

THE EMPOWERMENT OF CHILDREN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME

Richard A. Gardner, M.D.

The parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is a disorder that arises in children in the context of child-custody disputes. It is the result of the combination of the programming (brainwashing) of children by the alienating parent and the children's own contributions to a campaign of denigration against the alienated parent. A central factor operative in the children's contributions is their empowerment, most often by the indoctrinators, but occasionally by the passivity of the targeted parent. In addition to these intrafamilial factors, extrafamilial factors are also operative, especially the legal system and mental health professionals. This article focuses on the ways in which all of these empowerment factors operate in the etiology, development, and perpetuation of the parental alienation syndrome.

The parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is a disorder that arises almost exclusively in the context of child-custody disputes (1-17). In this disorder, one parent (commonly referred to as the alienator, the alienating parent, or the PAS-inducing parent) induces a program of denigration against the other parent (commonly referred to as the alienated parent or the target parent). However, this is not simply a matter of "brainwashing" or "programming" because the children contribute their own elements to the campaign of denigration. It is this combination of factors that justifiably warrant the PAS diagnosis. When bona fide abuse/neglect is present, then the PAS diagnosis is not applicable. The primary symptoms of the PAS are:

- 1) Campaign of denigration
- 2) Weak, frivolous, and absurd rationalizations for the deprecation
- 3) Lack of ambivalence
- 4) The "independent-thinker" phenomenon
- 5) Reflexive support of the alienating parent in the parental conflict
- 6) Absence of guilt over cruelty to and/or exploitation of the alienated parent
- 7) Presence of borrowed scenarios
- 8) Spread of the animosity to the extended family and friends of the alienated parent

In this article, I focus on the empowerment of children that is typically seen in the context of the PAS. Empowerment of children is operative in each of the eight symptoms. Such empowerment is provided primarily by the alienating parent who encourages the children to vilify the target parent in such a manner that traditional rules of good conduct and respect are ignored. The empowerment may be aided by the alienated parent if that parent is passive by personality or becomes passive because of fear of worsening the situation if he (she) were to more actively attempt to constrain the PAS child. Furthermore, there are a variety of extrafamilial factors that contribute significantly to the child's empowerment. The most important of these is the legal system at every level at which the family becomes involved. Here I will describe specifically how these empowerment factors operate in both the intrafamilial and extrafamilial realms.

The Role of the Alienating Parent in PAS Children's Empowerment

The primary source of PAS children's empowerment is the programmer who empowers the children in the context of the campaign of denigration. The programmer writes the scripts, and the children recite them. There are repeated rehearsals. In fact, the programmers know well that "booster shots" are frequently required if the programming is to be maintained. They know well that healthy and benevolent input is the best antidote to the poisons injected into the child's brain in the process of PAS indoctrinations.

Empowerment can be seen in each of the eight primary symptoms of the PAS. Here I describe how this operates for each of the eight symptoms.

With regard to the campaign of denigration, the alienating parent may say to the target parent in front of the child:

"Why don't you listen to her? "Can't you see that she hates you and doesn't want to be with you?"

"Can't you hear what she's saying to you? She's saying that she finds you despicable."

"Have you no respect for your children's wishes? She doesn't want you at the school play. Can't you get that into your thick skull?"

The child is empowered to mimic and parrot the programmer's disparaging and denigrating messages, and there are no consequences to the child for the ensuing displays of disrespect and denigration. Rather, the most absurd rationalizations for the alienation are never questioned. Instead of confronting the child with the absurdity of these reasons, the alienator may make such comments as "I respect his (her) feelings" and "It's important for her (him) to speak her (his) mind."

With regard to the weak, frivolous, and absurd rationalizations for deprecation, the child may give as reasons for never wanting to have contact again with the alienated parent: "He used to belch a lot at the dinner table," "He once said, `shit,'" and "She makes me go to bed too early." PAS children are not told by their alienators that their reasons are illogical and preposterous. They are exposed to such reactions in all other realms, e.g., "No, the earth is not flat," "Your sister did not make you hit your baby brother," and "Your teacher is not to blame for your not doing your homework." Yet, in the realm of the PAS professions, such constructive feedback is not given.

With regard to the child's lack of ambivalence, children in a healthy home are taught that everybody is a mixture of things they like and things they do not like, even one's parents. This principle is ignored when it comes to the comments about the victimized parent. PAS children are led to believe that there is one individual in this world who is an exception to that principle. The victimized parent may come to be viewed as the incarnation of all the evil that ever existed in the history of the world. The alienated parent may be compared to Adolph Hitler; Saddam Hussein; and Judas, the betrayer of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, any grief one can cause such a despicable individual is justified and supported. This contributes to the child's empowerment.

With regard to the "independent-thinker" phenomenon, inculcating this notion is an intrinsic part of the programming. Alienators traditionally are accused of indoctrinating the campaign of denigration into the children. Typically they deny such participation, and the children pick up this defense and claim vociferously that their maltreatment of the victimized parent is all their own idea. They know that the programmer wants them to profess such independence, and they fear that if they do not do so, they may lose the affection of the alienating parent. This also contributes to their sense of empowerment. Hence, they profess that they are not passive weaklings parroting reflexively the campaign of denigration. Nor are they puppets or marionettes, automatically professing hatred for the victimized parent. Rather, they are intelligent, independent thinkers who have a mind of their own and have come to these conclusions free of any influence from the programming parent. This delusion, too, contributes to their sense of empowerment.

The reflexive support of the alienator also contributes to a sense of empowerment. This is in line with what is referred to in psychiatry as the identification-with-the-aggressor phenomenon. Weak people can gain strength by joining in with more powerful individuals, even people whom they recognize as noxious and despicable. The child basically subscribes to the principle: "If you can't fight 'em, join 'em." The alienator is recognized as the more powerful force. Accordingly, the child reasons that joining the alienator will provide protection against being victimized like the targeted parent, obviously a stronger position. In contrast, to join the alienated parent may result in one's being victimized oneself, obviously a weaker position.

With regard to the absence of guilt, PAS children are taught to be psychopathic. They exhibit neither sympathy nor empathy for the feelings of the targeted parent. This defect enables them to perpetrate their campaign of denigration without any feeling of low self-worth that is an intrinsic part of guilt. The absence of such guilt, then, facilitates implementation of the campaign of denigration and the associated empowerment that comes with it. The guiltless acting out of anger also produces a sense of empowerment, no matter how despicable the cause. Probably the best examples of this in the 20th century were Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Saddam Hussein.

The borrowed scenarios that are incorporated into the PAS campaign of denigration are the ammunition that enhance the efficacy of the campaign. The children use words that would not generally be found in the vocabulary of youngsters that age. They may not even know what the words mean, but they do know that their use ingratiates them to the programmer and can have the effect of justifying the alienation. A four-year-old girl says, "I never want to see my daddy again because he penetrated me." The child does not have the faintest idea what the word penetrated means. She obviously learned this term from her mother who has incorporated a sex-abuse accusation into the PAS campaign of denigration. The child recognizes that this statement is going to get significant attention from all the adults around her, especially the child protection people, the police, and the sex-crimes investigators in the prosecutor's office. Never before did this little girl enjoy such notoriety. Such words indeed give the child power!

Last, when the campaign spreads to the victimized parent's friends and extended family, the child becomes empowered to treat with disrespect and disparagement an ever-growing number of adults. The child who says to a loving grandmother over the telephone, "I hate you grandma. I never want to see you again" and then hangs up the phone knows that there will be no repercussions for such maltreatment of a grandparent. In fact, each time the child does this, the programmer provides support and even rewards. This empowers the child to "tell off" powerful adults. It provides a fulfillment of the fantasy of the little kid beating up all the big guys in the neighborhood or the single soldier, with one sword, fighting off a whole army.

The Role of the Alienated Parent in PAS Children's Empowerment

In most cases of PAS, the disorder is primarily the result of the programming of the children by the alienator. However, there are occasions when the victimized parent contributes to the development of the disorder. My experience has been that most alienated parents are true victims and are doing nothing to deserve the grief that has been visited upon them by their children's PAS symptomatology. However, there are some, a small percentage, who unfortunately contribute to the children's empowerment. My experience has been that passivity on the part of the alienated parent has been the most common factor. Such a targeted parent may be afraid to provide corrective confrontations or implement traditional disciplinary measures for their PAS children lest their responding anger intensify even further the campaign of denigration. The children's responses may then become incorporated into their campaign of denigration, e.g., "He said that my mother wasn't telling me the truth," "She said that I've been brainwashed by my father," and "He gave me time out, just because I wouldn't talk to him all afternoon." Such a parent may also fear that such negative feedback will come to the attention of the court and be viewed by the judge as a violation of the court's restriction from disparagement of the other parent to the children.

There are some who claim that victimized parents (especially men) have been "asking for it" and thereby deserve their victimization. This to me is the equivalent of saying that women who have been raped are generally "asking for it." There are some who claim that narcissism contributes to such victimization. Those who make this claim are usually basing their conclusion on clinical impressions. On occasion, they may refer to an MMPI report in which the word narcissism appears among the sea of other characteristics which the patient presumably exhibits on the basis of the test finding. My experience has been that such parents' diagnosis of narcissism was not justifiable with the utilization of the more stringent criteria for narcissism to

be found in DSM-IV (18). I am not saying that I have never seen a narcissistic PAS targeted parent. What I am saying is that it is not a common problem for them, especially with regard to their contribution to the PAS. But even if some of the victims are narcissistic, that does not justify the conclusion that they thereby justify being so victimized. Some claim that targeted parents contribute to their children's hatred of them by their seemingly intrusive behavior and preoccupation with seeing their children. Those who view the situation in this way are generally insensitive to the plight of the alienated parent, whose frustration and impotent rage may be formidable. Their intrusiveness and obsessive preoccupation is a reaction to their exclusion, not the primary cause of it.

I have been seeing PAS children since the early 1980s. The only pattern that I have seen in which I can justifiably conclude that the alienated parent has contributed to the children's empowerment and campaign of denigration has been passivity. To date I have not seen any other factors. I am not claiming that other factors do not exist; I am only claiming that I have not seen them frequently enough to warrant my making any general statements about such contribution. It is this passivity, however, that facilitates the PAS children's empowerment.

The Role of the Legal System in PAS Children's Empowerment

The parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is primarily a product of the adversary system. The system is based on the theory that the best way to find out "the truth," when opposing sides have different opinions on a particular issue, is for each side to present its position to an impartial party or tribunal (judge, group of judges or jury). Presumably, the truth will emerge from the presentation of the opposing arguments. The system was originally designed to determine whether an accused party did indeed commit the illegal act that was alleged to have been perpetrated. Although it may be a useful system for making decisions in that realm (and I have my doubts about that as well), it is clearly not applicable for finding out who is the better parent when they are involved in a child-custody dispute. Yet, that is the system within which such disputes are presumably resolved in the United States and many other countries. Elsewhere, I have described in detail the deficiencies of this system for this purpose (2, 6).

I have been actively involved in child-custody litigation since 1963, a span of approximately of 38 years. I am convinced that this method for resolving custody disputes does families more harm than good. One of my books is completely devoted to the psychologically detrimental effects on children and their parents of their embroilment in this system (2). I believe that if the courtroom were completely unavailable for the adjudication of such conflicts, and if the family were to have no other place to turn but themselves for resolution of these conflicts, that, on the whole, more good than harm would be done. Of course, there would be some children who would be completely unprotected from their warring parents and might be used as ropes in the parental tug of war. However, this number would be small compared to the much larger group of children who would be protected from the depravities of the adversary system. Furthermore, parents too would be better off. Although battling it out on their own is certainly psychologically traumatic, using the courtroom as the battlefield is far more traumatic.

Pertinent to this article is the empowerment that the legal system-- especially the adversary system--provides children, an empowerment that complements the empowerment provided by the alienating parent. It is common in such disputes for the judge to appoint a third attorney, an attorney who represents the child's interests. Sometimes this person is referred to as the child's attorney and sometimes as the guardian ad litem. Although the terms may be used synonymously, most often the courts make a sharp differentiation between the two roles.

The person who is designated as the child's attorney functions in a manner very similar to the attorneys who are representing each of the parents. Such attorneys do not have unilateral access to the court. They cannot speak with the judge without the presence of the other attorneys. Furthermore, at the time of the trial, they

may put witnesses on the stand and conduct both direct and cross-examinations in a manner similar to the parents' attorneys.

In contrast, the guardian ad litem is the judge's designee and has direct access to the judge. The guardian has free access to all parties, that is, attorneys from both sides and the parents, as well as the child. It is a freer and more flexible role. In the courtroom the guardian ad litem is less likely to be permitted to bring in witnesses and conduct examinations, although I have seen some limited permission to engage in such a role in the courtroom.

The Guardian Ad Litem

I am ambivalent about guardians ad litem and the utilization of yet another attorney in adversarial proceedings. Because of my preference for mediation, arbitration, and other methods of dispute resolution that do not involve adversarial proceedings, I am reluctant to support a program that invites yet another attorney into the battle. Besides the extra expense, it is likely that another attorney will just add to the intensity of the conflict. However, I have found that the guardian ad litem can be particularly useful to the impartial examiner (and even to an adversary evaluator) in the course of the evidence-gathering phase of the evaluation. The guardian ad litem can generally be relied upon to assist in obtaining documents that a parent might have been hesitant to provide or to enlist the court's assistance in getting reluctant parents to cooperate in the evaluation. The guardian ad litem, even more than the impartial examiner, is allowed direct communication with the judge and can thereby speed the process of the evaluation and obtain information that might not be so easily acquired.

However, it is important that the judge and the attorneys (the people who are involved in choosing the guardian ad litem) be certain that the person chosen is familiar with the PAS. To select a guardian who is not familiar with the PAS increases significantly the risk that the PAS will become entrenched. Attorneys who serve as guardians in child-custody disputes must reorient themselves regarding what they have been taught in law school: that they must zealously support their client's position, even if they have no conviction for it. Guardians ad litem must appreciate that their clients are children and their judgment regarding what is really in their best interests may be somewhat compromised.

A guardian ad litem who is not familiar with the PAS may cause serious psychological damage to children suffering with this disorder. A guardian ad litem who is not familiar with the causes, manifestations, and proper treatment of children with PAS may prove a definite impediment in the course of their treatment. The guardian who takes pride in supporting what children profess they want is likely to perpetuate the psychopathology of children suffering with PAS. The guardian must recognize that PAS children need to be forced into doing things that they profess they do not want to do. They must appreciate that PAS children want excuses to have contact with their alienated parent. Most PAS children secretly welcome excuses that will enable them to have contact with the alienated parent, especially when the disorder is in the mild and moderate categories. They need to say to the alienator; "I really hate going to visit, but I'm scared that if I don't Mr. X or Ms. X (the guardian) will get us in trouble with the judge." In order to do this, the guardian must "switch gears" and unlearn certain principles learned in law school regarding being a zealous supporter of one's client's requests and demands. Guardians must be ever aware that the client is a child, not an adult.

And guardians must also be ever aware that the client is just not any child, but a child with a PAS. If these considerations are taken into account, then the guardian will be comfortable doing just the opposite of what the client requests. The guardian ad litem must appreciate that the children's best interests are not served necessarily by doing what the child professes, but doing what is really best for the child. The two might not be the same. A competent and ethical guardian will say to the court:

"I do not believe that it is in the children's best interests for the court to go along with their request that they have no contact at all with their mother (father). It serves their best interests that they be forced to see the alienated parent in spite of their protestations, even their vigorous and hysterical protestations."

Such a guardian must be comfortable with the children's criticisms and must be willing to be used as the excuse for the children going to the allegedly hated parent:

"I really hate that lawyer. He says I must visit my father. I really hate my father. You know, Mommy, I love you, and I don't want to go there, but he makes me go there."

In this way, the guardian serves as a vehicle for assuaging the child's guilt over disloyalty to the alienator, disloyalty implied by any willingness to visit the targeted parent.

Guardians who do their work properly will help educate judges and attorneys who are not familiar with the PAS. They will impress upon the adversary attorneys and the court the importance of ordering the kind of special therapeutic programs necessary for the treatment of PAS children (13, 16). The guardian should then serve to help implement the special court-ordered treatment program. Sometimes the guardian can serve as an intermediary between the court-appointed neutral PAS therapist and the court. I am not recommending here that the guardian serve merely as a messenger. Rather, the guardian would clarify for uncooperative parents the legal consequences of their recalcitrance to facilitate visitation and add clout to the therapist's warnings and threats.

The Child's Attorney

My experience with guardians ad litem has been mixed: some do what is best for the children and ignore their PAS professions, but most reflexively support them no matter how pathological their demands. In contrast, my experience with children's attorneys has been uniformly tragic (and I have no hesitation using that word). Without exception, they vigorously and zealously support their client's position, ignoring the fact that their clients are PAS children whose claims are just the opposite of what is good for them, just the opposite of what is in their best interests. My attempts to get them to see that they are corrupting their clients, empowering them to a degree that is significantly pathological, falls on deaf ears. Typically, a six-year-old PAS client will say to the alienated parent over the telephone: "If you come here and try to take me to your house, I'm going to call my lawyer," "If you don't let me go home right now, I'm going to call my lawyer," and "If you give me time out, I'm going to tell my lawyer." In testimony, I have spoken along these lines with regard to the children's attorney and sometimes even about the guardian ad litem:

"I am sure that Ms. X would not support the children's demands that they not go to school, not visit the pediatrician, and not take their immunization shots. I am sure that Ms. X would not support the children if they wanted to shoot their mother with a gun, poison her food, or throw their infant brother into the swimming pool. Yet, Ms. X is supporting vigorously the children's desires to do equally self-destructive things--destructive to themselves and destructive to others--when she argues that the court should respect their desire not to see their mother."

All this generally falls on deaf ears because lawyers are so deeply committed to the notion that a lawyer must zealously support the client's position. We see here an excellent example of the detrimental effects on children of the empowerment provided by the legal system. It is a form of corruption of young minds, a corruption that empowers them to not only wreak havoc on innocent alienated parents, but compromises themselves as well, because the deprivation of a loving parent cannot but produce significant psychopathology, both at present and in the future.

The Child Advocate

In recent years, the term child advocate has taken on a special meaning. Traditionally, the term referred to an attorney who served the children in the course of litigation. Some jurisdictions differentiate between the child advocate and the guardian ad litem; other jurisdictions do not. These differences sometimes relate to whether the individual is allowed to conduct cross-examinations in the courtroom. Recently, there has emerged a group of individuals, most often not attorneys, who refer to themselves as child advocates. These people may or may not have had formal training in any of the traditional mental health disciplines. They

generally are those who wave the banner, "Believe the children," and take at face value everything and anything children say.

Child advocates gravitate, especially, to sex-abuse evaluations, where they hold stringently to the position that "children never lie," especially in the realm of sex abuse. They sanctimoniously preach that we should "believe the children," and they look down condescendingly on those who claim that children alleging sexual abuse should not necessarily be believed. A false sex-abuse accusation is a common spin-off of the PAS and so this position can be extremely detrimental in PAS situations when the likelihood that the accusation is true is very small.

My experience has been that some of these individuals are using their seemingly benevolent advocacy of children in the service of venting rage upon men, and they are, for the most part, derived from the group of overzealous women who have found this field to provide a wonderful opportunity for this outlet (19, 20). Others are poorly trained and/or simpleminded and believe that they are indeed joining a noble cause. Whatever the motivations of these individuals, examiners do well, these days, to be wary of engaging the services of someone whose primary label is "child advocate." To date, I have not seen one child advocate in the context of a child-custody dispute who has been useful to the children whose position they advocated. And this has been especially the case when a false sex-abuse accusation has emerged as a spin-off from the PAS. Rather, they have provided children with pathological empowerment and often entrench PAS delusions and even sex-abuse delusions (19, 21).

Judges

Judges play an important role in the empowerment of PAS children. Obviously judges have the power to delegate and transmit their power down to children via pathways that are easily traceable. For example, it is routine for judges to warn parents that they should strictly refrain from criticizing one another in front of the children. This admonition may often be verbally transmitted in the course of a custody hearing and it is routinely incorporated into court rulings. Although well meaning, this advice is misguided. All of us, whether or not our parents are divorced, should have as accurate a view as possible of our parents -- both their assets and their liabilities. Children tend to identify with and unquestioningly accept their parents' characteristics. They operate on the principle: "If it's good enough for them, it's good enough for me." When young they swallow the whole package, so to speak, indiscriminately identifying with many qualities that are not in their best interests. As they grow older, healthy children learn to accept parental qualities that are desirable and tolerate or reject those that are not.

Subtle forms of denigrating communications to the children are quite common among PAS indoctrinators. They are ostensibly complying with the judge's order not to criticize the other parent to the children. In fact, they may profess, somewhat sanctimoniously, "I told him that there are things about his father that I could tell him that might cause him to hate his father, but they're too terrible to talk about, so I strictly refrain from mentioning them." A child returns home from a week's visit with mother. The father asks, "So what did you do this week with your mother?" The child answers, "She took me to Disney World." One father responds, with a tone of excitement and a look of surprise on his face, "She took you to Disney World?" The message imparted is this: "You are certainly lucky to have had such a wonderful vacation." Another father responds with a tone of incredulity and a facial expression of disbelief, "She took you to Disney World?" The response implies that the mother is somehow stupid or depraved if she could choose such a vacation. We see here how the same words were used by both of these fathers, but obviously entirely different messages were communicated. The first gets across the message that the child is indeed lucky to have such a loving mother. The second gets across the message that God must have shortchanged this child to have given him a mother who would subject him to such an abominable vacation. There is no way that a judge's order is going to effectively prohibit such communications. And if a judge believes that a supervisor is going to protect the children from such communications, then the judge is naïve. The supervisor will not only be

unable to protect the children from many of the PAS indoctrinating communications, but will serve as an intrusive element that cannot but compromise the healthy elements in the relationship between the indoctrinator and the PAS child, programming notwithstanding.

My experience has been that it is rare for a PAS indoctrinator to comply with the judge's order not to criticize one another in front of the children or criticize the other parent to the children. Overtly and covertly, they typically violate it. In fact, in all of my experiences with PAS families, I have never seen one indoctrinator who has been deterred by such an order. Nor have I seen such violating parents ever punished by a court for such violation. However, I have seen many situations in which the victimized parent will strictly comply with it. They not only fear that the court will sanction them for confronting the children with the programmer's lies, but fear that their confrontations will be incorporated into the children's campaign of denigration and add yet more ammunition to be used against them. Sometimes this failure to criticize the children relates to a general passivity problem on the part of the victimized parent. Elsewhere, I have elaborated on this possible contribution to the PAS on the part of the alienated parent (16). The net effect of this is that the children become free to indulge themselves in their vilification of the victimized parent. They know that the alienating parent will not comply with the court order to refrain from criticizing the alienated parent in front of and to the children. And they know also that such expressions of denigration will not be constrained or restricted by the alienated parent for the aforementioned reasons. We see here, then, how this misguided order contributes to the development and perpetuation of the PAS as well as the pathological empowerment of PAS children.

Another way in which judges contribute to the empowerment of PAS children results from their deep-seated reluctance to change child custody, even when PAS is clearly present. Indoctrinators who are primary custodial parents know well that judges are extremely reluctant to change the status quo, especially when it comes to custodial change. I am not claiming that judges never do this; I am only claiming that my experience has been that custodial change in PAS cases is uncommon, and victimized parents usually have a hard uphill fight to get the court to transfer custody to their homes. The courts believe the children's PAS lies and delusions, comply with them, and thereby empower them. And the parade of mental health professionals will discourage the court from such transfer lest these "tender little souls" become upset. Indoctrinating parents know this well and this situation encourages them to continue with their indoctrinations. And this, then, gives alienators free reign with regard to the programming process and thereby empowers the children to continue denigrating the targeted parent even more.

A related phenomenon is the absolute refusal of judges to impose sanctions on PAS adolescents. Communities generally have facilities for incorrigible youngsters. Some are placed in psychiatric hospitals and others in juvenile detention centers. Yet I have never seen a case where such a disposition has been ordered for a PAS child, no matter how despicable the behavior. I generally do not recommend that such youngsters be placed in such centers for long periods. Rather, I am certain that a visit for an hour or two would serve to sober most of them up and reduce significantly their ongoing disparagement of the victimized parent.

PAS children need excuses to give the programmer for reducing and even refraining from their PAS campaigns. They need to say to the programmer: "I really hate going there, but I'd better go because the judge said if I don't, he'll put me in a juvenile detention center" or "I really hate him, but I'm only going there because I know the judge will punish you if I don't." If the judge's warnings are frivolous and empty, they will have no effect. If, however, the mother and the youngster know that the judge is serious about threats of repercussions, then change is likely to take place. Unfortunately, I have great trouble getting judges to provide meaningful threats, threats with conviction. I am often criticized for the use of the word threat. Similarly, I am often criticized for even mentioning the term juvenile detention center to these children. All of us need threats. If you do not pay your electric bill, they turn off the electricity. If you do not pay your mortgage, you may lose your house. There have to be consequences in life. People must be

accountable. PAS children sidestep this important life principle, so important in a civilized society. They are encouraged to be uncivilized because they do not have accountability. Their empowerment corrupts them.

My experience has been that in about 10 percent of PAS cases, a false sex-abuse accusation emerges (3, 21, 22, 23). And such accusations provide children with enormous power. In the mid-1980s, when I first started to speak about this phenomenon, there was general incredulity on the part of judges. Over the years, courts have become increasingly aware of this common depravity. Although less likely to accept as valid such accusations, my experience has been that judges rarely dismiss entirely the accusation but, even when they find no evidence for sex abuse, will still recommend supervised visitation. One of the most famous examples of this is the Woody Allen case. The court did not find Woody Allen guilty of having sexually abused Mia Farrow's daughter; however, supervised visitation was still ordered.

A judge who has a reputation for protecting us from perverts, who puts them behind bars if there is even the slightest suspicion that they have sexually abused our children, will generally be viewed with approval and gratitude. In contrast, the one who has allowed even one pervert to roam the streets may not be reappointed or reelected. Under these circumstances, judges will often take no chances. There are judges who have openly made statements along these lines: "If there is one scintilla of evidence, no matter how remote, that this person sexually abused a child, I will do everything in my power to remove him (her) from society." In the service of this goal, constitutional protections of due process are ignored. The principle of our founding fathers that a man is innocent until proven guilty is basically ignored. In these cases, a man is guilty until proven innocent. The principle that it is preferable that a hundred guilty men be set free than one innocent man be incarcerated is reversed to: rather a hundred innocent men be found guilty than one guilty person be allowed to go free. Such judges get positive feedback from hysterical parents and thereby enhance the likelihood of reappointment or reelection. One result of this is that little children become empowered to put adults in jail. Elsewhere, I have elaborated on this point (19).

The Role of Child Protection Services in PAS Children's Empowerment

Mention has been made of the false-sex-abuse accusation spin-off of the PAS. Essential to the success of such a maneuver is the child protection service. Although we certainly need child protection services (CPS), especially because child abuse (including sexual abuse) is quite common, there is no question that the people who work in such agencies are often overzealous and err on the side of concluding that the accused party is indeed guilty. Although things have progressively become better over the last 15 to 20 years, my experience has been that the people who work in such agencies are still likely to be overzealous and err on the side of concluding that the abuse took place. They still use anatomical dolls, body charts, and other diagrams that are sexually suggestive and contribute to the child's making comments that lead to the conclusion that sexual abuse has taken place. And although they claim that they no longer use leading questions, all of the videotapes I have seen of their interviews (and I do not hesitate to use the word all) are replete with leading questions. Although CPS evaluators routinely profess that they do not use leading questions--because they know intellectually that they are supposed to claim that--they generally do not know what a leading question is and still provide questions that plant seeds and elicit sexual answers (24).

It is not simply naiveté that is operative here. The more such investigators conclude that sex abuse has occurred, the more demands they can make for money to support their services. Anyone who claims that these people are overreacting and that there are not as many sexually abused children as they profess is viewed as not being properly protective of abused children and may possibly have some kind of pedophilic tendencies him- or herself. Accordingly, a multimillion dollar, if not billion dollar, industry has grown. This industry has provided a powerful weapon for PAS indoctrinators. In fact, in the history of divorce conflicts, it is probably reasonable to say that no greater weapon has ever been placed in the hands of an angry parent

than the sex-abuse accusation. The whole industry is out there that will send "gangbusters" to the house within minutes in order to take action against the alleged perpetrator.

Divorcing parents know well that murdering the hated spouse will generally result in formidable repercussions for the murderer. However, such an angry parent can easily bring about a state of living death for the hated spouse, within a few minutes, by simply picking up the telephone and calling the local child protection people. Even when the accusation is ultimately considered to be "unfounded," the stigma remains--often throughout life. What good parent would want their child to visit the home of another child whose parent was accused of sexual abuse?

The child protection workers empower children enormously. Many wave the flags "Children Never Lie" and "Believe the Children." Every utterance, no matter how preposterous is given credibility, especially if the utterance relates to sex abuse. People are taking meticulous notes and even videotaping these utterances, no matter how ludicrous and removed from reality. The child was never taken so seriously. The child never had so much attention. And all this creates pathological empowerment. All the child needs to do is to say a word about a "bad touch" or about how a parent "touched my private place" and everyone in the room stops and freezes. Immediately, with pencil and pad in hand, the comments are memorialized for posterity. Photocopies are duly made and these are distributed to lawyers, the court, therapists, and all other concerned parties. I have seen cases in which satanic ritual abuse was allegedly perpetrated. Weekends were spent with the child's going around town pointing to the various sites where the satanic abuses allegedly took place. And it was not only the parents who accompanied the child but child protection people, the so-called "child advocates," and "experts" on satanical ritual abuse. It is rare for children to receive such empowerment. Elsewhere, I have elaborated on this problem (19).

The police, also, typically become involved. A child's interrogation by police, prosecutors, and those in the sex-abuse units, may be somewhat frightening. However, the interviews are also enormously ego-enhancing. All these important and powerful people are paying dutiful attention to every bit of dribble that flows out of the child's mouth. I have seen situations in which these people will give such children police badges and make them "junior cops" after providing their sex-abuse "disclosures." Again, more empowerment. I am not saying that all sex-abuse accusations are "dribble." What I am saying is that most, but not all, that arise in the context of child-custody disputes are false.

From the outset, the child is assured that the inquiry has nothing to do with any crimes he (she) may have committed. Rather, the child is told that he (she) is providing valuable assistance to the police in bringing to justice a pervert who, incidentally, happens to be the child's own father, mother, stepfather or stepmother. The child comes to learn that the sex-abuse accusation can be a powerful weapon in its own right, and the accusation need not be initiated by the programmer. I have come across children who have said: "If you punish me, I'm going to call Mary Jones at Child Protection and tell her that you sexually abused me again." Unfortunately, this will work, and it may actually freeze the accused parent. The child knows that Mary Jones is likely to take seriously any accusation, no matter how preposterous. And Mary Jones may claim that the law requires her to initiate, yet once again, an investigation, even though she herself may have little if any conviction by then for the validity of the allegation. The sex-abuse "team" descends upon the home and the child enjoys enormous attention and notoriety. Once again, we see here how the child abuse industry provides these children with empowerment.

The Role of Therapists

in PAS Children Empowerment

My experience has been that the vast majority of therapists have contributed formidably to the pathological empowerment of PAS children. Child therapists traditionally take the stance that they are more sensitive than others to the needs of children, more respectful than others of their desires, and are therefore more likely to provide them with the support for their professions and requests. A common problem here is that

they often do this to the point where they lose sight of the injudiciousness of such "respect" and compliance. They often sanctimoniously profess that they really respect what children want, unlike parents and others in the world who do not really respect children. This holier-than-thou attitude often contributes to the empowerment of PAS children, especially their campaigns of denigration and often false sex-abuse accusations.

Some therapists take the position that their role is to support the position of the child no matter how injudicious. In the service of this principle, they blind themselves to the preposterousness of the professions of their child patients, even when they are as ludicrous as those often seen in a PAS campaign of denigration. And this, of course, contributes to their pathological empowerment. A common situation is the one in which the PAS programmer selects a therapist who is not likely to get input from the other parent. In fact, they will screen therapists and will engage only the services of those who will join in with them against the victimized parent.

Some therapists are naïve enough to agree at the outset that they will see the child with the understanding that the treatment will be kept secret from the alienated parent. I have seen many cases in which the victimized parent did not learn for weeks, months, and even years about the "treatment." Competent child therapists know that it is important for the therapist to have access to both parents, divorce notwithstanding. Incompetent therapists are generally not appreciative of this important principle and contribute thereby to PAS empowerment.

Some take the position that their role is to respect the child's "perceptions." No matter how pathological the perception, no matter how divorced from reality, no matter how delusional, the therapist still rolls on with the child's perception. And if the perception is that the alienated parent is despicable, abusive, dangerous, neglectful, etc., then the therapist accepts that as valid and does not question it. In fact, questioning it would be viewed as an antitherapeutic maneuver, because it would allegedly demean the child and get across the message that the therapist is not taking the child seriously. Competent therapists recognize that one of the purposes of therapy is to correct misconceptions in a benevolent way, in a way that does not necessarily demean the child. And this can certainly be done. The analogy to one's own children is applicable here. A loving parent needs to criticize children continually, but the love and affection that lies beneath the criticisms are felt by the child, and they are not demeaned. The child recognizes that the correction of misperceptions is an important developmental experience and necessary for the child's well-being.

Such "respect" for the child's "perceptions" regarding the target parent is different from every other experience a child has in life, experiences in which other people express incredulity and disagreement with perceptions that have absolutely nothing to do with reality. And when the sex-abuse spin-off is operative here, then the result of such respect for the child's "perception," can contribute to the promulgation of a false sex-abuse accusation. Some of these therapists, in the course of the treatment of these allegedly sexually-abused PAS children, repeatedly tell the child that the environment in the office is "safe." In fact, I have seen situations in which the facility has a room that is referred to as the "safe room." The implication there is that the alleged perpetrator is so relentless in the desire to abuse the child that some kind of protection on an ongoing basis is necessary.

I have seen situations in which the alleged perpetrator is incarcerated and yet the child is still told that he (she) is now "safe." This cannot but engender in the child the notion that the accused party is still dangerous and still likely to perpetrate sexual depravities. This approach cannot but engender unnecessary fears, hypervigilance, and anticipation of sexual dangers when there is no evidence for such. It is an antitherapeutic maneuver promulgated under the guise of being therapeutic. It also has the effect of empowering the child because it gets across the message that there are people all around who are constantly protecting the child from the alleged perpetrator.

There are therapists who subscribe to the principle that one of the purposes of treatment is to release feelings and "let it all out." They tell the PAS children that they must be angry at the victimized parent and that one of the purposes of the treatment is to let out the anger. The child is encouraged to punch dolls, bang with sticks, and even scream profanities. This is allegedly therapeutic. What it does is to entrench ever more deeply in the child's brain circuitry the notion that the alienated parent is indeed a despicable individual. It encourages more acting out against that parent and strengthens the campaign of denigration. It also has the effect of producing the pathological empowerment that comes with the acting out of anger.

The same therapists who are ever proclaiming that they subscribe to the aforementioned principles of respect for the child's professions, respect for the child's perceptions, etc. generally have their limits regarding such alleged respect. They would not "respect" the child who refuses to go to school on an ongoing basis. They would not respect the child who wants to take drugs, drink alcohol, run away from home, or throw an infant sibling into the swimming pool. Yet, they fully respect the child's campaign of denigration against the alienated parent and fully respect the derivative false sex-abuse accusation. They would not respect the child's destruction of their own property, attempts to physically assault them personally (especially with weapons), or to burn down their offices. They would not respect the child who comes in with an animal that defecates on their rugs or attempts to bite them. They would not respect the child who comes in with a baseball bat and tries to wreak the waiting room. Yet, they respect the same child's similar, if not identical behavior, when it is directed toward others, especially a victimized parent in a PAS.

The Occasional Role of the Alienated Parent

in The PAS Children's Empowerment

I have seen many reports in which the examiners claim that the alienated parent has contributed to his or her grief. Some have claimed that they are "asking for it." I have never seen this happen. I consider targeted parents to be true victims. The comment is reminiscent of those who claim that women who are raped are "asking for it." Some claim that the alienated parent is overly intrusive, thereby provocative, and so contributes to the children's animosity. I have not seen this to be the case. Rather, I find these parents to be suffering with profound feelings of helplessness and they repeatedly try to gain access to their children, which then becomes labeled as intrusiveness and even harassment. Some have claimed that victimized parents are narcissistic and have an inordinate sense of entitlement. I have never yet seen one such parent satisfy DSM-IV criteria for the Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

What I have seen, however, is passivity that has played a role in the empowerment of PAS children and the development of the PAS. Typically, the parents are fearful of imposing traditional disciplinary measures, lest the children become even more antagonistic. They are fearful that any criticism of either the children or the alienating parent will result in their being referred to as "liars" and this will become incorporated into the children's campaign of denigration. This situation is worsened by courts typically warning divorcing parents never to criticize one another to the children. Accordingly, the parent who confronts the children with the fact that they are being programmed may be accused of violating court orders. Accordingly, the parent fears taking action and becomes viewed as an easy "pushover," as someone who can be degraded, mocked, and ignored with impunity and without consequences. Such is the humiliation suffered by the targeted parent. This passivity, so often imposed upon the targeted parent, contributes to the children's empowerment and the intensification of their PAS symptomatology.

Conclusions

We are seeing, then, an empowerment of children unequalled in history. Many grandparents have said to me, with regard to their PAS grandchildren, comments along these lines: "When I was a kid, if I spoke to my father that way, he'd beat the daylights out of me," "It's too bad they can't whip kids anymore. A good whipping would cure that kid in five minutes," and "In my day kids would never dare to speak to their

parents that way. They'd get the strap." I am not suggesting that we go back to physically abusing children. I am suggesting that we just go back to the point where reasonable and humane disciplinary and punitive measures are implemented so that children are not free to denigrate and humiliate with impunity their PAS-alienated parents. There must be accountability. There must be consequences. Without accountability and consequences, there cannot be a civilized society. PAS children are being programmed to be uncivilized and even to be psychopathic.

Such empowerment of children results in defective reality testing, narcissism, impairment in the ability to feel sympathy and empathy, and disrespect for authority that cannot but spread to nonparental figures, such as teachers and employers in the future. PAS children are often viewed as "spoiled brats" and justifiably so. My experience has been that such corruption of these children in their youth contributes to their becoming social misfits as adults.

I have described here how pathological empowerment is provided not only by parents of PAS children, but the whole network of mental and legal professionals who are involved in PAS litigation. The PAS is a product of the adversary system. Unfortunately, the system that is available to bring about alleviation of PAS symptomatology generally results in a deepening of the disorder adding, thereby, unnecessary grief to people who are already suffering painfully.

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about the author

Richard A. Gardner, M.D. is Clinical Professor of Child Psychiatry at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, in New York City. In addition, he is in private practice in Cresskill, New Jersey. He is the author of numerous books and articles on various aspects of forensic psychiatry. His most recent books related to this article: *The Parental Alienation Syndrome, Second Edition* (1998) and *Therapeutic Interventions for Children with Parental Alienation Syndrome* (2001).

"The young of all animals need to be nurtured.

Uniquely in the animal kingdom however human young require in equal measure an additional input – they need to be socialised – conditioned to understand the advantages and constraints of living in a society with its set of rules.

Humans have evolved in societies as a result of the caring – both nurturing AND socialising – tendencies of mothers and fathers in balance.

It is how well this combination is acknowledged and respected which ultimately measures the success and well-being – or otherwise of a society"

Roger Eldridge, June 2000. Foreword to "Things for Dads to do with Kids" by Sam Carroll.