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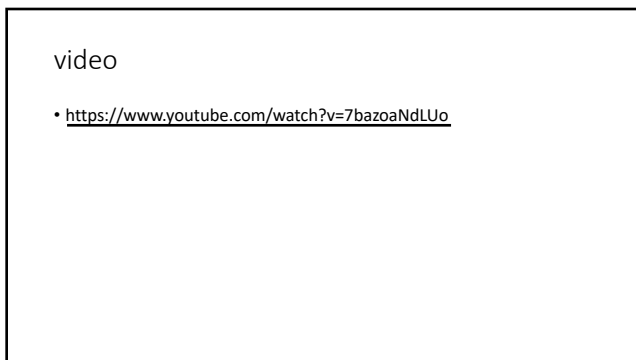
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## Parental Alienation

- The belief system that claims the preferred parent is the cause of the child's avoidance or rejection of the non-preferred parent
- The presence of avoidance or rejection
- The behavior of the preferred parent is the cause of the alienation

Meier, 2009



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## PAS vocab

- Parental alienation belief system
- Parental alienation proponents
- Child avoidant behavior
- Parent encouraged child avoidant behavior
- Preferred parent
- Rejected parent

Mercer & Drew, 2023



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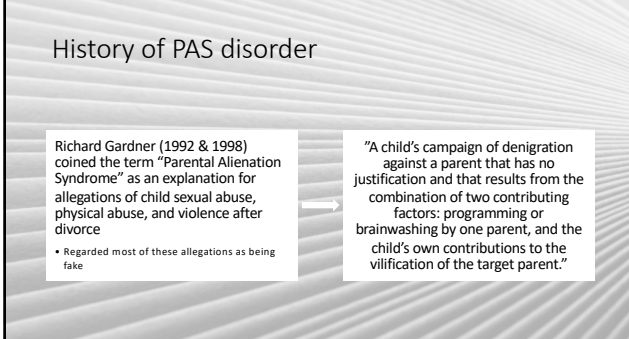
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## History of PAS disorder

Richard Gardner (1992 & 1998) coined the term "Parental Alienation Syndrome" as an explanation for allegations of child sexual abuse, physical abuse, and violence after divorce

- Regarded most of these allegations as being fake

"A child's campaign of denigration against a parent that has no justification and that results from the combination of two contributing factors: programming or brainwashing by one parent, and the child's own contributions to the vilification of the target parent."



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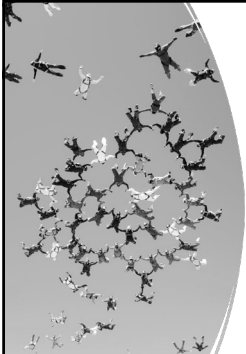
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### Gardner's Parental Alienation Theory (PAT)

- Offered theories about why children and adults make allegations of sexual abuse during divorce
  - Children normally exhibit sexual behavior and sexual fantasies are a normal part of childhood
  - "A four year old girl, for example, may harbor, among her collection of polymorphous perverse fantasies, thoughts of some kinds of sexual encounters with her father." (Gardner, 1992, p. 125)
  - "What is striking is the degree of sadism that many of these children may exhibit. In many of these cases I have been impressed by what I consider to be the innate cruelty of these children." Gardner, 1992, p. 119-120).
- In regard to mothers, Gardner (1992) said that those who make up allegations of sexual abuse are "delusional" and exhibit "psychopathic behavior."
- In regard to alienated fathers, Gardner (1992) said, "provided normal loving parenting or, at worst, exhibited minimal impairments in parenting capacity" (page xxii)

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### Eight Characteristics of an Alienated Child

- Campaign of denigration
- Weak, frivolous, or absurd rationalizations for the deprecation
- Lack of ambivalence
- Independent thinking phenomenon
- Reflexive support for alienating parent
- Absence of guilt
- Presence of borrowed scenarios
- Spread of animosity to the extended family of the alienated parent

Evans & Bone, 2011 and Gardner, R.A., 1998

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### Criticisms of the Eight Characteristics

- The eight characteristics are all of the child, but alienation supports emphasize that it is the relationship of child and parent
- These criteria are subjective analysis of attitudes of parents and children and lack validity
- Is focused on the characteristics without consideration for the causes behind them
- There may be legitimate concerns about the avoided parent
  - The behaviors of the child do not occur in a vacuum.

Doughty & Drew, 2023



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**Identifiable Behaviors of parental alienation**

- Visitation or access blocking of one parent by another
- False allegations of abuse or neglect of one parent by the other
- Targeted parent/child relationship deterioration following marital separation
- Exaggerated fear reaction on the part of the child towards the targeted parent

Evans & Bone, 2011



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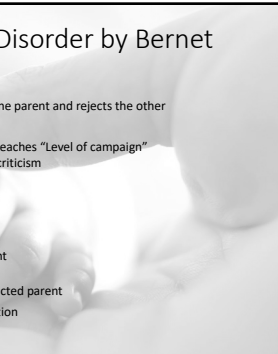
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**(PAD) Parental Alienation Disorder by Bernet (2010)**

- The child, during a separation allies themselves with one parent and rejects the other
- Child's behaviors:
  - Persistent rejection or denigration of parent that reaches "Level of campaign"
  - Weak, frivolous, or absurd rationalization for this criticism
- Child presents with two or more of the following
  - Lack of ambivalence
  - Independent thinker phenomenon
  - Reflexive support of one parent against the other
  - Absence of guilt over exploiting the rejected parent
  - Presence of borrowed scenarios
  - Spread of animosity to the extended family of rejected parent
- Child's refusal to visit rejected parent without justification



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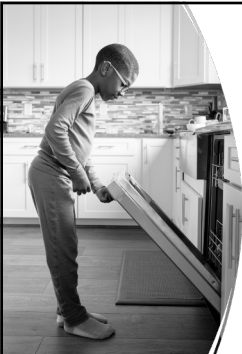
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**Parent Alienating Behaviors & The Alienated Child**

- Sani, Johnston, Fidler, & Bala (2016) coined the term "Parent Alienating Behaviors" or PAB after Parental Alienation Disorder was rejected by the DSM-V and ICD-11.
  - "...false, malicious, and unjustified negative beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors by one parent about the other parent that have the purpose of sabotaging a child's relationship and wish to spend time with the other parent."
- The Alienated Child was coined by Kelly & Johnson (2001) as a manner of reformulating PAS



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### Alternative diagnoses posed by PAS advocates

- Shared delusional disorder
  - Preferred parent suffers from a delusion that avoided parent is to be feared or avoided
  - This delusion is shared with the child, who becomes similarly delusional
  - Presence of any delusional disorder is 0.18% of the population
  - No research, support, or rule outs
- Factitious Disorder Imposed upon Another
  - Controversial disorder or "Munchausen's by proxy"
  - Feigning or production of symptoms while under the care of another
  - No research, support, or rule outs
  - Lack of empirical evidence to support

Harman et al, 2022

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### PAS advocates potential Causes of a Child's Negative View of one Parent

- Potential danger associated with sexual, physical, or verbal abuse
  - Children who are abused still want a relationship with the abusive parent
  - They are willing work with the parent and have continued contact
- Brain-washing of the child by the "Alienating Parent"
  - If a child is alienated, then they are increasingly resistant to contact with the "Alienated Parent"
  - They are hostile, aggressive, and altogether rejects the parent
  - Engage in "Splitting" which is not seen in abuse cases
    - View "Alienating Parent" as all good and "Alienated Parent" as all bad

Heitler, S. 2019

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### Scientific support for parental alienation/or lack thereof

- Numerous articles have been published about PAS, but they lack scientific support
  - Articles, blog posts, movies, and anecdotal evidence
  - Qualitative interviews with alienated children with no control group or established criteria
  - Established as "methodically weak" with non random and based on unreliable applications of research
  - Fail to consider rule out or other possible explanations for behaviors

Milchman, m., 2020

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### Empirically verified issues with parental alienation theory

- Limited research and credibility
- Gender-bias in alienation claims
- Deflection of scrutiny of negative parenting practices in favor of projecting the blame onto the preferred parent
- Deflection of risk factors in family violence cases
- Implementing joint custody, equal time, and co-parenting assumption
- Shifts attention away from the "best interests of the child" criteria
- Silencing of women and children
- Inappropriate assignment of parental blame for adolescent behaviors that may be explained by something else



Collective Memo of Concern to WHO, 2019

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### Organizational support or lack thereof

American Bar Association	American Psychological Association	American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The materials herein represent the opinions of the authors and/or editors, and should not be considered to be the views or opinions of the American Bar Associations or the Family Law Section</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The opinions and statements published are the responsibility of the authors, and such opinions and statements do not necessarily represent the policies of the American Psychological Association</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PA is not listed in the APSAC guidelines about emotional abuse and maltreatment</li> <li>• Issued strongly worded statements against the use of PA without considering all other explanations for behavior</li> </ul>

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### Myths reinforced by parental alienation

- It is suspect when a mother rejects shared custody
- Vengeful mothers attempt to exclude fathers from their children's lives
- Fathers only contest custody out of genuine concern and care
- Interpersonal violence between adults has little impact on a child
- Mothers fabricate allegations in order to manipulate the custody process
- Allegations of sexual abuse are "outrageous" and used as a "bombshell"

Meier, 2009

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### When children reject a parent after separation

- The child may be fearful or reject the parent's harsh parenting
- The child may be going through developmental changes
- The child's personality may clash with the avoided parent
- The child may still be upset about the separation/break-up
- The child may hold the parent accountable for lies or previous behaviors
- The parent may refuse to acknowledge previous behavior
- The child may resent a new partner or a new child/pregnancy



Meier, 2021

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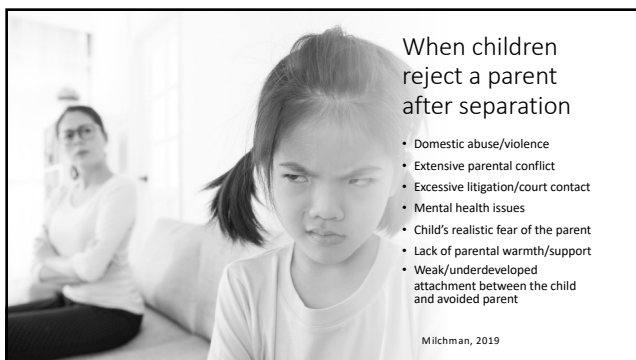
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### When children reject a parent after separation

- Domestic abuse/violence
- Extensive parental conflict
- Excessive litigation/court contact
- Mental health issues
- Child's realistic fear of the parent
- Lack of parental warmth/support
- Weak/underdeveloped attachment between the child and avoided parent



Milchman, 2019

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### When disclosures are made after separation

*In a large portion of cases, children who reject a parent are not singularly alienated by an angry, vindictive ex-spouse, rather they are also often young, emotionally vulnerable children who are simultaneously enmeshed with the preferred parent and realistically estranged by inadequate, problematic, or abusive parenting on the part of the rejected parent. (Johnson and Goldman 2010, page 3)*

- Safety is the paramount and most often reason for disclosures
  - Children feel safe from the abuser and finally able to make disclosures



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**Child development**

- Formative Experiences
- Temperament – Biological and individual way of interacting
  - Temperament during infancy can set a blueprint for behaviors into adolescence
  - Mood quality, adaptability, and responsiveness
- Resilience
  - Partly biological, partly learned. The ability to bounce back
  - Children with lower resilience are significantly more likely to be negatively impacted or even “pick sides” during a divorce/separation

Mercer, 2023

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**Child development and alienation allegations**

- Preschool cases are extremely rare
- Lower limit is typically 9
- Most common allegations are children between 12 and 17
- Aspects related to allegations of alienation
  - Young children lack sophistication during lying
  - Older children often get more say in where they want to live

Mercer, 2023

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**Parent/Child relationship**

- Bidirectional in nature, just as parents influence and impact a child's development children do the same for the parent
  - Continue to change over time due to experience and maturation
- Viewed through different attachment styles
  - Secure
  - Anxious/ambivalence
  - Avoidant
  - Disorganized
- Attachment can be different for each caregiver

Mercer, 2023

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### Child Attachment

- First coined by John Bowlby in the 1940s
- Any behavior, attitude, or perceptions of a relationship that is held by a child towards an adult or caregiver
- Young children form attachments if they are in a safe place with consistent, caring caregivers
  - Stay near a caregiver if the child is in distress
  - Grief and negative experiences if the attachment is separated, but able to form new attachments
- Adolescent attachment is more mature and less dependent
  - More attached to peers at this age
  - More adaptable to change/separation/divorce

Mercer, 2023

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### Bias against women

- Gender biases against women (conscious and unconscious) exist in most cultures in the world (Johnson, 1988)
- In the United States, women had no legal claim to the children because the father was always the legal guardian
- Belief system that women generally lie and that they especially lie about abuse
- Women of color are dismissed in even higher frequencies
- Studies show that 98% (Everson & Boat, 1989, p 231) and 95% (Drew, 2017, p. 215) of women who report sexual abuse are credible



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### Historical Roots of misogyny

- Women in ancient myths were often seen as half human/half animal
- Women's beauty was seen as a trap for men
  - Succubus
  - Sirens
- Adam and Eve
  - "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. It was Eve and not Adam who was responsible for human sin." (Moore, 2015, p. 24)

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**Psychology and Misogyny**

- Sigmund Freud and the "Hysterical Woman"
- Women reported childhood sexual abuse by fathers, Freud connected the behaviors, but later changed his stance when it was opposed by peers
- Was pressured by other men in the field to deny these initial findings
  - The oedipal complex
- Although since discounted, discrediting women's reports of sexual abuse continues
  - Many are told they have "daddy issues."

Drew, 2023

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**Misogyny and the Court System**

- Women accused of crimes are usually treated more harshly than men
- When women and men act together in committing the same crime, the woman often receives more severe sentencing (Grabe et al., 2006)
- In DV cases, women are expected to be scared, helpless and meek



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**Misogyny in the Family Courts**

- Women who do not "act like they are expected to" are often not believed
- Women who file PFA order may appear to be "obstructionist" since they are intentionally restricting communication
- Many present with symptoms of trauma, which can make them appear unlikable

*The symptoms of their trauma – the reliable indicators that abuse has in fact occurred – are perversely wielded against their own credibility in court. Because PTSD symptoms can make abused women appear hysterical, angry, paranoid, or flat and numb, they contribute to the credibility discounts that may be imposed by police, prosecutors, and judges. (Epstein & Goodman, 2019, p. 399)*



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### Studies of gender bias in the courts

- Multiple studies show that legal professionals are more likely to use the term "parental alienation" or award a change in custody if the alleged alienator is a woman (Meier & Dickson, 2017; Goldfarb et al. 2019)



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### Distorting Victim Dynamics

- Protective mothers and healthy response to violence
  - Fearing or resenting the father
  - Limit contact between the child and the abuser
  - Reaching out to professionals to diagnose or treat the child
  - "Women's reactions to violence seem to overshadow men's violence such that women become alienators for not suppressing their own fear." (Sheehy & Boyd, 2020).



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### Joint or 50/50 custody

- Embraced by the Courts as the best outcome
- Not always the most effective way to divide custody
- There is usually one primary parent in each household, or one who has more of a role

*[Research] suggests that children do not necessarily benefit from greater contact with their non-custodial parent – rather it is the type of parenting the non-custodial parent engages in, not the amount of time that parent spends with the children, that is most significant [The research also indicates that children do not fare better post-divorce in joint custody arrangements than they do in sole custody and some children – including those in high conflict families – may fare worse]*  
Schaffer, 2007



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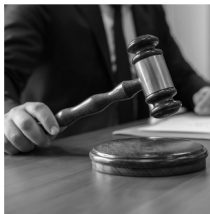
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## Family Courts and Judges

- Assume that parents have equal rights to custody of the child
  - May contradict with "best interests of the child"
  - Minimizes the caregiver history
  - Minimizes the wishes of the child
- Milchman (2017) found evidence of gender bias in custody hearings where the woman alleges sexual abuse
- Meier et al. (2020) produced a study that showed that mothers are "far less likely" to be awarded custody when they allege sexual abuse and the father counters with allegations of parental alienation




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## The Courts and parental alienation

- "Best Interests of the Child"
  - Is a child's rights issue not a parent issue
- Preference for "working it out" or "the friendly parent rule"
- Mothers may refuse to comply with Court orders because they see the other parent as being dangerous
  - Do so considering "the best interests of the child"
- Fathers may threaten to involve the Courts
  - Attempt to have the mother found in contempt of Court for violating the order




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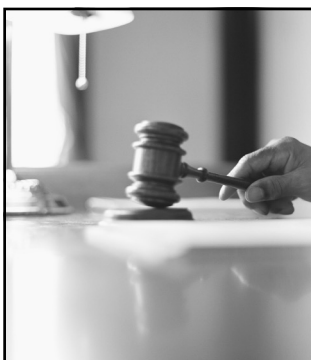
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## The Courts and parental alienation

- Focus on parent/child estrangement through the lens of alienation rather than try to learn the cause of the rift
- Allegations of violence can be dismissed, also if investigated and unfounded, are often considered as fabrications
  - Minimizes or dismisses the dynamic that contributed to the violence allegations.
  - What's really going on here?
- Relationship between the avoided parent and the child is not evaluated with specific detail, rather the focus is on "alienation" as the cause of the behaviors
- Quicker, less effective solution to the relationship issue




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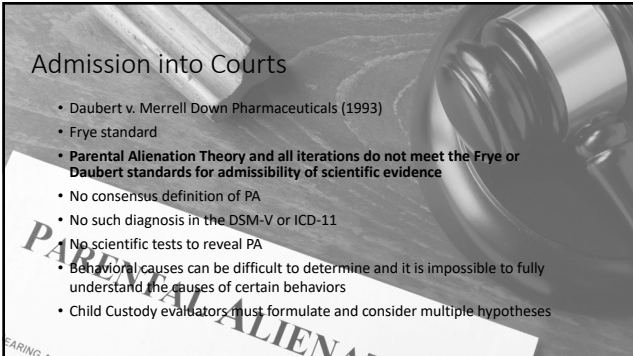
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### Admission into Courts

- Daubert v. Merrell Down Pharmaceuticals (1993)
- Frye standard
- **Parental Alienation Theory and all iterations do not meet the Frye or Daubert standards for admissibility of scientific evidence**
- No consensus definition of PA
- No such diagnosis in the DSM-V or ICD-11
- No scientific tests to reveal PA
- Behavioral causes can be difficult to determine and it is impossible to fully understand the causes of certain behaviors
- Child Custody evaluators must formulate and consider multiple hypotheses

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### Outcomes of Child Custody and abuse/alienation allegations

- Meier (2020) produced the first ever national quantitative analysis of U.S. Custody Courts where allegations of abuse and alienation were made
- Family Courts in General
  - Skeptical of domestic violence allegations (55% rejecting)
  - Even more skeptical of child abuse allegations (rejecting 73%)
  - Mothers lose custody approximately 25% of the time when they make these allegations
- Family Courts when the abuser alleges alienation
  - 63% of domestic violence allegations rejected
  - 98% of allegations of child sexual abuse rejected
  - 82% of child physical abuse rejected
  - Mothers lose custody over 50% of the time when they make allegations but are also accused of alienation

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### The National Association of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

*Under relevant evidentiary standards, the court should not accept testimony regarding parental alienation syndrome, or "PAS." The theory positing the existence of PAS has been discredited by the scientific community...Daubert, in which the court re-examined the standard it had earlier articulated in the Frye 37 case, requires application of a multi-factor test, including peer review, publication, testability, rate of error, and general acceptance. PAS does not pass this test. Any testimony that a party to a custody case suffers from the syndrome or "parental alienation" should therefore be ruled inadmissible and stricken from the evaluation report under both the standard established in Daubert and the earlier Frye standard*

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### “It’s a custody case so you know...”

- Claims of abuse during custody disputes are often viewed as being highly suspect or fabricated
  - Evidence suggests they are not investigated as rigorously
  - Mothers making up false allegations is not supported by empirical evidence
- Allegations of false allegations reinforce the alienation belief system
  - Research shows this can deter the legal system from investigating allegations of abuse when law enforcement and judicial assume the parent is a liar.
- Mothers who allege physical or sexual abuse are at greater risk of losing custody to the abuser (Meier, 2020).
- Research shows that in many cases, the Courts view alienation as more severe than actual abuse (Sheehy & Boyd, 2020)
- Meier (2019) found that the presence of evaluators in custody abuse cases nearly doubles the unfavorable outcomes for mothers who allege abuse

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### Parental Alienation “Experts”

- Often advise the courts to ignore the views of children
- Ignore the children’s well-being while with the preferred parent
- Ignore potential negative parenting
- Ignore child’s current therapies in favor of a alienation specialized therapist
- Often recommend that children be removed from homes (sometimes by police)
- Recommend placing the children with a parent they fear or reject in favor of reunification

Neilson, 2018

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### Impacts/Fallout

- The alienation allegations and biases of the Courts discourages mothers from denouncing violence
- Mothers who ask for no-contact orders are often viewed as being “hostile”
- Many victims fear the possibility of losing custody to the abuser and stay in an abusive relationship in order to better protect the children
- Women and children become even more vulnerable to continued violence




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### PAS and DV

- Women are viewed as alienators if they do not try to show the father in a positive light
- A mother's healthy response to violence (limit contact with father, ask for the child or father to be evaluated, amend custody) is often viewed as alienation
  - Fearing or resenting the father/perpetrator
- "Women's reactions to violence seem to overshadow men's violence such that women become alienators for not suppressing their own fear." (Sheehy & Boyd, 2020, p. 88)

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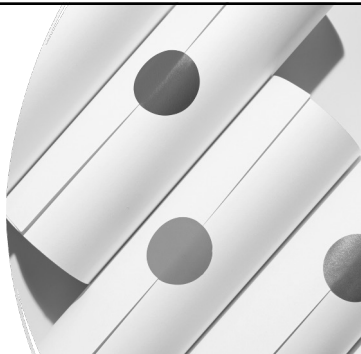
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### Using PAS to continue the violence post separation

- Alienation proponents suggest that avoidant behavior occurs without reason, which minimizes the impact of domestic violence
- Makes the parent who reports violence out to be the abuser
  - Denigrates
  - Portrays them as the aggressor
- Financial abuse
- Custodial manipulation



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### Biases related to domestic violence

- Alienation offers a more palatable theory for behavior and marital conflict than accepting the reality of violence directed towards partners and children
- Most do not want to believe that violent people exist in our community
- Easier to assume victims are making up allegations than the truth
- Our own fears

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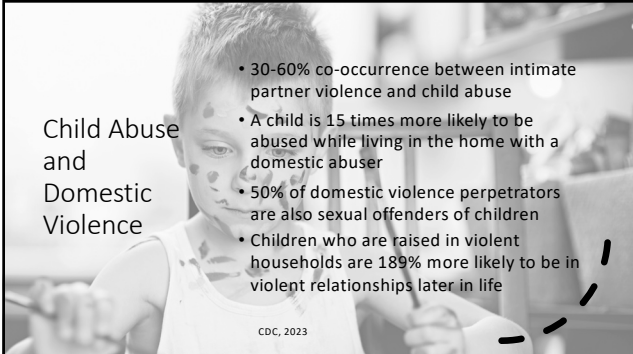
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**Child Abuse and Domestic Violence**

- 30-60% co-occurrence between intimate partner violence and child abuse
- A child is 15 times more likely to be abused while living in the home with a domestic abuser
- 50% of domestic violence perpetrators are also sexual offenders of children
- Children who are raised in violent households are 189% more likely to be in violent relationships later in life

CDC, 2023

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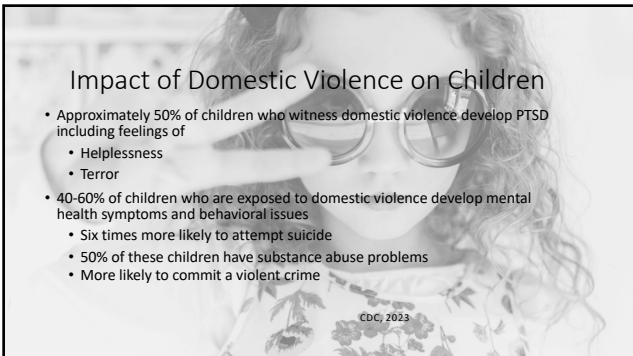
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**Impact of Domestic Violence on Children**

- Approximately 50% of children who witness domestic violence develop PTSD including feelings of
  - Helplessness
  - Terror
- 40-60% of children who are exposed to domestic violence develop mental health symptoms and behavioral issues
  - Six times more likely to attempt suicide
  - 50% of these children have substance abuse problems
  - More likely to commit a violent crime

CDC, 2023

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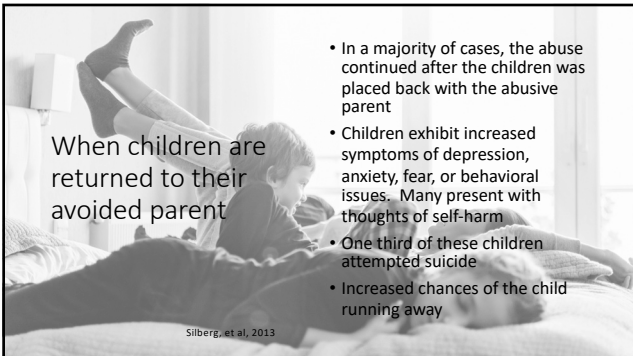
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**When children are returned to their avoided parent**

- In a majority of cases, the abuse continued after the children was placed back with the abusive parent
- Children exhibit increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, fear, or behavioral issues. Many present with thoughts of self-harm
- One third of these children attempted suicide
- Increased chances of the child running away

Silberg, et al, 2013

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### Kayden's Law

- In 2018 Kayden Mancuso was murdered by her father during an unsupervised visit. Mom had opposed the visits and warned about dad's violence.
- Bill was introduced in 2021 and re-introduced in 2023. Aimed at restricting child custody decisions where allegations of parental alienation are present
  - Closely examine each custody case involving allegations of violence
  - Presume supervised physical custody cases with proven ongoing abuse
  - Provide training for family court judges about abuse and allegations of alienation
- Bipartisan and unanimously passed the Pennsylvania Senate
- Passed to the House on December 28, 2023 and awaiting hearing
- Already in place in Colorado, Maryland, California, & Tennessee

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### Family Court Statement

*The Discredited 'diagnosis' of "PAS" (or allegation of "parental alienation"), quite apart from its scientific invalidity, inappropriately asks the court to assume that the children's behaviors and attitudes toward the parent who claims to be alienated have no grounding in reality. It also diverts attention away from the behaviors of the [disliked] parent, who may have directly influenced the children's responses by acting in violent, disrespectful, intimidating, humiliating and/or discrediting ways towards the children themselves, or the children's other parent*

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1994



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### Parental Alienation Interventions

- Gardner (1992) suggested that an immediate change of custody in cases of alienation is the preferred approach
- Residential treatment facilities for the child
- Many programs utilize a 90 day no contact order with the preferred parent
- "Flooding" where the child is removed from the preferred parent and forced to spend every moment with the avoided parent
- Children are told that they cannot trust their memories because they have been brainwashed
  - Elizabeth Loftus and the False memory syndrome

Johnson & Kelly, 2005



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**Parental Alienation Interventions**

- Resist and Refuse Dynamic (RRD) is used to describe any behaviors that impact the child's relationship with the avoided parent
- Child is taught to mistrust their own memories.
- Child is taught that their preferred parent is actually being coercive and abusive
- Children are provided information about obedience (Milgram's study) and this is related to their dynamics with the preferred parent
- Children's progress is dictated by the frequency and quality of their interactions with the avoided parent

Trane, Champion, & Hupp, 2023



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**Treatment Providers**

- Turning Points for Families
  - Camp program
  - Preferred parents must write a letter telling the child to engage with the avoided parent. Content of this letter is used to determine how long the child needs to spend away from the preferred parent
  - Coercive. Negative memories are "corrected" by staff
  - Not supported by research or any outcome data
- High Road to Family Reunification
  - 60-90 day no contact with preferred parent
  - 4 day intensive camp with avoided parent where they are required to spend every moment with them
  - Not supported by research or any outcome data

Trane, Champion, & Hupp, 2023



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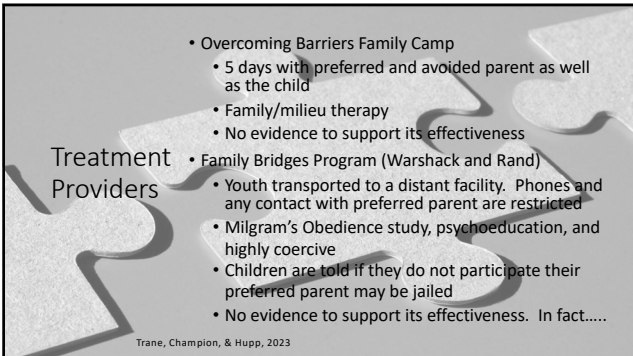
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**Treatment Providers**

- Overcoming Barriers Family Camp
  - 5 days with preferred and avoided parent as well as the child
  - Family/milieu therapy
  - No evidence to support its effectiveness
- Family Bridges Program (Warshack and Rand)
  - Youth transported to a distant facility. Phones and any contact with preferred parent are restricted
  - Milgram's Obedience study, psychoeducation, and highly coercive
  - Children are told if they do not participate their preferred parent may be jailed
  - No evidence to support its effectiveness. In fact....

Trane, Champion, & Hupp, 2023



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**Building Family Bridges™**  
Reuniting and strengthening families

**Family Bridges Aftermath**

- Randy Rand lost his license in 2009.
  - Punished for "Unprofessional Conduct, Gross Negligence, and Ethical Violations."
  - He appealed this and California Attorney General Kamala Harris successfully defended the lost license
  - Other psychologists associated with this lost licenses too
- Certain Courts stopped using the Family Bridges and other reunification programs
- Children were returned to families
- Undisclosed civil amount was awarded

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### An-Unhappy Ending

- Family Bridges continues to operate in California and is still supervised by Randy Rand
- The program has shifted from "therapeutic" to "educational" allowing Rand and the other psychologists to still practice because they are providing education instead of treatment
- Costs to the parents can exceed \$100,000 per year
- Higher-socioeconomic parents are targeted for these programs as way
- Courts are still using them as a solution to embroiled custody conflicts and accusations.



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### Video

- <https://www.tiktok.com/@realraywilliam/video/733261923774658858?lang=en>

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## Laws/Changes

- The Federal Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized by congress in 2022.
  - Includes a model law that prohibits use of reunification therapy
- Colorado and California were the first two to outlaw "reunification camps"
- More states to follow suit



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- <https://www.tiktok.com/@onemomsbattle/video/7232800407779593515>

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## So what are the evidence-based treatments?

- Rigorously tested
- Rooted in science and providing the best level of care with minimal discomfort to the child
- Individual therapy, CBT, trauma-informed treatments
- Reunification therapy
  - Not an effective method of treatment for allegations of alienation
  - Because alienation is not recognized by the APA



Trane, Champion, & Hupp, 2023

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### Actual alienation/influence

- Alienation hypothesis where the parent denigrates the other parent and turns the children against them
  - Research shows that attempts to alienate a child typically produce the other intended result
  - The child most often turns against the parent who denigrates the other
  - Parents who attempt to alienate the children most often produced the opposite effect (Rowen & Emery, 2018)
- Children who are alienated for various reasons often reunite with the alienated parent to some degree
- Children who stay with their alienating parents do so most often for healthy reasons
- Can be addressed therapeutically with both parent and child without need for separation
- Lack of clear evidence of any long-term impact of alienation



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### Solutions Associated with PAS

- Assess any allegations of abuse firsts
- Assessment of abuse should be done with individuals who have expertise in evaluating and working with abuse
- If abuse is indicated, alienation claims by the other party should not be considered
- If abuse is not indicated, allegations of abuse should not be treated as "alienation"
- Subsequent claims of "alienation" should be evaluated only if other reasons for avoiding the parent are ruled out first



Meier, 2023

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### Using a Multifactorial approach to assessing alienation and abuse

- Considering the myriad of factors that may lead to a child avoiding a parent, it is nearly impossible for an evaluator to assess which factors are most prevalent and impacting the child.
- The Courts and many evaluators have an implicit bias towards allegations of alienation and this is often over-emphasized over other possible causes
- Past family abuse is often not assessed in regard to current risk
- Many recommend removing the child from the preferred parent in order to better evaluate for abuse. This could have serious detrimental consequences to the child.



Mercer, 2023

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Solutions associated with PAS

- Removal of the child from the preferred parent and placement with the avoided parent can have grave consequences
- Idealistically, limit Court interventions in favor of mediation
- Increased empathy/understanding for the child's situation
  - Overly ambitious interventions with a small chance of success may actually cause more harm to the child and their relationship to the avoided parent
- Scaling back interventions improves a child's autonomy and emotional safety
- Individual therapy for both parents and the child

Meier, 2023

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Solutions Associated with PAS

- Other, non-alienation reasons for avoiding a parent
  - Reject harsh parenting, going through developmental changes, personality clash, upset about separation, hold parent accountable for previous behaviors (or parent refuses to acknowledge them), and child may resent new partner
- Only conscious intent should be considered "alienation"
- Any remedy should focus on healing the child's relationship with the avoided parent, not harming the child's relationship with the preferred parent

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Current Issues with about parent alienation

- There is a lack of established protocol to assess for alienation
- Allegations of alienation are weaponized within the Courts
- Continued stress/conflict associated with these allegations
- PA advocates insisting (erroneously) that it has strong scientific support
- Using PA allegations to counter allegations of abuse
- Treatments associated with PA are experimental or pseudoscience
- No empirical evidence supports the claim that child avoidance is a form of abuse or has a detrimental impact on the child
- An evaluator who finds an "alienated child" presents as being all-knowing in regard to the child's behaviors without considering other sources

Mercer & Drew, 2023

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