

## Parentectomy in the Crossfire

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*Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother and Thou Shalt Not Bare False Witness; true words of wisdom for an educated mind. When an alienating parent does not follow this advice—it leads to the erosion of the very heart of a child’s mind, granting them by example an unhampered blur of reality for the rest of their life. This article features Dean Tong’s literary work, Elusive Innocence—Survival Guide for the Falsely Accused covering parental alienation and false abuse allegations. Victims of Another War, a documentary about the effects on three adults who suffered an abduction and alienation of affection during childhood. And finally, A View For The Bench, produced by the Superior Court of Maricopa County in Arizona is an education for the judiciary on parental alienation.*

*Elusive Innocence—Survival Guide For The Falsely Accused* by leading forensic specialist on false child abuse allegations, Dean Tong, accurately states, “We will not win the war until we win the battle against false allegations first” (Tong, 2002, p. 6). This contribution provides the knowledge to understand the scope and depth of this problem and assists the reader to prevent the false accuser or alienating parent from achieving a fully severed parent-child relationship, so often referred to as a parentectomy.

For professionals working with those innocent victims of being falsely accused, *Elusive Innocence* will aid, protect, and motivate one to reverse the “guilty until proven innocent” mindset. This work underscores the tools for professionals and of those falsely accused to understand, educate and overcome this horrific and distasteful situation, to fight back and encompasses many aspects with all the nuances. Detailing extensive methods, and provides the motivational reasons needed to get straight to the truth of the matter. Chapters expose the atrocities and travesty of errors occurring within our legal system that harm the victim.

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Moving beyond the fact that false abuse allegations are primarily used to gain financial, material or custodial advantages, the author exhorts those who have been falsely accused how to defend themselves, giving a wake up call as to how false abuse allegations have become the current weapon of choice, which tear families apart to the demise of the victims and their child(ren), in protracted divorce or child custody disputes. This whistleblower delivers timely information, intermixing stories; legal cases, social issues and the “what to do’s” with a concise summary of problems and solutions.

What is the penalty for this type of child abuse? “Only recently have some states enacted new laws, sanctioning ex-spouses who knowingly and maliciously file false allegations, making it at least a second degree misdemeanor. In Florida, the same is a third degree felony.” Society’s laws are developing to protect children—how these laws are being twisted and used, perpetrates what the author refers to as “the reverse cycle of child abuse” (Tong, 2002, p. 107).

All too often, many believe that children “always tell the truth”; too few realize that children’s memories are very suggestible and programmable by adults. They forget that those adult reporters maybe lying, exaggerating, or acting with an agenda to harm the target parent. Caseworkers, counselors and evaluators may take sides, unwittingly, or even as a hired gun. They may ignore the fact that “children can be taught to parrot almost anything and coached to relate stories both true and false” (Tong, 2002, p. 86). Children are used as pawns and may or may not become enmeshed with the harmful manipulation or mentality of the accuser/alienator. Within such issue, including the acceptance of parental alienation, the author touches upon the upcoming relevancy of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS).

In protracted divorce and custody disputes, the most common strongest alignments occur at the impressionable ages of 9–12. This preadolescent time, the child(ren) frequently develops a polarized view by the pressure and influence of the alienator towards the target parent. A severe alienator may lay in wait for years until the child(ren) reach this particular age with the goal to deliver further destructive actions and begin more litigation.

When the child(ren) develops a strong alignment with one parent against the other, they internally are trying to desperately reduce their own anxiety and confusion. Typically, at some point, these child(ren) mirror the perpetrator’s false allegations, feelings, statements, or emotions after being alienated and separated for a long period of time from the victim parent.

Any attempt by this parent to reunite is often twisted and used against them by the alienating parent. Should they express any frustration, anger or disappointment and attempt to sort out any issues, it is usually portrayed in some negative form. Many forget that alienation can occur during a marriage, and not just during a legal action. When one claims that alienation exists, professionals should first determine when the alienation initially started. Often, therapists, evaluators, and the legal community claim that a child is

old enough to make their own choice, however it is disturbing that rarely what must be taken into account is—(has this child(ren) been alienated for years prior?). Thus, an older child is not always truly in a position to make a healthy choice after years of being brainwashed.

Dean Tong perceptively stimulates cautioning people who work with children to be initially skeptical of allegations arising out of divorce or custody suits and counsels that one must not jump to automatically believing the reports of abuse. Discernment and evidence is necessary. The alienator-accuser may falsify and manipulate the facts with particular tactics and submit false allegations intended to conceal their behavior as well as exaggerate minor faults of the innocent target victim. Far too few professionals realize that accusers may suffer from mental disorders themselves, which distort their views. Usually, but not always, the accuser either has something to hide or is otherwise unfit in some area to gain custody.

In mentioning the narcissist, one learns about the tactics used and their personality profile. They often appear convincing and in control and present themselves well to professionals such as doctors, police officers and school officials, yet these accusers underneath are masters of deception. In some case stories, they may give one-sided and misleading information to third parties, through slander and libel, for the purpose of gaining the recommendations they seek for their own agenda and a favored opinion for themselves in court.

## THE BORDERLINE PERSONALITY

There is also excellent coverage on Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), which addresses that BPs have twisted and devious minds that would use a child as a pawn in a custody battle. There is empirical data to support the finding that many adults who suffer from BPD were abused as children (Fonagy et al., 1996; Paris et al., 1994; Famularo et al., 1991 and Herman et al., 1989). Paris and colleagues concluded that trauma and problems with fathers (e.g., children witnessing father's domestic violence) are important factors in the development of BPD in males (Tong, 2002, p. 17, Fonagy, 1999). Due to the projection from the adult BP, child(ren) can also become BPDs, which is a sign of parental alienation. When children begin to participate in a "denigration, berating, or disparaging campaign against the non-BP, propelled onto them by the borderline, is called PAS."

Borderlines typically distort, exaggerate, put their words into actions, and they also "will shop for experts to collaborate their own delusions." Borderlines are more likely to cause trouble, abduct a child and move away without ever informing the other parent. Borderlines, themselves, do everything they accuse the other parent of. Promiscuity and cyber affairs tend to be second nature to them and they are "experts at convincing family, friends, and even professionals, their abuse accusations are absolutely true, even in

the face of overwhelming evidence against them that nothing happened” (Tong, 2002, p. 177). It is important to note that while some parents appear flawless on paper, they are unaware of the consequences of their own behavior on others, including children.

Discussion and use of various tests to help screen for BPD are addressed such as Gunderson’s *Diagnostic Interview for Borderlines—Revised* (DIB—R), and the *Personality Diagnostic Questionnaire—Version 4* (PDQ—4). There is a wide number of symptoms associated with this disorder, thus it is difficult to diagnose. BPD is oftentimes misdiagnosed. The traits must be seen collectively for a correct diagnosis.

In Tong’s experience, he describes many of the traits but highlights where the borderline projects themselves onto the non-BP. “The borderline believes that everybody else thinks and feels much like them. If the borderline is angry, they project this emotion on their partner and then believe the partner is angry at them” (Tong, 2002, pp. 181–183). Divorce and custody disputes, are a critical period for any family. In order to offset, their own trepidation of abandonment and maintain control, borderlines often choose to do some of the following:

- Discourage or stop visitation with the Non-Custodial Parent (NCP)
- Allege false claims of physical or sexual child abuse
- Involve police with false 911 alleged domestic violence calls
- Systematically alienate the child(ren) from the NCP
- Eliminate the NCP from educational, religious, and medical decisions
- Engage in litigation on a regular basis for years post-divorce
- Attempt to sabotage the NCP of future relationships with potential partners
- Attempt to alienate the child(ren) from the NCP’s family members or friends

The relationship between PAS and the BPD parent is well connected. The longer PAS goes unnoticed and without intervention, the enmeshment of the child to the point of becoming a mirror image of the alienator is assured. Children who go beyond just alienation and develop all the signs of PAS frequently will develop pathological symptoms as they grow to maturity, include, but are not limited to:

- Splitting in their relationships
- Difficulties in forming future intimate relationships
- A lack of ability to tolerate anger in relationships
- Psychosomatic symptoms and sleep or eating disorders
- Psychological vulnerability and dependency
- Conflicts with authority figures resulting with brushes with the law
- An unhealthy sense of entitlement for one’s rage leading to social alienation
- Physical ailments such as irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers, ulcerative colitis, Crohn’s disease, and migraines (Tong, 2002, pp. 173–190).

Dr. Richard Gardner has suggested “performing a parentectomy (removing child victims of PAS from parental alienator) via litigation, if the PAS becomes severe enough. Many BPD parents employ PA(S) to maintain control over their children and keep them dependent. In order to stop the child from internalizing their emotional pain causing psychosomatic disorders and physical ailments, it is necessary to do whatever is required to protect the child. Sometimes a parentectomy may be the only answer when all else fails” (Tong, 2002, pp. 191; Gardner, 1992).

In covering interviews, Tong points out to both professionals and the victim that “all documented child interviews should be analyzed for the presence or absence of open-ended versus closed-ended questions, specific versus forced-response questions, leading and suggestive questions, reinforced behavior . . .” (Tong, 2002, p. 146), and dedicates explicit details on evaluations and scientific research. There is support that some social workers, court evaluators, and therapists often produce biased, inaccurate and flawed reports. Evaluators and therapists need to take equal time to speak with both the accuser and the accused, and ask the same questions and request evidence supporting the claim of abuse. This protects both the professional and the victims of an accuser. He is informative about procedures and professional guidelines, which need to be followed.

As pointed out, it is emotional abuse of children “having to tell lies, to select one parent over the other, and to experience an ongoing uncertainty about their future home and lifestyle may have serious effects on their future mental health.” There is often expressed concern about any lengthy court process to which children are subjected and the conflicting messages they receive from their mother or father and numerous “helping” professionals who attempt to manipulate the court system for their own vested interests (Tong, 2002, p. 146).

One should not treat a child who has not been abused as a real victim. As Mr. Tong refers to Dr. Ralph Underwager and Hollida Wakefield, “When a non-abused child is treated by adults as if the child had been abused and the adult pressure and influence is used to produce statements from a child about events that did not happen, this is an assault upon the child’s ability to distinguish reality from unreality” (Underwager & Wakefield, 1990, pp. 20–22).

The author’s diverse resources cover legal aspects, the courts, the agencies, including the Frye and Daubert Standards, and science in the courtroom; with a gripping analysis of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2), Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Penile Plethysmography (PPG), Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III (MCMI-III), and other tests.

## MULTISCALE INVENTORIES

The use and misuse of the MMPI-2 and MCMI-III multiscale inventories are well noted in Tong’s work. However, other research available on multiscale

inventories for the legal and mental health fields shows us similar findings. Leading inventory expert, Dr. Richard Rogers points out “many mental health professionals erroneously equate the lack of clinical elevations with an absence of psychopathology or impairment” . . . “As noted previously, computerized reports can be less than helpful to mental health professionals who are not versed in the test itself. The daunting task of separating the wheat from the chaff should only be undertaken by those with specialized MMPI-2 training.” (Rogers 2003, p. 318).

The MCMI-III is marketed to psychologists and other mental health professionals “by promoting “MCMI-III generated diagnoses” that are consonant with DSM-IV.” . . . “MCMI-III scales cannot be used to diagnose DSM-IV personality disorders; the test may generate errors in about 80% of diagnosed cases.” . . . “Unfortunately, close examination suggests that the MCMI-III may promise more than it delivers.” . . . “However, clinicians should not try to make direct linkages between test interpretations and specific diagnoses or legal capacities” . . . “Should elevations on these scales—even marked ones—be seen as evidence of antisocial personality disorder? The answer is definitely not. Although they measure antisocial characteristics, these scales are not effective in establishing a DSM-IV diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder.

Moreover, these scales on the different tests are not highly correlated with each other, which indicates that they are measuring different facets of antisocial, asocial, and delinquent characteristics. Like the metaphor of the utility player, multi-scale inventories can provide general information about antisocial characteristics, but are ineffective at furnishing detailed data regarding diagnosis or risk management.” . . . “Forensic professionals should carefully consider whether or not the multiscale inventories will pass muster under the Daubert standard and related case law that limits expert testimony to scientifically established data.” . . . “For example, the Supreme Court of New Hampshire refused to allow MCMI and MMPI-2 results to be used for profiling sex abusers.” . . . “To accept all of the marketing claims supporting multiscale inventories would be a serious error; to dismiss these inventories categorically would be equally misguided” (Rogers, 2003, pp. 319–320).

It would be an error to interpret an elevation in such a situation as indicating high defensiveness, anger, distrust, sexual conflict, poor behavioral controls, and tendencies toward acting out conflicts and impulses. In many cases, elevations in people accused of abuse were labeled as “seriously abnormal,” a “very pathological profile,” “scary” and the conclusion was made that these people were very likely to be “abusers” (Underwager & Wakefield, 1990).

“The MMPI must be interpreted in light of the biographical and other information about the client—“an elevation for schizophrenia may have a different interpretation if the client is in a psychiatric hospital than if the person is a respected professor at a university, with no history of psychiatric

disorder, who is interested in yoga or some other occult or esoteric study” (Karp & Karp, 1999).

According to leading professionals the use of the MMPI or MMPI-2 and interpretation without proper consideration is negligent. “The attitude of the person taking the MMPI-2 and circumstance in which the questionnaires are given can have a significant impact on the results” (Connor, 1999).

As to the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory, with the computerized interpretation, any psychologist is apt to report significant psychopathology. “The computerized interpretation of the MCMI-II may be lifted verbatim and without qualification from the computerized printout, which accompanies the test scoring. This practice is a particular problem with the MCMI-II, which is normed on and intended to be used for a clinical (psychiatric) population. When used for other assessment purposes, the MCMI-II must be interpreted extremely cautiously because of its tendency to overpathologize. The result of using these computerized interpretations greatly exaggerates psychopathology” (Underwager & Wakefield, 1990). In some cases, this may be deemed as gross negligence or incompetence.

In his authoritative work, *MCMI-III diagnostic validity: bad test or bad validity study*, Dr. Paul Retzlaff concluded; “Operating characteristics describe the validity of tests that attempt to dichotomously predict a diagnosis. These statistics are not fully published in the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III Manual (MCMI-III manual; Millon, 1994). When calculated from available statistics, the positive predictive powers of the MCMI-III scales are poor both in absolute terms and relative to the MCMI-II (Millon, 1987). There were a number of problems, however, with the initial MCMI-III validity study both inherently and in execution. Although it is doubtful that the MCMI-III is weaker than the MCMI-II, a new validity study is needed” (Retzlaff, 1996, pp. 431–437).

## ELUSIVE INNOCENCE

In an interview with James Selkin, the *Denver Post* of April 9, 1989, stated “the many people I have known who have been falsely accused of sexual abuse of a child have all agreed that the American justice system, for them, proved a sham. It did not result in the restoration of their reputation, their livelihood, or their good name. Under the heading of ‘search for truth,’ perhaps the truth to be recognized is that often a lawyer, whether prosecuting or defending, does not, in fact, want the court or juror to reach a sound, educated result or even guess, if it is not in the best interest of his particular client. Where, then, is the best interest of the child truly considered, protected, and defended?” (Tong, 2002, p. 123).

Tong continues, “Because no one is in favor of child abuse and everyone wants to do their part for children, there has been a steady erosion of the accused’s right to confront his accuser and a corresponding rise in the

use of hearsay. There is an ongoing controversy surrounding the right of the accused to face his accuser and the potential emotional damage to a child witness. Justice Scalia explained the Confrontation Clause in the opinion, *Coy v. Iowa*, supra, 866, "It is always more difficult to tell a lie about a person 'to his face' than behind his back. . . That face-to-face presence may, unfortunately, upset the truthful rape victim or abused child; but by the same token, it may confound and undo the false accuser or reveal the child was coached by a malevolent adult" (Tong, 2002, p. 122). The author covers the courts and law with relevancy, and continues with specifics of the accused and accuser, the "agencies" and includes a critical review, along with a self-help guide.

For therapists, attorneys and parents combating false allegations, the following snippet may help: "Parents, who cannot, or will not communicate directly with each other, communicate through the child, thereby providing the child with a part of their adult insight, feelings, and information. Children in this position often evolve into miniature dictators at a very young age, given the ability to manipulate and control both parents because of their knowledge and insight. Younger children tend to align their requirements and their emotional allegiance with the dominant or custodial parent and frequently mirror that parent's descriptions or feelings concerning a situation" (Tong, 2002, p. 75). Children in these situations often reflect one or more of the following behaviors:

- Giving responses that appear to be rehearsed, coached, or conditioned
- During interviews, initiating conversation by quoting the same phrases as those used by the controlling parent who presented the complaint
- Using verbal descriptions inappropriate to their age, with no demonstrated practical comprehension of the meaning
- Offering spontaneous and automatic reports of the act(s) perpetrated upon them, without any direct questions being asked to solicit this information
- Offering inconsistencies in various aspects of the reported incident(s), such as the specifics (who, what, where, when), frequency (once or twice, exaggerated to numerous times) and subjective perceptions of the experience (very frightened, not scared, hurt, not hurt)
- Lacking the appearance of traumatized individual, from an emotional and behavioral standpoint

Blush and Ross determined that as children approached adolescence and developed into their teenage years, they developed a more vindictive agenda. Whereas young children tend to mimic the dominant parent, adolescents develop their own requirements and desires, often built around getting or not getting their own way (Tong, 2002, p. 76; Blush & Ross, 1986).

Hickman and Reynolds, defined six sources of trauma to a child victim of false accusations:

- The investigative procedures, especially repetitive interviews, are troubling
- The behavior of the accusing parent may induce trauma in the child
- The refusal of a delusional accuser who projects her or his own pathology on to a child to recognize and address the same
- Deprivation of accused parent-child contact past 72 hours is traumatizing
- Constant high conflict parental litigation, intimidating PAS
- Treating an alleged child victim prior to an actual finding of abuse may develop a victim mentality and traumatize a child” (Tong, 2002 pp.149–150; Hickman & Reynolds, 1994)

*Elusive Innocence* demonstrates and lists sure signs of parental alienation, which many professionals and authorities claim knowledge of, but frequently are uninformed.

Although this book is written from a male perspective originating from his personal experience, everything is applicable to both genders. After beginning with the author’s personal story and other classic case studies, many parents give up due to their financial resources being depleted. This leaves the child(ren) stranded and often put with the false accuser who has the monetary means.

The author proceeds into the educational realm of varied topics in detail, finishing with an all inclusive and particularized appendices benefiting professionals and the victim. This area can help prevent children from growing up in an insane asylum with an accuser/alienator and can help one retain their life savings.

Recognizing that false abuse allegations have reached epidemic proportions, *Elusive Innocence—Survival Guide for the Falsely Accused* details the extensive ways, reasons and tools regarding the entire issue with all the ramifications to use against those who falsely accuse. The information in this book, classically sets the stage for a substantial understanding and change to occur in our society on this issue.

#### VICTIMS OF ANOTHER WAR: THE AFTERMATH OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

Whether it’s the topic of being falsely accused, or parental alienation, the long-term effects and bi-products are just a few aspects of another kind of war. The documentary film, *Victims of Another War—The Aftermath of Parental Alienation*, is a study of poignant stories, an exposé of the psychological effects on three adults whose childhood was stolen from them the day they were abducted through the abuse we have come to know as parental alienation.

“In 1999, 797,500 children were reported missing in America and 203,900 were victims of family abduction. To date, there are no accurate statistics from

other countries” (Gebhard, 2004). These children end up being turned against their family—who become fading distant memories.

Revealing the disabling effects that Parental Alienation and abduction has on adults who were victimized as children by a parent. This film is constructive for any therapist treating parental alienation or an individual who is fighting an alienator who is withholding a child across borders or state lines.

Often these alienators remarry a new spouse who also engages in this type of child abuse, with no respect or conscience for the child(ren) who live in their home full of silent or overt hate toward the target parent. These deeply sad true stories of these adults, who were stolen from their mother or father and taken to far away places, describes their pain and the years of alienation through systematic psychological abuse.

### CASE EXAMPLE VICTIM 1

#### Cecilia

Cecilia was born and raised in Denmark. Her parents separated when she was age 4 and moved with her mother to Norway. Her mother always encouraged her to see her father who never missed a visitation. At this young age, Cecilia was abducted by her father and taken to the United States. He told her they were going to go to the park, where they always had fun, instead she was taken to an airport and they boarded a plane to New York. Her father verbally enticed her by promising her “more fun times together” (Gebhard, 2004).

As an adult, Cecilia reflects, “This is serious child abuse” and remembers being taken away by her father and consistently receiving negative information about her mother. In hindsight, she feels manipulated by her father because of his own interests, in addition to instilling “sheer mental torture and fear” into her about her mother whom she once loved. In an emotional statement her pain surfaced “My father’s primary tool was changing my own perception of my mother. I think the most important thing is time alone, ‘time,’ in a little child . . . made it so, that the images of even my mother’s face faded away.”

While living with her father, she began to believe only what he told her. He said things like your “mother doesn’t want to see you anymore.” Her mother was made “scary” based on her father’s consistent badmouthing and blaming. Through manipulation, everything that was wrong in his life was projected as her mother’s fault.

After moving to New York City, which to this day she still considers home, her father changed her name to Sarah and spoke about her “new life” and the “new wonderful person she would become”. Unbeknownst to Cecilia, her mother came to America, searched for her, and found her when she was 6 years old, and took her father back to court. Again her father

whisked her off. Cecelia always felt that NY was her home base after living there for two years. She then moved to a new home location, but occasionally returned for visits back to New York.

Cecelia described the subtle and not so subtle messages she heard from her father, being false, of bad things her mother had “said and done.” Stories that her “mother hung around bad people.” She continues to discuss her development during adolescence of how she gained a very dark image of her mother, ending with “I did not see her for the next 12 years after that” (Gebhard, 2004).

As an adult, she has come to not trust her own perceptions in life after her father had painted up her mother and vilified her family as being destructive. Later, as the dynamics changed with her father, this entire process caught up with her, which led to depression, anxiety, and trouble sleeping because of nightmares.

## CASE EXAMPLE VICTIM 2

### Anthony

Anthony was born in Atlanta and moved to Mexico City at the age of 3, where he lived there with both parents until the age of 10 when his parents separated. His father is an American and his mother Mexican. Close to age 9, Anthony became aware of his parents relationship difficulties. His mother told him that they would be taking a vacation, which was the first time he experienced sadness and depression. From the age of 10 to 16, Anthony never saw his father.

He stated he would not consider asking his mother to see his father, due to her opinions, blame and anger she had towards his father. He remembers a phone call where his mother grabbed the phone away and said bad things to his father, “you have no rights to see the kids,” intermixed with other threats. This behavior eventually leads to turning any child to hate the other parent. The mother, in this case, punished the father by having the child(ren) not want to see him.

Anthony makes clear that alienating parents adopt a campaign to “Satanize” the other parent under the guise of “being a victim,” or to create the false belief under the guise of “protecting the child.” As an adult, he recognized that the best way “to punish the other parent is to say you can’t see your children.” “She could have let him see us because there was visitation rights, but she used every legal recourse to make it very difficult for him to see us” (Gebhard, 2004).

He now realizes that this was done without any regard to their welfare. His mother was expressing her own needs through Anthony and his brother, in venting her anger. He now recognizes that she deliberately kept them away from their father, hurt them, and herself. “There are no winners in this.” This experience for him has significantly affected his lack of self-esteem, lack of

trust, and he also stated he “puts up barriers.” This behavior from a parent “has created a situation which has damaged all of us for the rest of our lives.” He ends with discussing how “the very people who love you are very capable of hurting you” (Gebhard, 2004).

### CASE EXAMPLE VICTIM 3

Thomas

Thomas lived with his brother and parents in Oregon when they were both abducted at a young age to Scotland by his mother, grandmother, and grandmother’s husband. The “visitation period was being used as a key and a buildup to turn me against my father,” “We were being treated not as developing human beings, but as weapons” (Gebhard, 2004). Weapons of emotional assault, where Thomas was taught to blame the other parent.

Both his mother and grandmother instilled fear into him about his father for the purpose of preventing him to ever see his father again. He remembers his grandmother asking him if he wants to move to Scotland. At an impressionable age, he was not aware of the future consequences of having all ties severed from his father and extended family. “It was just like a game, all that time I was in favor of the move, but in reality I was abducted for the purpose of preventing me from seeing my father again” (Gebhard, 2004).

As an adolescent and due to the constant moving he incurred, he poignantly discusses his difficulties and internal psychological strategy he created within himself to fit in. As a teenager, he admits he became violent towards others and had additional outbursts. He continues to discuss that time in his life, the fact he didn’t want to give his past away or tell people what has happened or his own role he played in it regarding his own behavior. He was told he would have a new life and be with new people. Over time “I was taught to be afraid of my father and was voicing the views of my mother that had been fed to me.”

His father tried to see his son and showed up, and again Thomas was taken by his mother and grandmother that day to a hideaway and was rejected by his mother. “Just another aspect of the game—the bad guy is here,” his mother stated explaining that his father was a monster.

Thomas discusses the long-term enduring effects that is crippling, and still having a lack of confidence and a sense of being an outsider. There were consequences for all, and the consequences of the alienation from that parent “are for them personally, inescapable.” As an adult, he now wants contact with his father, who was cut out of his life, and has now cut off contact with his mother.

Alienation takes on many tactics and forms, particularly with divorce or bitter custody disputes, and is a form of child abuse. Already traumatized by the loss of a parent, stepparent, and extended family, the child is caught in an impossible situation, which they may never psychologically recover from.

The feeling of security and balance, intimacy, and childhood feeling of trust is forever gone.

The alienating parent so often denigrates the target parent with outright 'lies, and misleading' and exaggerated statements. These individuals may even go so far as to withhold from the target parent the fact that their child was involved in an injurious accident or even tell the child(ren) the other parent is dead. These alienating parents frequently tell the child(ren) that the target parent no longer loves them. They will brainwash a child convincing them that abuse occurred, when there was none. Treating a child, who was never abused, as if they were, only makes matters worse and further assists in harming and alienating the target parent and the child. Over time, the destruction is frequently irreparable. An alienator will continue using deceptive methods to other third parties surrounding the child(ren) for his or her personal agenda.

Many of these children find themselves experiencing turmoil, disruption, anger, fear, and resentment during the disputes of their estranged parents. Some feel embarrassed to speak about their own willing participation they undertook which is a byproduct of parental alienation. They are in a conflict of loyalty between their parents where there are no winners.

The alienation of everyone surrounding the child, including schools and friends is nothing new. The biggest sadness is not how the alienator lives daily in denial regarding the hideous path they pursue to hurt their former mate, but the fact that they are inept to see the truly heart-wrenching damage they do to the child(ren), who become yet again, the victim of another war.

Perpetrators of this type of denigration often include the alienator's new spouse or extended family, who cunningly and joyfully contribute to hindering all forms of communication i.e., returning mail, confiscating letters, turning off message and fax machines, or having an unlisted telephone number. Additionally, hindrance is also instructing a child what to say, this can include deliberate actions of discouragement, subtly or overtly, filled with 'excuses not to encourage, acknowledge, or remind the child about birthdays and holidays with the target parent, and frequently exposing a selected and biased version of legal documents to the child. These personalities will do everything in their power not to reintegrate the target parent and erase them from the child's mind. Some go so far as to listen in on private telephone calls, come to court to testify with fictitious allegations that the target parent "intends" to harm the child, and constantly make threats to the target parent to have the police, even if they show for a child's graduation or to the family home. Withholding of records about a child or information about caregivers and friends of the child to raise legal costs is not uncommon.

#### A VIEW FOR THE BENCH

Family court judges like those of the Superior Court of Maricopa County in Arizona believe that all judges should be specifically informed about

mild, moderate, and severe forms of parental alienation. According to Family Court Judge Mark Armstrong, some of the recognized signs of parental alienation are “withholding visitation and making disparaging comments about the other parent, and when done in front of the child, is one of the most damaging behaviors” (Jeanes, 2003). It is common for the alienator to make allegations that child support is not being used for the child and that there can be no visitation until it’s paid—one has nothing to do with the other.

It is recommended that family courts take very definitive action against an alienating parent, who willfully and consciously disaffects the relationship with the other parent. One of the priorities and the general view of the courts is that a child should have meaningful and regular contact with both parents. If a child does not have contact with the target parent, this can be very harmful to the child(ren) and later in adult life. The expression one frequently hears is that “children are resilient,” yet one must remember that they can all be wounded and scarred for life. Children should not be put in the middle where they feel that they have to defend both parents. Rehabilitated alienated children report that when they hear hurtful things said about the other parent, that it destroys a lot more than just their relationship with the other parent.

Some typical causes of conflict are about money or that there are no commonly shared rules or values between households. It is expected to see common parenting differences such as one household having stricter rules than the other. Parents need to understand that there will be parenting changes when they divorce because divorce is a transition. Parenting a child of divorce is different than parenting a child in a regular family setting. Parents need to put the child first and never discourage the child from loving the other parent. The child needs to hear that they are loved, so that they don’t have to constantly second guess.

In the documentary *Children of Divorce—A View For The Bench*, mental health professionals have observed that a child will show a clear allegiance with one parent. Often the child has no interest in the other parent, feels that the alienated parent is bad and cannot think of anything positive about them. In cases of willful alienation, you will see a parent lie about the other and a parent who will even “destroy pieces of memorabilia loved by the child, which were received from the target parent” (Jeanes, 2003). Parents are often myopic—only seeing a win or lose, property and money, and loss of affection perspective.

## PARENTAL POLARIZATION/ALIENATION

According to Lynne Kenny-Markan “Parental Alienation differs a little bit from the term Parental Polarization. Parental Polarization is the less politicized term and also refers to a situation which some family members are considered the good part of the family and others are considered the bad part of the family” (Jeanes, 2003).

The purposes of polarization are to protect children, exercise rage, revenge, annihilate the other parent, repair narcissistic injury, maintain dysfunctional relationship, and avoid closure. Just as with parental alienation, the mild form is where the child experiences significant discomfort. In the moderate form, the child is compelled to keep separate worlds and identities, and in severe cases, is where the child refuses contact with the target parent. Some signs and manifestations of mild alienation are:

- Lack of communications between visits
- Inability to tolerate presence of other parent at events important to the child
- Disregard for the importance of the relationship between child and the other parent
- Child expresses mostly negative perceptions of target parent
- Presence of borrowed descriptions and scenarios by the child

Some signs and manifestations of moderate alienation are:

- Child communicates dislike of visitation
- Weak, frivolous, or absurd rationalizations for denigration of the other parent
- Refusal to hear anything about the other parent, especially if it is good
- Refusal to speak directly with the other parent
- Refusal to allow target parent to be physically present
- Delights in hearing negative news about target parent

Some examples are when a parent states “I can’t make my child go,” thus colluding with their child’s unhealthy perspective of not valuing the access time with the target parent. The child will display oppositional behavior by not wanting to get in or out of a car and a school will say that there is lack of concentration and distractions. Jeanes (2003), goes on to tell us the signs and manifestations of severe alienation:

- Overt criticism of target parent
- Child is required to keep secrets from the target parent
- Threat of withdrawal of love by child
- Extreme lack of courtesy to target parent
- False allegations

Some “higher levels of symptomology—is when the child takes on multiple personas at each parent’s house. In severe cases, the alienating parent tends to be the more powerful parent by that point, because polarization and alienation take a long time—it is a longitudinal process. In severe cases, therapists will hear a lot of black and white thinking, comments about all or

nothing and that there is absolutely one good parent and absolutely one bad parent” (Jeanes, 2003).

Dr. Anna Scherzer points out how to tell the differences with those who treat and evaluate children. They first need to know what is “normal development” for children, the “mental status and history of each parent,” and knowing the “life history of both parents” (Jeanes, 2003).

Regarding false allegations of abuse, Judge Armstrong states “we frequently see cases where the alienating parent will call the police or Child Protective Services and attempt to involve them to gather evidence in support of their alienating behavior and the allegations many times are not substantiated” (Jeanes 2003). Sometimes it is difficult to assess the credibility of parents and the tools available to the court to identify alienating behavior vary.

The court needs to be mindful that the alienating parent will, as Judge Armstrong confirms “profess that they have an interest for the child to have a relationship with the target parent.” In the severe situations where the parent is “blatant in their behavior, and will admit in court that the target parent should not have access to the child is a clear signal of severe alienation” (Jeanes, 2003).

Judges need to see the evidence versus what is said, and note the inconsistencies. In cases of parental alienation, there is usually a missing piece. Judges need to ask themselves if the statements that they hear from the child are common to children their age and make a determination of where the child is getting the information.

Judges must make timely decisions and never allow long periods of time to pass, as waiting for a decision is a disservice to the child(ren). In severe cases, when a parent performs a full parentectomy, the following tools and sanctions should be utilized.

- Mandatory therapy for the alienating parent behavior
- Integration between the child and the target parent
- Family therapy
- Donations to target parent’s favorite charity
- Community service, where the alienator teaches about alienation
- Reverse custody
- Severe monetary sanctions
- Incarceration

Judges should follow common guidelines by being proactive, not reactive; consider both sides of the story, be clear and specific in all court orders, refer the case to therapy or education, refer the case for monitoring, and delegate treatment but not the decision making to the therapeutic interventionist (Jeanes, 2003). Especially in cases of alienation, any psychological report or correspondence or defamatory writing should immediately be sealed in the

court file, and hefty sanctions imposed upon those who use such documents publicly against another. This serves to protect everyone's privacy, particularly that of third parties, such as extended family. In some severe cases, the alienating parent is not affected by paying large monetary sanctions and the only way to stop the abuse of the child and the target parent is to incarcerate them.

## SUMMARY

Fully severed parent-child relationships are referred to as a parentectomy. Professionals need to understand the dynamics of the custody dispute and keep a watchful eye on the role the child is playing, before eliciting and placing any weight on children's or adolescent's expressed preference of residence and visitation.

When an ex-spouse bad mouths the other parent to their children, perhaps even turning them against the once-loved parent, the risk is high that not only is the child's respect lost, but also their affection. Even in extreme cases, total contact with the target parent is severed. As the sixteenth-century English philosopher John Locke wrote "Parents wonder why the streams are bitter, when they themselves have poisoned the fountain."

Many alienators reference their former spouse (in front of the children) with filthy language and even as their adversary. These alienators are not intimidated by the court and ignore their own mediated agreements not to alienate the child(ren). The fact remains that a child miseducated is a child lost, and through this behavior, further disrespect is perpetrated—a true example of how abusers breed abusers and alienators breed alienators. It is not difficult to comprehend that when the child(ren) refer to the target parent on a first name basis, it is disrespectful and learned by example. Coercing a child to spy on or keep secrets from the target parent, therapist, or custody evaluator only exemplifies to the child that deception is acceptable behavior. When the alienator keeps a secret and puts it on the child to collude with their deception, they are teaching their child(ren) unhealthy and destructive values. This behavior will erode the child's trust, ruin their self-esteem, and often lead them to be deceitful later in life—repeating the cycle.

With *fait accompli*, whether it's mild, off-the-cuff badmouthing to outright systematic character assassination of the target parent, there is hope, through examples and solutions for everyday conflicts that occur with children caught in the fallout of divorce.

It is often said that the human mind is our fundamental resource. Forensic custody evaluators need to pay special attention to alienators who constantly write persuasive, yet defamatory letters full of speculation, dubious statements, or present a deceptive chronology. A forensic statement analysis of their depositions and correspondence usually reveals evidence of the deception designed to turn an evaluator (or other third-party reader)

against the target parent in order to have a custody report published in favor of the alienating parent.

Alienators often refuse to even speak with the target parent and will unilaterally hire an independent evaluator under the guise of a therapist to treat the child. These hired guns, in a joint custody situation, are ethically bound to deal with both parents and can be held responsible and accountable before a licensing board, an ethics committee, or even have legal action taken against them.

Unfortunately, some professionals listen to the alienating parent's story of horror, and may even go to the extent of involving themselves overtly by writing defamatory letters about the target parent, whom they may have never met, to other third parties or a court. This can occur as a result of erroneous false statements, created and slanted histories, false legal documents provided to them by the alienating parent about their custody or divorce dispute.

The fact remains that "caseworkers, teachers, even coaches, and the child's therapist were often drawn into the coalition by submitting affidavits to the court, colluding to block contact between the child and the alienated parent, suppressing information about the child's whereabouts and the child's day-to-day activities" (Ellis, 2005, pp. 417–418). Their solution is not to stop this alienating abuse when it exists, but instead they abandon principle.

Everyone needs to understand, including our family court judges, the dynamics and nuances surrounding alienation and ways to recognize when a campaign of alienation begins as well as how to counter it. Just as violence is the last refuge of the incompetent, the alienators own memoirs of domestic violence, false allegations of child abuse, retaliation, and revenge, equate in the alienator's mind, as justice. Internal satisfaction occurs only when the full parentectomy of the parent-child relationship is achieved. Distinguished Parental Alienation expert Dr. Richard A. Warshak so eloquently and succinctly states: "Absence does not make the alienated child's heart grow fonder; usually it makes alienation more profound" (Warshak, 2001).

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