

## Expert Testing

Psychological tests are used in some, but not all, custody evaluations. The tests that are usually used are discussed below:

**Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI):** The MMPI is an objective personality test. Brace yourself. This is a 567 true-false test. The test is scored by a computer and the results are graphed on a series of four "validity scales"<sup>1</sup> and ten "clinical scales."<sup>2</sup> The validity scales help determine when a client may not be answering questions entirely truthfully. Your results will then be tested against normative scales.

**MMPI- 2:** The classic MMPI was revised in 1989 and the new test, in addition to the 14 scales of the MMPI, includes more scales-three more for validity and a multitude of clinical subscales. The MMPI-2 is not a custody evaluation tool, per se, but it can be used by qualified experts as a tool in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of an individual as a candidate for single-parenting.

**The Millon Clinical Multi-axial Inventory (MCMI):** This is a 175 true/ false test modeled after the MMPI. It is designed to track the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)-the compendium that defines and categorizes elements of psychopathology. Some experts have even gone so far as to advise not using it for such purposes.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Dr. Theodore Millon himself (the test's developer) argues that the test is very useful in custody cases because so many of his test subjects were involved in such litigation while he was devising his test.

**The Ackerman- Schoendorf Parent Evaluation for Custody Test (ASPECT Test):** ASPECT, like Bricklin and CQ, was specifically created to aide judges and lawyers in making custody awards. Sixty questions are answered partly by the subject and partly by the examiner. The questions fall into one of three categories which, in turn, are translated into three scales.<sup>4</sup> The results are formulated into a "parental custody index" (PCI). When the PCIs of both parents are compared, a variance of less than ten points produces no recommendation. A variance of more than ten points however, strongly indicates that the parent with the higher score would be the better care provider (and custodial parent) for the child. Scores above a certain range<sup>5</sup> indicate that either parent would satisfy the custodial requirements-and, of course, two scores below a certain minimum<sup>6</sup> indicates that neither parent will serve as a good custodial parent.

**The Bricklin Perceptual Scales Test (BSP):** This test is intended to measure a child's unconscious perception of his or her parents in the areas of competence, supportiveness, follow-up consistency and admirable traits. The test was designed to be used in custody evaluations. Dr. Bricklin's objective was to devise a test that would offer meaningful insight into the determination of which parent would be the better primary care giver.

The test focuses on the child's perceptions rather than the parent's respective performance. It does this without asking direct questions of the child. The test consists of 64 cards with a long, horizontal line drawn across them. The examiner asks a question and the child punches a hole along the continuum of the line (like, on a scale of one to ten, with one meaning "I disagree" and ten meaning "I strongly agree"). The questions ask about how the child perceives each parent's abilities-each question is asked twice, once for Mom and once for Dad-and the child punches a card for each question. At the end of the test, the examiner identifies which parent the child perceives to have scored higher in response to each question. The scores are tallied and the parent with the greatest number of positive answers is recommended as the primary care-giver.

There are some flaws to the Bricklin test-most obviously, a child whose mind is made up (or has been made up for him) likely will not give reliable answers. More problematic is the fact that by the time the test is administered, the parents have probably undergone a significant change in their attitude and approaches to parenting. "Superparents" often develop when the specter of a custody contest arises. Parents who, only weeks before, had never done homework with their children may now demand to be present and involved every night. It is often the case, too, that one parent has been removed from the home and has very little contact with the children. Giving a Bricklin test after a duration of such a status quo probably accurately reflects the child's perceptions, but does not necessarily accurately assess the parents' respective parenting strengths. Again, call our offices to learn more and to learn what you can do to obtain the best outcome for your children.

**Adult Intelligence Tests:** The most common IQ tests administered today are the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (WAIS-R) and the Stanford Binet. Intelligence tests offer very little to the court when faced with a custody contest. Perhaps at best, they can serve as a baseline for how a given subject performs under testing conditions.

**The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (Revised):** Applicable to children aged five to fifteen years of age.

**Custody Quotient Test:** Like the Bricklin test, and ASPECT, this test (developed in the late 1980s by Dr. Robert Gordon and Dr. Leon Peek-both in Dallas, Texas) was specifically intended to aide in custody evaluations. In fact, the test is designed to assess awards of sole and joint custody as well as assigning specific parental responsibilities and visitation schedules. The test can assess the knowledge and skills of the parents. There are even complimenting education programs for parents with low scores. The test is designed to be taken more than once-in six month intervals-so that parents may set improvement goals and monitor their progress. The Custody Quotient test produces ten evaluation scales and one validity scale.<sup>7</sup>

**Rorschach Ink Blot Test:** This is the one you've seen in the movies. Introduced in the 1930's it is still the most popular "projective" psychological test. Ten cards (five color, five black and white or black and white with gray shading) with freeform inkblots are shown to the subject who tells what he "sees" in each card. After this "free association" portion, the psychiatrist / tester goes back with the subject to review each inkblot explaining which part of the inkblot represented a given part of his association.

**The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT):** Another "projection" test. Out of 31 images, only ten are shown to the subject (some are only for men, some only for women, some only for children). The subject is asked to tell a story about the image. The idea is that the subject will reveal his personal apperception of the ambiguous image.<sup>8</sup> Most experienced attorneys have a list of all the photographs, their contents and what typical responses are elicited by each.

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This article was written by the law office of Cowell Taradash, P.C., whose attorneys are familiar with the latest court decisions, recent changes in the law and even the tendencies of many judges. We can help. Contact us at 866.987.6723 or [info@illinoisdivorce.com](mailto:info@illinoisdivorce.com).