

Parental Alienation

Southern England Psychological Services

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The comparison of parental alienation to the “Stockholm syndrome”

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What follows is in great part fact and what is not fact is based on supposition and psychological assessment of how the Stockholm Syndrome develops and how it has worked in the case of Natascha Kampusch recently reported in the press. She was abducted and kept in a prison in an underground cell without natural light and air being pumped into her enclosure. The Stockholm Syndrome was coined in 1973 by Nils Bejerot, a psychiatrist, while working for the police. It occurred that there was a bank robbery and four bank clerks were taken hostage by an armed robber who threatened to kill them. To the surprise of the police, the hostages stated that they had no wish to be rescued indicating that they felt sympathy for their captor.

It was assumed that the feeling of stress and helplessness and possibly a desire to survive led to this unlikely scenario. All the captives were eventually released without harm. The hostage taker himself must have been influenced by the behaviour of his victims as they were influenced by him. One can only wonder how this phenomenon occurred after such a short captivity. In the case of Natascha Kampusch her period of captivity of eight years probably brought about deeper psychological changes and more enduring ones.

As a specialist in the area of parental alienation and parental alienation syndrome where I have acted as a psychological expert in the courts, there appears to be a considerable similarity between parental alienation and the Stockholm Syndrome. The alienator in the case of the Stockholm Syndrome also needs to extinguish any desire in the victim's past, seeking to demonstrate any allegiance to anyone other than the powerful captor of that individual.

Here too is demonstrated the power of the alienator and the insignificance of the power of the alienated party/parties. It is almost certain that Natascha Kampusch had opportunity in the past to escape from her captor, yet chose not to do so. This was despite her initial closeness to her family. A combination of fear, indoctrination and “learned helplessness”, promoted the total loyalty and obedience of the child to her captor. This captor was no longer viewed, as was the case initially, as evil but as necessary to the child's well-being and her survival. A similar scenario occurs in the case of children who are alienated against an absent parent.

My forthcoming book about to be published and my website www.parental-alienation.info provides information as to why Natascha may have remained so slavishly with her captor for eight years of her young life. Why she decided finally to escape her enslavement will in due course be established. I will attempt to explain what might have occurred to finally induce her to escape.

A child who has had a good relationship with the now shunned parent will state: “I don't need my father/mother; I only need my mother/father. Such a statement is based on the brainwashing received and the power of the alienator who is indoctrinating the child to sideline the previously loving parent.

In the case of the Stockholm Syndrome, we have in some ways a similar scenario. Here the two natural loving parents have been sidelined by the work of subtle or direct alienation by the perpetrator of the abduction of the young girl. At age 10, the child is helpless to resist the power of her abductor.

To the question: "How does the abductor eventually become her benefactor?", we may note the process is not so dissimilar to the brainwashing carried by the custodial parent. This is done for the double reason of: 1) Gaining the total control over the child and consequently its dependence upon them. 2) To sideline the other parent and to do all possible to prevent and/or curtail contact between the child and the absent parent/parents.

The primary reason for such behaviour is the intractable hostility of the custodial parents towards one another. This reason does not exist in the case of the abductor of a child such as occurred in the case of Natascha Kambusch. Nevertheless the captor wished to totally alienate or eliminate the child's loyalty or any feeling towards her natural parents. Due to the long period away from her parents and a total dependence for survival on her captor, Natascha's closeness to her family gradually faded. She may even have felt that her own parents were making little or no effort to find her and rescue her. This view may also have been inculcated by her captor.

Her captor's total mastery and control over her, eventually gave her a feeling of security. She could depend on the man to look after her with food, shelter, warmth, protection and hence led to her survival. Such behaviour on the part of the captor led over time not only to "learned helplessness" and dependence, but in a sense to gratefulness. As he was the only human being in her life this was likely to happen. She therefore became a ready victim of what is commonly termed the "Stockholm Syndrome" or the victim of "Parental Alienation."

This led even to her beginning to love her captor. This view has been substantiated by the fact that Natascha found it difficult to live and feel any real closeness to her natural parents once she was rescued or once she ran away from her captor. She even pined for the loss of the captor who had since committed suicide. Even her speech had been altered from the native Austrian or Viennese dialect to the North German speech due to the fact that she only had access to the outside world via radio and television. This again, however, was carefully monitored by her captor. He controlled what she could see on television and listen to on the radio from outside her underground cell. There was little in Natascha's present life to remind her of her past except for the dress that she wore when she was captured.

While she developed physically from 10-18 years, her weight changed but little. Why did she decide eventually to leave her captor? This is a question that requires an answer. It is the view of the current author that the answer lies in the fact that she may have had a quarrel with her captor, possibly over a very minor issue. The result was her leaving her captor and then regretting doing so, especially after she heard of his death. By the time her captor, undoubtedly fearing the retribution by the law, had ended his life, she had pined for him.

After eight years or living in close proximity to his victim, some form of intimacy undoubtedly occurred including a sexual one. This led to a mutual need and even dependence. It is likely that the "learned helplessness" of the victim succumbed eventually a caring, perhaps even loving relationship developing. It is also likely that the psychological explanation is that attribution, helplessness and depression in the victim for the loss of her parents quickly gave way to seeking to make the best of her situation while under the total domination of her captor.

Again the same scenario occurs in the case of parental alienation where the power of the dominant custodial parent programmes the child/children to eschew or marginalise the absent parent. That absent parent no longer appears to be important and is even likely to be viewed as damaging to the child's survival.

