

This Week's Citation Classic®

Parker G, Tupling H & Brown L B. A parental bonding instrument.

Brit. J. Med. Psychol. 52:1-10, 1979; and, Parker G. *Parental overprotection: a risk factor in psychosocial development.* New York: Grune & Stratton, 1983. 325 p.
[School of Psychiatry, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia]

The paper described the development of a refined self-report measure (the parental bonding instrument, or PBI) of fundamental parental attitudes and behaviors, defined as dimensions of "care" and "overprotection," with preliminary reliability and validity data. The monograph reported further studies of the psychometric properties of the PBI, and applied case-control studies in those with psychiatric and psychosomatic disorders. [The *SSCI*® and the *SCI*® indicate that the paper and monograph have been cited in some 170 and 105 publications, respectively].

A Parental Bonding Instrument

Gordon Parker
School of Psychiatry
University of New South Wales
Randwick 2031, Sydney
Australia

As a trainee in psychiatry, I was struck by the seemingly nonspecific and, at times, gratuitous imputation of a particular style of parenting as a causal determinant of most psychiatric (and even a number of nonpsychiatric) conditions. Such parental characteristics of low care and overprotection were captured in terms such as the "schizophrenogenic" and the "asthmaticogenic" mother. Rarely were fathers so captured, although Quentin Crisp (in *The Naked Civil Servant*¹) rejected any maternal monopoly on anomalous parenting, when he wrote, "My mother protected me from the world and my father threatened me with it."

I undertook a doctorate of medicine thesis, supervised by Laurie Brown (psychology) and Leslie Kiloh (psychiatry) and assisted by a research assistant (Hilary Tupling), with several objectives. The objectives were, first, to define

and refine the fundamental dimensions of care and protection that were held to underlie all important interpersonal (parent-child, husband-wife, teacher-pupil) relationships, and, second, develop a self-report measure (with the view that, if we are determined by early environmental factors, shaping emerges more from our perception of them than any "objective" reality).

Subsequently, as reported in the monograph and other publications,²⁻⁴ the measure has proved to be more robust than originally anticipated—not influenced by mood state, reliable in a sample retested after a decade, and of acceptable validity as a measure of "actual" as well as of "perceived" parenting. Applied studies suggest that those with "neurotic" disorders, but not those with psychotic disorders (such as schizophrenia and manic depressive psychosis), are distinctly more likely to report low parental care and parental overprotection (a style labelled "affectionless control") while chronic illness (e.g., asthma) and certain early childhood personality traits (e.g., dependency, separation anxiety) appear to elicit a caring variant of overprotection, with such studies therefore suggesting quite distinct specificity to the earlier general application of "toxic" or "noxious" parenting.

Most of the citations in recent years reflect use of the measure in applied studies with researchers examining specificity issues further, quantifying the level of risk, and pursuing determinants (genetic and environmental⁵) of disturbances in parental care and overprotection.

1. Crisp Q. *The naked civil servant.* London: Duckworth, 1977.

2. Parker G, Kiloh L & Hayward L. Parental representations of neurotic and endogenous depressives. *J. Affect. Disorders* 13:75-82, 1987.

3. Silove D, Parker G, Hadzi-Pavlovic D, Manicavasagar V & Blaszczynski A. Parental representations of patients with panic disorder and generalized anxiety disorder. *Brit. J. Psychiat.* 159:835-41, 1991.

4. Parker G, Hadzi-Pavlovic D, Mitchell P, Hickie I, Wilhelm K, Brodaty H, Boyce P & Roy K. Psychosocial risk factors distinguishing melancholia and non-melancholic depression: a comparison of six systems. *Psychiat. Res.* 39:211-26, 1992.

5. Neale M C, Walters E, Heath A C, Kessler R D, Pérusse D, Eaves L J & Kendler K S. Depression and parental bonding: cause, consequence, or genetic covariance? *Genet. Epidemiol.* (In press.)