

Interpersonal Acceptance

NEWSLETTER

September, 2020, Volume 14, No. 3





Photo credit: Google Images

Inside this Issue

Editor: Fauzia Naz, PhD
Executive Editor: Ronald P. Rohner, PhD

1. Parental Alienation: Science and Law: Lorandos, D., & Bernet, W. (2020).....	2
2. Which Wolf Are You Feeding?.....	9
3. ISIPAR Officers (2020)	10
4. Regional Representatives (2020)	11
5. A Fundamental Truth	14
6. 9 th International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection.....	15
7. Covid-19 or No-Covid-19, IPARTheory’s global reach continues to expand.....	16
8. I want all of my lasts to be with you.....	17



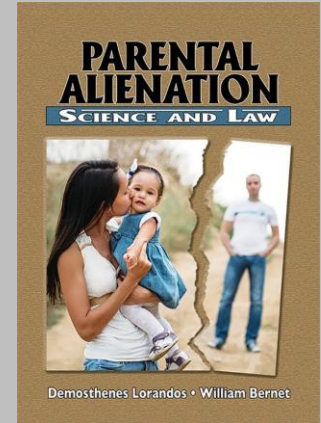
Parental Alienation: Science and Law

Lorandos, D., & Bernet, W. (2020)

Reviewed by

Lena Hellblom Sjögren, PhD, Östhammar, Sweden

lenahellblomsjogren@gmail.com



How can a formerly loved parent become an alien a child rejects? How can it be that a child's love can be turned to hate? This is explained by scholars in the comprehensive textbook on Parental Alienation: Science and Law, edited by Lorandos and Bernet (2020). The first section of the book (chapters 1-6) contains "Clinical considerations and research". The second section (chapter 7-13) contains "Legal Issues". Each chapter ends with summarizing conclusions. The book is clearly structured and well written, making it a must-read for law and mental health professionals working with children and families.

In 1985 the American child psychiatrist Richard Gardner coined the term parental alienation syndrome (PAS), but as Bernet and Lorandos pointed out, several earlier professionals had already made similar observations. The PA(S) construct describes empirically made observations of a child's unjustified rejection of a parent, as well as the severity of alienating behaviors in varying degrees: mild, moderate and severe (Appendix A, pp. 550-551).

In chapter 2, Freeman introduced the concept of contact refusal. This is a general term describing a child "who does not enjoy seeing both parents and may actively avoid spending time with either the mother or the father" (p. 44).

Freeman compares the concept of contact refusal to school refusal. Just as there can be many causes for school refusal so can there be several explanations for contact refusals—for example, stubbornness, conflicting personality traits, delusional thoughts, and avoidance of parental discourse. Freeman presented the fundamental distinction between children who have rational reasons to distance themselves from a parent (for example from an abusive parent, called parental estrangement) versus children who were never abused, and yet totally reject a relationship with loving parents (parental alienation). Freeman also corrected the false claim that PA cannot be identified because it is not in the DSM-5. He showed that although the term is not a codified diagnosis, the DSM-5 does include three diagnoses that can be used in classifying cases of PA: child affected by parental relationship distress; parent-child relational problem; and, child psychological abuse.

In chapter 3, Harman and Matthewson present research showing how one parent acts to harm the relationship between the other parent and the child, and/or to harm only the other parent. They state: “Ultimately, the central component of PA is to use the children to maintain power and control over the alienated parents” (p. 92). Of special interest are the authors nine detailed tables at the end of the chapter. The tables are a rich source of examples of alienating behaviors harming the child’s relationship with the other parent, among them the use of the children to maintain power and control over the alienated parent. “In this view children are harmed when they are manipulated and influenced to deprive themselves of love, nurturance, and involvement with the other parent” (p. 143). He concluded that to deny that this is a form of child abuse is reminiscent of society’s denial in the early 20th century of the widespread prevalence of physical and sexual abuse of children.

In chapter 4, Warshak addressed the fact that there are detractors who claim that the concept of parental alienation is bogus, and nothing more than legal strategy used by abusive men to deflect blame away from themselves for their children’s fear and hatred of them.

“In this view, children who reject parents always have valid reasons and all hated parents have no one to blame for their suffering but themselves” (p.143). Warshak contrasts the sentiments of these detractors with those who recognize the validity of the concept of PA, and who regard parental alienating behaviors as a form of psychological child abuse and family violence. “In this view children are harmed when they are manipulated and influenced to deprive themselves of love, nurturance, and involvement with the other parent” (p. 143). He concluded that to deny that this is a form of child abuse is reminiscent of society’s denial in the early 20th century of the widespread prevalence of physical and sexual abuse of children. Is there any remedy for children who have been harmed through PA? According to Warshak in Chapter 4, Family Bridges is so-far the most systematically studied program to help moderately to severely alienated children. It is a structured, four-day educational workshop that rests on a foundation of empirical research. Two-thirds of the children who went through the workshop rated it as good or excellent, whereas only 8 % rated it as poor. From this, Warshak concluded that “overall, Family Bridges is a resource that judges and lawyers should consider for alienated children” (p. 171).

In Chapter 5, Baker concluded that “taken together, the clinical literature provides a wealth of support for the thesis that some parents engage in behaviors that can result in a child’s rejecting an otherwise loving and fit parent” (p. 219). She also pointed out that it is not possible to determine whether a child is alienated solely based on the child’s behavior: “No mental health professional should endorse this premise as it violates PA theory as well as sound clinical practice” (p. 209). The actions and attitudes of all parties—the child, the rejected parent, and the favored parent—have to be considered. Additionally, she discussed the Five-Factor Model of PA, which is based on her and her colleagues’ Four-Factor Model. The Five-Factor Model has been empirically supported in a study of 68 mental health professionals who rated 16 variations of a vignette.

Bernet added the first factor: The child resists a relationship with a parent. Baker summarized the other four factors. Factor two refers to the presence of a prior positive relationship between the child and the now rejected parent. Factor three refers to the absence of abuse or neglect or seriously deficient parenting on the part of the rejected parent. Factor four refers to the use of multiple alienating behaviors on the part of the favored parent. And factor five refers to the exhibition of many of the eight behavioral manifestations of PA by the child. Baker concluded that: “Only when all five factors are present should it be concluded that the child is alienated as opposed to estranged” (p. 209). A false statement repeated many times by PA detractors is that PA has not been recognized by APA or other professional organizations. In chapter 6, however, Bernet pointed out that PA and/or alienation behaviors have been accepted by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, the American Psychological Association, the Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. He also noted that the editors and authors of DSM-5 never said they doubted the reality or importance of PA. However, they were of the opinion that PA did not meet their criteria for a *mental disorder* (pp. 274-275).

Lorandos wrote the first four chapters in the second section of the book. In Chapter 7, he presented historical cases that illustrate the complexity of PA. One case from 1804 is about a father called De Manneville who “literally snatched his nursing daughter from the breast of the wife, and absconded with the naked child in an open carriage in inclement weather” (p. 286). The mother’s decision at that time to live apart from her husband was found illegal. Lorandos also discussed several other historical cases. One was about Charles Dickens who wanted to start a new life with his mistress, actress Ellen Ternan. So, he alienated his ten children from their mother, Catherine Dickens.

“In addition to his own expulsion of Catherine, he insisted that his younger children, as well as his circle of family and friends, do so as well” (p. 292). Albert Einstein was an alienated father. In a private letter to one of his closest friends he wrote, “...My fine boy had been alienated from me for a few years already by my wife, who has a vengeful, ordinary disposition, but also is so sly that outsiders and particularly men are always deceived by her” (p. 293).

In Chapter 8, Lorandos examined the criteria for the admission of expert testimony, and how PA meets these criteria. Based on empirical evidence, Lorandos convincingly refute the claim often repeated by detractors that “PA-theory doesn’t fulfill criteria for testimony in court” To the contrary, however, Lorandos demonstrated that “the construct-PA-passes all relevant tests, be it Daubert, Frye, or some variant” (p.353).

In chapter 9, Lorandos discussed his research regarding the number and characteristics of parental alienation cases in the U.S. trial courts and appellate courts from 1985 to 2018. He and his six research assistants carefully reviewed court cases meeting the following criteria: “(1) An independent evaluating expert had testified on the subject of PA, whether or not the expert found PA, or (2) the court found on any basis that there was PA, whether or not there was an expert testimony” (p. 368). Lorandos also added another variable, (3) “whether there is a significant difference in the shared parenting time allocation after the parties were in court versus before the parties were in court... (p. 369). With the application of these three inclusion/exclusion criteria, 1,181 cases remained from an original listed 3,555 cases. Results of analyses showed that:

- The number of PA-cases in the U.S. steadily increased over this 34-year period.
- About 75 % of the identified alienators were females, and 25 % were males.
- A significant change in child custody occurred in 61 % of the cases.

In Chapter 10, Lorandos discussed the fact that scientific testimony often carries an aura of infallibility. However, he also noted that the process of preliminary courtroom questioning called *Voir dire* (speak the truth) can be used to determine if the proposed expert testimony is supported by reliable research and methodology, and if the testimony is based on the facts of the case. *Voir dire* is a three-step process: 1) test the preferred expert's knowledge of relevant literature, 2) reveal the expert's inadequacies from prior court appearances, 3) test the expert's knowledge of the facts of the present case (pp. 394-397). Unfortunately, however, the reality is—as Lorandos pointed out—unreliable testimony can be accepted because “many attorneys and judges are not sufficiently up to speed on psychological standards” (p. 386).

In Chapter 11, Joshi compared civil and common law systems around the world. He concluded that in Germany, Sweden, and Norway, civil law judges and their experts “could prevent a robust presentation and examination of scientific theories along with empirical support if these theories do not muster with some special interest groups or are politically incorrect” (p.462). From his reviews of judicial opinions in the Canada, the US, Australia, and England, he concluded that judges in these jurisdictions for the most part “get it”. “The trial-by-combat tradition allows the target-parent-part-litigant and his or her lawyer to identify the proper legal issues, select the evidence to be presented, and more importantly, expert witnesses to present the evidence” (p. 462).

In Chapter 12, Lorandos and Bernet made it clear that expert testimony is nearly always required to establish the existence of parental alienation. The person providing this testimony must demonstrate several qualities beyond expertise in a mental health profession, knowledge of the scientific research addressing PA, experience in diagnosing and treating PA, and actual knowledge of the dilemma facing the child and the family.

Lorandos and Bernet suggested questions that can be put during examination—for example to ask additional questions after a cross-examination has been completed. If the opposing attorney has insisted on yes-or-no answers, this gives the expert the opportunity to provide a more complete response.

Bernet called Chapter 13 a “smorgasbord”. In this chapter ten professionals contributed short texts describing important experiences and suggestions. It is not possible to credit them all here. But I want to highlight Miller’s conclusion that “in my respectful opinion, the family court system requires an extreme makeover, not half-way measures. As we say in medicine, it is not enough to put a Band-Aid on a bullet wound” (p. 517).

In conclusion, I highly recommend this book for the further education of law and mental health professionals, as well as for researchers and laymen interested in interpersonal relationships.

References

Lorandos, D., Bernet, W. (Eds.) (2020). *Parental Alienation – Science and Law*. Charles C Thomas Publisher.

Which Wolf Are You Feeding?



A grandfather was teaching his grandchildren about life. He said to them, “A fight is going on inside me. It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf expresses fear, rejection, anger, and hatefulness. The other wolf expresses love, hope, kindness, friendship, and warmth. These wolves are always fighting with each other. My grandchildren, this same fight is going on inside of you. And not just you, but inside every other person too.”

The children thought about it for a minute. Then one child asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win the fight?” The grandfather replied, “THE ONE YOU FEED.”

ISIPAR's Officers



President
Brien Ashdown
ashdown@hws.edu



President-Elect
Nadia Koltcheva
nkoltcheva@nbu.bg



Past President
Francisco Machado

flbsmachado@gmail.com



Secretary/Treasurer
Nancy Rohner

nancy.rohner@gmail.com

Regional Representatives 2020



Oladimeji Ogundipe
Central and South Africa
globaldon1@ymail.com



Julie Lee
East Asia
julie041206@gmail.com



Paolo Senese
Europe
vincenzopaolo.senese@unicampania.it



Ebru Akun
North Africa & Middle East
ebruakun@gmail.com

Regional Representatives 2020



Tatiana Melendez-Rhodes
South America
tmelendezm@hotmail.com



Carrie Brown
North America
dr.carrie.brown@gmail.com



Mussaffa Butt
South Asia
mussaffa@gcu.edu.pk



Maria (Kit) Diaz
Southeast Asia
crstnad@gmail.com

NOMINATIONS WELCOMED

NOMINATIONS (INCLUDING SELF-NOMINATIONS) ARE WELCOMED
FOR THE VACANT REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE POSITIONS

INSULAR PACIFIC AND AUSTRALIA
MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA, AND THE CARIBBEAN

A FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH

For as long as humans exist, there will be...
social interaction.

For as long as there is social interaction, there will be...
interpersonal acceptance and rejection.

For as long as there is interpersonal acceptance and
rejection, there will be...

Ronald P. Rohner, PhD
September 2, 2020



9th
international Congress
on Interpersonal
Acceptance and
Rejection **June, 15 – 18, 2022**

9th International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection

Geneva, New York
USA



Photo credit: Google Images

Program Chair: Brien Ashdown, PhD
President, ISIPAR
ashdown@hws.edu

Covid-19 or No-Covid-19, IPARTheory's global reach continues to expand



Readership report from Scholar Works shows more than 15,436 downloads of one article on IPARTheory from 1117 institutions in 146 countries”

I want all of my lasts to be with you

