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The Role of Adult Attachment in Child Custody Litigants

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The Role of Adult Attachment in Child Custody Litigants

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2014

The Role of Adult Attachment in Child Custody Litigants

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Recently, attachment theory has been proposed as a possible unifying framework for assessing the parent-child relationship as part of custody determinations, due to the theory's rich empirical support. Though forensic evaluators have begun to incorporate the child's attachment to his/her caretaker, the question of the parents' adult attachment style has so far been overlooked as a potentially relevant area for gathering information regarding parenting. Adult attachment theory not only has implications for parenting, but also for understanding co-parenting relationships and conflicts, which is often the primary reason for many child custody referrals. This study will use an attachment framework to explore group differences between child custody litigants and satisfied married couples on the Rorschach Inkblot Test. Analyses of these variables will be completed through multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). Additionally, discriminant function analysis (DFA) will be conducted to explore the dimensionality of the multivariate composites between groups. Information derived from the prospective study will contribute to understanding specific attachment related group differences and thus serve as the first step in establishing the R-PAS as a system for detecting attachment organization in child-custody litigants. It is hoped that this research will better inform forensic evaluators concerning: stress and coping styles; co-parenting; caregiving fitness; and ultimately child custody decisions.

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Introduction

Over the past half-century, few theories have had as much impact and influence on infant and child development than attachment theory. John Bowlby (1973,1980,1982) offered the scientific community a grand conceptual framework to explain the powerful bonds between parent and child, romantic partners, and close friends. Ultimately, a paradigm that speaks to the instinctual force behind what keeps humans social and connected (Ainsworth & Bowlby 1991; Bowlby, 1982). These forces are developed and shaped in infancy and throughout childhood through the interactions between a caregiver and his/her child has highlighted the delicate nature of parenting, and the vital importance of providing children with the optimal nurturing environment to allow them to grow, in turn, into healthy, and nurturing adults. Thus, in times in which a family environment is unfit, or parents separate, it is a vitally important task to decide upon the appropriate custody placement of visitation rights of the child, to ensure the "best interests" for the child's emotional and social development (American Psychological Association, 2010).

Estimates of the number or percentage of parents seeking divorce that require a court hearing and a psychological evaluation to inform custody determination are difficult to obtain. Similarly, for the increasing numbers of parents seeking alternative dispute resolution, such as mediation, the degree to which outside psychological input is needed is difficult to discern. According to latest estimates (US Census Bureau, 2012) roughly 50% of marriages end in divorce. However, not all married couples have children. Some research suggests that around 40% of children will experience the divorce

of their parents prior to age 18 (Bumpass, 1984). Even more importantly, not all divorced couples with children will legally contest child custody. In fact, contesting the legal custody of children occurs in a minority of divorces. The best available data seem to suggest that only about 5 to 10% of cases involve legal conflict about the custody of children (Bernet, 2002; Maccoby, Mnookin, Depner, & Peters, 1992; Mcintosh & Prinz, 1993). It is almost assured that those cases that do proceed through the court system and require a psychological evaluation are the more difficult and complicated cases, characterized by contested views of custody, current and past conflict between separating partners, and inability to negotiate emotionally challenging and upsetting matters; accusations by one or both parents of mistreatment of the child are also not uncommon (Halikias, 1994; Johnston & Campbell, 1993).

Taken together, attachment theory offers a novel way of conceptualizing the complexity and volatility of custody cases. But while attachment theory would likely contribute much to the custody process, the forensic assessment community has been slow to adopt attachment research into its practices (Bryne et al., 2005). At present, the question of the parent's adult attachment style has so far been neglected as a potentially relevant area for gathering information regarding parenting (Byrne et al., 2005; Rivas et al., 2009). Forensic evaluators in custody cases typically rely on a combination of clinical interview, parent-child observation, and personality measures to assess general psychological functioning of the parent and child (Otto, Buffington-Vollum, & Edens, 2003). In the event that attachment theory strongly influences an evaluator's thinking, he/she must rely only on what can be extrapolated from parent-child interactions,

interviews, and functional parenting surveys. In the age of Heilbrun (1992) and Duabert (Daubert v. Merrel Dow Pharmaceuticals, INC. 1993), forensic psychologists have been increasingly aware of the demand for relevant, reliable, and scientifically-based evidence for evaluations in forensic settings (Grisso, 2003; Weissman & DeBow, 2003). As a measure that meets court admissibility standards, research has begun to show evidence that the Rorschach Inkblot Test (1921/1942) is sensitive in detecting attachment organization in adults (Berant, Mikulincer, Shaver, Segal, 2005; Berant & Wald, 2009).

In an article published in 2005, Byrne et al. proposed that attachment theory should be incorporated not only as an additional variable to consider in custody evaluations, but as a unifying "conceptual framework for assessment and decision-making" (p.117). Byrne and his colleagues (2005) discussed attachment theory's potential applications to custody; however, the authors almost exclusively focused on assessing the child's attachment to his/her parent, while ignoring the role of the parent's attachment style on his/her care giving capacities, which is considered a primary factor in the development of the infant's attachment style (Bowlby, 1973, 1980, 1982). In this regard, the parental caregiver becomes their child's model for attachment representation, thus potentially maladaptive parental attachment organization will be modeled and then internalized by children; which quickly leads to the transmission of parental attachment style to their children (George & Solomon, 1996). Additionally, the exploration of litigant attachment style is particularly relevant for understanding individual differences in emotional regulation strategies, and thus may shed light on potential mechanisms underlying this population's interpersonal volatility and uncompromising nature

(Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Therefore, the present study seeks to explore how adult attachment organization between custody-disputing dyads may contribute to the level of dissension within the couple, and, as a result, the need for litigation. Such a model will also offer implications for quality of parent-child relationship and for co-parenting fitness. Before focusing on attachment theory's applicability to child custody, it is first important to overview the theoretical underpinnings of attachment theory itself.

Integrative Analysis

Attachment Theory

Adult Attachment Style

Attachment theory, according to Bowlby, is "a way of conceptualizing the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others" (1977, p. 201). Over the course of development, children are hypothesized to internalize their experiences with primary caretakers, or attachment figures, to form internal working models of self and others (Bowlby, 1969/1982,1973, 1977,1980,1988). These internal models include strategies and procedures that affect the way in which we navigate close relationships and implement emotional regulatory strategies throughout life (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Although the attachment system is most critical during the early years of life, Bowlby (1998) assumed that it is active throughout the life span, and influences how one perceives and behaves in close relationships, copes with distress, and the level of comfort one has with intimacy and caregiving. As a result, the internal working model has been theorized as the means by which early attachment relationships are carried, internalized, and ultimately represented in adulthood (Bowlby, 1973, 1980, 1982). The role of the attachment figure is thus pivotal across the lifespan.

Bowlby (1982/1969) and other attachment theorists (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003; George & West, 2012) have overviewed the functions a relationship partner must serve for becoming an attachment figure. First, he or she is a target of proximity maintenance. Individuals across the lifespan tend to seek proximity to their attachment figures in times of need and to

experience “separation distress” from the attachment figures real or expected disappearance (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). Second, attachment figures provide a physical and emotional “haven of safety” (Ainsworth et al., 1978), which helps to alleviate distress. Third, attachment figures provide a “secure base” (Ainsworth et al., 1978) allowing the child or relationship partner to pursue non-attachment goals in a safe environment. By accomplishing these requirements, a relationship partner becomes a source of attachment security. Additionally, Bowlby (1973) theorized on individual differences in the functioning of the attachment system. Interactions with relationship partners who are available in times of need, sensitive to one’s attachment needs, and responsive to one’s bid for proximity promote the optimal functioning of the system and facilitate the formation of attachment security. As a result, positive expectations about others’ availability as well as the self give way to affect regulatory strategies that are organized around these positive beliefs. However, when a primary attachment figure proves not to be physically or emotionally available in times of need, not responsive to a person’s proximity bids, or poor at alleviating distress or providing a “secure base,” attachment-system functioning is disrupted and attachment security is not attained. As a result, negative representations of self and others are formed (e.g., doubt in others’ good will as well as doubt in internal goodness), and attachment strategies (e.g., proximity seeking) must be adjusted and certain secondary attachment strategies must be implemented to maintain attachment organization.

Main (1990) proposed two secondary attachment strategies, *hyperactivation* and *deactivation*, which offer the basis for individual differences in attachment system

functioning. The majority of the latest research conceptualizes attachment style defined by two underlying dimensions, avoidance and anxiety (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2008). This two-dimensional framework is theoretically linked to the enduring implementation of secondary attachment behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Thus, attachment anxiety is generally connected to hyperactivation strategies, while attachment avoidance is generally connected to deactivation strategies. A full description of these secondary attachment strategies will be presented below.

A Model of Attachment-System Functioning in Adulthood

The proposed study relies on Mikulincer and Shaver's (2003) model of the activation and dynamics of the attachment system. This control systems model integrates findings with the theoretical proposals of Bowlby (1982/1969, 1973, 1980), Ainsworth (1991), Cassidy and Kobak (1988), Fraley and Shaver (2000), and Main (1995). The model (Figure. 1) includes three major components (i.e., modules in Figure 1). The first involves monitoring and appraisal of threatening events; it is responsible for activation of the primary attachment strategy (e.g., proximity seeking). Bowlby (1969/1982) proposed that the appraisal of threat for either an internal or external stressor tends to activate the attachment system. The activation of the attachment system then automatically brings the individual into contact with attachment related mental content, which increases the probability of seeking contact with an attachment figure. The second component involves monitoring and appraisal of the availability of external or internalized attachment figures; it is responsible for individual differences in the sense of attachment security and the

development of what is known as security-based strategies (Mikulincer et al., 2003). The third component involves monitoring and appraisal of the viability of proximity seeking as a means of coping with attachment insecurity and distress. This component is responsible for individual differences in the development and maintenance of specific secondary attachment strategies (*hyperactivtion versus deactivation*). Additionally, the model includes excitatory and inhibitory pathways that result from recurrent use of secondary attachment strategies (shown as upwardly directed arrows on the left side of Figure 1); these pathways in turn impact the monitoring of threatening events and the appraisal of the attachment figure's availability.

---- Insert *Figure 1* ----

Security-based Strategies

Using Shaver and Mikulincer's model (2003) as a guide, interactions with relationship partners who are available and supportive in times of need lead to the formation of both a sense of attachment security and internal working models of self and others that are generally positive (Fredrickson, 2001). These models and the associated sense of security provide an important foundation for mental health. Security-based strategies are characteristic of those who score relatively low on both attachment anxiety and avoidance dimensions. Research has shown that this particular profile is related to optimistic beliefs about distress management, positive views of the self and others, and maintenance of mental health and effective functioning in times of stress (Collins &

Read, 1994; Mikulincer, 1995; Mikulincer et al., 2003). In summary, security-based strategies lead people to deal actively and constructively cope with negative affect and to take advantage of the enhanced flexibility made possible by such security (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). This enhanced flexibility may help secure people find new and novel ways to deal with events, enjoy task performance, and maintain a positive mood (Mikulincer et al., 2003).

Secondary Attachment Strategies

When close relationship partners (e.g., attachment figures) are rejecting, unavailable, or inconsistent in times of need the sense of attachment security is undermined, negative models of self and others are formed, and the likelihood of positive mental health decreases (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). When the attachment figure's responsiveness is in question, the individual is then forced into a decision about the viability of proximity seeking as a means of self-regulation, which in turn leads to the activation of a specific secondary attachment strategy (*hyperactivation or deactivation)* (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Each secondary attachment strategy has a unique affective process and may be viewed in terms of the famous fight-flight distinction in biopsychology (Cannon, 1939).

Hyperactivating Strategies. In the attachment literature, these active, intense secondary strategies are called *hyperactivating strategies* (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Main, 1990); "fight" responses that keep the attachment system constantly activated. As a result, such a strategy requires constant vigilance, concern, and effort until an attachment figure is perceived to be available and a sense of security is attained. Hyperactivating

strategies are characteristic of people who score relatively high on the attachment anxiety dimension. Research shows that attachment anxiety is associated with exaggeration of the appraisal of threats, negative views of the self, and pessimistic, catastrophic beliefs about interactions with other people (Baratholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer et al., 2003; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). This particular secondary strategy seems to result from relationships where the attachment figure is intermittently responsive, which places the individual on a partial reinforcement cycle that rewards persistent proximity seeking because of occasional success. As a result, hyperactivating strategies produce self-amplifying cycles of distress in which chronic attachment-system activation interferes with engagement in nonattachment-related activities and makes it likely that new sources of distress will combine with old ones, creating a cumulative and rather tumultuous mental experience (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

Adding to the above findings and particularly relevant to the proposed study, Berant and colleagues' (2005) study demonstrated that self-reports of attachment anxiety were associated with Rorschach scores, based on Exner's (1995, 2001) Comprehensive System (CS) scoring[1], thought to indicate less stringent regulation of emotional expression (CF; $r=.47$; $p<.01$), high attraction to emotional situations (Afr; $r=.48$, $p<.01$), and a complex and rich network of emotional memories and associations (Color-Shading Blend; $r=.36$, $p<.01$). This intense and rich emotional life poses a liability however, because of the typical difficulties that anxious individuals have in modulating their

[1] Please see Appendix B for general information concerning relevant Rorschach variables of *hyperactivation/anxiety* as well as CS terms and their R-PAS Counterparts.

emotions and their tendency to experience the intrusion of negative feelings during positive emotion states (Color-Shading Blend), thereby increasing emotional uncertainty and confusion. An additional liability is that they easily experience situational stress (m; $r=.36$, $p<.01$). These individuals harbor a perception of the self as vulnerable and helpless (Y; $r=.46$, $p<.01$), weak and needy (Food; $r=.42$, $p<.01$), and unworthy with a pessimistic view of the self (MOR; $r=.26$; $p<.05$). The findings regarding the self-perception of weakness and unworthiness of the anxious individual converge with research that showed that attachment anxiety was negatively associated with self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Schmitt & Alik, 2005). Additionally, anxious attachment style has been found to be associated with negative memory bias as well as poor self-worth (Mikulincer, 1995; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 1997). Thus, those who primarily utilize hyperactivating strategies tend to minimize cognitive distance from others by creating an illusion of consensus (Mikulincer, Orbach, & Iavnieli, 1998) and projecting their own self-traits onto others (Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999).

Deactivating Strategies. The appraisal of proximity seeking as a nonviable option can result in deactivation of proximity seeking altogether, inhibition of the drive for support, and active attempts to handle distress alone (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). These secondary strategies are called *deactivating strategies* (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Main, 1990), because their primary goal is to keep the attachment system deactivated so as to avoid frustration and further distress caused by attachment-figure unavailability (Mikulincer et al., 2003). As a result, the primary goal of this strategy is literally "flight"

from distress by down-regulation of the attachment system. Such strategies are characteristic of people scoring relatively high on the attachment avoidance dimension. Research shows that attachment avoidance is associated with low levels of intimacy and emotional involvement in close relationships, suppression of painful thoughts, repression of negative memories, lack of cognitive accessibility to negative self-representations, projection of negative self-traits onto others, failure to acknowledge negative emotions, and denial of basic fears (Dozier & Kobak, 1992; Fraley & Shaver, 1997; Mikulincer, 1995; Mikulincer, Florian, & Tolmacz, 1990; Mikulincer & Horesh, 1999; Mikulincer & Orbach, 1995).

Regarding self-reports of attachment avoidance, Berant et al. (2005) found that they were associated with Rorschach variables, based on Exner's (1995, 2001) Comprehensive System (CS) scoring[2], thought to reflect a lack of acknowledgement of need states (FM; $r=.44$; $p<.01$), the dismissal of challenging or demanding person-environment interactions and a disengaged orientation to the world (high Lambda; $r=.44$, $p<.01$), the defensive maintenance of a grandiose sense of self-esteem (reflection responses; $r=.33$, $p<.01$), and façade (Cg; $r=.26$, $p<.05$). Thus, individuals who utilize avoidance as their primary secondary attachment strategy were found to keep the attachment system down regulated so as to avoid acute pain and distress caused by potentially demanding or threatening person-environment transactions.

[2] Please see Appendix C for general information concerning relevant Rorschach variables of *deactivation/avoidance* as well as CS terms and their R-PAS Counterparts.

In summary, hyperactivating strategies keep the attachment system chronically activated, constantly on the alert for threats, separations, and betrayals; deactivating strategies keep the attachment system in check, with serious consequences for cognitive and emotional openness. These secondary attachment strategies have serious implications for other behavioral systems (e.g., romantic and caregiving) as shown below.

Mate Preference

Research on mate preferences has revealed a tendency toward insecure attachment pairings in couples (e.g. hyperactivating vs. deactivating) which are likely to undermine relationship cohesion (Levy at al., 2006; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994; Shaver, 2005), leading to a higher incidence of relationship-destructive behaviors (Bouthillier et al., 2002), and ultimately separation (Kachadourian et al., 2004). Further, some studies considered potentially confounded variables and found that insecurely attached people's relationship dysfunction could not be explained by other personality factors, such as the "Big Five" traits, depression, self-esteem, or sex role orientation (e.g., Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1994; Jones & Cunningham, 1996; Noftle & Shaver, 2006; Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Whisman & Allan, 1996), thus highlighting the unique contribution of attachment related variables to relationship cohesion.

There is substantial evidence that two combinations of insecure attachment styles significantly interfere with relationship adjustment: (1) the pairing of an anxious person with an avoidant person, and (2) the pairing of two anxious people (e.g., Allison, Bartholomew, Mayseless, & Dutton, 2008; Feeney, 1994; Roberts & Noller; 1998). Couples in which an anxious person is paired with an avoidant person tend to produce

destructive pursuit-distancing or demand-withdrawal patterns of relating (Allison et al., 2005). In such couples, anxious partner's needs and demands frustrate the avoidant partner's preference for distance and the avoidant partner's tendency to create distance frustrates the anxious partner's intense desire for closeness. As a result, both partners are dissatisfied and can potentially become abusive or violent when attempting to influence their partner's undesirable behavior (Allison et al., 2005). Attachment studies also reveal the destructive effect of pairing two anxious partners: one partner's anxiety exacerbates the other partner's anxiety, and the combination erodes marital satisfaction (Gallo & Smith, 2001; J.A. Feeney, 1994), amplifies negative responses to partner's distancing (J.A. Feeney, 2003), and similarly increases the possibility of interpersonal violence (Allison et. al., 2005). Feeney (2003) described these anxious-anxious couples as engaging in "mutual attack and retreat," and Bartholomew and Allison (2006) labeled them "Pursuing- pursuing." In such couples; both partners feel misunderstood and rejected, both are excessively focused on their own insecurities, and both try to control the other's behavior.

In the next section, we shift from partner attachment concerns to overview the caregiving behavioral system and how attachment dysregulation may implicate its flexible utilization.

Parental Caregiving

According to attachment theory, the most important factor guiding the formation of the attachment relationship is the child's experience with caregivers. The caregiving behavioral system is a biologically based motivational control system that governs the

rules and behaviors associated with specific proximate caregiving goals (George & Solomon, 2008). Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973) postulated that the caregiving system is reciprocal to, and evolved in parallel with, the attachment system. If the development of a person's caregiving system occurs under favorable social circumstances (i.e., compassion, loving-kindness, and generosity) then these values are likely to become templates for future caregiving relationships. Research has shown a high concordance rate with parental caregiving and child attachment style (Solomon & George, 1996). However, Main and Hesse (1990) also show that attachment dysregulation significantly compromises the successful utilization and reappraisal of caregiving goals.

One major implication of parental dysregulation involves the lack of flexibility in switching between the parent's caregiving system and other behavioral systems that may compete with providing care for any particular child (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Solomon & George, 1996; Stevenson-Hinde, 1994). In addition to being a caregiver to one child, a parent may be a caregiver for other children (competing caregiving), a friend (affiliative system), a sexual partner (sexual system), a worker (exploratory system), or a person who seeks care from his or her own attachment figures (attachment system). A parent must strike a balance among these competing demands (Cassidy, 2000; Hrdy, 1999; Solomon & George, 1996), and such attachment dysregulation limits the parent's flexibility; often times resulting in self-absorption (Stahl, 1999) and in a lack of sensitivity for the child's needs (Bernier & Dozier, 2003; Bretherton et al., 1989; Slade et al., 2005).

Parental attachment insecurities also influence mental representations of themselves as caregivers, their child as a developing care recipient, and the parent-child

relationship (George & Solomon, 1999). These mental representations, like other working models of self and others, guide caregiving behaviors during parent-child interactions and influence parents' expectations, feelings, and actions (George & Solomon, 1999). For example, people who score high on avoidance or anxiety are in fact less positive than their secure peers when it comes to judging their ability to relate to children and imagining relationships with future children (Rholes, Simpson, J. A., & Blakely, 1995; Rholes, Simpson, Blakely, Lanigan, Allen, 1997). Similarly, results obtained in studies of adults who were already parents revealed that insecure parents: experience less joy and pleasure with their children (Rholes, Simpson, & Friedman, 2006; Scher & Dror, 2003); are less attentive and response to their infant's needs, and more distressed and intrusive when interacting with their infants (Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, Rudolph, & Grossmann, 1988; Raval et al., 2001; Tarabulsy et al., 2005); are affectively colder, controlling, distressed, and intrusive (Adam et al., 2004; Crowell & Feldman, 1989; Eiden et al., 1995); and were involved in more abusive, life-threatening parental behavior (Crittenden, Partridge, & Claussen, 1991). As a result, parental attachment (in)security is modeled through the parent-child caregiving interaction and parental attachment style is then transmitted to the next generation (Solomon & George, 1996; van Ijzendoorn, 1995).

Summary

Even though reliance on secondary attachment strategies may maintain functional organization in the moment, they are only temporary defenses against dysregulation and unable to fully mitigate the attachment related threat (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). As a

result, the maintenance of the secondary strategy requires constant vigilance for stressors, which demand an abundance of cognitive and affective resources, and ultimately reduces creative flexibility in switching between other behavioral systems (e.g., romantic and/or caregiving). Consequently, insecure attachment is marked by a sense of egocentric-self-preservation that ultimately limits the spouse or caretaker in offering security to others. It is then not hard to imagine how insecure attachment is transferred generationally (van Ijzendoorn, 1995) and how insecure attachment pairings generally lead to relationship disruption (Kachadourian et al., 2004). The current study seeks to apply the above theoretical framework to explore the conflicted relationship pairings seen in many child custody evaluations.

Child Custody Litigation (CCL)

Litigant Sample Characteristics

As noted in the introduction, over 50% of all marriages end in divorce and approximately one million children per year experience the divorce of their parents. Of these divorces, 10% are characterized as high conflict (Glick, 1988), and of those families an even smaller percentage requires a child custody evaluation to resolve custody disputes (Hoppe & Kenney, 1994). Therefore, parents involved in child custody disputes are described as different from other clinical populations (Hoppe, 1997; Nelson, 1989). Clinical descriptions of this population often describe the litigants as having a "relationship disorder" and/or an underlying character disorder (Hoppe, 1997; Stahl, 1999). Child custody litigants have also been described as self-centered, rageful, and self-righteous (Stahl, 1999). Parents who are working together for the interests of the

child(ren) are unlikely to require the input of the court system and a psychological evaluation. Along these lines, recent estimates report roughly 10% of CLLs have adaptive and compliant problem-solving styles (Singer, Hoppe, Lee, Olsen, Walters, 2008). Additionally, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) described the intense anger that was exhibited in a group of parents who could not resolve custody issues as so passionate "no amount of reasoning could deter them from their goals" (Ellis, 2000 p.238). The authors (1980) discussed this behavior as being previously uncharacteristic of both parents, and discussed additional levels of paranoia (e.g., spying on the other parent, making excessive phone contact, being assaultive, and attempting to get the children to align with them) that was brought upon by the evaluation. Johnston and Roseby (1997) noted that 64% of their sample had personality disorder diagnoses and an additional 27% were found to have personality disorder traits; 15% of these parents had a diagnosis of intermittent explosive disorder and 25% had a substance abuse problem (Hoppe, 1997; Johnston & Campbell, 1998). In characterizing personality features of CCLs, Stahl (1990) said, "Many custody evaluators observe that most high-conflict families have one or both parents who exhibit narcissistic, obsessive-compulsive, histrionic, paranoid, or borderline features" (Stahl, 1990 p.94). Again, despite all of these difficulties, Johnston and Campbell (1998) as well as Hoppe (1997) found that prior to and following the current dispute, these parents were functioning quite well, which does not seem to fit the personality disorder diagnosis.

In an effort to better describe child custody litigants, Singer and colleagues (2008) analyzed 700 CCL Rorschach protocols. Singer et al. (2008) found significant differences

in the CCL population in comparison to a nonclinical population. Specifically, the autors (2008) reported marked deficits in managing interpersonal conflict; problematic ability to modulate, control, and tolerate their own affective experience; difficulties engaging collaboratively in problem solving; poor reality testing; and tendency toward projection in CCLs. On these lines, the author's (2008) characterized the thinking of their CCL sample as: defensive, self-focused, lacking the capacity for empathy, and distorted with respect to self and other. Taken together, the combination of cognitive rigidity mixed with their distorted views of the other parent makes cooperative conflict resolution particularly difficult for the CCL sample. Additionally, Singer et al. (2008) made explicit observations that mirror attachment research on insecure couple pairings. Specifically, the CCL's either defend against a sense of inadequacy or they are self-absorbed and self-serving, unable in either case to take responsibility for their actions and projecting blame onto the other to protect their fragile sense of self. Child custody litigants have been labeled as a psychologically vulnerable group as custody proceedings are thought to reawaken and exacerbate past trauma (Johnston & Campbell, 1988; Stahl, 1999). Attachment theory views high-conflict divorce as a significant threat to the adult attachment system (e.g., Peris & Emery, 2005) and contributing to attachment dysregulation (George & Solomon, 2008; Solomon & George, 1999). To date, parental attachment style has yet to be examined as a factor that underlies CCL disputes.

Psychologist's Role in CCL

Before exploring attachment theory's applicability in CCL, however, it is helpful to understand a psychologist's role within the child custody system. Psychologists are

oftentimes called upon to provide psychological assessments in child custody cases (Ackerman & Ackerman, 1997) and to assess parenting abilities in child protection matters involving neglect and abuse (Budd & Holdsworth, 1996). The expanded role of psychologists in such proceedings is due in large part to the Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act of 1970 (National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, 1970), which shifted focus to "the best interest of the child." This ultimately reduced the impact of discriminating factors such as gender and religion in custody determinations (Ellis, 2000) and expanded the role of psychological assessments (APA COPPS, 1994).

APA has delineated aspirational guidelines (2010) for forensic evaluators in family law proceedings that overviews the (a) ideology of child custody evaluation, (b) preparation for the custody evaluation, and (c) procedures for conducting the child custody evaluation itself. Such guidelines place special emphasis on the development/maintenance of the forensic evaluator's competence, impartiality, appropriate data gathering methods, and appropriate recommendations based on the referral question; all of which executed with "the best interests" of the child in mind (APA, 2010). Despite these well-defined guidelines, there has been little in the way of developing a uniform practice for integrating attachment theory into the child custody evaluation (Byrne et al., 2005). As such, forensic evaluators in custody cases typically rely on a combination of clinical interview, parent-child observation, and personality measures to assess general psychological functioning of the parent and the child (Otto, Buffingron-Vollum, & Edens, 2003). The principal objective of the custody assessment seeks to provide valid information to the court on the current and future impact on the

child and family of alternative custody options. Nearly all child custody and parenting time evaluations involve some kind of psychological testing (Ackerman & Pritzl, 2011; Ackerman & Ackerman, 1997; Quinnel & Bow, 2001). Thus, the practicing forensic psychologist must make decisions, with respect to test selection and theoretical approach, that uphold the Daubert standard (Daubert v. Merrel Dow Pharmaceuticals, INC. 1993), for court evidence admissibility. The Daubert standard has been interpreted to require psychologists to go beyond the basic general acceptance standard to focus more on scientific factors (e.g., test validity and reliability) and relevancy. This decision forces psychologists to be more careful and critical in their selection of child custody assessment measures. Heilbrun (1992) has provided seven guidelines for forensic test selection: (1) commercially available with a manual, and list/reviewed in Mental Measurement Yearbook or similar source, (2) standard guidelines for administration, (3) reliability coefficient exceeding 0.80, (4) relevancy to the legal issue or psychological construct underlying the legal issue, with available validation research, (5) application to the population and purpose for which the test was designed, (6) preference for objective tests and actuarial data combination, and (7) response style should be explicitly assessed. As a result of the rigors of the Daubert standard, the inclusion of new measures has been a slowly evolving process in child custody practice (Rivas, Handler, & Sims, 2009).

The Rorschach Inkblot Test (R-PAS; Meyer, Mihura, Vigliore, 2011) has historically met guidelines for court admissibility as it meets the Daubert standard (Bow, Gould, Flens, Greenhut; 2006). Currently, the Rorschach is the second most commonly used adult personality measure, behind the MMPI-2, with research suggesting that it is

used in 48% to 64% of cases (see Ackerman & Pritzl, 2011; Ackerman & Ackerman, 1997; Hagen & Castagna, 2001; Keilin & Bloom, 1986). The Rorschach is particularly well suited to child custody litigation as it circumvents biased responding that plagues other face valid self-report measures (Bathhurst, Gottfriend, & Gorrfried, 1997), which when unaccounted for can be misleading to the evaluation (Graham, 2011). In contrast to most self-report tests, Rorschach findings most directly apply to implicit traits and motives that may or may not be apart of an individual's verbal self-description or self-concept (Bornstein, 2007; Meyer & Archer, 2001). Implicit traits are most likely to emerge over time and to be expressed in relatively unstructured or unfamiliar situations where rules, social customs, or interpersonal expectations do not play a strong role in dictating behavior (Meyer & Viglione, 2008). With respect to CCL the Rorschach is not a test of parenting ability, and it cannot provide information about what parenting time arrangement is in the child's best interest. However, in addition to a personality measure, the Rorschach may also be well suited for measuring attachment style (Berant, et al., 2005; Berant & Wald, 2009) according to Shaver and Mukilincer's (2003) control systems model of adult attachment system functioning.

Summary

With its rich research support, attachment theory offers a valuable framework for conceptualizing: individual differences in interpersonal functioning, maladaptive relationship pairings, and the way in which attachment related dynamics are transmitted. Given research on attachment related mate preferences (Levy at al., 2006; Pietromonaco & Carnelley, 1994; Shaver, 2005) as well as attachment system dynamics (Mikulincer &

Shaver, 2003), the proposed study seeks to conceptualize the CCL population in a similar light. That is, the uniqueness of the CCL population (Hoppe, 1997; Nelson, 1989) may be most represented by the interaction of insecure attachment pairings during a period of attachment dysregulation (Bowlby, 1973; Peris & Emery, 2005). Presently, forensic evaluators do not have the means to measure adult attachment style in CCLs. This is due in large part to the scientific rigor that is required for a new measure to meet court admissibility standards (Daubert v. Merrel Dow Pharmaceuticals, INC. 1993; Heilbrun, 1992). In this regard, the proposed study will explore the Rorschach Inkblot Test's utility in detecting adult attachment style. Such information will add valuable data in guiding the forensic evaluator to ensure the "best interests" for the child's emotional and social development (APA, 2010) are being met.

Proposed Research Study

Statement of Purpose

The proposed study seeks to examine differences in attachment organization between child custody litigants and satisfied couple dyads. More specifically, it aims to expand on previous work (Berant et. al., 2005) in exploring the Rorschach's utility in detecting secondary behavioral strategies in a forensic sample. Additionally, it seeks to measure which collection of attachment variables (e.g., avoidance and anxiety) best discriminate between those groups. In accomplishing these goals, two separate one-way multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) will be conducted at the dyad level. R-PAS variables selected a priori to replicate previous results by Berant and colleagues (2005), will serve as the dependent variable and dyadic groups (Custody versus non-custody) will comprise the independent variable. The two MANCOVAs will serve as the overall omnibus test for group differences across both attachment dimensions. Two discriminant function analyses (DFA), as well as simplifications of the multivariate composites, will also be conducted to discern which multivariate combination of variables best discriminates between the two groups and thus better describe the dimensionality of the independent variable (Sherry, 2006). Information derived from the prospective study will contribute to understanding specific attachment related group differences and thus serve as the first step in establishing the R-PAS as a system for detecting attachment organization in child-custody litigants. It is hoped that this research

will better inform forensic evaluators concerning: stress and coping styles; co-parenting; caregiving fitness; and ultimately child custody decisions.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1: Are there overall group differences in Rorschach variables between child custody litigants and satisfied couples?

***Hypothesis 1a*:** Overall pattern of hyperactivation variable means will differ between

groups.

***Hypothesis 1b*:** Overall pattern of deactivation variable means will differ between groups.

***Rationale 1*:** Prior research has found attachment organization to be a significant contributing factor in relationship cohesion (Carnelley et al., 1994) that goes above and beyond other personality variables. These implicit dynamics have been captured by previous research (Berant et al., 2005), although little is known about how these findings generalize to child custody dyads. As such, the first step in the proposed analysis is to test whether group differences occur in both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Therefore, the researcher proposes that group differences will be found over a constellation of eight Rorschach variables (R8910%, CF, CBlend, m, Y, Mor, ODL%, T) that represent the underlying affective and cognitive processes associated with hyperactivating strategies and that this constellation is consistent with behavioral strategies of attachment anxiety found in previous research (Berant el al., 2005).

Additionally, group differences will be found over the collection of four Rorschach scores (low FM –reverse code-, high F%, r, Cg) coherently represents the underlying affective and cognitive processes involved in deactivating strategies associated with avoidant attachment.

Research Question 2: Which Rorschach variables best discriminate between groups on avoidance and anxiety variable groupings?

***Rationale 2*:** Given the exploratory nature of the proposed analysis, no a priori hypotheses will be made on the dimensionality of the multivariate composites for both attachment dimensions. Previous research has found child custody litigants to struggle with interpersonal functioning, affect regulation, cognitive rigidity, and empathy (Singer et al., 2008). Because no Rorschach variable should be interpreted in isolation (Meyers et al., 2011), an analysis of univariate contrasts (ANOVA) would be antithetical to the interpretive process as it completely ignores the correlations among the variates. With a Discriminant Function Analysis (DFA) the researcher is not only able to discern which variable collection best discriminates between groups, but also which multivariate combination accounts for the most variability in the independent variable (Sherry, 2006; Grice & Iwasaki, 2007). As past research has relied largely on univariate analyses of mean differences (Hoppe, 1997; Johnston & Campbell, 1998; Singer et al. 2008; Stahl, 1999), the proposed study seeks to add to the literature by exploring the dimensionality of these differences. Essentially, what multivariate combination of either anxiety or avoidance variables makes this group unique (Hoppe, 1997; Nelson, 1989) from other couple dyads? In addition to better defining the CCL group, the proposed analysis will

serve as the first step towards validating an attachment based coding system for the Rorschach. Such a measure would allow forensic practitioners to covertly measure adult attachment, thus aiding in their conceptualization of parental fitness and ultimately ensuring more informed custody decisions.

Method

Participants & Procedure

Participants consisted of 50 heterosexual parental dyads undergoing child custody evaluation in central Texas. The sample had an average age of 37.9 (*SD* = 9.4), with 72 Caucasians (72%), 22 African Americans (22%), two Hispanics (2%), and four "other" (4%). Most reported at least some college education (M=15.36, SD=2.66) and the families averaged 1.47 (SD=0.76) children per family. All evaluations were the result of court order or were stipulated by parties' respective attorneys. All of these evaluations were initiated because of the parents' inability to resolve child custody and visitation disputes independently and not necessarily because the parents' mental status was in question. Psychological evaluations were performed by a licensed psychologist and involved approximately 5–6 hours of direct contact on one day, including standardized testing and clinical interviews. The evaluation included a standardized administration of the Rorschach Inkblot Test (R-PAS; Meyers, Viglione, Mihura, Erard, & Erdberg, 2011) as a part of the evaluation procedures; it was not selectively administered. Dyads were tested on separate days. The data for this group were already collected as part of the court-mandated procedure and were examined as an anonymous archival data set in compliance with the University's Institutional Review Board policies. All the Rorschach assessments were administered according to the R-PAS administration and scoring criteria (Meyer et al., 2011). All Rorschach protocols were valid, containing 16 or more responses. Exclusion criteria for the CCL group included 14 or fewer Rorschach

responses as well as in instances where the mental health of one family member was significantly in question.

The comparison group consisted of 50 volunteer Italian married couple dyads (age ranging from 19 to 57 years (mean = 40; SD = 7.1)) not in or seeking couples therapy. These couples averaged 1.4 children (SD = 0.7) per household. Inclusion criteria for the control group were (a) not being (or having been) under treatment for individual, couple, or family therapy; (b) not undergoing psychiatric treatment; (c) were currently married; (d) never been involved in child custody litigation; and (d) having a score above 100[3] on the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959). The MAT is still one of the most widely used tests in couples research, and was selected as a screening method for the control group because it reliably discriminates between distressed and non-distressed couples (Crane, Allgood, Larson, & Griffin, 1990). The mean MAT score for control group husbands was 112.5 (SD = 6.6) and for wives was 113.3 (SD = 8.5). Higher scores indicate better marital adjustment and scores can range from 50 to 138. As the MAT was used solely as a selection criteria method, scores will not be included into the proposed analysis[4]. Each individual of the couple dyad was tested without the other member present. All the Rorschach assessments were administered according to the R-PAS administration and scoring criteria (Meyer et al., 2011). All Rorschach protocols were valid, containing 16 or more responses.

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[3] Scores below 100 indicate a marriage "at risk."
[4] See Appendix D for more information on the MAT.

Approval by the Human Subjects Committee. The proposed study will follow guidelines and standards established by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Texas at Austin.

Materials

Rorschach. In the current study participants were administered the Rorschach Inkblot test and results were coded and interpreted according to the Rorschach – Performance Assessment System (R-PAS; Meyer et al., 2011) scoring system. The Rorschach is a behavioral problem-solving task in which respondents must use reasoning and problem-solving skills to make sense of perceptual regularities and irregularities found in the blots. It also requires the clear communication of how one sees the blot to another person. R-PAS measures performance over four domains: Engagement and Cognitive Processing, Perception, Stress and Distress, and Self and other Representations. Thus, in creating a response to the ambiguous complex and contradictory stimuli, respondents need to utilize their internal cognitions and underlying schema, which makes it a good method of assessing implicit motivation, cognitive and perceptual style, interpersonal understanding of human representations, and coping style (Bornstein, 2001; Perry, Viglione, & Braff, 1992). R-PAS has recently been published as an improved Rorschach system with a strong evidence base, administrative changes to maximize reliability and scoring consistency, and more accurate normative comparisons, although it sustains a great deal of procedures and characteristics found in previous Rorschach literature.

Given current court admissibility standards and the growing emphasis on evidence based methodology the Rorschach is the best approach for assessing these latent attachment variables as it: does not introduce new scales/measures into the CCL process that would be discoverable and thus bias the respondent; meets the Daubert standard; and it allows the examiner to observe the CCL process as it usually unfolds.

Cultural Validity. The R-PAS is less dependent on language and cultural factors than are most assessment methods. As a result, Allen and Dana (2004) underscored the Rorschach's unique attributes as a cross-cultural instrument. Specifically, the authors made note of its composition of neutral, nonverbal, imperfectly suggestive visual forms of stimuli, with no need for translation of individual items. Though the importance of sociocultural background is an important aspect in most every assessment, research has shown impressive similarities in the ways individuals responded to the Rorschach images across cultures (Meyer, Erdberg & Shaffer, 2007; Moon, Cundick, 1983; Porcelli & Meyer, 2002; Viglione, 1999).

Variable Selection. A subset of R-PAS (Meyers et al., 2011) variables will be selected a priori as a function of the previous work of Berant and colleagues (2005). These variables are considered to be theoretically sound markers of hyperactivating and deactivating strategies (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2003). The constellation of these variables is then taken together to inform two attachment domains: anxiety and avoidance. The researcher proposes that a constellation of eight Rorschach variables (R8910%, CF, CBlend, m, Y, Mor, ODL%, high T) represent the underlying affective and cognitive processes associated with hyperactivating strategies and that this

constellation is consistent with behavioral strategies of attachment anxiety found in previous research (Berant el al., 2005). Additionally, the collection of four Rorschach scores (low FM –reverse code-, high F%, r, Cg) coherently represents the underlying affective and cognitive processes involved in deactivating strategies associated with avoidant attachment. Both variable constellations will inform two attachment groupings:

------ Insert Table 1 ------

------ Insert Table 2 ------

Inter-rater reliability. The Rorschach was administered and coded according to Meyer et al. (2011) Performance Assessment System. All records will be coded by one of the examiners who will be blind to the hypotheses of the study. Inter-rater reliability will be estimated for 35 of the 100 records (35% of the protocols, approximately 2,200 percepts) by comparing codes assigned by the examiners and calculating kappa coefficients (Cohen, 1988).

Demographic Questionnaire

Satisfied married couple participants completed a background questionnaire reporting parent and child age, sex, and race/ethnicity. This questionnaire also gathered information regarding parent marital status, number of times divorced, education, occupation, and socioeconomic status (SES). Dyads who sought child custody litigation completed a more extensive background survey and interview as a part of their

evaluation, though these additional variables will not be included in the proposed study. The proposed study will include: years of marriage, number of divorces, years of education, and SES as covariates.

Data Analysis

As attachment research has evidence to suggest attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance are orthogonal (Berant et al., 2005; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2003; Brennan et al., 1998), two one-way multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) will be conducted at the dyad level. R-PAS variables selected a priori to replicate previous results by Berant and colleagues (2005), served as the dependent variable and dyadic groups (Custody versus non-custody) comprised the independent variable. The two MANCOVAs will serve as the overall omnibus test for two factorial discriminant function analyses (DFA) and for further simplifications of the multivariate composites. The a priori level of significance will be set at .05.

Preliminary Analysis:

Research on attachment style (Campbell et al., 2001; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2003) has provided evidence for romantic partners mutually influencing each other's attachment organization. As a result, the current study will test the dependent variables at the level of the dyad to account for the nonindependence of the observations (Stevens, 2002). Thus, both partner's scores will be averaged across all dependent variables (Kenney et al., 2006) creating a single average score over each dyad. Prior to testing the research hypotheses, assumptions of the statistical tests will be assessed. Additionally, four covariates (*years of marriage, number of divorces, years of education, SES)* will be included into the analysis to minimize within group variance, though their effects will not be analyzed.

R-PAS variable raw scores will be used as the basis for the proposed analysis.

Descriptive statistics including the mean, standard deviation, ranges, and minimum and maximum values and frequencies will be computed, examined, and plotted. Continuous variables will be assessed for normality and outliers. Given Rorschach data from Meyers et al. (2011), it is assumed that 9 of 12 dependent variables (e.g., CF, CBlend, m, Y, Mor, T, FM, r, and Cg) will be positively skewed and thus require log transformation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Scatterplots will be inspected to ensure linearity and normality and should be elliptical (Stevens, 2002). After these transformations, the Shapiro-Wilk test will then be conducted to test for marginal normality for the individual variables at the 0.05 level. The assumption of equal covariance matrices (homoscedasticity) will be assessed by interpreting the results of Box's Test for the MANOVA (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005).

Inter-correlation matrices for Rorschach variables will be run and assessed. Avoidance and anxiety variables are expected to be orthogonal, thus mirroring Brennan et al.'s (1998) two-dimensional, attachment-style space. Therefore, two multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) will be conducted on both attachment dimensions.

Tests of Research Questions

Research Question 1: Are there group differences in attachment organization between child custody litigants and satisfied couples?

Hypothesis 1a: Pattern of hyperactivation variable means will differ between groups.

Hypothesis 1b: Pattern of deactivation variable means will differ between groups.

Analysis 1. To test the above hypotheses, two separate MANCOVAs will be conducted to examine group differences of either attachment avoidance or attachment anxiety between child custody litigants and satisfied couple dyads, while controlling for demographic variables. Because conducting several one-way ANOCVAs would increase the probability of making a Type I error and the dependent variables are independently related, a MANCOVA was selected. Given the one-way design, Wilks' Lambda is the preferred test statistic and most researchers generally support reporting it over of other values (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007).

Projected Results. There will be significant differences between the dependent variables (avoidance or anxiety) across child custody and satisfied couple groups. The strength and dimensionality of these differences will be analyzed more completely in the DFA below.

Research Question 2: Which Rorschach variables best discriminate between groups on avoidance and anxiety variable groupings?

Analysis 2. To explore the above hypotheses, statistics from the previous set of MANCOVAs will be utilized. Specifically, for both analyses (e.g., avoidance and anxiety) Pillai's Trace will be tested to find how much variability in the grouping variable is accounted for by the first multivariate combination of dependent variables. As the analysis has two grouping variables, only one multivariate composite will result, so an overall omnibus measure of effect size is appropriate. Following the MANCOVA analysis strategy recommended by Harris (2001), a multivariate composite, based on the standardized discriminant function coefficients, will be constructed and simplified for all

dependent variables of both sub-factors (e.g., anxiety and avoidance).

As both dimensions of dependent variables are on different scales the standardized function coefficients and standardized variables (z-scores) will be used for interpreting and computing the simplified composite variables (Grice & Iwasaki, 2007). Equations 1 and 2 shown below delineate the unsimplified standardized discriminant functions (D_i). Avoidance and anxiety composites are thus simplified by focusing only on the relatively large standardized discriminant function coefficients ($ß_P$). A low standardized coefficient might mean that the groups do not differ much on that variate or it may mean that that variate's correlation with the grouping variable is redundant with that of another variate in the model. As suppressor effects can also occur, correlations between anxiety variables and $D_{Anxiety}$ as well as for avoidance variables and $D_{Avoidance}$ will also be run. As a result, two loading matrices will be computed that will also add in the interpretation (i.e., classification) of standardized discriminant functions. Generally, any variate with a loading of .30 or more is considered to be important in defining the discriminant dimension.

------ Insert Equation 1 & 2 -------

As a result, small coefficients are converted to 0s and relatively large coefficients are converted to 1s while their signs are retained (Harris, 2001). The rationale behind this simplifying process is to round to zero those coefficients that are relatively small because they are assumed to be deviating from zero well within the bounds of sampling variability

(Einhorn & Hogarth, 1975; Grice, 2001; Wainer, 1976), although no statistical test of this assumption exists. Additionally, the differences among the large coefficients are assumed to be within the bounds of sampling variability, and thus important information is not lost by converting these values to +1s and –1s consistent with their original signs (Rozeboom, 1979). As a result, the simplified composites will yield the most discriminating variable clusters for attachment avoidance and anxiety (Grice & Iwasaki, 2007). To test whether the two groups differ in terms of their population means on the simplified multivariate composite, the researcher will conduct two separate ANCOVAs using either $D_{Anxiety}$ or $D_{Avoidance}$ as the dependent variable across the independent variable. In both analyses, R-Squared will be evaluated and compared to the overall omnibus test to assess how much overlapping variance with the independent variable was lost in the simplification process. The resulting analysis will yield the most discriminating variable clusters for both attachment dimensions.

Discussion

Limitations

The proposed study is exploratory in nature, but as such, has a number of limitations. The first involves the heterogeneity of groups despite the inclusion of covariates. As the control group is entirely comprised of Italian participants, cultural differences in dyadic attachment organization may also contribute to group differences. Though evidence suggests that the R-PAS is valid with respect to administration and interpretation across cultures (Allen & Dana, 2004; Meyer, Erdberg & Shaffer, 2007; Moon, Cundick, 1983; Porcelli & Meyer, 2002; Shaffer et al., 2007; Viglione, 1999), it does not account for the way in which the Italian and American culture have differentially shaped group member's implicit dynamics with respect to: world view, gender role orientation, and accepted level of relational dependence. This may raise questions about generalizability.

Though the proposed study design is constructed to address important preliminary questions, the analytic model lacks the sensitivity to analyze mutual influence of partner-actor effects for attachment (dis)organization within dyads. Kenney and colleagues (2006) have proposed the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) for examining the relational aspects of adult attachment organization (e.g., actor-partner interactions, see pp. 144-184). Unlike the current analysis, the APIM can assess how strength of relational interdependence moderates partner attachment style. Beyond accounting for effects of gender, the APIM allows the investigator to explore how each attachment style varies in its use of relational interdependence, which may supply implications for differential

malleability of attachment style (e.g., high for hyperactivators & low for deactivators). Such work will be important for beginning to understand how interdependence impacts insecure attachment pairings in child custody litigants. For the current study, the author felt that foundational questions concerning the CCL population as well as the R-PAS needed to be addressed in order to lay the ground-work for future analyses that utilize the APIM.

Given the nature of the archival data, an external criterion measure of attachment organization was not included. Additionally, the R-PAS has not been validated to measure attachment organization, despite promising findings by Berant et al. (2005). As a result, the proposed study is unable to claim definitively that the selected R-PAS variables are uniquely related to attachment behavioral strategies. However, an additional analytic step may be conducted to offer preliminary evidence for construct validity. As described above, the analytic model is composed of two single-factor MANCOVA's measuring group differences in either multivariate composites of anxiety or avoidance sub-factors. The most potent variable groupings for both attachment dimensions were then explored in the DFA. Consequently, the proposed analysis fails to include both attachment sub-factors into a single model, which makes it impossible to justify that the latent factor structure delineated by attachment research (Berant et al., 2005; Brennan et al., 1998; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2003) is present in the proposed analysis. Therefore, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) would be an important next step for assessing these assumptions and for supporting claims that the construct was captured. In conducting the CFA the researcher must be mindful of how the significant degree of interpersonal

conflict within the child custody group may artificially raise R-PAS variables, such as m and Y (Ludolph & Dale, 2012), or others in unforeseen ways.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

The proposed study seeks to examine differences in attachment organization between child custody litigants and satisfied couple dyads. Additionally, it seeks to measure which collection of attachment variables (e.g., avoidance and anxiety) best discriminate between those groups. As such, it is hoped that this work will offer a small, but substantial advance towards explaining the interpersonal volatility in child custody litigants as well as laying the foundation for measuring adult attachment organization with the Rorschach. While certainly not a direct or complete measure of parenting propensities, the assessment of adult attachment would lend additional evidence towards the issues of "parent's mental status" and "parent's caretaking capacities" which are two of the main concerns of custody evaluations (Otto, Buffington-Vollum, & Edens, 2003). Perhaps the greatest benefit of using the Rorschach to measure adult attachment style is in its ability to assess at the representational level rather than through staged parent-child observation or self-report, which can reach behind the barrier of impression management that is all too common in child custody litigation.

As the Rorschach is a common measure to the child custody evaluation, forensic evaluators are able to research this phenomenon immediately without sacrificing their professional responsibilities. The proposed study focused predominantly on a small sample of Rorschach scores. Future research might explore how additional R-PAS variables may be integrated into Mikulincer and Shaver's (2003) framework.

Adult attachment dynamics are likely to be affected by a broad array of historical forces, innate temperamental tendencies, and contextual factors that moderate or even override the effects of past experience (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). As such, longitudinal studies are needed to assess how the adult attachment system is altered by the threat of child custody litigation.

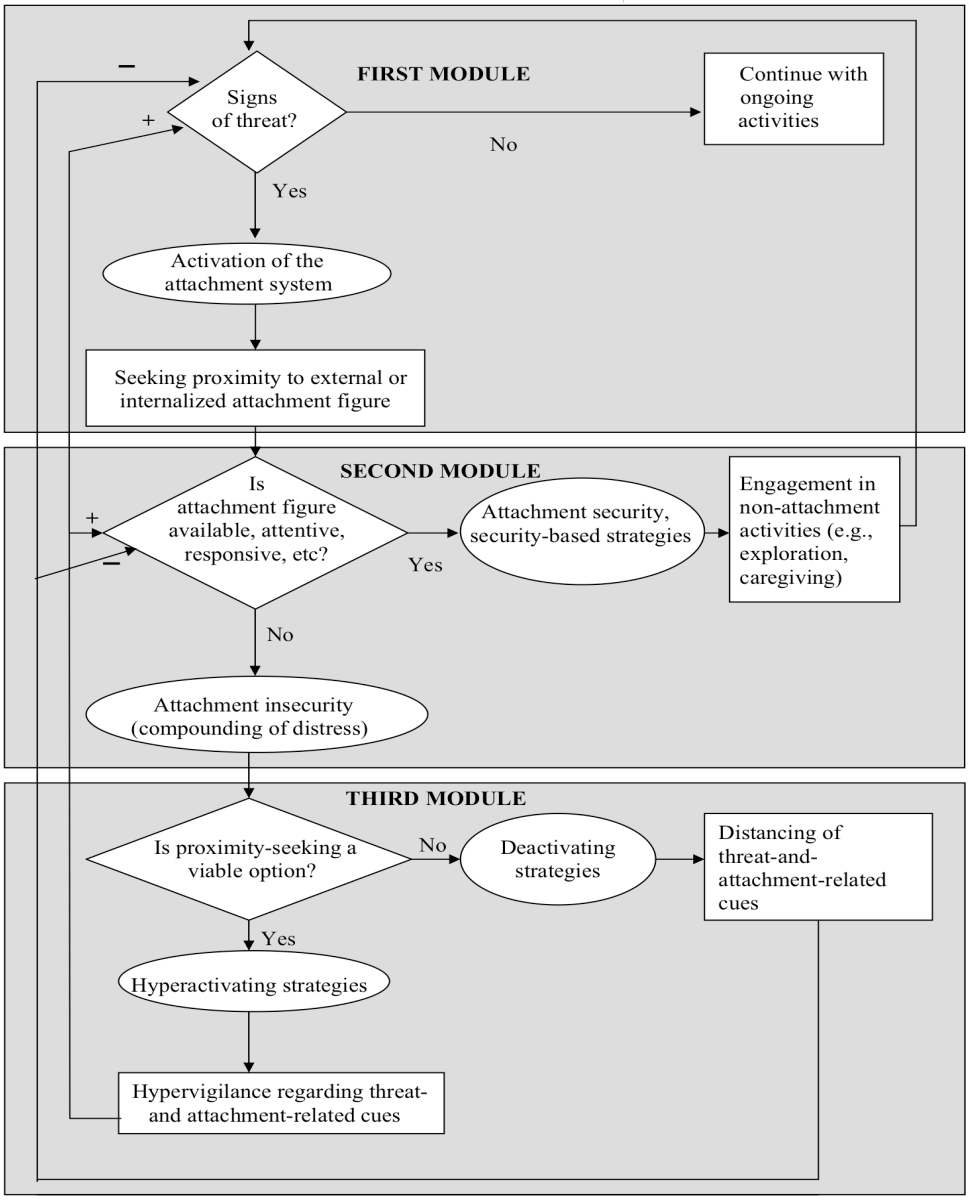
Possibly the most important step for future research is to begin to explore the actor-partner interaction within child custody dyads. Specifically, how does one's attachment style influence their partners? Can we make similar conclusions to previous research on mate preference? Do particular attachment pairings between child custody dyads help to account for the uncompromising and temporal nature of the conflict? Not only would researchers be better able to explore the inner workings of such relationships; they would also be in a position to explore resiliency factors within couples. All must be considered under the "best interest of the child " (APA, 2012) aspirational guideline, and would pave the way for more systematic decisions on co-parenting relationships, parental fitness, and caregiving capacity.

Despite the restricted focus of the proposed study, the anticipated findings will enrich both attachment theory and forensic practice in child custody. With Byrne and colleagues' (2005) call for attachment theory to be utilized in forensic science, it is the investigator hope that the anticipated findings will offer a novel way to integrate attachment theory into forensic practice and open the door for future scientific inquiry. However, practitioners and researchers must remember that psychological assessment measures capture a finite, albeit personally substantial, moment of the litigant's ongoing

and ever evolving life story. Towards this end, it is the author's hope that this work will serve as an "empathy magnifier" that will be useful for forensic practitioners to get into clients' shoes (Finn, 2007; Finn & Tonsager, 1997). In this way, not only are the child's best interests honored, but more effective recommendations, strategies, and decisions are delivered to uphold the best interests of the family system.

Appendix A

Figure 1. A model of attachment-system activation and functioning in adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003)



Appendix B

Rorschach Variables of *Hyperactivation/Anxiety*

CS Variable [1]	RPAS Variable[2]	Calculations RPAS	CS Terms & Their RPAS Counterparts
Afr (Affective Ratio)	R8910% (Eight-nine-ten percent)	The # of responses to last 3 cards divided by the total R	Afr no longer used. Now calculated as R8910%
CF (Color dominated determinant with Form)	CF	Determinant Color Form Count	Same across systems
Col-sh Blend (Color-shading Blend)	CBlend (Color Blend)	Blends of Color with Shading or Achromatic Color	Same across systems
m (Inanimate Movement)	m	Determinant – inanimate movement Count	Same across systems
Y (Diffuse Shading)	Y	Determinant – diffuse shading Count	Same across systems
Mor (Morbid Content)	Mor	Thematic Score	Same across systems
Food	ODL% (Oral Dependency Language Thematic Code)	ODL / Total # of responses	Food now accounted for by ODL
T (Texture)	T	Determinant-Texture Count	Same across systems

[1]Comprehensive System (CS; Exner, 1995, 2001) applies to previous work of Berant et al. (2005)
[2]Rorschach-Performance Assessment System (R-PAS; Meyer et al., 2011) applies to the proposed study

Appendix C

Rorschach Variables of *Deactivation/Avoidance*

CS Variable[1]	R-PAS Variable[2]	Calculations RPAS	CS Terms & Their RPAS Counterparts
FM (Animal Movement)	FM	Animal Movement Count	Same across systems
L (Lambda)	F% (Form Percent)	F percent; divided by R	Lambda now calculated as F%
Fr + rF (Form dominance of Reflections)	r (Reflections)	Reflection Determinant Count	Fr + rF now coded as r
Cg (Clothing)	Cg	Clothing Codes Count	Same across systems

[1]Comprehensive System (CS; Exner, 1995, 2001) applies to previous work of Berant et al. (2005)
[2]Rorschach-Performance Assessment System (R-PAS; Meyer et al., 2011) applies to the proposed study

Appendix D

The Marital Adjustment Test (MAT)

Description of Measure:

A 15-item scale that measures marital satisfaction. It was initially used to differentiate well-adjusted couples from distressed (unsatisfied) couples. The 15 items are answered on a variety of response scales. Reliability found to be .90 (Locke & Walace, 1959).

Questionnaire:

MAT

Print Name_____ Date_____

Circle One: *Male* *Female*

Circle the dot on the scale line which best describes the degree of happiness, everything considered, of your present marriage. The middle point "happy" represents the degree of happiness which most people get from marriage, and the scale gradually ranges on one side to those few who are very unhappy in marriage, and on the other, to those few who experience extreme joy or felicity in marriage.

• • • • • • •

Very Unhappy Happy Perfectly Happy

State the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your mate on the following items. Please check each column.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
Handling Family Finances						
Matters of Recreation						
Demonstrations of Affection						
Friends						
Sex relations						
Conventionality (right, good, or proper conduct)						
Philosophy of Life						
Ways of dealing with in-laws						

Circle one letter in each statement:

When disagreements arise, they usually result in: (**a**) husband giving in, (**b**) wife giving in, (**c**) agreement by mutual give and take.

Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together? (**a**) All of them, (**b**) some of them, (**c**) very few of them, (**d**) none of them.

In leisure time do you generally prefer: (**a**) to be "on the go", (**b**) to stay at home?

Does your mate generally prefer: (**a**) to be "on the go", (**b**) to stay at home?

Do you ever wish you had not married? (**a**) Frequently, (**b**) occasionally,(**c**) rarely, (**d**) never

If you had your life to live over again, do you think you would: (**a**) marry the same person, (**b**) marry a different person, (**c**) not marry at all?

Do you ever confide in your mate: (**a**) almost never, (**b**) rarely, (**c**) in most things, (**d**) in everything?

(LW-MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959)

Appendix E

Descriptive statistics and theoretical interpretations of selected R-PAS variables:

Table 1. Variables delineating Attachment **Anxiety**

Variable	Mean*	SD*	Interpretation[1]
R8910%	31.82	5.42	Attraction to emotional situations
CF	1.35	1.58	Problems in emotion regulation
CBlend	50.30	27.75	Intrusion of negative affect
m	1.64	1.61	Experience of situational stressors
Y	1.51	1.68	A sense of helplessness
Mor	1.32	1.48	Failure to maintain a positive self-image
ODL%	11.62	8.89	Adoption of a dependent relational position
T (rs>1)	0.69	0.94	Strong desire for interpersonal closeness

Table 2. Variables delineating Attachment **Avoidance**

Variable	Mean*	SD*	Interpretation[1]
Low FM	2.89	1.94	Lack of acknowledgement and expression of one's primary needs
High F%	41.64	17.24	Disengaged attitudes toward reality
r	0.46	0.96	Maintain a grandiose, inflated self-representation
Cg	1.46	1.56	A tendency to hide behind a façade

**Descriptive statistics taken from Meyers and colleagues' (2011) reference sample (n=1396);* [1] Interpretations taken from R-PAS (Meyers et al., 2011)

Appendix F

Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients

Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients

$$D_i = \beta_1 Z_1 + \beta_2 Z_2 + \ldots + \beta_p Z_p$$

Equation 1: Attachment Anxiety

$$D_{Anxiety} = \beta_1 R8910\% + \beta_2 CF + \beta_3 CBlend + \beta_4 m + \beta_5 Y + \beta_6 Mor + \beta_7 ODL\% + \beta_8 T$$

Equation 2: Attachment Avoidance

$$D_{Avoidance} = \beta_1 FM + \beta_2 F\% + \beta_3 r + \beta_4 Cg$$

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