

## HOW AND WHY DOES THE ALIENATING PARENT ACHIEVE "PARENTECTOMY?"

In keeping with my family therapy training at the Minuchin Center for the Family, I was educated me to assess the power between the two members of the parental dyad as being roughly equal and subject to amelioration by a trained family therapist----assuming that neither parent's power is enhanced by a professional rescuer---in the MENTAL HEALTH, CHILD PROTECTION, LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND JUDICIAL SYSTEMS. My family therapy approach allows me to assess PAS families to view the alienating and alienated parents in a very different light than is portrayed in most of the literature on the PAS. As the reader continues in this book, I suggest that attention be paid to this distinction: namely that there is an essential difference between being a victim and allowing oneself to be victimized. I am not talking about, for example, a woman who has been abducted off the streets by a stranger and held in captivity against her will. I am talking about adults who are choosing to live with each other in intimate relationships over a protracted period of time in which the behaviors of each are predictable and known to the other. Clearly each of the adults in the previous statement has made a choice. Victims, however, do not see themselves as having options, and this is a very disempowering self-perception. There are major implications for treatment depending upon which formulation is made about the relationship between the alienating and the alienated parents; that is, how we perceive the family map.

The reader should not interpret this analysis to mean that my intent is to blame the alienated parent for her/his plight. I would not assert this anymore than I would declare that a woman who has been physically abused by her partner is to blame for the abuse. I am merely maintaining that the alienated parent has options to ameliorate her/his

situation, just as the abused woman can choose to leave her partner. WHAT THE READER SHOULD CONCLUDE FROM THIS BOOK IS THAT THE ALIENATED PARENT BECOMES A VICTIM AS A RESULT OF THE CONFLUENCE OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE AFOREMENTIONED LARGER SOCIAL SYSTEMS WHICH SOLIDIFY, INTENSIFY AND PERPETUATE THE POWER IMBALANCE BETWEEN THE ALIENATING AND ALIENATED PARENTS. It is when the professionals in these systems are co-opted by the alienating parent----their susceptibility perhaps being a result of their biases, pre-conceived ideas, ignorance, inattention, and/or self-interest---that the alienated parent finds herself/himself at a severe disadvantage in custody and visitation proceedings. This disadvantageous situation is akin to tying a bowling ball around a runner's leg and expecting her/him to be able to compete in a track meet. The playing field instead must be leveled by these powerful systems, which must examine how to remedy its respective participation in the escalation of the power imbalance between the alienated and alienating parents.

Professional rescuers are not malevolent, but they harm children. They are misguided do-gooders. Other professionals who intervene in the lives of children are not so magnanimous; they are motivated by their bottom line to make a living, a big living. They will eventually discover that living with oneself has a higher value.

The PAS is real: I lived it as a child, and I am living it now in my role as a family therapist, treating an endless number of families afflicted with this syndrome----a family interactional pattern which family therapists labeled the perverse triangle and have been treating since the 1950's. The families keep coming and coming and coming as a result of the high divorce rate. As long as child custody cases continue to be adjudicated in an

adversarial system, the best interests of the child will be compromised by this system in which attorneys for the litigating parents seek to maximize their advantage and fail to admonish their clients from engaging in alienating behaviors; by PAS-unaware therapists who fail to involve both parents in diagnosis and treatment, which can be accurately obtained only by assessing the family's interactional patterns through firsthand observation of the entire family system as well as of all its various sub-groups; and by PAS-unaware forensic evaluators who are appointed by the court to make recommendations regarding custody and visitation. Divorce inevitably involves some degree of distress for the child, and some degree of disruption to the parent/child relationship is unavoidable. But the distress and disruption can be minimized when the professionals work together to help the parents help each other allay each other's respective fears and anxieties in order to then develop of a shared parenting relationship in the best interests of their children.

Because of procrastination, incompetence, rescue-fantasy, ignorance, or sometimes self-interest, the professionals within the aforementioned larger systems which are supposed to support and protect children instead maintain a dysfunctional family system, known as the perverse triangle/PAS. The therapists who diagnose and treat it, the forensic evaluators who assess for it, the lawyers who quarrel about it, the child protection workers who investigate it, the law enforcement personnel who become ensnared in it, and the judges who adjudicate it must be more proactive in protecting the right of the child to have a meaningful and enduring relationship with each parent. Each profession which has influence over custody and visitation decisions must guard against becoming co-opted by the alienating parent and by their puppet child, who mimics the

ventriloquist parent's words. These professions must further recognize that the concept of "time is of the essence" has the greatest relevancy to the PAS.