

Foreword

By Stan Korosi, M.Couns.HS

The Pinball Machine: 'Let's Play the Alienation Game'

As with any good mystery, the story of alienation such as this leaves the reader mystified by the inevitable erosion of a child's loving relationship with their father and at the same time wondering: What has this father done to earn the opprobrium of rejection? To cut to the chase, you should read this book because you just can't make this stuff up! The reality is indeed stranger than fiction. This is the lived story of parental alienation, a form of coercive family violence and child psychological maltreatment that equally affects the children of both mothers and fathers in all types of families.

I have been a specialist consultant in the field of parental alienation here in Australia for nearly a decade. As far as I'm aware, I'm the first person in Australia to have "put up their shingle" with this specialisation. I'm an accredited facilitator of an evidence-based remediation workshop that provides children who have been psychologically abused in the form of severe alienation, with their best chance of a relationship with both parents and where parents and children learn how children's views may be shaped by adult influence. I have therefore worked with

many targeted-alienated parents to help them and their children find each other again and to help these parents live a better life when remediation of their relationship is not possible.

Additionally, I was the founding Editor-in Chief of 'Parental Alienation International' a publication of an international, not-for-profit organisation, the Parental Alienation Study Group (PASG). The PASG has more than 550 members, mostly mental health and legal professionals from 52 countries, including Australia, who provide scholarship and thought leadership in the field of parental alienation.

I am currently undertaking doctoral research into parental alienation as a social issue; surveying and interviewing targeted-alienated parents about their social experiences as they navigate society and social institutions, as parents rejected by their alienated children.

Trevor, the author of this book, and I have moved in the same contexts, with Trevor's voluntary work with mothers and fathers through a national organisation to which I also provided professional development to some of their volunteer groups. Both of us, in our own way share similar experiences. Trevor writes of his lived experience of how a child, his daughter, was coerced into the unwarranted rejection of him, as her father, by the depreciation of his identity as a parent. This is the hallmark of a psychologically and emotionally maltreated child, exposed to alienating process by one of their parents. We need more books like this in the Australian context to demonstrate the

reality of this type of emotional abuse as a form of family violence hiding in plain sight in our families and in society.

In Australia, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men experienced some form of emotional abuse from a current or former partner. International research indicates that the prevalence of parental alienation is more or less equal between mothers and fathers. That is to say, that men and women are equally the perpetrators and victims of alienation against their children and every one of their children, a victim of abuse. In Australia 8.9% of men and 4.6% of women who experienced emotional abuse by a previous partner had their partner threaten to take their children away from them, and 38.5% of men, 25.1% of women that experienced emotional abuse by a previous partner had their partner lie to their children with the intent of turning them against them¹.

Why Should You Read This Book?

Like so many experiences of parental alienation, the author unfolds a torturous story that ends with the rupture of a loving relationship between a child and a good parent without regard for the child's welfare. The principal character and protagonist in this book falls victim to its plot of parental alienation; where, in the words of well-known researcher Amy J. Baker, they were cast as being "unavailable, unemotional and unsafe".

¹ Commonwealth of Australia, Family Law Act 1975, Section 4AB, § 4AB (2012). Retrieved 17 May, 2019, from http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/fla1975114/s4ab.html,

It is tempting to offer ‘spoilers’ about this book. Suffice to say, I suggest that readers not only focus upon the author’s autobiographical description of events (particularly in Part 1) but also ask: who’s narratives and who’s voice are silenced? Parental alienation manifests not only in what is said and what is done, but also in its absence. If there is one message to take away from this book, it is the sheer purposiveness and intentionality of parental alienation as a form of child psychological maltreatment and coercive emotional abuse, and how easily a child and their loving man, parent and father can be enveloped in a distorted, artificial reality created by the other partner. This artificial alienating reality is dangerous to both the targeted parent and their children. Note the threat made by the mother in this story, “I will make sure you never see your daughter again”. In my experience such threats are always carried out and not always recognised by our family violence services as the coercive family violence for which they are commissioned to respond. As many targeted-alienated parents report, they are most in danger for as long as they try to keep in contact with their children—a stark contrast to the opposite experience for victims of other forms of family violence; that they are most in danger when they leave the relationship.

‘The Pinball Machine’ is an appropriate title as the author explains in the preface to this book. It is a metaphor for entertainment and distraction but with a singular purpose: to take your child. Once you are in the game, you cannot get out unless you lose, and even if you stay in to the end, the

'house' always wins. It is stories like this, told with courage, that reveal the nature of the game in which children are the 'ball', and their rejected parent are the 'flippers'. Of course, we know where the 'ball' always ends up.

Beyond This Book: The Winds of Change

In the spirit of 'that which does not destroy us makes a stronger,' Trevor came close, very close to making a lie of Nietzsche's proposition. Trevor's story illustrates how the trauma of alienation infiltrates all parts of their lives. Parental rejection by alienation is worse than any death, not only is there no body to bury but these parents cannot even acknowledge the loss because to do so, validates the means by which their children were taken. As if that is not enough, they also face the judgement of society oblivious to the abuse of parental alienation hiding in plain sight. The author has taken the path of many parents and made a vocation of his traumatic experience, now advocating for parents and their children touched by alienation.

In Part 3, Trevor discusses the issues that need to be considered in the context of the family at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century. The family is no longer a structure underpinned by social and gender defined roles. Instead, it is fluid, and reconfigurable as a voluntary network of relationships organised into a family. And it can just as easily be dismantled by the intentional processes of alienation. Yet, within Australia's social and legal contexts, parental alienation is narrowly viewed as a type of relationship issue to

which children respond by alienating themselves to resolve an impossible loyalty conflict. At the same time this presentation is considered as a form of coercive, controlling family violence, given as an example in the Australian Family Law Act, 1975². This contradiction is highlighted in cases where children are placed with the parent who alienated them, and their targeted parents excluded from a relationship with their children.

This book highlights the need for the Australian family law system to consider children and parent's welfare as a whole, differentiate children's valid voices from coerced choices and develop a more congruent child support system that does not validate alienation as a ticket for financial abuse. Perhaps, this book will inspire you, the reader; get your placards ready because, mothers and fathers, it is time to hit the streets! Only a 'root and branch' review of the family law system in Australia by a Royal Commission can deliver the necessary change.

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²Commonwealth of Australia, Family Law Act 1975, Section 4AB, § 4AB (2012). Retrieved 17 May, 2019, from http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/fla1975114/s4ab.html,