

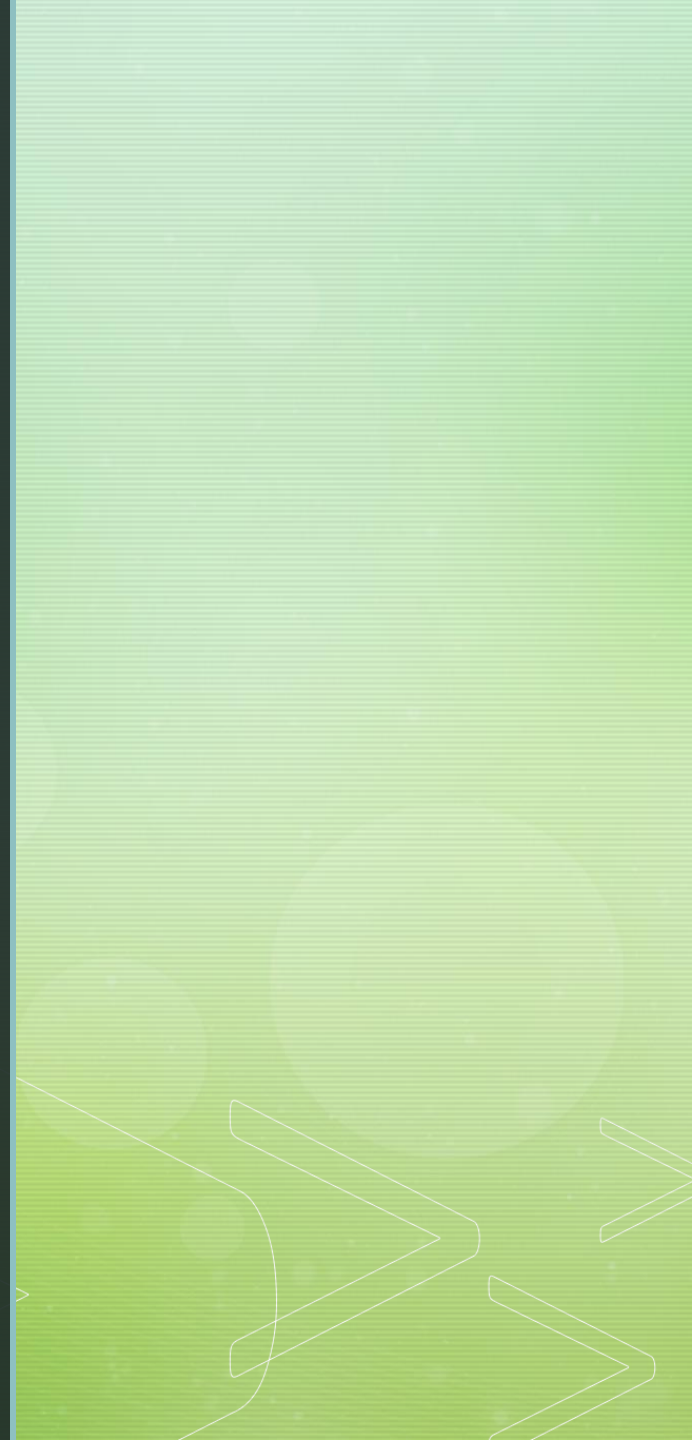
# What are the pressing research questions in the field?



Jennifer J. Harman, PhD

Mary Alvarez, PhD

Stephen Morrison, PhD





## Research Agenda

A sub-set of the global Advocacy Agenda, this Research Agenda identifies the robust research required for an airtight argument that can mobilize urgent and large-scale change around parental alienation.

- 1. Establish the pattern of alienating behaviors that triggers parental alienation**  
Is there a constellation of alienating behaviors that have a clear and strong relationship with parental alienation?
- 2. Ascertain the best methods for identifying and assessing parental alienation**
- 3. Ascertain the best methods for intervening with families that are experiencing mild, moderate, and severe levels of parental alienation**
- 4. Ascertain the direct and indirect impact of parental alienation**  
(1) How are the support networks of rejected parents and targeted children affected, and how does that impact on the community overall? (2) What are the short- and long-term emotional, physical, and economic impacts, and how do these compare to the average population?
- 5. Ascertain the psychological impact of alienating behaviors on targeted parents**  
(1) Do targeted parents display symptoms and behaviors consistent with complex PTSD, anxiety, depression, etc.? (2) Are their symptoms and behaviors similar to that of any well-documented at-risk group (e.g. veterans or emergency workers)?
- 6. Assess the global prevalence of parental alienation**  
What proportion of parents are rejected, what proportion of children are directly affected, and how does this vary around the world?
- 7. Determine the extent to which parental alienation resembles other forms of family violence**  
Does parental alienation meet the defining criteria in respect to intent and/or impact?
- 8. Ascertain a relationship between the likelihood of parental alienation and membership in various populations**  
Does the rejected parent's (1) economic disadvantage, (2) educational disadvantage, (3) incarceration or criminal record, (4) identification as LGBTQI, (5) military history or other demographic factor increase the likelihood or risk of adverse outcomes for that parent or that parent's children?

- What tests of theoretical adaptations, extensions, and innovations can be applied to the study of PA?
  - Attachment theory and emotional availability hybrid models
    - E.g., Biringen, Z., Closson, L., Derr-Moore, A., Hall, A., Pybus, K., Saunders, H., Warren, V., Lucas-Thompson, R., Harman, J. J., & Neu, M. (2015). Mindfulness, emotional availability, and emotional attachment: Three pillars of daily practice. *Zero to Three Journal*, 20-26.
  - Interdependence theory and explanations of power dynamics
  - Evolutionary models of aggression and parenting/offspring protection
  - Field theory explanations for resistance to social change/policy
- Research questions tested using multiple methods, replication
  - Qualitative and quantitative methods in field research and evaluation research
  - Longitudinal methods

- What do we know about severe PA clinically?
- > **The FP has significant psychopathology**
  - -Personality disorders, especially borderline, narcissism, antisocial
  - -Delusional disorder
  - -Munchausen's by proxy (false sexual, physical, & emotional abuse)
  - -Folie a deux
- > **Disrupted attachment between TP and child**
- > **Pathological enmeshment**
- > **Children are traumatized by PA**
- > **Considered child abuse**

▶ What do we know about mild or moderate PA clinically?

**Not very much beyond behavioral or family dynamic descriptions**

## Why study mild and moderate parental alienation?

- >Define mild-moderate-severe along a continuum? Or is mild a discreet category and moderate and severe are along a continuum?
- >Prevention of PA in at-risk families.
- >Early intervention of PA in at-risk families.

## Interesting research questions for mild/moderate/severe PA

- >Is parental alienation present in *intact families*?
- >To what degree, in what manner, and what is the frequency of mild or moderate alienation (or severe?) in intact families?
- >In families that divorce, to what degree, in what manner, and in what frequency is mild or moderate parental alienation found?
- >What type of psychopathology is present at both the parent level and the child level in intact families? In families that divorce?



## Interesting research questions for mild/moderate/severe PA cont....

>What is the difference in alienation severity

**Mild**

**Moderate**

**Severe**

>and adult psychopathology concerning:

**depression, anxiety, dominance, borderline, narcissism, hostility,  
domestic violence, relationship power, parent insight, loneliness**

>and child psychopathology concerning:

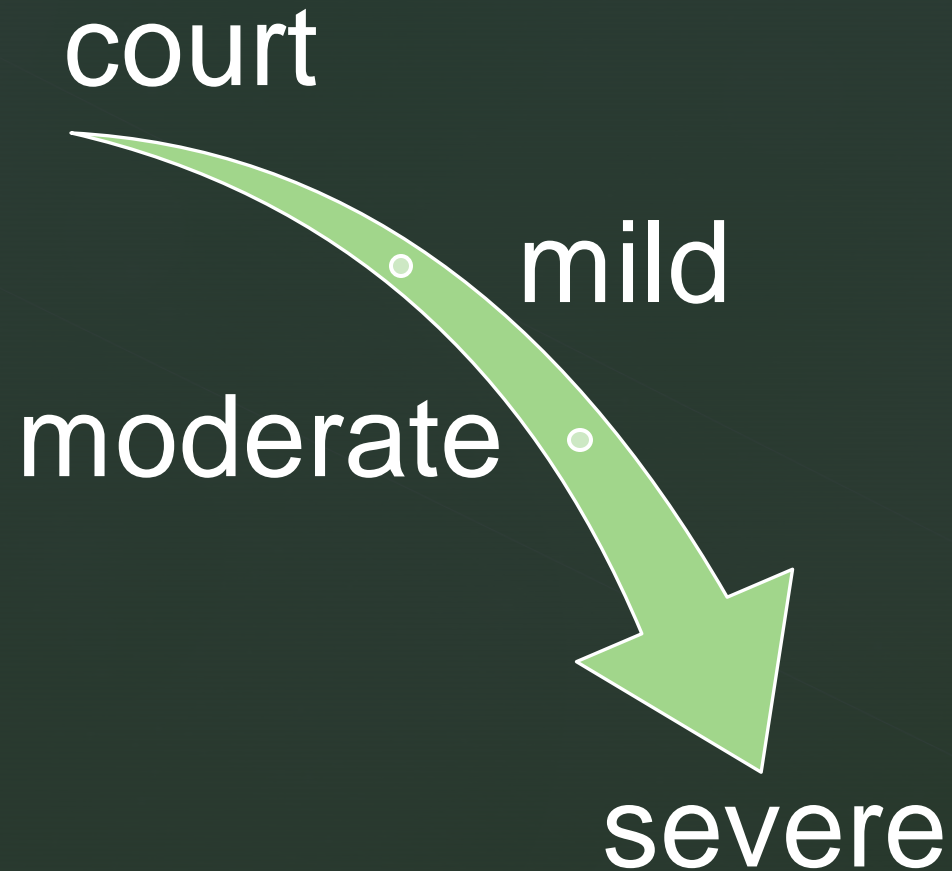
**depression, anxiety, peer relationships, splitting,  
academic performance, behavioral disorders**

# Clinical

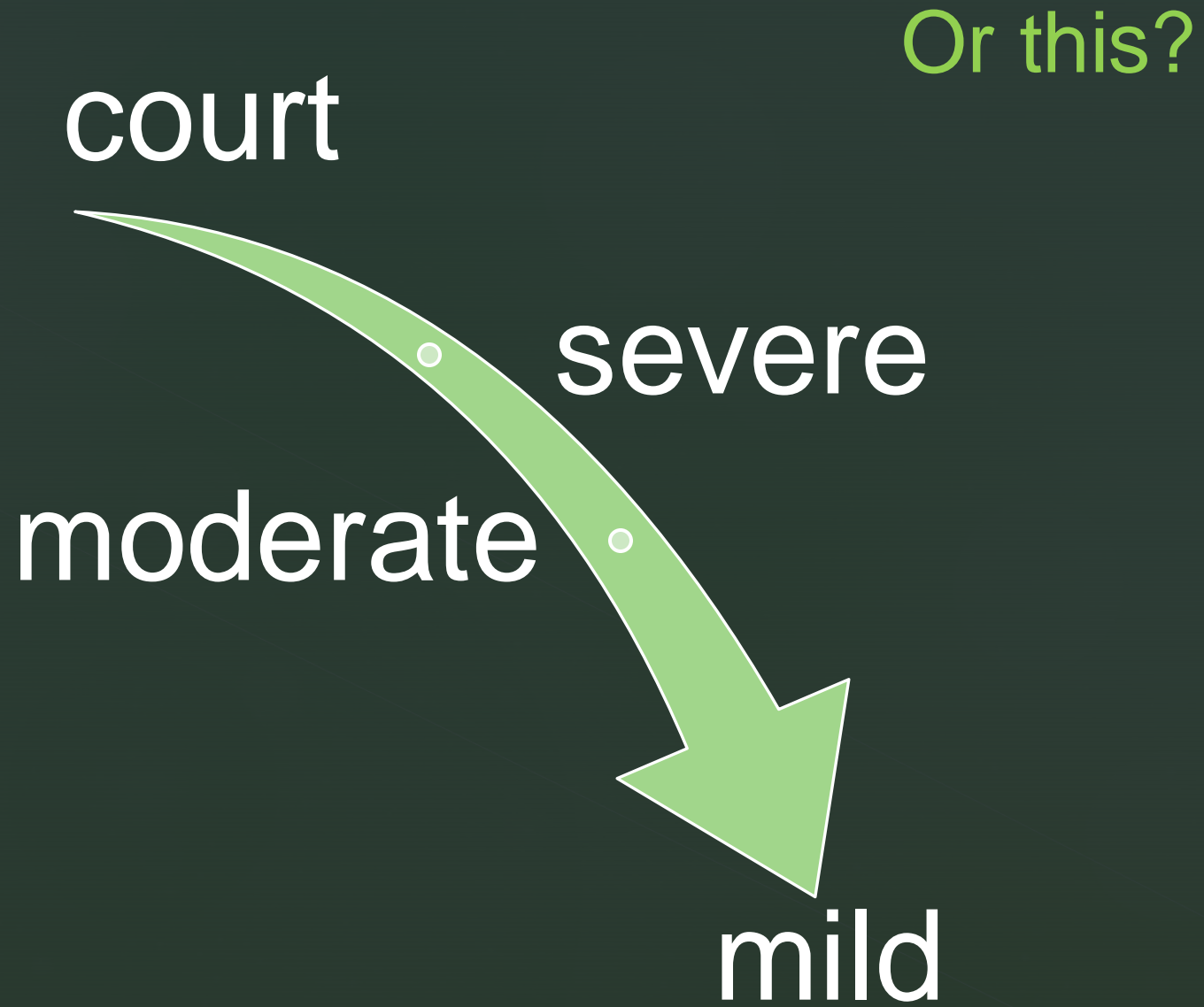


What is the difference in psychopathology between parents who have a.....?

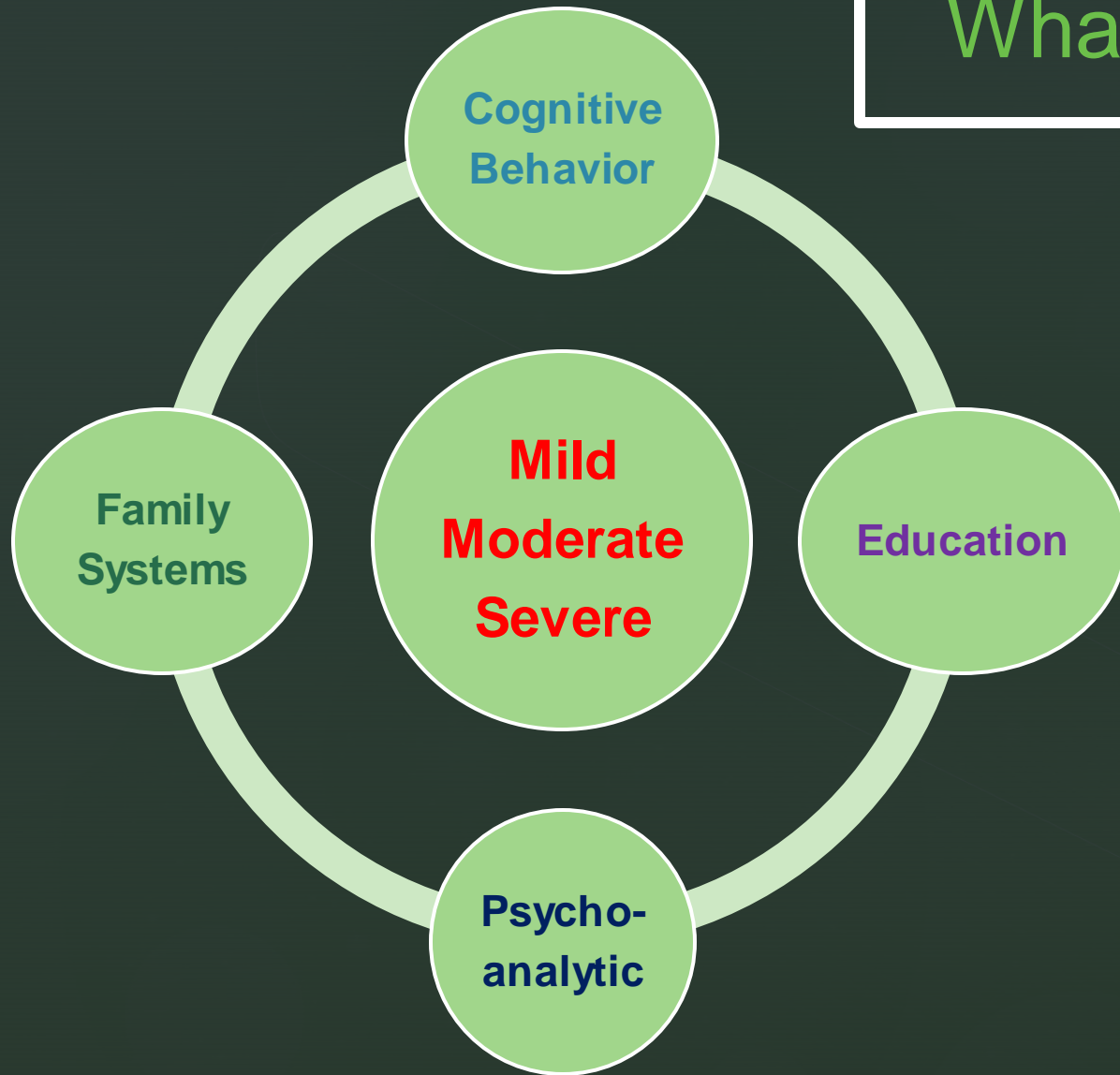
What happens when a court puts  
“teeth” into the process?



# Clinical



# Clinical



What about treatment?



## Addressing Education

- What are we doing to educate the legal system – participants?
  - Judges - Reoccurring Change
  - Lawyers – Law School Classes – Are there any?
  - Custody Evaluators – Psychologists and Psychiatrists
- Research Question –
  - Is there a reduction in high conflict cases – through education
  - Is there a reduction in PA – through education
  - How do we measure for change?



## Addressing Marriage Resolution Methodology

- Addressing the Adversarial Process
  - Competitive Society – We take competition into the court room.
  - Cultural Shift in Thinking
  - Types of Court Resolution
    - Mediation
    - Collaborative Law
    - Litigation - Research Question – does this method contribute to PA



## Addressing Marriage Resolution Methodology – Name Change

- Presently - Plaintiff vs Defendant (negative connotation)
- Plaintiff 1 vs Plaintiff 2
  - Research Question – does simple name change reduce high conflict divorce, thus reduce potential for PA





## Addressing Marriage Resolution Methodology

- Survey Courts for any Innovative Resolution Methodology
  - What are some of the current court practices for 2019?
  - Is there a reduction in high conflict divorces?

## Addressing Divorce Contentiousness

- Assigning Court Psychologist – Testing the Impact on Divorce Process
  - Is there a reduction in high conflict divorce cases?
  - Is there a reduction in negatives associated with PA
    - Juvenile Delinquency
  - Is There Improved Mental Health of Children of Divorce?
- How do we measure for change?

## Criminologist Interest in Why the Occurrence of Juvenile Delinquency

- Presently – the thinking – contributing factors
  - Poverty
  - Age
  - Family setting only
    - Not drilling down - did high conflict divorce contribute?
    - Collect new or additional data at arrest     UCR v NIBRS

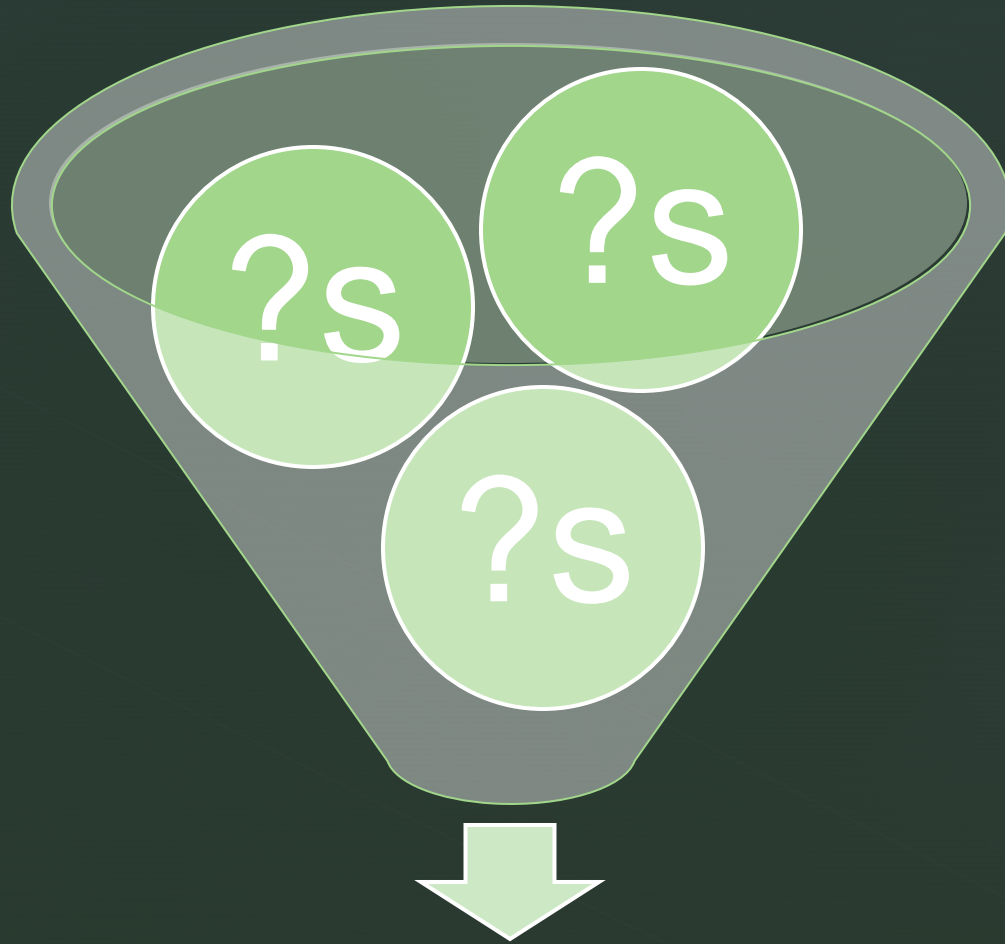
## Covering the Bases – Report Writing

- For the Researcher – Addressing the Question – “Where is the data?”
  - 2018 – still asking the question
- Include – Gardner's work examples the “Ground Theory Method”
- Include – Qualitative Data – Descriptive Data – Not Numerical

# Legal/Systemic

▶ Theory Building through Replication Research

PA Test Instrument



Overlapping questions

# Other

- What research questions would help...
  - CPS responses?
  - Police?
  - Teachers?
  - Guidance counselors?
  - Physicians?

Other pressing questions?

