The handout of the 6/1/17 Powerpoint presentation of Dr. Childress and Dorcy Pruter from the AFCC convention in Boston has been divided into three parts to allow for a manageable file size for downloading.

This is Part 1.

Part 1 covers the paradigm shift of a return to established constructs and principles of professional psychology, and a description of the key features of AB-PA.

Attachment-Based Model of Parental Alienation (AB-PA)

**Foundations:** C.A. Childress (2015)
California Southern University Master's Lecture Series:
(online)
- An Attachment-Based Model of Parental Alienation
  7/18/14
- Treatment of Attachment-Based Parental Alienation
  11/21/14
**Diagnosis:** C.A. Childress (fall 2017)
**Training & Certification in AB-PA (fall 2017)**

drcraigchildressblog.org

The Construct of “Parental Alienation”
The Wilderness

Gardner & PAS

In proposing the existence of a supposedly new form of pathology called “parental alienation” - which he claimed represented a "new syndrome" that was unique in all of mental health (identifiable by an equally unique new set of symptom identifiers made up specifically for this pathology alone) - Richard Gardner led everyone off the path of professionally established constructs and principles and into the wilderness of professional ignorance and incompetence.

Gardner was correct in identifying a family pathology surrounding divorce in which a child was induced by one parent to reject a relationship with the other parent.

However, he was **incorrect** in claiming that the symptom features he identified represented a new form of pathology – a "new syndrome."

Gardner was simply a poor diagnostician.
When he skipped the step of professional diagnosis, Gardner led everyone off the path of professional psychology and into the wilderness of ill-defined constructs and "new forms of pathology."

The family pathology of "parental alienation" is NOT a new form of pathology. Gardner was simply a poor diagnostician.

It is long past overdue that professional psychology leave the wilderness of "new forms of pathology" and return to the established path of professional diagnosis that relies solely on established constructs and principles of professional psychology.

The term "parental alienation" is a popularized term in the general culture, but it is not a defined psychopathology in clinical psychology. Professional-level discussion and professional-level practice needs to discontinue the use of the construct of "parental alienation" and return to the proper professional path of defined constructs and principles within professional psychology.

A child's rejection of a parent is fundamentally an attachment-related pathology. (Bowlby, 1969; 1973; 1980)

We must leave the wilderness of new forms of pathology and return to the path of diagnosis using established constructs and principles of professional psychology.

An Attachment-Based Model of "Parental Alienation"
The attachment system is the brain system that governs all aspects of love and bonding throughout the lifespan, including grief and loss.

A child rejecting a parent is fundamentally an attachment-related pathology.

“The deactivation of attachment behavior is a key feature of certain common variants of pathological mourning.”

(Bowlby, 1980, p. 70)

Personality Pathology

“Disturbances of personality, which include a bias to respond to loss with disordered mourning, are seen as the outcome of one or more deviations in development that can originate or grow worse during any of the years of infancy, childhood and adolescence.”

(Bowlby, 1980, p. 217)

Parental Personality Pathology

Beck – Millon – Kernberg
- Narcissistic vulnerability to rejection.
- Borderline vulnerability to abandonment.
- Divorce involves both rejection and abandonment and will therefore trigger a full display of narcissistic and borderline personality pathology.

The narcissistic personality is characterologically unable to process sadness, grief and loss.

Instead, the narcissist translates sadness and grief into anger, resentment, and blame.
The Narcissistic Personality

"They [narcissists] are especially deficient in genuine feelings of sadness and mournful longing; their incapacity for experiencing depressive reactions is a basic feature of their personalities."

"When abandoned or disappointed by other people they may show what on the surface looks like depression, but which on further examination emerges as anger and resentment, loaded with revengeful wishes, rather than real sadness for the loss of a person whom they appreciated."

(Kernberg, 1975, p. 229)

The narcissistic and the borderline personalities are variants of the same underlying core beliefs:

- I am fundamentally inadequate as a person.
- I will be rejected (abandoned) because of my inadequacy.

(Beck et al, 2004; Kernberg, 1975)

The divorce activates the core vulnerabilities of the narcissistic and borderline personalities of rejection and abandonment by the "attachment-figure" of the spouse.

They then seek to restore the narcissistic defense:

"I'm not the rejected one – you are."
"I'm not the inadequate one – you are"  
"You're the inadequate parent – and you're being rejected because of your inadequacy."  
"I'm the all-wonderful and ideal parent; the child is choosing me and rejecting you."

Psychological Control:


"Psychological control refers to parental behaviors that are intrusive and manipulative of children's thoughts, feelings, and attachment to parents."

(Barber & Harmon, 2002, p. 15)
Psychological Control:

"Psychological control has historically been defined as psychologically and emotionally manipulative techniques or parental behaviors that are not responsive to children’s psychological and emotional needs. "Psychologically controlling parents create a coercive, unpredictable, or negative emotional climate of the family, which serves as one of the ways the family context influences children’s emotion regulation."

(Kui et al., 2014, p. 48)


"Rather than telling the child directly what to do or think, as does the behaviorally controlling parent, the psychologically controlling parent uses indirect hints and responds with guilt induction or withdrawal of love if the child refuses to comply."

"In short, an intrusive parent strives to manipulate the child’s thoughts and feelings in such a way that the child’s psyche will conform to the parent’s wishes."

(Kerig, 2005, p. 12)

By psychologically manipulating the child through techniques of psychological control, domination, guilt induction, and contingent love, the narcissistic/(borderline) parent transfers his or her own fears of inadequacy, rejection, and abandonment onto the other spouse—as-a-parent.

Childress & Pruter (2017)

Psychological Control:

"Such parenting strategies ignore the child’s need for autonomy, impede the child’s volitional functioning, and intervene in the individuation process. In such an environment, children feel pressure to conform to parental authority, which results in children’s emotional insecurity and dependence."

(Kui et al., 2014, p. 48)


"In order to carve out an island of safety and responsibility in an unpredictable, harsh, and depriving parent-child relationship, children of highly maladaptive parents may become precocious caretakers who are adept at reading the cues and meeting the needs of those around them."

"The ensuing preoccupied attachment with the parent interferes with the child’s development of important ego functions, such as self organization, affect regulation, and emotional object constancy."

(Kerig, 2005, p. 14)

The child is being used as a "regulatory object" to stabilize the fragile self-structure organization of the narcissistic/(borderline) parent that is threatened with collapse in response to the inherent rejection (narcissistic vulnerability) and abandonment (borderline vulnerability) by the spousal attachment figure surrounding the divorce.

Childress & Pruter (2017)
The child's induced rejection of the other parent is being used to projectively displace onto the other spouse the narcissistic/(borderline) parent's own inadequacy and abandonment fears.

"I'm not the rejected one – you are."
"I'm not the inadequate one – you are."
"You're the inadequate parent (spouse/person) – you're the rejected parent (spouse/person). Not me."
"I'm the wonderful and ideal parent (spouse/person)."

"I'm not the rejected one – you are."
"I'm not the inadequate one – you are."
"You're the inadequate parent (spouse/person) – you're the rejected parent (spouse/person). Not me."
"I'm the wonderful and ideal parent (spouse/person)."

Family Systems Pathology

The child is being triangulated (Bowen, Minuchin, Haley) into the spousal conflict through the formation of a cross-generational coalition (Haley, Minuchin) with the allied narcissistic/(borderline) parent against the other parent, resulting in a cutoff (Bowen) in family relationships.


Inverted Hierarchy, Enmeshment, Cross-Generational Coalition, & Cutoff of Mother

(Minuchin & Nichols, p. 42)

Divorce Transition:

Intact Family Structure United by the Marital Bond

Separated Family Structure United by the Children

Cutoff Family Structure

pathological mourning
High parental conflict rips the child apart.

The narcissistic/(borderline) parent creates a "loyalty conflict" for the child by forcing the child to choose sides in the spousal conflict.

If the child tries to remain neutral – the child is placed in middle and forced to choose.

If the child tries to remain bonded to the other parent – the child is placed in middle and forced to choose.

"Death" of a Parent:

The child pays the price of losing a relationship with a beloved parent...

but at least the child escapes being placed in the middle of the spousal conflict.

"Reunification therapy" will be ineffective

"Reunification therapy" will simply put the child back in the middle of the spousal conflict created by the narcissistic/(borderline) parent by turning the child into a "psychological battleground" between the efforts of therapy to restore the child's normal-range relationship with the beloved—now—rejected targeted parent, and the ongoing efforts, manipulation, and psychological control of the narcissistic/(borderline) parent to keep the child symptomatic.
Individual child therapy will be ineffective

Individual therapy will simply allow things to remain forever unchanged, and the individual therapist will be drawn into colluding with the pathology by validating the child’s false beliefs about the supposed "inadequacy" of the beloved—but-now-rejected targeted parent, without ever obtaining direct first-hand experience of the parent-child relationship.

Childress & Pruter (2017)

The narcissistic–borderline personality was created in childhood attachment trauma.

Childress & Pruter (2017)

Personality Pathology & Attachment

"Various studies have found that patients with BPD are characterized by disorganized attachment representations."

"Such attachment representations appear to be typical for persons with unresolved childhood traumas, especially when parental figures were involved, with direct, frightening behavior by the parent."

(Beck et al., 2004, p. 191)

The attachment system of the narcissistic–borderline parent is activated by the divorce to mediate the loss experience (the loss of the attachment-mediated spousal relationship).

When the attachment system of the narcissistic–borderline parent is activated, so are the trauma networks (the internal working models of attachment trauma) contained within the attachment system.

Childress & Pruter (2017)
Trauma Reenactment Narrative

Neurological Foundation:
The simultaneous activation of two sets of representational networks in the attachment system of the narcissistic/(borderline) parent:
- One from the PAST childhood trauma, and
- One for the CURRENT family relationships;
Creates a neurologically based psychological equivalency in these representational networks.

Childhood Attachment Trauma Pattern
- Bowlby: Internal working models
- Beck: Schemas
- Freud: Transference

The divorce activates two sets of representational networks in the attachment system of the narcissistic/(borderline) parent,

One from the PAST childhood trauma:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Working Models of Attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victimized Child</td>
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One for the CURRENT family relationships:

| Current Child | Targeted Parent | Alienating Parent |

Psychological Equivalency:

Targeted Parent = "Abusive Parent"
Current Child = "Victimized Child"
N/(B) Parent = "Protective Parent"

It is a false drama;
Created in the childhood attachment trauma experienced by the narcissistic/(borderline) parent many years ago;
Embedded in the internal working models (schema) of this parent's attachment networks.
One primary transference-countertransference dynamic involves reenactment of familiar roles of victim-perpetrator-rescuer-bystander in the therapy relationship. Therapist and client play out these roles, often in complementary fashion with one another, as they relive various aspects of the client’s early attachment relationships.

(Pearlman & Courtois, 2005, p. 455)

emphasis added

The "bystander" role is filled by all the mental health and legal professionals. The role of the bystander mental health and legal professional is to:

- Legitimize the false trauma reenactment narrative.
- Shame the targeted parent.
- Serve as witness to the narcissistic grandiosity of the "all-wonderful" narcissistic/(borderline) parent.

Childress & Pruter (2017)

These allied mental health and legal professionals allow themselves to be manipulated into colluding with the enactment of the pathology within the family.

- The narcissistic personality manipulates and obtains allies through the assertion of confident self-assurance.
- The borderline personality manipulates and obtains allies through the presentation of helpless vulnerability and "victimization."

Childress & Pruter (2017)

Mental health and legal professionals who have their own family of origin issues are especially vulnerable to being recruited into becoming allies of the narcissistic/(borderline) parent.

It's called "counter-transference"