Parental Alienation: Intimate Partner Violence by Proxy

by

Carly Ashe

Bachelor of Arts, University of New Brunswick, 2021

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the Graduate Academic Unit of Sociology

Supervisor: Carmen Gill, PhD, Sociology

Examining Board: Cathy Holtmann, PhD, Sociology, Char
Tia Dafnos, PhD, Sociology
Luc Theriault, PhD, Sociology
Petrea Taylor, PhD, Nursing

This thesis is accepted by the
Dean of Graduate Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

December 2023

Carly Ashe, 2023

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines interviews with nine women to explore how women experience and are impacted by parental alienation as a tactic of coercive control. Thematic analysis using NVIVO-14 software was used to identify recuring themes related to the three research questions that guide this study: how mother-child relationships are impacts by parental alienation; what resources mothers use in help-seeking; and do they experience barriers and obstacles to meaningful support in their help-seeking. Through understanding victims' experiential perceptions of parental alienation, the key purpose of this study was aimed at better understanding how mothers victimized by parental alienation can be better supported in the future by legal professionals. Greater recognition of the pattern of coercive control, in which parental alienation occurs, was found to be needed by intervening professionals, along with further consideration towards preventative measures and more trauma-informed approaches.

Keywords: parental alienation, intimate partner violence, coercive control.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the women who chose to participate. Your insight is invaluable and your courage to share it is commendable. Transparent conversations with you have meant a meaningful contribution to a broader dialogue regarding parental alienation and intimate partner violence and has helped point to the necessity of greater recognition of parental alienation and a more trauma-informed approach by legal and mental health professionals. Thank you.

The loss of a child does not just happen in a morgue.

(Martin, 2023, p.85).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and thank my supervisor, Dr. Carmen Gill, for encouraging and supporting me throughout both my undergrad and master's degrees at UNB. Her dedication to IPV research has inspired me and I consider myself lucky to have her continued support and expertise to draw on throughout my academic journey. I would also like to acknowledge and thank my supervisory committee, Dr. Tia Dafnos, who has also continued to support and encourage me as well. Professors and administrative staff within the Sociology Department have offered ongoing knowledge and support also worthy of acknowledgement. Finally, thank you to my family.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT iii
DEDICATION iiii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
Table of Contents v
List of Figures vii
List Abbreviations viii
Chapter 1: Introduction 1
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework 6
2.1: Gendered Power & Control Dynamics Within IPV 7
2.2: Parental Alienation 16
2.3: Conclusion 25
Chapter 3: Literature Review 28
3.1: Distinguishing PA from other PCCPs 29
3.2: The Credibility Debate 36
3.3: Impacts of Misinformation 44
3.4: Issues with Standardization 54
3.5: Bernet & Baker's (2020) Proposal to the DSM-5-TR 58
3.6: Conclusion 62
Chapter 4: Research Design & Methods 63
4.1: Methodological Approach 63
4.1.1: Recruitment 63
4.1.2: Interview 66
4.1.3: Instruments 67
4.2: Analysis 69
4.3: Ethical Considerations 70
4.4: Conclusion 72
Chapter 5: Findings 73
5.1: Participant Demographics 73
5.2: Experiences & Impacts 74

5.3: Access to Supports & Resources 80
5.4: Barriers & Obstacles 81
5.5: Conclusion 88
Chapter 6: Discussion 90
6.1: The Credibility Debate 90
6.2: Intimate Terrorism & Parental Alienation 100
6.2.1: Regulation & Micromanagement 103
6.3 Parental Alienation 114
6.4 Barriers & Obstacles to Supports & Resources 129
6.5 Conclusion 142
Chapter 7: Conclusion 144
7.1 Limitations 146
7.2 Areas of Future Research 147
References 151
Appendix A: Comparing the Four-Factor & Five-Model of PA 165
Appendix B: Comparing the BAQ, PARQ, and RPAS 166
Appendix C: Invitation to Participate 167
Appendix D: Informed Consent 168
Appendix E: Interview Guide 172
Appendix F: Preliminary Thematic Search Table 175
Appendix G: Complete Thematic Search Table 177
Glossary 181
Curriculum Vitae

List of Figures

Figure 1: Kelly & Johnston's (2001) Differentiation of Alienation & Estrangement 21
Figure 2: Harman et al.'s (2022) Analysis of Published PA Studies since 1992 32

List of Abbreviations

ABA: American Bar Association, a voluntary professional organization of lawyers and law students setting ethical and academic standards within the legal profession.

AFCC: The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, "the premier interdisciplinary and international association of professionals dedicated to the resolution of family conflict. AFCC members include many of the leading practitioners, researchers, educators, and policymakers in the family court arena. AFF provides training and education, and does not license, certify, or regulate the practice of its members" (Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, 2023, np).

APA: American Psychological Association

BAQ: Baker Alienation Questionnaire, created by Baker, Burkhard and Albertson-Kelly (2012) to identify instances of PA from other reasons of contact refusal and to identify instances of splitting by the child.

CARPD: Child Affected by Parental Relationship Distress (CAPRD) in which the child is negatively affected by the parental relationship including high levels of conflict, distress or disparity. This a condition related to PA that is already considered within the DSM-5.

DSM: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, used by mental health professionals and referenced within legal contexts. The DSM-5 was published in 2013, the fifth edition, and is currently undergoing a text revision (DSM-5-TR) in which Bernet and Baker (2022) proposed the incorporation of PARP.

IPV: Intimate Partner Violence.

PA: Parental Alienation, the manipulation of child access post-separation, manipulation of the child's perception of one parent by the other parent, leading to contact refusal between the child and one parent.

PAS: Parental Alienation Syndrome; identified by Dr. Richard Gardner in 1985, PAS is a psychological clustering of symptoms of the child [e.g., behavioural manifestations] from which current PA literature has derived.

PARP: Parental Alienation Relational Problem; parental alienation as it is presented by Bernet and Baker in their 2022 proposal to the DSM-5-TR.

PARQ: Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire: Created by Rohner (2005) and later analyzed for usefulness by Bernet et al. (2018), the PARQ is used to identify splitting.

PASG: Parental Alienation Study Group; Bernet and Baker (2022) submitted their 2022 proposal to the DSM-5-TR on behalf of the PASG of which they lead, "a nonprofit corporation consisting of about 700 mental health and legal professionals, family members, and family advocates who have a special interest in parental alienation" (Parental Alienation Study Group, 2021, np.)

PCCP: Parent-Child Contact Problems; a range of dynamics relating to child reluctance/resistance/refusal to have contact with a parent.

RPAS: Rowlans Parental Alienation Scale, a widely referenced measuring tool to identify PA from other reasons of contact refusal.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Parental alienation (PA) occurs most commonly after a high conflict separation or divorce (Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Darnall, 1999, 2006; Gardner, 1985). PA is defined by manipulative behaviours perpetrated by one parent onto the child to cause interference in the relationship the child has with that other parent. There are three key people within an alienation dynamic (i.e., the alienating triad): (1) the parent experiencing alienation from the child, interchangeably called the target parent, rejected parent, or alienated parent; (2) the parent attempting to manipulate the relationship between the child and the other parent, also referred to as the alienating parent, or the favored parent; and (3) the child, who is used as a proxy by the alienated parent to indirectly perpetrate control tactics onto the targeted parent.

Some consider PA to be child psychological abuse (Boch-Galhau, 2018) as children are the proxy through which perpetrators attempt to hurt their former partner post-separation. Purposeful manipulation of child access is also considered by some to be post-separational intimate partner violence (IPV) (Harman et al., 2022, 2019). IPV is commonly referred to in the literature as family violence, domestic violence, women abuse, or women battering. IPV impacts people globally regardless of ethnicity, gender, relationship status (e.g., married, common-law, dating, or separated), or socio-economic status. IPV includes several forms of abuse between intimate partners: physical abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, etc. IPV is gender-based violence in which women experience victimization at a greater rate than men (World Health Organization, 2023). The differences in gendered victimization relate to a feminist

perspective of IPV. Foundational to a feminist lens is the understanding that power and control are the motivations for IPV perpetration, intrinsically linked to men's patriarchal attitudes (Johnson, 1995; World Health Organization, 2023). Each form of abuse has various ties to power and control dynamics (Johnson, 2008). Explained by Pence and Paymar (1993), perpetrators that seek power, do so for its "corresponding ability to control" (Pence and Paymar, 1993, p.180).

Coercive control refers to a pattern of controlling behaviours used to establish dominance (i.e., power and control) between intimate partners in which the perpetrator has complete and general control of the victim and the relationship rather than control over a particular argument or situation (Stark, 2009). While coercive controlling behaviour occurs most often alongside physical and sexual abuse, coercive control can be present within any form of IPV through use of both violent and non-violent control tactics (Johnson, 2008). PA manifests as a post-separational tactic of coercive control, used to continue power and control over a victim through the weaponization of the children (e.g., non-violent control strategy) when continual access to the victim is lost or threatened by separation.

Coercive controlling behaviour is referred to by Johnson (2008) as intimate terrorism and is further explained by Kelly and Johnson (2008) to include strategies such as "intimidation, emotional abuse; isolation; minimizing, denying, and blaming; use of children; asserting male privilege; economic abuse; and coercion and threats" (Kelly and Johnson, 2008, p.481). In conceptualizing PA as a post-separational strategy of coercive control, use of children and asserting male privilege are key considerations. These are examples of non-violent control tactics which can be used by a perpetrator alongside

other forms of violence (Kelly and Johnson, 2008). Power is exerted through manipulation of child access to re-establish control dynamics that were lost or threatened by separation.

Despite a growing body of academic research recognizing PA as a form of IPV (Lee-Maturana et al., 2021), this conceptualization has not been readily adopted by legal professionals who tend to understand IPV and PA as separate issues (Johnston and Sullivan, 2020). Legal recognition of PA has been hindered by the growing body of misinformation being academically published regarding the concept that has been subsequently referenced by the courts (Bernet, 2023).

Aimed at identifying how victim-mothers experience PA and if/how they can be better supported by legal professionals, this study aims to answer three research questions: (1) how are women experiencing physical alienation (complete blocked access) or threatened alienation; (2) which resources did mothers victimized by PA reach out to for support; and (3) how did these women experience barriers or obstacles when accessing these resources?

In the Theoretical Framework chapter, I will situate PA within a context of intimate terrorism (i.e., coercive control) as defined by Johnson (2008) and in association of power and control dynamics. I will then discuss Parental Alienation Theory, including history, definition, associated terminologies, and controversies related to the theory. PA will be considered within a regime of post-separation coercive control.

In the Literature Review chapter, I will further contextualize the debate around the legal credibility of the PA concept. This includes discussion regarding the dissemination of misinformation and issues related to the legal, academic, and clinical

adoption of a standardized tool for measuring PA. Finally, Bernet and Baker's (2022) proposal to have PA, as Parental Alienation Relational Problem (PARP), included in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) will be discussed as it relates to the legal admissibility of the theory.

In the Research Design chapter, I will discuss the methodology used for this study including recruitment strategies, interview method, instruments, analysis, and ethical considerations. Further, I will discuss the withdrawal of two participants who chose to retract their participation due to the study's use of the term "parental alienation", though they both expressed that this is what they had experienced. The withdrawal of these participants are examples of the ongoing debate about the conceptual legal credibility of PA as discussed in the Conceptual Framework.

In the Findings chapter I will present the findings from the interviews, including experiences and impacts of alienation, supports and resources sought by participants, and associated barriers and obstacles participants faced when seeking these resources. Then, in the Discussion chapter, I will highlight the need for mental health and legal professionals to better recognize behaviours related to PA as well as its impact on victims to provide more knowledgeable, and sensitive, support. Key findings from the thematic analysis, conducted via NVIVO-14 software, will be discussed in relation to an array of emergent themes related to IPV and PA. A concluding chapter will follow to summarize this study.

Understanding the victim's perceptions of support, or the lack of support, that these resources offered could point to ways in which professionals are, or are not, trauma informed. Trauma informed practices indicate knowledge about the impacts of

experiences, including trauma caused by victimization of intimate partner violence and parental alienation. Professionals that are trauma-informed offer positive and supportive environments and resources for victims to turn to, rebuilding their sense of personal control and empowerment. Being trauma-informed works against victim-blaming and may encourage victims to seek help. The key objective of this study is to better understand, from the perspectives of victims of PA, how they can be best supported in the future.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I outline my theoretical framework for situating parental alienation (PA) as a form of intimate partner violence (IPV). Specifically, I outline how PA is a specific form of IPV: coercive control, referred to by Johnson (2008) as intimate terrorism (IT). Coercive control is a pattern of controlling or threatening behaviour that entraps women through the diminishing of their autonomy and agency and is founded on patriarchal beliefs (Stark, 2009). I therefore adopt a coercive control framework that situates PA as a strategy of coercive control, a form of gendered violence, in the context of systemic patriarchy.

PA occurs when a child resists or refuses contact with one parent, often after a high-conflict divorce or separation (Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Darnall, 1999, 2006; Bernet, 2010; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1976; Baker and Chambers, 2011; Rowlands, 2019; Gardner, 1985). While there are several reasons associated with parental resistance/refusal under an umbrella term of Parent Child Contact Problems (PCCPs) (Pruett et al, 2023), PA is a unique circumstance in which the child's perception of one parent is manipulated by the other parent (Harman et al., 2019). The manipulation of the child's perception of one parent, and the manipulation of child access onto the targeted parent, are examples of how PA is rooted in coercive controlling dynamics and behaviours (e.g., non-violent control tactics in which child access is controlled to sabotage the parent-child relationship and exert power/dominance over the ex-partner). Through triangulating strategies (i.e., perpetration of abuse through a third party), the child becomes the proxy through which coercive control is perpetrated between one parent to the other.

Key to a coercive control theoretical framework is understanding power and control dynamics as gendered. In the following section, I will first discuss the gender dynamics of IPV and coercive control. Next, I will use Jonhson's (2008) typology of domestic violence to highlight the unique occurrence of coercive control in intimate partner relationships as intimate terrorism (IT), as this is where I situate PA. Finally, PA theory will be discussed as a specific form of contact resistance/refusal, separate from other PCCPs. PA will be contextualized within power and control dynamics that support PA as a coercive control strategy post-separation.

2.1. Gendered Power & Control Dynamics Within IPV

Under the umbrella term 'IPV' are several forms of violence against or between intimate partners. These include physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse, and sexual abuse, among others. Each of these forms of abuse are individually situated within a different context of power and control. These forms of violence can be used singularly or in tandem with one another and may entail a combination of coercive control tactics (Johnson, 2008).

Coercive control is a pattern of controlling or threatening behaviour that entraps women through the diminishing of their autonomy and agency and is founded on patriarchal beliefs (Stark, 2009). Perpetration of coercive control, or IT as it is referred to by Johnson (2008), is aimed at establishing a power dynamic between intimate partners in which the perpetrator has complete and general control of the victim and the relationship. Importantly, perpetrators of coercive control use as many or as few forms of violence as perceived necessary to establish a sense of dominance over the intimate

partner (Johnson, 2008). Coercive control can be present during the relationship or post-separation (Johnson, 1995; 2008).

Foundational to the conceptualization of coercive control is the gendering of perpetration and victimization. Men are found to perpetrate coercive controlling behaviour more often than women, and women are victimized more often than men (Stark, 2009; Johnson, 2008). Underlying this assertion of general control is a dominating dynamic, exerted systematically as a pattern to diminish and eliminate the victim's sense of autonomy and agency. Johnson and Ferraro (2000) explain the concept of coercive control

> is most visible in the feminist literature, which has argued that partner violence is primarily a problem of men using violence to maintain control over "their women", a control to which they feel they are entitled and that is supported by a patriarchal culture. (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000, p.950)

Coercive control is rooted in patriarchal gender inequity (Johnson, 2008; Stark, 2009; World Health Organization, 2023).

The use of control, to assert power/dominance, influences a victim's help-seeking patterns (Leone et al., 2007). Victims who experience low (or no) control are more likely to use informal supports (e.g., support from family and friends). This is explained by Leone et al. (2007) to reflect the victim's wanting to end the violence, but not the relationship. Victims who experience high levels of control are more likely to use formal supports (e.g., hospitals, police, shelters, and courts) (Leone et al., 2007). Johnson's typology of domestic violence distinguishes between low and high control IPV which will be discussed below. Those experiencing coercive control will be in a

higher control bracket and tend to use formal resources as these are related to instances of isolation (e.g., not being able to contact family/friends for help) and will have sustained greater injures that requires police, shelter, hospital, or court assistance (Johnson, 2008). Victims of PA, as a post-separational tactic of coercive control, may also tend to need support from formal institutions.

To best understand how power and control play different roles in different abuse dynamics, Johnson offers a four-part typology that distinguishes the various types of violence between intimate partners. Johnson's violence types include: (1) situational couple violence (SCV), (also referred to by Johnson as common couple violence); (2) violent resistance; (3) mutual violent control; and (4) intimate terrorism (IT). Each of these forms of violence are different in terms of causes, participation, consequences to participants, and the form of intervention required (Kelly and Johnson, 2008). Each form of violence identified by Johnson (2008) may include non-physical or physical control tactics (Johnson and Leone, 2005).

Johnson's first violence type, SCV, is motivated by a need to control a specific situation but not to control the partner or relationship more generally (Johnson, 1995). SCV does not have foundations in power, control, or coercion (Johnson and Leone, 2005), is perpetrated relatively equally amongst men and women (Kelly and Johnson, 2008) and intimate partners report common causes for the violence (Johnson, 2008). SCV is considered "the most common type of physical aggression in the general population of married spouses and cohabitating partners" (Kelly and Johnson, 2008, p.45). SCV is situationally provoked "as the tensions or emotions of a particular encounter lead one or both of the partners to resort to violence" (Johnson et al., 2014,

p.291). Escalation can occur within SCV, and it can be a chronic problem with one or both partners frequently resorting to violence with a potential for homicide (Johnson et al., 2014). However, SCV is less likely to escalate over time in comparison with other forms of violence and is more likely to stop after separation (Kelly and Johnson, 2008).

In heterosexual relationships, violent resistance, the second type of violence within this typology, is primarily used by women (Johnson et al, 2014). Violent resistance occurs when the target of coercive controlling behaviour uses physical violence in response to her own victimization. The victim's use of violence is not to assert control over her partner, but as a means of self-defense or in the belief that it will deter future violence (Johnson, 2008). Despite the use of violence, the victim is not considered a perpetrator of IPV since her motive is self-defense, not power and control. As Johnson and colleagues argue,

> many victims of intimate terrorism do respond with violence of their own. For some, this is an instinctive reaction to being attacked, and it happens at the first blow – almost without thought. For others, it doesn't happen until it seems that the assaults will continue forever if something is not done to stop them. (Johnson et al., 2014, p.187)

However, many women find out quickly that responding with violence is ineffective and only makes matters worse (Kelly and Johnson, 2008); for some victims of IPV, "eventually it seems that the only way out is to kill their partner" (Johnson, 2008, p.290). Kelly and Johnson (2008) find that regarding instances of violent resistance, "the most severe incidents took place when they threatened or tried to leave their partner" (p.485).

Control is not a key feature of SCV nor violent resistance. However, Mutual Violent Control, Johnson's third form of violence, does include a pattern of relationship-level control. Mutual violent control occurs as "the true mutuality of two people fighting for general control over the relationship" (Johnson, 2008, p.12). This violence type occurs when "a violent and controlling individual [is] paired up with another violent and controlling partner" (Johnson, 2006, p.1006).

The last violence type of Johnson's four-part typology is IT, referred to as patriarchal terrorism in Johnson's earlier works because it is considered intrinsically linked to patriarchal attitudes of the perpetrator. IT is the form of violence that Johnson argues is typically enacted when "domestic violence" is referred to (Johnson and Leone, 2005). As a focal point of feminist IPV research, "it is not surprising that the institution of gender, in which male domination is a central element, is implicated in the structure of intimate terrorism, which is about coercive control" (Johnson, 2008, p.535). IT is "a pattern of emotionally abusive intimidation, coercion, and control coupled with physical violence" (Kelly and Johnson, 2008, p.478). Male perpetrators of IT are significantly more likely to hold misogynistic attitudes when compared to male perpetrators of SCV (Johnson, 2006, 2008; Kelly and Johnson, 2008; Hayes and Boyd, 2017; Wrathall and Herron, 2021), and therefore in theorizing this form of violence, it is considered that "misogyny and gender traditionalism play an important role" (Johnson, 2008, p.290). IT is defined by the

> attempt to dominate one's partner and to exert general control over the relationship, domination that is manifested in the use of a wide range of power and control tactics including violence, [… and] nonviolent control tactics […]

> including emotional abuse, isolation, using children, using male privilege, economic abuse, threats, intimidation, and blaming. (Johnson and Leone, 2005, p.324)

While perpetration of SCV is roughly gender symmetric, IT is perpetrated almost entirely by men in heterosexual relationships (Johnson and Leone, 2005, p.325). The perpetration of IT (i.e., coercive control) by predominantly men against women is also supported by Stark (2009). Men who perpetrate IT are motivated not only to control the relationship, but to also ensure that their partner will never leave them (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). Therefore, upon separation, dynamics of IT can be expected to continue as post-separation abuse, when control dynamics are threatened/severed, to reinstate the relationship and associated domination over the intimate partner. While victims of SCV are more likely to use informal supports, victims of IT rely more heavily on social institutions including police, shelters, and courts for support (Leone et al., 2007). Assistance from formal supports by IT victims is reflected in how perpetrators of IT

> rely upon frequent and severe physical and sexual violence to emotionally and economically terrorize their victims. Intimate terrorists more often injure their victims, forcing them into crisis situations where urgent medical or legal intervention is necessary, even life saving. (Leone et al., 2007, p.436)

In a study by Leone and colleagues (2007), IT victims contacted police twice as often as SCV victims, sought medical help four times as often, and were twice as likely to contact a counsellor (Leone et al., 2007). Further, IT perpetrators were found to induce social isolation from family and friends, which deter informal help-seeking (Leone et al., 2007). The number and variety of control tactics used by intimate terrorists

are significantly greater than those associated with other forms of violence, resulting in greater injuries and psychological distress (Johnson et al., 2014).

Johnson (1995) argues that within the dynamics of IT, "the perpetrator does not need to use violence often in order to terrorize his partner" (Johnson, 1995, p.287). This is because violence is only part of an overarching pattern of control, to garner power/domination. Even with seldom use of physical violence, a level of threat or fear can be instilled in the victim that forces compliance (Johnson and Leone, 2005). That is to say that one instance of physical violence may be enough to establish "a level of fear that allows the intimate terrorist to exert control almost exclusively by means of nonviolent tactics" in the future (Johnson and Leone, 2005, p.324).

Hardesty et al. (2015) state that control becomes coercive "when it involves the repetitive use of tactics to regulate and dominate an intimate partner's daily life and restrict personal liberties" (Hardesty et al., 2015, p.834). It is this notion of an attack on personal liberties that brings Stark (2009) to argue that coercive control should be considered a "liberty crime" (Stark, 2009, p.13). Stark argues that coercive control is intrinsically linked to gender, arguing, "the lost connection between women's status, domesticity, and dependence on men [is what] coercive control is designed to reinstate" (Stark, 2009, p.192). Leone et al. (2007) also explains that

> the physical and sexual violence associated with the pattern of control that defines IT effectively entraps victims in the relationship by creating an overwhelming sense of fear and by diminishing victim's personal resources (e.g., confidence, self-esteem), financial resources (e.g., money to escape, stable

employment), and contact with support networks (e.g., family, friends, and shelters) (p.427).

In addition to the personal resources identified by Leone et al. (2007), Stark (2009) adds that weaponization of personal knowledge is used by perpetrators to intimidate, isolate, humiliate, exploit, regulate, and micromanage victims. Stark (2009) writes that "everything from a victims' earnings and phone conversations to her medical problems, personal fears, sexual desires and illicit activities" (p.206) are exploited, or threatened to be exploited, in a regime of power and control. Exploitation of intimate knowledge, coupled with tactics of psychological abuse including "criticism, threats, denial of the victim's perception, and shifting responsibility" (Stark, 2009, p.202) create a regime of regulation and micromanagement that enforces victim compliance and normalization. Normalization is a social process in which recurring exposure to an environment (e.g., a coercive controlling environment) comes to be accepted by the victim as normal or routine, becoming accepted aspects of 'everyday life'.

Regulation of the victim is often not recognized as abuse by outsiders (e.g., the victims' friends and family). Threat of exploitation of intimate knowledge is therefore a covert, non-physically violent tactic of coercive control used to entrap women within the relationship. In explaining coercive control as a metaphorical jail cell, Stark (2009) explains, "the iron rods – a barrage of assaults, a locked door, missing money or a distributor cap, rules for cleaning, a mysterious text message, a time set at the telephone – are now recognized as bars" (Stark, 2009, p.198). The sense of entrapment that is produced by this, Stark (2009) says, is "sexism with a vengeance" (Stark, 2009, p.194). Such sexism is intrinsically lined to "women's default and devalued roles as

homemaker, caretaker, and sexual partner […where] women are still more or less competent by how they perform their second shift" (Stark, 2009, p.211).

Both Stark (2009) and Johnson (2008) theorize coercive control/IT as societal patriarchal norms reproduced in personal relationships. Power is therefore associated with gender superiority (i.e., patriarchy), exerted to gain control over the intimate partner (e.g., to present their dominant status within the relationship and subordinate the female gender). Just as men have held a traditional gender dominant (i.e., powerful) role in society, this dominance is reproduced in intimate relationships by the assertion of control (e.g., assertion of controlling/abusive behaviours aimed at diminishing women's autonomy and agency).

The gendered dimension of coercive control can have serious implications for custody disputes for women. As Stark (2009) argues, "nowhere is it more evident than in family court, where women's failures as homemakers are highlighted while men's neglect of domestic work is rarely considered a relevant factor in determining their fitness to parent" (Stark, 2009, p.211). Patriarchal ideals not only riddle relationships where coercive control is present, but patriarchy remains systematic within many Canadian institutions (Collier, 2022; Meyer, 2011). This can have devastating effects for women who are experiencing IPV and PA and who turn to the courts for help only to experience secondary-victimization as they are further traumatized by legal professionals (Gezinski and Gonzalez-Pons, 2021; Roebuck et al., 2022).

"Using children" (Johnson and Leone, 2005, p.324) has been highlighted as a non-violent strategy within coercive control dynamics in which women are disproportionately victimized. The following section will turn to discussing PA Theory,

as PA is used as a tactic of coercive control post-separation to maintain or reinstate power and control dynamics over separated partners. Origins of the theory, behaviours, and differences between PA and estrangement will be discussed.

2.2 Parental Alienation

Despite PA being increasingly considered a form of IPV within academic research, there is no such agreement in legal fields. Citing Meier (2009), Bernet and colleagues acknowledge that "nothing is more polarized in the family law field than the debate about domestic abuse and parental alienation" (Bernet et al., 2022, p.593). This polarization is regarding how legal professionals tend to prioritize either claims of PA or claims of IPV, viewing them as separate phenomenon rather than looking at the former as within a pattern of the latter. Arguing that PA is a form of IPV, Lorandos (2006) refers to the separation of PA and IPV by legal professionals as viewing the two as a "dichotomy" (p.1) to which IPV and PA are considered contrasting parts despite being an encompassing occurrence. Both authors, Bernet et al. (2022) (i.e., polarization) and Lorandos (2006) (i.e., dichotomization) speak to the legal conceptual separation of PA and IPV despite a substantive body of literature affirming their relation.

IPV is often considered in the legal field to subside post-separation (Johnston and Sullivan, 2020; Sheehy and Boyd, 2020). Rather than subsiding, however, divorce or separation causes physical distance between partners which makes direct control strategies harder to implement. This is problematic for partners perpetrating coercive control, as the control dynamic is altered or threatened by separation. This does not mean that perpetrators do not find other ways to maintain an omnipresence or to (re)establish a sense of control over the victim. The inability to assert control directly

may motivate the use of indirect control strategies. This is why children become weaponized by the perpetrator, to continue control and domination over the victim indirectly as this is not possible directly due to separation. This is IPV by proxy.

In this section I will first discuss Gardner's (1985) Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) as the foundation for the concept of PA. While PAS is particularly relevant to the field of psychology, the concepts as presented within PAS have been foundational to the sociological interpretation of the phenomenon of manipulated child access. Then, I will discuss Baker and Darnall's (2006) Parental Alienating Behaviours (PABs) as this shifts focus from the child (e.g., as presented in PAS) to the behaviours of the alienating parent (e.g., highlighted by PA), an important consideration when analyzing the experiences of mothers targeted for PA.

Gardner (1985) first coined the term Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS), which has been adopted and adapted throughout PA literature to date (Baker, 2020; Bernet, 2023; Bernet and Greenhill, 2022). A key contribution by Gardner was the identification of eight behavioural manifestations of the alienated child, used to identify instances of PA. The clustering of these manifestations, or symptoms, experienced by the child is the basis for Gardner's argument that PAS should be considered a clinical syndrome (i.e., pathological condition) and therefore incorporated into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM). While this is an argument more related to the field of psychology, it has social implications in the admissibility of PA within legal contexts and affects how we sociologically understand women's experiences, impacts, and help-seeking related to PA victimization.

The eight behavioural manifestations are: (1) a campaign of denigration; (2) weak, absurd, or frivolous rationalizations for the deprecation; (3) lack of ambivalence; (4) the independent thinker phenomenon[1]; (5) reflexive support of the alienating parent in the parental conflict; (6) absence of guilt or cruelty to and/or exploitation of the alienated parent; (7) the presence of borrowed scenarios; and (8) spread of animosity to the friends and/or extended family of the alienated parent (Gardner, 1985). These manifestations are considered by Gardner to be the ways in which children respond to alienation tactics used by one of their parents (i.e., the alienating parent), often resulting in their altered perception of the other parent (i.e., target parent), which in turn leads to a resistance/refusal for ongoing contact with that parent. Gardner argues that alienation occurs in mild, moderate, and severe stages. Children who are mildly alienated are "taught to disrespect, disagree with, and even act out antagonistically against the targeted parent" (Gardner, 2002, p.96). While moderately alienated children pose greater behavioural problems or further resist visiting the target parent than mildly alienated children, children who are severely alienated spend no physical time with the target parent and typically suffer from most, if not all, eight symptoms. Since the child is manipulated by a parent, resulting in these behavioural manifestations, PA is considered

[1] The independent thinker phenomena refers to children's claims that their resistance or refusal to see the alienated parent comes from their own independent thought and is not influenced by the other parent. Baker and Darnell (2006) offer the following anecdote: "he will start out by saying, 'mom, this is my decision and mine only' and then repeat exactly what his dad has been saying. He challenges me on events that he is not even witness to, and he is not getting the information from me" (Baker and Darnell, 2006, p.66).

a form of child abuse in psychological fields (Bernet, 2023; Boch-Galhau, 2018). The nature of PA is pointed to by Gardner (1985) as progressive, as mild cases are considered likely to intensify if alienation is left unattended, leading to more severe cases (Gardner, 1998).

Many PA researchers have kept ties to Gardner's (1985) eight criteria for identifying PA (Baker, 2012; Bernet et al., 2022). However, many contemporary researchers have adopted a feminist framework of IPV regarding PA, in response to criticism of Gardner's approach to presenting PAS as a vindictive legal strategy used by women post-separation to limit father-child contact, with no substantive empirical evidence. PAS was originally presented by Gardner (1985) as a legal method used by mothers to limit father's access through false allegations of sexual abuse (Gardner, 1985; Meier, 2020). Criticism of Gardner's gendered explanation of PAS has led to psychological and sociological reconceptualization of the concept, ultimately leading to its renaming as PA. There has also been a shift of focus to the behaviours of the alienating parent rather than the psychological pathology of the child (Baker and Darnall, 2006). This change in focus considers the behaviours enacted by the alienating parent onto the child to sabotage the relationship the child has with the other parent (i.e., triangulation).

Baker and Darnall (2006) offer a non-exhaustive list of 17 Parental Alienating Behaviors (PABs). These include: (1) badmouthing; (2) limiting contact; (3) interfering with communication; (4) interfering with symbolic communication (e.g., not having pictures of the rejected parent in the alienating parents' home); (5) withdrawal of love (e.g., the alienating parent becomes emotionally distant or punitive if the child shows

positive feelings towards the rejected parent); (6) telling the child the targeted parent does not love them; (7) forcing the child to choose (e.g., making the child participate in the rejection of the other parent); (8) creating the impression that the target parent is dangerous; (9) confiding in the child (e.g., about flaws and faults of the target parent); (10) forcing the child to reject the target parent (e.g., both parents going to the child's soccer game but telling the child not to go see the other parent); (11) asking the child to spy on the target parent (e.g., usually about social interactions and finances); (12) asking the child to keep secrets from the target parent, creating psychological distance; (13) referring to the target parent by their first name to devalue the status of the target parent to the child; (14) referring to a step-parent as mom or dad and encouraging the child to do the same; (15) withholding medical, academic, or other important information from the target parent; (16) changing the child's name to remove association with the target parent; and (17) cultivating dependency of the child on the alienating parent (Baker and Darnall, 2006). These 17 PABs are divided by Baker and Darnall (2006) into five broader categories: (1) poisonous messages; (2) interfering with the target parent's contact and communication; (3) erasing and replacing the target parent; (4) encouraging the child to betray the target parent; and (5) undermining the target parent's parental authority (Baker and Darnall, 2006).

By shifting focus from the symptoms of the child to the actions of the alienating parent, a feminist analysis to situate PA within a pattern of power and control is strengthened. Further support to a feminist analysis is found by applying Johnson's (2008) coercive control framework in which perpetrators use non-violent control tactics to gain and maintain control over their victim, as using the children (Johnson, 1995).

Identification of PABs, as offered by Baker and Darnall (2006), in tandem with Gardner's (1998) behavioural manifestations have given rise to a more thorough understanding of PA and has helped differentiate PA from other reasons for contact refusal. However, while these tools are used in academic and clinical research, they have not been so readily adopted in custody evaluations by legal professionals.

PA is a unique circumstance. While children can experience a range of reactions to their parent's divorce or separation, these reasons for contact resistance/refusal are not always shaped by manipulation by their parents. It is important to differentiate PA from other PCCPs as the associated resources and interventions differ. A range of children's reactions to their parents' divorce or separation are illustrated in Figure 2, differentiating estrangement (e.g., other reasons for contact resistance/refusal) and PA (Kelly and Johnston, 2001).

Figure 1. Kelly and Johnston's (2001) Differentiation of Alienation & Estrangement

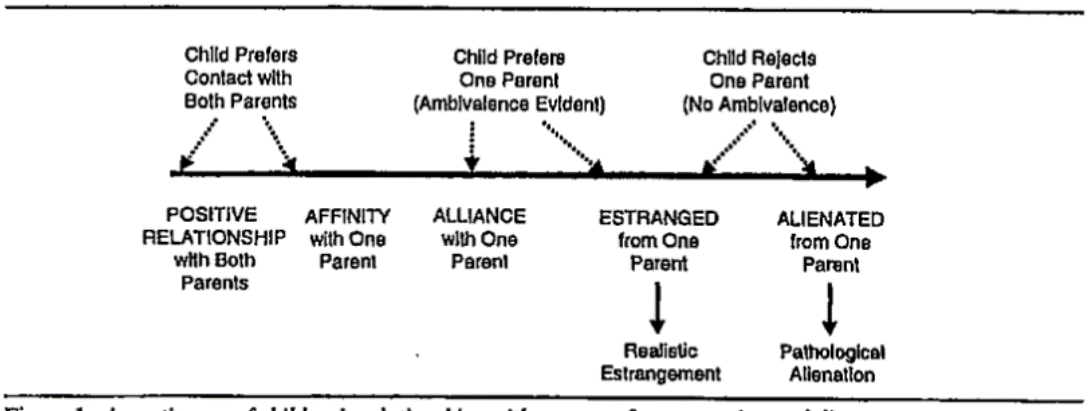


Figure 1. ***A continuum of children's relationships with parents after separation and divorce.***

(Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.249)

Contact refusal is "simply a symptom that could have a number of possible causes, one of which is parental alienation" (Bernet, 2010, p.5). Kelly and Johnston

(2001) argue that "too often in divorce situations, all youngsters resisting visits with a parent are improperly labelled *alienated* […] There are multiple reasons that children resist visitation, and only in very specific circumstances does this behaviour qualify as alienation (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.251). The unique experience of PA reflects that is it a post-separation tactic of coercive control; PA does not occur where a child resists or refuses contact with a parent because they are simply closer with the other parent, but rather that they do not want a relationship with one parent because they have been conditioned (i.e., manipulated) to believe that the other parent is dangerous or unloving. This form of manipulation is rooted in exerting gender dominance, where even in parenting it is about expressing to the other parent that they [the perpetrator] are still able to control the victim's life. Understanding alternate reasons for contact refusal is important, then, to understand PA as this unique dynamic, needing specific interventions reflecting its unique dynamics.

> Other reasons for contact refusal could be related to resistance rooted in: (1) normal developmental processes (e.g., anxieties related to parental separation in a young child); (2) the nature of high-conflict divorce (e.g., inability to cope with transition); (3) a parenting style (e.g., rigidity, insensitivity); (4) the emotional state of one parent (e.g., wanting to remain with that parent for emotional support); or (5) the remarriage of a parent (e.g., behaviours of the parent or stepparent that deter willingness to visit). (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.251)

Other reasons for contact refusal could include:

> (1) personal preference the child has for one parent over the other (e.g., common interests); (2) in the hopes to avoid a loyalty conflict; (3) the child is experiencing some form of separation anxiety from one parent; (4) being overly stubborn or oppositional (e.g., in belief the tension they cause will make their parents reunite); or (5) estrangement due to previous maltreatment, abuse, or neglect. (Bernet et al., 2022, np)

A child's contact resistance/refusal to see a parent after separation that is rooted in "temperament, gender, age, shared interests [with one parent but not the other], sibling preferences, parenting practices, [or the] child feel[ing] much closer to one parent than the other" (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.251) constitute an allied child. An allied child is a child that has a parental preference and a lack of closeness with the other parent before separation; not being close to the parent is not related to abuse or neglect in this case. Allied children differ from alienated children as they "generally do not completely reject the other parent or seek to terminate all contact" (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.252). In contrast, an alienated child expresses "extreme disproportion between the child's perception and beliefs about the rejected parent and the actual history of the rejected parents' behaviours and the parent-child relationship" (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.263). An important identifying marker of children who are alienated is that they had a positive and loving relationship with the now rejected parent before separation (Baker and Fine, 2008). Having had a loving relationship prior to the separation points to the possibility of the child refusing contact as a justified rejection (Gardner, 1985).

A justified rejection, as originally defined by Gardner (1985) and subsequently adopted by Baker (2020) and other PA researchers (Bernet et al, 2022; Lubit, 2019;

Lorandos et al, 2013), occurs when the parent had been emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive, or neglectful to the child prior to the alienation. Children engaging in justified rejection differ from alienated children as children of a justified rejection are most often able to provide information to support their allegations, where alienated children are not (Kelly and Johnston, 2001). Where the child of a justified rejection had experienced abuse by the target parent, they are justified in their rejection of that parent as a self-protecting measure. Where a justified rejection, or estrangement (Bernet et al., 2022), points to the occurrence of child abuse it does not constitute PA nor PAS (Gardner, 1985; Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Baker, 2020; Bernet et al., 2022). Where an alienated child had not been neglected or maltreated by the target parent, this leaves PA, or another unjustified rejection explanation a possibility.

Having had established a prior loving relationship, and therefore ruling out a justified rejection, Kelly and Johnston (2001) explain that alienated childrens' allegations about the rejected parent are

> mostly replicas or slight variants of the aligned parent's allegations and stories. The scripted lines are repeated endlessly but most often are hollow, without underlying substance, texture, or detail to support the allegations […] frequently using adult words or phrases. (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.263)

Kelly and Johnston (2001) go on to explain,

> although there may be some kernel of truth to the child's complaints and allegations about the rejected parent, the child's grossly negative views and feelings are significantly distorted and exaggerated reactions […] it is a severe

distortion on the child's part of the previous parent-child relationship. (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.254)

In contrast to the vilification of the rejected parent, the child adopts a completely supportive perspective of the aligned parent. Kelly and Johnston (2001) explain, "they refuse to consider any information that might undermine this viewpoint of their perfect companion and parent" (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.263). However, to view one parent as all good and one parent as completely bad is not normal behaviour of a child, nor is it a normative parenting strategy (Kelly and Johnston, 2001). This polarized parental perception by the child is called splitting (Baker et al., 2012; Bernet et al., 2022). Regarding splitting, Kelly and Johnston (2001) argue,

> Even when there is a history of child abuse, the other parent is mentally ill, or the child's safety is endangered, the average parent will seek different venues and more rational means of protecting the child. Furthermore, such parents often recognize that their child loves that parent despite the destructive behaviour. (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.258)

2.3 Conclusion

The preceding theoretical framework has supported parental alienation as a coercive control strategy used post-separation. Coercive control is indirectly perpetrated through the use of child to (re)establish a power dynamic between intimate partners despite separation or to demand to reinstate the relationship. Since PA has been recurringly cited by PA researchers to occur most often in the context of high-conflict separation and divorce (Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Darnall, 1999, 2006; Bernet, 2010; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1976; Baker and Chambers, 2011; Rowlands, 2019; Gardner,

1985), PA is used as a post-separational tactic of coercive control to reinstate the power dynamics in a time when the control regime has been threatened or lost due to precarious contact related to separation. The “use of children” (Johnson, 1995) is therefore adopted by the perpetrator as a strategy to reinstate the power and control dynamics between intimate partners. The use of children as a non-violent control tactic supports Johnson’s (1995) argument that a range of violent and non-violent control tactics may be used by the perpetrator to instill fear. Once fear is instilled in the victim, ongoing tactics may not be required to (re)establish a control dynamic.

The gender dynamic of coercive control has also been highlighted in this chapter. Adopting a coercive control framework has meant the insertion of a feminist lens to understanding IPV as women are disproportionately victimized by intimate terrorism (Johnson, 2008) and PA (Pruett et al., 2023). In referring to both Stark (2009) and Johnson (2008), PA has been contextualized as coercive control, a form of gender-based violence rooted in patriarchal beliefs. Patriarchy is systematically evident within society, legitimizing men’s dominant behaviour and the subordination of women, reproduced by the perpetrator within intimate relationships. This is the basis of the power and control dynamic that drives IT perpetration: the gendered domination of the intimate partner. This is the gendered motivation to gain control and present oneself as powerful, dominant, or superior, mirroring systematic patriarchy traditionally seen in society.

PA is indicative of IT for the element of coercive controlling behaviour: the use of non-physical violent strategies, including the use of children, and the (re)establishment of power and control dynamics that are the motivation for manipulating child access. General control over the individual and the relationship is

only seen in instances of coercive control rather than any other dynamic of IPV identified by Johnson's four-part typology of domestic violence (Johnson, 2008). The adoption of a coercive control framework is needed as it is coercive control that separates IT from all other forms of violence (Johnson, 2008; Kelly and Johnson, 2008).

Polarization, as identified by Bernet (2023), and dichotomization as identified by Lorandos (2006) were referenced to highlight how PA has been understood as IPV by sociological and psychological researchers, though not by legal professionals (i.e., separate from IPV) (Meier, 2020; Pruett et al., 2023). This has led to a widespread debate within sociological and legal fields as to the proper evaluation and administration of proper parenting arrangements that prioritize the best interests of the child.

In the following literature review, I will further examine the credibility debate regarding PA. In doing so, I will highlight the gendered dynamics of PAS as offered by Gardner (1985) as a tactic used by women to leverage custody by false accusations of sexual abuse as this has been the source of much contention regarding PA's credibility, since PA has foundational roots to PAS. This relation had initiated reconceptualization efforts leading to the sociological identification of gendered dynamics of PA victimization and the adoption of the terminology 'PA' in place of PAS. Following, I will discuss the costs of the credibility debate in terms of legal inadmissibility and confusion of PA with other PCCPs, conflated with the lack of standardized screening tools to identify PA. Adoption of more standardized screening tools by legal professionals could better support legal professionals in offering knowledgeable and sensitive parenting arrangements and interventions that recognize the best interests of the child.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The very nature of PA is rooted in coercive control as discussed in the previous chapter. Power and control are exercised by the perpetrator (alienating parent) in renouncing child access which is the mother's parental right. This assertion of power (i.e., manipulation of child access) diminishes her autonomy and agency, key aims of coercive control perpetration as identified by Stark (2009). By controlling the mother's access to the child, the alienating parent can (re)establish a sense of control over her, previously lost or threatened due to separation. The assertion of power (i.e., successful manipulation of the child's perception of the parent) and subsequent control (i.e., contact resistance/refusal) aligns with Johnson's (2008) identification of IT, aimed at maintaining or reinstating control over her individually as well as generally over the relationship, even post-separation.

Post-separational abuse is perpetrated not only to express ongoing control over the ex-partner but to intimidate her to return to the relationship so that the regime of power and control can be reinstated. Post separation, with limited contact between now separated partners, children are weaponized for indirect perpetration of ongoing control tactics which possibly make the targeted parent believe that if they return to the relationship, they will get to see their children again. Reproduction of patriarchal ideologies are seen in circumstances of PA in that power and control are used diminish the agency of female victims of IPV, even including post-separation as PA. Having placed PA within a framework of coercive control I will discuss the ways in which a coercive control framework has been, or has not been, applied to PA in public, academic, and legal discourses. This will offer background information for the

proceeding literature review as “parental alienation (syndrome) is a controversial issue, criticized by experts in different fields. However, this concept is often used by professionals and is frequently cited in courtrooms” (Feresin, 2020, p.56).

In This section, I will discuss the rise in academic scholarship pertaining to PA and common issues of distinguishing PA from other PCCPs by legal professionals. The credibility of PA by legal professionals will be further discussed in terms to its connection to criticisms regarding the founder of PAS, Dr. Richard Gardner. Misinformation, as the referencing to outdated will then be discussed as PAS and PA are used and conceptualized interchangeably by legal professionals. Issues of standardization in PA measuring tools will then be discussed, as if there was widespread legal adoption of a standardized screening tool, this could lead to proper distinguishing of PA and other PCCPs by legal professionals. Finally, Bernet and Baker’s (2022) proposal of PA, as Parental Alienation Relational Problem (PARP), will be discussed as this could be a tool adopted by legal professionals to better understand the complex components of PA, which could lead to earlier intervention and more appropriate custody decisions.

3.1 Distinguishing PA from other PCCPs

Since the 1970’s, PA has gained attention in “legal, psychological, and media-based controversy” (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.249); such controversy is found in academic sociological spheres as well. The increased attention reflects the heightened legal climate in North America of the possibility/accessibility of divorce in line with the second wave of feminism where with higher divorce rates came subsequent experiences of PA. Academics in psychological and sociological fields have (re)conceptualized and

published about the phenomenon (Harman et al., 2019; Baker, 2020), while legal professionals have been accredited with decision-making regarding parenting arrangements.

Legal professionals have been tasked with needing to uphold federal standards of shared parenting and maximum contact on one hand and differentiating justified and unjustified rejection scenarios for proper intervention (e.g., upholding the best interests of the child) on the other. Issue with the legal understanding of PA as IPV is highlighted by Feresin (2020), arguing that legal professionals "often fail to recognize and understand domestic violence, and this focus on 'high-conflict situations' and 'PA' tends to obscure even more the presence of domestic violence" (p.65), showing the legal separation of IPV and PA.

The problem is the lack of widespread (e.g., public, academic, and legal) understanding of PA and coercive control. This has meant that while targeted mothers seek help through the courts to stop post-separational abuse (e.g., PA) and to have their children returned, this is not always the legal intervention that occurs. Rather than reprimanding the alienating parent and reinstating access of the child to the targeted parent, mother-blaming (e.g., accusing the victim of not doing enough to maintain a relationship with the child), custody reversals (e.g., the alienating parent receives sole custody), or mandated reunification therapy "that are neither evidence based nor trauma-informed" (Berman and Weisinger, 2022, p.214) (with little empirical evidence regarding their efficiency) are ordered.

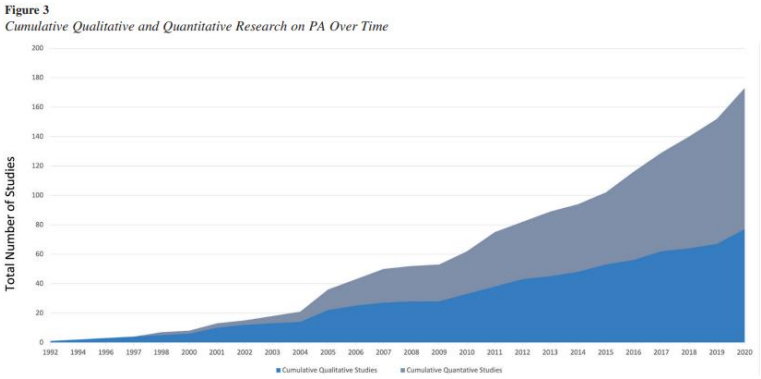
Each of these legal responses to PA raises question to whether the best interests of the child are being upheld or if shared parenting and maximum contact principles are

being prioritized in the face of IPV and PA (Sheehy and Boyd, 2020). Martin (2023) explains that "when judges intervene during the infancy of alienation, there is a stronger likelihood that a custody variation will be met with less resistance and that the relationship between the alienated child and the rejected parent will recover" (Martin, 2023, p.94). However, this highlights the need for legal professionals to properly distinguish PA from other PCCPs and intervene swiftly as the nature of PA has been identified as progressive, in which mild cases will become severe cases without timely and effective intervention (Gardner, 1985; Bernet et al., 2022).

The increase in legal discourse regarding PA can be seen in the heightened rate of PA allegations in court as public discourse has lent attention to PA, enabling victims to put a name to their experiences through reproduction of knowledge in social discourse. In the media, PA has been the focus of TV shows including a 2007 episode of Law-and-Order SVU entitled "Alien" and is featured in the Turner Classic 2017 film *The Perfect Soulmate*. PA has been the theme of celebrity books such as Alec Baldwin's 2008 *A Promise to Ourselves* and memoires such as Kimber Adams' 2009 *The Parentectomy*. Bernet (2010) points out that, "these works – both fact and fiction- reflect the public's recognition of an issue that affects thousands of children, parents, and extended family members every year" (Bernet, 2010, p.109) in North America.

Not only are victims of PA watching their stories come alive on film, in books, or bringing their testimonies to court, but they are having their experiences recognized in academic research as well. Harman et al. (2022) identify an increased publishing of peer-reviewed studies, dissertations, and master's theses internationally since 1992, as shown in Figure 2, with separation of qualitative (blue) and quantitative (purple) studies.

Figure 2. Harman et al.'s (2022) Analysis of Published PA Studies since 1992



(Harman et al., 2022, p.10)

In a systematic review, Harman et al. (2022) found that nearly 40% of PA literature has been published since 2016. This increase in publishing means that PA research "has moved beyond an early stage of scientific development and has produced a scientifically trustworthy knowledge base" (Harman et al., 2022, p.10). This increase in publishing may have serious effects for victim resources as law reviews and other academic works influence the development of legislation and are cited by courts as a source of authority (Bernet, 2010). PA has been cited in over 250 law reviews in Canada, the US, and the UK (Bernet, 2010) and has dominated divorce litigation in North America (Meier, 2009).

While there has been an increase in academic publishing and in personal testimonies of PA victimization in court contexts, some of the information being published is misinformation, and has still been cited by the courts (Bernet, 2010). Key to this issue is ongoing reference to PAS. While Gardner did not provide empirical evidence for the gendered dimensions he argued, he was in addition criticized for self-

publishing (e.g., not being subjected to peer-review processes). The gendered dynamic of PAS presented by Gardner (1985), despite being contemporarily refuted and subsequently reconceptualized, has tainted the current credibility of PA as a sociological phenomenon among victims, academics, and legal professionals alike.

The publishing of misinformation (Bernet, 2023) and the dissemination of non-empirically based claims regarding gender dynamics (Gardner, 1985) has meant that some members of the public, academia, and legal fields have considered PA only within a "junk science vacuum" (Lorandos, 2006, p.1). This has challenged the credibility of PA theory in sociological, psychological, and legal fields.

False-positive (Warshak, 2020) identification of PA by legal professionals has also come about when judges state that PA exists in cases it does not. Further, Meier (2009) explains that "in the past, the credibility of an abuse claim was always an implicit concern in custody litigation, now, such claims are automatically treated as highly suspect and trivialized as not uncommon in a divorce dispute" (p.242). Stating PA is present where it is not, not identifying PA where it is present, and not linking PA to a broader pattern of IPV are key issues victims are facing when asking for legal intervention. Each of these issues are related to legal professionals not distinguishing PA from other PCCPs and not considering PA to be a dynamic of violence involving coercive control.

Marques et al. (2020) identify that a key reason legal professionals have issue in distinguishing PA from other PCCPs is related to

> the increased use of parental alienation in therapeutic and family court contexts [which] place the onus on the need for more empirical and scientific validity

> studies to identify assessment criteria of all the factors related to children's rejection of a parent (Marques et al., 2020, p.2).

The availability of standardized, reliable and valid screening tools, then, could play an influential role in custody evaluations if adopted by legal professionals.

Despite issues of credibility and legal admissibility highlighted by some (Lorandos, 2006; Pruett et al, 2023), there remains

> a significant number of lawyers, judges, child protection workers, therapists and psychologists who deploy the concept of "parental alienation" in their everyday practices with abused women, even though commentators have questioned the theoretical and the empirical foundations of the work conducted in the area (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p.125).

Increased use of PA in courtrooms is further supported by Jaffe-Geffner (2010) who argues, "although PAS is widely discredited and courts have ruled it inadmissible, new formulations of the theory, such as Parental Alienation (PA), continue to play a dominant role in custody proceedings" (p.58). While PA may be increasingly argued in court, the argument could become strengthened if coercive control was criminalized (e.g., mandatory training was implemented) in Canada as it has been in England, France, Scotland, and Ireland (Galloob et al., 2022). While coercive control is being argued for criminalization in Canada, PA has already been criminalized in Brazil under section 12.318-10, described as the promotion of developmental harm between a child and a parent, introduced by the other parent, grandparent, or other guardians of the child (Castro and Williams, 2020). Brazil's criminalization of PA recognizes it as post-

separational abuse and child psychological abuse; meanwhile in Canada, PA remains legally separated from PA.

Perceived credibility of PA theory by victims, academics, and legal professionals impacts custody arrangements for victims. With legal professionals referencing academic research, victims are indirectly impacted by the academic work cited by legal professionals. This can influence who victims turn to for help (e.g., expectation of mother-blaming would deter help-seeking) and what kind of support victims would expect to receive if using PA related terminology in a legal argument (e.g., reprimanding the alienating parent versus neutralization of claims). Victims could be further influenced by legal perceptions of PA as they hear about custody arrangements or interventions applied to others, and either fear or feel empowered to seek legal support themselves.

The credibility of PA theory is therefore an important area of exploration. Related to legal credibility is the doubt that victims have that their circumstances will be properly identified as PA by legal professionals. This is influenced by the availability of standardized, reliable, and valid measuring/screening tools. While there are several screening tools available, widespread legal adoption of such tools has not occurred, leaving it up to custody evaluators and other legal professionals to independently distinguish PA from other PCCPs.

In the following section the credibility debate will be further discussed including legal implications and possible impacts on victims. Available sociological and psychological screening tools will be briefly described to illustrate available evaluation

tools for use by legal professionals, though not readily adopted, to better inform custody evaluations through proper PA identification and distinguishment from other PCCPs.

3.2 The Credibility Debate

While there is significant agreement in psychological and sociological fields of research and practice that PA occurs in the context of high-conflict divorce or separation (Gardner, 1998; Darnall, 1999, 2006; Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Bernet, 2010; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1976; Baker and Chambers, 2011; Rowlands, 2019), there is considerable debate over the ties that the term PA has to its predecessor, PAS (Gardner, 1985). Perhaps more specifically, the debate is directly related to the child psychologist Dr. Richard Gardner, both personally and professionally.

Gardner has been cited for condoning pedophilic ideas. His personal beliefs have affected his professional work as these ideas, or beliefs, have been published in relation to his theory of PAS, despite lacking empirical evidence. Therefore, his personal beliefs have tainted his professional work. Gardner has stated in his work that child sexual abuse is normative and even beneficial. Gardner is infamous for statements including "at the present time, the sexually abused child is generally considered to be the victim, though the child may initiate sexual encounters by seducing the adult" (Gardner, 1986, p.93). However, Harmen and Lorandos (2021) explain,

> Gardner never recommended applying the PAS term if there was bona fide child abuse by the rejected parent, and evidence-based assessments continue to require that child abuse be ruled out as a cause for the child's rejection of a parent for PA to be diagnosed […] Child sexual abuse was portrayed by critics as being an essential feature of PAS […] critics have still chosen to misrepresent Gardner's

> work […] without citing evidence to support their claim that the concept of PA was created to reject child abuse claims (Harman and Lorandos, 2021, p.185).

This is an example of the misinformation that has plagued PAS theory and has in turn affected the credibility of the conceptualization of PA more generally. While Gardner's theory identified that child maltreatment did not constitute PAS, these views, along with gendered dimensions of PAS perpetration (also offered without empirical evidence) have had long lasting effects, even for the reconceptualized concept of PA. Additionally, Gardner has also been criticized professionally for self-publishing about PAS and therefore his work not being subjected to peer review (Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Baker, 2020; Brunch, 2002; Dallam, 1999). These issues, exacerbated by exclusion from the DSM (e.g., largely related to lacking empirical evidence), have alluded to the citing of PA as "junk science" (Lorandos, 2006).

The implication of this credibility debate regarding PAS and subsequently PA is pointed out by Van Der Bijl (2016) in identifying that "the terms parental alienation and parental alienation syndrome are often confused or used interchangeably, despite being two categorically distinct concepts" (Van Der Bijl, 2016, p.148). PAS is a proposed pathological condition; PA is a sociological concept. Both, however, identify the same triangulating methods against a parent post-separation, and both use common identifying markers of behavioural manifestations of the child to distinguish this triangulation from other reasons of contact refusal. While either behavioural manifestations or alienating behaviours could be used to point to instances of PA, the use of both can give a more meaningful analysis in distinguishing PA from other PCCPs.

With connections to Gardner's PAS, PA has ultimately suffered the same credibility issues due to interchangeability, or generalizations, in the use of the terms. As Kelly and Johnston (2001) argue,

> The lack of empirical support for PAS as a diagnosable entity, the barring of testimony about PAS in some courtrooms, for overly simplistic focus on the brainwashing parent as the primary etiological agent, and the frequent misapplication of Gardner's PAS theory to many diverse phenomena occurring in child custody disputes, there is a critical need to reformulate a more useful conceptualization of PAS. (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.250)

A need to reconceptualize PAS, to distance the concept of PA from both personal and professional affiliations with Dr. Gardner, has meant that new terminologies have been offered to describe the concept. As pointed to by Meier (2009),

> the many critiques of Gardner have resulted in a shift—at least among leading researchers and scholars of custody evaluation—from support for PAS to support for a ''reformulation of PAS'' typically called instead ''parental alienation'' or ''the alienated child'' (Meier, 2009, p.245).

In addition to the alternative terms cited by Meier (2009), 'the alienated child' (Kopetski, 2006), 'the toxic parent' (Cartwright, 1993), or a 'pathological alienation' (Bernet, 2010) have also been offered. However, currently PA remains the most common term to reference the concept (Harman et al., 2019).

I will now discuss issues of rigor and patriarchal undertones Gardner has been accused of and which have in turn tainted the credibility of the PA concept in more detail. First are issues related to scientific credibility as Gardner has been criticized for

lacking conclusive scientific evidence for common causes, symptoms, treatments, and interventions in proposing PA as a syndrome (Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Baker, 2020; NCJFCJ, 2006; Bernet et al., 2022). With "no commonly recognized, or empirically verified pathogenesis, course, familial pattern, or treatment selection" (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.249), the simplicity of Gardner's symptomatic clustering has been pointed out as the "greatest gap in our understanding of the syndrome […] our lack of knowledge of what happens to the victims of PAS over the medium and long term" (Cartwright, 1993, p.7). The theory of PAS has been repeatedly argued to lack rigor and therefore "the term PAS does not add any information that would enlighten the court, the clinician, or their clients" (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.250). The lack of rigor that PAS has become known for has meant that the PA concept, more generally, has been deemed 'junk science' by many due to its association; a common argument remains, deeming the science behind PA theory unsound (Baker, 2020).

The second issue with Gardner's (1998) theory of PAS is that it overemphasizes the role of the alienating parent (e.g., for Gardner, this is considered to most often be the mother). Gardner has been cited as being "coercive, punitive, and simplistic […] putting[ing] too much emphasis on the alienating parent as the cause of the child's alienation and his recommendation for change of custody in severe cases is ill advised" (Kopetski, 2006, p.378).It is important to remember, here, that Gardner argued that PAS was typically perpetrated by mothers looking to get a leg up in custody disputes, limiting access the child would have with the father by falsely accusing him of child sexual abuse. Further, in such cases, Gardner argued for the complete and immediate reversal of custody to the alienated parent. Custody reversal was supported by Gardner, who did

not believe that women's allegations of child maltreatment and instead argued normalcy of pedophilia. This is why over-emphasizing the role of the alienating parent (e.g., presented by Gardner as the vindictive mother) has been largely criticized by sociological and psychological researchers to date, because complete custody reversal would have put the child into the sole custody of the abusive parent, taking them away from a protective mother.

Despite the critiques associated with Gardner's PAS theory, court officials in information gathering processes have continued to turn to PAS theory for understanding PA. Research obtained by some court officials, however, has been heavily focused on the critique of the credibility of PA (e.g., the elements that have caused debate) rather than literature supporting the prevalence, impacts, and traumatization associated with PA as a sociological phenomenon.

One example of such citing is seen in the judge's handbook, *A Judge's Guide: Making Child Centered Decisions in Custody Cases* by the Child Custody and Adoption Pro Bono Project and the Center of Children and the Law, two components of the American Bar Association (ABA). In the Handbook it is stated that,

> Related to the Friendly Parent Provisions [that children will have as much time as possible with each parent as long as it is in their best interests] is the controversial issue of Parental Alienation Syndrome. Under this theory, a parent who 'bad-mouths' another parent in front of the child, or 'brain washes' the child to turn against the other parent, is considered to be not acting in the child's best interests. This theory is highly controversial and has largely been discredited as bad science. (ABA, 2008, p.134)

As pointed out by Bernet (2010), however, this ABA document only cited one author in the section regarding PA, Hoult (2006), a widely cited skeptic of the admissibility of PAS to the DSM.

Further, a footnote in the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) (2006) states that, "we do not use the labels of 'parental alienation', 'alienation', or 'parental alienation syndrome' to describe this behaviour because to do so would give credibility to a 'theory' that has been discredited by the scientific community" (NCJCJ, 2006, p.24). The discrediting that is being referred to is by the psychological community, to which PAS has not been admitted to the DSM. Without psychological recognition, it appears officially invalid within legal proceedings as a sociological phenomenon. Legal professionals have noted the overall issue of credibility cited within psychological and sociological fields.

Like the ABA document, Bernet (2010) points out that only three sources were referenced within this NCJFCJ document: the American Psychological Association (DeLeon, 1997), which holds a strong stance against the diagnosability of PA as a syndrome, and articles by Faller (1998) and Brunch (2002) who hold strong views in line with the APA. Ties to PAS and its lacking incorporation into the DSM have meant ongoing questions regarding "whether it is or is not a syndrome and where there is sufficient science to merit its inclusion in a legal process" (Baker, 2010, p.101). This shows that if PAS were to be clinically diagnosable it could gain authority as a legal argument.

Continued focus on the original tenets of PAS, or the credibility issues PA has inherited from its association to PAS, not only hinders its legal authority when used in

court by women trying to regain access to their children but hinders the extent to which professionals can help. Child therapists, court evaluators, lawyers, and judges may "unknowingly contribute to the problem by providing misinformation to decisionmakers, implementing adverse treatment protocols and making detrimental custody arrangements" (Rowlands, 2019, p.318). Legal recognition of PA therefore is especially important in recognition in terms of being able to distinguish PA from other PCCPs.

While PAS did not pass the Frye test in the US, a theoretical evaluation tool used to assess the validity of a theory as a legal argument, PA did pass the Mohan Test (i.e., the Canadian equivalent of the Frye test). However, the Canadian legal system still tends to reference the DSM (Rueda, 2004); Rueda (2004) states that, despite PAS passing The Mohan Test, it still faces legal resistance. Rueda (2004) states,

> unfortunately, the debate over PAS within the mental health system deters many people from presenting this issue in court […] to admit the existence of PAS in legal proceedings, it would have to obtain scientific approval, which is usually provided by admission into the DSM after the disorder has been appropriately tested. (Rueda, 2004, p.393).

The issue of legal admissibility, therefore, is two-fold. Since PAS has passed the Mohan Test in Canada, but has not been included in the DSM, it remains legally speaking a week argument outside of PA being identified by a custody evaluator.

In a review of family law cases involving claims of PA in Quebec between 2017 and 2020, Paquin-Boudreau et al (2022) found that,

> in a majority of cases where PA was raised, the court did not make a finding that there had been alienation. In almost half of all of the cases, the court clearly rejected the claim of PA, while in more than a quarter of all of the cases, the court did not make a specific finding about the claim of alienation (Paquin-Boudreau et al., 2022, p.8).

This study also found that

> claims of DV [domestic violence] are often not fully addressed in judicial decisions dealing with PA claims, raising concerns that DV claims may be inappropriately dismissed as a characteristic of high-conflict cases rather than as abusive conduct endangering the safety of parents and children" (Paquin-Boudreau et al., 2022, p. 16).

The authors found that custody evaluators were recommended, as

> the evaluator's recommendations are followed by the judge in the vast majority of cases, which is consistent with other studies […and] judges tend to avoid taking position on claims of PA when there is no independent evidence from an evaluator" (Paquin-Boudreau et al., 2022, p.17).

Whether custody evaluations are mandated by the courts or not, or are believed by victims to potentially help or not, court evaluation fees come from the pockets of the parents. New Brunswick does offer a flat rate federally funded supplement through the Department of Justice's program, called the Court-Ordered Evaluations Support Program, for eligible parents (PLEIS-NB, 2016). However, any cost associated with custody evaluations is unmanageable for many victims as they restart post-separation. As pointed to by Paquin-Boudreau et al. (2022), the use of a custody evaluator's services

can help immensely in identifying and explaining a dynamic of PA. Leaving custody determinations to a judge alone could have consequential results for alienated mothers.

In the following section I will discuss how the improper identification of PA by the courts can cause re-traumatization of children and mothers, I will highlight the importance of understanding PA as IPV and post-separation abuse and discuss limitations of describing PA as a social phenomenon using terms and concepts derived from a psychological framework as imposed by PAS.

3.3 Impacts of Misinformation

In this section I will consider additional gaps in PA literature that affect not only the perceived credibility of PA within a scholarly context, but also the impacts of alienation on rejected parents in legal and social contexts. I will then discuss false allegations of PA and additional ways that PA victimization is heightened through court experiences, including a common legal understanding of PA and IPV as a dichotomy (Johnston and Sullivan, 2020). Sheehy and Boyd (2020) found an increase in PA claims in Canada between 2014-2018 in cases where IPV was also alleged alongside PA.

The "false dichotomy" described by Johnston and Sullivan (2020, p.273) is one in which either IPV *or* PA is considered in legal contexts, rather than treating the latter as a manifestation of the former. This is evident by Sheehy and Boyd's (2020) study on judicial outcomes concerning PA. Sheehy and Boyd (2020) found IPV to be "neutralized" (p.84) by judges, meaning that IPV was considered by judges as "a one-off occurrence, placed it firmly in the past, or mutualized (it) as the couple's 'conflict'" (Sheehy and Boyd, 2020, p.84). By neutralizing IPV, PA cannot be considered within a broader context as a post-separational tactic of coercive control.

With increased allegations of PA within Canadian courts (Sheehy and Boyd, 2020) come increased false allegations or misuse of the related terms as well. False allegations can play out in several ways. First, the alienating parent may try to justify the child's contact refusal, to claim that the child is justified in their refusal due to abusive behaviours of the targeted parent. This creates a justified rejection scenario and is not considered PA. However, Sharples et al. (2023) conducted a study on such allegations and found that "targeted parents had an 86% greater probability of having unsubstantiated abuse claims made against them than the parent alienating the child" (Sharples et al., 2023, p.7). This supports the claim that such allegations are used by alienating parents as a post-separational tactic of coercive control.

> This scenario is also pointed out by Pruett et al. (2023) who explain,
>
> false allegations may be used in the context of PA as a legal strategy to counter IPV and child abuse allegations with abused children and their victim mothers being wrongfully labeled as 'PA cases' when PA is used to counter valid concerns about a mother's or child's abuse at the hands of the other parent (Pruett et al, 2023, p.374).

However, parents may be justified in this situation if there were legitimate concerns of child abuse based on past child abuse by the target parent or if suspected child abuse was alleged during a visit. The duality of these allegations therefore calls for knowledgeable legal professionals to distinguish PA from other reasons for contact refusal or to identify when mothers are protecting their children, not alienating them.

As expected in an adversarial[2] judicial system, such as the judicial system adopted by Canada, there is a "climate of protracted postdivorce custody disputes, in which claims and counterclaims of parental alienation abound" (Baker et al., 2012, p.190). Counterclaims of PA, as described above, are used by alienating parents to target protective mothers (Sharples et al, 2023). The ability of legal professionals to distinguish PA could limit allegations of PA and the chance for perpetrators to use PA as a victim blaming tool, as "like other forms of family violence, parental alienation has serious and negative consequences for family members, yet victims are often blamed for their experience" (Harmen et al., 2018, p.1275).

Ability to recognize where PA is happening and where it is not could promote the safety of victims who are "particularly vulnerable to violence and harassment after separation due to continued contact with former partners related to children" (Hardesty et al., 2015, p.9), as seen in litigation concerning custody disputes. For mothers already victimized by IPV prior to separation and who are experiencing PA as a coercive control tactic post-separation, they may experience further victimization, or secondary victimization, through the legal system (Jordan, 2004).

[2] Adversarial system: two parties provide evidence to a neutral third party (e.g., the judge). For cases of PA, Kelly and Johnston (2001) find that this type of judicial system "often mobilize(s) and enable(s) these aligned parents to present themselves in a coherent, organized manner. The nature of the adversarial process encourages hostile, polarized, and black-and-white thinking with little challenge, presents perceived truths as facts and fuels and channels rage in a scripted manner. The intensity and duration of the legal fight may also serve as an antidote to depression" (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.258).

Secondary victimization is wholistically articulated by Pemberton and Mulder (2023) as epistemic injustice. The authors explain

> Epistemic injustice refers to the harm done to someone specifically in his or her capacity as a knower. […] can take the form of testimonial injustice, which points to (unwarranted) prejudice concerning the credibility of a person's input, and hermeneutical injustice, which refers to unfairness in the accessibility and adequacy of collective resources for sense-making. The use of epistemic injustice anchors secondary victimization in an experience of wrongdoing: not due to a violation of the criminal law, but in the often legally mandated harms caused by the criminal law (including its actors) to the victim in their capacity as a knower. (p.4)

Secondary victimization then, refers to the "additional harm and sense of betrayal experienced by victims of traumatic events when the responses they receive from formal or informal supports are inappropriate" (Laing, 2017, p. 1316). For legal professionals to mitigate further harm they need to recognize the PA behaviours women are describing, with special attention to more covert, or indirect, forms of control as this type of control tactics which have been found by Harman et al. (2019) to be utilized more frequently by men.

Harman et al. (2019) considered the gendered dimensions of alienating behaviours; male perpetrators were found to use both indirect and direct aggressive tactics. Indirect tactics were defined by the authors to include alienating behaviours aimed at frightening the child to believe the target parent is unsafe or aimed at eliciting false accusations about the target parent (i.e., covert PABs).

Direct aggressive tactics including verbally advising the child to call the target parent names, destroying their property, or refusing to see the target parent for extended periods of time (Harman et al., 2019) (i.e., overt PABs). Indirect tactics were cited by Harmen et al. (2019) as being particularly consequential for victims as these were noted by participants as hard to prove within legal contexts (Harmen et al, 2019). Harmen et al. (2019) explain that

> indirect aggression is often difficult to identify because of the hidden and manipulative ways it is used. Unfortunately, the preference for the use of indirect aggression poses challenges for the target parent, as it is more difficult for them to provide direct evidence of it occurring" (Harman et al., 2019, p.466).

Alienating behaviours, covert and overt, impact mothers in terms of "negative emotions, such as feelings of injustice or guilt, and physical consequences, such as weight loss or physical fatigue" (Tavares et al., 2021, p.8) and are experienced by women more than men (Balmer et al., 2018).

Further negative impacts PA has on mothers, Meier (2009) points out, are related to custody litigation, and even the involvement of legal personnel, that play an additional role in the victimization of women that are target parents. Meier (2009) explains, "custody litigation is an 'ideal mechanism for denigrating the mother by providing a forum for attacks on her dignity and competence as a mother while enlisting court personnel to join the attack" (Meier, 2009, p.234).

In Canada, where shared parenting is prioritized (i.e., maximum contact rule in which a child will spend as much time as possible with each parent), the possibility that targeted mothers will lose some amount of custody to an abuser can be considered quite

likely. Meier (2009) explains that when abusers are successful in targeting the mother in court as incompetent, and custody reversal is ordered, "deletion of a mother-child relationship would seem to be the epitome of destructive parental alienation (while admittedly accomplished by judicial action)" (Meier, 2009, p.234). This issue, Meier (2009) argues, is supported in that "alienation theory's traction in family courts is fueled by the denial of abuse; it is used to *refute* mothers' claims of paternal abuse and almost never to recognize the emotional abuse many abusers inflict on their children" (Meier, 2009, p.234).

The issues of the legal admissibility of PA are argued by Meier (2009) as directly related to issues associated with Gardner's PAS. Gardner's PAS is highlighted as problematic in relation to the anti-feminist perspective adopted. These anti-feminist views could be argued to be the dissemination of broader patriarchal ideas. Further problems arise when these ideas have been reproduced through publishing (albeit self-publishing) and considered, for a time, by sociological, psychological, and legal fields as true. Needed reconceptualization was found to be required later on to address these anti-feminist notions, hence, the adoption of 'PA' to distance the concept from its predecessor psychologically, sociologically and legally speaking despite foundational concepts remaining the same. Meier (2009) explains,

> Based solely on his interpretation of his own clinical experience, Gardner posited that child sexual abuse allegations were rampant in custody litigation, and that 90% of children in custody litigation are suffering from the PAS ''disorder.'' He described PAS as a ''syndrome'' whereby vengeful mothers employ child abuse allegations as a ''powerful weapon'' to punish the ex and ensure custody to

> themselves (Gardner, 1992a, 1992b). […] He claimed - based solely on his own clinical practice—that the majority of child sexual abuse claims in custody litigation are false (Gardner, 1991), although he suggested that some mothers' vendettas are the product of mental illness rather than intentional malice (Gardner, 1987, 1992b). Gardner posited that when children reject their father and abuse allegations are made, this behavior is most likely the product of PAS rather than actual experiences of abuse. PAS theory recasts abuse claims as false tools for alienation, thereby inherently dissuading evaluators and courts from serious consideration of whether abuse has actually occurred. (Meier, 2009, p.236).

According to Meier (2009), the secondary victimization of female targeted parents through judicial practices is a byproduct of Gardner's explanation of PAS at the micro level.

The emphasis on shared parenting highlighted by the Canadian Divorce Act, have had serious implications for female victims of IPV that are being accused of PA as well. In a 2016 Quebec study considering the number of abused women accused of alienating their children, Lapierre and Côté (2016) found a dramatic increase in the prevalence of female victims of IPV living in shelters who were being accused of alienating their children from their abuser. The authors found that

> the women who had been accused, or threatened to be accused, of parental alienation over the past year represented 45% of all women who had been accused or threatened to be accused of parental alienation over the past five years. (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p.122)

The majority of such accusations were first made by social workers, then respondents' former partners (i.e., the IPV perpetrators), then the family courts or criminal justice system (Lapierre and Côté, 2016). As pointed to by Meier (2009), respondents in Lapierre and Côté's (2016) study reported accusations, or their being "framed" (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p. 123) as alienating parents by the family court. In this study, respondents explained that this framing was a direct result of "child protection workers and family court professionals […] had not had a good understanding of domestic violence, particularly in the post-separation context" (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p. 123). Therefore, PA was not distinguished from a justified rejection context due to allegations of child abuse not being verified and false allegations of PA believed. This supports the dichotomy presented by Johnston and Sullivan (2020).

The emergence of father's rights activism in the 1960's, of which shared parenting has been a byproduct (Sheehy and Boyd, 2020), argue for "entitlements to equal parenting along with a punishment discourse directed against primary care parents and children who resist" (Neilson, 2018, p.17). While early father's rights movements were stark in their assertions, demanding "custody and financial support of children after divorce, arguing that an ineffectual government and overzealous feminist movement discriminated against fathers" (Iker, 2023, p.52). Today, fathers' rights movements present "a softer 'fatherly face', making it more publicly palatable while the movement [has] drifted toward the growing [parental] right" (Iker, 2023, p.52).

Father's rights activism has been argued had detrimental effects for female victims of IPV. In a PA study by Lapierre and Côté's (2016), PA was found to "serv(ed) a men's rights agenda […] known to use a children's rights discourse in order to

promote their own interests and make their demands more appealing to various professionals" (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p.125). The points made by both Meier (2009) and Lapierre and Côté (2016) are important considerations since PA has increasingly been used in custody litigation against female victims of IPV in Canada (Neilson, 2018).

Where women are sometimes targeted as abusive by the alienating parent, as found to be prevalent in Sharples et al.'s (2023) and Lapierre and Côté's (2016) studies, their social perceptions as 'good mothers' could become vulnerable in the perceptions of their family and friends that hear such accusations against them. Accusations could informal, or formal (e.g., submitted as a formal complaint by the alienating parent to the court) (Kelly and Johnston, 2001), though either having detrimental effects on their personal perception and identity and their relationship with others.

In agreement with Johnson's (2008) explanation of IT to include the use of both physical violence and non-physical violent control tactics, Lapierre and Côté (2016) state that "abusive men do utilize a range of violent and non-violent coercion strategies in order to maintain their control over their ex-partners, which may also involve manipulating professionals through family court and child protection proceedings" (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p.125). As a non-violent control tactic, "mother blaming" (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p.125) reinforces the dichotomy between PA and IPV (Johnston and Sullivan, 2020) and is used as a tactic by both the abuser and legal professionals. Mother-blaming is further detailed by Lapierre and Côté (2016):

> The research findings may reflect a broader phenomenon in the family court and child protection systems, i.e. the tendency to blame women for either their actions (or their inaction) when it comes to protect their children from men's

> violence, and to shift the focus away from men's violence onto women's "inadequacies" as mothers […] women can be accused of "failing to protect" if they are perceived as "not doing enough", while they can be labeled with "parental alienation" if they are perceived as "doing too much" to protect their children. All those practices shift the focus away from men's violence and reframe the problem in terms of women's "deficiencies" as mothers; it is women's actions that are seen as posing a threat to their children's safety and well-being (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p.126).

The gendered dimension Gardner connects to PAS, intertwined with a Canadian legal prioritization of shared-parenting orders, some argue, has imposed male dominance in custody ordering (Sheehy and Boyd, 2020; Meier, 2009). Lapierre and Côté (2016) explain, "abusive men can use, or threaten or use, child protection and family court proceedings to maintain their control over their ex-partners and to undermine mother-child relationships, women's parenting, and their identities as mothers" (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p.125). The diminishing of female autonomy and agency that occurs, relates to IT.

The issues associated with PA victimization may be better responded to by legal professionals should they adopt a screening tool outside, or alongside, independent custody evaluations. Screening tools could assist legal professionals in identifying PA and distinguishing it from other PCCPs to avoid false-positive identification of PA (Warshak, 2020). While tools are available to identify PA and differentiate it from other PCCPs, there have been issues in clinical and research settings regarding reliability. This is largely due to researchers adapting parameters and altering categories. While used as

originally intended, many PA assessment tools have been found to be both reliable and valid (Bernet and Baker, 2022) lacking standardization has infringed on their credibility. While legal professionals often refer to custody evaluators, such tools have not been adopted in legal settings.

In the following section, I will highlight three key measuring tools as they have been recurringly referenced throughout PA literature. Then I will discuss Baker's (2020) Four-Factor Model for identifying PA, a contemporary synthesis of pre-existing PA research which has influenced the current study. Finally, I will consider some of the most current explorations of PA, with Bernet and Greenhill's (2022) Five-Factor Model and Bernet and Baker's (2022) Proposal to have PA (as PARP) incorporated into the most current edition of the DSM.

3.4 Issues with Standardization

Several measuring tools currently exist to identify PA in clinical and sociological research settings such as the Baker Alienation Questionnaire, the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ), and the Rowlands Parental Alienation Scale (RPAS). However, parameters and scales are applied differently among researchers. This makes compatibility an issue as "the inconsistent approaches used limit our ability to compare findings and build on prior studies" (Hardesty et al., 2015, p.9). The standardization of a widely adopted measuring tool could be beneficial for PA researchers and legal professionals alike. Such tools could be used to determine the prevalence of PA, the stage of progression (e.g., mild, moderate, severe), and for eliminating other reasons of contact refusal. Legal professionals could also benefit from having a common diagnostic tool, to distinguish PA from other reasons of contact refusal, which could in turn identify

false allegations against victim-mothers of IPV. Finally, with a standardized measuring tool, mental health and legal professionals could benefit from "a clearer understanding of PA, its impact on child development and information on psychiatric and legal interventions" (Bernet et al., 2022, p.593). A standard tool and widespread adoption of this tool (i.e., in academic and legal fields) could therefore benefit victims as currently the "typical information available to the court for decision making is too limited to make effective distinctions and effective screening processes and appropriate assessment tools are not available or in place" (Kelly and Johnson, 2008, p.478).

PA is part of coercive controlling abuse (Sharples et al., 2023) and therefore coercive control needs to be part of PA assessments. However, "there is no standard approach to operationalizing coercive control, which limits comparisons and generalizability across studies" (Hardesty et al., 2015, p.2). This also means that legal professionals do not always consider understanding PA as a form of coercive control, further dichotomizing PA from IPV, which can impede court understandings of the phenomenon and misinform custody decision-makers. A major issue in creating an instrument to measure coercive control is the fact that it is inherently difficult to measure. Coercive control can be executed through a range of tactics (few or many) that can be both overt and covert (physical and non-physical), as discussed in the conceptual framework chapter.

While the number of tactics needed to instill fear and compliance in a victim greatly vary, counting (e.g., number of tactics used) or frequency (e.g., number of times tactics are used) approaches to measure coercive control can be seen to lack validity when applied to IPV/PA. As Hardesty et al. (2015) point out, there is risk of

> (mis)classifying highly controlling abusers as "low control" when they rely on very few control tactics but enforce them relentlessly. Likewise, there is risk of (mis)classifying low controlling abusers as "high control" because of their rare use of a variety of different control tactics. (Hardesty et al., 2015, p.2)

The Baker Alienation Questionnaire (BAQ), the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ), and the Rowlands Parental Alienation Scale (RPAS) are three key measuring tools recurringly referred to in PA literature as assessments of experiences of alienating behaviours. A table depicting the similarities and differences between these three measuring tools can be found in Appendix B. The BAQ, the PARQ, and the RPAS all use Gardner's eight behavioural manifestations as criteria. These tools differ, however, as two are administered to the alleged alienated child about their relationship with their parents, while the RPAS is completed by the alleged alienated parent about their relationship with their child.

Gaps associated with these measures reflect the inherent complexities of objectively assessing PA. First, there is unlikely ever to be an assessment including the perceptions of the alienating parent. This would entail the alienating parent disclosing his manipulative (i.e., alienating) behaviours and would be self-incriminating. Since there are three parties (at least) involved in PA, measures need to be targeted toward either the child (as in the cases of the BAQ and the PARQ) or the alienated parent (as intended with the RPAS). Still, these measures rely on self-reporting, and therefore may be influenced by "selective memory, exaggeration, inaccurate attribution of events, and dishonestly […as well,] parents' reports of their children's behaviour would likely differ from what the children would report about themselves" (Rowlands, 2019, p.328).

Further, when asking a child about their experiences of alienation, their responses may be influenced by prior brainwashing or programming by the alienating parent.

Brainwashing, or programming, occurs as a common alienating tactic through which the alienating parent attempts to re-write the child's memories in the favour of the alienating parent. This results in manipulated beliefs by the child regarding the target parent and described by Gardner (1985) as borrowed scenarios. Measuring tools aimed at assessing only one player, and therefore only one perspective, when there are three players within the PA dynamic (e.g., alienating parent, alienated parent, and the child). Understanding the complexities and range of impacts of alienation, therefore, calls for the implementation of a tool that can capture as many perspectives as possible. This would allow for a more robust understanding of the dynamics at play and in turn inform more effective intervention strategies.

Baker's (2020) Four-Factor Model synthesizes key components of the tools mentioned and is used by researchers and clinicians to identify PA. Still, the Four-Factor model has not been readily adopted in judicial settings. Baker's (2020) Four-Factor Model was later elaborated by Bernet and Greenhill (2022) as a Five-Factor model, as described in the conceptual framework (and in Appendix A). This model was cited by Bernet and Baker's s (2022) proposal to have PA (presented as PARP) included in the current edition of the DSM (i.e., DSM-5-TR). In the following section I will briefly discuss this proposal, as if it were to be incorporated into the DSM legal professionals may obtain the tangible diagnosis they has been looking for, to further validate and strengthen PA as a legal argument. PARP could offer a more fact-based evaluation tool for mental health and legal professionals to assess PCCPS they are presented by clients.

3.5 Bernet & Baker's (2022) Proposal to the DSM-5-TR

William Bernet and Amy Baker, both Doctors of Psychology and PA researchers, founded and lead the Parental Alienation Study Group (PASG)[3]. On behalf of the PASG, they submitted a proposal to have PA incorporated into the DSM-5-TR in November of 2022. Bernet and Baker (2022) propose that "parental alienation be considered a relational problem in the chapter of DSM-5-TR, Other Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention" (Bernet and Baker, 2022, p.2). Due to the proposed incorporation into this chapter, Bernet and Baker offer new terminology for PA, as PARP (Bernet and Baker, 2022):

> this category may be used when a child – usually one whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict separation or divorce – allies strongly with one parent and rejects a relationship with the other parent without a good reason. The diagnosis of parental alienation relational problem usually requires five criteria: the child avoids, resists, or refuses a relationship with a parent; the presence of a prior positive relationship between the child and the now rejected parent; the absence of abuse or neglect or seriously deficient parenting on the part of the now rejected parent; the use of multiple alienating behaviours by the favored parent; and the manifestation of behavioural signs of alienation by the child. (Bernet and Baker, 2022, p.2)

[3] The PASG is an international, not-for-profit organization open to anyone with an interest in the topic of parental alienation, personally, professionally, or both (pasg.info).

Bernet and Baker (2022) argue that PARP is progressive, "from a mild level of intensity (when it is reversible) to a severe level (when it is almost intractable)" (Bernet and Baker, 2022, p.2), reflecting Gardner's (1998) original argument for PAS. However, while Gardner (1998) offered three categorizations of PAS (e.g., mild, moderate, and severe), Bernet and Baker (2022) have proposed one additional categorization: extreme.

> Occasionally, the feelings associated with PARP become so intense that one of the participants of the pathological triad [i.e., alienation triad] kills themselves and/or another family member, for example: an alienated child kill their alienated parent, and alienating parent kill the child and themselves; an alienated child or alienated parent may become so hopeless and frustrated that they kill themselves. (Bernet and Baker, 2022, p.15)

This, Bernet and Baker (2022) argue, is a key reason for the incorporation of PARP into the DSM-5-TR, to offer a clear definition and to promote early detection and appropriate intervention and treatment before the extreme level is achieved (Bernet and Baker, 2022).

The BAQ, the PARQ, and the RPAS, among other measures, are cited by Bernet and Baker (2022) in support of the incorporation of PARP into the DSM-5-TR "to reliably distinguish alienated from nonalienated children" (Bernet and Baker, 2022, p.19). While such measures were noted in the previous section to be associated with issues of standardization, this is due to how other researchers adopt and adapt measuring tools, making it hard to compare and generalize findings. The problem is the replication of findings due to adaptations of parameters put in place by other researchers (i.e., causing issues of reliability). Bernet and Baker (2022) are referring to using the tools

using the original parameters, which they argue could support PARP being incorporated into the DSM, which would mean it would be strengthened as a legal argument.

Bernet and Baker's (2022) proposal, therefore, demonstrates an ongoing synthesis of PA literature to promote the theory's credibility (Bernet and Baker, 2022). However, while the incorporation of PARP, with its admission to the DSM-TR-5, could gain PA legal credibility more generally, Bernet points out in a webinar (Bernet, 2023) that there are three conditions already included in the previous version of the DSM that relate to PA: (1) A condition referred to as Child Affected by Parental Relationship Distress (CAPRD) in which the child is negatively affected by the parental relationship including high levels of conflict, distress or disparity; (2) Parent-Child Relational Problems, in which negative attribution of the other parents intentions, hostility toward the other parent, and unwarranted feelings of estrangement are posited on the child; and (3) Child Psychological Abuse, in which harming or abandoning people or things that the child cares about has detrimental effects (Bernet, 2023, 4:50).

Each of these three conditions focus on different players within PA dynamics (e.g., the alienating parent, the target parent, and the child). The first condition, CARPD, focuses on the beliefs and experiences of the child. The second, Parent-Child Relational Problem, focuses on the relationship between the target parent and the child. Finally, child psychological abuse focuses on the contributions of the alienating parent and the effects this has on the child (Bernet, 2023). While each of these three elements speak to PA they are presented separately and do not allow for identifying them as part of an overall dynamic. All three conditions could be diagnosed concurrently or independently

and not capture the overall conceptualization of PA and its impacts on all parties. The inclusion of PARP would unify these concepts. For example,

> CAPRD is a heterogeneous concept that covers at least four family scenarios: children exposed to intimate partner distress; children exposed to intimate partner violence; children experiencing intense loyalty conflict; and children experiencing parental alienation (Bernet and Baker, 2022, np).

A key argument for the incorporation of PARP into the DSM by Bernet and Baker (2022) is that by unifying the concepts, it points to the specific and unique occurrence of PA. This, they argue, could "reduce the criticism and the polarization that has compromised the appropriate use of the concept of parental alienation" (Bernet and Baker, 2022, np). This could limit false accusations, where abusive ex-partners deflect being accused of child abuse to saying the target parent is alienating them from the child if there was a citable psychological phenomenon for legal professionals to use (Bernet and Baker, 2022).

The issue is the fragmentation of the concept of PA (i.e., the component parts being included separately, as they currently are) within the DSM that does not allow a comprehensive understanding of the experience on the child, the target parent, or the full range of behaviours aby the alienating parent. Further, while IPV appears a possibility, the three concepts are not unified in identifying this as an overarching pattern, making it hard to consider appropriate interventions. Incorporating PA, including all associated players and behaviours, as one condition in the DSM could help alleviate this issue and lend legal professionals a better understanding of the experience of PA as an interrelated phenomenon including three actors.

3.6 Conclusion

PA research has accumulated drastically over the past couple of decades. Unique about PA research, however, is the debate regarding the associated terminologies, having ties to rudimentary theory and a founder with questionable morals. Despite this debate, PA continues to affect the lives of women internationally and is achieving increased public and academic interest. Ongoing investigation into a robust understanding of PA as part of a pattern of coercive control post-separation is needed. This literature review has pointed to the need for legal professionals to be trauma-informed when dealing with potential cases of PA. Being trauma-informed in relation to PA would entail being able to distinguish PA from other reasons of contact refusal which could in turn help identify false allegations. Without commonly adopted tools to properly identify these concepts, legal professionals "may unknowingly contribute to the problem by providing misinformation to decision makers, implanting adverse intervention and treatment protocol, and recommending detrimental custody arrangements" (Rowlands, 2019, p.4). In the following chapter, I will discuss the research design of the study.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods

Informed by the conceptual framework and literature review, three research questions guide this study: (1) how are women experiencing physical alienation (a physical separation between the child and the mother due to the manipulation of the alienating parent) or threatened alienation (threats or accusations of alienation); (2) which resources did victims of PA reach out to for support; and (3) did victims of PA experience barriers or obstacles when accessing these resources? This chapter will present the methodological approach taken, including participant recruitment, interviews, and instruments. Analysis and ethical considerations to minimize participant risk will also be discussed.

4.1 Methodological Approach

This qualitative study relied on speaking with women who have experienced PA to understand their experiences, identify which resources women turned to for support, and how these supports were associated with barriers or obstacles. Semi-structured interviews with nine women were audio recorded with their consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using NVIVO-14 software. Thematic analysis was based on the identification of common experiences and perceptions shared by participants in relation to the research questions. In the following sections, recruitment, interviews, instruments, and analysis will be discussed.

4.1.1 Recruitment

The initial recruitment process was focused on the Fredericton, New Brunswick area. Physical flyers, as an invitation to participate (see Appendix C), were posted in February 2023 on bulletin boards in daycares (1), convenience stores (1), grocery stores

(3), Service NB (3), legal aid offices (2), and doctor's offices (3). These areas were chosen as spaces of 'everyday living' and did not include shelters or emergency venues to purposely avoid recruitment of women still experiencing the crisis period (i.e., the first year past separation which is often considered a dangerous time for victims due to partner retaliation). In speaking with one administrative assistant at a doctor's office, three additional flyers were offered to be taken to redistribute at other doctor office locations by the secretary that worked at these alternate locations as well.

Due to a low initial response, an amendment was submitted to the Research Ethics Board (REB) in March 2023 to alter the recruitment strategy to include posting advertisement of the study online. The amendment was approved in April 2023. After receiving a list of potential contacts from a member of the Sociology department to whom I had inquired for help. I sent e-mails to each of the five contacts offered by the department member, each connected in some way to local IPV outreach or support. E-mails explained the study and asked for help administering the flyers via their professional social media outlets. Both the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Foundation (MMFC)[4] and Liberty Lane[5] agreed to share information of the study via their social media platforms. In addition, information about the study was posted to UNB News[6].

[4] MMFC: The Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research at UNB is dedicated toward eliminating family violence from society.

[5] Liberty Lane is a charitable organization local to Fredericton that offers residential and outreach programs to survivors of domestic violence.

[6] UNB News is accessible to students and faculty of UNB, it advertises university related activities and studies.

Once the invitation was posted online by each of these contacts it was subsequently shared on other social media outlets by their followers. According to participants, the advertisement was also shared on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

The subsequent sharing of the study by followers of these two IPV support resources led to snowball sampling. The study was shared via a Facebook site used for PA advocacy in Canada. Four of the nine participants were informed about the study from the sharing of the invitation to participate on this Facebook site; two other participants talked independently about this group, so that six of the nine participants were informed about this advocacy group.

All potential participants enquired about the study via e-mail. I replied with thanks, and offered further explanation where requested, along with a copy of the consent form (see Appendix D). Participants were advised the consent form would be read aloud at the beginning of the interview to obtain verbal consent and to offer time for questions or concerns. At the bottom of the consent form was information for three local counselling services. Since counselling services were local to Fredericton, participants outside the Fredericton area were offered additional support in locating more appropriate services, though no participants requested this assistance. E-mails sent in reply to potential participants also asked their preference of communication method (e.g., phone, Teams, Zoom) and choice of pseudonyms, though each participant elected that I chose the pseudonyms. Interview scheduling was completed through subsequent e-mail correspondence and all participants consented to being audio-recorded prior to the interview. Online invitations were sent to the participants requesting interviews via Teams and Zoom to schedule meetings. Phone numbers, and preference on whether the

participant wished to call or be called, were confirmed for the remaining participants via e-mail.

Eleven interviews were conducted in total with ten participants from Canada and one from the US. However, two participants retracted their participation after the conclusion of their interviews. Both participants gave the reason of being uncomfortable being associated with a study that uses the term "parental alienation" as they felt this term had been "weaponized by the abuser". This will be further discussed in the Discussion section. Four other people inquired about the study, but I was unable to secure an interview with them. Two additional potential participants hoped to participate but scheduling issues did not allow this. One final potential participant inquired about the study then withdrew in fear of potential re-traumatization before the interview began.

4.1.2 Interviews

Interviews lasted between 1 hr. 30 mins. and 3 hrs., with the average interview being 1 hr. 45 mins. Of the interviews used for this thesis, two participants chose to speak over the phone and seven participants chose video conferencing. In-person interviews were purposefully avoided due to speculation of the reinstatement of COVID-19 regulations and to avoid complications later in the project should this occur. While this was a preliminary concern, the amendment in recruitment strategy to post information about the study led to recruitment outside the province, meaning that in-person meetings would not have occurred due to dispersed locations of participants. Interviews were guided by an interview guide to direct conversations along a series of themes related to the research questions.

4.1.3 Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method to conduct this study. This allowed for making space for victims' narratives about their own experiences and perceptions. By better understanding the lived-experiences of victims, this allows for identifying their experiences within gender-based violence and patriarchal structures (e.g., the legal system).

An interview guide (see Appendix E) was used to help direct the interview along a series of themes related to the research questions. Following the interview guide, questions regarding demographic information were asked first, followed by questions about their relationship with their ex-partner while it was intact. This was important for establishing if coercive control (i.e., intimate terrorism) was present prior to separation and worked to build rapport as this eased the participant into speaking about memories prior to recent experiences of alienation. Subsequent probes were used to help articulate matters pertaining to the research questions.

The interview guide was influenced by the preceding conceptual framework and literature review. In establishing the occurrence of coercive control, and therefore intimate terrorism (Johnson, 2008), probes regarding overt and covert tactics of control were used when participants described feeling controlled. In identifying the presence of coercive control, PA could be considered within a pattern of IPV lasting post-separation.

Regarding the first research question, the interview guide included questions aimed at distinguishing PA from other reasons of contact refusal, understanding how alienating behaviours were used, and the impact of these behaviours on the mother-child relationship. To do this, similar questions to those found in the BAQ, the PARQ and the

RPAS were adopted in the creation of this interview guide. Since the RPAS is also administered to target parents, similar questions were adopted within this study. Since the BAQ and Child PARQ are administered to children, questions were reworded to be from the parent's perspective, for example rewording question 10 from the BAQ: Do you feel that your child is angry or unhappy with you?

In addition to these measuring tools, Baker's (2020) Four-Factor Model of PA was also used to inform the first research question, as this is used to distinguish PA from other reasons of contact refusal. By considering the criteria of Baker's (2020) Four Factor Model, there is also reference within the interview guide to Baker and Darnall's (2006) PABs and Gardner's (1985) eight behavioural manifestations. By referencing the Four-Factor model, questions regarding how participants experienced, were impacted by, and how they perceived their child to be impacted by alienation were included in the interview guide. Questions asked to participants included how they thought they were perceived by their child (e.g., being framed as dangerous), their relationship with their child prior to alienation, and to elaborate on findings of Child Protective Services (CPS) investigations to establish that maltreatment on the part of the target parent was not the cause of the alienation (Baker, 2012). Further consideration of alienating behaviours (Baker and Darnall, 2006) were asked about where appropriate.

The other two research questions related to the participant's use and evaluation of resources. The interview guide included questions regarding legal interventions (e.g., custody orders. protection orders), if/how the term "parental alienation" was used within these processes, and if outcomes reflected knowledge about PA.

4.2 Analysis

Once all interviews had been conducted, I transcribed them verbatim within a Word Document. Once all nine of the interviews had been transcribed, the documents were individually saved under the associated pseudonym and were imported to a NVIVO-14 file. The themes included in the preliminary search table (Appendix F), informed by the literature regarding experiences of PA and coercive control, were created as codes within the NVIVO-14 file. A thematic search table, similar to a search summary table used for systematic reviews (Bethel et al, 2021), was designed prior to the interviews to inform a deductive analytical approach based on PA literature. By identifying what researchers have already identified as markers of PA (e.g., alienating behaviours; association of formal help seeking with IT), a list of key themes to consider was created, influencing the interview guide. Preliminary themes consisted of six broader categories (i.e., abuse, parental alienation, supports/resources, victimization, terminology, outcomes) and several narrower themes, as presented in Appendix F. Interviews were then thematically analyzed using a deductive approach for evidence of the preliminary codes (i.e., abuse, parental alienation, supports/resources, victimization, terminology, outcomes).

I also engaged in an inductive analysis, as examples of control emerged that were not already created as codes (e.g., technology facilitated abuse and evaluative components to the resources mentioned, etc.), (see Appendix G). Themes were added and eliminated from the original thematic table as they were identified by participants. The complete thematic table, after alterations, can be seen in Appendix G. This included seven categories (an additional category concerning control) and a series of additional

narrower themes as well as categorization of positive and negative experiences as related to these sub-themes.

When all nine interviews had been analyzed, each interview was analyzed again so that the complete list of codes (see Appendix G) were considered, including evaluative components (i.e., positive and negative experiences as sub-codes) added after the first round of coding. Recurring themes among interviews were considered to point to common experiences regarding PA victimization, resources used, and obstacles and barriers to these resources. For the analysis, I chose the most prominent themes, indicated by the highest number of references (e.g., references referring to not only the number of times the code had been mentioned, but the number of participants that referenced the code).

4.3 Ethical Considerations

A key ethical consideration for this study was confidentiality. Due to the vulnerable nature of participants, it was of the utmost importance to ensure anonymity throughout this research. Participants of this study are considered vulnerable due to their experiences with IPV and PA victimization. Vulnerable populations refer to a group of people who are at a greater risk of exposure to a negative outcome (e.g., emotional triggering) because of a common characteristic or status.

Questions asked within the interview could trigger or cause emotional distress or re-traumatization. Therefore, for informed consent, victims were made aware of the nature of the study and were given remedying options (e.g., contacts for counselling and ability to retract involvement or withdraw from the study). To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all parties mentioned by participants (e.g., including alienating

parents, children, professionals) and the findings are presented mainly in an aggregate form with pseudonym use for direct quotes. Pseudonyms were also used to safeguard recording and transcription files. All files were password protected on a personal computer.

Audio recordings were saved only by the numerical order in which the participant was interviewed. A single master list linked the order of the interview with the participants first name. The master list was intended for possible issues in the future regarding participation withdrawal, in which I would need to know which interview to delete. The transcription files were each saved as a number (corresponding to the order in which the participant was interviewed), and the pseudonym. The master list was saved separately from the enumerated copy.

The use of a formal consent form and discussion at the start of the interview allowed for the participant to understand my role as researcher, their role as a participant, and potential risks associated with their participation. Concerning my role as researcher, the aims of the study and contact information were disclosed. Concerning their role as participant, their ability to retract participation at any time was explained. Finally, concerning potential risks, emotional triggers were discussed and contact information, or assistance in finding counselling services was provided.

Having e-mailed participants a copy of the consent form prior to the interviews, participants could read at their leisure and gather questions or concerns as they were directed that time would be allotted to discuss these concerns before the interview began. Several participants took this time to ask for further details about the study and their eligibility. By reading the consent form aloud at the beginning of the interview, issues of

literacy were avoided, and this served to refresh the participants of the roles and risks associated with this study immediately before their participation.

To ensure that participant's perceptions are accurately depicted in the findings of this study, pseudonyms allowed for verbatim quotations to be used in addition to the aggregate presentation of common themes. Verbatim quotations were considered to support the perspectives of the participant, supporting transparency.

4.4 Conclusion

While the target sample for this study is a vulnerable population, measures to ensure anonymity were taken to ensure that the probability and severity of harm or risk to participants was minimal. This research gives participants an opportunity to be part of research that has potential to help future victims of PA. In the following Findings Section, I present the recurring themes that emerged from the interviews related to the three research questions.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter is divided into four subsections presenting findings from nine interviews with women regarding PA. The first section provides demographic information about the participants. The following three sections consider experiences and impacts of PA and support for PA measuring tools and concepts; resources sought by participants; and barriers and obstacles participants faced in their help-seeking initiatives to these resources. To see a complete list of themes, see Appendix G.

5.1 Participant Demographics

All nine participants were mothers who reported having had been in heterosexual relationships with the child's father prior to separation and who self-identified as having experienced PA after separation. Participants were between thirty-four and fifty years of age, had between one and four children, and one participant identified as Indigenous. Participant's children were between eighteen months and ten years old at the time of alienation and were between the ages of three and twenty-three at the time of the interview. While one participant reported being in a dating relationship, four participants lived common-law, and four participants had been married to the child's father prior to separation. Other than one relationship reported as a sporadic dating relationship, relationships between the participants and their ex-partners lasted between five and fifteen years with an average of nine years. Participants reported being separated from their ex-partner for between 1 and 27 years, averaging 12 years. Legal names were changed to pseudonyms including Adeline, Briar, Bridgette, Charlotte, Claire, Greta, Hazel, Layna, and Myra.

5.2 Experiences & Impacts

In this section, subthemes of Abuse, Control, and Parental Alienation are used to identify PA within a patten of IPV as described by the participants. Impacts on the participant, alienated child, and third parties (e.g., siblings, grandparents) will also be discussed, as perceived by the participants. Participants' experiences of PA were classified as one of four types: physical separation (identified by Gardner (1998) as severe alienation), threatened separation, false accusations, and fear of alienation.

Five women reported experiencing physical separation, with two of these women experiencing physical separation on multiple occasions. Intergenerational alienation, or the dual experience of PA occurs when victims experience alienation more than once (e.g., alienated from a parent then a child or alienated from a child then a grandchild) (Verhaar et al., 2022). This was experienced by two participants. In these cases, the separation between the mother and child lasted between one and twenty-three years. In one case, periods of physical separation were ongoing (e.g., pattern of the child being returned and then alienated for another period); the other participant remained physically separated from her children at the time of the interviews.

Two women who had experienced physical alienation reported that they had also experienced threats of alienation as well. Two other women reported experiencing threats of alienation but no physical separation, and three women reported being wrongfully accused of alienation as they were actively protective in separating their child from an abusive ex-partner. One other participant feared alienation, though not due to verbal threat.

Of the five participants that reported experiencing physical separation from their child, three perceived the motivation for their child's alienation to be related to leaving the relationship, exposing the ex-partner's abusive behaviour, or the separation causing the sense of a break in the power and control dynamic. The other two participants that reported physical separation perceived alienation as motivated in relation to the ex-partner's new partner. Participants who had experienced threats of PA also believed the threats were motivated by the break-up.

Women that had been accused of PA reported that their own motivation to withhold their child from their ex-partner was completely based on previous or suspected child abuse. Each of these women reported being wrongfully labeled as alienating mothers, and instead described themselves as protective mothers. Finally, for the participant that feared alienation, this fear was based on being exposed to an acquaintance's experiences of alienation and observing seemingly similar behaviour from their own former partner in terms of power and control dynamics. Eight of nine participants perceived their former partners' motivations for PA, regardless of the type experienced, as being related to revenge for the participant having had reported IPV to authorities or for having ended the relationship. The ninth participant attributed their former partner's motivation to their intent to establish a family with a new partner who wanted a child.

Participants reported that being accused of alienation altered their thinking and behavioural patterns and was therefore insightful to the study. While they had been accused of alienating the child from the child's father, they reported that they were denying access because they had witnessed the father's abuse against the child or had

been told by the child that their father was abusive. Therefore, these were issues of justified rejection and not parental alienation. While this does not fit the criteria for PA, Baker's (2020) Four Factor Model was referenced to separate justified (not PA) from unjustified (PA) rejection scenarios.

All five participants that experienced physical separation, threatened alienation, or feared alienation reported having loving and healthy relationships with their children before the separation and were the child's primary caregiver. Therefore, women's experiences were found to reflect the factors discussed regarding Baker's Four-Factor Model of PA aimed at distinguishing PA from other PCCPs.

Participants spoke about power and control dynamics in relation to experiences and impacts of PA. Eight of nine participants pointed to at least one form of IPV (physical abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, or isolation) being present before separation. Each of these participants pointed to experiencing multiple forms in tandem and five of these participants referenced escalation of IPV tactics in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. Five participants reported suspected or witnessed child abuse by the child's father; these incidents were previously dealt with by child protective services. In addition, two participants reported animal abuse by their ex-partners. Other forms of abuse reported by participants included threats (e.g., physical and written), destruction of property, false accusations made to agencies (e.g., police, CPS), and stalking. Four women specifically mentioned only being able to recognize their experiences as abusive in hindsight, post-separation.

Overt and covert control tactics were identified by all nine participants before and after separation (Johnson, 2008). Pre- and post-separation control was identified almost

equally amongst participants, with forty-four references made regarding pre-separation control and forty-nine references to post-separation control. In addition, the term "coercive control" was specifically used by three participants to describe their experiences. Reward and punishment dynamics were specifically pointed to by three participants (e.g., withholding communication for leaving the bathroom light on). Although many pre-separational control tactics were pointed to by participants, they were not labeled overtly as reward and punishment dynamics.

Control tactics were related to the participant's victimization by alienating behaviours. Seven of the nine participants reported experiencing Baker and Darnall's (2006) PABs (fifty-two references to these behaviours); three of these participants reported these behaviours as DARVO, the abbreviated concept: Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender. This is a concept related to victim-blaming in which the perpetrator accuses the victim of actions they have not done but perpetrated themselves. The only alienating behaviours from Baker and Darnall (2006) that were not identified were: (12) Asking the child to keep secrets from the target parent, creating psychological distance; (13) Referring to the target parent by their first name to devalue the status of the target parent to the child; (14) Referring to a stepparent as mom or dad and encouraging the child to do the same. Additional to the 17 PABs identified by Baker and Darnall; (2006) parental alienating behaviours found in this study include (1) bribery (e.g., one participant said that the child's father offered to buy her a cat if she would agree to live with him); and (2) abduction, as multiple participants pointed out that their child was picked up early from school on their parenting days.

It is important to keep in mind that participants were not directly asked about each of Baker and Darnall's (2006) PABS as this study was not an evaluation of the tool. Rather, in conversation regarding experiences of PA, these behaviours were identified by the participants and were probed for further detail where appropriate. Considering physical separation, participants would likely not know if some alienating behaviours were occurring, as they are perpetrated by the alienating parent onto the child at the alienating parent's house. For example, alienated parents may not know if they are being referred to by their first name while the child is at the alienating parent's house.

Participant experiences related to IPV victimization were categorized as (1) those with direct impact on the participant; (2) perceived impact of witnessing IPV and impacts on the child; and (3) third party victimization. Concerning direct impacts on the participant, longevity of traumatization, including being nervous or fearful from unexpected knocks at the door, was reported by two participants. Physical health effects were also reported, with one participant explaining, "I had inflammation in my chest from being so stressed out". Participants also expressed feeling guilt for their children's exposure to IPV or the control dynamics present between themselves and their ex-partner prior to separation. Concerning children, participants that had been accused of PA said that the children returned from their last visits with the allegedly abusive parent to have "concerning behaviours" or that the child was "terrified" and "clung" to them once returned.

Five participants described feeling under "constant" threat of alienation and reported continually documenting their experiences as evidence. This includes e-mail communication to have a "paper trail" of conversations, keeping calendars or logs of

personal activities in case they are accused of alienation in the future, and most commonly, audio-recording their children when they return from visiting an alienating parent (for mild/moderate cases or cases involving threat of alienation in which visitation was still ongoing). Participants were careful to begin the audio-recording at the time that the children returned from the alienating parent to ensure the entire conversation was recorded and that they could not later be accused of brainwashing techniques or provoking negative stories about the other parent from the child. This shows public knowledge of alienating behaviours that mothers wrongfully accused of alienation were aware of and tried to provide evidence against.

Normalization was also considered a direct impact, as participants reported feeling that they did not recognize their experiences as PA when alienation tactics began (i.e., hindsight), showing that their experiences had been normalized until reflecting on their experiences at a later point in time. Participants reported that they felt they could have done more to stop the alienation from happening if they had known what it was, and so they could explain their situation to legal and mental health professionals. Inability to articulate or label their experiences is a common barrier to victims as identified by Leisenring (2011), as "their failure to proactively define the situation in their favor" (p.362). One participant referred to her experience of being alienated as systematically "falling through the cracks". Issues with identification of PA were two-fold: victims did not know what to label their experiences, and when they described their circumstances to professionals, the professionals did not label their experiences as PA either. Even where participants did label their experiences, they did not feel they received effective responses because professionals did not know how to intervene.

Participants perceived one of the impacts of PA on the child to be disassociation. One participant explained in referring to her children that “they were robots”. In two cases, participants viewed children’s attempted suicides as linked to the alienation and alienating behaviours, and four participants reported behavioural issues with their children, including one participant who recalled her children throwing rocks at her.

Regarding third-party impacts, two participants talked about the familial impact of alienation. One participant explained that they not only lost their daughter but “my older kids lost their little sister. My parents lost their baby granddaughter”. Two participants also reported their own parents being impacted financially as they were questioned in court regarding access to funds as in one participant’s case, and in assisting with court-related costs (e.g., hiring an evaluator) in another. Further, anxiety and depression were also reported by one participant in explaining the effects of physical alienation from other non-alienated siblings. Impacts on third parties included participants’ new partners as well, as they were accused of child abuse in two cases.

The impacts of alienation left victims of PA searching for help. In the following section, resources, as referenced by participants, will be discussed. This will include categorizations of resources including formal and informal supports, as well as court orders, organizations, and supervised visitations as they were reported by participants.

5.3 Access to Supports & Resources

Participants spoke about their access to formal resources, informal resources, and legal resources. A breakdown of codes is presented, along with the number of times these codes were referenced by participants in parentheses. Formal resources, as identified by Johnson (2008) are common help-seeking resources for victims of IT. Participants

reported seeking support from: child protection workers (seven); custody/alienation evaluator (one); doctors (one); intimate partner violence support workers (seven); judges (four), lawyers (eight), police (eight), teachers (five), and therapists/psychologists (eight). Informal resources fall outside of the conventional category and participants reported use of: phone apps (three) (i.e., phone apps can be used to track communication between ex-partners and can be later used for evidence of coercion if needed); coaches (e.g., parenting, IPV coaches) (two); group support (two); online support (four); authors (one) (e.g., prominent PA authors for personal advice); fundraisers (e.g., reaching out to the hosts of local IPV fundraisers for IPV/PA contacts or supports) (one), and parenting programs (one) (e.g., co-parenting programs and parenting after separation programs). The extent of help sought by participants was evident in a range of creative ways when resources did not seem readily accessible to them, or they did not know where to go to for help.

Legal Resources included: custody orders (three); emergency intervention orders (two); protection orders (one); restraining orders (one); and safety planning (two). Participants turned to a range of organizations to obtain court information (e.g., related to PA and IPV victimization), to inquire about supervised visitation, to document child experiences, to assistance with post-separation housing, and to report issues related to children's rights. Four participants identified supervised visitation as a resource to assist with alienation and post-separational abuse.

5.4 Barriers & Obstacles

This section outlines a variety of ways in which participants reported victimization, as well as their advocacy for training and better recognition of PA by legal

and mental health professionals. Finally, personal projects in which participants were involved or hoped to become involved in the future are identified, as five participants identified PA as a "niche" victimization type currently neglected from effective resources intervention.

Participants spoke about whether resources had positive or negative effects on their children: child protection workers (one positive, six negative); lawyers (two positive, six negative); police (two positive, six negative); and therapists/psychologists (four positive, four negative). Overall, more negative experiences were reported when dealing with child protection workers, police, and lawyers, while equally negative and positive experiences were reported regarding therapists/psychologists. Participants described the negative experiences as largely reflective of resources not being trauma-informed or that these professionals were not able to identify PA or recognize its impacts. Further negative experiences were directly related to perceived collusion amongst professionals including personal and professional affiliations, which will be discussed below.

The "hysterical woman" trope references woman as characteristically less rational and less emotionally stable than men. Four participants referenced this trope, either reporting being referred to in this manner by professionals or fearing being labeled this way. This trope falsely accuses woman as responding irrationally and often relates to accusations of mental illness. This had implications for how participants perceived the helpfulness of resources as legal and mental health professionals were "unaware of the realm of it" and participants felt re-traumatized by these professionals which they reported impeded on their willingness to help seek in the future.

Victimization by the legal system was referenced by eight of nine participants. Four participants reported issues of miscommunication between the two legal systems (e.g., criminal and family courts), thus their ex-partner's IPV convictions were not considered in the context of child custody. These participants also identified pre- and post-separation IPV being dismissed in consideration of custody arrangements. Further, one participant reported being criminally charged in pursuit of having her daughter returned to her after being severely alienated. Moving forward, this participant believed her credibility was affected when calling police about future incidents related to post-separation harassment and PA due to case-file documentation.

Victimization by the legal system was related to DARVO as three participants reported abusers denying their own criminal histories (even after been convicted) and accused participants of deviant, abusive, or neglectful behaviour to the courts. Further victimization related to the legal system/family court was identified by participants as an inability to access or be kept up to date on information regarding criminal charges or court appearances for their ex-partner. This affected one participant in having an Emergency Intervention Order (EIO), a form of protection order, expire without warning and without knowing she would need a new one reinstating her safety. Not having a valid EIO meant that she did not know to inform the school that the ex-partner was released from jail and to not allow her child to have contact with the ex-partner. This participant explained, "you can't tell me whether or not she would run to him and say hi, (…) they loved him. they had a good time with him up until the end when it got escalated".

Victimization related to housing was reported by five participants. This included victimization related to (1) physical space, as two participants reported needing to remain

in the same house in which they were victimized; and (2) limitations in housing opportunities, as two participants reported being required to remain within a close proximity to their ex-partner for reasons related to the custody order (e.g., needing to stay close to the child's school), and one participant reported being given a court-ordered proximity in which she was allowed to move after the divorce. Further, (3) two participants reported their ex-partner having expectations to only move downstairs; and (4) one participant reported being financially dependent on the ex-partner, affecting her ability to get her own place right away. This participant's situation was exacerbated by lengthy wait times related to housing assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two participants reported keeping the familial home, though experiencing further victimization by the ex-partner. Participants reported that their ex-partner turned off the heat to the house or had virtual access to the heating system. One participant reported her ex-partner as being the landlord of her house, affecting her ability to receive subsidized housing without his awareness as he would be contacted as a referral.

Victimization related to the weaponization of support services was identified by three participants in that the abuser made false reports concerning both the mental health condition and the ability to parent to support agencies. Weaponization of reports to doctors, police, and child protection workers were identified by participants as well, which will be discussed below as collusion. Participants report that victimization led to advocacy efforts by many participants. Seven of nine participants advocated for better general training by legal and mental health professionals to recognize IPV and PA and a more trauma-informed response. One area of concern was the ability of professionals to recognize PA by associated alienating behaviours, with one participant explaining, "they

need to look at the behaviours. Just look at the behaviours". Being falsely accused of alienation by ex-partners as well as by professionals, other participants reported a need for greater recognition of alienating behaviours to protect women from false accusations. One participant described professionals as,

> trying to establish a false alienation narrative against me. They were both trying to establish that the children's issues with their father are not-, they're based on my brainwashing fake stories into their heads, which terrorized me because both of those professionals have all of the evidence of the abuse [perpetrated by the father] that the kids are talking about. (Charlotte)

Regarding advocacy, participants stated that legal and mental health professionals need to be better informed about PA and its impacts. Participants reported frustration with mental health and legal professionals who they said "pass-the-buck" or handed their cases off to other agencies or departments without providing any of them help or remaining in contact with them; another participant refers to this as "sending me around in circles". In relation to this issue, other participants reported that advocacy could have played a role in their own ability to respond to their situation. One participant said that "if they had been trained on this [PA], they could have educated me and my son". Further, four participants reported not being able to label their experiences as PA and therefore not reporting it or not knowing what resources were available to help. Others pointed to needed preventative strategies, saying, heightened recognition of PA could "equip people, before they get married, like women need to see what red flags look like".

"Personal Projects" were described by six participants who identified gaps in current resources tailored for PA victims that they intended to fill themselves. PA was

considered by five participants as a “niche” area of victimization that needed tailored responses by professionals educated on identifying PA as well as its impacts. Areas that the participants felt they experienced barriers to meaningful support became personal projects for the participants to help other future victims avoid the barriers they had experienced. Participants explained that not knowing where to go to for help could be alleviated with a type of ‘instruction manual’ for victims that could ease some of the stress by having some of this work ‘already done’. While at the time of the interviews some of these projects were in the beginning stages, others shared plans of what they hoped to accomplish.

Personal projects included giving public awareness speeches (two); personally creating pamphlets (including PA informed services and affordable housing options as these were key issues faced by these participants) for future victims of PA (e.g., participant planned to distribute t pamphlets at IPV related services that did not already offer such information(two); accountability initiatives (e.g., having resources like child protection workers registered to the province in cases in which provinces do not currently require registering) (one); suicide prevention in which alienation contexts are incorporated (one); the passing of bills amending the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (one); and writing or offering their stories to authors to inform upcoming book publications (two).

The personal projects were reported by participants to be in effort of offering future victims of PA support they did not feel that they received themselves. Two participants reported not knowing who to contact for help or difficulty in explaining their situation to others (i.e., not knowing what to call their experiences or not knowing the

label ‘PA’). In addition, two participants reported professionals not recognizing the term PA when they brought it up to them; and six of the nine participants spoke about the credibility debate pertaining to PA leaving them unsure about labeling their experiences as such when speaking with mental health and legal professionals.

The credibility debate was one of the highest-ranking referenced subthemes, with 49 references amongst six of nine participants. One online advocacy group was referenced by each of these six. These participants described a key aim of the group was to alter the terminology regarding the concept of PA (e.g., not wanting to refer to themselves as alienated parents or having any ties to Gardner’s PAS theory, including the terminology used regarding the alienating triad). Two of the six participants were not members of the advocacy group, though still described being aware of it and its aims. All participants that referred to this group brought it up independently within our interviews, without being asked about it specifically.

The advocacy group was identified as making substantial social and legal waves in the way PA is currently understood by the greater public and in terms of advocating for legal reform regarding PA. Participants explained that key to the group’s agenda is renaming PA as Domestic Violence (DV) by Proxy. However, three participants pointed to a “divide” among members regarding the renaming of the concept.

Those who believed that PA was an appropriate term and should me maintained acknowledged the term already having had been reconceptualized (e.g., and therefore distanced) from its predecessor PAS (i.e., and specifically Gardner’s gendered claims in relation to the theory). This side of the divide also believed that changing the name would

mean that it would take years to gain credibility through publishing, and they believed that PA explained their circumstances appropriately, how it is currently conceptualized.

The other side of the divide (i.e., the majority side) was described by participants to be advocating for not only the widespread adoption of a new term to refer to PA as, but the elimination of current reference to PA, and the alienation triad (e.g., not being called alienating mothers, believing that this term was "reserved for the abuser", a comment repeated throughout the interviews). The replacement term: Domestic Violence (DV) by Proxy, is at the forefront of initiatives of this advocacy group and is described to have a substantial international following. This debate will be further considered in the Discussion Chapter.

5.5 Conclusion

This section has presented findings related to the three research questions which guide this study. All participants' PA experiences occurred within a broader context of IPV and PA was described as occurring alongside a variety of other violent and non-violent control strategies post separation. Impacts on participants, their children, and their family members were discussed in relation to four forms of PA considered. Several formal resources, as well as informal resources, including online support networking, were used by participants. However, in referencing these supports, there was overwhelming agreement that PA was underrecognized and services were not trauma informed. This led to personal advocacy efforts to fill these gaps. Finally, the credibility debate of PA was identified as creating division amongst PA victims, even amongst a prominent advocacy group. This division was largely related to disagreement over the

labeling of PA experiences (e.g., alienated mother, protective mother). In the following section, these findings will be further discussed.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Drawing on the interviews, I will first discuss the credibility debate regarding PA as this was described by participants as affecting their credibility as victims when help-seeking. Further, mental health and legal professionals' perceptions of PA were described to have impacted the support victims were offered. Next, I will discuss PA as IT, as this points to the experiences and impacts described by participants. This includes discussion regarding pre- and post-separation coercive control strategies. Discussion regarding key supports and resources will follow, including participant's allegations of collusion as ex-partners provided false information, informing professional reports (e.g., police, CPS reports) which were shared between agencies and departments without further investigation.

6.1 The Credibility Debate

This section will first consider how participants explained their experiences of witnessing a credibility debate over PA in their interactions with professionals and amongst themselves as victims. This was in large part in reference to their perceived mislabeling by these professionals in being classified as alienating parents when they preferred the term protective parent. This, they felt, reflected the professionals being unaware of PA dynamics from an IPV context.

All participants were members of, or were aware of, a Canadian advocacy group promoting the labeling of "DV by Proxy". The 'proxy' through which IPV is manifested post-separation are the children. While this looks like the already formulated definition of 'PA' (i.e., as first conceptualized by Gardner as PAS, then reconceptualized by researchers such as Baker (2010), Baker and Darnall (2006), Harman et al. (2019), a key

issue was brought up by participants: that reasons of justified rejection (e.g., child abuse) are being lumped together with PA (i.e., PA is not being distinguished from other reasons for contact refusal). For participants, this points to a wide-reaching need for further education and awareness of what PA is. The reason given by participants for their advocacy for this name-change was a desire to distance their experiences from being affiliated with a 'discredited' theory (PAS), the controversial morals of the founder of that theory (Gardner), and its influence on legal inadmissibility. They stated that they felt that these associations hindered their experiences from being validated by legal professionals. This in turn affected their willingness to ask for help.

In discussing these issues with participants, Gardner's affiliation with pedophilia and self-publishing were identified multiple times. Charlotte explained, "no one wants to have anything to do with pedophilia," showing that victims are not willing to associate their experiences with a theory having roots supporting these behaviours. Another participant referenced Gardner, describing his work as "disgusting". Charlotte said that in Gardner's version it is "always mom brainwashing the child". Participants pointed out Gardner's neglect of adopting an IPV/coercive control framework and rather targeting mothers for PA perpetration as a litigation strategy that they felt discredited their own experiences when explaining their situations to mental health and legal professionals.

While Harman et al. (2022) identified a dramatic increase in both qualitative and quantitative academic studies regarding PA since 2016, the lack of validation participants expressed was attributed to the continued influence PAS has had on PA. The reproduction of patriarchal attitudes associated with PAS was rejected by participants, as

anything related to the PAS (or its founder) was considered by most participants to be discredited.

Not all participants reported objections towards Gardner, however. Having had first experienced PA over twenty years ago, Briar stated that Gardner's theory had played a substantive role in her ability to label her experiences, which validated them. Having Garner's (1998) book referred to her by a psychologist, she explained, "I read that book, it was my life. Everything that he described about-, and this is now how I know what I was facing. And I know that I wasn't crazy. And I know that it was not just me." Regarding the validation Briar felt after reading this book, she described, "probably after I read Gardner's book, I was more aware (…) I was able to get back in touch with my two kids. Even though I hadn't seen them for a full year".

Related to affiliations with Gardner is the misinformation about PA. Misinformation was referenced by four participants regarding PA theory, reporting legal professionals are unable to identify PA or its impacts, or the participant's inability to distinguish PA characteristics from other reasons of contact refusal (e.g., justified rejection). There appeared to be so much association among participants that contemporary works were only cited by one participant, while Gardner's works were referenced by multiple. Professionals not identifying PA as a form of coercive control therefore, or participants not understanding their own circumstances as PA at onset of alienating behaviours, reflected lacking acknowledgement of Baker and Darnall's PABs. Further, participants stated that professionals did not distinguish between estrangement, allied children, and justified and unjustified rejection narratives in both legal and social contexts.

One participant explained PA theory in saying, “Dr. Gardner himself stated that if there is domestic violence in the situation then you don’t have parental alienation (…) acknowledge that there has been domestic violence, they can’t claim that there is alienation”. This statement is significant in that PAS is being used interchangeably with PA, something identified by Van Der Bijl (2016). While if abuse were to have occurred between the alienated parent and the child (i.e., justified rejection), this claim would be valid. However, abuse against a (former) partner does not mean alienation is not considered as such; rather, according to Harman et al. (2019), Lee-Maturana and Matthewson (2019), and others, this increases the likelihood of PA dynamics to be present. The significance of this statement, then, lies in the influence Gardner has had on contemporary conceptualizations of PA.

Supporting Lorando’s (2006) description of the current professional (e.g., psychological, legal) perception of PA as “junk science, two participants referred to the lack of legal response to their circumstances being related to legal professionals believing this claim as well, their experiences were invalidated due to legal professionals perceptions of PA continuing to be that it is “junk science” (e.g., not a strong legal argument).

One participant said, “the whole parental alienation theory and syndrome has been debunked, it has been rejected by the World Health Organization (…) it’s not real”. For this participant, this also meant that “doing an alienation evaluation is not a thing, it’s been scientifically debunked.” This participant went on to remark that PA is “banned from being used in family courts”. However, while PA is not specifically named within the current edition of the DSM and therefore cannot be used as a legal or psychological

concept, the phenomenon itself continues to fill affidavits and court arguments, as pointed to by other participants. PA may have been "roundly rejected" as a syndrome by the APA, though certainly has remained a "social fact" by many courts (Sheehy and Boyd, 2020, p.80). As a social fact (e.g., child access denial does occur), the term "PA" carries with it a history of being discredited that the term is not often used in legal contexts, or according to participants, purposefully avoided by legal professionals.

Fear of being mislabeled as an alienating parent (and therefore the possibility of custody reversal to the abusive parent) was a key fear for many of the participants in this study. This deterred them from seeking help in one case, and in purposely describing their situation without PA-associated terms in another. For almost all of the participants, fear of being mislabeled by legal professionals or fear of not having their circumstances believed by legal professionals led them to document nearly every aspect of daily life to ensure they could prove that they were either not alienating the child from the other parent (but rather acting protectively), that they were being framed by their ex-partner as alienating, or that alienation was actually occurring.

This concern with being framed as an alienating mother rather than a protective mother became evident. While the label 'protective mother' has not been officially adopted within PA literature, five of the nine participants used this phrase to describe themselves as mothers that were denying access of their child, but that this was not alienation due to the occurrence of child maltreatment. Child maltreatment does not constitute PA (Gardner, 1985, Harman et al., 2019, Baker, 2020) and so participants felt that by being labeled an alienating mother rather than a protective mother, they were being lumped into PA dynamics that were not appropriate for their circumstances. The

labeling that is associated with alienation as child-psychological abuse and post-separational abuse was considered by participants to misrepresent their situations. It is important to note that this was also a key aim of the advocacy group of which some of participants belonged. This is a significant observation, as the terms alienating and protective mothers differentiate in their association with justified versus unjustified rejection scenarios, but are being used interchangeably (Zaccour, 2018).

Charlotte explained that either being an alienating mother or a protective mother comes with the legal assumptions assigned to each. An alienating mother, in line with Gardner's PAS theory, has no legal credibility as they are assumed to be withholding child access (i.e., alleging child sexual abuse by the father). This is why victims want to be dissociated with the term. Protective mothers, on the other hand, are considered by Charlotte, and four other participants, to better represent the specific dynamic of denying child access for reasons of protection as they have been accused of alienating by former partners as well as mental and legal health professionals. This shows a disassociation by victims and professionals between justified and unjustified rejection scenarios (i.e., what does, and does not, constitute PA); that is, PA is being confused for other PCCPs.

Myra and Adeline both feared being falsely accused of PA. This led Myra, Adeline, and Bridgette to document their own daily routines to avoid this from occurring. Since these participants denied the father access for reasons of protection, they feared being accused of alienation and having their custody reversed, in line with Gardner's proposed remedy to PAS situations. Again, we can see that Gardner's PAS theory has influenced current perceptions of PA.

Inaccurate, or dated, information about PA has affected the way alienated mothers label their own experiences as well as how they are labeled by mental health and legal professionals. Greta, Layna, Myra, and Adeline each described not knowing what to call their experiences; when they sought help, mental health and legal professionals did not offer this term either. Participants, like Charlotte, explained their circumstances as the perpetration of post-separational control. When they explained their experiences to legal professionals, their experiences were normalized as being part of a high-conflict divorce. Claire explained that some of the legal demands of her ex-partner were even supported by her own lawyer. The broader identification of PA as a form of post-separational IPV was, for eight participants, not acknowledged by mental health or legal professionals.

Layna pointed out, "we need more resources. We need more research. And we need *correct* research because there's so much misinformation and misinformation being disseminated." Layna went on to explain,

> one of the other anti-parental alienation people, or parental alienation deniers, who are not scientists. They're attorneys. And they just- they published this book and Jennifer and Will Bernet (…) like scrutinized it all. They went through and went as far as to asking the publishers to take it off the shelves (…) They're calling people on it. And saying this is misinformation - disinformation and you published a book that is unethical. This is unethical for you to publish a piece of literature that is incorrect.

Legal professionals have expressed inability to distinguish PA from other reasons of contact refusal and have therefore minimized victims' experiences or avoided

the term in custody debates. With victims reporting an important role of online support and relationships, the credibility debate becomes even more important as misinformation is disseminated within these online groups at a rapid pace due to the instantaneous nature of 'sharing'.

Misinformation about PA has created division among victims, according to victims. In referencing the agenda of the advocacy group that the participants were a part of, one participant who appeared aware of the lineage of PA theory, said, "at first, yeah, it's like, oh, Richard Gardner, junk science. yes. True. But parental-, we're not talking anymore about parental alienation syndrome, in court. Nobody's calling it parental alienation syndrome." This comment points to the way in which PAS has been deemed "junk science" and become avoided or rejected in court settings. Another participant explained how links to Gardner's PAS theory and exclusion from the DSM has led to debate not only about the credibility of the theory itself but has also resulted in victims trying to distance themselves from the theory, rejecting the labels associated with the alienating triad. Charlotte explains,

> I wanted to explain that it's very very important to not call victims of this weaponization alienated mothers because that-, that term. By definition, yes, we are alienated (…) The alienation label is reserved for the abusers and for the professional abusers in this industry who are there to protect the abusers.

Protective mothers are being lumped into the alienating triad by legal professionals without examining the specifics of manipulation or investigation into broader IPV dynamics which are the reason for denying access (i.e., to protect children from their abusive parent).

The call for reconceptualization of PA to include the term protective mothers may be misguided as this form of alienation resonates more with other PCCPs than PA. However, the continued dominance of PAS as reference for PA seems to be the base of this confusion. The renaming of the alienating triad, then, is more directed at advocating for proper identification of PA as IPV and for identification of coercive controlling behaviours by mental health and legal professionals. Advocating for this proper identification, Layna explains that in explaining alienation, online advocates said to her,

> I agree with everything you're saying, except, don't call it parental alienation. I'm like why? That's what all the research is calling it. I'm like you guys haven't even read Gardner's books. Gardner-, you haven't even read the books. You're repeating misinformation - disinformation.

Regarding this division, Layna advocated for the "bridging of the two camps" in saying, "let's change the narrative here […] but they are not-, they [advocacy group] will not even entertain the thought of it."

While Layna had also cited Gardner, she did so in a manner to show how disinformation associated with Gardner (i.e., unsupported gendered claims) have influenced victim's understanding of their experiences. This, she says, has been exacerbated by the same perspective of alienation adopted by legal professionals who also cite Gardner which in turn minimizes victim experiences. Layna's argument is that more current literature, contextualizing PA withing broader IPV dynamics, is not being referenced or having the same level of influence as Gardner's PAS on how victims and legal professionals interpret PA.

Layna identified another issue with renaming PA: there is currently limited research using the proposed name DV by Proxy. There is currently little research using this term; it has not yet been adopted by professionals in sociological, psychological, or legal field and would be, as she says, "starting from the beginning". In considering the credibility debate, Layna, "I think that what's important, is that people understand the pattern more than whatever term is being used." She further pointed out, "they [members of the advocacy group] are more concerned about the name than what to do about it (…) there's a lot of trauma coaches or trauma people on TikTok that are still so traumatized, and they're rage-farming." The "rage-farming" that Layna is referring to is that women are being mislabeled as alienating mothers (rather than protective mothers) and are feeling that their experiences are not validated by mental health or legal professionals, nor within broader social discourse. They are being labeled 'the bad guy' when they are actively protecting their child from an abusive parent, association with PA (e.g., especially that they are mothers and therefore women) discredits their argument and experiences.

The impact of the credibility debate for yet another participant had her relate, "when I go back to court (…) I don't think I'm going to use the word alienation, but I'm certainly going in using the patterns of behaviours." The credibility debate, therefore, not only affects victims of PA in the context of labeling their experiences but has directly impacted the way victims help-seek and the way professionals are assessing their situations. Considering the dismissal of PA experiences referenced by participants, not using the term alineation may be a productive way of assessing justice (e.g., regaining child contact). This may remain problematic as well, in that explaining the

pattern of behaviours (i.e., IPV and coercive control victimization) are also frequently minimized or neutralized by legal professionals as well (Wydall and Zerk, 2021).

In the following section, PA will be discussed in terms of intimate terrorism victimization. This will offer further contextualization of the experiences and impacts of targeted parents while understanding the dilemma they concurrently face in labeling their experiences, as previously discussed.

6.2 Intimate Terrorism & Parental Alienation

This section considers participants' experience of both pre-separation control (e.g., financial control, isolation, and normalization of micromanagement and regulation) and post-separation control (e.g., weaponization of housing and court orders). Power and control are discussed in terms of participants' experiences of pre-conditions to PA and situates PA as a post-separational measure to regain this control dynamic. The reproduction of patriarchal attitudes within and between intimate and institutional relationships, as identified by Stark (2009)are discussed.

The harm of one person by another, through manipulation of a third party is discussed in terms of alienating behaviours being perpetrated either by a spouse of an alienating parent (rather than the child) or against the spouse of a target parent (rather than the target parent themselves). This showcases use of various post-separation non-violent control tactics adopted by the alienating parent, other than identified in the literature, to exert the greatest control possible on the target parent. Briar identified that the attack on her new partner by her ex-partner was a method of asserting control by potentially ruining the ex-partner's new relationship. Briar explained this to have been a

pivotal point at which she, for a while, stopped reaching out to her children in order to stop the ongoing abuse and control she had been experiencing. She explains,

> And then it hit me, it was not just me. It was everybody around me, will turn to being a bad person for them. And I was willing to fight, but I was not willing to fight to see my partner and all of my family around me being attacked.

The method of exercising post-separational control was identified by Briar to be particularly impactful when executed against her new partner. In the following section, the impacts of control tactics by other participants will be discussed, including their perceptions on how witnessing obscure parenting dynamics is believed to affect their children. Along with understanding triangulation and third-party impacts, participants perceptions of what motivated their ex-partners to deny child access will be discussed in relation to power and control dynamics because they were described by participants, in seven of nine cases, to be in response to either "outing" their ex-partners abusive behaviours or for leaving the relationship (i.e., threatening or breaking the control dynamics by separation).

The establishment and maintenance of general control over the relationship was identified by all nine participants who reported multiple experiences of pre-and post-separation control, which is consistent with the feminist perspective of IPV. Ex-partners were described by participants in ways that align with Johnson's (2008) description of intimate terrorists. As Johnson (1995) has argued for the distinction of various forms of violence to promote proper funding, theory, policy development, education and appropriate prevention and intervention strategies (Johnson and Leone, 2005), different

types of alienation were examined in this study to differentiate experiences, impacts, and to point to differences among needed supports and interventions.

In this study, PA was considered within four contextual experiences of alienation: (1) physical separation (aligning with Gardner's severe category of PA); (2) threatened alienation; (3) accusations of alienation onto the target parent; and (4) fear of separation (without verbal threat). Each participant identified that their experiences of PA were related to high-conflict divorce or separation, supporting current literature (Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Bernet, 2010; Rowlands, 2019). Five participants reported physical separation from their child, with two participants reporting the progression of alienation from the severe to the extreme (Bernet et al., 2022) in which the child of an alienation dynamic became suicidal. Whether physical alienation or threats/accusations of alienation were experienced, participants highlighted the assertion of control dynamics (i.e., both violent and non-violent) becoming more intense post-separation. Violence (e.g., violent and non-violent tactics) is a method to assert control. Control is perpetrated to establish domination/subordination dynamics as the reproduction of patriarchal ideals from society into the intimate relationship (Johnson and Ferrero, 2000; Johnson, 2008).

Charlotte expressed that the abuse she endured was rooted in patriarchal ideals, explaining that her abuser had "confessed to police that he could do with me as he pleased, because I am his wife". Her ex-partner also stated to police, "I'm the breadwinner. That's how it is". Similarly, Briar identified that, "I wanted to go back to work at some point. I don't want to just be a mother at home. And honestly this is when it started to get sour". Hazel also explained, "it was all a woman's kind of job to do

everything". Adeline described explaining her experiences of gendered oppression within her intimate relationship to police officers. Adeline explains "we have a misogynistic, patriarchal system" and Greta similarly offers that "I tone police myself because I'm conditioned to, like, misogynistic thinking". This sense of tone-policing yourself (i.e., presenting a particular type of self, the ideal victim) lends support for Leisenring's (2011) argument that only ideal victims (e.g., passive, feminine) are believed by police and therefore have appropriate services provided to them.

Patriarchal ideals were identified by participants in relation to power and control in the relationship, supporting Johnson and Ferraro's (2005) argument that there is a correlation between coercive control and perpetrators' patriarchal beliefs. This also supports Johnson's (2006) argument that male perpetrators of intimate terrorism are more misogynistic in their beliefs than male perpetrators of other form of violence (Johnson, 2006).

Johnson and Leone (2005) identified a range of violent and non-violent power and control tactics that are used by intimate terrorists including emotional abuse, isolation, male privilege (e.g., strict regime of gendered roles used to allow or disallow the victim to perform certain activities, ultimately diminishing her agency and increasing her vulnerability) and using children, both overt and covert. Control tactics were identified by all participants both before and after separation. Both violent and non-violent control tactics will be discussed in the following section.

6.2.1 Regulation & Micromanagement

In the following section regulation and micromanagement will be discussed. This will include consideration of pre-separation and post-separation control tactics as well as

isolation and normalization of these tactics by participants, which made it hard for them to describe or identify their experiences as IPV or PA during the relationship or for a period after separation. Varying frequency and intensity of control tactics are used to establish and maintain a sense of threat or fear of future harm in the victim that in turn compels compliance (Hardesty et al., 2015). The perpetrator may use as many or as few tactics as needed to instill a sense of fear (Johnson et al., 2014), not needing to resort to physical violence often (Johnson, 1995) as once fear is instilled almost entirely non-violent tactics may be used (Johnson and Leone, 2005). As Charlotte reported, "as a domestic violence victim, I'll bend over backwards to not make him upset. Cause it's dangerous for him to be upset". Charlotte went on to explain that when her ex-partner was upset, control tactics would escalate. Also speaking about control, Bridgette said her ex-partner "was never the same person in public as he was with me in private", remembering meeting her ex-partner for dinner when he was showing her pictures from what he did at work that day, "because we were out in public, right? Everything seemed fine and then get home, and just… plane crash. Nosedive. Like just a total 180".

Participants reported a range of frequencies and intensities of violent and non-violent control tactics. Using frequency counts of the number of times participants referred to an experience, financial abuse, isolation, and normalization of control dynamics were most commonly rated highest among all participants pre-separation. Pre-separation control was experienced in tandem, for most participants, with various other forms of abuse (e.g., physical, psychological, sexual, and verbal abuse) and they reported it escalating during COVID-19 regulations.

For some participants, like Charlotte and Greta, control was highly related to overt financial control. Charlotte explained, “I wasn’t allowed income, (…) he found an excuse to come and take my bank card and credit card and cut it up. Because [he said] I wasn’t smart with the money”. Further, Claire explained that “he always told me, if you leave me, (…) You will be left financially destitute. I will ensure it”. Adeline also pointed to overt financial control in that,

> the only way I could buy anything or have any money was if he gave it to me and he would only give it to me for weird things, like making me wake up at 5am with him, (…) paying me to, you know, do chores. Make his lunch.

While financial abuse was used as an overt form of control for Charlotte, Claire, and Adeline, Greta explained financial abuse as a more covert and gradual tactic, explaining that, “he just ran me dry financially (…) everything was in my name. He destroyed my credit rating, left me in tons of debt”. Claire also explained that “anything over a thousand dollars would be discussed but that didn’t hold on his end (….) the thousand-dollar limit was for me and the kids”. Finally, Charlotte pointed to a progression of control as, “towards the end I had no access to any marital funds at all. I was actually starving a lot”. These experiences of financial control are consistent with Hardesty et al.’s (2015) claim that control tactics are successful when they have established a sense of fear within the victim. Charlotte, Adeline, and Claire were each threatened by the elimination of access to funds or experienced overt power and control dynamics regarding finances that altered their behaviour. Charlotte expressed feeling that “if I could just show him, I was actually extra smart with money” the control would subside.

Financial abuse, however, was not the only pre-separation control tactic reported. Isolation was also used, with Bridgette describing, “it was covert. It was very… I would get in trouble for it [going out with friends] when I got home, kind of thing”. Likewise, Charlotte referenced covert tactics to establish a sense of relationship-level control as well. She explained, “I’d have to ask his permission (…), he wouldn’t say like no, you’re not going. He would orchestrate something to make it impossible for me to go”. This could include ordering tasks (e.g., having dinner ready, bathing the children) before going to the store, but the store being closed by the time the tasks were completed. Claire also reported, “he wouldn’t restrict me from my friends. But when I’d come home, it’d be like, well, what did they say? What did you talk about? What did you do?”. Similarly, covert tactics were described by Myra, who said while she was not forbidden contact with friends and family, “there was always complaints that my family didn’t, wasn’t nice enough to him. Wasn’t accepting him. Was trying to interfere with our family and our relationship”. In explaining how she perceived his motivation to isolate her, Bridgette explained, “they [perpetrators] keep you in their circle of people (…) like all the people who know of his bad behaviour are not going to attest to it for me, they’re going to stay on his side”.

Layna spoke about being geographically isolated, “if I went to the grocery store, we lived (…) like very rurally. And if I drove to the grocery store which was like forty-five minutes away, he called me like ten times”. More covertly, Layna also explained, “if I spoke to my parents, for instance (…) he would be in the background, just you know, not mean, not mean. But I never had privacy. I could never speak on the phone”. Similarly, Myra explained, “I basically never went out alone, like without him. And if I

did (…) there was constant texts and check ins (…) a lot of accusations of cheating and flirting". Likewise, Charlotte reported that,

> he would always have an issue if I wanted to leave the house. It was a very slow thing, it's just that he eventually made me feel so stressed about the idea about going out for coffee, I would just not even bother trying (…) so I kind of isolated myself.

To avoid punishment for breaking covert rules, Charlotte points to a response of self-regulation.

Regulation and micromanagement, as identified by Stark (2009), were confirmed by this study participants experienced tactics of coercive control. As Charlotte explained, "they have this way of controlling you so much that you even punish yourself". Further, Layna explained that

> the abuse is so subtle, and it starts off so, it's so calculated, I guess, that before it's over, like you know, it happens a little bit and then five years later, it's every day all day long.

Fear associated with non-compliance relates to coercive control when it is repetitive and regulates the daily lives of the victim (Hardesty et al., 2015), which is why Stark (2009) considers coercive control to be a liberty crime (Stark, 2009). Entrapment (Stark, 2009; Hardesty et al., 2015) was reported by participants as normalization of the control regime in which they felt the need to 'fix' oneself (e.g., "if I could just prove to him that I was actually really smart with money") to better adhere to the demands or expectations of their partner. Normalization of power and control dynamics, leading to entrapment (Stark, 2009), was identified by Bridgette, "it was just like my normal. It

was my normal reality." In realizing this normalization, Layna, Myra, Charlotte, Claire, Greta, and Hazel referenced understanding their own abuse only in hindsight, with Layna referring to this dynamic as a "trauma-bond". Myra explained, "it was always volatile. There's lots of things that I recognize in hindsight that I didn't' at the time". Similarly, Charlotte reported that, "I didn't have a name for it, I just knew that I was scared everyday (…) I didn't realize that that was considered abuse until ten years later (…) I was always like, on eggshells, and my body always felt tense, but that became by normal".

Similarly, Layna reported that normalization was accompanied by a sense of dissociation. She explained,

> You're activated constantly. It's affecting you but you're desensitized to the affect (…) It becomes normal (…) I was like oh my god, he-, he's just the most horrible person on the Earth. He's an asshole. He's a bully. But I didn't-, I wouldn't use the term he's an abuser.

Claire also reported that, "I didn't really realize, well I didn't, at all, that I was in a domestic violent relationship (…) for a long time, I didn't think it was that bad". Greta reported that her daughter was also affected by normalization, "if there's a knock at the door it's perceived as a threat, and it's nothing we discussed. It's our- it's normal".

A cycle of rewards and punishments was also recognized in hindsight by Adeline and Layna, supporting Johnson's (2008) explanation of coercive control being infiltrated with a series of rewards and punishments used to exercise power and control dynamics and to establish an overarching regime of gendered domination, a reproduction of patriarchal norms within the intimate relationship (Stark, 2009). Adeline explained, "a

lot of his forms of punishment would be withholding-, so like withholding talking to me for a week because I left a bathroom light on (…) just really covert things that someone could always arguably say, aw, it could be this other thing". Layna also reported punishments as "stonewalling", an emotional withdraw from a partner in which they refused to communicate or cooperate, through a separate reward and punishment cycle for herself opposed to their children. Referencing a reward/punishment dynamic with the children, Layna explained,

> he would align with my daughter. Right? And they would be sitting on the couch together and he would *enlist* her, to berate and abuse, verbally abuse, my son - her brother (…) then, he would align at some point with my son to berate, her. (…) He has to keep people pitted against each other *all* the time or his authority and his power could be threatened, right? (…) So, um, the reward was getting to sit on the couch next to him and be his favorite. And keep being able to abuse someone else in the home (…) rather than being the target.

In this case, the reward can be something as small as having a break from being victimized by ongoing control tactics. For herself, Layna explained rewards as, "for me, I guess (…) would be just that he would throw me, just a breadcrumb here and there." Only being able to specify their experiences as abusive in hindsight speaks to this normalization, with Layna explaining, "it took me about a year to just thaw out enough to start feeling again".

Reward and punishment cycles do not necessarily end at the time of separation, despite the typical future-focus adopted in judicial settings that assumes violence will not continue past separation (Sheehy and Boyd, 2020). Rather, control was identified by

participants to continue after separation, supporting Johnson and Ferrero's (2000) identification that perpetrators of intimate terrorism are motivated to not only control the intact relationship but are also motivated to not have their partner leave them, as this could break or alter the control dynamic (Johnson and Ferrero, 2000). Layna explained her experiences of post-separational control:

> He. *Never*. Stopped abusing me. He called-, he texted constantly. He e-mailed me constantly. Especially when the boys would go back to his house from my house. Like within twenty minutes, I would get an e-mail this long. Obviously he had just grilled them. About everything that had happened. And he would write me and just like, how dare you do this. And you're doing this. And Layna you're a horrible mother and why would you do this to our kids? And I mean, it was, *constant.* And texting me. Threatening me. Not threatening like, I'm going to kill you, but just, constant abuse. Constant abuse. So that never went away.

Regulation and micromanagement as control strategies were described by participants as having been performed in unexpected ways. Believing to be free of ongoing violence or control at the point of separation (e.g., when physical contact is limited), they believed the abuse would subside. However, housing was weaponized by perpetrators in terms of technology (e.g., manipulation of home systems or housing) or in terms of actual living arrangements. Further, while it was commonly believed by participants that legal intervention (e.g., reporting victimization would lead to support and more resources) would deter ongoing abuse (i.e., victimization of ongoing power and control tactics) ex-partners weaponized court orders, giving false statements to police and CPS workers and overtly defied or altered existing custody arrangements. In

these ways, housing and court orders were weaponized by ex-partners to continue control over them when direct contact was limited due to separation.

Housing was weaponized in several ways for participants, with manipulation of heating reported by both Bridgette and Claire. Bridgette explained that after her ex-partner had turned off access to the heat, she remembered, “there was no heat in the house. The pipes were frozen, everything. We had to sleep with winter coats on, under a whole bunch of blankets because it was like minus twenty-eight”. Similarly, Claire reported that, “he was controlling the lights, but out-, like via his phone. Even though he was not living here, he was controlling the heat. He locked me out of controlling the heat”. In addition to manipulation of home heating systems, Claire also related that during an investigation with child protection workers, “he watched them interview us via our security cameras that he could log into”. This supports Alshehri et al.’s (2020) identification of housing weaponization as technology-facilitated domestic abuse.

Participants also talked about being metaphorically trapped in their house after the relationship because of the inability to relocate either due to financing or availability. Remaining in the house where the abuse occurred was re-traumatizing for both Hazel and Greta. Hazel explains the traumatization of having to remain in a house where she was abused after physical separation from her children. She explained that “I don’t feel safe and I, I can’t stay and be in a place where, not only was I abused but also, look at my kid’s stuff. Like, it’s a double whammy. Like it hurts”. Hazel experienced physical separation from her children and was left alone in the house where abuse had occurred. Likewise, Greta also pointed to re-traumatization related to her physical living space

after an abusive situation saying, “I am in an environment where all these things happened. I’m dysfunctional here".

Further, Briar and Myra both experienced entitlement to the home by their ex-partner post-separation. Briar explained, “he gave me nine months to leave the place, after he moved to his mother’s”, though the mother only lived downstairs in the same house. Similarly, Myra explained that her ex-partner “in front of our kid said, I’m not leaving. You can call the police. But I’m not leaving. He hadn’t lived at this house for six months”. Finally, Charlotte reported, “he wanted to keep me under control at my mom’s house. He did not want me in my own house (…) I know it’s because he didn’t want me to have another partner”. This study therefore confirmed the association between IPV and housing instability (Pavao et al., 2007; Botein and Hetling, 2016).

Participants reported the weaponization of court orders. Manipulation of custody orders concerned participants as the order itself seemed to provide minimal protection considering IPV (Kernic et al., 2005). This theme largely emerged in relation to issues of collusion, with Greta relating, “he’s above the law”, a sentiment supporting Sheehy and Boyd’s (2020) study regarding PA in which participants also reported their abusers to be “above the law” (Sheehy and Boyd, 2020, p.84). While custody orders are often sought to provide stability for parent’s post-separation, participants explained how their orders had been manipulated by their ex-partners, as they violated the order while expecting the participant to abide by it, as a way of asserting dominance and control post-separation. Greta explained,

> he won’t ever follow any court order. He’s above the law. He won’t follow any laws. Like he blatantly stalks us and attacks us at home (…) all the time. We’re

> not in a safe environment (…) we had a court order in full force and effect, but he removed her from school every single day that was mine. Because he knew that I would follow the court order to a tee. Out of fear.

In this case, the participant believed that her ex-partner violated the court order in belief that his familial connections to law enforcement and CPS would not render him accountable. In referring to having had asked for help with this issue, Greta later explained "after that was dismissed, you know, he ramped up again", showing how not only court orders, but ongoing attempts to have the order enforced is also weaponized by abusers to continue a sense of control. Similarly, Charlotte explained,

> For seven months in a row, at the last minute, he would let me know, oh, by the way, come pick the children up in this place, or that place. He would go to all of these different towns (…) How is this system allowing this? So that says something about coercive control.

In another incident, Clair explained to her ex-partner that she had wanted to take her kids on vacation for March Break but needed her ex-partner's signature to cross the border. She explained, "he refused me. So, we went to court. Costed me fifty-five hundred dollars. He never did, first nor last, sign the form to give permission. The judge did. Days before. He never signed the form". Finally, Greta related that,

> his current lawyer said if I don't follow the court orders, he's going to take me to court, to reduce my parenting time. So, I can only see her once a month with a supervisor of his choice. But he doesn't have to follow the court orders. And I am afraid to not follow them, to a tee. Like I cannot tell you how I would not even roll through a stop sign I'm so afraid of everything.

Both examples of weaponization (e.g., housing and court orders) speak to patterns of control as ex-partners try to continue to influence the decisions and abilities of their victims after separation. However, perhaps the most devastating weaponization for victims of this study, is the weaponization of children through PA.

6.3 Parental Alienation

Eight of nine participants considered their experiences of PA, whether as physical separation, threats, accusations, or fear, as a means of post-separation abuse. As Greta explains,

> This is regular threats. This is me not seeing her for a year. This is forcing me into the family court system by forcing me to sign papers. Having no legal representation. This is him taking her every year for weeks or months at a time. This is him pulling her out of school on my parenting days for four months (…) This. Will. Not. Stop.

With the control dynamic altered due to separation and no longer having continual contact with the former partner, children become a tool which the abusive partner could continue that control. Control, in this sense, is seen in the manipulation of the mother-child relationship. However, participants' recognition of their experiences of PA did not often occur at the onset of alienating tactics. Instead, hindsight played a role in participants understanding their circumstances as IPV/PA as participants were able to reflect on their experiences post-separation and learned about IPV/PA through social networking. Not understanding their victimization or experiences as IPV is common due to the normalization or isolation that occurs within these dynamics. Charlotte explains that she knew something "was not right" but that she did not view herself as a victim of

IPV at the time. Post-separation, Layna described a "thawing out period" in which she was able to make sense of her experiences, this period post-separation is when many participants expressed learning about what to label their experiences, reading and speaking to other victims, they became aware of associated dynamics as well including coercive control. Layna explains,

> I now know it to be coercive control and narcissistic abuse. I did not have the words for it at that point (…) I didn't know what to look for. There were no preventative measures in my vocabulary to say this is not okay, this is not right (…) later on, I knew what I had experienced had a name, really actually had a name.

Similarly, Greta reported, "I came into knowing about alienation, because when it started ten years ago, there was *nothing* [published]" and Myra explained, "I literally had never heard the term coercive control until the week after I got an EIO. I had no idea." Further, stumbling upon support, Greta remembered, "I think deeper down I knew, right? Like, something wasn't good". Referencing the inability to label experiences**,** Briar explained**,**

> back then, in 2000, nobody wanted to hear about that [PA]. Still today. We are in 2023 and I see with the parents who are going through those kinds of things now, that's the same issue [lacking recognition] of me twenty-tree years ago. It's unbelievable".

Not only was PA not been identified by professionals by nearly all participants, but PA was also not considered within a broader pattern of IPV despite the growing body of academic literature contextualizing it as such (Lee-Maturana et al., 2021). While

IPV and coercive control have recently gained greater attention in legal and public contexts, not associating PA in the context of these more highly recognized patterns seemingly diminishes the victims' experiences and points to issues for victims and professionals alike. Since the pattern of control is "exercised across the many encounters that comprise a relationship" (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000, p.949), it can only be expected to entail PA as there are limited ways to exert control post separation aside from the weaponization of children.

Eight of nine participants considered power and control the driving force for their ex-partner's motivation to perpetrate PA. Three participants reported alienation being motivated by retaliation for ending the relationship or exposing the ex-partner's abusive behaviours to officials. Charlotte explained, "it's all revenge on me for speaking up and calling 911 and leaving (…) taking the children from their mother, that's the goal with the abusers, to punish the mother for leaving". Likewise, Claire explained that "he's mad. He told his friends that he would fight me every step of the way (…) because I *wronged* him. I outed-. I never should have talked about abuse". Finally, when asked about her perceived motivation for alienation, Adeline replied, "power and control, right? They don't want to lose that".

Another theme emerged related to perceived motivations for PA: the introduction of a new partner after separation. Hazel explained that her children were kept from her after her ex-partner accused her new partner of being violent towards the children. However, she stated that the children were "brought to the hospital. And the doctor said there were no signs of abuse". Despite this, alienation continued. Likewise, Layna explained that when she began a new relationship, "that is when the alienation *really*

kicked in. Which is very typical, right? When a new partner is introduced (…) and I know that was a *huge* threat to him. *Huge*".

Eight participants related that they believed alienation was motivated by causing threat to the power and control dynamic established prior to separation: either terminating the relationship or introducing a new partner. This supports Lee-Maturana and Matthewson's (2019) finding that targeted parents "considered hate, anger, revenge, or a combination of these as the trigger for the alienating parent's behaviour" (Lee-Maturana and Matthewson, 2019, p.89). One other participant believed the motivation to be related to her ex-partner wanting to start a family with his new partner. Still, power and control can be seen in the manipulation of the child's relationship with her biological mother. In the following section, impacts of PA will be discussed in relation to the target parent (participant), the alienated child (as perceived by the participant), as well as third parties.

Impacts of alienation were spoken about by all participants, not only in terms of their own alienation but to the impacts on their children and extended family members, such as grandparents. Two key themes emerged regarding direct impact on participants: Devastation (e.g., personal devastation and regarding the ineffectiveness of resources) as well as deterioration of physical and mental wellbeing. Devastation (Lee-Maturana et al., 2021) and psychological distress (Baker, 2010) have been cited in previous studies regarding PA as key impacts on targeted parents.

Considering devastation, Layna said, "I collapsed for about six months. I was literally on the floor in the fetal position (…) but I needed to have that time to just fall apart". Likewise, Greta explained,

> For me it was, perpetual (…) got to the school, she wasn't there. This happens all the time. It's-, this has happened three times since she got out of school last year where I had gone to the bus stop, and she's gone. This happened like, a week ago. Where your heart... your heart sinks. And, um, she wasn't there. And I got a text from him. (…) and it said, you should call your lawyer. And I'm like, but we had just recovered from being apart (…) I mean it happened *a lot*. Like we're-, like *months*. Months at a time. And there's nothing- no one would help me. No one will help her. Not just me. It's not me. No one would help her.

Greta went on to explain, "it's not like torture, it is torture. It's constant. It doesn't stop. It doesn't stop. It's, every single weekend I'm with her there's interference. (…) I associate her with so much danger (…) I feel like I'm being hunted." Greta went on to explain the toll of an ongoing search for help. She explained,

> Like my baby was gone. And no one would help me? (…) when people talk about fight or flight, I was very much like that. And now I have run out of that and I'm frozen and I'm scared. And I don't, have the strength, anymore, to advocate like I used to for myself. Like my resilience bag is empty. I'm tapped out.

Greta also offered insight to the impact of repeated physical separations from her child,

> just because it happened once, doesn't make it easier the next time. And to be honest, it was easier when it was for a long time. I know that sounds disturbing to say, because, you know, you can live with the ambiguous grief. Because you get into the routine of not knowing. But having it… it's so hard when it's all the time.

Devastation is further referred to by Briar, explaining that, “every time it is his birthday for me, it’s again something, it came back. It follows you all of the time. There is nothing you can do about it and people just don’t care”. Others not caring, or lacking effective resources, were directly referred to by Greta in saying, “I’d probably have support if I was an alcoholic. If I drank. If I was suicidal. I probably would. There would be a lot more support. I’m in such a grey area”.

Another theme emerged regarding direct impacts of alienation, related to physical and mental wellbeing. Greta reported being “diagnosed with severe PTSD from all of this”, an impact associated with PA victimization found by Harman et al. (2019). Greta also expressed physical responses to the stress brought about through alienation:

> It’s so overwhelming. I have a heart condition now. I’ve chipped all of my teeth. My hair fell out. This is all, all the times she’s gone. (…) one of the times she was gone for seven, six or seven weeks, that’s when I started fainting. This is all related to the time she’s been gone- taken (…) it’s going to kill me one way or another.

Hazel also referenced her mental wellbeing, as a diminishing sense of self-worth. When asked about the impacts of being alienated from her child. She said, “I went from a fulltime mom, fulltime worker, to, I’m nothing”. Hazel also reported fear associated with separation from her child, “we don’t know what’s being told to them. We don’t know how they’re living”. Briar also related to her mental health being impacted when she was verbally abused by her children, reportedly under the influence of the alienating parent. She explained,

> when people tell you that you are not good, you're worth nothing, you're just-, the words that my kids were telling [calling] me, honestly, and again the other family, at the end of it, you almost believe it. Because they repeat to you so often, and you start to repeat that to yourself too. And your self-value doesn't exist at all.

However, Briar also reported finding a glimmer of hope in a seemingly hopeless situation,

> I was not able to bring them with me. So, during that phase, when I could have gone very low in depression and things like that, this is when [I decided to go back to school]. And that saved me. That saved me because I moved further away (…) I was unable to sustain the psychological distance with the physical. I need to put the physical distance in order to understand in my brain, the emotional distance.

Nevertheless, physical distance did not mean that Briar was unaffected by the continued separation from her children. Briar continued,

> when I decided to move away, I tried to live like I never did have any kids. Because it was so hard, every time I was talking, people would say what is happening with your kids now, and I have no answer. You don't know what to say. You find your own thing. I used to say, oh you know, it's quite complicated. But it's complicated in every family, isn't it? But in my heart, it was still kind of, very hard. And you can feel that people kind of asking, well, but you're the mother. You lost your kids. You should have done something (…) it was killing me.

While Myra had not experienced physical separation, she did experience accusations of alienation which she explained as having a similar impact to what Briar described as victim-blaming. Myra reported being hypervigilant in fearing professional accusations that could reverse custody; in the same way that Briar feared being accused of 'bad-mothering' by friends, Myra feared being accused by legal professionals of alienating (i.e., falsely accusing the father of abuse as a litigation strategy, in relation to Gardner's PAS) rather than protecting her children. In explaining how she has been impacted by fear of such accusations, Myra explained that she had,

> left such a paper trail of, of how accommodating I have been, and trying to encourage access, which, goes against every instinct I have but I, it's definitely affected the way I've behaved. Because I'd probably done things that were beyond what I need to do for the wellbeing of my children (…) I've been more accommodating than I probably have to be. Purposefully so that somebody can't go back and say I'm potentially alienating.

These targeted parents were not the only parties considered to have been impacted by alienation. Many participants voiced that their own suffering was second to the suffering of their child. Charlotte explained that "his [ex-partner] behaviour eventually led the kids one by one to turn suicidal and self-harm", showing the progression from severe to extreme alienation, as identified by Bernet et al. (2022). For Charlotte, this did not only happen with one child, but with two, as "within months she [second child] turned suicidal, blocked from me". Charlotte expressed the possibility of traumatizing effects this can have on children, as she explained that they are "dealing with issues now that are going to follow them forever".

Considering child-impacts, themes emerged regarding child compliancy with the alienating parent. Greta suspected compliancy when she reported that, the sporadic times that she did get to see her daughter were pelted with physical and emotional distance; "there was like a month where we sat in separate rooms. She's only a little girl". Greta believed that her daughter not wanting to sit near her was her daughter's way of remaining compliant to her father's (likely covert) demands in which she believed her daughter had been encouraged by her ex-partner to remain distance during the brief visit. This, according to Harman et al. (2019), is an indirect act of aggression behind the alienating behaviour. Greta further explained what she believes to be her daughter's compliancy in saying,

> My poor child has learned to not ask to, not ask for help. She's learning-, she's learned that love is conditional. She's learned that she-, I don't think she can express that she would miss me. She's an only child in that household [father's household] that has to ask permission to talk to her mother (…) we are truly close, but I can see in her ways that she has also become compliant.

Greta went on to explain that her daughter is "very aware" of the dynamics of alienation at play, explaining that "she has never had a moment where her mother wasn't under threat". However, not all children were described by their mothers as being aware of alienation dynamics, as PA is a control tactic used by the perpetrator by weaponizing the child. While the foundation of PA is based on the psychological manipulation of the child as a proxy to continue control over the ex-partner, the child is commonly unaware of the dynamics at play. This is why PA is often referred to in the literature as the "brainwashing" or "programming" of the child by the alienating parent. This is

explained by Byrne (Gardner, 1985; Bernet, 2023; Mercer, 2019; Bernet et al., 2022). While Greta described her child being "very aware" of PA dynamics, Hazel reported that her daughter was unaware of why she could not see her mother anymore. She explains, "it was so horrible. It was bad. Like she kept asking why she couldn't come home, and like, she was screaming and yelling for me".

Impacts of alienating dynamics on the children were also highlighted by Briar. While Hazel described the confusion her daughter expressed on that first day of school when she could not visit with her mother, Briar suspects that alienation, in addition to mental health vulnerabilities, played an impactful role in her child's mental health. An escalation in behavioural problems during the first year of alienation, Briar believed that this may have been a point to finally get the help she had been looking for, if PA dynamics would have been recognized by mental health professionals. She explains, "from the end of my first year [the first year alienated from her children] (…) my youngest was admit to psychiatric at the hospital for behavioural issues and things like that. I say, at least then, people will realize parental alienation, right? No". In this case, Briar had expected support, though with mental health professionals not identifying PA dynamics and behaviours, she was left unsure where else to turn to for help.

For Layna, it was not in professional recognition that she found justice, but it was in her own behaviour of "planting seeds" (e.g., sending texts or phone calls that were never returned, though she kept leaving in case the children received them and could not reply because they were not allowed by the alienating parent). Layna describes the moment when she realized her children were breaking from the mold of 'the alienated child', on their own,

> let me tell you, if you know nothing else about parental alienation, and for anyone who denies that parental alienation is real, this is the biggest thing that you can see. Is that when my kids *knew* that they were not being watched, by their dad; when there was no way that their dad could find out that they had been around me, they were my kids. They came in and they would hug me like *nothing* had *ever* happened (…) Just (snap). The light would flip. Right? And they would be my kids again. They're terrified if they're, you know, they're so afraid that the alienating parent is going to find out that that you're showing affection. That you're showing love to your parent. You're not allowed to love your parent. You're not free to love your parent. And so, when they were free to love me, they did. And so, at that point I knew. I was like I'm not going to lose them. They're going to come around. They're going to see-, they're going to get sick of his shit like everybody else does. Sorry, but they will.

All three of Layna's children did eventually return to her. While this is a triumphant alienation story, the experiences and impacts Layna related regarding her separation from them will surely not be forgotten. However, this is also a relatively rare story, as assistance by mental health and legal professionals remains key to regaining child access.

Third party impacts were described by participants to include both siblings and grandparents of the alienated child (i.e., parents of the targeted parents that also experience separation from the child due to their association with the targeted parent). As Charlotte pointed out, "here I am, I lost my daughter. And my older kids lost their little sister, my parents lost their baby granddaughter". Briar also explained, "my mom

lost her grandkid as well". Siblings are impacted not only by the loss of another sibling to the alienating parent in a context in which one child is alienated while others remain with the mother as seen in Charlotte's story, but Layna referenced the children being routinely pitted against one another in a triangulation effort by the alienating parent prior to separation.

Myra also spoke to how her children had been impacted as one child refused to visit the father at first, though changed his mind only to "protect" his brother. The responsibility placed on children within an alienation/post-separational abuse dynamic can be immense. Briar explained that for her son, "being placed in that middle spot between me and his brother, he cannot tolerate it (…) There needs to be that pressure off their shoulder. And the only person who can take that pressure off is the target parent". For Briar, at one point one child was alienated while the other was not, creating complicated dynamics between the brothers.

In addition to the impacts of alienation on siblings, Briar also noted impacts on new partners. Much PA literature (Rand, 1997; Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Warshak, 2000) points to the escalation of alienating behaviours and post-separational abuse targeted at the alienated parent when a new partner is introduced. Briar explained that when her ex-partner had accused her new partner of abusing the children, he had a career that meant "you could lose your license".

Further third-party impacts included grandparents. In addition to losing contact with their grandchildren, Charlotte pointed out that in association with alienation accusations, "my dad had to sell his brand-new truck to pay this evaluator (…) because it was tens of thousands of dollars and I had already been devastated by years and years

and years of ongoing litigation". In attempts to support their own children, financial costs associated with litigation were referred to as well by Claire, whose father was brought to the stand to explain how he financially contributed to his grandchildren's lives. Claire explains that her ex-partner "tried to not just leave me destitute. He tried to gut my parents on the way through". In addition to impacts on siblings, new partners, and grandparents, Greta reported third party impact in terms of her sister's suspicion when she was physically separated from her daughter. Greta explained that her sister said,

> I don't believe you that you didn't do anything. I don't blame her in a way. I mean (…) people don't want to know. People don't want to hear about it. It's not possible. And it seems impossible. I know it seems wild.

This supports Kelly and Johnston (2001) in that, "extended family revise their memories and beliefs in accord with these new understandings" (Kelly and Johnston, 2001, p.257) in the context of alienation.

Related to impacts of alienation, another theme emerged: intergenerational victimization (Verhaar et al., 2022) which occurred when participants were alienated from their own parent and then from their child, as reported by Adeline; or they were alienated from their child and then their grandchild, as reported by Briar. In explaining the impacts of this unique type of victimization, Briar explained,

> my granddaughter doesn't know that I am her grandmother. Probably it's my mother-in-law who took my role. And nobody does nothing about that (…) you have nobody on your side when you face things like that, people stay away from that, and you feel even left more alone.

Briar went on to explain,

> I know if [my son's] daughter would not be in my ex-family, and he didn't have that pressure, I think it would have been alright. But now he's still under the pressure of that whole thing. So, he had to choose. He cannot be in both [families].

This dynamic speaks to the ongoing victimization and impact on the alienated child as well.

Direct questions regarding alienating behaviours were not asked in the interview as this was not an evaluation of Baker and Darnall's (2006) alienating behaviours. Rather, the focus of this study is on experiences and impacts of alienation and so PABs were referenced by participants in discussion of more general experiences. While all but three of Baker and Darnall's (2006) PABs were identified amongst participants, another alienating behaviour emerged: triangulation. Triangulation (Tavares et al., 2020; Kelly and Johnston, 2001; Moné et al., 2011) occurs as one parent targets the other parent, through the weaponization of the child. As the child is weaponized by the alienating parent, weaponization becomes successful if the perception of the child is altered and splitting occurs. Successful triangulation also infers the progression of alienation as identified by both Gardner (1998) and Bernet et al. (2022).

Layna described triangulation in which the traditional triad (e.g., alienating parent, target parent, and alienated child) was altered as the alienating parent and the alienating parent's mother target the rejected parent. This was also expressed as the alienating parent and the alienating parent's new partner targeting the alienated parent.

In these cases, the child is not the primary proxy in creating the alienation dynamic. Rather, third parties play an active role in separating the mother from the child. Triangulation was also explained by one participant to include the alienating parent, a target child, and another child. In this case, the alienating parent targeted one child at a time. This created the 'favoured parent' bond which was later used in alienating behaviours against the target parent. This was considered by the participant as a reward and punishment scheme to create a "trauma-bond" between one child and the alienating parent at a time. The triad then changed, as the child was then subjected to further alienating behaviours against the mother. The siblings, therefore, were "pitted" against one another in a grander scheme which would later "pit" them against the mother (i.e., participant).

The involvement of third parties reflects Kelly and Johnston's (2001) explanation of extended family re-writing their own memories in accordance with an alienation narrative. However, while Kelly and Johnston (2001) first articulated this re-writing of memories in the context of aligning with information "enshrined in court documents" (p.258), participants related that it did not take court documents for former in-laws to side with the alienating parent, nor for siblings to play a role in confirming the relationship between the child and the favoured parent. Rather, the re-writing of memories was more reflective of strong interpersonal relationships between the alienating parent and the individual that supported the alienating parent, even taking part in the alienating behaviour.

For Layna, triangulation began pre-separation, between the now alienating parent and their two children. Layna referred to this as an abuse cycle in which the various

family members were routinely "pitted" against each other. Post separation, this tactic results in splitting, the child's "extreme rejection of one parent and extreme idealization of the other" (Baker et al., 2012, p.182). Layna's experiences point to PABs occurring both pre and post separation as tactics to assign allegiances between the favored parent and the child, showing potentiality of having been rooted in premeditative behaviours (i.e., established before separation occurred).

Experiencing alienating behaviours, participants sought help through both formal and informal supports. In the following section, barriers and obstacles to these resources will be discussed. This will include discussion regarding gaps and issues in current prevention and intervention strategies as identified by participants.

6.4 Barriers and Obstacles to Supports & Resources

Experiencing alienating behaviours, often coupled with a history of IPV, participants sought help in a variety of locations. While several resources were identified by participants, three resources were most commonly used. These included child protection workers (CPS), police, and lawyers. Participants' experiences with these three key resources were mainly negative.

Charlotte, pointing out issues with CPS, explained that "they're not failing to protect children, they're refusing to protect the children". Greta explained,

> this is so degrading. They would have me every year, get a letter from my psychiatrist and my doctor saying that I'm not suicidal. They were just, they were torturing me. I don't know how else to say it. Every year they would make me have a letter saying I'm not suicidal. I mean, what if I was? What would that

do to a person if they were? […] I had a very overzealous social worker there. I wish I'd followed my gut instinct.

Other incidents related to CPS included accusations that CPS was aware of the alienation dynamic but would not intervene. One participant reported, "the social worker absolutely knows what's going on (…) the excuses they [CPS] give me are that it's targeted at me, not [my daughter]." Hazel also reported, "it took me calling, and figuring out, who the social worker was, getting a hold of her, to get her to come do the investigation (…) I stopped calling and reporting it because they won't do anything". Like Hazel, Myra also reported, "there's been three separate child protection reports. I won't say investigations because I don't think that's what anyone would call that". Adeline added, "yeah, 'protection' services, [laughs], yeah". Adeline reported that CPS workers appeared aware of PA as a phenomenon, targeted her as an alienating parent. This supports Warshak's (2020) consideration of false-positive PA identification. Finally, Adeline explained, "no matter what I say, you know, the worker's just like, well I think you just want to take your daughter away." CPS was negatively viewed by participants. Where one participant reported that despite being aware of the dynamic, the CPS worker declined services since the abuse was targeted at an adult rather than a child. This is an area that should be considered for intervention or referring a third party. Participants described CPS as not being proactive enough and neglecting to intervene in situations in which the participant felt their child was at risk.

Overall, police were also viewed negatively by participants. The only positive reference to police was reported by Charlotte, who explained that police had said they would respond if the child was being forced to visit an abusive father, "they are prepared

to try to step in at that point and apprehend my son under the Mental Health Act and take him to the hospital so that the hospital has custody [responsibility] of him". This was due to existing mental health issues. Charlotte also reported that an officer gave her alienated child "her private cell number" so that "when my daughter was afraid, she would text the private cell of this officer (…) so the officer would show up at the father's house, like in her baseball hat and sweats. Off duty." Other participants, however, had more negative experiences in their interactions with police.

Regarding IPV victimization, one participant reported that after calling 911, the officer "took me into the house, and she took a photo of me in the doorway where he [ex-partner] slammed the door into my stomach. And because I didn't have any marks on me, that's what they went off". With a narrow understanding of IPV as physical violence resulting in overt injuries, police investigations were reported by Claire as uninformed. She refers to an incident after calling police related to child abuse by the father, "he says well, there's not a mark now, and basically, between you and I, I got worse when I was growing up. And I looked at him and I said you just told that man that what he did was okay." In another incident after calling the police, one participant reported that upon arrival, the victim was told, "you know, both of you can be charged here tonight. What do you say? Ok thanks, come again later?" Likewise, Hazel reported that, "the officer called me back and said he wasn't going to come out unless I guaranteed that I was going to press the charges." Referring to an acquaintance's experiences, Hazel also explained, "she called the cops, and the cops tell her that they're not going to do anything because she knew-, she knows what he's like and she still went back. "Greta, reported that when facing alienation from her child,

> the police wouldn't help me, and they kept sending me around in circles. And they're like, he has primary care, and I ripped the thing off the family law site that said that primary care means that she's at one house more than another, they told me that he had the right to change our court order.

Further, Greta reported that, "I've told the police before he's going to do it, that he's going to do it [alienate]. And begged for support. Nothing." In another incident where police were involved in relation to PA, Briar explained a situation in which her child had run away to the alienating father's house while in her care,

> I remember, clearly, I said to the police officer, there is a possibility that he is [gone] to his dad. And I know-, I know it will look stupid to you that I cannot call there (…) But I say, I just hope-, if he is there, please question yourself why his dad hasn't called me, and I had to call a police officer. But I haven't been heard.

In sum, police involvement was largely negatively viewed by participants as they reported that their circumstances were trivialized (Wolf et al., 2003). Much of the concern from participants related to issues of lacking rigorous investigation or not being trauma informed. Additional negative encounters referenced instances of collusion, which will be discussed below.

Lawyers were also described as not being trauma informed. One participant spoke about the possibly of hiring a new lawyer because she did not feel confident with the one she had hired. She said, "there's another lawyer that I looked at going to whose very, it seems like that's what he does, is domestic violence." Another participant pointed to this theme in saying, "he [the lawyer] appears to be by far the most domestic

violence informed lawyer in our area." She goes on to explain, "there are a lot of people (…) amazed by the things my lawyer seems to understand, so I don't think that's common." This points to a common belief amongst participants that there are a select number of lawyers who "do" domestic violence. Said differently, there are few lawyers that *are* trauma informed or that have experience in this area. Greta also explained, "so, she's new. (…) She's not scared, I am. She doesn't understand the realm of it". Greta went on to explain,

> if you look at it as an isolated incident or it doesn't look like, 'oh he's enrolled her in things on three of your five parenting days, that's no big deal'. I'm like, but it's part of a greater scheme of things where our relationship's been minimized and desecrated (…) I don't have credibility for some reason.

Lack of awareness of PA by lawyers was referenced by Adeline who said, "my first lawyer was like don't talk about anything, don't talk about anything. Second lawyer was like, you're crazy, there's no way, they could never use the alienation claim against you.". Greta also explained, "she's [lawyer] coming back to me saying, "maybe it could be misconstrued. I'm like, woah lady (…) this is a form of interference".

Another participant reported IPV being dismissed by lawyers in addition to PA: "they don't care about the history and all of that. They care like, oh, well, he's not going to be abusive to his child and it's like, oh my god". Another participant's lawyer had referenced IPV but minimized the effects as historical. This supports Sheehy and Boyd's (2020) finding that judges tend to consider IPV a one-off occurrence or place it as a past event. This participant explained that the lawyer had included a history of IPV in the affidavit, though, "you know, in the past, and that he was arrested. But she hasn't like,

really filled in the blanks". This participant pointed out that the broader pattern of IPV had not been recognized, nor ongoing related traumatization. Claire explained the potential dangers associated with the unawareness of her lawyer in an incident before leaving for vacation, explaining that her lawyer said to her, "he wants to know your flight information, and she said, and I have to let you know this is a reasonable request." In consulting with her coach, she e-mailed the lawyer with a list of fears,

> If I give him the flight details he will show up to the airport, I fear he will have his parents on the other end [of the flight]. If he shows up to the airport, do I involve the police? How big of a situation am I getting? Will he cancel my flight? Will my kids be terrified? Will he come after me?

Another participant reported a traumatizing experience in court, referencing her ex-partner's lawyer,

> she's got that drumbeat of alienation themes. Then, she finally comes out and says, this woman is completely psychologically unstable, the child's not safe. We ask that-, we urge the court to reverse custody to the father and sever all access and contact with the mother.

While this lawyer appears to be aware of PA, a motion for complete reversal of custody was shocking to this participant, without an evaluation to prove alienation, and while the participant had been acting protectively. Fear of accusations of alienation affected Adeline as well: "I'm at the point where, if I repeat any of those disclosures, they're going to be weaponized, 'I'm putting those in her head'. And I've even been told by my previous lawyer, like you better hope she doesn't disclose". These experiences had participants doubting their lawyer's understanding of both IPV and PA and showed a

lacking identification of the possibility of other PCCPs. One participant pointed to a nuanced approach to dissatisfaction with lawyers, explaining, "you see a lot of moms who've been through a couple legal aid certificates[7] and they're like screw it, I'm doing it myself, you know?" In frustration with her experiences with her past lawyers in understanding the severity of her circumstances, Greta retorted, "I need a pro bono feminist lawyer".

In contrast to participants' experiences with CPS, police, and lawyers, five participants identified teachers as having had played a positive role. In none of these cases were teachers acting under protocol but by personal choice. Participants expressed that since teachers spent extensive time with the children, they were aware of family dynamics and tried to positively intervene. This points to the possibility of teachers playing a progressive role in the identification and intervention of PA in the future. One participant explained, "they would have me come to the school, and sit outside of her classroom starting at 1:30. Because they knew his [ex-partner's] habit was to come to the [school and pick the child up early on my parenting days] – like this was ongoing". Hazel also described her child's teacher, "she's the one that had like safety talks with [my daughter]. Because, without the protection order, he can go on school property." Finally, an additional participant related that in working with victims of PA, "I've had teachers tell me, oh we see this all the time." Participants pointed to schools as being

[7] A legal aid certificate refers to use of services by a legal aid lawyer. A legal aid certificate is a voucher that guarantees the use of a legal aid lawyer, that accepts the case, for a determined number of hours. Acquisition of a legal aid certificate is based on financial need.

weaponized by the alienating parent in which the child was picked up early from school on the target parent's parenting days, such as in Greta's case. Therefore, ongoing awareness of PA by teachers could lead to effective intervention with further education.

From the negative experiences with resources came secondary victimization, the experience of additional trauma for victims instilled by the professionals they trusted to help (Campbell et al., 1999; Postmus, 2009; Wydall and Zerk, 2021). Relatedly, suspected collusion emerged as a theme. Suspected collusion was identified in terms of (1) the belief of the participant that their ex-partners were able to manipulate help-seeking resources, and (2) the belief they had experienced collusion amongst agencies to minimize victim experiences. These interferences in help-seeking, in many cases, were believed by the participants to have framed themselves as an alienating parent, minimized alienation threats or accusations, or experiences were not recognized. Collusion was suspected and described by participants in terms of familial affiliations (e.g., with family of the ex-partner holding legal positions) as well as in terms of suspicion that since many front-line responders often associate with each other (e.g., child protection workers often work alongside police), narratives could have been established against victims based on false reporting of ex-partners, without further investigation.

One participant believed PA to be used conspiratorially by law who she said purposefully elongate litigation with multiple court appearances in order for capital gain (e.g., more court appearances will mean higher legal costs). While this participant said this is an aim of the legal system generally, she explained that a "cottage industry" (e.g., legal professionals working in the legal system) are "forcing" victims of domestic

violence into the legal system by giving them false hope that they will have their children returned to them. The cost of custody evaluators and lengthy litigation had this participant believing that this is all part of a gendered capitalist "scheme" in which women victimized by IPV and PA were targeted by legal professionals for systematic financial gain. This participant claimed that this is a belief that is supported through a substantial online following of IPV/PA victims that also believe this to be true, collectively believing the legal system has "monetized the parental alienation theory that was developed by Dr. Richard Gardner", and is described by this participant to having resulted in "judicial child trafficking" (e.g., custody reversal of a child from a protective mother to an abusive father.

Other examples of collusion were pointed to by Charlotte who states, "there have been a few officers who happened to be buddies in the same town with my abuser, and they dismissed me". Affiliations the abuser has with formal institutions, therefore, were considered to have hindered victim services for this participant. Greta also reported similar circumstances when a social worker she was dealing with had affiliations with her ex-partner. She explained that the social worker was "pathologizing" her mental health concurrently with mental health accusations of her ex-partner. Mental health was therefore reported as weaponized by the ex-partner and affiliations with formal institutions as Greta claimed to not be symptomatic of the issues alleged by the social worker and the ex-partner. Greta explained that doctors "went over all of her [social worker's] notes. They said, "she is not suicidal. She is a loving mother. She is no risk'", going against the accusations of both the social worker and the ex-partner who knew each other personally. In a review of the case, "they [CPS agency] actually put out a

letter, had a letter saying that social worker had not been involved." The social worker in this case played an additional role as, "she gave him [the ex-partner] the power to assess me. You know what that is? That's a license to stalk someone (…) she gave him the power to assess me. Like it's really unhinged". Greta went on to explain, "I know the power that he pulled, the sway he has". She reported multiple ways in which her ex-partner worked with personal acquaintances in agencies who directly altered court orders. She also explained how false reports by the ex-partner led to both CPS and police investigations where the CPS worker was a familial acquaintance who involved the police (i.e., colleagues) in the matter. The police took the CPS worker's explanation as truth without further investigation. She explains, "she's [social worker] close friends with his sister-in-law (…) and his father is the former [legal position]". She goes on to report, "we got it back to 50/50 [custody] (…) so when I went to court, the judge-, the judge who had worked for his father-in-law-, made this decision that when it came to her school time, we would go to this crazy new schedule".

Participants described the false information provided by ex-partners being used to inform reports by professionals, pathologizing the victim based on non-medical sources. While professionals were not affiliated with the abuser in another case, one participant explained, "I have to walk a really fine line because (…) they're not going to take kindly to me pointing things like that out to them (…) I work with these same social workers professionally". Multiple participants identified that their ex-partners had offered false reports of their behaviour or mental health to mental health and legal professions. These were taken as truth by the professionals without further investigation. This is an indirect form of collusion as these false reports ended up being compounded

as they were transferred between and among agencies and departments, being reproduced in the process by informing other reports. Pathologizing has been identified, again, as having been conducted by a professional other than a doctor. Greta explained,

> The sergeant filed a false report to CPS saying I was bipolar and delusional (…) I had had support from victim services. Their lead coordinator, like four days before that I was in correspondence with her (…) for a referral for housing, for domestic violence (…) And she called me and she said, are you recording this? (…) She screamed at me until I cried for an hour and a half. Because she had now got the false information from the sergeant, and she filed a false report to CPS.

The initial false report was provided by the ex-partner in this case. In explaining another false report, this participant also stated,

> So their files say I was suicidal, I was borderline (…) they said that I had driven over people's lawn and gardens, and so they have taken these labels from the social worker (…) they fabricated all of these symptoms and scenarios. Like, it's all there in black and white and none of it's true.

Implications of the false statements made by the ex-partner were therefore heightened by the sharing of these reports among agencies, though additional investigations were not conducted. Collusion with the abuser in these cases was suspected by participants to discredit their ability to parent and to assist with alienation motivations by the ex-partner. However, collusion was also identified outside of relationships with the abuser, among victim-responding agencies. Charlotte explains,

> to tell me my rights at the time would have been completely… worked against whatever they were doing (…) the social worker was giving the attorney [ex-partner's attorney] recommendations. And none of this went to the minister of justice- the community services. None of this went through anything. This was their private arrangement.

One participant explained that the social worker was personal friends with a member of the police victim services. Another participant was accused by victim services for "complaining about her [the worker]. The head of victim services, said *me,* a nobody, was going around complaining (…) she is now going around telling other agencies."

Greta also explained her circumstances of obtaining an EIO, "he [police officer] said that you're not credible, because if that were true the police would have helped you." Adeline said that in asking for help from the Special Victims Unit (SVU), "instead of interviewing her [daughter], they interrogated me for two and a half hours, I was told how it was supposed to proceed, it didn't proceed that way. They interrogated me, the officer blamed it on me, well maybe you have PTSD." Again, mental health was weaponized by a responding professional. Adeline further explained that in asking for additional help, other professionals already knew about her circumstances, "he's like, so I hear you've been to SVU already, is that what you're here about? (…) and victim services was like, call your CPS worker. We're done talking here".

The impact of affiliations between the ex-partner and responding agencies and amongst responding agencies impacted multiple participants, some of whom refrained from reaching out for further help. One participant explained, "it's not that I'm not

believed. It's that there's so much misconduct that it's like people keep piling on, it's like a cover up". Also pointing to the impact of collusion, Greta reported,

> where do I go for help? It's not even like it's neutral-, it's not neutral. It's not CPS doing nothing. It's not the police doing nothing. It is *far* worse than that. The only thing that I can do to stay safe is to be small, and to disappear. And comply and subjugate to his behaviours. Because the consequences are so extreme for us. How the hell do you have victim services doing this?

Greta went on to explain coercive control as part of a larger problem. Lacking rigor in investigations or explicit refusal to investigate has left her feeling that,

> part of the problem I'm in with coercive control, is when you talk about isolation, this is the nuanced part of it (…) And it is intersectional. Whoever throws the first stone, that's it. Because their whole model, whatever they write down on paper, it is *that*, that *opinion-based* piece is used to inform.

Participants described each of the victim-resources as being weaponized by the ex-partner, perceivably to continue control and assist with alienation. Resources, therefore, could be effectively weaponized by the abusers as professionals have neglected to identify the patterns of control and abuse, including alienating behaviours. Charlotte pinpointed this outcome in referencing victims unexperienced with these resources, "they are turning to these professionals for help, not understanding that these professionals are the dangerous individuals who are doing this to us victims".

Supporting Sharples et al.'s (2023) and Lapierre and Côté's (2016) studies regarding gendered PA victimization, participants in this study expressed that they were targeted by their ex-partners for having had been abusive towards the child, such as in

Adelines case, which justified their decision to deny access. However, the participants. claim that they had not been abusive and that this was a legal strategy to socially deem them 'bad mothers'. These types of allegations against them caused suspicion among the participant's friends and family, altering their relationships with these people, as seen in both Adeline and Briar's experiences. On the other hand, participants accused of alienation who claimed that the father had been abusive toward the child, as in Myra and Claire's cases, were perceived as "doing too much" (Lapierre and Côté, 2016, p.126) to protect their child, infringing on the parental rights of the father. Together these cases point to a balancing act described by Sheehy and Boyd (2020) that legal professionals partake in when weighing the best interests of the child with shared parenting mandates.

The collusion that was reported by participants, either directly or indirectly, supports Meier's (2009) claim that "custody litigation is an ideal mechanism for denigrating the mother by providing a forum for attacks on her dignity and competence as a mother while enlisting court personnel to join the attack (p.234). This was evident in Claire's explanation of wanting to explain a "pattern of behaviours" rather than terminology associated with PA/PAS in her next court appearance. Using PA as a legal argument, or even bringing the term up to legal professionals was pointed to by participants, like Bridgette and Briar, to have their experiences minimized by mental health and legal professionals.

6.5 Conclusion

This discussion of findings first considered the credibility debate of PA. Then, PA was considered in relation to Johnson's (2008) description of IT to which participants provided support of perpetrators use of both violent and non-violent control

tactics, explained by Harman et al. (2019) as aggressive and non-aggressive tactics. Power and control dynamics were considered in terms of Stark's (2009) identification of regulation and micromanagement which was articulated in this discussion as pre- and post-separation control tactics. Impacts on participants as target parents, their children (alienated children), and third parties were then considered.

After considering alienating behaviours, triangulation was highlighted outside of the traditional alienating triad, with alienating parents manipulating the perceptions of their parents (i.e., alienating parent's mother), new partners (i.e., alienating parent's new partner), and other children (i.e., siblings of the potentially alienated child) to enforce alienation initiatives. Further, this section discussed key resources, including child protection workers, police, and lawyers, as they were most frequently referenced by participants. Overall, participants pointed to the need for a more trauma-informed approach among all three resources. Teachers were highlighted to possibly play a positive intervening role for target parents in the future on the matter. Finally, this section considered experiences and impacts of collusion between ex-partners and professionals as well as among responding agencies (i.e., directly and indirectly). This was considered by participants to extend power and control to the perpetrator and discredit themselves as victims in legal contexts.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study highlighted the unique experience as PA within coercive control dynamics. Coercive control, creating a sense of entrapment (Stark, 2009), was identified by participants of this study to have normalized abusive experiences and resulted in some form of PA post-separation (e.g., physical, threatened, accused, or feared). Participants identified patriarchal ideals held by their ex-partner and victim stereotyping (i.e., "crazy lady") by legal professionals, alluding to the gendered dynamic of IPV being adopted by legal professionals. Baker's (2020) Four-Factor Model (including Baker and Darnall's (2006) parental alienating behaviours and Gardner's (1985) eight behavioural manifestations) were used to situate experiences of PA. Misinformation related to PA was a key theme, as participants discussed ties to Gardner and issues regarding the credibility debate affecting their own, and professionals' understanding of PA. This affected victim's ability to identify their experiences as IPV and PA and led to minimization of victim experiences by mental health and legal professionals.

While there had been consideration of the role PA could play in the legal admissibility of alienation arguments (including the possibility of Bernet having PARP included in the DSM-5-TR), participants found that because PA dynamics were not currently considered in the DSM as a compounded dynamic, participants reported that they felt encouraged by their lawyers to refer to the pattern of abusive or controlling behaviours they were experiencing post-separation to highlight the experiences of parental alienation, without using the term parental alienation. Due to a historical favoring of the legal system to validate psychological conditions that have been accredited to the DSM, the lack of incorporating PA into the DSM falls second to

explaining parental alienation as a strategy of coercive control. With coercive control currently recognized within the most current amendments of the Divorce Act in Canada, parental alienation testified as post-separation coercive control is an important future consideration in custody litigation.

This study has shown the need for better identification of PABs and ability to distinguish PA from other PCCPs. Participants described hope that better identification would lead to more sensitivity among legal professionals which would in turn encourage their own help-seeking, if they did not fear minimization of their experiences. Overall, this study confirmed findings from much of the current PA literature regarding the occurrence of PABs and behavioural manifestations, and direct and indirect tactics of alienation (e.g., affecting siblings. grandparents, and other extended family members). These were non-violent and violent (i.e., overt and covert) violence as described by Johnson (1995). Both direct and indirect collusion was described by participants as false allegations made by ex-partners were taken as truth by mental health and legal professionals without further investigation. While participants explained that the false reports were likely created by ex-partners to discredit their ability to mother (e.g., to reprimanding the protective mother with diminished/lost custody and commending the alienating parent), these reports were compounded and reproduced among agencies and departments. Ex-partner's reports were accepted by mental health and legal professionals without further investigation, causing female victims to fear further help-seeking as they no longer trusted these agencies that either did not consult them or withheld information pertaining to their cases. Participants (i.e., female victims) were

therefore also minimized by mental health and legal professionals who took 'the word' of their ex-partners.

7.1 Limitations

Several limitations were associated with this study. The first limitation was that participants were not screened for more specific experiences of PA. While physical alienation (e.g., severe) and threats of alienation were both considered key focus points of this thesis, potential participants were not screened for having had experienced one of these two forms of PA. This meant that some participants had experienced accusations of being the alienating parent, and/or feared alienation but did not actually experience verbal threats of alienation nor physical separation from the child. While including these other forms of PA helped to better understand the range of experiences and impacts related to PA, screening for severe alienation (e.g., physical separation) alone could have led to a more in-depth analysis regarding alienating behaviours. However, these interviews were still insightful in understanding PA as post-separational tactics of IPV, and the many ways in which alienation is being used (e.g., allegations and counterclaims). Time played a role in my decision to screen participants and while threats of alienation may mean fewer identifying markers of PABs, the trauma caused by the threat of having one's child "snatched" from them was considered to better inform the ways in which PA is used (i.e., counterclaims), highlighting PA as a unique and complex social phenomenon. Future studies, however, could screen for more specific participant criteria should time allow.

Second, allegations of personal and professional collusion could not be affirmed or denied. While this was not the aim of this study, further investigation into the

reporting procedures among agencies may have further explained participant experiences. However, time did not allow for this analysis of professional's explanations although this could have contributed to a more in-depth understanding. Further analysis into agency protocols could also provide further information as to if allegations of IPV call for any specific action on the part of the professional.

Third, experiences and impacts of parental alienation, as well as experiences of barriers and obstacles when help-seeking were only considered in terms of the perceptions of the participants. Voices of the alleged alienating parents, the children, and the responders (e.g., police, lawyers, child protection workers) were not considered within the scope of this study, though would have given a more robust understanding of the situation at hand. While including these additional perspectives would allow for more insight, the aim of this study was focused on the perceptions of mothers who self-identified as experiencing PA.

Finally, recruitment of participants belonging to a common advocacy group was accidental, though became apparent. Common membership among many participants meant that the findings of this study are not necessarily generalizable to the broader population of women who have experienced PA. With a common affiliation to an advocacy group, participants expressed views common to the broader group in which they had interest in promoting which may have influenced our conversations.

7.2 Areas of Future Research

Considering the active role of alienating behaviours by the extended family of alienating parents (e.g., new partners, parents), future research could address the impact of having individuals outside of the intimate relationship interfere with their relationship

with their child. Also concerning extended family members, future research could consider the impact experienced by family members of the target parent that also experience alienation from beloved familial children. Intergenerational PA victimization is another interesting area for future research pointed to by a participant of this study who, as a grandparent, was experiencing alienation for the second time (e.g., alienated from her child and subsequently alienated from her grandchildren). This type of double victimization was also identified by another participant who was alienated as a child and was experiencing alienation from her own child later in life.

The misuse of the term PA, and the increase in counterclaims by abusers within the courts (Baker et al., 2012), could pose an interesting and worthwhile area of investigation in the future as either case studies or longitudinal studies since many participants pointed to the experience and impact of false allegations onto them by their ex-partners. To date, longitudinal studies are limited within PA literature (Mercer, 2019). Funding and support for longitudinal studies could positively impact academic understanding of PA and its long-term impacts on alienated parents and children, possibly having clinical and legal influence in educating mental health and legal professionals.

When we think of supports and resources for victims of PA and IPV, we tend to think of police, domestic violence support workers, hospitals, and the like. One important group pointed to in this study, that I have not found discussed by much research, are teachers. Teachers are with children almost as often as children are with their parents. School is typically a safe place for children to express themselves, outside of the view of either parent, possibly meaning that they are more comfortable disclosing

alienation dynamics to these trusted professionals. From this study, teachers have played an important role in identifying and supporting alienated mothers. Future studies could focus on teacher's understandings of PA and IPV and investigate people of this profession in how they could act as an intervening strategy for targeted mothers.

Should PARP be incorporated into the DSM-5-TR, as per Bernet and Baker's (2022) proposal, evaluative studies looking at (1) if inclusion of PARP in the DSM has any bearing on legal admissibility in PA cases (e.g., are custody arrangements reflecting PA credibility); (2) if PARP has impacted victim's perceptions of legal professionals understanding of PA or impacted their ability or willingness to distinguish PA from other PCCPs (e.g., are victims finding meaningful help when explaining circumstances of PA); (3) and whether or not the incorporation of PARP has had meaningful impacts for alienated parents. These research questions in relation to PARP could prove to be important areas to explore.

Finally, while the need for better recognition and training for mental health and legal professionals was identified by participants, a conceptual divide among victims was also cited as substantial. This division is regarding the labeling of victims within the alienating triad. Some called for the renaming of PA to DV by Proxy, while others believed that actions spoke louder than words and that prioritizing professional education on PA would lead to as many improvements as renaming the concept. With all participants reporting either affiliation with or knowledge about this advocacy group, it appears to have a substantial following, according to participants. Further investigation into the history, motives, participation, and results (e.g., legal reform) of this advocacy group is an important area of future research for PA theory.

With almost half of PA literature being published in only the last 7 years (Harman et al., 2022) there is a plethora of avenues to explore as the topic of PA continues to have a place in academic, professional, and public discourses. Within a loop of interest, funding, research, advocacy, and legislation, the future for PA research and recognition is bright.

Let’s Keep Talking.

References

Alsheri, A., Ben Salem, M., Ding, L. (2020). 19th International Conference on Trust, Security and Privacy in Computing and Communications (TrustCom) Guangzhou, China 2020 Dec. 29 – 2021 Jan. 1. (2020). 2020 19th International conference on trust, security and privacy in computing and communications. In *Are smart home devices abandoning IPV victims?* (pp.1368-1375), essay, IEEE. https://doi.org./10.1109/TrustCom50675.2020.00184.

Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC). (2023). *Association of Family and Conciliation Courts*. Retrieved from: Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (afccnet.org)

Baker, A. J. L. (2010). Adult recall of parental alienation in a community sample: prevalence and associations with psychological maltreatment. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *51*(1), 16–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/10502550903423206

Baker, A. J. L., Burkhard, B., & Albertson-Kelly, J. (2012). Differentiating alienated from not alienated children: a pilot study. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *53*(3), 178–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2012.663266

Baker, A. (2020). Reliability and validity of the four-factor model of parental alienation. *Journal of Family Therapy*, *42*(1), 100–118. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.12253

Baker, A. J. L., & Chambers, J. (2011). Adult recall of childhood exposure to parental conflict: unpacking the black box of parental alienation. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *52*(1), 55–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2011.534396

Baker, A. J. L., & Darnall, D. (2006). Behaviors and strategies employed in parental

alienation. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, *45*(1-2), 97–124. H ttps://doi.org/10.1300/J087v45n01_06

Baker, A. J. L., & Fine, P. (2008). Beyond the High Road: Responding to 17 Parental Alienation Strategies without Compromising Your Morals or Harming Your Child. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage.*

Balmer, S., Matthewson, M., & Haines, J. (2018). Parental alienation: targeted parent perspective. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, *70*(1), 91–99. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12159

Berman, Pearl., Weisinger, Ethan. (2022). Parental alienation vs coercive control: Controversial issues and current research, Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development, 19:3-4, 214-229, DOI: 10.1080/26904586.2022.2125475

Bernet, William. (2010). *Parental alienation, dsm-5, and icd-11*. Charles C Thomas.

Bernet, William. (2023). *Update Regarding Parental Alienation Relational Problem and DSM-5-TR*. [Webinar]. Families Divided TV. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ElLzejFri4.

Bernet, W., and Baker, A.J. (2022). Proposal for Parental Alienation Relational Problem to be Included in "Other Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention in DSM-5-TR". August 22, 2022. Proposal-2022-08-22.pdf | DocDroid.

Bernet, W., Baker, A. J. L., & Adkins, K. L. (2022). Definitions and terminology regarding child alignments, estrangement, and alienation: a survey of custody evaluators. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, *67*(1), 279–288. https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.14868

Bernet, W., & Greenhill, L. L. (2022). The five-factor model for the diagnosis of parental alienation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, *61*(5), 591–594. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2021.11.026

Bernet, W., Gregory, N., Reay, K. M., & Rohner, R. P. (2018). An objective measure of splitting in parental alienation: the parental acceptance-rejection questionnaire. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, *63*(3), 776–783. https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.13625

Bethel, A. C., Rogers, M., & Abbott, R. (2021). Use of a search summary table to improve systematic review search methods, results, and efficiency. *Journal of the Medical Library Association: JMLA*, *109*(1), 97–106. https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2021.809

Boch-Galhau, W. (2018). Parental alienation (syndrome) – eine ernst zu nehmende form von psychischer kindesmisshandlung. *Neuropsychiatrie: Klinik, Diagnostik, Therapie Und Rehabilitation : Organ Der Gesellschaft Osterreichischer Nervenarzte Und Psychiater*, *32*(3), 133–148. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40211-018-0267-0

Botein, H., & Hetling, A. (2016). *Home safe home: housing solutions for survivors of intimate partner violence* (Ser. Violence against women and children). Rutgers University Press.

Bruch, C. S. (2002). Parental alienation syndrome and alienated children - getting it wrong in child custody cases. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, *14*, 381–400.

Campbell, R., Sefl, T., Barnes, H. E., Ahrens, C. E., Wasco, S. M., & Zaragoza-Diesfeld,

Y. (1999). Community services for rape survivors: enhancing psychological well-being or increasing trauma? *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *67*(6), 847–858.

Cartwright, G. F. (1993). Expanding the parameters of parental alienation syndrome. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, *21*(3), 205–15.

Castro, M., Willaims, L. (2020). Upholding justice: social, psychological and legal perspectives (1st ed.) Eds: Deb, S., Subhalakshmi, G., & Chakraborti, K. (Eds.). Chapter 8: Parental Alienation and its controversies. Routledge India. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429324086.

Collier, C. N. (2022). Gender-based violence research in Canadian political science: a call to action. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *55*(4), 769–783. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423922000920

Darnall, Douglas. (1999). Parental Alienation: Not in the Best Interest of the Children. *North Dakota Law Review, 75, 323-364.*

DeLeon, P. H. (1997). Proceedings of the American Psychological Association, Incorporated, for the year 1996: Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Council of Representatives: August 8 and 11, 1996, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and February 21–23, 1997, Washington, DC. *American Psychologist, 52*(8), 813–868. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.8.813

Faller, K. C. (1998). The parental alienation syndrome: what is it and what data support it? *Child Maltreatment*, *3*(2), 100–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559598003002005

Feresin, M. (2020) Parental alienation (syndrome) in child custody cases:

survivors' experiences and the logic of psychosocial and legal services in Italy, Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law, 42:1, 56-67, DOI: 10.1080/09649069.2019.1701924

Galoob, S., Sheley, E. (2022). Reconceiving coercion-based criminal defenses. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology (1973-)*, *112*(2), 265–328.

Gardner, Richard, A. (1985). Recent Trends in Divorce and Custody Litigation. Academy Forum, Vol 29 (2) (3-7).

Gardner, R. A. M. D. (1998). Recommendations for dealing with parents who induce a parental alienation syndrome in their children. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, *28*(3-4), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1300/J087v28n03_01

Gardner, R. A. (2002). Parental alienation syndrome vs. parental alienation: which diagnosis should evaluators use in child-custody disputes. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, *30*(2), 93–115.

Gezinski, L. & Gonzalez-Pons, K. (2022) Legal Barriers and Re-Victimization for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence Navigating Courts in Utah, United States, Women & Criminal Justice, 32:5, 454-466, DOI: *10.1080/08974454.2021.1900991*

Hardesty, J. L., Crossman, K. A., Haselschwerdt, M. L., Raffaelli, M., Ogolsky, B. G., & Johnson, M. P. (2015). Toward a standard approach to operationalizing coercive control and classifying violence types. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *77*(4), 833–843. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12201

Harman, J. J., Bernet, W., & Harman, J. (2019). Parental alienation: the blossoming of a

field of study. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *28*(2), 212–217. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721419827271

Harman, J. J., Kruk, E., & Hines, D. A. (2018). Parental alienating behaviors: An unacknowledged form of family violence. *Psychological Bulletin, 144*(12), 1275–1299. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000175

Harman, J. J., & Lorandos, D. (2021). Allegations of family violence in court: how parental alienation affects judicial outcomes. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, *27*(2), 184–208.

Harman, J. J., Lorandos, D., Biringen, Z., & Grubb, C. (2019). Gender differences in the use of parental alienating behaviors. *Journal of Family Violence*, *35*(5), 459–469. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00097-5

Harman, J. J., Maniotes, C. R., & Grubb, C. (2021). Power dynamics in families affected by parental alienation. *Personal Relationships*, *28*(4), 883–906. https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12392

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

Hayes, B. E., & Boyd, K. A. (2017). Influence of individual- and national-level factors on attitudes toward intimate partner violence. *Sociological Perspectives, 60*(4), 685–701. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121416662028

Hoult, Jennifer. (2006). The Evidentiary Admissibility of Parental Alienation Syndrome: Science, Law, and Policy. *Children's Legal Rights Journal, Vol. 26, No.1.*

Iker, T. (2023). ``all wives are not created equal'': women organizing in the late

twentieth-century men's rights movement. *Journal of Women's History*, *35*(2), 51–72.

Jaffe-Geffner, N. (2022). Gender bias in cross-allegation domestic violence-parental alienation custody cases: can states legislate the fix? *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, *42*(1), 58–111. https://doi.org/10.52214/cjgl.v42i1.9373

Johnson, M.P. (1995). Johnson M. P. (1995). Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 57, 283-294.

Johnson, M. P. (2006). Violence and Abuse in Personal Relationships: Conflict, Terror, and Resistance in Intimate Partnerships. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 557–576). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606632.031

Johnson M. P. (2008). *A typology of domestic violence: Intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and situational couple violence*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Johnson, M.P., Ferraro, K.J. (2000). Research on domestic violence in the 1990's: Making Distinctions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62, pp.948-963.*

Johnson, M.P., Leone, J.M. (2005). The Differential effects of intimate terrorism and situational couple violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. *Journal of Family Issues, 26, pp. 322-349.*

Johnson, M. P., Leone, J. M., & Xu, Y. (2014). Intimate terrorism and situational couple violence in general surveys: ex-spouses required. *Violence against Women*, *20*(2), 186–207. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801214521324

Johnston, J. R., & Sullivan, M. J. (2020). Parental alienation: in search of common ground for a more differentiated theory. *Family Court Review*, *58*(2), 270–292. https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12472

Jordan, Carl. (2004). Intimate Partner Violence and the Justice System: An Exaination of the Interface". *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 19*, 1412-1434. http://jiv.sagepub.com/content/19/12/1412.

Kelly, J. B., & Johnston, J. R. (2001). The alienated child: a reformulation of parental alienation syndrome. *Family Court Review*, *39*(3), 249–249.

Kelly, J. B., & Johnson, M. P. (2008). Differentiation among types of intimate partner violence: research update and implications for interventions. *Family Court Review*, *46*(3), 476–499. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-1617.2008.00215.x

Kernic, M. A., Monary-Ernsdorff, D. J., Koepsell, J. K., & Holt, V. L. (2005). Children in the crossfire: child custody determinations among couples with a history of intimate partner violence. *Violence against Women, 11*(8), 991-1021.

Kopetski, L., Rand, D. C., Rand, R. (2006). Incidence, gender, and false allegations of child abuse: Data on 84 parental alienation syndrome cases. In Gardner, Richard A, Sauber, S Richard, Lorandos, Demosthenes (Eds.), The international handbook of parental alienation syndrome: Conceptual, clinical and legal considerations, (pp. 65-70). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher.

Laing, L. (2017). Secondary victimization: domestic violence survivors navigating the family law system. *Violence against Women*, *23*(11), 1314–1335. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216659942

Lapierre, S., & Côté, I. (2016). Abused women and the threat of parental alienation:

shelter workers' perspectives. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *65*, 120–126. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.03.022

Lee-Maturana, S., Matthewson, M., Dwan, C., & Norris, K. (2019). Characteristics and experiences of targeted parents of parental alienation from their own perspective: a systematic literature review. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, *71*(2), 83–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12226

Lee-Maturana, S., Matthewson, M., & Dwan, C. (2021). Understanding targeted parents' experience of parental alienation: a qualitative description from their own perspective. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, *49*(5), 499–516. https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2020.1837035

Leisenring, A. (2011). "'Whoa! They Could've Arrested Me!': Unsuccessful Identity Claims of Women during Police Response to Intimate Partner Violence." *Qualitative Sociology* 34(2): 353–70.

Leone, J. M., Johnson, M. P., & Cohan, C. L. (2007). Victim help seeking: differences. between intimate terrorism and situational couple violence. *Family Relations*, *56*(5), 427–439.

Lorandos, D. (2006). Parental Alienation Syndrome: Detractors and the Junk Science Vacuum. In Richard Gardner, S. Richard Sauber, and Demosthenes Lorandos (Eds.), The International Handbook of Parental Alienation Syndrome: Conceptual, Clinical and Legal Considerations (pp. 397-418). Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Ltd

Lorandos, D., Bernet, W., & Sauber, S. R. (Eds.). (2013). *Parental alienation: the*

handbook for mental health and legal professionals (Ser. American series in behavioral science and law, 1116). Charles C. Thomas,

Lubit, R. (2019). Valid and invalid ways to assess the reason a child rejects a parent: the continued malignant role of "parental alienation syndrome." *Journal of Child Custody*, *16*(1), 42–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/15379418.2019.1590284

Marques, T. M., Narciso, I., & Ferreira, L. C. (2020). Empirical research on parental alienation: a descriptive literature review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *119*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105572

Martin, Z. (2023). Remedies for parental alienation in canadian family law. *Canadian Family Law Quarterly*, *42*(1), 85–105.

Meier, J. S. (2009). A historical perspective on parental alienation syndrome and parental alienation. *Journal of Child Custody*, *6*(3-4), 232–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/15379410903084681

Meier, J. S. (2020). U.s. child custody outcomes in cases involving parental alienation and abuse allegations: what do the data show? *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, *42*(1), 92–105. https://doi.org/10.1080/09649069.2020.1701941

Mercer, J. (2019). Examining parental alienation treatments: problems of principles and practices. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *36*(4), 351–363. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-019-00625-8.

Mercer, J. (2022). Reunification therapies for parental alienation: Tenets, empirical evidence, commonalities, and differences. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development, Vol.19. Is.3-4: Special issue on Parental*

Alienation and Family Reunification, pp.383-401. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2022.2080147

Meyer, S. (2011). Seeking help for intimate partner violence: victims' experiences when approaching the criminal justice system for IPV-related support and protection in an Australian jurisdiction. *Feminist Criminology*, *6*(4), 268–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085111414860

Moné Jennifer Gerber, MacPhee, D., Anderson, S. K., & Banning, J. H. (2011). Family members' narratives of divorce and interparental conflict: implications for parental alienation. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, *52*(8), 642–667. https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2011.619940.

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (2016). National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. May 26, 2016. Enhanced Resource Guidelines - NCJFCJ.

Neilson, Linda C. (2018) Parental Alienation Empirical Analysis: Child Best Interests or Parental Rights? (Fredericton: Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research and Vancouver: The FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children). Retrieved from: Parental-Alienation-Linda-Neilson.pdf (fredacentre.com).

Paquin-Boudreau, A., Poitras, K., & Bala, N. (2022). Family court responses to claims of parental alienation in Quebec. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, *36*(1). https://doi.org/10.1093/lawfam/ebac014

Parental Alienation Study Group. (2021). "The Parental Alienation Study Group". Bernet, William (ed). https://wwww.pasg.info.

Pavao, J., Alvarez, J., Baumrind, N., Induni, M., & Kimerling, R. (2007). Intimate partner violence and housing instability. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *32*(2), 143–6.

Pemberton, A., & Mulder, E. (2023). Bringing injustice back in: secondary victimization as epistemic injustice. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, *(20230630)*. https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958231181345

Pence, E., Paymar, M., & Paymar, M. (1993). *Education groups for men who batter : the duluth model*. Springer Pub.

Pruett, M. K., Johnston, J. R., Saini, M., Sullivan, M., & Salem, P. (2023). The use of parental alienation constructs by family justice system professionals: a survey of belief systems and practice implications. *Family Court Review: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 61*(2), 372–394.

Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick. (2016). "welcome to the Court-Ordered Evaluations Support Program (C-OESP)". Family Law NB. Retrieved from: PLEIS-NB • Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick :: Court-Ordered Evaluations Support Program (legal-info-legale.nb.ca)

Postmus, J.L., Severson, M., Berry, M., and Yoo, J.A. (2009). "Women's Experiences of Violence and Seeking Help." *Violence Against Women* 15: 852-68.

Rand, Deirdre Conway. (1997). The Spectrum of Parental Alienation Syndrome (Part II). *American Journal of Forensic Psychology, Vol. 15 (4).*

Roebuck, B. S., Sattler, P. L., & Clayton, A. K. (2023). Violence and posttraumatic

change (PTC). Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 15(1), 18–26. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001222

Rowlands. (2019). Parental alienation: a measurement tool. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, *60*(4), 316–331. https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2018.1546031

Rueda, Carlos. A. (2004). An inter-rater reliability study of parental alienation syndrome. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, *32*(5), 391–403. https://doi.org/10.1080/01926180490499864

Sharples, A. E., Harman, J. J., & Lorandos, D. (2023). Findings of abuse in families affected by parental alienation. *Journal of Family Violence, 1-11*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00575-x.

Sheehy, E. and Boyd, S.B. (2020). "Penalizing Women's Fear: Intimate partner Violence and Parental Alienation in Canadian Child Custody Cases." *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law, 42*(1):80-91.

Stark, E. (2009). *Coercive control: how men entrap women in personal life* (Ser. Interpersonal violence). Oxford University Press.

Tavares, A., Crespo, C., & Ribeiro, M. T. (2021). What does it mean to be a targeted parent? parents' experiences in the context of parental alienation. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, (2021)*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-01914-6

Van der Bijl, C. (2016). Considering parental alienation under the aegis of the criminal law. *South African Journal of Criminal Justice*, *29*(2), 140–157.

Verhaar, S., V., Matthewson, M.L., Bently, C. (2022). The impact of parental alienating behaviours on the mental health of adults alienated in childhood, *9*(475), 475–475. https://doi.org/10.3390/children9040475

Wallerstein, J. S., & Kelly, J. B. (1976). The effects of parental divorce: experiences of the child in later latency. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *46*(2), 256–69.

Warshak, R. A. (2000). Remarriage as a trigger of parental alienation syndrome. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, *28*(3), 229–241. https://doi.org/10.1080/01926180050081667

Wolf, M.E., Ly, U., Hobart, M.A., and Kernic, M.A. (2003). "Barriers to Seeking Police Help for Intimate Partner Violence." *Journal of Family Violence* 18(2): 121–29.

World Health Organization. (2023). "Violence against women". (9 March 2021). Retrieved from: Violence against women (who.int).

Wrathall, M., & Herron, R. (2021). Regional service providers' understandings of rurality and intimate partner violence. *Journal of Rural & Community Development*, *16*(2).

Whydall, S. and Zerk, R. (2021). "Listen to Me, His Behaviour is Erratic and I'm Really Worried about Our Safety…": Help-Seeking in the Context of Coercive Control." *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 21(5): 614–32.

Zaccour, S. (2018). Parental alienation in Quebec custody litigation. *Les Cahiers De Droit*, *59*(4), 1073–1111. https://doi.org/10.7202/1055264ar

Appendix A: Comparing the Four-Factor & Five-Factor Model of PA

	Four-Factor Model of PA	Five-Factor Model of PA
Author	Baker (2020)	Bernet. Laurence, and Greenhill (2022)
Aims	• To identify PA in a sociological sense. • To differentiate PA from other reasons for contact refusal • To influence custody assessments • Inclusion of perspectives of alienating parent, alienated parent, and the child within the vignettes.	• To identify PA in a psychological sense. • To differentiate PA from other reasons for contact refusal, "there are several causes of contact refusal, and it is necessary to conduct an evaluation to determine whether the cause in a particular case is PA or some other issue within the child or the family" (Bernet et al., 2022, p.591). • For consideration as a syndrome and incorporated into the DSM.
Factors	1. Presence of a prior positive relationship between the child and now rejected parent. 2. The absence of maltreatment or seriously deficient parenting on the part of the now rejected parent. 3. The use of multiple 21fda alienating behaviours on the part of the favoured parent 4. The exhibition of the eight behavioural manifestations of alienation by the child	• All four of the factors present in Baker's (2020) four-factor model, with the addition of one factor: "the child manifests contact resistance or refusal, including justified rejection or estrangement" (Bernet et al., 2022, p.591).
Requirements to be considered PA	• PA is only present when all four factors are present.	• Considering 4 of 5 factors were adopted from the four-factor model, all 5 factors need to be present.
Influences	• Directly references Baker and Darnall's (2006) PABs • Directly references Gardner's (1998) eight behavioural manifestations	• Baker's (2020) Four-Factor Model (which was influenced by Baker and Darnall (2006) and Gardner (1998). • Baker and Darnall (2007)
Related Findings	Baker (2020) found that of sixty-eight vignettes offered to mental health professionals, 90% were successful in differentiating PA from other reasons of contact refusal.	The five-factor model was used in a 2022 proposal for the incorporation of PARP into the DSM, which will be discussed below.

Appendix B: Comparing the BAQ, PARQ, and RPAS

	BAQ	PARQ	RPAS
Authors	Baker, Burkhard and Albertson-Kelly (2012)	Rohner (2005), later analyzed for usefulness by Bernet et al., 2018	Rowlands (2018)
Answered By	Prospect alienated children	Prospect alienated children	The parents of prospect alienated children
Administration	2-page, 10-minute self-administered questionnaire	60 statements about each of the child's parents	23 questions aimed at the parents' perception of their relationship with their child. (e.g., does/did your child make false accusations about you for events when your child was not present or was too young to remember?" (Rowlands, 2019, p.321).
Aims	To identify splitting Distinguish alienated children from non-alienated children. (PA from other reasons of contact refusal) (Baker et al., 2012).	To identify splitting; the child's perception of maternal and paternal accepting and rejecting behaviours (Bernet, 2018) Differentiating PA from other instances of contact refusal <u>There are 4 versions of the PARQ</u>: (1) Early childhood PARQ; (2) Child PARQ; (3) Adult PARQ; (4) Parent PARQ (Rohner, 2005)	Differentiating PA from other forms of contact refusal.
Tests/Findings	Baker et al. (2012) found that children consistently reported findings in accordance with splitting.	"PARQ scores for alienated children were dramatically different from those of the other three family groups" (Bernet et al., 2019, p.780)	"The RPAS developed for this study shows promise in both identifying the presence and severity of parental alienation" (Rowlands, 2019, p.329).
Association to Gardner	Children were screened for not having been victimized by abuse or neglect by the target parent (Baker, 2012)	Splitting relates to Gardner's criterion that the child lacks ambivalence and is a behavioural manifestation unique to alienated children.	Based off six of Gardner's (1998) eight criteria

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate

Invitation to Participate in Research

My name is Carly Ashe, and I am a master's candidate at the University of New Brunswick. I am seeking women to participate in a study that have experienced parental alienation, or separation from their child(ren) after divorce or separation, as a measure of post-separation intimate partner violence.

I would like to interview you online, via Teams, or over-the-phone if you are interested in sharing your experiences about manipulated child access. You may choose your own pseudonyms, or I will assign one for you, as no identifying information will be used in this thesis.

This research is part of a master research thesis. If you are interested, please reach out to me at cashe1@unb.ca.

This project has been reviewed by the UNB Research Ethics Board and is on file as

REB 2023-005.

Appendix D: Informed Consent

Informed Consent for Study Participants

Hello, thank you for your interest in this research study.

My name is Carly Ashe. I am a master's student in the department of Sociology at UNB and will be conducting this interview. For your convenience, you will have received an e-mail copy of this form to review before our interview. I will read the same consent form aloud at the beginning of our interview with time for questions or clarifications.

You are invited to participate in a research project that is being conducted by myself, Carly Ashe, a Graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick. The master's thesis in which this study will be used to support, is about how women are experiencing, and coping with, being separated from their children as a form of intimate partner violence (IPV). This includes discussing where women turned to for help (e.g., legal services) and whether they found the support they sought.

You are invited to participate in a Teams/Zoom meeting, or telephone interview to discuss your experiences of post-separation parental alienation (estrangement from your child after you separated from your child's father), how you responded to this dilemma, and your perspective of whether you believe you had meaningful support, or your perspective of how you believed you could have been better supported. I, Carly

Ashe, am conducting the research as part of my masters' studies in the Department of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick under the supervision of Dr. Carmen Gill.

The online/phone interview will take no more than one hour to complete and audio will be digitally recorded if this is agreed to. It is important to note that statements of current child abuse are required by law to be directed to social services.

- The nature of this interview touches on sensitive areas, including specificities of your experiences and encounters with manipulated child access and the family law system (and relatable resources) in New Brunswick. This is to better understand mother-child estrangement as a form of intimate partner violence, and how it is currently being recognized within family court in NB. This could cause some emotional distress.
- At the bottom of this consent form is contact information for three local counseling services in the Fredericton area, with brief descriptions of cost and waiting times. I will kindly remind you at the end of the interview that you have this information, and you can use it at your own discretion.
- If topics or questions become distressing to you, you can skip the question, or if you would rather, retract your participation at any time. This is intended to be a constructive conversation that could help answer some research questions and help women in the future that are estranged from their children as a tactic of abuse.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the interview at any time. You may also choose to not answer any question that you do not want to answer, without explanation. If you wish to withdraw from the study, all audio information that has been collected will be deleted and not used at any part of the analysis.

All collected data will be securely stored. Digital files and electronic transcripts will be stored on a password protected computer and accessible only to Carly Ashe (principal investigator) and Dr. Carmen Gill (supervisor) at the University of New Brunswick. All digital files and interview transcripts will be saved under a pseudonym. No identifying

information or direct narratives from the interviews will be included in the dissemination of findings that might allow others to deduce a participant's identity or agency in which they are employed. Employing these techniques will maximize the anonymity of information to ensure confidentiality to the best of our ability.

If you wish to receive the final results of the study, the principal investigator, Carly Ashe, may send them to you via email or mail, at the participant's discretion. Individual results will not be available, and all information will be summarized in the aggregate to protect participant's identity and location. Since this study is part of a Master dissertation, results may also be shared with academic journals and conference presentations.

By agreeing to participate you are agreeing that you understand your role as a participant and my role as a researcher, the associated potential risks, and the use of any information given.

Would you like to confirm your participation in this research study?

If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact the principal investigator, Carly Ashe, at cashe1@unb.ca or Dr. Carmen Gill, Professor in the Department of Sociology at cgill@unb.ca or 506-452-6367.

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB – 2023 – 005. Related concerns should be directed towards Dr. Cathy Holtmann (Chair, Department of Sociology) at 506-458-7442.

Since the nature of this interview may bring up some negative emotions, the following is a list of counselling services (with brief descriptions) in the Fredericton area.

- **Family Enrichment and Counselling Service (FECS)**
  356 Queen Street, Fredericton, NB
  (506) 458-8211
  Info@FamilyEnrichment.ca

  According to their website, familyenrichment.ca, this counselling services offers professional and confidential services to individuals 12 years of age and up. Family Enrichment and Counselling Service does not require referrals and as stated on their website, is able to see most clients within a week of their inquiry. FECS does charge for services used, although they are subsidized for many programs and partner with several insurance companies.

- **Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), New Brunswick (CMHA of NB)**
  403 Regent Street, Suite 202, Fredericton, NB
  (506) 455-5231
  www.cmhanb.ca

  CMHA serves Canadians of any age, and is a charitable organization, so there is no associated cost. Self-referrals are welcome.

- **Liberty Lane**
  (506) 451-2120
  www.libertylane.ca
  residentialsupportworker@libertyland.ca.

  Liberty Lane representatives can meet you in their office, your home, or within the community if preferred. Dealing directly with IPV victimization, Liberty Lane offers individual and group services, “all of which are free and confidential within legal limits” (libertylane.ca).

Appendix E: Interview Guide

1. **General Relationship information**

- How many children do you have? What are their ages?
- Were you a part of a married, common-law, or dating relationship prior to separation?
- How long has it been since you separated?
- How old were you and your ex-partner when you first got together?
- How long did the relationship last?

2. **Identifying PA Within an Already Established Pattern of IPV**

- Can you explain to me how the relationship was when it was intact?
    - Did you experience violence or threats of violence, can you explain?
        - Physical, psychological/emotional, financial, sexual, etc.
    - Did you experience control, can you explain?
        - Control pre-separation?
        - Control post-separation?
        - Non-physical violence?
            - Fear/isolation?
- Did the violence or control escalate with COVID restrictions?
- Was there ever a sense of rules in your relationship?
    - What were expectations/your roles in the relationship?
        - Was there an overtone of patriarchal ideals in your relationship? (Gender roles)
    - Did you sense a reward/punishment circumstance?
        - What did the rewards look like?
        - What did punishments look like?
- Did you identify the relationship as abusive when it was intact?
        - If not, what changed to make you understand it in this way?
        - Did you believe violence and control would end with the termination of the relationship?

3. **Parental Alienation**

- Did you experience physical separation from your child, or threats of alienation?
    - Have you been accused of alienating your child from their father?
        - Does this have to do with reasons of allegations of previous child abuse by the father (e.g., protective mother)?
- How long have you been physically alienated from your child?
- How was your relationship with your child before separation?
- Have you been accused of maltreatment or neglect of your child prior to separation?
- What types of behaviours has your ex used to create alienation between you and your child? (PABs)
    - Does your child talk about things that you feel that have only been told to her by your ex to make your child view you negatively?

        - Do you feel that this has been effective, that your child views you with anger?
    - Does your child say that it is their decision (and only their decision) not to see you?
    - Has your ex accused you (in court or otherwise) of performing these alienating behaviours, that he has done himself? (e.g., DARVO)
- How do you feel you've been impacted by the physical, or threat of, alienation from your child?
    - How do you believe your child has been impacted?
    - How do you believe your extended family has been impacted? (e.g., child's grandparents or other siblings)
- Do you feel that your child thinks that their father is all good and you are the bad guy?
    - What kind of things have been said or done to make you believe this?
- From your own perspective, what do you believe is the motivation of alienation?
    - (Is it to make you return to the relationship, to get back at you for leaving?)
- Was parental alienation ever threatened to you before separation?
    - Did you think this was something he would go through with? Did you fear separation from your child?
        - How did this impact you?

- Has the term alienation been used in association with your case in court?
    - (regarding credibility: supported as a phenomenon or rejected?)
    - Have reunification camps been mentioned as a possible court mandated response to allegations of PA?

4. <u>Supports and Resources</u>

- Which supports and resources did you turn to for help at separation?
    - Where they aware of what parental alienation was? (did they, or you, use the term?)
- Was there a court ordered custody order soon after separation?
- Were you given any protective orders after experiencing IPV?
- What kind of evidence did you feel you could provide to court to prove parental alienation?
- When alleging parental alienation, did you feel that you were believed by legal professionals? (e.g., speaking to stereotyping, 'crazy woman').

5. <u>Victimization</u>

- Did you identify as a victim of IPV or PA immediately after separation?
    - If not, what changed this view?
- How do you feel you were impacted by experiencing IPV? PA?
- Weaponization of children is referred to with parental alienation, what other things do you feel have been weaponized against you?
    - E.g., Intimate knowledge, court systems (victim-blaming)?

6. <u>Terminology</u>

- Were you aware of the term parental alienation, coercive control, or intimate partner violence?
    - Did hindsight play a role for you?
    - Were you able to refer to your situation as parental alienation when asking for help? Did they understand what you were referring to?

Appendix F: Preliminary Thematic Search Table

Categorization	Themes	Intended Use of Theme
Abuse	• Control Pre-Separation • Control Post-Separation • COVID-19 • Financial Abuse/Threats • Absence of abuse • Physical Violence • Protecting Children • Psychological Abuse • Sexual Abuse	To establish PA within a pattern of IPV & Differentiating PA from other reasons for contact refusal
Parental Alienation	• Experiences of PA (physical) • Threatened PA • Parental Alienating Behaviours (PABs) • DARVO • Direct Impact (Mother) • Direct Impact (Children) • Direct Impact (Others) • False Accusations • Behavioural Manifestations • Perceived motivation • Previous positive relationship with child • Reunification Camps	<u>In Reference to Research Question 1:</u> How are women experiencing parental alienation?
Supports & Resources	• Custody Evaluator • CPS • Doctor • Domestic Violence Support Worker • Online Support Network • Parenting App • Police	<u>In Reference to Research Question 2:</u>

	• Protective Orders • Safety Planning • Support for the Abuser • Supervised Visitation • Therapy/Counselling • Custody • Evidence	Which resources did victims of PA reach out to for support?
Victimization	• Perceived Collusion • Victimization: Court • Victimization: IPV • Victimization: PA	<u>In Reference to Research Question 3:</u> Obstacles & Barriers to Supports/Resources
Terminology	• Reference to Gardner • No Name (inability to label experiences) • Debate about "PA" Terminology • Misinformation	In Reference to the Credibility Debate
Outcome	• Advocacy: Court Training • Advocacy: Recognition of PA	In Reference to Future Hopes for Victims of PA

Appendix G: Complete Thematic Search Table

Category	Code	Child Codes (CC)	+ /-	# Related Interviews (Out of 9)	# Times Each Code Ref.
Abuse	• Abuser Characteristics			6	14
	• Animal Abuse			2	2
	• Child Abuse			5	12
	• COVID ref.			5	10
	• Financial Abuse			7	10
	• Is this abuse?			4	9
	• Isolation			3	3
	• Other[8]			3	8
	• Physical			5	12
	• Psychological			2	5
	• Sexual			2	3
	• Verbal			4	4
Control	• Coercive Control Ref.			3	3
	• Post-Separation control			9	49
	• Pre-separation control			9	44
	• Reward / Punishment			3	6
Parental Alienation	• Alienation Type[9]	- Accused Alienating		3	10

[8] Other, in the Abuse section, refers to other forms of abuse, as reported by study participants including stalking, threats, false reports and destruction of property.

[9] The total number of interview references exceed the total number of interviews conducted; this is because some study participants reported multiple forms of alienation (e.g., having PA threatened to them as well as

		-	Feared Alienation		1	1
		-	Physical Separation		5	27
		-	Threatened Separation		4	13
	• Impact of PA	-	Child (perceived)		5	28
		-	Mother		7	50
		-	Other[10]		2	8
	• Prior Relationship				2	2
	• DARVO				3	7
	• Splitting				2	2
	• Behavioural Manifestations				3	3
	• Reunification Camps				1	2
	• Progressiveness				1	3
	• PAB				7	52
	• Triangulation				4	20
	• Double Victimization				2	2
	• perceived Motivation				6	9
Supports/ Resources	• Conventional Resources	-	CPS	+	1	1
				-	6	34
		-	Evaluator		1	2
		-	Doctor		1	1
		-	DV Support		3	4
		-	Judge		4	9
		-	Lawyer	+	2	3
				-	6	21
		-	Police	+	2	4

being physically separated from their child, being accused of alienation while also experiencing alienation, etc.) This will be further discussed in the Discussion section of the thesis.

[10] Other, in the Parental Alienation section, refers to third parties impacted by the alienation, as perceived by the study participant (e.g., siblings, grandparents, etc.)

			-	6	15
		- Teachers		5	6
		- Counselling	+	4	7
			-	4	9
	• Evidence			5	10
	• Human Rights			2	2
	• No Support	- No Support Victim		5	14
		- Abuser Support		3	3
	• Nuanced Supports	- Apps		3	4
		- Coach		2	2
		- Group		2	3
		- Online	+	3	6
			-	1	1
		- Other[11]		3	4
(Supports Continued)	• Orders	- Custody		3	4
		- EIO		2	5
		- Protection		1	1
		- Restraining		1	1
		- Safety Plan		2	5
	• Organizations			3	14
	• Supervised Visitation			4	7
Terminology	• Gardner Reference			4	13
	• Misinformation			4	12
	• No Name Experience			4	5
	• No Recognition PA			2	5
	• PA Debate			6	29
Victimization	• Legal Process / Family Court			8	44

[11] Other, in the Supports & Resources section, refers to supports not already referenced (e.g., art donators, co-parent counselling, parenting after separation (high conflict) programs, and communication with authors).

	• IPV	- Direct Victim		8	22
		- Child		1	5
		- Third Party		2	4
	• Housing			5	19
	• Collusion			5	39
	• "Crazy Lady"			4	17
Outcome	• Advocacy: Recognition / Training			7	21
	• Authors Referenced			8	19
	• Personal Projects			6	24

Glossary

Allied Child: An allied child is not an alienated child. Allied children have a personal preference with one parent that was present prior to the parents' separation or divorce. While being an allied child may lead to minor forms of contact refusal, it is not normal behaviour to completely reject one parent, and to be supported to reject that parent by the other parent. Allied children may have personal preference based on personal interests, common gender, or like qualities.

Alienated Child: The child experiencing alienation tactics by the alienating parent as a method of interference between the child and the target parent.

Alienated Parent: Also referred to as the target parent or the rejected parent, this is the parent that is suffering from alienation from their child.

Alienating Parent: Also referred to as the preferred parent or the aligned parent, this is the parent that is weaponizing the children and causing the alienation between the child and the other parent.

Alienation Triad: Reference to the three parties involved in a parental alienation dynamic: the alienating parent, the alienated child, and the target parent. However, as mentioned in the section regarding triangulation, the third party of this triad may not always be the alienating child that is manipulated to side with the alienating parent against the target parent, but may instead be another third party (e.g., new partner of alienating parent, alienating parent's mother).

Aligned Parent: see alienating parent.

Coercive Control: a combination of overt and covert control tactics often combined with physical or sexual abuse. Coercive control is used to diminish the autonomy of the

intimate partner and is the defining feature of intimate terrorism (IT) as defined by Johnson (2008) that separates IT from other forms of IPV.

Contact Refusal: Contact refusal refers to any reason the child resists or refuses contact with a parent. There are many reasons for contact refusal including, but not limited to parental alienation.

Estrangement: While there is still separation between a child and a parent, estrangement refers to a justified rejection narrative and is not considered PA or PAS due to the maltreatment, abuse, or neglect of the child by the parent.

Favoured Parent: see alienating parent.

Intimate Partner Violence: Intimate partner violence (IPA) is also referred to as domestic violence, women abuse, family violence, etc. This is violence that occurs between intimate partners. Partners may be married, living common law, dating, or separated. IPV affects both women and men internationally regardless of age, gender, culture, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.

Justified Rejection: A justified rejection refers to the reason for contact refusal between a child to a parent is related to maltreatment, abuse, or neglect. This does not constitute PA or PAS as the reason for contact refusal are considered by the child to legitimately be for reasons of personal safety and wellbeing.

Preferred Parent: see alienating parent.

Protective Mothers: Protective mothers have been found to often be confused with alienating parents, often due to encouraging the separation between the child and the other parent. However, protective mothers only encourage this estrangement for reasons of child safety and wellbeing, satisfying a justified rejection narrative.

Rejected Parent: see also alienated parent.

Splitting: Splitting occurs when an alienated child views one parent as entirely good and the other parent as entirely bad, without merit. This is a key distinguishing feature of alienated children that is not present for children of any other type of estrangement.

Target Parent: See alienated parents.

Triangulation: Refers to the manipulation of one party by the alienating parent against the target parent; see also alienating triad.

Unjustified Rejection: An unjustified rejection refers to situations of parental alienation or PAS for which the child has no legitimate reason (e.g., personal safety or wellbeing) to refuse contact with a parent. Due to there not being issues related to maltreatment, abuse, or neglect, manipulation of the child's perspective of the rejected parent is often considered, pointing to PA dynamics.

Curriculum Vitae

Candidate's full name: Carly Ashe

Universities attended (with dates and degrees obtained): University of New Brunswick;

2017-2012; Bachelor of Arts

Publications: N/A

Conference Presentations: N/A

Academic Awards:

- School of Graduate Studies (SGS)
  Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick
  $5000.00 per year for 4 years; 2023 - 2027
- Sociology Graduate Assistantship
  Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick
  $16,299 for academic years: 2023-2026; $5,799 for academic years 2026-2027
- Graduate Student Research Assistantship (GSRA)
  Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick
  September 2021 – August 2023
- Honours Ceremony, 2022
  Department of Sociology, University of New Brunswick
  Recognition for the successful completion of the undergraduate honours program
- Dean Scholar Award, 2020 - 2021; University of New Brunswick
- Dean's List, 2020 - 2021; University of New Brunswick
- Dean's List, 2019 - 2020; University of New Brunswick
- Dean's List, 2018 - 2019; University of New Brunswick