

SCIENTIFIC and PROFESSIONAL REJECTIONS OF PAS

Compiled by Professor Joan S. Meier, Esq., updated March 4, 2009

- “Although there are no data to support the phenomenon called parental alienation syndrome, in which mothers are blamed for interfering with their children’s attachment to their fathers, the term is still used by some evaluators and courts to discount children’s fears in hostile and psychologically abusive situations.”
- APA Task Force Rpt, 40¹ (emphasis added)
- "Family courts often do not consider the history of violence between the parents in making custody and visitation decisions. . . . Psychological evaluators not trained in domestic violence may contribute to this process by ignoring or minimizing the violence and by giving inappropriate pathological labels to women's responses to chronic victimization. Terms such as "parental alienation" may be used to blame the women for the children's reasonable fear of or anger toward their violent father" (emphasis added)
- APA Task Force Report, p. 100
- “PAS as a scientific theory has been excoriated by legitimate researchers across the nation. Judged solely on his merits, Dr. Gardner should be a rather pathetic footnote or an example of poor scientific standards.”
- Dr. Paul J. Fink, past President of the American Psychiatric Association²
- “The scientific status of PAS is, to be blunt, nil.”
- Emery, Otto & O’Donohue (2005)³
- Gardner’s Sexual Abuse Legitimacy Scale (“SALS”), which PAS draws heavily upon, is “[p]robably the most unscientific piece of garbage I’ve seen in the field in all my time. To base social policy on something as flimsy as this is exceedingly dangerous”
- Professor Jon Conte, a leading expert on child sexual abuse⁴
- The American Psychiatric Association has refused to include PAS in the DSM – the diagnostic directory for psychiatric disorders - despite concerted campaigns by Gardner and his followers to have it included, presumably because it is not an actual proven syndrome.
- National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse⁵

¹ American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence in the Family, “Violence and the Family” at 12 (1996)

² Carol S. Bruch, “Parental Alienation Syndrome and Parental Alienation: Getting It Wrong in Child Custody Cases,” *Family Law Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Fall 2001, 527-552, 539 (quoting Dr. Fink from Pasadena-Star News, April 24, 2000, at www.canow.org/NOWintheNews/familylaw_new_text.html)

³ Emery, R.E., Otto R.K. & O’Donohue, W. T. (2005). A Critical Assessment of Child Custody Evaluations: Limited Science and a Flawed System, *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 6(1), 1-29

⁴ Bruch, supra at 539 n. 46, citing Debra Cassens Moss, Abuse Scale, 74 A.B.A. J., Dec. 1, 1998, at 26 (quoting expert Jon Conte criticizing SALS)

⁵ Erika Rivera Ragland and Hope Fields, “Parental Alienation Syndrome: What Professionals Need to Know,” National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse (NCPCA) Update Newsletter, Volume 16, Number 6, p. 2 (2003), published by the American Prosecutors Research Institute and National District Attorneys Association, at www.ndaa.org/publications/newsletters/update_volume_16_number_6_2003.html

- “The theory positing the existence of ‘PAS’ has been discredited by the scientific community.”
- NCJFCJ Custody Evaluation Guidelines, p. 24⁶
- “Although PAS may be hailed as a “syndrome” . . . in fact it is the product of anecdotal evidence gathered from Dr. Gardner’s own practice. . . PAS is based primarily upon two notions, neither of which has a foundation in empirical research.
- National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse/American Prosecutors Research Institute/National District Attorneys Association⁷
- “PAS is not recognized by any professional associations, including the American Psychiatric Association.”
- *Id.*⁸
- “PAS is an unproven theory that can threaten the integrity of the criminal justice system and the safety of abused children.”
- *Id.*⁹
- “On balance, the search for truth about abuse would be better served if parental alienation syndrome went the way of the dinosaur.”
- THE AMERICAN PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY ON THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN¹⁰

⁶ State Justice Institute and National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges, “Navigating Custody & Visitation Evaluations in Cases with Domestic Violence: A Judge’s Guide,” (rev. 2006), p. 24

⁷ Erika Rivera Ragland and Hope Fields, “Parental Alienation Syndrome: What Professionals Need to Know,” National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse (NCPA) Update Newsletter, Volume 16, Number 6, p. 1 (2003), published by the American Prosecutors Research Institute and National District Attorneys Association, at www.ndaa.org/publications/newsletters/update_volume_16_number_6_2003.html

⁸ *Id.*, p. 2.

⁹ NCPA Update Newsletter, Volume 16, Number 7, p. 4

¹⁰ Myers, J.E.B., Berliner, L., Briere, J., Hendrix, C.T., Jenny, C., Reid, T.A., Eds., THE APSAC HANDBOOK ON CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2d Ed., p. 396 (2002)