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Review: The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics

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Title: *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics, 2nd Edition*

Authors: Lundy Bancroft, Jay G. Silverman, D. Ritchie

Published: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012

The second edition of *The Batterer as Parent* is a well written, wellreferenced practical resource that provides both a balanced, state of the science review and a reasonable set of approaches that guide our current practice around batterers and programmatic efforts to support their parenting post-battering intervention. In the words of the authors:

“Our goal, then, is to prepare the reader to identify and to respond to the range of individual and family dynamics that can be created by battering behavior. Moreover, we are eager to help community members understand that these dynamics rarely disappear when a battered mother leaves her abusive partner; they live on in the patterns of interaction that have been established and, often more directly, in the batterer’s use of ongoing intimidation and violence and in his use of litigation for custody or visitation. Therefore, professionals and others wishing to assist mothers and children need to understand a host of sources of emotional injury to a mother and her children, as well as appropriate strategies for fostering recovery. In fact, we propose in this book some substantial shifts in the thinking that currently prevails regarding the nature of children’s trauma and their needs for recovery in cases where they have been exposed to domestic violence perpetrators” (page xiv).

The book is well organized into nine chapters that span the set of issues faced by professionals working with families dealing with the impact and aftermath of intimate partner violence. The chapters are grounded in current peer reviewed literature and provide a reasonable platform from which readers can assess their own understanding of the concepts and consider how their understanding matches or differs from what the science in the field currently documents as accurate. One’s practice with clients and communities is rooted in one’s understanding of what is scientifically known and effective, so a careful reading of each chapter in sequence if nothing else will provide a useful exercise to update views and enhance one’s understanding of the available evidence base that should guide practice. The chapter titles are as follows:

1. The Battering Problem
2. Power Parenting: The Batterer's Style With Children
3. Shock Waves: The Batterer's Impact on the Home
4. The Batterer as Incest Perpetrator
5. Impeding Recovery: The Batterer as Parent Postseparation
6. The Mismeasure of Batterers as Parents: A Critique of Prevailing Theories of Assessment
7. Supporting Recovery: Assessing Risk to Children From Batterers and Structuring Visitation
8. Is It Real? Assessing and Fostering Change in Batterers as Parents
9. Improving Community Responses to the Parenting Batterers

The final chapter is an advocate's roadmap that could guide meaningful practice reform in a community's response to intimate partner violence. It also addresses the challenge of safely working with perpetrators and victims around the batterers' willingness to change their behavior and responsibly participate in their children's parenting. The sub-headings for this community response chapter include:

Chapter 9: Improving Community Responses to the Parenting of Batterers

- ❖ Child Advocates, Child and Family Therapists, and Programs for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence
- ❖ Custody Evaluations
- ❖ Family Courts
- ❖ Child Protective Systems and Courts with Protective Jurisdiction
- ❖ Parent Trainers
- ❖ Psychological Evaluations
- ❖ Batterer Programs and Fatherhood Programs
- ❖ Battered Women's Programs
- ❖ Supervised Visitation Centers
- ❖ Family Lawyers and Bar Associations
- ❖ Police Department
- ❖ Researchers
- ❖ Summary

A prominent focus of the book is how the victimized partner is impacted by the batterer's actions and desire to parent as well as the

impact on the children who live in the environment influenced by the batterer, exposed to the parenting of the batterer either pre- or post-separation. The pervasive impact of living with the unpredictable and the corrosive effective of witnessing violence, as well as being an actual physical victim of it, are also well described. An important component of the scholarly discussion in the book is the existence of what can only be characterized as sensational “junk science around alienation syndromes that while widely discredited continue to appeal to courts and media outlets.” The authors step through a careful, scientific dissection of these alienation views and the opinion pieces upon which they are based. Unlike the more traditional scientific approach of disseminating innovation and characterizing emerging theory, the proponents of the alienation position provide little data, avoid much peer review by publishing in books rather than prominent journals and do not feel encumbered by the conceptual limitations and logical flaws that become apparent in their work. Despite this, in an adversarial legal process, a sort of moral equivalence is claimed and the violence inflicted upon a victim by a perpetrator is somehow seen as “mutual” or “equivalent” with the actions taken by a victim in response to the perpetrator’s violence. While a clever legal strategy that might confuse a jury, this sort of “being fast with the facts” has no place in scientific inquiry and certainly does not stand the test of robust scientific theory nor responsible professional practice. Again, in the authors’ words: “As we explain in this edition, we have grave concerns about the implications of this research trend for children. This period has also seen an exponential growth in the use of “parent alienation” theories and charges against battered mothers; modern society has come to a stage where it accuses battered mothers of parental unfitness for exposing their children to batterers and then, postseparation, does an abrupt about-face to accuse them of unfitness for their efforts to limit their children’s exposure. In this context, we have felt it urgent to expand considerably our discussion of parental alienation theories” (page xv).

In summary, the second edition of *The Batterer as Parent* is well worth the read for both practitioners on the front lines of family strengthening activities as well as for professionals and advocates who seek to promote evidence-informed policies around how to keep children safe in the face of family violence. The authors of this valuable book

provide a well organized overview of the key issues of which interested readers need to be aware so that positions taken, policies advocated for and services delivered all reflect the best and most accurate systematically developed information about how best to keep children safe (both developmentally and physically) in the setting of a batterer who wants to continue parenting.