



EDITORIAL

# Does Evil Underlie Some Cases of Parental Alienation Syndrome? Commentary and a Working Hypothesis

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## ABSTRACT

Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) emerges predominantly in the context of child-custody disputes, where one parent (the alienator) systematically denigrates the other parent (the alienated parent) to the child. This paper delves into the hypothesis that evil underlies some cases of PAS, examining its implications and the way it corrupts individuals. PAS manifests in varying degrees of severity, from mild to severe, and is characterized by behaviors such as a campaign of denigration, lack of ambivalence, and the spread of animosity to the alienated parent's extended family. The paper argues that PAS constitutes a form of child abuse, significantly harming the child's well-being and relationship with the alienated parent. The alienating parent's actions are seen as embodying evil, driven by narcissistic traits and unresolved attachment traumas, which they project onto the child, creating a harmful cycle of emotional abuse and alienation. The paper also discusses the long-term emotional effects on children, including anxiety, depression, diminished self-esteem, and difficulties in forming intimate relationships. These adverse effects carry over into adulthood, leading to ongoing relational and emotional difficulties. The viewpoint of alienated parents is explored, revealing significant psychosocial trends such as feelings of powerlessness, loss of moral parental authority, and unanticipated relational stress. Suggested psychotherapeutic approaches for targeted parents and affected adults are provided to help manage the complex emotions and relational challenges resulting from PAS. The paper concludes that the behaviors and intentions of PAS-inducing parents align with the concept of evil, as they systematically manipulate and harm the child, leading to irrevocable emotional and spiritual damage.

**Keywords:** child abuse; evil; narcissism; parental alienation syndrome; targeted parent

## Introduction

Parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is thought to arise solely in the context of child-custody disputes.<sup>1</sup> PAS occurs when “one parent (the alienator, the alienating parent, the PAS-inducing parent) induces a program of denigration against the other parent (the alienated parent, the victim, the denigrated parent).”<sup>2</sup> During legal proceedings, the child becomes the PAS-inducing parent’s weapon of choice in their relentless crusade of criticism, denigration, and hatred toward the alienated parent.<sup>3</sup>

There are mild, moderate, and severe forms of PAS.<sup>1</sup> The child in the mild form cooperates with visitation, but may become episodically critical and dissatisfied. In the moderate form, the campaign of alienation is practically continuous, and the child becomes more adversarial and petulant. In the severe form, visitations become almost impossible, and the child’s hostility can turn into violence toward the targeted and despised parent. The primary characteristics of PAS include the following behaviors: (1) “The Campaign of Denigration;” (2) “Weak, Frivolous, or Absurd Rationalizations for the Deprecation;” (3) “Lack of Ambivalence;” (4) “The ‘Independent’ Thinker Phenomenon” (i.e., the resistance from the child is of their own thinking); (5) “Reflexive Support of the Loved Parent in the Parental Conflict;” (6) “Absence of Guilt over the Denigration and/or Exploitation of the ‘Hated’ Parent;” (7) “The Presence of Borrowed Scenarios” (i.e., when the child tells the preferred PAS-inducing parent’s story about the targeted parent); and (8) “Spread of Animosity to the Friends and/or Extended Family of the Hated Parent.”<sup>1</sup>

There is confusion about whether or not PAS is a bonafide mental disorder. The late Dr. Richard A. Gardner, the originator and proponent of PAS, argued that it is a legitimate syndrome with an actual cluster of symptoms, making it worthy of inclusion in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).<sup>4</sup> Other individuals have argued that the research supporting PAS as a diagnosis is limited, which may result in severe adverse consequences.<sup>5</sup> Others have argued that the PAS debate should remain exclusively in the courtroom, and not in the DSM, fearing confusion among mental health practitioners and the courts.<sup>6</sup>

What seems less controversial is that PAS harms the child and the child’s relationship with the alienated parent. According to Kruk, two fundamental aspects of parental alienation—specifically, the child’s development of a severe mental condition as a result of the alienating parent’s strategies—align with two key elements of child abuse.<sup>7</sup> The first key element pertains to the harm inflicted on the child by both abuse and parental alienation, significantly undermining the child’s well-being. The second key element concerns the essential human agency involved in perpetrating this form of abuse, emphasizing the necessity of deliberate human intention. This abuse can lead to a fractured and damaged relationship between the child and the alienated parent. More significantly, the alienator’s campaign of denigration may erode the child’s sense of self, autonomy, and self-agency, as well as their ability to empathize with others and regulate their emotions.

Consequently, it is clear that PAS constitutes a form of child abuse resulting from the intentional actions of the alienating parent.

Initially, I found it challenging to view PAS from a perspective beyond child abuse due to its complexity. However, as my clinical interest in PAS grew, I began to understand it through the lens of evil—examining its implications and the way it corrupts individuals. In certain cases of PAS, human evil seems to play a significant role. Therefore, in this editorial, I will argue that, while not universally recognized as a psychiatric concept, evil is an essential factor in some instances of PAS. This intrinsic evil fuels the motivations of the parent who alienates, leading to child abuse, and irrevocably damaging the relationship between the child and the alienated parent.

## Methodology

To support this hypothesis, I conducted computer searches across multiple databases, including PubMed, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, examining articles from 1970 to 2024. The keywords used included “Parental Alienation Syndrome,” “Parental Alienation,” “Child Abuse,” “Evil,” and “Narcissism.” Many of these terms were searched in combination with one another. References from the initial search were reviewed, and relevant journals and books were hand-searched. Articles and books were included if they addressed any aspect of parental alienation or PAS that could be linked to the concept of evil.

## Human Evil in the Context of Parental Alienation Syndrome

Most well-meaning parents attempt to exert control of their children on some level, and often for justifiable reasons (e.g., grabbing a child that is about to run across the street or lovingly punishing a child to build proper ethics and morals). Such parents work with consistent efforts to maintain healthy attachments while also encouraging their children to individuate as people in this ever-changing and complex world, which is filled with an endless array of challenges and uncertainties.

Parents that function to persistently alienate the other parent, in contrast, are doing the opposite of what good parents do. They commit deliberate acts of denigration toward the alienated parent, which can only result in harm, and whose undertaking necessitates exerting significant pernicious and overt control over the child’s actions, thoughts, and feelings. Parents who condone behavior representative of PAS are in my opinion committing acts of evil and/or embodying evil itself.

According to M. Scott Peck, evil is some force “residing either inside or outside of human beings, that seeks to kill life or liveliness,” and which includes the desire to control others (i.e., to make them controllable), to support their dependency, to limit the capacity to think for themselves, to lessen their unpredictability and originality, and to foster obedience.<sup>8</sup> Peck has also defined evil as a power used “to destroy the spiritual growth of others for the purpose of defending and preserving the integrity of our own sick selves.”<sup>8</sup> Zimbardo has defined evil as “*intentionally behaving in ways that harm, abuse, demean, dehumanize, or destroy innocent others-or using one’s*

authority and systematic power to encourage or permit others to do so on your behalf.”<sup>9</sup> Guirdham noted that “evil is an emanation with a capacity to wither whatever it encounters in its path,” resembling “a malevolent wind of incalculable force which achieves majestic acts of destruction, as in the case of tornadoes, or withers the grass by its more surreptitious machinations.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, alienating parents actively and chronically manipulate their children because they both embody and commit acts of evil, in addition to deep-seated narcissism, and destroy the liveliness of their innocent children. Moreover, this evil causes incalculable withering effects that prevent these children from having formed essential relationships with the important other, non-preferred parents, further impeding their growth and maturation into normal and healthy functioning adults.

While most PAS-inducing parents are women, research has shown that both women and men can play the role of PAS-inducing parents.<sup>11</sup> The intention here is not to denigrate women (or men), but rather to place blame on the evil behaviors and values that PAS-inducing parents embody, participate in, and promote. There are legitimate situations where it would make logical sense to alienate a parent from a child if, for instance, the alienated parent was abusive and when there is a strong likelihood that abuse will occur, such as physical and/or sexual abuse. PAS has also been used in custody battles between parents, each accusing the other to garner legal leverage. The way PAS is positioned in this paper, however, is in stark contrast to these types of abuse and involves circumstances where the targeted parent is certainly a good enough parent and is not abusive in any manner, but has been denied access to the child (or time with the child has been severely limited), as well as the ability to play an integral role in the life of that child.

## The Characteristics of Human Evil as Embodied by Parental Alienation Syndrome

Siegel and Langford examined the personality of PAS-inducing parents to better understand the psychopathology behind the perpetration and determine if some common personality features underlie the motivations of the alienators.<sup>12</sup> All subjects in their study were female, and all were involved in child custody litigation. Of the 34 subjects (mean age: 38.1 years), 16 met the study criteria (p. 3., “The PAS criteria”) for PAS-inducing parents whereas the remaining 18 subjects did not.<sup>12</sup> All parents were administered the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) to determine if there were psychopathological differences between the two groups of parents. The results demonstrated that the PAS-inducing parents responded to the test items “in such a way as to appear highly virtuous and without emotional problems or difficulties.”<sup>12</sup> These types of psychological defenses - those that manifested as needing to be perceived a certain way - were believed to be consistent with psychological defenses “typically used by people with the externalizing personality disorders (histrionic, borderline, narcissistic, and paranoid).”<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the MMPI-2 results indicated that these parents often viewed themselves as “all good,” frequently employed psychological defenses

like splitting, projection, and denial, and relied heavily on “defensive distortion” to navigate their experiences.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, a narrative review underscored the significant impact of narcissistic traits on parental alienation.<sup>13</sup> It pointed out how the alienating parent encourages the child to reject the other parent, driven by their own vulnerabilities and psychological needs. Within a psychodynamic-psychoanalytic framework, the review contends that the alienating parent projects their unresolved attachment traumas onto the child, creating a harmful cycle of emotional abuse and alienation.

These findings do not necessarily mean that PAS-inducing parents are evil. These findings merely point to shared personality features that might make it more likely for these parents to engage in behaviors that embody evil while also believing themselves to be just in thinking that they are operating in the best interests of their children. This is further complicated by the frank fact that evil is difficult to describe and articulate, and yet we know it when we see it and/or we know it when we experience it.

There are many ways in which alienating parents may commit acts of evil. While I have not studied them systematically, I have attempted to group them by two overarching central characteristics: (1) dehumanization and (2) moral judgments and denigration, which could be linked or connected to the behaviors and motivations of alienating parents.

### DEHUMANIZATION OF THE TARGETED PARENT

One of the most salient features of evil ideology is its ability to dehumanize other people. According to Zimbardo, “Dehumanization is like a cortical cataract that clouds one’s thinking and fosters the perception that other people are less than human,” while making “some people come to see others as enemies deserving of torment, torture, and annihilation.”<sup>9</sup> Within the context of PAS, it is possible that the overarching modus operandi for some alienating parents is to dehumanize the targeted parent so that they become less relevant (and, in time, completely irrelevant) in the child’s life. I constructed a list to delineate the dehumanizing ways that typify PAS, including its perniciousness and damaging effects, and how it serves to maintain the deification of the alienator by maintaining superiority and control over the child’s actions and affections. The alienating parent overtly and/or subtly sends consistent messages, demonstrating the targeted parent’s irrelevance through engagement in the following acts:

1. Not speaking about the targeted parent.
2. Abruptly terminating conversations involving the targeted parent.
3. Not acknowledging the existence of the targeted parent.
4. Destroying photographs or history of the targeted parent.
5. Undermining, not acknowledging, and/or acting indifferently when the child expresses or shares positive experiences with the targeted parent.
6. Manipulating the child’s scheduled time with the targeted parent to diminish the time spent

together.

7. Permitting the child to determine visitation dates and times despite any pre-established arrangements.
8. The targeted parent is excluded from salient events in the child's life by not informing them of specific dates and/or the events themselves.
9. Obliterating the very existence of the targeted parent<sup>14</sup> by, for example, completely withholding the targeted parent's name and address from places, such as the school that the child attends.

#### MORAL JUDGMENTS AND DENIGRATION TOWARD THE TARGETED PARENT

Alienated parents report feeling sabotaged "of their relationships with their children by the alienators," and also believe the alienators to use denigrating techniques to signal, for example, that the alienated parents are "not good people."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, alienated parents believe that the underlying motivation comes from hatred, anger, revenge, or a combination thereof.<sup>14</sup>

Alienated parents have shown this to be a rather common phenomenon. They feel very much maligned and unfairly judged by PAS-inducing parents, who are almost always custodial parents. The children spent much more time with the PAS-inducing parents and then came to view the targeted parents in the same contemptuous manner.

### The Psychosocial Consequences of Parental Alienation from the Perspective of the Alienated Parent

The viewpoint of alienated or targeted parents is receiving increased attention in research, revealing significant psychosocial trends and effects. Vassiliou and Cartwright summarized the numerous adverse psychosocial effects among a small cohort of interviewed parents.<sup>15</sup> Their "Summary of Results," identified the following salient findings: A loss of both parental role and power; decreased contact with the child; a strained or lost relationship with the child despite frequent attempts to connect without any reply; and experiencing serious negative emotional consequences.<sup>15</sup> These adverse consequences appear to have come from the alienator's abuse of power, their ability to manipulate others for their own selfish needs, and their apparent pleasure from having been able to render the targeted parent as both redundant and repugnant to their child, and likely to other people who inhabit their inner circle.

Research has systematically examined the effects and prevalence of adults who experience parental alienation behaviors.<sup>16</sup> In the United States, approximately 35.5% of parents and around 32% in Canada perceive themselves as victims of such behaviors, highlighting the significant impact of parental alienation on countless families. Those affected by these behaviors have reported elevated levels of depression, symptoms of trauma, and suicidal ideation.

I have also delineated the psychosocial consequences that I have observed among clients that have been targeted, and thus, severely distanced or excommunicated from

their children. These have not been subject to any systematic analysis but come from my own clinical observations and experiences.

**POWERLESSNESS AND FEELINGS OF UNIMPORTANCE**  
Targeted parents try to empower themselves to alter the outcome, but their exes' behaviors have a much more powerful influence on their children's lives. They also experienced pervasive feelings of unimportance, impotence, or redundancy.

#### LOSS OF MORAL PARENTAL AUTHORITY

Targeted parents have been limited in modelling the type of moral parental authority they believe to be instrumental in shaping their children. The decline of moral parental authority leads to reduced involvement in important decisions regarding their children's lives, particularly in areas like health and education. These losses are yet another tragedy of alienation, for the children do not receive the tutelage that these parents could have provided; similarly, these parents are robbed of assuming the parental role they had always longed for.

#### COMPENSATORY BEHAVIORS

By trying to compensate for lost time, targeted parents often behave in ways that are contrary to how they would normally act. Because they are always trying to gain their children's affections, they sometimes withhold honesty, exaggerate the fun they are supposedly having, and/or excessively indulge in too many compliments or the provision of disingenuous positive reinforcement. It becomes a significant challenge for targeted parents to authentically parent when under the constant threat of either not seeing their children and/or losing predetermined protected time such as vacations, weekend visits, dinners, etc.

#### COMPLICATED FEELINGS

Targeted parents experience conflicting feelings toward their children. They often feel anger by having been neglected by their children despite their efforts to connect. They also miss their children and feel the emotional absence that they desperately want to mend. They never anticipated having to endure this strange and complex form of emotional pain.

#### UNANTICIPATED RELATIONAL STRESS

Targeted parents can become entangled in the chaos since their actions threaten the genuine relationships that support them. Often, these parents prioritize the needs of their children and ex-spouses over what is necessary, neglecting other significant individuals in their lives. As a result, their current relationships may suffer because of occasional emotional unavailability or absence.

### The Psychosocial Consequences of Parental Alienation Syndrome upon the Child

Qualitative research has been conducted to evaluate adults alienated from parents as children.<sup>11</sup> Forty subjects were selected and interviewed because the alienation they reported was determined in part to be due to the attitudes and behaviors of the other parent. The subjects

were between 19 and 67 years of age (mean age=40.5; standard deviation=11.5). Fifteen subjects were male and 25 were female. Twenty-nine of the participants reported that their parents were divorced during childhood. In most cases, except for six subjects, the alienating parent was the mother. The most consistent pattern identified was “NARCISSISTIC MOTHER IN DIVORCED FAMILY,” which occurred in 14 subjects.<sup>11</sup> This pattern described mothers who were custodial parents that exhibited narcissistic personality traits. The subjects felt that they were forced into an emotionally enmeshed relationship with their mothers, which was prioritized to their detriment and in lieu of their own emotional growth and development. The results showed that as children, they were required to serve their mothers’ needs for love and admiration and to express feelings of admiration and awe.

The results also demonstrated that when the participants were children, they felt forced to be complicit in the badmouthing of the targeted parent because of their mothers’ feelings of abandonment and rejection.<sup>11</sup> As children, the participants were exposed to their mothers’ intense hatred and admonitions, such that they also felt rejected by the targeted parent. Moreover, when they showed a desire to have a relationship with the targeted parent, the participants were admonished by their mothers. The mothers also created loyalty conflicts with the participants when they were children, which meant that they were forced to choose their mothers over the targeted parent. Essentially, the results showed that there were two distinct strategies - i.e., “cultivation of dependency/threat of rejection and a creation of a sense of obligation/guilt” by which the mothers influenced the adult subjects when they were children.<sup>11</sup>

These effects are so damaging that they are “cataclysmic to the child’s long-term development and well-being,” and are “likely to have catastrophic consequences for that child throughout the child’s life.”<sup>14</sup> The child has lost so much by not being part of the alienated parent’s ongoing life, losing intimacy and love, not receiving the infusion of morals and values, and not having a more nuanced self-awareness that can only be enhanced by being in a relationship with the alienated parent and, by extension, the alienated parent’s extended family.

Children deprived of the targeted parent often experience a host of other psychosocial consequences, such as anxiety, the need to hide affection, trouble making sense of the world, self-blame, self-loathing, feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy, having an inflexible/rigid worldview, difficulty experiencing feelings, dependency, guilt, confusion, and even damaging intergenerational effects.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the alienating parent’s narcissism leads children to experience low self-esteem, guilt, difficulties in forming intimate relationships, and a range of psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, and impulse control problems.<sup>13</sup> These adverse effects carry over into adulthood, leading to ongoing relational and emotional difficulties.<sup>13</sup> I will now describe the more salient psychosocial consequences that play a significant negative role in the development of such children by

drawing upon Steinberger’s work.<sup>14</sup>

**UNWANTED ANXIETIES, AND HIDING/REPRESSING POSITIVE FEELINGS TOWARD THE ALIENATED PARENT**  
These children have to manage unwanted anxiety because of the need to appease the emotional insecurities of the PAS-inducing parent. Many of their anxiety is brought on because they are admonished and/or pressured when openly expressing affection or enthusiasm toward the targeted parent.

One can only imagine how intense their anxieties are when in the presence of alienating parents, unless they are behaving as expected. This pattern of hiding positive feelings and appeasing alienators has continued for many years as a necessary self-preserving strategy. As these children age from toddlers to teenagers, they become less amenable to spending time with the targeted parent, less communicative, and less able to have fun around them. Eventually, their anxieties become displaced by anger, resentment, and/or ambivalence. They end up behaving, as though nothing positive can come from being around the targeted parent and their extended family.

**TROUBLE MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD, DIFFICULTIES WITH EMOTIONAL REGULATION, AND HAVING A RIGID/INFLEXIBLE WORLDVIEW**

Children rely on their parents to learn about the world. Parents become the social reference by which children navigate their own experiences, from which they build comfort about their emotions, and what is safe and trustworthy. In situations involving parental alienation, the child adapts, but to their detriment and out of necessity, by staying attuned to the emotional needs and states of the alienating parent. As a result, most of what they learned from the world came from the vantage point of the alienating parent. This overinvestment in the alienating parent’s emotional needs, or stated differently, this ascription of tremendous importance to the alienating parent’s emotions, has the adverse effect of reducing the child’s confidence and capacity in their own emotional regulation.

The child has thus learned to relate by neglecting their own feelings and, ultimately, by sacrificing them to maintain ongoing relational stability and appeasement with that of the alienator. The child becomes over reliant on the alienator to co-regulate and make sense of their emotional life. This has the detrimental effect of acculturating the child to a one-sided dominant worldview that is shaped, pruned, and grossly distorted by that of the alienating parent. The child also adopted much of the alienating parents’ psychologies. As children age and mature along their developmental path, they eventually assume a similar worldview and psychology akin to the alienator, which becomes more or less internalized as their own.

These children have been grossly deprived of developing a more well-rounded perspective of the world and a more nuanced psychological flexibility to manage their emotions and the difficulties inherent in daily life. Enmeshed with PAS-inducing parents for extended

periods of time, this devastatingly undermines their capacity to gain enough personal insight to understand the sheer magnitude that these deprivations have had upon them and their personal development.

**LACK OF EMPATHY AND INTERPERSONAL CHALLENGES**  
Regrettably, as these children age, it appears that they become less capable of being empathetic in situations that should normally invoke this type of response. Because the PAS-inducing parent was unable to be truly empathetic, the children became similarly challenged and experienced difficulties attuning themselves to the suffering of other people. They also tend to adopt personality traits that distance themselves from others, such as self-absorption, difficulties with honesty (i.e., with self-disclosure), and difficulties extending themselves to others, unless there is the promise of personal gain (e.g., presents and/or money).

This makes it difficult for many children to meet the interpersonal demands of their lives. This does not seem surprising, as some of these children were raised with the singular purpose of being almost exclusively at the beck and call of their respective PAS-inducing parents. They were not raised to acquire normal interpersonal skills, which would have helped them to be more relatable to others and feel more relatable to themselves. All of this ultimately yields a more isolated and individualistic existence, even though all of these adverse consequences would largely remain outside their own awareness.

#### **PARENTAL DEPENDENCY AND REJECTION OF THE TARGETED PARENT**

It is possible that a disproportionate number of PAS-inducing parents were notably clingy during their marriages or partnerships. Thus, for most of these children, the breakup of their parents' marriages (or partnerships) resulted in PAS-inducing parents clinging to them. These enmeshed relationships force these children to possess a certain readiness and vigilance to soothe the dependency needs of the PAS-inducing parents.

This also makes it rather difficult for any child to show enthusiasm about visiting the targeted parent, especially since hostility and anger are often directed at them for wanting to separate from the PAS-inducing parent. This excessive and chronic dependency makes these children not only confused about who they ought to be, but also more negative and less enthusiastic about spending time with the targeted parents.. For too long, they have been denied the opportunity to freely explore versions of themselves, independent of the PAS-inducing parents' enmeshment and control. Ultimately, PAS-inducing parents' rejection becomes their own rejection.

#### **INTERGENERATIONAL EFFECTS**

If one were to closely examine the family background of the PAS-inducing parent, it's likely that there would be at least one influential caregiver with pronounced narcissistic personality traits. Exposure to such strong narcissism may have negatively affected the PAS-inducing parents during their formative years. Growing up in an environment dominated by narcissistic qualities could predispose them to adopt similar traits. The narcissistic characteristics of the PAS-inducing parent often stem from

their unresolved attachment traumas, which they project onto the child, perpetuating a cycle of emotional abuse and alienation.<sup>13</sup> These personality traits are then transferred to their affected children, often with a harmful intent that can lead to lasting damage. Unless these children come to recognize their own free will and understand the severity of their experiences, it is unlikely that significant change will occur, resulting in ongoing intergenerational effects.

### **Long-term Psychosocial Consequences of Parental Alienation Syndrome upon the Child**

A systematic review examined the long-term emotional effects on children who experienced parental alienation.<sup>17</sup> The findings indicated that adults who faced parental alienation in their childhoods reported increased levels of depression and anxiety, as well as diminished self-esteem and self-sufficiency in adulthood. They also showed higher instances of substance abuse, relationship difficulties, insecure attachment styles, and a lower overall quality of life. Additionally, these individuals were more likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder and to undergo depressive episodes. As a result, they often exhibited insecure attachment styles, had strained relationships with parents, partners, and their own children, and tended to replicate alienating behaviors with their children.

### **Suggested Psychotherapeutic Approaches**

Several different psychotherapeutic approaches would invariably benefit the targeted parent and the affected adult (i.e., the former affected child), if provided.

#### **PSYCHOTHERAPY SUGGESTIONS FOR TARGETED PARENTS**

Targeted parents need to literally grieve about the loss of their children, even though they are still alive. Specific aspects of interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) could prove invaluable when assisting the targeted parent in managing complicated feelings of disconnection, including the possibility that the relationship could be permanently over. Normal bereavement involves many complex emotions, such as anger, anxiety, despair, and sadness, but they eventually become supplanted in some manner so that people can eventually begin new interests and relationships to fill the void left by the lost or severed relationship.<sup>18</sup> When targeted parents have not been able to work effectively through their loss of relationship, this experience would be very similar to those associated with "complicated bereavement" because it can be long-lasting and accompanied by severe symptoms.<sup>19</sup> To assist clients in working through complicated bereavement as applied to PAS, the psychotherapist should appropriately guide treatment to accomplish the following: Elucidating the circumstances of the loss; establishing linkages between the onset of symptoms and the experience of disconnection and/or loss; honoring and validating the sadness associated with the disconnection and/or loss; assisting with communicating the loss to others; accepting or tolerating the lost relationship; and augmenting current social support while fostering new reciprocal and positive attachments.<sup>18</sup>

## PSYCHOTHERAPY SUGGESTIONS FOR ADULTS THAT WERE PREVENTED FROM HAVING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE TARGETED PARENTS AS CHILDREN

The work of Rappoport provides guidance on how psychotherapy could benefit these clients.<sup>20</sup> Rappoport would likely view such clients as having become co-narcissists because of how they were treated and raised by their narcissistic PAS-inducing parents. He asserts that all co-narcissists believe (albeit, “automatically and unconsciously”) as though everyone is narcissistic.<sup>20</sup> Even though the client believes the psychotherapist to be a narcissist, they also believe that the psychotherapist could be different. Thus, the work of psychotherapy “consists of determining to what degree the therapist is narcissistic,” and assisting clients to “develop confidence that the therapist is not narcissistic.”<sup>20</sup>

Since these clients have been so sensitized to narcissism, the psychotherapist needs to construct a therapeutic relationship “not based on narcissism,” but where the authentic needs of clients are given paramount attention.<sup>20</sup> The psychotherapist should embody the “Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change,”<sup>21</sup> which Rappoport describes as “Rogers’ principles of accurate empathy, interpersonal warmth and positive regard, and personal genuineness.”<sup>20</sup> These behaviors by the psychotherapist “provide a direct contradiction to the experiences that have caused their problems,” and clients will then “seek to determine how safe they are not to accommodate their behavior to the therapist’s imagined needs, but to be able to experience and express themselves freely.”<sup>20</sup>

A major part of the psychotherapeutic work should focus on “understanding how events and experiences in patients’ early lives resulted in their current fears, inhibitions, and orientation toward others.”<sup>20</sup> Additionally, psychoeducation should be provided to explain narcissism and co-narcissism, which Rappoport has found helps to develop an “intellectual understanding of the nature of the problem,” which “goes a great distance towards helping them make sense of their lives and why their relationships take on the characteristics that they do.”<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, this type of psychotherapy

provides a solid framework to allow clients to feel comfortable when discussing their concerns, to assist them in knowing what to focus on, and to eventually “free themselves from these problems.”<sup>20</sup>

## Limitations

The perspectives presented in this paper are biased and numerous counter-arguments could be proposed, some of which may be equally or more plausible. Additionally, there are details in this paper which cannot be fact-checked because they are based on opinion. Although I have referenced various publications, they have primarily been used to support my working hypothesis.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that the multiple interpretations offered here may be seen as speculative and lacking solid evidence. Despite these limitations, I remain confident in the legitimacy and plausibility of this working hypothesis, provided that readers approach the complex nature of PAS with an open mind.

## Conclusion

The behaviors and intentions of PAS-inducing parents align with the concept of evil, as they have, to a significant degree, diminished the vitality of the affected children, hindered their spiritual development, and systematically manipulated them to control and involve them in actions designed to dehumanize, belittle, and harm the targeted parents. The overarching consequences of this evil effectively exclude the targeted parents from their children’s lives, but more critically, these children suffer irrevocable emotional and spiritual harm as a result.

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