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Today's Lesson from Alec Baldwin: Alienation Begins with You

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One would think that Alec Baldwin would be pretty clear on why his daughter hates him. When you go about leaving messages calling your child a “rude, thoughtless little pig” who needs you to “straighten your ass out” – well, that’s pretty good grounds for hatred right there. After all, while it’s possible that Baldwin got angry with his daughter for the very first time ever, it’s a good deal more likely that this was but a taste of what he’s capable of. After all, when you’re leaving messages for your non-custodial daughter during a messy divorce proceeding, you’re usually going to try to be on your best, not worst behavior.

Aside from being a personal problem, Baldwin’s tirade – leaked, unfortunately, by someone on his ex-wife’s side – was a public-relations nightmare. Baldwin may have boldly asserted that he didn’t care that his daughter was a child, but most feeling human beings certainly did. And so it was that Alec Baldwin boldly went onto the talk show “The View” to apologize.

Or, you know, attack the victim. Whatever.

Baldwin did pay lip service to the idea that he screwed up, but focused mostly on so-called “parental alienation,” blaming ex-wife Kim Basinger for turning his daughter against him.

“What you learn in parental alienation is that affection for the alienated parent or loyalty to the alienated parent is portrayed as betrayal of the custodial parent. And that parent communicates in very subtle and not-so-subtle terms that this person is not a part of my life and I don’t want anything to do with them and I don’t want you, either,” he lamented.

The fact that his daughter could possibly feel loyalty toward her mother because Baldwin occasionally says she lacks the brains or decency of a human being doesn’t seem to have entered his mind. Instead, he’s adopted the low whine of the Men’s Rights Movement, a loose-knit organization of ex-husbands who feel aggrieved and put-upon by the whole world, which is working against them to ensure that their children hate them.

Baldwin has the usual routine down. He stated on “The View” that he was considering quitting his lucrative gig on NBC’s “30 Rock” to write a book about parental alienation. That this would

reduce his income – and child-support payments – was left unsaid, but hovered nicely in the background.

Of course, in his rambling diatribe on “The View,” Baldwin barely mentioned his daughter, save to make a point against his ex-wife. He did complain that women actually get angry, though.

“Things have changed so much since I was a child, and things like this would happen,” he bemoaned, “and a woman might go and have lunch with her friends or go see her family, or she might go to the country club or to a group she was involved with and tell people what she was feeling about what was going on.”

Today, vents Baldwin, “a person presses one button and the whole world knows that’s happened to you.”

And that’s true, I suppose. If I leave a verbally abusive message for my daughter on my ex-wife’s answering machine, she’ll be able to play it for anyone who wants to hear it. She might even share with people at work, where she goes to work, as opposed to the country club, where she’d go if this was 1956, and we all lived in Leave-it-to-Beaverland.

Now, in some ways it’s bad that this message got out. Not bad for Baldwin – I could care about him – but bad for his daughter, Ireland, who is the actual victim here, and who didn’t necessarily need the world knowing that her father was a jerk.

But to blame Basinger for releasing the tape is to remove blame from Baldwin for abusing his daughter. And make no mistake about it – this was abuse. You don’t tell your kids that they’ve humiliated you, that they’re rude and thoughtless, that you’re getting on a plane to straighten them out. You certainly don’t scream it like you’re rabid.

There are parents who try to turn their kids to their side, and there is a case to be made that men are undervalued as parents, just as women are undervalued in the work force. But it’s never the poor schlubs who care for their kids who end up screaming about parental alienation. It’s generally the narcissistic abusers, the men who are enraged not that their exes are working against them, but that their exes dared to leave in the first place. Reread the “country club” statement, and tell me that Baldwin is talking about the situation with his daughter. He isn’t. He’s talking about how his wife wouldn’t have left him 50 years ago, that she would’ve vented at the country club and then come home to be at his side. And he’d conveniently ignore that perhaps, just perhaps, that wasn’t healthy and wasn’t right, and perhaps – just perhaps – a man who would verbally abuse his 11-year-old daughter may not have shown even that much compunction about verbally abusing her mother. And that her mother in that case had every right and reason to leave.

It’s not the fault of society that Alec Baldwin is an abuser, not the fault of the divorce, not the fault of his ex-wife and certainly not the fault of his daughter. It’s his fault, and his responsibility. I understand why he doesn’t want to look in the mirror. Abusers rarely do. But that’s where the fault lies. He can blame his ex all he wants, but if his ex-wife is really trying to turn his daughter against him, she has no greater ally than him.