

1 more so, for the consistency of their messages. Chief among these messages is the proposal that
2 infants benefit from a single, primary, secure base at least until they have the cognitive wherewithal
3 to understand the migratory patterns our courts are inclined to impose upon them (Main, Hesse, &
4 Hesse, 2011). Not only does primary placement in Parent A's care through years 1, 2, and 3 allow the
5 dyad to develop a secure relationship, it opens the door for the child to, thereafter, develop secure
6 bonds with others, including and especially Parent B. To divide the infant's time otherwise, these
7 authors argue, is to make the child work too hard and to potentially undermine her capacity to feel
8 secure in any relationship.

9 Certainly no parent wants to be marginalized in the Parent B role, visiting his or her baby for brief
10 daylight hours several times each week. However, the hypothetical parent who accepts the theory and
11 manages to put aside his or her needs in the best interest of the child for as long as 3 years (or, even
12 more likely, the court-ordered parent who has no other choice, pending appeal), reasonably asks how
13 the child's socio-emotional gains in Parent A's care will someday magically generalize to include him
14 or her. Unfortunately, attachment experts and the science that they so eloquently summarize fail to
15 answer this question directly. Instead, one is left to infer a dynamic that might be conceptualized as
16 *security by association*.

17 18 PRIMARY VERSUS SECONDARY ATTACHMENT? 19

20 The authors argue à la Bowlby (1988) that, in the harsh light of evolutionary biology, the infant's
21 opportunity to establish a primary attachment is imperative. They reason that the infant with a single,
22 unambiguous safe haven has a survival advantage over her peer with two (or more) attachment figures
23 who, figuratively consumed with the geometry of which of her havens is safest, risks being literally
24 consumed by a predator in the process (Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011). This reasoning also allows one to
25 imagine evolution's first custody battle emerging as the latter child's primary attachment figures argue
26 over who can provide the best protection. The child thus triangulated is at an additional evolutionary
27 disadvantage in that she becomes even more vulnerable to predation while her caregivers are preoc-
28 cupied filing motions and appearing in court.

29 To those of us who fear that infancy constitutes a critical (or at least a sensitive) period for the
30 development of attachments, thereby locking out the poor, marginalized Parent B forevermore, the
31 authors in this issue of *FCR* reply like a Greek chorus, "Bah, humbug!" Healthy human beings form
32 attachment relationships throughout the life span, from grandparents to daycare providers and, as
33 adults, to intimate partners. The question is, how?

34 35 (IN)SECURITY BY ASSOCIATION 36

37 Outside the extremes of deprivation, the quality of a child's primary attachment relationship has no
38 necessary bearing on the quality of her subsequent attachment relationships. We know, for example,
39 that the quality of a child's attachment to each of her two parents can be quite distinct and is strongly
40 related to the child's experience of each parent's sensitive and responsive care (Main et al., 2011).
41 Thus, when Parent B begins to assume greater and greater caregiving responsibility sometime in the
42 child's 3rd year, he is neither gifted nor cursed by the child's prior experience of Parent A's caregiving
43 successes and failures.

44 But is Parent B on his own to establish a secure relationship with the child whom he has only known
45 in passing throughout the course of her first 3 years? These authors suggest that the answer is no. The
46 quality of a child's attachment with Parent B is strongly mediated by the child's experience of Parent
47 A's relationship with and reaction to Parent B. This dynamic is implicit in George, Isaacs, and
48 Marvin's (2011, p. 523) reference to the critical value of the primary parent's endorsement of the
49 potential new attachment figure, such as when the child experiences his parents', ". . . shared joy in the
50 baby and eagerness to be together."

1 Lieberman, Zeanah, and McIntosh (2011, p. 536) explicitly state that “. . . to facilitate the devel-
2 opment of an attachment to the father, the mother would be present with the father and the young
3 child. Her presence would take separation reactions off the table for the child, then at least they would
4 be comfortable in exploring and developing a relationship with the father.”

5 Bowlby (2011, p. 555) recommends that

6
7 [o]ptimally, when you are building an attachment relationship, the primary figure is there, supporting it on
8 a frequent basis, and physically present to start with. You have then got to start stressing the child a little,
9 to realize that at some level their attachment seeking can be terminated by the new friend.

10
11 What about the child who never receives Parent A’s endorsement of Parent B? What happens when the
12 toddler, held tight in Parent A’s arms, feels that caregiver’s pulse quicken, her muscles contract, her
13 breathing become rapid and shallow, her voice become loud and harsh in response to Parent B’s
14 approach? Far from inducing comfort, inviting exploration, and communicating security, these
15 responses alert the child that a threat is approaching. They, in turn, trigger proximity-seeking behav-
16 iors in the child. Being removed from the safe haven that Parent A provides is the last thing that this
17 child needs—an outcome evolution has programmed her to avoid at all cost—and yet this is precisely
18 the outcome that we have engineered.

19 Of course, Parent A is likely unaware of the extent to which she is communicating her anxiety about
20 her former partner (irrespective of the objective validity of her reaction) to her child. From her point
21 of view, the child’s clingy, distressed behavior in Parent B’s presence is certain confirmation of her
22 worst fears. She believes that even the baby recognizes that her other parent is a (insert expletive)
23 harsh, demanding, insensitive, even abusive and neglectful parent. In this way, the primary attachment
24 figure and the child feed off of one another in a destructive and self-reinforcing spiral of anxiety-
25 fear-greater anxiety such that the child’s opportunity to establish a secure relationship with Parent B
26 is over before it has begun. Thus alienation is born in its most primitive, preverbal form (Garber,
27 2004).

28 29 FORENSIC APPLICATIONS

30
31 Dr. McIntosh and her colleagues have provided the family law community with an invaluable and
32 long overdue perspective on the processes underlying the typical child’s experience of security and the
33 role of this experience in shaping her continuing development. I fear, however, that we may do the
34 children whom we serve a disservice by mapping population-based, empirically derived norms onto
35 the very non-normative, unique subgroup who fill our offices and our courtrooms (Garber, 2009).

36 These parents represent a very small, but very loud and demanding fraction among all divorcing
37 parents. They are intractably conflicted, recidivist litigants who commonly behave as if their children
38 are possessions to be divided like bank accounts, even if they know enough to say otherwise. Among
39 these parents, custody is a matter of winning and noncustody is experienced as an intolerable
40 narcissistic injury that must be righted, no matter the cost. I suspect that these adults are dispro-
41 portionately unresolved/disorganized in their own attachment security (Main et al., 2011) and thereby
42 especially vulnerable to role corruption in relationships with their children (Garber, 2011). The
43 likelihood that any such parent would genuinely endorse her former partner to be around their child
44 in the interest of fostering the child’s healthy (albeit secondary) attachment with that parent is remote.

45 Thus, I write to pose a critical dilemma: If we can reasonably anticipate that Parent A will never
46 endorse Parent B as a potential secure attachment figure, does it still serve the child’s best interests to
47 spend her formative years in a near-exclusive relationship with that parent? How do the intangible
48 scales of emotion, development, and relatedness weigh the greater stress of transitioning between two
49 primary caregivers against the possibility that the child might enjoy an exclusive primary attachment
50 through infancy without ever thereafter enjoying the benefits of a secure secondary relationship?

1 With deep gratitude to Dr. McIntosh and her colleagues and to *FCR*, I eagerly embrace their advice
2 as it applies to those relatively healthy, mature, and child-centered coparents whom I see profession-
3 ally. I am newly reassured that when mom and dad can act respectfully, their kids may benefit from that
4 occasional shared Sunday brunch or postgame celebration. I have a new perspective on the child's
5 opportunity to experience her parents' cordial, face-to-face meeting at transition and valuable insights
6 into the infant's experience of overnight stays. Nevertheless, in my work as an expert consultant,
7 guardian ad litem, parenting coordinator, custody evaluator, and coparenting facilitator with high-
8 conflict parents, I will continue to draw firm boundaries and carefully consider each individual child's
9 needs in the interest of keeping the kids out of the middle.

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Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited	
Journal Code: FCRE	Proofreader: Elsie
Article No: 1461	Delivery date: 16 May 2012
Page Extent: 4	

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