

WHAT EVERY PROFESSIONAL WHO INTERVENES IN CHILD CUSTODY AND VISITATION NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT PARENTAL ALIENATION/PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME

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Much controversy surrounds a family interactional pattern first labeled in 1985 by child psychiatrist, Richard Gardner, as the Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS). This interactional pattern is, specifically, a cross-generational coalition of one parent with the child to the deprecation and rejection of the other parent. But this specific family interactional pattern, characteristic of the PAS, had been noted dating back to the 1950's by numerous, independently practicing child psychiatrists upon observing their psychiatric child patients on the hospital wards during family visits. These child psychiatrists, Nathan Ackerman (1958, 1961, 1965); Murray Bowen (1971, 1978); Don Jackson (1971); and Salvador Minuchin (1974, 1978, 1981, 1993, 1996; et al.), who later founded the family therapy movement, have observed and written extensively about this family interactional pattern. Murray Bowen (1971, 1978) labeled it the "pathological triangle" and Jay Haley, (1963, 1968, 1973, 1977, 1990) labeled it "the perverse triangle," which, in the extreme situations, caused a psychosis in the child. This long history of documented triangulation was extensively validated by second generational family therapists (Andolfi 1983, 1989; Angelo, 1983; Boscolo, 1987; Gottlieb, 2012; Nichols, 1992, et al.), although the psychiatrists and therapists in the family therapy movement did not apply the label of parental alienation syndrome to this family interactional pattern. But hey, when there has been 60+ years of observable and scientific supporting data, what's in a name? And that is the point: it is unnecessary to become side-tracked by and hung-up on a label when there is such extensive empirical evidence for the existence of this dysfunctional family interactional pattern and its adverse effects on children.

This cross generational cannot be a good outcome for any child who is caught in it. It empowers them and gives them a sense of entitlement, and it creates a double-bind as they have to reject one half of themselves to satisfy the co-opting parent. Or, if they refuse to join in a coalition, the co-opting parent usually rejects the child. Double-binds are crazy making behaviors that create severe disturbances in those who are victimized by it. I have written a chapter from my book documenting how this coalition, which I will

refer to as parental alienation syndrome, is a form of emotional child abuse.

Any prudent parent's perception and any prudent professional's perception would have to agree with Christopher Barden, PhD., JD., who has received 2 national research awards in psychology and a law degree with honors from Harvard Law school, when he stated, "There can be no credible controversy about the power of parents to influence children." (The International Handbook of Parental Alienation Syndrome, p. 420.) And we would also have to agree with Barden when he stated that custody cases require "the critical obligation to carefully review the influence of parents, therapists or other adults on the attitudes, beliefs and memories of children." (pp. 419-432)

Given how children are so powerfully influenced by parents and given what Minuchin and the other family therapists described as the negativity on children of triangulation, any prudent person and any prudent professional would also have to agree that, in typical cases of divorce, children are negatively affected even more from triangulation----or what I would also label "destructive parenting," "hostile parenting" or simply "crappy parenting."

I would further like to confirm that hatred for and rejection of the parent is anti- instinctual. I have reached this conclusion in part due to my training as a family therapist but primarily as a response to having worked for 24 years with a foster care population numbering in the thousands of children. Not one of these many children, who had been removed from their home due to adjudicated neglect and/or abuse, ever expressed hatred for her/his parents or refusal to visit. Indeed, the two most frequently asked questions were, "When can I go home" and "When is my next visit with my mom/mommy or dad/daddy?" I am therefore unequivocally certain that there is only one explanation as to why a child expresses hatred for and refusal to have contact with a parent: the child has been programmed by the other parent and is receiving sanctioning by that parent to reject the targeted/alienated parent. You have to be carefully taught to hate and fear---- especially a parent.

I am quite concerned that our customary professional response to a child's refusal to have contact with a parent is to support the refusal or at least to sanction it. It is not healthy to conduct one's life feeling hatred for parent or believing, as in the case of alienation, that one hates a parent. Remedy must be reunification therapy between the child and targeted/alienated

parent. Additionally, the programming parent must be made to understand that they are engaging in emotional child abuse by facilitating an alienation, and remedy must be the same as for any form of child abuse---even including transfer of custody for failure to cease the abuse.

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