

Parental Alienation International

Advancing worldwide understanding in the field of parental alienation

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Parental Alienation Study Group

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September 10 - 12, 2025

Marriott Downtown at Eaton Centre

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Alan D. Blotcky, PhD

Welcome to the May issue of PAI. Thank you for reading this newsletter!

PASG 2025 in Toronto is fast-approaching. September is not far off. Dozens of excellent presentations have been accepted and scheduled. This will be an international conference of the highest order. Please register as soon as you can.

In this issue of PAI, we have several very interesting articles. We begin with an alarming state of affairs in Argentina that will shake your sensibilities. We thank Martin Soriano for sharing this development with us.

Mary Alvarez offers new PARQ data that will be of interest to all professionals who work in our field. It advances the ball in the identification of PA in children.

Shawn Wygant's article on primitive defenses in PA cases is quite instructive. It provides a good conceptual understanding of the connection between primitive defenses and PA.

Joshi and Deeter have written a great article on Kayden's Law that we are republishing because of its strong emphasis on the unintended negative impact that law creates.

Finally, as usual, upcoming PA events are listed in detail for you.

We continue to solicit articles for this newsletter. All submissions can be sent for review to alanblotcky@att.net. We actively seek articles from scholars, researchers, clinicians, legal practitioners, and parents.

Thank you for your continued interest in this important area.



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<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ParentalAlienationStudyGroup/>

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2025 THEME

Best practices in parental alienation
assessment, intervention & advocacy:
A roadmap for judicial accuracy and resolution

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REGISTER FOR IN-PERSON

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WE'RE EXCITED TO SHARE SIX FEATURED SPEAKERS:

Justice Marie-France Vincent (Canada), **Francine Cyr** (Canada),
Amylie Paquin-Boudreau (Canada)

A psychojudicial protocol for child resistance refusal dynamics

Ashish Joshi (USA) and **Judge Jon Van Allsburg** (USA)

Effective Legal Interventions in Cases Involving Parental Alienating Behaviors

Denise McCartan (UK), author of *Parental Alienation: An Evidence-Based Approach*

Clinical Psychology Assessment of Parents when Parental Alienation is Suspected

Prof. Nick Bala (Canada)

Parental Alienation - Junk Science or Child Abuse? A Question for Politicians, Judges or Psychologists?

Dr. Jennifer Harman (USA) and colleagues

Parental Alienating Behaviors: Ignore at Children's Peril

Dr. Yvonne M. Parnell (Canada)

Family Bridges workshop and aftercare: 18 years of data

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**To register for the conference
in-person and virtual, visit
www.pasg2025toronto.ca**

Primitive Defenses and Group Loyalty in Cases of Parental Alienation

Shawn A. Wygant, MA

THE USE OF PRIMITIVE DEFENSES is recognized as a prominent feature of parental alienation.¹ Yet, how these defenses develop within the alienating parent-child relationship is often overlooked, ignored, or overshadowed by alternative theories.² One possible explanation is group loyalty³ in the context of divorce related tribal warfare.⁴ In a study of tribal warfare, Johnston and Campbell (1986) observed 80 divorcing families (100 children ages six months to 12 years) who were mired in custody disputes. When examining how the divorcing conflict extended to significant others and the children, the researchers found that the primary purpose was to form coalitions of support. Consistent with coalition formation theory,⁵ Johnston and Campbell found that parents who felt the most disempowered and aggrieved in the divorce took the first steps to seek an alliance against their former spouse and once the aggrieved parent was aligned with a group of supporting defenders the conflict between the divorcing parents tended to escalate into tribal warfare.

Tribal moral psychology often entails two phenomena observed in cases of parental alienation – (1) applying different ethical standards to ingroup and outgroup members and (2) sacrificing individual interests to group interests. According to Ferrera (2015), both of these phenomena are born out of induced loyalty to one's tribe. With parental alienation, the alienator demands absolute loyalty from the child while simultaneously dehumanizing the target parent through a campaign of denigration.⁶ This conveys to the child a double standard of morality leading the child to view mistreatment of the target parent as morally acceptable. Thus, the alienated child's campaign of denigration and absence of guilt for the mistreatment of the target parent is psychically guarded through the primitive defense of denial (frivolous rationalizations). This dynamic is reinforced and giving power through splitting (lack of ambivalence) by the child who actively uses two primary psychological defenses – idealization of the alienator and devaluation of the target parent.

¹ Bernet, W., Gregory, N., Reay, K. M., & Rohner, R. P. (2018). An objective measure of splitting in parental alienation: The parental acceptance-rejection questionnaire. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 63(3), 776-783; Gordon, R. M., Stoffey, R., & Bottinelli, J. (2008). MMPI-2 findings of primitive defenses in alienating parents. *American Journal of Family Therapy* 36(3), 211-228; Kopetski, L. M. (1998). Identifying cases of parent alienation syndrome - Part II. *Colorado Lawyer*, 27, 61-64.

² Garber, B. D. (2020). Sherlock Holmes and the case of resist/refuse dynamics: Confirmatory bias and abductive inference in child custody evaluations. *Family Court Review*, 58(2), 386-402; Kelly, J. B., & Johnston, J. R. (2001). The alienated child: A reformulation of parental alienation syndrome. *Family Court Review*, 39(3), 249-266; Sullivan, M. J., Pruett, M. K., & Johnston, J. R. (2024). Parent-child contact problems: Family violence and parental alienating behaviors either/or, neither/nor, both/and, one in the same?. *Family Court Review*, 62(1), 68-85.

³ Ferrera, S. J. (2015). Tribalism: Biological roots and emotional process. *Family Systems: A Journal of Natural Systems Thinking in Psychiatry & the Sciences*, 11(1), 9-30.

⁴ Johnston, J. R., & Campbell, L. E. (1986). Tribal warfare: The involvement of extended kin and significant others in custody and access disputes. *Conciliation Courts Review*, 24(1), 1-16.

⁵ Gameson, W. (1969). A Theory of Coalition Formation. *American Sociological Review*, 26, 373-382.

⁶ Iacobescu, M. R. (2021). Loyalty Conflict and Parental Alienation in Children with Divorced Parents. *Anuarul Universitatii Petre Andrei din Iasi-Fascicula: Asistentă Socială, Sociologie, Psihologie*, 27, 171-184.

To fully understand how these defenses take root and operate within the parent-child dyad, it is critical to examine legal cases that document the behaviors of alienating parents and the psychological sequelae observed in their children. The following cases provide examples that illustrate how children, enmeshed in high-conflict custody disputes, adopt primitive defenses and internalize tribal moral structures in response to the alienating parent's manipulation. These cases not only demonstrate the mechanics of splitting, denial, and devaluation but also highlight the underlying motivational structure—group loyalty—that anchors the alienation process.

- In *In re Marriage of Marcy Moore and Paul Moore* (2018),⁷ Dr. Shobha R. Nookala noted the child was being negatively influenced by the father and, as a result, was exhibiting signs of psychological splitting. Specifically, the child would idealize the father while simultaneously devaluing the mother.
- In *Wright v. Wright* (2021),⁸ the father persistently undermined the mother's role by telling the children she poorly cared for them, revisiting past conflicts, and involving the children in legal disputes. He further escalated the psychological harm by discussing his criminal matters and blaming the mother, labeling her a liar, encouraging the children to criticize her, and exposing them to her private life through social media and direct comments.

In some instances, alienating parents enlist external support to intensify the alienation. For example, in *Matter of Marriage of Valencia* (2020), the court-appointed counselor testified that the mother referred to the father as a “monster,” coached the children to fabricate suicide threats, and obstructed visitation. The children's denigrating statements closely mirrored the mother's language, and no independent basis for their rejection of the father could be found. The following additional cases further demonstrate how children caught in loyalty conflicts will tend to internalize the alienator's narratives and their use of psychological defenses – primarily through devaluation (i.e., campaign of denigration) – to maintain group allegiance against the child's best interests:

- In *In re A.F.* (2024),⁹ a counselor testified that the child was caught in a loyalty bind. The child described the father as a “monster” but could offer no specific reasons, and presented with anxiety and confusion indicative of internal conflict rooted in divided loyalties.
- In *McNutt v. McNutt* (2015),¹⁰ the court found that the children fabricated claims of abuse and suicidal ideation as a result of intense loyalty to their mother. The mother's manipulation was so severe that it led to unnecessary psychiatric hospitalizations and profound insecurity in the children.
- In *Palazzolo v. Mire* (2009),¹¹ the child exhibited a complete lack of ambivalence, expressing hatred for the rejected parent without any emotional nuance—an indicator of splitting.
- In *State of Wisconsin v. Hoffman* (2011),¹² the evaluator documented that the mother's parenting was characterized by chaos, control tactics, and manipulation. The child reflected these same psychological defenses and attitudes.

⁷ *In re Marriage of Marcy Moore and Paul Moore*, 2018 IL App (3d) 170279-U (Il. Ct. App., 2018)

⁸ *Wright v. Wright*, 29 Neb. App. 787, 794-795 (Neb. Ct. App., 2021)

⁹ *In re A.F.*, 2024 WL 791785 * 7 (Ariz. Ct. App., 2024)

¹⁰ *McNutt v. McNutt*, 2015 WL 8967327 **3-4 (Mich. Ct. App., 2015)

¹¹ *Palazzolo v. Mire*, 10 So.3d 748, 774-775 (La. Ct. App., 2011)

¹² *State of Wisconsin v. Hoffman*, 336 Wis.2d 476 **2-3 (Wis. Ct. App., 2011)

- In *Linder v. Johnson* (2007),¹³ the children’s total rejection of their father and even their half-sibling was marked by pride, not distress. Their use of adult-like language and justifications, inconsistent with their developmental level, suggested parroting of alienating narratives.
- In *Costley v. Benjamin* (2005),¹⁴ the child demonstrated black-and-white thinking, offering only negative statements about one parent, with no evidence of balanced or nuanced perspectives—a hallmark feature of parental alienation syndrome.
- In *Hall v. Stewart* (1998),¹⁵ the custody evaluator documented the mother’s relentless devaluation of the father. Therapy was recommended to “reprogram” the child’s cognitive and affective patterns, which had become deeply distorted.
- In *K.D. v. E.D.* (2021),¹⁶ the court found that the mother engaged in polarizing behaviors, instilled fear and hatred toward the father, and actively devalued him in front of the child.
- In *Rousos v. Boren* (2014),¹⁷ the evaluator found that the father’s denigration of the mother met partial criteria for parental alienation. However, the children still showed some openness to reunification, indicating less entrenched splitting.

These cases illustrate how group loyalty and primitive defenses—particularly splitting, denial, and devaluation—play critical roles in the development of parental alienation. An alienated child’s rejection of a parent is most often the product of internalized group narratives that distort reality and impair the child’s capacity for ambivalence. The loss of ambivalence in the parent-child relationship is not only a psychological marker of parental alienation but also a warning sign of deeper identity fusion with the alienator—ultimately compromising the child’s emotional development and autonomy. ■

¹³ *Linder v. Johnson*, 2006 WL 3425021, **8-9 (Ark. Ct. App., 2006)

¹⁴ *Costley v. Benjamin*, 2005 WL 1950114, ** 11 & 13 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2005)

¹⁵ *Hall v. Stewart*, 1998 WL 1997568, **5-6 (Mich. Ct. App., 1998)

¹⁶ *K.D. v. E.D.*, 267 A.3d 1215, 1232 (Penn. Super. Ct., 2021)

¹⁷ *Rousos v. Boren*, 2014 WL 4217415, **7-8 (Tn. Ct. App., 2014)



Contact Information for PASG Officers and PAI Editors

Mailing Address

Parental Alienation Study Group
P.O. Box 4090
Brentwood, TN 37027, USA

Board of Directors

Phillip Hendrix, MA, MBA, President
Castle Rock, Colorado, USA
info@covenantcounselors.com

Phillip Hendrix, MA, MBA, Treasurer
Castle Rock, Colorado, USA
info@covenantcounselors.com

Brian Hart, MBA, MS, Secretary
Needham, Massachusetts, USA
Brianhart123@gmail.com

Kelley Baker, PhD
Georgetown, Texas, USA
kabakerphd@gmail.com

William Bernet, MD, Past President
Nashville, Tennessee, USA
william.bernet@vumc.org

Alan D. Blotcky, PhD
Birmingham, Alabama, USA
alanblotcky@att.net

J. Michael Bone, PhD
Winter Park, Florida, USA
michael@jmichaelbone.com

Lena Hellblom Sjögren, PhD
Siljansnäs, Sweden
mail@testimonia.se

Ashish S. Joshi, LLM
Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA
a.joshi@joshiattorneys.com

Stan Korosi, PhD
Melbourne, Australia
skorosi@usc.edu.au

Editors-in-Chief

Diana Alberter
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA
dmalberter@gmail.com

Alan D. Blotcky PhD
Birmingham, Alabama, USA
alanblotcky@att.net

Managing Editor

Tom Janssen
Antwerp, Belgium
tomjanssen@outlook.com

Column Editors

Targeted Parents' Column

Editor: Diana Alberter
Pennsylvania, USA
dmalberter@gmail.com

Interventions Column

Editors: Mary Alvarez, PhD, &
Chris Turner
Texas, USA
dralvarez@resetting-the-family.com
cturner@resetting-the-family.com

Legal Column

Editor: Shawn Wygant, MA
Oscoda, MI
swygant@psychlaw.net

Book Review Editor

Brian Hart, MBA, MS
Needham, Massachusetts, USA
Brianhart123@gmail.com

Events Editor

Holly Mattingly PhD
Kentucky, USA
h.mattingly@yahoo.com

PASG Archivist

Robert Ferrer
Urbana, Illinois, USA
r-ferrer@illinois.edu

About the Parental Alienation Study Group

Parental Alienation Study Group, Inc. (PASG) is an international, not-for-profit corporation. PASG has 937 members—mostly mental health and legal professionals—from 65 countries. The members of PASG are interested in educating the general public, mental health clinicians, forensic practitioners, attorneys, and judges regarding parental alienation. PASG members are also interested in developing and promoting research on the causes, prevention, evaluation, and treatment of parental alienation.

About *Parental Alienation International*

Parental Alienation International (PAI) is published bimonthly by PASG. PAI seeks to lead and promote the scholarly discussion and debate concerning parental alienation practice, research, prevention, education, and advocacy to promote development of informed practice and policy in this field.

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