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Parental Alienation Expert

Menu

THE CAPTURED MIND: STOCKHOLM SYNDROME IN CASES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

3 OCT
2017

13 COMMENTS

STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

The Stockholm syndrome appears when an abused victim, develops a kind of respect and empathy towards their abuser. It was named after a bank robbery in Stockholm when a group of bank employees were held hostage and developed a strong sense of empathy towards their captors. When this traumatic event was over, they even defended their captors by not wanting to say anything that might endanger their captors' freedom. This usually happens because the victim sees the smallest act of decent behavior as an extracted event which makes them see their captors as essentially good. This way they leave aside all the negative behavioral distinctions of their captors and focus on the positive ones. This syndrome is also called "traumatic bonding" or "victim brainwashing".

One of the behaviours we see in our work with families affected by parental alienation is Stockholm Syndrome in which not only the child becomes bound into the reactive behaviour of psychological splitting of everything into good and bad, the rejected parent does too. In severe cases of parental alienation, professionals are also drawn into the behaviours seen in the family system, which means that the concentric circles around the family become infected with trauma based defensive responses in those who are trying to help the child.

Stockholm Syndrome is caused by a trauma based defensive response to events which are beyond one's control. In rejected parents, the experience of having your children removed from you, (often right from under your nose) and the experience of knowing that this has been caused by the dysfunctional behaviours of the other parent, is a sufficient trigger to cause the psychologically split state of mind. In

some parents the split state of mind causes rage towards the alienating parent, in others it causes passivity and a desire to placate. Being trauma bonded to the person who is abusing their child becomes a very strong defensive mechanism for some parents, who will continue, even in the face of consistent evidence to the contrary, to believe that an abusive parent might change.

In our work we see many parents who continue to believe, long after those with a healthy mindset would be able to, that the other parent might change. This is a particular group of rejected parents who are almost always men. On interview and further investigation, these fathers are those whose children have been systematically removed from them by the mother of their children, often before the family separation occurred. Common themes in the landscape of the lives of these men are physical and emotional abuse at the hands of their ex partner and an inability to speak to others about what has happened to them. Coupled with their internalised belief about what being a man looks and feels like, these fathers often reach us in a state of shocked passivity. What they seek is help to reconnect to their children but in doing so they are keen not to upset their ex partner for fear of upsetting her or re-triggering the behaviours they have escaped from. What they often end up asking for is an intervention which will allow them to reconnect to their child without changing the dynamic at all, they seek therapy which placates their children's mother or persuasion of her to come to the table and talk. It can take many sessions of work with fathers in this position until they come to recognise that their mind has been captured in exactly the same way as their children's have been.

In the worst cases seen of this nature, men are so bound to the person who has abused them that they will bind together with that person against the help they have been seeking. This is a pattern of behaviour which is defensive at the deepest level, in which the unconscious traumatic experiences suffered, cause the abused parent to seek to protect the abuser from challenge. This behaviour denotes a need to defend the self against the reactive attacks from the abuser who, when challenged by those seeking to help, seeks revenge in attack upon the abused parent. Thus we see the abused parent colluding with the abusive parent to defend against outside incoming help as an unconscious self protection mechanism. This echoes the behaviour of alienated children who, when they are in the double bind of being controlled by an abusive parent, will collude with that parent to prevent outside help being effective.

The underlying dynamic seen in this situation is power, who uses it and who is affected by it. I have seen this dynamic play out in cases of parental alienation at the familial level and at the professional level in teams of people who, when feeling threatened by the abusive parent, have threatened others in order to prevent the abusive parent from being exposed or challenged. The key dynamic here being that those who are unused to working with personality disordered people or those with severe control issues, become trauma bonded to the abusive parent because of the threats that person makes against them.

Stockholm Syndrome is a fascinating but deeply destructive dynamic and when a rejected parent is bound into these responses it becomes difficult to work with the family as a whole. This is because the action and response between abusive and abused parent is maintained and the emerging patterns of collusion and sabotage prevent help being given to the child. Breaking this pattern is the first step in changing the dynamic in these cases, which are often seen at first as hybrid in nature simply because of the dynamic which is seen in which the abused parent colludes with the abuser.

When parental alienation dynamics infect a team of professionals it is equally fascinating to observe and many severe cases of parental alienation will include a team of people who become trauma bonded to the abusive parent. This causes behaviours which are consistent with Stockholm Syndrome, in which an abusive parent who is clearly judged to be so, is excused for the harm done and the abused parent is instead seen as the one who must change. What triggers this is usually the power which is wielded by an abusive parent against a weak professional who is unskilled in this area. I have seen it happen repeatedly in social work teams with social workers who are absolutely unaware that they have become bonded to the abusive parent but who will seek to placate that parent at length whilst attempting to fix the abused parent. Unaware professionals in this field are all at risk of being used in this way and many cases are hijacked by the personal subjective responses of professionals, to the underlying dynamics which caused the child to be rejecting in the first place. Avoiding this dynamic requires a strong Judge with clear oversight but even with the best of judgments a case can descend into the holding hostage of professionals to the will of the abusive parent, if people without skill or awareness and disproportionate power become infected with Stockholm Syndrome.

The clear message we give to all rejected parents is to understand the way in which the child has been captured in the mindset of their other parent and avoid being drawn into that yourself. If you have been damaged to the point of passivity, find someone to help you breathe life back into your own sense of self worth and your right to your own control over your sovereign self.

To practitioners working in this field we advise, know your own subjective self and caution against placating a parent who has been recognised as abusive. Steer clear of your need to rescue parents and deliver a happy ending. There are few happy endings involving an abusive parent making remarkable changes in cases of parental alienation, protecting the child by supporting the healthy parent is the very best route you can take.

Children, parents and professionals can all be taken hostage by Stockholm Syndrome and the court process is a perfect hatching place for such infectious dynamics to breed. Whilst the legal and mental health interlock is absolutely necessary for resolution of such cases, the combination of unskilled practitioners and psychologically unaware counsel can trigger a take over which grinds a case to a halt in minutes.

As the aware therapist amongst this, the risk of becoming the lightning rod for the pent up psychological distress generated by this lack of awareness is very high indeed.

Staying safe and staying sane where Stockholm Syndrome is present requires resilience, guts and determination. Knowing who is affected and how and when to step forward and when to step back is key as a practitioner in this field.

Loving your hostage taker. It is a defence which protects you from the harm which is being done to you but also from seeing the truth. It is a coercive controlling behaviour which is used by alienating parents freely. It can affect everyone around the family, including the professionals and it can cause even the clearest of cases of abuse to look like something else.

The captured mind. It can start with the child and end with the therapist. Those who venture inside this world beware.

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No Guru, No Method, No Teacher - Just You and Your Children and The Love That Doesn't Disappear

I am not one for keeping things mysterious when they can easily be explained and so today I am going to tell you exactly how a child who is
With 37 comments

Living With The Alienator: Parental Alienation as Coercive Control in Five Easy To Understand Steps

I work with social workers a lot. I also work with CAFCASS (GAL's for our stateside readers) and I teach and train psychotherapists,
With 45 comments



Making the Right Decisions: Advice for Rejected Parents in the UK

With 11 comments

PREVIOUS

Talismans, Triggers and Twists in the Tale: Understanding thematic narratives in the intrapsychic world of the alienated child

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The European Association of Parental Alienation Practitioners Conference 2018

13 COMMENTS

Seriously

3 Oct 2017 at 11:57 am

So true , every word , I have a regular fight with myself to remain out of the control of the alienating parent , my ex wife . I thought she might change , I was wrong , so wrong , my step son is now controlling his younger brother and sister , he is their father figure . No end in sight but staying safe where possible.

★ Like

[REPLY](#)

Alizee

3 Oct 2017 at 12:00 pm

This is ridiculous. Of course you won't publish my comment but I least I can tell you you're a joke.

★ Like

[REPLY](#)

karenwoodall

3 Oct 2017 at 12:16 pm

Well Alizee there's one of your assumptions squashed flat. Welcome, you sound like a lovely person.

★ Liked by [1 person](#)

[REPLY](#)

madisonelizabethbaylis

3 Oct 2017 at 12:13 pm

Reblogged this on Madison Elizabeth Baylis.

★ Like

[REPLY](#)

sadsam

3 Oct 2017 at 12:15 pm

Great blog Karen if poignant and hard to bear when one recognises oneself as someone who allowed themselves to be privately emotionally/psychologically abused, who went down the 'placating' route for years as an attempt to hold at bay exposure to levels of emotional/psychological pain of which I became so afraid. It didnt work. As you say placating is not the way to go and I finally hit back but the die was cast. To then watch as professionals from all walks of life became aligned with my old abuser was a searing experience. My distress only helped to seal my fate. We all know Life isn't fair etc but how I wish more people understood the dynamics of abusive relationships and how it is possible to become stuck in one. When the children then become embroiled in these dynamics, the heartbreak knows no end....

★ Like

REPLY

daveyone1

3 Oct 2017 at 3:53 pm

Reblogged this on World4Justice : NOW! Lobby Forum..

★ Like

REPLY

Carl Garnham

3 Oct 2017 at 5:50 pm

“Breaking this pattern is the first step in changing the dynamic in these cases, which are often seen at first as hybrid in nature simply because of the dynamic which is seen in which the abused parent colludes with the abuser.”

Absolutely essential to grasp, completely missed this one, that a degree of masking can take place where pure alienation is seen as hybrid because of the stockholm effect leading practioners to view such a situation only needing an intervention such as a family therapy, which apart from not only not working but even more so damaging to the alienated parent if that parent happens to be the father and thats due to the feminist grip and feminist influence in bodies and organisations of authortiy which are completely maligned, inadequate, biased and archaic. So easy to blame the dad....enforce demasculisation, hoodwink, shackle, control, disposal of for the non compliant.. etc Thats without mentioning the short and long term effect on the childrens life chances as well as the targetted parents own....and the cost to society, the tax payer etc,

Fantastic Karen,

better finish reading the blog now lol x

★ Like

REPLY

Carl Garnham

3 Oct 2017 at 6:48 pm

A song from a local band(my best mate when i was a steelworker is the dad of one of the young men in the band and had a big influence upon the arctic lads from sheff, Josh loved the arctic lads and milburn... oh how he rocked in the car on the way to football....at our place...at the leeds festival....at the O2 academy....the hull ice rink... and that was just watching both the local bands not including the times we went to see the manics, slipknot, coldplay, metallica, linkin park; In particular milburn, arctics, metallica and linkin park were his favourites, the sheffield lads and my one degree of separation made their music just that little bit more special to us....the arctics first album was almost a narrative to what i was experiencing with the Pure's.

Milburn – Stockholm Syndrome, great song but a bit loud so wont post here, its on youtube. 😊

Welcome, to the world of fake reality
Where you can never believe what you hear or believe what you see
It's like the coliseum of the annual games
With the Roman Emperor being entertained
A flick of the wrists that will seal your fate
A flick of the wrists that will seal your fate

A flick of the wrist and you're through
And there's no telling what they might do
Now they've captured your soul
Oh you're under control
They've captured your soul
And they won't give it back 'till you plead

Setting agendas and fashions which must be obeyed
(You must obey it, you must obey it)
With their stories and lies they decide, the way you're portrayed

You only see what they want you to see and nothing else
You only see what they want you to see and nothing else

A flick of the wrist and you're through
And there's no telling what they might do
Now they've captured your soul
Oh your under control
They've captured your soul
And they won't give it back 'till you plead

Nothing ever happens
So why are you watching? X3
No, nothing ever happens
So why are you watching!?

They've captured your soul
And they won't give it back
No they won't give it back
No they won't give it back

★ Like

REPLY

Rose

5 Oct 2017 at 5:47 pm

Wow! This is really powerful stuff. This is a situation I can see playing out now in the lives of my bonus sons and their father... and all the professionals are totally sucked in to the web of lies. And then some else happens even if the professional realises they might be wrong or even if evidence becomes available they cannot say 'I got it wrong' Infact the more evidence to the contrary the more embedded their opinion becomes!! There is a word for it but it escapes me right now... Amazing work Karen.

★ Like

REPLY

Rose

5 Oct 2017 at 5:50 pm

@seriously We have the same issue... now the older brother is alienating his younger brother from his Father. It is vile to behold.

★ Like

REPLY

Anonymous

6 Oct 2017 at 8:55 am

As someone who has co-parented for the last ten years or so, barely a few words passing between the lips of me and my former partner, all my efforts have been directed toward maintaining a balance so that the children experience both parents. For my part I must deal with my children's upset not by dismissing it, but by acknowledging it.

My children and I know what my Ex is like. I don't collude with my children against my Ex. If I had behaved differently, rubbing my Ex up the wrong way, then she is quite capable of re-aligning the thoughts of her children to slavishly follow her will.

She would have said she was protecting the children from me.

But the truth would have been, she had aligned the children against me.

To some extent I still am under the control of my Ex, because I fear what she is capable of and how strong is her conviction.

Ironically her strength of conviction is what attracted me to her in the first place.

At the tender age of ten years old when my daughter told me she was going back to live with her Mum she said, “I know what she is like, I can deal with her”.

Of course, I was beside myself with worry, knowing the ferocity of her mother and the vulnerability of my daughter. I feared the worst (the mental breakdown of my daughter and drip feed alignment toward her mother’s way of thinking).

I only gradually became aware of how my change in behaviour would make a huge difference to the healthy survival and development of my daughter.

★ Like

REPLY

Ally

6 Oct 2017 at 7:09 pm

Spot on Karen....as usual!

My partner was abused by his ex-wife & when he thought he had escaped, the abuse continued from afar & he sees now that he did spend his time trying to placate her.

He was affected just as you described for years & it cost him his relationship with a long-term partner. Fast forward a couple of years when he is in a much healthier place, and starting a new relationship with me, seeing & saying the same things his ex-partner said...and thankfully he is no longer suffering from Stockholm Syndrome and sees her abuse clearly now.

Re the professionals, we have seen it many times. We have tried to ‘educate’ them, to no avail as they are completely sucked in to her story.

We have found though, that if you go above them, to their ultimate manager (not their immediate line manager/supervisor, but higher) you are heard by someone with a more open, objective (& professional) mind. They have no direct connection or existing relationship with the abuser, so can be more objective & listen to facts, rather than just hearsay from the abuser.

We’ll see if it ultimately makes any difference or if they end up protecting each others backs after all....but we can live in hope that professionalism is still alive & well in some institutions.

★ Like

REPLY

JLB

30 Dec 2017 at 4:04 pm

I find it hard to read this article because of the introductory statement:

‘we see many parents who continue to believe, long after those with a healthy mindset would be able to, that the other parent might change. This is a particular group of rejected parents who are almost always men.’

What is the basis of evidence for this? Your experience? As I understand it there are few statistics in this

field for example amazingly there are no statistics on the numbers of mothers who are apart from their children. And accessing help can be financially impossible for women – I speak from experience. I can't see how opposing men and women in this way helps to combat the gender war dynamics that obscure the heart of the problem. Ultimately abuse affects everyone regardless of gender. Maybe I've misunderstood the point you are making?

★ Like

REPLY

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