

# The International Handbook of Parental Alienation Syndrome

Conceptual, Clinical and Legal Considerations



Richard A. Gardner

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# THE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME

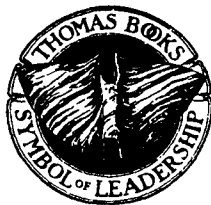
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CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.  
*Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.*

*Published and Distributed Throughout the World by*

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.  
2600 South First Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62704

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ISBN 0-398-07647-2 (hard)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2006040449

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*Printed in the United States of America  
UB-R-3*

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

The international handbook of parental alienation syndrome / edited by Richard A.  
Gardner, S. Richard Sauber, Demosthenes Lorandos.

p. cm. -- (American series in behavioral science and law)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-398-07647-2

I. Parental alienation syndrome--Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Gardner, Richard  
A. II. Sauber, S. Richard. III. Lorandos, Demosthenes, 1946-IV. Series.

RJ506.P27I58 2006  
618.92'89--dc22

2006040449

**THE INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK  
OF PARENTAL ALIENATION  
SYNDROME**

*Publication Number 1108*

*AMERICAN SERIES  
IN  
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE AND LAW*

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## Chapter 33

# PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME AND INTERNATIONAL CHILD ABDUCTION: A MULTIGENERATIONAL SYNDROME

BARBARA BEVANDO SOBAL

### OVERVIEW

*The purpose of this Chapter is to bring awareness to the fact that parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is a multigenerational syndrome. The group studied is composed of children who were abducted internationally before the Hague Convention was adopted on October 25, 1980, and ratified by the United States on July 1, 1988, since it is that group of children who have produced a new generation of children who exhibit the same PAS symptoms as their parents toward their grandparents. In accordance with Clawar and Rivlin<sup>1</sup> these groups of internationally abducted children were “programmed by their parents to the point of no return.” This means that intervention was not found to be effective in deprogramming these children. They were emotionally and physically lost to the targeted parent. These are the children that the late Dr. Richard Gardner describes as victims of parental alienation syndrome. Unless successful deprogramming by trained professionals – who are closely supervised, whose credentials are verified and who are specifically licensed in this field – is accomplished, there will be no end to the generations of PAS victims. Great caution should be taken to eliminate those programs who claim to deprogram, but who do more harm than the alienating/abducting parent has done.*

### INTRODUCTION

*. . . Your children are not your children.*

*They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself . . .<sup>2</sup>*

This is so with the internationally abducted child who is also a victim of PAS.

PAS is nothing new. In fact, it dates back to biblical times<sup>3</sup> and to the Ancient Greeks.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, PAS has become multigenerational with the internationally abducted PAS child, just as with a child who is emotionally abducted. It starts with the alienating parent, who assesses the behavior on to the child, who in turn becomes an alienator, and passes it on to his or her own child.

These children are not the sons and daughters of life. Rather, their “life” involves “living” in the world of the alienating parent. They are robbed of their childhoods by the alienating parent. For the internationally abducted child, their language and customs are also stolen away from them. They belong to the alienating parent and to that parent’s country.

They are not loved in the true sense by the alienating parent. Rather, the alienating parent uses the child as a vessel to pass on their hatred for the alienated parent, and disguises it as “love – to the extent that the child never really knows what love is.

They do not develop their own thoughts. Rather, they are programmed. According to Gardner, “Programming refers, to the implantation of information that may be directly at variance with what the PAS child has previously believed about and experienced with the alienated parent.”<sup>5</sup>

In PAS, the alienating parent programs into the child’s brain circuitry ideas and attitudes that are directly at variance with the child’s previous experiences. In mild cases the child is taught to disrespect, disagree with, and even act out antagonistically against the targeted parent. As the disorder progresses from mild to moderate to severe, this antagonism becomes converted and expanded into a campaign of denigration. PAS children respond to the programming in such a way that it appears that they have become completely amnesiac for any and all positive and loving

experiences they may have had previously with the targeted parent.<sup>6</sup>

... PAS children have been programmed, and they need to be deprogrammed. They have been taught to hate, so they must be reeducated in such a way that the suppressed loving feelings can once again emerge. Attempts must be made to replace the unhealthy material in the child's brain circuitry with healthy material.<sup>7</sup>

[The] child's pathological PAS material [is] superimposed on and suppressive of healthy thoughts and feelings about the victimized parent that are still very much in the child's brain circuitry. It is like a black cloud that covers the brain circuitry but has not obliterated the healthy, loving thoughts and feelings that are still there. The more prolonged the period of indoctrination, the more deeply embedded the pathological material becomes and the more difficult it will be to remove it. The goal of the deprogramming process is to remove this superimposed PAS material in order to allow the expression, once again, of healthier material that lies beneath it. The treatment is analogous to the detoxification process in which poisons are removed from the body so that healthy functioning can resume. It is a process by which the automatic routinized thinking of the child is removed, allowing thereby the expression of the child's own earlier judgments and critical thinking.<sup>8</sup>

PAS children are deprived of their own souls. Their souls are selfishly possessed by the alienating parent. The PAS child has no identity of his/her own. The child's identity is enmeshed with the alienator. For the PAS child, life is always going backward. They are frozen in time at the point of the abduction and/or alienation. The bow from which the internationally abducted PAS child is set forth is unstable, because the alienating parent is unstable.

The International abduction and/or PAS can begin before, after, or during the divorce process. This is a process that children, especially the very young, are completely helpless to combat. The obsessed parent is angry, bitter, or feels betrayed by the other parent. The initial reasons for the bitterness may be justified. They could have been verbally and physically abused, betrayed by an affair, or financially cheated. Or, there could be cultural differences that cannot be resolved. The problems occur when the feelings don't heal but, instead, become more intense due to the necessary continued relationship with the person they despise because of their common parenthood. Just having to see or talk to the other parent is a reminder of the past, and this can trigger the hate. Although, Clawar and

Rivlin did not specifically discuss the obsessed alienator in their book, they found that five percent of the children in their study were programmed by similar parents "to the point of no return," meaning that no interventions were found to be effective in deprogramming these children. These children were emotionally and physically lost to the targeted parent.<sup>9</sup> These are the children that Gardner described as a victim of PAS.

## **PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME**

PAS is a disorder that arises primarily in the context of child custody and International Child Abduction disputes. Its primary manifestation is the child's campaign of denigration against one parent – a campaign that has no justification.<sup>10</sup> It results from the *combination* of the programming (brainwashing) parent's indoctrinations and the child's own contributions to the vilification of the target parent. When true parental abuse and/or neglect is present, the child's animosity may be justified, and so the PAS explanation for the child hostility is not applicable.

### ***Symptoms of Parental Alienation Syndrome***<sup>11</sup>

The eight cardinal symptoms of PAS are:

- A campaign of denigration.
- Weak, frivolous, and absurd rationalizations for the depreciation.
- Lack of ambivalence.
- The "independent-thinker" phenomenon.
- Reflexive support of the alienating parent in the parental conflict.
- Absence of guilt over cruelty to and/or exploitation of the alienated parent.
- Presence of borrowed scenarios.
- Spread of the animosity to the extended family and friends of the alienated parent.

### ***The Campaign of Denigration***<sup>12</sup>

Typically, the child is obsessed with "hatred of a parent." These children speak of the alienated parent with every vilification and profanity in their vocabulary – without embarrassment or guilt. The denigration of the vilified parent often has the quality of a litany. After only minimal prompting by a lawyer, judge, probation officer, mental health professional, or

other person involved in the litigation, the brain recording will be turned on, and a command performance is provided in which the targeted parent's defects are listed at length.

### ***Weak, Frivolous, and Absurd Rationalizations for the Depreciation***<sup>13</sup>

Typically, PAS children provide irrational and often ludicrous justifications for their alienation from the targeted parent. The child may justify the alienation with memories of minor altercations experienced in the relationship with the estranged parent, even years after they have taken place. These are usually trivial experiences that most children quickly forget. When PAS children are asked to give more compelling reasons for their rejection, they are unable to provide them. Typically, the alienating parent will agree with the child that these professed reasons justify the ongoing animosity.

### ***Lack of Ambivalence***<sup>14</sup>

Another symptom of PAS is complete lack of ambivalence. All human relationships are ambivalent, and parent-child relationships are no exception. However, the concept of mixed feelings has no place in PAS children's lives. The victimized parent is all bad, and the indoctrinating parent is all good. Most children ("normal" ones, as well as those with a wide variety of psychiatric problems), when asked to list both good and bad things about each parent, will generally be able to do so. When PAS children are asked to provide the same list, they will typically recite a long list of criticisms of the targeted parent, but will not be able to think of one positive or redeeming personality trait. In contrast, they will provide only positive and endearing qualities for the alienating parent and claim to be unable to think of even one trait they dislike. The vilified parent may have been deeply dedicated to the child's upbringing, and a strong bond may have been created over many years. Yet, it seems to evaporate, almost overnight, at the time of the onset of PAS. In contrast, the alienating parent, toward whom the child was previously ambivalent, becomes idealized and "can do no wrong."

### ***The "Independent-Thinker" Phenomenon***<sup>15</sup>

Many PAS children profoundly profess that their decision to reject the targeted parent is their own. They deny any contribution from the programming

parent, who supports this "independence" vociferously. In fact, alienators will typically proclaim that they want the child to visit and profess recognition of the importance of such involvement. Yet, the indoctrinator's every act indicates otherwise.

### ***Reflexive Support of the Alienating Parent in the Parental Conflict***<sup>16</sup>

In family conferences, in which the children are seen together with both the alienating and alienated parent, the children reflexive take the position of the indoctrinating parent – sometimes even before the victimized parent has had the opportunity to present his or her side of the argument. Even the alienating parent may not present the argument as forcefully as the supporting child. Thus, PAS children may even refuse to accept evidence that is obvious proof of the vilified parent's position.

### ***Absence of Guilt over Cruelty to and/or Exploitation of the Alienated Parent***<sup>17</sup>

The child may exhibit a guiltless disregard for the feelings of the victimized parent. He or she will show a complete absence of gratitude for gifts, support payments, and other manifestations of the vilified parent's continued involvement and affection.

### ***Presence of Borrowed Scenarios***<sup>18</sup>

The presence of borrowed scenarios should clue examiners into the high probability that they are dealing with the PAS. Not only is there a rehearsed quality to PAS children's litanies, but one often hears phraseology that is not commonly used by children of that age. Many expressions are identical to those used by the indoctrinating parent. The parental terms and phrases become scripted into the children's litanies of denigration. Frequently, the children attribute a particular statement to the programming parent, thereby "letting the cat out of the bag" and confirming that the particular phrase has been programmed.

### ***Spread of the Animosity to the Extended Family and Friends of the Alienated Parent***<sup>19</sup>

The hatred of the alienated parent often extends to include that parent's complete extended family. Cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents – with whom the child previously may have had loving relationships – are now viewed as similarly obnoxious. Grandparents,

who previously had a loving and tender relationship with the child, now find themselves suddenly and inexplicably rejected. The child has no guilt over such rejection, nor does the alienator. Greeting cards are not reciprocated. Presents sent to the child are refused, remain unopened, or even are destroyed (generally in the presence of the programming parent). When the denigrated parent's relatives call on the telephone, the child will respond with angry vilifications or quickly hang up on the caller. (These responses are more likely to occur if the alienating parent is within hearing distance of the conversation.) With regard to the denigration of the relatives, the child is even less capable of providing justification for the animosity. The rage of these children is often so great that they become completely oblivious to the privations they are causing themselves. Again, the indoctrinating parent is typically unconcerned with the untoward psychological effects on the child of this rejection of the network of relatives who previously provided important psychological gratifications.

## HAGUE CONVENTION

The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction was adopted on October 25, 1980.<sup>20</sup> The Hague Convention was adopted by the signatory nations and addressed the increasing problem of international child abduction in the context of international law while respecting rights of custody and visitation under national law.

According to the preamble, "the Convention aims 'to protect children' internationally from the harmful effects of their wrongful removal or retention and to establish procedures to ensure their prompt return to the State of their habitual residence."

The United States ratified the Hague Convention on July 1, 1988. In the United States, the enabling legislation is codified by the International Child Abduction Remedies Act (hereinafter referred to as ICARA).

Because the language of the Convention is somewhat conclusory, United States courts look to two sources of official commentary for guidance: (1) The Explanatory Report by Elisa Perez-Vera, the official Hague Conference reporter (the "Perez-Vera Report"); and (2) The Legal Analysis of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction ("Legal Analysis").

As noted in the Legal Analysis notes in pertinent part "Access rights" correspond to "visitation rights." The Perez-Vera Explanatory Report is "recognized by the Conference as the official history and commentary

on the Convention and is a source of background on the meaning of the provisions of the Convention available to all States becoming parties to it."

## Case Analysis

The following are cases that are unpublished because they existed before PAS and/or International Child Abduction were known. In fact, the Hague Convention did not exist. Therefore, the parties' names are not used. Instead, the cases will be referred to by the countries in which they occurred.

All of these cases involve PAS, two of the cases are multigenerational and involve the spouses and the children of the abducted child.

### *Iran/United States*

I once interviewed an American mother who was married to an Iranian. They had a successful son, who was in his thirties and married with two children. The mother divorced the father when their son was one year old. The father abducted the son from the United States and brought him to Tehran. When the mother tried to get her son back, she was told that she would be shot in the streets, and that acid would be thrown in her face.

The mother did not see her son again until he was forced to come to the United States during the Iranian Revolution, when her son was in his late teens. Once he was back in the United States, she was not invited to his lavish wedding. Her son accuses her of abandoning him and of being a sinner by not following the Muslim religion. He is verbally abusive, to the point that he sounds just like his father. Her son's wife is verbally abusive to her and makes statements such as, "How can a mother abandon her child?" Her two grandchildren (a boy, 4, and a girl, 6) mimic their father, mother, and their grandfather by also being abusive to her.

To date, Iran has not ratified the Hague Convention Treaty.

### *Japan/United States*

I interviewed a beautiful 32-year-old Japanese woman with a flawless porcelain face. She told me that she had a Japanese-born father and a Japanese-American mother. She was abducted from the United States to Japan by her father when she was five years old. As a result of the abduction, she no longer spoke English. She spoke through the aid of a translator, her Japanese ex-husband.