

An Objective Measure of Splitting in Parental Alienation: The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire

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Citation

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Abstract

Both clinicians and forensic practitioners should distinguish parental alienation (rejection of a parent without legitimate justification) from other reasons for contact refusal. Alienated children—who were not abused—often engage in splitting and lack ambivalence with respect to the rejected parent; children who were maltreated usually perceive the abusive parent in an ambivalent manner. The purpose of this study was to assess the usefulness of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) in identifying and quantifying the degree of splitting, which may assist in diagnosing parental alienation. Results showed that severely alienated children engaged in a high level of splitting, by perceiving the preferred parent in extremely positive terms and the rejected parent in extremely negative terms. Splitting was not manifested by the children in other family groups. The PARQ may be useful for both clinicians and forensic practitioners in evaluating children of divorced parents when there is a concern about the possible diagnosis of parental alienation.

Measuring the Difference between Parental Alienation and Parental Estrangement: The PARQ-Gap

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Abstract

Parental alienation (rejection of a parent without legitimate justification) and realistic estrangement (rejection of a parent for a good reason) are generally accepted concepts among mental health and legal professionals. Alienated children, who were not abused, tend to engage in splitting and lack ambivalence with respect to their parents; estranged children, who were maltreated, usually perceive their parents in an ambivalent manner. The hypothesis of this study was that a psychological test—the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ)—will help to distinguish severely alienated from nonalienated children. The PARQ, which was used to identify and quantify the degree of splitting for each participant, was administered to 45 severely alienated children and 71 nonalienated children. The PARQ-Gap score—the difference between each child’s PARQ: Father score and PARQ: Mother score—was introduced and defined in this research. Using a PARQ-Gap score of 90 as a cut point, this test was 99% accurate in distinguishing severely alienated from nonalienated children. This research presents a way to distinguish parental alienation from other reasons for contact refusal. The PARQ-Gap may be useful for both clinicians and forensic practitioners in evaluating children of separating and divorced parents when there is a concern about the possible diagnosis of parental alienation.