

# Parental alienation syndrome: The lost parents' perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines alienated parents' perceptions of their own experience of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS). The participants were five fathers and one mother. The data were collected via semi-structured, open-ended interview questionnaires. A qualitative analysis of the data was performed for each participant in an attempt to answer the following questions: (1) Are there characteristics (e.g., number of children, number of marriages, etc.) common to alienated families? (2) Are there common themes or issues among the conflicts between couples that contribute to marriage dissolution? (3) From the lost parent's perspective, are there commonalities in the underlying causes of the alienation? (4) Are there common themes in the participants' experience of the alienation process? (5) Given the opportunity what are some things that the lost parents perceive they might do differently? The findings are discussed and the limitations of the present study are given.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE NATURE OF PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME

Dr. Richard A. Gardner, a forensic and child psychiatrist, has conducted evaluations regarding the custody of children following divorce ([Rand, 1997](#)). Through his case work he observed that many divorcing families shared common characteristics which he labelled as Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS). PAS was defined as a syndrome where one parent (usually the custodial parent) alienates the child or children from the other parent. PAS includes the alienating parent engaging the child in a series of conscious and subconscious techniques like brainwashing in an attempt to denigrate the other parent. Further, the child also contributes to the denigration of the allegedly hated parent ([Cartwright, 1993](#); [Gardner, 1992](#)). The general pattern of characteristics PAS children display during and after the divorce have been described by [Gardner \(1992\)](#) as follows:

1. **Campaign of denigration:** PAS children denigrate the "lost" parent completely, particularly in the presence of the alienating parent. The children express a profuse hatred for the lost parent. Initially, the children may denigrate each parent in the presence of the other. Eventually they learn that the denigration of the non-custodial or alienated parent is beneficial within the custodial home ([Cartwright, 1993](#); [Gardner, 1992](#)). Subsequently, the child rejects the lost parent completely.
2. **The children's unfounded rationalizations:** The children base their denigration on rationalizations that are weak or frivolous, e.g. "she snores in her sleep". Statements such as these are often made with a complete lack of ambivalence by the children. The alienating parent, as well, does not question such statements as the bases for denigration and further uses the children's statements as evidence of the lost parent's inadequacy ([Cartwright, 1993](#); [Gardner, 1992](#)).
3. **Dichotomization of the parents:** The alienating parent is perceived by the child as encompassing only positive qualities and as such the children attempt to express themselves as "perfect little photocopies" ([Goldwater, 1991 p. 126](#)) of the alienating parent. On the other hand, the lost parent is believed to encompass only negative qualities. This negative attitude is generalized to events that the children and lost parent have shared. Even events that the children once enjoyed are now remembered as being forced, not enjoyed, or never even remembered ([Cartwright, 1993](#); [Gardner, 1992](#)).
4. **The independent thinker phenomenon:** The children present the decision to reject the parent as their own. The alienating parent reinforces this contention by making such statements as "I can't force her to see her dad, if she does not want to". Further, the

claim that the decision to reject the parent was the child's own is made suspect by the child's use of **language and phrases that are developmentally inappropriate** and indicative of the alienating parent's influence ([Cartwright, 1993](#); [Gardner, 1992](#)).

5. **Automatic love of the alienating parent:** the children automatically and reflexively **support the alienating parent**. This automatic love may be a consequence of the belief that the alienating parent is an ideal or perfect person or that the children perceive that parent as weak and in need of support and defending ([Cartwright, 1993](#); [Gardner, 1992](#)).
6. **Absence of guilt:** The children do **not express any feelings of guilt** about the circumstances surrounding the relationship with the lost parent. There is a **lack of gratitude for any gifts, favours, etc.**. This lack of guilt cannot be attributed solely to cognitive immaturity but is related to the brainwashing done by the alienating parent ([Cartwright, 1993](#); [Gardner, 1992](#)).
7. **Borrowed scenarios:** The children use language and expressions that are clearly **not their own**. The quality with which they express their beliefs appears to be coached and rehearsed, and the only source of the borrowed scenarios appears to be the alienating parent ([Cartwright, 1993](#); [Gardner, 1992](#)). For instance, a five year old borrows the alienating mother's words and say "Daddy's new girlfriend is a whore!" ([Cartwright, 1993, p. 207](#)).
8. **Generalization of animosity:** The lost parent's extended family is also included in the **animosity**. These individuals are also perceived as encompassing negative qualities or inappropriate actions since they are associated with the lost parent. For instance, any attempt by the extended family to counter the denigration of the lost parent is viewed by the children as an attack on their beliefs that they must defend ([Cartwright, 1993](#); [Gardner, 1992](#)).

Further, [Cartwright, 1993](#) postulated that often allegations of abuse associated with PAS may be virtual. Virtual allegations refer to cases where the abuse is simply suggested in order to cast aspersions the lost parent's character without the alienating parent having to fabricate real incidents of alleged abuse. For example, in one case, the mother hinted at an allegation of sexual abuse by accusing the father of renting a videotape containing pornography for the child. The mother reported in court that the child was disappointed with the movie because it was "suggestive, erotic, and pornographic". The movie, a Hollywood comedy starring Chevy Chase, was chosen by the child at a family video store. The judge proceeded to interview the child extensively and, disagreeing with the mother, found that the child was not disappointed in the movie because it was pornographic but rather because it was not funny. **Virtual allegations are subtle and, as a result, difficult to prove or disprove.** Therefore, [Cartwright, 1993](#) postulates that as lawyers and judges become more aware of PAS and become more skilled at detecting it, the incidence of virtual allegations will increase.

As in most disorders, the severity of PAS can range from mild to severe. As a result, [Gardner \(1991, conference\)](#) has described three levels in the continuum of severity of the syndrome as mild, moderate, and severe. Using these anchor points, [Gardner \(1992\)](#) described the characteristics of the alienating parent and the child.

In a Severe level of PAS, the alienating parent demonstrates paranoid thoughts that may be limited to the lost parent or may generalize to other circumstances. Prior to the divorce,

however, the alienating parent may not have demonstrated any paranoia. Another characteristic includes the alienating parent's obsession with preventing the lost parent from having or exercising any visitation rights. The alienating parent will use any means necessary to ensure this goal. Further, alienating parents project their own negative qualities onto the lost parents, reinforcing their own paranoia and portraying themselves as victims. As a result of this paranoia, alienating parents do not respond with appeals to logic or reason, or even to confrontations with reality. Those who do not support the alienating parents' beliefs, whether they are mental health professionals, lawyers, etc., are believed either to be against them or to be paid by the lost parent. The children in severe cases of PAS share the alienating parent's paranoia about the lost parent. They will refuse to visit the lost parent and often demonstrate panic and hostility that renders visits impossible. Further, if visitation does occur, once they are in the lost parent's home they may run away, become paralyzed with fear, or become destructive to the extent that they must be removed from the home.

The Moderate level of PAS includes alienating parents who exhibit more rage than paranoid tendencies. They are able to make some distinction between a child's preposterous allegations and those which may have some validity. However, as in severe cases, an alienating parent in a moderate case of PAS will also undertake a campaign of denigration against the lost parent and will tend to prevent the lost parent's exercise of visitation rights. Prior to the divorce, the moderate alienating parent is more likely to have been a good child rearer. The children of moderate PAS tend to be less persistent with their campaigns of denigration, and are more likely to abandon them in the presence of the lost parents, especially after long periods of time. In this type of case campaigns of denigration by younger children in the presence of their lost parents can only be sustained with the help of older siblings who function as surrogate parents during visitation. The alienated children's primary motives for maintaining campaigns of denigration are to maintain "healthy" psychological bonds with the alienating parents.

The Mild level of PAS, the parents have generally healthy psychological bonds with their children. They respond to logic and reason in that they recognize that the alienation of the non-custodial parent is not beneficial for the children. Therefore, the alienating parent will be willing to take a conciliatory approach towards the lost parent's requests. [Gardner \(1992\)](#) also notes that mild cases of PAS require considerably less therapy than the more severe cases. Further, the children may become healthier when the intervention simply requires the child to remain in the presence of the lost parent over time.

[Cartwright \(1993\)](#) noted that the time that is spent alienating the child may be an indicator of the degree to which the child is alienated; the longer the alienation, the more alienated the child. Further, the excessive alienation may "build up" or increase the risk of mental illness in the child. As a result, the sooner the children are removed from the alienating situation, the healthier it is for the lost parent and the PAS children. It is, therefore, important to gain a better understanding of parental alienation, its development, and its termination, because of the devastating consequences of PAS to the family members who experience it.

### **Operational Definitions**

**Alienator or Alienating Parent.** The terms "alienator" and "alienating parent" are used to designate the parent who influences the child or children to turn against the other parent.

**Lost or Hated or Absent Parent.** The lost (and usually non-custodial) parent is the one who is the target of the alienator.

**Conflict.** This term signifies opposing ideas and beliefs that members of the family experience in the form of arguments that may or may not become violent.

**Alienation:** This term signifies any actions, whether physical or psychological, that lead to the negative perception of a parent. Specifically, the term alienation refers to tactics utilized in order to induce PAS.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature concerning the development of parental alienation in families requires a review of the main theories surrounding the development of PAS. The main postulates include: (a) heightened levels of conflict, (b) divorce, (c) the contributions or influence of the legal system, and (d) a combination of various other factors that may contribute to the development of PAS.

#### HIGH CONFLICT SITUATIONS

As the dissolution of a marriage proceeds and court proceedings begin regarding the custody of the children, there is likely to be increasing conflict among the divorcing parents. It is believed that this conflict propels and heightens the occurrence of PAS. Family conflict may contribute to many difficulties that the individual family members encounter -- such as problems in social development, emotional stability, and cognitive skills. These difficulties may instigate long-term consequences that may persist long after the finalization of the divorce ([Kurdek, 1981](#)). Further, when the conflict occurring in a family (whether divorced or intact) is ongoing and heightened, the individual family members have been found to express feelings of lowered self-esteem, increased anxiety, and diminished self control ([Slater & Haber, 1984](#)). Particularly at risk are the children. There are reports that adolescents have a greater risk of developing adjustment problems whether the family goes through divorce or remains intact ([Hoffman, 1971](#)). Therefore, the level of family conflict is an important dimension which can alter the family structure and affects children's well-being ([Demo & Acock, 1988](#)).

PAS is a syndrome that is usually associated with a heightened level of conflict. Further, the children in PAS families are present not only in the conflictual situation (in this case the denigration of one parent) but often contribute additional conflict to the situation. These conflicts tend to occur in conjunction with long custody proceedings. [Johnston, Gonzalez, and Campbell \(1987\)](#) examined the behaviour of children from separated and/or divorced families who were subjected to "entrenched" parental conflict regarding their custody. These researchers assessed 56 children between the ages of four and twelve during custody disputes and 2.5 years later. The assessment consisted of three measures: (1) parental conflict as measured by the Straus Conflict Tactics Scale; (2) Clinical rating scales that were completed by each family's counsellor; and (3) the Achenbach Child Behaviour Checklist which measured the children's adjustment on four scales: Depression, Withdrawn/Uncommunicative, Somatic Complaints, and Aggression, as well as overall problem behaviour. [Johnston and her colleagues \(1987\)](#) found that at the time of the custody disputes, overall behaviour problems and aggression could be predicted by (a) the extent to which children became involved in the custody dispute and (b) the occurrence and extent of role reversal between the child and parent. Specifically, aggression between parents, both physical and verbal, was found to be a significant predictor of overall behavioural problems



two years later. Moreover, involving the child in the custody dispute was a more important predictor of overall behaviour problems when it was the father who involved the child rather than the mother. If both parents involved the child in the disputes, then the child was more likely to have a tendency to display more withdrawn and uncommunicative behaviours two years after the dispute. Finally, overall behavioural problems and depression were also predicted by the role reversal between father and child. These findings are related to the development of parental alienation in that PAS children who are exposed to heightened levels of conflict in combination with the denigration of one parent by the other. As a means of coping with the heightened levels of stress, PAS children may copy the alienating parent's behaviour primarily by denigrating the lost parent. In doing so, they reduce some stress by believing that one parent is bad while the other is good. Subsequently, they focus on pleasing the alienating parent who is usually the custodial parent. Therefore, they ensure their survival in the alienating home by supporting the alienating parent's beliefs. Children who do not adapt in this way may feel they run the risk of also being rejected by the alienating parent and losing that parent's love.

## **DIVORCE**

The effect of divorce itself on the family can be devastating. What was once decided amongst the parents is now decided by third parties like lawyers and judges ([Girdner, 1985](#)). Further, access to the children by each parent changes. Where before everyone lived together and parents and children had the freedom to interact whenever they wished, divorce dictates they must now abide by rules set by others. The most common effect of divorce is that the child remains primarily with one parent while the other parent becomes a "visitor" who is only allowed to see the child on certain occasions. In theory, this "visitor" is allowed to have parental authority, that is to engage in the decision making process regarding the children (e.g., what school they should attend) ([Turkat, 1994](#)). However, divorce often occurs because the parents can no longer make decisions together. Consequently, the visiting parent does not always have the visitation that he or she should have and may be unable to participate in the decision making process for important issues in their children's lives. One time significant parents can become unwanted visitors for their children. The Children's Rights Council in 1994 reported that an estimated six million children in the U.S. were victims of interfered visitation by their custodial parents. [Arditti \(1992\)](#) found that as high as 50% of fathers (usually the non-custodial parents) reported that their visitation with their children had been interfered with by their ex-wives. Further, as many as 40% of custodial mothers admitted denying their ex-husbands their right to visitation as a means of punishing them ([Kressel, 1985](#)). In PAS families, the interference with child visitation is but one of the symptoms, though the most important. It is believed that the goal of the alienating parent is to not only interfere in the lost parent's visits, but to eliminate both the visits, and the visiting parent as well from the child's life. [Gardner \(1992\)](#) postulated that PAS is of a serious nature that may be provoked by a serious emotional issue, such as custody. Consequently, [Cartwright \(1993\)](#) noted that PAS may also be provoked by other serious and emotional issues such as property divisions or finances.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM**

According to [Gardner \(1992\)](#), the legal system contributes to the occurrence of PAS. In his book, *The Parental Alienation Syndrome: A Guide for Mental Health Professionals*, Gardner devotes two chapters to the history of the legal system and its impact on the occurrence of PAS. He postulates that parental alienation began to occur when courts began replacing the "tender-years" presumption with that of the "best-interests-of-the-child" presumption. The

"tender-years" presumption stipulates that certain psychological benefits exist for children who remain with the mother, therefore custody was usually awarded to the mother. In the 1970s the courts began to favour the "best-interests-of-the-child" presumption, a less sexist position. With this presumption, the courts attempted to award custody to the parent who the best custodian for the child regardless of the parent's gender. Gardner believes that this change in the legal system exacerbated mothers' fears that they might lose custody of their children to the fathers. Moreover, for mothers to strengthen their cases they needed to denigrate the fathers, engendering the beginnings of PAS. Gardner supports this notion by reporting that in 90% of his PAS cases, it was the mother who was the alienating parent ([Gardner, 1991, conference](#)). Further changes in the legal system during the 1970s and 1980s, according to Gardner, contributed to the occurrence of PAS. Specific was the adoption in many jurisdictions of the notion of joint custody. Ideally in joint custody, both parents are to contribute equally to the upbringing of the children instead of one parent being the custodian and the other the "visitor". For joint custody to be granted it must be established that both parents can communicate with each other and can participate in the upbringing of the child. However, when joint custody is granted, the parents are often placed back in the same situation that led them to seek a divorce initially: the inability to communicate and make decisions together. Although some couples can do so successfully, Gardner notes that this situation presents the opportunity for the children to be used as weapons in parental conflicts that may arise.

Gardner developed several other related notions concerning the development of PAS and the contributions of the legal system are simply a part of this influence on PAS development. Unfortunately, the only statistics that Gardner provided were those that demonstrated that mothers were usually the alienators without detailing the procedure by which he attained these results.

[Cartwright \(1993\)](#) noted that the involvement of lawyers and the prolonged involvement of the court contributes not only to the occurrence of PAS but also to the increase in the severity of PAS. [Clawar and Rivlin \(1991\)](#) conducted a twelve year study regarding the parental programming of children "to influence the outcome of disputes" which was commissioned by the American Bar Association Section of Family Law. They found that 80% of divorcing parents practiced parental programming to varying degrees and 20% of whom did so at least once a day. Further, [Rand \(1997\)](#) postulated that many allegations of either sexual or physical abuse may be an alienating technique. These allegations are powerful factors in the courts' decisions for custody and therefore an invaluable tool to the alienators. Cartwright noted that the court requires adequate time to assess each case in order to determine the best interests of the child. However, he cautioned that once identified as a PAS case, then the court needs to make speedy judgements in order to stop the alienation process immediately. Unfortunately, the usual procedure of court postponements and continuances permit the PAS process to continue. Further, [Goldwater \(1991\)](#) had postulated that the longer the children are in the alienating custodial situation, the "further they will drift away from their non-custodial parent" (p.130). Cartwright also noted that forceful judgement is required to counter the force of alienation. Specifically, clear and forceful judgements are believed to deter possible alienating parents from even beginning the alienation process as they may immediately lose custody of their children. This is only possible if the judge is aware of PAS as a syndrome and if it has been clearly identified in each case. A second consequence of a clear and forceful judgement against the alienating parent is that such judgements can stop existing alienating processes from continuing.

Support for the notion that the court can counter the occurrence of PAS has been found in a



study conducted by [Dunne and Hedrick \(1994\)](#). These researchers are two of the very few who conducted research specifically on PAS. In a qualitative study they interviewed sixteen families who exhibited a specified set of characteristics that met [Gardner's \(1992\)](#) criteria for PAS. The findings suggested that various family characteristics, such as the degree of PAS severity, were not indicators of the degree or effect of alienation on the family. Further, they found that the only effective intervention to counter alienation was a court implemented custody change that resulted in the children being removed from the alienating home. The various types of therapy demonstrated no improvement in any of the families that had undergone therapy; in two of these cases the alienation actually became worse. It appears that the legal system is the most effective mean of terminating the process of alienation, reflecting the strong influence exerted by the legal system on the occurrence of PAS.

[Girdner \(1985\)](#), in an ethnographic study, examined the structure of custody litigation and the strategies used by parents who were contesting the custody of their children. She immersed herself in the legal culture for eighteen months. By observing court proceedings regarding custody she examined the relationships between the legal and the familial processes within the context of those proceedings. She found that the final custody arrangements were usually made with respect to the economic issues of the divorce. Specifically, her findings suggested that the factors which influenced custody agreements included: (a) the negotiating style of the attorneys involved; (b) the dynamics of bargaining in the legal system; and (c) at which stage of the emotional process of divorce in which the clients were.

## COMBINED FACTORS

A number of factors influence the occurrence of PAS. The family unit does not function in isolation. Individual characteristics of family members may also play a role on the occurrence of PAS. A study conducted by [Calabrese, Miller, and Dooley \(1987\)](#) examined the characteristics of 49 parents and their children from two fourth grade classes. These researchers assessed the parents' alienation of their children using the Dean Alienation Scale that provides an overall measure of alienation through examining the following dimensions: Isolation, Powerlessness, and Normalesness. They also assessed the children's school achievement by examining their percentiles, as well as the children's attitudes toward school. However, these researchers found that the best predictors of alienation was unrelated to the children's academic attitudes or performance, but rather to the characteristics of the individuals involved. Specifically, they reported that high levels of alienation were found to be associated with unemployed, single mothers, whose child was female and the child had only a few perceived friends. While these findings appear to support Gardner's contention that the alienator is usually the mother, they provide little support for Gardner's theory that the introduction of the "best-interests-of-the-child" presumption contributed to this phenomenon.

[Lund \(1995\)](#) examined factors that contributed to the development of parental alienation. She assessed families in terms of (a) developmental factors in the child, (b) parenting styles, and (c) level of stress experienced by the child. She postulated that contributing factors in the occurrence of PAS included the following: (1) Separation difficulties that are developmentally inappropriate. Specifically, PAS could be related to the occurrence of pre-schooler's separation problems that may normally occur but are heightened by the stress occurring within a separated home. (2) The child exhibiting oppositional behaviour. With older children in adolescence and preadolescence the development of oppositional behaviour may be manifested as a rejection of the lost parent in a family with conflicts. (3) The deterioration of the non-custodial parental skills. The alienated parent usually displays a

distant, rigid, and sometimes authoritarian style of parenting, whereas the alienating parent is indulgent and clinging. The children can then more easily reject the harsher parent and defend the more indulgent one. (4) Conflicts occurring during the divorce. According to [Lund \(1995\)](#), these may prompt the child to seek means of escaping the stress related to such conflict. Therefore, the child may denigrate the lost parent as a justification of the alienating parent's actions.

## SUMMARY

Relatively few research studies have been conducted specifically on PAS. The literature examined in this section pertained primarily to several articles that described parental alienation, however the majority were not empirical studies. The literature suggests that several factors may contribute to the occurrence of PAS. The heightened levels of conflict that are often associated with the dissolution of a marriage have been shown to have several short- and long-term effects on family members ([Demo & Acock, 1988](#); [Hoffman, 1971](#); [Kurdek 1981](#)). [Johnston et al., 1987](#) found that involving the children in the disputes tended to result in the children displaying behavioural problems (e.g., withdrawing and not communicating). PAS is one area in which heightened levels of conflict are believed to play a large role in the lives of the family members. Therefore, it is postulated that the heightened conflict levels may be an important factor in the occurrence of PAS. Divorce is a difficult time for all family members. With divorce comes a stressful restructuring where one parent, who was once involved in the child's life, may suddenly become an unwanted visitor ([Turkat, 1994](#)). This is difficult for those involved and there are indicators that these visiting parents (usually the fathers) encounter difficulties with their visits. For instance, [Arditi \(1992\)](#) found that as many as 50% of fathers reported an interference in their visitation rights; similarly, [Kressel \(1985\)](#) found that 40% of mothers admitted to attempting to interfere in the father's visitation. Some circumstance or factor that occurs in the process of divorce may result in the rejection of one parent by the other. If this occurs, it is postulated that PAS may follow. The circumstances that lead to the rejection of a parent are as yet to be determined. There may be high levels of conflict or stress involved in the dissolution of the marriage and thus further research is necessary to examine the degree to which these factors are important in the occurrence of PAS.

With the initiation of a divorce, the legal proceedings involved may pertain not only to the divorce but to custody agreements as well. Most of the literature on PAS suggests that various aspects of the legal system have contributed to the occurrence of PAS ([Gardner, 1992](#)) and has even heightened the severity of PAS ([Cartwright, 1993](#)). Moreover, [Dunne and Hedrick \(1994\)](#) found that the legal system can play an important role in the termination of PAS. Specifically, a court ordered change in custody was found to be the most effective intervention that resulted in the termination of PAS with time. As [Calabrese et al., \(1987\)](#), and [Lund \(1995\)](#) found, many factors from individual characteristics to stress on the children have been linked to the occurrence of alienation. The number of possible factors that instigate PAS are legion, therefore, there is a need to examine PAS qualitatively to gain better comprehension. A better understanding of how PAS occurs may be helpful in learning how to treat and perhaps prevent PAS.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD AND PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

This chapter describes the objectives, the sampling technique, the instrumentation for the data

collection, as well as the interview protocols. It concludes with a description of the data analyses.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The findings discussed in the literature review pertain mainly to studies on divorce rather than on Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS). The purpose of the present study is to examine qualitatively six cases of parental alienation in order to gain a better understanding of its development. Specifically, the focus of the present study is to gain an understanding of factors that result in an intact family becoming an alienated one. With such information it is believed that possible indicators of PAS development can be determined. The following questions are posed:

1. Are there characteristics (e.g., number of children, number of marriages, etc.) common to alienated families?
2. Are there common themes or issues among the conflicts within couples that contribute to marriage dissolution?
3. Are there common themes in the participants' experience of the alienation process?
4. Given the opportunity, what are some things that the lost parents perceive they might do differently?

## PARTICIPANTS

As this is a qualitative study of cases, the sampling procedure was criterion-based. To be included in the sample, the families had to meet a number of criteria, bases, or standards constituting a criterion-based sample ([Yin, 1984](#)). All of the participants included in the study met the following criteria:

- they were formerly part of a family unit which included at least one child;
- they had divorced or were in the process of divorcing;
- they identified themselves as having experienced or were experiencing alienation from their ex-spouse.

The participants studied were five fathers and one mother. The fact that the majority of the participants were male is consistent with [Gardner's \(1992\)](#) findings suggesting that the alienators are more frequently mothers. Two of the participants resided in different areas in the province of Quebec. The remaining participants were residents of various states in the United States. These participants were recruited with flyers, e-mails and letters sent by the investigator (See Appendix A). Letters of consent and self-addressed envelopes were sent to those participants who responded via telephone or e-mail indicating that they were willing to participate in the research (See Appendix B). Finally, all of the participants were telephoned by the investigator once consent was received and appointments were made with the participants to be interviewed.

## TOOLS OF INQUIRY

The data were collected through a semi-structured, open-ended, tape-recorded telephone

interview questionnaires. The interview method was chosen as a means of achieving a more holistic understanding of the alienating situation.

The interview questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first consisted of ascertaining the current status and characteristics of the family, and establishing rapport to enable the participants to feel comfortable discussing the situation with the researcher. The remaining sections related to the dissolution of the marriage, factors related to the alienation, and a retrospective reflection on the alienation. The content of the interview items were based on previous studies and current theories related to the development of PAS. Questions were designed to determine whether there were any common themes that occurred throughout different individuals' experiences of alienation. It was hoped that answers to such questions might shed light on possible indicators of the instigation, continuance, and termination of PAS. The actual interview questions are presented in Appendix C.

## **INTERVIEW APPROACH**

### **Context of Interviews:**

Each participant was interviewed separately by the researcher. Because of the different locations of the participants across the continent the interviews were conducted over the telephone and tape-recorded. Before each interview, the researcher reminded each participant that they would be tape recorded and that they were free to decline to answer any question or discontinue the interview at any time. Field notes were taken during the course of the interview to record emerging and unexpected dimensions. Each interview lasted a maximum of one-and-one-half hours. All the interviews were conducted in the months of June and July 1997 in one block of time, except one which was continued the following day. Rapport was established with each participant with the initial telephone call when appointments were made and again prior to the beginning of the interview session.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

The tape recorded data were transcribed. Within the transcriptions all "... " represented pauses in the conversations, "uhms" and "uhs" were also included in the transcriptions. See Appendix B for a sample page of the transcribed data. The data were then reviewed to determine possible commonalities among the cases. Seven general commonalities emerged that formed classifications of information which were then labelled to reflect the issues identified. These classifications and their related issues were labelled as follows: (1) Family Data including family constellation and relocation (2) Dissolution of the Marriage including cause of marital dissolution and current relationship with ex-spouse (3) Relationship with the PAS children including: frequency of visitation/contact, and current relationship with PAS children (4) Alienation and Alienating Techniques including: alienators' attitudes and behaviours, other's contributions, causes of PAS, and control/power issues (5) Issues related to the classification of experiences with professionals including legal and psychological services (6) Current perceptions including: looking back, the impact of PAS, causes of PAS, and Termination/Looking to the future and (7) Miscellaneous. Following the formation of these classifications, the data were reinspected to determine whether they related to these classifications. A third reading of the data was performed to ensure that the data were classified appropriately. Once the data were categorized, the contents of each classification were summarized with the inclusion of relevant quotes that reflected participants' responses. For instance, a quote pertaining to the issue of the participant's frequency of visitation with his child would be as follows: "So right now, it's about once a month. Uhhh, about three

years ago...it was once or twice a week, and since then...so I can see him [his son] about once a month."

The results of the analysis are presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis described in Chapter 3.

#### Family Data

For the determination of indicators of PAS, the study of family data was an important area to examine first as there may have been some characteristics relevant in the occurrence of PAS.

**(a) Family Constellation:** Information about participants' family characteristics such as marital status, number of marriages, length of alienating marriage, and number of PAS and non-PAS children were included. The information gathered pertaining to the family constellation was attained primarily through probing with the questions developed by the researcher which were part of the questionnaire shown in Appendix C.

**Results:** Three of the six participants had remarried after the alienating marriage and another participant reported that he was living with a partner. Of the remaining participants, one was continuing legal proceedings and the other, the only female participant, had remained unmarried since the divorce. The length of the alienating marriages ranged between three and thirteen years.

Four of the six participants each had one child (two of whom were girls) from the PAS marriage, one participant had two children of PAS (two boys) and another had three children (two of whom were boys). Four of the six participants had no other children outside of the PAS marriage (one participant was living with his partner's children) and two participants had two children outside their PAS marriage. However, the lost parents tended to have had only one child from the PAS marriage and tended to have remarried after the PAS marriage ended. See Table 1 for a summary of the results. These results suggest a lack of common family characteristics inherent in PAS families.

**Table 1**  
**Summary of the participants' family constellations:**

Participants	Marital Status	Total Number of Marriages	Length of PAS marriage (in years)	Number of PAS children	Number of non-PAS children
1	Married	2	3	1	2
2	Married	2	13	3	0
3	Divorced	1	9	2	0
4	Married	2	8	1	2
5	Divorced	1	9	1	0
6	Cohabitant	2	5	5	1



**(b) Relocation:** Information for this area was not probed. The participants related this information primarily when discussing either alienating techniques or the marital dissolution. Specifically, the data gathered pertained to any of the participants' references to his or her own, or the child's (with the alienator) change of home(s), whether to a different home, town, city, state or province, or country.

**Results:** The number of relocations per alienated family varied. The participants reported that they or their children (of the PAS marriage) had relocated between one and ten times. The father who reported that his ex-spouse and the PAS child relocated approximately ten times, had done so in the same city and simply relocated to ten different houses. Three of these participants reported at least one relocation of the alienator to another city or town. Only one parent attributed his ex-spouses' repeated relocation to other cities as an alienation technique to prevent him from seeing his child. The remaining participants did not indicate whether or not their ex-spouses with the PAS children had relocated since the divorce. Only one alienated father indicated that he had relocated after the alienating marriage and he reported doing so in order to remain in close contact with his daughter who was being relocated by the alienating mother. The lost parents tended to report the relocation of the alienator with the PAS child or children after the marriage with little or no indication of their own relocation. Further, the nature and the reasons behind the relocations were not given. This information was not probed further as this was not an intended area of study. Thus the results suggest that the alienators' change of home may not be a salient characteristic of PAS families. The overall results from the family data suggest that family characteristics such as number of PAS children, number of marriages, and the alienators' relocations were weak indicators of PAS.

### **Dissolution of the Marriage**

Another area indicative of the underlying reasons for the occurrence of PAS concerns the dissolution of the marriage. By broadening the examination of PAS into this area the issues of conflicts may be addressed, as well as indicators of the relationship between the alienator and the lost parent.

**(a) Cause of marital dissolution:** Primarily via the researcher's questioning, data were gathered that pertained to any issues and conflicts that occurred within the marriage that the participants perceived as resulting in negative consequences for the marriage (i.e., leading to the dissolution of their marriage).

**Results:** Participants reported various reasons for the dissolution of the marriage. Those participants (four of the six) who initiated the divorce reported a breakdown in the relationship between themselves and their spouses for various reasons. A participant reported that his friends urged him to initiate the divorce due to the way his wife at the time treated him. He noted that she became physically violent at times:

She ripped my shirt off my back. On one occasion she took the flower pot and almost threw it on the lid of the car when I was backing up...She would just get in this rage when I would leave.

The remaining two participants reported that they were unaware that their wives wanted divorces and they were in disbelief when the divorce proceedings began. One participant described how he found out his wife had left him: her mother informed him of the impending divorce: "X decided to divorce you, that's the only way she can be happy is if she divorces you and...you just have to live with it, that's how it is." In his own words, the participant

explained "...she apparently decided to...divorce me and I didn't know." These results suggest that marital conflicts and their intensity are weak predictors in the occurrence of PAS as participants either reported no conflicts that led to the dissolution of the marriage or, if conflicts did occur, a variety of issues were reported as resulting in conflicts.

**(b) Current relationship with ex-spouse:** The researcher had probed the participants to describe their current relationship with their ex-spouses. The issues relating to this topic presented in the data pertained to the verbal and physical interactions between the participants and the ex-spouses in the alienating situation.

**Results:** The participants reported that they currently engaged in little or no communication with their ex-spouses (the alienators). Three of the six participants stated that they had no contact with the alienator for one to three years. As one participant explained his current relationship with his ex-wife: "...there's not too much to the relationship. I haven't talked to her for about three or four years." Two of the remaining three participants reported that they had some communication, however this communication was often limited to e-mail or to requesting to speak with the children over the phone. Those participants who reported having had some limited contact with the alienators described their relationships as tense. One participant explained her relationship with her ex-spouse as "very tense and... unpredictable at times." There was one exception, a participant described his relationship with his ex-spouse as a relationship that they were "working on". Previously their relationship was strained, however a change in their relationship occurred when, recently, his ex-spouse was diagnosed with a terminal illness. The results suggest that the participants' experienced either an on-going strained or chronic lack of relationship between themselves and their ex-spouses (the alienator).

Overall, the findings indicated that related to the dissolution of the marriage, the conflicts between the participants and their ex-spouses were of varying issues and intensity. Specifically, the nature and intensity of the conflicts appeared to be weak indicators of the occurrence of PAS. The results also suggest, however, that after the dissolution of the marriage and the occurrence of PAS, the relationship between the alienator and the lost parent was virtually strained or non-existent.

### **Relationship with the PAS children**

The importance of studying PAS is evident in its effects on the children and their relationship with their lost parents. Examining the frequency of visitation and the lost parents' relationship with their children may provide insight as to the impact of PAS on the children and their relationships with their lost parents.

**(a) Frequency of visitation/contact:** The researcher probed the participants for information pertaining to the amount of contact between the participant and his or her child (or children). Contact was defined as any interaction between individuals whether by conventional mail, e-mail, telephone, or physical ("face to face") contact.

**Results:** All of the participants reported that the mother had primary custody of the children at the time of divorce or separation. Visitation for the fathers was approximately every second weekend, with the exception of one father who was allowed visitation five days a week for five hours per day. Since the finalization of the divorce or the implementation of the custody agreement, all of the alienated parents had their visitation drastically reduced, including the alienated mother who initially had primary custody. Upon asking her how often she sees her

children, if at all, her response was "none." Most of the alienated parents had not seen their children via a court implemented visitation for up to four years. Those parents who continued to have visitation had less frequent visits than when they were first divorced or separated (e.g., instead of every second weekend, a father reported that his visitation had been reduced to once a month). For instance, one father described his reduction in visitation as follows: "...about three years ago...it [visitation] was once or twice a week, and since then...I can see him about once a month." Overall, the results suggest that a change in the frequency of visitation and custody arrangement occurs with these PAS families. The change of visitation and custody arrangement tends to be as follows: At the onset of the divorce, fathers received regular visitation schedules and the mothers (including the alienated mother in the present study) were given primary custody. After the legal proceedings and the onset of PAS there was a significant decrease in the frequency of the visitation schedule with all the alienated parents, including the alienated mother who had been given primary custody at the onset of the divorce. Although this result may be attributed to having primarily male participants in the study who tended to have visitation rather than custody, nonetheless, the frequency of the visitation was drastically reduced after the proceedings for all of the participants. Further, it remains uncertain as to the cause of the change in the visitation frequency. This change may be due to the legal proceedings or to PAS itself or a third unknown factor. If such a change were due to PAS however, it would be indicative of the success of the alienators in having the lost parents removed from the children's lives.

**(b) Current relationship with PAS children:** Again, the researcher probed the participants for data pertaining to the type of physical, verbal, and emotional contact between the participant and the children.

**Results:** Three of the participants reported having little or no relationship with their alienated children. The alienated mother reported that although she had very little contact with her children she still felt "connected" with them. She continued to attempt to be present during important children's events such as soccer, baseball games and graduations despite various obstacles (e.g., not being told of such events and being "scolded" by the alienator for going). The fathers who had little contact with their children reported that they attempted to maintain contact by writing letters and cards as well as sending various types of gifts (e.g., toys) to their children. Regardless of whether their children responded to their communication attempts, these fathers hoped that their children understood that by these gestures they were demonstrating their affections to their children. One father described his attempts as follows: "...I write every week. I try to send him [his son] something every week. It can be a postcard, it can be a toy... "

Only two alienated fathers reported having a close relationship with their alienated children. One of these fathers described his case as a mild form of PAS and attributed his closeness to his daughter to her young age and that he continued to maintain daily telephone contact with her. In his words:

I've always been very close with my daughter...very, very close...I don't think they [the divorce/custody proceedings] had anything [to do with it], she was too young. She was only two years old.

The other lost parent reported a close relationship with his two younger children, while his relationship with his oldest daughter remained somewhat strained. This participant's close relationship with his younger children may be attributed to a milder form of PAS with his younger children than with his daughter and to his relationship with his ex-spouse who was

diagnosed with a terminal illness and with whom he is currently re-establishing some communication. Thus, the results confirm that most PAS children and their lost parents did indeed have a strained relationship. However, the severity of PAS was a weak indicator of the extent of such a strain.

Overall, the results pertaining to the issues of the lost parents' relationships with their PAS children are as follows: First, the results suggest a decrease in the frequency of visitation for the lost parent which may or may not have been due to PAS. Specifically, participants reported that custody was routinely given to the mother at the onset of the divorce, regardless of who became the alienator and who became the lost parent with the onset of PAS. Further, all fathers had a consistent visitation schedule where all had visitation every two weeks with the exception of one father who visited every day. With the onset of alienation, the alienator received custody and the lost parents had their visitations drastically reduced either to absolutely no visitation or no contact, to visitation of approximately once a month. Of interest is that the only lost female parent who initially had primary custody of the children had absolutely no visitation schedule by the time of the interview. Second, as there was a reduction of other contacts with their children, the lost parents described a limited relationship with their children, often writing to them without reply. The only exceptions to these findings were two fathers who related that their ability to maintain a relatively stable relationship with their children was a function of the mild severity of the PAS in their cases. Therefore as expected, the findings mildly suggest indications that the less severe the PAS the better the chance of having a good relationship with their children.

### **Alienation and alienating techniques**

As there is little research on this subject, a more detailed examination of alienation and associated alienating techniques is necessary in gaining a better understanding of its impact.

**(a) Alienators' attitude and behaviours:** Data pertained to all references to the alienators' behaviours and actions that resulted in any negative consequences for the participant or the alienated child or children. Some of the data gathered for this issue was either probed by the researcher or was spontaneously reported by the participants throughout the interview,

**Results:** The results suggest that the alienators denigrated the lost parents by implying that the lost parents were not good people. For instance, one father accidentally overheard the alienator inform the children that she had hired an attorney to prevent them from having to visit with their father. The alienator did not allow the child to continue a healthy relationship with the lost parent. Another parent reported that whenever his child went back to the alienator's home after a visit with him, the child would be questioned or "debriefed" about everything that happened there. A way the alienators exercised their power, as described by a father, included attempts offering the children alternate choices (e.g. shopping) to visiting with the father. The results suggest that all of the participants perceived a general "sabotage" of their relationships with their children by the alienators. The lost parents reported that they perceived their relationship with their children as being "eroded" often by not being informed of a child's activities (e.g., soccer game schedule) that the lost parent may have wished to attend. Whether the alienator used mild "alienating techniques"- for instance whenever the lost parent called, the alienator would call the children to the telephone by saying in an "angry voice" "Its your father!" - or more drastic means by making accusations of physical and sexual abuse, the effect was that all the lost parents perceived that they were denied or deterred access to their children.

**(b) Other's contributions:** Data gathered for this group pertained to all references to any individual, with the exception of the ex-spouse, who engaged in any alienating techniques (i.e., that were perceived by the participants as attempts at alienating the lost parent from the PAS child). Some of the responses were due to the researcher's questioning but the primary source for the data was due to the participants' spontaneous descriptions of the alienating circumstances involving others.

**Results:** In five of the six cases the children of the PAS families were described as "spies" for the alienator. These children reported back to the alienator anything that the lost parent said that the child did not like. This reporting would often result in arguments between the alienator and the lost parent. The female participant in the study reported that her children would copy all of her personal papers and bills for their father. Further, her children would report to him whenever she had a date. The results also indicate that gifts given to the children by the lost parent would often "disappear" or be broken by the children. In the two cases where there was more than one PAS child, the results indicated that the children were "turned against each other" where in one case they would spy on each other and in the other case the oldest child would engage in alienating the younger children (e.g., enticing the younger children to abandon their visit with their father in order to go to "Sea World" with her and her mother). In one of the cases the maternal grandparents continued the alienation when the alienator (the mother) had discontinued all contact with the father and the grandparents were placed in the position of monitoring the child's visits with his father. In another case the lost parent's ex-brothers-in-law and ex-mother-in-law also contributed to the alienation by denigrating the father in front of the children (e.g., saying "I am really sorry you have a father like that"). These results suggest that the children acted as the secondary alienator (i.e., the second alienator after the parent) and they would do so primarily by being spies for the alienating parent and by continually rejecting the lost parent via various means (e.g., breaking toys). Grandparents and other extended family members also appeared to play an important role by contributing to the alienation as secondary alienators, provided that they were close to the alienator. The findings suggest that the closer the alienator's family members, the greater their tendency to alienate as well. These findings raise the question as to why close family members contribute to the alienation. For instance, are some of the alienating parent's family characteristics indicative of their engagement in alienation or is it something about the alienation itself that engages other family members to contribute to the alienation or is it simply that these family members take sides? Researchers have yet to address this issue and future research will be important in answering this question.

**(c) Cause of PAS:** Data gathered here pertained to any causes or factors that the participants perceived to be linked to the development or occurrence of the alienation. Some of the data collected on this issue resulted from direct probing by the researcher, and some resulted from the participants descriptions of their circumstances.

**Results:** All of the participants believed that the motive behind the alienation was triggered by hate, anger, or a sense of seeking revenge towards them by the alienator or some combination of these. One father reported his belief that the cause of the alienation was "Hate...Hate towards me" and another participant perceived: "She hates my guts and she says it...And she's trying to get back at me as well." Another motive suggested in the findings was that the participants perceived the alienation as a means by which the alienators could succeed in severing the participants' relationships with their children. One participant noted that the alienator may have made accusations of abuse as a means of explaining the reason behind the divorce. He described his belief as follows: "This gives her an excuse for leaving a bad guy and why the marriage broke up, and therefore it's not her fault." The findings suggest



that the participants perceived the underlying cause of the alienation as the hatred toward the lost parents, anger, or revenge, or some combination of these.

**(d) Control/power:** All data gathered pertained to references to situations where the participant perceived that an individual's actions or behaviours led to another individual's behavioural change or constraint. Moreover, the data were spontaneously generated by the participants rather than elicited by the researcher.

**Results:** The results suggest that the participants had lost some power over their relationship with their PAS children. The alienators were often described by the participants as using the child or other means to attempt to produce a desired outcome in the lost parent or the child. An example of an alienator using the child is as follows: an alienator locked her child in a dark closet, to be found "yelling and screaming" by the lost parent, in order to make the lost parent give her some papers.

Feelings of powerlessness were also apparent in the findings as the participants reported feeling constrained as to the way in which they had to behave in the presence of their children. They reported a need to control their behaviour while in the presence of their children for fear of losing their visitation privileges or experiencing other legal consequences when the child reported to the alienator what the lost parent had done. As one father described his feelings:

So I think she [his daughter] has a lot more power than I do, you know. She has the power to just terminate the relationship at any time. I mean, if at any time she would say 'Well Dad, I don't feel like seeing you any more.' Well, her mother's ...she says, you know, 'whatever your daughter wants, you know...that's the law type of thing'.

There is a sense of loss of parental role in the life of their children that has been attributed to the alienation. The lost parents cannot exert any of his or her parental responsibilities over their children. For instance, one lost parent reported how he could not discipline his child (e.g., send the child to her room) when the child behaved inappropriately, or she might end the visit the alienator would become angry at him for having disciplined his daughter as he once would normally have done.

Participants who did not have any contact with their children also reported a sense of being controlled or constrained in their behaviour. For instance, one father believed that he had to monitor the frequency with which he sent cards or packages to his child for fear of being charged with "harassment" if he did so too frequently. Further, two of the participants reported a sense of the children being controlled by the alienator. These children had to behave in a certain manner while with the alienated parent to avoid negative consequences by the alienator. For instance, one participant reported that an unscheduled visit to his child (in order to bring her a gift) resulted in the alienator yelling at the child for speaking to him. There was a sense of powerlessness reported by all the participants forcing them to behave in a certain manner to avoid legal or other consequences. As one father reported, once divorce occurs then "the courts really have the say over what happens to the kids, not you" [the parent]. These findings suggest that the lost parents perceived themselves as powerless with their children and to have lost their traditional parental roles whether or not they had visitation with their children.

Overall, the findings confirmed that the alienators used denigrating techniques (e.g., implying

that the lost parents were not good people) and provided ultimata to children and spouses to further the alienation that was motivated by hate, anger, revenge or some combination of these three. Others were enlisted to contribute to the alienation. Children, in particular, were seen as spies to relay information to the alienator and, as such, may be considered secondary alienators. Second, extended family members such as in-laws who shared close relationships with the alienators contributed to the alienation as well. Moreover, the lost parents felt powerless as a result of the alienating situation. The children in particular were perceived as controlling the lost parents, they could determine when, if at all, they would see the lost parent, under what circumstances and in particular what the lost parent would do with the child. The lost parent had to be careful not to anger the child for fear of never seeing their child again and to be careful even sending them letters or toys. This loss of parental role was reported by the participants whether or not they had visitation with their children.

### **Experience with Professionals**

When a marriage dissolves the family undergoes court proceedings to legalize the divorce. If children are involved, then the parents may seek custody in the courts, and the testimony of mental health professionals may be included during these proceedings. Services for mental health professionals may also be sought by any of the family members outside of the legal system before, throughout, or after a divorce. The role of these professionals and the participants' perceptions of them may provide useful information for these same professionals as to their future dealings with PASfamilies.

**(a) Legal services:** The issues gathered here pertained to any legal proceedings, such as interactions with lawyers, judges, and the court system in general. The principle means of data collection for this issue was from the participants' spontaneous divulgence of information and some data were gathered via the researcher's additional probing.

**Results:** The participants generally reported having negative experiences within the legal system. The participants felt that the judges in their cases either played minimal roles in the final decisions since everything was decided beforehand by the lawyers, or the judges made quick and uninformed decisions, lacking knowledge and experience with respect to PAS. For instance, one father reported that his ex-wife -- who was preventing him from having visits with his child -- ignored court orders of his visitation rights. The judge did not impose any consequences on her; she received only a warning after ignoring more than one court order. Accusations were made against three of the fathers. The accusations ranged from physical and mental abuse of the ex-spouse and sexual abuse of the child, to accusations of scaring the children because he "talked like a walrus". The participants perceived the court as an obstruction to seeing their children as well as a financial burden. Some participants reported the cost of the lawyers' fees between U.S. \$12,000 to \$200,000. One father reported having to pay legal fees of \$1,000 in order to see his child for one weekend. Overall, the participants reported a sense of discontent over the way in which their cases were managed by the legal system. However, the discontent may have been related to the fact that the participants lost custody. A future study examining this issue may indicate whether the discontent with the legal services was due to the process of the legal proceedings or due to the end result (the loss of custody by participants).

**(b) Psychological services:** Here data gathered pertained to the participants' experience of receipt of any type of psychological service whether by psychiatrist, psychologist, or counsellor. Once again, the principal sources of data were from the participants' own descriptions of their experiences with mental health professionals. The secondary means was

via follow-up probes by the researcher for the purpose of clarification.

**Results:** Half the participants reported receiving counselling with the alienator prior to the divorce. However, the female participant was the only lost parent to continue with the service and one male participant was "hoping" that an intervention by the therapist would be "crucial" for his case in court. Approximately half of the participants reported receiving a psychological assessment of the family for the legal proceedings in court. In general, the results suggest that the mothers in these families tended to receive psychological services around the time the separation was initiated and that they continued to receive counselling or therapy after the finalization of the divorce. The fathers, on the other hand, were asked by their wives to join their counselling sessions prior to the divorce.

Half of the respondents described their experiences with mental health professionals in negative terms. There appeared to be a sense of discontent with the mental health professionals' knowledge of PAS and how they managed the PAS family. One father initiated a formal complaint against the psychiatrist who tape recorded their conversations without his knowledge. Members of the mental health profession were reported as being utilized as a "legal tactic" by the alienators and their lawyers. The mental health professionals involved with these PAS cases were often described as individuals who lacked the necessary knowledge of PAS and often neglected to collect pertinent information regarding the child's relationship with their father. For instance, one father, whose daughter was seen by a psychologist, was never telephoned or asked for any information about his daughter until he called and complained to her himself. Moreover, the participants reported that their children primarily received psychological care for the family assessment for the court, with the exception that one child was seeing a psychiatrist for treatment of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), a daughter who was being treated for anxiety, and two other children (from different families) who were being treated for aggression. Results indicate a general dissatisfaction with the psychologists or psychiatrists who were involved in the families of the participants and there was a lack of a positive outcome from seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist. Not one participant reported any positive outcomes from receiving psychological services. When asked how they coped with the alienating situation, three of the participants reported a desire to discuss and teach PAS to others.

Overall, the results suggest that the participants sought the assistance of both legal and mental health professionals. Further, the results suggest a lack of satisfaction with the services rendered by both legal and mental health professionals. There was a general sense of a lack of knowledge of PAS on the part of the professionals, as well as failing to gather "both sides of the story". These negative perceptions gave rise to the question as to whether or not accusations that flew back and forth in the courtroom might have the impact of fuelling PAS, and suggests that further research is needed..

### **Current Perceptions**

Examining the lost parents' current perceptions after having undergone PAS may provide insight as to what issues are important for focus in future research, possible indicators of PAS, and the impact of PAS on the lost parents.

**(a) Looking back:** Here data gathered referred to the participants' beliefs of any actions that they would have done differently as well as any general perceptions of the past.

**Results:** The results suggest that the participants, provided that they had had the knowledge

about PAS that they presently have, would have behaved differently towards their ex-spouse. One participant reported that he would have never been married, while two participants reported that they would have taken different legal routes, such as hiring a different type of lawyer and taking a more aggressive legal approach from the onset. Two other respondents reported that they would have sought psychological services earlier on with a professional who was knowledgeable about PAS. The female participant would have allowed more discussions and pictures of the alienator with her children. Armed with the knowledge they now had, every participant would have taken other means to prevent the current alienating situation from ever occurring.

**(b) The impact of PAS:** Data pertaining to the participants' perceptions of how the alienating circumstances have affected their life were gathered.

**Results:** Overall, the results suggest that the participants perceive the alienating circumstances as exerting serious negative emotional and financial consequences on their lives. Specifically, they felt that they had been drained emotionally, most participants reported a sense that the circumstances had "ruined my life completely", and asserted that PAS had had "devastating" effects. One parent described the alienating experience as traumatic. The participants believe that they had lost a child or at the very least their roles as a parent. A participant described this feeling as if they would "rip one of my arms off" and another participant noted that his three year marriage will impact on him for the rest of his life (or at least until his child marries). A financial impact was also reported by three of the six participants, one of whom described himself as being "ruined financially". The only positive impact was reported by the female participant who believed that the alienating experience helped her become more understanding of her pain, others' pain, and this had assisted her to become a more understanding person.

**(c) Termination/Looking to the future:** Data gathered pertaining to this area included the participants' belief that certain situations or circumstances are necessary for the termination of the alienating circumstances.

**Results:** The results suggest that the participants believed that by maintaining contact with the children (i.e., by sending letters and cards) increased the possibility of a reconciliation with their children. Even though the participants' attempts at communicating with their children often remained unanswered, these parents believed that their attempts would inform their children that they were thinking of them, that they loved them, and that their doors were still open to the children. These participants hoped that as the children grew and matured they would decide to contact their lost parent on their own. However, these participants also reported that they realized that their children may never resume contact with them and that they must prepare for this eventuality. Two participants reported that they believed that by gaining access to their children the alienation might stop, and one of these parents stressed that terminating the contact between the alienator and the child was another means through which the alienation may cease. These results suggest that all the participants hoped that the alienation would terminate. The majority of the participants appeared to behave that this would occur with time; one participant perceived "time as a healer".

Overall, the results suggest that the participants perceived their experience of PAS as having resulted in negative and devastating impacts on their lives and themselves and they would go to great lengths to avoid experiencing the alienation again. Moreover, the participants believed that their continued attempts at communicating with their PAS children, despite a lack of responses, would someday lead to the termination of PAS. Therefore, the results

suggest that although PAS has had serious consequences on these families' lives that could have been avoided, the lost parents hoped they would be "reunited" with their children in the future.

## Miscellaneous

**Results:** The remaining data that did not appear to share any commonalities with other participants' responses were gathered here. For instance, information gathered included detailed descriptions of the participants' employment and finances as well as some information regarding other lost parents' experiences as described by the participants. Such information was not related to any issues discussed by other participants and primarily pertained to details of the participants' lives rather than to PAS.

## Summary of Findings

The results of the study suggest that::

1. Family characteristics, such as number of children, and number of marriages, were weak factors in the occurrence of PAS.
2. The alienators' changes of home were not a salient characteristic of PAS families.
3. Marital conflicts and their intensity were weak predictors in the occurrence of PAS.
4. The relationships between the alienating and lost parents were strained after the onset of PAS.
5. There was a general decrease in the frequency of visitation for the lost parent which may or may not have been due to PAS.
6. There was a reduction of other contacts (aside from visitation) between the lost parents and their children that, as expected, further limited the relationship between them.
7. All of the participants perceived a general "sabotage" of their relationships with their children by the alienators. The findings confirmed that the alienators used denigrating techniques (e.g., implying that the lost parents were not good people).
8. The children acted as secondary alienators.
9. The alienator's closer family members tended to also alienate.
10. The participants perceived the underlying cause of the alienation to be hatred of the lost parents, anger, or revenge, or some combination of these.
11. The lost parents experienced a loss of both parental role and power whether or not they had visitation with their children.
12. Lost parents were generally dissatisfied with legal and mental health assistance. Both the legal and mental health professionals have inadequately explored all the parameters implied in PAS.
13. Lost parents would go to great lengths to avoid experiencing alienation again. They



continued to hope to be reunited with their children in the future. Specifically, the participants believed that maintaining contact with their children (i.e., by sending letters and cards) increased the possibility of a reconciliation with their children.

14. Given the knowledge they now had about PAS, the participants would have behaved differently towards their ex-spouses.
15. The participants perceived the alienating circumstances as exerting serious negative emotional and financial consequences in their lives.

Though tentative, these findings demonstrate both the complexity and seriousness of PAS.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present qualitative study examined lost parents' perceptions of the alienating circumstances they and their families experienced in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the nature of Parental Alienation Syndrome and its consequences. The participants included five fathers and one mother who perceived themselves as having experienced PAS. The data were collected via semi-structured, open-ended interview questionnaires. The results consisted of verbatim data transcribed from participants' tape recorded responses. A qualitative analysis of the compiled data was performed for each participant. This section presents a summary and discussion of all the results. The four previously outlined study objectives are addressed with respect to the findings of the present study.

*Question 1:* Are there characteristics (e.g., number of children, number of marriages, etc.) common to alienated families?

Previous studies on alienation that have examined the role of family characteristics as possible factors in the occurrence of the alienation have found differing results. For instance, in the study conducted by [Dunne and Hedrick \(1994\)](#) family characteristics were not found to be a factor of PAS, whereas a study conducted by [Calabrese et al., \(1987\)](#) found that characteristics of individuals were better predictors of alienation than family characteristics. Specifically, high levels of alienation were found to be associated with unemployed, single mothers with a daughter. Further, the daughter was found to have had few friends. Although a number of the participants in the present study had tended to only one PAS child, the lost parents tended to remarry after the alienation, and the alienators had tended to relocate with the PAS child. These results were found to be weak indicators of PAS as they were not reported by a majority of the participants (i.e., greater than 50%). Supporting the results of [Dunne and Hedrick \(1994\)](#), it appears that family characteristics such as number of children, number of marriages, and number of relocations are weak indicators in the occurrence of PAS. Though these findings contradict those of [Calabrese et al., \(1987\)](#), they examined different family characteristics reported by the alienator and found that individual family members characteristics, such as the alienator's employment and the gender of PAS and non-PAS children were relevant in the occurrence of PAS. Further study is required with a larger sample and more detailed questions concerning the number and gender of PAS children and non-PAS children, the number of marriages by both alienator and lost parent, the current marital status and employment of each parent, and the number and reasons for relocations. With these specific questions, a larger sample, and a comparison group of non-PAS divorced families, more light might be shed on the role of family characteristics in the occurrence of

PAS.

*Question 2:* Are there common themes or issues among the conflicts within couples that contribute to marriage dissolution?

Previous studies examined the effects of conflict involved in separation and/or divorce on individual family members. For instance, [Johnston, Gonzalez, and Campbell \(1987\)](#) examined the behaviour of children from separated and/or divorced families who were subjected to "entrenched" parental conflict regarding their custody. It was postulated, in the current study, that an elevated level of conflict contributed to the occurrence of PAS. However, the results suggest that the dissolution of the PAS marriages occurred with varying degrees of conflict, from high levels of conflict including physical aggression, to situations with absolutely no conflict. The current study also found that with time, the majority of the participants reported strained relationships with their ex-spouses, where most had little or no contact with their ex-spouses due to a degradation of communication between the parents. These results suggest that there may be other factors aside from initial marital conflict that contributes to the occurrence of PAS. [Lund's \(1995\)](#) findings indicated that a heightened number of conflicts occurring during the divorce, not during the marriage, may contribute to the occurrence of PAS. Again, further study of separating families is necessary to determine whether it is other factors that occur during the dissolution of the marriage and subsequent custody proceedings or if it is the time of the conflicts with respect to the divorce that plays a more significant role in PAS. Such studies should consist of a long-term examination of the situations that occur in separating families and the family member's responses to them. For instance, a future study may have participants maintain daily journals that chronicle the events of the separation and these journals may later be analyzed qualitatively in order to determine whether any similarities exist across different families.

*Question 3:* Are there common themes in the participants' experience of the alienation process?

Several common themes among the cases were found in the present study. Interestingly, these commonalities spanned the continent; they were not focused geographically. One such commonality was that the PAS children were "enlisted" by the alienating parent as secondary alienators to them (i.e., to the primary alienator) to contribute to the alienation. This finding is consistent with the characteristics of PAS children described by [Gardner \(1992\)](#). Also described by [Gardner \(1992\)](#) and [Cartwright \(1993\)](#), others such as grandparents participated and contributed to the alienation. The reasons for which extended family members participate in that alienation remains unclear. Although there is some support for the notion that the closeness of these other alienators to the alienating parent may play a role, the results were inconclusive. A future study could contribute to the knowledge of PAS by examining the roles of the extended family members of PAS children.

A second commonality was that the lost parents reported feeling powerless as a result of the alienating situation. Others, especially the children, appeared to have gained control of the lost parents' behaviour. These children could determine when, if at all, they would see their lost parent under what circumstances, and particularly what the lost parent would do with the child. The lost parent had to be careful not to anger their child lest they not see the child again. The sense that power shifted from the parent to the child, although not previously examined in the field of PAS, remains a logical consequence of the custody proceedings. As [Turkat \(1994\)](#) noted, the family undergoes a shift from having two parents who make decisions for the child, to one parent becoming a "visitor" in the child's life. The "visiting"

parent then loses the influence that he or she had previously and is unable to make the same decisions as he or she once did.

Third, the results suggest a lack of satisfaction with the services rendered by both legal and mental health professionals. The participants perceived a lack of knowledge of PAS on the part of the professionals, as well as a failure at the professional level to gather pertinent information prior to drawing conclusions. Participants perceived the psychological services they received as not helping the alienating situation, and perceived the legal professionals as supporting and even contributing to the alienation. The sense of dissatisfaction toward mental health professionals may be merited. Currently, there is a minimal amount of research conducted on PAS by psychologists and psychiatrists. Consequently, the number of these professionals who have any knowledge and understanding of PAS may be limited. Further research and discussion of the topic is imperative in order to provide more mental health professionals with greater knowledge of PAS and the intervention techniques that may be useful.

Legal professionals appear to be more aware of PAS as more articles are published by lawyers. However, the dissatisfaction with the legal system appears to stem from lawyers contributing to the alienation. Many have postulated that the legal system contributes to the occurrence of PAS ([Gardner, 1992](#); [1991](#); [Clawar & Rivlin, 1991](#); [Dunne & Hedrick, 1994](#); and [Girdner 1985](#)). For instance, [Cartwright \(1993\)](#) had noted that prolonged legal proceedings contribute to the occurrence of PAS. Much of the blame for the occurrence of PAS may be related to the dissatisfaction the lost parents experienced with the legal system. This dissatisfaction may be due to the lost parents losing primary custody of their children to alienators. As a result, it is imperative that indicators and precursors of PAS be established in order to better inform judges, lawyers, and mental health professionals about PAS. These professionals, working together, can influence the outcome for PAS families. Their influence is shown with the findings of [Dunne and Hedrick \(1994\)](#) who linked the termination of PAS to the legal enforcement of a change in custody from the alienators to the lost parents. This finding was the only one to suggest an effective intervention for PAS families. Specifically, a possible intervention includes mental health professionals identifying PAS families to the legal professionals, who can then legally enforce the necessary change in custody.

The role of these professionals is also to inform others of PAS and its consequences. Currently, [Anita Woolfolk \(1998\)](#), in her bestselling textbook Educational Psychology, provides some startling information to student teachers. In her note to be "sensitive" to the rights of information for both parents, she suggests the following:

1. "When parents have joint custody, both are entitled to receive information and attend parent-teacher conferences."
2. "The noncustodial parent may still be concerned about the child's school progress."  
(emphasis added) (p. 96)

In her first point, she neglects to mention the rights of noncustodial parents and when she does so in her second point, she states that they "may still be concerned" about their child. Such remarks provide future teachers with the impression that once a parent loses custody they also lose their parental rights and feelings for their children. Under Quebec law, Article 648 stipulates that a parent retains parental authority even if that parent does not have physical custody of the child (as cited in [Department of Justice Canada, 1993](#)). Specifically, parental authority is elaborated in Article 647 of the Quebec Civil Code (as cited in

[Department of Justice Canada, 1993](#)) is stated as follows:

The father and mother have the rights and duties of custody, supervision and education of their children. They must maintain their children.

Fourth, the results of the present study suggest that the lost parents attributed the cause of the alienation to the alienators' feelings and desires. Specifically, they perceived the alienators' actions as motivated by hate and anger, revenge or some combination of these. However, these results lack enough detail to determine whether these motivations may be influenced by the influences that [Gardner \(1992\)](#) had suggested, such as the alienators' mental health and the legal system. Specifically, the motivations of hate and/or anger and revenge found in the present study may be mediated by the alienators' mental health as well as the alienators' reactions to the lengths, processes, and outcomes of their legal cases.

Fifth, the results suggest a change in the frequency of visitation and custody arrangements impact on the relationships between the lost parents and their children. The participants reported that primary custody was given to the mother at the onset of the divorce, regardless of who later became the alienator and who later became the lost parent. Further, the fathers all had a consistent visitation schedule at the beginning of the custody arrangements (e.g., one weekend every two weeks). The final custody arrangements resulted in the alienators receiving custody and the lost parents receiving a significant reduction in their visitation schedules from half the original plan to no contact at all. Of interest is the apparent gender bias in initial custody agreements; specifically, mothers received primary custody. However, following the alienation all the lost parents -- even the mother with initial primary custody -- had their visitation drastically reduced. Moreover, as expected with a reduction of visitation, the lost parents described limited relationships with their children to whom they often wrote without reply. The only exception were two fathers who related that they probably maintained a relatively steady relationship with their children because the PAS was mild and even one of these fathers was alienated from his eldest child and with whom he had a limited relationship.

Overall, these findings indicate that there are several possible factors, such as changes in relationships among family members, the roles of mental health and legal professionals, as well as custody arrangements, that may be indicators or precursors to PAS. All of these factors lend support to several of [Lund's \(1995\)](#) findings. First, [Lund's \(1995\)](#) identified separation difficulties that are developmentally inappropriate as a contribution to PAS. It is possible that the pattern of the change in custody arrangements (where the alienator received primary custody at the end of the custody dispute) may result in the separation difficulties described by [Lund's \(1995\)](#). Second, a characteristic of PAS children is that they exhibit some form of "oppositional" behaviour at least to the lost parent, as supported in the present study. Third, [Lund's \(1995\)](#) also found that the non-custodians' parental skills deteriorated and contributed to the occurrence of PAS. Such deterioration of the parental skills may be a result of the lost parent's sense of lost power over their situation and, as indicated in the present study, they did not exercise their usual parenting styles. The lost parents reported that they felt that disciplining the PAS child may result in the child becoming angry and retaliating by denying visits with the lost parent. Since there appears to be several factors that may influence the occurrence of PAS, a long-term study that examines these singly and in combination may provide a useful insight as to possible indicators.

*Question 4:* Given the opportunity, what are some things that the lost parents perceive they might do differently?

The results of the current study suggest that armed with the knowledge they have now, each participant would have taken other means in order to prevent the current alienated situation from ever occurring. Examples of the means they would take include never having married, taking different legal routes, or seeking psychological services at an earlier date. Few studies have addressed this issue, however, the importance of preventing PAS is evident in that all of the participant's would never want to repeat the experience.

A summary of the findings of the present study is as follows: (1) Family characteristics, such as number of children, number of marriages, and the alienators number of relocations were weak factors in the occurrence of PAS. (2) Marital conflicts and their intensity were weak predictors in the occurrence of PAS. (3) As expected, the relationship between the alienating and lost parents were strained after the onset of PAS. (4) There was a general decrease in the frequency of visitation for the lost parent which may or may not have been due to PAS. (5) There was a reduction of other contacts (aside from visitation) between the lost parents and their children that, as expected, limited their relationship. (6) By the very nature of PAS, all of the participants perceived a general "sabotage" of their relationships with their children by the alienators. The findings confirmed that the alienators used denigrating techniques (e.g., implying that the lost parents were not good people). (7) The children acted as secondary alienators. (8) The alienator's closer family members tended to also alienate. (9) The participants perceived the underlying cause of the alienation as the hatred toward the lost parents, anger, or revenge, or some combination of these. (10) The lost parents experienced a loss of parental role and power whether or not they had visitation with their children. (11) Although the lost parents sought the assistance of both legal and mental health professionals, they remained dissatisfied with these services. Both the legal and mental health professionals have inadequately explored all the parameters implied in PAS. (12) The participants, provided that they had the knowledge about PAS that they presently have, would have behaved differently towards their ex-spouse. (13) As expected, the participants perceived the alienating circumstances as exerting serious negative emotional and financial consequences on their lives. (14) They hoped to be able to be reunited with their children in the future. They would be able to do so by maintaining contact with the children (i.e., by sending letters and cards). These findings illustrate both the complexity and seriousness of PAS. Thus the ability to identify precursors, indicators, and effective interventions for these families is essential.

### **Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Additional Research**

The research conducted in the present study involved a small sample of participants who described themselves as victims of PAS and consequently, generalizations can only be made cautiously. Although some pre-defined criteria were given as a basis for choosing the participants, additional specific criteria are necessary. For instance, a useful future criterion may be that the participants be identified as PAS subjects by trained professionals. However, due to time limitations, a lack of resources and the difficulty of identifying cases of PAS when there were so few professionals who had any knowledge of PAS, it might be difficult for a researcher to include this criteria. Second, interviews were conducted by telephone due to the great distances involved. Such a means of interview may be prone to overlook or minimize important qualitative data from nonverbal cues. Ideally, with a larger sample size, possibly a random sample, and the inclusion of a comparison group (e.g., families involved in amicable divorces) greater generalizability may be attained in such a study. To date there is very little research specifically on PAS; much that is known remains tentative. Further building on the data base available to researchers to date can provide greater information upon which to base hypotheses for future research.



The importance of a greater wealth of knowledge on PAS is evident by examining the focus placed on problems encountered in custody disputes by the government. The Senate of Canada has debated drafts of legislation [Bill-C41](#), whose principle is to have both spouses share the "financial obligation to maintain the children of the marriage in accordance with their relative abilities" (Chapter 1, article 11-2). As a result, the Senate of Canada and the House of Commons has created a Joint Committee on Custody and Access. The purpose of this committee is to "examine and analyze issues relating to parenting arrangements after separations and divorce" (Senate Debates, October 28, 1997, pp. 253). Senator Anne C. Cools presented a speech to amend certain aspects of the Joint Committee. The amendment passed and has been sent to the House of Commons for their approval. The amendment Senator Anne C. Cools proposed was to have the Joint Committee on Custody and Access examine important issues relating to separation and divorce. Specifically, she noted that issues such as Parental Alienation Syndrome and false allegations of sexual abuse are difficulties that non-custodial parents encounter. As a result the Committee will set out to:

assess the need for a more child-centred approach to family law policies and practices that would emphasize joint parental responsibilities and child-focused parenting arrangements based on children's needs and best interests; (Senate Debates, p. 257)

The Committee will be examining issues related to custody and access to children after divorce and separation. Mental health professionals will likely be sources of information for this Committee, and Parental Alienation Syndrome will likely be a relevant issue to be examined. Consequently, mental health professionals need to examine PAS further in order to provide both pertinent information to the Committee and more importantly help for the families of PAS.

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## APPENDIX A

### LETTERS TO PARTICIPANTS

### PARENTAL ALIENATION STUDY



If you or someone you know has experienced Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) and are willing to participate in a study, please contact Despina at (514)-840-1159 or via e-mail at [dvassi@PO-BOX.Mcgill.Ca](mailto:dvassi@PO-BOX.Mcgill.Ca).

\*PAS is defined as a syndrome where one parent (usually the custodial parent) attempts to alienate the child or children from another parent. It includes a series of conscious and subconscious techniques, such as brainwashing, by the alienating parent, as well as the child or children's own contributions for denigrating the allegedly hated parent ([Cartwright, 1993](#), [Gardner, 1992](#)).

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORMS

Note: All consent forms will be kept by the researcher (Despina Vassiliou) until the completion and acceptance of her thesis and graduation. After that time, the consent forms will be destroyed.

Consent Form  
McGill University Research Project

The Effects of Parental Alienation Syndrome on Individual Family Members

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are presently conducting research that will examine the development of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS)\* within the family unit. More specifically, we are interested in examining each of the family member's role in the alienation process. Participants will be asked a series of questions pertaining to the alienating relationships within the family unit. The questions are straightforward and will take approximately one hour to discuss and will be tape recorded. Your responses will be kept completely confidential and anonymous. You are not under any obligation to participate, and you may choose to discontinue the study at any point. If you agree to participate in this research project, please sign the form below.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of this project. We would be delighted to provide more background information and answer any questions you might have. For more information, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Despina Vassiliou  
MA student, School Psychology  
McGill University  
514-398-4257

Glenn F. Cartwright, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor, Educational Psychology  
McGill University  
514-398-4240

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the McGill PAS study.  
(Please print your name in full)

Participant's Signature

Date

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

#### Interview Questions

##### *Current Status:*

1. Describe to me your current family constellation?
  - How many children do you have?
  - Are they currently living with you?
  - If no, how often do you get to see them if at all?
  - Have you remarried?
2. Describe your current relationship with your ex-spouse.

##### *Beginning of the Marital Dissolution:*

3. When did the conflicts that lead to the dissolution of your marriage begin?
4. Did you see a common theme or issue in the conflicts?
5. How long did these conflicts before divorce became an option?
6. Who initiated the divorce and on what grounds?

##### *Initiating and Proceedings of the Custody Case(s):*

7. Describe the events that lead up to the custody proceedings?
8. How long was each of the legal cases (custody and divorce)?
9. Do you remember an occasion during the custody proceedings that lead to the delay of the case?
  - If yes,
    - What effects did the delay have on the case?
    - What effects did the delay have on your children and your relationship with them?

##### *Contributions to P.A.S.:*

10. Tell me some factors that contributed to the alienation in your case?
11. Do you believe that you had any role or make any contributions to the alienating situation?
12. What were your children's role in the alienation? Describe some of their behaviours.
  - Describe some of your behaviours or actions that contributed to the alienation?
13. Tell me about the effects of the alienation on your relationship with your children?
14. Describe for me your relationship with your children today?
15. Do you remember an occasion when other individuals contributed to the alienation? (How?)

##### *Cause and Possible Termination of P.A.S.:*

16. For how long did the alienation occur (in months)?
17. What do you believe was the underlying cause of the alienation?
18. How do you feel about the alienation now?
19. Has the alienation ceased? In your opinion, why is this so?

If the alienation has ceased:

- How long has it been since you have been removed from the alienated situation?
- Can you tell me about the circumstances that have made it possible for the alienation to have been terminated?

If the alienation has not ceased:

- Do you believe that there is a possibility of a reconciliation?
- If yes, what do you believe would make a reconciliation possible?

*Looking Back:*

20. When and how did you realize the implications of what was occurring, with regard to the alienation?

21. What do you feel is the impact of this whole experience on your life?

22. Had you or any of your family members sought out services for emotional assistance?

If yes,

· Who? And for what reasons?

· What was the outcome? (Were there any diagnoses made? Were you taking any medication?)

If not,

· How did you or they cope with the situation on your/their own?

23. How do you view the experience now as compared to how you viewed it then (while you were experiencing it)?

24. Has your opinion changed over time? How much time? How did it change?

25. Is there anything else that you would like to change or do over again?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **SAMPLE PAGE OF TRANSCRIPT**

## **APPENDIX E**

### **CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY**