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# Reliability of the Five-Factor Model for Determining Parental Alienation

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## ABSTRACT

Mental health practitioners (MHPs) need a reliable assessment tool for parental alienation (PA). This study assesses the reliability of the Five-Factor Model (FFM) asserted to test for PA. The FFM contains five criteria; Yes, responses to each of the five criterion is asserted to indicate PA is occurring. Six vignettes were presented to respondents, who provided a response for each of the five criteria. The Intraclass Correlation Coefficient indicated reliability with an average of 0.923 for all vignettes. The Cronbach Alpha values indicate consistency, with an average of 0.926. FFM was determined to be a reliable assessment tool for PA.

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Mental health professionals (MHPs) often address claims that parental alienation (PA) is occurring during divorce and post-divorce. MHPs are also consulted by family courts to decide whether PA is occurring when allegations have been made. Knowledge that PA is occurring will assist MHPs to set up effective treatment plans. The first step of this process dictates that the behaviors and strategies that define PA be correctly identified as occurring. Thus, creating the need for a reliable assessment tool to assist and structure that determination.

While the percentage of allegations of PA might not be in the majority, its negative impact to children highlights the importance of a reliable instrument to appropriately identify injurious behaviors that could further destroy the family relationship between parents and children (Warshak, 2020). Searching for an assessment tool, early researchers focused on the eight behavioral manifestations identified by Richard Gardner, MD, (Baker et al., 2012; Baker & Damall, 2007; Rowlands, 2019). More recently, Baker (2018) developed an assessment tool for PA called the Four-Factor Model. Her model presented four criteria-filled questions that, if observed, indicated a significant likelihood that parental alienation is occurring. Baker's

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research concluded that this instrument was reliable and valid to make an accurate determination of the occurrence of PA.

William Bernet, MD, built on Baker's assessment tool and added a criterion to enhance Baker's Four-Factor Model. Bernet (2020) asserted that the additional criterion evolved from the definition of PA and provided a measure to assist mental health professionals in determining whether the resistance to contact the alienated parent was "unjustified." The intended result of the additional criterion is to determine if contact resistance was occurring and exclude children where there is no contact resistance. Bernet detailed his model in 2020 in a published paper titled, "The Five-Factor Model for the Diagnosis of Parental Alienation."

This study sought to determine the reliability of the Five-Factor Model by determining the level of agreement between raters. This method of evaluation can be used to establish the reliability of a specific set of facts. In this study, the researchers sought to determine the rate of agreement between raters reviewing six vignettes. The vignettes, by design may or may not present any of Gardner's eight behavioral manifestations of PA or Baker's 17 alienating strategies. These strategies are referred to as alienating behaviors (ABs). Statistical testing of the responses provided by multiple raters viewing the same vignette will indicate whether the defined behaviors and alienating strategies are identified in similar ways. When rater agreement occurs, researchers may conclude that the assessment tool is reliably measuring the same thing (Koo & Li, 2016). In this case, the measurement is for the behaviors that encompass PA.

## **Literature review**

### ***Parental alienation***

The concept, parental alienation syndrome, was originally named by Richard Gardner, MD, in 1985. As a psychiatrist, Gardner conducted child custody evaluations and observed a repeating pattern of behavior where children would unjustifiably reject a once loved parent. He theorized that one of the divorcing spouses was the cause of the unwarranted rejection and named this rejection of the once-loved parent parental alienation syndrome (Gardner, 1985, 1992, 2002). Gardner documented the details of behaviors he associated with alienation, and provided examples through documented observations of children during custody evaluations in his 1985 seminal paper on PA. He categorized his observations of behaviors into eight groups, which now are referred to as the eight behavioral manifestations of PA.

## **PA controversy**

Today, behavioral scientists have settled on parental alienation as the term used to identify the concept and a general definition as “a mental condition in a child usually whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict separation or divorce, in which the child allies strongly with one parent and rejects a relationship with the other parent without legitimate justification” (Bernet, 2020, p.5). The concept of PA has been validated by MHPs and researchers who have observed the behaviors and reported their observations. The Parental Alienation Study Group webpage (PASG, 2021) maintains a database of publications related to PA. This site provides a list of 913 qualitative and approximately 255 quantitative publications or reports that deal with PA. Regardless of the many observations and reports, some practitioners and social science researchers are still at odds with accepting the existence of PA and how to deal with it despite its conceptual development.

Although it is good to discuss PA to increase our knowledge, bantering based on what seems to be a lack of understanding of research methodology contributes indirectly to the continuing occurrence of PA, and the assertion by detractors that PA is based on nothing more than ‘junk science’ (Katz, 2003; Teoh et al., 2018; Thomas & Richardson, 2015). Two of these articles come from journals relating to law, with the third being presented on an American Bar Association web page. All make disclaimers concerning the existence of PA, and each gives the appearance of providing argumentative support in court for those accused of parental alienation. Research supporting the nonexistence of PA is not presented.

Two types of research classifications exist, quantitative and qualitative. The discovery of and reporting of PA aligns with the Grounded Theory, an accepted research methodology regularly used in the medical field and first introduced by Sociologist Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 (Nathanial, 2021). Generally, the person who reports the theory did not set out to report theories or conduct research; however, during their work they observed a repeated pattern of behavior, or a relationship between two variables. Gardner reported his observations, which were collected while conducting child custody evaluations.

A second and recurring point raised by the detractors of PA concerned its evolution and its supporting research data. The question most often asked is, “Where is Gardner’s research data?” Every child custody evaluation is a written record of the MHPs’ observations and fact-gathering purposed to assist the family court in determining custody. These written records resemble field data utilized under Grounded Theory research methodologies. Researchers report their observations, retrospect, as did Richard Gardner. Each child custody evaluation is essentially a report containing qualitative data.

From their unique vantage point MHPs have reported their observations of PA behaviors observed during child custody evaluations for divorce and high conflict divorce cases. Research that shows PA to be nonexistent would be of interest and put the arguments to rest. The only reports found by researchers of this study are those that simply disclaim its existence. No studies were located to disprove PA.

While conducting a child custody assessment, it is incumbent on the MHP to understand the many issues that can impact the outcome of their evaluation. Gardner (1999) noted that, “therapists who treat PAS children individually are likely to be ‘led down the garden path’ and seduced into believing that their patients have indeed been subjected to the humiliations that PAS children are so skilled in describing” (p. 1). Gardner is referring to deceit or lying of which both parents and children can play an active part. Loftus and Pickrell (1995) determined that memories could be altered and manipulated. Thus, children and adults can be led to believe something occurred that did not. Loftus (2003) demonstrated that false memories relating to claims of abuse is a significant issue. These are additional issues that MPHs should be aware of and watch for when assessing PA.

### ***Determining reliability***

Researchers emphasize that before an instrument or assessment tool can be appropriately used for research or clinical applications, its’ reliability must be established (de Vet et al., 2017; Koo & Li, 2016). Hallgren (2012) asserts that the assessment of Inter-Rater Reliability provides a way of quantifying the degree of agreement between two or more coders (raters), making independent ratings about a featured set of subjects or factors. Instruments that provide a high degree of correlation between factors and the agreement between raters are deemed reliable as they provide a consistent measurement each time the instrument is used (Koo & Li, 2016). While there are several statistical methods to determine an instrument’s reliability, Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) and Cronbach Alpha (CA) were used for this study.

The intraclass correlation coefficient is an established technique that measures the degree of correlation between factors and agreement between raters (Koo & Li, 2016). Thus, we are testing agreement between a group of factors and a group of raters which gives us a measure of reliability. Koo and Li (2016) indicate that when the result of ICC is less than or equal to 0.5, the reliability is poor. Should ICC values occur between 0.5 to 0.75, the reliability is considered moderate. Values between 0.75 to 0.90 are considered good and values greater than 0.90 are considered to have excellent reliability.

Reliability coefficients such as ICC are not considered true statistical tests but are coefficients of reliability and include the established Cronbach's Alpha (CA) (de Vet et al., 2017; McGraw & Wong, 1996). Tavakol and Dennick (2011) indicate CA provides a measure for internal consistency of a test or scale. If items in a test are correlated to each other the alpha values will increase. Values range from 0 to 1, with a value of 0.75 to 0.95 considered to indicate reliability. Both the ICC and Cronbach Alpha values are reported in this study.

### ***Origins of vignettes***

Carlos Rueda as a student, conducted an interrater reliability study on PA (dissertation) in 2003 and later published a paper on his study in 2004. At the time of the Rueda study, PA was referred to as parental alienation syndrome or PAS. Rueda's (2004) report is a peer reviewed reporting of his dissertation findings which contained five vignettes based on real cases from Rueda's private counseling practice. No names and/or identifying information were included. Three of the cases had valid symptoms of PA. One of the cases presented some similarities with PA but did not meet the criteria for PA. Last, one case did not present any criteria for PA. Rueda (2004), indicated the five vignettes were "evaluated by a panel of experts in child custody and PAS" (p. 394). For this study an additional vignette was added (Case 6) by the researchers which contained rejection of one of the parents; however, rejection was not due to PA. Rueda (2003) sought to determine the reliability of the eight behavioral manifestations for determining the occurrence of PA. In his study, he found the manifest behaviors to be recognizable and thus reliable for identifying PA. The number of raters who participated, 14 for test and 10 for re-test, was small, thus not allowing for any significant application due to sample size. The above is relevant in that Rueda's five vignettes were utilized in this study.

In his dissertation, Morrison (2006) replicated the Rueda study using the same vignettes. Morrison determined from his research that the eight manifest behaviors are reliable in identifying PA. Morrison's sample size was slightly larger with 32 raters for test and 20 raters for re-test; however, still not significant in sample size for application.

### ***Assessment tool development efforts***

Baker and Damall (2007) surveyed 68 parents who believed they were victims of alienation for the presence and severity of Gardner's eight behavioral manifestations. The study showed support for the presence of

the eight behavioral manifestations of PA. Additionally, the study raised hope for intervention and reunification with alienated children. Baker and Chambers (2011) developed the Baker Strategies Questionnaire (BSQ), which was purposed to assist MHPs in determining the presence of the 17 strategies of PA.

In 2012 Baker and colleagues created a 28-question assessment tool called the Baker Assessment Questionnaire (BAQ). The questions were formulated from the eight behavioral manifestations of PA identified initially by Gardner. The BAQ administered to the child has two sets of identical questions, one set about the mother and one set about the father. Questions were designed to elicit the child's thoughts and feelings about each parent to map the critical behaviors of PA. For example, a child could claim they do not have any good memories of one parent and nothing but good memories of the other. Questions presented to the children were purposed to help identify if the child was alienated from one parent and aligned with the other, and those children who did not have any of Gardner's eight behavioral manifestations of PA. When the alienation-consistent responses were summed, the researchers used the score to classify the children as alienated or not with a 96% accuracy rate, (Baker et al., 2012).

Cunha-Gomide and colleagues developed the Parental Alienations Scale, a questionnaire utilized by evaluators (MHPs) working with the family. The questionnaire sought responses from both parents and the children on family activities and behaviors. The questionnaire assisted in identifying the alienating parent from the target parent, as well as alienated children from non-alienated children (Cunha-Gomide et al., 2016).

Rowlands (2019) developed and tested the *Rowlands Parental Alienation Scale*, a testing instrument for PA directed at alienated parents. Rowlands' study asked 42 questions purposed to determine the prevalence of the eight behavioral manifestations identified by Gardner. Using factorial analysis, Rowlands determined which PA behaviors were most prevalent. She also identified two of the eight manifest behaviors that were less likely to occur, such as making false abuse allegations and having negative interactions or no interactions with extended family.

While most early research focused on the eight behavioral manifestations (Baker et al., 2012; Baker & Damall, 2007; Rowlands, 2019), some focused on measuring the 17 strategies (Baker & Fine, 2008; Baker & Chambers, 2011). More recently, Baker broadened an assessment tool for PA to include other factors (Baker, 2018). Baker's research culminated in a PA assessment tool called the Four-Factor Model. This model presented four questions or criteria. If these criteria are observed, it is an indication that parental alienation is occurring. Baker concluded through her research that the



Four-Factor Model was a reliable assessment instrument for determining if PA was occurring.

As stated previously, William Bernet, MD, added one additional criterion to Baker's Four-Factor Model. Bernet called his PA assessment tool the Five-Factor Model and provided details in a published paper titled, "Five-Factor Model for the Diagnosis of Parental Alienation." Bernet's additional criterion was purposed to enhance the Four-Factor Model.

### **Five-Factor Model**

Each factor of the Five-Factor Model is defined below.

*Factor One: the child manifests contact resistance or refusal, i.e., avoids a relationship with one of the parents.* Does the child avoid or refuse contact with one of the parents? Does the child avoid a relationship with one of the parents? This criterion was added to Baker's Four-Factor Model by Bernet (2020) and purposed to enhance Baker's Four-Factor Model.

*Factor Two: the presence of a prior positive relationship between the child and the now rejected parent.* For this criterion the evaluator is asked to determine if there was a prior positive relationship between the child and the now rejected parent (Baker, 2018; Bernet, 2020). Both Baker and Bernet explain in their papers how the MHP might be able to arrive at or determine an answer.

*Factor Three: the absence of abuse, neglect, or seriously deficient parenting on the part of the now-rejected parent.* For this criterion the evaluator is being asked to determine if there is true abuse, neglect or if there is seriously deficient parenting to provide an answer of Yes or No (Baker, 2018; Bernet, 2020).

*Factor Four: the use of multiple alienating behaviors on the part of the favored parent.* Baker (2018), and Bernet (2020) state, for a child to be considered alienated, they must have been exposed to parental alienation behaviors by the favored parent. To answer Yes to this factor, the alienating behaviors must be observed through the actions, attitudes, written statements, and behaviors. Baker (2018) lists the 17 alienating strategies. These alienating strategies are also referred to as alienating behaviors (ABs).

*Factor 5: the child exhibits many of the eight behavioral manifestations of alienation.* For this factor, Baker (2018) and Bernet (2020) provide a list of eight behavioral manifestations. They were initially presented in the writings of Richard Gardner, MD, and are listed in his book *The Parental Alienation Syndrome*, published in 1992. If any of the eight behavioral manifestations are observed the evaluator would answer Yes to this question and No if they are not observed. Unsure was also an answer choice for each factor.



Factors Two, Three, Four, and Five are factors contained in the Four-Factor Model identified and presented by Baker et al. (2012) and Baker et al. (2014) in the book, *High Conflict Custody Battle*. Lorandos and Bernet (2020) authored *Parental Alienation – Science and Law*. The book discusses the why in the adding of Factor One, in that it stems from the definition of PA. This paper reports the results obtained concerning the reliability of the proposed Five-Factor Model for determining if PA is occurring.

## **Methodology**

### **Respondents**

In February 2021, invitations to participate in an inter-rater reliability study were sent by email to 1,116 potential respondents, who identified themselves as MHPs. Lists of email addresses were obtained from Parental Alienation Study Group (PASG) members or lists obtained from the Parental Alienation Study Group webpage itself, the American Psychological Association, the Professional Academy of Custody Evaluations, and an Internet search seeking child custody evaluators. Respondents were selected if they had a present role in determining if PA was occurring. A global audience was approached with emails going to MHPs from six of the seven continents. The study was also announced on the PASG Facebook page and in the “Contemporary Family” newsletter. Approximately two weeks after sending the initial request for participation, 739 reminder emails were sent to the potential respondents. A reduction in the number of reminders being sent was due to notices of bad email addresses.

### **Survey instrument**

Rueda’s five vignettes were reused in this study and presented to the respondents each as a case. An additional case, Case 6, was created to depict the rejection of a parent for reasons other than PA. Case 6 presents a child’s personal preference of one parent over the other, evolving from non-alienating reasons and non-abuse reasons. The survey instrument contained five questions reflective of each factor and several questions seeking responses on other PA observations. Case 1 included some demographic questions and questions related to family court. The survey email contents are as follows, the study purpose, there was no requirement of participation, and anonymity was provided for each participant. Each survey email provided a link to each of the six cases. When accessed each case provided the respondent with the survey questions, a vignette,

a list of the 8 manifest behaviors (for reference) and a list of the 17 ABs (for reference). Responses to the survey questions were collected via an Internet link to an Excel spreadsheet, purposed to collect the respondents' answers.

### ***Case descriptions***

For Case 1, several of the 17 ABs are presented. This story presents clear PA.

For Case 2, evaluators are presented initially with rejection due to poor parenting. There is a shift from no PA initially, over time what could be construed as PA behaviors emerge. A dilemma is created on how to respond.

For Case 3, several of the 17 ABs are presented, and one of the eight behavioral manifestations occurs. This story presents clear PA.

For Case 4, the story presents a child who appears to be having post-divorce emotional issues and may have developed her own desire to avoid a parent. There are no ABs presented. The child's rejection of contact and communication with one of the parents could be interpreted as one of the eight behavior manifestations. The rejection could be construed as occurring due to PA; however, it is not. The story presents the complexities of a PA determination. The expected answer should be no.

For Case 5, respondents are presented with several of the eight behavioral manifestations. Respondents also are presented with one of the 17 ABs. This story presents clear PA.

Case 6 illustrates a scenario where the child presents a desire to be with one of the parents. That desire was based on the relationship that existed before the divorce, in that the child spent a great deal of quality time with one parent. The other parent had a demanding job that left him with little interaction time. The rejection for one parent did not occur because of PA behaviors. Simply, one parent is favored. When asked if PA is occurring, the expected answer for this question should be no.

### ***Survey questions***

The Five-Factor Model is composed of five questions or criteria. These were previously listed and defined. In each case presented for this study, respondents were asked five questions reflective of each of the factors for the Five-Factor Model. They are Questions 1 through Question 5 in the survey instrument. Each question aligns with the corresponding factor. For Case 1, some demographic questions and family court-related questions were asked as a part of the survey. For Case 1, the respondents were also asked if they were familiar with parental alienation.

### ***Statistical technique utilized***

An inter-rater reliability study sought to evaluate an assessment tool for parental alienation called the Five-Factor Model. Is the assessment tool, the Five-Factor Model, reliable when utilized to determine if PA is occurring?

Testing the reliability of the Five-Factor Model as an assessment tool, two reliability coefficients that use classical test theory were chosen, the results are expressed in intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs), and Cronbach's Alpha (CA) for each vignette. ICC and CA were chosen for their reliability in expressing the ratio of variance derived from the analysis of variance (ANOVA). These methods provide an acceptable and established method of determining the rate of agreement between raters (de Vet et al., 2017). SPSS and Excel were used for statistical testing and determining percentage values. It should be noted that percentage value calculations do not consider chance error when presented as a rate of agreement, thus the reason for utilizing and determining the ICC. The study is a two-way mixed model (non-random selection) with a Confidence Interval of 95%.

For this study,  $k$  was the rater, and  $n$  was the survey factor, thus  $n=5$ . Not all respondents rated all the cases, thus  $k$  is different for each of the six vignettes. Based on guidelines by Koo and Li (2016) a two-way mixed-effects model was chosen, as only raters of interest who were likely to assist the court on custody decisions were included. For type, multiple raters versus a single rater were selected;  $k$  is greater than one. Last for agreement; absolute agreement was selected for this study sought to measure agreement between raters. No agreement is coded as 0. Total agreement would be coded as 1 and indicates absolute agreement. Researchers indicate results of 0.75 to 0.90 as a good indicator of reliability, and greater than 0.90 indicates excellent reliability (de Vet et al., 2017; Koo & Li, 2016).

Cronbach alpha (CA) is another measurement for determining reliability (Cronbach, 1951; de Vet et al., 2017; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Tavakol and Dennick (2011) indicate CA is purposed to provide a measure for internal consistency of a test or scale. It is important to understand it is not a statistical test, but rather a method for determining a coefficient of reliability. If items in a test are correlated to each other the alpha values will increase. Values range from 0 to 1, with a value of 0.75 to 0.95 considered to be scores which indicate reliability. Cronbach's alpha is used to provide a measure of internal consistency for the five factors as a test instrument.

### **Results**

The purpose of this inter-rater reliability study was to determine the reliability of the Five-Factor Model. Reliability was determined by the

agreement rate between raters once a set of facts via a case or vignette had been reviewed and scored. The scores were analyzed using SPSS and the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient value for each case was determined at a 95% confidence interval. ICC indicated reliability in this study and the results are presented below in Table 1. To increase the measure for reliability, six different vignettes were utilized, requiring separate ratings by the rater. The ICC value for each vignette is provided as well as the average of all six vignettes. The aggregate number of ratings was 250.

For each case, the participation response is as follows:

For Case 1. there were 61 respondents. That is, at best, a 5% response rate, given that 1116 emails were sent.  $k = 61$

For Case 2. there were 46 respondents.  $k = 46$  4% response rate Need spaces between  $k = 46$  and 4%

For Case 3. there were 40 respondents.  $k = 40$  5% response rate

For Case 4, there were 37 respondents.  $k = 37$  3% response rate

For Case 5. there were 32 respondents.  $k = 32$  4% response rate

For Case 6. there were 34 respondents.  $k = 34$  3% response rate

Only 29, or approximately half of the respondents for Case 1, completed all six cases. Thus, each case result is independently reported. As previously indicated, respondents' demographic information was requested in conjunction with Case 1 as well as questions concerning family court and parental alienation. With only 29 respondents evaluating all six cases, the demographic results presented are only applicable to Case 1. For Case 5 (32) and Case 6 (34), the number of participating respondents was close to the total number of respondents to all six cases. To protect the anonymity of the respondents, only the USA and Canada were identified as countries, while the continent of residence identified others. Thirty-seven percent of those that responded to Case 1 live outside of North America. The results support knowledge of PA as a global phenomenon. Demographics only apply to Case 1 and are as follows: 38 from the USA, 7 from Canada, 2 from South America, 8 from Europe, 4 from Asia, 1 from Africa and 1 gave no answer. Respondents for Case 1 were also asked "Are you familiar with parental alienation?" Ninety-five percent or 58 said Yes, with 3 stating No. In determining reliability, Button et al. (2020) indicate it is essential for the rater to have what is called "Observer Expertise." The rater should have knowledge of PA.

### **Data analysis**

While not significant in number, it is worthy to note for Case 1, three respondents were not familiar with parental alienation. Respondents were

asked to review six cases. Upon completing the review, respondents were asked to indicate, No, Unsure, or Yes to Question 1 through Question 5, with each question representing one of the five factors of the Five-Factor Model. Below, Table 1. contains the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) for each Case.

A two-way mixed-effects model where people effects are random and measures effects are fixed.

**Cronbach alpha results**

Cronbach Alpha values range from 0 to 1 and a higher value indicates agreement. A lower value indicates a lack of agreement. In this study a value of 0.827 was the lowest obtained and a value of 0.995 was the highest. The average Cronbach Alpha for all cases was 0.915. Table 2 contains the Cronbach Alpha results.

**Data availability**

The data set collected for this research project is available from the authors. Stephen Lee Morrison, email is [smorrisontx@aol.com](mailto:smorrisontx@aol.com) and Robyn Ring email is [robynring@gmail.com](mailto:robynring@gmail.com).

**Limitations**

A limitation of this study was that the vignettes are short stories with limited information. Respondents cannot acquire additional information to help them in their determination for the occurrence of PA or to clarify any given information. Another limitation is that an assessment tool is only as good as the skills possessed by the administrator. If the person using the tool lacks the skills and knowledge needed for its use, then the

**Table 1.** ICC Results  $k$  is the number of raters, and  $n$  is the number of factors.

$k$	Average measures	Intraclass correlation	95% Confidence interval		F test with true value 0			
			Lower bound	Upper bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig
61	Case 1	0.850	0.590	0.982	7.465	4	240	.000
46	Case 2	0.972	0.922	0.997	42.3838	4	180	.000
40	Case 3	0.948	0.804	0.997	19.422	2	78	.000
37	Case 4	0.946	0.795	0.999	19.294	2	72	.000
32	Case 5	0.829	0.447	0.988	5.809	3	93	.001
34	Case 6	0.995	0.976	1.000	221.12.	1	33	.000
	Average	0.923						

**Table 2.** Cronbach alpha results.

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Average all
0.866	0.976	0.948	0.948	0.827	0.995	0.915

results they provide could be in error. This MHP evaluation error could impact the reliability of the test instrument. Another limitation of this study is that it evaluated responses to a designed vignette (analogy type research) as opposed to evaluation of individual observations or evaluations of human interactions. While this type of research on more controlled studies allows researchers greater control over variables, the limitation is the inability to capture real life interactions and attributes. Nesselroade and Molenaar (2016) discuss the difficulties encountered by researchers when conducting research on human behavior.

### **Family court**

As a part of Case 1, respondents were asked if they believed our present-day adversarial family court could be improved upon. Ninety-five percent stated Yes. Respondents were asked if they believed the assignment of mental health professionals upon entry into the family court system could help reduce conflict? Eighty-six percent stated Yes.

### **Interpersonal violence**

Research conducted by Harman et al. (2018) concluded that PA is an unacknowledged form of interpersonal violence. In their paper, they present and discuss the losses endured by those who suffer from PA. Historically, our society has sought and made significant efforts to address domestic violence or interpersonal violence; however, some appear to be ignoring this research conclusion. In this study, 51 of 61 respondents for Case 1, or 83%, viewed parental alienation as a form of domestic violence. Three of the respondents provided no answer, and seven said no, it was not interpersonal violence.

### **Discussion**

The importance of an assessment tool for PA has been presented. Other issues to discuss are the adversarial nature of the family court which continues to be an issue. While some lawyers will steer their clients away from conflict, some hold steadfast to their client's position, even if they know it is wrong, and/or creates harm. These lawyers will hire experts that support their effort to win even if the results create harm (Prescott & Fadgen, 2019). Ashish Joshi, a practicing family attorney, and author of *Litigating Parental Alienation* (2021) made the following statement on Facebook, "Lawyers who have represented a targeted parent and seen what parental alienation does to the targeted parent flip their position when representing an alienating parent and go on to challenge the existence of

the phenomenon itself” (Joshi, 2021). Prescott and Fadgen (2019) assert that the adversarial nature of the family courts is itself a contributor to conflict and decision dilemmas for judges. Each side in the divorce proceedings will hire competing experts, which likely creates “partisan bias in experts through unconscious affiliation with the side that hires them (i.e., adversarial allegiance) and by attorneys who select and pressure experts to make extreme claims” (Prescott & Fadgen, 2019, p. 122).

Respondents were also asked if they believed the assignment of mental health professionals upon entry into the family court system could help reduce conflict; 86% stated yes. Pruett et al. (2005) conducted a study purposed to reduce conflict in family court proceedings when divorce occurs. MHPs were utilized during the divorce process not to choose sides but to address conflict issues. Their intervention model resulted in outcomes with less overall conflict and reducing the need for costly court services.

Research conducted by Harman et al. (2018) concludes that PA is an unacknowledged form of interpersonal violence. In Case 1, respondents were asked if they believed parental alienation was interpersonal violence or domestic violence, with 83% indicating Yes. How can society only address domestic violence between partners in relationships and then ignore other forms of abuse, such as the emotional abuse occurring during divorce and post-divorce? Children caught in the middle are robbed of healthy family relationships with both parents and their extended families.

Warshak (2020) presents a paper on the complexities of a child custody evaluation and the determination that PA occurs. His paper highlights the effects of false positives, conclusions that PA is happening when it is not. Asserting PA is occurring when it is not would be detrimental, and likewise, not recognizing the occurrence of PA would be similarly detrimental. Harman et al. (2018) presents the harmful effects (abuse aspect) of PA when it is occurring, and it is either ignored or not correctly diagnosed. Kerr and Bowen (1988) assert that the examination should be expanded to include all family members as noted under the family systems theory that describes the family unit as a complex social system in which members interact and influence each other’s behavior. In the end, it seems clear that an assessment tools’ success for determining if PA is occurring hinges on the knowledge of PA possessed by the evaluator, noting there is always the possibility of error. The objective of all is to reduce the potential for error.

### ***Future studies***

Replication of any study serves to grow our knowledge base. Replication of this study is a viable research opportunity. Responses obtained in this



study indicated that our family courts could be improved upon. Research should be conducted on methods for improving our family courts. Responses suggested that MHPs should be assigned to family courts with a purpose of reducing conflict. This should be further tested. Possible research on certification for MHPs and judicial officials is worth exploring.

## **Conclusion**

### ***Validity***

To assert the validity of a test instrument it must be determined that the instrument measures what it is reported to measure. One should also note a test instrument could be deemed reliable yet not have validity, in that it does not measure what it is purposed to measure. Previous studies have validated the concept of PA and its components. These components were utilized in the creation of the Five Factor Model. The findings of this study suggest the test instrument for PA as being valid.

### ***Reliability of the Five-Factor Model***

The purpose of this research was to determine the reliability of the Five-Factor Model. This is achieved by determining the rate of agreement between raters utilizing the five factors to determine if PA may be occurring when given a certain set of facts for evaluation. A statistical method for determining the rate of agreement is by determining the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient. Koo and Li (2016) report that Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) is a widely used reliability index for interrater reliability analyses. Values between 0.75 and 0.90 have a good rating of reliability, and a value greater than 0.90 yields a test instrument with excellent reliability. The agreement between raters participating in this study for all cases is 0.829 or greater, with an average for all six cases being 0.926. This high value suggests the Five-Factor Model is reliable when measuring for PA. It also suggests that PA is recognizable, that there is agreement on the PA manifest behaviors and that they are observable. There is also agreement on the existence of the strategies used to cause PA and that they are observable.

The researchers in this study sought respondents who had knowledge of PA. For Case 1, 95% of the respondents indicated they knew of or were familiar with PA (Observer Expertise). This question was not asked of respondents evaluating the other cases—the ICC value for Case 1 where  $k=61$  is 0.850. A value of 1 indicates absolute agreement, where a value of zero indicates no agreement. The Cronbach Alpha for Case 1 is 0.866

Cronbach Alpha provides a coefficient of reliability. Tavakol and Dennick (2011) indicate values of 0.75 to 0.95 are considered indicators of reliability

for a test or scale. For this study the lowest obtained value was 0.827 and the highest value was 0.995, with an average of 0.926 for all cases. The Cronbach Alpha values obtained for all cases fall within the parameters of values deemed to indicate reliability.

Six cases were evaluated by each respondent, thus six tests. Each ICC test produced a score indicating agreement between raters. Four of the six tests yielded results of excellent reliability, and two reporting good reliability. The results obtained in this study statistically indicated that the Five-Factor Model is a reliable assessment tool for determining if parental alienation occurs. The CA results also indicate the FFM is a reliable test for PA. The conclusion that PA is occurring requires exploring each factor of the Five-Factor Model, and an evaluator must have explicit knowledge of the difference between estrangement and parental alienation. A simple yes to each factor without exploration or analysis could yield a false conclusion. Likewise, not knowing the manifest behaviors and understanding alienating strategies could yield a wrong conclusion: PA is not occurring. This type of conclusion allows for the continuance of abuse, in that PA is considered a form of domestic or interpersonal violence.

The professionals who assist the court in making child custody decisions should know the causes of parental alienation, estrangement and know the difference between them. They should know about the “garden path.” They should know about the planting of false memories. They should know the 17 alienating strategies and the eight behavioral manifestations of PA. The MHP who may have to address PA in a clinical setting should possess the same knowledge.

Last, any MHP who must determine if PA is occurring should have a reliable assessment tool. The Five-Factor model enhances the Four-Factor Model, previously deemed a reliable assessment tool for PA (Baker, 2018). In this study, the Five-Factor Model as an assessment tool for the occurrence of PA has been determined to be valid and reliable.

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We confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved by all named authors and that there are no other persons who satisfied the criteria for authorship but are not listed. We further confirm that the order of authors listed in the manuscript has been approved by all of us. We confirm that we have given due consideration to the protection of intellectual property associated with this work and that there are no impediments to publication, including the timing of publication, with respect to intellectual property. We further confirm that any aspect of the work covered in this manuscript that has involved either experimental animals or human patients has been conducted with the ethical approval of all relevant bodies and that such approvals are acknowledged within the manuscript. We are both independent social researchers, under no publication obligations or contracts with any university. We understand that the Corresponding Author

is the sole contact for the Editorial process (including Editorial Manager and direct communications with the office). He/she is responsible for communicating with the other authors about progress, submissions of revisions and final approval of proofs. We confirm that we have provided a current, correct email address which is accessible by the Corresponding Author. Signed by all authors as follows: Stephen Lee Morrison and Robyn Ring.

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