Reviewer’s report

Title: Pictorial Representation of Attachment: Measuring the parent-fetus relationship in expectant mothers and fathers

Version: 2 Date: 15 January 2013

Reviewer: Helen McK. Doan

Reviewer’s report:

I think this version of the article is much better than the first one but still have some concerns that I feel should be addressed before the article is published:

The van Bakel, Vreeswijk and Maas (2009) conference presentation reported a study of 80 mothers and 76 fathers who were administered the Condon measure of attachment and also the Pictorial Representation of Antenatal Attachment (PRAA). The Vreeswijk et al 2010 conference presentation discussed a study examining “the parental representation of the antenatal relationship with the fetus relates to a verbal self-report measure”. They administered the Condon measure of attachment and the PRAA to 169 pregnant mothers and their partners. The Hoffenkamp et al article published in Evolutionary Psychology in 2012 administered the PRAM as a measure of attachment to determine the impact of premature childbirth on parental bonding. The description of the PRAM, in the present study sounds very identical to the PRAA. I am wondering why the change in the name of the measure, and why there is no discussion of the literature on the PRAM in the introduction, nor an explanation of what this particular study adds, or how it relates, to the previous literature. In fact, the statements, “We here propose an alternative, non-verbal tool” and “we here introduce the PRAM” suggests this is the initial study using the pictorial tool. Also, in the discussion section, it would be interesting to have an explanation of how the authors feel the present findings relate to the previous research.

I have problems with the assumption that because the PRAM is correlated with a measure of prenatal attachment that it “is a valid instrument to assess prenatal feelings of bonding”. I think that further research is needed to determine more clearly what the PRAM measures about the parent-fetus relationship. Rather than assuming the PRAM is a valid measure of attachment, I prefer the representation of it on page 7, and in the earlier research, as a “measure of parental representations of the antenatal relationship with the fetus”. This latter statement could be used wherever the aims of the study are described.

In my former review, I mentioned several methodological questions which have not been addressed. For example, there is a comment that this study is part of a larger project, but no description of what the larger project included. It would be particularly important to know what other measures preceded those used in this study.
What information about the aim and design of the study were the participants given both for the larger project and for the present study?

What instructions were given to them?

Why were the terms “the place of the baby in your life at the moment” chosen? Was there any kind of pilot work done to determine if this language was easily understood and what these terms meant to the participants?

Did the authors find that any of the parents had difficulty understanding what “Where would you place the baby in your life at the moment” meant?

In what order were the two tests administered? Where they counterbalanced for order effects? Or, was there a rationale for presenting them in the order they were given?

There are also a couple of small points:

P3 “Prenatal attachment can be described as the unique relationship that develops between parents and fetus” implies to me that there is a two way relationship. My understanding of the use of prenatal attachment is that it relates to the parent’s emotions, perceptions, behaviours to the fetus.

P3- l19-“the substance of maternal-fetal relationships” it is not necessary to add “during pregnancy”.

P8- what was the range of gestational age? What were the numbers of the primiparous and multiparous mothers and their partners?

P16- l14- there is a typo- “a” should be removed

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'