



Parental Alienation Study Group
<https://www.pasg.info>

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Dr. Jyoti Doley, Editor in Chief
Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities
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Re: Retraction of Problematic Article

Dear Dr. Doley:

We are members of the Parental Alienation Study Group (PASG), a family advocacy organization with 1,400 members from 60 countries. Our international group of scholars, researchers, clinicians, and policymakers focuses on parental alienation and its negative consequences for children and their rejected parents.

We express here our grave concerns regarding your recently published article, “The Scientific Case Against Parental Alienation: A Critical Review” by Mr. Keith Robert Head. In our opinion, this article must be retracted because it promulgates extensive misinformation on the serious topic of parental alienation. Rather than being an objective, scientifically based review of the literature, it appears to be a polemic characterized by misstatements, distortions of fact, and blatant misinformation.

One of our team, Rabbi Yaakov Aichenbaum, already reached out to Mr. Head on January 18 and 19, 2026. Rabbi Aichenbaum pointed out, for example, that Mr. Head ignored “hundreds of peer reviewed articles that appear in many of the top academic journals as *lacking credible academic support*.” Mr. Head simply responded that he conducted a “narrative review,” which apparently allowed him to select and cite whichever resources he preferred, as long as they supported his predetermined, biased opinion on this topic.

The Head article is unacceptable in the following six areas. For each, we provide the critique as well as our rebuttal in the form of scientific information.

1. Selection Bias and Lack of Rigor

- The article relies on non-peer-reviewed and subjective sources rather than scientific data.

The selection bias is overwhelmingly obvious, in that the article cites at least 16 articles by authors who have consistently criticized parental alienation theory, including Bruch (2001), Houchin et al. (2012), Johnston (2003), Johnston and Kelly (2004), Katz (2015), Kelly and Johnston (2001), Lapierre et al. (2016), Meier (2009, 2019, 2020), Mercer (2022), Milchman (2019), Mooney (2024), Rowen and Emery (2014), Silberg and Dallam (2019), and Willis and O'Donohue (2018).

The article's lack of scientific rigor is reflected by its citing non-peer-reviewed documents, including Alsalem (2023), Dreyfus (2023), and NCJFCJ (2021).

- **Scientific Rebuttal:** In contrast, the article cites exactly one article by a proponent of parental alienation theory, i.e., Rueda (2004).

In the parental alienation literature, there are more than 1,000 peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly book chapters. For example, the two articles below are excellent examples of the status of the scientific literature regarding parental alienation.

Harman J. J., Warshak, R. A., Lorandos, D., & Florian, M. J. (2022). Developmental psychology and the scientific status of parental alienation. *Developmental Psychology*, 58(10), 1887–1911.

Marsden, J. (2025). The scientific rigor of parental alienation studies: A quality assessment of the peer-reviewed research. *Partner Abuse*. Available online prior to publication.

2. Ad Hominem Attacks Against Richard Gardner

- The article attacks Richard Gardner and some of that content constitutes misleading statements, such as: (1) “Gardner formulated PAS based on his subjective, anecdotal clinical observations from his practice rather than peer-reviewed scientific studies” (p. 64). (2) “Gardner avoided peer-review while creating an appearance of legitimate third-party validation” (p. 64). (3) “No controlled studies have supported the theory, and Gardner’s claims have not been independently replicated” (p. 65). (4) “The body of empirical research that does exist appears to contradict rather than support the concept’s core claims” (p. 65).

- **Scientific Rebuttal:** These false statements are addressed as follows:

(1) It is normal and typical for a new medical or psychological condition to be identified and described based on a practitioner's personal clinical observations. For example: George Huntington described "hereditary chorea" (Huntington's disease) in 1872; Leo Kanner described "infantile autism" in 1943; Gilles de la Tourette published an account of nine patients with Tourette Syndrome in 1885. Gardner should be complimented rather than criticized for identifying and describing a novel psychological condition in the context of his own practice as a child psychiatrist.

(2) It is blatant misinformation to say that Gardner did not publish in peer-reviewed journals. Our records indicate that Gardner published at least 18 articles regarding parental alienation in peer-reviewed journals in 1989 (two articles), 1991, 1998 (two articles), 1999 (three articles), 2001, 2002 (four articles), 2003 (two articles), 2004 (three articles). For details, see the extensive bibliography in Bernet, W. (2010), *Parental Alienation, DSM-5, and ICD-11*.

(3) and (4) As stated above, there are more than 1,000 peer-reviewed journal and scholarly book chapters regarding parental alienation. See the review articles by Harman et al. (2022) and by Marsden (2025) and the extensive bibliography in Bernet, W. (2010).

3. Misinformation Regarding Parental Alienation and Estrangement

- The author falsely claims: (1) "While PAS provides a possible explanation for a breach in relationship between a child and a parent, it ignores evidence that children may have valid reasons for rejecting a parent" (p. 65). (2) "Researchers alleging parental alienation behaviors acknowledge that no reliable instruments exist to differentiate parental alienation from justified estrangement in cases where children have been victimized by abuse or family violence and appropriately fear or reject the offending parent (Saini et al., 2016)" (p. 66).
- **Scientific Rebuttal:** These false statements are addressed as follows:

(1) For at least 20 years, proponents of parental alienation theory have stated clearly that there are multiple causes of contact refusal or parent-child contact problem, which must be considered when a child refuses to have a relationship with a parent. For example, see: Freeman, B. W. (2020). The psychosocial assessment of contact refusal. In D. Lorandos and W. Bernet, *Parental Alienation – Science and Law* (pp. 44–81).

(2) First, the author is misrepresenting the opinion of Saini et al. (2016). In that same book chapter, Saini et al. famously said: "There is remarkable agreement

about the behavioral strategies parents can use to potentially manipulate their children's feelings, attitudes, and beliefs in ways that may interfere with their relationship with the other parent. The cluster of symptoms or behaviors indicating the presence of alienation in the child can also be reliably identified" See: Saini, M., Johnston, J. R., Fidler, B. J., and Bala, N. (2016). In L. Drozd, M. Saini, and N. Olesen (Eds.), *Parenting Plan Evaluations: Applied Research for the Family Court* (2nd ed., p. 423).

Furthermore, the Five-Factor Model for the diagnosis of parental alienation is a generally accepted and reliable way to distinguish alienation from estrangement. The five factors are: the child manifests contact resistance or refusal; a prior positive relationship between the child and the rejected parent; absence of abuse, neglect, or seriously deficient parenting by the rejected parent; alienating behaviors manifested by the favored parent; and behavioral manifestations of alienation in the child. See: Bernet W., and Greenhill, L. L. (2022). The Five-Factor Model for the diagnosis of parental alienation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 61(5): 591–594.

4. Gender and Ideological Biases

- The author claims that parental alienation is a tool used by abusive men to gain custody of their children. He relies on two prominent publications for that argument: (1) The Family Court Outcomes Study, reported by Meier (2020). (2) The non-peer-reviewed report of the Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (Alsalem, 2023).
- **Scientific Rebuttal:** The author relied on two documents that have been thoroughly critiqued and refuted by parental alienation scholars. The Meier (2020) article was reviewed and criticized by: Harman, J. J., Lorandos, D. (2021). Allegations of family violence in court: How parental alienation affects judicial outcomes. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 27(2), 184–208. Another pertinent article is: Harman, J. J., Kruk, E., & Hines, D. A. (2018). Parental alienating behaviors: An unacknowledged form of family violence. *Psychological Bulletin* 144(12),1275–1299.

The Alsalem (2023) report is an extremely biased and unscientific document. The report was reviewed and criticized by members of the Parental Alienation Study Group and Global Action for Research Integrity in Parental Alienation, and the review was published as *An Analysis of the Report by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, Its Causes and Consequences to the United Nations Human Right Council*. The analysis by PASG and GARI-PA can be found at: <https://www.wir-vaeter.at/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/20230602-Analysis-Report-Special-Rapporteur.pdf>.

5. Argument from Ignorance

- In another example of blatant misinformation, the author says: “Perhaps most significant, is the consistent refusal of major medical, psychiatric, and psychological professional organizations to recognize PAS as a legitimate theory or diagnostic criterion” (p. 65). Specifically, the author cites out-of-date documents—that is, American Psychological Association (1996) and National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (2021)—that misrepresent the current position of those organizations.
- **Scientific Rebuttal:** In the United States, parental alienation has been accepted in legal circles in every state. Also, the concept of parental alienation has been recognized by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (1997), the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (2015), the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016/2022), the American Psychological Association (2022), the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (2019, 2022), and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judge (2022). For more information and detailed references, see: Parental Alienation Study Group (2025), The recognition of parental alienation by professional organizations. In *Parental Alienation Theory: Official Synopsis* (pp. 101–108). The PDF of this book is available for free on the homepage of www.pasg.info.

6. Misinformation Regarding the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR)*

- The following statement by Head is highly misleading: “The American Psychiatric Association has consistently declined to include PAS in any edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* due to insufficient empirical evidence supporting it as a distinct mental disorder” (p. 65).
- **Scientific Rebuttal:** The DSM distinguishes “mental disorders” (which occur within the minds of affected individuals) and “mental conditions” (which occur between individuals, such as relational problems). The leadership of the DSM have consistently said that parental alienation should be considered a mental condition, since it involves an interaction among three family members. In fact, the definitions of the following DSM relational problems include the concept of parental alienation: child affected by parental relationship distress, parent–child relational problem, and child psychological abuse. For a more complete discussion, see Parental Alienation Study Group (2025), Parental alienation, DSM, and ICD. In *Parental Alienation Theory: Official Synopsis* (pp.125–131). The PDF of this book is available for free on the homepage of www.pasg.info.

This letter summarizes only the major deficiencies of the Head article. We can provide a more detailed commentary if you find that helpful. However, the serious flaws explained here are more than enough reason for you to promptly retract this article from publication. We believe that the article satisfies the criteria for retraction promulgated by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

This request is urgent because the Head article is already being cited by critics and detractors to say that parental alienation theory “lacks validation, reliability, and scientific rigor.” For example, a post on social media states: “A January 2026 peer reviewed review found that parental alienation originated from anecdotal clinical observations rather than peer reviewed scientific studies. As the research makes clear, this theory was never grounded in controlled research. Anecdotes do not meet the evidentiary threshold required to justify separating children from a safe parent” (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17TxaMfANp/>). That short post, based on Head (2026), contains multiple false statements.

The authors of this letter include Rabbi Yaakov Aichenbaum, William Bernet, M.D., Alan Blotcky, Ph.D., Michael Bone, Ph.D., Jennifer Harman, Ph.D., Brian Hart, Ph.D., Phillip Hendrix, M.A., MBA, Ben Hine, Ph.D., Stan Korosi, Ph.D., Jesper Lohse, Ph.D., and Joshua Marsden, Ph.D. However, please send your response to the undersigned at the email addresses indicated below.

Yours truly,

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