parenting approach, which is associated with different psycho-social outcomes in children. The purpose of the present study was to gain insight into the parenting actions considered by parenting professionals (psychologists and school guidance counsellors) to be overparenting. One hundred and twenty-eight professionals responded to an online survey about their observations of overparenting, with eighty-six respondents providing lists of the types of actions they believed were behavioural examples of the term. The survey data revealed that certain types of actions were considered to be indicative of overparenting and that particular beliefs and outcomes may be involved in this parenting approach. Implications for parenting advice and education programs, and further research are discussed.

Key words: Overparenting; children; helicopter parenting; parenting.

Introduction

Research has firmly established the link between particular parenting approaches and the behavioural and emotional wellbeing of children (Baumrind, 1965, 1991). Baumrind's seminal 1965 and 1966 parenting research, extended by Maccoby & Martin (1983), established parenting styles based on combinations of high or low scores on two aspects of parenting posited as most important for a child's wellbeing – *parental responsiveness*, the amount the parent responds to the child's needs, and *parental demandingness*, the parent's tendency to have rules and demand responsible and mature behaviour from their child. The majority of findings have shown that the authoritative parenting approach, which is high in demandingness and high in responsiveness, is the ideal parenting method, improving children's wellbeing in areas such as self-esteem (Milevsky et al., 2007), self-reliance (Baumrind, 2005), a sense of security (Baumrind, 2005), and popularity with peers (Buri et al., 1988; Wenar, 1994).

As this approach to parenting (high in responsiveness and demandingness) has been shown to be the most efficacious in terms of child outcomes in the social-emotional domains, parents who are thought to be using considerable effort in both areas have rarely warranted research attention designed to assess or improve their parenting approach. Indeed, substantial parental efforts in loving and caring for children by establishing highly affectionate relationships with them (Maselko, Kubansky, Lipsitt & Buka, 2011), and providing safe, highly educational environments (Houtenville & Conway, 2008), are all assumed to ensure an upbringing that allows children and young people to thrive. Active shaping and manipulation of a child's environment is expected to produce greater competence and self-esteem in the child (Baumrind, 1993).

Recent popular media interest, however, has focussed on intensive parenting effort, predicting that it could impact negatively on children's wellbeing. Imprecise but common terms for this parenting style include 'helicopter parenting' which involves "hover[ing] closely overhead, rarely out of reach, whether their children need them or not" ("Helicopter parent", 2011) and 'lawnmower' parenting, where "mothers and fathers...attempt to smooth out and mow down all obstacles" in the way of the child's success ("Helicopter parent", 2011). Authors and columnists around the world (e.g. Gibbs, 2009; Nelson, 2010) regularly use these terms in the popular media, detailing the dangers of this parenting approach.

These intensive parenting actions are often assumed to be extensions of what are valued parenting practices. In an article on the effect of parenting on university students, helicopter parenting was posited as "appropriate parenting characteristics taken to an inappropriate degree" (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011, p. 405). This overly-effortful parenting approach has been generally hypothesised as being deliberately chosen by these parents in a loving but misguided attempt to improve their child's current and future personal and academic success. Many popular media authors posit there will be immediate or eventual harm for children who are parented with an excessively cultivating parenting approach, as they claim it does not allow children to develop independence or become fully-functioning or community-minded adults (Levine, 2008; Nelson, 2010).

Some authors have cited specific actions of parents who are perceived to do too much for their children. For example, LeMoyne and Buchanan (2011) hypothesised that parents of some university students were intrusive in specific areas of their child's life, particularly areas such as education where parents believed they could improve their child's future competitiveness. Similarly, Ungar (2009) described

overprotective parenting as being excessive concern in relatively safe environments, and parenting that does not show flexibility in parental rules as a child matures. Twenge and Campbell (2009) described parental overinvolvement as emphasising their child's specialness and self-esteem, resulting in parents putting effort into ensuring a child receives what they want at all times. Among other characteristics identified by Levine (2008) were an intrusive presence in the child's life, elevated anxiety about the child, and protecting their child from consequences of their actions.

To date, most authors have described overparenting in particular areas of a child's life, such as parent overinvolvement in school achievement (Pomerantz & Moorman, 2007) or communication with children who are university students (Nelson, 2010). However, there is no well-accepted or researched general definition of overly effortful parenting or overparenting, if indeed this style of parenting exists, or any empirical studies of the impact of excessive parenting effort on children (Ungar, 2009).

To be able to research the concept and determine if media claims are true, it is important to ascertain what overly effortful parenting may comprise. One way to clarify the concept is to consult professionals who see a range of parenting practices in a range of circumstances, asking them about actions they see as excessive parenting. The aim of the current study is therefore to investigate actions considered by psychologists and guidance counsellors to denote the overuse of valued parenting practices, such as protection and responsiveness. Thematic analysis was applied to their descriptions.

Method

Participants.

The criterion for participation in this study was employment as a psychology or counselling professional and/or working with children and families. The recruitment process consisted of an invitation to the members of two professional associations of guidance counsellors and/or psychologists to complete an online survey. Survey responses were provided by 128 professionals. Of those who identified their profession, 34 (64%) were school counsellors or school psychologists, 12 (23%) were mental health professionals outside of schools, and 7 (13%) were teachers. Forty-five percent had over 25 years of experience working with children and/or parents, while only 9% had less than 5 years experience. Seventy-four percent were parents. Participants were not required to identity their gender or age.

Measure.

Participants were presented with information about the project and asked to consent. If they consented, the following information was presented:

> *It can safely be said that most parents do the best job they know how to, and most parents work hard to give their children the best start in life. Recently, commentators have suggested certain groups of parents may 'overparent'. There has been some suggestion that this 'overparenting' involves overusing valued parenting practices like monitoring, protection or caring for their children. It has also been proposed that parents who 'overparent' don't alter their parenting style as their children develop, to give them more independence, or expect more from them. There has been speculation that this 'overparenting' might be negatively impacting on children.*

Participants were then asked if they had seen any instances of this type of parenting and had three options (Yes, many; Yes, some; No). If participants had not

observed overparenting, they exited the survey. Respondents with experience with overparenting were asked to describe concrete but anonymous examples of overparenting actions. They were then given a list of parenting beliefs and actions and asked whether they thought these were associated with overparenting. This paper reports the results of the open-ended responses providing examples of overparenting.

Procedure.

Ethical permission was obtained from the university human ethics committee (All ethics approvals found in Appendix A and B). Participants were recruited from two sources - the Australian Psychological Society's research webpage and an email to the Queensland Guidance and Counsellors Association, advertising the research. Participants from either source clicked on a hyperlink to the online survey (at Survey Monkey). A donation to Kids Helpline was offered as an incentive for completing the survey.

Data analysis.

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, open-ended questions about overparenting were used to obtain an understanding of actions considered being too effortful. Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis was used to derive themes. After reading through participants' responses to the question, initial codes were generated and key themes were identified. Themes were initially theory-driven: responses were coded in relation to Baumrind's parenting dimensions – parental responsiveness and demandingness. Responsiveness has been described as "the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Baumrind described demandingness as "the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their

maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (Baumrind, 1991, pp. 61-62). Responses were coded as high or low levels of these dimensions, and then other themes were identified in the responses, as they emerged. While many responses involved only one theme, others covered more than one. Examples from each set were re-read to ensure the theme represented a coherent set or needed to be further broken down.

Results

The majority of professionals reported familiarity and experience with actions which they considered overparenting. Of the 128 people answering this question, 27% (n = 34) said that they had seen “many” instances of overparenting. Almost two thirds (n = 84) reported having seen “some” instances, and only 8% (n = 10) reported no experience of overparenting and exited the survey.

Examples of overparenting.

Eighty-six people provided examples of overparenting. Most themes that emerged from the behavioural examples of overparenting appeared to mirror Baumrind’s/Maccoby and Martin’s dimensions of parenting – a parent’s demandingness of maturity in a child, and their responsiveness to a child’s perceived needs. The primary themes were grouped into six categories: low demandingness (Group 1), high responsiveness (Group 2), a combination of high responsiveness and low demandingness (Group 3), high demandingness of outcomes (Group 4), a combination of high demandingness (re expectations) and low demandingness (re problem solution) (Group 5), and contextual factors (parental anxiety, SES factors, or characteristics of the child) (Group 6). Some perceived child outcomes from overparenting were incidentally reported.

Group 1: Low demandingness.

The primary theme involved parental actions that the professionals saw as presenting low demands of the child to become mature by developing life skills, becoming independent, facing difficult circumstances, and accepting consequences. Some responses reported instances where parents did not appreciate that their child was maturing or where they did not allow their child to undertake actions that would encourage further development of maturity.

> *Cutting up a 10 year old's food; Bringing a separate plate of food for a 16 year old to a party as he is a picky eater (not letting the child grow up)* (#30,)
>
> *Parents that believe that their 16yo does not know what sex is* (#11)
>
> *Carrying instead of allowing child to walk* (#12)
>
> *A parent who does not take into consideration the developmental changes in their child and still treats them like a baby.* (#13)

One theme that emerged regularly was the parent not allowing an older child to use public transport, to attend a school camp, or learn to drive.

> *A mother who won't let her 17 year old son catch the train to school* (#24)
>
> *Too many restrictions to allow child to participate in school camp* (#7)
>
> *Not allowing the student to go for learners (written test) because they say driving is dangerous* (#52)

Many examples of low demands on the child appeared to be associated with parents unwilling to have their child face unpleasant consequences for a child's poor choices or their failure to complete work.

> *Parents don't want their children to experience the consequence of their actions. The parents blame everyone else. The parents fight for the child to have what they want rather than tough it out and face the consequences.* (#50)
>
> *I have had follow up phone calls from parents within 2 minutes of a student finishing a conversation with me - wanting to express concern, frustration, about what had been discussed with their child. With the child's emotions high and a 'one-eyed' view of what was discussed, they phone their parent who in turn takes immediate action to me. More often than not, their version of the 'supposed' conversation is completely inaccurate. I have had parents who will phone and make excuses for their daughter*

> *about forgetting something instead of the student speaking with me directly. I could go on.....* (#3)

Many respondents reported low demands on children to cope with life not going their way, followed by parents placing high demands on other people or institutions. These were typically high expectations of the school delivering positive outcomes to the child, and a parent placing low demands on the child to face the situation and learn how to cope.

> *…Constant badgering of the school. A campaign to the school to make sure their child is in a specific class the following year…* (#6)

> *Confronting teachers about their child's assignment or homework - making excuses, demanding concessions, even though clearly the student has not had any serious health or family situation preventing the work being completed.* (#7)

Some professionals discussed these parental actions still occurring when children had become young adults.

> *Still preparing massive meals for adult children in their twenties, including breakfast…Providing very cheap or no cost housing for young adults and middle aged adult offspring.* (#20)

Group 2: High responsiveness.

Respondents often listed overparenting as involving extremely high responsiveness to the child, sometimes to the point of befriending them.

> *They involve themselves in their child's social interactions, they see themselves as their child's 'best friend' rather than the parent.* (#32)

> *Feeling affronted that their adolescent does not confide in them for everything.* (#28)

Constantly being with a child or expecting a complete report of their day was also seen as being overparenting.

> *Sitting in a coffee shop monitoring their adolescent child, constantly playing with their child - not leaving the child with any autonomy or lack of supervision* (#6)

> *Phoning their child a lot when they are out* (#34)

Some participants reported that high responsiveness to a child could become intrusive, particularly in relation to the child’s privacy.

> *Over involved… intrusions to child privacy, pathologising* (#31)

A few saw those who overparent as perceiving the child's views and needs as being the most important in the family, even surpassing the parent's needs.

> *Parents who prioritise children's participation in a social event over their own need to take part in community activities and social events* (#27)

Another theme was the perception by the parent that their child was always right.

> *Taking the child's perception as the truth, regardless of the facts.* (#33)
>
> *Parents are quick to believe their child over the adult and deny the possibility that their child was at fault or would even do something of that nature.* (#57)

Group 3: High responsiveness and low demandingness.

Many respondents indicated that when parents excessively assisted their children, it was due to the parents' high responsiveness to them. When parents were highly responsive to their child's perceived needs and issues, some tried to protect them from the consequences of their actions. Thus high responsiveness was often paired with low parental demands that children solve their own issues.

> *Parents who will rush to school at the whim of a phone call from their child to deliver items such as forgotten lunches, forgotten assignments, forgotten uniforms etc.* (#3)
>
> *Question everything on the child's behalf as though they are always right— try to prevent the child from being able to problem solve through racing to their rescue— not allowing for failure or a struggle* (#4)
>
> *Come to student's locker to check on whether daughter has all she needs to take home in afternoon. Knock on classroom door to bring daughter's lunch Seek assistance for IT team re student computer. Do student's homework for them* (#5)
>
> *For example a student doesn't like the teacher because they are making them do their work so the parent complains to everyone. Has numerous staff involved until the child is moved to the class he wants to be in. Even though staying where he was [originally] was probably more beneficial to him learning about himself and developing an inner strength that he can cope.* (#50)

Some respondents reported that parents' high responsiveness to their child resulted in them believing that their child had mental health problems or special

needs. These respondents suggested that if parents perceived their child was affected by these problems, they became less demanding of their child facing difficult challenges or coping with things not going their way, and instead became more insistent that the school altered the way they dealt with the child. This was despite the fact that the professionals did not believe the child had these issues or needs.

> *Parent who phones several school contacts several times a week telling of the difficulties the child is having, but the child appears to be well adjusted and coping very well.* (#54)

> *Parents who regularly arrange meetings for advice for their child when most issues are normal developmental sequences.* (#69)

> *Parent called counsellor to see her daughter as they were not talking and mother just wanted her to have someone to talk to* (#84)

It was also reported that a parent's high attunement towards their child and belief their child was gifted, could result in them wanting special treatment to ensure the child's potential was not adversely affected.

> *Have the child complete cognitive assessments very early in their academic life to 'prove' to the school how gifted their child is, and how unnecessary any form of behaviour management strategies may be which may 'damage' their development* (#1)

Group 4: High demandingness.

Some responses of the professionals involved high parental expectations of academic outcomes and public behaviour.

> *Giving constant instructions to children in public places - often from afar, rather than up close and ensuring child cooperation e.g. Don't touch that, sit down, move away from that lady, don't touch that (again and again)*. (#16)

> *I find them very keen to be successful in parenting as they have been at their work so they assume their child is special or too intelligent in comparison to other children and push them all the time* (#25)

> *Parents expecting children to do exceedingly above age appropriate expectations for independent play, chores, even taking on caring roles to nurture the parent* (#41)

Some of these high demands of a child's behaviour appeared linked to an insistence on close supervision and monitoring of children's activities, so that freedom to interact with peers was restricted.

> *Parents preventing 13 year olds to attend any public place without parental supervision - not allowing attendance at movies or local shops because "not old enough"* (#16)

> *Students not being allowed to leave the house to socialise when a senior at school.* (#61)

> *Refusing to allow year 12s to attend a workshop in [location] as they were expected to find their own way home at 3.00 pm and [location] was perceived as too dangerous (workshop was opposite [name] school and there were 100s of students exiting from there at the same time).* (#67)

High parental expectations and demands on a child may also require high levels of parental effort. If a parent is reminding a child about what they should do, is pushing them academically, and restricts their activities, parents also take on high levels of responsibility for the child.

Group 5: A combination of high and low demandingness.

Respondents reported some parents to have high demandingness of the child through their high expectations of particular outcomes, but when those expectations were not achieved, they attempted to solve their child's issues or insisted that the school address them, rather than requiring that the child solve or cope with the issue.

> *Wanting to solve children's problems such as not achieving over 80% on tests* (#38)

> *…Demand better grades on the final semester reports or threaten withdrawal from school (private and International school contexts) - especially if that family had been known to provide donations to the school for facilities etc …* (#1)

> *Not allowing a child to do any form of chores or have any responsibility - because can't do it right, but then expecting perfect behaviour, or that at age 16/17 can do everything perfectly.* (#16)

Some parents reportedly were highly controlling of a child's choices. In these cases, they were seen to have a high demand that the child conform to their

expectations, while also being highly directive of their child and low in demand that the child should attempt to solve the issues or make decisions themselves.

> *Telling their child what to do rather than guiding them and teaching ways to cope* (#34)

> *Parents insisting on making most decisions related to choices available to a child (e.g. school subjects, clothing, friends)* (#17)

> *A student who said that his mother made him go to bed at 9pm. He is 16 years old.* (#74)

> *Restriction of children's activities and modes of travel…* (#62)

Interference in a child's social life may also be highly demanding of the child's social skills, or demanding of their 'success' with peer friendships, while also undertaking actions that remove their responsibility to solve issues.

> *As a teacher I have seen parents getting far too involved in their 8-year-old's play and friend issues. I try to encourage the students to work it out themselves, not involving their parents. Some parents have been known to come into the school, find the "other" child and have a word with them, some parents have written a letter to the "other" child and had their child give it to them.* (#45)

> *A parent confronting the parent of another student at a railway station because her daughter had not been invited to her birthday party; parents going on Facebook and requesting that something be returned to their daughter…* (#6)

Group 6: Contextual factors.

Many respondents discussed their perception of high levels of anxiety in parents who overparent.

> *During group anxiety programs for parents and children, parents being unwilling/unable to tolerate their child's distress during exposure exercises - not even attempting exposure exercises because the child says 'no', despite the impact the child's anxiety is having on the whole family* (#29)

> *Anxious parenting style… tendency to worry rather than normalise,* (#31)

> *Parents not allowing their children to play outside for fear that they will be stolen.* (#56)

Some respondents discussed their belief that certain socioeconomic or cultural groups were more likely to overparent.

> *In mostly high SE populations, and in some distinct cultural groups …*(#1)
>
> *Working in the context of private schooling, parents are very anxious about their child or young person's performance* (#82)

Perceived child outcomes from overparenting.

Some respondents detailed child outcomes they saw as emerging from this type of parenting. These were not specifically asked for, and do not form a category of parenting actions; however, they provide further relevant information.

The main perceived child outcome of overparenting was a lack of resilience.

> *Parents not prepared for children to be resilient. They believe that regardless of effort their child must be rewarded. When these children experience failure they become extremely emotional in the school setting* (#57)
>
> *Staying at home is another one that is common, the child doesn't want to come to school and the parent takes the easy way out and keeps them at home as they might have been bullied - even though they might be bullying others too or they might not have the skills to cope and therefore never learn them.* (#50)
>
> *Children are not experiencing or dealing with many life events - parents are not wanting to upset their children, believing that they should not have to deal with unpleasant /stress invoking situations. Thus kids do not get a chance to learn how to cope with loud teachers, teasing, not getting what they want, wanting things to be immediate.* (#21)

Some participants mentioned a sense of entitlement emerging in children who had been overprotected by their parents.

> *I have worked with quite a number of parents who are so overprotective of their children that the children do not learn to take responsibility (and the natural consequences) of their actions. The children may develop a sense of entitlement and the parents then find it difficult to work with the school in a trusting, cooperative and solution focused manner, which would benefit both child and school.* (#)

Inadequate development of life skills was also reported.

> *'Helicoptering' to ensure that their child does not have to be 'burdened' with any mundane tasks like learning to tie their shoe-laces, dry themselves, or even comb their own hair. This in turn became a major issue when the school would have to take these Year 5 -6 students off to school camp, and they had NEVER learnt to dress, dry themselves, or make their own beds...* (#1)

Transference of high parental anxiety to children was also a theme.

> *Being too emotionally involved, so that parent anxiety transfers to high school children so they refuse to go to school.* (#20)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the concept of overparenting, where parents may do too much for their children. Professionals—mainly school counsellors or school psychologists —offered behavioural examples of actions parents took which they saw as overparenting. Overall, the responses fitted well with Baumrind's two dimensions of demandingness and responsiveness, with respondents often describing actions indicating low demandingness, high demandingness of child outcomes, a combination of low and high demandingness, and high responsiveness.

Low demandingness, or reduced expectations that the child should use or develop maturity, was often described. It appeared to be as a result of a parent taking extra responsibility for solving a child's issues, or asking a third party (such as the child's school or their peers) to alter their actions to ensure the child did not experience difficulty or disappointment. Thus, a parent's reduced expectations of the child's ability to complete tasks resulted in compensatory effort by the parents or by other people. The colloquial term 'lawnmower parent' describes these types of parenting actions and authors such as Levine (2008) have detailed similar compensatory effort designed to protect children from disappointment.

While not specifically on overparenting, research on low levels of demandingness, where parents act intrusively and undertake tasks that the child could be doing independently, is starting to emerge more in anxiety research. Parental intrusiveness has been shown to be associated with higher levels of separation anxiety in children, speculated to be the result of a child's unfamiliarity with situations where they have to complete actions themselves, and reduced self-efficacy in children

(Wood, 2006). Some professionals in this study reflected this finding by indicating they noted a reduced sense of self-efficacy in children who they thought were overparented.

Other descriptions of overparenting appeared to involve high demandingness, such as high levels of parental supervision and monitoring of behaviour, and of high parental expectations of school results and peer relationships. Research on 'helicopter parenting' has often emphasised a parent's difficulty with accepting their child's failures (e.g., LeMoyne & Buchanan 2011). Much of the previous parenting research has focussed on children whose parents push them towards high levels of academic performance and have high levels of perfectionism (Ablard & Parker, 1997). However, there is no known research on extreme parental expectations of high achievement in other areas, such as peer popularity.

Some responses of high expectations of the child related to parents wanting a high level of control over their child, their results, and their future, and the parent then becoming the main instigator of solutions for the child when success might be in doubt. This appeared to be a combination of high expectations of outcomes, combined with low demands on children themselves, so that the parent steps in to help the child achieve. There has been a large body of work on autonomy support vs. control in parents, showing the impact of parental control on a child (Grolnick, 2009; Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). Research on parental control in academic settings has shown that when parents are orientated towards control rather than supporting autonomy in their children, then the child may fail to develop autonomous motivation in academic settings (Grolnick, 2009). These overparenting actions, where parents assume responsibility for improving their child's experience of life, may impact on their

child's perceived ability to effect change in many aspects of their life, and on their sense of wellbeing. Further research is needed to investigate this.

Some perceived overparenting actions, such as not allowing their child to use public transport, could be interpreted as highly controlling; however, these actions could also be seen to be low in demandingness, by not forcing a child to mature and experience discomfort or inconvenience by taking public transport. Similarly, not allowing a child to drive may be restrictive, unless the child were driven everywhere they wanted to go. If a child's needs are at the centre of a family, it is possible all their needs are being met through extreme parental effort. Further inquiry would be needed to determine which level of demandingness these actions describe.

Consistent with some previous observations, high levels of responsiveness appeared to drive many actions that involved high and low demandingness (Levine, 2008, Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Baumrind described one aspect of responsiveness as being attuned to a child's special needs (Baumrind, 1991). It appeared that many professionals saw overparenting as being so responsive to the child, that the child's needs are at the centre of the parent's life, even at ages where the child should be taking on more independent responsibility for their life, such as the early adult years. If a parent insists their child is always right or gifted, or that they face constant danger, this would result in more parental focus and actions to ensure the child experiences success and safety.

Much of the previous research on high levels of responsiveness has been based on a permissive parenting style (high responsiveness combined with low demandingness) and this approach has been shown to be associated with lower levels of achievement orientation, less self-regulation and reduced social responsibility in children (Baumrind, 1991). There has been limited research on extreme levels of

responsiveness to children that is not combined with low demandingness; however, higher levels of responsiveness to children has been shown to increase a child's likelihood for risk of victimization at school due to the likelihood of overprotective parenting (Georgiou, 2008). Recent Australian studies from the Longitudinal Study of Australian children suggest overprotective parenting is becoming more common in Australia, only slightly decreasing with the age of the child (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010).

The respondents suggested some parents focus on perceived child problems, and become highly demanding of the schools to ensure the child was taken care of, even though the professionals saw this action as unnecessary. Many of the professionals reported that anxiety in parents had an impact on the intensity of parenting actions. Parental anxiety has been hypothesised to be increasing in Australia, shown in statistics including the declining rates of child activity, such as walking to school or playing outdoors (Zubrick et al., 2010), and the community's tendency to overestimate the incidence of crime (Tulloch, 2004). It is likely that if a parent is constantly attuned and responsive to perceived potential dangers the child may face – whether it were a risk of abduction, or placed in a non-preferred class – it would encourage the parent to monitor and solve their child's potential issues in more intensive ways.

Respondents in this study perceived child outcomes from the parental actions as poor resilience, a sense of entitlement, high anxiety levels, poor life skills, and an inadequate sense of responsibility. Other research has shown similar outcomes of overprotective or over involved parenting. For example, Hudson and Dodd (2012) have shown that over-involved mothering is a risk factor for a child developing a clinical anxiety diagnosis in middle childhood.

In combination, the perceptions of respondents suggested a model of potential causes and effects of overparenting (see Figure 3.1). The respondents appeared to suggest that parents, who are highly responsive to their children and want to ensure their child has a uniformly pleasant and unspoiled life, then try to protect the child from facing difficult circumstances. Overinvestment in their child may make parents highly aware of events in their child's life, and offer both triggers and opportunities for them to step in and 'help' their child. Such actions are proposed to be related to beliefs about their child's inability to face difficulties, their uniqueness, potential for success, and risks of harm.

Parents who are highly responsive or attuned to their child may be more likely to invest intensive parental effort, and ask people and institutions the child encounters, to alter policies and procedures to maintain an ideal and pleasant life for them. Some actions to ensure safety and a life unhindered by unpleasantness include parents doing more for their child, with correspondingly less being done by the child—whether that means completing their homework, providing transport, helping them avoid discipline, or insisting that peers meet their child's needs. On the other hand, such parents may also be highly controlling, monitoring their child closely, overly restricting their activities, making decisions for them, or discouraging age-appropriate milestones such as learning to drive. They may demand to know every detail of their life or want to be perceived as a friend. This may be perceived as very controlling parenting by the child, or may produce a charmed life for the child, depending on the degree that restrictions are onerous.

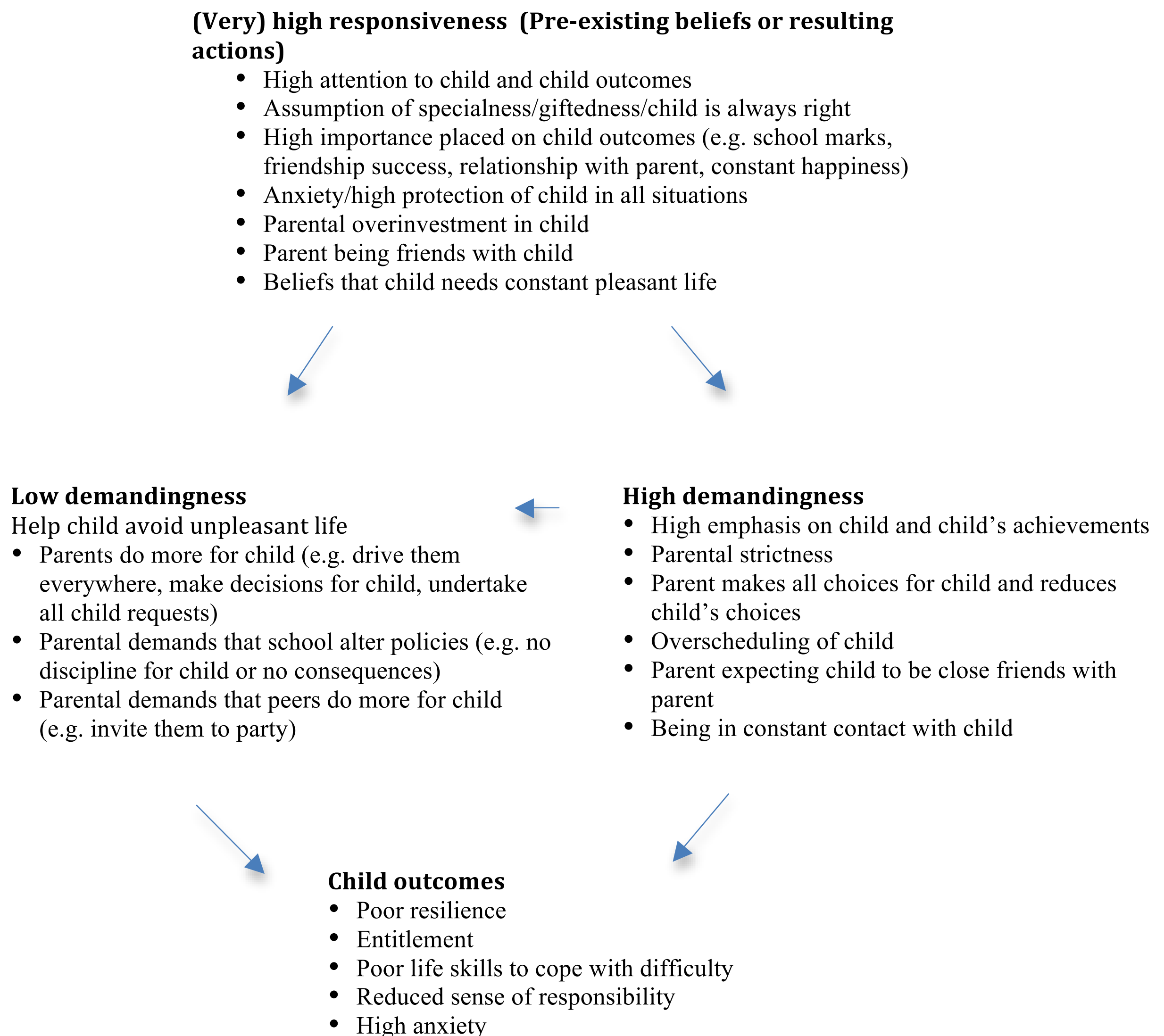

Figure 3.1. A proposed model of the potential causes and effects of overparenting.

Thus, based on the model, a tentative definition of overparenting is that it is very high levels of parenting responsiveness and high demands for child success, often resulting in parental behaviours that reduce demands on the child to undertake actions that would effect change in their own life. These overparenting actions are thought to result in reduced child resilience, a sense of entitlement, child anxiety, reduced life skills, and an inadequate sense of responsibility or self-efficacy.

Limitations.

Results of the study should be interpreted in the context of its limitations. The first question in the recruitment email—*"Do you work with parents who put a lot of effort into their parenting?"*—meant that the sample might have been biased towards professionals with experiences of overparenting. Because of this, the observation that only 8% reported no experience of overparenting may be an underestimate, and the reported frequency of overparenting actions may be an overestimate of the occurrence of the parenting approach. Further quantitative research will assist in determining the frequency and severity of overparenting actions in parenting populations in Australia.

Behavioural examples provided by respondents may also have been biased by the description of overparenting as "monitoring, protection and caring for children": There may have been other facets of overparenting that were not included as a result. If respondents had been given another description, it may have resulted in different responses.

Parental supervision is ideally tied to the safety of the child's surroundings, and the level of protection of a child should match the level of actual danger in the environment. 'Excessive' parental involvement for some students could be the right amount of support for other students, depending on the student's circumstances (Wolf et al., 2009). While it could be argued that respondents in this study only gave

examples where they considered parental demandingness or responsiveness to be inappropriate for the child's age, abilities, or environment, further research would be needed to clarify this issue.

Additional information about the role and work context of respondents (e.g. state or independent school; socioeconomic environment) may have provided further clues about potential determinants of intensive parenting. It is not clear whether the respondents' own personal experiences as parents may have influenced their responses, or whether their reports of parenting actions were first- or second-hand, or were biased towards or against parents.

Implications.

While the current respondents indicated that some parents may be undertaking actions that could be harmful for children, it is likely that many had the best of intentions. High levels of parental involvement, protection and care have previously been shown to improve child wellbeing (Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan & Blair, 1994). Western societies are strongly influenced by 'the ideology of intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996), and overparenting may be triggered by such advice. However, even positive features may be problematic if taken to extremes. Parents themselves may be negatively affected. Mothers who attempt to increase childhood intelligence and accomplishment through intensive effort and increased time spent with children may be at risk of exhaustion, stress, anxiety, and guilt (Wall, 2010).

The present study raises issues about the potential impact of overparenting on schools and other agencies, on other adults in the child's life, and on their peers. Not only do these impacts probably include excessive demands on parents' time; they also are likely to cause difficulties for schools in maintaining discipline and providing

proper care and opportunities to allow children to experience appropriate maturational experiences.

The professionals who participated in this study appeared to suggest that overparenting has, at its core, a mixture of higher responsiveness to children and lower demandingness, making it appear similar to Baumrind's description of permissive parents (high levels of responsiveness and low levels of demandingness). However, Baumrind also notes that a characteristic of permissive parenting is to "emphasize freedom over control" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 63). Is the child who is at the complete centre of a parent's world, whose every utterance and action highly examined and acted on, truly free? Are modern parents' higher efforts in both dimensions still producing better outcomes in children, as Baumrind has previously proposed, or is there now a level of parental responsiveness to a child that is too high? Does an extreme attentiveness to children and their imagined needs and issues, encourage parents to reduce their demands on their child, resulting in the child rarely facing adverse situations, learning to cope, and acquiring resilience, maturity, and other essential life skills? The current study raises the disturbing possibility that the answer is yes.

Hays (1996) has suggested that, post World War II, developmental and psychology and child-centred parenting advice has demanded increasing amounts of parental resources in bringing up children in what is seen as an ideal parenting approach. More intensive parenting is often encouraged in parenting programs, and insufficient parental effort is seen as problematic (Romagnoli & Wall, 2012). The current research suggests that the focus of parenting interventions should be on encouraging an optimal level of parental involvement and effort, rather than

encouraging parents to believe ever-increasing effort will produce better child psychosocial or academic outcomes.

Further quantitative research on overparenting beliefs and actions, and into associated child outcomes is clearly warranted. Such research will help parents know how best to undertake their key role in fostering the development of capable, resilient and socially responsive future generations.

Commentary following publication

As this is a published paper, improvements cannot be added to the paper itself.

To improve the generalisability of the results, it would have been helpful to gather the gender, age and further information about the socio-economic status of the parenting professionals and their workplace.

As the first author was the only coder, it would have been helpful to improve objectivity by having other researchers within and outside of the author's supervisory team independently review the data, to determine if the themes were accurate, and if the quotes included best represented the themes.

Unfortunately, as overparenting is a new area, a definition of it had to be given to the participants to ensure they were speaking about parenting which is overusing valued parenting practices. While it is acknowledged that the definition given could have biased the participants, it also could have been mentioned that the statement of it *potentially negatively impacting children* should not have been put in, or a more neutral statement such as "some think this type of parenting has a positive impact on children, others believe it has a negative impact".

Chapter 4: Development and Validation of a New Overparenting Measure - The Locke Parenting Scale

How this paper relates to the thesis.

The first paper established that the concept of overparenting was a valid one and was considered by parenting professionals to be impacting on children, adolescents, as well as young adults. To study the concept further, a scale was needed to be able to assess it and be able to further understand what actions or wellbeing factors were associated with the concept. It was important that this scale include all child developmental stages so that it could be used across a broad range of ages and developmental abilities in children and adolescents. It was hypothesised that broad parenting beliefs and goals would be less subject to differing child ages than specific parenting behaviours, such as allowing them on public transport or cutting up their food. Accordingly, a list of 70 parenting beliefs and intentions were garnered from intensive parenting literature. We focused on parenting populations proposed by many researchers to be more likely to overparent, such as the often highly educated or affluent parents who pay for their child's education. Through this series of large studies and exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, an 8-item scale, The Locke Parenting Scale (LPS), was produced, comprising two factors, Ensuring Constant Happiness (5 items), and Befriending (3 items).

The previous study had defined overparenting as "very high levels of parenting responsiveness and high demands for child success, often resulting in parental behaviours' that reduce demands on the child to undertake actions that would effect change in their life" (Locke et al., 2012, p. 259). What is interesting about the two

factors of the LPS is that one (Befriending) is clearly a highly responsive action to the child by wanting to be their child's friend, and the items on the other (Ensuring Constant Happiness) represent high demands of the parent for the child to be always happy, but then the parent putting in effort to make the child happy and having low demands of the child to make themselves happy. Thus the two factors continue to show similar themes in overparenting as had been identified in the first study.

Citation.

Locke, J. Y., Kavanagh, D. J., & Campbell, M. A. (to be submitted). Development and validation of a new overparenting measure - The Locke Parenting Scale.

The percentage of authorship

Judith Locke - 60%

David Kavanagh – 30%

Marilyn Campbell – 10%

This paper is in the process of being submitted.

Abstract

Contemporary media discussion has speculated that there is a point where parenting effort can become extreme (often called 'helicopter parenting' or 'overparenting') and creates vulnerability or distress in children. The current research aimed to develop an instrument to measure beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that may contribute to overparenting. Study 1 involved consultation with parenting professionals (*N* = 84) to identify items deemed to be related to overparenting. In Study 2, the resultant scale was given to 404 parents of school-aged children, and after refinement to select 23 items with acceptable item-total correlations, exploratory factor analysis identified 4 factors defined by a total of 13 items. In Study 3, these 13 items were administered to a new sample of parents (*N* = 638) and a confirmatory factor analysis was applied. The four-factor structure did not provide acceptable fit, but with omission of two factors, excellent fit was obtained. The resultant 8-item scale (The Locke Parenting Scale, LPS) comprised Ensuring Constant Happiness (5 items), and Befriending (3 items). While research on predictive validity is needed, the LPS shows initial promise as a reliable test of these forms of overparenting.

Keywords: overparenting; children; helicopter parenting; parenting

Introduction

Effective parenting requires active involvement and a significant investment of time. Maintaining a strong, positive relationship and creating an environment that both protects children and facilitates their development require considerable parental effort. Underinvolved or neglectful parenting is known to have ongoing negative effects on the child (Steinberg, Lambourne, Darling, Munts, & Dornbusch, 1994). However, parents who are highly responsive to their children, while actively placing appropriate demands on them (Baumrind, 1965; Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983), have children with greater self-esteem (Milevski, Schlecter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007), popularity (Buri et al., 1988) and competence (Baumrind, 1993). High levels of effort and involvement by a parent are also associated with motivation and application at school (Keith & Keith, 1993) and improved school achievement (Houtenville & Conway, 2008).

Can parents go too far, however, in their efforts to provide an ideal environment for their children? Over recent years, there has been repeated argument by social commentators and journalists that the excessive efforts of some parents, instead of nurturing, may potentially be harming their children (Gibbs, 2009; Nelson, 2010). These excessive efforts have been described as ‘overparenting’, ‘indulgent’ or ‘intensive’ parenting (Hays, 1996) and ‘helicopter parenting’ (hovering over offspring to ensure they experience success and come to no harm). While all of these describe parental involvement that is extreme or unnecessary given a child’s developmental stage, the concepts are somewhat imprecise, and neither the criteria for overparenting nor its negative effects on children are established as yet (Schiffrin et al, 2013).

Up to now, the study of university-aged students has dominated research in this area, perhaps due to the manifest inappropriateness of intensive parenting of a young adult who is establishing independence from their parents' influence (Padilla –Walker & Nelson, 2012). Examples of excessive parenting at this stage include making decisions for their adult child or controlling their child's friendships (Padilla –Walker & Nelson, 2012), providing intensive support (Fingerman et al., 2012), excessive indulgence (Klein & Pierce, 2009), and overprotection (Montgomery, 2010). University students who report a history of overparenting show greater neuroticism, dependence, and less openness to new ideas (Montgomery, 2010), an external locus of control Spokas & Heimberg, 2009), and more use of both prescription medications and over-the counter analgesics (LeMoyne & Buchanen, 2011). Limited research has focused on the outcomes of parental overinvolvement in younger children. For example, mothers who overprotected their child at pre-school ages had more anxious children at 9 years old (Hudson & Dodd, 2012).

Overparenting has been argued to be a result of a parent being fixated on their child's needs, in their effort to do the best for their child (Segrin et al., 2012). Parents who overly identify with their child's achievements may exert excessive pressure on their child to achieve, with the effective focus being on their own benefit, rather than the child's (Grolnick, 2003). Some commentators also link helicopter parenting to a preoccupation with their child's happiness, resulting in efforts to resolve any issues their child experiences (Segrin et al., 2012), as well as excessively praising and indulging their child (Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

Most research on overparenting has relied on a young adult's reports of the parenting they experienced, which are, of course, retrospective [e.g. Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2012) or the methodology has been observing parental

interactions with young children (Hudson & Dodd, 2012). There is, however, no well-established self-report measure to assess a parent's tendency to overparent a school-aged child. A psychometrically sound instrument would provide a basis for further research on overparenting, and establish whether it results in problems for either the parent or their child.

The purpose of the present series of studies was therefore to assess parental beliefs, attitudes and behavioural tendencies thought to be associated with overparenting of a school-aged child. Our goal was to produce a scale based on the beliefs and attitudes previously reported in the literature to be involved in extreme levels of parenting effort. Using factor analysis, we produced an eight-item scale with a replicable factorial structure and a high degree of stability over time.

Study 1

This study generated a pool of items that were considered to be associated with overparenting. While there are some suggestions from previous theoretical work on potentially problematic areas of overparenting (e.g., Kavanagh, 1992; Landry et al., 2008), it is not yet clear whether a single coherent concept underlies the disparate descriptions in recent literature. Neither is there a sound theoretical model of the concept that can be used to guide development of an assessment scale.

The initial phase of development of a measure therefore involved identifying beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in existing literature on excessive or problematic parenting (e.g., Grolnick, 2003; Honore, 2008; Levine, 2008; Seligman, 1995; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). A wide range of parental beliefs was associated with intensive parenting in the literature. These included parental ego involvement, the belief that the child has limitless potential, a lack of trust in the child's environment and in the child coping with responsibilities and tasks, limited confidence in one's

parenting skills and decisions, a need for psychological control in parenting, encouragement of narcissistic traits in children, self-sacrifice, high expectations of the child's achievements, limited demands being placed on the child, and extreme levels of responsiveness or warmth, including considering themselves a friend of their child, or praising them excessively.

An item pool was created, sampling parenting beliefs and intentions that were potentially relevant to the construct of high parental effort. We followed Clark and Watson's (1995) recommendation, that the initial pool of items should be broader and more comprehensive than our own theory of the construct, and that items should cover content that may eventually shown to be unrelated to the core construct. Four to eight items were included in each speculated area to ensure that each was adequately represented. This provided an initial pool of 70 items, which were listed as statements such as "I need to stand up for my child with others" and "I try hard to make sure my child is always happy", with responses on a 5-point Likert scale from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. (See Appendix D for the list of questions)

To reduce items to those considered most relevant to the concept, we consulted practitioners who reportedly had experience of parents who overparented. Our aim was to confirm that the items were considered to be associated with overparenting rather than typical parenting.

Method.

Participants. After obtaining approval from the Queensland University of Technology human ethics committee (# 1100001398), 128 parenting professionals were recruited from the Australian Psychological Society's research webpage and a recruitment email to the Queensland Guidance and Counsellors Association. Respondents completed an online survey on effortful parenting, with 84 completing

the total questionnaire; because of the nature of online recruitment the response rates are unknown. Most participants were school counsellors or school psychologists (34, 64%), or mental health professionals outside of schools (12, 23%). Almost half of the sample (45%) had over 25 years of experience, with only 9% having less than five. Seventy–three percent said they were parents themselves.

Procedure.

After written consent was provided, the following information was provided.

> *It can safely be said that most parents do the best job they know how to, and most parents work hard to give their children the best start in life. Recently, commentators have suggested certain groups of parents may 'overparent'. There has been some suggestion that this 'overparenting' involves overusing valued parenting practices like monitoring, protection or caring for their children. It has also been proposed that parents who 'overparent' don't alter their parenting style as their children develop, to give them more independence, or expect more from them. There has been speculation that this 'overparenting' might be negatively impacting on children.*

Participants were asked about their familiarity with overparenting. The 118 respondents who had seen “some” or “many” instances with overparenting were asked to describe some concrete but anonymous examples of overparenting actions (further detailed in Locke, Campbell, & Kavanagh, 2012). They were then given the 70 belief scale items and asked, as experts in parenting, whether they believed strong agreement or strong disagreement from parents with the individual items could distinguish overparenting from typical parenting. Respondents had three categories to choose from: “Strong agreement with this item suggests overparenting”; “Strong

disagreement with this item suggests overparenting"; and "Responses to this item are irrelevant to overparenting". (See Appendix C for the complete questionnaire).

Results.

We used a criterion of at least 50% of the parenting professionals indicating strong agreement or disagreement that an item distinguished overparenting for its retention. This reduced the scale to 39 items. Twenty-nine were items where agreement was thought to indicate overparenting (e.g., "I put a lot of effort into praising my child to help them feel good"; "I try hard to make sure my child is always happy") and ten were ones where overparenting was expected to be associated with disagreement (e.g., "There will be a time when my child no longer needs my assistance"; "I feel fine if my child does not like me when I enforce an unpopular rule"). As two items were very similarly worded, one was removed, producing a scale of 38 items. (See Appendix E for list of the 38 items).

Study 2

Method.

Study 2 refined the 38-item scale by administering it online to a large sample, comprising parents of school-aged children. Since our aim was to create an instrument assessing a coherent overall concept, we reduced the length of the scale by omitting items with low corrected item-total correlations. We then applied an exploratory factor analysis to identify the reduced scale's internal structure.

Participants. Approval was obtained from the human ethics committee (# 1100001398) and from individual schools, to email 71 independent primary and high schools in southeast Queensland. Participation was also invited from parents who were students at Queensland University of Technology, or parents who accessed the

Australian Psychological Society's (APS) research web page. Four hundred and thirty-five parents completed the 38-item survey on parenting beliefs. Of the 374 parents who identified their gender, 93% (348) were female and 7% (26) were male, and of the 406 participants who identified their age, 32% (130) were 41 – 50 years old. Most participants who responded to the education question had an undergraduate or postgraduate degree (79%, $N = 238$) and of those who answered the income question, 64% (258) earned over AUD$100,000 a year, with only 10% (42) earning under AUD$60,000. Participants were asked to answer the questions based on their youngest child, should they have more than one child; the gender of this youngest child was reported as 48.2% boys (195) and 51.8% girls (210). Of the parents who reported the age of this child, the ages given were Under 5 (18%); 5-6 (15.5%); 7-8 (13.6%); 9-10 (11.3%); 11-12 (11.3%); 13-14 (14.53%); 15-16 (8.87%); 17-18 (5.42%) and 19 or over (1.48%). Participants were not asked how many children they had.

Measures. The online survey included the 38-item parenting self-report measure described in Study 1 as well as an unscored positive item at the start of the list of questions ("I have a good relationship with my child"). Demographic questions, such as age and gender, were also included. (See Appendix D for a complete list of the questions).

Procedure. Participating schools, the university, and the APS placed information about the online survey in a newsletter, email or web page. The information asked parents of children aged between 5 and 18 to participate in a survey on modern parenting. A donation to Kids Helpline (a telephone support service for children) for each response was offered as an incentive. A website hyperlink uploaded

a page where parents could provide their consent and complete the survey. Participation was voluntary and participants could exit it at any point.

Results.

With listwise deletion, 404 parents provided data for the analysis. The internal consistency of the 38-item scale using coefficient alpha was .73. Items with corrected item-total correlations < 0.20 were removed, reducing the scale to 23 items. The reduced scale had an alpha of .82.

Principal axis factoring was then applied to the 23-item scale. While this produced six factors with eigenvalues >1, the scree test suggested that four factors be fitted. After varimax rotation, the factors were interpreted as: Ensuring (the child's) Constant Happiness (five items), Befriending the child (three items), Guilt (or highly emotional parenting) (three items) and Worry about what others think of one's parenting (two items). (See Appendix F for the table of each item and its factor loading on each factor of the EFA)

An examination of demographic associates of scores on the measure showed a negative association between the total score and income (F (3, 388) = 4.13, $p = .007$, η2 = .031), which was also reflected in the subscales of Ensuring Constant Happiness (F (3, 394) = 5.76, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$), and Worry about what others think (F (3, 395) = 3.43, $p = .017$, $\eta^2 = .025$). Ensuring Constant Happiness was also associated with lower education levels (F (2, 398) = 9.12, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .044$). While Parental Guilt (F (1, 371) = 6.61, $p = .011$, $\eta^2 = .018$) and Worry (F (1, 371) = 4.240, $p = .040$, $\eta^2 = .011$) were higher in fathers than mothers, the small proportion of male respondents suggests that this result should be interpreted with caution. Befriending the child was not associated with any demographic characteristics.

Study 3

In Study 3, we undertook a confirmatory factor analysis of the 13-item scale with a new sample of parents.

Participants. Approval was obtained from the human ethics committee (# 1200000342) to recruit the parents of students from two inner-city Brisbane independent schools (one boys', one girls') with students from a preparatory year through elementary to senior high school. Six hundred and thirty-eight parents responded. Of those who reported gender, 84% (587) were female. Most respondents (490, 70%) were aged between 41 and 50, and most had a university degree (287, 41% undergraduate only, and 248, 36% postgraduate). Half of the respondents had two children (351, 50%), while 15% (101) had one child and the remaining 35% (244) had three or more. Of those who answered the marital status question, 87% (598) said they were married or living together with their partner. Income was not assessed as per the schools' request, but as a guide to the possible financial situation of the participants, annual fees at the schools ranged from AUD$13,000 to AUD$17,000 per student putting them in the middle to high SES bracket. Parents were asked to give their answers based on their oldest child at the school and the age ranges of these offspring were: Prep to Year 3 (9.4%); Year 4 to 6 (15.8%); Year 7 to 9 (37.9%) and Year 10 to 12 (37.9%).

Measures. The 13 items derived from the exploratory factor analysis in Study 2 were again preceded by an unscored positive item ("I have a good relationship with my child"). The remaining ten items identified in Study 2's initial reliability analysis were also administered, together with a revised version of an item. However, all reported analyses were on the 13 core items only. (See Appendix E for the complete questionnaire).

Procedure. The two independent schools advertised the parenting survey in an email to all parents at the school and in an article in both online school newsletters. Parents were invited to participate in an online study of modern parenting.

Results.

We applied a confirmatory factor analysis using Amos 20, and the model derived from the exploratory factor analysis in Study 2. This did not give an ideal solution (χ^2 (19) = 64.02, $p < .001$; CFI = .873; GFI = .944; AGFI = .914; NFI = .843; RMSEA = .059). We therefore focused on the first two factors (Ensuring Constant Happiness, and Befriending), given their centrality to the overparenting concept that was our focus. This reduced focus improved the fit of the model (χ^2 (19) = 64.02, $p <$ .001; CFI = .949; GFI = .977; AGFI = .957; NFI = .930; RMSEA = .059), and when intercorrelations between error terms were taken into account, the fit became excellent (χ^2 *(15)*) = 16.82, p =.330; CFI =.998; GFI = .994; AGFI = .985; NFI = .982; RMSEA = .013).

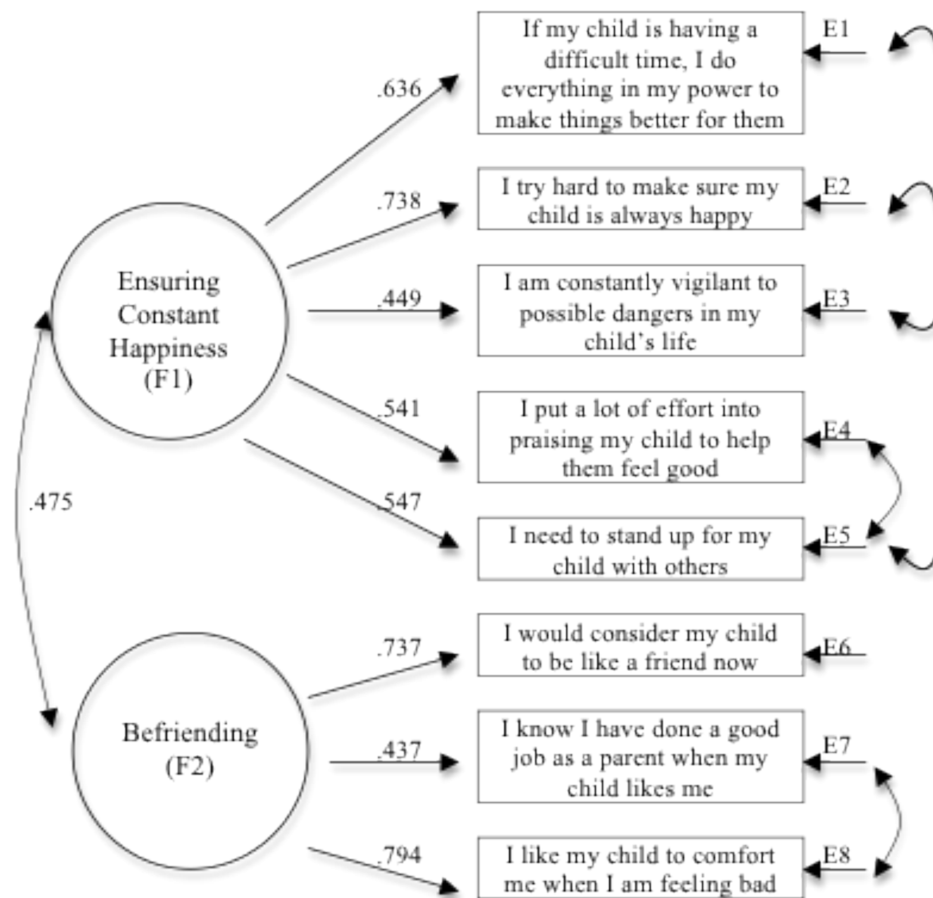

Figure 4.1. Final confirmatory factor analysis model. F = Factor; E = Error.

Figure 4.1 displays the model, and the items that constitute the final scale, which is called the Locke Parenting Scale (LPS; Table 4.1). Coefficient alpha for the total LPS (8 parenting beliefs) in this sample was acceptable at .73, with all corrected item-total correlations > .30. The internal consistency of the 5-item Ensuring Constant Happiness subscale was .71 (with corrected item-total correlations ≥ .42), and while the 3-item Befriending subscale gave a coefficient alpha of .59, all item-total correlations were ≥ .38, suggesting that the alpha coefficient was constrained by the number of items rather than by a lack of intercorrelation.

Table 4. 1
The Locke Parenting Scale

The Locke Parenting Scale (LPS)

For each statement, please circle the number that best describes your parenting approach or your beliefs about parenting and children.

	Strongly agree	Agree more than disagree	Neutral/ Unsure	Disagree more than agree	Strongly disagree
1. I have a good relationship with my child	5	4	3	2	1
2. I try hard to make sure my child is always happy	5	4	3	2	1
3. I would consider my child to be like a friend now	5	4	3	2	1
4. I like my child to comfort me when I am feeling bad	5	4	3	2	1
5. I put a lot of effort into praising my child to help them feel good	5	4	3	2	1
6. I need to stand up for my child with others.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I am constantly vigilant to possible dangers in my child's life	5	4	3	2	1
8. If my child is having a difficult time I do everything in my power to make things better for them	5	4	3	2	1
9. I know I have done a good job as a parent when my child likes me	5	4	3	2	1

Scoring. Total: Add items 2-9. (Note that Item 1 is not included).
Factor 1: Ensuring Constant Happiness: Add items 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8.
Factor 2: Befriending: Add items 3, 4, and 9.

Means, standard deviations, 10th and 90th percentiles, skew and kurtosis for the LPS and its subscales are presented in Table 4.2. Fathers had higher average scores on the total LPS ($F(1, 679) = 4.17$, $p = .041$, $\eta 2 = .006$) and on Befriending ($F(1, 685) = 5.23$, $p = .021$, $\eta 2 = .008$). Younger parents gave higher scores on the total LPS ($F(2, 681) = 6.60$, $p = .001$, $\eta 2 = .019$) and on Ensuring Constant Happiness (F

(2, 683) = 8.47, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .024$). The total LPS and its two factors did not vary according to parental education.

Table 4.2.
Means, standard deviations, 10th and 90th percentiles, skewness and kurtosis of total LPS and its factors (Study 3) (N = 638)

	LPS Total	Ensuring Constant Happiness	Befriending
Mean (SD)	25.07 (4.62)	17.16 (3.33)	7.93 (2.25)
Median	25.00	17.00	8.00
10th percentile	18.60	13.00	5.00
90th percentile	31.00	21.00	11.00
Skewness (SE)	.054 (.092)	-.098 (.092)	.367 (.092)
Kurtosis (SE)	-.099 (.184)	-.200 (.183)	-.003 (.183)

Test-retest reliability of the LPS was calculated for a sub-sample of 39 parents who completed the LPS on two occasions 16-19 months apart. Acceptable test-retest reliability was obtained on the total LPS scale ($r = .77$, $p < .001$), Ensuring Constant Happiness ($r = .59$, $p < .001$) and Befriending ($r = .63$, $p < .001$). There was no significant change in mean scores for either the total LPS ($F(1, 38) = 1.95$, $p = .170$, $\eta^2 = .049$), Ensuring Constant Happiness ($F(1, 38) = 0.91$, $p = .346$, $\eta^2 = .023$) or Befriending ($F(1, 38) = 0.48$, $p = .493$, $\eta^2 = .012$), indicating stability over the interval.

Discussion

In this series of studies, a brief self-report measure of overparenting, the Locke Parenting Scale (LPS), was developed. The scale was derived from beliefs, attitudes

and behavioural tendencies that had previously been reported to be associated with overparenting (e.g., Grolnick, 2003; Levine, 2008; Twenge & Campbell, 2009), and was refined using expert judgements. Through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, we refined the measure, deriving an 8-item scale with satisfactory internal consistency and a two-factor structure—Ensuring Constant Happiness, and Befriending. Both the total scale and its subscales showed a high degree of stability over 16–19 months.

Ensuring Constant Happiness appears related to two parental beliefs: (1) parents have to keep their child happy at all times, and (2) parental efforts are essential in keeping the child happy. Research about a parent's desire for their child to always be happy is limited. Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1996) appear to be the first researchers to look at the concept of meta-emotions—a parent's emotions about their own and their children's emotions. Parents' misguided attempts to build their children's competence and confidence through eliminating the possibility of the child experiencing difficult events have been associated with poorer social skills in children and less ability to self-soothe (Gottman et al. 1996).

There has also been some related research on parents who are overprotective or grant insufficient autonomy. Recollection of overprotective parenting by university students has been linked to students' social anxiety (Spokas & Heimberg 2009) and as already mentioned, Hudson and Dodd (2012) found that overinvolvement by mothers with their preschool child predicted child anxiety at age nine. Parenting approaches that have parents constantly close and intervening in the child's life have sometimes attributed this behaviour to an attempt to ensure high self-esteem in the child (Rutherford, 2011).

Both ensuring constant happiness and befriending appear to suggest enmeshment – a tendency to be too close to a child—often involved in parenting actions that intrude on a child's autonomy (Barber & Harmon, 2002). Enmeshment has been posited to be involved in overparenting, where parents are believed to be excessively over-involved and concerned about their child's mental state, to have difficulty with separation from the child (Munich & Munich, 2009), and to be disproportionately dependent on their children for their own validation and self-esteem (Jones, 1991).

While a positive and warm parental relationship is known to be beneficial (Maselko et al., 2011) both ensuring constant happiness and befriending may inhibit parents from placing demands on their child for behaviour that is socially and developmentally appropriate. Befriending the child carries a further risk, that excessive reciprocal support may be expected from the child—a concept that has been described elsewhere as *parentification* (Peris, Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Emery, 2008). A parent relying on a child for care and comfort can have a range of meanings and impacts on the child depending on the child's developmental status, the parent's expectations of the child (e.g., being a peer, a decision maker, or a confidante) and whether it was the child or parent who instigated the role reversal (Peris et al., 2008). Parentification research is sparse, but Peris et al. (2008) found that parents who seek such support lack sensitivity to the child's needs, and that youths who experience parentification from their mothers may be at more risk for both internalising and externalising behaviour problems.

The results of Studies 2 and 3 suggest that overparenting is not restricted to parents of high socioeconomic status or to highly educated parents. In fact, Study 2 suggested that parents on lower incomes or with less education actually showed

slightly more of a propensity to endorse overparenting beliefs. This result conflicts with some previous theorising (e.g., Levine, 2008) and with popular conceptions of overparenting or indulgent parenting.

Each stage of the development of the LPS required that many items be discarded. From the initial pool of 70 items derived from past writings on overparenting, only 38 (54%) received agreement by at least half the expert raters that they did indeed measure overparenting. Discarding another 15 of these (39%) was necessary in order to form a total scale with high reliability and an interpretable exploratory factor structure. Two of the obtained factors had to be set aside for a satisfactory model to be obtained in confirmatory factor analysis. While all scale development requires refinement of the items that compose it, these results suggest that popular concepts of overparenting involve a combination of separate concepts, which may not cohere well. While there may be many ways in which parenting can be excessively effortful, the dimensions of ensuring constant happiness and befriending appear to capture two important and coherent aspects.

The finding that fathers scored more highly on Guilt and Worry in Study 2, and on the total LPS and Befriending in Study 3 was interesting, but (as in many parenting studies), we had relatively few fathers in our studies, rendering the result difficult to interpret. The higher rate of survey completion by mothers suggests that the task was seen as more role-appropriate by mothers than fathers, perhaps resulting in a skew of paternal responses towards fathers who were more highly involved with their children. The finding that younger parents had higher scores on the LPS should be also be viewed with similar caution, given their small numbers relative to older parents.

Limitations.

We acknowledge some limitations of our methodology. Our first sample of parents was recruited from universities and independent schools, and our second sample was from parents who had their children enrolled in two independent schools. While both samples were large, the socio-economic status and education levels of the participants was likely to be higher than the general population, and the results may not generalise to other groups; in addition, we cannot be sure that our first and second sample of parents were uniformly similar in terms of education and income. The fact that our sample had more women than men may also have influenced the factor structure of the LPS. Further research on more varied populations is needed, to clarify the contribution of SES, gender, education and other demographic factors as they relate to overparenting beliefs or actions. Future research on the measure should also include further demographic information such as number of children in the family.

Clinical implications and future research.

The impact of overparenting on a child's wellbeing is not well understood, and the Locke Parenting Scale provides a new tool to examine whether extreme scores on Ensuring Constant Happiness and Befriending are associated with risks to wellbeing and optimal development for children. Research on these issues will also establish whether the LPS has strong predictive validity.

Appropriate parenting actions designed to protect or care for a child are likely to vary across ages, child characteristics and situations, and developing a measure that acknowledges all of these differences is challenging. Speaking to a child's teacher about a child being left out of a social group may be very appropriate in early schooling, but becomes less appropriate in upper high school, university, or workplace settings. Risks are especially likely from protective parenting actions that

undermine the child's confidence, or that repeatedly attempt to ensure that the child is insulated from anything that poses a problem or challenge. Identifying attitudes that underpin parenting that is insensitive to the child's developmental needs may offer a way for clinicians and researchers to detect potentially problematic parenting that crosses developmental and situational divides.

Conclusion.

This paper described the first steps in the development of an instrument to measure overparenting. The eight-item Locke Parenting Scale is an easily administered and scored assessment instrument that has a clear and stable factorial structure. However, replication of its structure and establishment of its predictive validity are needed. The current results offer promise that the LPS offers a tool that will advance our understanding of overparenting and whether it carries significant risks to the wellbeing of children or their parents.

Chapter 5. Overparenting and homework: The student's task, but everyone's responsibility

How this paper relates to the thesis.

Further research was required to understand what parenting actions were associated with the LPS scale. Given that overparenting and helicopter parenting had been associated with, and in some studies defined by, parental academic interference in university (e.g., Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2012), investigating the correlations between the LPS and parental involvement with, and beliefs about, their child's or adolescent's school work was seen as an appropriate study. Homework was seen as ideal, because students, teachers and parents, all had some involvement with the completion of it but the third party assistance and responsibility was assumed in the homework literature to be gradually reducing as the child becomes older. Thus we saw the investigation of the parents' expectations of and taking of responsibility by the child and other third parties (parents and teachers) as being an important area in which to being investigations of the effects of overparenting.

To undertake this research, the sample from Study 3 (N = 638) was augmented with parents recruited from an independent Year 8 – 12 girl's school, to result in a cohort that was larger (N = 866) and more evenly matched in terms of the child's gender.

We found that higher scores on the LPS correlated with higher responsibility taken by and expected to be taken by parents for their child's homework. The study has also shown a that parents high on overparenting also expect their child's or adolescent's teachers to be highly responsible for their homework. There was no associated reduction in expectations of child responsibility. However, with such a

high amount of responsibility expected of teachers and parents, it is likely that students may acquire a sense of academic entitlement – that others are responsible for their successful completion of academic work. Thus, this article may show a potential starting point of the phenomenon reported by university personnel (e.g., Somers & Settle, 2010a) on parental overinvolvement with their adult child's academic experience and high expectations of university lecturers to be similarly occupied with, and taking responsibility for, each individual student's academic success. It also again reflects the themes established in our definition of overparenting – that either high parental demands of a child achieving academic success or high responsiveness to perceived child needs, results in actions where parents' expectations of their own or teachers' support may reduce demands on the child to self manage their homework responsibilities.

Citation.

Locke, J. Y., Kavanagh, D. J., & Campbell, M. A. (to be submitted). Overparenting and homework: The student's task, but everyone's responsibility. *The Journal of Educational Psychology.*

<u>The percentage of authorship</u>

Judith Locke - 60%

David Kavanagh – 35%

Marilyn Campbell – 5%

Why this journal was chosen.

Because of the educational focus of this article, it was decided that this article needed to be placed in a journal primarily concerned with education, but also with a psychological focus. The *Journal of Educational Psychology* was chosen as being appropriate with a potential readership that encompassed educational professionals,

guidance counsellors, and psychologists. The journal has a very high impact in the field (3.289 in 2012).

This paper is in the process of being submitted.

Abstract

A high level of parental involvement is widely considered to be essential for optimal child and adolescent development and wellbeing, including academic success. However, recent consideration has been given to the idea that extremely high levels of parental involvement (often called overparenting or helicopter parenting) might not be beneficial. This study used a newly created overparenting measure, the Locke Parenting Scale (LPS), to investigate the association of overparenting and children's homework. Eight hundred and sixty-six parents completed online questionnaires about their parenting beliefs and intentions, and their attitudes associated with their child's homework. Parents with higher LPS scores tended to take more personal responsibility for the completion of their child's homework than did other parents, and ascribed greater responsibility for homework completion to their child's teacher. However, increased perceived responsibility by parents and teachers was not accompanied by a commensurate reduction in what they perceived was the child's responsibility. While believing students have a responsibility for their homework may promote the development of self-management of academic work, the greater responsibility expected of themselves as parents and of the teachers implies behaviours that could undermine independence.

Keywords: overparenting; children; homework; helicopter parenting

Introduction

Parenting beliefs, intentions and actions have powerful influences on children's wellbeing (Baumrind, 1965, 1991) and differing child-rearing practices have been shown to be associated with different wellbeing outcomes for children and adolescents (Buri et al., 1988; Milevski, Schlecter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007). Parenting approaches that provide higher levels of commitment and investment in children, result in higher levels of efficacy and self-esteem in their offspring (Baumrind, 1993). Much of the research on the positive outcomes of high levels of parental effort has focussed on parental involvement with their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) and parental effort has been positively linked to a range of positive academic outcomes in students, including high scholastic motivation, achievement, and time spent on homework (Keith & Keith, 1993).

Parental involvement in a child's school experience is considered an important factor in a child's or adolescent's academic success, with homework being a key aspect (Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2008). There has been much research undertaken on parental involvement with their offspring's homework (e.g., Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Moorman & Pomerantz, 2010; Steinberg et al., 1989), with high levels of parental involvement long considered to be beneficial to a child (e.g., Brooks, 1916). Research on parental involvement with a child's schooling experience and their homework has posited that high parental involvement influences positive student outcomes through modelling, reinforcement and instruction (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Because of assumed positive effects, teachers are encouraged to promote parental involvement in children and adolescents' schooling (Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2008). Teachers believe parents need to be more involved in homework,

and specific programs have been created to encourage parents to interact more with their children when they are completing homework (e.g., Epstein & Voorhis, 2001).

While high levels of parental effort in encouraging their offspring's academic success are considered important in areas such as schoolwork; recently, it has been suggested that there may be a point where parental assistance ceases to be beneficial to offspring. Overparenting, (also known as helicopter parenting), that is, a parent providing developmentally inappropriate assistance to their child, in an attempt to improve their academic and personal success (LeMoyne & Buchanen, 2011), has been found to be associated with poor adolescent and young adult wellbeing outcomes such as dependence on adults (Montgomery, 2010), a sense of entitlement (Segrin et al., 2012), and social anxiety (Spokas & Heimberg, 2009).

Much of the research on overparenting has been undertaken with young adults studying at university. In this research, overparenting has been defined as high levels of parental monitoring, advice, and communication with their university-aged child about their coursework (e.g., Segrin et al., 2012; 2013). Parental overinvolvement in a student's university life has been reported to include a parent choosing their subjects, editing or completing their university assignments, and insisting lecturers improve their child's grades, with one author recommending university faculties develop policies about how to deal with increasing extreme parental interference in their child's university education (Vinson, 2013). When parents are making decisions about their child's class choices or providing academic pressure, it has been found that the adult student has reduced school engagement (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012), increased depression, and decreased satisfaction with life (Schiffrin et al., 2013).

Although the idea of parents being over-involved in their child's or adolescent's schooling has been discussed in many recent opinion pieces about helicopter parenting in mainstream media (e.g., Lahey, 2013; Levine, 2012), it has not been specifically examined in empirical research. Some of the literature on homework has defined inappropriate parental involvement with a child's homework as being more to do with the type of support given by parents. This research has shown that parental involvement can be more or less effective depending on the motivation and the sense of responsibility taken by parents and students in the task of the student completing their homework (e.g., Katz, Kaplan, & Buzakashvily, 2011; Wingard & Forsberg, 2007). Parent help has been shown to be constructive or unconstructive, with constructive assistance posited to be assisting the child to master core principles of the tasks set, and providing opportunities for students to complete tasks on their own, while unconstructive assistance has been found to include actions such as telling the child the right answer, pressuring them through authoritarian methods, and taking over from the child when they are completing school tasks (Moorman & Pomerantz, 2010). Parental assistance with homework has been expected to reduce over a child's years at school and daily parental involvement in an adolescents' homework has been posited as developmentally inappropriate (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). However, inappropriate levels of parent effort with a child or adolescent's schooling remain relatively unexplored, with the majority of research typically focusing on the positive elements of parents being a part of their child or adolescent's schooling experience (e.g., Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Suggestions that parents can be over-involved in their child's or adolescent's schooling and homework have begun to emerge in the literature on overparenting. In a qualitative study of parenting professionals, actions by parents, including attempted

interference with school processes and consequences for homework, constantly contacting the school or teachers about their child's academic experience, and doing homework for their child, were considered to constitute overparenting (Locke, Campbell, & Kavanagh, 2012). The expert informants believed that this level of involvement resulted in high child emotionality and poor academic resilience in children and adolescents (Locke et al., 2012).

As overparenting is a relatively new concept, there are limited quantitative measures of a parents' tendency to be overdoing valued parenting actions such as monitoring or care. The Locke Parenting Scale (LPS) (Locke, Kavanagh, & Campbell, under review) is a scale that has been created from the types of beliefs associated with overparenting in the literature. This scale was created through expert opinions on a set of beliefs and behaviours they considered to reflect overparenting. After exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, the best performing items were selected to create an 8-item scale.

The purpose of the present study was to explicitly assess the relationship between overparenting as measured by the LPS and the amount of responsibility taken by parents for their child completing their homework in the primary and high school years. We expected that higher parental endorsement of statements associated with overparenting would be associated with greater parental expectations of parent and teacher responsibility for their child completing their homework.

Method

Participants.

Parents were recruited from three inner-city Brisbane Catholic/independent schools (a boys' Prep – Year 12 school, a girls' Prep – Year 12 school, and a girls'

Year 8 – 12 school). Parents from the first two schools (N = 638) had previously participated in research on the development of the LPS (Locke et al., submitted). Only one parent per family could be a participant.

Measures.

Overparenting. The Locke Parenting Scale (LPS; Locke et al., under review) was used to assess a parent's tendency to overparent. The LPS assesses beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that may contribute to overparenting and was designed to be used with parents of school-aged children. Its eight items form two factors: Ensuring Constant Happiness (five items, such as *I try hard to make sure my child is always happy*) and Befriending (three items, including *I would consider my child to be like a friend now*). Parents respond on a Likert scale, from 1, *Strongly Agree, to* 5, *Strongly Disagree*. Items are reverse scored so that high numbers indicate strong agreement. The LPS has high stability over a 16-19 month interval ($r = .77$; $p < .001$). Co-efficient alpha for the total LPS scale has been shown to be acceptable at .73 (Locke et al., under review).

Responsibility for homework. Parents rated the extent to which they believed they, their child, and their child's teachers had responsibility for their child or adolescent in completing their homework. The first set of these items asked about the ideal responsibility taken for homework completion: "…How much responsibility *should* [you/your child/your child's teacher]… have, to ensure [their/your child's] homework is completed?" The second set asked about current responsibility: "…How much responsibility [*do/does*] [you/your oldest child/your oldest child's teacher] take…" Responses were on a Likert scale from 1, *A lot*, to 6, *A little*. These scores were reversed to make high numbers indicate greater responsibility.

Demographic information. Parents were also asked about their gender, age, education, marital status, and number of children.

Procedure.

Approval was obtained from the Queensland University of Technology human ethics committee (# 1200000342). Parents were advised of the study in each school's electronic newsletter and also in direct emails to the parents from a member of the school leadership team. They were informed the research was on modern parenting trends and child wellbeing. Parents were given a hyperlink to the survey and invited to participate. When answering questions on their parenting beliefs and actions, they based their responses on their oldest child at the school.

Analysis.

Correlations between the LPS factors and homework variables were similar for the two factors of the scale. Accordingly, for simplicity of presentation, the presented results below focus on the total LPS score rather than the two factors. As we were unsure whether the relationship of LPS and homework variables was linear, and to avoid making assumptions, for the primary analyses, the LPS scores were split into quartiles (8-22; 23-25; 26-28; 29-40), with Pearson correlations with the continuous total LPS score also presented. Analyses for grade level divided the sample into five cohorts, selected on the basis of potentially differential demands on the student (Preparatory and initial primary years: Prep to Year 3; Upper primary: Years 4-6; Middle school: Years 7-9; a critical transitional year: Year 10; and the most senior years: 11-12). A combination from the Preparatory year to Year 3 was needed to achieve a minimum sample size for reliable analyses on this important youngest group. Discrepancies between ideal and actual responsibility were analysed by taking the difference between the two ratings for a given responsibility target. Participants

were not required to answer every question, so the total number of respondents differs across survey items.

Results

Participant characteristics.

Out of a potential pool of 2983 families at the schools, 1,136 (representing 38% of the families at the three schools) responded to the online survey on parenting, with 866 providing data for the current analyses. The return rates of online surveys are typically lower than for paper surveys and a return rate of 38% is higher than previous averages reported (previously shown to reflect an average of 33%; Nulty, 2008). Of those who reported their gender, 83% were female (N = 694) and 17% (N = 139) were male. The median age category was 41-50 (N = 573, 70%). Most participants said their highest level of education was a university degree: 41% (331) had an undergraduate degree, and 36% (293) had a postgraduate degree. Half of the parents had two children (407, 50%), with 15% (125) having one child, and 37% (299) having three or more. Most parents were married to or living with the other parent of the child (714, 88%). Income was not asked for, at the request of the schools; however, as a guide to the possible SES of the participants, annual fees at the three schools ranged from $3,000- $17,000 AUD per student, indicating that most came from middle or upper SES backgrounds; the gender of the student they were reporting on represented 48% boys (N = 400) and 52% girls (N = 433). Middle and high-school student cohorts were most strongly represented (Prep to 3: 68, 8%; 4-6: 116, 13%; 7-9: 402, 41%; 10: 118, 14%; 11-12: 208, 24%), reflecting the instruction to respond in relation to the oldest child.

As reported in Locke et al. (in submission), ANOVAs showed there was a non-significant trend for LPS scores to be lower after primary school ($F(4, 819) = 2.10$, p

= .080, η^2 = .010), with fathers (M = 25.82, SD = 4.88) reporting slightly higher scores than mothers (M = 24.89, SD = 4.67; $F(1, 819) = 7.53$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .009$). There was no Parental Gender by Grade interaction ($F(4, 819) = 1.22$, $p = .301$, $\eta^2 = .006$).

Correlations between homework responsibility of parents, teachers and children.

Results of the correlations are displayed in Table 5.1. As may be expected, ideal and current responsibility for homework intercorrelated highly for both parents (56% of the variance) and teachers (36%). However the ideal and current responsibility of the child or adolescent were only moderately related (10% of the variance)—presumably reflecting differential perceptions of the discrepancy between ideal and actual child commitment across respondents. Intercorrelations between perceived responsibility of teachers and parents accounted for 14-21% of the variance, with the correlations of parent or teacher responsibility and that of the student being modest (-.16 to .12). Relationships between perceived student and parental responsibility tended to be negative, albeit small in size. The only significant student/teacher relationship involved the current responsibility of each, which was modestly positive.

Table 5.1. *Correlations between perceived ideal and current homework responsibility for parents, teachers, and students across the total sample*

	Homework responsibility				
	Ideal parent	Current parent	Ideal teacher	Current teacher	Ideal child
	Pearson's r (Probability)				
Current parent	.75 (<.001)				
Ideal teacher	.46 (<.001)	.37 (<.001)			
Current teacher	.43 (<.001)	.38 (<.001)	.60 (<.001)		
Ideal child	-.09 (.009)	-.16 (<.001)	.03 (.352)	.02 (.511)	
Current child	-.02 (.537)	-.12 (.001)	.01 (.771)	.12 (.001)	.31 (<.001)

Table 5.2.

Effects of LPS quartile and grade cohort on perceived homework responsibility.

	LPS Quartile				Grade cohort				LPS Quartile x Grade Cohort			
	F	df	*p*	η^2	*F*	df	*p*	η^2	*F*	df	*p*	η^2
Homework responsibility[1]												
Ideal parent	19.52	3, 817	**< .001**	.067	8.35	4, 817	**< .001**	.039	1.03	12, 817	.420	.015
Current parent	20.69	3, 797	**< .001**	.072	23.72	4, 797	**< .001**	.106	0.56	12, 797	.879	.008
Ideal teacher	18.25	3, 816	**< .001**	.063	3.51	4, 816	**.007**	.017	1.91	12, 816	**.030**	.027
Current teacher	9.00	3, 790	**< .001**	.033	1.33	4, 790	.257	.007	0.52	12, 790	.901	.008
Ideal child	5.86	3, 817	**.001**	.021	15.21	4, 817	**< .001**	.069	1.54	12, 817	.104	.022
Current child	1.86	3, 799	.135	.007	7.13	4, 799	**< .001**	.034	1.05	12, 799	.401	.016

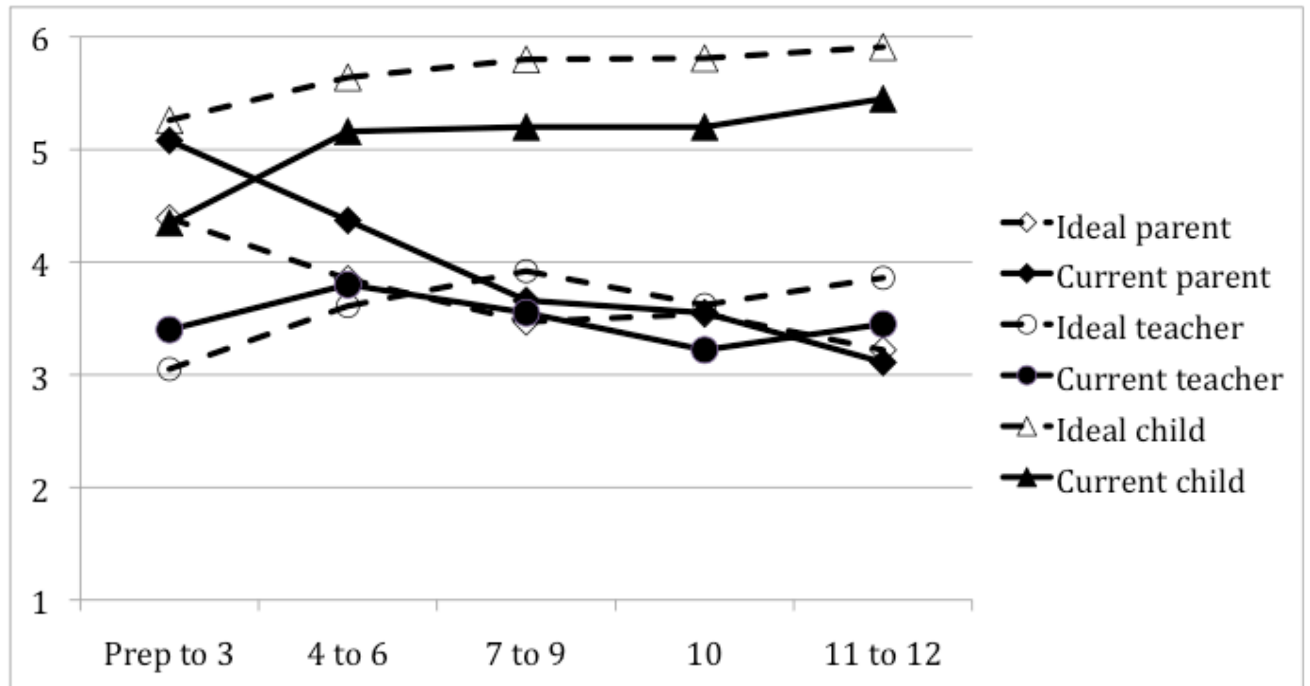

Figure 5. 1. Homework responsibility by grade

Perceived homework responsibility across year levels.

As Figure 5.1 and Table 5.2 show, there were significant rises in the ideal and actual responsibility of the child for homework over the grade cohorts, and significant reductions in the perceived responsibility of parents. The ideal responsibility of teachers was higher in middle and high school grades than in initial school grades, but there was no change in perceptions of the actual responsibility that was taken by teachers over the course of schooling.

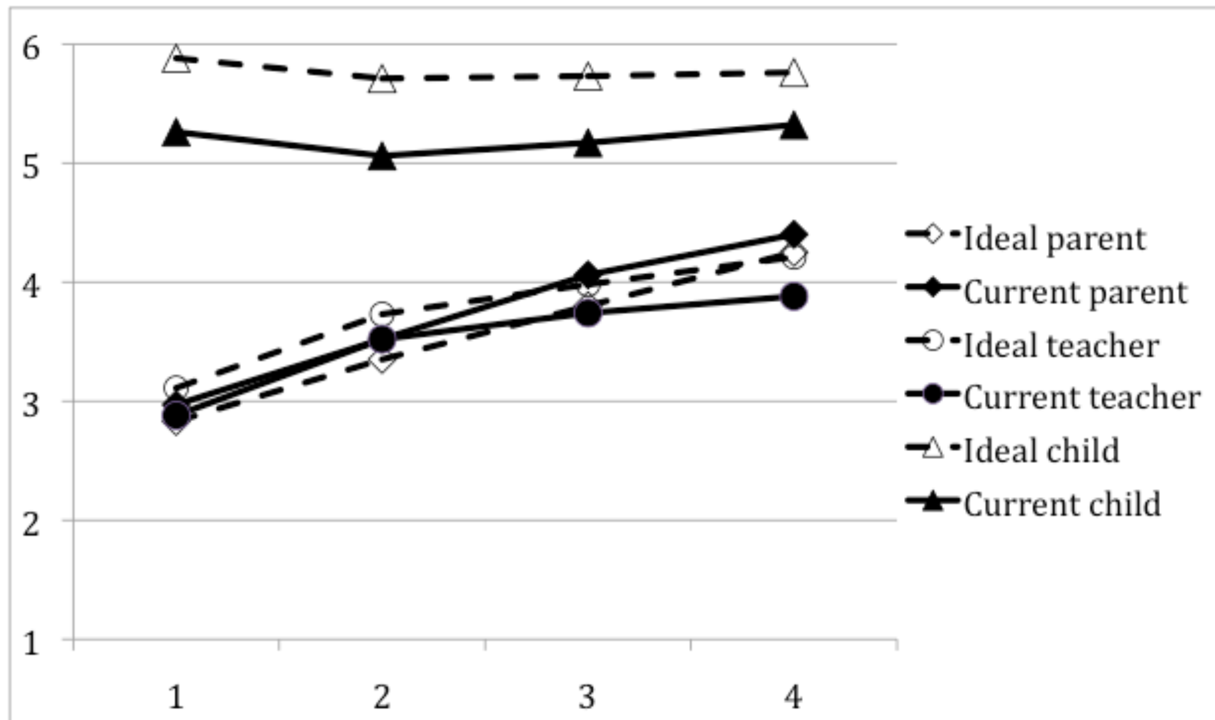

Figure 5.2. Homework responsibility by LPS quartile

Perceived homework responsibility across LPS quartiles.

The key focus of the study was on any differences in perceived responsibility for homework as LPS scores rose indicating overparenting. As Figure 5.2 and Table 5.2 show, there was a highly significant increase in the perceived responsibility of both parents and teachers with increasing LPS scores. Correlations between the total LPS scores and homework responsibility, reflecting the continuous linear trend, were small to medium in size (Ideal Parent: $r = .30$; Current Parent: $r = .32$; Ideal Teacher: $r = .24$; Current Teacher: $r = .21$, all p's < .001).

There was a slight tendency for the ideal child scores to differ across LPS quartiles, with the means suggesting greater responsibility in the lowest quartile. However, the Pearson correlation between LPS scores and ideal responsibility of the

child was not significant (r = -.05, p = .134). Nor was there any effect of LPS scores on the responsibility that the child was currently taking (Table 1; r = .03, p = .444).

Only the ideal teacher scores showed an interaction between LPS quartile and grade cohort (Table 1). This primarily reflected a large increase with rising LPS scores in the Prep to Year 3 cohort (on continuous scores, r = .54, p < .001), and the lack of an effect in Years 4-6 (on continuous scores, r = .13, p = .175).

Discrepancy between ideal and actual responsibility.

Parents saw the ideal responsibility of the child for homework as exceeding the responsibility they actually showed (Figures 5.1 and 5.2; $F(1, 799) = 147.40$, p < .001, $\eta^2 = .156$), with this difference being unmodified by either grade or LPS score. Teachers were perceived to fall short of the ideal more substantially in higher grade cohorts ($F(4, 789) = 6.06$, p < .001, $\eta^2 = .030$) and in higher LPS quartiles ($F(3, 789) = 2.64$, p = .048, $\eta^2 = .010$).

As Figure 1 shows, results for parents were more complex. Parents saw their actual responsibility as exceeding the ideal in preparatory and lower primary grades, but thereafter, they approximated each other (Effect for Grade cohort: $F(4, 797) = 5.56$, p < .001, $\eta^2 = .027$). An interaction between LPS category and grade ($F(12, 797) = 1.89$, p = .032, $\eta^2 = .028$) primarily reflected the fact that this effect was slightly more evident in Prep to Year 3 and in the highest LPS quartile.

Discussion

Consistent with previous work on the rate and appropriateness of homework assistance in older adolescents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001), our study found that parents' perceptions of average levels of child responsibility rose over increasing grade cohorts, while maintaining a similar discrepancy between ideal and actual responsibility. In contrast, perceived parental responsibility for homework fell,

especially for actual responsibility, so that a perception that their actual support exceeded the ideal disappeared in middle and high school. Interestingly, there was no significant change in perceptions of the responsibility parents thought teachers actually took at different grade levels, but their ideal responsibility for teachers was higher when the child was in middle or high school. As a result, teachers were seen as falling short in their actual responsibility in the higher grades.

Parents who endorsed beliefs associated with overparenting, as measured by their scores on the LPS, saw both themselves and the child's teacher as having greater ideal and actual responsibility for their child completing homework. In addition, high scores on the LPS were associated with a greater tendency to see teachers as falling short of their ideal responsibility for homework. This result provides some early validation of the LPS as a measure of beliefs associated with overparenting actions.

Some specific effects for higher LPS scores were seen in the youngest cohort: notably, an increased tendency for parents to see their actual homework responsibility as exceeding the ideal, and for ideal teacher responsibility to be higher. However, these results need to be viewed with caution, given the small sample size in that cohort, and replication is needed to have confidence in them.

In contrast to the results on parental and teacher responsibility, we did not find that parents' overparenting beliefs were associated with the level of ideal or actual responsibility they saw their child as taking for homework. This lack of compensatory reductions in responsibility (given the rise in the perceived responsibility of parents and teachers with higher LPS scores) may be positive, in that parents are building independent responsibility, even when they attempt to provide—and ensure that the school provides—a highly supportive environment. Alternatively the lack of a zero-sum effect for homework responsibility may reflect an over-investment in academic

achievement by high LPS scorers, which may result in excessive emotional responses reactions if the academic expectations are not fulfilled. Whether there is a relationship between LPS scores and the level and strength of academic expectations merits exploration.

Implications.

Overinvolvement with children's homework has previously been reported by parenting experts (Locke et al., 2012) and in university student samples (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012), and has been described in first-person descriptions of teaching experiences (e.g., Lahey, 2013). However, to our knowledge, this is the first study to report a quantitative relationship between overparenting beliefs and perceived homework responsibility in relation to school-aged children and adolescents.

There has been some research indicating that older children (aged 9 and 10) perceive high levels of parental help when completing homework as well intended, but as also implying their incompetence (Pomerantz & Eaton, 2000). Parental assistance with homework sometimes takes the form of a parent simply checking if the adolescent is right or wrong according to the parent's terms, which can be a cause of stress for both parties (Solomon, Warin, & Lewis, 2002). Research on university students' perception of their parents' tendencies to be highly involved in their school work, showed that students viewed this support as being controlling and undermining of them (Schiffrin et al., 2013). It has also been shown that a perception of assistance from loved ones in achieving goals related to academic or health and fitness pursuits, is associated with people spending less time and effort in pursuing those goals, and more procrastination (Fitzsimons & Finkel; 2009)".

The assistance and support offered by parents and teachers may not only impact on a child's sense of competence but also the academic pressure they experience. High levels of parental help also reduce student opportunities to learn personal responsibility for their academic achievements (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Academic entitlement, the sense that a student should get high grades and that university personnel are primarily responsible for their grades, has been found to be common in US universities (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2007). Many tertiary students with high entitlement scores also report high levels of parental pressure about grades, and it has been assumed that parenting factors contribute to a student developing a sense of academic entitlement (Greenburger et al., 2007). The high levels of parent involvement and interference previously reported at universities (e.g., Vinson, 2013), and the perception of a greater tendency for current students to see their lecturers as responsible for their grades (Greenberger et al., 2007) may at least partly be the result of the kind of parental beliefs and actions described in the current study, concerning academic work during the student's school years.

Schools use homework as a means of developing student responsibility for their academic work (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parents who expect their child's teachers or themselves to take responsibility for their child's homework, could adversely impact on schools' policies and practices aimed at developing this responsibility. Over-involved parents may also be seen by schools as an intrusive presence in ensuring their child achieves constant success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Locke et al., 2012).

Limitations.

The current sample, while large, was subject to a relatively low response rate, and the instructions to relate answers to the oldest child resulted in relative low

numbers in junior grades. The sample was restricted to three independent schools, where parents pay for their child's education and there were higher numbers of mothers responding. As a result of these factors, the representativeness of the sample to the general population, and thus, the generalisability of the results is potentially limited, and the results require replication in other settings, in large samples, with larger numbers of fathers, and with higher response rates. Associations between the LPS and perceived homework responsibility are subject to shared method variance, but the focus of this paper was on relationships between different parental perceptions, rather than on prediction of objectively assessed behaviour.

The current study combined the two factors of the LPS for simplicity of presentation. While this is defensible since the total score has high internal consistency, we could have presented the results in terms of the separate factors of the LPS. When these results were separated the results were similar but weaker, likely due to the higher reliability in the total score: Further research on the LPS is required to understand the factors and total scale better.

Conclusion.

The results in this paper suggest that a parent who endorses overparenting beliefs will take more responsibility for their child doing their homework, and will expect their child's teachers and school to as well. While there is no effect on the parents' perceptions of the ideal or actual responsibility of their child, the greater third-party involvement in ensuring homework completion means that parents displaying high levels of involvement are attempting to implement fall-back provisions to deal with the perceived discrepancy between the ideal and the actual homework responsibility of their child. In practice, this potentially undermines the child's exposure to negative consequences if they fail to apply self-management

strategies. If this is its result, a high degree of parental involvement may undermine actual self-management of academic work, and instead build a reliance on compensatory actions by others. Ironically, extreme efforts by parents to promote academic achievement may then undermine the development of independent and resilient performance.

Chapter 6: General Discussion

This chapter summarises the main findings from this research program, discusses the implications of these findings, considers the strengths and limitations of the studies, and makes recommendations for future research.

Overview and Synthesis of Key Findings in Relation to Research Questions

This thesis had the overarching aim of investigating the concept of overparenting, first by defining it, then creating an instrument to measure it, and then determining if overparenting is associated with parenting choices that are likely to have different outcomes for children. The questions guiding the research design were: (1) can we develop a conceptually coherent definition of overparenting, and identify examples of overparenting actions, based on expert opinion; (2) can an internally consistent measure of overparenting be created for parents of school-age children and (3) do parents who have high scores on this scale show different parenting beliefs and actions to do with children and adolescents, particularly relating to schoolwork?

In answering these questions we have presented three papers, with each paper achieving a goal proposed in this study of overparenting. The total sum of papers contributes significantly to a clearer understanding of overparenting.

Aim 1: Explore and understand overparenting.

Can we develop a conceptually coherent definition of overparenting, and identify examples of overparenting actions, based on expert opinion?

As described in the literature review, to date, as a relatively new term, the exact concept of *overparenting* (or *helicopter parenting*) has been somewhat imprecise (Schiffrin et al., 2013) with most research on overparenting of emerging adult offspring. Thus, our research focused on an open-ended question on overparenting

proposed to parenting experts working with a broad age range (including children, adolescents and young adults) to ensure we captured a definition of the term applied to offspring of all ages.

The answers to the question of parenting actions associated with overparenting were analysed as qualitative data with thematic analysis using Baumrind's parenting theory of responsiveness and demandingness. Through this procedure, it emerged that overparenting was defined by the experts as "very high levels of parenting responsiveness and high demands for child success, often resulting in parental behaviours that reduce demands on the child to undertake actions that would effect change in their life" (Locke et al., 2012, p. 259). We believe this definition is an important step in understanding overparenting better as a parenting approach potentially being applied to offspring of all ages. Some opinion about the extent of overparenting was also established in this study, with the majority of parenting professionals reporting experience with overparenting in their professional experience.

In this paper, we believe we have established a clearer understanding of overparenting, particularly overparenting children and adolescents in the school-age years, where parental influence need to be somewhat high, but should be in the process of being gradually withdrawn to develop child independence and ability (e.g., Slee et al., 2012). The results of this paper establish the importance of further investigation of overparenting. With this information and exigency of further knowledge, we then went on to create an appropriate measure for parents of children and adolescents.

Aim 2: Develop a measure of overparenting.

Can an internally consistent scale of overparenting be created for parents of school-age children?

Our next step was to create a measure that would enable further examination of the concept in parents of school aged children and adolescents. In the process described in Chapter 4, our statistical analyses produced an 8-item scale with two factors, Ensuring Constant Happiness (5 items) and Befriending (3 items). We believe we have achieved the goal of establishing an overparenting scale that is more universal than previous measures, which have relied on particular developmental stages and unique parenting actions only appropriate for discrete age groups of children, adolescents or young adults.

What is particularly noteworthy is that the factors in this measure seem to suggest that two parenting intentions, the desire to make a child happy through parental actions, and the desire to be friends with the child, may be driving developmentally inappropriate or extreme levels of parental assistance with their child or adolescent. The first factor is particularly interesting in that the items describe a goal of the parent, to make the child happy, that is primarily achieved by parental effort. Thus in this factor we see high responsiveness to a child's distress, high demands of the child being happy, but also low demands placed on the child as it is the parent who is undertaking the actions to make the child happy. This again reflects on the themes of overparenting uncovered in research question one.

Aim 3: Establish parenting actions associated with the overparenting scale (the LPS)

Do parents who agree with overparenting beliefs and intentions show different parenting choices to do with their child's homework?

When citing examples of overparenting in the first study, many parenting professionals mentioned the responsibility parents were taking for their child's homework and school work. Thus it became clear that the first study undertaken with the created LPS scale should be about parental involvement in schoolwork, particularly homework, an activity that is not limited to a particular age or developmental stage in the school years.

To investigate this further, parents completed the LPS and a series of questions on homework and the responsibilities currently taken and ideally taken by their child, their child's teacher and the parents themselves. Parents with high scores on the LPS, as compared to parents with low scores, tended to believe they were ideally more responsible and tended to take more responsibility for their child completing their homework. They also tended to assign more accountability to their child's teacher to be responsible for their child's homework. These increases were not accompanied by a corresponding reduction in child responsibility. The result of this study appeared to indicate that overparenting was associated with parents being more involved in homework and expecting their child's teachers to be more involved to the point of accepting some responsibility for students' completion of homework.

This is some evidence that overparenting intentions, measured through our created scale, are associated with an altered parenting approach at least in regard to homework. Overparenting appears to be accompanied by an increased emphasis on third party responsibility for homework, a task designed to promote self-management skills. This finding echoes many of the overparenting actions cited by parenting professionals in the first study, high responsiveness to a child's perceived needs by a parent (and potentially expected or undertaken by their teachers too), high demands of the child achieving school success in school activities undertaken at home, and

corresponding low demands potentially placed on the child because of increased adult assistance for a child or adolescent when completing their homework responsibilities.

Theoretical Contribution of the Research

Together these studies make a number of original contributions to existing knowledge about overparenting and provide preliminary evidence that challenges some common practices and perceptions about purported ideal parenting practices. We have better defined the term overparenting, have an idea of the frequency, suggested key factors that may be involved in it, and shown its potential impact on a child's or adolescent's academic experience.

This is the first known program of study to establish that the concept of overparenting, the idea that parents can be over-involved in parenting their offspring, may be applicable to some parents of children and adolescents. Previously, most of the work on overparenting has focused on, and thus primarily been defined by, high levels of parental involvement in their young adult children's lives, an age where traditionally parental involvement was considered unnecessary for their offspring's wellbeing. This study has shown that parenting experts believe that some children and adolescents are being subject to overparenting actions, and that this is becoming much more common with most parenting professionals having experience of the phenomenon. These specialists also believed that these parents' well intended, but inadvertently potentially harmful actions, may be impacting negatively on their children and adolescents and putting them at risk of poor resilience, a sense of entitlement, and anxiety. It seems in these findings, we can begin to question the idea that there is no limit in the levels of effort involved in an ideal parenting approach, and, in the current climate of parenting, we can begin to directly challenge

Baumrind's (1991) claim that 'exceptional' parenting effort produces exceptional children.

As first proposed by Aristotle, and recently revived by Grant and Schwartz, ideal levels of effort need to be somewhere between deficiencies and excesses, and there is likely to be a point where positive phenomena reach a height at which their effects turn negative (Grant and Schwartz, 2011). It is highly likely that the same could be said for parental involvement and effort for their children. Paradoxically, the extreme levels of effort and support offered to their children in an attempt to help their child succeed, may undermine their child's competence, confidence and chance of success (i.e. Schiffrin et al., 2103)

The second major finding is that in an era when many parents are more involved in the activity of parenting, our research has shown that this overinvolvement appears to extend to their child's and adolescent's academic experience. It appears that some parents are at great risk of assigning more responsibility to themselves and to their child's teachers for their child or adolescent doing their academic work and that this may result in the child expecting others to take responsibility for their academic work, even in an area such as homework, a task that has been traditionally been designed to teach student self-management. In this finding, we believe we have potentially discovered the starting point of academic entitlement, (beliefs that others are highly responsible for one's academic achievements), a phenomenon only so far researched in university students.

Our third significant finding is that there appear to be two factors highly related to overparenting actions: the parent's desire to make their offspring constantly happy (Ensuring Constant Happiness) and the parent's desire to be considered a friend of their child (Befriending). This first factor is interesting in that does not seem simply a

parental desire for their offspring to experience a pleasant mood, but all items are characterised by high levels of parent effort in keeping their child always happy and not facing difficult times. The second factor, Befriending, discusses the importance the parent places on the child approving of them, consoling them, and being their friend, and has almost an air of role reversal about it. It suggests that the parent is requiring from the child effort and care for the parent, which (for high scorers on both factors) may almost be seen as a reciprocation for the parental effort involved in the first factor. In the study of homework and overparenting, there is the chance that these two factors are highly motivating for a parent to want their child or adolescent to be highly assisted in their academic tasks. Perhaps the parent wants to ensure their offspring is not unduly challenged by their academic tasks and thus wants to step in and help their child, or the parent may want to use the opportunity of doing homework with the child or adolescent, as a means to connect with them. Further research is required to understand the motivations behind these factors and parenting actions.

Taken together, the findings of this thesis help to establish that overparenting is an important issue, which needs to be addressed as a potentially harmful parenting approach in a range of ages.

Practical Implications of the Research

The studies have implications for a range of domains in psychology and related disciplines. If—as some suggest—what we describe as overparenting has become the accepted ideal approach to parenting (Marina, 2013), potentially harmful parenting may be becoming endemic. If affluent, educated, and subsequently, influential parents are more likely to be parenting with high levels of effort (Levine, 2008), they may be inordinately influencing public opinion, particularly through

social media such as ‘mummy blogs’ and Facebook, widely broadcasting their views about ideal parenting. Messages about the definition, risks and potentially negative outcomes of overparenting need to be just as widely communicated to the general parenting population, through press releases and by offering education programs in communities where parents gather, such as schools.

It is not only parents who need to be informed of the findings; parenting professionals also need to be well versed in this parenting style. To date, much parenting research has focussed on parents delivering insufficient effort and, often, parenting programs aim to increase parents’ responsiveness to their offspring and their involvement in areas such as their offspring’s schooling. While this is an effective intervention for negligent or authoritarian parents, it may be somewhat harmful to encourage a parent at risk of overparenting to increase their involvement with their child. Established parenting programs need to ensure that their programs take existing parenting tendencies into account. There are likely to be some parents for whom the message of restraint in responsiveness or assistance to their offspring would be more apt.

The current studies also suggest that it is not only children and adolescents who are being impacted by this parenting approach. Results in both the first and final papers suggest that the teachers and schools are being impacted by highly involved parenting beliefs and actions. The current results are highly consistent with reports by schools that their staff are being contacted more by parents who demand that the school alter policies and procedures to keep their children happy and successful. Overparenting is likely to be impacting on schools’ capacity to provide students the opportunity to experience corrective maturational experiences and develop a sense of independence in their education and subsequent career.

Our research shows that parents who report overparenting have higher expectations of teachers taking on personal responsibility for students' homework, and that these expectations exceed what they see as teachers' current responses. In conjunction with perceptions in the first study about parental demands on teachers, this suggests that these parents may be putting excessive pressure on teachers to take on responsibilities that more appropriately lie with the student. It may be in schools' interests that their parent population becomes better educated about overparenting and its associated risks, in order to ensure that parental expectations of schools do not become overly inflated. In addition, as has already been suggested for university populations, schools may need to develop specific programs that counteract these parenting tendencies, such as clear homework policies that clarify appropriate and inappropriate levels of parent and teacher assistance that is provided to students of differing ages.

Future research

This thesis is a starting point in an important examination of a parenting issue that has recently been receiving greater attention—potentially impacting many students, teachers, and schools. However, there are many areas to be further researched to determine the veracity of our definition, the prevalence and the impacts of overparenting.

First, we need to explore other parenting populations to determine if this is a parenting approach only undertaken by parents who are educated or in socially and economically advantaged situations. While our second study found that parents who earned less money had slightly higher scores on the LPS, further research with a broader parenting population is needed to establish if this finding can be replicated. Higher response rates, particularly with larger numbers of fathers and parents of

younger school aged children would also assist in determining the reliability and replicability of our findings in the general parenting population, and if particular demographic variables, such as family size and SES are more associated with this type of parenting.

While the particular parenting actions we investigated associated with the LPS overparenting measure is an acceptable start, given the scope of the required program of research, there are many more actions undertaken by parents that need to be investigated to determine their correlation with overparenting. Aspects include parental involvement with the child's sporting issues, friendships, issues with peers, school consequences, choice of career, and degree of parental support for autonomy, to name a few.

While we have investigated the parents' views of homework responsibility, it would also be interesting to investigate what students and teachers see as ideal and current levels of responsibility taken for homework, and what they see as being the ideal and current responsibility taken by parents. Comparing and contrasting these responses with parents would add significantly to our findings.

A particularly important area for future research involves associated child wellbeing issues that may be associated with overparenting. Potential negative outcomes may include anxiety, depression, poor social skills, and narcissism of children being parented in this manner. In particular, overparenting actions could make the offspring more vulnerable to stressors that are experienced without parental support, or in situations where parental efforts do not ameliorate the external problem. This program of research may need to extend longitudinally over a number of years, as it may be that the impacts of overparenting on offspring may not be experienced at the time of the initial receipt of excessive parental assistance and support. It would be

valuable to look at parent wellbeing measures to determine if particular parent issues such as anxiety, depression, stress, or life satisfaction, are associated with a parent adopting a more intensive approach.

In addition, further investigation may add a greater understanding of the interaction of potential causes and effects of overparenting. Qualitative research with parenting experts featured in Chapter Three suggested that they believed that highly responsive parental actions towards children might lead to parenting actions that show either high demands or low demands on children, leading to poor outcomes in offspring. It is highly likely that if this proposed model is correct, then the presence of poor child outcomes – reduced resilience, a sense of entitlement, poor life skills, reduced sense of responsibility and high anxiety in children – actually encourages higher levels of parental involvement in assisting their child, which would set up a potential vicious cycle of overparenting actions leading to reduced child wellbeing leading to further overparenting actions and so on. Further research would assist to further understand the accuracy of this hypothesis and the interplay of other pre-existing child characteristics such as anxiety and ADHD, situational factors, such as child distress, with overparenting actions, and actual child competencies, such as independent skill or academic results.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of these studies was their the large sample size, and while the relatively low response rates require us to be cautious about their applicability to the school populations, that issue is likely to apply more to conclusions about the frequency of overparenting than to its constituents or correlates. As overparenting is an issue that has been often thought to reside in affluent and educated populations, we stand by our choice of recruiting from independent schools and university

populations; however, we are keen to see how our definition, our scale, and our findings are useful to and reflective of the general parenting population.

The research has also produced a measure of overparenting that is yielding strong early psychometric results, is easily administered to parents, and will be freely available to parenting professionals who need to access such a resource. The scale has the potential to diagnose overparenting in a child's younger years before problems potentially emerge, meaning that early intervention is more achievable.

As already noted, there were limitations with the recruitment of participants. In the first study, parenting professionals were recruited via an email asking them about their experience with highly effortful parenting, meaning the sample may have been biased toward professionals with greater overparenting experience or a bias towards over-identification of the phenomenon. As a result, the prevalence of overparenting may be over reported. In addition, the initial definition of overparenting provided to participants, while broad, may have biased them towards particular responses. The results may also have been affected by the specific environments in which the professionals worked and by the possibility that cited examples were from personal rather than professional experience. Due to the online nature of recruitment for the first two studies, we are unaware of response rates.

In the second and third study, the sample of parents who responded to a request for assistance in a parenting research project may be overly representative of those with a greater interest and involvement in parenting. The second and third studies also recruited participants from either university populations or independent schools, where the SES and education levels were likely to be higher than in the general population. As with many parenting studies, more women participated in the studies,

and the higher LPS scores of the fathers who did respond may have been indicative of a greater bias towards high involvement in that group.

Having established in our first study that parenting experts considered the construct of overparenting to be a valid term of which they had experience, our primary aim in our second study was to create a scale with high internal consistency. What emerged from the analyses was that the scale did have strong internal consistency. However, there appeared to be two factors (of potentially many factors) that contributed to the measurement of a parent's likelihood of undertaking overparenting actions. In confirmatory analysis, excellent fit was obtained for the two-factor structure.

Having two factors within the Locke Parenting Scale is not necessarily an indication that a single overarching construct of overparenting is invalid. Having many factors within one construct is not unusual in psychology, particularly in parenting research. The Parenting Scale (Arnold, O'Leary, Wolff, & Acker, 1993), a measure of the construct of dysfunctional discipline, is one such area where analysis has shown there are three different factors (Laxness, Verbosity, and Over reactivity) which can be used individually or together as a global index of dysfunctional parenting (Arnold et al., 1993). Indeed our final study has shown that the LPS scale hangs together well and we are somewhat justified in the primary emphasis being on the total score from this scale.

However, it is possible that our process of reducing the original 70-item scale in the first, second and third studies may have eliminated items and potential factors that are highly relevant to overparenting, but were not strongly related to the other items. Similarly, the two factors that were originally identified in the exploratory factor analyses but were omitted after confirmatory factor analyses may represent

important parenting characteristics that should be studied in their own right. Overparenting, and parenting in general, appears to be very complex. This thesis remains an initial exploration of essentially a potentially valid construct of overparenting, and, as an initial exploration, it cannot be assumed that this final factor structure and 8 item scale is indeed the definitive measure of overparenting. Further research is needed to confirm the validity, utility and structure of the final scale. While our scale offers a promising start to the measurement of overparenting, it may not capture all of its key components.

The third study's design also represents a limitation. As that study was cross-sectional, associations of parenting behaviours to the measure of overparenting cannot be interpreted as causal. For example, parents who scored highly on the LPS, were more involved with homework, and expected more of the teacher, may have been appropriately reacting to the academic difficulties of their child. While it is difficult to believe that the highest quartile of LPS scorers (representing 25% of the population who completed the research) all had children with learning difficulties, further research including objective measures of the child's academic skills, would be required to rule out this possible explanation. A further limitation of the methodology of the third study was that only parental self-reports were used, which capitalises on method variance, and may mean that the perceptions of actual responsibility taken by parents, children and teachers for homework may not be reflected in objective observations.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a broad intention to investigate the concept of overparenting—parenting that is excessive or developmentally inappropriate for the needs of their child or adolescent. An examination of the literature on the topic in

Chapter 1 identified some likely characteristics and outcomes of extreme parenting. However, while aspects of overparenting such as overinvolvement had an extensive research history, the existing research had significant limitations, and the study of the emerging broader overparenting concepts appeared still to be in its early stages. The concept of overparenting was somewhat ill-defined, with no well-established measure, and with most research being limited to adult or infant offspring. Chapter 2 detailed a coherent program of study to investigate the concept further.

The research resulted in three papers that have provided a clearer definition of overparenting, proposed a reliable, short scale to measure it, and provided evidence that high scores on this scale are associated with parenting actions that have the potential to undermine the independence of offspring. These findings present preliminary evidence that overparenting, as defined in this thesis, is a valid term, and that further investigation into the concept is warranted to ensure that parents' tireless efforts and great care in giving their child the best chance of future success and happiness, are not in vain.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval for Study 1 and 2

University Human Research Ethics Committee
HUMAN ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE
NHMRC Registered Committee Number EC00171

Date of Issue: 2/11/11 (supersedes all previously issued certificates)

Dear Miss Judith Locke

A UHREC should clearly communicate its decisions about a research proposal to the researcher and the final decision to approve or reject a proposal should be communicated to the researcher in writing. This Approval Certificate serves as your written notice that the proposal has met the requirements of the *National Statement on Research involving Human Participation* and has been approved on that basis. You are therefore authorised to commence activities as outlined in your proposal application, subject to any specific and standard conditions detailed in this document.

Within this Approval Certificate are:

* Project Details
* Participant Details
* Conditions of Approval (Specific and Standard)

Researchers should report to the UHREC, via the Research Ethics Coordinator, events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project, including, but not limited to:

(a) serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants; and
(b) proposed significant changes in the conduct, the participant profile or the risks of the proposed research.

Further information regarding your ongoing obligations regarding human based research can be found via the Research Ethics website http://www.research.qut.edu.au/ethics/ or by contacting the Research Ethics Coordinator on 07 3138 2091 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au

If any details within this Approval Certificate are incorrect please advise the Research Ethics Unit within 10 days of receipt of this certificate.

Project Details

Category of Approval: Human non-HREC

Approved From: 1/11/2011 **Approved Until:** 1/11/2014 (subject to annual reports)

Approval Number: 1100001398

Project Title: An exploratory investigation into intensive parenting and its associated child outcomes

Experiment Summary: Investigate modern parenting practices and examine whether some parenting actions are more effortful in parental warmth and managing the child's environment.

Investigator Details

Chief Investigator: Miss Judith Locke

Other Staff/Students:

Investigator Name	Type	Role
A/Prof Marilyn Campbell	Internal	Supervisor

Participant Details

Participants:
Approximately 500

Location/s of the Work:
QUT

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University Human Research Ethics Committee

HUMAN ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

NHMRC Registered Committee Number EC00171

Date of Issue: 2/11/11 (supersedes all previously issued certificates)

Conditions of Approval

Specific Conditions of Approval:
No special conditions placed on approval by the UHREC. Standard conditions apply.

Standard Conditions of Approval:
The University's standard conditions of approval require the research team to:

1. Conduct the project in accordance with University policy, NHMRC / AVCC guidelines and regulations, and the provisions of any relevant State / Territory or Commonwealth regulations or legislation;

2. Respond to the requests and instructions of the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC);

3. Advise the Research Ethics Coordinator immediately if any complaints are made, or expressions of concern are raised, in relation to the project;

4. Suspend or modify the project if the risks to participants are found to be disproportionate to the benefits, and immediately advise the Research Ethics Coordinator of this action;

5. Stop any involvement of any participant if continuation of the research may be harmful to that person, and immediately advise the Research Ethics Coordinator of this action;

6. Advise the Research Ethics Coordinator of any unforeseen development or events that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project;

7. Report on the progress of the approved project at least annually, or at intervals determined by the Committee;

8. (Where the research is publicly or privately funded) publish the results of the project is such a way to permit scrutiny and contribute to public knowledge; and

9. Ensure that the results of the research are made available to the participants.

Modifying your Ethical Clearance:
Requests for variations must be made via submission of a Request for Variation to Existing Clearance Form (http://www.research.qut.edu.au/ethics/forms/hum/var/var.jsp) to the Research Ethics Coordinator. Minor changes will be assessed on a case by case basis.

It generally takes 7-14 days to process and notify the Chief Investigator of the outcome of a request for a variation.

Major changes, depending upon the nature of your request, may require submission of a new application.

Audits:
All active ethical clearances are subject to random audit by the UHREC, which will include the review of the signed consent forms for participants, whether any modifications / variations to the project have been approved, and the data storage arrangements.

End of Document

Appendix B: Ethics Approval for Study 3

QUT

University Human Research Ethics Committee

HUMAN ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

NHMRC Registered Committee Number EC00171

Date of Issue: 31/7/12 (supersedes all previously issued certificates)

Dear Miss Judith Locke

A UHREC should clearly communicate its decisions about a research proposal to the researcher and the final decision to approve or reject a proposal should be communicated to the researcher in writing. This Approval Certificate serves as your written notice that the proposal has met the requirements of the *National Statement on Research involving Human Participation* and has been approved on that basis. You are therefore authorised to commence activities as outlined in your proposal application, subject to any specific and standard conditions detailed in this document.

Within this Approval Certificate are:

* Project Details
* Participant Details
* Conditions of Approval (Specific and Standard)

Researchers should report to the UHREC, via the Research Ethics Coordinator, events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project, including, but not limited to:

(a) serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants; and
(b) proposed significant changes in the conduct, the participant profile or the risks of the proposed research.

Further information regarding your ongoing obligations regarding human based research can be found via the Research Ethics website http://www.research.qut.edu.au/ethics/ or by contacting the Research Ethics Coordinator on 07 3138 2091 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au

If any details within this Approval Certificate are incorrect please advise the Research Ethics Unit within 10 days of receipt of this certificate.

Project Details

Category of Approval: Human non-HREC

Approved From: 30/07/2012 **Approved Until:** 30/07/2015 (subject to annual reports)

Approval Number: 1200000342

Project Title: An exploratory investigation into intensive parenting and its associated child outcomes

Experiment Summary: Investigate modern parenting practices and examine whether some parenting actions are more effortful with regards to parental warmth and parents managing their child's environment.

Investigator Details

Chief Investigator: Miss Judith Locke

Other Staff/Students:

Investigator Name	Type	Role
A/Prof Marilyn Campbell	Internal	Supervisor
Prof David Kavanagh	Internal	Supervisor

Participant Details

Participants:
Approximately 2,750 students

Location/s of the Work:
QUT, Brisbane Boys College and Somerville House

RM Report No. E801 Version 4

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University Human Research Ethics Committee

HUMAN ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

NHMRC Registered Committee Number EC00171

Date of Issue: 31/7/12 (supersedes all previously issued certificates)

Conditions of Approval

Specific Conditions of Approval:
No special conditions placed on approval by the UHREC. Standard conditions apply.

Standard Conditions of Approval:
The University's standard conditions of approval require the research team to:

1. Conduct the project in accordance with University policy, NHMRC / AVCC guidelines and regulations, and the provisions of any relevant State / Territory or Commonwealth regulations or legislation;

2. Respond to the requests and instructions of the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC);

3. Advise the Research Ethics Coordinator immediately if any complaints are made, or expressions of concern are raised, in relation to the project;

4. Suspend or modify the project if the risks to participants are found to be disproportionate to the benefits, and immediately advise the Research Ethics Coordinator of this action;

5. Stop any involvement of any participant if continuation of the research may be harmful to that person, and immediately advise the Research Ethics Coordinator of this action;

6. Advise the Research Ethics Coordinator of any unforeseen development or events that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project;

7. Report on the progress of the approved project at least annually, or at intervals determined by the Committee;

8. (Where the research is publicly or privately funded) publish the results of the project is such a way to permit scrutiny and contribute to public knowledge; and

9. Ensure that the results of the research are made available to the participants.

Modifying your Ethical Clearance:
Requests for variations must be made via submission of a Request for Variation to Existing Clearance Form (http://www.research.qut.edu.au/ethics/forms/hum/var/var.jsp) to the Research Ethics Coordinator. Minor changes will be assessed on a case by case basis.

It generally takes 7-14 days to process and notify the Chief Investigator of the outcome of a request for a variation.

Major changes, depending upon the nature of your request, may require submission of a new application.

Audits:
All active ethical clearances are subject to random audit by the UHREC, which will include the review of the signed consent forms for participants, whether any modifications / variations to the project have been approved, and the data storage arrangements.

End of Document

Appendix C: Study 1 Questions used for Paper 1 and 2

Thank you very much for your interest in this survey.

My name is Judith Locke, and I am a clinical psychologist currently undertaking a PhD on modern parenting at QUT under the supervision of Professor David Kavanagh, A/Professor Marilyn Campbell, and Mr Joe Coyne.

I am approaching educators, counsellors and health practitioners to gain insight into current parenting practices.

The purpose of my study is to establish new parenting measures that may detect important characteristics of modern parenting.

The screens that follow have some draft items for the measures, and will ask you for some brief information about yourself. Your responses will be treated confidentially, and no reports will include any information that would identify you or your school or workplace. The questionnaire will take around 20 minutes.

Your participation in this project is, of course, voluntary, and you can stop at any time.

We really appreciate you taking part—your participation will help us ensure that the measure is informed by direct observations of a wide variety of parenting practices.

If have any questions or comments about the project, please contact
Judith Locke, School of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Health QUT
judith.locke@qut.edu.au

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, please contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on 07 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

You can print this page to retain a permanent record.

I agree to take part in this project
Yes
No

1. It can safely be said that most parents do the best job they know how to, and most parents work hard to give their children the best start in life.

Recently, commentators have suggested certain groups of parents may 'overparent'. There has been some suggestion that this 'overparenting' involves overusing valued parenting practices like monitoring, protection or caring for their children. It has also been proposed that parents who 'overparent' don't alter their parenting style as their children develop, to give them more independence, or expect more from them. There has been speculation that this 'overparenting' might be negatively impacting on

children.

Have you seen many instances of these types of overparenting?

Yes, many
Yes, some
No (please exit the survey)

2. If you answered yes, could you give 1 or 2 brief, concrete examples? (Please keep these anonymous).

(Textbox)

3. Some parenting beliefs and parenting scenarios follow. These items will be used with parents of school-age children.

Parents respond to each belief or action by selecting "Strongly Agree, Agree more than disagree, Neutral/Unsure, Disagree more than agree, or Strongly Disagree".

Some items may be sensitive to overparenting when the person strongly AGREES with it. An example may be: "I want to solve all of my child's problems.

Others may be sensitive to over parenting when a person strongly DISAGREES with it. An example may be: "My child should solve their problems."

Please tell me whether you think each item identifies overparenting.

- If you think strong AGREEMENT with the item would indicate overparenting, rate it "+1".

- If you think strong DISAGREEMENT with the item would indicate overparenting, rate it "-1".

- If you think it is irrelevant to overparenting rate it "0".

+1 Strong agreement suggests overparenting
0 Responses to this item are irrelevant to overparenting
- 1 Strong disagreement suggests overparenting

I have a good relationship with my child.
I am confident that my child will cope with everything that comes their way.
I want my child to make decisions to reach their goals, not mine.
I am confident that my parenting actions have all been good enough.
My child will be able to do whatever they want if they believe in themself.
My child’s success in life will be a reflection of my parenting.
The world is a safe place.
It is important to me that my child has every opportunity other children have.
I hope my child ends up being a close friend too.
It is important my child knows they are special and not like anyone else.
We have rules in our house that my child has to follow.
I am extremely loving towards my child.

I believe my child will be able to deal with any friendship difficulties that come up, including bullying.
If my child does something I disapprove of, the warmth of our relationship remains the same.
I worry what others think of me as a parent.
The way a child turns out in life is a lot to do with luck.
If my child performed below average in a test or a sporting activity, it would make me distressed.
I want my child to obey authority figures.
I reflect often on my parenting decisions to judge if they were appropriate.
Some of the opportunities I have provided for my child have been more expensive than I could really afford.
My child gives me comfort when I am sad.
I try hard to make sure my child is always happy.
I am occasionally insensitive to my child's needs.
I offer to help my child with schoolwork and assignments, before they ask me.
I have used guilt as a technique to change my child's behaviour.
I stop thinking about any of my parenting mistakes quickly.
My child's achievements in many areas will be limited by their natural skill.
I am as proud of my child's accomplishments as I am of my own.
I have faith that the other students will treat my child well.
I often compare my child's life with what other parents are providing for their children.
I would consider my child to be like a friend now.
If my child likes him/herself, others will like them too.
I know what my child is doing most of the time.
I let my child sort out friendship issues themselves.
I hope my child would become upset if I was angry with them.
I feel guilty about some of the parenting decisions I have made.
I believe my child should be very successful in life.
I am comfortable sitting back and watching how my child turns out in life.
I am confident that teachers' actions are in my child's best interest.
I feel no guilt when I see my child has fewer or less expensive possessions than other children.
I like my child to comfort me when I am feeling bad.
Self-confidence is the most important skill my child could develop.
My child has a large say in what goes on in our house.
I secretly check up on my child in their friendship groups (e.g. listening in on their conversations or looking on their social media pages).
I have manipulated my warmth with my child to make them change their behaviour.
I know I am doing a good job as a parent when my child likes me.
If my child is not successful in life, I will take on some of the blame.
There is much to do as a parent to ensure your child achieves their potential.
Being a parent has made me worry more.
My child is typically unaware of my sad moods.
I put a lot of effort into praising my child to help them feel good.
I feel fine if my child doesn't like me when I enforce an unpopular rule.
I need to stand up for my child with others.
My own parent or parents are great role models in good parenting.

There are mistakes I have made with my child that I will probably always feel guilty about.
There are certain careers I want my child to end up in.
I am constantly vigilant to possible dangers in my child's life.
It makes me happy to think of my child becoming an independent adult and not needing my help.
People criticising my child will affect my child's self-esteem.
I spend enough time talking to my child.
If my child is having a difficult time I do everything in my power to make things better for them.
I try to be a better parent than my parent or parents were.
I like to think my child will blend into the crowd in the future.
I know I have done a good job as a parent if my child likes me.
There will be a time when my child no longer needs my assistance.
I would make a good parental role model.
I want others to know how special my child is.
I wish I had experienced a better childhood.
If a parent is in a child's corner 100% of the time, a child will be more likely to be successful.
My child is no better and no worse than other children.
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Now, only three anonymous questions about you.

What is your role in your current position?
Part of the school management team
School counsellor or psychologist
Mental health professional outside of schools
Teacher (with or without added responsibility)
Other (please specify)

How many years have you worked with children and/or parents?
Under 5 years
6 - 10 years
11 - 15 years
16 - 20 years
21 - 25 years
26 years or more

Are you a parent?
Yes
No

Appendix D: Study 2 Questions used for Paper 2

This project is being undertaken as part of PhD study for Judith Locke. The following is a detailed explanation of the important facets of this study. It is important we include this so you are aware of what the measure is for and what your involvement will entail.

The purpose of this project is to establish new parenting measures that acknowledge modern parents beliefs and actions. There is evidence that parenting has changed significantly since many of the measures of parenting were first created.

You are invited to participate in this project because you are a parent with at least one child between the ages of 5 and 18 years old.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation will involve completing three measures and some brief information about yourself, which will not identify you.

The first measure is a list of statements including some about your beliefs about parenting, your children, and things around your children, such as their friends. The answers to these statements range from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree". Statements for you to agree with or disagree with include "The world is a safe place" and "I have a good relationship with my child".

The second measure includes 6 fictional parenting situations and certain fictional parents' responses. Accompanying the scenarios is a list of the actions the fictional parents have undertaken. You will be asked to indicate how likely you would be to undertake a similar action in such as situation with responses ranging from "I'm sure I would" to "I'm sure I wouldn't".

The final measure is a 17 question about your feelings about parenting. You will be given a range of statements and be asked to indicate your level of agreement with the statements.

You will also be asked basic demographic information – your age, the age of your children, and your education.

We would appreciate it if you answered these questions truthfully. Should we get responses parents think are 'ideal' parenting responses that don't reflect their true thoughts and feelings, then our measure will not reflect real parents' thoughts. Another advantage of answering truthfully will be that the questions will take you less time if you answer with your first thought.

If you agree to participate you do not have to complete any question(s) that you are uncomfortable answering. We expect the questionnaire will take no longer than 30 minutes. As we are developing a questionnaire, we typically ask a large number of questions at first to determine the most useful questions for our future measure.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from the project at any time without comment or penalty. Your decision to participate, or not participate, will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT or with the school your child attends.

EXPECTED BENEFITS
It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you. However, it will benefit our understanding of modern parenting approaches and help us work out what is currently typical in parenting and which parents may need further assistance in the future. If we are able to create parenting measures that truly represent real parents, we will do this better, and you would be helping us to do this.

To recognise your contribution, should you choose to participate, the research team is offering a donation to Kids Helpline for every response. We hope to raise funds of up to $1000 for this important charity.

RISKS
There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

We do not expect anyone to become distressed as a result of completing this survey these questionnaires; however, in case you do, we would like to detail some support you could seek.

If you are worried or distressed about yourself, your parenting or your child, there are many ways to receive support. The best way is to speak to your regular GP and alert them to your concerns. They will typically refer you to a psychologist who can provide counselling. There is Medicare support you can receive if your issues are considered to be impacting on your life. Another way to find a psychologist is to contact the APS Find a Psychologist service at www.psychologist.org or phone 1800 333 497.

In addition QUT has a Counselling centre where you can receive free treatment should your participation in this survey affect you. You can phone them on 07 3138 0999.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY
All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially. The names of individual persons are not required in any of the responses. We ask for your mobile phone number if you would consider taking the survey again to help us check our questionnaires are accurate; however, this number will only be used to text you 2 reminders in 4 weeks. You will not ever receive a phone call from us about any other matter and we will take those details out of the data as soon as we have texted you.

Please note that non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used as comparative data in future projects.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
Submitting the completed online questionnaire is accepted as an indication of your consent to participate in this project.

QUESTIONS / FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT
If have any questions or require any further information about the project please contact one of the research team members below.

Judith Locke
School of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Health QUT
0421 165 25
jy.locke@qut.edu.au

Associate Professor Marilyn Campbell
School of Learning and Professional Studies, Faculty of Education QUT
07 3138 3806
ma.campbell@qut.edu.au

CONCERNS / COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT
QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on 07 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

As this is an electronic survey – you may forget the details above. Should you get to the end of the survey and require this assistance, simply clicking on the hyperlink again will take you to this page where you can note the details above. You could also print this page.

THANK YOU FOR HELPING WITH THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

Please look at the following statements about beliefs about parenting, children and modern times. Please indicate next to each statement, how much you agree or disagree with it. If you have more than one child, please answer the statements for your youngest child

Column choices
Strongly agree
Agree more than disagree
Neutral/unsure
Disagree more than agree
Strongly disagree

I have a good relationship with my child.
I am confident that my child will cope with everything that comes their way.
I want my child to make decisions to reach their goals, not mine.
I am confident that my parenting actions have all been good enough.
My child will be able to do whatever they want if they believe in themself.
My child's success in life will be a reflection of my parenting.
The world is a safe place.
It is important to me that my child has every opportunity other children have.

I hope my child ends up being a close friend too.
It is important my child knows they are special and not like anyone else.
We have rules in our house that my child has to follow.
I am extremely loving towards my child.
I believe my child will be able to deal with any friendship difficulties that come up, including bullying.
If my child does something I disapprove of, the warmth of our relationship remains the same.
I worry what others think of me as a parent.
The way a child turns out in life is a lot to do with luck.
If my child performed below average in a test or a sporting activity, it would make me distressed.
I want my child to obey authority figures.
I reflect often on my parenting decisions to judge if they were appropriate.
Some of the opportunities I have provided for my child have been more expensive than I could really afford.
My child gives me comfort when I am sad.
I try hard to make sure my child is always happy.
I am occasionally insensitive to my child's needs.
I offer to help my child with schoolwork and assignments, before they ask me.
I have used guilt as a technique to change my child's behaviour.
I stop thinking about any of my parenting mistakes quickly.
My child's achievements in many areas will be limited by their natural skill.
I am as proud of my child's accomplishments as I am of my own.
I have faith that the other students will treat my child well.
I often compare my child's life with what other parents are providing for their children.
I would consider my child to be like a friend now.
If my child likes him/herself, others will like them too.
I know what my child is doing most of the time.
I let my child sort out friendship issues themselves.
I hope my child would become upset if I was angry with them.
I feel guilty about some of the parenting decisions I have made.
I believe my child should be very successful in life.
I am comfortable sitting back and watching how my child turns out in life.
I am confident that teachers' actions are in my child's best interest.
I feel no guilt when I see my child has fewer or less expensive possessions than other children.
I like my child to comfort me when I am feeling bad.
Self-confidence is the most important skill my child could develop.
My child has a large say in what goes on in our house.
I secretly check up on my child in their friendship groups (e.g. listening in on their conversations or looking on their social media pages).
I have manipulated my warmth with my child to make them change their behaviour.
I know I am doing a good job as a parent when my child likes me.
If my child is not successful in life, I will take on some of the blame.
There is much to do as a parent to ensure your child achieves their potential.
Being a parent has made me worry more.
My child is typically unaware of my sad moods.
I put a lot of effort into praising my child to help them feel good.

I feel fine if my child doesn't like me when I enforce an unpopular rule.
I need to stand up for my child with others.
My own parent or parents are great role models in good parenting.
There are mistakes I have made with my child that I will probably always feel guilty about.
There are certain careers I want my child to end up in.
I am constantly vigilant to possible dangers in my child's life.
It makes me happy to think of my child becoming an independent adult and not needing my help.
People criticising my child will affect my child's self-esteem.
I spend enough time talking to my child.
If my child is having a difficult time I do everything in my power to make things better for them.
I try to be a better parent than my parent or parents were.
I like to think my child will blend into the crowd in the future.
I know I have done a good job as a parent if my child likes me.
There will be a time when my child no longer needs my assistance.
I would make a good parental role model.
I want others to know how special my child is.
I wish I had experienced a better childhood.
If a parent is in a child's corner 100% of the time, a child will be more likely to be successful.
My child is no better and no worse than other children.
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What is the age of your youngest child?
Under 5
5 - 6
7 - 8
9 - 10
11 - 12
13 - 14
15 - 16
17 - 18
19 or over

What gender is your youngest child?
Male
Female

What age category do you fall into?
Under 25
26 - 30
31 -35
36 - 40
41 - 45
46 - 50
51 - 55
56 - 60
Over 61

Your gender?
Male
Female

Your highest level of education?
Less than Year 10
Year 10/11
Year 12
Trade/apprenticeship
TAFE/college certificate
Undergraduate university degree (e.g. Bachelors degree)
Postgraduate degree (e.g. Masters Degree)

What is your total household income?
Under $60,000
$60,000 - $80,000
$80,001 - $100,000
$100,001 - $120,000
$120,001 - $150,000
$150,001 - $200,000
$200,001 and over

Appendix E: Study 3 Questions used for Paper 2 and 3

Thank you very much for your interest in this survey.

My name is Judith Locke, and I am an experienced clinical psychologist currently undertaking a PhD on modern parenting at QUT under the supervision of Professor David Kavanagh, and Professor Marilyn Campbell.

The purpose of my study is to establish what parenting characteristics and approaches produce the best outcomes for children and teenagers.

You have been invited to participate in this project because you are a parent of a child or children at (X School). (X School) has decided to be involved in this research.

Participation will involve completing anonymous survey. The screens that follow have some questions, and will ask you for some brief information about yourself, your child and your parenting beliefs. Questions will involve Likert scale answers (a strongly agree – strongly disagree style scale) on statement such as “I try hard to make sure my child is always happy” and “I feel fine if my child doesn’t like me when I enforce an unpopular rule”.

The questionnaire will take around 15 minutes.

Your participation in this project is, of course, voluntary, and you can stop at any time.

Your participation is not likely to be of direct benefit to you but I really appreciate you taking part—many parenting projects concentrate on parents who have obvious difficulties and this project will be able to look at what works well in parenting with parents who are typically very committed to parenting. (X school) will also be given general feedback to allow them to plan further parenting assistance and education sessions as warranted and requested by parents.

I do not anticipate any distress as a result of participating in this project. If you are worried or distressed about yourself, your parenting, or your child, there are many ways to receive support. The best way is to speak to your regular GP and alert them to your concerns. They will typically refer you to a psychologist who can provide counselling. There is Medicare support you can receive if your issues are considered to be impacting on your life. Another way to find a psychologist is to contact the APS Find a Psychologist service at www.psychologist.org or phone 1800 333 497. Other sources of support are Lifeline or Parents’ Helpline (13 11 14).

In addition QUT provides for limited free counselling for research participants of QUT projects who may experience discomfort or distress as a result of their participation in the research. Should you wish to access this service, please contact the Clinic Receptionist of the QUT Psychology Clinic on 07 3138 0999. Please indicate to the receptionist that you are a research participant.

Your responses will be treated confidentially, and no reports will include any information that would identify you or your child. Parental data will be matched to student data through the use of a student number; the researchers do not know the name associated with your child's student number. The school will not have any access to data except in de-identified aggregate form.

Any data collected as part of this project will be stored securely as per QUT's Management of research data policy.

Please note that non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used as comparative data in future projects.

If have any questions or comments about the project, please contact:

Judith Locke, School of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Health QUT
judith.locke@qut.edu.au

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at QUT (approval number 1200000342). QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on 07 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Thank you for helping with this research project. You can print this page to retain a permanent record.

I agree to take part in this project
Yes
No

Could you please write the student number of your oldest child at X school? (If they are twins, please designate one child as the oldest for the rest of the questionnaire.)
(Textbox)

This child's year level?
Prep
Year 1
Year 2
Year 3
Year 4
Year 5
Year 6
Year 7
Year 8
Year 9
Year 10
Year 11
Year 12

For each statement below, tick the number that best describes your beliefs about parenting your oldest child at X school. There are no right or wrong answers. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each statement.

Column choices
Strongly agree
Agree more than disagree
Neutral/unsure
Disagree more than agree
Strongly disagree

I have a good relationship with my child.
My child's success in life will be a reflection of my parenting.
A parent should be in a child's corner 100% of the time.
It is important my child knows they are special and not like anyone else.
I worry what others think of me as a parent.
If my child performed below average in a test or a sporting activity, it would make me distressed.
Some of the opportunities I have provided for my child have been more expensive than I could really afford.
I try hard to make sure my child is always happy.
I offer to help my child with schoolwork and assignments, before they ask me.
I have used guilt as a technique to change my child's behaviour.
I often compare my child's life with what other parents are providing for their children.
I would consider my child to be like a friend now.
I believe my child should be very successful in life.
I like my child to comfort me when I am feeling bad.
I have manipulated my warmth with my child to make them change their behaviour.
If my child is not successful in life, I will take on some of the blame.
I put a lot of effort into praising my child to help them feel good.
I need to stand up for my child with others.
There are certain careers I want my child to end up in.
I am constantly vigilant to possible dangers in my child's life.
People criticising my child will affect my child's self-esteem.
If my child is having a difficult time I do everything in my power to make things better for them.
I know I have done a good job as a parent if my child likes me.
I want others to know how special my child is.
If a parent is in a child's corner 100% of the time, a child will be more likely to be successful.
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For the next three questions, think of the IDEAL situation regarding homework.

How much responsibility should your oldest child at school have for completion of their homework?
1 A lot
2
3
4
5
6 A little

How much responsibility should the teacher/s of your oldest child at school have for completion of homework?
1 A lot
2
3
4
5
6 A little

How much responsibility should you have for completion of homework by your oldest child at school?
1 A lot
2
3
4
5
6 A little

Now, please rate the CURRENT situation.

How much responsibility does your oldest child at school take for completion of homework?
1 A lot
2
3
4
5
6 A little

How much responsibility does the teacher/s of your oldest child at school take for completion of homework?
1 A lot
2
3
4
5
6 A little

How much responsibility do you take for completion of homework by your oldest child at school?
1 A lot
2
3
4
5
6 A little

Your gender?
Male
Female

What age category do you fall into?
Under 30
31 - 40
41 - 50
51 - 60
Over 61

Your highest level of education?
Less than Year 10
Year 10/11
Year 12
Trade/apprenticeship
TAFE/college certificate
Undergraduate university degree (e.g. Bachelors degree)
Postgraduate degree (e.g. Masters Degree)

What is your current living situation?
Myself and the other parent of the child/ren are married or living together
Separated parents with shared custody
Sole parent (other parent has limited or no custody)
Sole parent (I have limited custody of my child/ren
Widower

How many children in total do you have? (at and not at the school)
1
2
3
4 or more

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Appendix F: Factor Loading of Items in Exploratory Factor Analysis (Paper 2)

	Factor 1 **Ensuring constant happiness**	Factor 2 **Be-friending**	Factor 3 **Parental guilt**	Factor 4 **Worry**
If my child is having a difficult time I do everything in my power to make things better for them	**.600**	.306	.047	-.064
I try hard to make sure my child is always happy.	**.591**	.386	.004	.039
I am constantly vigilant to possible dangers in my child's life.	**.524**	.020	.152	.089
I put a lot of effort into praising my child to help them feel good.	**.519**	.227	-.029	.047
I need to stand up for my child with others.	**.413**	-.026	.172	.117
It is important my child knows they are special and not like anyone else.	.412	.268	-.207	.180
People criticising my child will affect my child's self-esteem.	.389	.205	.106	.071
If a parent is in a child's corner 100% of the time, a child will be more likely to be successful.	.341	.146	.101	.206
I offer to help my child with schoolwork and assignments, before they ask me.	.319	.064	.176	.102
Some of the opportunities I have provided for my child have been more expensive than I could really afford.	.207	.021	.141	.202
I would consider my child to be like a friend now.	.109	**.549**	.055	.031
I know I have done a good job as a parent if my child likes me.	.113	**.522**	.142	.028
I like my child to comfort me when I am feeling bad.	.091	**.437**	.217	.098
I want others to know how special my child is.	.345	.430	.024	.274
I believe my child should be very successful in life.	.287	.336	.003	.184
My child's success in life will be a reflection of my parenting.	.148	.287	.073	.150
I have manipulated my warmth with my child to make them change their behaviour.	.051	.087	**.588**	.102
I have used guilt as a technique to change my child's behaviour.	.015	.079	**.547**	.093
There are certain careers I want my child to end up in.	.095	.192	**.410**	.168
If my child performed below average in a test or a sporting activity, it would make me distressed.	.167	.032	.362	.150
I often compare my child's life with what other parents are providing for their children.	.119	.169	.216	**.585**
I worry what others think of me as a parent.	.053	.092	.209	**.498**
If my child is not successful in life, I will take on some of the blame.	.198	.120	.301	.301