



Parental Alienation Study Group
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Dear Dr. Chen and Dr. Yang:

We are concerned about the recent article, "When Retraction Replaces Rebuttal: Suppression of Critical Scholarship on Parental Alienation," by Keith Robert Head (*Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics*, 11:1807122, published April 28, 2026). By way of introduction, we are the president (Phillip Hendrix, M.A., MBA) and former president (William Bernet, M.D.) of the Parental Alienation Study Group, the largest and most active organization in the world that promotes research and education regarding parental alienation theory. Our website: www.pasg.info.

We are concerned because the article by Mr. Head contains a number of false statements regarding parental alienation (PA) theory and the professional literature about PA. By "false statements," we *do not* mean simple difference of opinion among writers and experts, but outright incorrect statements of fact, that is, misinformation or disinformation. The false statements are mixed with true statements and a few misleading statements. We provide several examples in the same order in which they appear in the original article.

MISLEADING: "*Parental alienation (PA) remains one of the most contested concepts in psychiatry, psychology, law, and social work.*" Most PA scholars agree with that statement. However, the statement is misleading because it implies that there is disagreement about the basic premise of PA theory, that is, that a parent can indoctrinate or influence a child to dislike and fear the other parent. On the contrary, in one survey of family law professionals, 98% of the participants agreed that a favored parent can influence a child to dislike and avoid the other parent. The "contested" aspects of PA theory pertain to topics such as the criteria for identify PA in a family and appropriate strategies for intervention.

FALSE: “[T]he concept has been excluded from the DSM-5 for insufficient evidence of validity and reliability” Head provided no citation for that statement. The leadership of the DSM-5 revision process did not question the scientific basis for the concept of PA. They agreed that PA exists and is a problem for children of high-conflict families. The DSM-5 Revision Committee said PA is not a “mental disorder” because it does not occur within the mind of the affected individual. Instead, they considered PA a “relational problem” because it occurs *between* two affected individuals.

FALSE: “The American Psychological Association [APA], the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges [NCJFCJ], and the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children [APSAC] have either rejected or cautioned against its use” Head provided no citation for that statement. Regarding the APA and the NCJFCJ, Head is relying on very old opinions from those organizations—20 to 30 years old. In recent years, the APA and the NCJFCJ have fully endorsed the reality and importance of PA. Regarding APSAC, Head’s statement is TRUE.

TRUE: “The concept continues to play a role in custody proceedings in multiple countries, making the terms of the debate consequential for courts, practitioners, and families.”

TRUE: “The most extensively documented suppression effort targeted *Challenging Parental Alienation: New Directions for Professionals and Parents* by Mercer and Drew (2021) Following its publication, prominent PA proponents submitted a 126-page critique requesting retraction, endorsed by 45 organizations.” It is correct that PASG members and colleagues analyzed *Challenging Parental Alienation* in great detail and tried to have it retracted from publication.

MISLEADING: “Following the publication of my own critical narrative review of the PA literature (Head, 2026), I received multiple emails from PA proponents pressuring me to retract or withdraw the article.” This statement is misleading because it is incomplete. It is correct that several individuals contacted Head about his article, “The Scientific Case Against Parental Alienation: A Critical Review.” It is noteworthy that the publisher of the *Integrated Journal of Research in Arts and Humanities* retracted Head’s article from publication due to the many false statements and other misinformation in the article.

FALSE: “[A] search of the published records ... failed to identify any instances in which critics of parental alienation have initiated formal retraction campaigns against publication by PA advocates.” However, the writers of this letter are personally aware of one instance in which a PA critic prompted the retraction of a book chapter by a PA proponent, and another instance in which a PA critic requested a change to a sentence in a journal article.

FALSE: “Retraction exists under COPE guidelines in address fabrication, plagiarism, and serious ethical violations, not to adjudicate disputes over interpretation or methodology (COPE Council, 2025).” Head refers several times to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) to bolster his case that PASG and our colleagues are overusing the use of retraction to correct errors in scientific literature. He implies that COPE says that retraction is justified only in major transgressions, such as “fabrication, plagiarism, and serious ethical violations.” But actually, the *COPE Retraction Guidelines* convey a much broader landscape in which retraction might be appropriate. The *Guidelines* say: “Retraction might be warranted if ... there is clear evidence of major errors, irregularities in the data or images, or any form of misrepresentation (e.g., fraud, identity theft, or fictitious authorship) that compromise the reliability of the findings.”

Whenever PASG members sought correction or retraction, the problematic material clearly came under the topic of “any form of misrepresentation ... that compromise the reliability of the findings.”

FALSE: “*The complaints have instead centered on what complainants characterize as misinformation, a framing that conflates theoretical disagreement and with scientific misconduct and repurposes integrity mechanism for what are substantive scholarly disputes.*” This is the most important false statement in Head’s article. When PASG members have petitioned to have published material corrected, amended, rebutted, or retracted, *we have not* been concerned about “theoretical disagreement” or “substantive scholarly disputes.” Instead, we have always tried to correct factual errors in articles, book chapters, and presentations. In fact, that is what we are doing with this letter to the editor of *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics*; that is, we are concerned about factual errors in the article by Head, and not with a “substantive scholarly dispute.”

FALSE: “*What distinguishes the campaigns documented here is that the objections center on interpretation and conclusions rather than on the forms of misconduct retraction guidelines were written to address.*” Head provided no citation for that statement. As noted previously, retraction guidelines pertain to “any form of misrepresentation ... that compromise the reliability of the findings.” Also, Head is repeatedly claiming that PASG objections pertain to “interpretation and conclusions,” which is incorrect. PASG has consistently endeavored to correct false statements and misinformation, not differences in opinion among writers.

FALSE: “*The campaigns [of PA proponents] do not identify fabrication or fraud. They identify conclusions the campaigners oppose and seek to remove them from the literature.*” Once again, Head misrepresents the strategies that PASG members use to correct misinformation. We consistently try to correct false statements, which amount to “fabrication.” For example, we arranged for the retraction of the paper that Head recently published in the *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*. In that article, Head (2026) blatantly stated the following three fabrications: (1) “Gardner avoided peer-review while creating an appearance of legitimate third-party validation” (p. 64). (2) “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). And (3) “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). These are factually false statements by Head, not simply divergent opinions and conclusions among experts. We can prove these are false statements by citing specific material from the PA literature.

CONCLUSION: Head’s recent article in *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics* contains numerous false and misleading statements, some of which are identified in this letter to the editor. Once again, these statements are factually incorrect, not simply our disagreement with Head’s opinions and conclusions. Evidence that these are false statements can be found by referring to the underlying documents, i.e., the primary sources for this information.

The *Frontiers* establishment should not let these false statements stand, since they are seriously misinforming your readers. The false statements about specific proponents of PA theory may amount to defamation. We see three possible solutions: (1) Correcting the online article with multiple corrigenda and

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then publishing only the corrected version of the article. Head can state his opinions and his conclusions without making any reference at all to the activities of PASG members. (2) The *Frontiers* editors should consider retraction of the entire article by Head. We realize that suggestion is somewhat ironic, since the entire message of the article criticizes peremptory and inappropriate retraction of journal articles and book chapters. (3) A third possibility is for our colleagues and us to prepare and submit a commentary regarding Head's objectionable article. We reject this option because Head's article in its current form would continue to be available for citation by critics of PA theory, which propagates the misinformation.

Thank you for reading this lengthy letter to the editor. Let us know if you want to discuss any of this by conference call or Zoom. Also, please let us know how you intend to correct this error in your publishing activities. The best way to get in touch is at our email addresses below.

Yours truly,

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