

FOUR FATHERS' EXPERIENCES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

by

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I declare that,

Four Father's Experiences of Parental Alienation

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Date

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ABSTRACT

During the past few decades there has been a breakdown in the commitment to long term relationships, with no fault divorce laws making it easier for couples to obtain a divorce resulting in increase in divorce rates. Research has shown that in acrimonious divorces with high levels of conflict children often get caught in the middle of their parents' enduring battles. These children are often prevented from or encouraged not to have contact with their non residential parent. The term parental alienation is used to describe this phenomenon. A qualitative study focusing on the personal experiences of South African fathers who seem to be victims of parental alienation, will be examined and discussed from the perspective of systems theory.

Key terms:

Divorce, family system. parental alienation. high conflict, conflict, enmeshment, loss, systems theory, qualitative research,

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*“No one suffers more or had more to lose from a divorce
than the children involved.”*

Ackerman, 1995

1.1 BACKGROUND

During the past few decades, there has been a breakdown in the commitment of individuals to long-term relationships. According to Statistics SA (2012), the number of registered marriages fluctuated between 2002 and 2008, where a decline in civil marriages (2%) and customary marriages (49.1%) was seen from 2010 to 2011.

Ackerman (2006) argues that few people are staying with the same employer for the duration of their employment, and moves from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and from city to city are more common. Personal relationships are also becoming more transient, and the introduction of “no fault” divorce laws have made it easier for couples to obtain a divorce.

Divorce is no longer considered as a single legal process. It is now accepted as a multidimensional process, with distinct legal, emotional, financial and religious processes that unfold over a number of years. The decision to divorce rarely occurs by mutual consent in families with children. According to Kelly and Wallerstein (1980), irrespective of which party initiated the divorce, the divorce is nevertheless a loss that has to be mourned. Both parties need to mourn appropriately, even when they may feel that ending the marriage was the best step to take. Nichols and Everett (1986) contend that mourning appropriately may be more difficult for men than women, especially if they have been socialized to hold back and deny their feelings, and to negate their dependency needs.

Jordan (1985) contends that men find divorce a highly emotional experience, for which they are untrained in their capacity to “experience and express the emotional and interpersonal side of life” (p. 3). Winn (1986) supports Jordan's view and avers that when marriages breakdown, men often struggle alone in a state of emotional turmoil, because they do not

have, or rather do not utilize the same support systems of friends and family that women traditionally do.

Baum (2003) suggests that men respond to divorce differently from women. He says that men, "start the mourning process later than women, mourn the loss of their home and children more than the loss of their wives, and tend to express their mourning through actions rather than words or obvious emotional manifestations of grief" (p. 37). Research carried out by Bloom, Asher and White (1979) on divorced fathers' coping mechanisms, seems to support Baum's argument.

Research carried out by Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1998) and Lund (1987) (in Seltzer, 1991) on non-resident fathers' relationships with their children, suggests that a number of fathers handle the pain of trying to maintain close bonds with their children post separation by limiting their contact with them. Through avoidance of contact with their children, these fathers face fewer reminders of their "lost" children. It has also been found that some fathers limit contact with their children in order to avoid conflict with their former spouses (Wright and Price, 1986 in Seltzer, 1991). According to Hetherington and Camara (1984) and Wallerstein and Huntington (1993) (in Seltzer, 1991), some fathers remarry, establish new families and gradually move away from their children, thereby eliminating contact with them.

In contrast to the above-mentioned, there are fathers who want contact and a relationship with their children, but who experience contact difficulties due to high levels of conflict in the divorce process. In extreme cases of high conflict, behavioural patterns in the family emerge whereby children become alienated from their fathers.

Despite it being a child's right to have a relationship with both parents, and notwithstanding that it is generally held by experts such as Kelly (2001) that children's best interests are served when they are able to maintain frequent and consistent contact with both parents in a conflict-free environment, many parents and children currently still experience contact difficulties post-separation and/or divorce. It has been demonstrated that contact difficulties occur in many forms, and along various continua. The common thread running through contact difficulties is the negative impact that it has on the parent-child relationship. As a social worker working in private practice, I have come across a number of fathers who have been deliberately denied contact with their children, and who have experienced parental alienation. There is currently no research on fathers' experiences of parental alienation and the impact that this has on them.

1.2 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to understand the impact and the emotional experiences of fathers whose former spouses have been perceived to have actively attempted to withhold their contact with their children. Through this study, South African fathers whose contact with their children has been actively discouraged or withheld, will be given a voice and an opportunity to share their experiences. Their unique stories might also demonstrate that there are a number complex reasons and dynamics that may account for contact difficulties.

The participants will be given an opportunity to share their personal experiences in their own words. Interview data from the four fathers who experienced contact difficulties with their children post-separation and /or divorce will undergo thematic analysis to find commonalities in their experiences, and to contextualize it relative to considerations derived from systems theory.

1.3 CHAPTER OUTLINE

In Chapter 2, a theoretical perspective of divorce will be provided, and fathers' altered roles post-divorce will be discussed. The influence of the co-parental relationship, as well as the impact that high conflict has upon fathers' contact, will be demonstrated. Family Systems theory will be explicated, as it is from this perspective that the fathers' personal experiences of parental alienation will be examined and discussed.

Chapter 3 will focus on fathers' contact with their children post-separation and /or divorce. The South African legal approach to divorce will be presented. The impact of fathers' involvement and the role they play in children's lives will be highlighted. The impact of divorce on children will be discussed thereafter. Fathers' altered role post-separation will be demonstrated. Contact difficulties will be examined, and a historical overview of parental alienation will be provided. The argument for the inclusion of parental alienation disorder in the DSM-5 and International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11) will be presented.

In Chapter 4, the *Research design and methodology* contains a discussion of the research process, and an outline of analysis and interpretation processes.

In Chapter 5, *Identified themes* will focus on the lived experiences of the four fathers in this study, who were denied contact with their children for a prolonged period of time. A brief overview of the fathers' stories from their perspective will be presented, describing for each one their marriage, and their involvement with their children prior to and after the separation. Their separation will then be narrated, their post-separation relationships with their former

spouses will be discussed, and information on parental alienation experienced by the fathers will be examined. Themes will be identified as they manifest in the narratives of each participant.

Chapter 6 gives *Discussion and Recommendations* where the link between the identified themes and the literature will be made. The strengths and limitations of the study will be highlighted and recommendations regarding future research will be made.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

Other things may change us, but we start and end with the family.

Anthony Brandt

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is of experiences of fathers' who have been denied contact with their children post-separation and or divorce, for prolonged periods of time. This chapter discusses the epistemological and theoretical positions that have influenced the conceptualisation of this study. Statistical data relating to divorce is provided; Kaslow and Schwartz's (1987) dialectical model of divorce is then reviewed; the developmental tasks experienced by divorced families is thereafter briefly examined; and the view that divorce is a process of loss, mourning and acceptance will be explored. The impact of divorce related to loss on fathers will then be briefly highlighted and the relevance of the four divorce typologies of post-divorced parenting described by Ahrons (1994) explained. Thereafter, the link between high conflict divorce, personality disorders and contact will be explicated, and the chapter will be concluded with a discussion of family systems theory.

2.2 STATISTICAL DATA

The researcher working as a social worker in the field of divorce and child custody matters identified that in her practice, there appears to be an increase in the number of divorces where marriages have subsisted for less than ten years. This information is particularly relevant, as it implies that the children involved in these marriages would likely still be very young, and accordingly, they need parental input and care from both their parents.

According to the trends of divorces reported by Statistics South Africa statistical release, which covers data from 43 courts and which is based solely on divorces from civil marriages,

the total number of divorces shows a fluctuating trend over the period 2002-2011, with the highest number in 2005 (32484) and the lowest number in 2011(20980).

It is evident that since 2008 there has been a change in the way in which divorce was distributed across ethnic groups. Between 2002 and 2007, the white population group had the highest number of divorces of 45.2% in 2002. This proportion declined to 32,1 % in 2011. Conversely the proportion of divorces in the black African group increased from 22158 in 2005 to 35,8% in 2011. The proportion of coloured divorces increased consistently from 10,6% in 2008 to 16,6% in 2011. Approximately 80,0% of divorces were from first time marriages, as compared to approximately 10,0% from second time marriages, and 2,0% of third or more time marriages.

The data shows that there were fewer divorces among younger individuals (less than 25 years) and older individuals (55 years and older). For male divorcees, the age with the highest number of divorces was 35-39 for coloured and Indians; while for black Africans and whites the highest number of divorces was in the age group 40-44. With regards to females, the age group with the highest number of divorces was 35-39 for black Africans and whites, while for the coloured group the age groups 35-39 and 40-44 also had an equally high number of divorces. For the Asian group, the age groups 30-34 and 35-39 saw the highest number of divorces.

The data indicates that the largest number (26,4 %) of marriages that ended in divorce in 2011, lasted between five and nine years. The second largest group of marriages (21, 4%) lasted less than five years. It is evident that almost half (47,8 %) of the 20980 divorces in 2011 were marriages that lasted less than ten years. The researcher's clinical observation thus appears to correlate with the available data.

In 2011, 54,7% (11475) of the marriages that ended in divorce affected children younger than 18 years. In total there were 18 571 children younger than 18 years old involved in divorce, indicating that on average there was between one and two children per divorce. The proportion of divorces with children were quite high among the coloured population group (64,4 %), black Africans (57,1%) and Indian/Asians (57,8 percent). The distribution of the number of children affected by divorce shows that 37,4 % were from the black African population group; 27,1% from the white population group and 20,2 % from the coloured population group.

2. 3 KASLOW AND SCHWARTZ'S DIALECTIC MODEL OF THE STAGES OF DIVORCE

In the past, divorce was considered as a single legal event. As divorce was studied more closely, it became evident that it is not an isolated, single dimensional static event. Divorce is now seen as a multidimensional process, with distinct legal, emotional, financial and religious processes which unfolds over many years.

Kaslow and Schwartz (1987, p. 36) argue that observers are able to identify several "stages" in marriage and separation, however they suggest that the impact of the divorce process will vary somewhat, "depending on the point at which it intersects not only with the adult's individual life cycles, but also with the family as a unit, and each child individually." Accordingly, stages have different outcomes, depending on the prior experiences and expectations of the individuals involved. As a result, Kaslow and Schwartz (1987) developed a dialectic model of the seven stages of divorce. This model lists the experiences and disappointments in the pre-divorce, divorce and post-divorce phases, as well as the numerous other feelings that are apt to surface during the divorce process.

The "dialectic" model of the divorce process incorporates theories of human growth and development, marital dissolution, and family systems. The constructed term *diaclectic* is a combination of the concepts *eclectic* (selective) and *dialectic* (seeking a synthesis that continues to emerge as new data comes forth) to include numerous theories of behaviour dynamics and existential humanistic ideas (Kaslow, cited in Mikesell, Lusteran, & Mc Daniel, 1995). It is important to note that the stages described below do not necessarily occur in sequence, nor do all people go through every stage.

2.3.1 Pre-Divorce Phase

Stage 1: The Emotional Stage

The emotional stage comes into play when either one or both parties become conscious of the fact that they are discontent with the marital relationship. Typical feelings experienced during this stage may be: disillusionment, dissatisfaction, anxiety, disbelief, despair, anguish, ambivalence, emptiness, anger, chaos, inadequacy, low self-esteem, loss, depression, alienation and detachment. Common behaviours associated with this stage are: crying, denial, withdrawal, pretending all is fine, avoiding the issue, seeking advice and confronting and quarrelling with the partner. This stage may be brief, but in some cases it may be protracted.

2.3.2 Divorce Phase

Stage 2: Legal Divorce

During this phase, either one or both parties initiate legal action and consult with either an attorney or mediator. Parties attend to legal matters, financial matters, and matters relating to custody of the children. Predominant feelings experienced during this phase may be self-pity and helplessness. Amongst the observable behaviours commonly seen during this phase are: bargaining, screaming, threatening and suicide attempts.

Stage 3: Economic Divorce

Financial insecurity and instability may result in parties being unable to leave an unhappy and unfulfilling marriage. The realisation that when assets are divided each party will have substantially less than what they had as a couple, is too much to countenance for some individuals. Feelings frequently experienced during this stage are: confusion, fury, sadness, loneliness and vindictiveness, but divorce can also lead to feelings of relief. Behaviours that are usually associated with this stage may be: physical separation, and contemplating a final settlement agreement and finalisation of custody of and maintenance for the children.

Stage 4: Co-parenting and Issues of Child Custody and Contact

Ahrons (1981) argues that the lives of children are changed dramatically when their parents end their marriages. According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), the way in which children survive the breakup to some extent correlates with the degree of conflict during and post-divorce. Hewitt (in Freeman & Freeman, 2003) suggest that in some divorcing families, the children's contact with parents appears to become paramount and is the main source of conflict between parents. Parents may experience the following feelings during this stage: concern for children, ambivalence, numbness, uncertainty, and fear of loss. Behaviours associated with this stage include: mourning and grieving, telling relatives and friends, and re-entering the work place.

Stage 5: Community Divorce

As with the economic and co-parenting stages, the social and community stage begins during the divorce and continue beyond the legal divorce. Individuals find the support and empathy given by those concerned family and friends extremely helpful.

Having others available to listen, empathise and validate the distressed individual's worth is very helpful. Feelings experienced during this stage include: indecisiveness, optimism, resignation, excitement, curiosity, regret, and sadness. Behaviours associated with this

stage include: undertaking new activities and interests, seeking new friendships, exploring possible job opportunities, establishing a new lifestyle, finalising the divorce and establishing a new daily routine for the children.

Stage 6: Religious Divorce

Different cultures and different religions such as the Jewish and Muslim religions prescribe certain religious rituals and ceremonies, which followers of the faith are obliged to undergo in addition to a civil divorce, before they are considered divorced in the eyes of the Church. Rituals are thought to aid healing, as they symbolise and enhance one's connectedness to others who participate in the same ritual. Feelings that could be experienced during this stage are: fear of Divine displeasure or wrath; need for the Church's approval, as well as acceptance and self doubt.

2.3.3 Post-Divorce Phase

Stage 7: Psychic Divorce

The process of divorce has been described by many of those who have undertaken it as something that may be described as a roller coaster ride or a ride through a dark tunnel. After finalising the legal divorce, individuals begin to reestablish their lives in new and more meaningful ways, resulting in some light filtering into the widening tunnel. Feelings experienced during this stage could include: acceptance, self-confidence, energy, self-worth, wholeness, exhilaration, independence and autonomy. Behaviours associated with stage may be: re-synthesis of identity; seeking new love; adapting to a new lifestyle and friends; helping children to accept the finality of their parents' divorce, as well as their continuing relationship with both parents.

Professionals working with individuals and families going through a divorce should take cognisance that each individual, his/her nuclear and extended family and friends will be at different stages in the divorce process. And that the stages do not necessarily occur in the above-mentioned order. Each individual will thus experience every event and stage differently, as they will have attached individual meaning to it.

2.4 DIVORCE AS A PROCESS OF LOSS AND ACCEPTANCE

Throughout one's life one is faced with significant losses which one has to grieve, as grief is a natural reaction to loss. From Kaslow and Schwartz's descriptions of the stages of divorce (1987), it can be seen that divorce at all times entails loss, albeit it that for some the loss may be minor, while for some it may be greater. The literature on divorce is replete with

descriptions of divorce in terms of loss, with the recovery process described as one akin to mourning (Bohannon et al., in Johnston & Cambell,1988).

Comment [GW1]: Date?

Emery (2004) emphasises the many losses for parents and children of divorce. It is the end of a marriage and also the end of the nuclear family unit. For some, it may mean the loss of an intact family unit, a shared family home, loss of financial stability, loss of status, in some instances loss of one's health, loss of friendships, and loss of cherished dreams, to name but a few. In the case of parental alienation, parents and children lose contact with one another. According to Reay (2011, p. 202) "The losses, combined with the effects of undergoing the dynamics of parental alienation syndrome, mark the beginning of one of the most painful times in an alienated parent's life."

Although grief is a normal response to loss, grieving in divorce is complicated for several reasons (Kalter, 1990). Unlike what happens in the case of death, there are no traditions to support this process through its stages, to direct and encourage the individual's grief and to lead to eventual healing. In the case of death, others in the community share in the grief of the bereaved, but in the case of divorce, those undergoing their divorce do not get the same support. Often, friends and family do not know what to say, or they may 'take sides' with one partner against the other, leaving that individual feeling socially isolated, lonely and depressed (Kalter,1990).

It can be argued that many people experience divorce in the same way as they experience the death of a love one. They mourn the loss, grieve, suffer emotional turmoil and move through a transitional period, before they finally accept their realigned marital status (Boyan and Termini, 2009). Kübler-Ross (1973) developed a stage theory of the process of acceptance of death by those who are dying and by those who are grieving the loss. In the following paragraphs, Kübler-Ross'(1973) description of the process of acceptance of death or dying as it develops through a series of five stages, is compared to the process of separation undergone by divorcing couples. The researcher has drawn a comparison between Kübler-Ross'(1973) stage theory of the process of death by those who are dying and by those who are grieving the loss, with those experiencing loss whilst going through the process of divorce. It is noteworthy that as in the case of Kaslow and Schwartz's(1987) dialectic model of the stages of divorce, so too in Kübler-Ross' stage theory (1973), the stages of loss do not necessarily occur in an unchanging sequence, nor do all individuals go through every stage. Rather, the stage conceptualization provides a broad framework that helps those involved in helping the divorcing family system such as therapists, custody evaluators, attorneys and judges, to understand the core issues, behaviours and feelings divorcing individual family members may experience during the various phases of the

divorce process, and how these feelings and emotions might impact on the divorce itself and the post-divorce phase/process.

2.4.1 Stage 1: Denial

According to Kübler-Ross (1973), denial is a common, temporary unconscious defense mechanism used to ward off the pain of loss. Initially, many people react to an impending death by entering a state of denial. In so doing, they protect themselves from negative emotions associated with loss by death. Similarly, very often in the case of marital separation, one partner enters a state of denial and pretends that the impending divorce is not going to happen. The researcher has observed that in the case of divorce, it is usually the partner who is “left” who goes into a state of denial.

Boyan and Termini (2009) argue that denial is a means of avoiding the pain of loss by refusing to deal with it. These authors (2009, p. 26) maintain that, “since grief is painful, most people try to put it off, at least temporarily”. Johnston and Campbell (1988, p. 102), argue that some parents, who are unable to tolerate the pain of divorce due to their “underlying vulnerabilities to loss and conflicts around attachment and separation [...] are implicated in prolonged or entrenched divorce disputes”, and in so doing, they deny the reality of their loss. These parents cannot stand to accept the pain of the loss of separation from their partner or their child. Accordingly, they cannot let go of the child, partner or the marriage. This is demonstrated in various prolonged divorce-related disputes, such as those disputes seen in relation to the custody of and access to children (Johnston & Campbell, 1988). Johnston and Campbell (1988, p. 103) argue that “the custody dispute allows parents to live out the fantasy that they are still together in some way.”

2.4.2 Stage 2: Anger

Kübler-Ross (1973) states that when the first stage of denial can no longer be maintained, it is replaced by general feelings of anger and rage against oneself or others. Boyan and Termini (2009) argue that anger is a necessary part of the grieving process. In the case of divorce, anger may take the form of one spouse blaming the other for initiating the divorce or for destroying their dream of the perfect family and home. Some individuals may turn their anger inward, and may blame themselves for being unable to prevent the divorce. Anger may also be the other face of sadness, fear or other painful emotions, and often erupts when the individual is afraid of losing someone or something they may value deeply (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

“Anger can serve a useful, adaptive, constructive purpose or it can serve as a useless, non-adaptive, deconstructive purpose” throughout one’s life (Reay, 2011, p. 141). Eddy maintains that in a high-conflict divorce, the parties’ emotions are heightened and they frequently increase over time. In some cases, parents’ simmering anger turns into “yelling rages at parenting exchanges, anger at family members, anger at professionals, and yelling or running out of court hearings [...] to prove how bad the other parent is.” (Eddy, 2011, p. 4).

Comment [GW2]: This part does not follow the rest of the sentence

In the case of parental alienation, anger is inevitable. The researcher’s clinical experience with families who experience parental alienation resonates with the experiences of Reay (2011, p. 136) who states that, “Anger is inevitable with mild, moderate, or severe cases of PAS [...] I have never seen any alienated child, parent, or alienating parent escape the feelings of anger.” Angry parents who want to inflict emotional pain or who may seek revenge on the other parent, often engage in alienating behaviours, which may ultimately disrupt the other parent’s relationship with the child.

The loss of a child, be it through death or by exclusion from the child’s life, is “beyond the realm of many parent’s ability to cope” (Darnall, 2010, p. 175). Darnall (2010), argues that in the beginning of the alienation cycle, parents may have difficulty in accepting and wanting to deny that the person they once loved and trusted would jeopardise their relationship with their children by excluding them from their children’s lives. Darnall (2010) maintains that it is only with the passage of time and the continued refusals from children to have contact with that parent that the denial turns to anger and rage. “Then, the battle lines are drawn and the time with the children becomes the bounty” (Darnall, 2010, p.175).

2.4.3 Stage 3: Bargaining

Kübler-Ross (1973) argues that after anger, comes the bargaining phase, when promises to change are made and new regimes are set. For individuals suffering from cancer or heart disease, this may take the form of a promise such as, “if I give up smoking and eat healthy foods, then the marriage deserves more time”. Bargaining is common amongst divorcing couples, where one of them is reluctant to accept that for the other, the marriage is over. For these couples, bargaining may take the form of, “I’ll come home early from work and spend more time with you and the children.”

Boyan and Termini (2009), argue that grieving is often accompanied by feelings of isolation and loneliness. These authors (2009) state that almost as a last attempt before grief resolution can begin, the individual may try to bargain with themselves, with God, or with their former partner. When these efforts are unsuccessful, they are likely to experience depression.

2.4.4 Stage 4: Depression

Kübler-Ross (1973) states when terminally ill patients can no longer deny their illness, they experience depression, sadness or mourning for what they have already lost, as well as for what they will miss in the future. As described earlier on in this chapter, the separating couple undoubtedly experiences a number of significant losses, for instance, the loss of the perfect relationship that they had planned when they first married, a loss which has to be accommodated. They may also mourn the loss of dreams they may have had for their future, as well as the loss of the pleasures of shared parenting. Furthermore, they may also mourn the loss of their home and the environment in which they have felt comfortable. Depression is commonly experienced by separating couples, as well as those who are also separated from their children; and especially amongst those individuals who have relatively less power in the situation, and who have fewer options for achieving a reasonable future (Reay, 2011). Seligman (cited in Power, 1996), argues that when individuals perceive that events are beyond their control, they begin to feel helpless, and thereafter depression sets in.

2.4.5 Stage 5: Acceptance

Finally, Kübler-Ross (1973) suggests that some dying people and those around them reach a stage of acceptance that their death is inevitable. They are able to say their last goodbyes, and to make the most of their final days without bitterness. In the case of divorce, the individual who has accepted the divorce and who is ready to continue without their former spouse, neither denies the pain of loss nor the joys of past experiences, and becomes ready to face the future (Boyan & Termini, 2009).

In the case of parental alienation acceptance and/or moving on without bitterness is an impossibility, as a seemingly never-ending battle ensues.

2.5 DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF DIVORCE

Divorce, especially when children are involved, is regarded as an extremely demanding task. All family members during the divorce process as well as post-divorce, experience problems that affect and in turn are affected by problems in other family members. Divorce impacts upon all family members in a number of ways, during the various stages of the process. McIntosh (2003) argues that the stress of separation and divorce places men and women at risk of psychological, physical as well as health problems. Hetherington et al., (in McIntosh, 2003) contend that alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, psychosomatic problems and accidents, are more common amongst divorced than non-divorce individuals. McIntosh (2003) argues that parents undergoing divorce often display marked emotional lability.

Comment [GW3]: Meaning unclear

Individuals may experience euphoria and optimism, alternating with anger, irritability, loneliness, sadness, depression and suicidal tendencies, in addition to changes in self-concept and self-esteem. Non-residential parents, usually men, are especially likely to experience the negative effects of divorce. Dudley (in McIntosh, 2003) found that a pervasive problem experienced by non-residential parents is the feeling that they have lost their children, and the resultant feelings of inadequacy about their role as parent. They may also feel guilt at the breakup of the marriage and the loss of daily contact with their children can be emotionally devastating for non-residential fathers (Smyth, 2004).

Ruschena et al. (in McIntosh, 2003) found that for children, the process of experiencing their parents' separation, of learning to alternate between two households, and of potentially moving schools and neighbourhoods, can be very taxing. Contact with the non-residential parent may be erratic, and may diminish over time. Exposure to ongoing conflict and difficult parent-child relationships has been found to impact negatively on a child's wellbeing.

Before divorcing families are able to move forward, relationship changes must be addressed, and a new set of developmental stages has to be dealt with. Carter and McGoldrick (1987) provide a well-expressed explanation of the family life cycle. These authors also provide an additional stage model of the family life cycle for divorcing families, including a description of the emotional processes of transition, as well as developmental issues, which will be briefly discussed in Chapter 3. Having already discussed Kaslow and Schwartz's (1987) dialectical model, and Kübler Ross' (1973) model of loss, the researcher will focus now on Carter and McGoldrick's (1999) model of the developmental issues in relation to the family life cycle of divorcing families; as it sensitizes those working with families of divorce such as therapists, attorneys and judges to the core issues such as feelings, behaviours, and developmental tasks experienced by divorcing fathers during the life cycle of their divorces.

Carter and McGoldrick (1999, p. 375) refer to a number of developmental tasks that are brought about by divorce. The following table is an adaptation of these tasks:

Table 2.1.

Emotional Process of Transition

Phase	Prerequisite Attitude	Developmental Issues
<p>Divorce The decision to divorce</p> <p>Planning the breakup of the system</p>	<p>Acceptance of the inability to resolve marital tensions sufficiently to continue relationship.</p> <p>Supporting viable arrangements For all parts of the system.</p>	<p>Acceptance of one's own part in the failure of the marriage.</p> <p>a. Working co-operatively on problems of custody, visitation, and finances. b. Dealing with extended family about the divorce.</p>
<p>Separation</p> <p>The divorce</p>	<p>a. Willingness to continue Cooperative co-parental relationship and joint financial support of children.</p> <p>b. Work on resolution of attachment to spouse.</p> <p>More work on emotional divorce: overcoming hurt, anger, guilt, etc.</p>	<p>a. Mourning the loss of intact family. b. Restructuring marital and parent-child relationships and finances; adaptation to living apart. c. Realignment of relationships with extended family; staying connected with spouse's extended family.</p> <p>a. Mourning loss of intact family; giving up fantasies of reunion b. Retrieval of hopes, dreams. expectations from marriage c. Staying connected with extended families.</p>
<p>Post-divorce family: Single parent (custodial household or primary residence)</p> <p>Single parent (noncustodial)</p>	<p>Willingness to maintain financial responsibilities, continue parental contact with ex-spouse, and support contact of children with ex spouse and his or her family.</p> <p>Willingness to maintain financial responsibilities and parental contact with ex-spouse and to support custodial parent's relationship with children</p>	<p>a. Making flexible visitation arrangements with ex spouse and family. b. Rebuilding own financial resources c. Rebuilding own social network.</p> <p>a. Finding ways to continue effective parenting. b. Rebuilding own social network.</p>

In the previous sections, the stages of divorce and the process of separation and divorce as well as the experiences during these stages were discussed. In the following section the focus will be on the impact of divorce on fathers. A discussion of some of the problems adults, specifically men as fathers experience when going through the divorce process, will be presented.

2.6 THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON FATHERS

The literature is replete with studies undertaken on the impact of divorce on children, and to a much lesser extent, on the impact of divorce on men and women. Research on the impact of divorce on fathers per se, appears to have been overlooked. Smyth (2004) argues that, "Fathers are overlooked in many areas of research. The divorce literature is no exception". He maintains that in spite of fatherhood attracting widespread worldwide attention, particularly in relation to divorce, significant gaps exist in the knowledge of post-separation fatherhood in the context in which he writes in Australia.

Noted marriage researchers Waite and Gallagher (2000) have examined the possible consequences of divorce on adults. They argue that compared to adults in stable marriages, divorced adults on average, experience poor physical and mental health. In addition, they experience more social isolation. Waite and Gallagher (2000) maintain that for some divorced adults, new romantic relationships help rebuild self-esteem and happiness. However, for others, new romantic relationships produce greater feelings of loneliness, unhappiness, and lower self-esteem. They argue that several individuals continue to depend on their former spouses for emotional support and practical matters, and that as a result, they struggle to adjust to the divorce.

One of Wallerstein's (1986), most surprising findings in a 10 year follow up on divorced families, is that in most families, the divorce resulted in an enhanced quality of life for only one of the partners, more often than not, the wife. Notwithstanding the passage of a decade, only 16% of divorced men had improved psychologically, 12% had deteriorated, and 17% remained unchanged. This may be partially explained by the fact only 35% of the men had sought to dissolve their marriages, and the remaining 65% of divorced men had opposed their wives' initiation of the divorce. The men and women who had initially desired the divorce, were more likely to have enhanced the quality of their lives than those who had opposed it.

Bloom, Asher and White (1979), found that divorced and separated men have higher admission rates to psychiatric hospitals than divorced and separated women. They found a higher admission ratio of divorced men to married men, as well as a higher admission ratio

of divorced women to married women. Additionally, it was found that even though divorced and separated women attempt suicide more often than divorced and separated men, the deaths from suicides are higher among men. It is noteworthy that separated and divorced men have higher mortality rates than separated and divorced women from a number of causes not limited to homicide, which includes motor vehicle accidents, and cirrhosis of the liver (Bloom et al., 1979 ; Verbrugge, 1979).

The question as to whether the impact of divorce is more severe on men or on women remains disputed. Clarke-Stewart and Bailey (1989, p. 167), for example, contend that, "men were better adjusted than women in the three years after divorce. They were also better off financially, had more stable and satisfying jobs, and had experienced less psychological stress and more psychological satisfaction in the previous months."

Hughes (in Smyth, 2004), argues that while women tend to initiate separation more frequently than men, it could well be that this reflects men being "more out of touch" on emotional and relational matters than women. Irrespective of gender, "leavers" initially fare better in terms of emotional wellbeing than those who have been "left" and who frequently feel rejected (Bickerdike cited in Smyth, 2004). Jordan (cited in Smyth, 2004) found that men appeared to be generally "unaware or unprepared for separation"(pp. 57 to 58), and often "shut down" feelings about the relationship soon after it ends. As a result, they frequently carry unresolved feelings of grief and hurt for several years after the initial marital separation. According to Smyth (2004), these feelings may impact on men's physical and mental health.

2.6.1 Impact on Physical Health

Separated and divorced men and women are inclined to be at risk for both psychological and physical health problems, due to the stress they experience (Burke, McIntosh & Grindley, 2009). Jacobs (1986) and Ambrose, Harper and Pemberton (1983), found that in almost half of their samples, divorced fathers developed physical symptoms, including weight loss, nerve-related eye and dental problems, high blood pressure, increased drinking, sleeping and eating difficulties, as well as a number of psychosomatic complaints.

According to Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan and Anderson (in Burke, et.al., 2009), alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, psychosomatic problems and accidents are more common among divorced than non-divorce adults. Additionally, the former mentioned research which suggests that separation and divorce and the associated pain depresses the immune system, making separated and divorced individuals more vulnerable to disease, infection, chronic and acute medical problems and also death. Reay (2011) maintains that long-term

exposure to stress can lead to serious health conditions including, but not limited to high blood pressure, heart attacks, heart disease, strokes, digestive problems, sleep difficulties, obesity, anxiety disorders, depression, and various types of body pain.

2.6.2 Psychological Impact

A large body of research conducted in the 1990's found that when compared to married individuals, divorced individuals experienced lower levels of psychological wellbeing, less happiness, more symptoms of psychological distress and a lower sense of self-concept (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Demo & Acock, 1996; Marks, 1996 cited in Burke et al., 2009). Tennant (2002) concluded that divorce is generally viewed as the leading cause of depression in adults. More recent research conducted by Baris; Coates; Duvall; Garrity; Johnson and La Crosse (2001), suggests that divorce generally evokes intense feelings of helplessness, humiliation, shame and anger.

The results of Tepp's (1983) study of non-custodial but involved fathers three years after divorce are striking. These fathers reported feelings of loss, dysphoria, sadness and struggle in relation to their not having custody of their children. They describe feeling "shut out" from parental roles, decreased feelings of being special, a perception of being displaced, and a feeling of confusion and difficulty about their status as parents.

The research findings of Mitchell-Flynn and Hutchinson (1993) show that being lonely during the first month after separation was a major concern for men, however, loneliness decreased significantly as a major concern within six months, concurring with White's (1979) earlier research that loneliness is the most pervasive and problematic area for men who are separated. White (1979) found that during the first six months after divorce, men appeared to have difficulty making new friends, dating, developing intimate relationships, and being sexually satisfied.

Studies conducted by Jordan (1996) and Mc Murray and Blackmore (cited in Smyth, 2004) found that a fathers' loss of daily contact with their children can be devastating, and may have a long-lasting and severe emotional impact on them post-separation.

2.6.3 Financial Impact

Smyth (2004) reports that about a decade ago, divorced Australian mothers and their children were found to be at an economic disadvantage after divorce, when compared with fathers. However, since the late 1980's, major social and economic changes may have improved the financial living standards of divorced women relative to divorced men. In contrast, a significant number of men did not appear to be in a strong financial position. It

was found that men who were living alone and those who had sole custody, were the most disadvantaged. In fact, one third of the men living alone and one quarter of fathers with sole custody had incomes below the poverty line (Smyth, 2004).

Braver (1999) examined the hidden and hard-to-establish costs associated with parent-child contact. He found that many non-residential parents maintain large homes than they would otherwise not require, so that their children can stay over. Transport costs associated with contact as well as providing entertainment and mutually rewarding experiences, clothes, food, toys and other stayover-specific items impact financially upon fathers (Woods in Smyth, 2004). Smyth (2004) argues that divorce duplicates many of the costs of caring for children. Fathers have the parental responsibility contributing financially towards their children, and in some cases, this may mean their contributions are doubled, as costs are duplicated across two households.

2.6.4 Impact on the Parenting Role

Studies conducted by Maccoby and Mnookin (1992), Smyth et al. (2001) and Woods (1999), revealed that distance and face to face contact are negatively correlated: the greater the distance, the less frequent the contact.

Smyth (2004) reported a finding of some concern that approximately 26% of separated or divorce parents in Australia live more than 500 kilometres away from their former spouse. This means that at least one in four non-resident parents (mostly fathers) live a considerable distance from their children. The majority of the remaining separated parents live less than 100 kilometres apart, which is typically within one hour drive, from their former spouses. According to Jordan (in Smyth, 2004), the further parents live apart from their children, the greater time, effort, and money needed to make parent-child contact successful.

Divorce not only severs the spousal relationship, it also affects the couple's relationship as parents, along with the manner in which they fulfill their parental roles and functions (Baum, 2003). A number of non-residential fathers, as a consequence of only having contact with their children on weekends or during school holidays, report that their time with their children feels stilted, brief, shallow and artificial. (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Dudley, 1991; Kruk, 1993; Smyth, 2004).

Amato (2000), maintains that following divorce, a period of less effective parenting is commonly found, whilst post-separation parental roles are being redefined and reconstructed. Fathers who are commonly the non-residential parents are most likely to experience the negative effects of divorce. According to Dudley (cited in Burke et al., 2009),

these fathers suffer as a result of their pervasive feelings of inadequacy about their role as parents, in addition to their fears that they might have lost their children. Smyth (2004) argues that non-residential separated and divorced fathers may experience feelings of guilt about the marital break-up and the loss of daily contact with their children, which can be “emotionally devastating” for them. This research study found that all four fathers suffered from acute depression, as a consequence of not having contact with their children for prolonged periods of time.

It is noteworthy that Smyth (2004) found that in his study, the majority of fathers expressed an “intense attachment and interest as fathers”, thus pointing to the importance of fatherhood to men.

It is well established that the parental post-separation relationship influences and affects both the quantity and quality of a fathers’ contact with their children. According to Baum (2003), some couples are able to establish cooperative co-parenting relationships, whilst others remain in constant conflict over their children.

Interestingly, Baum (2003) found that some parents not only disconnect from one another as spouses, they may also disconnect and disengage as parents.

2. 7 FOUR POST-DIVORCE PARENTING TYPOLOGIES

Ahrons (1994) conducted a study of divorced parents’ relationships post-divorce. She argues that divorced parents can be divided into four parenting typologies. These four typologies, explained below, eloquently describe the correlation of former spouse’s interaction and relationships with one another pre-separation and post-separation, and how their interaction and relationships impact upon the non-residential parent’s parenting role.

2.7.1 Perfect Pals

Ahrons (1994) described the first group of parents as Perfect Pals. These parents consisted of a small minority, about 12% of the sample. Ahrons argues that for Perfect Pals, their disappointments of a failed marriage did not eclipse the positive aspects of their longstanding relationship. These parents trusted one another and they still called themselves friends. They spoke to one another at least once a week and they stayed connected to family and old friends. As they did not have angry adversarial divorces, they remained very much a part of each other’s extended families. All the Perfect Pals in Ahrons’ study had joint custody and equal time schedules with their children. They shared childcare responsibilities and they stayed very involved with their children.

2.7.2 Cooperative Colleagues

Ahrons (1994), categorised 38% of divorced parents in her study as “Cooperative Colleagues”. In contrast to the Perfect Pals, these parents did not consider each other to be close friends. For the most part, these parents cooperated quite well with each other, and they engaged with one another in a business-like manner, with low to medium conflict. These parents were able to be with one another in public, however they often needed assistance in communicating and making decisions regarding their children. A number of these parents turned to mediation to help resolve their difficulties, whilst others disengaged and avoided communicating with one another.

Ahrons (1994, p. 54), concluded that, “ A common denominator for Cooperative Colleague couples was their ability to compartmentalize their relationship. They separated out issues related to their marital relationship from those related to their parenting relationship. Their desire to provide the best situation for their children took precedence over their personal issues.” According to Ahrons (1994), Cooperative Colleagues were able to cope with more flexible rules and they were able to manage permeable boundaries.

2.7.3 Angry Associates

Ahrons (1994) categorised a third group, who made up about 25% of the initial sample of divorced parents as “Angry Associates”. The distinguishing feature of this category of parents was the way in which they managed conflict. These parents were unable to contain their anger and they were “generally tense and hostile, or even openly conflictual” (Ahrons, 1994,p. 56). These parents frequently needed specialized parent education programmes to help them learn skills to reduce their level of conflict (Stahl, 2011).

2.7.4 Fiery Foes

The final group of post-divorced parents made up about 25% of the sample studied by Ahrons (1994), was categorised as “Fiery Foes”. According to Ahrons (2004), these former spouses hardly interacted with one another and when they did communicate with one another they usually ended up fighting. Their divorces were acrimonious and their legal battles often continued long after the divorce was finalised. These parents were not able to work out arrangements for the children without arguing. As a consequence, they repeatedly returned to court to argue about almost everything. Stahl (2011) maintains that this category of parents is inclined to be low in communication and high in conflict. They often misconstrue court orders in a highly problematic way and they have great difficulty in adhering to court orders, in settling their parenting plans, and resolving their financial issues. Stahl (2011,

p.150), argues that, “many of these parents seem to hate each other more than they love their children.”

Whilst some post-divorced families are engaged in mild conflict as discussed by Ahrons above, others in contrast remain entrenched in high conflict (Stahl, 2011). It is within these families that seeds of parental alienation begin and come to dominate a parent’s experience of divorce. In the context of this study it is imperative that the nature and dynamics of high-conflict families is fully understood, so that fathers’ experiences of being denied contact with their children for protracted periods of time can be better understood and appreciated.

2. 8. CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO HIGH CONFLICT POST- DIVORCE

2.8.1 High Conflict Parents

According to Lebow and Newcomb Rekart (2006, p. 79) “conflicts over child custody and visitation number among the most pathogenic of situations for [...] families. There is a great deal of discord. The family structure is unclear. Children are triangulated between parents, and others (including family, friends and lawyers) readily become involved in these complex disputes.”

Amato (cited in Lebow & Newcomb Rekart , 2006) contend that high parental conflict is a very powerful predictor of the negative effects of divorce for both children and adults. Such high levels of parental conflict most often accompany disputes over child custody and visitation (Doolittle, cited in Lebow & Newcomb Rekart, 2006). According to Buchanan (in Lewbow & Newcomb Rekart, 2006), the child-centered conflicts engendered created are particularly distressing for children. Whilst decisions related to custody and visitation may be difficult for all those involved, most divorcing parents are able to negotiate the change with little or no help from others (Emery, cited in Lewbow & Newcomb Rekart, 2006), there are a subset of parents who remain mired in intractable conflict.

High conflict divorce cases typically have the following characteristics: high rates of litigation or repeated litigation, a high degree of anger and distrust, incidents of verbal abuse, intermittent physical aggression, an ongoing difficulty in communicating with one another and difficulty in communicating about matters pertaining to the care and co-parenting of their children. High conflict parents remain locked in deep-rooted and serious conflict, which plays out in court, in public, and in front of their children (Johnston, 1994 ; Johnston & Campbel,1988 ; Johnston & Rosenby,1997; Johnston, Roseby, & Kuehnle, 2009). Eddy (2011), argues that high conflict divorces are caused by one or two “high-conflict” parents. One or both of these parents commonly obtain protection orders against the other parent,

which limits their ability to be together in the same place at the same time, including at handovers and at their children's school and extra-curricular events.

A striking finding of Ahrons' (1994), was that both Cooperative Colleagues and Angry Associates were described in 2.7.2 and 2.7.3 as having the same level of anger. What distinguished these two groups was that Cooperative Colleagues managed their anger better than the Angry Associates. It is noteworthy that couples that stayed Angry Associates five years post-divorce "couldn't or wouldn't let their anger go" Ahrons (1994, p.82).

Ahrons (1994) argues that high conflict between parents who are Angry Associates and Fiery Foes as described in 2.7.4 arises over boundaries. She states that "Either the boundaries keep arbitrarily shifting, causing uncertainty and frequent power struggles, or they're too rigidly defined, not allowing for necessary interdependency" Ahrons (1994, p. 143). Ahrons (1994,p.143) maintains that in the first instance, children bear the "brunt of the ambiguity" walking around on eggshells, not knowing what is going to cause a 'blowout' between their parents. In the second instance, children are often forced to choose between their parents and they develop painful, damaging conflict between love and loyalty. Accordingly, these children live compartmentalised lives.

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Stahl (2011) agrees with Ahrons (1994) regarding a high conflict set of parents' poor boundaries. In addition, he suggests that some of these parents have very poor boundaries with their children as well. He maintains that these parents may merge their own feelings with those of their children, thereby alienating the children from their other parent.

High conflict parents often tend to become rigid in their perception of one another, and they tend to deal with things in an extreme manner. A number of parents become polarised in their thinking and points of view. These parents see themselves as all good and the other parent as all bad. They then focus on the traits in the other parent that reinforce this perception. In addition, such parents externalise blame and they have little insight into the role they play in conflict. Sadly, these parents usually have little empathy for the impact that their conflict has upon their children.

Eddy (2010, p. 5) asserts that "high conflict divorces are driven by one or two 'high-conflict' parents." He maintains that over time these divorced families often turn into cases with an alienated child. Eddy goes on to say that in his experience of over thirty years working with divorcing families, and based on his surveys of divorce professionals, he estimates that half to two-thirds of high-conflict divorces include one high-conflict parent and one reasonable parent, "who has been walking on eggshells for years" (Eddy, 2012, p. 6). Eddy (2010, p. 6), argues that if an individual is a high-conflict person, "then he or she may have a personality

disorder. If so, this means that they are stuck - that these characteristics are part of who they are.”

According to Stahl (2011), personality traits such as narcissism, anger, anxiety, fear, a tendency to overreact, paranoia and so on, are important contributing factors to the source of conflict for parents who are engaged in high conflict divorce. Stahl (2011, p. 151), maintains that “many custody evaluators observe that in most high- conflict families, one or both parents exhibit either narcissistic, obsessive-compulsive, histrionic, paranoid or borderline traits or features.” Reay (2011) concurs with Stahl, and she adds anti-social personality disorder to the fore mentioned list amongst the most common types of personality disorders seen in a number of alienating parents. A brief description of these five personality disorders follows.

2.8.1.2 Personality Disorders

Kearney and Trull (2012, p. 284) adapted the following general features from the DSM-IV-TR (2000) described below in order to explain personality disorder. They argue that:

Personality disorder is an enduring pattern of experience and behaviour that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture. This pattern is manifested in two (or more) of the following areas: cognition (i.e., is ways of perceiving and interpreting self, other people and events) affectivity (i.e., the range, intensity, lability, and appropriateness of emotional response) interpersonal functioning and impulse control. The enduring pattern is inflexible and occurs across a broad range of personal and social situations. The enduring pattern leads to clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The pattern is stable and of long duration, and its onset can be traced back at least to adolescence or early adulthood.

It is important to be aware that individuals with personality disorders or traits of personality disorders perceive their personality styles as egosyntonic. They do not learn from previous mistakes and in general, people find their behaviour confusing and unpredictable. Their behaviour is also often unacceptable as they are not attuned to the demands of society. These individuals often cause as many problems and difficulties in the lives of others as they do in their own lives.

2.8.1.2.1 Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Kearney and Trull (2012, p. 290) explain that narcissistic personality disorder is:

...characterised by grandiose behaviour, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy for and sensitivity to others. Specific features include:

- Extreme sense of self importance
- Preoccupation with (unrealistic) fantasies of greatness and importance
- Belief that one's "uniqueness" can only be understood by special or high status people
- Excessive need for admiration
- Extreme sense of entitlement
- Interpersonally exploitative
- Lack of empathy for others
- Frequent envy or belief that others are envious of him or her
- Arrogant behaviour and attitude

According to Kopetski (in Boyan & Termini, 2005, p. 268), the following are indicators of a narcissistically vulnerable parent:

1. The other parent is seen as having a serious potential to harm the children, but these fears are unfounded;
2. The wounded parent gives the children a distorted, negative perception of the other parent;
3. The wounded parent talks to and treats the children as if the children were peers;
4. The wounded parent directly expresses a desire to limit or exclude contact;
5. The wounded parent claims an entitlement or some other method of redressing an injustice.

It is important to be aware that the above indicators are often found in alienating parents who obstruct, deny and withhold contact from their children's other parent. This issue will be explicated in Chapter 3.

2.8.1.2.2 Histrionic Personality Disorder

Kearney and Trull (2012, p. 288) argue that according to the DSM-IV-TR, histrionic personality disorder is characterised “by frequent attention seeking and dramatic emotional displays.” The authors note that features include:

- Discomfort in situations where s/he is not the center of attention
- Emotions that shift rapidly and do not seem “real”
- Speech characterised by unsupported “impressions”
- Very suggestible and easily influenced
- Inappropriately provocative or sexually seductive interaction with others
- Physical appearance is used to draw attention to oneself
- Very dramatic behavior and expression of emotions
- Relationships are considered much more intimate and closer than actually are.

Eddy (2011) argues that such individuals with a histrionic personality disorder constantly speak about being a victim of one thing or another, and they may dramatise details, which may not be true or accurate. They are attentions seekers who once they have someone's attention, are reluctant to let it go. These individuals look to others to solve their problems.

Having to live with someone with histrionic personality disorder can be challenging and it can also be destructive to a relationship. A person with histrionic personality disorder needs to be the centre of attention, is flirtatiousness with others, manifests demanding and dramatic behavior as victims and can make co-operative post-divorce co-parenting exceedingly difficult. The researcher has observed that individuals with histrionic personality disorders frequently exaggerate their former spouse's minor parenting 'flaws' and perceived inadequacies, which are then cited by them as valid reasons for withholding contact from the other parent.

2.8.1.2.3 Paranoid Personality Disorder

Kearney and Trull (2012, p. 284) explain that according to the DSM-IV-TR paranoid personality disorder is characterised “by a pervasive distrust and suspiciousness of other people”. The authors cite the following symptoms:

- Suspicion that others are harming them (without sufficient evidence)

- Chronically doubt the loyalty or trustworthiness of others
- Be afraid to confide in others because the information may be used against them
- Read threatening or insulting meanings into benign remarks or events
- Be unforgiving and bear grudges
- Be prone to perceive attacks on one's own character or reputation and be quick to react angrily
- Frequently suspect, without justification, that one's spouse or partner is cheating

Because trust is a fundamental element in all relationships, one can hypothesise that when one parent is mistrustful of the other, a co-parenting partnership cannot be formed. Parents with paranoid personality disorder find it difficult to trust that the other parent will take adequate care of the children, hence they appear to rationalize that they are thus justified in withholding contact from the other parent.

2.8.1.2.4 Borderline Personality Disorder

Kearney and Trull (2012, p. 286) explain that according to the DSM-IV-TR, borderline personality disorder is characterised by "marked instability in mood states, in interpersonal relationships, and in self image. Further there are a number of impulsive behaviours that are typically associated with this disorder." They note specific features as including:

- Extreme attempts to avoid real or imagined abandonment
- Impulsivity that is potentially self-damaging (e.g. excessive spending, substance abuse, binge eating)
- Anger control problems
- Lack of sense of self, or unstable self image
- Recurrent suicidal behavior (i.e. threats, gestures) or self mutilating behaviour
- Dissociation (e.g. depersonalisation or derealisation) or paranoid thoughts that occur in response to stress
- Chronic feelings of emptiness
- Intense and unstable interpersonal relationships

Boyan and Termini (2005, 276) argue that most individuals suffering from borderline personality disorder, were engag[ing] is a distortion campaign due to their feelings of abandonment and anger. Johnston and Rosenby (1997) argue that loss evokes powerful feelings of anxiety, sadness, and fear of being abandoned. A number of individuals mask

their grief with anger and try to postpone the abandonment and divorce by keeping their spouse in ongoing and protracted conflict. By arguing and fighting, they are able to maintain contact. Furthermore, these authors argue that individuals with borderline personality disorder experience a fragile self-esteem that needs all sense of failure to be outside of the self. Such an individual frequently demonstrates a self-righteous air of angry superiority and entitlement, and accuses their former spouse of being psychologically and morally inferior (Boyan & Termini, 2005). Additionally, individuals with borderline personality disorder frequently rewrite the marital history with their spouse to depict their former spouse as intentionally plotting to exploit and cast them off, justifying their feelings of justification in seeking retaliation. According to Boyan and Termini (2005), many individuals with borderline personality disorder assume an aggressive stance, and they attack before they are attacked.

Boyan and Termini (2005) contend that it is not unusual for a parent with borderline personality disorder to threaten them with suicide if their partner asks for a divorce. These parents may continue to threaten others if they do not get their way both, during the pre and post-divorce process. The threats may include divulging marital secrets or moving the children away, kidnapping the children or blocking contact with them. Some may make false allegations or even alienate the children. According to Boyan and Termini (2005), such behaviours are a desperate effort to relieve their pain by whatever means they have at their disposal.

2.8.1.2.5 Antisocial Personality Disorder

Kearney and Trull (2012, p. 288) aver that according to the DSM-IV-TR, antisocial personality disorder is characterised by a pervasive disregard for the rights of other people. This pattern of behavior is evident both in childhood and adulthood. This diagnosis is unique in that there is a requirement that childhood conduct disorder symptoms (aggression towards people and animals, destruction of property, deceitfulness or theft, serious violation of rules) were present. Features of antisocial personality disorder that appear in adulthood include:

- Repeated criminal acts that could result in arrest;
- Repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning;
- Impulsivity;
- Irritability and aggressiveness;
- Disregard for the safety of oneself or others;
- Chronic irresponsibility;
- Lack of remorse for having hurt or mistreated others.

Comment [GW5]: Is this a citation?

Eddy (2011) maintains that individuals with antisocial personality disorder can be the most dangerous and uncaring. They can be highly manipulative and they often convince others to believe that they are victims, when in fact they are the perpetrators of bad behaviour. Eddy (2011) argues that they view people as either powerful or as suckers, who deserve what they get. They see violent revenge or causing other people pain and suffering as justified. Owing to their lack of a moral conscience and their irresponsible parenting, such parents may flout court orders and they may withhold or deny their childrens' other parent contact.

Having discussed the internal factors that contribute to a high conflict divorce, I will now briefly discuss external factors that contribute to high conflict divorce. In addition to the internal factors that were mentioned above, there are several external factors which may also contribute. These will be briefly discussed here.

2.8.2 Contributions of Attorneys and Litigation to Prolonging Disputes

Lebow and Newcomb Reckart (2007) have noted that high-conflict families often select attorneys to use an aggressive manner in advocating for their client. These authors maintain that should an attorney appear too conciliatory, high-conflict clients "will look for more aggressive representation, delaying the resolution of differences and settling on a post-divorce family structure" (p. 88). According to Johnston and Cambell (1988, p. 39), "lawyers [are] intractably wedded to an adversarial stance [...] invariably intensified parental conflict [...] regardless of the impact on the child in the context of the family."

Galatzer-Levy and Kraus (in Lebow & Newcomb Reckart, 2007) maintain that the adversarial environment of the judicial system provides never ending opportunities for confrontations in pleadings, subpoenas, depositions and court appearances; frequently engendering further conflict. They contend that children can become highly polarised when they are interviewed by judges and when attorneys determine their best interest.

Johnston, Roseby and Kuehnle (2009) concur with the fore mentioned authors. They aver that within an adversarial process, attorneys initiate action from a purely partisan standpoint in order to strategically maneuver the presentation of evidence, and to call to mind statutes and case law in order to win their client's case. Weinstein (in Johnston et al., 2009, p. 232) maintains that attorneys contribute to rather than resolve disputes "when they are wedded solely to their advocacy role". For example, they may advise their client not to talk to the other spouse, thus cutting off corrective feedback. Furthermore, they may caution parents against making any temporary arrangements regarding contact, in case they compromise their position, thereby escalating the parent's reluctance to collaborate. Some attorneys may also advise their client to make extreme demands in order to increase the bargaining

advantage. Others may advise their clients to make a number of submissions to the court making allegations, such as neglect, physical abuse or mental incompetence, in order to cast the other parent in a bad light and to win their case. The resulting public shaming, guilt and rage at being so tainted, motivates the other parents' need to 'set the record straight'. Johnston and Cambell (1988) argue that few separating parents are able to identify that this may emanate from the toxic practices and procedures endemic to the adversarial system.

Johnston and Cambell (1988) contend that many attorneys involved in these matters lose their professional objectivity as they become too emotionally involved with their clients. These authors argue that some of these attorneys try to rescue their clients and take on the fights as their own personal feud, while others become secretly hostile and ambivalent about representing their clients. As shown in 2.8.1.2, many high-conflict divorcing parents have personality disorders and they have the tendency for "forming complex hostile-dependent relations, losing their boundaries, projecting aspects of their own needs and wishes onto others, and playing out their intra-psychic conflicts in the interpersonal world" (Johnston & Cambell, 1988, p. 40). Inexperienced attorneys may easily be caught off guard and become enmeshed with these clients. Attorneys who over-identify with their clients may hastily make unnecessary applications to court, or they may make unreasonable counter demands.

Johnston and Cambell (1998) cite ambitious attorneys who want to make a name for themselves in the legal community as contributors to the elevation of conflict, as these attorneys grab hold of a case because it gives them the opportunity to challenge the constitutionality of a new law or the legality of a procedure.

Johnston et al., (2009, p. 232) argue that the use of the child as a bargaining tool in settlement negotiations, where contact is traded for reductions in maintenance is a "particularly pernicious example of destructive adversarial behaviour". Some attorneys wanting to win their client's case may produce emotionally charged documents or cases, citing evidence of abuse, neglect, physical violence, or emotional and mental incompetence, that become a public record of charges and counter charges which are often made out of context. The resulting public shame, humiliation and anger at being thus represented compels the accused party to 'set the record straight' through costly litigation.

As can be seen from the above, within this context there, is commonly limited encouragement for problem solving and conflict resolution (Stahl, 2011). It is evident that in some cases, litigation and the legal system may polarise parents and may unwittingly reinforce some of their problems.

Finally, the courts are often ill-equipped to deal with allegations of child abuse and molestation, which are common amongst high conflict divorcing families. The lack of coordination and cooperation amongst the different agencies such as the police, the Teddy Bear Clinic, the Child Protection Unit and the judicial system, and the inadequate training of investigating officers, can cause serious emotional damage to children involved, as well as to parent-child relationships. Whist children are subjected to physical examinations and psychological assessments, many of them go for prolonged periods of time without contact with a parent, or at best with supervised or limited contact. Johnston and Cambell (1988, p. 43), point out that “their trust in and sense of safety with the accused parent is severely shaken if not destroyed.”

2.8.3 Promotion of Disputes by Mental Health Practitioners

According to Boyan and Termini (2005, p. 9), “professionals working with the family, such as attorneys, mental health workers, and social agencies, play a significant role in the restructuring of the family.” For example, custody evaluators, by the nature of their role, frequently back or lend support to one parent over the other. Mental health practitioners and social service agencies who undertake individual counseling or therapy for a spouse, usually only hear that spouse's view of the problem. They may then align themselves with that spouse, while failing to notice the interactional nature of the relationship of the parents. In support of an apparent “victim”, they may encourage an uncompromising and aggressive stance that results in lengthy disputes over post-divorce parenting of the children. Additionally, they may also encourage avoidance and non-communication with an ex-spouse in order to support their client's autonomy (Johnston & Cambell, 1988). Therapists may also contribute to the escalation of conflict between parents by unwittingly endorsing their client's distorted perceptions of the divorce situation and by consolidating their client's negative view of the ex-spouse.

Johnston and Cambell (1988, p. 45), maintain that the predominant iatrogenic influences of mental health professionals are reports that explain the situation in terms of the spouses individual psychopathology, which clearly places blame and responsibility on one spouse, rather than in terms of a more complex marital dynamic. Johnston and Cambell (1998) argue that these authoritative declarations result in the relationships between the divorcing spouses becoming rigid under the imposition of these stereotyped labels, and moreover, the children are inclined to perceive and act toward their respective parents in accordance with these views.

Albeit an ethical violation, certain mental health professionals/psychologists and social workers may make recommendations regarding residency and contact without having met or

assessed both parents and the children. Furthermore, some therapists may attempt to see the whole family but only after having provided extensive individual therapy or counseling with one family member, rendering their neutrality questionable. Johnston and Cambell (1988) contend that pursuant to the breakdown of family therapy, certain therapists may continue to see one party and may thus be complicit in the polarisation of positions and the intensification of the dispute.

According to Johnston and Cambell (1988, p.49), as these matters proceed towards court, mental health professionals become “highly prized allies in a custody dispute” as they wield considerable power by virtue of their status and authority as “expert witnesses.”

2.8.4 Involvement of Extended Family and Friends in the Conflict

Johnston and Cambell (1988, p. 32) contend that as the marriage breaks down, the spouses look to their families of origin for help and understanding. They frequently presented distorted and polarised versions with scant facts to grandparents, siblings and other family members, thus engendering extremely negative views of the ex spouse. Most families support their own against their ex-spouse, however, in a limited number of instances individuals may side with the ex-spouse against their own family member. Family members who support their own become enraged and try to protect their relative from being victimised by the ex-spouse. They demand justice, restitution, and in some cases revenge on behalf of the spouse with whom they are involved. Boyan and Termini (2005) agree with Johnston and Cambell (1988). They argue that extended family members either promote or sabotage the parent’s efforts at cooperation and solidarity. In some instances, the extended family members fail to recognize how their negative behaviours impact upon the restructuring of the family. As a result of their own inability to disengage from the situation, “family members may sabotage the parental subsystem by undermining the decision making of one or both parents, engaging in inappropriate behaviour in front of the children such as denigrating one or both parents, and instigating conflict between the parents” (Boyan & Termini, 2005, p. 9).

Low-income parents, particularly mothers, often need to return to their families of origin in order to provide a home for their children. Their economic dependence appears to give the extended family permission to intervene in their affairs, and to have a great deal of input regarding the care of the children. Some parents who return to their families of origin may actively identify with their family’s ethnic culture or rekindle their commitment to their religion. In the case of marriages of mixed race or religions, ethnic and/or religious differences become polarized, which sets the scene for what Johnston and Cambell (1988, p. 33) term “tribal or ethnic feuds between opposing extended families”.

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Johnston et al.,(2009) explains that divorce disputes can rapidly spread and include the social networks of the couple, resulting in a modern form of “tribal warfare” or feud where a number of others including extended family, new partners, mental health practitioners, attorneys and even judges form part of the disputing relations who help to entrench the fight. Separating spouses may turn to extended family members or members of the community for advice, emotional support and encouragement. Upon hearing only one side of the story, these significant others may become angry and try to right the wrong and help the ‘victim’. They may form alliances with and fight on behalf of the ‘victim’, and in so doing, unintentionally confirm negative, polarized, and frequently distorted views of the other spouse. Members of the ‘tribe’ declare the need to protect the children from the now-demonized ex-spouse. Johnston et al.,(2009) maintain that such behaviour results in long-term disputes over the children.

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Johnston et al., (2009) argue that unresolved conflicts and suppressed resentments within the larger relationship network can be easily displaced onto or included into the custody battle. For example, when a divorced mother is financially dependent upon her own parents, she may be unable to refuse when it is insisted that she return to court to demand a decrease in the father’s contact. Similarly, new partners can set in motion custody disputes. For example, a newly remarried man’s wife may agitate to save the children from their “abusive” mother. On closer examination, the real problem may be the new wife’s anxiety about securing her role in the marriage that she fears is being threatened by her husband’s ties to his first family.

Thus far, the researcher has explained the statistical data pertaining to divorce, various perspectives of divorce, the developmental tasks of divorce, the impact of divorce on parents, particularly on fathers, four post-divorce parenting typologies and high-conflict divorce. A systemic framework that grounds the explanation and understanding of fathers’ experiences of parental alienation will be presented next.

Comment [GW8]: Be careful of repetition here. A lot of this has already been said.

2. 9 FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

As previously mentioned, this study is interested in the experiences of separated and divorced fathers who have been denied contact with their children for a prolonged period of time, post-separation and divorce. At the beginning of this chapter, divorce was presented as a process that not only impacts upon the couple’s relationship, but also impacts upon the children and the parent-child relationship .Therefore, in order to fully understand a fathers’ experiences when they were denied contact with their children for a prolonged period of time, a systemic perspective will be adopted.

A brief introduction to general systems theory and family systems theory follows. Then, the core ideas relevant to understanding and exploring relational and system dynamics is explored, which may be useful for understanding the processes, patterns and rules underpinning those fathers' experiences who have been denied contact with their children for prolonged periods of time.

2.9.1 General Systems Theory

Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), the 'father' of general systems theory, criticised scientific inquiry of the time as being reductionistic, as it focused on the isolation of phenomena into basic units interacting in a linear way, with analysis as the foremost method of understanding. He contended that in order to understand phenomena, consideration had to be given to individual elements, as well as to the interrelationships between these elements. Furthermore, he suggested that the focus of understanding should be on systems' processes, with general systems theory supplying the functional and structural rules applicable for the description of all systems.

Von Bertalanffy (1968) defined a system as a set or group of elements that are interrelated by a dynamic interchange of energy, information or materials into a product of the outcome, which can function either within or outside of the system. Similarly, Gregory Bateson (1971) defined a system as "any unit containing feedback structure and therefore competent to process information." From this it is possible to see that the most outstanding characteristics of a system is the flow of information, the patterned interactions of the system components and the circularity of those interactions as they feedback into the system and into the environment. Every action is therefore seen as a response, and every response is seen as an action.

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General systems theory examines the principles of systems in various contexts and creates models to describe them. As a consequence, general systems came to be regarded as a meta-theory, a theory of theories. The principles and models applicable to systems in general can be applied to any field, including biology, engineering and psychology.

2.9.2 Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory was advanced through the work of several prominent researchers and therapists in different fields, who practiced the joint treatment of couples and families. Gregory Bateson and the Palo Alto Group are considered synonymous with the development of family systems theory. Initially this group concentrated their attention on communication patterns within families, thereby signalling a shift from content to patterns and process in the

treatment of families. Instead of concentrating on the intra-psychic workings or dynamics of respective individual members, the focus turned to the family system as a whole, and to the patterns observed in the family and between family members (Gurman & Kniskern, 1991).

In implementing this new approach, it was realised that the psychoanalytic language predominant at the time would no longer be adequate, as it was unable to explain the observed individual patterns, reciprocal influence and recursion in relationships. Therapists and researchers thus began developing a new language and created in general systems theory, a useful way to express their new thinking about families as a supra-individual phenomena (Becvar & Becvar, 2003, Gurman & Kniskern, 1991).

Changes regarding the manner in which individuals and families were viewed signalled a paradigm shift in the field of psychology. From then on, individuals and individual problems were viewed and understood in the context of relationships and relationship issues between individuals, rather than in isolation. Additionally, researchers and clinicians working from a systemic perspective no longer focused on *why* things happen the way they do, they rather focus on the *what* and *how* of phenomena (Hoffman, 1981). The focus is concentrated on the 'here and now' dynamics and experiences of events, in addition to the patterns in relationships (Searight & Openlader, 1987; Tomm, 1984).

Throughout recent years, influenced by a new understanding of discourse and meaning as a social construction, the field of family therapy has evolved to incorporate not only the above mentioned patterns, processes and sequences, but also begun to stress meaning, the centrality of language and the joined construction of understanding between system members as patterns in themselves (Dallos & Stedmon, 2006). It is thus implied, that all patterns and regularities are understood to be created through language and in turn, this creation is regarded as a pattern or process in itself. Accordingly, from a family systems perspective, families and relationships are not only cybernetic systems, they are also systems of meaning, and are therefore interpretative, as well as interactive (Hoffman, 1992).

The following important concepts are particularly relevant for understanding and exploring relational and systems dynamics. Accordingly, they will be useful for understanding the processes, patterns and rules underpinning parental alienation and parental alienation syndrome, and they will also prove useful in conceptualizing alienated fathers' experiences.

2.9.2.1 Systems, Subsystems and Suprasystems

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2009, p. 72) argue that "if a system represents a set of units that stand in some consistent relationship to one another, we can infer that the system is organized around those relationships." These authors argue that additionally, it can be seen

that parts or elements of the system interact with each other in a predictable, “organised” fashion. A system functions in certain characteristic ways, and it is continuously in the process of evolution as it seeks new and steady states (Becvar & Becvar, 2009).

Becvar and Becvar (2009), maintain that structural theory defines three subsystems: the spouse subsystem, the parental subsystem, and the sibling subsystem. According to these authors (2009, p. 171) “the rule among these subsystems for the functional family is that of *hierarchy*.” The theory firmly advocates appropriate boundaries between the generations. Accordingly, each subsystem ought to be examined separately.

Subsystems are part of the overall system, which are assigned to carry out certain functions or process within the system as a whole. Each system exists as a part of a larger suprasystem, and includes smaller subsystems, of which it is in turn the suprasystem.

According to Minuchin (in Becvar & Becvar, 2009), families commonly consists of several coexisting subsystems. The husband and wife dyad makes up a subsystem, so do the mother-child, father-child, and child-child dyads. Subsystems in a family can be formed by generation (mother and father), by sex (fathers and sons), by interest (intellectual pursuits) or by function (parental caregiver). Within each subsystem, different levels of power are implemented, different skills learned, and different responsibilities assigned (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Because each family member belongs to several subsystems they enter into different complementary relationships with other members.

According to Minuchin, Rosman and Baker (in Becvar & Becvar, 2009), “the most enduring subsystems are the *spousal*, *parental* and *sibling* subsystems”. The husband-wife dyad is critical as any dysfunction in this subsystem is “bound to reverberate throughout the family, as children are scapegoated or co-opted into alliances with one parent against the other whenever the parents engage in conflict” (Becvar & Becvar, 2009, p. 84). The spousal subsystem teaches the children about male-female intimacy and commitment, by providing a model of marital interaction. Becvar and Becvar (2009, p. 84), argue that the way in which “the marital partners accommodate one another’s needs, negotiate differences and make decisions together, manage conflict, meet each other’s sexual and dependency needs, plan the future together and so on, help influence the effectiveness of relationships between all family members”. This is of particular relevance to this study, especially in the context of parental alienation.

Spouse subsystem

Minuchin (1974) originally described the spouse subsystem being formed when two individuals marry and create a new family. Today, it would be more appropriate to say that the spouse/partner subsystem is formed when two people marry and/or enter into a committed relationship with one another, thereby creating a new family (Becvar & Bevar, 2009). Each partner has their own unique set of values and expectations, both recognised and unconscious, which need to be reconciled over time so that a common life becomes possible. Moreover, each spouse/partner has to sacrifice part of his or her own ideas and preferences, losing individuality but gaining belonging (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

Bevar and Bevar (2009) argue that the processes required to form the spouse subsystem are called *accommodation*, which implies adjustment, and negotiation of roles between the spouses/partners. According to Becvar and Becvar (2009) such accommodation can best be achieved when spouses or partners have accomplished a certain degree of independence from their families of origin. Whereas each partner brings with them the basic rules for being a spouse and being a parent from their family of origin, spouses who remain enmeshed within their families of origin after marriage will necessarily experience difficulty accommodating and negotiating their roles relative to one another. Effectively, their experiences in their families of origin failed to provide them with sufficient autonomy to negotiate successfully alternative roles to complement their new spouses.

Complementarity refers to the phenomena of each behaviour having a logical complement. For example, the typical gender roles seen in traditional marriages may involve the husband going out to work and the wife working within the home. According to Becvar and Becvar (2009, p.172) "complementary roles evolve during the early part of the marriage and in the formation of the spouse subsystem". Whilst some of these roles may be transitory and others may remain permanent, the basis to successful direction, namely finding a life as a family, are negotiation and accommodation, especially with regard to rules and roles.

It is understood that complementarity implies that certain family functions must be performed so that the family can function effectively. Becvar and Becvar (2009), argue that the adjustment process may be slow and difficult as each has specific expectations about the carrying out of various functions and roles. In the adjustment process, each individual has to learn to accommodate and adapt to help meet the needs of the other. Irrespective of the issues that have to be resolved, early negotiation accommodation process in the spouse subsystem is vital as a basic tool that enables the family to be functional as it adapts throughout its life. Negotiation and accommodation are amplified, to the extent that each

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spouse is his or her own person and is not overly attached to his or her family of origin, or its rules, patterns and roles.

According to Minuchin & Fishman (1981), one of the spousal subsystem's most important tasks is the development of *boundaries* which protect the spouses, providing them with the space in which to satisfy their own psychological needs without intrusion of in-laws, children and others. Minuchin and Fishman (1981, p. 17) state that the adequacy of these boundaries is one of the most important aspects to the vitality of the family structure.

Becvar and Becvar (2009) point out that an important requirement of the spouse subsystem is that the couple are supportive of one another in the development of their respective talents and interests, whilst additionally retaining their own individuality. In a healthy and well-functioning spousal system, there is co-operation, conciliation and mutual respect for the uniqueness of the other. Minuchin and Fishman (1981) argue that the spousal subsystem may provide a supportive place wherein members can deal with the extra-familial world, which may also offer a safe haven from outside stresses. However, Minuchin and Fishman (1981, p. 17), caution that "if the rules of the subsystems are so rigid that the experiences gained by each spouse in the extra-familial transactions cannot be incorporated, the spouses-in-the system may be bound to inadequate survival rules by past contracts and allowed a more diversified use of self only when away from each other."

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004, pp. 218 and 219), argue that

the strength and durability of the spousal system in particular, offer a key regarding family stability. The way in which husband and wife learn to negotiate differences and eventually accommodate one another's needs and the development of complementary roles tells us a great deal about the likelihood of family stability and flexibility to change, as future changing family circumstances demand [...] it is crucial at the start and throughout parenting that, whatever the demands of child rearing and the efforts experienced toward the involvement of an effective parental subsystem, the parents continue to work at maintaining and strengthening their spousal subsystem, which is fundamental to family well being.

According to Becvar and Becvar (2009) "[the] available spousal subsystem [is] one in which the marital partners have worked out a fulfilling relationship with one another, provides both spouses with the experience of intimacy, support, mutual growth, and an opportunity for personal development."

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Parental subsystem

The parental subsystem, also known as the executive subsystem, is the second subsystem described by structural theory. The birth of a child immediately transforms the system. The parental subsystem may differ broadly in composition (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). A grandfather, uncle or an aunt may be included in the parental subsystem if they are fulfilling a parental role.

The parental subsystem holds the main responsibility for providing adequate child rearing, nurturing, guidance, limit setting, and discipline. Becvar and Becvar (2009, p. 170) maintain that, "if accommodation and negotiation have been developed successfully in the spouse subsystem, these skills will be very useful in the evolution of the parental subsystem". Through interacting with their parents, children learn how to deal with authority figures, how to solve problems, and they develop the capacity to make decisions. Often upon marriage, their own parental system needs to be loosened, in order to accommodate the new system (marriage).

Sibling subsystem

The sibling subsystem comprises all the siblings within the family. According to Minuchin and Fishman (1981), siblings constitute a child's first peer group. According to Becvar and Becvar (2009) sibling relationships are typically the longest lasting connections the individual makes, extending over a lifespan.

Becvar and Becvar (2009, p.173), describe the sibling subsystem as, "a social laboratory in which children can experiment without the responsibility that accrues to the adult." According to Minuchin and Fishman (1981) in large families siblings organise themselves in an assortment of subsystems, according to their developmental stages. They form their own transactional patterns for negotiating, cooperating and competing. Through participation in this subsystem, siblings learn to negotiate and work out their differences, and to support one another; and later they learn to form attachment to friends. In time, siblings learn how to join together to take on and challenge the parental subsystem, whilst negotiating necessary developmental stages and changes. Becvar and Becvar (2009), argue that the influence of this subsystem on overall family functioning depends mainly on how viable all family subsystems are. The authors (2009, p.85) state that, "Spousal, parental, and sibling subsystems stand in an overall dynamic relationship, each simultaneously influencing and being influenced by one another. Together, relationships within and between subsystems help define the family's structure."

Supra systems

As previously mentioned, families according to Minuchin and Fishman (1981) are part of larger systems such as extended family, the neighbourhood and society as a whole. According to Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004, p. 88), families are embedded in their “cultural, ethnic, social class, and social history.” Family systems interact with, and are influenced by, one or more of society’s bigger outside systems such the health care, religious congregations, welfare, schools, the legal system (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). The family’s interaction with larger subsystems creates a large part of the family’s problems and tasks as well as of its systems of support (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004, p. 89), argue that “for most families engagements with larger systems are time limited and proceed perhaps with exceptions, in ways that are free of long term problems”. Nevertheless, a relatively large portion of families often become entangled with these larger systems in adverse ways, impeding growth and development of family members. Elizur and Minuchin (in Goldenberg, 2004) state the therapeutic efficacy of looking beyond the dysfunctional family itself to a “broader view of social systems that encompass the entire community” in order to take cultural, political and institutional issues into account. These authors stress that “the power of organisations in which families are embedded must be understood, lest the frequent inflexibility of agencies such as psychiatric hospitals, isolating patients from their families, undo any therapeutic gain” (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004, p. 89).

2.9.2.2 Boundaries

Becvar and Becvar (2009, p. 85) define a boundary “as an invisible line of demarcation that separates an individual, a subsystem or a system from outside surroundings”. They argue that boundaries help to define the individual independence of a subsystem’s separate members, and also helps to differentiate subsystems from one another. Additionally, they state that “within a system such as a family, boundaries circumscribe and protect the integrity of the system, determining who is considered an insider and who remains outside. The family boundary may serve a gatekeeper function, controlling information flow into and out of the system” (Becvar & Becvar, 2009, p. 85).

The authors (2009) argue that within the family itself, boundaries distinguish between subsystems, helping define the separate subunits of the overall system and the quality of their interactive processes. Minuchin (1974) maintain that such divisions need to be sufficiently well defined, so as to allow subsystem members to perform their tasks without unnecessary interference, whilst simultaneously to be open enough to allow contact between

members of the subsystem and others. Accordingly, boundaries help safeguard each subsystem's autonomy, whilst maintaining the interdependence of all of the family's subsystems.

Becvar and Becvar (2009) argue that the clarity of the subsystems boundaries, and the clear lines of authority and responsibility, are far more important in the effectiveness of family function than the composition of the family subsystems. The permeability of the boundaries is an additional important issue, as boundaries differ in how easily they allow information to flow to and from the environment. In addition to the importance of boundaries within the family being clearly drawn, it is important for the rules that govern the family to be apparent to all. When boundaries are too blurred or too rigid, they induce confusion or inflexibility, thereby increasing the family's risk of instability and ultimate dysfunction.

Clear boundaries

Becvar and Becvar (2009), maintain that the perfect relationships between subsystems are defined by clear boundaries. In contrast, the less than perfect relationships are defined by rigid or diffuse boundaries. Clear boundaries are firm, yet permeable. In family systems where clear boundaries exist, the family members are supported and nurtured whilst still being given a certain degree of autonomy. Accordingly, the theory implies an ideal balance between support, nurture, and inclusion on the one hand, and freedom to experiment and individuate, whilst retaining one's own identity and individuality on the other hand. Additionally, clear boundaries imply access across subsystems to negotiate and accommodate various situational and developmental challenges that face the family.

Consequently, changes in structure, rules, and roles can occur as appropriate to the process of evolving a new structure for dealing with changing circumstances within the family; or in its relationship with systems outside of the family. Becvar and Becvar (2009, p.174), argue that "the one constant in the life of a family is that its circumstances will change". Indeed, "each scenario is an experiment in living" that necessitates negotiation, accommodation, and experimentation with a new structure again and again until the family 'gets it right', only to find its circumstances have changed once more (Becvar & Bevar, 2009, p.174).

Becvar and Becvar (2009), maintain that clear boundaries in a family permit an increase in the frequency of communication between subsystems. Consequently, negotiation and accommodation can take place successfully in order to facilitate change, in that way maintaining the stability of the family. Parents and children can belong and they can still individuate.

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Rigid boundaries

Rigid boundaries indicate that there is disengagement between and within systems, as well as with systems outside of the family, and that there is a limited information flow.

Disengaged family members are isolated from one another, as well as from systems within the community of which the family is a part. Such individuals and families are relatively autonomous and segregated and when taken to the extreme, this situation may be dysfunctional (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Children living in families with rigid boundaries learn to fight their own battles, and to negotiate without interference from their parents. Access between the subsystems is restricted, and there is little room for negotiation and accommodation between the subsystems. In the extreme of disengagement, only an intense crisis or severe stress can mobilise support (Becvar & Becvar, 2009, p.174). Spouses, parents, and children are so involved with their own matters that they are slow to observe or respond when others need support.

Diffuse boundaries

Diffuse boundaries are in many ways opposite to rigid boundaries. Enmeshed relationships are characteristic of diffuse boundaries. Systems with diffuse boundaries are characterised by over-involvement with all members constantly involved in one another's business, and there is an excessive amount of 'hovering' (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Parents in the family system are too accessible, and the essential distinctions between subsystems are absent. There is excessive amount of negotiation and accommodation. The authors argue that there is a loss of independence, autonomy, and experimentation. The spouse system devotes itself entirely to parenting, with parents spending too much time with the children and doing too much for them. As a result, children tend to rely too much on their parents and not enough on their own abilities.

Children in families with diffuse boundaries have difficulty distinguishing their own feelings from that of their parents, and they feel disloyal to their parents if they do not want to accept what their parents offer. Such children may also feel uncomfortable being on their own, and may have difficulty building relationships with others outside the family. These children may have trouble negotiating with and accommodating new spouses when they get married. It is to be expected that they will remain very attached to their families of origin, continuing to depend upon them for support and nurture, particularly if the new spouse does not provide support and nurture to the same extent that they experienced it in their family of origin.

2.9.2.3 Open and Closed Systems

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004, p. 86), argue that “a system with a continuous flow to and from the outside is considered in systems terms, as first outlined by Bertalanffy (1968), to be an open system, while one whose boundaries are not easily crossed is considered to be a closed system”. The salient feature of this is the degree of interaction with easy access to the outside environment. Open systems are bidirectional, meaning that more than simply adjusting, they also start activities that allow an exchange with the community, because their boundaries are permeable. On the other hand, closed systems have impermeable boundaries, they do not interact with the outside environment, they lack feedback corrective mechanisms, become isolated and resist change (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004).

According to Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004, p. 87)

“in family terms, no system is ever fully open or closed; if it would be totally open, no boundaries would exist between it and the outside world, and it would cease to exist in a separate entity; if totally closed, there would be no exchanges with the outside environment, and it would die”.

Instead, systems exist along a continuum, depending upon the flexibility or rigidity of their boundaries. Effectively functioning families maintain the system by establishing a balance between openness and closedness and are tuned to the outside world so that appropriate change and adaptation can be achieved, while changes that threaten the survival of the system are resisted.

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004) argue that the more open the family system, the more adaptable and free it is to change. Such a system tends to thrive, be open to new experiences and to alter or eradicate interactive patterns, which are no longer useable. It is thus said to have negentropy, or a tendency toward the highest order. This type of family system can alter its patterns in response to new information; calling for a change in family rules, and discarding those established responses that are inappropriate to the new situation. Nichols and Everett (cited in Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004), maintain that due to exchanges beyond their boundaries, open systems – especially if they have had an open core – increase their opportunities of becoming more highly organised and developing resources to repair a small or temporary breakdown in efficiency.

The absence of such exchanges in relatively closed systems decreases their competence in dealing with stress. Limited and nonexistent contact with others outside of the family unit

may result in fearful, confused and ineffective responses in times of crisis. According to Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004, p. 87), "such closed systems run the risk of entropy; they gradually regress, decay because of insufficient input, and thus are prone to eventual disorganisation and eventual disorder, particularly if faced with prolonged stress." It can be seen that closed systems are rigid and cannot adapt.

A couple with marital problems may respond to them and a possible divorce by maintaining closed boundaries in which they refrain from telling their children, as well as extended family members and friends, about the impending divorce, or they may not seek divorce counselling when it is needed. As previously mentioned, closed boundaries limit the flow of new and potentially helpful information into the system at a time when it is needed, for example, how best to adapt to the change in the couple system and how to support the children, so that they can maintain a healthy relationship with both their parents.

In contrast to the above, the couple system may move towards becoming too open and allowing too much information into the system. For example, the couple may indiscriminately talk about one another and the relationship problems in front of the children, which may result in the children forming an alignment with the parent whom they perceive as being the 'victim' or being 'wronged'. In addition, the couple may allow over involvement of other individuals and systems, such as extended family members, the legal and or mental health systems. Moreover, they may indiscriminately adopt viewpoints from these individuals, regardless of whether these viewpoints are congruent with their system's values and viewpoints. Too much information and too many people becoming involved in the couple's relationship in their nuclear family system may maintain or exacerbate the instability and chaos in their system.

Divorce brings about a disruption to the system and to its members (Nichols & Everett, 1986). The couple system boundaries undergo significant changes in terms of openness and closedness in the post-separation and divorce context. This subsystem 'shuts down' with emotional and physical distance between ex-spouses.

The spousal system loses its functions and integrity. The co-holders of this sub-system become disengaged, and they have to adapt to necessary structural and emotional changes. For example, the couple have to adapt to the loss of the emotional bond and security this system offered and the transformation of the relationship with their former spouse.

2.9.2.4 Communication and Information Processing

Becvar and Becvar (2003) argue that communication and information processing are central to systemic thinking. These writers maintain that although a discussion may be about a relationship, behaviour, change, boundaries, stability or other systemic concepts, one is essentially discussing the manner in which the system communicates and processes information. Consequently, when studying the ex-spouses and the father-child relational and interactional dynamics post-separation and or divorce, the researcher is essentially studying their respective communication and information processes.

According to systemic thinking, the following three principles are essential to communication and information processing in a relationship (Becvar & Becvar, 2003; Watzlawick, Weekland, & Fisch, 1974):

- Principle 1: one cannot not behave
- Principle 2: one cannot not communicate
- Principle 3: the meaning of a given behaviour is not the true meaning of that behaviour, but it is the personal truth for the person giving it that specific meaning.

Based on principle one, it follows that one cannot really ever be said to be doing nothing. Even when one says that one is doing nothing, for example sitting still, one is sitting *still*, which constitutes a behaviour. Similarly, following principle two: "... all behaviour in the context of others has message value..." (Becvar & Becvar, 2003, p. 70). Consequently, it is impossible not to communicate, because even when we are not saying anything, we are still behaving, and therefore sending a message to those around us (Bateson, 1979).

It is noteworthy that the meaning of a message can only be understood in relation to the context in which it occurred. Similarly, emotions can also be viewed as a form of communication since they convey message value in the context in which they occur. Some theorists regard emotions as actions or bodily predispositions, not as feelings, separate from our bodies and thoughts. Bateson (cited in Searlight & Openlander, 1987) regarded feelings, emotions and thoughts as specifying patterns of relationships between people. Thus, emotions may not be as intrapsychic as previously believed, and can also be perceived as context markers for an interpersonal system.

The third principle mentioned above refers to the fact that a number of different meanings can be attributed to a specific behaviour or message and that no specific attribution or interpretation can be considered more "correct" or more "real" than another. In systemic

terms, reality is subjective, and everyone creates their own meanings and reality. Becvar and Becvar (2003) argue that the manner in which a person creates their reality and attributes meaning is a function of the frame of reference, or set of assumptions they bring to bear on an event, interaction or communication. In the context of the couple's relationship, one can then expect that both partners, in terms of their respective life histories, life experiences and where relevant, different gender, may implement fairly or indeed vastly different interpretative frameworks on their own and one another's behaviour and communication. Over time, partners also co-create a shared reality or interpretative framework with specific agreed-upon meanings attributed to this reality, their interactions and communications.

In the context of parental alienation and the alienated child and post-divorce contact resistance or refusal, the child may create his /her own reality and set of assumptions regarding their rejected parent's behaviour and communication, and moreover they may be influenced by the other parents' creation of reality. As a result, the child may refuse to communicate with and or to have contact with the rejected parent. The child's refusal to communicate with their rejected parent sends a potent message, one which may be laced with indications of anger, hurt and rejection.

According to Becvar and Becvar (2003), communication can be divided into verbal or digital modes or non-verbal or analogic modes. In digital communication, messages are coded into spoken or written words. The meaning of the messages is clear from the description and ordering of the words. This characteristic is regarded as the least significant in defining the way in which a message is going to be understood.

The analogic/non-verbal mode, which is also referred to as the command aspect of a message, includes all non-verbal communication, such as tone, voice, gestures, facial expressions, body language, inflection etc. Other modes of analogic communication are hugs, kisses and other forms of contact. In addition, the way in which people dress, use make up, and present themselves, carries their analogic messages. This mode is also referred to as the relationship-defining mode of communication, as it defines the intent of the person sending the message as well as their view of the relationship.

The context also includes characteristics such as other people, places where, and time when the communication occurs. Furthermore, the context defines the meaning of the message in addition to how the people in the context are able to relate to one another, and how they understand or interpret one another's communication.

Becvar and Becvar (2003) talk about a further distinction in communication and information processing, namely the content and process level of communication. The content level refers to the verbal information of the message, and the process level refers to the combination of the non-verbal and context information of a message. When these two levels correspond, communication between two people is congruent, each person is sending and receiving clear messages, and they know where they stand with one another.

When these two levels are not congruent, communication is described as incongruent, and the person receiving the communication is faced with two conflicting messages. The content or verbal level of the message may communicate one thing, for example "Go away and leave me alone", whilst the process or non-verbal level of the message communicates something entirely different. The person receiving the message is thus placed in a difficult position, and has to choose a message to which to respond.

Becvar and Becvar (2003) describe an additional type of communication which they call "mind reading" whereby, over time, partners become familiar with the way in which the other person communicates, and they develop certain expectations from one another based on this knowledge and on past experience. This usually ends in a situation where partners believe that they know the other person well enough to know what they are thinking or feeling, without any discussion of these thoughts or feelings having taken place. Irrespective of whether or not this is the case, regardless of the partners' experiences and history with one another, each person continues to remain a separate individual with their own frame of reference and unique perspective, creating his or her own reality according to which meaning is ascribed to events and interactions. This may be particularly relevant in the context of separation and divorce, as each partner's experiences of the separation is likely to be very different, and therefore both partners' usual behaviour and communication patterns may differ considerably from what they were previously.

Based on the above information, it is evident that there is no way for one partner to 'know' what the other partner is thinking or feeling and certainly what meaning he or she will ascribe to an event or experience such as the trauma of a separation. The breakdown of trust between the parties and their disengagement from one another often leads to misconceptions and distortions, which may further disconnect and isolate the partners from one another, resulting in instability in the couple system. From a systems perspective, the focus lies not necessarily with the content of the mind reading, but with its impact on the couple's relationship.

Becvar and Becvar (2003) argue that it is important to bear in mind that the aforementioned communication impasses do not occur on a clean relational slate, but in the context of the

couple's relationship with its particular rules, boundaries and various established patterns, including an established communication pattern.

A systems perspective essentially focuses on *what* happens in the communication pattern of the couple, as well as on the communication pattern of the parent and child, in addition to the relational impact of communication traps. Misinterpretations, incongruent communications and double-bind messages can be expected to contribute to distance, disengagement, rigid boundaries and isolation between partners, and in some cases, between parent and child.

In the context of parental alienation and the alienated child post-divorce, the parent-child patterns and rules have to include a provision for meta-communication in order for the parent to be able to successfully convey to the child his/her degree of perplexity by means of the 'non-communication' rule. If however, their pre-existing patterns and rules do not make provision for meta-communication and the parent attempts to exit the communication impasse by use of meta-communication, his/her attempts may be misunderstood, and may provoke the child's anger further, ultimately exacerbating the disruption of the parent-child communication pattern (Becvar & Becvar, 2003).

2.9.2.5 Triangulation

When research into communication and interactional patterns and process in families first started, the focus was on dyadic, or two-person exchanges (Becvar & Becvar, 2003; Hoffman, 1982). Researchers and therapists soon established that triads, or three-person exchanges, were also common in pathological as well as in healthy familial interactions. Bowen (1985), suggested that the dyad is stable for as long as it is calm. However, severe or chronic stress or anxiety may destabilise the dyad to such an extent that another party may be triangulated into the relationship in order to diffuse or refocus attention away from the dyad.

According to Hoffman (1981), triangulation comes about when two people in a family dyad bring a third party into the matter in order to end the stress, anxiety, or tension that exists between them. Sharf (cited in Charles, 2001), maintains that the least differentiated person in the family is the one who is most likely brought into the conflict. Ackerman (1984) argues that triangulation barricades emotional give and take, prevents resolution of conflict, and stunts growth, especially in the so-called triangulated member. It is noteworthy that other people outside of the family system may also be triangulated into the spousal/parental dyad in order to diffuse or to redirect attention away from it.

Nichols and Everett (1986) maintain that normative developmental, as well as transitional and situational events, can also cause stress and conflict in family systems. Thus, triads are considered basic interactional building blocks in the structures of relational systems, and can be both functional and dysfunctional.

In the case of parental alienation and the alienated child, marital conflict and dissatisfaction between the parents increases the probability that children will become inappropriately involved in their parent's emotional lives (Buchanan & Heiges, 2001; Cox, Paley, & Harter, 2001; Davies, 2002; Johnston et al., 1987; Kerig, 1995, 2001b, 2005; Leon & Rudy, 2005; Margolin, Gordis & John, 2001; Stone, Buehler & Barber, 2002). Children who are required to side with one parent against the other, mediate parental disputes or listen to their parents marital problems may be triangulated, and could get caught in the middle of the conflict (Bradford & Barber, 2005; Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbush, 1991, & Kerig, 2001b).

2.9.2.6 Relationship Patterns

People have a tendency to develop habitual ways of communicating, behaving and relating to one another. According to Watzlawick et al., (1974), these patterns maintain stability in interactions, which are otherwise characterised by continuous changes over time. As a result, patterns are interactional stabilities in the context of continuous change, and therefore patterns are often presumed to represent the rules of a system. System rules express the values of the system in addition to the roles appropriate to behaviour within the system. They also provide an indication of the system's organisational structure (Becvar & Becvar, 2003).

2.9.2.7 Relationship Definition

Relationship interactional patterns are traditionally defined as complementary, symmetrical or parallel. Bevan and Jackson (in Becvar & Becvar, 2003, p.23), defined a complimentary relationship as, "one in which the interaction between two people is characterised by a high frequency of exchanges of opposite kinds of behaviour."

For example, one partner gives closeness, assistance, kindness or in some cases cruelty or abuse, and the other partner receives what has been offered. They define a symmetrical relationship as, "one in which the interaction between two people is characterized by a high frequency of the same kind of behaviour" (Becvar & Becvar, 2003, p.23). It can thus be seen that behaviour of one mirrors the behaviour of the other. A parallel interactional pattern is a combination of symmetrical and complimentary behaviours depending upon flexibility and on the requirements of the system. If the relationship is flexible, then partners can

alternate between the up and down positions and they will exchange different types of behaviour. Alternatively, they will remain in their up or down position.

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Becvar and Becvar (2003) maintain that the process of definition of a given relationship is normal, ongoing and an inherent. Given the ongoing nature of the process of defining a relationship, every interaction, behaviour or message between partners represents either a confirmation of, or a request or challenge for a different definition. Interactions, behaviours or messages requesting a different definition, or challenging the present definition, highlight the type of definition by placing this definition in question. Haley (1963), labelled these "manoeuvres" and indicated that manoeuvres essentially consist of requests, commands or suggestions that the partner do, say, think or feel something; or alternatively consist of comments on the other person's communicative behaviour.

It must be noted that manoeuvres occur in all relationships and are not symptomatic of relational problems or difficulties, but rather form part of the normal and ongoing process of finding a workable definition. Hayley (1963), suggests that problems or issues arise when one person attempts to define the relationship, or circumscribe the other person's behaviour, while at the same time indicating the opposite.

2.9.2.8 Relationship Roles

Traditional roles in families are usually allocated to positions and traditional functions such as wife, husband, child, mother, father, provider or caregiver. In the context of divorce, traditional roles have to be restructured and reassigned, which often results in partners taking on multiple roles and in some instances where there is dysfunction in the family, there might be role reversal, where children may adopt adult/parental roles.

Closely linked with the couple's relationship definition and issues of power and control, is the allocation of roles within the relationship. The couple's relationship is characterised as a fundamentally communal relationship, consisting of mutual expectations by both partners in order to provide benefits, such as support, nurture and safety (Turner, 1970). These expectations suggest that partners expect that they will fulfil certain roles for one another, and also that each partner will occupy certain roles, and therefore carry certain responsibilities in the relationship. Moreover, these expectations and roles, as well as their allocation eventually form part of the couple's relationship definition (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). Additionally, culture and socialisation also play an important role in the individual's expectations from intimate relationships, as to what kind of roles are available in these relationships, how these roles are assigned, and whether the relationship is defined as complementary, symmetrical or parallel.

Given the ongoing nature of the process of defining a relationship, every interaction, behaviour or message between partners represents either a confirmation of the working definition, or a request or challenge for a different definition. Interactions, behaviours or messages requesting a different definition, or challenging the present definition, highlight the type of definition by placing this definition in question. Haley (1963), labelled these “manoeuvres” and indicated that they essentially consist of requests, commands or suggestions that the partners do, say, think or feel something; or alternatively consist of comments on the other person’s communicative behaviour.

It must be noted that manoeuvres occur in all relationships and are not symptomatic of relational problems or difficulties, but rather form part of the normal and ongoing process of finding a workable definition. Hayley (1963) suggests that problems or issues arise when one person attempts to define the relationship, or circumscribe the other person’s behaviour, while at the same time indicating that he or she is not doing it.

Comment [GW19]: Do you mean, while at the same time not doing it? Or while at the same time presenting a grievance? Consider revising the wording for clarity

2.9.2.9 Rules

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004, p.73) argue that a family is “a cybernetically rule-governed system”. The interaction of family members typically follows organised, established patterns, based on family structure; these patterns enable each person to learn what is permitted or expected of him or her as well as others in family transactions.” A family’s rules reflect its values, and helps to set up roles that are consistent with these values, and in so doing, provide dependability and regularity to relationships within the family.

According to Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004), family rules help stabilise and regulate family functioning. They form the foundation upon which family traditions are developed. Additionally, they determine to a large degree the expectations that family members have of one another. Family rules uncover a family’s values and help to establish family roles which are consistent with these values, thereby providing dependability and regularity to relationships within the family system (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). Rules are often carried over from one generation to the next, and frequently have a strong cultural component (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004).

The authors write that “Rules may either be *descriptive* (metaphors describing patterns of interchange) or *prescriptive* (directing what can or cannot occur between members)” (2004, p. 75). Rules are thus the formulae for constructing and maintaining family relationships. For example, within a family, descriptive rules may be centred around individual privileges, rights and obligations, as determined by age, sex, or generation. Some rules may be negotiable,

while others may not be. Rigid families may have too many rules, and chaotic families too few (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2004).

According to Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004, p.75) "some prescriptive rules are stated overtly [...] most family rules are covert and unstated. They are inferences that all family members draw from the redundancies and repetitive patterns in the relationships that they observe".

2.9.2.10 Closeness and Connectedness

Relational patterns of closeness and connectedness are complex and multi-dimensional. As previously mentioned, the permeability of the boundaries can be judged by how easily they allow information to flow to and from the environment. Patterns of closeness and connectedness are another dimension on which information flow can be judged. For example, the manner in which and the nature of what couples communicate, what they share with one another and what they do not share, how they support, nurture and care for each other, how they resolve or fail to resolve conflicts and how they interact physically with one another, provide an indication of the relative connectedness and closeness of the couple in a relationship (Pistole, 1994).

Pistole (1994) argued further that difficulty with the closeness-distance regulation is a fundamental source of disagreement in all couple's relationships, and struggles in this regard are frequently a prominent theme in their relational distress. A recurring pattern found amongst couples is that one partner at some point in time needs or desires greater involvement, intimacy or closeness, whereas the other partner requires disengagement, separateness, distance or space. This becomes part of the normal ebb and flow in couple systems; in a flexible relationship, the partners are able to alternate between these positions, depending on their needs, available system resources and the requirements of the context. Consequently, partners have to negotiate or regulate a comfortable level of closeness as part of their relationship functioning and definition. When a level of closeness-distance has been reached that is mutually desirable, it will serve as part of the couple's system of parameters, rules and boundaries, and their relationship will be stable in this regard.

When a couple comes under threat, for example in the case of separation or divorce, substantial alterations in permeability of boundaries and the regulation of closeness and distance within the system and between the couple system and other systems occurs. Thus, the previously negotiated, settled and comfortable closeness-distance parameters between the partners are rendered unstable. One or both partners, but usually the partner who does not want the divorce, may manoeuvre for a change by becoming more involved than the

norm (rule) for their relationship. On the other hand, the change may also move in the opposite direction, with one or both partners manoeuvring for increased distance or space.

The closeness-distance struggle is always accompanied by strong emotions; however, in the context of trauma, trauma-related emotions add to the emotional overload of the struggle. The more acute the threat introduced by the trauma, the greater the possibility of distress in the couple (Nelson, Wangsgaard, Torgaston, Kesler & Carter-Vassel, 2002). The greater the distress within the couple system, the more they will manoeuvre to change the parameters in terms of closeness-distance regulation, and the more vulnerable their interaction becomes to highly predictable sequences of behaviour. According to Nelson et al. (2002), distressed couples frequently appear to adopt mutually exclusive stances in a pursuer-distancer pattern, when one partner approaches and pursues, and the other partner consistently distances and moves away. Pistole (1994) argues that partners can also switch stances, where the distancer suddenly manoeuvres for closeness and the pursuer then adopts the opposite stance and distances themselves from the partner. As a consequence, the couple's interactions become limited to moves associated with closeness and distance.

Based on the above research, it can be seen that in the context of divorce, the couple's closeness-distance regulation may become disturbed, as the partner seeking the divorce may manoeuvre for more distance and space, whilst the partner who does not want the divorce may manoeuvre for closeness by behaving in a more caring and nurturing manner, attempting to hold the marriage together. Alternatively, both partners, realising that the marriage is over, may manoeuvre for more distance, by becoming involved in matters outside of the marriage and the home such as work; alternatively, they may also become involved in new romantic relationships outside of the marriage.

Furthermore, in the case of divorce, a disturbance in balance of reciprocity between giving and taking of care, providing and receiving support and nurture, and the allocation of responsibility in the relationship, are all evident. This may have implications for the couple's relationship definition and their respective roles post-divorce. Concerns regarding disengagement, enmeshment, closeness and distance play out, not only within the couple system, but may also play out within the extended family system. For example, in the context of perceived threat, anxiety and fear, the parental subsystem may become over-involved or enmeshed within the sibling subsystem, and in so doing, the seeds of alienation are sown. Similarly, the extended family system, in their attempts to provide support for either one of the parental couple and for the children, may become enmeshed with one member of the couple. In some instances, when the parental system disengages and one partner leaves the marriage, that partner may become completely cut off from the sibling subsystem as

well. The above responses will not only reflect the couple's response to the divorce, but may also reflect larger pre-existing system dynamics, particularly in terms of levels of involvement, disengagement and differentiation. Accordingly, these dynamics will recursively impact upon the manner in which the couple and the larger family systems respond to and deal with the divorce and its impact.

2.9.2.11 Recursion

Bateson (1979) and Becvar and Becvar (2003), argue that according to the concept of recursion, or reciprocal causality, people and events are seen and understood in the context of mutual interaction and mutual influence. Moreover, meaning is derived from these mutually constructed relations and interactions between system members, system and events; as each defines the other through their interaction (Tomm, 1984). Information also flows back to a system which produces it. Accordingly, meaning is always context- and relationship-specific. Instead of thinking in terms of linear causality, this concept implies that we affect, and are also significantly affected by other people, or that any occurrence, behaviour or event can be both cause and effect of other occurrences, behaviours or events. As a result, people, their behaviours and events are seen as forming part of a larger recursive dance (Hoffman, 1981).

In the context of this study, this approach means that parental alienation cannot be understood as an event that only linearly impacts upon fathers and family systems, with undeniable consequences or effects. By viewing parental alienation rather through a *systemic* lens, the researcher is interested in placing the alienation process in the parents' larger relational context. In focusing on *what* and *how* questions, and on the here and now dynamics, patterns and behaviour sequences of the parent system and the parent child subsystem, the researcher aims to explore and understand reciprocal impact and influence between parental alienation and subsystem and system processes. Taking the recursiveness of systems into consideration, it is expected that just as traumatisation resulting from the separation may impact the types of behaviours exchanged between the partners, the couple's pre-divorce relationship definition may also affect the way in which couples deal with the separation and the divorce.

2.9.2.12 Feedback Processes

Becvar and Becvar (2009), argue that systems are constantly changing, pursuing goals and responding to outside forces simultaneously. They state that, "the regulatory mechanism by which the system manages to maintain a state, while at the same time monitoring its attempts to achieve certain of its goals, is referred to as feedback" (2009, p. 80). Information

about how a system is functioning is looped back from output to input in a circular manner, changing or self-correcting consequent input signals. A thriving system requires both stability as well as change.

According to Becvar and Becvar (2009), feedback loops can be described as circular mechanisms, whose function is to introduce information about a system's output back to its input, in order to change, correct and ultimately control the system's functioning and to ensure its viability. Feedback loops help alleviate excessive fluctuations, thereby serving to maintain and extend the life of the system.

Information that is fed back can either be negative or positive. Becvar and Becvar (2009) point out that these terms are not value judgements and they do not refer to the information as being good or bad.

Two types of feedback can be distinguished, namely negative feedback and positive feedback. Negative feedback, or deviation-correcting feedback, maintain the stability or homeostasis within a system and operate by keeping deviation in the system, within certain parameters (Hoffman, 1981; Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Consequently, adjustments are made for a perceived change in the system in a manner that maintains the status quo or the homeostasis of the system. Positive or deviation-amplifying feedback on the other hand, refers to those processes which acknowledge the occurrence of a change within the system, and show that this change was accepted by the system (Hoffman, 1981; Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Thus, positive feedback resets the parameters, rules, structures, values, patterns or norms of the system, allowing more variation within the system, and thus increasing the system's adaptability, creativity, growth and organisation. As the variable that was initially adjusted for reaches its parameters, the system settles back into a temporary homeostasis or balance. Ultimately, in order to ensure survival, any system constantly has to balance its tendencies towards stability and towards change, which results in a dynamic equilibrium between these processes (Becvar & Becvar, 2003; Gurman & Kniskern, 1991).

From the above, it can be seen that systems need both positive and negative feedback. Positive feedback accommodates new information and changing conditions, whilst negative feedback, when appropriate maintains the status quo.

Family systems, problems, conflict and growth are, to a certain extent, understood by taking into account the manner in which the systems' feedback processes maintain stability or allow change, and are therefore also a sign of the system's rigidity or flexibility (Becvar & Becvar, 2003).

In the context of divorce, the family system is required to adjust to several changes in order to remain functional, however, certain roles and rules need to be protected. In this study, the focus is on the feedback processes present in post divorce dysfunctional family systems such as in the high conflict family, and how changes are negotiated in order to maintain homeostasis.

2.9.2.13 Morphostasis and Morphogenesis

Morphostasis and morphogenesis are two systemic concepts which are closely linked to the feedback processes mentioned above. Morphostasis refers to the system's ability or potential to remain stable in a context of change. This is accomplished through negative feedback processes. Whereas morphogenesis describes the system-enhancing behaviour which enables growth, creativity and change of its structure, as part of the process to maintain the system's stability and functionality (Becvar & Becvar, 2003 ; Penn, 1982). Hoffman (1981) argues that these changes are achieved through positive feedback cycles. In order for a system to remain functional, there has to be a balance between morphostasis and morphogenesis. In other words, system rules will tolerate change in the rules when such change is required, and will resist change when it is inappropriate or threatens the system.

It can thus be seen from the above that morphostasis and morphogenesis refer to the level of system rules, and to change and stability in those rules. If the family mainly emphasises morphostasis over morphogenesis by sticking to rules and roles that are no longer appropriate for it, or mainly emphasises morphogenesis by allowing too many or too frequent changes, the previously-established degree of family functioning will be threatened. For example, in the case of the divorced family, the assigning of new roles may show some positive aspects for children, in that they develop independence, however a number of negative outcomes may also occur. For example, inappropriately assigned roles may result in a relaxing of the generational boundaries between parents and children, and the children may be assigned adult roles that are inappropriate, pertaining to developmental and generational roles. Such children are referred to by Minuchin (1974) as *parentified* children.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of factors surrounding divorce, and has introduced systems theory as a way of conceptualising a multidimensional process. It is evident from the preceding discussion that systemic thinking lends itself well to understanding the dynamics and interactions of both parents and children in the context of fathers' lack of contact with their children for prolonged periods of time post divorce. Through the use of a systemic model, a broader view of the relation between the parents and also of parent-child

relationships in this situation was gained. Additionally, this perspective provided an understanding of how parental alienation and parental alienation syndrome is often instigated and encouraged by a larger system such as extended family, friends, therapists, attorneys and the adversarial legal process. In order to fully understand fathers' experiences of being denied contact with their children, it was vital to have an understanding of the system in which the fathers and their respective families functioned, and how their families adjusted and reorganised post divorce. In addition, by adopting a systemic perspective, and by focusing on the dynamics and meanings in these systems, the researcher was able to move away from content issues and from linear explanations.

With regards to roles and rules, in the context of this study, there are a multitude of changes that occur in the spousal relationship post separation and/or divorce, resulting in former spouses having to relinquish their roles as marital partners as well as having to establish new rules for co-parenting. In the case of divorce, shifts in parental closeness and distance in relational areas such as affection, emotional support and parenting decisions is necessitated. The family systems model views the failure to establish relationship boundaries that clearly define the former partner as co-parent, but not as a spouse (Madden-Derdich, Leonard & Christopher, 1999) as a significant source of post-divorce conflict. Similarly, Boss and Greenberg (1984) argue that a lack of clarity regarding the roles that individuals are expected to play post divorce, hampers the ability of family system to reorganize results in increased family stress and conflict.

Having examined the context in which parental alienation and parental alienation syndrome occurs, a discussion on the nature of contact difficulties follows in the next chapter.

Comment [GW20]: Fragment, consider revising

CHAPTER 3

CONTACT AND CONTACT DIFFICULTIES POST SEPARATION AND/OR DIVORCE

“Every child needs a mother and every child needs a father. For us it’s different, we want to be with our mother, we don’t need a father.”

Kayla, aged 9.

Comment [GW21]: Where is this from?

3.1 Introduction

In the first part of this chapter, the South African legal approach to post divorce care and contact as well as the literature most appropriate to the study of contact with children post separation and/or divorce, as well as contact difficulties, will be explored. The impact of father’s involvement in their children’s lives during the various developmental phases will be reviewed. The impact of divorce of children according to developmental stages will be discussed. Children’s views about contact will be highlighted. Fathers’ altered roles post separation and/or divorce will be examined. The factors that impact upon father’s contact post divorce will be presented. The first part of the chapter will be concluded with an explanation of the effects of parental alienation on fathers and children. In the second part of the chapter, a concise historical background to contact difficulties will be presented. The terms *parental alienation*, *parental alienation syndrome* and *parental alienation disorder* will be defined and discussed. Finally, the argument for the inclusion of parental alienation disorder in the DSM-5 and International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, ICD-11, will be presented.

3.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN LEGAL APPROACH TO POST DIVORCE CARE AND CONTACT

3.2.1 Introduction

The principles governing the determination of child custody have radically changed, evolving over the years. In South African law, the **best interests of the child standard** has been used for several years in matters concerning children. The best interests of the child standard is enshrined in The Bill of Rights in section 28(2) of the South African Constitution, 1996 and in the Children’s Act 38 of 2005.

Comment [GW22]: Should this be capitalized?

3.2.2 Best Interest Definition

There is no standard definition of the 'best interest of the child'. In general, this terminology refers to the deliberation that courts undertake to make when deciding what type of services, actions and orders will best serve a child, as well determining who is best suited to take care of a child. *Best interest* determinations are usually made by taking into account a number of factors related to the circumstances of the child and the circumstances and the capacity of the child's potential caregiver(s), with the child's safety and wellbeing taken as the central overriding concern.

3.2.3. Factors To Be Considered When Determining the Best Interest Principle

The best interest principle underpins all matters pertaining to minor children. In the matter of *McCall v. McCall*, the Hon. J. King set out a comprehensive 'checklist' of salient factors, which he said should be taken into account when deciding what is best for a child (Schäfer, 2007). This checklist has been cited in a number of subsequent judgments. It is important to note that The Natural Fathers of Children Born out of Wedlock Act of 1997, prescribes a different 'checklist', which needs to be taken into account when determining access, custody or guardianship of unmarried fathers. In the application of the best interest principles in English and Australian courts, equivalent "checklists" are utilized (Schäfer, 2007).

In *McCall*, Justice King listed thirteen factors that are allied to the determination of the best interest of the child. These are:

- (a) the love, affection and other emotional ties that exist between parent and child and the parent's compatibility with the child;
- (b) the capabilities, character and temperament of the parent and the impact thereof on the child's needs and desires;
- (c) the ability of the parent to communicate with the child and the parent's insight into, understanding of and sensitivity to the child's feelings;
- (d) the capacity and disposition of the parent to give the child the guidance that he requires;
- (e) the ability of the parent to provide for the basic physical needs of the child, namely the so-called 'creature comforts', such as food, clothing, housing and the other material needs - generally speaking, the provision of economic security;
- (f) the ability of the parent to provide for the education, wellbeing and security of the child, both religious and secular;

Comment [GW23]: If this is a direct citation it requires a page number

Comment [GW24]: Meaning unclear in relation to the main clause

- (g) the ability of the parent to provide for the child's emotional, psychological, cultural and environmental development;
 - (h) the mental and physical health and moral fitness of the parent;
 - (i) the stability or otherwise of the child's existing environment, showing regard to the desirability of maintaining the status quo;
 - (j) the desirability or otherwise of keeping siblings together;
 - (k) the child's preference, if the Court is satisfied that in the particular circumstances the child's preference should be taken into consideration;
 - (l) the desirability or otherwise of applying the doctrine of same sex matching;
- any other factors that are relevant to the particular case with which the Court is concerned.

Section 7 of The Children's Act 38 of 2005 includes the above list and it also expands and elaborates on it as follows:

- (a) the nature of the personal relationship between-
 - (i) the child and the parent, or any specific parent; and
 - (ii) the child and any other caregiver or person relevant in those circumstance;
- (b) the attitude of the parents, or any specific parents, towards-
 - (i) the child; and
 - (ii) the exercise of parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child
- (c) the capacity of the parents, or any specific parent, or if any other caregiver or person, to provide for the needs of the child, including emotional and intellectual needs;
- (d) the likely effect on the child of any change in the child's circumstances, including the likely effect on the child or any separation from-
 - (i) both or either of the parents; or
 - (ii) any brother or sister or other child, or any other caregiver or person with whom the child has been living;
- (e) the practical difficulties and expense of having contact with the parents, or any specific parent, and whether that difficulty or expense will substantially affect the child's right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with the parents or any specific parent, on a regular basis;
- (f) the need of the child-
 - (i) to remain in the care of his or her parent, family and extended family; and
 - (ii) to maintain a connection with his or her family, extended family, culture or tradition;
- (g) the child's-
 - (i) age, maturity and stage of development

- (ii) gender
- (iii) background; and
- (iv) any other relevant characteristics of the child;

- (h) the child's physical and emotional security and his or her intellectual, emotional social and cultural development;
- (i) any disability that a child may have;
- (j) any chronic illness from which a child may suffer;
- (k) the need to protect the child from any physical or psychological harm that may be caused by-
 - (i) subjecting the child to maltreatment, abuse, neglect exploitation or exposing the child to maltreatment, abuse, degradation, ill treatment, violence or harmful behavior; or
 - (ii) exposing the child to maltreatment, abuse, degradation, ill treatment, violence or harmful behavior toward another person;
- (m) any family violence involving the child or a family member of the child; and
- (n) any action or decision that would avoid or minimize further legal or administrative proceedings in relation to the child.

3.2.4. Key Concepts

Several key concepts contained in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 that apply to this study will be explained briefly.

3.2.4.1 Primary Residency and Contact

The term "primary residency" is not defined in the Children Act 38 of 2005. Primary residency implies the home in which the child mainly resides. Tanya Robinson (2009, p.127) suggests that the term should be explained to children in the following manner, "Primary residency means that most of the nights you will stay and sleep at this house. Visitation to daddy/mommy means that you will go to him/her every second weekend and will see him/her for dinner twice a week."

According to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 'contact', in relation to a child, means:

- (a) maintaining a personal relationship with the child; and
- (b) if the child lives with someone else:
 - (i) communication on a regular basis with the child in person, including:
 - (aa) visiting the child; or
 - (bb) being visited by the child; or
 - (ii) communication on a regular basis with the child in any other manner including:
 - (aa) through the post; or
 - (bb) by telephone or any other form of electronic communication.

From the above it can be seen that the Act includes both direct as well indirect forms of contact. The comprehensive definition of contact as set out in the Act, illustrates the paramount importance of parent-child contact, and it is considered to be in the best interest of the child that the parent-child relationship remains *intact* and *unaltered* post separation and or divorce. It is most noteworthy that Section 35(1) of The Children's Act, criminalises the refusal to allow an individual who has parental responsibilities and rights to exercise contact. Punishment for such an offense is a fine or imprisonment for up to one year (Davel & Skelton, 2007).

3.2.4.2 Guardianship

In terms of the Children Act 38 of 2005, a person who acts as a guardian must:

1. Administer and safeguard the child's property and property interest;
2. Assist or represent the child in administrative, contractual and other legal matters; or
3. Give or refuse any consent required by law in respect of the child including;
 - consent to the child's marriage;
 - consent to the child's adoption;
 - consent to the child's departure or removal from the Republic;
 - consent to the child's application for a passport; and
 - consent to a sale of any immovable property of the child.

Parents are usually joint guardians and are called 'natural guardians'. A natural guardian has a duty to support his or her children. In the event that the natural guardian cannot carry out his or her duties, the court appoints a 'legal guardian' for the child.

3.2.4.3 Parental Responsibilities

Preceding the enactment of the new Children's Act 38 of 2005, which came into effect on 1 April, 2010, the terms custody and access referred to the parental rights. Now however, those terms have been extended to include "parenting responsibilities and rights", which incorporate the obligation to care for children, as well as the right to maintain contact with the children (Mtshengu, 2011). Of significant importance is that parental responsibilities and rights are viewed in a much broader manner than under the former paternal dispensations. The current focus is on children's right to parental care, rather than on parental powers.

Unmarried parents may enter into an agreement pertaining to parental responsibilities and rights, with the provision that certain procedures provided in the Act have specifically been followed (Mtshengu, 2011).

In the case where a dispute has arisen between the parents regarding the implementation of the agreed upon parental responsibilities and rights, parents may create a parenting plan, which stipulates what is required from both parents regarding parental responsibility and rights.

3.2.4.4 Parenting Plan

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 does not provide a definition of a parenting plan. At the sixth National Conference on Dealing With Children and Divorce, held from 1 to 2 November 2007, Advocate Chris Maree of the Family Advocate's Office Pretoria, maintained that "a parenting plan should be seen as a roadmap, which will guide the family to a workable regime..." that:

- a) ...serves the best interests of the minor child
- b) protects the reservation and strengthening of families and guarantees the participation of both parents and minor child
- c) gives effect to the constitutional rights of children as stated in Section 2(b) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005
- d) creates a rearranged family and not two armies, and makes provision for the least adversarial regime possible
- e) provides for changing circumstances
- f) ought to be unique to this particular family. (Maree, 2007).

Comment [GW25]: Add citation info here

Parents who are unable to agree upon the details of the parenting plan have to obtain the assistance of a family advocate, social worker or psychologist, or they must enter a mediation process which is facilitated by a social worker or other suitably qualified person before they are allowed to approach the court (Skelton, 2011).

In terms of section 34(1)(a) of the children's Act 38 of 2005, parenting plans have to be made in writing and they must be signed by the parties who agreed on the plan. Section 34(1)(b) makes provision for the plan to be registered with the family advocate, or it can be made as an order of court. Parenting plans may be amended or terminated (Skelton, 2011).

According to Barris, Coates, Duvall, Johnston & La Cross (2001), high conflict families benefit from a highly structured parenting plan which stipulates the drop-off and pick up dates with times and locations, specific holiday plans in addition to the attendance at events and means of communication. Stahl (2011) is in agreement with Barris et al. (2001) regarding the provision of structured parenting plans for high conflict families. Stahl (2011, p.156) states that: "For high conflict families a lack of specificity promotes conflict, and conflict breeds insecurity for children."

Comment [GW26]: Date?

Barris et al., (2001, p. 173), argues that the goal of a parenting plan for high conflict families is "disengagement between the parents with access between the children and each parent". Stahl (2011) concurs with Barris et al., (2001) in this regard, and he puts forward the argument that parallel parenting ensures that one or both parents undertake the tasks of parenting. With parallel parenting, each parent is encouraged to develop their own unique routine and structure. Parallel parenting minimizes contact between parents and results in lower levels of inter-parental conflict, which is beneficial to the children involved. Stahl (2011, p.161) argues that despite a great deal of the divorce literature focusing on the goal of cooperative co-parenting, in which parents communicate and work with one another so that they can raise their children in a cooperative manner, high conflict families "fail miserably at this task". Each parent is usually of the opinion that their own way of parenting is the only way forward, and they are frequently quite critical of the other parent's approach.

Parenting plans and contact schedules can, however, significantly impact upon non-residential fathers' roles. Ahrons and Tanner; Finley (cited in Schwartz & Finley, 2009) argue that at best, parenting plans that accompany fathers' post-divorce role, in general are not conducive to a positive and nurturing father-child relationship for non-residential fathers, and at worst, that they may marginalize or completely sever the father child relationship. Their findings correlate with those of other studies, all of which indicated that young adult children

missed their fathers and wanted more involvement with them (Arditti & Prouty, 1999; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Lauman-Billings & Emery, 2000; Marquardt, 2005 cited in Schwartz & Finley, 2009).

3.3 THE IMPACT OF FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT ON THEIR CHILDREN'S LIVES

As is evident from the above information, when parents separate, their children enter into new living arrangements with each parent, which is determined by one or both parents, or by professionals such as lawyers, social workers, psychologists or custody evaluators, or by the Family Advocate. Kelly (2006, p.35) argues that most of these living arrangements are based on “cultural traditions and beliefs regarding post separation parenting plans, visitation guidelines adopted within jurisdictions, unsubstantiated theory, and strongly held personal values and professional opinions, and have resulted since the 1960s in children spending most of their time with one residential parent and limited time with the non-resident or “visiting,” parent.

In order to ensure the continuation of the parent-child relationship, it is important for those professionals involved in determining children's living arrangements post separation to have a clear understanding of the impact of fathers' involvement in their children's lives, so that children's relationships with their fathers can be maintained, and their best interests can be served.

3.3.1 The Unique Role Fathers Play in Their Children's Lives

Hon. Judge Townsend (2003, p. 360), an American Family Court Judge, put forward the following cogent view of fatherhood: “fatherhood is about being present physically and emotionally for a child every day of the child's life, building trust in the eyes of the child... [the father] will be a role model and provide emotional support, structure and direction for the child from the beginning and continuing forever throughout adulthood.”

The image of fatherhood and the role that fathers play in their children's lives has shifted over the past three decades (Carlson, 2006). Today, fathers are more directly involved in child-rearing in a number of different ways, including nurturing and caregiving, engaging in leisure and play activities, providing moral guidance and discipline, in addition to providing the child's mother with emotional and practical support (Cabrera, Shannon, Raikes, Tamis-Le Monda & Cohen cited in Carlson, 2006).

Comment [GW27]: Meaning unclear, consider revising word order

Although fathers and mothers usually play different roles in their children's lives, several studies have shown that infants form close bonds with their parents. This finding demonstrates that although both parents play different roles, nevertheless "different" does not imply more or less important. Lamb (1975) wrote a leading article in 1975, which he called "Fathers [the] forgotten contributors to child development." This article set the stage for further exploration into the father's impact on the life of his children.

Schwartz and Finely (2009) concur with researchers, who argue that parenting is crucial to the lives of children of all ages. Children's attachment to and involvement with both parents is essential to their healthy development throughout their lifespan (Parke, cited in Swartz and Finely, 2009).

3.3.1.1 Fathers' Role During Infancy

Berk (2003, p. 425) argues that "fathers are salient figures in the lives of babies, building relationships with them shortly after birth. According to Belsky (1996); Coley and Hernandez (2006) and Cox, Fedio & Rappoport (1989,1992), all referred to in Shäffer and Kipp (2014, p. 398) fathers are "most highly involved with their infants and hold most favourable attitudes about them when they are happily married" and "when their wives encourage them to become an important part of their babies' lives (De Luccie,1995; Palkovitz,1984). Several authors such as (Braungart-Rieker, Courtney, & Garwood,1999; Frosch, Mangelsdorf & McHale, 2000 in Berk, 2003, p. 426) maintain that "a warm, gratifying marital relationship supports both parents' involvement with babies, but it is particularly important for fathers". As mentioned in section 3.5.2, in cases where there is a negative marital relationship, as in the case observed in this research, it is the researcher's hypothesis that those fathers whose marital relationships are unstable and unhappy, are vulnerable to experience problems in the parent-child relationship, as the mothers are not supportive of the father-child relationship.

Shaffer and Kipp (2014) argue that many infants form secure attachments to their father during the last half of their first year, especially if the father has a positive attitude about parenting and spends a lot of time with them. Lamb et al. (cited in Maclean, 2007), argue that infants and toddlers need regular interaction with their 'attachment figures' so as to maintain and strengthen their relationships. This implies that young children need to interact with both parents in a variety of caregiving and nurturing contexts such as feeding, playing, soothing, putting to sleep etc. in order to ensure that the relationships are consolidated and strengthened. In the absence of such opportunities for regular interaction across a broad range of contexts, infant-parent relationships may weaken. Once fathers become objects of affection, they begin to serve as a secure base from which babies will venture to explore the environment (Hwang, 1986; Lamb, 1997, in Shaffer & Kipp, 2014).

According to research conducted in several countries, mothers and fathers play different roles in their baby's life. Mothers are more likely to hold and soothe and talk to babies and take care of their physical needs than fathers. Fathers are more likely than the mother to provide playful stimulation "and to initiate unusual or unpredictable games that infants often enjoy" (Hazena, McFarland, Jacobvitz, & Boyd-Soisson, 2010; Parke & Brunel, 2006; in Shaffer & Kipp, 2014).

Pruett (cited in Warshak, 1992, p. 38) maintains that, "We know for certain that men can be competent, capable, creative caretakers of newborns." Warshak(1992, p.38) further argues that not only can fathers be competent caretakers for their infants, "the more they do so, the more their children are likely to benefit. Warm, involved, caring fathers provide children with advantages in several areas of psychological development."

Johnston et. al., (2009), highlights the central role that fathers play in supporting their infants individuation. Johnston et. al.,(2009, p. 64) state that when the child learns that he "can find connections in other relationships and need not lose his mother in the process, feelings of dependence can coexist with feelings of independence". They describe this type of intimacy as being "the cutting edge of maturation and the life-long process of learning about the self, other people, and relationships".

Bowlby (cited in Maclean, 2007) argues that extended separations from either parent with whom the child has formed a meaningful attachment is undesirable, because such separation may cause the loss or attenuation of important attachment relationships, which may result in depression and anxiety, particularly within the first two years.

A number of studies such as the studies conducted by Biller and Salter (in Warshak, 1992, p. 40) argue that "there is a great deal of data indicating that strong father-child relationships, even in infancy, can facilitate the child's intellectual competence." Clarke-Stewart (in Warshak, 1992) found that a boy's intellectual development is enhanced when his father is a good playmate, keeps him interested in his games, and provides him with lots of physically stimulating play. In contrast, a girl's intellectual development is aided by her father's provision of verbal stimulation and praise.

3.3.1.2 Father's Role in Their Toddlers' and Preschoolers' Lives.

This developmental period occurs roughly between the ages of eighteen months and five years. It is a period marked by remarkable growth in physical and intellectual development. During this phase, children start to realise that they can control their actions and that their intentions can be acted out. Rapid language development and imaginative play are the

cornerstones of this age. According to the American Bar Association (2011, p. 55) “for the most part of this developmental stage, the child’s focus is on the parents or other primary caregivers”.

Radin (in Warshak, 1992) found that the father’s influence on his child’s intellectual achievements extend beyond infancy. Toddlers with involved fathers start school with higher levels of academic readiness. Pruett (2000) argues that these toddlers are more patient and can handle stresses and frustrations associated with schooling more easily than children with less involved fathers.

Warshak (1992) found that boys who have missed out on extensive contact with their fathers in their preschool years, are generally less assertive and more dependent on their peers by the time they reach elementary school. These children are more likely to avoid physical and competitive activities, and they steer clear of contact sport such as soccer.

Stahl (2000) argues that it is during the first three years of life that the essential elements of trust and relationships are formed. For the greater part of this developmental stage, the child’s focus is on their parents or other primary caregivers. Significantly, at around eighteen months, a toddler may experience separation anxiety. Common reactions to parental separation of children of this developmental stage are more crying, clinging, irritability and sleep disturbances.

From the above information regarding toddler’s intellectual development and their common reaction to parental separation, it can be seen that this age group require predictability, consistency and routine. Thus, when divorce occurs around this time, the child feels a loss that they may not be able to fully comprehend (Stahl, 2000).

Children of this developmental stage need stability and security in their relationships with both their parents, who will maintain their routines, provide them with reassurance, nurture and warm physical contact, amongst other things.

3.3.1.3 Fathers Role in The Primary School Aged Child

At this stage, the child learns skills in social areas, in sports, music and art. During these skill-building years, the child develops a critical sense of self-competence. A parent’s physical presence and psychological support strengthens the child’s sense of mastery and accomplishment (American Bar Association, 2011). Blanchard and Biller (in Warshak, 1992) found that boys whose fathers spent a lot of time with them earned superior test scores and grades than those whose fathers were often out of town on business, or were not interested in spending much time with their sons. Horowitz, Grasso, and Boyd-Rauber (2001) argue

that a parent's physical and psychological support strengthen the child's sense of mastery and accomplishment. Furthermore, Horowitz et al. (2001) cautions that in this absence of parental support, the child may experience difficulty in progressing to the next developmental stage in later years.

Children of this age are able to make up games with unique rules. Stahl (2000) stresses the importance of these rules, as school age children focus on fairness in their lives. This sense of fairness has particular implications for children of separation and divorce, with regard to the contact they have with both their parents. These children want to please both their parents and they may often feel pressured to make their relationships with each of their parents, "as equal as possible in terms of love, affection, and time" (Horowitz et al., 2001).

Hawthorne et al. (2002) reviewed the studies of children's perspectives about family change. They found that a prominent theme in the data that they collected from children was their distress over the loss of the day-to-day contact with their non-residential parent. In their study, children who maintained good relationships with both parents reported that they coped well, in contrast to children who did not retain good relationships with both parents. According to Hawthorne et al., the nature of the parent-child relationship is a critical predictor for longer-term wellbeing.

According to Warshak (1992), one of the predominant causes of emotional problems in children of divorce is their diminished contact with their fathers. Biller (cited in Warshak, 1992) observed that warm, caring and involved fathers tend to foster very moral children and adolescents. More recently, Warshak (2007, p. 610) noted the intangible contributions fathers make to children's lives in this specific phase, such as "providing moral and ethical guidance" and "helping the child to develop and maintain [...] appropriate interpersonal relationships." Warshak argues that the axiom of child rearing is that children learn lessons more from what their parents do than they do from what they say. Koestner et al., (cited in Gould & Martindale, 2007), found that paternal involvement is the most important factor in developing empathy. Bernadett-Shapiro et al., (cited in Gold & Martindale, 2007) reported similar findings. These researchers found that fathers who participated more actively in childcare, had sons who were more empathic than sons whose fathers were less involved in providing childcare.

Warshak (2007, p. 610) makes reference to the following two studies, which highlight the importance of father's contact with their children. A Yale University study, over 26 years, found that the "one factor most predictive of empathy in adults is growing up with a father in the home." Since empathy is the foundation of successful, high quality relationships for children and for adults, the significance of a father's presence in his children's lives is

evident. A second study mentioned by Warshak is that carried out by Dr. Neil Kalter, who examined a father's contribution to his children's feelings of protection and safety, which he refers to as the "atmosphere of father-presence." (Warshak, 2007). Kalter's study found that traditional contact arrangements in which children see their father every alternate weekend are insufficient for sustaining meaningful father-child relationships.

Comment [GW28]: Citation required

Amato et al. (cited in Maclean, 2007) argue that relationships with parents continue to play a vital role in influencing children's social, emotional, personal and cognitive development into middle childhood and adolescence. Lamb (cited in Maclean, 2007) argues that children in both two and single parent families seem better adjusted when they enjoy warm, positive relationships with two actively involved parents.

As the child grows older and moves into adolescence, parents play the crucial roles of monitoring, supervising and guiding the child (Maccoby, 1992; Sroufe, 2005; Steinberg, 2001, cited in Schwartz and Finely, 2009). Despite their increased independence, adolescents still need parental supervision to ensure their safety and security.

3.3.1.4. Fathers Role in The Adolescent's Life

The major developmental task of adolescence is the development of greater independence and separation from the family (Stahl, 2000). Horowitz et al., (2001) stress the importance of both parents' physical and emotional availability to the adolescent, in order to provide comfort, support, and to guide them into adulthood. During the adolescent stage, teenagers establish a strong sense of identity, they achieve a clearer separation from their families, and they deal with emerging feelings of sexuality.

Research has shown that the influence of a father's involvement on academic achievement extends into adolescence and young adulthood (Warshak, 1992). Active nurturing fathers have been found to be associated with better verbal skills, intellectual functioning, and academic achievement among adolescents (Goldstine, 1982).

Warshak (1992) argues that a central developmental task of adolescence is the development of relationships with the opposite sex. Warshak (1992, p. 44) argues that "when a man has grown up enjoying a warm and close relationship with his father and has observed harmonious relationships between his parents, his own marriage has a better chance of succeeding". Furthermore, Warshak (1992, p. 44) argues that, "a father's contribution to his daughter's social development becomes most apparent in adolescence, when relationships with boys occupy centre stage... in general, girls who have a warm

relationship with their fathers and feel accepted by them, are more likely to feel comfortable and confident when relating to the opposite sex.”

When divorce occurs at this developmental stage, the adolescent’s sense of security and rootedness may be disrupted, as the adolescent worries about the loss of their family life (Stahl, 2000). Adolescents may experience an intense grief process following separation or divorce (Horowitz et al., 2001). Ironically, during this period of family upheaval, many adolescents receive less parental supervision and guidance. As a result, they are more vulnerable to substance and alcohol abuse, inappropriate sexual behaviour, as well as general forms of ‘acting out’ (Horowitz et al., 2001). Adolescents who feel rejected by a father may seek outside relationships as alternative sources of love and intimacy. This search can in turn increase the adolescent’s risk of teenage pregnancy and/or contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Marston (cited in Boyan & Termini, 2005) concurs with the above-mentioned research. Marston (in Boyan & Termini, 2005) found that fathers’ absence is associated with poor academic performance, higher incidence of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and suicide. Hetherington et al. (in Carlson, 2006) confirm Marston findings in their research. Additionally, they argue that adolescents who live apart from their fathers are more likely to experience depression and anxiety than those who live with both parents.

Comment [GW29]: Did he publish in the same year as the book in which he is cited above?

A considerable body of research has demonstrated that living apart from one’s biological father is associated with greater risks for adverse outcomes for children and adolescents, regardless of race, education or mother’s remarriage (Amato, Barb & Thomas, in Carlson, 2006). According to Dawson and McLanahan (cited in Carlson, 2006), the strongest effects of a lack of a father’s involvement in adolescent development are found in behavioural problems. Dawson (cited in Carlson, 2006) argues that compared to children who live with both their married biological parents, children who live apart from their fathers are, “on average more likely to be suspended or expelled from school, [and] more likely to engage in delinquent activities”.

Bearing the fore-mentioned information in mind, it can be seen that it is critical that adolescents receive appropriate and adequate support, structure and supervision from both their parents prior to and post separation and divorce.

It is generally held by researchers such as Kelly, (2007); Kelly and Lamb (2000); Pruett, (2005); Pruett, Ebling & Insabella (2004); and Warshak (2002) that children’s best interests are served when they are able to maintain frequent and consistent contact with both parents in a conflict-free environment. Notwithstanding the research evidence that supports children’s need to have healthy and meaningful relationships with *both* their parents, many

parents and children nonetheless still experience contact difficulties post separation and or divorce.

3.3. 2 Children's Views on Contact

Gindes (1998) argues that divorce can significantly undermine children's sense of security and stability. Gindes (1998) argues that post separation, the two significant people upon whom the children are dependent are no longer accessible to them, and as a result, the foundation of their world is splintered. Gindes (1998) argues that post separation, children may still need their non-residential parent to fulfill the expected and routine parental roles of monitoring homework, attending school functions, spending holidays together and providing discipline.

Early studies found that children commonly reported the loss of the non-residential parent as the most difficult aspect of their parents' divorce. These children were distressed and extremely dissatisfied with the alternating weekend access they had with their fathers. Moreover, they described their fathers as increasingly unimportant in their lives in terms of closeness, and providing discipline and emotional support (Amato et al., in Kelly, 2006). According to Kelly (2006) more recent studies have reported that about half of children and adolescents expressed a desire for more contact with their fathers, and one third wanted contact to be longer.

Seventy five percent of the young adults in the research study conducted by Braver, Ellman and Fabricius (2003), who were separated from one parent post-divorce due to the custodial or non-custodial parent living beyond an hour's drive from the custodian parent, indicated that equal time-sharing would have been the best possible post-divorce solution for them. In another study of college students conducted by Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000), who lived in shared physical custody post-divorce, reported fewer feelings of loss when compared with those who lived in sole custody arrangements.

The best possible solution from a child's perspective following parental separation and/or divorce includes parents who are co-operative, amicable and who do not display overt hostility, who can communicate with one another about matters relating to the child, and who live close enough to one another to ensure that the child can have the same friends when they spend time with either parent (Gindes, 1998). Such conditions maximize the potential for the child developing strong, meaningful and healthy relationships with both parents. Moreover, these conditions facilitate both parents' involvement in the child's school and extra-curricular activities, as well as frequent and regular contact with the non-residential parent.

Smith et al., (2003, p. 2006), found that for the most part, children in their study valued contact with their non-residential parent and viewed this contact as an important part of their lives. These children said they would have liked more frequent and longer contact with their non-residential parent. They found that only about a fifth of the children in their study experienced contact as being difficult, problematic and was “clearly a source of pain and unhappiness”.

According to Smith et al., (2006), from a child’s perspective, the quality of their relationship with their father is the key to satisfactory contact. They found that, “children valued affection, emotional support and their parents taking an interest and an active involvement in their lives in meaningful ways.” When fathers were very angry, grumpy, difficult, or disinterested in them, they frequently said that they did not want to see them. They found that children experienced contact as being difficult when they were angry with their non-residential parent, when they felt resentment about the lack of input in their lives, and being let down and feeling disappointed and rejected by their non-residential parent.

Dunn (2004) found that children who have witnessed inter-parental violence, or have been victims themselves of abuse or violence, might have mixed feelings about having contact with their fathers after separation.

3.4 The Impact of Divorce on Children According to Developmental Age

Children’s growth into adulthood is marked by several stages, physical as well social and emotional. Psychosocial development incorporates changes in thinking, understanding of self and the world, ways of relating to others, and a level of independence (Burke, McIntosh & Gridley, 2009).

According to Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, and Cherlin (1995), the reactions of children and adolescents to their parents’ divorce differ quantitatively with age. This difference is thought to be attributable to cognitive maturity, as older children and adolescents are more capable than younger children of understanding the reasons behind a marital separation. In addition, younger children are more dependent upon and are more in need of continuous, reliable care from their primary caregiver. Some researchers have identified that the limited understanding of pre-school children results in them being more vulnerable to the effects of parental conflict and family disruption Allison and Furstenburg (1989), and Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992).

Enduring parental conflict is thought to disrupt vital attachment processes in infancy and toddlerhood, with high-intensity conflict in addition to disrupted care, each separately and

jointly linked to the development of insecure and disorganized attachment styles (McIntosh, 2003). Emery (1994) argues that young children's limited cognitive capacity implies that they are unable to grasp the concept of divorce, and can thus be expected to be remarkably unprepared for the changes resulting from the separation. Moreover, young children's limited capacity to realistically assess the reasons for the divorce makes them more likely to blame themselves for the divorce and fear total abandonment (Burke, McIntosh & Gridley, 2009). Burke et al., (2009) point out that although young school-age children between 6 and 9 years are able to express their feelings better than preschoolers, they may have difficulties in talking about their fears, which they may express through behavioural problems. Children of this age may miss their absent parent regardless of the quality of their relationship with that parent before the separation. These children are likely to believe that the absent parent has rejected or stopped loving them, which is extremely distressing and can lead to low self-esteem. Pre-adolescent children at between 9 and 12 years tend to view the world in concrete terms. This often results in them seeing one parent as the 'good' parent and the other as the 'bad' parent. They may also align themselves with one parent (usually the mother or residential parent) and they blame or reject the other, which helps them to reduce their own anxiety. In addition, because these children are able to understand their parents' feelings, they may take responsibility for looking after their parents, rather than the other way around. McIntosh (2003) argues that children of this age group are able to express their feelings, and they often experience conflicted loyalties to one or other parent. At this age children are very impressionable, and they closely watch how their parents behave, and form their own views. Older children have a deeper understanding of interactions between people, and they know that conflict may mean that one or other parent will have to compromise or change.

Other studies, such as those conducted by Hetherington et al., (cited in Burke, McIntosh & Gridley, 2009) have found that pre-separation stress and divorce, and the concomitant family disruption and instability that accompanies it, has an especially harmful impact upon adolescents who have to cope with developmental challenges such as the development of a sense of identity and independence. Burke et al. (2009), point out that adolescents are better able to accurately assign responsibility for the divorce, to resolve loyalty conflicts, and to cope with stresses brought about by the divorce, such as economic changes and family role definitions. Hetherington (in Burke et al., 2009) argues that many adolescents experience premature detachment from their families, which may lead to increased involvement in a pro-social peer group, or may be associated with involvement in anti-social groups and activities with scant adult concern or monitoring.

Table 3.1 below has been adapted from the table cited in *Parenting and Child Health, Family Break Up* (1997). It summarises children’s developmental stages, common reactions to and level of understanding of parental separation, and the protective interventions parents can make in order to help their child to cope with the family’s changes.

Table 3.1 Relationship factors between parents and children for healthy post-divorce adjustment

Developmental Stage	Level of understanding	Common reactions to parental separation	Protective interventions
Infants (0- 2)	Sensitive to changes in their parents' mood and conflicts between parents Difficulty with concepts of time (e .g. hours can seem like an eternity)	Loss of appetite. Upset stomach. More fretful and anxious.	Maintain routine and ensure favourite toys are available. Remain calm, and warm. Provide safe environment.
Toddlers and preschoolers (3- 5)	Basic understanding of what separations means and that the parent has moved away. Does not understand why their parents have separated Improving sense of time. May feel responsible for separation. Uncertain about the future.	More crying, clinging and irritability. Problems sleeping, nightmares. Regression to infant behaviours. Angry, but may hold it inside. Withdrawn, and aggressive. Accident-prone. Grieving and sad. Worried about absent parent.	Maintain routines. Allow some regression. Reassurance, nurturance. Warm physical contact. Encouraging child to talk. Reinforcing that the child is NOT responsible for the divorce.
Primary (6 -10)	Begins to understand what divorce is. Knows that parents don't love one another. Knows that parents may not get back together.	Feeling deceived, sense of loss. Hoping parents will unite. Feeling rejected by parent who left. Ignoring school and friends. Worried about the future. Having somatic complaints and sleep disturbances. Attempts to recreate the parental alienation syndrome.	Encourage children to talk about feelings, but not using expressions such as "be brave". Answer all questions about what is happening, changes taking place. Watch for signs of depression. Monitor child, respecting child's privacy.
Pre-teen and adolescents (11- 18)	Understands but may not accept the separation or divorce.	Feels disillusioned and angry. Feels abandoned by parent who left. Tries to take advantage of parent's stress and lack of energy. Tries to take control of the family. Becomes moralistic. Gets involved with high-risk behaviours. Feels like s/he will never have long-term relationships. Worries about finances.	Continue to talk about each step of the separation and divorce. Maintain routines. Continue to enforce behavioural rules and household responsibilities. Remind child that parents own the problem. Do not discuss adult problems.

The above table highlights the relationship factors between parents and children that facilitate and promote children’s healthy post-divorce adjustment. Booth (in McIntosh, 2006) argues that decline in the parent-child relationship is normative as development progresses; however, it is worsened by divorce, especially in the case of father-child relationships. As previously mentioned, research has demonstrated that the quality of a father’s involvement

with their children is forecast by the extent to which fathers feel supported within the co-parenting relationship (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000; Sobelevski & King, 2005, in McIntosh, 2006).

3.5 Fathers' Altered Role Post Separation

Drawing from the literature, several critical factors that influence the development of contact difficulties in the post-divorce family were identified. These factors will be discussed hereunder.

A central fundamental issue for parents during the divorce involves the redefining of emotional boundaries and identity, especially those related to the redefinition of family roles (Burke, McIntosh & Grindley, 2009). According to Burke et al., (2009), adults frequently feel less effective in performing their parenting and other roles for a time post-divorce. Accordingly to Baum (2003), besides severing the spousal relationship, divorce also affects the couple's relationship, as well as the manner in which they fulfill their parental roles and responsibilities. Amato (2003) found that often times following a divorce there is a period of less effective parenting. As mentioned in Chapter 2, parental roles have to be reconstructed. Some divorced parents are able to establish collaborative co-parental relationships, whilst others are engaged in ongoing conflict over their children (Baum, 2003). There are yet others who not only disconnected from one another as spouses, but they also disconnect as parents. A number of studies of divorced fathers, who have disengaged from their children, have linked their disengagement to their feelings of anger, rejection and distress post-divorce (Dudley, 1991).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Carter and McGoldrick (cited in Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004) describe the life cycle of divorcing families as being divided into distinct phases. They argue that during the first phase, individuals make the decision to divorce and they plan the breakup of the system. This requires the acceptance of their inability to resolve their marital tensions sufficiently in order to enable them to continue their relationship. In addition, they are required to make viable arrangements for all parts of the system, which entails working cooperatively on matters such as primary residence, contact with the family, as well as dealing with extended family members with regard to the divorce.

During the next phase, which is the separation and divorce, parents are required to show a willingness to continue to co-parent cooperatively, as well as to jointly support their children financially. Furthermore, they have to work on the resolution of their attachment to their spouse. During this divorce phase, couples need to work on the emotional aspects of the divorce, such as overcoming hurt, anger and guilt, and mourning the loss of the intact family. They also have to relinquish any fantasies they may have of a reunion. Parents are also

required to restructure the marital and parent-child relationships, as well as realign relationships with extended family members.

During the post-divorce stage, parents are required to make flexible visitation arrangements with their former spouses and their extended family members. Additionally, they are required to rebuild their own financial resources and their own social networks. Most significantly, during this phase, parents have to find ways in which they can continue to effectively parent their children. According to Carter and Mc Goldrick (in Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004), in pathological families, the demand for change such as those required in a divorce may be met with increased rigidity, as the family stubbornly attempts to retain family rules.

Symptoms in the family and family members may develop when the family system is inflexible, unable to permit change in order to accommodate the changing needs of its members.

According to research by Coiro and Emery (cited in McIntosh, 2003), the father's role seems to be more consistently altered by marital conflict than the mother's role. Their research suggests that fathering remains more fragile and less well-defined socially than the mothering role, and as such, is subject to the disruption and disorganization brought about by marital conflict. The mother's retraction of facilitation with regards to situations that enhance the father-child relationship, is a crucial variable in this instance (Mc Intosh, 2003).

3.5.1 Fathers and Their children Post Separation and Divorce

The parent who moves out of the common home, begins a new role, "for which there is no dress rehearsal and no script" (Kelly & Wallerstein 1980, p. 123). After separation, the daily events which determined the parent-child relationship no longer exist, and the roles are awkward and new. Kelly and Wallerstein (1980, p. 123) point out that "neither child nor parent fully shares the life of the other, nor is fully absent." The parameters and limitations of the father's new role are often unclear. According to Kelly and Wallerstein (1980), fathers in their study who were accustomed to disciplining their children and setting moral standards of behaviour for them pre-divorce, and who were unable to do so post-divorce, experienced a sense of impotence and frustration. The complexities of their new roles post-divorce, was unsettling for many of these fathers.

Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1976), in a study of divorced fathers, found that fathers experienced adjustment difficulties, as well as several other additional difficulties post-divorce. As a consequence, divorced men spent more time at work, perhaps as a result of loneliness, or because of additional financial pressures; 75% of divorced fathers felt that they were functioning less competently socially, especially with women, and 19% reported sexual

difficulties; non-custodial fathers reported extremely painful and persistent emotional distress associated with having less contact with their children, and with having a diminished say in the decision-making regarding the frequency and duration of visitation.

Kelly and Wallerstein (1980) carried out a longitudinal study of the vicissitudes of the parent-child relationship after one and a half years, and again at five years post-divorce. They describe the difficulties experienced by fathers and children with regards to post separation contact as follows, “with the marital separation, father and child both face an abrupt discontinuity in the form of their daily contact. Suddenly, they must adapt their mutual feelings and needs to the narrow confines of the visit” (1980, p. 123). Kelly and Wallerstein (1980) argue that during the years following divorce, the father-child relationship depends entirely upon what can be compressed into a new and limited form. These authors conclude that, “the central hazard which divorce poses to the psychological health and development of children and adolescents is seen in the diminished or disrupted parenting which so often follows in the wake of the rupture, and which become consolidated within the post-divorce family” (1980, p. 316).

Kelly and Wallerstein (1980) found that depressed fathers in their study found it too painful to visit their children, and as a result, they often visited them irregularly or not at all. Some depressed fathers did not have the energy to mobilize themselves for the stresses and demands of their children. These fathers' roles changed from being active parents to being distant and uninvolved parents. As a result of the altered father-child relationship, their children were extremely disappointed, hurt and angry when their fathers did not arrive to make contact with them.

According to Amato and Booth, (1996) and Baum (2003), the quantity and quality of contact between children and non-residential parents usually diminishes over time due to several factors, for example when parents remarry or relocate.

3.5.2 Family Rules Post-Separation and Divorce

Rules that originated in the intact family may or may not be duplicated in the divorced family, thus as the family adjusts to their new and changed structure, the children are most likely to experience different rules in each household. For example, children who live primarily in one household during the week, may experience more rigid rules and routines, whilst they may encounter more flexible rules and routines whilst living in their other parent's household primarily on weekends.

Hetherington, Bridges and Insabella (1998) found that non-custodial fathers usually relaxed the application of rules and consequences for inappropriate behaviour and they generally became more permissive after divorce. Fathers' apparent relinquishing of their role as disciplinarian may perhaps be an attempt to prevent children from resenting or rejecting them. Amato and Gilbreth (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of 63 studies in which they addressed the issue of non-residential fathers and children's wellbeing. They point out that fathers who had limited contact with their children were fearful that their relationships with their children were tenuous; hence, they were often reluctant to set firm rules or to discipline their children. Kelly (2007) argues that placing fathers into the altered role of a 'visitor' undoubtedly does not provide children and adolescents with the fathering they need or want.

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The Children's Act 38 of 2005 makes provision for and encourages co-parenting. Co-parenting enables children to spend a significant amount of time with each parent, which means that the tasks of childrearing, not only the costs, are shared by both parents. All major decisions are made jointly, enabling both parents to actively participate in all aspects of children's lives, and to play an active role across a broad range of parenting functions including the role of disciplinarian. It can be seen that the Children's Act 38 of 2005 makes provision for fathers to continue to play the roles that they played during the course of marriage post-separation.

3.6 Factors That Impact Upon Post-Separation and/or Divorce Parent- Child Contact

3.6.1 Post-Separation and/or Divorce Co-Parental Relationship

As mentioned in point 3.3.1.2, parents' relationship post-separation and divorce play a significant role in the degree to which the father as the non-residential parent has involvement with his children, as well as the frequency of contact he has with them. Researchers such as Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) and Pleck (1997) (in Kelly, 2006) argue that maternal attitudes towards parental involvement during the marriage - and even more so post-separation - play a critical role in father's involvement with their children.

It is well understood that mothers can be influential gatekeepers of paternal involvement through their attitudes and behaviours, which may either facilitate or limit fathers' opportunities to parent and to establish close relationships with their children (Kelly, 2006). Madden-Derdich and Leonard (2001) concur that maternal support for fathers and a co-operative parental relationship between ex-spouses are crucial factors in ensuring continued parental involvement in children's lives.

According to Fagan and Barnett (in Kelly, 2006) the more that mothers perceive fathers as being incompetent, the more they intensify their gatekeeping efforts post-divorce. Furthermore, fathers who pay higher amounts of maintenance are perceived as being more competent than fathers paying lesser amounts, and in these instances there is less gatekeeping.

In Chapter 2, Ahrons' four post-divorce parenting typologies were discussed. Kelly (2005) concurs with Ahrons that parents be grouped according to their post divorce co-parental relationship. Kelly (2005) argues that post-divorce parents can generally be divided into three types of co-parental relationship, along the dimensions of conflict, co-operation and communication post-divorce. Kelly argues that approximately 25-30% of parents have a co-operative co-parental relationship, which is characterized by mutual support and co-ordination of children's activities and schedules. More than half adopt parallel parenting, which is characterised by emotional disengagement, low conflict, and minimal communication about their children. Albeit that this is less optimal for children than co-operative parenting, they nevertheless thrive in these arrangements, particularly when the quality of parenting in each home is adequate and nurturing. The remaining 20% of parents described by Kelly (2005) have continuing conflicted relationships with poor communication and low levels of, if any, cooperation. It is in these high conflict families that alienation flourishes and contact difficulties occur.

3.6.2 Dysfunctional Relationship Boundaries Post-Separation and or Divorce

Separated and divorced partners have to renegotiate their relationship with one another, because the separated or divorced family remains a family nonetheless. Although it is not defined by a shared residence, it is defined by shared relationships. As evidenced in Chapter 2, former spouses have to establish new rules for co-parenting in their new family structure, whilst simultaneously having to give up their former roles as marital partners. These tasks necessitate shifts in parental closeness and distance in areas such as affection, emotional support and child-rearing decisions (Madden-Derdich, Leonard & Christopher, 1999).

The assertion that former spouses' failure to establish relationship boundaries that clearly define each former spouse as a co-parent but not a spouse, is a significant source of post-divorce conflict. Madden-Derdich et al. (1999) argue that parents' inability to successfully renegotiate relationship boundaries is influenced by conflicts associated with intimacy and power. Emery (1994) suggests that intimacy refers to the extent of the emotional intensity that exists in the former spousal relationship, and power refers to the control that individuals perceive themselves to have over their own lives, particularly in aspects of parenting and in financial roles. In addition, Emery (1994) maintains that post-separation and divorce

boundary conflicts typically manifest themselves in conflicts over child-related concerns, such as the amount and frequency of contact that fathers have with their children.

3.6.3 High Conflict Co-Parental Relationship Post-Separation and or Divorce

McIntosh and Deacon-Wood (2003) suggest that a level of post-divorce conflict is a normal adjunct to the complex task of deconstructing the beliefs systems connected with marriage, and making sense of what has happened. Conflict which normally occurs during the divorce process is usually temporary, often rational and adaptive. In contrast to this, the authors write that ongoing conflict “is associated with ambiguous boundaries, attachment disparity and personality disorders that ensure egocentric needs are prioritised, and an inability to compromise, communicate and use appropriate coping skills ” (2003, p.109).

Stahl (2011) agrees with both Ahrons (1994) and Kelly (2005) and argues that in low conflict families, parents are able to resolve their financial, property and child custody and access issues. These parents get along with one another, are respectful towards one another in front of the children and they rarely go to court. Stahl (2011, p.149) argues that these parents are able to “seamlessly integrate the children’s lives” despite them being shared between the two households. In contrast, high conflict parents often regard court orders as only suggestions (Bruniers, cited in Stahl , 2011) and have difficulty in following these orders. These parents hold very negative and derogatory views of one another which they often share with their children.

Kelly and Johnston (2001) cite ongoing parental conflict as the main protagonist in the creation of the alienated child. They emphasise particular risks that occur when children are used in the expression of marital conflict, pulled into the marital conflict as “major players in a Greek chorus...The intensity of the conflict, its burdensome presence for one or more years, the polarization of extended family, larger community and the failure of parents to address their children’s needs combine to create intolerable anguish, tension, and anger for children” (p. 256). Mc Intosh (2003, p.74), argues that “one psychological resolution for the child is to diminish the feeling of being torn apart by rejecting the ‘bad’ parent and ceasing contact.”

Most recently, Johnston (2009, p. 5) has argued that high conflict families “remain distrustful of one another; they engage in frequent arguments and undermine and sabotage each other’s role as parent.” This can include bad-mouthing the other parent in front of the child, having the child give messages to the other parent, making unilateral decisions with respect to their children, and the refusal of contact (Greif et al., cited in Johnston, 2009).

Johnston (2009) states that domestic violence is a feature in a high percentage of families that litigate about custody. According to Johnston (2009), these parents have difficulty focusing on their children's needs as separate from their own. As a result, children of these parents witness considerable verbal abuse and physical aggression between their parents. Children who witness domestic violence between their parents may avoid contact with their non-residential parent, who is often the father.

Drawing on the literature, it can be seen that high levels of ongoing parental conflict result in less paternal involvement, more difficulties in the father-child relationships, and a deterioration in father-child relationships over the long term (Ahrns & Tanner et al., cited in Kelly, 2006).

3.6.4 Parental Attunement and Emotional Availability

Some parents do not connect with their children as they are emotionally not available to form close attachments to them. Other parents do not connect with their children, because they are physically unavailable to them and spend a limited time with them. Parents who do not establish meaningful relationships with their children during the marriage have little to fall back on after the divorce. The core parental functions such as parental attunement or parental reflective functioning and emotional availability demonstrate each parent's ability to provide the child with an available emotional relationship, or 'emotional scaffolding' which can ameliorate the potentially toxic impacts of divorce (Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch, 1996; Katz and Gottman, 1997). Emotionally overwhelmed parents who are preoccupied with ongoing battles with their former partner, are compromised by the limited emotional capacity they have in order to integrate change and stress in healthy manner (Wolchick, Wilcox, Tein & Sandler, 2000). According to McIntosh (2003a, p. 14) the ongoing parental disputes compromise the parental capacity for attunement to the child and has "demonstrable corrosive effects on the developmental pathways of young children."

In the following section, the terms Parental Alienation (**PA**), Parental Alienation Syndrome (**PAS**) and Parental Alienation disorder (**PAD**) will be defined. This will be followed by a discussion on a historical overview to contact difficulties. Finally, the argument for the inclusion parental alienation disorder in the DSM-5 and International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems ICD-11 will be presented.

3.7 CONTACT DIFFICULTIES

The literature is increasingly referring to problems that arise with post-divorce child-parent relationships as “contact difficulties”. Freeman and Freeman (2003, p. 71) have defined contact difficulties as “a complex set of circumstances that negatively affects the child-parent relationship, whether originating with the residential parent, the non-residential parent, child, or a combination of two or more of these people.” The term contact difficulties includes but is not limited to parental alienation and alienating behaviours engaged in by a parent.

3.7.1. Parental Alienation

Darnall (1998, p. 4) defines parental alienation as “any constellation of behaviours, whether conscious or unconscious, that could evoke a disturbance in the relationship between a child and the other parent.”

Bernet (2010, p. xvii) define parental alienation more broadly. According to these authors, parental alienation is “a mental condition in which a child, usually one whose parents are engaged in a high conflict divorce, allies himself or herself strongly with one parent (the preferred parent) and rejects a relationship with the other parent (the alienated parent) without legitimate justification.”

3.7.2 Parental Alienation Syndrome

Gardner (1985, p. 61) defined parental alienation syndrome (PAS) as follows:

The parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is a disorder that arises primarily in the context of child custody disputes. Its primary manifestation is the child's campaign of denigration against a parent, a campaign that has no justification. It results from the *combination* of a programming (brainwashing), parent's indoctrination, and the child's own contribution to the vilification of the target parent. When true parental abuse and/or neglect are present, the child's animosity may be justified, and so the parental alienation syndrome explanation for the child's hostility is not applicable.

The above definition of parental alienation syndrome refers to a phenomenon whereby a child displays several characteristics and behaviours such as weak, frivolous or absurd rationalization for deprecation of the parent, lack of ambivalence and absence of guilt, that have been said to make up a syndrome. In addition, the term parental alienation syndrome implies the presence of a causative factor, namely the alienating parent (Bernet, 2011). It is of import to note that whilst there has been acceptance of the term parental alienation, there

has however been disagreement and debate regarding the use of the term *parental alienation syndrome*.

In summary, parental alienation refers to the strong alliance between one parent and rejection of a relationship with the other parent, without legitimate justification, whereas parental alienation syndrome is a more complex concept, which characteristically refers to a child who displays some or all of the eight characteristic behaviours described by Gardner (1992a). These behaviours will be discussed in greater detail further on in this chapter.

A further difference between parental alienation and parental alienation syndrome is that parental alienation syndrome as a rule includes the idea that one of the parents has actively influenced the child to fear and avoid the rejected parent. Bernet et al.,(2010) argue that parental alienation may occur in the context of a high conflict divorce, where parental fighting may result in the child aligning themselves with one parent in order to get out of the middle of the battle, without any indoctrination by the favoured parent.

From the above, it can be seen that parental alienation refers to the same group of children. Bernet et al.,(2010) describe parental alienation syndrome as a subset of parental alienation. They argue that a considerable number of children who experience PA also manifest some or all of the eight characteristic behaviors of *parental alienation syndrome*.

3.7.3 Parental Alienation Disorder

Bernet,Von Boch-Galhau, Baker,and Morrison (2010)proposed that the term parental alienation disorder or parental alienation relational disorder be included in the DSM-5 and ICD-11.

Bernet et al.,(2010, p. 147) propose that

...the essential feature of parental alienation disorder is that a child, usually one whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict divorce, allies himself or herself strongly with one parent (the preferred parent) and rejects a relationship with the other parent (the alienated parent) without legitimate justification. The primary behaviour symptom is the child's resistance or refusal to have contact with the alienated parent. The behaviour in the child [...] include[s] a persistent campaign of denigration against the alienated parent and weak, frivolous, and absurd rationalisations for the child's criticism of the alienated parent. The following clinical features frequently occur [...] lack of ambivalence refers to the child's belief that the alienated parent is all bad and the preferred

parent is all good. The independent thinker phenomenon [...] [where] the child proudly states that the decision to reject the alienated parent is his own [...] Reflexive support of the preferred parent against the alienated parent [...] [where] the pattern of the child immediately and automatically takes the preferred parent's side in a disagreement [...] The child may manifest borrowed scenarios [...] the child's animosity toward the alienated parent may spread to that parent's extended family.

3.7.4 The Effects of Alienation on Children

The literature consistently demonstrates that alienated children are at risk for emotional distress and adjustment difficulties (Burrill,2006a; Cartwright,1993; Clawar & Rivlin,1991; Dunne & Hendrick,1994; Gardner, 1992a, 2006; Garity & Barris,1994; Kelly & Johnston, 2001; Kopetski,1998a,1998b; Johnston, 2003; Johnston and Roseby, 1997; Johnston, Walters & Olesen, 2005c; Lampel, 1996; Lee & Olesen, 2001; Loewenstein, 2006; Lund,1995; Racusin & Copans,1994; Rand, 1997a, 1997b; Rand, Rand & Kopetski, 2005; Stahl, 1999; Stoltz & Ney, 2002; Turkat, 1994, 1999 ; Waldron and Joanis, 1996; Walsh and Boe,1997; Wallerstein & Blakslee,1989; Ward & Harvey,1993; Warshak, 2010a).

Whist the degree of emotional damage to the child varies depending on the severity of the alienation and the age and the vulnerability of the child, the impact is never benign (Stahl, 2011). Findings from clinical observations, case reviews as well as qualitative and empirical studies unfailingly report that alienated children may exhibit:

- poor reality testing
- illogical cognitive operations
- simplistic and rigid information processing
- inaccurate or distorted interpersonal perceptions
- disturbed and compromised interpersonal functioning
- self-hatred
- low self esteem
- pseudo-maturity
- gender identity problems
- poor differentiation of self (enmeshment)
- aggression and conduct disorder
- disregard for social norms and authority
- poor impulse control
- emotional constriction, parental alienation syndromesivity or dependency

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- lack of remorse or guilt

3.7.5 The Effects of Alienation on Adult Children

Results from Amy Baker's (2005a, 2005b, 2007) qualitative retrospective studies of adults alienated as children are grave and thought provoking. A considerable number of these adults suffered from low self-esteem, having internalized the negative characterisation by the alienating parents of their rejected parent. Additionally, self-hatred, self-blame and guilt for abandoning younger siblings were observed. A staggering seventy percent of the subjects revealed that they had suffered significant episodes of depression. A third of the sample reported using drugs and alcohol to cope with painful feelings of loss and parental conflict, which led to serious substance abuse.

Participants in Baker's study reported that their memories and experiences of their rejected parent did not match those painted by their alienating parent. This resulted in them doubting their own perceptions and feelings about themselves and others. They also experienced difficulty trusting that anyone would ever love them. Two thirds of these respondents had been divorced once, and one quarter more than once. Additionally, Baker's respondents reported that they became angry and resentful about being emotionally manipulated and controlled, which ultimately negatively affected their relationship with their alienating parent. Approximately half of Baker's sample revealed that they had become alienated from their own children.

Baker (2005) recounted that whilst most adults clearly remembered *claiming* during childhood that they either hated or feared their rejected parent and had some negative feelings towards that parent, they did not want their rejected parent to walk away from them. These respondents stated that as children, they secretly hoped someone would realise that they did not mean what they said. It is noteworthy that Clawar and Rivlin (1991) also reported that 80% of alienated children in their study wished that the alienation would be uncovered and stopped.

Additionally, Baker's (2005) results demonstrated that more than half of those alienated remained disconnected from their rejected parent for more than 22 years, whilst the alienation lasted for at least 6 years in all of the cases. These findings are relevant to the debate over how much weight should be given to children's preferences, and whether or not their wishes should be paid attention to when making decisions regarding whether they wanted to have contact with their fathers.

3.8 A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF PARENTAL ALIENATION

Parental alienation was first described in legal cases approximately 200 years ago and in the mental health literature, approximately 60 years ago (Bernet, 2010). A number of qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted, where researchers identified a group of children of divorce who became alienated from one parent for no apparent reason. In these cases, the alienation was not due to abuse or neglect by the rejected parent.

In 1945, psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, made the first reference to contact difficulties and parent's alienating behaviours in the context of divorce, when he wrote about parents who defend themselves against narcissistic injury by fighting for custody of their child and by denigrating their co-parent. Reich (in Bernet, 2010, p.19) wrote that

rescuing the child is regularly [is] just a pretext and unfulfilled motive, as the result shows. The true motive is revenge on the partner through robbing him or her of the pleasure in the child [...] the lack of consideration for the child expresses itself in that his or her love for the other parent is not taken into account [...] the result is harm to the child, the motive is revenge on the partner and his/her destruction, as well as control over the child, and not love for the child.

In 1953, Louise Despert, a pioneer child psychiatrist, in her book *Children of Divorce*, referred to various aspects of parental alienation. She wrote, "It is a sharp temptation for the parent who remains with the child to break down their love for the one who has gone. As we have said several times before, this may be a temporary relief to the parent who does so, but it can only harm the child. It only keeps alive the bitterness and misunderstanding which cause parents and children so much pain in divorce (Despert in Bernet, 2010, p. 20).

Mavis Hetherington has studied divorced parents and their children since the early 1970s. Although she did not use the term, "parental alienation" in her long-term study named the Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage, or in her study called the Nonshared Environment Study, she nevertheless described some aspects of the phenomenon (Bernet, 2010). For example, Hetherington stated:

As obviously destructive as conflict is to all involved in this dilemma, it was surprising to discover that six years after divorce, 20 to 25 percent of our couples were engaged in just such conflictual behaviour; former spouses would make nasty comments about each other, seek to undermine each other's relationship with the child, and fight openly in

front of the child. Aside from being damaging, constant put-downs of the other parent may backfire, producing resentment and a spirited defense of the criticized parent by the child [...] conflictual co-parenting distresses children and undermines their well-being and it makes parents unhappy too (Hetherington & Kelly in Bernet, 2010).

Some thirty years later, psychologists Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) made reference to an “unholy alliance between a narcissistically enraged parent and a particularly vulnerable older child or adolescent, who together waged battle in efforts to hurt and punish the other parent” (in Fidler & Bala, 2010). Johnston and Roseby (1997) recorded that these “unholy alliances” are a subsequent symptom of a failed separation-individuation process in vulnerable children, who have been exposed to pervasive dysfunctional relationships during their early years.

3.8.1 Parental Alienation Syndrome According To Richard Gardner

In 1985 forensic psychiatrist Richard Gardner first described *parental alienation syndrome* as a disorder that occurs in children whose parents are involved in custody disputes. He later presented the following composite definition of parental alienation syndrome:

The parental alienation syndrome (Parental Alineation Syndrome) is a childhood disorder that arises almost exclusively in the context of child-custody disputes. Its primary manifestation is the child's campaign of denigration against a parent, a campaign that has no justification. It results from the combination of a programming (brainwashing), parent's indoctrinations, and the child's own contributions to the vilification of the target parent. When true parental abuse and/or neglect is present, the child's animosity may be justified, and so parental alienation syndrome explanation for the child's hostility is not applicable (2002, p. 95).

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At first, Gardner branded the mother as the parent who most commonly engaged in alienating behaviours. He estimated that mothers were responsible for ninety percent of cases of alienation (Gardner, 1992). He later changed his position and he acknowledged that fathers are as likely as mothers to engage in the alienation process (Gould & Martindale, 2007).

Gardner (2002) argues that in instances of parental alienation syndrome, the alienating parent programs the child's ideas and ways of thinking and behaving directly, which may be inconsistent with the child's previous experiences. According to Gardner (2002), most often

children add their own representation to the campaign of denigration. The programming parent reinforces and welcomes the child's contributions, resulting in further contributions made by the child. The ultimate result of such behaviour is an upward-spiraling campaign of denigration (Gardner, 2002). This upward spiral is described by Schuman (1986) as a "positive feedback loop" (Gardner 2002, p.96).

Gardner (1992) argues that parental alienation syndrome consists of the following eight characteristics:

- I. A campaign of denigration in which the child relentlessly declares their hatred and fear of the target parent. The child withdraws from physical and telephonic contact with their parent. The child may speak indirectly to the target parent and he/she may reject any gifts from the target parent. Gardner suggests that the child's rejection of the target parents gifts could be due to the child having learnt to reject anything associated with the target parent and in so doing avoid becoming 'contaminated' by them. A further possible explanation for the child's rejection of the target parent's gifts is that by accepting the gifts, the child may feel pleasure, which may anger the alienating parent.
- II. Exhibiting inconsistent, illogical and absurd rationalisations for devaluing the target parent.
- III. The child's use of phrases, terms or scenarios that do not reflect the child's experience or developmental level.
- IV. The child's lack of ambivalence toward either parent. The child often perceives the target parent as all bad and the alienating parent as all good.
- V. Another aspect of **Parental Alienation Syndrome** is the allegation on the part of the alienating parent that the decision to reject the target parent is the child's. The child may frequently invoke phrases and concepts about the target parent that duplicate the alienating parent's statement, revealing both the degree of parental influence and the child's lack of awareness of that influence.
- VI. The sixth and seventh components of the syndrome appear to be directly related to children's psychological splitting of parents into good parent and bad parent. **Parental Alienation Syndrome** children provide unconditional and unquestioned support to the alienating parent. The alienating parent may become idealized as one who can do no wrong or as the weaker of the two parents, who needs the children's protection from the bad target parent. There is also a significant lack of guilt or feelings of loss about the target parent. Children's empathic response is an important step in normal child development. Children with **Parental Alienation Syndrome** often demonstrate a lack of empathy toward the target parent.

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- VII. The child's use of borrowed scenarios for example: "Daddy's girlfriend is a slut."
- VIII. Finally, the feelings and beliefs about the danger inherent in a relationship with the target parent are generalised to include extended family members, and sometimes friends and neighbours associated with the target parent.

Gardner avers that empowerment of children is a prominent feature evident in all eight symptoms. He contends that the alienating parent empowers the child by encouraging them to disrespect and to vilify the target parent. He argues that the programming parent writes the scripts which the child repeatedly recites. He further maintains that the programming parent is well aware that they need to give the child frequent "booster shots" in order to sustain the campaign of denigration (Gardner, 2002, p. 6).

Gardner (2002) adds that the situation is compounded if the alienated parent has a parental alienation syndromesive personality, or if the alienated parent becomes parental alienation syndromesive for fear of making the situation worse, should they try and correct the child's behaviour. Gardner argues that there are a number of extra-familial factors, such as the legal system, which further empower children.

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Gardner states that although the diagnosis of *parental alienation syndrome* is based on the symptoms observed in the child, the problem is however a family problem involving one alienating parent, one target parent and one or more children who exhibit the symptomatology (Gardner, 2002). Gardner (2002), stresses that the term *parental alienation syndrome* is *only* applicable when the target parent has *not* behaved in a manner that may remotely justify the degree of vilification demonstrated by the children. In classic cases of parental alienation syndrome, the target parent is usually a normal loving parent who at worst showed signs of minimal impairments in their parenting. Gardner emphasizes that it is the exaggeration of these minor flaws and deficiencies that is the hallmark of *parental alienation syndrome*. In the event that bona fide abuse has occurred, the child's responding alienation is justified and the diagnosis of *parental alienation syndrome* is not appropriate.

Gardner described three degrees of parental alienation syndrome, namely: mild, moderate and severe. The following table provides a differential diagnosis of the three different types of *parental alienation syndrome* and it includes the primary symptomatic manifestations of the three different stages as well as additional differential diagnostic considerations.

Table 3.2 : Differential diagnosis of the three types of Parental Alienation Syndrome

		MILD	MODERATE	SEVERE
PRIMARY SYMPTOMATIC MANIFESTATION	The campaign of the denigration	Minimal	Moderate	Formidable
	Weak, frivolous, or absurd rationalizations for the deprecation	Minimal	Moderate	Multiple absurd rationalizations
	Lack of ambivalence	Normal ambivalence	No ambivalence	No ambivalence
	The independent-thinker phenomenon	Usually absent	Present	Present
	Reflexive support of the alienating parent in the parental conflict	Minimal	Present	Present
	Absence of guilt	Normal guilt	Minimal to no guilt	No guilt
	Borrowed scenarios	Minimal	present	present
	Spread of the animosity to the extended family and friends of the alienated parent	Minimal	Present	Formidable, often fanatic

Source: Gardner, 2001, p. 62

Table 3.2 illustrates how parental alienation occurs on a continuum of severity ranging from mild parental alienation to severe parental alienation syndrome. In mild cases of parental alienation, the alienating parent uses subtle means either consciously or unconsciously to turn the child against their other parent. The alienating parent appears to be outwardly supportive of the child visiting their other parent and having a relationship with them,

however they will teach their child/ren to disagree with their other parent and to behave in a disrespectful and antagonistic manner towards them.

According to Gardner, in most cases of mild parental alienation syndrome, the children suffer minimal consequences, and they will display only a few of the eight symptoms. They may experience a slight increase in loyalty conflicts or anxiety; however their view of their other parent is not sullied. Neither Gardner nor the other proponents of parental alienation syndrome state just how many symptoms need to be present in order for the diagnosis to be made. Gardner does not recommend any court-ordered intervention for mild parental alienation syndrome. (Walker, Brantley & Rigsbee, 2004).

Gardner (2002) avers that with time, and as the syndrome progresses from mild, to moderate, and then to severe, the hostile and antagonistic behaviour becomes converted and expanded into an unmitigated campaign of denigration.

Gardner describes moderate *parental alienation syndrome* as occurring when children experience more programming and more of the eight symptoms than occurred in the mild *parental alienation syndrome* category. Once again he does not however specify how many of the symptoms need to be present nor the time period in which they should be observed (Walker, 2004). The terms “programming” and “brainwashing” are attributable to Gardner, and are indicative of his metaphysics, which appear to be behaviouristic.

Gardner points out that children who have moderate parental alienation syndrome, will resist visitation. He recommends that if the programming parent is likely to stop their brainwashing activities, then the court should award them primary custody. In the event that the parent continues with their brainwashing campaign against the target parent, Gardner recommends that custody be assigned to the other parent. Gardner further recommends that a court-appointed therapist should work with the child in order to remediate the child's relationship with their alienated parent (Walker, 2004).

In cases of severe parental alienation syndrome, the alienating parent brainwashes and programs the child against the alienated parent. The alienating parent engaged in severe parental alienation often experiences feelings of abandonment and betrayal, which manifest as anger and bitterness towards the other parent. The alienating parent and the child jointly and consistently denigrate the other parent and behave in a hostile manner towards them. According to Gardner (2002) children exposed to severe parental alienation syndrome will exhibit all or many of the eight symptoms described. In addition, they will all too often be inflexible in their hatred and rejection of the target parent. These children will refuse to visit

the target parent and may even make false allegations that they have been neglected or abused by the target parent (Rand, 1997a).

Gardner (2002) recommends that children in the severe alienation category should be removed from their programming parent's home and placed in a 'transitional-site program' until such time as they are ready to be transferred to the target parent's home. As in the case of moderate parental alienation syndrome, Gardner recommends that court appoint a therapist for the child.

According to Gardner (2002), parents who induce parental alienation syndrome in a child are perpetrating a form of child abuse. More specifically, it is a form of emotional abuse which may have lifelong adverse consequences for the child. It may disrupt and even totally destroy the psychological bond between parent and child and in so doing alienate the child from a loving parent, and at worst, may also induce a lifelong psychiatric disturbance for the child. He purports that the victimized parent is also a victim of emotional abuse. Gardner (2000) reports that he has observed target parents exhibiting psychotic deterioration and even suicide.

Gardner (2002), contends that that once the custody battle is over the 'brainwashing' and 'programming' will come to an end. Gardner's critics argue that since most mental health syndromes don't usually change when situations change, it is questionable as to whether these cases were ever in the first instance representing parental alienation syndrome (Walker, 2004).

When the term Parental Alienation Syndrome was initially introduced by Gardner, it was hailed with enthusiasm by both mental health and legal professionals. Since its inception, considerable debate has been generated, and much criticism of parental alienation syndrome has been leveled against it.

Several researchers such as Dunne and Hendrick (1994); Kopetski, Rand & Rand 2006); Rand (1997,1997b); Warshak (200b, 2003) and Bernet et al.,(2010), support the concept of *parental alienation syndrome*. Others have challenged the validity of the term.

3.8.2 Critique of Gardener's parental alienation syndrome

The main criticisms of parental alienation syndrome as cited in the literature appears to be focused on the following four issues:

1. The appropriateness of the terminology
2. The derivation and definition of the concept

3. Evidentiary criteria for diagnostic and legal purposes
4. Clinical and legal remedies

The first criticisms of Gardner's parental alienation syndrome emerged in 1996, when the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family examined the role of violence in custody decisions. They concluded that parental alienation syndrome was being used by abusive fathers in order to obtain custody of their children. Battered mothers who protected their children from abusive fathers were labeled as alienators, and thus courts awarded custody of these children to their abusing father, who made claims of parental alienation syndrome. (Gould & Martindale, 2007).

Zirogiannis (2001, p. 334) cautions the judicial system to view Gardner's parental alienation syndrome theory with "heightened skepticism". He maintains that Gardner's research methods and techniques are questionable, as they lack predictive value, validity and reliability.

Zirogiannis also criticizes Gardner's theories for lacking professional peer review. Walker et al. (2004) argue, in a similar vein to Zirogiannis, that parental alienation syndrome fails to meet scientific standards required to be considered a theory, and should therefore not be admissible as evidence in court.

Williams (2001) argues that in his view, the concept of parental alienation syndrome faces substantial difficulty if examined critically in terms of principles of admissibility. He cautions that the "admissibility of parental alienation syndrome and/or parental alienation should *not* be benignly taken for granted" (2001, p. 278) and should therefore not be admissible in court.

Walker, Brantley and Rigsbee (2004) caution researchers and practitioners to examine Gardner's parental alienation syndrome theory with skepticism. They further advise researchers and practitioners to question the wisdom of integrating it into their testimony or evaluations. They caution that, in addition to Gardner's theories and his tests lacking in reliability, his work has also not been subjected to professional peer review, as his publications have been made available through his own publishing company.

From the above, it is evident that Gardner's work is historically important, whilst at the same time being controversial, both at the time it was published and today. There are a number of researchers who support Gardner's parental alienation syndrome phenomenon and there are others who reject it outright.

Janet Johnston (1993) reported on two studies “of divorcing families who represent the more ongoing and entrenched disputes over custody and visitation.” Amongst the 175 children who participated in the study, Johnston (1993) identified that some children demonstrated a “strong alignment” with one parent and they rejected the other parent. Johnston (1993) found that these children often refused to visit, communicate or have anything to do their rejected parent. Johnston (1993) points out that a child’s reluctance to have contact with their non-residential parent is manifested in a wide range of observable behaviours. The child may verbalize or demonstrate through gestures or actions that they are reluctant to visit their non-residential parent. Such resistance may manifest only at transition times, or it could also involve intermittent complaints about not wanting to have contact. In extreme cases, children may adamantly refuse to have contact with their non-residential parent.

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Johnston and Rosenby (1988) in a book chapter entitled “Children of Armageddon”, have described how parental alienation comes about (Bernet, 2010). According to these authors:

A central problem in high conflict divorce and protracted custody disputes involves the narcissistic vulnerability of divorcing parties [...] the other parent is seen as irrelevant, irresponsible or even dangerous, whereas their self is seen as the essential, responsible, and a safe caretaker. These parents tend to selectively perceive and distort the child’s concerns regarding the other parent [...] vulnerable parents over-identify with elements of the child’s emotional response that remind them of their own experience with the ex-spouse and confirm the other parent’s badness (Johnston & Rosenby in Bernet, 2010).

Baker and Darnall (1996) identified a range of sixty-six different behaviours/actions used by alienating parents. This finding demonstrates that no single act constitutes parental alienation and that alienating parents engage in a number and variety of different behaviours. Consequently, it is evident that parental alienation syndrome is an outcome rather than a particular set of behaviours or actions carried out by the alienating parent. An additional notable finding of this study is that neither the number nor type of strategy was related to the gender of either the target child or the target parent. Baker and Darnall (2006, p.121) state that, “it appears that universal alienating strategies could be used by either mother or father”. Baker & Darnall (2006) focus on the alienating parents’ behaviour in their conceptualizations (Fidler & Bala, 2011).

Baker and Darnall (in Fidler & Bala, 2011, p. 19) identified a number of alienating strategies used by parents which they categorized as follows:

- (1) Badmouthing (e.g., qualities portrayed as dangerous, mean, abandoning; using the rejected parents' first name with the child instead of "Mom or "Dad", etc.);
- (2) Limiting/interfering with parenting time (e.g., moving away, arranging activities during scheduled time with rejected parent, calling during contact; giving the child the "choice" about whether to have contact, etc.);
- (3) Limiting/interfering with mail or phone contact (blocking, intercepting, or monitoring calls and mail, etc.);
- (4) Limiting/interfering with symbolic contact (limiting mentioning, no photographs, having child call someone else "Mom" or "Dad"; changing child's name etc.);
- (5) Interfering with information (e.g. refusing to communicate, using the child as messenger, not giving important school and medical information, etc);
- (6) Emotional manipulation (e.g. withdrawing love, inducing guilt, interrogating child, forcing child to choose/express loyalty or reject, rewarding for rejection, etc.);
- (7) Unhealthy alliance (e.g. fostering dependency, the child having to spy, keep secrets, etc.); and
- (8) Miscellany (e.g. badmouthing to friends, teachers, doctors, interfering with child's counseling, creating conflict between child and rejected parent, etc.)

Richard Warshak (2001) identified three elements that have to be present for

a *bona fide* identification of parental alienation; (1) a persistent, not occasional, rejection or denigration of a parent that reaches the level of a campaign; (2) an unjustified or irrational rejection by the child; and (3) rejection by a child that is a *partial* result of the alienating parent's influence (Fidler & Bala, 2010, p. 12-13).

Warshak (2006, p. 361) defines pathological alienation as "a disturbance in which children, usually in the context of sharing a parent's negative attitudes, suffer unreasonable aversion to a person, or persons, with whom they formerly enjoyed normal relations or with whom they would normally develop affectionate relations." In addition to considering the role of the child, this definition explicitly identifies the role of the alienating parent, an essential component of the problem. Notably, Warshak's definition further acknowledges the following two essential aspects: "(1) a *change* from a previously good relationship, where the child shared a warm and healthy attachment, or would have been expected to develop a good

relationship and (2) the possibility that the *aversion* may also be *applied to others* (such as other family members), and not only to parents” (Fidler & Bala, 2011).

Warshak (2000b, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003) supports the phenomenon parental alienation syndrome. He writes:

parental alienation syndrome fits a basic pattern of many psychiatric syndromes. Such syndromes denote conditions in which people who are exposed to a designated stimulus develop a certain cluster of symptoms [...] These diagnoses carry no implication that everyone exposed to the same stimulus develops the condition, nor that similar symptoms never develop in the absence of the designated stimulus [...] Similarly, some, but not all, children develop parental alienation syndrome when exposed to a parent’s negative influence. Other factors, beyond the stimulus of an alienating parent, can help elucidate the etiology for any particular child (Warshak, 2006).

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3.8.3 Parental Alienation According to Kelly and Johnston

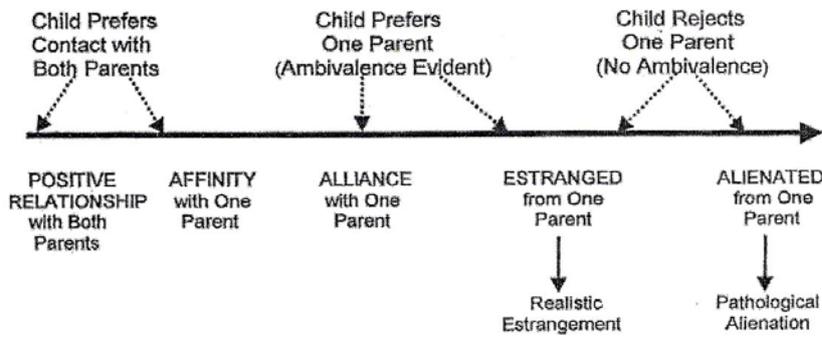
Contrary to Gardner’s work, which does not take into account other variables that may contribute to a child’s alienation, Kelly and Johnston’s (2001) model recognises that multiple causes may contribute to this situation (Stahl, 2011). Their recommendation of the model of the ‘alienated child’ suggests that the child’s behaviour, in addition to the multiple contributions to this behaviour, are more important than the alienating parents’ emotions and behaviours (Stahl, 2011). Kelly and Johnston (2001, p. 250) support Johnston’s earlier argument that too much consideration has been wrongfully given to adult behaviour, that being the alienating parent who is viewed as the “etiological agent of the child’s alienation”. Their reformulation focuses on the alienated child, and his/her observable behaviours, and the parent-child relationship, rather than on “programming parent’s malicious behaviours” (Kelly & Johnston 2001, p. 251).

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Kelly and Johnston (2001) suggest that parent-child relationships post separation and divorce can be viewed on a five point continuum, which ranges from positive relationships with both parents, to progressively stronger alignment to the primary care giving parent, and on the other end of the continuum, the most negative relationship is found, that being alienation from their other parent.

The following diagram is an illustration used by Johnston and Kelly (2001) to explain that children's relationships with their parents after separation and divorce can be best described on a continuum ranging from positive to negative.

Figure 1. A Continuum of Children's Relationships with Parents after Separation and Divorce



According to Kelly and Johnston (2001), most children whose parents have separated are found at the first step of the continuum. These children enjoy a positive relationship with both their parents, and they would like to spend significant if not equal amounts of time with each parent.

"Children who have an *affinity with one* parent but who also want to continue having contact with their other parent are found along the second step of the continuum" (Kelly & Johnston, 2001, p. 252). The child's preference for one parent may be due to a number of factors, including but not limited to the child and the parent having similar temperaments, being the same sex or sharing similar interests. Kelly & Johnston, (2001, p. 252) state that although these children may from time to time express "an overt preference for a parent," they nevertheless still want to maintain contact with both parents and they want to receive love from both parents".

Allied children are found further along on the third step of the continuum. These children have formed an alliance with one parent, either during the marriage, or upon separation. They persistently express a preference for one parent over the other. Whilst they do not fully reject their one parent, they do however show some ambivalent feelings towards them, such

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as sadness, anger and love (Kelly & Johnston, 2001). According to Kelly and Johnston (2001), alliances seem to occur more frequently in older children, who tend to make moral judgments as to which parent caused the breakup of the marriage, which parent is the most hurt or vulnerable and which parent needs or deserves the child's support. Kelly and Johnston (2001), caution that although the aligned parent may appear to overtly support the child's relationship with their other parent, they covertly sabotage the rejected parent's efforts to communicate with or to have contact with the child. In extreme cases, all reference to the rejected parent is banished and the child learns not to talk about their rejected parent. When the rejected parent requests contact with the child, the aligned parent will strongly support their angry child's "right to make their own decision" as to whether they want to have contact with their rejected parent.

The estranged child is found at the fourth step along the continuum. According to Kelly and Johnston (2001), these children are realistically estranged from one of their parents as a result of the being subjected to domestic violence, abuse or neglect. These children refuse to have contact with their parent as a cumulative result of the observed repeated acts of domestic violence, or explosive outbursts of that parent during the marriage or after separation, or who themselves were the victims of that parent's abusive behaviour.

According to Kelly and Johnston (2001, p. 253), children may become estranged from a parent due to severe parental deficiencies, including persistent immature and self-centered behaviours; chronic emotional abuse of the child or preferred parent; physical abuse that goes undetected; characterologically angry, rigid and restrictive parenting styles; psychiatric disturbance, or substance abuse that grossly interferes with parenting capacities and family functioning.

Kelly and Johnston (2001, p. 254) regard a child's estrangement from an unreliable, deficient, abusive or violent parent as being "reasoned, adaptive, self-distancing, and protective stance that has led to cognitive and affective differentiation of their parents."

According to Kelly and Johnston (2001), *alienated children* are found at the fifth step, at the extreme end of the continuum. These children stridently reject one of their parents without apparent guilt or ambivalence, and they either strongly resist or completely refuse contact with that parent (Kelly & Johnston, 2001). Usually the rejected parents are "good enough" and sometimes "better" parents, who have no history of abusing the child. Whilst the child may have some complaints about the rejected parent, such complaints are usually exaggerated, and are a distortion of reality. These children's rejecting behaviours are a response to a complex and frightening dynamic within the divorce process, to a range of

parental behaviours, as well as to their own vulnerabilities, which may make them predisposed to becoming alienated.

Kelly and Johnston (2001) argue that in more severe cases, these children may refuse to see their parent in any setting, including the therapeutic one, and they express the desire to terminate the parent-child relationship. These children only wish to speak to lawyers, judges and professional custody evaluators, whom they believe will hear all the 'facts', and who will support their desire to terminate the parent-child relationship.

Kelly and Johnston (2001) propose that in order to adequately diagnose and intervene when a child is presented as alienated, a systems framework that assesses the various interrelated factors influencing a child's response during and after separation be applied.

Kelly and Johnston (2001, p. 254) identified a set of four "risk factors" or systemic processes that may potentiate alienation:

1. Triangulation of the child in intense marital conflict.
2. The parent's experience of separation as deeply humiliating.
3. The parent's involvement in highly conflicted divorce and litigation.
4. Tribal war or the contributions of new partners, extended kin, and professionals.

1. Triangulation of the child in intense marital conflict

Before the parties have separated, some parents may use their children in their marital conflict. Children often get caught up in taking sides, becoming a messenger, rescuing a parent and or being punitive towards a parent.

2. Separation is experienced as deeply humiliating

Parents who are narcissistically wounded and outraged by the separation, and who feel a sense of humiliation and abandonment, often encourage their children to reject their other parent. Other reasons for the parent's narcissistic injury may be due to the manner in which the separation occurred, for example the presence of a lover, the decision to pursue a gay lifestyle, no perceived emotional preparation, and so on. (Kelly & Johnston, 2001).

3. Highly conflicted divorce and litigation

Protracted litigation, allegations and counter allegations of abuse and neglect, verbal and physical aggression post-separation, are likely to potentiate alienation in the child. In order to reduce the feeling of being torn apart, children who are used as their parent's confidants,

and who are exposed to ongoing parental denigration of one or both parents, reject one parent and refuse to have any contact with that 'bad' parent (Kelly & Johnston, 2001).

4. Contribution of new partners, extended kin and professionals

Kelly & Johnston (2002, p. 256) described new partners, particularly those perceived by the child as having caused the breakup of their parent's marriage as "a lightning rod for rage about divorce", due to the fact that children in such situations are often faced with loyalty conflicts. Strong religious beliefs held by children, their extended families and congregational condemnation of a parent instituting divorce may also contribute to a child becoming alienated. Lawyers who use inflammatory language and terminology in the divorce proceedings may wittingly or unwittingly contribute to the alienating process. Family members who recall negative parental alienation syndrome behaviours of the rejected parent, may add fuel to the fire. Therapists, who have no knowledge of the alienation process or the collaborative efforts needed to help these children, may unwittingly support and consolidate the child's rage and unwarranted rejection of a parent (Kelly & Johnston, 2001).

Kelly and Johnston (2001) cited the above four factors as "risk factors" which may increase the likelihood of parental alienation developing. Additionally, they put forward a number of reasons for children's resistance to visitation and included are the following:

1. The child's concerns based on normal developmental processes such as separation anxiety experienced in young children.
2. The child's concerns stemming from high conflict in the marriage or divorce. eg fear or inability to cope with the high-conflict transition (Kelly & Johnston, 2001, p. 251).
3. The child's resistance, based on a parent's parenting style, such as the parent's rigidity and insensitivity towards the child.
4. The child's concerns originating from the child's worries about an emotionally fragile parent, whom they may be afraid to leave on their own.
5. The child's concerns arising out of the remarriage of a parent, such as the behaviours of parent's or step-parents, which result in the child's reluctance to visit.

Kelly and Johnston's (2001) observations of the clinical behaviours and emotional responses of alienated children are consistent with those put forward by Wallerstein and

Kelly (1980), Clawar and Rivlin (1991), Gardner (1992,1998) and Warshak (2001a, 2003, 2003).

Several years later, Johnston reformulated the problem articulated by Kelly and Johnston (2001), now focusing on the 'alienated child' rather than on 'parental alienation'. Johnston et al. (2009, p. 363), define the alienated child "as one who persistently expresses strong, negative feelings (such as anger, hatred, contempt and fear) and beliefs that appear irrational, distorted, or exaggerated and significantly disproportionate to the child's actual experience with a target parent." In addition, Johnston et al. (2009, p. 364) maintain that "entrenched alienated children respond in a phobic manner and express unremitting, strident rejection of a parent with no apparent guilt or ambivalence." According to Johnston et al. (2009), early precursors of alienation are inter alia, complaints of feeling uncomfortable, resistance to and lack of pleasure in visiting the target parent, in addition to role reversal and separation anxieties from the referred parent. Based on this view point, it can be seen that the destructive and harmful behaviours of a 'programming' parent are no longer assumed to be the starting point. Instead, the problem of the alienated child starts with a "primary, neutral, and objective focus on the child and his or her observable behaviours and expressed feelings and invites a broad search among multiple factors that might help explain the parent-child relationships" (Johnston et.al., 2009, p. 364).

3.8.4 Parental Alienation Disorder

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM) is a guidebook that is used by clinicians and researchers to diagnose and classify mental disorders. The DSM-5 task force considered whether to adopt parental alienation disorder (PAD) as a mental illness. The reasons put forward as to why it should be included as a mental illness will be presented and thereafter the task force's decision as to whether it should or should not be included will be presented.

Although parental alienation has been described in the psychiatric literature for approximately sixty years, it has never been considered for inclusion in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). Psychiatrist, Professor Bernet and many of his colleagues, who are mental health and legal practitioners, argue that when the DSM-IV was developed in 1994, there were no formal proposals that parental alienation be included in that edition. Pursuant to its publication in 1994, there have been numerous publications regarding parental alienation in articles, peer reviewed mental health journals, legal literature as well as in the press. Controversy regarding some aspects of parental alienation has arisen between mental health and legal professionals, which has been described by Bernet

et al., (2010, p. 3) as resembling “the hostility manifested by entrenched and angry parents fighting over their children”.

Bernet et al., (2010, pp. 4 to 5), define parental alienation as the child's strong alliance with one parent and rejection of a relationship with the other parent without legitimate justification. Bernet et. al., (2010, p. 5) state that parental alienation syndrome typically refers to a child with parental alienation who manifests some or all of eight characteristic behaviours, as described by Gardner (1992a). Bernet et al., (2010) regard parental alienation disorder as a serious mental condition and not as a minor aberration in the life of the divorced family. These authors believe that it affects the mental health of many children and their parents, negatively impacting on the quality of life in these families. Furthermore, these authors believe that recognition of the phenomenon will enhance the prevention and treatment of this condition.

Bernet et al., (2010) propose that for inclusion in DSM-5 and International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11), the terms *parental alienation disorder* or *parental alienation relational problem* be used. Bernet et al. (2010, p. 6) argue that

in addition to being included in the DSM-5 either as a mental or a relational problem, the concept of parental alienation should be mentioned in the DSM differential diagnoses of certain disorders seen in children and adolescents [...] should be mentioned in the differential diagnoses of separation anxiety disorder [...] in the differential diagnosis of oppositional defiant disorder, since both conditions can be manifested by the child's adamant refusal to follow a reasonable expectation of an adult.

Bernet et al. (2010, p. 89) meanwhile state that

family system theorists have long identified parent-child alignment against the other parent as a significant problem in the structure and dynamics of the family [...] triangulation involves two members of a family drawing in or excluding a third family member [...] according to Minuchin (1974), cross generational coalitions develop when one or both parents try to enlist the support of the child against the other parent [...] parental alienation can easily be conceptualized as an extreme of such a pathological coalition.

Parental alienation disorder as a diagnostic category would imply that the child's behavior would be considered as pathological. The researcher's view aligns with the views of Bernet et al., namely that parental alienation disorder is a relational disorder that typically occurs when a child whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict divorce allies themselves strongly with one parent (the preferred parent) and rejects a relationship with the other parent (the alienated parent) without reasonable justification. The main behavioural symptom is the child's resistance or refusal to have contact with the alienated parent. The researcher is of the view that by applying such a diagnosis, an appropriate family-systems approach to treatment, including participation of the entire family in various combinations of therapy, can be implemented, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the intervention.

According to Bernet et.al., (2010), the following clinical features often occur in parental alienation disorder, particularly when the child's symptoms reach a level that is moderate or severe. Lack of ambivalence, which refers to the child's belief that the alienated parent is all bad and the preferred parent is all good. The independent- thinker phenomenon, which refers to the child's insistence that their decision to reject their alienated parent is their own decision, and not the influence of the preferred parent. Reflexive support of the preferred parent against the alienated parent, refers to the manner in which the child immediately and automatically takes the side of the preferred parent in a disagreement or argument. The child may show a total disregard for the feelings of the alienated parent and an absence of guilt over the maltreatment of the alienated parent. In addition, the child's animosity toward the alienated parent may spread to that parent's extended family.

Bernet et al., (2010) argue that parental alienation is an important observable fact that mental health practitioners should know about and should have a thorough understanding of, particularly those working with children, adolescents, and adults, whose parents divorced when they were children.

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Researchers (Houchin, Ranseen, Hash & Bartnicki, 2012), put forward cogent reasons as to why parental alienation should not be considered a mental disorder. In an article entitled *The Parental Alienation Debate Belongs in the Courtroom, Not in the DSM-5*, they added two further considerations in addition to previous criticisms of parental alienation syndrome, namely economic considerations, and the 'Hollywood effect' of parental alienation syndrome. Houchin et al. (2012, p. 129), maintain that, "to a business-minded, professional child custody evaluator, the adoption of parental alienation syndrome or parental alienation disorder as a *bona fide* psychiatric diagnosis in DSM-5 represents a potential windfall opportunity to increase fee revenue"; due to the fact that more interviewing and more testing would be required in order to enable independent experts to testify as to whether children

have parental alienation syndrome or not. They maintain that by including parental alienation syndrome into a custody battle, the already tense situation between parents will escalate, resulting in additional billable preparation time for lawyers and psychiatrists, and reducing the likelihood of an amicable settlement without a protracted trial. Houchin et al. (2012, p. 129), argue that not only has parental alienation caught the attention of mental health professionals, “it makes for lively discussion among attorneys, social workers, parents and even Hollywood celebrities”.

Dr. Lenore Walker is a strong opponent to inclusion of parental alienation syndrome in the DSM-5. She published an article in 2010, rebutting the assertion that parental alienation syndrome is a diagnosable mental illness. Dr. Walker argued that there is a paucity of empirical data to support a formal psychiatric diagnosis of parental alienation syndrome (Houchin et al., 2012).

According to Houchin et al., (p.130):

...at its best, adopting parental alienation syndrome or parental alienation disorder as a formal diagnosis in the DSM-5 serves only to further confuse mental health practitioners and the courts. At its worst, it lines the pockets of both attorneys and expert witnesses by increasing the number of billable hours given in a case. It creates an entire new level of debate, in which only qualified experts can engage, adding to the already murky waters of divorce testimony.

On 1 December 2012, The American Psychiatric Association released notification regarding their decision against the inclusion of parental alienation as a disorder in the DSM-5. Dr. Reiger, vice chair of the task force drafting the manual, said that, “the bottom line is that it is not a disorder within one individual. It’s a relationship problem – parent-child or parent-parent relationship problems per se are not mental disorders.”

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter began with a discussion on the South African approach to post-divorce contact. Then, the importance of contact between the child and the non-residential parent was examined. Thereafter, an explanation as to when contact is not in the child’s best interest was provided. A father’s altered role post-divorce was explicated and factors that complicate post separation and divorce were considered. The second section began with a definition of key concepts. This was followed by a concise historical overview of parental alienation and parental alienation syndrome. The debate as to whether parental alienation disorder should

be included in the DSM-5 was discussed. Arguments exist why this may not be a good idea and that it may cause more harm than good, especially for affected children.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted.”

Albert Einstein.

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research design, research process, methodology and research tools used in the overall study are elucidated. The research process as well as the process of analysis and interpretation is outlined. As previously mentioned, the aim of this study is to gain a broader understanding of the experiences of separated and divorced fathers, whose contact has been denied or withheld.

4.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In the current study, the researcher's purpose was to understand and explain the experiences of fathers whose contact with their children post-separation and or divorce has been withheld or refused for prolonged periods of time. The researcher's main goal was, therefore, to add knowledge, not to pass judgement on a setting or the people therein. The purpose of this study was not to apportion blame for a particular state of affairs, nor to label a parent as “good” or “bad”. The value of this study will be determined by the extent to which it generates theory, description or understanding.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design was based on the requirements of a qualitative paradigm as the researcher wanted to produce rich and detailed information about a small number of fathers who had experienced no contact with their children post-separation or divorce.

Qualitative design refers to the collection of relevant text and its interpretation. The researcher found suitable participants, who had the relevant experience. Then, she conducted interviews with each participant individually. Thereafter, she interpreted their stories using a phenomenological procedure. Phenomenological research searches for the lived stories of a particular phenomenon and seeks a thick description of the story from participants (Van Manen, 2000).

According to Stiles (1993), it is only when people's "lived experiences" have been explored and contextualized that we get to understand them personally and experience what they experience in their daily lives.

4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Strydom (in De Vos, 2001, p. 24) puts it that "ethics is a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct, towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students."

4.4.1 Informed Consent

Seidman (2006) explains that indepth interviews require participants to reconstruct their life histories as they relate to the subject of inquiry. Through this process, a degree of intimacy can develop between the interviewer and participants, which results in the participant sharing aspects of their lives which, if misused, could leave the participant exceptionally vulnerable.

Participants thus have the right to be protected against any possible abuse. Moreover, interviewers can protect themselves against misunderstanding through the process of seeking informed consent, which requires them to be explicit about the range and purpose of their study in a way that makes them clarify what they are doing.

From an ethical and methodological perspective, it is necessary to obtain the participants' informed consent. A consent form for this study was created (See Appendix A).

This form:

- Informed participants as to what they were required to do and for what purpose.
- Informed the participants that they had the right to withdraw from the process and they had the right to review the material.
- Advised participants that their names would not be used in the study.
- Requested permission to tape record the interviews.

By requesting that the participants sign the form, their informed consent to voluntary participation was ascertained, and the participants were assured of anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without negative consequence.

4.4.2 Harm to Experimental Subjects and /or Respondents

The research should be structured in such a way that potential harm to subjects can be avoided or minimized (Strydom in De Vos, 2001). In this study, the researcher followed the ethical guidelines detailed in a number of codes of conduct for psychological practice and research. The researcher clearly and openly communicated the research procedures and the aim of the study to the participants. No physical harm was caused to participants, as they were merely required to relate their 'stories', which remained anonymous. The researcher debriefed the participants after they had concluded their narratives, so as to provide them with an opportunity to reflect upon issues and to discuss matters which may be evoked during the narration of their stories.

4.4.3 Deception of Subjects and/or Participants

De Vos (2001) says that deception of subjects or participants involves deliberately misrepresenting facts in order to make another person believe what is not true, violating the respect to which every person is entitled. No information was withheld and no incorrect information was provided in order to ensure the participation of subjects.

4.4.4 Actions and Competence of Researcher

Strydom, cited in De Vos (2001) explains that an ethical obligation rests with the researcher to ensure that they are competent and skilled to undertake the investigation they have chosen. The researcher undertook the study under the supervision of two supervisors allocated by the University of South Africa. She has twenty two years experience as a social worker working predominantly with families experiencing divorce.

4.4.5 Release or Publication of the Findings

Strydom, cited in De Vos (2001), says that the final report must be accurate, objective, clear, and unambiguous and include all essential information. The final document is presented in the form of a Masters dissertation and acknowledgement has been attributed to all sources consulted, so as to avoid plagiarism. The shortcomings and errors of the study have been documented and all forms of bias or emphasis of results have been avoided.

4.4.6 Debriefing of Participants

The participants were each debriefed at the end of each interview. The researcher paid attention to gauge whether any distressing issues for the participants had been aroused by the interview, and participants were given the opportunity to deal with any stressful issues that were evoked as previously mentioned in 4.3.2.

4.4.7 Anonymity

Participants' anonymity was maintained in accordance with ethical guidelines.

4.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity of methodology and the reliability of findings were maintained, relative to the requirements of qualitative research.

Kvale (2002, p. 39) contends that "validation depends on good craftsmanship in an investigation, which includes continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting findings". Stiles (1993, p. 267) explains that "reliability refers to trustworthiness of observations or data", whereas "validity refers to credibility of interpretations or conclusions". Reliability and validity are two essential characteristics of high quality research that have to be addressed, as all social researchers aspire to having reliable and valid measures, irrespective of their method of inquiry. Neuman (2000) argues that reliability and validity are crucial to establishing the truthfulness and credibility of findings. He maintains that qualitative research findings should provide a fair, honest and balanced account of social life from the perspective of someone who lives that life daily. In order to obtain this, the following principles were taken into account.

4.5.1 Competence and Craftsmanship

Competence and craftsmanship was ensured through continuous checking, questioning, addressing theoretical questions, interpreting data and discussion and sharing research actions with her supervisors. All data, procedures and decisions were critically questioned, and the data was checked for bias, neglect and lack of precision. Theoretical questions which arose throughout the process were examined and addressed throughout the research process.

4.5.2 Taking Action

Henning (2004) asserts that in the South African research community, it is an ethical imperative that research needs to be translated into action. Consequently, research designs have to be explicit about how the work is going to be communicated, as well as how it is going to be translated into action. Pragmatic validity is concerned with the usability of knowledge as well as the empowerment of participants. The results of the research study will be published in the form of a dissertation, making it available for academic and practical purposes.

4.5.3 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Any research strategy needs to be credible in order to be useful. The researcher has to adopt a neutral stance regarding the phenomenon being studied, and therefore may not manipulate or distort data in order to serve their vested interests and prejudices. In this particular study, the researcher had no theory to prove and no predetermined results to support, and thus she adopted a neutral stance towards the research inquiry. The researcher did not view the participants as “victims” and their former wives as ‘villians’, or vice versa. She developed empathy through direct and personal contact with those participants interviewed.

4.5.4 Managing the Researcher’s Biases

According to Stiles (1993, p. 614), an appropriate way to deal with researcher bias in qualitative research is to “increase the investigators’-readers’ exposure to the phenomenon” by using rigorous interviews and giving “thick descriptions” of the data as well as triangulation of the data.

A thick description captures the experience from the perspective of the participant to fullest complexity (Denzin,1989). Triangulation of data refers to the process of contrasting data from more than one source and more than one instance, confirming whether it yields similar findings.

Stiles (1993) argues that while personal involvement and passionate commitment to a topic can result in becoming enmeshed with risks of distortion, it can also motivate a more thorough investigation and a deeper understanding. Detachment and distance, on the other hand, can also distort. Stiles (1993) maintains that when the investigators reveal their personal involvement and commitments, readers can incorporate the investigator’s part in the story into their understanding, and they are thus able to adjust their understanding to compensate for the investigator’s biases.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION

4.6.1The Sample

4.6.1.1 Sample Selection

Arkava and Lane (cited in [De Vos, 2001](#)) explain that a sample represents the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. Qualitative research usually focuses on using small, purposefully selected samples, so that an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon can be obtained (Patton, 2002).

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Moustakas (1994, p. 107) cites the following criteria as essential parameters for the selection of participants: the research participant must have experienced the phenomenon of interest to this study, must be interested in understanding its nature and meanings, must be willing to participate in a lengthy interview (and perhaps a follow-up interview), and must grant the investigator the right to tape record, possibly videotape, the interview, and publish the research information in a thesis and other publications. The participants in this study met these parameters, considered essential to this study.

4.6.1.2 The Sample Size

Patton (2002, p. 244) states that “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry”. Patton stresses that the size of the sample is dependent upon what the researcher wants to find out, the reason for wanting to find it out, how the findings will be used, and what resources (including time) the researcher has for the study. This research study made use of a sample of four subjects. Owing to the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to the population of all divorced fathers whose contact has been denied or withheld. The goal of this research is to gain insight into certain experiences and not problems faced by the participants, and it does not claim to be a comprehensive or exhaustive description.

4.6.2 Sampling Strategy

In this study, a non random, purposeful sampling method was used. Non random samples are samples in which “not every element in the population has a chance of being selected for the final sample” (Reamer, 1998, p. 145). According to Osborn (1994) the phenomenological researcher tries to find those potential participants who have experienced the phenomenon in question and are able to communicate their experiences. Participants were therefore not randomly selected, but were rather selected according to certain criteria:

- divorced or separated fathers who have not had contact with their children for at least 3 months

The researcher initially approached psychologists and social workers working in the field of forensic custody evaluations, the Johannesburg Office of the Family Advocate, as well as *Father 4 Justice*, which is a fathers' rights organization, asking after appropriate participants. A list of names was provided. The researcher contacted these individuals and asked them whether they would be interested in participating in this study, repeating the search process, until a sufficient number of candidates were found.

4.6.3 Method of Data Collection

4.6.3.1 Interviews

According to Patton (2003, p. 340) we “interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe”. Patton (2002, p. 41) states that “the purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective [...] we interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind to gather their stories.” In face to face interviews, participants provide us with their experiences of the world from their own personal point of view, in a “formatted” discussion, which is guided and managed by the researcher and later integrated into a research report (Henning, 2004).

The interviews in this study were opened-ended and an interview schedule was used as a guide. This interview schedule (Appendix B) was developed as a guideline for the interviewer to use during the interview. It was used to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry were followed with each participant. The interview schedule, as suggested by Marlow (2005), consists of questions and themes which are relevant to the research study. De Vos (2001) contends that the main advantage of unstructured interviews with a schedule is that they ensure a reasonably systematic collection of data and at the same time make certain that important data is not omitted. The issues that appear to be relevant to the research study as well as the research questions were clearly defined and questions were then generated to cover each of the themes and research questions.

The interviews ranged from an hour to an hour and 45minutes in length, depending upon the amount of information the participants had to share. During the interviews, the researcher engaged interactively with the participants, asked them questions, listened to them speaking and gained access to their accounts and articulations in order to obtain descriptions of their lives regarding the interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena. In summary, the researcher adopted a non-judgemental, empathic attitude and immersed herself in another’s world by listening deeply and attentively, so as to enter the other’s experience and perception as “being-in” another’s world (Moustakas, 1994).

4.6.3.2 Recording of the interviews

All the interviews were tape-recorded on numbered audiotapes and were later transcribed verbatim onto a computer disc. Participants were informed about the use of the tape recorder in the consent form, and again at the start of the interview. The researcher informed the participants that she wanted to record the interviews, as she did not want miss any

aspect of what they had to say; neither did she want to inaccurately record what the participants had said.

The use of a tape recorder or other electronic recording device increases the accuracy of the research information and at the same time it allows the researcher to focus on the participant and to be more attentive to them. Patton (2002) contends that when the researcher tries to make notes and to record every word whilst interviewing, they are unable to respond appropriately to the participant's cues. Additionally, verbatim note taking can also interfere with the researcher's ability to listen attentively.

4.6.3.3 Transcription of the interviews

The transcription of the tapes was carried out by two professional typists, who were unaware of the identity of the participants and who undertook to ensure confidentiality of the material. The researcher later checked the transcriptions in order to ensure that that representation of the interviews was as accurate as possible.

4.6.4 Analysis of Research Information

Researchers analysing qualitative research information should make every effort to understand a phenomenon as a whole. Patton (2002) contends that this holistic approach assumes that the whole is understood as a complex system, which is greater than the sum of its parts. When the research information is collected, each case under study is treated as a unique entity with its own particular meaning and its own constellation of relationships emerging from and related to the context in which it occurs. Additionally, it is also seen as a window into the general patterns that may emerge across individuals.

Qualitative inquiry is especially inclined towards exploration, discovery and inductive logic. Inductive analysis begins with specific observations and moves towards general patterns. The qualitative analyst tries to describe a situation and extract meaning, rather than looking for structural relationships among pre-established variables or testing formal hypotheses.

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study was to understand and explain the experiences of fathers whose contact with their children post-separation and/or divorce was withheld or refused for prolonged periods of time. Accordingly, a phenomenological research method lent itself well to this study. Welman and Kruger (cited in Groenwald, 2004) state that "the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of the people and individuals."

4.7 INTRODUCTION TO THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

Whilst the origins of phenomenology can be traced back to Kant and Hegel, Vandenberg (cited in Groenewald, 2004) regards Husserl as “the fountainhead of phenomenology in the twentieth century”. Husserl disagreed with the idea that objects in the external world exist independently, and that the information about objects is reliable. He maintained that people can be sure about how things look in, or present themselves to their consciousness (cited in Groenewald, 2004). In order to arrive at a determination, anything outside immediate experience has to be ignored, thereby reducing the external world to the contents of personal consciousness. Accordingly, realities are treated as pure ‘phenomena’ and the sole absolute data from where to begin. Husserl called his philosophical method ‘phenomenology’, the science of pure ‘phenomena’ (Eagleton, 1983, p. 55). The aim of phenomenology is eloquently captured by the slogan: ‘Back to the things themselves!’ (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56; Kruger, 1988, p. 28; Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

Comment [GW45]: Citation requires page number

Martin Heidegger, who was a student of Husserl, introduced the concept of ‘Dasein’ (being-in-the-world) and the dialogue between an individual and their world. Heidegger differed from Husserl, arguing that all concepts appear within a ‘horizon’ of conventional meaning within a shared history. Heidegger’s existential phenomenology was taken forward by amongst others Jean-Paul Satre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who expanded the influence of Husserl and Heidegger (Vandenberg, cited in Groenewald, 2004).

Having explored phenomenology, the following section will outline Giorgi’s (1994) phenomenological method used in this study. It begins with the description of phenomena, then a description the reduction, followed by a description for the search of essences, and thereafter Dreyer Kruger’s method of phenomenological analysis is outlined.

Comment [GW46]: Meaning unclear, consider revising

Giorgi (1994) argues that the phenomenological method basically involves three interrelated steps, namely description, the reduction and the search for essences.

4.7.1 Phenomenological Method

In this study, the researcher has had to study the descriptions of phenomena as presented by the participants, and thereafter he/she has to present them precisely without adding or subtracting from what has been given. Patton labels the first step of phenomenological analysis *epoche*. Epoché has its origin in the Greek language and means to refrain from judgement and from the common everyday way of perceiving things. Common “understandings, judgements, and knowings are set aside and the phenomena are revisited,

visually, naïvely, in as wide-open sense, from the vantage point of a pure transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33).

Through the process of epoche, the researcher attempts to remove prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Accordingly, the researcher is able to approach and investigate the phenomena from a fresh and open point of view, without imposing meaning prematurely. The researcher's setting aside of their personal view and their suspension of judgement is crucial in phenomenological investigations, because in so doing, the researcher is able to see the experience for itself or to see it as it is presented (Patton, 2001).

4.7.2 The Reduction

Description of the phenomenon occurs within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction. This necessitates that the researcher (a) brackets or disengages from all past theories or knowledge about the phenomenon, and (b) withholds existential agreement of the phenomenon. According to Kvale (1996), phenomenological reduction does not require a total absence of presupposition, but rather a critical analysis of one's own presuppositions. Hence, the researcher cannot base her insights on traditional or well-established theories, be they philosophical or scientific, since s/he is concerned with the phenomenon as it presents itself (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

Giorgi (1994) argues that a number of researchers have difficulty with the idea of phenomenological reduction. Frequently, researchers believe that it has to be practiced at its ideal limit (i.e. everything given to consciousness has to be reduced at once), or that once having entered the attitude, one is frozen in the neutrality state. The reduction means that one attempts to bracket all past knowledge or theories about the phenomenon being researched that might be relevant to the research question. This implies that the researcher cannot base his/her insights on traditional or well established theories, either philosophical or scientific, but has to base them immediately on insight into the phenomena themselves (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). Within the reduction, the researcher avoids speculating, but rather looks at the research information with an attitude of relative openness. According to Van Maanen (1982, p. 16) the crucial question to be asked in qualitative research is "What is going on here?" This differs from the position of "I will speculate that X is going on and I shall attempt to prove it, or alternatively hope that it is Y that is actually occurring."

4.7.3 Search for Essences

The third step in the phenomenological analysis is the search for essences. The search for essences entails uncovering the core meanings of phenomena. The researcher endeavours to describe the invariant characteristics of a phenomenon and their connection to one another, and that becomes the structure of the phenomenon. Kvale (1996) contends that in the *investigation of essences* the researcher moves from describing separate phenomena to searching for that which they have in common and which makes them what they are.

The above corresponds with what Patton terms imaginative variation. According to Patton (2002), during this step of phenomenological analysis, all aspects of the bracketed data is treated with equal value and is considered to be of equal weight. Then, the data is organized into meaningful clusters. The researcher adopts a process whereby irrelevant, repetitive or overlapping data are demarcated and eliminated. Following this, the researcher identifies the invariant themes within the data in order to carry out an “imaginative variation” on each theme. Through imaginative variation, the researcher develops better or increased versions of the invariant themes.

The researcher uses these better and increased versions of the invariant themes to address the textural portrayal of each theme. Patton (2002, p. 486) argues that the textural portrayal is an “abstraction of the experience that provides content and illustration, but not yet essence”.

4.7.4 Application of the Phenomenological Analysis

4.7.4.1 The Phenomenological Method According to Kruger

Patton (2002) argues that finding a way to creatively synthesize and present findings is one of the challenges of qualitative analysis. When a number of cases have to be compared, an inductive approach begins by constructing individual cases without categorizing or classifying them. As such, each case is a text, and each text is explored to find ‘fundamental’ or identified ‘themes’. These subsequently merged, and several themes or core elements across the cases were identified.

In accordance with this inductive methodology, Kruger (1979) identified the six steps or sub-phases, which he used in the application of the method. These steps or sub-phases are not viewed as operating independently, and may overlap with one another. The following sub-phases were used in the analysis of the data in this study.

4.7.4.2. An Intuitive Holistic Grasp of the Research Information

In the initial reading of the protocols, the researcher should bracket her own preconceptions and judgement, to the extent that she is able to, so as to remain faithful to the research information. Pursuant to having achieved a holistic sense of the research information, the protocols are reread as many times as is necessary, in order to assist the researcher in retaining a sense of wholeness of the research information; despite its breakdown in the subsequent phases.

4.7.4.3 Spontaneous emergence of Natural Meaning Units (NMUs)

The function of this phase is to articulate the central themes of each protocol. During this phase, the research information is broken down into naturally occurring units, each passing on a particular meaning which has emerged spontaneously from the research information.

This unit, which is called a Natural Meaning Unit (NMU), may be defined as a statement made by the subject, which is self-definable and self-limiting in the expression of a single, recognized aspect of the subject's experience.

The intention conveyed by each NMU is then expressed in a reduced form as succinctly and precisely as possible. It is preferable for the subject's own terminology and phraseology to be adhered to wherever possible. Notwithstanding, the researcher may articulate the central themes (reductions of NMUs) in words other than those used by the subjects, in order to unambiguously express the intended meaning.

4.7.4.4 Constituent Profile Description

After listing all the reductions of the central themes of each protocol, the researcher then eliminates those units which are repeated or which convey the same intention of meaning, as well as irrelevant units that are not concerned with the experience being investigated. The remaining statements are considered tentatively to be non-repetitive, and relevant descriptive statements concerning the experience and are termed the First Order Profile. Thereafter, the First Order Profile is converted to a Constituent Profile Description, which can be briefly described as a compacted summary of the original research information containing the essence of what the participant expressed.

4.7.4.5 Second Order Profile

The second order profile is a consequence of the repetition of phases one through three, but carried out on the Constituent Profile Description. The elements emerging from this procedure are listed and numbered. This final elimination procedure performed on the

constituent description aims at eliminating any redundant constituents and, as stated, is termed the Second Order Profile.

The afore-mentioned phases as outlined were repeated for all respondents.

4.7.4.6 Hierarchical Categorization

Subsequent to having repeated the aforementioned four phases for all the respondents, the researcher gathers those descriptive statements with similar – though not identical – meanings into clusters termed categories. Any category may contain elements from only one subject or from perhaps all the subjects. These categories, or key themes, are then arranged in a hierarchical fashion to set in motion the next phase.

4.7.4.7 Extended Description

By using the first few clusters of categories, the researcher writes an extended description of what these categories tell her about the overall question being investigated. Thereafter, she adds to this description the next category in the hierarchy, and so either extends or modifies it in light of the new information in the additional category.

This procedure is repeated, until further addition of categories is made superfluous, since the essence of the research information is already contained in the extended description.

Then, the researcher carefully and systematically checks the remaining categories, making sure that they are compatible with the extended description. The thematic elements, which are contained in the categories and which are not compatible, are described, and where possible, the researcher shows that these elements are only apparently compatible.

The extended description puts forward a condensed understanding of the essential or invariant meanings of the phenomenon. This final description of the phenomenon, now separated from the individual experience, makes the commonalities of human experience clear.

4.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the research design and method was discussed. Fundamental terminology such as phenomenological analysis and qualitative data analysis and interpretation was discussed. Subjects such as sampling, method of data collection, and data analysis that were applied in this study were explicated in order to find the essential aspects of the fathers' experiences which will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

IDENTIFIED THEMES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the lived experiences of four fathers who were denied contact with their children for a prolonged period of time after they had separated from their former spouses.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 4, the text of all four protocols were read and reread several times, while refraining from prejudgement. Themes were extracted using a phenomenological approach, as described in the previous chapter. The attitude of *epoche* was applied. Then, the researcher attempted to find the essential themes by reduction and bracketing. Key phrases and statements that spoke directly to the phenomenon in question were located within the participants' personal stories. The meanings of these phrases were then interpreted by the researcher. The researcher inspected these meanings for what they revealed about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied, and she offered a tentative statement or definition of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified.

In order to provide a context for each of the four participants, they will be introduced with a brief overview of their unique stories, as presented from their point of view, describing for each one their marriage as well as their involvement with their children prior to and after the separation. Their separation will then be narrated, their post separation relationships with their former spouses will be discussed, and information on parental alienation experienced by the fathers will be examined.

The themes which were identified by the above process will then be described as they manifested in the narratives of each participant. The table below represents the specific themes, which are going to be illustrated for each participant.

<p>Themes related to the marital relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of a well-defined spousal system</i> • <i>Disconnectedness</i> • <i>Dysfunctional boundaries</i> • <i>Dysfunctional communication</i> • <i>Dysfunctional behaviour during the marriage</i>
<p>Themes related to the divorce process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mastery of the divorce challenges</i> • <i>Consequences of high conflict</i> • <i>Post divorce parental relationships</i>
<p>Themes related to the alienation process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Limiting contact</i> • <i>Withholding and destroying of gifts*</i> • <i>Badmouthing</i> • <i>Withholding information</i> • <i>False allegations</i>
<p>Themes related to the impact of the alienation on the fathers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Loss</i> • <i>Emotional impact</i> • <i>Feelings of powerlessness*</i> • <i>Economic impact</i>
<p>Support systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Involvement of professionals, organization, family and external systems</i> • <i>Dissatisfaction with service providers</i>

It is not suggested that these themes are mutually exclusive categories, the core idea is focused on in each section.

*Not identified in all four cases

Comment [GW47]: Awkward phrasing, meaning unclear

5.2 MR. DEBONAIR

5.2.1 Profile

5.2.1.1 Context

Mr. Debonair is a thirty seven year old successful businessman. He comes from a close-knit family. According to Mr. Debonair, when he first met his former wife, she told him that she was eighteen years old. Two years later, just prior to their wedding day, he found out that she was only going to turn eighteen on their wedding day. Mr. Debonair and his former wife were both very young when they got married.

Three children were born of their marriage. At the time of the interview, the oldest child, a daughter, was aged fourteen; the middle child, a son was aged eleven; and the youngest child, a son, was aged five.

According to Mr. Debonair, from the outset, his marriage was tumultuous and fraught with problems. The bridal couple had their first serious argument at their wedding reception. Mr. Debonair recalls that, "She went ballistic over me going out to have a cigarette... she's shouting at me and I've got all these people looking at me and I'm red in my face and I don't know, I'm holding this fake smile and it was difficult".

Mr. Debonair said that various forms of abuse, including domestic violence, prevailed during the course of the marriage. He reports that his relationship with his former wife was characterised by lies, deceit and ineffective communication. The marriage subsisted for a period of fourteen years before the couple separated.

When the parties separated, Mr. Debonair's daughter (then aged thirteen), and his son (then aged four) went to live with their mother. His twelve year old son chose to live with him. From that time on, his former wife rejected the middle son and she refused to have anything to do with him. In addition, she prevented Mr. Debonair from having both direct contact as well as telephonic contact, with his two other children.

During the period of time that Mr. Debonair had no contact with his two children, he found out that his children were living in a destructive and unsafe environment. The children were being exposed to drug dealers, they were reportedly dirty and neglected, and they frequently failed to attend school.

At the time of the interview, Mr. Debonair had not seen his two children, who were living with their mother, for a period of two years.

5.2.1.2 The Marriage

Mr. Debonair remembered that whilst the couple were newlyweds on their honeymoon, his former wife displayed emotional outbursts. He said that from time to time during the course of their marriage, she also displayed these outbursts. Mr. Debonair reports that during the aforementioned episodes, Mrs. Debonair was prone to uncontrolled screaming, crying, running away, and had attempted suicide. He said that, "I've never experienced what I experienced on my honeymoon; I mean this girl would start banging her head into the wall. She'd just... I'd wake up in the middle of the night and she'd be sitting there crying, just crying".

In addition to having these emotional outbursts, Mr. Debonair reports that his former wife took certain medication prior to their honeymoon, which resulted in her miscarrying whilst they were on honeymoon. He said, "... the next thing you know she's having a miscarriage. I mean she had actually caused the miscarriage because she had taken...".

Drawing on Mr. Debonair's narrative it can be seen that the couple's relationship did not improve after they returned from their honeymoon. He recalled that he experienced significant interference in the marriage from his former wife's family. He said, "Her family, this unmarried aunt would not stop interfering". He also remembers that her brother, "introduced to her to drugs like cocaine and the likes".

The couple separated at least three times before Mrs. Debonair fell pregnant with their first child. Referring to his former wife's first pregnancy, Mr. Debonair said "she ran away from home when she was seven months, eight months and nine months pregnant".

Mr. Debonair recounted that he had told his former wife, "I said, let's not have kids immediately. We are young". Notwithstanding, "it was exactly two months, three months after we got married, she was pregnant with" their first child. He recounted that, "she fell pregnant with M.E., [their second child], literally after we had R [their first child] had just been born".

Mr. Debonair said domestic violence featured prominently in the marriage. He described an incident which occurred when his former wife was intoxicated and she took his gun and "things were just berserk". He recalled that "she grabbed a gun one day and shot out all the windows in the house".

Mr. Debonair related that as a means of escaping his wife's reported dysfunctional behaviour, her emotional problems, excessive shouting at the children and the general chaotic home environment, he involved himself in more and more business ventures, which

enabled him to spend less and less time at home with his family. He remembers that, "I would just try and avoid the situation. I started working harder and harder getting into more businesses and more things. I just couldn't handle it. I'd come home and just for being home there would be all hell breaking loose". At times when the conflict between Mr. Debonair and his former wife became too difficult for him to endure, he got into his car and drove away. He recalled, "You know, it was just too much. I jumped into my car and drove away on a number of occasions".

He explains that, "I mean she used to do really crazy things. I had things flung at me because I was shielding the baby away from her shouting at the baby and she flings things... it was just too much, I jumped into my car and drove way... and, really I blame myself from that point onwards... I actually found that when I didn't say anything it would be far easier because she wouldn't tell it off with the kids as much as she would if I would intervene. I would just try and avoid the situation."

Mr. Debonair recalls that at one stage during the marriage, the family spent a year overseas on their own. He perceives that period of time during which his former wife's family had no contact with them, as being blissful. He said, "And then... we went overseas and something happened between her and her family and their relationship soured. That year was absolute bliss. I promise you she was like the perfect wife ever... it was amazing... the kids were happy, everything was good".

Mr. Debonair reports as soon as their family returned to South Africa, his former wife's family began once again interfering with his family. He recounts that the feelings of bliss and happiness experienced by their family whilst they were overseas soon came to an abrupt end.

5.2.1.3 Father's Involvement with the Children Prior to the Separation.

Mr. Debonair acknowledged that from the outset he had felt that he was too young and not ready to have children. He recalled that he had pleaded with his ex-wife after their miscarriage, "not to have kids immediately" [sic]. Notwithstanding, she soon fell pregnant again. Subsequent to the birth of his daughter, he confided in his father that he did not want a child, neither did he want to remain in the marriage. He recalled, "I told my dad and he said, 'well, you're expecting a kid and marriage is a time to adjust to get to know one another. You people are just having adjustment difficulties. Talk about it, work through the difficulties, go and see professionals and just chat it through and see if you can come together. It's not easy. All marriages go through it".

As previously mentioned, Mr. Debonair was in his early twenties at the time of the marriage, and he did not feel ready to assume the responsibility of marriage or parenthood. It can be understood from his narrative that he did not play an active parenting role in the children's lives, and his involvement with them during the course of the marriage was minimal.

Mr. Debonair explained that he found it exceedingly difficult to cope with his ex-wife's rages, particularly when she screamed at the children. He said, "It was just a lot to endure, it was too much. I jumped into my car and I drove away on a number of occasions". By physically and emotionally disengaging and distancing himself from his ex-wife and his home situation, Mr. Debonair was thus able to avoid a confrontation with her. He explains that "when I didn't say anything it would be far easier than if I did... I would just try and avoid the situation". Through his avoidance and disengagement, Mr. Debonair may have succeeded in minimising the conflict between him and his ex-wife; however in so doing, he also minimised his contact and interaction with his children. Upon reflection, Mr. Debonair appears to regret his absence from home. He reflects that, "working harder and harder, getting into more businesses and more things" limited the time spent and quality of his interaction with his children. He appears to recognise the mistake that he made by playing such a limited parenting role in his children's lives before the marriage broke down as he said, "I blame myself, in the past because I was an absent parent because I couldn't take the fighting at home. You know, rather than fighting, I chose avoiding. Big mistake!" .

5.2.1.4 The Separation

After having been married for fourteen years, Mr. Debonair's home life became untenable for him, and so he explains that he decided to move out. Subsequent to his leaving the common home, Mr. Debonair rented an apartment in a very exclusive establishment in an upmarket area. He lived there for several months, and thereafter he moved in with his parents. Several months later, he received a phone call from his former neighbour informing him that, "there is constant screaming at your house". Mr. Debonair made it clear that he was worried about his children's wellbeing, so he decided to return to his home as, "My idea was to keep an eye on my children". Upon his return, he told his former wife, "I'll take one bedroom; you can take the rest of the house. It has its own entrance; I won't be in your face".

Mr. and Mrs. Debonair lived separate lives but remained living in the same home for several months. Then out of the blue, Mrs. Debonair took the three children and moved in with her boyfriend. She refused to tell Mr. Debonair where they were staying. He wondered, "Where are my children? What has happened to them? What, running around looking for them, looking for them, couldn't find them? Ten days later she comes back to my house, inebriated with her grandmother and her mother, to come back". Despite their unresolved marital

conflicts, the couple reconciled once again, however that time, the reconciliation did not last for very long. One day an intoxicated Mrs. Debonair was involved in a bad car accident with their baby in the car. Mr. Debonair reflected, "The day she wrote off my car with my baby boy in the car, drunk out of her mind, smashing into a wall... now, I mean, that is the day I said, I can't take this anymore! She refused to allow me into the house that day...I went to live somewhere else with my parents for a while...".

At the time of the final separation, Mr. Debonair's eleven year old son elected to live with him. As mentioned, the child's mother distanced herself from the child; counter rejecting him, and would have nothing to do with him at all. Mr. Debonair explained that, "He's called his mother a hundred times. She doesn't want to know him". His daughter and youngest son continued living with their mother.

5.2.2 Themes Related to the Relationship

5.2.2.1. Lack of a Well Defined Spousal System

The spousal system is formed when two people marry and start a new family. The procedures necessitated in forming the spousal system are referred to as accommodation, which implies adjustment and negotiation of roles between spouses. The importance of a well-defined spousal subsystem should not be underestimated. It is within the spousal subsystem that the couple works out important aspects of their relationship, such as establishing new patterns of relating to others, and developing ways of processing information and dealing with affect. The couple also learn to develop rules about closeness, and they have to establish patterns of cooperation. Furthermore, it is within the spousal subsystem that the couple learn to manage and to resolve conflict.

In the adjustment process, each partner learns to adapt to and to help meet the needs of the other, which ultimately enables the family to be functional, as it adapts throughout its life. In this family, there appears to have been no complementarity. For example, Mr. Debonair recalled his disappointment in what he perceived as his former wife's failure to perform her spousal role of cooking meals for him. He said, "I could actually say this woman cooked breakfast for me 5 times throughout our married life. She had a maid who worked for her permanently. She had a helper for the kids who worked permanently... and she still had no time for nothing. I promise you I think as far as dinner was concerned, I mean 8 out of 10 times we were eating toasted sandwiches". From this, it seems that this couple experienced difficulty in accommodating and negotiating their roles in relation to one another. In addition, it appears that Mr. Debonair and his former wife each had their own unique set of values and

expectations, which they were never able to reconcile over the course of the marriage; hence common life became impossible for them.

As noted in 2.2.8, one of the important factors of an effective spousal subsystem is that its members attain a certain degree of independence from their families of origin. From Mr. Debonair's narrative, it appears that neither he nor his former wife experienced sufficient autonomy in their families of origin to provide them with sufficient autonomy to successfully negotiate alternative roles to complement one another in marriage. Mr. Debonair related how he turned to his father in times of trouble and unhappiness, instead of turning to his wife to try to discuss and resolve issues. Furthermore, his former wife turned to her mother, grandmother or aunt in times of unhappiness and trouble, rather than turning to her husband for support and assistance in resolving their conflict.

It is important to be aware that the way in which a functional spousal subsystem functions will have an effect on the parental subsystem. From the above, it can be deduced that in the case of Mr. Debonair and his former wife, their spousal subsystem was not functional, hence their parental subsystem suffered as a result.

Based on Mr. Debonair's narrative, it appears that there was a lack of mutual accommodation, complementarity, adjustment, emotional bonding, co-operation and negotiation of roles in their spousal system. Furthermore, it is evident from Mr. Debonair's narrative that the couple were unable to agree on the way to parent their children, the way to discipline their children, and what role each parent would assume, keeping in mind that Mr. Debonair reports not having been very involved with the children.

5.2.2.2. Disconnectedness

The relative closeness or connectedness in a relationship is negotiated between the couple, and eventually becomes part of their relationship definition. Accordingly, it forms part of the couple system's rules, however it is also simultaneously determined by those rules. This couple were seldom alone, and thus they did not have the opportunity to negotiate closeness, connectedness, rules and roles. Based on Mr. Debonair's story, it appears that as time went by, the couple seemed to have become more distant and more disconnected from one another.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, an important requirement of the spousal subsystem is that the couple are supportive of one another in their development of their respective talents and interests, whilst additionally retaining their own individuality. Mr. Debonair and his former wife appeared to have lived their own independent lives, avoiding one another and running

away from one another, rather than supporting one another. Mr. Debonair recalled that, "she ran away from the house, when she was seven months, eight months and nine months pregnant". He remembered that he too avoided his former wife and ran away from her. He said, " I jumped into my car and drove away on a number of occasions... I would just try and avoid the situation. I started working harder and harder and harder getting into more business and more things". Drawing on this, it appears that the spousal subsystem failed to provide Mr. and Mrs. Debonair with a supportive place in which they could each respectively deal with the family and other children. At many times during the course of the marriage, each party "ran away" from the other.

5.2.2.3. Dysfunctional Boundaries

Dysfunctional boundaries refer to the relationships within and between subsystems. Mrs. Debonair's reported enmeshment with her family of origin appears to have resulted in the spousal subsystem having diffuse boundaries. Members in such families rely upon systems outside the family for nurture and support. It is noteworthy that the boundaries within the spousal subsystem were rigid, which resulted in the couple's disengagement and isolation from one other. It can be seen that not only was the spousal subsystem not a cohesive system, it was also unable to screen out threatening and destabilising information, such as the information given to Mrs. Debonair by her mother, aunt and her brother who, "introduced her to drugs like cocaine."

Drawing on Mr. Debonair's narrative, it is evident that the spousal subsystems dysfunctional boundaries hindered the couple's ability to form a functional spousal subsystem. Furthermore, it appears that there was a lack of mutual accommodation, complementarity, adjustment, emotional bonding, co-operation and negotiation of roles in their spousal system. The spousal subsystem's dysfunctional boundaries seem to have hindered the couple's ability to move through the family lifecycle, where appropriate differentiation is considered a norm of healthy development.

Mr. Debonair explained that his former wife was undifferentiated from her mother, grandmother and her aunt, and that she was unable stand up for herself and to deflect their instruction and their interference in the marriage. Her inability to stand up to her family members is also reflected in her mothers' and other family members' reportedly abusive and disrespectful behaviour towards her. It seems as if Mrs. Debonair replicated her disturbed primary relationships in her own marriage with Mr. Debonair.

Mr. Debonair narrated that just before the birth of their second child, "we went overseas and something happened between her and her family and their relationship soured. That year

was absolute bliss... I promise you, she was like the most perfect wife ever. It was amazing". From this statement, it can be seen that when there was no destabilising interference from extended family members, the couple were more connected and the marital relationship improved significantly.

Unfortunately, the euphoria that Mr. Debonair experienced during that year was short lived, as the distance and separateness (change) was not maintained. After Mr. Debonair's former wife had reconciled with her family, the conflict between the couple resumed. They sought counselling, however it was to no avail. The conflict between them remained unresolved and the parties remained unhappy and disengaged from one another, with rigid boundaries between them. Their relationship never seemed to be the same, as when there was no interference from Mr. Debonair's former wife's extended family members.

5.2.2.4 Dysfunctional Communication

In Mr. Debonair's case, the couple's inability to effectively verbally communicate with one another is well illustrated by the following statement: "I've never experienced what I experienced on our honeymoon. I mean this girl would just start banging her head into the wall. I would wake up in the middle of the night and she'd be sitting there crying, just crying, what's wrong? I could never identify what I did or what I didn't do". This narrative illustrates how Mr. Debonair's ex-wife conveyed her emotions non-verbally by sending powerful messages to her husband about how she felt. Additionally, this dialogue demonstrates how, from the outset, their communication pattern defined the nature of their turbulent and dysfunctional relationship.

Mr. Debonair recalls that, "I never once yelled at her or touched her. I've been yelled at many a time. I've had pots thrown at me." He remembers that "...The day before M.E. (youngest son) was born was when all hell broke loose again. At the hospital she started screaming at me, shouting at me. Throughout her pregnancies, throughout the births, I had to be the object of humiliation in front of all the doctors ...". As previously mentioned, in times of conflict and unhappiness, rather than verbally communicating their feelings of unhappiness and discontent directly with one another, the couple ran away from one another.

Mrs. Debonair moved out of the house with her children at one stage during the marriage. She and the children lived with her boyfriend for ten days. Then, of her own volition and without any discussion, she returned home as if nothing untoward had happened. Mr. Debonair narrated the following, "...she calls me and she says, I've left you, I've moved in with my boyfriend and my kids are with me. She bangs down the phone and I can't find

her..., ten days later she comes back to my house... inebriated, with her grandmother and her mother, to come back". This incident highlights the couple's dysfunctional patterns of communication.

Mr. Debonair explained that he found it easier to remain silent about his unhappiness and dissatisfaction in the marriage. He explained that "I actually found that when I didn't say anything, it would be far easier than if I did."

It is apparent that these patterns of communication defined the nature of the couples's dysfunctional and conflicted relationship. Mr. and Mrs. Debonair never co-created a shared reality or interpretative framework with agreed-upon meanings regarding reality, interactions and communication.

5.2.2.5. Dysfunctional Behaviour During the Marriage

According to Mr. Debonair, his former wife "started to go mad... she started acting mad after their wedding. She said it was her childhood and her mother used to beat her up, she was molested by her cousins and this and that".

As his story unfolded, Mr. Debonair described more and more of his former wife's apparent dysfunctional behaviour. Referring to their honeymoon, he said, "I've never experienced what I experienced on my honeymoon". He went on to relate that when his former wife was pregnant with their second child, she tried to commit suicide three times by cutting her wrists, and that she also ran away from home several times during that pregnancy. He recalled that, "She ran away from home when she was seven months, eight months and nine months pregnant. She's 'within her due time'; and she disappeared; I'm frantic; no-one knows where she is". From Mr Debonair's account, it seems as if his ex-wife's dysfunctional behaviour became progressively more dysfunctional after she had given birth to their three children. He said that, "all hell broke loose after their first child was born, because now she would start screaming and shouting at the older child and I couldn't take it. I just couldn't take it". The older child was a mere two years old at that time. Mr. Debonair recalled that, "I mean, I remember that she used to do very crazy things. Very, very crazy things. I had things flung at me because I'm shielding the baby away from her, shouting, and she's flinging things".

Mr. Debonair explained that a forensic psychologist had diagnosed his ex-wife as having a borderline personality disorder. He said, "My ex-wife was never mentally well. She's a borderline personality". He reflected that, "She's been an alcoholic for many years. I took her to various sessions to try and get her better and, and you can lead a horse to water but

you can't force it to drink. And no matter how much therapy, how much counselling, how much of rehab you get; if you don't want to make a concerted effort to change, you are not gonna get there. And the day she wrote off my car, drunk out of her mind smashing into the wall. The cars' a write-off. It's fine. Car's not insured... it's also fine. Now I mean, that was the day I said, I can't take this anymore!". It seems from Mr. Debonair's narrative that from their wedding day onwards until after they were separated; his former wife's behaviour was dysfunctional. According to Mr. Debonair, their oldest son is scared of his mother. He reported that the clinic which assesses and treats abused children, disclosed that his former wife had held a knife to their oldest son's neck, because he would not go to the neighbour's house. It is noteworthy that this child elected to live with his father post-separation.

After fourteen years of marriage, the couple's dysfunctional relationship finally broke down. As previously mentioned, Mr. Debonair's former wife notified him telephonically after the fact, that she had left him.

5.2.3 Themes Related to the Divorce Process

5.2.3.1 Mastery of Divorce Challenges

It is important to bear in mind that at the time that the interview with Mr. Debonair took place, he was separated from his wife, but not yet divorced from her. From the outset, it became apparent that Mr. Debonair attributed the breakdown of the marriage mainly to his wife's reported personality disorder. He was however also able to recognise that running away from and his avoidance of their relationship difficulties because he "just couldn't handle it", contributed to the failure of the marriage.

Referring to the initial separation, Mr. Debonair narrated that, "I moved into an upmarket apartment but it wasn't conducive to my lifestyle. It was too much hype, too much of the 'plasticness'... which did me a bit of good during the first couple of months of the divorce... these plastic girls making you feel better and younger than you really are. But it wasn't my lifestyle, so I moved in with my parents". From the above, it appears that Mr. Debonair had completed the psychic post-divorce stage of Kaslow and Schwartz's model as described in 2.2.3.1 of Chapter 2.

Drawing on Mr. Debonair 's narrative, after the separation he seemed to be tackling the tasks of restructuring the marital and parent-child relationships and finances. He also appeared to be trying to find ways to effectively gain contact with his two youngest children. Notwithstanding, as the interview progressed, it became evident that he and his former spouse were unable to work co-operatively to resolve their problems of custody, visitation

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and finances. As a result, he never managed to restructure the marital and parent-child relationships.

5.2.3.2 High Conflict

From Mr. Debonair's narrative, and as discussed in 5.2.1.2 and also in 5.2.2, it can be seen that this couple's relationship during the marriage was characterised by a high degree of anger between the spouses, and it was generally fraught with conflict. The couple mistrusted one another, they had difficulty communicating with one another around matters regarding their children, and this pattern continued after they had separated. They were thus never able to co-parent effectively, owing to the continued high conflict post-divorce. The couple failed to draft a parenting plan after they separated, and as a result, Mr. Debonair was unable to exercise his parental responsibilities and rights in respect of his two youngest children, with whom he eventually lost contact. In addition, his former wife was unable to exercise her parental responsibilities and rights in respect of their oldest child, with whom she eventually lost contact.

5.2.3.3 Post Divorce Parental Relationships

Based on Mr. Debonair's lived experiences, he and his former wife seldom interacted with one another and they hardly communicated with one another effectively. When they did interact with one another, they did not talk politely to one another and they usually ended up fighting.

Mr. Debonair described the couple's divorce as being exceptionally acrimonious and litigious. He related that the couple were repeatedly going back to court to resolve various issues, particularly issues relating to maintenance for his ex-wife and contact with his two children, who were living with their mother. It can thus be seen that the couple were low in communication, and high in conflict. As mentioned above, the couple never managed to successfully work out contact arrangements for any of their three children.

5.2.4 Themes Related to the Alienation Process

It is important to be aware that at the time of the interview Mr. Debonair had not had contact with his two children for approximately two years. Taking into account the time period that Mr. Debonair did not have contact with his children, it can be inferred that Mrs. Debonair's primary alienating behaviour both during the marriage and post-separation was the withholding of contact from Mr. Debonair. The withholding of contact and other alienating behaviours that negatively influenced two of Mr. Debonair's children in turning against him will be discussed here under.

5.2.4.1. Limiting Contact

Mr. Debonair explained that he did not spend much time with the children during the marriage, as he tried to avoid the high level of conflict between himself and his former wife, by staying away from home and by working harder and establishing more and more businesses. Nevertheless, in an attempt to illustrate how his former wife tried to keep him away from his children during the marriage, he cited the following incident: he recalled that “she refused to allow me in the house that day. I called the police over to see the kids”. She told the police that she’s scared of me and she won’t allow me in. Alienating mothers commonly use the ploy that they are afraid of their violent or aggressive ex-husbands as a means of withholding contact with the children. Such behaviour places the police in a double-bind, as they can’t take the risk of allowing children to have contact with a man suspected of abusiveness, even though the law may say that the father is theoretically entitled to have contact with his children.

In addition to the above-mentioned incident, Mr. Debonair explained that his ex-wife tried to keep the children away from him, by trying to obtain a Protection Order against him. He recalled that, “...she then takes out a Protection Order against me, saying that I am physically abusive towards her, I’m sexually abusive towards her and I’m financially abusive towards her”.

Not only did Mrs. Debonair withhold access to the children from Mr. Debonair during the marriage, it appears from his narrative that she continued to do so post-separation, too. During the two years that he did not have any contact with the children, Mr. Debonair made several attempts to see them with professional people, such as the Family Advocate. He narrated the following incident that occurred during his first appointment at the Family Advocate’s Office, and which illustrates the said behaviour. He said, “I go the Family Advocates Office, the first appointment thinking I’m gonna see my kids today. It’s gonna be the first day I’ve seen them for some... She doesn’t pitch with them! I pitch there with my son. The form clearly said who she must pitch with. But guess what? We walk in the room... no one’s there!”.

Drawing on the following statement made by Mr. Debonair it can be seen that his former wife not only withheld contact with the children from him, but she also withheld contact with the children from his extended family members. He recalled that, “Before you knew it, this being the first grandchild, all the family came to see the baby. She refused for most of the family to see the kid.”

Mr. Debonair spoke about further incidents in which his former wife withheld physical and telephonic contact with the children. He said that the “meeting is scheduled for the 3rd March, first appointment with the Family Advocate” [sic], however Mrs. Debonair failed to attend the meeting. As a result, Mr. Debonair said, “I’ve got total lack of contact with these kids.” He added, “she (the Family Advocate) witnesses how my ex-wife won’t even let me speak on the phone to my children.”

5.2.4.2 Withholding and Destroying Gifts

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher asked Mr. Debonair how old his three children were. He responded with the following explanation, “Ah, my daughter is twelve. She just, she just turned thirteen. I haven’t seen her. I tried to call her for her birthday. I said, I had someone go and deliver something, a professional company. Ah, they arrived at the gate, ah; the grandmother took the stuff and threw it away!”. Mr. Debonair’s daughter probably never knew that her father had tried to call her on her birthday or that he had sent her a birthday gift. The child possibly felt hurt and rejected by what must have seemed like her father’s failure to acknowledge her milestone birthday.

Mr. Debonair recalled that, “I bought a whole lot of things for M on his birthday, I couldn’t get it to him, it was his birthday on... R (his daughter) birthday was on... I couldn’t see or chat to my daughter on her birthday or get anything to her on her birthday”.

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It is likely that through the acts of destroying the child’s birthday gift from her father and by frustrating his telephonic contact with his children on their respective birthdays, Mr. Debonair’s ex-wife was able to create the false and misleading impression that he had forgotten about their birthdays, or that he did not care about them enough to acknowledge their birthdays. Mr. Debonair perceived his ex wife’s behaviour in this regard as a deliberate attempt to sabotage his relationship with his children.

5.2. 4.3. Badmouthing

Mr. Debonair reported that his former wife badmouthed him, besmirched his good reputation in their community and she also spread false and malicious stories about him to several business associates, which had an extremely negative impact on his business relationships. He related how she has phoned his various business associates, and that she had disseminated untrue rumours about him. Whilst some of his business associates did not take any heed of his ex-wife’s allegations, there were others who did pay attention to what she had said. As a result, several business associates “...launched a Section 252 application to remove me from the company. So I’m now stuck in hefty commercial litigation, and these

stories are flying around the papers about me being a drug addict, me being this, me being that...I'm fighting four commercial matters". In addition to badmouthing Mr. Debonair amongst his business associates, Mrs. Debonair badmouthed him amongst the parents of his son's friends. Mr. Debonair explained, "she phoned every one of my son's friends' mothers up to say, do not let the children come near me. I'm a drug addict, I'll molest those kids, I'll do this, and I'll do that". As a result, the child's friends ostracised him at school for a period of time.

It would seem that Mr. Debonair's ex-wife may have spread rumours about him to the oldest child's friends' mothers as a counter-rejection of the child, as well as a means of punishing the child for his rejection of her and his apparent alignment with his father.

5.2.4.4. Withholding Information

Whilst Mr. Debonair had no contact with those two children who were living with their mother, he also had no access to any information about them. He did not know where his children lived and which schools they attended. He reports that, "I've got [a] total lack of contact with these kids. Come January [R his daughter] is taken out of the school she is in. Where is [R?]" Mr. Debonair subsequently ascertained that their daughter had been removed from her school without his knowledge or his consent. He explained that "that was not my permission. No transfer card given by the school and I had paid for the school fees for the year already" . He felt enraged and powerless that he had neither been consulted nor informed that his daughter had changed schools. He exclaimed, "You're not allowed to move a child without my permission! She's done it. She's done it!".

By sheer chance, Mr. Debonair found out that his youngest child had been enrolled at a religious school. To his dismay, he found out that the child had been absent from school for two thirds of year, and as a result the child had been removed from Grade 1, and he had been placed back in nursery school. He also found out that the child was "neglected, unkempt dirty and that he smelled" .

During the two years that Mr Debonair had no contact with his youngest children he did not receive any school reports or information as to whether they had visited any professional such as doctors, dentists or psychologists.

5.2.4.5 False Allegations

It appears that as the marriage progressed, the conflict between the couple escalated and a crescendo was reached post-separation. Mr. Debonair explained that subsequent to their separation, his former wife made a number of false allegations against him. He recalled that

she tried to discredit him by alleging that he abused illegal substances. He said, “Now in their papers I’m a cocaine addict, in their papers I’m a drug addict, in their papers, I’m an alcoholic, in their papers I’m a violent man” . He continued, “she takes out a Protection Order against me saying I’m physically abusive towards her, I’m sexually abusive and I’m financially abusive towards her”. Taking this into consideration, it is apparent that Mr. Debonair and his former wife were unable to communicate with one another effectively, they were unable resolve their conflict during the marriage, and they appeared to have greater difficulty resolving their conflict after they separated from one another.

Mr. Debonair claims that in addition to his former wife making false allegations against him, his daughter also made false allegations against him. He said, “R goes around telling everyone how I put a belt around her neck and tried to strangle her. She goes around telling people the most vicious stories I’ve ever heard and it hurts, it really hurts me. Because, God I’ve never been violent towards a man let alone a, I’ve never been in a fight. I mean from the time that I was a kid, I’ve always had a good mouth...”.

The two children who were living with their mother post-separation were removed from their former school and were enrolled in new schools. It took Mr. Debonair three months to locate the school in which his daughter had been enrolled. Thereafter, he went to the school hoping to get some information about his child. After leaving the school he was accosted by a gangster, who threatened him with his life. The following day, a Friday, the police arrived at his home and they attempted to arrest him for allegedly assaulting his ex-wife, even though he had not seen her or had any contact with her for quite some time. His former wife had laid a false charge of physical abuse against him. The police officers arrived at Mr. Debonair’s home, however they did not arrest him. He was warned to appear in the Magistrates Court several days later. Mr. Debonair attended court to find that his former wife had laid false charges of assault against him. This was the second occasion that his ex-wife had tried to obtain a Protection Order against him. Mr. Debonair provided the magistrate with proof that he was out of the country when the alleged assault was said to have taken place, and consequently the matter was withdrawn.

5.2.5 Themes Relating to the Impact of the Alienation

5.2.5.1. Loss

Mr. Debonair describes the loss of his relationship with his two youngest children as his first and most devastating. The loss of contact with these two children resulted in chronic emotional distress for him. He said, “I mean I hardly sleep, an hour, two hours I wake up in the night worrying about these kids, worrying about where this process is going to ‘get me’”

[sic]. From Mr. Debonair's narrative, it can be seen that he has suffered multiple losses as a consequence of the alienation process, where for example, he has lost his right to play a healthy and meaningful parenting role in the lives of his daughter and youngest son. He also lost the right to make major decisions affecting his children's lives, such as which schools they should attend. He stated that, "... that was not my permission ... and I had paid the school fees for the year already".

It is apparent from Mr. Debonair's narrative that he feels that as a result of the alienation process, he has lost his dignity, and that he is being treated worse than a criminal. He asks the following rhetorical questions, "When am I going to see my children? Drug dealers, drug addicts, murderers have access to their kids. Why am I not allowed to speak to them on the phone? Why all this?" The following statement made by Mr. Debonair seems to be a projection of his innermost feelings, and his feelings of his loss of dignity. He said, "if you don't have the money, and if you don't have connections, there's no way you're getting anywhere. You will be trodden over and dealt with like a piece of crap" .

In addition to the loss of contact with his two children, Mr. Debonair suffered a number of material losses as a consequence of the divorce. He lost his home and his car. He gave the following description of his home , " ...my house is one thousand three hundred square meters under roof. It's massive...". He said that he had lost his car when his former wife "smashed the car" .

Mr. Debonair made reference to the financial losses he has suffered as a result the alienation process. He stated, "I've spent so much money all over the show. I don't care about the money, but I'm spending money, I don't get to my end result" [sic]. The financial losses suffered by Mr. Debonair will be discussed more fully under 5.2.4.4.

5.2.5.2. Emotional Impact

When asked how the prolonged lack of contact with his children has impacted upon him, Mr. Debonair responded, "You don't wanna know eh?... it's been very difficult. It's been, you gotta understand it's two fold. I can't break down. But at the same time if I don't breakdown, If I don't deal with these issues, I am gonna breakdown to a point of not getting up... So I take everything within my control. It's impossible to cope because I do feel very powerless in a situation I find myself in. And I am powerless" .

From the above narrative, it can be seen that Mr. Debonair experienced a wide array of emotions post-separation, which he struggled to keep in check. He reflected, "I've never been in a state that's less then, I mean right now I haven't slept for three nights now, hardly

had sleep, but this is me without three night's sleep. Do you know what I'm saying? I mean, hardly sleep, an hour, two hours. I wake up in the night worrying about these kids, worrying about where this process going to 'get me'" .

5.2.5.3. Feelings of Powerlessness

It can be seen that the divorce and the commitment loss of his children have left Mr. Debonair feeling depressed and powerless. Powerlessness is a common theme underpinning Mr. Debonair' story. As previously discussed, Mr. Debonair's ex-wife unilaterally changed the school of the two children in her care, without consultation or notification to her ex-husband. Mr. Debonair's sense of powerlessness is well illustrated in the following narrative: "No. No-one got permission from me, no transfer card was given and I had paid the school fees for the year already... it took me three months to find her at that school. I went to the school, to try and get results. I was threatened with my life by a gangster" .

Mr. Debonair explained how he felt that other people such as his ex-wife and children seemed to have gained power over him. He appeared to feel that that he had lost control over the children's behaviour towards him, as two of his children had been given the power to determine whether they would agree to see him or speak to him or not. Moreover, it looks as if he had to be very careful when communicating with his children, lest he angered or antagonised them, as he feared that that would give his ex-wife additional reasons for not letting him see the children. Based on Mr. Debonair's account of his contact and relationship with two of his children post-separation, it seems as if he has lost his parenting role and that power and control shifted from him to his two children.

Mr. Debonair reported that his son, who is living with him, is also suffering from depression. This child lost all contact with his mother as well as with his two younger siblings. In referring to the child, he said that he, " ...was going through a portion of depression not long ago... He's now reached a point of....: will I ever see my brother again? Because everyone makes me promises and I don't see him" [sic]. Having to watch his child suffer from depression due to the breakdown of the family unit may well have engendered feelings of guilt in Mr. Debonair. Not being able to remedy the situation could also have heightened his sense of powerlessness.

Closely interlinked with Mr. Debonair's feelings of powerlessness is his feeling of not being in control over his life and not being able to control the alienation carried out by his ex-wife. On several occasions when his ex-wife attempted to get Protection Orders against him, he had to appear in court to defend the allegations made against him. In addition, he was a victim of

his ex-wife bad mouthing of him. He was rendered powerless in protecting his “good” image, particularly as a businessman, when his ex-wife slandered him amongst his business associates.

It is uncertain as to whether Mr. Debonair ever had much control over this situation. He acknowledged that, “I can’t control everything that’s in my power. I can’t control...It’s impossible to cope, because I do feel very powerless in the situation I find myself in. And I am powerless”. His feeling that he has no control over his destiny is echoed in the following statement, “I’ve learnt a lot, I’ve learned a lot of lessons. The most important lesson that I have learned is that you never have control over what you have in front of you and things will happen”. Mr. Debonair’s pain at being rendered powerless to help his children is reflected in the following statement, “they have been traumatized and I can’t do anything to help them, that’s what hurts the most.” Mr. Debonair seemed to feel as if he had been relegated to the realm of an impotent and ineffective parent.

5.2.5.4 Economic Impact

Mr. Debonair explained that the divorce process had a considerably negative economic impact upon him. He recalled that, “...they launched a section 252 application to remove me from the company... I’m stuck in hefty commercial litigation ...stories flying around in the papers of me being a drug addict... I live in a very conservative business world... I’m fighting four commercial matters plus my divorce right now. [I have] spent millions of rands in litigation and frankly I’m financially crippled...I’m totally crippled”. Having to consult with his legal advisors and having to appear in court impacted upon Mr Debonair’s working hours and limited his earning capacity.

Mr. Debonair summarised the economic impact upon him as follows,“I don’t have anything. I’m sitting in a crisis; I haven’t drawn a salary for six months now. Six months. I haven’t drawn a salary because of the litigations”.

5.2.6. Themes related to support systems

5.2.6.1 Involvement of Professionals, Organisations, Family and External Systems

There were a number of different professionals and organisations involved in Mr. Debonair’s case. When Mr. Debonair realised that he could no longer continue living as he was and that the marriage was over, he put forward a settlement agreement, which Mrs. Debonair rejected. Thereafter she attempted to obtain a Protection Order against him, citing physical, sexual and financial abuse. As a result of the allegations of abuse made against Mr.

Debonair, the South African Police Services, as well as several magistrates, were also involved in the case.

During the separation, Mr. Debonair's daughter made false allegations that he had sexually abused her. This resulted in an investigation being conducted by The Teddy Bear Clinic, which is a resource for abused children. According to Mr. Debonair, the Teddy Bear Clinic could find no conclusive evidence that any of the children had been abused by him. His daughter apparently launched what are known in family law circles as the 'nuclear weapons' of custody litigation, namely accusations of physical or sexual abuse. These accusations are potent, and they usually result in an immediate court-ordered restriction or limitation on normal contact between the accused parent and their child/ren. According to Mr. Debonair, The Teddy Bear Clinic found that their youngest son had been abused by his mother. Notwithstanding this allegations, the child was not removed from his mother's care.

After several months of being denied contact with his two children, Mr. Debonair approached the Family Advocate for assistance in order to gain contact with them. A meeting was scheduled for the parties and the children to meet with the Family Advocate. At the time of the scheduled meeting, Mr. Debonair had not seen his children for a period of seven months. When Mr. Debonair established that his former wife and their two children were not going to attend the meeting, he "broke down in tears". The Family Advocate then phoned Mr. Debonair's former wife and she witnessed the way in which his former wife would not allow him to speak to the children on the telephone. To Mr. Debonair's astonishment, and to his great despair, the Family Advocate seemingly did nothing to remedy the situation.

The family were referred by the Family Advocate to an independent psychologist for a custody evaluation. The psychologist identified that the children had been alienated from their father, and she recommended that he be given age-appropriate contact with his two children from whom he had been alienated.

It is noteworthy that in spite of the number of different professionals involved in this matter, nobody was able to assist Mr. Debonair in regaining contact with his two children.

5.2.6.2. Dissatisfaction with Service Providers

It is evident from Mr. Debonair's dialogue that he was most dissatisfied with what he perceived as the police, forensic psychologist, attorneys and the Family Advocate Office's lack of knowledge of PAS. He attributed the fore mentioned service providers apparent inadequate knowledge of PAS as a major contributing factor to his ex-wife's unrelenting and alienating behaviour.

Mr. Debonair explained that he went along to the Office of the Family Advocate, thinking that they would assist him in finally gaining contact with his children. He remembers how he thought, "Now the kids' access and everything will be decided by the Family Advocate". His thoughts were not unreasonable, as theoretically the role of the Family Advocate is to assist parties to reach an agreement on disputed issues, namely residence, contact and guardianship. As previously mentioned, much to his disappointment, Mr. Debonair's ex-wife and his children never arrived for their appointment with the Family Advocate. Undaunted, Mr. Debonair went along to the Family Advocate Office for the second time, only to find that once again, his ex-wife had not turned up.

From the above, it seems that Mr. Debonair appears to have been under the misapprehension that the Family Advocate had the powers to instruct his ex-wife to bring the children to their office immediately. In addition, he seemed disappointed that the Family Advocate had not punished his ex-wife for her failure to bring the children as she had been requested to do. In his eyes, she had managed to carry out alienating behaviour with impunity.

Mr. Debonair perceived the Family Advocate as having failed him as he naively expected that they would intervene and ensure that he had contact with his two children who were living with their mother.

Mr. Debonair voiced his dissatisfaction with what he perceived as the police services' incompetence. He relayed that he had been wrongfully arrested and detained for allegedly assaulting his ex-wife, despite having proof that he was out of the country when the alleged offence was supposed to have taken place. He recalled that "when it went to court, the public prosecutor looks at this, looks at my passport, looks at all the proof of the hotels, looks at the talks [where] I was speaking, looks at the video the conference at which I spoke. He says, 'This is [a] false arrest. I want you to lay a charge against her' [sic]. Mr. Debonair justifies his refusal to lay a counter charge against his ex-wife by saying, "I'm sorry, I'm not gonna put the mother of my kids in jail" .

Mr. Debonair also expressed his disappointment with the forensic psychologist, who assessed the family. He maintained that she had failed to correctly identify why his children had rejected him. He contends that his children have been alienated. He denies that his one child is frightened of him as the psychologist had reported. He explained, "That boy loves me to bits. When I read what she said in that report... put him in front of me, see him in front of me.... watch him run and not leave me. Watch him grip me and say Dad. He's saying that because he has been made to believe things about me, which are not true. Which are totally not true" .

Mr. Debonair queried the psychologist's professional competence. He asked, "...the kids are traumatised. Why wouldn't B (psychologist) insist on M (oldest son who was living with him) going for therapy? He should not be given the option" [sic]. Mr. Debonair said that he fervently hoped that by the child going to therapy some competent professional would have identified what was happening to the children and would thus have put a stop to the protracted process of alienation.

Mr. Debonair recalled that he felt hurt by the contents of the psychologist's report, which he perceived to be inadequate. He said, "That report hurt me a lot. I said, 'How much more of a process is this gonna be?' Why didn't B (psychologist) write the stuff about the school? Why didn't this come in? Why didn't that come in? I've spent so much money all over the show" [sic]. Mr. Debonair felt let down and disillusioned by all the professionals who he believed should have assisted him, but who in his eyes had failed to do so. He asked, "Why are the kids being destroyed the way they are? Has no-one got any care for the kids? Show me how this process has helped my kids one iota?"

In conclusion, it can be seen from Mr. Debonair's rich and descriptive interview that his former wife engaged in a number of alienating behaviours, including but not limited to: badmouthing him; limiting his contact with two of their children; withdrawing love from the child who chose to live with him, and badmouthing him by saying he is dangerous and abusive.

Mr. Debonair has a sense that 'the system' has failed him and it has also failed his children.

5.3 MR. PATHOS' PROFILE

5.3.1 Profile

5.3.1.1.Context

Mr. Pathos is a man in his early forties. He was born and raised in United Kingdom. He is the only son born of his parent's marriage. He had two sisters older than himself, one of whom passed away. His parents were divorced when he was a young boy, after which his mother left the family to pursue her own interests. According to Mr. Pathos, his father, "was never there for me 'cause he was always overseas... It was very difficult for our family and I always vowed that I'd never be like that with my children" [sic]. Mr. Pathos emigrated to South Africa after he had completed his schooling in the United Kingdom.

At the time of Mr. Pathos' marriage to his former wife, she had a child from a previously relationship, whom he later adopted. The marriage survived for only a few years. Mr. Pathos

fell ill when his second son was a toddler. According to Mr. Pathos, the couples' relationship deteriorated and it became particularly bad after the youngest child was born.

Mr. Pathos explained that he was hospitalised on twenty three occasions, and he almost lost his life. He believed that his marriage deteriorated as a result of his ill-health and his incapacitation. Mr. and Mrs. Pathos separated when their children were three, four and eight years old, respectively.

Mr. Pathos lost his health, his job and his family as a result of his illness. His youngest sister, with whom he had a close relationship, passed away during this time.

Mr. Pathos' story is slightly different from that of the other three father's stories. For a period of two years post-divorce, he had no contact with his three children at all. Then, the children were removed from their mother's care, as she neglected them, and her erstwhile boyfriend had also reportedly physically abused them. After the children were removed from their mother, they were placed in his care. Having been in his care for approximately two years, the children returned to their mother's care, as Mr. Pathos had fallen ill again, and he could no longer look after them. During the two years that the children lived with their mother Mr. Pathos was not allowed contact with them by his ex-wife.

At the time of the interview, the children had once again been removed from their mother's care on the recommendation of a social worker, and they had been placed back with their father. According to Mr. Pathos, his ex-wife "... wasn't caring for the children and her boyfriend at the time, with whom she and the children were living, was a very violent individual".

5.3.1.2. The marriage

Mr. Pathos and his ex-wife had known one another for a year prior to their marriage. Mr. Pathos recalled that soon after the marriage, Mrs. Pathos fell pregnant, however early on in the pregnancy, she miscarried. Shortly thereafter, she fell pregnant again and she gave birth to their second son. Mr. Pathos reflected, "After that, I fell ill, I had complications, health complications, and that stretched right the way through on and off". Mr. Pathos recalled that as his health deteriorated, so too did his marriage. In his words, "there were serious problems". His former wife had established a new relationship and thus she was "not at home the majority of the time, she was out with the children, dropping the children at her aunt's place and then going out and... till the small hours of the morning partying with a certain individual, her then-boyfriend".

Mr. Pathos recalled that, “what really hurt me as well is, I was so sick and ill and my former wife used to push me and I used to end up in tears” . Based on Mr. Pathos’s former wife’s reported lack of empathy and her apparent callous behaviour towards him, one can infer that the couple’s relationship was devoid of mutual support, love, concern and care.

Drawing on Mr. Pathos’ narrative, it is understood that the couple’s relationship lacked intimacy and mutual support. According to Mr. Pathos, he was unaware that his former wife did not love him. He said that, “...believing that my wife loved me and then finding out she didn’t... I feel that I was blinded to so much”.

5.3.1.3 Father’s Involvement with the Children Prior to the Separation

When Mr. Pathos’ children were still young, his health was very poor. As a consequence, he spent a great deal of time in hospital, away from his family. Accordingly, his parenting of and involvement with his children was limited. He explains that, “I was really bad. During the period of 2001 to 2003, I spent about... I was in hospital about 23 times in total”. He said “...I feel there’s a part of my life that I missed out on with my children” [sic]. He recalls that for a period of six weeks whilst he was hospitalised, he never saw his ex-wife or their children.

Mr. Pathos explained that, “I missed out so much of my children’s life and I wasn’t there like I wanted to be... I couldn’t play an integral part in their lives that I always wanted to do... utilise this against me”. One can infer from this that Mr. Pathos’ former wife used his illness as a means to undermine his parenting role and to disrupt his relationship with the children, by withholding contact with them from him.

Comment [GW51]: unclear fragment requiring a subject.

As a result of Mr. Pathos’ absence from the children’s lives, and the minimal parenting role that he was able to fulfil due to his illness, it can be inferred that the parent-child relationship could at best be described as tenuous. Accordingly, his lack of involvement with the children made it easier for them to become aligned with their mother post-separation, and in so doing, that they rejected him.

5.3.1.4. The Separation

According to Mr. Pathos, the separation came as a surprise to him. He recalled that he was notified by his attorney the day before his former wife and children left the common home that she would be living elsewhere. Mr. Pathos has no knowledge as to what explanation his former wife gave the children regarding their separation. He said, “She basically had told the children ...I don’t know what she told the children”.

Mr. Pathos was denied the opportunity of saying goodbye to his three children when they left their common home. He remembered that, "she had taken the children early in the morning to her aunt's house. [D, the oldest child] was at a friend, so I had no opportunity there to really say goodbye to any of the children". Mr. Pathos reflected that from the time that his ex-wife left their common home, "she was reluctant to let me have any contact with the children from that point." Later on after his ex wife had left the common home, and subsequent to his discharge from hospital, his ex-wife agreed to let him have contact with the children, however she insisted that his contact with them was supervised. She seemed to be of the opinion that due to his poor health, and because he was on strong medication, Mr. Pathos was incapable of looking after the children on his own. Mr. Pathos indicated that "...if I wanted to see the children I had to have somebody ...an adult who could care for them, at that point in time". Whilst Mr. Pathos experienced his ex-wife's behaviour in this regard as being unreasonable, given the circumstances and especially since he was taking such strong medication to control his pain, while also given his children's very young age, it appears that his ex-wife was simply exercising responsible parental care in respect of the children.

Shortly after Mrs. Pathos and their three children left the common home however, they all moved in with her boyfriend, who turned out to be a very violent individual. It was established in court that he had physically abused the children. In addition, it appears that the children were being neglected by their mother, who in Mr. Pathos' words, "wasn't caring for them and was going through job after job after job" [sic]. Mr. Pathos lamented that "she can't even provide for them. I have to buy them flannels, I bought them lip-ice 'cause their lips were cracked, and she won't do it... I mean she's providing underpants, I bought three to four years [ago] and they are still wearing them at eight and nine years old".

Mr. Pathos recalled that his ex-wife managed to keep the children away from him for two years. During that time, she also managed to block and to sabotage his telephone contact with them. He recalled that, "she wasn't answering her phone. And then, when it was the children's birthday, my birthday, the children's birthdays, my birthdays, Christmas, that she would refuse me, or they would answer and I have E [youngest son] answer the phone [saying] 'I don't want to speak to you ever again, just go away', and it was something that she had instrumented".

5.3.2 Themes Related to the Martial Relationship

5.3.2.1 Lack of a Well-Defined Spousal System

The lack of early negotiation of roles and rules and accommodation in this spousal subsystem is of importance in this family. In the context of Mr. Pathos' relationship with his ex-wife, it appears that the couple had not allocated rules or traditional role functions, and that they did not seem to have mutual expectations that they would provide one another with benefits such as social support, care, nurture and safety. This was especially evident when at the time that Mr. Pathos fell ill and needed his ex-wife's support, care and nurture, she was unavailable to him, and there was no complementarity in their relationship. He recalled that, "[as] soon as I fell ill, she turned her back on me and that was it" [sic]. Owing to his illness, early on in the marriage Mr. Pathos was unable to fulfil the traditional role of breadwinner. From this, it seems that this couple did not establish rules that helped to stabilise and regulate the family's functioning. Change in traditional roles, such as which spouse ought to be the breadwinner, was not negotiated effectively, and that led to the disintegration of the couple's relationship and marriage.

An additional prominent feature of this spousal subsystem is the lack of complementarity. The couple never seemed to have learnt how to accommodate and adapt to the needs of the other. Each spouse appears to have gone their own way, and there appears to have been no give and take on either side. Mr. Pathos said that, "...the fact that nobody was there for me, the fact that she was never there for me, the fact that she started this in the very beginning with the children, to actually accomplish something in the morning was so damn difficult" .

Comment [GW52]: Meaning unclear

As previously mentioned, there was no emotional bonding in this couple subsystem, and there was also no accommodation of one another's needs. It can be inferred that due to Mr. Pathos' serious health issues during the marriage, his former wife's needs were unmet. Consequently, she established a new relationship with a boyfriend.

5.3.2.2. Disconnectedness

Based on Mr. Pathos' narrative, it appears that there was little involvement among family members, as well as a great deal of personal separateness and independence. In addition, family members were unable to turn to one another for support and problem-solving. The extent of disconnectedness in Mr. Pathos' relationship with his ex-wife is clearly illustrated by the following narrative, "But the situation was that I honestly, I didn't realise that there was so much going on. My marriage was breaking down, there were signs that I didn't obviously

see, but my family saw... where it became evident was where I was in hospital for a period around about six weeks... and during that period of time, I never saw R [his wife] or the children". These patterns of disconnectedness escalated, and ultimately resulted in the alienation of the children.

Had the couple been connected to one another, it could reasonably have been expected that Mr. Pathos' ex-wife would have been at his side to comfort and to support him throughout his illness. Instead, Mr. Pathos felt that he was left with "not having anybody around besides me at that time, when this was, when I was going through, especially somebody you thought was so important" . From this statement, the couple's opposing needs of connectedness and disconnectedness is made evident.

5.3.2.3. Dysfunctional boundaries

In contrast to rigid boundaries are clear boundaries, which are firm, yet permeable, and allow appropriate access across subsystems and systems. Additionally, clear boundaries allows for the negotiation of developmental, expected and unexpected changes in the family system, such as when a family member falls ill. In systems with clear boundaries there is an appropriate balance between nurture, support, the taking of responsibility and making allowances for an appropriate amount of autonomy amongst system members and subsystems. These elements were sorely lacking in Mr. Pathos' family.

Based on Mr. Pathos' narrative, it is evident that the spousal subsystem and the parent-child subsystems had rigid boundaries that were characterised by disengagement within and between systems. Family members were isolated from one another and the family lacked cohesion, particularly during the period of his illness.

Drawing on Mr. Pathos' narrative, it can be seen that the boundaries between the spouses were rigid, and were characterised by a lack of mutual support and dysfunctional communication. The boundaries between the spousal system and the environment, however, were diffuse. Consequently, Mr. Pathos' wife was easily able to become involved with a boyfriend whilst they were still married, and furthermore, the interference of family members such as her aunt was able to permeate the spousal subsystem.

5.3.2.4. Dysfunctional Communication

It appears that during the marriage, Mr. Pathos and his former wife developed a pattern of indirect communication with one another to the extent that Mr. Pathos acknowledged that "I didn't realise that there was so much more going on. My marriage was breaking down... there were signs that I didn't obviously see, but my family saw" . He explained that it

“...became evident... I was in hospital for a period of around six weeks...”.During that time he didn't see his ex-wife or his children. His ex-wife's failure to visit him for six weeks whilst he was hospitalised, and her apparent failure to directly communicate with him during that time, sent a very powerful message of her disinterest in and apathy towards him. Furthermore, by frequently going out till the small hours of the morning on her own, his ex-wife sent a powerful indirect message to him that she was disinterested in him and that the marriage was over for her.

Mr. Pathos spoke about the following incident, which highlights the couple's inability to communicate effectively with one another and their failure to resolve their differences. He related that the parties could not agree as to whether they should tell the oldest child that he was not his biological father, and that he had been adopted. He said that they were consulting a psychologist in this regard, who was preparing them as to how they should approach the matter, when he relates that unexpectedly and without warning, “she just came out and told him: ‘your father's not your father. ‘Joe Blogs’ is”.

Mr. Pathos related that during the marriage he was under the impression that his wife loved him. He said that he was shocked to find out that this was not the case. He recalled that, “...believing that my wife loved me and then finding out she didn't...I feel that I was blinded so much...”. This highlights the couple's lack of direct communication with one another, and one can infer that rather than expressing the feelings about one another directing to each other, they engaged in “mind reading” and that they assumed they knew what one another was thinking and feeling.

Comment [GW53]: Awkward, meaning unclear, consider revising

It can be seen from Mr. Pathos' narrative that towards the latter part of the marriage, the couple's communication with one another had broken down to the point where they only communicated with one another indirectly via third parties, such as their respective attorneys. Significant life-changing events such as their separation was never discussed between them.

From a systemic perspective, it could be understood that the couples' dysfunctional communication patterns may have contributed to the distance, disengagement, rigid boundaries and isolation between the partners and between Mr. Pathos and his children.

5.3.2.5. Dysfunctional Behaviour During the Marriage

With regards to dysfunctional behaviour during the marriage, as previously mentioned, Mr. Pathos remembered that whilst he was ill and incapacitated, his ex-wife was “going out till the small hours of the morning, partying with a certain individual, her then-boyfriend - she

was seeing somebody...". He remembered that there were "nights where she wouldn't even make her bed. The bedding had been washed and it hadn't even been made and she would just pull the duvet over and sleep with the children". Mr. Pathos' ex-wife's reported behaviour demonstrates her lack of respect for the traditional and expected spousal roles, such as loyalty, support, care and respect for the marriage.

Not only was his former wife's behaviour detrimental to Mr. Pathos, it was also not good for the children's physical and emotional wellbeing.

5.3.3 Themes Related the Divorce Process

5.3.3.1 Mastery of Divorce Challenges

From Pathos' narrative, it can be understood that he struggled to work co-operatively with his ex-wife post-divorce. They were never able to resolve the problems of custody, and they never managed to make flexible visitation arrangements. They appeared to have been stuck regarding their parenting roles as they were unable to find ways effectively co-parent. As a result, the children have moved back and forth between their parents post-divorce.

With respect to financial support, it is inferred from Mr. Pathos' account that he had a willingness to maintain financial responsibilities for the children post-divorce.

5.3.3.2 High Conflict

Mr. Debonair and his ex wife's post divorce relationship is characterised by litigation and re-litigation, high degrees of anger and distrust, verbal abuse and ongoing difficulty in communication about the care of their children. Despite numerous visits to the Office of the Family Advocate, and despite having engaged the services of two social workers, this couple never managed to draft a parenting plan, and they were unable to co-parent effectively.

Mr. Debonair reports that after he discovered that his ex-wife and her boyfriend were physically abusing the oldest child, he went to court to obtain a Protection Order against them, after which he went back to court to have the original divorce order adjusted in order that the children could live primarily with him. As mentioned above, the children had never experienced both their parents being actively involved in their lives at the same time. Either their mother took care of them to the exclusion of their father, or vice versa.

It appears that a great deal of the conflict experienced by this couple arose over boundaries. The boundaries between them seemed to have constantly shifted, and arbitrarily so, which caused uncertainty and frequent power struggles; either this or they were too rigidly defined, which did not allow for necessary interdependency.

5.3.3.3 Post Divorce Parental Relationships

From Mr. Pathos' narrative, it can be seen that he experienced his ex-wife as being verbally, emotionally and physically abusive towards him during their marriage. From his narrative, it is understood that the physical abuse stopped after the separation however, the verbal and emotional abuse continued. They seemed angry with one another, whenever they communicated with each other.

It can be seen from Mr. Debonair's narrative that because this couple experienced difficulty in containing their anger towards one another; that they were unable to communicate effectively with one another; and that they were never able to resolve their conflicts with one another. As a result, their relationship has been in a consistent state of conflict. They have been unable to find common ground, and so they have parented separately and their children have lived compartmentalized lives.

5.3.4 Themes Related to the Alienation Process

It can be seen from Mr. Pathos' narrative that the alienation process in this family began during the course of the marriage, and continued post separation. As in the case of Mr. Debonair and the other two fathers, limiting contact appears to have been the main alienating manoeuvre engaged in by Mr. Pathos' former spouse.

5.3.4.1. Limiting Contact

It can be seen that in this family, the alienation process began whilst Mr. Pathos and his ex-wife were still married to one another. Mr. Pathos recalls that when he was hospitalized for a period of six weeks he "...never saw R [his ex-wife] or the children."

Subsequent to his discharge from hospital, Mr. Pathos struggled to see his children. By that stage, Mr. Pathos' ex-wife had left the common home and the children were living with her. He recalled that, "...she refused me contact with the one child on his birthday... she refused to let me have them that day, to even spend some time with them". He recalled that his ex-wife denied him contact with the children on special occasions such as their birthdays and Christmas. He said, "she wasn't answering her phone...when it was the children's birthday... Christmas...she would refuse me."

Mr. Pathos continued to struggle to have contact with his children after they had left the common home. During the couple's separation, Mr. Pathos' former wife and children had moved in with her boyfriend. He recalled that for a period of time, "I didn't have the children

for sleepovers at that point in time, I had daily visitation that was it, and there was no week-end visitation” .

Mr. Pathos recalled that as time went by, his ex-wife “was very reluctant to let me have any contact with the children. My contact was frustrated, telephone calls was frustrated” [sic]. Mr. Pathos recalled that when he went around to the children’s nursery school without having made an appointment to see them there. He recalled that he was “... threatened with the fact”. He said that his ex-wife had notified the school that that he was not allowed to have contact with the children. He remembered that his ex-wife had informed the school that in the event that Mr. Pathos arrived at the school “...they must notify her and she would phone the police, which she had no right to do”.

With regards to telephone calls, Mr. Pathos remembers that his ex-wife wouldn’t answer the phone. He reflected that, “the children didn’t realise the times I’d phoned” and eventually he ascertained that, “They had been told that I had abandoned them and this had been documented as well”.

Mr. Pathos explained that he believed that his former wife was repeating the pattern of limiting her oldest son’s contact with his biological father, with him and their children. He said, “Exactly the same as [R] did to the oldest child’s biological father. I realise now, you know, [R] during that time spun me out this long elaborate story of how... how he was such a bad and horrible person, he didn’t care and I realise that at that point I was travelling down the same path as... what you know, what she was actually saying and doing to me is what she said and done to him”.

Mr. Pathos summed up the situation as follows “...I was always fighting against something. but it was clear that her and her attorney were not interested in me having any form of contact with the children”.

5.3.4.2 Badmouthing

Mr. Pathos was prescribed post-operative medication for pain relief. He remembers that, “In public, she made it known that I was now a drug addict, and she went around telling the children as well that I was, ‘Daddy’s a drug addict, he’s not good, he’s this, he’s that ’, and this is the type of thing I’d contend with”. In addition, his ex-wife insisted that his contact with the children be supervised, despite him having a “letter from my doctor to her stating that there is nothing wrong with my condition that will inhibit me from looking after the children, so I could get that visitation, but she still, still needed somebody to be with me”.

Mr. Pathos' narrative is interspersed with references to what he perceives as his ex-wife's manipulative behaviour, and to the lies he says she has told about him and his relationship with his children. He said, "R will manipulate it, R will lie, R will do anything". He said that, " R has lied and she does that. If I say, hello to R, she'll go and say to the courts I swore and threatened her life, that's the type of person she is. She'd done it before it before, she'll do it again. And who believes the man? Nobody".

5.3.4.3. Withholding Information

Whilst the children were in their mother's care, Mr Pathos' ex-wife withheld information about them from their father. Mr. Pathos also had no access to children's respective schools or to their school reports.

At one stage in the two year period of time that Mr. Pathos had no contact with the children, he received a phone call from a radiologist who informed him that the middle child had broken his arm. He said, "... and that's the worst thing, you don't have contact, you don't have, you don't have any form, there's no form of information at all... you know, didn't know what was going on their lives". He continued, "but to find out things out through other people that involved my rights to know what's actually going on in their lives, it's disgusting, beyond acceptable. It's unacceptable totally unacceptable. Deplorable". From this it is evident that Mr. Pathos felt frustrated, humiliated and disempowered when information regarding his children was being withheld from him. He said that "not knowing is the worst thing" [sic]. He added, "and that's what I had to go to bed with every night, not seeing my children for two years. Not knowing...".

5.3.4.4 False Allegations

As previously mentioned, when Mr. Pathos established that his oldest son had been physically abused by his former wife's boyfriend, he obtained a Protection Order on behalf of their oldest child against his ex-wife and her boyfriend. Shortly thereafter the children were placed in his care. He said that his ex-wife – in what appears to be a retaliatory form of behaviour – then laid a false charge against him for allegedly breaching the divorce order by withholding the children from her.

According to Mr. Pathos' account, subsequent to his ex-wife laying the charge, the children were reluctant to have contact with her, as they were afraid that their father would be incarcerated during their absence and they would have to go back to their mother. Mr. Pathos explained that his ex-wife informed the children that their father was going to be arrested if they did not have contact with her. He explained that when the police came

around to their house to investigate the charge laid by his ex-wife, the children were very frightened. After much persuasion, they capitulated and they went to visit their mother. Thereafter, they had only intermittent contact with her.

5.3.5 Themes Related to the Impact of the Alienation

5.3.5.1 Loss

Loss is a predominant and poignant theme that runs through Mr. Pathos' story, in terms of general personal losses as well as losses related to the divorce and losses related to the alienation process with his children. The overarching loss he experienced was the severe losses related to his failing health.

From Mr. Pathos' story, it can be seen that the separation was a time of great sadness and loss for him. He remembers wondering, "You've lost your ability to work, you've lost your marriage, you've now lost your children, what else, what else was on the horizon? You know... and my children to me were the most important thing, they really were".

Mr. Pathos summed up his losses as follows: "having these operations, what's gonna happen and having complications in operations before where you didn't know what was gonna happen, you know, whether this was the last time you gonna breathe or whatever or come out, you didn't know what was gonna happen. I didn't know what was gonna happen. It was horrible, it was terrible. And, you know, the fact that you've done nothing wrong, to actually experience your life had taken such a bad turn with your health and then everything around you disintegrates".

With regards to the losses that arose as a result of the alienation process, Mr. Pathos lost contact with his children, and he essentially lost his parental role. He had no knowledge about or say in the children's education, or in matters pertaining to their health. He was denied the opportunity to make decisions regarding the children and he was unable to impart his beliefs and values to them. Furthermore he was denied sharing pleasurable experiences with them.

Mr. Pathos poignantly summed up the devastating effect of the losses he experienced as follows, "Not knowing what they looked like, enjoying events that fathers should be able to enjoy with their children... football, their enjoyments, their activities... sitting down and laughing, joking with them like we do now, being part of their life...having that taken away from me...".

5.3.5.2 Emotional Impact

Mr. Pathos's recalled that his feelings of loss were compounded by his sense of extreme isolation and abandonment, as a consequence of the alienation. He felt that nobody cared about what happened to him, which may well have contributed to his reported depressed state. It appears that Mr. Pathos's sense of isolation and his feelings of abandonment were exacerbated by his perception that the system had failed him and had let him down. He had the sense that nobody cared about his plight. He said that, "You know, no matter who you speak to nobody cares... the amount of frustration within and the system just doesn't work, it just doesn't work".

It is evident that not knowing what was going on in his children's lives and missing out on significant events and occasions had a profound impact on Mr. Pathos. He said, "I was missing out. I'd fought for my life and I was missing out on my children's life, being able to be there for them, to speak to them, to hold them, to love them, to care for them, to enjoy life with them...".

Mr. Pathos recalls that when he had no contact with his children, he felt that his life was empty and that he had nothing to live for. He explained how he felt as follows, "as I have told you, waking, going to bed with nothing, waking up the next day with nothing.... how can I say it, it's an accumulation of the day before".

Ultimately, Mr. Pathos was overwhelmed by a profound sense of despair and depression, which resulted in him being unable to function or to accomplish anything. He recalled that he was just focused on worrying about his children. He said, "...to function, you can't... to actually get up and accomplish something in the morning was so damn difficult. You know I would lie to you if I said I hadn't contemplated suicide". He added, "cause at the end of the day I didn't have the guts to tell you the truth I didn't have the guts to commit suicide, I really didn't".

5.3.5.3. Feelings of Powerlessness

Mr. Pathos felt angry, outraged and powerless that his three children were neglected, whilst they were under their mother's care. He reflected that nobody had identified that the children were being neglected, nor had anybody stepped in and put measures in place to stop the neglect. He bemoaned that "...what they've been subjected to is just totally unacceptable and no child should have to go through that. No father should have to go through it. I mean, right from the outset ,I portrayed everything that people stood back and looked at... and it hurt because I know, under me, they will have that care" [sic].

Notwithstanding the Protection Order which Mr. Pathos obtained against his wife and her erstwhile boyfriend, he still felt powerless and unable protect his children. Referring to his oldest child he said, "...he cut the sacrum area of the spine quite deeply, I had to take him to the doctors. He couldn't sit down... grabbing him by the face and bruising him... he couldn't even speak properly, his jaw was bruised... my bringing the application created more problems for the child... because my ex-wife just 'flew at' the child". He said that, "she hurt the children because they didn't say thank you for the sweets she gave them... immediately didn't say thank you when they got into the car. Witnessed by the security guard through the front window, she laid into them".

From this statement it can be inferred that despite there being witnesses present when his ex-wife "laid into" the children, he was powerless to stop her abusive behaviour towards them.

Mr. Pathos explained that whilst the children lived with him, he also felt powerless, as he was unable to manage and control their dysfunctional behaviour. Referring to the oldest child he said that "...he was disturbing the whole environment... he was getting involved in fights at school, I was forever down at the school trying to attend to situations... when I told him to go to his bedroom to study, I was accused of locking him in his bedroom... escape through the windows... if I disciplined him in any form or manner... the same stories would come out again... and homework wasn't being done, studying wasn't being done, he was stealing from me, I had a situation where he was stealing from shops...".

It appears that Mr. Pathos feels that his poor health handicapped him and rendered him powerless to protect his children, as he had to send them back to their mother after two years of being cared for by him. He explained he had relapsed and fallen very ill and was he was thus unable to take care of them. He said that sending the children back to their mother was very painful for him, however he felt that there was nothing else he could do. He recalled that "when the children went back to live with R, she didn't stop with me... the abuse from her boyfriend, the abuse continued... she ceased all contact. She lied to the attorneys... she had no regard for anything... her boyfriend phoning me and swearing at me". Mr. Pathos recalled that ex-wife's behaviour rendered him powerless.

The alienation process has left Mr. Pathos feeling powerless and psychologically scarred. He said that, "It's just very difficult, because there is so much, there's eight years, seven years or eight, six to eight years of emotion and trauma that's all locked up inside me that I can't, I can only deal with what I said to you, and it vents itself in different ways... when I have the children and I wanna cry because I can't believe that I'm seeing my children".

5.3.5.4 Economic Impact

Referring to his ex-wife, Mr. Pathos explained that “when she left here, she basically wiped me out... basically left with everything... I never had any support from her during those two years, financially as well, you know, with all this, trying to provide for the children. You know major, major debt. You know, maxed my credit cards trying to provide. Got nothing from her whatsoever...”.

After the separation, Mr. Pathos incurred heavy legal costs in his efforts to gain contact with his children. When the children were finally placed in his care, he incurred additional costs to provide for their basic needs, such as “providing underpants... socks and school uniforms” which his ex-wife reportedly failed to do. He lamented, “I have to be financially responsible, and that’s it ... and she can do what she wants. She doesn’t have to care for them; doesn’t have to do anything”.

5.3.6. Themes Related to Support Systems

5.3.6.1. Involvement of Professionals and Organizations

For the first two years after the divorce, the children lived with their mother, and no professionals appear to have been involved with the family. Then, Mr. Pathos became aware that the children were being neglected by their mother, and that they were being abused by her boyfriend, so he approached his attorney for assistance. Thereafter, his attorney referred him to a social worker in private practice who investigated the matter, who recommended that the children be removed from their mother’s care and placed in their father’s care. The matter went to court and based on the social worker’s recommendation, the children were placed in their father’s care, where they remained for a period of two years.

Mr. Pathos reported that he fell ill once again and he struggled to cope with the children. He recalls that the children’s “behaviour patterns was terrible. They were obviously playing out and acting towards what they had been through, their frustrations and everything else” [sic]. When it reached a stage where Mr. Pathos was no longer able to manage the children’s behaviour and to take adequate care of them, they were returned to their mother. This time, they were returned without a court order.

According to Mr. Pathos, it was not long before history repeated itself and his ex-wife started to neglect the children. In addition, her new boyfriend began physically abusing the children. He bemoans that fact that children had to be returned to their mother. He said that he feels that “the majority is my own fault, I have to take responsibility and I do. Yes, I did fall ill and

that had I not sent them back they wouldn't have been subjected to...". After Mr. Pathos had returned the children to their mother, he was given no recourse to contact with the children for two years. During that time, he approached the Office of the Family Advocate for assistance, to help him gain contact with them but to no avail. Mr. Pathos recalls that "I mean it's amazing, if I look at the Family Advocate how her hands are tied... there always seems to be red tape involved somewhere along the line" [sic]. Mr. Pathos sees the bureaucracy as being the reason for the Family Advocate's limited capacity to ensure that his contact with his children was reinstated.

After the children had been returned to their mother, it became evident that the pattern of abuse and neglect was once again being played out for a second time. A different social worker was appointed by Mr. Pathos' attorney to investigate the matter once again, and she was instructed to make recommendations regarding care and primary residence that were in the best interests of the children. Based on the second social worker's recommendations, Mr. Pathos and his ex-wife entered into an agreement for the children to be returned to his care.

5.3.6.2 Dissatisfaction with Service Providers

Mr. Pathos maintains that the Family Advocate has limited capacity to successfully resolve matters because "with the Family Advocate it goes [only] 'so far and no further' ". He recalls that the Family Advocate told him that, "...I can't go there, it's beyond my capacity as a Family Advocate....I can't, but this is what I advise you to do It's disgusting, she shouldn't be allowed to... get her into court for contempt of court, get her to sit inside". He continued, "The Family Advocate feels nothing" . This reflects Mr. Pathos dissatisfaction with the services rendered to him by the Family Advocate. Based on this, it seems as if Mr. Pathos did not fully understand the role and function of the Family Advocate. He seemed to believe that the Family Advocate has far-reaching legislative powers, including the power to move children from one parent's home and to place them with the other parent, in addition to having the power to administer punitive measures to a parent for non-compliance with their recommendations. Hence, he is of the opinion that the Family Advocate has a limited capacity to successfully resolve matters where stating that "with the Family Advocate it [only] 'goes so far and no further'" .

Mr. Pathos feels strongly that mental health and legal professionals such as the attorneys that represented both parties and the Office of the Family Advocate, simply pay lip service to the plight of alienated fathers. He is of the opinion that their concern is not genuine as he believes that they do nothing practical to alleviate the rejected fathers' suffering. He says, "I'm sorry, it's just, it's all written but not practiced... ignored. Nobody, nobody wanted to

know. Nobody". Mr. Pathos' sense of isolation and abandonment by the system is evident in the following statement, "If somebody cared they'd put a stop to it. The amount of frustration within the system just doesn't work. The law doesn't protect everybody. The courts didn't care. You know you feel you've got somebody sitting there who really doesn't want to be there, as far as a magistrate, judge is concerned...".

It is evident from Mr. Pathos' narrative that he has had a negative experience with the legal system. As a result, he believes that the law does not uphold or enforce fathers' parental rights. According to his perception, the law only enforces a mother's parental rights. He explained that, "It kills me. Because as their father I have the right, I don't understand what, why the law doesn't recognise fathers' rights as they do mothers' rights... it may be written, but it's not practiced and that's the truth". He continued, "[I'm] angry, I'm livid. You know, we all go for equal rights, everybody has equal rights. Rubbish, nobody has equal rights. You know, there's no discrimination, there is discrimination against gender!". It may be that on a deeper level, Mr. Pathos' anger may be a mask for his feelings of sadness and powerlessness.

Drawing on Mr. Pathos' narrative, it appears that he was only satisfied with the services provided by the social workers, who recommended that the children be removed from their mother. He said, "I involved a social worker through attorneys and, then my attorney, in consultation with the social worker said, 'That's enough we need to get them removed', so they came to live with me".

5.4 MR. TENACIOUS' PROFILE

5.4.1 Profile

5.4.1.1 Context

Mr. Tenacious is a man in his early fifties. He described himself as a self-made wealthy, successful businessman, who prior to his divorce acquired a lot of wealth and material possessions, such as expensive cars and several luxury holiday homes. He said that he lived a very lavish lifestyle. Then, through circumstances related to his divorce, and the concomitant legal battles, he lost all his wealth, to the point that he was unable to put food on the table for himself and his two oldest children.

Mr. Tenacious is the father of four children. He has three sons aged, 11, 22 and 25 years old, respectively. He has one daughter aged fourteen. He and his ex-wife courted for a period of ten years. The parties got married when Mr. Tenacious' wife fell pregnant with their oldest child.

Mr. Tenacious left the marriage when his children were fifteen, thirteen, six and three years old, respectively. At that time, his oldest son elected to live with him. Shortly thereafter, his second son decided that he too wanted to live with his father. Of his own volition, he moved in with his father and his older brother.

Mr. Tenacious has been divorced for ten years. For the entire ten years post-divorce, Mr. Tenacious has been fighting to regain contact with his two youngest children. As a result, he has been involved in a number of psychological assessments, criminal investigations and numerous court cases, as his ex-wife has made close to 400 false allegations of abuse against him. She has even gone so far as reporting him to the SPCA for mistreating his animals.

Mr. Tenacious has paid a heavy price in defending the numerous allegations made against him. He has lost his home, several sports cars, ten holiday homes and his business. Notwithstanding the financial hardships and challenges he faces, Mr. Tenacious continues his battle to have contact with his two youngest children, so that he can be in a relationship with them.

At the time that this interview took place, Mr. Tenacious' two oldest sons were still living with him. His daughter and his youngest son were living with their mother. He had not had any contact at all with the youngest two children for a period of two years. The older children have had intermittent contact with their two youngest siblings on the odd occasion when they have had contact with their mother.

5.4.1.2 The Marriage

Mr. Tenacious described his marriage as being "rocky from the outset". He said that "... I had tolerated lies in our marriage, our whole marriage". He also remarked that their counsellor had said, "that she was misbehaving, that she had to change her ways". Mr. Tenacious does not give explicit examples of how his ex-wife misbehaved, or why he believed that the marriage was rocky, however he reports that having a child was the only aspect of the marriage that was good. He said, "my first son was born. That was in actual fact the only thing in the marriage that I thought was working". He recounted that he and his ex-wife had dated for ten years before they got married. He explained that, "when we got married my wife was pregnant". Their first child was born six months after the wedding took place.

Mr. Tenacious experienced the marriage as being ruined by "just a lot of deceit, lies" in addition to the behaviour of his ex-wife, whom he perceived as "just wanted to control" him

[sic]. For example, he explained that, “if I did anything with the children it was sanctioned by her, then it was acceptable”. Mr. Tenacious experienced his marriage as being fraught with problems. He recalled how “we went through a lot of trauma in our marriage, [for] which we went through counselling”. He explained that the counsellor, “would see that she was wrong and that his ex-wife “... was misbehaving, that she would have to change her ways” [sic]. He recalled that his ex-wife “accused me of having an affair with the counsellor and we left counselling” . According to Mr. Tenacious, the couple consulted with several counsellors, however the counselling was to no avail.

Mr. Tenacious explained that he “was very isolated” when his wife took the two youngest children away on most weekends, and so “eventually he lived a life that was almost separate from the kids. So I only saw the kids when I was allowed to see the kids from her side”. Nevertheless, he maintains that, “... I still had a very good relationship with the kids though”. He reports that the two oldest children remained with their father on the weekends that their mother took the two youngest children to their grandparents.

5.4.1.3 Father’s Involvement with the Children Prior to the Separation

Mr. Tenacious explained that “I was a parent in a marriage for 16 years with children, and my wife by her own admission said that I was a great father. The day I decide to divorce her I became a paedophile, a wife beater and a rubbish”.

Mr. Tenacious believes that he had good relationship with all four of his children prior to the separation and divorce. He explained that, “my relationship with my oldest child was excellent from the time he was born. My next son was born three years later, that’s where the problem came, where he was alienated from me from almost birth. She would keep him away from me”.

Regarding his two older children, Mr. Tenacious explained that, “I’m almost a stay at home parent because I operate from home, so I fetched the kids, I took the kids to school whereas my ex-wife didn’t, she went to work. I did it purposefully. I wanted to be with my kids and I wanted to see them grow up. You only get one shot at it. I loved watching them grow up. I loved participating in their lives, so it was the thing that I really enjoyed as a parent, I didn’t just want to be a provider... My problem wasn’t that I was a bad parent, my problem was that I was a good parent! If I was a bad parent my wife, we wouldn’t be having this problem”.

Mr. Tenacious explained that once the marital relationship had started to sour, “If I did anything with the children, it was sanctioned by her. Then it was acceptable. I’ll give you an example, when the boys were [...] ten and eleven, I still hold a pilot’s license, I wanted to

take the kids to an air show. There was a 75th anniversary air show. They had planes which we will probably never see again in South Africa... I wanted to take the boys there and she wouldn't allow me... because the bottom line was that they couldn't have fun with dad. If they had to enjoy anything that they enjoyed that had to do with mom, so dad was very much isolated. So eventually I lived a life, I lived a life that was almost separate from the kids. So I only saw the kids when I was allowed to see the kids from her side. But I still had a very good relationship with the kids. When I was at home I still had a good relationship, but as long as she was controlling she was happy... she wouldn't openly say that I wasn't allowed to see the kids but I was never allowed. If I made an arrangement she would change it. She would engineer it that I wouldn't see the kids...". He recalled that, "We had a lot of holiday homes in the bush, which I loved and which the kids loved. I knew that whenever we went to the bush it became a problem... even if it meant taking the kids to the zoo it would become an unpleasant experience unless she initiated it".

With regards to his two younger children, Mr. Tenacious explained that he had limited time to play a meaningful parenting role in their lives. He reports that he feels that had he been given sufficient time to establish attachments to and relationships with his youngest two children, he could have also played a more meaningful parenting role in their lives as he did in the lives of their older siblings.

It is important to be aware that the two younger children were a mere four and two years old, respectively, at the time of the separation.

5.4.1.4 The separation

Mr. Tenacious believed that his ex-wife was jealous of his relationship with his brother, who was his business partner at the time that the couple were still married to one another. He recalled that his ex-wife apparently had no valid reasons for wanting him to sever his business partnership with his brother. He reasoned that "she wanted him out of my life because, for whatever reasons, she told me, the essence of it was that she told me "you get rid of your brother or I'll get rid of him". I said, "that wasn't going to happen. He was my business partner and I certainly wasn't going to change the structure of my company to suit her". Mr. Tenacious recalls that within ten days of his ex-wife issuing him with this ultimatum, his brother "... was charged with sexually molesting my daughter". He recalls that "she was four, my daughter was four and my brother was pulled off a plane as he was going on holiday. He was going to the U.K. He was booked. He was stuck in jail. His holiday was messed up and she finally ruined our business partnership....the case went on... for a year and was thrown out". Whilst the case was underway, Mr. Tenacious' ex-wife issued him with the following ultimatum: "You'll support us or you'll support your brother". He said that "I gave

it a lot of thought and I then made the choice to divorce her, because she had now moved to a different level of deception". He reflected, "...You know I tolerated lies in our marriage, our whole marriage, but this was a new level, she had dropped to a new level and I filed and straight after filing because I didn't support her, I was then charged with sexually molesting my son, who was then two. Also that case... was in fact that case was thrown out immediately...".

Mr. Tenacious recalled that when he left the home, "then my two older ones ,my son was thirteen and my older one was 15, he came with me when I left, and she took the three little ones. She denied me access, it got so bad that when access was granted through the attorneys, she arranged me access, her own attorney was involved, she would agree to it and then when it came to handing the kids over she would not actually hand the kids over". Sometime after the separation, the second oldest son decided that he too wanted to live with his father. Of his own volition, this child moved in with his father and his brother.

Reflecting on handovers, Mr. Tenacious remembered that "she wouldn't hand over the kids, she would physically hang on to the kids, so they would make a move to get into my car and she would restrain them physically and then hold them and kiss them and say that they didn't want to come to me". From this narrative, it seems that Mr. Tenacious' ex-wife wanted total control of his relationship with their children.

5.4.2 Themes Related to the Relationship

5 .4.2.1 Lack of a Well-Defined Spousal System.

Mr .Tenacious reported that the couple's "marriage was rocky from the outset... when we got married my wife was pregnant". From this statement, it can be inferred that in spite of the fact that this couple had courted for ten years prior to their marriage, they did not have adequate time to form a well-defined spousal system in which accommodation and negotiation had been successfully developed. Within a short period of time after their marriage, the couple were required to form a parental subsystem, which required negotiation and complementarity around issues such as parenting styles.

The couple appeared unable to meet the challenge of mutually supporting and accommodating the other in order to provide an appropriate balance of structure and nurture for the children. According to Mr. Tenacious, he and his ex-wife appeared to have engaged in a struggle for power and control to define their relationship. They also appeared to have struggled over power and control in different areas of their relationship, such as their parenting of the children, as well as with control over who Mr. Tenacious could have as a

business partner. Mr. Tenacious reflected that “she would have to sanction anything... if I made an arrangement she would change it... anything that I initiated became a problem, it became an unpleasant experience even if it meant taking the kids to the zoo, it would become an unpleasant experience unless she initiated it”.

Mr. Tenacious’s ex-wife appears to have felt insecure in the spousal subsystem and she seemed to have felt threatened by Mr. Tenacious’ relationship with his brother. As mentioned, his ex-wife alleged that his brother had sexually molested their daughter, which ultimately led him to have “made the choice to divorce her...”.

In summary, it can be seen that the couple’s relationship was tumultuous and difficult, as there was disagreement between the partners regarding the types of behaviours that took place between them, who was in control of what area of the relationship, and how power and control were dealt with. For example, Mr. Tenacious recounts that, “if I did anything with the children it was sanctioned by her. Then it was acceptable. If I did anything that was out of the ordinary, ... she would change it, she would engineer it that I wouldn’t see the kids”.

5.4.2.2. Disconnectedness

Mr. Tenacious described the couple’s relationship as being “rocky”. It appears that from the outset it was never stable, as a mutually desirable level of closeness and distance was never reached.

Drawing on Mr. Tenacious’ narrative, it can be seen that the relationship pattern of this couple could be described as being one characterised by disconnectedness. As previously mentioned, the couple went their separate ways on weekends. Mr. Tenacious and his two older children stayed together, whilst Mrs. Tenacious took the two younger children with her to her parents. The couple consulted with several marital therapists, some recommended by her attorney and some recommended by Mr. Tenacious, however they never seemed to find a therapist whom they both felt that they could relate to, and ultimately, they both went their own ways and the therapy was to no avail.

According to Mr. Tenacious, the relationship was unfulfilling, as the couple never supported one another, shared with one another or nurtured or cared for one another. Mr. Tenacious appeared to need greater involvement, more intimacy and closeness, whilst his ex-wife appeared to want disengagement, separateness, distance and space. He said that “...typically, on a Friday she would take the children ..I wouldn’t see the children for the weekend” .

Thus, the spousal system did not provide the couple with a safe haven and a supportive place in which each partner could deal with the extra-familial world.

5.4.2.3. Dysfunctional Boundaries

As evidenced from Mr. Tenacious' narrative, from the outset, this couple did not manage to effectively negotiate the boundaries within their spousal subsystem. Consequently, they lacked an area in which to satisfy their own psychological needs without the intrusion of relatives, such as Mr. Tenacious' brother and his parents-in-law. As a consequence, the couple failed to work out patterns of relating to others, for example, they never resolved the issue of Mrs. Tenacious' dislike for her brother-in-law, and the issue around the fact of him being Mr. Tenacious' business partner.

Mr. Tenacious recalled that, "we went through a lot of trauma in our marriage, which we went through counselling... that she had to change her ways. She then accused me of having an affair with the counsellor and we left counselling". It is understood from this account that the spousal system's boundaries were rigid, and would thus not allow helpful information from the counsellor to permeate their boundaries, consequently, the couple were unable to reconcile their differences and expectations, and they never learnt a viable way in which to deal with conflict.

Ultimately, it can be seen that before the couple separated, they were relatively autonomous, they were in a state of disengagement and they were isolated from one another; implying that the boundaries within the couple system were rigid.

5.4.2.4 Dysfunctional Communication

At the beginning of the interview with Mr. Tenacious, he explained that "...typically on a Friday she would take the children, and this went right through even when there were more children, when the other little ones were born, she would take the children, she would take them across to her parents... she'd make excuses why she couldn't come back". From this account, it can be inferred that Mr. Tenacious' ex-wife was sending powerful non-verbal messages to him that she did not want to be with him on weekends. Furthermore, it can be understood that the couple never openly discussed how Mr. Tenacious felt about his ex-wife taking the children to her parents on the weekends, neither did they discuss how he felt about her leaving him on his own with the two other children whilst she was away.

The following statement made by Mr. Tenacious provides a further example of the couple's failure to communicate directly and effectively with one another. It appears that rather than openly and directly communicating her feelings to Mr. Tenacious, his ex-wife would

Comment [GW54]: What is the basis for this inference?

“engineer” situations in order to demonstrate how she felt about matters. He said that, “she wouldn’t actually openly say that I wasn’t allowed to see the kids, but I never was... she would engineer it that I wouldn’t see the kids... if she initiated it then that was fine and we had a great time... If I suggested it or made arrangements, then she would make sure it ‘went pear-shaped’... I didn’t even realise this until later on, I only realised what was going on” .

The couple’s failure to communicate openly and directly with one another continued post-separation. This is well illustrated by the following statement, “my daughter had a bicycle accident, she went straight to the police and said that I had beaten my daughter”. From this statement, it is understood that instead of directly engaging in a discussion about how their daughter sustained her injury, Mrs. Tenacious assumed the injury was caused by Mr. Tenacious and she immediately reported the matter to the police. It is a question as to whether Mrs. Tenacious considered what the impact of her actions were on the child, and also on Mr. Tenacious.

Comment [GW55]: This doesn't seem to be the only inference possible

5.4.2.5 Dysfunctional Behaviour During the Marriage

Whilst relating his story, Mr. Tenacious described his ex-wife as having a number personality traits and behaviours, which may be described as dysfunctional, such as lying, being deceitful, lacking in conscience, using devious means to achieve her goals, and having scant respect for the law as well as for figures of authority, including court orders.

Mr. Tenacious did not, however, report on or describe any specific incidents of dysfunctional behaviour on his ex-wife’s part during the marriage, other than the incident when their oldest son was an infant, and Mr. Tenacious wanted to put him in the bath with him, his ex-wife “ ..wanted me to get into the bath with a costume on, as her mother was constantly saying to her and her sisters that every man is a rapist waiting to sexually molest the children” [sic]. From this statement, it can be inferred that Mr. Tenacious’ ex-wife had preconceived, rigidly held, paranoid ideas.

Mr. Tenacious however alluded to the fact that his ex-wife’s behaviour was dysfunctional. He said “even her own attorney recommended that we go for counselling...”.

It appears from Mr. Tenacious’ narrative that his ex-wife’s dysfunctional behaviours manifested predominantly after the separation. For example, he said that “she broke court orders, she had no respect for court orders... she has framed my brother... she has committed perjury, she has planted evidence... she has a propensity to lie... I had to be very, very careful that more evidence wasn’t planted”.

5.4.3 Themes Related to the Divorce Process

5.4.3.1 Developmental Issues

At the time of the interview, which was ten years after his divorce, Mr. Tenacious reported that he had rebuilt his social network, was rebuilding his financial resources and he was maintaining his financial responsibilities to all four of his children. He said, "I have no choice, you know it's the same as if you lose a child, you have to carry on for the rest of the children, I have the other two children that I have full custody of I have to be strong for them. I have to provide for them, I have to provide an education for them and for the little ones that have been alienated. I still support them financially. I try and keep them in the best schools, I try and educate them so I'm still, financially, I'm still the backbone of what keeps them alive".

Mr. Tenacious explained that he had not managed to find ways to communicate effectively with his ex-wife and that they had failed to make flexible visitation arrangements for the two youngest children. As a result, he has been unsuccessful in co-parenting them.

Mr. Tenacious said that he had not managed to stay connected with his former spouse's extended family, and that his relationship with them was extremely acrimonious.

5.4.3.2 High Conflict

Drawing on Mr. Tenacious' narrative, it can be seen that this couple are entrenched in serious, deep-rooted and high level conflict. The conflict that the couple experienced during the marriage regarding Mrs. Tenacious wanting power and control over Mr. Tenacious, particularly with regard to her apparent need to control his contact with the children, appears to have escalated and continued long after the divorce was finalised.

According to Mr. Tenacious, this conflict is frequently and consistently played out in court, in public and in front of their children. Mr. Tenacious recounted how he was sworn at, spat at and physically abused at handovers of the children.

5.4.3.3 Post Divorce Parental Relationships

Mr. Tenacious recalled that he and his ex-wife were disconnected and hardly engaged or interacted with one another during the marriage. In addition, it appears that he experienced their communication during the marriage as being dysfunctional and often involved conflict. From Mr. Tenacious' narrative, it seems that this pattern continued after they separated, as their legal battles continued to rage long after the divorce was finalized.

For the past ten years, this couple have been locked in an ongoing battle regarding Mr. Tenacious' contact with the two youngest children. Their enduring battle has seen them returning to court a number of times.

5.4.4 Themes Related to the Alienation Process

5.4.4.1. Limiting Contact

Based on Mr. Tenacious' narrative, it is evident that his ex-wife limited his contact with their children, both during the marriage by taking them away on weekends, and by sanctioning where and when he could take the children, as well after the separation. He recalled that after the separation, "she denied me access, her own attorney was involved, she would agree to it and then when it came to handing the kids over she would not actually hand the kids over."

Mr. Tenacious recalls that "handovers took up to nine hours." He said that, "she wouldn't hand over the kids... she would physically restrain them". In an attempt to remedy the problem, handovers at one stage took place in the principal's office at the children's school. That brought little relief to Mr. Tenacious as his ex-wife would, "grab the kids physically and pull them out of there and no-one could restrain her physically" [sic]. Mr. Tenacious' ex-wife's manoeuvres at handovers would ultimately severely limit the duration of contact he had with his children.

Mr. Tenacious explained that his ex-wife made a number of false allegations and she laid a number of false charges against him, and against what he terms as his "system", as "she had to prove that my system was dangerous... so my neighbour, my gardener, my maid, my other maid, myself, my brother was charged with sexually molesting my son and my daughter". He added that she used these false allegations and false charges as "a tool to alienate the children from me". It is important to be aware that whilst the said false allegations and charges were being investigated, Mr. Tenacious was prohibited from having any form of contact with his two youngest children. He was neither afforded supervised contact with the children, nor was he able to have telephonic contact with them.

5.4.4.2. Bad MOUTHing

Mr. Tenacious recalled that after the separation, his ex-wife had taken to badmouthing him. He said that she " ..told everybody that I'm raping my children....allegations that I drink too much or that I'm an alcoholic. I'm a non-drinker". He went on to explain that to this day, ten years after the divorce, his ex-wife continues to badmouth him to his two oldest sons who are now adults. He maintains that "the alienation is so strong that the minute she gets

together with them (the two oldest sons) she's bad mouthing me and telling them how she was beaten and that... they don't want her near them because she embarrasses them".

5.4.4.3. Withholding information

Although Mr. Tenacious makes no direct mention of his ex-wife withholding information of the two youngest children from him, one can assume that to some degree, that owing to the lack of effective communication between him and his ex-wife, coupled with his lack of contact with the children for two years, he has also not received information regarding them.

5.4.4.4. False Allegations

False allegations are a dominant theme underpinning Mr. Tenacious' story. As previously mentioned, Mr. Tenacious' ex-wife first made false allegations against his brother, claiming that he had sexually abused their four year old daughter. Thereafter, she made false allegations that Mr. Tenacious had sexually abused their two year old son. Mr. Tenacious reported that, "I was then charged with sexually molesting my son, who was then two... and subsequent to that there have been different perpetrators involved with the kids, all sexual abuse allegations made by my ex-wife..... she had to prove that my system was dangerous to the authorities in order to gain control and custody. So the people she, my neighbour, my gardener, my maid, my other maid, my one neighbour... those were the six of us they were all people around my circle". It can thus be seen that Mr. Tenacious' ex-wife extended her false allegations to all who she perceived as being close to Mr. Tenacious or to those in relationship with him.

Mr. Tenacious advises that he suspects that his ex-wife has damaged his children's genitalia in an attempt to frame him with sexually-abusing their children. He explains that he believes she is simply unconcerned about the children's wellbeing. He said that she is "absolutely not concerned, she framed me, clearly framed me. She framed my brother and when she was caught out, that was the problem, clearly she has been caught out framing, she has committed perjury, she has planted evidence. My daughter's genitals and my son's genitals have been damaged, I want to know as a father how they have been damaged, I think she has gone to the extent, and we are waiting now [to find out]". At the time of the interview, Mr. Tenacious was awaiting medical evidence with regard to the injuries and damage the younger two children sustained to their genitalia.

Mr. Tenacious clarified that there were so many instances of false allegations that were made against him by his ex-wife that, "I'm talking about probably close to 400 false allegations over the last ten years ranging from anything to anything, the SPCA coming to

my house to check if I was mistreating my animals, which was false". He hastened to add that, "I had never been convicted of a criminal offence ever in my entire life ever on anything. The only time that I have been charged with a criminal offence is from my ex-wife.... I'm a law abiding citizen".

5.4.5 Themes Relating to the Impact of the Alienation

Referring to the impact that the alienation has had upon him he said, "... this is just very, very, very sad. It just distorts so many things within a home. It's just so damaging, at so many levels, on so many levels... you eventually get to a stage where you are scared to give your children a hug... I've never seen my children naked, because you don't, you don't want to open yourself up at any level... where you enter a bathroom where a child is changing...". From this it is clear that Mr. Tenacious fears accusations of molestation and abuse. Unlike other parents, he is unable to engage with his children in 'normal' parent-child interactions, for fear of negative repercussions.

5.4.5.1. Loss

A significant loss experienced by Mr. Tenacious is the loss of what he calls "a normal, healthy parent-child relationship." He lamented that, "...the relationship can never be restored."

Mr. Tenacious' feelings of loss, powerlessness and depression are echoed in the following statement, "It's so sad, I don't have any, I used to have pictures of the little ones around my house. The only way I can cope now is to just not have any of them, it hurts too much. I try and live as if I don't have kids, I wake up during the night, still constantly thinking that I've just had a bad dream, only to realise it's not a bad dream, it's a reality... the impact on me has been emotionally it's just been a rollercoaster, I cannot, I have never felt loss like this. When I have lost people close to me that have physically passed on, the loss has not been as bad. This has been worse because it's always there, because you don't get any closure, you see your daughter, you know when someone passes on they leave you".

5.4.5.2. Emotional impact

Mr. Tenacious made it clear that being alienated from his two youngest children has been "so damaging" to him. He explained that he was an involved father who took his oldest two children to school and that he "loved being with my kids, I loved watching them grow up, I loved participating in their lives". He appears angry that the alienation of his two youngest children has robbed him of the opportunity to participate in their lives as he did with his two

oldest children. He seems to feel that has been denied the opportunity of watching these two children grow up.

Listening to Mr. Tenacious tell his story, it is evident that the alienation of his two youngest children has indeed impacted upon him in a number of ways. He related how the alienation of his children and the sexual abuse allegations made against him has prevented him from interacting with them freely, fluidly and in an uninhibited manner as parents normally might interact with their children.

Mr. Tenacious explained that with respect to his two youngest children, he feels that he has been unable to fulfil his parental role effectively. He said, "You have an obligation to society and to those children to do the best you can... our role as a parent is to just advise our children and to get them equipped as adults... she wants to make them dependent, so she isolates them from friends, she isolates them from things that I would expose them to...". Implicit in this statement is Mr. Tenacious' feelings of frustration that he cannot stop his ex-wife's alienating manoeuvres.

5.4.5.3. Feeling Powerless

From the above, it can be seen that feeling powerless is a strong theme that runs through Mr. Tenacious' story. Drawing on his narrative, it is evident that he was rendered powerless early on in the marriage. He reflected, "If I did anything with the children, it was sanctioned by her." By having to defer to his ex-wife to grant him permission to take his children on an outing, diminished his role as a parent. In addition, he was rendered powerless in preventing her from taking children away on weekends, and this pattern continued after their separation.

Mr. Tenacious explains that he feels powerless to protect the children from the control their mother wields over them. In addition, he has been rendered powerless in preventing her from using them as pawns in the conflict between them. He said, "...they need me. I can't turn my back on them either, I must try and soften the blows to them because it's not easy for them either. They're caught in the middle of this constantly because they are used as pawns. They're the ones that have to keep testifying against me... she uses the children... an aliening parent like this... so the power that comes, the power that she has is the power that she exercises through the children".

Furthermore, Mr Tenacious feels powerless to protect the children against the injuries that were being inflicted upon them in order to demonstrate that they were being abused, in order to serve the argument that they should not have any contact with him. He said, "My daughter's genitals and my son's genitals have been damaged, I want to know as a father

how they have been damaged". He complained that he was powerless to stop his wife from pretending that the children were ill after they had visited him, and from medicating the children unnecessarily. He said that, "she was over-medicating the children to the point that because every time the children came back from dad supposedly they were sick and she would take them for medication. Eventually the doctors got wise to this there were meetings involved to stop her from doing this, because this was abuse because of the amount of tablets that the children were getting to eat".

Mr. Tenacious was rendered powerless at handovers, as his ex-wife seemed to maintain control on the situation. He said that she, "wouldn't hand over the kids, she would physically hang on to the kids" and added to that, he would "get assaulted at handovers, sworn at, spat at." Mr. Tenacious expressed his sense of powerlessness in the following dialogue, "...the handovers were absolutely diabolical. Legally there was nothing we could do. The police were called on various occasions and the police just had their hands tied... the court orders are ineffective legally... that's the problem with our society." He added, "The law is ineffective and all of the cases, the attorneys knowingly or not knowingly protect their clients for whatever reason, but the law has got to change... the law cannot control people who are as extreme as my wife".

Mr. Tenacious summed up his sense of powerlessness over his situation in the following statement, "It was getting to a stage where I was getting arrested, thrown into a cell, dockets get missing... it'd been a process that's taken 10 years, we've gone through hell with arrests and that sort of thing. It's affected our lives... the damage that is done, ...you are creating problems for your kids for the rest of their lives".

5.4.5.4 Economic Impact

Mr. Tenacious explained how alienation "puts such a strain on many parents financially... because the lawyers, unfortunately, still want their fees. The psychologists still need to be paid...". He stresses that, "I've tried my damndest. I've spent lots of money, time, it hasn't only been direct cost. Indirect costs in business. I've spent vast amounts of time away from my office. I can't focus on my business, our court dates always take priority. I'm in and out of court, constantly in court. I'm in court, two or three times a month. And the preparation before so that you are halving your ability to earn a living as well".

The long term financial sequelae of parental alienation is often overlooked. Mr. Tenacious spoke of the large sums of money, which he said was spent fighting the alienation process. He explained that his lifestyle has changed from a life of opulence to a life of impoverishment and financial hardship, to the vast sums of money that he had spent on litigation and other

sources related to fighting the allegations against him and the alienation of his two children from him.

Mr. Tenacious enumerated upon his losses as follows "Well, I had owned a house in a very affluent area, fully paid, when I bought the house I paid cash for it twenty years ago. I had sports cars. I had ten holiday homes, I lost everything. It dropped to such a point that I left, I finally left. I rented a townhouse and I had a HP agreement that was worth more than what the car was. And we literally didn't have food and you question, you say, how did it get that bad? It can, financially... I managed to hold onto some assets, which eventually pulled me through, but at that stage, they virtually had no value... it impacts, but the biggest impact is the emotional impact on your children" .

5.4.6. Themes Related to Support Systems

5.4.6.1 Involvement of professionals and organisations, family and external systems

As a result of the approximately 400 allegations of abuse that Mr. Tenacious' ex-wife has made against him over the past ten years, a large number of professionals from different disciplines, including doctors; psychiatrists and approximately twenty different psychologists; police; The Teddy Bear Clinic; The Child Protection Unit; and the SPCA; all of these professional people have been involved in this matter. Amongst the legal professionals involved in this matter were lawyers, junior advocates, senior counsel, judges, the Family Advocate and the Sheriff of the Court. Notwithstanding the involvement of this extensive body of professionals and organisations, Mr. Tenacious has not managed to have contact with his two youngest children for a period of two years. He said that he has been told by the head of the Child Protection Unit that "the system had failed the children".

Mr. Tenacious made no direct mention of the influence that extended family members may have had upon the marriage. Nevertheless, based on his recollection of events, his ex-wife's family appears to have had had a negative influence on his contact with his children post-divorce. He said that at handovers of the children, his ex-wife "would involve her family members, she would bring in 15, 17 people at handovers. I would get assaulted at handovers, sworn at, spat at in front of my children".

5.4.6.2 Dissatisfaction with Service Providers

Mr. Tenacious appears to have lost faith in the system. He explained that "I've no faith in our system. I have no faith in the judiciary. I see police through different eyes. The hurt has been caused. Psychologists, I have learned who get pulled into this...the law is ineffective and all of these cases, the attorneys knowingly or not knowingly protect their clients for whatever

reason...". His opinion of the individuals and organisations who have been involved in his case is succinctly captured by the following statement, "...the system sucks! The system does not work!".

With regard to Mr. Tenacious' dissatisfaction with psychologists, he reflects that he has had over twenty psychologists deal with his case. He contends that, "Another thing is that the psychologist won't identify anything. They've seen it, off the record they've told me that she's a psychopath, some of them said sociopath, and that she has disorders, they are very reluctant to come out and actually support you on it... this woman is absolutely, she's a nutcase, and I've said: 'put it in writing' and he's said: 'I can't, she's not my patient'. That is a huge, huge problem with this". Mr. Tenacious reports that, "we've had something like 20 psychologists involved. She psychologist hops, and when they find out what she's actually doing then she leaves them and goes onto the next one... in some instances she succeeded in getting semi-favourable reports".

Mr. Tenacious shares the insight that, "she has no respect for the police, but the problem is that she manages to win the police over as being a victim, the police unfortunately are not trained in this area". Mr. Tenacious recalls how ineffectual he perceived the police to be at handovers of the children. He recounts, "the handovers were absolutely diabolical. Legally there was nothing they could do, the police were called on various occasions and the police just had their hands tied". He reflects that, "The police just say that they use their discretion and they are not going to enforce court orders". He maintains that, "The courts are ineffective legally. That's the problem with our society. The original court order what was written ten years before what we're talking about, the magistrate, the judge made provision for the sheriff would be allowed to go in and remove the kids physically, her advocates fought that the clause get removed which was a problem, because had just that one clause remained, it would have saved the children so much trauma... the law is ineffective and all of the cases, the attorneys knowingly or unknowingly protect their clients for whatever reason but the law has got to change... the law cannot control people who are extreme as my ex-wife" .

Mr. Tenacious recalls how inadequate law enforcement left him vulnerable and unprotected whilst his ex-wife, undeterred, continued with what he described as her toxic, alienating manoeuvres. This is evidenced by Mr. Tenacious' account of the following incident, "...when I was imprisoned, while I was locked up, just my son and I were living together, police arrived, she broke a police order, entered my townhouse illegally, and you have no recourse in the law to even protect yourself from that. She assaulted me in my own house. I never fought back". He explained that, "She buzzed the neighbour's buzzer and that's how she got

access, so she got access illegally, assaulted me. I got locked up; my son didn't know how long I'd be locked up. He walked to the police station. He brought me food and clothing, just absolutely sick". He asked the following rhetorical question, "Just how a mother can put her children through what she has put her children through... she clearly has no conscience, she sociopathic".

Towards the end of relating his story, Mr. Tenacious summed up his dissatisfaction with the police and the legal system by saying, "I've no faith in our system; I have no faith in the judiciary". Upon reflection, Mr. Tenacious appears to see the police and the judiciary as also being victims of alienation as the alienating parent's behaviour impacts negatively upon them as well. He said, "I see the police through different eyes. The hurt that this case has caused, the hurt and trauma that this has caused my family... the policeman who has come and make a call as a professional, who knocks on your door and he's been hoodwinked, the judge who sits in judgement of something like this and has to make a call and responsibility that lies with them is also unfair, you know the policeman comes and he's doing his best and he has to make a call because you've got a devious parent".

Comment [GW56]: In what sense?

Mr. Tenacious maintains that "...the judiciary have got to come to the party, they've got to recognize it for what it is and I think it is getting better. But people should be prosecuted , if people are falsifying evidence, or they are putting children through court cases that are not true, they should be prosecuted and not the business now where they get slapped over the knuckles, they should get prosecuted accordingly. If a woman falsely charges a man for sexual molestation and the court, I believe, that if the court sentence for that type of crime is ten years, and he has been falsely accused, she should face the equivalent time...".

From the above, it can be seen that not only did the parental alienation impact upon Mr. Tenacious, it also had a significant impact upon all his children, including the two oldest boys who were not alienated from him.

5.5 MR. ACTIVIST

5.5.1 Profile

5.5.1.1. Context

Mr. Activist is an Afrikaans-speaking gentleman in his middle fifties. He said that he grew up in the Cape, and as an adult he relocated to Gauteng. He described his family of origin as being very close. He reported that he has maintained a close relationship with his surviving parent.

Mr. Activist practiced as an educator for thirteen years prior to becoming a businessman. He reports that he has a great love of children and as a result he took a keen interest in the learners under his care. He explained that he has maintained contact with a number of these learners who regarded him as a father figure. He recalled that some of these individuals now have children of their own.

Mr. Activist explained that he and his ex-wife separated when their only child, a son, was one year old. After a protracted legal battle, they finally divorced when the child was three years old. According to Mr. Activist, from that time on, he has had an uphill battle trying to get contact with his son.

At the time of the interview, Mr. Activist had not had any contact with his son for a period of two years.

5.5.1.2. The Marriage

When asked to tell the researcher about his marriage, Mr. Activist responded, “the biggest problem in our marriage was not between my wife and myself... but because she had her family always in our house, this house. Her mother was always sleeping here, her sister was sleeping here 24 hours, they had their own place but D [his ex-wife] couldn’t go without them”. From this statement, it is understood that Mr. Activist and his ex-wife had a good relationship prior to the birth of their son. However, it seems that his former mother-in-law and former sister-in-law’s constant presence in his home after the child was born was the primary cause of dissatisfaction and conflict between his ex-wife and himself. He explained that he felt like his privacy had been invaded, and this caused a barrier between himself and his former spouse, and it was a big cause of contention in the marriage. He explained that “when my little boy was born, I asked her very nicely, I said please ask your mother... to give us space, just the two of us with our child. She wanted me to build a house or a flat at the back for her mother and her sister”. When Mr. Activist refused to accede to his wife’s request, major conflict ensued. He recalled, “I said that I’m not going to do that and from there all hell broke loose”.

5.5.1.3. Father’s Involvement with the Child Prior to the Separation

It is important to be aware that Mr. Activist’s child was one year old at the time of the couple’s separation. It is noteworthy that Mr. Activist recalled more of what he wasn’t allowed to do rather than what he was allowed to do for the child. He said, “...and I wasn’t even allowed to feed him, I was not allowed, because you know, what time I come home, then they would already have him sleeping. They would make him to sleep. Then he’ll start crying

at 1'o clock, 2'o clock at night ... the problem is I know children. I said, 'leave him, let him go to sleep by himself, don't...' [but] they rushed him to sleep so that I cannot see him. That was the biggest problem".

Mr. Activist recalled that it was only with hindsight that he became aware that his ex-wife had been deliberately withholding the child during the marriage. He remembered that, "It only dawned on me years after that I thought about it, and I thought, but this problem didn't start when we got divorced, it started when he was born". He recounted how he had offered to come home from work to help his ex-wife with the child and she had refused his offer. He recalled, "...I said I will help you with the child, it's not a problem. I've got my own business. I can come home, I can do whatever I like ...but no, no, no, no. no she doesn't want ...she's only looking for an excuse for me not to have contact with our child. That's all". Mr. Activist's ex-wife's attitude towards him having contact with their child did not change after they separated.

5.5.1.4. The Separation

Mr. Activist recalls that his ex-wife threatened to divorce him several times during the course of their marriage. He remembered that, "five previous times she got lawyers letters delivered to me when I was still at school and then to my work, that she wants to divorce me. The fifth time was the last. I said, listen I can see you just don't want to be with me, let's just get divorced. And when we got divorced then she wanted to come back". Mr Activist' ex-wife's ambivalent feelings about the divorce are highlighted in the following statement, "...she wanted to come back to me on three occasions. She asked me if we are divorced now, can I move back into the house? And I said, No ways!" .

At the time of the separation, Mr. Activist's ex-wife promised to bring their child to visit him, however her promises never materialised. He recollects that, "from that time she promised that she would bring him to visit me and I could come and visit him there, but that never happened". Mr. Activist remembers that when he went to visit the child, he was made to wait outside, whilst the child was being brought out to him. Being treated in this manner was evidently a painful and humiliating experience for him, as he complained that, "I was not allowed into the flat. I have to stand outside. Then, they will come outside with my child. I can only see him in this little grass area. It's like, it's not even bigger than a garage" .

5.5.2 Themes Related to the Martial Relationship

5.5.2.1. Lack of a Well-Defined Spousal Subsystem

Based on Mr. Activist's narrative, it is understood that after the couple married, his ex-wife

was unable to separate from her family of origin. Mr. Activist recalled how his former mother-in-law and his former sister-in-law constantly intruded in the couple's relationship. Based on Mr. Activist's narrative, it seems as if the over-involvement of his ex-wife's family resulted in the couple never having been afforded the opportunity of forming a couple subsystem or an independent unit.

Listening to Mr. Activist's narrative, it seemed as if the couple never managed to devise a fulfilling relationship. Mr. Activist's ex-wife did not manage to develop sufficient autonomy in her family of origin and she was thus unable to successfully negotiate alternative roles with Mr. Activist that complimented one another. Owing to their undefined spousal subsystem, the couple were also not able to successfully negotiate roles and rules as parents. It appears that they never managed to reconcile their respective sets of values and expectations, and they were thus unable to accommodate one another's needs. Taking the level of conflict between them into consideration, it can be seen that they were unable to negotiate their differences. For example, Mrs. Activist threatened her ex-husband with divorce on five occasions during the marriage. The couple also appeared incapable of making mutually-satisfying decisions. In short, their relationship lacked intimacy, support, loyalty and the opportunity for personal development.

Mr. Activist pointed out that he does not trust his ex-wife, as she withdrew all the money which he deposited into an account for their son. He recalled that "she withdrew it on one month" [sic]. He added the following statement, which highlights his view that his ex-wife is a dishonest person. He said, "... but that's the type of person she is, she's always conniving, she's always lying, she's always screwing, you name it, she does it".

5.5.2.2. Disconnectedness

According to Mr. Activist his ex-wife "...likes to fight, she is built to fight, She cannot love, she could never love, that was the biggest problem she had" [sic]. From this statement, it seems that couple fought with one another easily and as a result their relationship was tumultuous and fraught with conflict. They appear to have lived separate lives and they seem to have lacked understanding of one another's needs, and the relationship seems to have been devoid of nurture and mutual respect. Systemically speaking, this couple were disengaged and disconnected.

5.5.2.3. Dysfunctional Boundaries

As mentioned above, the couple seemed to be disengaged, which implies that the boundaries within the couple subsystem were rigid. However, drawing on Mr. Activist's

narrative, it can be seen that this ex-wife had an enmeshed relationship with her mother and her sister, which means that the couple system's boundaries with the external environment were diffuse. It is evident that the spousal subsystem's diffuse boundaries enabled and facilitated his ex-mother-in-law and his ex-sister-in-law over involvement in the marriage. Additionally, their over-involvement and interference in the spousal subsystem negatively impacted on Mr. Activist's relationship with his only child. Furthermore, his ex-mother-in-law and his ex-sister-in-law's over-involvement in the couple's business, resulted in Mr. Activist's ex-wife's over-reliance on her mother and sister, strengthened by her over-involvement with them, resulting in the loss of her autonomy and independence.

Despite his plea for some privacy for the spousal subsystem, Mr. Activist's ex-wife was unable to separate from her mother, so that the couple subsystem could consolidate and strengthen. As a consequence, Mr. Activist was unable to form a parental subsystem with his wife, as well as a father-son subsystem with their son.

5.5.2.4. Dysfunctional Behaviour During the Marriage

Mr. Activist perceived his wife to be "mentally unstable and mentally disturbed" [sic]. He perceived his ex-wife's attempts at bribing their child to give the forensic psychologist certain information as confirmation that she is "mentally not consistent in the first place" . As previously mentioned, Mrs. Activist was dishonest and untrustworthy during the marriage, she withdrew the money which Mr. Activist had deposited for their son, without his knowledge or consent. In addition, Mr. Activist reported that she was manipulative and that she lied. He commented, "...she will lie on every occasion" .

Mr. Activist related that his ex-wife sent him lawyers letters five times, indicating that she wanted to divorce him and then asked to move back in. This indicates that Mrs. Activist gave him double messages, and that her behaviour towards him during the course of the marriage appears to have been extremely unstable and unpredictable.

5.5.3 Themes Related to the Divorce Process

5.5.3.1 Mastery of Divorce Challenges

Mr. Activist lives alone in the former family home. He has not managed to form a new romantic relationship yet. From his narrative, it appears that he has not as yet come to terms with the loss of the intact family. He has joined Fathers 4 Justice, where he seems to spend a considerable amount of his time engaged in matters concerning parental alienation. He also seems to interact often with other fathers who have been alienated from their children.

Several times during the interview, Mr. Activist mentioned how he longed to have contact with his child. It was evident from his narrative that he has a great desire to play an active and meaningful co-parenting role in the life of his only child. He explained how he had consulted with various professionals regarding his former wife's alleged withholding of contact from him, notwithstanding his efforts to gain contact with the child and notwithstanding the vast sums of money he has spent in this regard, he has nevertheless been unable to find a way in which to effectively parent his son. Furthermore, none of the professionals he consulted, including the Family Advocate, managed to assist this family in drafting a parenting plan or in resolving their parenting conflicts.

5.5.3.2 High Conflict

Mr. Activist recalled that he was angry with his ex-wife, and that he did not trust her during the marriage. His negative feelings and attitude towards his ex-wife post separation appear to have escalated after the divorce. This couple never established clear boundaries during the marriage, nor were they able to establish clear boundaries after the marriage, hence the couple system has never been protected from external interference. This couple also continued to experience ongoing difficulty in communicating about their child. Their unresolved ongoing conflict about the child prevented them from establishing an effective co-parenting relationship.

5.5.3.3 Post Divorce Parental Relationships

Mr. Activist and his ex-wife seem to have had a dysfunctional marital relationship. The couple never connected with one another during their marriage. This couple's communication patterns remained problematic after the divorce, and as consequence, they were unable to work out arrangements for Mr. Activist to have contact with the child. According to Mr. Activist, his ex-wife misconstrued court orders that he managed to obtain, and hence matters were never settled regarding his parenting of and contact with his child. The couple's inability to change their behaviours towards one another and their inability to change their rigidly-held negative perceptions of one another, resulted in them becoming eternal foes.

5.5.4 Themes Related to the Alienation Process

Mr. Activist reflected that after the separation, he managed to have contact with his son for a short period of time only in a very uncomfortable and restricted environment. At that time, the child was very young, so he had no telephonic contact with him. The situation remained unchanged as the child grew older, as he was still not allowed to speak to his father on the phone. He recalled that his ex-wife would also not allow him to take photographs of the child

when he visited the child at her home. He said that “she even grabbed the video camera from my hands, stuff like that, took the tape out”. It appears from this statement that not only did Mr. Activist’s ex-wife not want him to have contact with their child, but that she also did not want him to have any record of the child whilst he was growing up.

Mr. Activist recalled that in an attempt to have his contact with his child terminated, his ex-wife had made allegations that he had abused the child, and that he was exposing him to pornographic material. He described how his ex-wife had coached their child to give the psychologist who was investigating the allegations of abuse made against him, specific information. He said, “Yes, he was coached and when they asked him certain other things he couldn’t answer and he made up another story”. Mr. Activist related how upset he felt when he found out that his ex-wife had told the child that he didn’t want to see him. He recalled, “The last time I saw him that is what he said: ‘Mamma sê maar Pappa wil my nie sien nie’” [Mommy says that Daddy does not want to see me].

5.5.4.1. Limiting Contact

Mr. Activist experienced interference with his contact with his child. As previously mentioned in 5.3.3, Mr. Activist recalled that since the day his ex-wife left the marital home, “I’ve been battling to see my child. It is noteworthy that Mr. Activist struggled to see his child even though the conditions in which he could see the child were unfavourable. From that time, she promised me that she would bring him to visit me and I could come and visit him there, but that never happened. If I go there, there was always a problem. I was not allowed into the flat... I have to stand outside, then they will come outside with my child, I can only see him in this little grass area, it’s like, it’s not even bigger than a garage”. He continued, “He’s my child as well as it is her child. My child needs a father as well; there are how many children that are in homes that hasn’t got a father or a mother? She is withholding him to see his father”.

5.5.4.2. Bad Mouthing

Mr. Activist related that his ex-wife had opened a number of cases against him. One can infer that in order to have done so, she most likely badmouthed him to bolster her case against him. Furthermore, she went to the child’s school and instructed the staff not to give Mr. Activist any information or reports about their child. Once again one can speculate that in order to justify her request for withholding information about their child from Mr. Activist, his ex-wife may have bad mouthed him to the staff at the child’s school.

Comment [GW57]: Speculative. Avoid.

Comment [GW58]: Speculative, avoid.

5.5.4.3 Withholding Information

Mr. Activist notes that, "I found out... when I went to pay his school feels that she is telling all the teachers and all the personnel there that they are not allowed to see me or tell me anything about my child or give him any reports, nothing". He continued, "I have never since last year, never had one report, one test result, nothing from him, nothing".

5.5.4.4. False Allegations

Mr. Activist explained that his ex-wife has made a number of false allegations against him. He explained that "I know now ... but she will lie on every occasion that she can get to just get back at me that's all. I've been, there is how many cases that she has opened against me for? The first was for family violence, she tried that one against me, alright. She tried the second family violence, then she tried, there was another one as well. I can't remember what it was... a protection order. There was a Protection Order as well. I drove over her mother, that's what she said. Every year there is something else and she gets that and sees how long she can get away with that. The third year she got a psychologist to write a letter to say I'm not allowed to see my child".

He later recounted how his ex-wife alleged that "I have molested him and oh, and I also took pornographic photos of him". According to Mr. Activist, his ex-wife coached their child to tell the psychologist that his father had sexually molested him. He recalled, "Yes, he was coached and when they asked him certain other things he couldn't answer. He couldn't answer and then he made up another story. And then he came up with another story. And, eventually he came up with five different versions of certain things that she told him to tell the psychologist".

Mr. Activist revealed that "She got an interdict against me [to say that] I was molesting my child. But I never saw him. So they called her psychologist and the psychologist said that if I was molesting the child then he would have told her, but he was telling her another story... that case is still pending and the other one involving the whole quagmire...".

5.5.5. Themes Related to the Impact of the Alienation

5.5.5.1. Loss

Mr. Activist experienced a number of psychological as well as economic losses stemming from the alienation he experienced with his son. Mr. Activist also compared the experience of the loss of his child through parental alienation to the loss of a child through death. He said that "... the first two years was the worst in my life. It was [as] if somebody died or was

taken away, but you don't know are they dead or are they not? They say that for this to happen, a father goes through more trauma not seeing his child but knowing he is there than a father that has lost his child to death".

Mr. Activist feels that he has been robbed of the opportunity of experiencing and being part of his son's childhood and being denied the opportunity of playing a meaningful part in his child's life". He lamented, "That is time you cannot buy, you cannot buy back. It's gone, gone forever, forever its' gone". Mr. Activist expressed his feeling of loss and sadness as follows. He said, "If I could only be allowed to be part of his life and he can learn things from me it would be lovely".

In order to illustrate the enormity and the extent of the loss he experienced as a result of not having contact with his only child he explained, "I want to read him a bedtime story; I've never been able to do that. I won't be able to do that anymore because he's nearly grown up now, you understand what I'm saying? She's taking the most precious time of my child's life away from him".

5.5.5.2. Withholding and Destroying Gifts

Mr. Activist's ex-wife seemed to have wanted to eradicate Mr. Activist from their child's life. He reflected that "anything I give my child she will either destroy it or give it away... at this moment there is nothing he has that is mine. She will go out of her way to make sure that anything that he has that comes from here will be destroyed".

He recalled that his ex-wife had thrown away an expensive pair of takkies which he had bought for their son. He remembered that "I paid R700.00 for a little pair of shoes like that and I asked her where are those shoes? And she said, no, she gave it away... and I bought him a rugby jersey and she gave that away too" [sic]. He reflected that his ex-wife broke Christmas presents and birthday presents intended for his son. He revealed, "that's what I'm saying. It makes me feel really, really sad that, not about her, but about what my child is going through, because to have a mother like that and that is what you grow up with, that is very, very sad".

5.5.5.3. Emotional impact

Mr. Activist explained that adjusting to the impact of the alienation "takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of energy and it takes a lot of... everything". He described having no contact with his son for two years as being "hell." He spoke of a number of symptoms of depression which he said he had experienced such as, "you come home and you can't do anything, you come home and you go and you lie down". Additionally, he said that for the first two years

post-divorce, he would come home and “I will go to my room and I will cry myself to sleep”. These symptoms and behaviours indicate that Mr. Activist may have suffered from depression as a result of his sadness for his son’s loss of his childhood as well as the loss of the opportunity to have a loving and healthy relationship with his father. He lamented, “It makes me feel really, really sad that ... not about her, but about what my child is going through, because to have a mother like that is very, very sad”.

Having been denied the opportunity to have contact with his only child, whom he described as being the apple of his eye, appears to have exacerbated Mr. Activist’s sense of loss. He said, “...a father goes through more trauma not seeing his child but knowing he is there, than a father that has lost his child to death”.

Mr. Activist related that he is concerned that his wife does not take adequate care of their child. He described how “she drives around without a child chair. He stands in the front seat, that’s why I’m saying if my child gets hurt, you must run, but I will get you, I will... I’m not a murderer but that’s my son I’m living for”. He expressed his fear, anger and frustration that something untoward might happen, which he would not be able to prevent. He warned that “if something happens to my child... I will go and I will kill her. I will”.

Mr. Activist’s lack of control of the alienation process and his feelings of depression resonate in the following statement. “I wanted it to be much for him, I wanted it to be the ultimate for him, I wanted it, he, I wanted my child to be the best that he could ever be. Things that I didn’t have in my childhood, now it’s just ripped out of his life, it’s just ripped out and I can do nothing about that because the police didn’t do their job and the justice system didn’t do their job, they failed not even me, they failed my child”.

5.5.5.4. Feelings of Powerlessness

As previously mentioned, Mr. Activist expressed feelings of anger, frustration and powerlessness that his child had been taken from him.

In addition to his own pain, Mr. Activist feels “really sad” about what his child is going through. He feels powerless in being unable to protect his child, to shield him from the alienation process and to give him a normal childhood. As a consequence, his faith in God seems to have been shaken and he appears to have lost his sense of the meaning of life. He reflects that he is struggling to understand why this situation has befallen him. He explained, “I just don’t see why this has happened to my child, this is the only thing I don’t understand, and I’m a Christian and cannot believe that God who is a loving God will do this to harm a little boy to be kept away from his dad”.

During the course of the interview, Mr. Activist asked the researcher whether she would like to see his son's bedroom. The researcher noticed the care that had been taken in decorating it. Mr. Activist explained, "I created this for him, I bought this for him... that wall is yellow, that wall is another colour and that one is another. I put in these little lights, they are from a Christmas tree, I took a drill, I drilled the holes and on top of the ceiling I pushed these lights through". Mr. Activist switched the light on and the ceiling lit up and twinkled as if million little stars were shining down upon us. Mr. Activist showed the researcher "all the programmes that I bought him, the CDs, 80% are in Afrikaans... I've paid a lot of money for that because that is like a collector's item. And things I grew up with I want him to also have... it's like classics and you won't get them and more and that is why I bought them... when he first saw this book he paged through this book over and over and over and over... it'd [be] beautiful this type of thing I wanted to teach him...". Mr. Activist pointed to chart on the wall and said, "There is his growth chart, this is the last one, 30.10. 2009, which was his last birthday here". He pensively pointed to the bed and said, "...he has never slept in this bed, never." It was evident to the researcher that Mr. Activist has a deep-seated sense of powerlessness at not being able to make it possible for his son to enjoy the beautiful room he has created for him and that he is unable to enjoy all the books, cds, puzzles and toys that he has bought for him.

Mr. Activist's acute sense of loss and powerlessness is revealed in the following poignant statement, "I can do nothing about not seeing my child. Now it's past, it's gone. I can do nothing about it, I cannot get him back to three years old... I cannot turn the clock back".

5.5.5.5 Financial Impact

Fighting the alienation process and trying to gain contact with his child had a hefty financial impact upon Mr. Activist. He considered that, "I spent nearly R400 000 to see my child. Just to see him. Just to get lawyers, advocates...". He emphasised that the money was spent simply to see his child and not to gain custody of him. He argued. "To see him, not to have him permanently with me just to see him every weekend, just to have my rights reinstated".

5.5.6 Themes Related to Support Systems

5.5.6.1. Involvement of Professionals and Organisations

Mr. Activist related how, through his pursuit of gaining contact with his son, a number of professionals and organisations became involved with the family. He recalled that "I have been everywhere. Everywhere. You can name it, I've been there. That's why I am with Fathers for Justice".

Mr. Activist said that, “just to get back at me... she has opened how many cases against me for? The first was for..., family violence... she tried the second family violence, then she tried..., there was another one as well. There was a protection order... every year there is something else. The third year she got a psychologist to write a letter to say I’m not allowed to see my child”. Mr. Activist explained that his ex-wife obtained “an interdict against me... I was molesting my child, but I never saw him” [sic]. As a result, The Teddy Bear Clinic and Kidz Clinic resources for abused children were also involved in this case, as Mr. Activist’s ex-wife was hopping from one psychologist to another and from one doctor to another.

It is noteworthy that Mr. Activist mentioned that the family utilised the services of these organisations in addition to legal services, judicial services the services of organisations as well as psychologists, social workers, and the South African Police Services. However, he made no mention of the family utilising the services of the Office of the Family Advocate, whose very role it is to help families resolve conflict regarding non-residential parents’ contact with their children.

5.5.6.2. Dissatisfaction with Service Providers

Mr. Activist seems to be disillusioned by what he perceives as the systems failure to help him to get contact with his son. He disclosed that he was dissatisfied with “the lawyer who didn’t do his job, with the police that’s not doing their job well, with the state prosecutor...”.

He related that a psychologist had written a letter to say that he should not have contact with the child without having seen any of the parties. He explained, “I’m going to take her to the Human Rights Commission, because it was unethical for her to state that without seeing me, not my ex-wife and not my child. ...I am going to go and make a civil case against her I will get the money she made me spend to just see my child because of what she said in her letter...”.

Mr. Activist explained that, “CSR¹ is investigating this whole quagmire with the lawyer that didn’t do his job, with the police that’s not doing their job well, with the state prosecutor, by the way I heard he resigned very quickly, he resigned because he heard they were on his case. The other three policemen, they are on their case as well, I can take her lawyer on. I can take whoever that corruption that they are busy with, I want to root out because if they

¹ Mr. Activist appears to have been confused with the names CSR and CMR. CMR is the acronym for Christelike Maatskaplike Raad, which is a welfare organisation who may have been involved with the family.

did it to me, how many other fathers do not have the funds don't never ever see their children because of those people, because they don't have the money. That is very, very sad".

5.6. CONCLUSION

From the above information it can be seen that a number of themes including difficult relationships, disconnectedness, dysfunctional boundaries, dysfunctional communication, dysfunctional behaviour during the marriage, involvement of professionals, organisations and external systems as well dissatisfaction with service providers were identified across all four participants. Additionally, common alienating behaviours, namely limiting contact, badmouthing, withholding information and false allegations were identified across all four participants.

Themes related to the impact of alienation upon fathers that were identified include: loss, emotional impact, feelings of powerlessness, and detrimental economic impact.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, core themes and the common patterns which emerged from the four fathers' narratives will be discussed in relation to the relevant literature and theories. Subsequently, the findings, as well as strengths and limitations of the study are highlighted. The chapter is concluded with recommendations for future research.

6.2 THE COUPLE AS A SYSTEM BEFORE SEPARATION

A prominent theme that emerged from all four participants narratives was their unhappy and dysfunctional marital relationships. From all the narratives, it is evident that none of couples formed a well-defined spousal subsystem. The couples' failure to form a differentiated system was due to their inability to establish well-defined roles and rules, and also due to their inability to form boundaries that defined the family as separate, and different from other systems.

Families are organised in terms of roles. Each family has to work out issues such as who cares for the children, who does what work around the house, who makes which decisions and who handles the finances. In order for a family to function well, there needs to be clarity and agreement about these roles. Becvar and Becvar (2009) stress the importance of couples being able to accomplish the process of accommodation in the formation of the spousal subsystem. This process entails adjustment to and negotiation of roles between the spouses.

A distinguishing feature of the families in this study was the lack of clear role definition and lack of allocation of responsibility. Participants expressed disappointment in the roles that their former spouses fulfilled. Most participants related that their parental roles had not been clearly defined, both during the marriage as well as post-separation.

With time, family members develop rules about how they relate to one another and to the external environment. A lot of rules are unspoken or openly recognised. There are rules about communication, how decisions are made, and how problems are solved. Rules are developed by the family system ensure its stability and promotes cohesiveness. From the participants' stories, it can be inferred that family rules which help to stabilise and regulate family functioning were never negotiated nor firmly established.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the relative closeness or connectedness in a relationship is negotiated between partners, and eventually becomes part of their relationship definition. Consequently, it forms part of the couple systems' rules. It is relatively stable however, like any other value system, it fluctuates within certain parameters. This implies that couples are at times closer or more connected to one another than they are at other times. Based on the participants' narratives it appears that the couples were more distant and disconnected from one another than they were close or connected to one another. This issue was highlighted by a participant who related that his former spouse had failed to visit him during the six weeks that he was hospitalised. In addition to the fluctuations between closeness and connectedness identified, in all four cases a lack of empathy, mutual support, nurture and safety within the participants' spousal system was evident.

An outstanding feature identified in all the participants' narratives was their diffuse boundaries. As evidenced in 2.9.2.2 in Chapter 2, diffuse boundaries are characterised by over-involvement with all members constantly involved in one another's business, with an excessive amount of "hovering" (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). It was also identified that the boundaries between the spousal system and other systems were also poorly defined and diffuse. Rules were never developed about how the subsystems should interact with each other, who is included in the subsystem and how each member should participate in the system.

A family has an invisible boundary that helps to define it as separate and different from other systems. As discussed in Chapter 2, Minuchin and Fisman (1981) maintain that one of the spousal subsystems' most important tasks is to form boundaries that protect both spouses and that provides them with a space in which to satisfy their own psychological needs, without intrusion from in-laws, children and others. Furthermore, boundaries need to be clear yet permeable, to protect the identity and integrity of the subsystem, failing which it becomes difficult to determine who is inside the system and who is outside the system. Drawing on the participant's narratives, it is evident that there was little privacy and space was not well regulated internally or externally. Extended family members such as mothers-in-law, aunts, brothers and even strangers such as a former spouse's boyfriend appear to have entered and exited the spousal system with relative ease.

Families develop distinct ways to make decisions and to resolve conflict. From the participants' stories, it can be seen that these couples failed to develop problem-solving techniques. High levels of conflict between the couples was identified during the marriage, which raged on post-separation. From each participant's account, it is clear that they lacked conflict resolution skills. It is evident that a great deal of the conflict was centred around the

fathers' relationship with their children during the marriage, and their lack of contact with their children post-separation.

Dysfunctional patterns of communication featured in all the spousal relationships. Drawing on the participants' narratives, it appears that none of these couples were ever able to communicate directly and effectively with one another. Thus, their problems and their conflicts with one another remained unresolved. According to systems theory (Becvar & Becvar, 2003), messages have both a content as well as a relational aspect. Some participants reported that their former spouses never communicated with them at all. Systemically speaking, this is not possible, because even though the communication between the couple may have broken down, and they were not "talking" to another, this does not mean that they were not communicating with one another. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in keeping with the systemic principle that one cannot *not* communicate, their behaviour in 'not talking' still constituted immensely powerful communicative value in the context of their relationship. Their apparent non-communication, communicated a very important message, namely that their relationships was in serious trouble, and pertinent relationship issues needed to be addressed.

Some participants reported that their former spouses expressed themselves and their feelings through physical means, rather than verbally. As discussed in Chapter 2, some theorists such as Bateson (cited in Searlight and Openlander, 1987) regard emotions as actions or bodily predispositions, which are not separate from one's body or thoughts. Most of the participants' former spouses expressed their anger, frustration and dissatisfaction with their partners and their marriages through physical means such as pushing, throwing things, and in one case - the participant's ex-wife banged her head against the wall.

Incongruent patterns of communication were identified in some of the participants' narratives. It appears that these participants' former spouses' verbal messages communicated one thing, while their non-verbal messages communicated something entirely different. For example, one participant explained that his ex-wife had issued a summons for divorce 5 times during the marriage, but that as soon as the divorce was finalised, she asked him whether they could get back together. Based on the participants' narratives, it was apparent that incongruent communication patterns led to misunderstanding and distrust between the couple, and ultimately resulted in their disengagement.

It is important to note that a family establishes its roles of organisation, its rules of operation and all of its activities, through communication patterns. In addition, as discussed in 2.9.2.10, the manner in which and the nature of what couples communicate, what they share with one another, and what they do not share, how they support, nurture and care for each other, how

they resolve or fail to resolve conflicts, how they interact physically with one another, provide and indication of the relative connectedness and closeness of the couple in a relationship (Pistole, 1994).

Drawing on the participants' narratives, it is clear that a level of closeness-distance that was mutually desirable was never achieved by any of the participants. As a result, struggle in this regard was a prominent theme in their relationship distress (Pistole, 1994). From the reported lived experiences of the participants, it can be seen that at some point in their marital relationships, there was a recurring pattern of one partner desiring greater involvement, intimacy and closeness in the relationship, whereas in contrast, the other partner required disengagement, separateness and space.

According to Becvar and Becvar (2009, p.171) complementarity "implies that each behaviour has a logical complement". For example, complimentary gender roles typically found in traditional marriages may involve the husband fulfilling the role of breadwinner outside of the home and the wife fulfilling the role of home maker within the home. Becvar and Becvar (2009) contend that complementarity is essential to enabling families to function effectively. All of the participants reported that they experienced an absence of complementarity in their marital relationships. The couples' expectations of one another were never met, and there was a lack of reciprocity between giving and taking care and also a lack of reciprocity in providing and receiving support and nurture. Furthermore, they experienced a lack of conciliation and cooperation and mutual trust for the uniqueness of the other. It is clear that the couples' martial relationships were dysfunctional, which made them vulnerable to divorce.

Becvar and Becvar (2003) argue that an intimate adult relationship necessitates joining, or a sense of togetherness, in addition to autonomy or separateness between partners. The challenge for the couple is to achieve and maintain a balance between these processes. This implies being able to function separately as individuals, while maintaining a sense of cohesion and connectedness with one another through mutual support, care and understanding. From the participants' narratives it is evident that their former spouses failed to differentiate and they were perceived to have been enmeshed with their families of origin.

Differentiation is a fundamental process in family systems. Bowen (1985) explains that a differentiated individual is one who can be close to his or her family members, while at the same time, maintaining his or her own sense of self as being separate. The participants' former spouses reported that the undifferentiated positions in their former spouses' relationships to their parents and/or members of their families of origin, contributed to tension and conflict in the marital relationship and brought about increasing levels of

distance, distrust and conflict that subsequently resulted in an imbalance in terms of the flow of protection between the spouses. These couples appear not to have invested sufficient time or energy with one another in their marital relationship. It seems as if the marital partners were disengaged and isolated from one another. Some participants reported that they experienced their ex-wives as being involved with their own issues and they were slow to respond or to notice when they needed their support.

From the participants' narratives, it can be seen that as the distance between the couples increased, they became less attuned to one another's needs and communications, and they communicated less effectively, which in turn contributed to even more tension, conflict and frustration, thus driving them even further apart from one another.

From the above, it can be seen that as partners, the couples had trouble negotiating with and accommodating their new spouses. They failed to establish complementary relationships with their spouses, and they continued to rely upon their family of origin for nurture and support. They had difficulty in accommodating and negotiating their roles relative to one another and their needs were not met in the relationship. The spousal system lacked the clear and permeable boundaries needed to protect the identity and integrity of the system. As a result, it was never clearly identified who was inside the system and who was outside of it. Lack of family rules and roles in the spousal system were not clearly defined, and not complementary.

6.3 THE DIVORCE PROCESS

From the participants' narratives, it is clear that the divorce process did not unfold as it ought to have done, according to the stages in Kaslow and Schwarz's dialectic model (1987) described in Chapter 2. It can be seen that most of the fathers in this study were stuck in the pre-divorce phase, which is characterised by feelings of disillusionment, alienation, anxiety, emptiness, depression and detachment, amongst other things. Some fathers seemed entangled in a legal divorce and in an economic divorce phase. They experienced thoughts of suicide, were grieving and mourning, as well as trying to negotiate contact with their children. Several of them were dealing with the financial instability caused by the ongoing litigation with their former spouses.

From the participants' narratives, it is understood that they did not successfully negotiate several stages of Kaslow and Schwartz's (1987) model (as described in 2.5 in Chapter 2). For example, it is evident that none of the participants had managed to resynthesise their identities or to re-establish their lives in more meaningful ways. Several years post-separation, most of the participants had not established new romantic relationships. They

had remained connected to their ex-spouses through their conflicted interactions and relationships with them. Despite a lengthy divorce process, these fathers were unsuccessful in making arrangements that ensured the children's continuing relationship with both parents.

Many people experience divorce in the same way as they experience the death of a loved one. As evidenced in Chapter 2, they mourn the loss, they grieve, and suffer emotional turmoil as they move through the transitional period before they finally accept their realigned status. Similar to the participants' failure to successfully move through and to complete the phases described in Kaslow and Swartz's dialectic model (1987), so too did they fail to successfully complete Kübler-Ross' stages of loss (1973). From their stories it appears that most of these fathers were stuck in the anger stage, which is Stage 2 of Kübler-Ross' (1973) stage theory of loss. These participants remained angry with their ex-wives, and blamed them for the breakdown of the marriage, as well as for their lack of contact with their children. Some of the participants turned their anger inwards and as result, they became depressed. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Reay (2011, p. 141), pointed out that anger "can serve a useful, adaptive, constructive purpose or it can serve as a useless, non-adaptive destructive purpose". In these instances it appears that anger served a destructive purpose, as it kept these fathers stuck, and unable to move on with their lives. Their dysfunctional post-separation relationship patterns mirror their dysfunctional marital relationships.

As evidenced in point 2.5 in Chapter 2, divorce, especially when children are involved, is regarded as an extremely demanding task. In table 2.1 in Chapter 2, the developmental tasks individuals in the divorce phase of Carter and Mc Goldrick' (1999) model were presented. According to this model, individuals are required to work on emotional issues such as overcoming hurt, anger and guilt. In addition they have to mourn the loss of the intact family and give up the hopes, dreams and expectations from the marriage. Drawing on the participants' narratives, it is understood that they were neither able to accomplish these tasks, nor were they able to negotiate ways in which to stay connected with their extended families.

As noted in Chapter 2, according to Nichols and Everett (1986) and Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2009), the divorce process has a powerful disruptive impact on all family members. Before divorcing families are able to move forward, relationship changes must be addressed and a new set of developmental stages has to be dealt with. Most families demonstrate ample re-bonding ability. In many instances the necessary adjustments are possible, particularly if the former partners continue mutually supportive co-parenting. In this study, the couples' pre-divorce relationships were dysfunctional in all domains. The partners

clearly lacked the willingness to continue cooperative co-parental relationships and they had no willingness or intention to support the children's relationship with the other parent.

A distinguishing feature in all four narratives was the participants' former spouses' pathological behaviour during the marriage and post-separation, and the impact that it had upon the marital and post-separation relationship. In the one case, a participant explained that whilst his ex-wife was pregnant with their first child, she tried to commit suicide three times by cutting her wrists. She also ran away from home several times during the pregnancy. He reported that he became so distressed by his ex-wife's dysfunctional behaviour, that he informed his father that he wanted to divorce his wife. As his story unfolded, he revealed several other incidences of his ex-wife's dysfunctional behaviour, such as the time when she shot out all the windows of their house with a handgun. He explained that he finally decided to divorce his wife at the time, after she had had a car accident with their youngest child whilst intoxicated.

Most of the participants experienced their ex-wives as being unloving and devoid of empathy. One father narrated that his ex-wife had pushed and shoved him whilst he was recovering from major surgery. Most fathers recalled that their ex-wives had consistently lied to them during the marriage. They perceived their ex-wives' behaviour as being dishonest, manipulative and deceitful. From this it can be seen that the participants' ex-wives' dysfunctional behaviour was a major contributing factor to the lack of joining and complementarity experienced between the spouses. Furthermore, their ex-wives' abnormal behaviour prevented them from forming close relationships and it made it difficult to support and respect one another.

Enduring high levels of conflict during the marriage and post-separation featured prominently in all four participants' narratives. Drawing on the literature in Chapter 2, it can be seen that post-divorce conflict is normally temporary, often rational, adaptive and considered a normal adjunct to the complex task of deconstructing the beliefs systems connected with the marriage (McIntosh and Deacon-Wood, 2003). From the narratives of the participants in this study, it is plain to see that they had extremely acrimonious divorces, which were characterised by high conflict and distrust between the parties. There were also reported incidents of intermittent physical aggression between spouses.

Furthermore, it is evident from the participants' stories that the enduring high conflict between the couples repeatedly drove them back to court. The ensuing legal battles appear to have exacerbated the level of conflict between them. It is important to note that not only did the conflict between the parties play out in court, it also manifested in public, such as at handovers of the children. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, high-conflict parents often tend to

become rigid in their perception of one another and they tend to deal with each other and with matters of importance to them in an extreme manner. According to Ahrons' (1994) parenting typologies these parents' relationships can be described as "angry associates" (discussed in section 2.7.3 of Chapter 2).

Kelly and Johnston (2001) cited in Chapter 3 note ongoing parental conflict as an underlying factor in the creation of the alienated child. In all four cases, the participants reported that they hardly interacted or communicated with their former spouses. They indicated that on the rare occasions when they did communicate or interact with them, they were unable to contain their anger towards one another, and they usually ended up fighting. From their descriptions of their relationships with their former spouses, their post-divorce parental relationships can be categorised as "fiery foes" according to Ahrons' (1994) parenting typologies (discussed in section 2.7.4 of Chapter 2).

As discussed in section 2.8.1 of Chapter 2, high-conflict divorce cases typically have high rates of litigation or repeated litigation, high degrees of anger and distrust, incidents of verbal abuse, intermittent physical aggression and ongoing difficulty in communicating with one another about matters pertaining to care and co-parenting of their children. The fore-mentioned characteristics were all identified in all four participants' narratives. Conflict prevailed during the marriage and it was evident that the hostility was perpetuated post-separation.

6.4 PARENTAL ALIENATION

As discussed in section 3.6.1 of Chapter 3, Darnall (1998, p. 4) defines parental alienation as "any constellation of behaviours, whether conscious or unconscious, that could evoke a disturbance in the relationship between a child and the other parent." It was also noted that parental alienation takes place within the context of high conflict divorce. As previously mentioned in this study, all four participants' narratives reflected unusually high levels of conflict. Attempts by mothers to alienate the children from fathers was identified in all four participants' narratives. Various 'alienation strategies' or 'alienation manoeuvres' used by these mothers were highlighted in all four narratives.

In Chapter 3, alienating strategies used by parents and described by Baker and Darnall (cited in Fidler & Bala, 2011, p.19) were discussed and included: "badmouthing; limiting/interfering with parenting time; limiting/interfering with mail or phone contact; limiting/interfering with symbolic contact; interfering with information; emotional manipulation; unhealthy alliance; and miscellaneous e.g. badmouthing to friends, teachers, doctors, interfering with child's counselling, creating conflict between child and rejected parent". In

this study, all the mothers reportedly incited rejection of the fathers by badmouthing them to others. Drawing on the participants' narratives, it can be seen that badmouthing was an alienating technique used by most of the participants' former spouses in order to discredit them and portray them to others as mean, dangerous and uncaring. It is important to note that when parents are not present to offset the impact of the harsh words about them or to dispel untruths told about them by the alienating parent, severe and long-lasting impressions can be created and can remain unchallenged in the minds of young children. Harsh, demeaning words spoken by the alienating parent can induce an unwarranted weariness towards the target parent, as seemed to be the case with some of the participants.

A notable 'alienation strategy' identified in all four narratives was seen when mothers attempted to prevent fathers from having contact with their children. Drawing on the literature in Chapter 3, an alienating parent may interfere with parenting time and contact in a number of different ways, ranging from seemingly minor infringements such as picking the child up early from the rejected parent at each visit, to extreme behaviours such as not allowing the child to go to the scheduled contact at all, as happened in all four of the cases in this study. Baker & Fine (2008) argue that limiting contact is one of the most frustrating experiences that rejected parents have to endure. The participants in this study appear to have experienced extreme frustration and emotional distress as a result of being denied contact with their children. Most of the participants recalled that they had experienced such chronic distress that, at times, they had contemplated suicide.

In addition to limiting physical contact, it can be seen from the literature that alienating parents also try to restrict their children's telephonic communication with the other parent, as well as with their other relatives on the rejected parents' side of the family. From what the participants recounted, it is evident that in addition to being denied physical contact with their children, most participants were also denied telephonic contact with their children. One participant reported that his ex-wife screened their children's phone calls, and she often let the answering machine take his calls. In addition, she reportedly put the phone on speaker phone so that she could monitor the children's conversations with their father. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the suggestion that the target parent is not physically or emotionally available to the child, creates an insecurity in the child about his or her relationship with the target parent. It can be inferred that this may have been the case with the participants' children.

The participants' narratives reveal that their attempts to have indirect contact with their children either telephonically or through cards and letters which were sent to their children were thwarted by their former spouses. Several of the fathers mentioned that the letters and birthday cards they sent to their children were reportedly destroyed or thrown away. These

fathers also reported that the gifts they gave or sent to their children were either rejected, given away or destroyed by the former spouse or by extended family members. From the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, it is evident that that withholding and destruction of gifts from the target parent is a powerful manoeuvre to isolate the target parent and to expunge them from their children's lives. Warshak (2003) explains that this sets the children up to feel rejected and makes them more dependent upon the alienating parent. When children do not receive any gifts or cards on birthdays and special holidays, they may feel unwanted and angry towards the parent who has disappointed them. It can be inferred that this would be the case with the participants' children in this study, as they very often did not receive the messages and gifts sent to them by their fathers on auspicious occasions such as on their birthdays and on Christmas.

Drawing on the four participants' narratives, it is evident that most fathers had not had any contact with their children for a period of two years. As a consequence these fathers became isolated from them. As discussed in Chapter 3, Warshak (2003, p. 130) contends that "isolation makes children more vulnerable to divorce poison" (alienation), and it does this by breeding dependence upon the custodial parent and by preventing the child from exposure to competing views of reality. Isolation also keeps children away from the influence of people who would counteract the effects of badmouthing.

Withholding of information was another 'alienating strategy' that was identified in the four participants' narratives. Information pertaining to their children's education and their general health and wellbeing had been withheld from them by their former spouses. They complained that they were unaware of any health issues such as injuries which their children have sustained. These fathers were upset that they had no knowledge of their children's academic achievements or problems they might have been experiencing at school. In addition, they felt hurt and angry that they had no knowledge pertaining to their children's extra-curricular activities. The participants reported that owing to the lack of such information, they were precluded from attending important school functions and they were denied the opportunity of being at their children's side to comfort them when they were ill or injured. It is understood that any attachment the participants' children may have established with them had become weakened as a result of them being denied the opportunity to play a meaningful part in their children's lives as described above. Furthermore, it can be inferred that the participants' children never learnt of the other parent's interest in and love for them.

Making false allegations was an additional theme that featured prominently in all four participants' narratives. From the participants' narratives it is evident that their former spouses made serious allegations in order to portray them as abusive, dangerous and

irresponsible. As a consequence of the allegations, their contact was disrupted and or withheld for prolonged periods of time, causing them severe emotional distress. Drawing on the literature, it can be seen that making false allegations against the target parent is designed to instil the belief in the child that the target parent is capable of inflicting harm upon them, and it also serves to make children feel unsafe at the thought of having contact with the target parent. Creating fear of the target parent heightens the child's need for a protector, the role of which the alienating parent is willingly to play. In this way, dependency upon the alienating parent is heightened and attachment to that parent is strengthened.

According to the participant's narratives, there was a wide range in the number and severity of false allegations made by ex-wives. In the most severe case reported on here, a participant's ex-wife had reportedly made 400 false allegations against him including allegations that he had sexually abused his two youngest children. Despite being cleared of any wrongdoing, the participant's ex wife's reported unquenchable anger towards him and a deep-seated distrust from her, which appears to have driven her to eliminate him from their children's lives. Based on the literature, it is evident that the most potent false allegation that a parent can make is that of physical or sexual abuse. Such allegations result in contact being immediately withheld, pending the outcome of an investigation.

It is understood from the participants' narratives that they all experienced an overwhelming sense of loss as a result of the divorce, and more specifically as a result of the alienation process. Not only did these participants suffer the loss of contact with their children, they also suffered humiliation and loss of dignity when allegations were made that they had sexually and/or physically abused their children. The fathers against whom allegations of sexual abuse were made reported that they experienced shame, embarrassment and a sense of degradation when they were arrested, incarcerated and treated like common criminals.

From their narratives, it can be seen that the fathers in this study longed to be able to regain the lost time with their children. They wished that they could have been present in the lives of their children and that they could have witnessed their children moving through their different developmental stages. They articulated that they felt that they had been robbed of the opportunity to be part of their children's lives. All these fathers said that wanted to enjoy the same opportunity to play a meaningful role in their children's lives as their former spouse had enjoyed. In summary, fathers in this study lost the daily opportunity of being physically and emotionally present in their children's lives. They were unable to provide emotional support, structure and direction for their children. In addition, they were denied the

opportunity of being effective role models for their children. In Chapter 3, the importance of fathers being able to perform parental roles was highlighted.

6.5 CONSEQUENCES OF THE ALIENATING BEHAVIOUR

As a consequence of the alienating behaviours employed by their ex-wives, all the participants experienced emotional and financial losses. They experienced acute sadness, depression and nostalgia for what they believed was missed. In addition, they also experienced physical symptoms, such as sleep disturbance and poor health. Most of the fathers experienced feeling powerless as a result of the alienation process. These experiences will be explained more fully below.

From the participants' narratives, it is evident that they experienced chronic emotional distress as a result of being precluded from performing their parental roles. Not being able to provide their children with adequate nurture, guidance, limit setting, and discipline as well as not being able to influence their children's intellectual achievements, distressed the participants. Drawing on the participants' narratives, it can be seen that they experienced humiliation and helplessness as a result of the loss of being able to make major decisions affecting their children's lives - such as which schools they should attend, to the extent that one participant recounted that he felt that he had been "trodden over and dealt with like a piece of crap".

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One of the participants explained that he had experienced feelings of extreme isolation and abandonment as a consequence of the alienation. Depression-like symptoms were identified in all the fathers' stories. As evidenced in the literature in Chapter 3, depression is almost always associated with feelings of helplessness and lack of control, especially in instances where alienation is present. Some fathers in this study reportedly cried themselves to sleep at night and others experienced sleep disturbances. Linked to the feelings of sadness and depression was evidence of a sense of powerlessness and helplessness.

As evidenced in most of the participants' narratives, they felt powerless in being able to shield and protect their children from the alienation process. Furthermore, they felt powerless in being able to stop their children from being used as pawns in the post-divorce parental conflict. One participant experienced powerlessness in being unable to stop his ex-wife from damaging his children's genitals. Another father experienced feeling powerless in being unable to protect his 'good' reputation, especially as a businessman, when his ex-wife slandered him amongst his business associates.

Drawing on the literature, it is evident that professionals working with the divorcing family, such as attorneys, mental health workers, and social service agencies, play a significant role in the restructuring of the family. All four participants expressed dissatisfaction with the services provided by such professionals.

Based on the participants' narratives it can be seen that they felt let down by these systems, and it appears that the families' interaction with some of these systems - for example the school and legal systems - created a large part of the participants' problems post-separation. For example, in some instances, schools withheld information about the children from fathers, and they made it clear to the fathers that their presence at the school was not welcome.

With regards to the legal system, the participants complained about attorneys who charged them inordinately high legal fees, and who instigated the prolongation of the legal battles. Some of the fathers expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as the legal system's failure to gather pertinent information prior to drawing conclusions. Several participants' narratives reflected that they felt that their former wives' attorneys had lost their professional objectivity. They perceived the attorneys' "toxic" practices and procedures as exacerbating the alienation process. As evidenced in Chapter 2, Johnston and Cambell (1988, p. 39), contend that "lawyers intractably wedded to an adversarial stance... invariably intensified parental conflict... regardless of the impact on the child in the context on the family."

From the participants' narratives, it can be seen that most of them were dissatisfied with the psychological services that had been rendered to them. They experienced some psychologists as having behaved unprofessionally and unethically towards them. Additionally, it is evident for their narratives that most of the participants appear to have had a lack of understanding of what can be realistically be expected of the Family Advocate and the services that that office renders. For example, they seemed to be under the misapprehension that they Family Advocate could take sides in disputes. They hoped that the Family Advocate would have instructed their former spouses to stop withholding contact, and to allow them to have contact with their children immediately.

With regards to the financial consequences experienced by fathers as result of the alienation process, it can be seen from their narratives that most of them spent vast sums of money on psychological assessments and legal fees. They also reported suffering financial losses when they had to leave work to attend meetings with professionals involved in the cases, as well as when they had to attend court to defend the allegations made against them by their former spouses. In one extreme case, the participant explained that after the divorce, the financial consequences of the having to deal with the alienation process resulted in a

dramatic lifestyle change for him. His lifestyle changed from being opulent to not having sufficient money to be able to put food on the table.

6.6 FINDINGS

The following findings were drawn from this study:

- The participants' narratives were almost exclusively fixated on prolonged high marital conflict that was perpetuated into the separation and continued unabated post-divorce.
- Contact difficulties were framed by blaming mothers. None of the participants acknowledged their own and/or their children's possible contributions to the contact difficulties.
- "The best interest of child" principle which is supposed to underpin all matters involving all minor children was not clearly appreciated or upheld.
- The adversarial legal system is not well-suited to dealing with matters involving parental alienation.
- Parental alienation has enduring emotional, physical and financial consequences for fathers. It disrupts and in some cases attenuates the father- child relationship.
- Fathers suffer multiple losses as a result of the alienation process.
- Fathers' obvious distress as a result of the alienation is not adequately addressed by support systems involved in these matters.

Based on the above findings, it is important for professionals working with families where alienation has been suspected to establish whether alienation has taken place, and to differentiate the alienated child from one who refuses or rejects contact post-separation for other reasons. By adopting a neutral focus, professionals can determine whether the child has been alienated or not. As Kelly and Johnston (2001, p. 254) point out, "to adequately diagnose and effectively intervene when a child is presented as alienated, a systems framework that assesses the multiple and interrelated factors influencing the child's response during and after separation and divorce is critical".

The issue of high conflict in post-divorce matters needs to be addressed by the professionals such as attorneys, psychologists and social workers, working with these families. A collaborative effort should be employed to address this matter.

6.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study created a context which enabled the voices of the four fathers to be heard. They were given the opportunity to tell their unique stories in their own ways.

Similar patterns of concern with conflict and the fathers' acute distress as a result of alienation, were identified. The similarity of patterns found in all four narratives are striking.

Owing to the small sample used in this study, the findings cannot be generalised to the larger population. The researcher acknowledges that her approach to the study, her perceptions and her interpretations, were coloured by her worldview, perceptions biases, values and experiences. Notwithstanding, she nevertheless attempted to remain faithful to the participant's worldviews.

In terms of the potential for furthering this research, the voices of former spouses and their children would provide valuable information regarding the roles they all played in the alienation process. It would also provide rich information as to how the alienation process impacted upon each family member in the system.

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APPENDIX A

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. The interviews will be recorded and used for research purposes only. Confidentiality will be retained at all times. To this end your identity and the identity of your children will be changed so that your privacy will be protected and you will not be able to be identified.

Please note that I will regrettably not be able to provide counselling for you either during or after this study, nor will I be able to assist you in any further custody litigation.

By signing this document it is taken that you have understood the fore mentioned contents and terms and you agree to participate in this study

Signed:

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Initial open –ended questions.

1. Tell me about your marriage before you separated.
2. Let's talk about the time when you first started experiencing contact difficulties.
3. What in your opinion gave rise to these difficulties ?
4. What was going on in your life when this happened?

Intermediate questions

1. What happened next?
2. How have you been feeling since the problems began?
3. Help me to understand how not having contact with your children has impacted on you and in what ways has it affected you life?
4. Tell me about the strategies and techniques you have used to cope with the situation.
5. Tell me about the changes that have occurred in your life as a result of your lack of contact with your children.

Ending questions

1. Lets' talk about the most important lessons that you have learned through going through this experience.
2. What helps you to manage the problems that you have experienced through not having contact with your children?
3. Who has been the most helpful to you during this time? In what ways have they been helpful?