

# Guest Editorial

## PA: Progress Made and Progress Ahead

I have been involved with the devastating problem of Parental Alienation (PA) long enough to have a personal sense of the progress we have made and the progress still needed. Much has happened in the field of Parental Alienation since 1985 when Richard Gardner, MD published his first paper describing Parental Alienation Syndrome. A recently compiled bibliography of sources addressing some aspect of PA required over 90 single spaced pages, and today I am sure the list would be even longer. The research has been robust both qualitatively and qualitatively, in spite of the misinformation that is still sometimes found on the internet and in the courtroom, to the contrary. The fact is, quantitative research that captures the phenomenon of parental alienation is difficult to design since it involves family dynamics, which does not lend itself easily to the double-blind peer reviewed “gold” standard that is used in evidence based medical research. This “poorness off fit” has been used as a criticism of research into PA, when it is more accurate to state that the multi person dynamic of the phenomenon cannot be completely captured with only quantitative research. As with the gold standard of medical research, “evidence based” does not require only quantitative research, but only the best research available. Even with these limitations, quantitative research has been produced which confirms the earliest perceptions of Dr Gardner. When Amy Baker performed her research on adults who had experienced PA as children, I had the opportunity to review the pre-publication manuscript. After review, I called Dr Baker and asked her if my impression was correct that her findings tended to support Gardner’s description. She immediately corrected me and said that her findings did not “tend” to support his model, but that they supported them absolutely. Since then questionnaires have been developed that identify various aspects of the parental alienation dynamic. Peer reviewed, evidence based journal articles

regarding the successful treatment of severely alienated children have been published.

Yet even with this progress in terms of great research, there persists an adverse opinion - not supported by research or evidence based data - that PA either (a) does not exist or (b) that it is unreliable or “junk” science. This persistent dragging anchor of misinformation is both puzzling and alarming and is ideologically based. It persists in spite of the legitimate research that has confirmed, described and explained how children become alienated, how easily they can be induced to believe horrible things that never actually happened, and can then become delusional into thinking that they did. Research has shown how suggestible adults and especially children are and how easily these consequent distortions of perception can occur. Research has shown how memory is easily distorted and how false memories are created. Research has shown the high incidence of severely alienating parents with significant personality disorders.

Yet, in spite of all of this, there persists an alienating core of “disbelievers.” But it is more than this group just being disbelievers. This group feels a need to disparage, to vilify and to attack. I had the honor of performing an evaluation with Dr Gardner years ago. After the court proceeding was finished, he asked my opinion about why he had become the target of such unfounded accusations that he had. I told him that I felt that he had become the quintessential targeted or unfavored parent of parental alienation by exposing the truth. Those of us who have worked in this field have felt this irrational wrath. Yet the work goes on as does the research.

One area that has received attention of late is that of finally seeing parental alienation as a severe form of child abuse. While the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5) did not include



the label of Parental Alienation per se, there were five new diagnoses that essentially describe the various moving parts seen in Parental Alienation. Most notably, the diagnosis of Child Psychological Abuse is presented and discussed as describing what happens to children when they are the victims of Parental Alienation. The definition is quite specific and very much on target with Parental Alienation. There is also increased awareness of the significance of this emotional abuse. In fact, it is often discussed as being as damaging or even being more damaging than is the case with physical or even of sexual abuse. In the case of these latter two categories, there are specific physical events that harm children such that when they pass from being its victims to being its survivor, the physical event serves as a focal point that can be reframed in the healing process. However, in the case of Parental Alienation, the victim typically has no such physical event to reframe and put into perspective. Rather, the victim of Parental Alienation must wrestle with the dilemma of being a co-conspirator with the alienating parent. This enmeshment of being both a victim and a victimizer is more difficult to resolve - sometimes described as trying to grab a cloud - and runs the risk of leaving life long scars on that child as they move into adulthood. Much more in the way of research is needed in this area and now that there is more general world wide understanding and awareness of PA, such research may move forward.

**Michael Bone PhD.** has 25 years experience with cases involving Parental Alienation working with high conflict divorce as a therapist, expert witness, mediator, evaluator and consultant, both nationally and internationally. Dr Bone began his career as a mental health professional, helping people of all genres in all areas of their lives and especially divorce. He found that most divorces move through normal court proceedings without much delay and divorcees are ready to move on and begin rebuilding their lives rather quickly without conflict. **Contact: Michael@jmicahbone.com Tel. (407)645.0662**