

An exploration on young adults' experiences of childhood Parental Alienation syndrome

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PREFACE

- This dissertation is in manuscript format as defined in rules A 7.5.7 as prescribed by the North-West University.
- The referencing and editorial style of this dissertation are in keeping with the guidelines as set out in the Publication Manual (6th edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA).
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LETTER OF CONSENT

Permission is hereby granted for the submission by the first author, O. M. Borstlap of the following dissertation for examination purposes, towards the obtainment of a MA degree in

Clinical Psychology:

An exploration on young adults' experiences of childhood Parental Alienation syndrome

I, declare that this dissertation hereby submitted by me for the Masters' Degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of the North-West is my own independent work and has not been previously submitted by me at another university/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the dissertation in favour of the North-West University.

O. M. Borstlap

Date

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SUMMARY

For over 20 years, the phenomenon of parental alienation and its related characteristics has been described in literature. Various clinicians independently researched and described the pathological alignment of a child within the context of divorce. In the 1980's Richard Gardner coined this "Parental alienation syndrome" (PAS). According to Gardner PAS is characterised by a child's profound preoccupation with criticism against a parent. This criticism is overstated and ungrounded, and it is caused by both conscious and unconscious behaviour by the alienating parent, which influences the child negatively against the alienated parent.

In essence, PAS is the subjective contamination of the child's understanding and beliefs about his/her environment. The alienating parent gives the impression that the targeted parent is unworthy, dangerous, unloving and deserving of the child's rejection. This is done by a series of alienation strategies like bad-mouthing, blaming, limiting contact and belittling. The alienated child, as a result responds with unjustified expressions of hate and discontent towards the targeted parent.

The experience of divorce can be very challenging to children. Research about the relationship between divorce and child adjustment holds that a child's exposure to inter parental conflict and the quality of the parent-child relationship are the two major predictors of children's adjustment during divorce. Research suggests that the negative effects of PAS may include guilt, self-hatred, distortion of reality testing, and general emotional and psychological problems.

The aim of this study was to provide an in-depth exploration and description of how PAS is experienced, and the possible effect it has on children from the perspective of young adults who was possible exposed to PAS as children. This was done by exploring their memories and their recalled experiences of their parents' divorce and the possible effect on their current lives.

In this study a collective exploratory/descriptive case study design was used. Nine voluntary participants, between 18 and 28 years of age, were chosen for this study by means of purposeful sampling strategies. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews that were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Transcribed data were analysed by means of thematic analysis from which themes and sub-themes were derived.

Two main themes with sub-themes were identified. It was found that some of the parental behaviour evident in PAS cases may fall under specific subtypes of psychological maltreatment and leave children feeling angry, worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, incompetent and sceptical about trusting other individuals.

It was found that parents who engage in alienation strategies are likely to discourage autonomous behaviour and lack nurturance and emotional responsiveness towards their children's needs. As result children exposed to PAS learn parental love and acceptance is conditional and is based needs fulfilment of the alienating parent. These expectations are brought forward from the early relationship into adulthood and influences individual's expectations, behaviour, and beliefs about relationships across the lifespan. The results indicate that the lack parental support, encouragement, and responsiveness may negatively influence the self-esteem, autonomy, competence, and relatedness of individuals exposed to

PAS. They reported difficulties with trust, intimacy and social skills and depression as adults.

Key words: divorce, parental alienation syndrome, PAS, parental alienation, long term effects of parental alienations syndrome, experience of parental alienation syndrome.

OPSOMMING

Ouervervreemdingsindroom as 'n verskynsel en die geassosieerde karaktertrekke daarvan word al vir meer as 20 jaar in die literatuur beskryf. Verskeie klinici en ondersoekers ondersoek reeds geruime tyd die patologiese belyning van 'n kind met een voorkeurouer binne die konteks van 'n egskeiding. Gedurende die 1980s het Richard Gardner hierdie verskynsel beskryf as “Ouervervreemdingsindroom” (OVS). Volgens Gardner word OVS gekenmerk deur 'n kind se ongegronde beheptheid met kritiek teen 'n ouer. Hierdie oorbeklemtoonde en ongegronde kritiek word veroorsaak deur die bewustelike en onbewustelike gedrag van die voorkeur ouer, wat daarop gemik is om die kind negatief te beïnvloed teen die vervreemde ouer.

OVS is hoofsaaklik 'n subjektiewe kontaminasie van die kind se verstaan en oortuigings oor sy omgewing. Die voorkeurouer skep die indruk by die kind dat die geteikende ouer verwerp behoort te word omdat hierdie ouer sleg en liefdeloos is en nie die kind se liefde waardig is nie. Dit word gedoen deur 'n reeks vervreemdingstrategieë, insluitende: gemene gerugte, valse beskuldigings, verkleinerings en die beperking van kontak met die geteikende ouer. As gevolg van hierdie strategieë sal die vervreemde kind reageer met ongeregverdigde uitdrukkings van haat en onvergenoegdheid teenoor die geteikende ouer.

Die ervaring en aanpassing na egskeiding is 'n uitdaging vir kinders. Navorsing dui daarop dat kinders se blootstelling aan ouerlike konflik en die kwaliteit van 'n ouer-kind-verhouding die twee belangrikste indikators is van kinders se aanpassing na die egskeiding van hulle ouers. Daar is ook gevind dat die negatiewe gevolge van blootstelling aan OVS

oormatige skuld, selfhaat, swak realiteitskontak en algemene emosionele en sielkundige probleme kan insluit.

Die doel van hierdie studie was die verkenning en beskrywing van jong volwassenes se OVS-ervaring asook die moontlike uitwerking van blootstelling aan OVS as 'n kind. Hierdie doelwit is bereik deur die herinneringe en ervarings van die ouers se egskedding te ondersoek en die invloed daarvan op die lewe van slagoffers te beoordeel.

Tydens hierdie studie is daar gebruik gemaak van 'n kollektiewe beskrywende gevallestudie-ontwerp. Deur middel van doelgerigte steekproefnemingstrategieë is nege vrywillige deelnemers tussen die ouderdom van 18 en 28 jaar geïdentifiseer en ingesluit in die finale steekproef vir hierdie studie. Bandopnames is van die onderhoude gemaak en verbatim getranskribeer. Genoemde data is analiseer deur middel van tematiese analise. Temas en subtemas is uit die gegewens afgelei en gegroepeer.

Dit was moontlik om twee hooftemas met subtemas te identifiseer. Daar is bevind dat die gedrag wat sommige voorkeuouers toepas in OVS-gevalle geklassifiseer kan word as sielkundige mishandeling. Hierdie gedrag laat kinders kwaad voel, maak hulle skepties en bevorder wantroue teenoor mense. Verder kan hierdie gedrag kinders laat glo hulle is waardeloos, sleg, ongeliefd en onbevoeg.

Die resultate dui aan dat die ouers wat vervreemdingstrategieë toepas, waarskynlik nie outonome gedrag in kinders aanmoedig nie. Verder blyk dit dat hierdie ouers 'n gebrek toon aan koestering en min/geen emosionele reaksie toon teenoor hulle kinders se behoeftes nie. Dit leer kinders wat blootgestel is aan OVS dat liefde voorwaardelik is en dat goedkeuring

van hulle ouers afhanklik is van die behoeftevervulling van die voorkeuouer. Bogenoemde aannames steek weer kop uit in volwassenheid en word gereflekteer in individuele verwagtinge, gedrag en oortuigings rakende verhoudings. Die resultate dui daarop dat die gebrek aan ouerlike ondersteuning, aanmoediging en koestering wat OVS-kindere beleef 'n negatiewe impak het op hulle selfbeeld, outonomie, bekwaamheid, en verhoudings. As volwassenes rapporteer hulle probleme met vertrouenswaardigheid, intimiteit, sosiale vaardighede en depressie.

Sleutelwoorde: egskeiding, ouervervreemdingsindroom, OVS, ouervervreemding, langtermyngevolge van ouervervreemdingsindroom, ervaring van ouervervreemdingsindroom

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, STATEMENT OF PROBLEM, AIMS AND OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Parental alienation syndrome is a complex phenomenon that has been the topic of various studies and debates within the academic community for several years. As such, it involves both interpersonal and intrapersonal modalities of human functioning. The effects thereof may severely affect both children and families. PAS is characterised by a child's profound unjustified preoccupation with criticism against one parent, fuelled by both conscious and unconscious acts of programming by the alienating parent.

Even though the concept of PAS has been discussed in literature for years, the lack of universally accepted diagnosis thereof leaves room for misuse of the concept within clinical and legal platforms that in turn threatens the integrity and validity of the phenomenon of PAS. The research suggest that exposure to PAS may have lasting effects on the development of a child that may stretch far into adulthood.

Children of parental alienation may need professional therapeutic assistance and support in order to be able to understand the alienation dynamics that they have been subjected to. They will furthermore need encouragement to look more realistically at their parents in order to begin to dismantle some of the false beliefs about their own worth and abilities that are probably interfering with their process of adaptation to a successful independent adult life.

In this chapter, the context of the study is discussed along with several key concepts; and the working definitions used throughout the study are outlined. An overview of research aims and general structure of this document are also provided.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Divorce is a multidimensional social issue with wide-ranging effects on families. The two major predictors of children's adjustment are their exposure to inter-parental conflict and the quality of the parent-child relationship (Burke, McIntosh, & Gridley, 2009). One of the phenomena related to divorce is what is termed as Parental alienation syndrome (PAS). PAS is characterised by a child's profound preoccupation with criticism against a parent. This criticism is overstated and ungrounded, and it is caused by both conscious and unconscious behaviour by the alienating parent, which influences the child negatively against the alienated parent (Whitcombe, 2014).

The main objective of this study was to investigate the experience of childhood Parental alienation syndrome in a group of young adults in a South-African context by exploring their memories and their recalled experiences of their parents' divorce. In addition, the study aimed to explore the perceived effect these young adults believed it had on their current lives. The study aimed to investigate, clarify and add to the present knowledge base of PAS, how it is experienced by children, and the possible effect it may have on them.

In the 1980s, Richard Gardner identified unique patterns of problematic behaviour that manifested itself in families where divorce was prevalent, primarily in the context of child-custody disputes in high-conflict divorces (Gardner, 1985). Gardner (2001) primarily focused on a wide variety of symptoms associated with a child's alienation from a parent. He

later on coined the term “Parental alienation syndrome” for cases where the behaviour of one parent resulted in the alienation of a child from the other parent (Baker, 2006).

Gardner (2004) distinguished between three degrees of PAS, namely mild, moderate and severe. The child is alienated by means of a series of parental alienation strategies like bad-mouthing, blaming, limiting contact and belittling. The alienating parent gives the impression that the targeted parent is unworthy, dangerous, unloving and deserving of the child’s rejection, and thus enhancing the child’s alienation (Andre & Baker, 2008).

Furthermore, characteristics like passivity and other parenting weaknesses on the side of the targeted or alienated parent render the parent-child relationship even more susceptible to alienation and rejection (Baker & Brassard, 2013).

PAS has been the topic of contentious academic critique for over 20 years (Gardner, 2001). Rand (2011) points out that there has been a great deal of controversy among mental health and legal professionals regarding PAS, especially surrounding the terminology and etiology of this phenomenon. Despite the consensus that children can become pathologically alienated, no standardised assessment and diagnostic tools for PAS have been designed and accepted to date (Baker & Darnall, 2007; Whitcombe, 2014). Furthermore, broad empirical research on PAS seems to be limited (Baker, 2005).

Nonetheless, existing research has indicated that PAS is a valid and reliable construct that has been accepted by the majority of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and legal professionals. The prevalence of PAS has been estimated at roughly 0, 25% of children and adolescents from divorced families (Bernet, 2008). However, the greater awareness of

PAS in both the public and professional domain as well as changes in child-custody¹ legislation has led to an increase in the prevalence of PAS. Furthermore, the occurrence of PAS may possibly be more than reported because of the academic controversy and debate surrounding this phenomenon.

In December 2012 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Board of Trustees approved the final formulation of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth edition (DSM-5)* and “Parental alienation syndrome” was not included (Bernet & Baker, 2013; Lamminen, 2013). Firstly, the use of the term “syndrome” to describe dysfunctional family dynamics, like those involved in PAS cases, was not supported. In addition, it was suggested that the phenomenon could be better accounted for in the diagnostic category of “Parent-child Relational Problems” (Kase-Gottlieb, 2013). The proposals provoked a great deal of comment, discussion and misunderstanding (Rand, 2011). The lack of a universally accepted diagnosis for PAS leaves room for the misuse of the concept within clinical and legal platforms that in turn threatens the integrity and validity of the phenomenon.

In essence, PAS is fundamentally the subjective contamination of the children’s understanding and beliefs about their environment (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Habib & Madaan, 2013). This issue of subjective reality points out one of the fundamental issues surrounding the diagnosis of PAS. What makes the formulation of a universal PAS diagnosis difficult is the very complicated matter of objectively separating the behaviour of parents and the presentation of PAS within children. This enmeshment of subjective experience and

¹ Despite the changes in terminology in the common-law concepts of custody and access to “care” and “contact” to better reflect the rights of children, the majority of legal authorities and scientific treatises still refer to the terms “custody” and “access” when addressing the resolution of decision making in care and contact disputes. In this study, the concepts “custody” and “access” are retained to provide continuity about past research and international literature.

reality complicates the formulation of objective diagnostic criteria that describes the presenting behaviour of one person as opposed to a family system.

Nevertheless, the diagnostic formulation of PAS is in its infancy. The inclusion of PAS in the next editions of DSM and ICD will facilitate greater awareness and understanding of this mental condition and inspire greater research about its parameters, presentation, causes and treatment (Bernet & Baker, 2013). Within the legal setting, it would limit the exploitation of the diagnosis, lead to more effective forensic tools and methods and will insure appropriate intervention.

Even though PAS has become a popular phenomenon in psychological studies, the need for further research on this topic is imperative. The current proposals on the diagnostic formulation (even though not accepted in the DSM-V) could structure and promote more empirical-based research that may lead to the inclusion of PAS in future versions of the DSM (Habib & Madaan, 2013). Bernet (2008) argues that this inclusion will further enable systematic research on PAS and assist clinicians in working with divorced families. Although divorce does not equate to pathology, it certainly has a significant impact on the lives and functioning of individuals and increases the likelihood of a person developing pathology (Gardner, 2001).

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF PRESENT STUDY

The research aims of this study are to explore how several aspects relating to the perceived experience of PAS influenced individuals' judgments about their reality. In keeping with the descriptive case study design and purposeful sampling strategies of the study, young adults between the ages of 19 and 27 will be interviewed. This strategy will

give them the opportunity to voice their perceptions about their parents' divorce, their experiences, expectations, personal understanding and beliefs about themselves and their parents, as a means to determine their experience of PAS. The interviews will be transcribed and analysed using thematic content analysis in an attempt to determine the following objectives: Firstly, the intention is to establish whether PAS was present by identifying possible PAS symptoms and indications of parental alienating behaviour in each case. Secondly, in those cases where PAS is present, the aim is to explore those young adults' subjective experience of their parents' divorce as well as the experience of possible PAS dynamics. Lastly, an analysis of the interviews will attempt to explore the perceived long-term effects these individuals believe their parents' divorce and the possible exposure to PAS had on them.

On a broader level, this study aims to generate more information about the dynamics of PAS and aim to facilitate greater awareness and understanding of the alienation dynamics. In addition, this may act as a guide for future research that in turn may be applied to develop effective treatment plans and interventions strategies regarding PAS in the long term.

Research and data on PAS in the South-African context is limited and further studies should specifically focus on the patterns, dynamics and influences of parental alienation on children in South Africa. By investigating young adults' experiences of childhood PAS and the role it plays in their current functioning, this study would contribute towards generating more information about the dynamics of PAS, as well as awareness and understanding of alienation dynamics, which in turn can be used for developing effective prognostic and therapeutic guidelines in the future. This is an essential element to helping individuals exposed to PAS to achieve long-term well-being.

The approach adopted in this study therefore has been chosen to enable the researcher to explore the experience of their parents' divorce and possible exposure to PAS, in such a manner as to avoid implying the presence of PAS. This approach ensured that participants were protected against the negative effects of stigmatisation and labelling of psychological disorders.

It is expected to gain new insight from the findings into the way children experience PAS as well as the ways in which it might affect them. This might act as a useful guide for future research on the dynamics of PAS and the long-term effects thereof. Furthermore, it may aid the development of divorce programmes and therapeutic intervention for children of divorce and PAS cases, as well as advocate for policies and legislation that aid children in coping with their parents' divorce.

1.4 CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

Defining PAS is a complex task since there is considerable debate amongst academics and practitioners regarding the specific formulation and terminology used to define and describe PAS. Moreover, up to date there is no universally accepted diagnostic criteria and definition for PAS.

In the following section, a summary of working definitions of several key concepts serves to orientate readers regarding the terminology and definitions used within this study.

- *Estrangement*

The working definition for *estrangement* is as follow (Brandes, 2000):

- a) Behaviour (conscious or unconscious) from any parent that can lead to the disruption in the relationship between the child and targeted parent.
 - b) The child is not actively participating in the alienation process.
 - c) Clear evidence of abuse (physical or sexual), neglect, or the presence of other justifiable reasons for the child's rejection.
- *Parental alienation (PA)*

The following working definition for *Parental alienation* can be formulated (Wakeford, 2001; Johnston, 2003):

- a) Behaviour whether conscious or unconscious, from any parent that can lead to the disruption in the relationship between the child and targeted parent.
 - b) The child is not actively participating in the alienation process.
 - c) No clear evidence of abuse (physical or sexual) or neglect or serious reason for the child's rejection is present.
- *Parental alienation syndrome (PAS)*

Parental alienation occurs within families exposed to divorce and high levels of conflict between parents. It is characterised by (Baker & Darnall, 2007; Gardner, 2001; Stahl, 1999):

- a) The unjustified rejection and campaign of denigration against one parent by a child.
- b) The denigration is unjustified and not a reasonable response to the targeted parent's behaviour.
- c) The child's behaviour and campaign of denigration is attributed to :
 - i. Both intentional and unintentional behaviour by the alienating parent that undermines the relationship between the targeted parent and child.
 - ii. The child's own contributions to the campaign of denigration against the targeted parent and weak and poor rationalisation.

It furthermore results in impairments in the child and the targeted parent's relationship as well as other impairments in the overall functioning of the child.

- *Alienating parent*

The *alienating parent* or the preferred parent is defined as the parent that actively contributes to the alienation of a child to ensure the primary attachment between parent and child, and the child's positive regard with the alienating parent, at the expense of the child's relationship with the other parent (Wakeford, 2001). This is achieved through a range of conscious and unconscious behaviour, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

- *Targeted parent*

The targeted parent is defined as the parent from whom the child is alienated by means of the repetitive negative influences of the alienating parent (Wakeford, 2001). The targeted parent's relationship with the child is marked by breaks in contact, discontent and disapproval of the targeted parent. All of these concepts and terms will be discussed in full in Chapter 2.

1.5 AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The following is a structure of the outline of this dissertation. In this introductory chapter the context of the study, as well several key concepts and the aims of the study will be summarised. In Chapter 2 the relevant literature regarding Parental alienation syndrome and divorce will be analysed. This chapter will integrate, discussed and critically evaluate what is known about Parental alienation syndrome today. Included will be the definition, related dynamics and characteristics, the three degrees, the current diagnostic guidelines, long-term consequence and associated behaviour of the various parties involved in PAS.

In Chapter 3, the nature of empirical investigation used in this study will be discussed by means of a summary of the goals of the research as well as the design utilised throughout this study. Included will be a description of the participants, the participant selection process, data gathering and methods of analysis used throughout the study along with the applicable ethical considerations.

The results and discussion of several key themes that emerged from the data will be summarised in Chapter 4. Lastly, in Chapter 5 the conclusions and recommendations of the study along with the inherited weaknesses and strengths are summarised.

CHAPTER 2

PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Parental alienation syndrome and the features of this phenomenon have been discussed in academic circles for more than 30 years. In this chapter, information from different sources and schools of thought were consulted to establish a broad understanding of the parental alienation syndrome phenomenon. The aim of this chapter is to discuss, integrate and critically evaluate what is known about Parental alienation syndrome today.

The discussion includes the definition of Parental alienation syndrome, the related dynamics and characteristics thereof, differentiation between the three degrees of PAS, the current diagnostic guidelines and differential disorders. The chapter will also focus on what is known about children of PAS, the alienating and alienated parents, as well as the long-term influence of PAS and parental alienation on a child. Lastly, the psycho-legal implication as well as intervention for PAS will be examined.

2.2 DIVORCE AS A PHENOMENON

Individuals get married for various reasons that may include legal, social, libidinal, emotional, financial, spiritual, and religious convictions and motivational forces. The nature of the couple's relationship is dependent on an array of interpersonal as well as individual characteristics and the dynamics between the two individuals as well as their environment (Amato & Previti, 2003). It involves a combination of emotions, cognitions and behaviour involved in an intimate relationship that has a significant influence of an individual's self-efficacy and self-esteem. Connectedness is primarily established through friendship, mutual

attraction, common interests, respect, intimacy, physical attraction and commitment (Baron & Byrne, 2000).

Poor marriage satisfaction can be caused by multiple relational difficulties and challenges that fall outside of the scope of this study. The success of relationships and marriages cannot be guaranteed, and inevitably, some marriages end in divorce. Divorce is the dissolution of the marriage institution between partners that involves psychological, emotional, social, financial and civil separation.

2.2.1 DIVORCE IN CONTEXT

The universal institution of marriage is a socially recognised or ritually recognised union or legal contract between partners that establishes the rights and obligations between them, them and their children, and between them and their in-laws (Haviland, Prins, Harald, Mc Bride, & Walrath, 2011). During 2010 in South Africa the Department of Home affairs registered 170 826 civil marriages under the Marriage Act (Department of Social Development, 2012; Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Statistics South Africa, 2011). It is estimated that 22 936 divorces from civil marriages were processed. The largest portion of couples filing for divorce have been married between five and ten years, and in 80% of these cases this was a first divorce. The highest divorce rates were among the black African population (35.6%) followed by (30.5 %) white South Africans (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

Children are involved in more than 56% of all marriages that end in divorce (Statistics South Africa, 2011). According to the South-African Institute for Race Relations (Department of Social Development, 2012), only 35% of children in South Africa are living with both their parents. In contrast, child-headed households and single parenthood is a

common phenomenon in South Africa due to divorce, teenage pregnancy, death and parental estrangement (Department of Social Development, 2012; Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Ziehl, 2002). On average, 40% of children have absent but living fathers. Statistics indicate that 50% all black children, 41% of coloured children, 15% of white children and 12% of indian children in South Africa are growing up without a father. The largest proportion of children in the country is living with their biological mother. Only 2% live with their father (Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

The research depicts a younger generation who is not growing up in a safe and secure environment. Young people are challenged with poverty, crime, HIV, orphan hood, divorce, child-headed or single parent households, a failing school system and general familial breakdown not conducive to healthy development. This familial breakdown appears to be cyclical, where children growing up in dysfunctional families are more likely to have dysfunctional families themselves (Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

2.2.2 FACTORS AFFECTING ADJUSTMENT IN DIVORCE

The outcome of divorce and the effects it has on various parties is largely associated with the individual parties' adjustment to the various changes and challenges that face them during, and after the divorce (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Kelly & Emery, 2003). The adjustment of both parents and children in divorce has been closely linked to various risks and resiliency factors that will be discussed below.

2.2.2.1 Factors affecting parental adjustment

Research shows that a rise in inter-parental conflict in most divorce cases directly follows the separation. However, several studies point out that successful separation can lead

to the reduction of conflict previously present within the marriage (Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski, 2009; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Shienvold, 2011). It would also appear that both parents are at greater risk of psychological and physical health problems. Marital disruption and the associated distress also weaken the immune system, making divorcees more susceptible to acute medical problems, infection and chronic disease (Baron & Byrne, 2000; Brotherson, Rittenbach, & White, 2012).

In addition, divorced individuals stand in greater danger of alcoholism, drug abuse, depression and psychosomatic problems (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Thompson, 2012). Several factors predicting parental adjustment after divorce will be discussed in the following section. It is important to note that several of the factors discussed may contribute to couples getting divorced in the first place, as well as predict and contribute to adjustment to the separation.

2.2.2.1.1 Parental characteristics and pre-morbid functioning

The outcomes of divorce are as varied as the individuals who are involved in the process. Parents' personality, age, coping skills, conflict management, mental health and pre-divorce difficulties all play a crucial part in their adjustment to divorce. Divorce is generally viewed as one of the prominent causes of depression in adults (Tennant, 2002). Other vulnerabilities may also be triggered by the stress associated with divorce. According to Brotherson, Rittenbach, and White (2012) individuals who struggle to manage a good self-esteem and self-worth prior to divorce experience greater difficulties to adjust after divorce. The personality functioning of parents as well as the presence of psychological pathology prior to divorce have been linked to higher levels of conflict during divorce and difficulties in parental adjustment post-divorce (Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski, 2009).

2.2.2.1.2 Social support

Divorce is associated with significant changes in the family structure and daily living arrangements of families. It brings about disruptions in social networks, loss of friends, family interaction and socializing. This change in the social support individuals experience has a marked effect on the coping and emotional regulation of individuals (Brotherson, Rittenbach, & White, 2012). Residential parents tend to struggle to re-establish a social life and report having considerably less contact with other adults than married individuals (Baron & Byrne, 2000; Ladd & Zvonkovic, 1994).

Research findings also suggest that residential parents tend to be overworked, overwrought and overwhelmed by their own and their children's needs. In contrast non-residential parents characteristically feel rejected, insignificant and under-appreciated (Pruett, Williams, Insabella, & Little, 2003). Generally, men are more susceptible to feelings of loneliness due to more restricted social support systems. These secondary effects of divorce may further stress divorces and may lead to poor adjustment and feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed. According to Baron and Byrne (2000) sufficient social support to divorcing individuals assists them to cope and adjust to the specific challenges that face them.

2.2.2.1.3 Decoupling

Most individuals do not make the decisions to divorce overnight. According to Tien, Sandler and Zautra (2000) there is usually a breakdown in communication and contact, poor conflict resolution, sexual breakdown, sabotaging and fighting that form the transition phase to divorce. One partner is usually in denial of these problems and sometimes blames the partner for these problems. The divorcing party generally initiates the psychological detachment from the partner, known as decoupling. According to Bickerdike and Littlefield

(2010) the “leavers” initially often fare better in terms of emotional well-being than those who have been “left” and who often feel rejected. This is because most often the individual that initiates a divorce is further along in the decoupling process and has resolved more of the emotional and psychological concerns over the divorce, than the individual receiving the request for divorce. The child often responds with revengeful, confronting and aggressive behaviour. This externalising behaviour leads to the short-term elevation of internal distress. Higher conflict is associated with couples where there is a significant difference in their decoupling process (Amato & Previti, 2003). The levels and degree of interpersonal conflict corresponds directly to the way individuals anticipate and adjust to the various challenges of divorce (Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski, 2009).

2.2.2.1.4 High-conflict divorce

Individual responses to divorce may vary; individuals may initially feel free, happy, relieved or liberated, In contrast, they may feel angry, shocked, rejected or revengeful (Amato & Previti, 2003; Tien, Sandler, & Zautra, 2000). As the initial shock of the divorce wears off and reality sets in, individuals come to grips with their feelings of betrayal, anger and mourning and even with the internal conflict over their choices. In some cases, conflict in the divorce is aggravated when individuals become hostile and destructive towards one another. High-conflict divorces are identifiable by a) the high degrees of mistrust; b) incidents of verbal abuse; c) intermittent physical aggression; d) ongoing legislation and custody disputes, and e) ongoing difficulty in communicating and taking care of the children two to three years following a separation (Johnston & Roseby, 1997; Shienvold, 2011). The level of conflict has been associated with adjustment of both parents and child post-divorce. Higher levels of conflict have been associated with increased family conflict and maladjustment and less positive divorce resolution. These less favourable divorce conditions

hinder the coping ability of both parents and children (Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski, 2009; Shienvold, 2011).

2.2.2.2 Factors affecting children's adjustment

Evidence show that children of divorce are significantly confronted with more adjustment problems than those of intact families (Kelly, 1993; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Research indicates that various factors may influence a child's adjustment after divorce. This includes the child's age and specific vulnerabilities, parent factors and the familial processes after divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Shienvold, 2011). The following are several important aspects that may influence a child's adjustment after divorce.

2.2.2.2.1 Quality of parenting

The difficulty in children's adjustment during and after divorce appears to be linked to the vital disruption of parenting functions and the child's exposure to detrimental parental conflict (Kelly, 2006). In some divorce cases, basic parental responsibilities become secondary to parental conflict and the needs of the parents. Structure, discipline and warm and consistent parenting may become neglected, which has a significant impact on the child's development as well as the family structure (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Campana, Henderson, Stolberg, & Schum, 2008).

The shift in family dynamics may lead to role reversal between parents and children causing children to become angry, non-compliant, depressed, and anti-social, and their school performance deteriorates (Kelly & Emery, 2003). According to Holborn and Eddy (2011) children's needs are often neglected due to the emotional turmoil of the parents. Besides, the

custodial arrangements, visitation and the fit thereof with children's evolving needs further predict children's adjustment during divorce (Trinder, Kellet, & Swift, 2008). Warm and positive parenting facilitates good adjustment after divorce. Misplaced guilt or anger towards children negatively affects children's adjustment and future development. Positive parenting is maintained by parents who are approachable, warm, nurturing, strict, fair, and sensitive to their child's needs, involved in and encourages healthy development (Campana, Henderson, Stolberg, & Schum, 2008; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Holborn & Eddy, 2011).

2.2.2.2.2 Parental adjustment

The best predictor of child well-being following a divorce has been identified as whether or not the children are exposed to parental conflict (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). The degrees to which the children are drawn into the conflict between parents/caregivers predict the outcome of their adjustment and the distress they experience (Amato, 1993; Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski, 2009; Brotherson, Rittenbach, & White, 2012;).

Additionally, maternal depression, anxiety, and stimulation/support of the child appeared to be significant predictors of child adjustment (Pruett, Williams, Insabella, & Little, 2003). Poor parental adjustment and distress after divorce often lead to the neglect of individual developmental and emotional needs of the children involved. These children are prone to higher levels of anxiety, depression and behavioural problems themselves due to their parents' poor adjustment (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Research indicate that parents that struggle to adjust after divorce may be preoccupied with personal feelings and distress and may in turn be less attentive to the needs of their children (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013). Moreover, relationships that foster secure attachment

between parents and children prior and following divorce reduce the risk associated with divorce. Secure attachment is facilitated by parents who are emotionally responsive, nurturing, sensitive, and who create a supportive environment for their children to regulate their distress (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010).

2.2.2.2.3 Multiple environmental changes

Children at various developmental ages are vulnerable to the difficulties and conflict in divorce. Children could experience an array of environmental changes that may provoke internal distress and anxiety that in turn may lead to depression, separation anxiety and various other behavioural problems (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). These changes may include the loss of everyday contact with one parent, moving to a new house, loss of pets and friends, relocation, financial or material loss (Kelly & Emery, 2003). In most cases, these changes are unavoidable. Without the proper attention, however, it may lead to immense psychological distress and disruption in children's lives. Children's adjustment is closely related to the predictability and stability of their environment after divorce as well as their ability to express their feelings of loss (Kelly, 1993). According to Andre and Baker (2008), parents who allow their children to freely express the conflicting emotions and feelings of loss they experience during divorce, may aid their children in more successful adjustment during and after the divorce.

2.2.2.2.4 Re-partnering

According to Sigelman and Rider (2006) up to 75% of single parents remarry within three to five years after a divorce. This is another major transition for children within a short period since most families only adjust to divorce after two years (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Children take time to adjust to new family roles and

relationships after the remarriage of one of their parents. Parents' new relationships may lead to an increase in familial conflict and role ambiguities that further aggravate adjustment difficulties (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Children may feel abandoned, jealous, angry and resentful toward their new siblings and even their parents. These difficulties may become even worse if other siblings are brought into the marriage or if the repartnering happens within a short period after divorce (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010).

2.2.2.2.5 Child characteristics and pre-morbid functioning

Age, personality, prior vulnerabilities and temperament are among the factors that influence children's experience of their parents' divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Shienbold, 2011). Younger children are more susceptible to long-term emotional distress and guilt following their parents' divorce (Pruett, Williams, Insabella, & Little, 2003). This is attributed to their limited cognitive understanding of the changes in their surroundings. Studies of older children have shown consistent negative effects on adolescents' behaviour, social interactions, psychological well-being, and academic performance.

In general, children's adjustment difficulties are exacerbated by marital transitions and conflict (Kelly, 1993). In contrast, children who are confident, competent, and easy tempered, have a good self-esteem, sense of humour and an internal locus of control are likely to attract positive reactions and support from others. This enhances their adjustment and copings skills during their parents' divorce (Amato, 1993; Kelly & Emery, 2003).

2.2.2.2.6 Nature and degree of parental conflict

Divorce does not always reduce conflict between individuals. It is estimated that twenty to twenty-five per cent of children experience high-conflict family relations following their parents' divorce (Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski, 2009; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). According to research approximately a quarter of co-parenting, relationships are still conflictual three years after separation (Amato, 1993; Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski, 2009; Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Whether or not the children are exposed to parental/caregiver conflict has been identified as the best predictor of child well-being following a divorce or partner separation, especially the degree to which the children are drawn into the conflict between parents/caregivers (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Effective conflict management between parents assist and allows children to form a healthy attachment to parents. In cases of severe conflict, children become a pawn in parental conflict.

Divorce or partner separation can be an extremely hostile and emotional experience for a family unit (Gardner, 2004). Although children involved in divorce or partner separation can be resilient, some will suffer in terms of well-being and functioning (Amato, 1993; Roth, Harkins, & Eng, 2014). Their alignments and alienations resulting from high-conflict divorce do affect their overall adjustment and functioning later on in life (Baker, Burkhard, & Albertson-Kelly, 2012). In some high-conflict cases, a parent may attempt to alienate a child or children from the other parent (Gardner, 2004). Some children of divorce can become unjustifiably estranged from a parent and aligned with the other parent (Johnston, 2003). Richard Gardner also described this phenomenon as Parental alienation syndrome.

2.3 PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME

For over two decades, the phenomenon of parental alienation and its related characteristics have been described in literature by varied formulations and definitions. During the 1980s and 1990s, according to Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker and Morrison (2010), various clinicians independently researched and identified the same phenomenon that describes the pathological alignment and triangulation of a child within the context of divorce (Bricklin, 1995; Clawar & Rivlin, 1991; Gardner, 1985; Kopetski, 1998; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). In some divorce cases, they established that conflicted parents attempted to win the sympathy and support of their child. The child is recruited by one parent as an ally in their struggle against the other parent, thereby becoming pathologically aligned with them. This results in the refusal of contact, verbal and behavioural preference of one parent and the denigration and rejection of the other.

2.3.1 DEFINITIONS AND CLARIFICATION OF PAS RELATED TERMINOLOGY

Defining PAS is a complex task since it is a phenomenon involving both interpersonal and intrapersonal modalities of human functioning. The phenomenon includes the behaviour, cognitive components, relational dynamics, emotions and experiences of multiple individuals. It is also one of many phenomena underlying alienation, estrangement, indoctrination, hostility and interrupted contact between parent and child within the context of divorce (De Jager, 2008).

The poor parameters of PAS and the uncertainty over its definition, etiology and clinical description have led to a widespread debate over the validity and reliability of the concept as well as the misdiagnoses and misuse of the term within the legal system. It has become a strategic tool in custodial warfare that includes false allegations of abuse and

neglect as a means to maintain custody of a child. On the other hand, non-custodial parents have used false allegations of PAS and related symptoms as a means to regain custody over their children (Ellis & Boyan, 2010).

2.3.1.1 Differentiation between PA and PAS

In defining a concept, one sets out to outline a phenomenon clearly and to identify the essential attributes and conditions related to its manifestation. One primary source of confusion related to PAS is the language associated with the concept. In the literature the terms “parental alienation”, “parental alienation syndrome” and “alienated child” are all used synonymously (Baker & Darnall, 2007). Moreover, the meaning and context in which these words are used differ between authors. When defining PAS it is important to differentiate between “Parental alienation syndrome” (PAS) and “Parent alienation” (PA). Both may occur in the context of divorce and child-custody battles, but it is not restricted to this context (Darnall, 1998). Comprehensive clarification of the approach and terminology used to define PAS is essential to avoid any confusion surrounding the phenomenon.

Some authors use the term “Parental alienation” to describe the process where the child become aligned with one parent and rejects the other parent of justifiable reasons (for example abuse or neglect) and “Parental alienation syndrome” to describe an alignment with one parent whilst *unjustifiably* rejecting and denigrating the other (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010).

In other sources, the term “Parental alienation” is used to describe the tactics and behaviour used by parent to undermine the child’s relationship with the targeted parent. These include the brainwashing and both conscious and unconscious alienating behaviour

described in the definition of PAS (Lowenstein, 2013). Parental alienation syndrome therefore, is the result and child's response to these tactics. The term describes the condition of the child (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010).

According to Darnall (1998) the differentiation between PA and PAS is not based upon identifying the perpetrator and the victim. In regards to the process of alienation, PAS as a phenomenon focuses on the *child's behavioural responses* to a parent's actions, whereas PA focuses on *parental behaviour* toward the child and other parent (Moné & Biringen, 2006).

Other authors use "Parental alienation" as an umbrella term to describe a situation where the alienation is present regardless of cause (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010). It describes the general triadic relationship that can develop between parents and children. In this context, Parental alienation syndrome is thus relatively described as a type of Parental alienation. It is more complex in its presentation. It involves one parent that undermines the child's relationship with the targeted parent and the child contributes in this rejection of the targeted parent (Wakeford, 2001).

Hence, parental alienation is used as an umbrella term for the occurrence of alienation or relational estrangement regardless of the causes. According to Wakeford (2001) it is the extent and depth of alienation, the apparent innocence of the alienating parent and lastly the child's own contributions to the denigration of the targeted parent that distinguishes PAS from PA. According to Gardner (1998) the child has not adopted the preferred parent's views and has not individually contributed to the vilification of the targeted parent.

Authors supporting a systemic approach to Parental alienation prefer to use the term “alienated child” rather than PA or PAS. For example, Johnston (2003) has consistently avoided the PAS terminology to avoid the controversy associated with the concept. These cases are referred to as “children in alignments.” The term “alienated child” is used to describe a child who freely and persistently expresses unreasonable negative feelings and beliefs toward a parent that are significantly disproportionate to the child’s actual experience with that parent (Johnston, 1993).

Uncertainty about which terminology and the different theoretical formulations of PAS leaves readers with a vague sense of what PAS is. It threatens the general acceptance of the term and leaves room for the exploitation of the term within the legal system.

2.3.1.2 Defining PA, estrangement and PAS

Ellis and Boyan (2010) describe parental alienation as a process where children become estranged from their parents. This is due to actions on the part of the estranged parent that the majority of people would agree are offensive, dangerous or immoral. Additionally, in the case of parent alienation the cause of the deterioration in the parent-child relationship is readily apparent. Thus, where true parental abuse and/or neglect are present, the child’s animosity may be justified. Hence, the parental alienation-syndrome explanation for the child’s hostility is not applicable.

The difference between estrangement and alienation depends on whether or not the child’s rejection of the targeted parent is disproportionate to the experience the child has with that parent. Thus, the difference between alienation and estrangement depends on whether the rejection or negative feelings the child have towards the parent is justified or not.

For the purpose of this study, *estrangement*, *Parental alienation* and *Parental alienation syndrome* are defined as follows:

The following working definition for *Parental alienation* can be formulated (Johnston, 2003; Wakeford, 2001):

- a) Behaviour, whether conscious or unconscious, from any parent that can lead to the disruption in the relationship between the child and targeted parent.
- b) The child is not actively participating in the alienation process.
- c) No clear evidence of abuse (physical or sexual) or neglect or serious reason for the child's rejection is present.

The working definition for *estrangement* is as follows (Brandes, 2000):

- a) Behaviour, whether conscious or unconscious, from any parent that can lead to the disruption in the relationship between the child and targeted parent.
- b) The child is not actively participating in the alienation process.
- c) Clear evidence of abuse (physical or sexual), neglect, or the presence of other justifiable reasons for the child's rejection.

The working definition for Parental alienation syndrome as accepted in this study is as follows (Baker & Darnall, 2007; Gardner, 2001; Stahl, 1999):

- a) The unjustified rejection and campaign of denigration against one parent by a child.
- b) The denigration is unjustified and not a reasonable response to the targeted parent's behaviour.
- c) The child's behaviour and campaign of denigration is attributed to :

- i. Both intentional and unintentional behaviour by the alienating parent that undermines the relationship between the targeted parent and child.
- ii. The child's own contributions to the campaign of denigration against the targeted parent and weak and poor rationalisation.

Even though the concept of PAS is largely characterised by controversy it can be argued that some misconception surrounding the dynamics and definition of PAS can be avoided by using congruent referencing and terminology that clarifies the theoretical base of the literature.

2.3.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF PAS

The concept of PAS not only includes conscious and subconscious factors within the preferred parent that contribute to the parent's influencing the child's alienation, but also contain independent factors within the child that cultivate the syndrome (Gardner, 1998). According to Gardner's earlier work the key characteristic of this disorder is *obsessive alienation* from a parent within a child-custody dispute (Gardner, 1991; Habib & Madaan, 2013). Lund (1995) however, is of the opinion that this puts too much emphasis on the psychopathology and the behaviour of the parent rather than on the child who finds himself/herself on the receiving end of the diagnosis. Brandes (2000) posed that in its primary manifestation PAS is the *child's unjustified campaign of denigration* against a parent. This disparagement results from the combination of the programming or "brainwashing" of parent's indoctrinations and the child's own contributions to the vilification of the parent.

In the review of the literature, four main themes emerged regarding the characteristics of Parental alienation syndrome. These include programming and brainwashing, the child's unjustified campaign of denigration, alignment and rejection of parents within the context of divorce.

2.3.2.1 Programming and brainwashing

Gardner (2002) defines “programming” or “brainwashing” as the child's absorption or incorporation of the parent's automatic responses or attitudes embedded in the brain circuitry. This results in the verbalisations and automatic behaviour that circumvents the child's previous desires, beliefs and judgements.

Wakeford (2001) pointed out concerns regarding the terminology used to describe PAS. She held that the use of terms like “unconscious” and “conscious” are used without explaining the specific dynamics between them. Further interchangeable use of the word “programming” and “brainwashing” might cause confusion in the understanding of the dynamics of PAS. She also considers the metaphorical term “brainwashing” as more successful in describing the dynamics of PAS. It refers to the process where individuals are persuaded to abandon their own attitudes, behaviour and standards for those of someone else.

According to Kopetski (1998) the above-mentioned phenomenon is characterised by a common delusion held by both the alienating parent and their child. This delusion entails that only the alienating parent (and only this parent) can provide the child with the relationship necessary for psychological survival. PAS is therefore the intentional parental attempt to alienate a child from the other parent, by “poisoning” the child's mind (Brandes, 2000). Darnall (1998), on the other hand, states that alienation can take various forms and can be

defined as any constellation of *unconscious* or *conscious* behaviour that results in the disturbance of the parent-child relationship. Baker and Darnall (2007) described these behaviours as follows:

Conscious acts of programming include but are not limited to:

- Denigrating the other parent in front of the child.
- Making statements:
 - Statements that the parent abandoned the children.
 - False allegations of abuse and neglect.
 - Virtual allegations, for instance, abuse is only hinted at to cast aspersions on the character of the targeted parent that is very difficult to contest or disprove (Cartwright, 1993).
- Exaggerating minor flaws in the targeted parent.

Unconscious or subtle acts of programming include:

- Sabotaging visitation through guilt inducement and passive discouragement.
- Attributing negative aspects to the targeted parent without actually saying them.

Thus, Parental alienation syndrome will take on different forms. The presentation will depend on the different underlying motivations and various strategies the alienator uses, as well as the different motivations of the child for siding with the alienating parent (Baker, 2006). A mutually reinforcing feedback loop develops during PAS regardless of the relative contributions to PAS by the alienating parent or the aligned child. This results in a self-generating “brainwashing” process, which is resistant to outside influence and to reality

testing (Rand, 1997). In other words, the child's subjective experience is contaminated. This makes for a phenomenon extreme difficult to identify, diagnose and treat.

2.3.2.2 The child's unjustified campaign of denigration

As explained above one of the defining features of PAS is the campaign of denigration against one parent. Darnall (1998) explains that this alienating behaviour towards the child, aimed at harming the relationship with the targeted parent is called Parental alienation. He differentiates this from Parental alienation syndrome, which according to him is the symptomatic expression of alienation by the child towards the targeted parent.

Gardner (2002) explained that in PAS we see not only programming of the child by one parent to denigrate the other parent, but also self-created contributions by the child in support of the alienating parent's campaign of denigration against the alienated parent. Examples of behaviour that can be found in the child's campaign of denigration include (Weigel & Donovan, 2006):

- Unjustified expressions of hate.
- Volunteering of negative information about the targeted parent.
- Minimizing of previous positive experiences with the targeted parent.
- Weak, frivolous, and absurd rationalisations by the child for their criticism and rejection of the targeted parent.

In 2001, Janelle Burrill compared the number of symptoms manifested by the parents and children of PAS. She found a correlation between the alienating parents' behaviour and

the child's negative behaviour toward the alienated parent (Burrill, 2001). As motioned above, PAS results from the interaction between the alienating parent and the child; and by reinforcing one another this process develops into a self-reinforcing system that is difficult to terminate (Cartwright, 1993). Rand (1997) considers the child's contributions to PAS to be due to several reasons. Firstly, the child seeks to fulfil the needs of the alienating parent, as well as their own needs to be accepted. Secondly, by rejecting the targeted parent the child is negatively empowered. They are able to gain a sense of control over their environment and avoid the ongoing loyalty conflicts often involved in PAS cases.

Differentiating between alienation, unjustified denigration, estrangement and justified denigration is a difficult task (Vassiliou & Cartwright, 2001). This further complicates the identification and diagnoses of PAS for practitioners who have the difficult task of establishing whether PAS is really present and if the claims of the children involved in PAS cases hold any merit (Lowenstein, 2013). Regardless the reasons the child contribute to the alienation it is crucial to note that their animosity toward the targeted parent is fundamentally *unjustified*.

2.3.2.3 Alignment and rejection

According to Johnston (1993), it is not uncommon for children of divorce to become aligned with one parent. This installs a sense of empowerment within the child by not being caught in the middle. Most children and adolescents of divorce are still eager to have an ongoing relationship with both parents (Rand, 1997). There might be cases where the animosity towards the parent is grounded on the premises that they want a better relationship with the parent, but that still implies a need for contact.

In PAS the child becomes aligned with one parent and preoccupied with unjustified and/or exaggerated denigration of the other. The child's once love-bonded relationship with the target/rejected parent is destroyed (Rand, 1997; Walker, Brantley, & Rigsbee, 2004). The alienating parent and the child have an unhealthy alliance based on shared distorted ideas about the targeted parent. When this happens, the child wholly adopts the views of the alienating parent (Baker, 2005).

Gardner (1998) ascertains that the self-generated denigration of the other parent as mentioned above is the result of this pathological alignment with the alienating parent. This has also been described in the various sources as an enmeshed relationship (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013). Enmeshed relationships have also been associated with the presence of parental pathology, which will be discussed later on in this chapter. The key focus of this disorder is on the child's alignment with one parent and rejection of the other parent. Any contact with the targeted parent is seen as a direct threat to the relationship between the child and the alienating parent (Brandes, 2000).

The rejection of a parent by the child is rationalised, weak, frivolous, and absurd justifications (Habib & Madaan, 2013; Weigel & Donovan, 2006). It forms part of the child's campaign of denigration against the targeted parent, which in essence is unjustified or disproportioned to the behaviour of the targeted parent.

2.3.2.4 Prevalent in divorce and child custody battles

In his definition of PAS Gardner (2002) proposed that PAS is a childhood disorder that arises almost exclusively in the context of child-custody disputes. He hypothesised that

PAS is a serious diagnosis, which may be provoked by issues that involve serious emotional distress, such as custody (Gardner, 1985).

According to Vassiliou and Cartwright (2001) PAS is a syndrome that is often associated with an elevated level of conflict pre-divorce, during divorce and post-divorce. As the divorce and litigation continues, escalation in conflict among the divorcing parents is common. They believe that this conflict propels and intensifies the occurrence of PAS. Cartwright (1993) theorised that essentially it is the intensity of the emotional conflict between estranged spouses (married or not) which provokes PAS. Therefore, hypothetically any disagreement, serious or frivolous, may trigger the development of PAS. According to his findings, it appears that other, non-custodial disagreements like finances, property division, or child support may also trigger the syndrome by inducing an emotional climate conducive to PAS.

The development of PAS can further be encouraged by third parties like a new spouse or girlfriend, in-laws, or unprincipled lawyers seeking to extend rather than resolve the litigation. This prolonged involvement of legal intervention increases the severity and permanence of PAS (Cartwright, 1993). Lund (1995) suggested that the definition of PAS contributes to its own exploitation and misuse in court. Furthermore, the formulation of PAS is similar to the win-lose approach of the court and encourages the disturbed versus healthy contest between parents. Parents and their legal representation set out to make the other party seem incompetent in any way possible. This practise also contributes to a rise in false allegations of PAS, where claims of alienation have become a tactic to denigrate the target parent. Furthermore, courts that are slow to render judgements are only one of the ways that alienating parents misuse the legal system to further their scheme of alienation (Cartwright,

1993; Habib & Madaan, 2013). This suggests that the etiology of PAS may be much broader than previously believed. It can happen in both intact and divorced families with or without the presence of custody litigations (Vassiliou & Cartwright, 2001).

2.3.3 IDENTIFYING PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME

Gardner (2002) held that Parental alienation syndrome (PAS) is a childhood disorder where the primary presenting behaviour is the unjustified campaign of denigration against a parent. This campaign is the result of the combination of programming or brainwashing and indoctrinations by alienating parents and the child's own contributions to the vilification of the target parent. In his work with PAS for over four decades, Gardner (2001) identified a cluster of eight symptoms present in PAS cases. The symptoms in the cluster predictably manifest themselves together as a group depending on the degree of PAS. Gardner (2002) proposed these eight symptoms, which appear primarily in children with PAS. According to Gardner (1998) these symptoms share common etiological factors even though they might appear to be unrelated. The following is a discussion of the eight symptoms of PAS:

2.3.3.1 Campaign of denigration

In PAS, the child actively partakes in a campaign of denigration against the targeted parent. The programming parent initially fuels the child's behaviour. The denigration becomes more severe when the child learns that the expressed hatred is beneficial to a relationship with the alienating parent (Raso, 2004). The campaign manifests itself in the child's expression of anger or hate toward the targeted parent. They frequently refuse visitation or are reluctant to contact with the targeted parent. They accuse the targeted parent of a vast range of behaviour and maltreatment in order to reflect the parent's "poor character" (Baker & Darnall, 2007).

2.3.3.2 Weak, absurd, or frivolous rationalisations for the deprecation

Children with PAS give weak and absurd rationalisations for their vilification and denigration of the targeted parent (De Jager, 2008; Lowenstein, 2013). Catastrophic thinking and unreasonable behavioural pretext to their justifications usually fuel rationalisations for their deprecation of the targeted parent. For example, “My dad maltreats me. He forces me to do things I do not want to. Like the one time, he took me to Disney World when I clearly said I do not want to go” (Raso, 2004). Gardner (1998) held that these rationalisations are not just the result of the alienating parents’ programming, but that children also actively produce their own rationalisations for their behaviour.

2.3.3.3 Lack of ambivalence

Children exposed to PAS present with dichotomous thinking and a lack of ambivalence in their description of both parents. The child objectifies the alienating parent and sees this parent as “all good” and the targeted parent as “all bad” (Baker & Darnall, 2007). The child minimises or contests all positive or pleasant previous experiences with the targeted parent. For example, a boy says that he has no positive memories of his dad. The child primarily only expresses positive emotions towards the alienating parent, and simultaneously imitate or model his behaviour on that of the alienating parent (Raso, 2004).

Waldron and Joanis (1996) describe this lack of ambivalence as “splitting” (a term related to object relations theory). Splitting is a psychological defence mechanism used by individuals to deal with anxiety caused by their environment or people that evoke ambivalence. Splitting or compartmentalising positive and negative emotions leads to fragmented views and opinions of themselves or others (Colman, 2001).

These children use “blended” pronouns, referring to themselves as “we” or “us” (Waldron & Joanis, 1996). Furthermore, they use irrelevant or reprehensible information to denigrate the parent (De Jager, 2008). This is a strong indicator of PAS, particularly when the child finds it difficult to validate the claims. For example, a boy claims that his father does not love him because he was not present at the time of his birth. This type of information is impossible for the child to know about without being communicated accordingly by the alienating parent.

2.3.3.4 The “independent-thinker” phenomenon

Children of PAS usually claim that their behaviour and feelings are their own, and that their decisions and reflection of the alienating parent’s behaviour or feelings are true. The child would claim that the choice of rejection is their own and that the alienating parent is just respecting their wishes (Raso, 2004). According to Gardner (1998) the child protects the alienating parent against guilt, criticism and embarrassment. The alienating parent reinforces this behaviour by giving direct or indirect positive feedback to the child’s denigration of the targeted parent. Children of PAS thus claim to have their own thoughts but their words mimic those of the alienating parent. They present with a parrot-like echolalia of the language used by the alienating parent. This reflects on the enmeshed relationship with the alienating parent (Waldron & Joanis, 1996).

2.3.3.5 Automatic support of the alienating parent in the parental conflict

Gardner (2001) holds that the alienated child always sees the preferred parent’s position as valid. Raso (2004) describes the child as having an automatic love for the alienating parent irrespective of the behaviour of that parent. This love is born out of the child’s perception that the alienating parent is either weak or a victim or perfect and superior

in relation to the targeted parent (Cartwright, 1993). This, for example, is evident in the case where a mother claims and reports to a child that the father is not paying maintenance. Even if the father shows the child the cheque that proves that maintenance was paid, the child will believe the cheque is fraudulent and not that his mother is lying (Warshack, 2000). In other words, the indoctrination by the alienating parent alters the child's reality testing abilities.

2.3.3.6 Absence of guilt over cruelty to and/or exploitation of the alienated parent

Children of PAS show no remorse over their behaviour towards the alienated parent (Raso, 2004). They also express no need to reconcile with the alienated parent and see little value in building a relationship with them. These children furthermore feel no shame for exploiting the goodness of the targeted parent for their personal gain (Wakeford, 2001). Gardner (1998) holds that this absence of guilt is the cruel effect of programming rather than an attribute of cognitive immaturity. For example, the child will maintain, "He doesn't deserve to see me and paying all that money is a good punishment for him."

2.3.3.7 The presence of borrowed scenarios

Gardner explained that children of PAS use terminology that is not their own. The language the child uses is most often environmentally coached (Raso, 2004). The terminology used by the child is usually developmentally inappropriate and reflects the language and accusations that the alienating parent frequently uses (Baker & Darnall, 2007). For example, "Mommy is homosexual" or "Daddy's new girlfriend is a slut." These children find it difficult to support their accusations and struggle to explain with comprehension what their accusations mean (Wakeford, 2001).

2.3.3.8 Spread of animosity to the friends and/or extended family of the alienated parent

A PAS child's hostility may extend to the targeted parent's whole family and anyone associated with them. Children might refuse to visit or have contact with their grandparent or other family members. Raso (2004) is of the opinion that it might be because some family members would try to motivate the child to repair the relationship with the targeted parent. The same "splitting" dynamic causes the child to extend the campaign of denigration to the targeted parent's family and friends. The children also use weak rationalisations for their animosity or refusal of contact with family associated with the targeted parent (Cartwright, 1993). Once again, neither child nor alienating parent shows any guilt over their behaviour or rejection of family members (Wakeford, 2001).

During the same time Gardner formulated his eight criteria for PAS, other researchers independently identified parent-child interactions evident during the process of alienation. Their results were very similar to the conclusions Gardner made about the characteristics of PAS (De Jager, 2008). Kopetski (1998) found that in 20% of the cases:

- The child shared the distorted negative perception the alienating parent has of the alienated parent.
- Visitation with the targeted parent is disturbed by the child's unfounded anger or distress.
- The targeted parent's contact with the child is blocked by various tactics of the alienating parent. This is then justified by the child's rejection and fear of the alienated parent.
- The alienating parent believes the alienation process is justified.

- The alienation is a form of justified punishment by the alienating parent.
- The need for a healthy relationship with both parents is not recognised by the alienating parent.

According to Lund (1995) the cluster of symptoms Gardner formulated is not sufficient as diagnostic criteria for PAS. He stated that not all cases of PAS fit neatly within the framework Gardner developed. This is true in the sense that Gardner's initial proposed formulation of PAS did not differentiate clearly enough between the degrees of PAS. His earlier work focused on describing children with severe PAS. Raso (2004) states that Gardner was able to divide the child's manifestation of denigration into categories but not those of the alienating parents, because they overlapped too much. This is to be expected, because PAS is a phenomenon that involved the reality and perceptions of the parent and the child as well as the alternative reality that is created between them. Thus, it is very difficult to delineate between the individual contributions of both the alienating parent and the child. It is important to remember that PAS is a childhood syndrome, making Gardner's descriptive focus on the child appropriate (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010).

2.3.4 DEGREES OF PARENTAL ALIENATION SYNDROME

During his work with PAS in 1998, Gardner expanded his description of PAS by differentiating between three degrees of PAS that can be seen on a continuum (Gardner, 1998). In addition to the eight identifying characteristics Gardner formulated for PAS, he added four more additional aspects that needed to be evaluated. This allows for a greater in-depth understanding of different behavioural presentation of each degree of PAS (De Jager, 2008)

The first is the presence of *transitional difficulties during visitation time* (Gardner, 1998). Turkat (1994) estimates that six million children in the United States have their visitation interfered with even though visitation with the noncustodial parent is a fundamental right of both child and parent. In PAS cases the interference of the child's visitation with the targeted parent becomes a tactic that alienating parents use to alienate their children. As a result, children with PAS present with problematic behaviour when transitioning between parents. In severe cases of PAS, children refuse visitation completely and respond with fear and anger at the idea of visitation (Gardner, 1998).

The second aspect of note regarding the differentiation between the different degrees of PAS is the *child's behaviour during visitation*. In less severe cases of PAS children occasionally present with behavioural difficulties during the visitation with the targeted parent (Gardner, 1998). On the other side of the spectrum children with severe PAS present with destructive and continual provocative behaviour throughout visitation.

The last aspect Gardner (1998) points out is the child's *attachment and bonding with both alienated and alienating parents*. Garber (2004) holds that a child's attachment, as outlined in the theory of John Bowlby, is a natural tool for childcare and of family system cohesion. In severe PAS cases the bonding between the alienating parent and child becomes pathological and is characterised by parental over-involvement, the child's inability to individualise and paranoid bonding between alienator and child. Gardner (1998) held that if these three aspects as well as the eight characteristics of PAS are taken into consideration; PAS could be grouped into mild, moderate and severe PAS.

2.3.4.1 Mild PAS

According to Stahl (1999) this type of alienation is relatively benign. The alienating parent is mostly supportive of the child's contact with the targeted parent. These children are allowed their own view of the targeted parent, but at the same time, they tend to be more loyal to the alienating parent. They are free to express ambivalent feelings toward both parents and they are allowed to convey affection and love towards the targeted parent. At times, the children in this category contribute to denigrate the targeted parent. Children do this to strengthen their bond with the alienating parent (Gardner, 1991). Furthermore, children with mild PAS change easily from household to household during visitation, unless provoked by the alienating parent.

The children in this category have usually developed a healthy psychological bond with both their parents. The alienating parent continuously tries to alter the child's perception of the targeted parent by means of conscious and unconscious programming (Wakeford, 2001). Thus mild degrees of programming may be present but with few serious ramifications. Some alienating parents might even recognize that their alienating behaviour is not in the children's best interest (Gardner, 1991).

Intervention in these cases of PAS is relatively simple. Strict court orders that ensure visitation to the targeted parent and retained custody for the alienating parent will ensure healthy functioning in most cases (Rand, 1997). According to Gardner (1991) therapeutic intervention in these cases might rather focus on other problems exacerbated by the parents' divorce.

2.3.4.2 Moderate PAS

According to Gardner (1991) alienating parents in moderate PAS cases are not as fanatic compared to those where severe PAS is involved. Their behaviour is however more dysfunctional with fewer insight and cooperation compared to mild PAS cases. What is more, parental psychiatric pathology may also be present in some cases (Baker, Burkhard, & Albertson-Kelly, 2012). The alienating parents engage in a campaign of deprecation of the targeted parent by means of programming, and have a significant desire for vengeance towards the alienated parent. Even though they promote the child's campaign, they might in some cases still allow contact with the targeted parent (Wakeford, 2001).

Children who experience this type of PAS present with all eight symptoms of PAS but the degree and presentation is less severe than in severe PAS cases. These children tend to be disrespectful and provocative towards the targeted parent, engaging in arguments, being rude, disrespectful, violating house rules, and neglecting chores. (Stahl, 1999). They will present with a lack of ambivalence in their ideas and feelings towards the targeted parent, but may at times be able to integrate alternative perceptions other than their own (Lund, 1995).

Children with moderate PAS further present with transitional difficulties between households. In most cases, the children adapt after a while but initial transitions are met by protest from the child (Baker & Darnall, 2007).

Intervention with this type of PAS involves more than simple visitation orders from the court because the tactics used by the alienating parent hampers visitation (Ellis & Boyan, 2010; Gardner, 1991; Lowenstein, 2013). The most successful intervention entails court-ordered therapy that monitors PAS. The psychologist monitors visitation and assist the court in the most appropriate custodial and/or visitation arrangements (Rand, 1997).

2.3.4.3 Severe PAS

This type of PAS is rare but detrimental to the healthy development of a child. A clear campaign of denigration against the targeted parent is present. It is supported by both the hostility and programming attempts by the alienating parent as well as the child's self-generated contributions (Baker, Burkhard, & Albertson-Kelly, 2012; Stahl, 1999). The hostility and animosity towards the parent by both the child and the alienating parent is found to be weak rationalisations that are disproportionate to the child's experience with the targeted parent (Baker, 2005). All eight symptoms of PAS are present in these cases to a significant degree.

Rand (1997) points out that these children refuse contact with the targeted parent and threaten to harm himself/herself or the parent if contact is forced. In most cases visitation is completely affected. These children express severe hatred toward the targeted parent and they do not settle down in the care of the targeted parent like in other types of PAS (Gardner, 1991). The alienating parent who sees no reason for the child to have any contact with the alienated parent supports the child's behaviour. The child's animosity of the one parent may extend to others associated with that parent including family and friends (Wakeford, 2001). They show no guilt over their behaviour due to their lack of ambivalent feelings and perspectives about their parents. This behaviour is fundamentally a reflection of the child's pathological alignment with the alienating parent (Rand, 1997).

Allegations of sexual abuse against the targeted parent are common in this degree of PAS. Generally, severe parental pathology is associated with severe PAS cases (Baker, 2005). Alienators in these cases frequently present with narcissistic qualities, as they are deceitful and manipulative, and in most cases communicate mixed messages (De Jager,

2008). They feed off a false sense of self and believe that they are superior to others. Their innate inadequacy is projected onto the targeted parent that is then reaffirmed by the child's rejection of that parent (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

Intervention in these cases is more severe. In some severe PAS cases, custody is awarded to the alienated parent if they are fit for parenting and if that placement is in the best interest of the child (Rand, 1997). The alienating parent's access to the child is usually reduced to limit the indoctrinating effects of alienation. The different behavioural presentations for the various degrees of PAS is summarised in the table below (Gardner, 1998).

Table 1: Degrees of Parental alienation syndrome

Presenting symptoms	Degree/type of PAS		
	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Campaign of denigration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of allegations against parent Campaign fuelled by alienating parent Fear/anger 	Minimal	Moderate	Formidable
Weak /absurd rationalisation of the depreciation of the targeted parent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor broad justifications for depreciation Unreasonable pretext Catastrophic thinking 	Minimal	Moderate	Multiple absurd rationalisations
Lack of ambivalence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectifying alienating parent as all good Objectifying alienated parent as all bad Dispels loving memories Blended pronouns (we) Alignment with alienating parent 	Normal ambivalence	No ambivalence	No ambivalence
Independent thinker phenomenon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choice to alienate is child own decision Want to save indoctrinating parent from criticism and embarrassment Mimic words of alienating parent 	Usually absent	Present	Present
Reflexive support of alienating parent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alienating parent behaviour is valid Indoctrinating parent perfect of weaker and need their support 	Minimal	Present	Present
Absence of guilt	Normal guilt	Minimal to no guilt	No guilt

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No remorse toward behaviour No guilt or shame 			
Borrowed scenarios <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use terminology not their own 	Minimal	Present	Present
Spread of animosity to friends & family of alienated parent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Denigration of family or friends Absence of guilt 	Minimal	Present	Formidable or visitation not possible
Transitional difficulties at time of visitation	Usually absent	Moderate	Formidable or visitation no possible
Behaviour during visitation	Usually Good	Intermittent antagonistic and provocative	No visitation, or Destructive and continually provocative behaviour throughout visitation
Bonding with the alienator	Strong, healthy	Strong, Mild to moderately pathological	Severely pathological, Often paranoid bonding
Bonding with alienated parent	Strong, Healthy or Minimally pathological	Strong ,Healthy or Minimally pathological	Strong ,Healthy or Minimally pathological

Conversely, the weakness of this grouping is that it is too vague, not specifying how many and/or which of the 12 symptoms are needed to determine the degree of PAS presented. The expansion of the PAS parameters in more recent literature has allowed for a richer description of the various subtypes of PAS (De Jager, 2008; Turkat, 2002).

2.3.5 DYNAMICS OF PAS: THE ROLE OF VARIOUS PARTIES

PAS is a phenomenon that involves behavioural, cognitive and emotional aspects and experiences of multiple individuals as well as the dynamics of their relationships. A comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and the role that each individual plays is needed for a comprehensive understanding of this syndrome. The role of the various parties involved in PAS is discussed below.

2.3.5.1 The alienating parent

PAS is a serious social problem and is seen by some as a form of child abuse that should be legally punishable (Kase-Gottlieb, 2013). The alienating behaviour of the parents and their individual contribution to PAS is a relatively new focus for research, therefore empirically based information on this topic is limited. It is crucial to understand what, how, why and when parents alienate their children to be able to successfully treat and identify PAS (Brandes, 2000).

2.3.5.1.1 Characteristics of the alienating parent

According to Raso (2004) Gardner successfully identified several characteristics of children with PAS. His description of alienating parents was more limited and specific behavioural depictions of their contribution to the child's campaign of denigration seemed vague. In an attempt to establish a general profile of parents prone to engage in alienating behaviour, Lowenstein (1999) found that 75% of alienators were women. He further found that they themselves have been exposed to the same alienating behaviour in their past. Subsequently, several key aspects surrounding alienating parents are discussed.

2.3.5.1.1.1 The use of programming

One of general aspects involved in PAS that Gardner identified is the subtle programming or brainwashing of the child by the alienating parent. According to Baker and Darnall (2007) *conscious acts of programming* included:

- Denigrating the other parent in front of the child.
- Making statements that entail:
 - Abandonment by targeted parent.

- Negative comments about the targeted parent.
- Discussion about intimate aspects of the marital relationship and financial matters.
- Exaggerating minor flaws in the targeted parent.

Furthermore, they held that the *unconscious process of programming* includes:

- Implying negative aspects of the targeted parent without actually verbalising them (omitting information or leaving the child to assume the worst about the targeted parent).
- Sabotaging visitation.
- Guilt inducement.
- Passive discouragement.

According to Waldron and Joanis (1996) programming of the child entails two processes. First, the *content theme* of the alienation includes themes of abandonment, fear and harm by the targeted parent. Every time the alienating parent sees an opportunity, negative aspects are attributed to the targeted parent. For example, the less time the targeted parent spends with the child, the more the alienating parent suggests abandonment on the part of the parent in question. These themes are extremely unrealistic and the child is forced to choose between parents rather than being allowed to love both (Baker & Darnall, 2007).

The second is the *mood-induction* process. Guilt, fear, playing the victim, intimidation, sympathy seeking and threats are just some of the mood-inducing techniques alienating parents use (Baker, 2005). If the child reacts negatively toward the targeted parent, the alienating parent will respond with positive reinforcement for the behaviour. Additionally,

through classical conditioning, any positive regard or affection toward the targeted parent is met by a negative reaction from the alienating parent. This is done by either ignoring the child or inducing guilt (Clawar & Rivlin, 1991; Waldron & Joanis, 1996).

This emotional induction continues until the child internalises the theme content of alienation. At this stage, the child independently carries forth the effect of the programming. The alienating parent is free to contest the child's behaviour because rejection and various themes of alienation are now the child's own (Waldron & Joanis, 1996). The processes of programming lead to a biased view of both parents resulting in a lack of ambivalence or splitting. Baker and Darnall (2007) found that it is easier for the targeted parent to report on the techniques used by the alienating parent than it is for children of PAS. This is most likely because the tactic is introduced in such a way that it becomes the child's uncontested reality.

2.3.5.1.1.2 Parental pathology

Research suggests that parental pathology is highly suspect in severe PAS cases. It was suggested that the degree of PAS is directly related to the pathology and the alienating behaviour of the alienating parent (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010). In their study, Siegel and Langford (1998) compared the validity scales of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2) of several groups of parents involved in child custody evaluations; those of parents who engage in parental alienation syndrome (PAS) and those who do not. They found that parents involved in PAS cases had considerably higher L (Lying/"faking good") and K (Defensiveness/denial/evasiveness) scales and a significantly lower F (infrequency/"faking bad") scale than parents who do not engage in these behaviours (Siegel & Langford, 1998).

These results suggested that parents who exhibit PAS behaviour are likely to produce extremely defensive MMPI-2 profiles that portray them as very virtuous and without emotional difficulties. This highly defensive MMPI-2 validity scale patterns found among PAS parents supports Gardner's belief that PAS may be related to the patterns of psychological defences associated with externalising personality disorders (histrionic, borderline, narcissistic, and paranoid) (Siegel & Langford, 1998; Wakefield & Underwager, 1990).

- *Characteristic vulnerabilities and defences of alienating parents*

Parents who are alienators tend to have primitive defences and defensive distortions such as splitting and projective identification and denial; symptoms closely related to borderline and narcissistic personality disorder (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010; Siegel & Langford, 1998; Wakefield & Underwager, 1990).

Kopetski (1998) and his team evaluated parents from over 600 child custody cases from 1975 to 1995 in attempt to better understand the behaviour of alienating parents and the tactics involved in programming a child. They found a portion of parents that dealt with the psychological distress of a divorce by externalising this pain into interpersonal conflicts. The study revealed that alienating parents demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Alienating parents display narcissistic or paranoid orientation toward their relationship with others. They tend to feel neglected, betrayed and vengeful when they disagree with others, which are the result of a personality disorders (Kopetski, 1998).

- The alienating parent relies on “splitting”, a defence mechanism that allows the alienating parent to see others or situations in a compartmentalised or mutually exclusive manner. The parent sees things as all good or all bad. This defensive behaviour, along with projection, phobias and obsessions of inadequacy results in interpersonal conflict (Kopetski, 1998; Siegel & Langford, 1998).
- The divorce generates an abnormal grieving process in the alienating parent. The loss of a marital relationship spawns feelings of such intense anger that leaves no room for sadness. The alienating parent responds with anger, to the extent that they are immediately struck in the anger stage of grief (Kopetski, 1998; Sigelman & Rider, 2006).
- Alienating parents were usually over-indulged as children. Their upbringing is fraught with lack of normal ambivalence and enmeshment that has negatively affected their childhood. Defence mechanisms such as splitting were also prevalent in their childhood. There is often a traumatic loss and a lack of empathy in the alienating parent’s family that resulted in unresolved grief (Garber, 2004; Kopetski, 1998).

Rand (1997) also formulated a number of common personality traits characteristic of alienating parents, including:

- An underlying narcissistic vulnerability wherein the parent lacks a clear self-identity and therefore relies heavily on primitive defences such as projection, denial and externalisation.
- Tendencies to conceal their parental shortfalls by deflecting scrutiny of their underlying personal problems by externalising alienation strategies.

- Pre-existing vulnerability to loss and conflict that relates to their attachment and separation, related to experiences in their family of origin.
- High intrapersonal need for control, often motivated by internal drives for power, influence, and domination.
- Obsessive and uncontrollable drive for revenge on the targeted parent. This drive will be exacerbated in cases of remarriage.

These studies and results support Gardner's theory that the defences and vulnerabilities portrayed in the behaviour of alienating parents are closely related to externalising personality disorders, especially narcissistic and borderline personality disorder.

- *Maternal narcissism*

According to Baker (2005) the alienating parents of PAS children appear to be narcissistically vulnerable. They are *self-centred, demanding a high degree of attention and admiration, and unable to differentiate themselves from others*. The narcissistic personality is characterised by grandiosity, extreme self-involvement, and lack of interest in and empathy for others (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). In these cases, narcissistic parents cultivated an enmeshed relationship with their children. This serves the parents' own need for love and admiration. Additionally it compensates for their individual unconscious and innate inadequacy. They install a sense of awe and admiration within their children (Baker, 2006; Siegel & Langford, 1998). Narcissistic parents alienate their children in the following ways: Firstly, they reinforce the child's dependence on them and threaten to abandon or reject the child if their demands is not met. Secondly, they install a sense of obligation or guilt within the child. According to Baker (2006) maternal narcissism fuels alienation in at least three ways:

- Narcissistic injury

During the divorce, the narcissistic parent is confronted with feelings of rejection or belittlement due to the failure of the marriage, that constitute a narcissistic injury (Rand, 1997). Once a person with a narcissistic personality feels belittled or psychologically abandoned, they respond by avoiding, denying and devaluating the offending stimulus, thereby restoring the balance of the narcissistic equilibrium. The partner leaving the marriage thus becomes an object of intense devaluation and hatred (Siegel & Langford, 1998). This fuels the themes of alienation and the targeted parent becomes “cheaters, gamblers, rapists, alcoholics, and abusers” (Baker, 2005; Baker, 2006).

- Secondary rejection

Alienation by the narcissistic parent may be fuelled by the secondary rejection and belittlement they feel because of the child’s behaviour. Narcissistic parents see their children as an extension of themselves (Masterson & Lieberman, 2004). They feel anger and resentment towards the children for wanting a relationship with the targeted parent even though the targeted parent rejected them. This fuels their emotional induction of guilt negatively reinforcing the child to reject the targeted parent (Baker, 2006).

- Inferring of abandonment

Narcissistic mothers tend to be particularly fragile following their divorce. They rely more on their children for comfort, companionship and reassurance. Any time spent with the targeted parent is experienced as a profound loss and threat to their well-being. They discourage contact with the targeted parent by means of inferring abandonment or rejection

by the targeted parent any time the child do not have contact with them. This results in children internalising these claims causing the unjustified rejection of the targeted parent (Baker, 2006; Baker, 2010).

- *Maternal borderline personality structure*

According to Masterson and Lieberman (2004) parents with Borderline personality disorder are extremely sensitive to real or imagined forms of rejection. Their interpersonal relationships are characterised by either idealisation or devaluation (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). These parents are prone to alienate their children due to their poor reality testing, frustration tolerance and impulse control. They appear to be denying any personal responsibility for the divorce and see themselves as a victim of the ex-spouse (Siegel & Langford, 1998).

Borderline parents may feel intense rejection after or during the divorce. Masterson and Lieberman (2004) hold that borderline parents have created a defence system designed to protect them against any feelings of pain and abandonment or “abandonment depression.” One of these defences involves “splitting” that includes a biased or fragmented view of themselves, things and people in their environment (Siegel & Langford, 1998). The alienating borderline parent engages in an enmeshed relationship with the children. Subsequently, the child shares the parent’s view of the world. They promote a view of themselves where they are the victims (Gardner, 1998). The child thus responds by taking care of the alienating parent. This parent is perceived as all good and in need of the child’s love and care and the targeted parent is seen as all bad and devalued (Rand, 1997).

The borderline parent avoids fear of rejection as well as receiving the love and care they need for self-preservation from the child. The parent will do this by promoting an enmeshed

relationship with the child using various tactics that are discussed below (Wakefield & Underwager, 1990).

2.3.5.1.2 Tactics used in PAS

Baker (2010) conducted a qualitative study examining the experiences of adults who had experienced PAS as a child. The results revealed several tactics involved in the alienation process. However, the results showed no clear relationships between the specific techniques applied and the degree of alienation present. This suggests that the behavioural presentation of parents alienating their children differs and that alienation itself is a process and not a specific behaviour set present in the alienating parent.

2.3.5.1.2.1 Badmouthing

In their study, Baker and Darnall (2007) found that 94.8% of alienating parents engaged in some form of badmouthing of the targeted parent. This includes general badmouthing like telling the child that the targeted parent is a bad person. Additionally the parent engages the child in inappropriate matters like child custody, child support financial matters (Baker, 2005). Wakeford (2001) found that alienating parents use repetition of negative messages about the targeted parent in their alienation to create the picture that the targeted parent is bad, inadequate or dangerous. The badmouthing might extend to the targeted parent's hobbies or extended family. For example, "Daddy doesn't give us any money so we can't buy cat food. The cat might die because Daddy is so selfish. The badmouthing is used as a tool to deceive the child into thinking the targeted parent is dangerous or bad (Vassiliou & Cartwright, 2001). They minimise and destroy positive memories with the targeted parent. For example, "Your father never showed interest in you when you were a child. I can't remember one time he did something fun with you kids."

2.3.5.1.2.2 Interfering with visitation and indirect contact

Alienating parents engage in manipulating behaviour during visitation time (Wakeford, 2001). Baker and Darnall (2007) found that interference with parenting time and contact was present in two-thirds of their study sample. The alienating parent interferes with the visitation by arranging early pick-up times or late drop-off times on visitations days. Further, they will engage in fun activities on the day of visitation or come up with excuses why the child cannot visit. The children in return refuse visitation to spend time with the “fun parent.”

In severe cases, the children will refuse visitation completely, cry and misbehave. This behaviour is supported by alienating parents by positive reinforcement. Alienating parents may use telephone conversations to promote denigration. They might say things over the phone in the child’s presence as a means to mislead the child (Wakeford, 2001). For example, “I just spoke to your father; he said he does not want us anymore.” More aggressive interruption of contact and visitation may include relocation (Gardner, 1998). In more severe cases of PAS where contact is limited, desperate attempts by the alienated parent to make contact with the child will be portrayed as stalking by alienating parents.

2.3.5.1.2.3 Interference with symbolic love

Alienating parents object to symbolic gestures of love by the targeted parent. They criticize any gifts or other expression of love made or given by the targeted parent. For example: “He is only trying to buy your love.” They minimise the role of the targeted parent in the child’s life (Wakeford, 2001). Photographs are removed and any positive regard of the targeted parent is negatively reinforced. They may even force children to call their new partner “father”/“mother” (Baker & Darnall, 2007). In addition, alienated children are also not

allowed to express themselves by means of symbolic gestures. For example: “Why are you writing a card for your father, he is just going to throw it away.” Any expressed love towards the alienated parent is discouraged by crying, anger or verbal denigration of the child’s attempt of contact or the targeted parent (Baker, 2006).

2.3.5.1.2.4 Interference with information

The alienating parent will instruct the school not to give any information to the targeted parent as a means of isolation (De Jager, 2008). This is later used to argue that the alienated parent shows no interest, is not involved, and has no knowledge of what is going on in the child’s life (Wakeford, 2001). Medical aid information and school records are also withheld in the same way. Alienating parents may further miscommunicate court dates or other important days or occasions. Alienating parents most often refuse to talk or communicate with the targeted parent. In these cases, the child ends up as messenger between parents. As a means to avoid the conflict between parents, the child may later refuse to communicate with the targeted parent completely (Baker & Darnall, 2007). Alienating parents also miscommunicate or withhold information from family members, significant others or clinicians to alienate the targeted parent from these individuals. They present the targeted parent in such a way that portrays them as the victim (Wakefield & Underwager, 1990). Alienating parents may also miscommunicate information to their children and convey messages in misleading ways as a means of alienation (Wakeford, 2001). For example, “Your dad does not care, he wasn’t even at your birth”, while in reality the child was an emergency Caesarean born while the father was on his way to the child’s birth hospital.

2.3.5.1.2.5 Emotional manipulation and enmeshed relationship

In PAS cases, the rejection of the alienated parent is met with positive reinforcement by the alienating parent. Having fun with, or having positive emotions towards the targeted parent is met with guilt-provoking statements, anger or withdrawal (Baker & Darnall, 2007). For example, “So you don’t love me anymore now” or “I was so lonely without you here.” Other tactics include the interrogation of the child after his/ her stay with the other parent.

Any unpleasant experience the child had is blown out of proportion and negatively attributed to the targeted parent. They install fear and doubt about the targeted parent (Baker, 2005). Positive experiences are questioned and met with fear or guilt inducing remarks, like, for example, “Your father is only nice to you to confuse you, don’t trust him.” Or, “I am glad you had a good time with your dad while I was here, all alone and sick, but at least you had a good time.” Additionally, alienating parents threaten the targeted parents in front of the children to install a sense of fear mistrust or uneasiness. For example, “If you let anything happen to him, it will be the last time you see him” (Baker & Darnall, 2007).

2.3.5.1.2.6 False allegations of sexual abuse

False allegations of sexual abuse or SAID Syndrome (Sexual Allegations in Divorce) have become a common phenomenon during divorce (Wakeford, 2001). The allegations typically surfaces after separation and legal action between the parents. In SAID cases, the child may show behavioural patterns of verbal exaggerations, excessive willingness to indict, inappropriate affective responses, and inconsistencies in relating the incident of sexual abuse (De Jager, 2008). Commonly in SAID cases, it is the mother who first communicates the allegation. They make use of expert evaluation of the children as a means to gain support for the allegations against the targeted parent. Accusing the targeted parent of sexual abuse is

one of the techniques that alienating parents use. According to Gardner (2002) this is a by-product of PAS rather than a syndrome in itself. Alienating parents may obtain restraining orders for an array of false complaints or accusations. False claims of sexual abuse is a tactic alienating parents use to prevent contact and promote relational breakdown between their children and the targeted parent. It ranges between isolated claims or hints toward sexual abuse to a full range of delusions about sexual abuse (Gardner, 1998).

2.3.5.2 The targeted parent

During the development of PAS, the alienated parent is seen as a victim in the alienation process (Siegel & Langford, 1998). Although research on the targeted parent's contributions to the development of PAS is limited, recent studies suggest that there are several characteristics of the targeted parent that contribute to the alienation process (Rand, 1997). Literature suggests that the primary gender of targeted parents is male (Baker, 2006). According to Vassiliou and Cartwright (2001) the targeted parent frequently feels powerless as a result of the alienation taking place. Furthermore, they feel overpowered by the alienated child's behaviour and reaction to them (Baker & Darnall, 2007). There is a shift in power since the child gets to decide what they want to do or not.

Targeted parents report a hesitancy to confront or aggravate the child for the fear that they would resist visitation. They further attribute the child's behaviour to the alienating parent feelings of hate, anger and revenge (Wakeford, 2001). Most of the targeted parents reported distrust or dissatisfaction with the legal system and mental health professionals. These findings were supported by Baker's study (2006) where the following five related factors of the alienated parents, that contribute to the development of PAS, were identified and are discussed in the next section.

2.3.5.2.1 Limited knowledge of PAS by the alienated parent

Most alienated parents had limited or no knowledge about PAS prior to development of the syndrome. They believed that if they were loving parents, the accusations of the alienating parent would have no effect.

2.3.5.2.2 Whirl-wind courtship between parents

The relationship between the alienating parent and alienated parent seem to be of an impulsive nature. Most couples involved in PAS had limited time to get to know one another. According to Baker (2006) the immaturity displayed in the couple's relationships may be a causal factor of PAS.

2.3.5.2.3 Passive parenting

It seems evident that parents who pre-morbidly assume a passive role in their children's lives are more susceptible to estrangement from their children (Rand, 1997). Baker (2006) found that if targeted parents passively avoid conflict, the child's behaviour and/or the alienated parent it increases the alienating parent's opportunity for exploitation and alienation. Alienating parents use the passivity on the side of the targeted parent as a way to affirm that the child is not loved or abandoned by the targeted parent (Baker, 2006).

2.3.5.2.4 Inconsistent visitation

Targeted parents that do not follow visitation agreements as proposed are susceptible to the alienating parent's interference of visitation and denigration strategies. Early detection of a child's animosity is not possible in cases where contact is limited (Baker, 2006).

2.3.5.2.5 Reaction to alienation

According to Baker (2005) the way in which targeted parents respond to the child's animosity may indirectly contribute to their own alienation. Targeted parents who respond to the child's behaviour with aggression, punishment and/or avoidance may reaffirm and fuel the child's denigration and discontentment. Instead of correcting the child's behaviour these responses reaffirm the child's false negative beliefs about the targeted parent (Gardner, 1998).

In conclusion, the aspects mentioned above aim to shed some light on the role alienating parents play in their own alienation process. Empirical research on the dynamics and factors involved in PAS that centres on the targeted parent might be a useful focus for future research on this syndrome that might yield specific and expectable parameters thereof.

2.3.5.3 Children with Parental alienation syndrome

Children with PAS are clearly distinguishable from other children who resist or refuse contact with a parent following separation or divorce for a variety of normal, expectable reasons, including estrangement. Children with PAS present with various behaviour patterns directly related to the degree of PAS that is present (Gardner, 1998). Exploring the dynamics and associated behaviour in PAS children will guide clinicians to accurately identify and treat PAS more successfully.

2.3.5.3.1 Presenting behaviour

Children of PAS may present with various associated characteristics or symptoms. They may vary between in accordance to the degree of PAS involved. Table 2 is a summary of the symptoms and characteristics in children with PAS (Lowenstein, 2002).

Table 2: Psychological characteristics of the child with PAS

Characteristics of pas child	Description
Anger	Towards targeted parent as to accommodate alienating parent
Lack of impulse control	PAS children often turn to delinquent behaviour
Lack of self-esteem/confidence	Especially in children who cannot identify with same-sex alienated parent
Clinging behaviour	Toward alienating parent, especially by younger children due to being programmed to believe the targeted parent is dangerous
Fear or phobias	School phobia and /or hypochondriacs as a result of fear for losing the targeted parent
Depression and suicide ideation	Parental conflict causes much distress and unhappiness for the child
Sleep disorder	Worries about participating in PAS process and fear of targeted parent
Eating disorder	Anorexia nervosa, bulimia, obesity
Educational problems	Aggression and disruptive behaviours result in school and dysfunction
Enuresis and encopresis	The loss of one parent and the conflict between parents result in very young children bed-wetting and soiling their beds
Substance abuse	Escaping from feelings emanating from the PAS
Obsessive compulsive behaviour	The child seeks reassurance in the environment through the use of obsessive compulsive behaviour
Anxiety and panic attacks	Anxiety reactions to PAS may manifest in nightmares
Sexual identity problems	Failure to identify with a parent from a previous secure relationship
Peer relationship problems	Withdraw or aggressive behaviour by the child of PAS lead to poor peer relationships
Guilt	Older children typically experience guilt a result of their wrongfull behaviour toward the targeted parent

2.3.5.3.2 Children being negatively empowered by PAS

Most commonly, children of divorce feel caught in the middle in some way. Divorce is usually distressing for all parties involved. According to Gardner (1998) one factor that fuels the child's contributions to PAS is the sense of empowerment over the alienated parent.

Similarly, De Jager (2008) holds that the child gains a sense of authority through the alignment with the alienating parent.

The alienating parent promotes the child's weak rationalisations for their hostility toward the targeted parent. The child can say and do anything without any corrective feedback. Thus, the child avoids being victimised like the targeted parent by siding with the alienated parent (Wakeford, 2001). Moreover, their extreme alignment protects children from the ambivalent feelings associated with divorce that creates guilt and psychological distress. Gardner (1998) held that the empowerment of the child is not limited to the alienating parent's behaviour but may also be fuelled by passivity in the alienated parent and their response to the alienation.

2.3.5.3.3 Alignment with the alienator and rejection of the targeted parent

Divorces that involve custodial disputes are commonly associated with the alignment of one child with a parent. As mentioned, the alignment can be seen on a continuum with extreme alignment on the one hand and complete rejection of the parent on the other (Johnston, 2003). Children with extreme alignments typically are poorly adjusted, angry and less able to conceptualise multifaceted situations. In contrast, they appear to have greater self-esteem. This seems related to their choice to align themselves with one parent, resulting in less anxiety and experiences of ambivalence due to parental conflicts (Lampel, 2005).

Children's rejection of the targeted parent is not an automatic function of the pathology of the targeted parent, or of the child's relationship with them (De Jager, 2008). It is rather the result of the alignment with the preferred parent. The more pathological the

alignment, the more pathological the relationship between the child and the rejected parent will be (Gardner, 1998).

It is important to keep in mind that there might be other reasons children align with their parents. Evaluators should have a good knowledge of appropriate age-related behaviours associated with a child's alignment and attachment with their caregivers (Stahl, 1999). Many children align themselves with one parent due to developmental issues specific to their age group, as discussed below:

- *Two to three years*

Johnston (1993) found that children between the ages of two and three who refuse visitation might be engaging in normal age-related separation anxiety. They may experience transitional difficulties characterised by sleep disturbances, enuresis, encopresis and poor impulse control (Kopetski, 1998).

- *Three to six years*

Rand (1997) found that children in this age group tend to be loyal to whomever they are with. In accordance to Freud's proposed psychosexual development stages these children have strong fantasies toward parents of the opposite sex parent that makes them compete and reject the same sex parent (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). Behavioural difficulties stem from anxiety that visitation with the same-sex parent might damage their relationship with the idealised parent.

- *Six to seven years*

Children this age will most likely suffer from loyalty conflicts. This is due to the shift in egocentric thought of those that incorporate the views of others. However, they will still try or avoid this conflict by siding with one parent and most likely projecting issues that cause them internal ambivalence (Wakeford, 2001).

- *Nine to twelve years*

This age group is most at risk to develop PAS. Alignment is an attempt to reduce guilt arising from loyalty conflicts. Johnston (1993) found that up to 43% of children in this age group would engage in the alienation process. They present with anxiety, depression and other psychosomatic illnesses in reaction to severe conflict between the parents (Toren, Bregman, Zohar-Reich, Ben-Amitay, Wolmer, & Laor, 2013).

- *Adolescents*

According to Ericson's psychosocial developmental stages, adolescents' primary need to develop at this age is mainly centred on the development of the self and personal identity. Adolescents might rebel against parents as a means of establishing their own sense of self (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). They commonly transcend the internalised representations of their parents formed in early childhood and establish a distinct sense of self (Colman, 2001). This psychological independence is not possible in enmeshed relationships where individuation did not take place. The aim is that adolescents become less dependent on parental internalisations for approval, self-esteem, and standards of conduct. They must learn to take over for oneself the tasks of self-esteem regulation and self-definition (Lapsley & Stey, 2010). The physical and psychosocial change that occurs during puberty renders most

adolescents vulnerable to adjustment problems, even more so when divorcing parents is involved.

2.3.5.3.4 Dynamics surrounding the alienated child that contribute to the development of PAS

The following are dynamics or factors related to the child that contribute to alienation independently from the alienating parent's influence:

- *Primary bond*

Johnston (2003) held that it is not uncommon for children to be closer to one parent. The bond between a child and parent may be influenced by many factors including their personalities and individual interaction styles. Children's relationships with their parents after separation and divorce are viewed on a continuum from positive to negative; with pathological alignment as one extreme and the complete rejection of the parent as the other (Johnston, 2003; Garber, 2004). The majority of children have positive relationships with both parents.

According to Gardner (2001) one of the primary contributing factors to PAS is the child's primary bond with the alienating parent. Most often, this bond is stronger than the bond with the targeted parent. The child's need for stability and the need for homeostasis within their immediate surroundings motivate the child to protect this primary bond with their caretaker (Rand, 1997).

It is customary for children of divorce to feel some rejection, especially if one of the parents moves away or remarries. Their perceived rejection in turn might motivate them to

protect the primary bond they do have with the alienating parent. They will side with the alienating parent in confrontations and avoid anything that might adversely affect the relationship with the alienating parent (Wakeford, 2001).

- *Reaction formation*

Reaction formation is a defence mechanism children may use designed to protect them from psychological distress. Colman (2001) defines it as a mechanism where the feeling and behaviour of an individual is expressed in an opposite manner to what they really feel and want.

Most children of divorce have the need for contact and love from their parents. The obsessive hostility may be the expression of deep-rooted need for love and acceptance (De Jager, 2008). Their campaign of denigration is still, even if dysfunctional, a way to remain in contact with the targeted parent. Sometimes these children realise their love and need for contact with the alienating parent. They know however that the alienating parent will not approve of their feelings, and therefore are not able to express them (Gardner, 2002).

- *Identification with the aggressor*

According to Wakeford (2001) children may identify with their aggressor or authority figure. The child's identification leads to the adoption of some of the characteristics of the parent. In this way, children compensate for their own feelings of insecurity, weakness and vulnerability.

- *Idealisation of a parent*

The alienating parent's campaign of denigration may lead to the child seeing the targeted parent as a weaker or inadequate figure. The child thus avoids identification with this parent, which in turn leads to the idealisation of the alienating parent (Siegel & Langford, 1998). In PAS cases, the child's enmeshed relationship is caused by an inability to individualise himself/herself separately from the alienating parent. Critique against the alienating parent is poorly received since it is perceived as critique towards the self (Wakeford, 2001).

- *Expression of hostility*

Anger and hostility by the targeted parent, loss in financial stability and less attention by parents are just some of the reasons children of divorce may feel angry toward their parents (Amato, 1993). The dynamics of PAS creates the perfect opportunity for children to express the negative emotions they have towards one parent. This is then reinforced by the alienating parent in strategically aligning the child (Gardner, 2002).

- *Transference of emotions*

Colman (2001) defines transference as a psychoanalytic term for the displacement or transferring of one's emotions and feeling onto other individuals or situations. When a child is living in an environment where the alienating parent frequently expresses hostility towards the targeted parent, the child may express the same emotions or behaviour without provocation (Wakeford, 2001).

- *Jealousy*

Gardner (2002) reported that some children have romanticised relationships with their parents. They may experience new relationships of a parent as distressing. They may present with acting out behaviour or hostility that may be strategically used by alienating parents.

- *Unsuccessful separation or individualisation of the child*

Johnston (1993) held that the extreme alignment with a parent might be caused by difficulties in the child's individualisation process. This refers to a process in human development that starts with the differentiation between parent and infant in early childhood and continues until individualisation in adolescence. Children that fail to individualise are extremely vulnerable to the hostility and conflict between their parents. They are highly susceptible to manipulation and the tactics employed by alienating parents (Wakeford, 2001).

According to Lapsley and Stey (2010) separation-individuation is a primary organising principle of human development that has implications for adaptive functioning across the lifespan of an individual. Disturbances in this process can manifest in an array of clinically significant problems, including narcissistic and borderline personality disorders, and family and marital dysfunction. The attachment and individuation of the parent will thus have an effect on their coping abilities, relationships and especially the way in which they cope with their own children's individuation (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010).

Each family system will vary in their tolerance for separation, autonomy and independence. Poorly differentiated families view individuation as a betrayal of the family or as a threat to its stability, and so require individuals to sacrifice agency for communion, or individuality for belongingness (Lapsley & Stey, 2010). In the case of PAS children, their

separation and individualisation have been compromised by their enmeshed relationships with the alienating parent. The behaviour they present with is an extension of the alienating parent's internalised feelings and needs.

Understanding of the aspects of child development and other dynamics involved in PAS will aid clinicians in the identifications and treatment of this highly controversial syndrome that is diverse in presentation and context.

2.3.6 THE DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA OF PAS

The lack of universally accepted diagnosis of PAS leaves a space for misuse of the concept within clinical and legal platforms that in turn threatens the integrity and validity of the phenomenon of PAS. It renders the task of proving the presence and impact of PAS in a divorce case nearly impossible for clinicians. What complicates the formulation of a universal PAS diagnosis is the difficulty of objectively separating the behaviour of parents and the presentation of PAS within children. PAS is fundamentally the subjective contamination of the child's understanding and beliefs about their environment.

This issue of subjective reality points out one of the fundamental issues surrounding the diagnosis of PAS, namely the subjective presentation of this syndrome. It does not fit into the current classification system (DSM) based on the medical model and its stipulations for pathology. However, should an observable problem be discredited on the grounds that it does not fit a theoretical framework created to understand and classify human behaviour? It is important to remember that PAS is not the first disorder that involves subjective reality. Psychotic disorders and many other disorders included in the DSM followed a difficult and

controversial road during its development to a fully-fledged psychological disorder (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010).

In October 2008, a small group of mental health professionals prepared the original proposal for the diagnostic formulation of PAS. This step was followed by a more detailed proposal in March 2010, in which 70 authors contributed to the scheme. In October 2010 the second proposal, along with additional information on PAS was published as *Parental alienation, DSM-5, and ICD-11*. These formal proposals were submitted to the DSM-V Taskforce of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010).

The proposed diagnostic formulation of PAS held that PAS would be included in the DSM-V as a childhood disorder named *Parental alienation disorder*. Alternatively, the same criteria would be used and included in one of the appendixes of the DSM called *Criteria sets and axes for further study*. The last proposal formulated PAS as *Parent alienation relational problem* to be included in the DSM under *Other conditions that may be the focus of clinical attention*. The criteria for *Parental alienation disorder* and *Parent alienation relational problem* are as follows (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010):

Proposed diagnostic criteria for Parental alienation disorder

- A. The child (usually one whose parents are engaged in a high-conflict divorce) associates with one parent and rejects a relationship with the other, alienated parent without legitimate justification. The child resists or refuses contact or parenting time with the alienated parent.

B. The child manifests the following behaviours:

- 1) A persistent rejection or denigration of a parent that reaches the level of a campaign.
- 2) Weak, frivolous, and absurd rationalisations for the child's persistent criticism of the rejected parent.

C. The child manifests two or more of the following six attitudes and behaviours:

- 1) Lack of ambivalence.
- 2) Independent-thinker phenomenon.
- 3) Reflexive support of one parent against the other.
- 4) Absence of guilt over exploitation of the rejected parent.
- 5) Presence of borrowed scenarios.
- 6) Spread of the animosity to the extended family of the rejected parent.

D. The duration of the disturbance is at least two months.

E. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, academic (occupational), or other important areas of functioning.

F. The child's refusal to have contact with the rejected parent is without legitimate justification. That is, parental alienation disorder is not diagnosed if the rejected parent maltreated the child.

Proposed diagnostic criteria for Parental alienation relational problem

- This category should be used when the focus of clinical attention is a pattern of interaction between mother and child, father and child, and mother and father (e.g., the parents are divorced and the child forms a strong alliance with one parent, the preferred parent, and rejects a relationship with the other parent, the alienated parent, without legitimate justification).

- This phenomenon associated with clinically significant impairment in individual or family functioning or the development of clinically significant symptoms in mother, father, or child.
- The symptoms that typically occur in parental alienation relational problem include:
 - a persistent campaign of denigration by the child against the alienated parent, and
 - weak, frivolous, and absurd rationalisations regarding the child's criticism of the alienated parent.
- The symptoms that sometimes occur in parental alienation relational problem include:
 - Lack of ambivalence (the child's belief that the alienated parent is all-bad and the preferred parent is all-good).
 - The independent-thinker phenomenon (the child proudly states the decision to reject the alienated parent is their own, not influenced by the preferred parent).
 - Reflexive support of the preferred parent against the alienated parent.
 - Disregard for the feelings of the alienated parent.
 - Absence of guilt over exploitation of the alienated parent.
 - Use of borrowed scenarios (rehearsed statements that are identical to those made by the preferred parent).
 - The child's animosity toward the alienated parent may spread to that parent's extended family.
- The diagnosis of parental alienation relational problem should not be used if the child's refusal to have contact with the rejected parent is justifiable, for example, if the child was neglected or abused by that parent.

In December 2012 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Board of Trustees approved the final formulation of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental*

Disorders Fifth edition (DSM-5) and “Parental Alienation Syndrome” was not included (Bernet & Baker, 2013; Lamminen, 2013). According to Kase-Gottlieb (2013) the PAS diagnosis was not included in the manual for two reasons: Firstly, it opposes using the psychological term “syndrome” to describe dysfunctional family dynamics that includes several individuals.

Secondly, it is held that the recently published DSM-5 provides scientifically based descriptive terminology for the dysfunctional family dynamic involved in PAS. It is alternatively labelled as “estrangement.” It is held that the diagnosis of PAS is better accounted for under the diagnostic category “Parent-Child Relational Problem.” The following is the terminology used in the DSM-5 to describe dysfunctional family dynamics under “Parent-Child Relational Problem” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

Cognitive problems may include negative attributions of the other’s intentions, hostility toward or scapegoating of the other and unwarranted feelings of estrangement. Affective problems may include feeling of sadness, apathy, or anger about the other individual in the relationship. (p. 715)

Furthermore, under the category of “Parent-Child Relational Problem” is the diagnostic code, V61.29, “Child Affected by Parental Relationship Distress.” is as follow (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

This category should be used when the focus of clinical attention is the negative effects of parental relationship discord (e.g. high levels of conflict, distress, or

disparagement) on a child in the family, including effects on the child's mental or other medical disorders. (p. 716)

It was held that both of these diagnoses are a better alternative for the proposed PAS diagnosis. The inclusion of PA in the next editions of DSM and ICD will facilitate greater awareness and understanding of this mental condition and inspire greater research about its parameters, presentation, causes and treatment (Bernet & Baker, 2013; Lamminen, 2013).

Within the legal setting, it would limit the exploitation of the diagnosis, lead to more effective forensic tools and methods and will insure appropriate intervention. It should be remembered that the inclusion of a disorder within the DSM renders no diagnosis absolute and free of review. The current proposals on the diagnostic formulation, even though not accepted in the DSM-V, can structure and promote more empirical-based research that may lead to the inclusion of PAS in future versions of the DSM.

Even though the diagnosis for PAS has been rejected by the American Psychiatric Association, the use of the proposed criteria will aid clinicians in future research and understanding thereof (Lamminen, 2013). It will guide the formulation of universally accepted diagnostic criteria for PAS, a better understanding of the dynamics and factors involved in PAS as well as effective treatment and intervention within the psycho-legal system.

2.3.7 DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS

PAS is not the only syndrome related to divorce, family relationships, parent-child interaction or alienation. There are other syndromes closely related to PAS. Health

professionals should have sufficient knowledge about these conditions to be able to successfully diagnose PAS and distinguish it from other conditions (De Jager, 2008).

2.3.7.1 False memory syndrome (FMS)

The primary manifestation of *False Memory Syndrome (FMS)* is the persistent belief that the individual has been sexually abused in childhood. However, this belief has no objective basis. This disorder usually presents itself during the young adulthood of women. In FMS, the individual engage against a campaign of denigration against a parent, close relative or friend, which focuses on childhood sexual abuse (Gardner, 2004). PAS on the other hand is a childhood disorders where the campaign of denigration include various accusations and vilifications of the targeted parent other than sexual abuse. FMS often involves an over-eager therapist whose enthusiasm fuels the patient's behaviour (De Jager, 2008).

In both PAS and FMS cases, the individuals state that their choice and decision to reject the targeted parent are their own. Furthermore, both will discredit any criticising of the favoured parent. Other similarities include the lack of guilt over the rejection of the parent and the rejection of anyone who advocate the position of the targeted parent or individual. This may extend to family members, grandparents, psychologists or other individuals who attempt to intervene (Gardner, 2004).

Both PAS and FMS require constant programming in order for the individual's delusions to be maintained. FMS differs from PAS in that the therapist programmes the individual, whereas in PAS the programming is done by an alienating parent, which is consequently internalised by the child (Gardner, 2004).

In FMS the rationalisations for the depreciation of the targeted parent is based upon alleged childhood sexual abuse. In addition, the lack of ambivalence in FMS cases is limited to the individual's memories. In PAS, the child's lack of ambivalence manifests itself in the child's biased views of his parents and his rationalisation for the denigration of the targeted parent is much more broad-based (Wakeford, 2001).

2.3.7.2 Threatened mother syndrome (TMS)

Threatened mother syndrome is the severe reaction a mother, father or major caretaker may experience in response to a perceived danger or threat regarding the relationship or bond between the parties involved. According to Klass and Klass (2005) the responses these individuals might present with include "rage, screaming, manipulation intolerance, irritability and even aggressiveness" (p. 189). These extreme reactive behaviours usually subside when the immediate threat is removed making it both impulsive and episodic in nature (Weigel & Donovan, 2006).

De Jager (2008) holds that these types of behaviours may fuel suspicion of PAS and it is thus crucial to differentiate between PAS and TMS, especially because the behaviour shown by the mother in both PAS and TMS are very similar. According to Klass and Klass (2005) the short-lived behaviour shown by parents with TMS is uncharacteristic and only motivated by the sole purpose to protect the bond with their child.

In PAS, the behaviour of the alienating parent is also intended to protect their bond with the child but in addition, their behaviour is also strategically intended to alienate the child from the targeted parent (Baker, 2005). In PAS cases, the alienating parent solicits the child as an accomplice in the alienation and involves other significant people in the alienation

process. In TMS the mother's behaviour and anger is more uncontrolled without the involvement of others or the child (Weigel & Donovan, 2006). Even though PAS and TMS may seem very similar, in comparison, the research on TMS is limited and has had little support in academic circles.

2.3.7.3 Divorce-related malicious parent syndrome (DRMPS)

Another syndrome that is closely associated with PAS is *Divorce-related malicious parent syndrome (DRMPS)*. In 1995 it was initially referred to as *divorce-related malicious mother syndrome* but in 1999 it was changed to *Divorce-related malicious parent syndrome (DRMPS)* to better reflect the gender-neutral nature of the phenomenon (Weigel & Donovan, 2006). The four major criteria for DRMPS include the following (De Jager, 2008; Turkat, 1995; Wakeford, 2001):

1. A parent who unjustifiably punishes his or her ex-spouse by:
 - a) Intentionally alienating the mutual child from the ex-spouse.
 - b) Involving other people in malicious actions against the ex-spouse.
 - c) Participating in excessive litigation with regard to the ex-spouse.

2. The parent attempts to:
 - a) Interrupt child visitation with the ex-spouse.
 - b) Inhibit telephone contact with the ex-spouse.
 - c) Interfere with the ex-spouse's participation in a child's school life and extracurricular activities.

3. The parent's behaviour involve damaging acts toward the ex-spouse, which include :
 - a) Lying to the children.

- b) Lying to others.
- c) Violating the law.

According to Turkat (1995) the parental attacks and hostility in DRMPS towards the targeted parent, are much more brutal and vicious than in PAS and may escalate to violence. Weigel and Donavan (2006) cautioned the acceptance of DRMPS since the introduction of a syndrome that overlaps with PAS might further confound the definition and acceptability of PAS. The empirically based information of DRMPS seems limited and in reality, the phenomenon is better represented by Gardner's severe form of PAS.

2.3.7.4 Medea syndrome

In Greek methodology, Medea was a woman who killed her own children as revenge against her ex-partner (Wakeford, 2001). The primary manifestation of Medea syndrome is that one parent will go to such extremes to harm the other parent that they are willing to damage the children in the process. In most cases, these individuals harm their children or commit infanticide as a method of revenge against their partner (Colman, 2001).

During the divorce of two individuals with serious character pathology Medea syndrome may present in the following way: one parent is typically characterised by narcissistic, self-centred, egocentric and even anti-social traits with little insight into the feelings of others. Typically, they leave their partner for a younger and more attractive person without any guilt or remorse (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). The other partner responds with intense feelings of rejection. They may present with depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, severe weight loss and even psychosis. In reaction to this severe rejection, these parents lash out at the narcissistic partner by hurting and damaging the children and their possessions. This is done because children and other significant individuals are an extension

of the narcissistic self (Raso, 2004). One partner hurts the other partner by hurting significant individuals. This is not the case in PAS where the parents' behaviour is primarily motivated by a need to protect the bond between them and the child and to alienate the child, not to hurt the targeted parent (Wakeford, 2001).

2.3.7.5 Münchhausen's syndrome by proxy

According to Wakeford (2001) the psychological abuse of children in severe cases of PAS is closely related to Münchhausen's syndrome by proxy (MS). Additionally, this syndrome is also closely related to Factitious disorder (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). It is characterised by the intentional imitating of physical and psychological symptoms in the child by the parent. The motivation for this behaviour is the primary gain of the parent whose child is unhealthy. No secondary gain is involved (Colman, 2001).

The parents in MS cases seem very supportive and stable especially when consulting medical professionals (Rand, 2011). This is not always the case in PAS where parental pathology is observable during custodial disputes. MS parents' carefully planned behaviour is usually supported by weak rationalisations that portray them as victims. An example would be moving to another town to protect the child against the father, when the mother already has a protective order against the father limiting contact. These parents frequently lodge false allegations of sexual abuse that disappear when challenged or questioned. MS parents can also use the child's medical care as a tactic to manipulate and to strengthen the bond between them and their child (Wakeford, 2001). They also use the child to gain secondary support from health care professionals. According to Siegel and Langford (1998) both parents of MS and PAS tell lies to enhance their point of view and stance against the targeted parent.

2.3.7.6 Other differential diagnoses

One of the primary manifestations of PAS is the child's rejection and deprecation of the targeted parent. There are various reasons that would justify a child's rejection of a parent (Brandes, 2000). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in PAS the child's rejection of the targeted parent is unjustified. Alternative diagnoses to PAS may include the following:

2.3.7.6.1 Normal development

According to Johnston (1993) it is common for children to become aligned or polarised with one parent. The child's alignment may also switch from one parent to the other depending on the child's developmental stage and life events. Disagreement and divorce might evoke loyalty conflict in children (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010). The difficulties children might experience could look similar to the behaviour seen in PAS children. However, reactive adjustment problems after divorce are typically transitory. In PAS however, as the alienation becomes internalised, the behaviour and difficulties these children experience may be continuous.

2.3.7.6.2 Child abuse or neglect

In the PAS child, the unjustified rejection and deprecation of the targeted parent is one primary behavioural manifestation of the syndrome. In cases where the child was abused, neglected or severely disliked by the targeted parent the child's animosity may be justified (Clarkson & Clarkson, 2007). If the refusal of visitation and rejection of the targeted parent is consequently seen as an appropriate response or as understandable, the PAS diagnosis will not be considered suitable (De Jager, 2008). If the child's refusal or rejection were the result of abuse, the diagnosis would be physical or sexual abuse of the child. This

distinction is very important because some abusive parents exploit the PAS diagnosis as a means to regain contact and custody of their children.

2.3.7.6.3 Shared psychotic disorder

Shared psychotic disorder or *Folie à deux* is characterised by the transfer of delusions from one person to another. Usually these individuals live together and are closely related (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). In shared psychotic disorder, a delusional parent may influence a child to believe that the other parent is an evil person who should be feared. The child may refuse visitation and respond by rejecting and avoiding the targeted parent. This behaviour is very similar to behaviour demonstrated in PAS. However, the distinction is cognisable by the intention of the parent (Wakeford, 2001). The parent in Shared psychotic disorder cases suffers from a mental disorder. In most cases, the transferral of the delusion is not strategic. In PAS cases, the parent's strategic denigration of the targeted parent is to protect their bond with their child. The idea that this bond is being threatened does not seem to justify classification as a delusion (Baker, Burkhard, & Albertson-Kelly, 2012).

2.3.7.6.4 Specific phobia

According to Gardner (1998) children with PAS actively contributes to the campaign of denigration against the targeted parent. A child with a specific situational type phobia might present with an unreasonable fear of a parent or some aspect of the parent's household (De Jager, 2008). They characteristically avoid the stimulus of their anxiety that may lead to visitation disturbance of relational difficulties. In contrast to children with PAS, a child with a specific phobia is unlikely to engage in a persistent campaign of denigration against the feared parent (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010). The rationalisations PAS children with give for their fear and discontent towards the targeted parent usually varies

as opposed to children with specific phobia whose source fear is more specific or situation specific.

2.3.7.6.5 Separation anxiety

In Separation anxiety disorder, the child displays anxiety and unrealistic fears that something will happen to the primary caretaker (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). In contrast, children with PAS are rather preoccupied with unrealistic beliefs that the alienated parent is dangerous or bad. The fear and animosity in PAS cases are closely related to the alienating parent's programming and indoctrination of the child (Wakeford, 2001). A child with Separation anxiety disorder may be worried and anxious about being away from the primary caretaker due to the disturbing effect the parents' divorce have on them. No parental probing contributes to the presentation of separation anxiety.

2.3.7.6.6 Oppositional defiant disorder

According to Bernet et al. (2010) children with Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) may become even more symptomatic if the parents go through a divorce. They manifest anger, resentment and stubbornness and they may refuse to participate in the process of transitioning from one parent to the other. In PAS cases, the children focus their objections on the character of the targeted parent and protest contact with them. ODD children are likely to be oppositional with both parents and other authority figures within a variety of contexts (De Jager, 2008).

2.3.7.6.7 Adjustment disorder

Divorce is one of the known causes of adjustment disorders. Divorce can be a taxing and stressful occurrence affecting the finances, living arrangements and relationships of a household (Baron & Byrne, 2000). Adjustment disorder is an expected reaction to the various stressors related to the divorce. These stressors include the discord between the parents, the loss of a relationship with a parent, and the disruption of moving to a new neighbourhood and school.

According to Sadock and Sadock (2007) the symptomatic presentation of adjustment disorder may vary. They may include depression, an anxious mood or disruptive behaviour. In contrast, a child with PAS will manifest a specific group of symptoms that is not common in adjustment disorders. These include a campaign of denigration and weak, frivolous rationalisations for the child's persistent criticism of the alienated parent (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010). Furthermore, the problem behaviour related to adjustment disorders are transitory and responsive to treatment, which is not the case with PAS. Many of the symptoms and the characteristics of PAS may be present in divorce but when these characteristics manifest together and is of a severe degree PAS is most likely the cause.

2.3.8 THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF PAS ON THE CHILD

Research on PAS is seen as being in its formative years and information on the effects of PAS on children is very limited. The experience of divorce, learning to alternate between households, and the possibility of moving schools or neighbourhoods can be very challenging to children (Burke, McIntosh, & Gridley, 2009). Research about the relationship between

divorce and child adjustment largely focuses on behavioural, social and emotional problems regarding the difficulties and stressors children experience.

The two major predictors of children's adjustment is their exposure to inter-parental conflict and the quality of the parent-child relationship. For most children it is not the divorce per se that is the cause of difficulties, but rather ongoing exposure to conflict and a difficult parent-child relationship (Burke, McIntosh, & Gridley, 2009). According to Waldron and Joanis (1996) some of the direct negative effects of parental alienation include guilt, self-hatred, distortion of reality testing, and general emotional and psychological problems. In recent literature the following characteristics have been linked to the long-term effect of PAS:

- *Lower level of achievements*

Individuals in which PAS was identified showed substantially lower levels of achievement, fewer degrees, less overall employment, lower college enrolment, and more economic hardship (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012).

- *Decreased self-esteem*

Ben-Ami and Baker (2012) link lower self-esteem in children with PAS to the minimal attention and need fulfilment these children experience during their emotional development. According to Baker (2005) the source of low self-esteem in PAS children is the internalisation of their hatred towards the targeted parent. In accordance with object relations theory, PAS children feel that they are unworthy because they feel that the "bad" targeted parent is genetically and symbolically part of them and therefore they must be bad. Controlling behaviour of parents further contributes to feelings of anger, guilt and lower self-sufficiency and self-esteem. This places individuals exposed to PAS at greater risk of

substance abuse and other addictions because of their poorer coping abilities and compromised self-worth (Baker, 2010).

- *Depression*

Children exposed to PAS often struggle with unresolved feelings of self-hatred and guilt in adulthood (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Toren, Bregman, Zohar-Reich, Ben-Amitay, Wolmer, & Laor, 2013). These children tend to internalise their hatred towards the alienated parent. They are led to believe that the targeted parent did not love or want them, resulting in their feelings of worthlessness. This renders children exposed to PAS susceptible to low self-worth and poor self-esteem, which in turn increases their risk of developing mood disorders (Toren, Bregman, Zohar-Reich, Ben-Amitay, Wolmer, & Laor, 2013). These individuals' depression are rooted in their feelings of being unloved or worthy, and not being allowed to express those feelings (Baker, 2006). The impact of the loss of the targeted parent is aggravated by the fact that PAS children's opportunity to mourn this loss is denied by alienating parents. According to Baker (2005) 70% of children involved in PAS cases are vulnerable to the development of depression.

- *Relational problems*

According to Baker (2005) one of the primary sources of PAS children's tendency to relational difficulties is their lack of trust. They typically have difficulty in trusting themselves and other people. The conflict PAS children experience between their own perception and what they were told to believe causes them to develop a lack of trust in others as well as their own ability for decision-making and self-efficacy.

According to Baker (2006) they seem to be stuck in a pattern of repeating the past. The need to repeat the primal rejection of the parent in all subsequent romantic relationships is a way of recreating the only experience they know (rejection by a love object) and confirming what they believe about themselves (that they are not worthy). This is yet another example of how internal attachments to early significant others becomes the platform for future relationships. Warshak (2000) also noted that parents who promote alienation in turn tend to have conflicted and/or distant relationships with their parents themselves. This places PAS children at a high risk for divorce and alienation from their own children. According to Baker (2005) adult children with PAS who are divorced attribute their failed relationships to their lack of trust in their partner, their inability to be intimate, as well as their problems with depression and substance abuse.

- *Personality development*

According to Bowlby's theory of attachment, experience with primary caregivers leads to generalised expectations and beliefs about self, the world, and relationships. He describes these representations as persistent, but adjustable according to experience (Colman, 2001). These internal working models become the foundation of personality, behaviour and relationships with others (Garber, 2004). Children with PAS presented with disorganised and avoided attachment styles. This resulted in relational difficulties where individuals usually distance themselves from their partner or even their own children (Baker, 2006). Some have a severe fear of and sensitivity to rejection (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Some present with immense anxiety, hostility and poor conflict management. This is attributed to poorer levels of self-regulation (Baron & Byrne, 2000). Baker (2006) found these individuals struggle to trust and have a higher divorce rate as adults.

Nolfte and Shaver (2006) compared anxious and avoidant attachment styles with the big five personality traits and relational functioning of individuals. They concluded that attachment security of individuals is moderately negatively correlated with their levels of neuroticism. These authors maintain that attachment, anxiety and avoidance, and neuroticism are all forms of insecurity. Thus, individuals that are exposed to PAS are more likely to be more neurotic with higher levels of depression, vulnerability and anxiety, and lower levels of competence and self-discipline (Nolfte & Shaver, 2006). Individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety are prone to a “negative model of the self” and a high risk for depression. In addition, high levels of anxiety associated with PAS children correlated with low levels of assertiveness and dominance (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012).

According to Nolfte and Shaver (2006) PAS children who develop avoidant attachment styles also have high levels of depression and vulnerability. They have extreme difficulties in trusting people and have lower levels of warmth and altruistic behaviour. High levels of attachment avoidance are associated with low scores on agreeableness, extraversion and openness. These children display a tendency to suppress emotions and emotional memories.

Even though research on the long-term effect of PAS is currently very limited, the characteristics discussed above give some indication of the difficulties and the impact PAS may have on individuals and their development. The goal of this study is therefore to provide an in-depth exploration and description of how PAS is experienced, and the possible effect it has on children from the perspective of young adults exposed to PAS. As such, it aims to contribute to current knowledge about PAS and the possible long-term effects on

victims. In doing so, treatment of PAS within a clinical and psycho-legal field may be more effective.

2.3.9 PSYCHO-LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF PAS

Since the 1970s health care professionals have seen an increase in their involvement in divorce litigation and child-custody disputes (Gardner, 1998). According to Gardner (1998) this is closely related to the replacement of the “tender-years assumption” with the “best-interest-of-the-child assumption” along with the increased popularity for joint custody. The “best-interest-of-the-child assumption” held that mothers, because they are female are intrinsically superior to men as child carers. For fathers to gain custodial status, the father had to supply the court with incontestable proof of serious maternal deficiencies (Gardner, 1998).

The new Children’s Act 38 of 2005 implemented in South Africa in 2007 requires that the “best interest of the child principle” be applied to custody disputes. This implied that custodial arrangement would no longer be dependent on gender but rather on factors that influence the best interest of the child along with parental capacity and skills. This had led to escalation in child-custody litigation and an intensification of the conflict and hostility among parents and litigators to obtain custody (Thompson, 2012).

Since the 1970s psychologists were increasingly drawn into the litigation as expert witnesses on cases. This gave rise to the forensic approach in the field of psychology. Forensic psychologists are experts in specific areas of psychology (e.g. child development and pathology) along with knowledge about litigation, report writing, and assessment sufficient to conduct sound investigations. According to Levy (2010) the psycho-legal

functions of psychologists especially regarding divorce and custodial disputes include assessment, mediation and therapeutic intervention.

Psychologists are primarily involved in the mediation of custody and visitation issues and the mediation in the formulation of a parenting plan during divorce. They are responsible for assessing whether any forms of abuse or inadequate parenting are present. Based on this assessment they need to determine the best custodial arrangement for the child. If parental care is not possible, they assist in the screening of potential foster or adoptive parents.

Psychologists also assess whether parental contact and interaction with grandparents is appropriate and necessary. If appointed by court they supervise visitation in the case of emotional abusive parents or parents with substance abuse problems. The court may also appoint psychologists to assist in therapeutic intervention. Amongst others, psychologists' roles include psychotherapy and trauma counselling, parent-child family counselling, therapeutic supervised visitation, anger management and psycho-education on parenting skills, communication skills and conflict management.

Working within the family law system a therapist will be confronted with multiple ethical considerations and dilemmas. Regardless of who requested the assessment or intervention, psychologists are ethically obligated to make decisions and recommendations that are in the best interest of the child. Parents and litigators are increasingly coercing therapists to sway custodial disputes in their favour.

The dynamics of PA and PAS can pose some serious challenges for psychologists tasked to intervene in divorce cases involving PA and/or PAS. According to Viljoen (2014)

research currently depicting the experience of psychologists working with PA and/or PAS is very limited. In her study on the lived experiences of psychologists involved in PAS, Viljoen (2014) found that the complex, difficult and destructive dynamics of PAS become an emotional burden for the therapist working with this phenomenon. This had led to some practitioners avoiding working with PAS cases due to the high levels of stress, frustration, disappointment, and low success rate they experience with these cases. It would also appear that in working with PAS cases clinicians expose themselves to the hazards of financial strain and compassion fatigue. They run the added risk of complaints being laid against them or being wrongfully prosecuted themselves (Viljoen, 2014).

2.3.10 THE DEBATES SURROUNDING THE PAS PHENOMENON

There is widespread debate among both legal and health care practitioners surrounding the phenomenon of PAS. Yet there is agreement among experts as to the existence of a unique cluster of divorce-related symptoms in the child who presents with a psychological disturbance, whether called PA, PAS, pathological alienation, or “alienated child.” They further agree that parental indoctrination or brainwashing can be a causal factor, and that the child actively contributes towards this phenomenon. Differences remain over the extent of the aligned or alienating parent’s role and suitable intervention strategies (Rand, 2011).

The controversy regarding PAS is caused by its applicability within litigation, mainly custodial disputes. The term is misused and in itself becomes a tool for alienation. Litigation postulates that one parent, the targeted parent, is preferred regarding custody of the child because the alienating parent’s behaviour is associated with psychopathology. In this way PAS fits well with the win-lose approach to custodial litigation. The result is that PAS itself

becomes an instrument in legal alienation. Depending on the legal position and parent being defended, PAS either will be advocated or discredited (De Jager, 2008).

According to Rand (2011) the debate against PAS and PA can be divided into two groups: The first group consists of mental health professionals, divorce investigators and other clinicians who work within the family law field. This group is referred to as the Johnston/Kelly critics whose main critique is with Gardner's conceptualisation of PAS. These critics include individuals like Wallenstein and Blakeslee (1989), Kelly and Johnston (2005) and Emery, Otto, and O'Donohue (2005).

The other group of critics consist of advocates for abused women and children. They include individuals like Bruch (2001), Faller (1998), Myers (1997) and Walker, Brantley and Rigsbee (2004). This group is referred to as the feminist and child advocate critics. Their criticism of PAS focuses mainly on the controversy regarding sexual abuse allegations during divorce as well as Gardner's views on child sexual abuse. According to Rand (2011), these critics frequently but mistakenly equate false allegations of sexual abuse with Gardner's definition of PAS. The controversial issues surrounding PAS explored by both groups are discussed below.

2.3.10.1 Validity and reliability of PAS

There is a widespread debate among academics regarding the validity and empirical foundation of PAS (Johnston, 1993). Both groups mentioned above are convinced of little empirical support for the reliable identification of PAS based on the limited available research on PAS as a diagnostic entity along with its correlates and causes (Rand, 2011).

One of the criticisms against PAS focuses on Gardner's work on this phenomenon. Supposedly, Gardner had no empirical data to support his theory and assumptions, and labels his work as his own "self-published ideas" (Bernet & Baker, 2013). These critics also assert that Gardner isolated his work from peer review using his personal publishing company, and republishing his self-published materials (Rand, 2011).

According to Bernet and Baker (2013) these accusations are unfounded. During 50 years as a child psychiatrist, Gardner authored 130 peer-reviewed articles, of which 19 were on PAS (Rand, 2011). The articles were published by independent publishers other than Gardner's company. Gardner himself attempted a corrective on Johnston and Kelly's perpetuation of the myth that his work on PAS was unsuccessfully peer reviewed.

In 2009, a proposal to include "Parental alienation disorder" as a diagnosis in the DSM-V was submitted and published by Bernet et al.(2010). They proposed that a valid concept refers to one for which there were general agreement regarding the meaning or definition. They reported PAS as a valid concept, identified and described by at least six independent groups of researchers during the 1980s when the term was first developed.

Bernet et al. (2010) reported that after Gardner's formulation of PAS many researchers applied the definition to their studies of children involved in high-conflict divorces. These researchers verified that Gardner's definition could be used to identify groups of children who fulfilled the diagnostic criteria of PAS.

2.3.10.2 The circularity of the PAS definition

The second criticism against PAS involves the circularity of its definition. For parental alienation to be identified, an alienating parent and a receptive child must be present. The problem Gardner created by adding this etiological agent to his working definition of PAS is that it renders the validity of the concept vulnerable to criticism (Kelly & Johnston, 2005). It is unlikely that all etiological agents can be included in a definition of a phenomenon, like in the case of Gardner's definition. All that critics have to do is to disprove or to expand on the etiology agent included in the definition to render the definition and its formulation questionable.

McKelvey (2011) regards Kelly and Johnston's criticism of circularity technically insignificant. According to him Gardner (1998), Kelly and Johnston (2005) all identify multiple possible causes of alienation. They agree for example that high-conflict divorces contribute to the development of alienation. McKelvey (2011) further regards this criticism as inapplicable to a legal formulation of parental alienation. He argues that courts are more concerned with the question of the existence and intervention of PAS, than with the psychological causes of the alienation.

Meier (2009) agrees with Kelly and Johnston that Gardner's definition of PAS is circular, but for different reasons. To verify whether allegations of child sexual assault are justified, one must evaluate whether parental alienation is present. However to determine whether parental alienation is present, one must determine whether the assault allegations are true or false. There is some truth to Meier's claim but it is important to note that not all cases of PAS include allegations of sexual abuse. According to McKelvey (2011) only 24% of

PAS cases include allegations of sexual abuse. Consequently, the circularity is not applicable to the majority of the cases of PAS.

2.3.10.3 PAS exclusively associated with Gardner

Critics in both groups have referred to PAS as “Gardner’s theory”. This is inaccurate since PAS has been independently observed by many different contributors (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010). They use different terminology, such as parental alienation, Medea syndrome, divorce related malicious mother syndrome, parental alignments, parental alienation dynamic, parent alienation continuum, post-separated parental rejection, child alienation disorder and programmed and brainwashed children. Each contributor conveys their own perspective on the PAS problem, which facilitates to elaborate and refine the concept. According to Rand (2011) this is what Gardner had always envisioned for PAS, a syndrome in its early developmental stages compared to other disorders included in the DSM-V.

2.3.10.4 PAS synonymous with false allegations of abuse

The feminist/child advocate critics are under the mistaken impression that PAS is synonymous with false allegations of sexual abuse. As previously discussed in this chapter, Meier (2009) hypothesised that PAS is circular in its definition and its relation to allegations of sexual abuse. Moreover, there is confusion amongst critics that Gardner’s sexual abuse legitimacy scale (SALS) was designed to substantiate the presence of PAS (Mc Kelvey, 2011). Gardner’s SALS was designed to assess the validity of an allegation of sexual abuse and not to measure PAS (Rand, 2011). Consequently, PAS and false allegations are not considered synonymous.

Other key components of PAS include the child's obsession with denigrating the hated parent, the alienating parent's influence combined with the child's active contributions to the campaign of denigration, and situational factors (Gardner, 1998). Kopetski (1998) found false allegations of sexual abuse in about 15% of cases. Rand (2011) sees false allegations of abuse as an extension of PAS, not part of PAS by definition. The confusion over the connection between PAS and the SALS is because Gardner introduced the SALS in his first book on PAS (Mc Kelvey, 2011).

2.3.10.5 Use of the term “syndrome”

There are several debates concerning the use of the word “syndrome” to describe phenomenon of PAS (Lamminen, 2013). Both mental health and legal professionals have challenged PAS as a diagnostic entity, and the syndrome has not been accepted as a psychiatric diagnosis in DSM (Johnston, 1993). According to Gardner (2002) “parental alienation” and “alienated child” are terms too vague to be of use in the identifying and defining of behaviour related to PAS.

Kopetski (1998) agreed with Gardner on the direct identifying of the alienating parent's role in PAS, but preferred to avoid the controversial PAS terminology in custody litigation. Instead, she provided detailed descriptions of the alienating parent's behaviour and pathological enmeshment with the child. Those clinicians who have observed the cluster of behaviour and dynamics related to PAS gave detailed descriptions, which are remarkably similar to those proposed by Gardner. Warshak (2000) held that those who use the term “Parental alienation syndrome” believe that the phenomenon sufficiently differs from other types of parent-child disturbances to warrant a separate designation.

According to Sadock and Sadock (2007) psychology has the immediate goal of understanding individuals and groups by establishing general principles in human behaviour. The cluster of symptoms that Gardner described is appropriately viewed as a syndrome since the general cluster of symptoms involved is seen repeatedly. These symptoms warrant being grouped together because of a common etiology, underlying cause, and repetitive concurrent presentation (Weigel & Donovan, 2006).

According to Johnston and Kelly (2005) PAS has no recognised or empirically verified pathogenesis, course, familial pattern, or treatment selection. Therefore, it cannot properly be considered a diagnostic syndrome. They stated that it could be considered a non-diagnostic syndrome. However, this sheds no light on cause, prognosis, and treatment of the behaviour involved in PAS. They hold that the use of a medical term like “syndrome” to explain the behaviour of family social systems expose the phenomenon to further controversy (Lamminen, 2013; Whitcombe, 2014). This can be why many attorneys manipulate the diagnosis and its poor parameters to vindicate their clients. This is also why many attorneys blame shift to manipulate the diagnosis to justify their clients’ actions.

Gardner (1998) has proposed eight symptoms of PAS, clearly differentiating between the three degrees of PAS and the behaviour associated with both children and alienating parents. It is not precisely clear though how many and which symptoms are necessary to distinguish between mild, moderate and severe PAS. The underlying cause of PAS has been identified as the brainwashing and indoctrination of the child by the alienating parent, combined with the child’s own contributions to the denigration of the alienated parent. Both these causational factors have been excluded from Parental alienation. If a syndrome is

based on frequent co-occurrence of symptoms and causational factors as described above (De Jager, 2008) it may be safely concluded that PAS is indeed a syndrome.

Some academics have expressed concern about labelling children of high-conflict divorce with a mental condition. Additionally the use of the term “syndrome” within legal proceedings has also been questioned. Syndrome evidence can be readily misused within litigation, as when an alienated parent asserts that the child’s rejection is prior proof that the favoured parent is alienating and vice versa (Rand, 2011). Nevertheless, the questions should be asked, to which scope of practise or profession does PAS apply? and, Can litigators diagnose or identify it without any training or knowledge about the dynamics and behaviour involved?

The following example clearly illustrates the dilemma. A teacher can identify a child who is sad, unmotivated and underperforming in school. Does this fall within her scope of practise and enable her to diagnose the child with depression? Whether or not parental alienation is a “syndrome”, it is a useful and familiar term that is descriptive of a certain type of family situation and dynamic (Mc Kelvey, 2011; Whitcombe, 2014).

2.3.10.6 Importance of parental influence in the development of PAS

Gardner (1991) proposed that the essence of PAS is a child’s campaign of denigration against a parent that results from “programming” or “brainwashing” of the child by one parent to denigrate the other parent. This campaign is accompanied by self-created contributions of the child in support of the alienating parent’s campaign.

The Kelly/Johnston critics hypothesise that PAS almost exclusively focuses on the alienating parent as etiological agent and that Gardner's definition focuses on the psychopathology of the alienating parent. Kelly and Johnston (2005) proposed that the alienating behaviour of a parent is neither sufficient nor a necessary condition for a child to become alienated from their parent. Cartwright (1993) agrees that a number of factors influence the occurrence of PAS. Thus, family units do not function in isolation and individual characteristics and family dynamics play an important role in the development of PAS.

Kelly and Johnston (2005), amongst others, argue that more than the alienating behaviour of the parent might cause parental alienation. They advocated a more comprehensive approach that also accounts for the child's context. This led to the development and adoption of a systemic theoretical model that include various factors directly and indirectly influencing the child and have the potential to increase the risk of alienation. From a family systems perspective, the cause of PAS cannot be linked to the psychopathology of one parent, but rather with the high conflict between both parents (Lund, 1995).

It further shifts the attention to the child by focusing more intently on alienation as a feature of the child. Subsequently a family systems perspective considers the child's level of vulnerability, behaviour problems, separation anxiety, lack of social skills, coping skills, problem-solving abilities and other family dynamics like parent-child role reversal as etiological factors of PAS (Godbout & Parent, 2012). By focusing more intensely on alienation as a feature of the child, and not as a phenomenon involving the alienated child and the favoured parent as a unit, there is more room to examine how the behaviour of both parents cause PAS (Mc Kelvey, 2011).

According to Rand (2011) part of the problem is that the Johnston/Kelly critics seem convinced that Gardner automatically assumed that whenever a child expressed fear or antagonism towards a parent and was reluctant or refused to visit, there had to be an alienating parent to blame. This is not the case; Gardner (2001) and many after him have identified various deferential causes to this behaviour other than PAS.

Despite Kelly and Johnston's factual and methodological concerns about Gardner's formulation of PAS, their description of the alienated child is remarkably similar to Gardner's portrayal of a child with PAS (Mc Kelvey, 2011). In fact, Johnston and Kelly described how the child's irrational alienation from a parent could be the psychological manipulation and control of an emotionally dependent child that is aligned with a parent and significant others (Kelly & Johnston, 2005). Thus the loving involvement in, acceptance of and support for the child comes at the price of the child's unquestioned allegiance, distortions in reasoning, judgment and moral integrity, and at the sacrifice of her relationship with the other parent (Rand, 2011). In principle, this is congruent with Gardner's explanation of the role of the alienating parent in the alienation of a child, but it is presented as a critique and a reformulation of parental alienation (Mc Kelvey, 2011). In other words, Kelly and Johnston (2005) proposed a change in terminology and focus for PAS.

Nevertheless, within the court system Kelly and Johnston's reformulation may have some significance. The change in terminology may assist in shifting the court's focus from the behaviour of the favoured parent to the behaviour of the alienated child. This will result in a greater awareness of the damage to the child and the need for intervention.

2.3.10.7 Financial gain of clinicians

The custodial warfare may result in colossal financial strain for parents. Many parents find themselves to be the victims of unprincipled litigators who exploit the system for financial gain, and aid resentful partners who use legal proceedings as a means of revenge (De Jager, 2008). Gardner (2002) mentioned that attorneys deny PAS because either it results in longer trials that equate to more money, or they prefer to use the term PA as it is vaguer and more readily exploitable within the court.

Litigators contest the existence of PAS by questioning its validity or the fact that it is not included within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*. This is done either for financial gain or as a tactic to validate their clients' stance or claims. Some litigators go as far as to exploit the health professionals involved. This is done by questioning their professional capability and practise or exposing them to prosecution themselves. At times, the war between litigators and health professionals (like psychologists, social workers and psychiatrists) resembles the dynamics in PAS itself. All parties claim to act in the best interest of the child, but in reality it is a strategic war rather than an intervention focused on the child (Turkat, 2000).

2.3.10.8 Gender bias and legal exploitation of PAS

Some critics believe that PAS is gender-biased. When Gardner coined the term in the 1980s it was proposed that the majority of alienating parents were female (Darnall, 1998; Gardner, 1998). However, since the 1990s there has been a shift supporting the opinion that the ratio between male and female potential alienators was the same. As mentioned earlier, this was due to the shift in legislation where the "tender years" principle was replaced with

the “best interest of the child” assumption (Baker & Darnall, 2007). Fathers obtaining custody of their children became more prominent, as did shared custodial arrangements.

The notions of PAS and PA have generated both enthusiastic endorsement and strong negative response along gender lines. According to Lowenstein (2002) PAS is considered biased by many critics who have failed to comprehend the gender shift in PAS. Gardner’s formulation of PAS has been rejected by some women’s advocates stating that it is indicative of typical social biases that victimise women and children by ignoring and rationalising abuse by men (Johnston, 2003).

Feminist critics of Gardner are mainly concerned with misuse of PAS within the legal system. They maintain that the gender-loaded language involved in his theories can be used to discredit women who have experienced domestic violence (Mc Kelvey, 2011). These critics oppose the inclusion of PAS within the DSM because of allegations of parental alienation disorder made by abusive ex-husbands as an attempt to gain full or joint custody (Bernet & Baker, 2013).

Finally, parental alienation is also critiqued for the severity of its remedies. Recommend change in custody, often combined with a temporary termination of contact between the child and the favoured parent is seen as too drastic by some critics and the possibility of even provoking further alienation. It should be recognised that even if a change in custody is an extreme remedy, certain circumstances justifies this adjustment.

According to Baker and Darnall (2007) parental alienation syndrome is a form of child abuse. It often exists in tandem with other forms of child abuse or dynamics detrimental

to healthy child development. This is supported by Reay's (2007) study of the long-term effect of PAS that suggested higher levels of psychological distress among children of PAS for various reasons. It is important that PAS cases be individually assessed and managed to ensure appropriate intervention and prevent individuals involved being exploited. Effective early intervention by courts and health care professionals may result in less drastic intervention.

The question is raised whether this criticism against the concept of PAS refers to poor validity or unethical application. The issue of the unprofessional and unethical application of PAS within custodial battles is a perturbing problem that causes a "hands-off" attitude among health care professional to avoid PAS cases. Bernet and Baker (2013) advocated that the inclusion of PA in the next editions of DSM and ICD would assist research regarding this mental condition. It will further strengthen the awareness and understanding of PAS or PA and help prevent its misuse in the legal setting (Bernet & Baker, 2013). The goal would be that intervention with these families could aid children of divorce to have a healthy relationship with both parents.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Examining PAS is a complex task since it involves both interpersonal and intrapersonal modalities of human functioning. The phenomenon includes behavioural, cognitive and emotional aspects and experiences of multiple individuals as well as the dynamics of their relationship. It is one of many phenomena involving alienation, estrangement, indoctrination, hostility and interrupted contact between parent and child within the context of divorce. There is now scholarly consensus that severe PAS is detrimental to children.

Every child has a fundamental right and need for an unthreatened and loving relationship with both parents. To be denied that right by one parent, without sufficient justification such as abuse or neglect, is in itself a form of child abuse. PAS is mostly understudied and a source of great debate. The lack of a universally accepted formulation of the disorder leads to further controversy and misuse. The goal of this study is to contribute in an explorative manner to existing knowledge about PAS and the effects thereof on all parties involved. Future research on this topic will assist practitioners in the identification and effective treatment of PAS.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The following chapter provides an outline of the methods used in this investigation. It serves to clarify the research goals and design of this study. The methods used in the selection of participants, data gathering and analysis are reviewed. Ethical considerations that were applicable to this study will be summarised.

3.2 ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN THE PLANNING OF THE RESEARCH

PAS is a complex phenomenon that involves both interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning of individuals. The phenomenon includes behavioural, cognitive and emotional aspects and experiences of multiple individuals as well as the dynamics of their relationships. In addition, PAS influences the subjective reality, memory and experiences of individuals.

The goal of this study was to explore the personal experiences of young adults who may have experienced PAS; primarily to capture the complexity of their subjective experiences and the role it played in the different dimensions of their lives. The use of appropriate and sensitive research methods that would bring about new insights about PAS yet at the same time maintained participants' well-being, proved to be a challenging task.

According to Gough and Madill (2012) research on participant reactivity and subjectivity have indicated that people are more complex in ways other than allowed to be examined by theories and experimental techniques. This study attempted to explore how several aspects relating to the perceived experience of PAS informed individuals' perceptions

about their reality. By nature of participants' experiences, the study inevitably necessitated a subjective approach. It included exploring their perceptions about their parents' divorce, their experiences, expectations, personal understanding and beliefs about themselves and their parents, as a means to determine their experience of PAS. This approach is based on a social constructivist paradigm that promotes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning and social construction of reality by focusing on the circular dynamic between the researcher and the participant (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Through close collaboration between researcher and contributor, participants were given the opportunity to tell their stories. By exploring participant's autobiographical memory about their parents' divorce, they could voice their reality about their parents' divorce and their subjective experiences which could be a reflection of the presence of PAS. According to Prebble, Addis, and Tippett (2013) autobiographical memory is a complex mental system that allows people to recollect information, events and experiences from their past.

Conway (2005) suggests that an individual's autobiographic memory is divided into systems, the "episodic memory system" and the "self-memory system". The goal of the "episodic memory system" is to provide an accurate account of events and to keep and learn from previous experiences. Episodic memories provide highly accurate records of discrete moments, but have minimal conceptual organisation and thus tend to dissipate quickly (Conway, 2009).

The "self-memory system" organises autobiographical information at different levels of abstraction; from highly abstracted summaries of one's whole life (life stories), knowledge

relating to periods of one's life (lifetime periods), summaries of extended and repeated events (general events), to specific, sensory-perceptual details of particular events (episodic detail) (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). Although episodic memories form the basis of autobiographical memory, it is their conceptual organisation within the self-memory system that transforms it into autobiographical memory allowing it to influence the conceptual self of an individual (Conway & Holmes, 2004).

For this reason, it can be assumed that individuals' experience of their parents' divorce, possible exposure to PAS, their sense of self and ability to regulate their self-concept are linked. The research done in this area should therefore be approached with great caution. In accordance, the investigation of a sensitive issue like PAS with the added involvement of vulnerable individuals who experienced PAS as children highlighted several specific ethical concerns throughout the research process. This required the adoption of several strategies in advance that prevented and minimised the risk of exposing participants to psychological distress during the research.

Due to the highly emotional content and nature of the research, all the data and responses were processed in such a way as to insure the anonymity of participants. Throughout the study, PAS as a syndrome was not identified, diagnosed, disclosed or discussed with the participants. This was done to protect participants against any form of psychological distress or harm as well as to shield them against the negative effect of stigmatisation and labelling of psychological disorders (Rosenfield, 1997).

By using open ended questions participants' subjective experiences of their parents' divorce were explored without implying PAS is/was present (Berg, 1998). This was also

done as a precaution not to aggravate the dynamics of PAS already present that could influence participant's responses about their experience.

Additionally it protected participants against the uncontrolled effects of diagnosing a family system without objectively evaluating the whole family. Interviews were aimed at collecting data to further research and not clinical intervention where diagnosis is appropriate. The data from the interviews were analysed and only interviews where possible exposure to PAS could be identified were included in the final analysis. These ethically justifiable compromises in the data collection process were effected to protect the well-being of the study participants (Garand, Lingler, Conner, & Dew, 2009).

3.3 METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

The following is a summary of the methods of investigation used in the empirical study.

3.3.1 RESEARCH AIM

The research aim of this study was to provide an exploration and description of how divorce is experienced from the perspective of young adults who were possible exposed to PAS as children. This was done by exploring their perceptions about their parents' divorce, their experiences, expectations, personal understanding and beliefs about themselves and their parents, as a means to determine their experience of PAS. It served to investigate, summarise and clarify what is currently known about PAS, how children experience this phenomenon and the possible consequence on their everyday lives.

3.3.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies and theories about PAS and related topics were examined and explored to gain sufficient knowledge for the completion of this explorative study. The acceptance of the concept of PAS, its formulation and definition is a highly contested subject of long-standing debate. It is for this reason that the relevant terminology for this study was operationally defined and explained in Chapter 2. Additional information on the dynamics of PAS, the role of the parents as well as children in the alienation process, related syndromes, and the dynamics of divorce was included in the literature review for a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon of PAS and the dynamics involved.

3.3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study a collective exploratory/descriptive case study design was used to explore and describe: 1) the dynamics of PAS as experienced and described by the young adults, and 2) the perceived effect this may have had on their current lives and functioning. This type/design of empirical inquiry is appropriate to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are vague.

A collective exploratory/descriptive case study design entails the study of several identifiable cases where possible PAS was involved to gain a detailed as well as holistic understanding of the mechanisms of PAS. It involves studying participants as individuals rather than as members of a population (Lindegger, 2006). According to Berg (1998) collective case study methods produce extremely rich, detailed, and in-depth information particularly suited to descriptive and explorative studies about phenomena like PAS where previous research on the topic is limited.

Collective case study methods provide tools for researchers to strategically and holistically understand and explore a complex phenomenon, like PAS, within its various contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It allows the use of multiple data sources including interviews and observations made by the researcher to explore and describe multiple facets of the PAS phenomenon (Lindegger, 2006). A collective exploratory/descriptive case study design was selected for the following reasons:

- Research on children's experience of PAS and related dynamics and prevalence of PAS is limited therefore explorative approaches are most suited.
- Divorce, PAS and the perceived long-term effect thereof is a sensitive subject to most participants and not all are therefore willing to share their experiences. What's more, such a phenomenon greatly affects children's subjective experience and beliefs about their environment and parents. A collective case study design allowed the researcher without diagnosing, identifying or implying PAS to explore the children's subjective experience of PAS. It allowed for indirect questioning about the experience of parental divorce and the effect thereof without implying the presence of PAS that would have made participants more guarded in their responses.
- The dynamics of ongoing PAS limits the information that the participant is willing to share with researchers. For example: An individual that was alienated from his father as a child and has become alienated to a severe degree will be unwilling to participate in a study to discuss the way his mother alienated him or the negative affects her behaviour had on him. Typically, the lack of ambivalence will keep him from seeing his mother (the alienator) as wrong. A collective case study design allowed for a

neutral platform broad enough to explore these individuals' experiences of PAS without implying its presence during the investigation.

- The boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear. Literature examined pointed out the difficulties in differentiating between PAS and the various debated contexts in which it may occur (Baker & Darnall, 2007; Cartwright, 1993; Gardner, 1998; Rand, 2011; Turkat, 2002). According to Yin (2003) this makes a collective case study design most suited for this study since it allows the researcher to analyse the dynamics of PAS and the experienced effects thereof within each case and across cases.
- Collective case study designs are based on a social constructivist paradigm. It promotes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning and social construction of reality by focusing on the circular dynamic between the researcher and the participant (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Through this close collaboration between researcher and participant within this case study design, participants were given the opportunity to tell their stories and voice their subjective experience of PAS and their reality about their parents' divorce. It gives them opportunity to talk about and make sense of experiences and gives a sense of purpose and meaning.

A major limitation of this design is the external validity of the study. Generalisation of the results is not possible, since case studies do not establish the frequency or prevalence of a phenomenon. Thus, the representativeness of the cases involved may be of concern (Yin, 2003). According to Tellis (1997) a case study design does however satisfy the three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding, and explaining. Furthermore, the use of multiple cases strengthens the results by replicating the pattern-matching, thus increasing confidence the results and conclusions drawn from it (Yin, 1993). Yin (2003) argued that the

concerns with the external validity of case study designs are criticism directed at the statistical and not the analytical generalisation that is the basis of case studies.

3.3.4 PARTICIPANTS

According to Durrheim and Painter (2006) the chosen sampling methods should be guided by the research goals. Participants for this study were chosen by means of purposeful sampling strategies in accordance with collective case study design. This non-probability sampling method was used to choose candidates who were willing and available. They were cases typical of a population needed for the study where typical signs, symptoms and dynamics of PAS could be identified (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This method of sampling does however limit the generalisation of the study's findings because the sample is statistically representative of all PAS cases. Nevertheless, it can serve to explore and describe PAS in such a way as to assist further research on this topic (Durrheim & Painter, 2006).

Young adults were approached to voluntarily form the research population for the study. They were asked to take part in a research project that examines young adults' experiences of their parents' divorce with the prerequisite that there must have been a significant period in which they did not have contact with the non-custodian parent.

Initially 45 participants were identified who were willing to participate in the study. This was narrowed down to 13 participants based on participant availability. They were between 18 and 28 years of age. All willing participants were interviewed with the objective of exploring their experiences of their parents' divorce and the role they believed it plays in their lives. The content of these interviews was analysed to see whether PAS could possibly

be identified by using the diagnostic criteria proposed for the DSM-V as a guideline (Bernet, Von Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2010).

Guideline criteria for the identification of PAS

A. The child manifests the following behaviour:

- 1) A persistent rejection or denigration of a parent that reaches the level of a campaign.
- 2) Weak, frivolous, and absurd rationalisations for the child's persistent criticism of the rejected parent.

B. The child manifests two or more of the following six attitudes and behaviours:

- Lack of ambivalence.
- Independent-thinker phenomenon.
- Reflexive support of one parent against the other.
- Absence of guilt over exploitation of the rejected parent.
- Presence of borrowed scenarios.
- Spread of the animosity to the extended family of the rejected parent.

The interviews were then assessed by using the guidelines of Baker and Darnall (2007) and (Cartwright, 1993) to establish what conscious or unconscious alienating behaviour or programming by the alienating parents were present and reported.

- *Conscious acts of programming*
 - Denigrating the other parent in front of the child.
 - Making statements.
 - Statements that parent abandoned the children.

- False allegations of abuse and neglect.
- Virtual allegations- abuse is only hinted to cast aspersions on the character-targeted parent that is very difficult to contest or disprove (Cartwright, 1993).
- Exaggerating minor flaws in the targeted parent.
- *Unconscious or subtle acts of programming*
 - Sabotaging visitation through guilt inducement and passive discouragement.
 - Attribute negative aspects to the targeted parent without actually verbalising them.

Lastly, Gardner's (1998) guidelines for the differentiation between the different degrees of PAS were used to identify the proposed degree of alienation that the participants were subjected to. A summary of these guidelines are given in the table below.

Table 3: Criteria used in participant selection

	Degree of PAS		
Presenting symptoms	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Campaign of denigration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of allegations against parent • Campaign fuelled by alienating parent • Fear/anger 	Minimal	Moderate	Formidable
Weak/absurd rationalisation of the Depreciation of the targeted parent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor broad justifications for depreciation • Unreasonable pretext • Catastrophic thinking 	Minimal	Moderate	Multiple absurd rationalisations
Lack of ambivalence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectifying alienating parent as all good • Objectifying alienated parent as all bad 	Normal ambivalence	No ambivalence	No ambivalence

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispels loving memories • Blended pronouns (we) • Alignment with alienating parent 			
Independent-thinker phenomenon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice to alienate is child's own decision • Want to save indoctrinating parent from criticism and embarrassment • Mimic words of alienating parent 	Usually absent	Present	Present
Reflexive support of alienating parent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alienating parent behaviour is valid • Indoctrinating parent perfect of weaker and need their support 	Minimal	Present	Present
Absence of guilt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No remorse toward behaviour • No guilt or shame 	Normal guilt	Minimal to no guilt	No guilt
Borrowed scenarios <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use terminology not their own 	Minimal	Present	Present
Spread animosity to friends & family of alienated parent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denigration of family or friends • Absence of guilt 	Minimal	Present	Formidable or visitation not possible
Transitional difficulties at time of visitation	Usually absent	Moderate	Formidable or visitation no possible
Behaviour during visitation	Usually Good	Intermittent antagonistic and provocative	No visitation, or Destructive and continually provocative behaviour throughout visitation
Bonding with the alienator	Strong, healthy	Strong, Mild to moderately pathological	Severely pathological, Often paranoid bonding
Bonding with alienated parent	Strong, Healthy or Minimally pathological	Strong ,Healthy or Minimally pathological	Strong ,Healthy or Minimally pathological

The interviews of those who met the criteria of moderate or severe PAS were then further analysed congruent to the purpose of this dissertation. In total nine cases of PAS was identified. Among these three participants met with the criteria for severe PAS and six participants met with the criteria of moderate PAS. Mild PAS cases were not included in this study. This was done because the diagnostic criteria of Bernet et al. (2010) used in this study are limited to moderate to severe PAS cases.

The comprehensive understanding and knowledge about the participants' language was a prerequisite for this study. Consequently, only Afrikaans and English speaking participants were interviewed. All participants included in the final sample were between 19 and 27 years of age. In total 13 participants were interviewed of which nine (through analysis of data) met the criteria of PAS. In all nine cases, the parents divorced before participants were 15 years old. Additionally in all nine cases, custody was awarded to the mother. The mothers of eight participants were also found to be the alienating parent and in only one case both parents took part in the alienation process. An important aim during participant selection was to protect the privacy of participants and to ensure that the future identification of all participants was circumvented.

3.3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Voluntary, in-depth semi-structured interviews served as the data gathering method in this study. This allowed all 13 participants to tell their story but at the same time, ensuring the same information was obtained (Baker, 2006). The interviews involved the implementation of a number of predetermined questions or themes. These themes were guided by the research question. Thus, they explored amongst others, the participant's subjective experience of their parents' divorce and the role they think it plays in their. The researcher further made use of probing questions to ascertain, clarify and explore the responses of participants.

This allowed the researcher to approach the world through the participant's perspective and to formulate a comprehensive approach to each case at hand (Kvale, 1996). Interviewing is the most common form of a constructionist approach in qualitative research. The interview is a platform for linguistic patterns that include phrases, metaphors and stories

told by the participants. Meaning in the interview was co-constructed by the interviewer and interviewee and reflected larger social systems involved (Kelly, 2006).

Throughout the study, PAS was never identified, diagnosed, disclosed or discussed with the participants. This was done as precaution not to aggravate the dynamics of PAS already present and to prevent psychological distress. The goal of exploring the participants' experiences of their parents' divorce was discussed in detail with each participant before interviews. It was further explained that interviews were for research purposes, and not for therapeutic intervention. Direct identification and disclosure of a PAS diagnosis was avoided to protect participants against the uncontrolled effects of diagnosing a family system without evaluating or observing the whole family. The interview consisted out of six major sections.

- *Interview section 1: Demographic information*

The first section focused on basic demographic information and characteristics of participants. Questions were incorporated that focused on the age, race and gender of participants and their siblings.

- *Interview section 2: Early memories*

The second section focuses on participants basic and early memories of their parents' marriage. This section included questions about the participants' relationship with their parents prior to divorce, their childhood memories and so forth.

- *Interview section 3: Experience of divorce*

The third section of the interview focused on the experience of their parents' divorce. It included how old they were at the time of separation, how they discovered that their parents were separating, who was appointed legal guardian, how this was decided and the reasons for their parents' divorce. This part of the interview also focused on conflict between their parents and between family members and parents, conflict between themselves and their parents, any break in contact with one of their parents, the reason involved, visitation and the feeling and experiences they remember surrounding their parents' separation.

- *Interview section 4: Characteristics of PAS*

The fourth section of the interview focused on the alienating behaviour of the parents and the characteristics of PAS. Enquiries about parental behaviour and characteristic behaviour of PAS children were made as a means to attain whether PAS was possibly present or not. For ethical reasons, this was done in an unbiased way without diagnosing or implying to the participants that PAS was present.

Probing questions were used throughout the interview to explore participants' support to their parents and to establish if a lack of ambivalence toward one parent was present. Participants' reasons for non-contact or deprecation of a parent were investigated along with their relationships with the extended families of both parents. Additionally, their feelings about their parents and their divorce were explored, and whether parents supported their contact with the other parent. Questions about parental behaviour included whether parents supported contact with the other parent, if the participant ever experienced mixed messages from parents, if guilt-inducing behaviour was present and how the response of the targeted parent affected their life. Most of the questioning about PAS was done in an indirect manner

to avoid aggravation of the alienation process and to protect participants. Objective observations of PAS and the related behaviour during interviews were documented and considered in the sample selection process.

- *Interview section 5: Current lives*

The fifth section of the interviews focused on the participants current lives. This included their current relationship with parents and family members, their role within their family and their personality. In this section of the interview participants' current functioning included their friendships, romantic relationships, people skills and other interpersonal difficulties they experienced. Intrapersonal and social aspects of their lives were also explored. These included time management, coping skills, academic and occupational functioning, hobbies, plans and the difficulties they experienced in these fields.

- *Interview section 6: Impact of their parents' divorce and PAS*

The last part of the interview focussed on the participants' present life, and their perception of the impact, both positive and negative, of their parents' divorce and non-contact with the non-custodian parent. They were asked how they would be different if their parents did not separate. In addition, participants were asked what people should know about divorce. This gave participants the opportunity to voice their opinions and empower them as well as to assure that the interview was a positive experience.

The sequence of all sections and probing questions within the interview varied according to the responses of participants. The questions and direction of all interviews was however adjusted in relation to the main objective of this study. The interviews lasted up to an hour depending on the availability and responses of participants. Each interview was

recorded on audiotape with the permission of the participants. All documentation and recordings was done in such a way to insure anonymity of participants. Throughout the study PAS was never identified, diagnosed or disclosed or discussed with the participants as a mean to protect participants against any psychological distress.

3.3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The recordings of the interviews was submitted and transcribed verbatim. The data of the selected nine cases was then submitted for inductive thematic content analysis, a qualitative method of analysis that makes inferences about data. It systematically and objectively identifies the characteristics of the themes imbedded in the data (Berg, 1998). Phrases or words from the transcribed interviews are identified and classified according to implicit and explicit ideas that unfold within the data. This is also known as coding.

Coding is the identifying of initial themes within the data by distinguishing important phrases and words in the data and thematically encoding it prior to interpretation and organisation. The interpretation of these codes can include comparing theme frequencies, identifying theme co-occurrence, and graphically displaying relationships between different themes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Berg, 1998; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the advantage of this method is its flexibility since it is compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms. Additionally the exploratory power of this popular technique is enhanced by limited prior knowledge of the research since this rids the results from any preconceptions (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Bernard, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The process of coding occurs without trying to fit the data into a pre-existing model or frame and the identified themes are strongly linked to the data

because assumptions are data-driven (Boyatzis, 1998). The analysis of the data and the coding process of this study were divided into three categories:

- Symptoms of possible PAS and parental alienating behaviour.
- The dynamics and subjective experiences of childhood PAS.
- The perceived long-term effects and aspects relating to the experience of PAS.

During this process, each unique unit of thought was separated and coded. Data was coded primarily on a latent level that involved the exploration of the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisation that was imbedded in the data (Silverman, 2006). This code was then organized and colour coded into categories, subcategories and central themes that emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inductive method of thematic analysis used ensured that the themes were very closely linked to the data itself. The themes were allowed to emerge freely from data without trying to fit it with preconceived theories about PAS (Saldana, 2009). A six-phase thematic content analysis process was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- *Phase 1 of thematic analysis: Familiarising data*

Firstly, the familiarization with the data was done by taking part in the transcribing of data and reviewing recordings several times. This assures and informs the early stages of analysis. Transcriptions were compared with the original audiotape to confirm the accuracy.

- *Phase 2 of thematic analysis: Initial codes*

During the second phase initial codes were generated. This is done by documenting where and how patterns occur and creating labels for more efficient analysis. These comprehensive codes depict young adults' experiences of PAS as well as their perception of what the impact is on them (Silverman, 2006).

- *Phase 3 of thematic analysis: Thematic conceptualisation*

The third stage involved the search for several themes. Different codes were grouped into potential themes and labels were grouped together to form a thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- *Phase 4 of thematic analysis: Review of themes*

The fourth phase involved the review of the themes that were identified. At this stage, initial data was recorded to enhance the dependability of the results. This involved the review of the codes produced from the data as well as refining themes to represent the meanings evident in the data accurately (Berg, 1998).

- *Phase 5 of thematic analysis: Defining and naming themes*

The fifth phase involved the defining and terming of themes. The quintessence of each theme was reviewed to generate clear definitions and names for the different themes (Saldana, 2009).

- *Phase 6 of thematic analysis: Report on themes formulation*

The sixth phase involved the report on themes formulation. Compelling extracts were selected in relation to the research question and reviewed literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

According to Berg (1998) the advantages of this method is that it is flexible and useful in surmising key features of a large body of data. It highlights the similarities and differences across a data set and allows for the social and psychological interpretations of data. The trustworthiness² of the analysis was enhanced by the following strategies:

- The data was transcribed on an appropriate level of detail and checked against original interviews.
- Each data item and accompanying codes was given sufficient attention throughout the study to ensure inclusiveness and comprehensiveness.
- Continuous checking for representativeness of data and fit between data and categories.
- All themes were checked against each other and the data set and checked for internal consistency, coherence and distinctiveness.
- The data was interpreted and not paraphrased or simply described.
- A balance between narrative and illustrative extracts were used.
- Adequate/ample time was spent on all phases of the content analysis to ensure the accuracy of results. The researcher actively participated in the research process to create, understand, and describe the results of the study.
- All coding and analysis of the data was submitted for peer review to ensure accurate results. During each coding stage the transcriptions, initial codes generated and

² Note that the general trustworthiness of this study is discussed later on in this chapter

ultimately the thematic summary and map were submitted to 3 researchers for peer review to ensure representativeness and trustworthiness of the results.

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to commencing the activities for this project, all involved parties were informed about the content and nature of the study and the required consent was obtained from all relevant parties. The following aspects were considered:

- Inevitably, individuals' experience of their parents' divorce, the possible experience of PAS, their sense of self and ability to regulate their self-concept are linked. Thus, the research was approached with great caution. This required the adoption of several strategies in advance that prevented and minimised the risk to participants during research.
- Throughout the study PAS was never identified, diagnosed, disclosed, or discussed with participants. This approach served to protect participants against the negative effect of stigmatisation and labelling or the psychological distress associated with diagnosing a family system without assessing or observing the whole family. The goal was not to mislead participants. Instead, open-ended questioning served to explore their subjective experiences of their parents' divorce without implying PAS was present.
- Informed consent from each research participant was obtained prior to interviews.
- Permission was obtained from the North-West University's Ethical Committee and other involved parties for conducting this research project.
- Ethical approval was granted and ethical number NWU-00065-10-S1 was issued

- Participants were informed that their interview and information may or may not form part of the final data used for this study, but that confidentiality and anonymity would be upheld at all times.
- Another ethical aspect that was addressed was participants' experience of the interview. The interview was formulated in such a way that the process was non-threatening to the subject. It was explained to the participants that the nature of the interview was for research purposes and that therapeutic intervention was not possible. However, if the participant were to express this need they would be referred to someone that could provide them with therapeutic assistance. Participants were also contacted following their participation to ensure that the interview did not leave them with any discomfort and that debriefing sessions were available if needed.
- Throughout the research process participants were monitored to ensure that no psychological or physical discomfort is experienced.
- Due to the highly emotional content and nature of the research, all the data, responses, transcriptions and information about the research participants were held confidential and anonymous at all times.
- Participants were informed of their rights, as well as of the ethical principles regarding research as required by the HPCSA and PsySSA.
- Research results focused on the portrayal of participant's experiences in the way that they experienced it. Generalisations about PAS and the effects thereof were avoided. The conclusions of this study are aimed to guide further research about the effects and experience of PAS.

3.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Krefting (1991) there are four key aspects relevant to the trustworthiness of a study: a) the truth value, b) applicability, c) consistency, and d) neutrality. In this study, the truth-value was based on the responses of participants. It was enhanced by giving accurate descriptions and interpretations of the experiences of the participants involved. The methods of analysis and results of this study were discussed with impartial expert colleagues as a means of peer review. In addition, the credibility of the study was enhanced by means of reframing, repeating and expansion on questions at various intervals during the interviews.

The applicability and neutrality of this study is limited due to the purposive selection of cases. However, the explorative and descriptive nature of this study allowed the researcher to describe and explore the dynamics of PAS without generalising these results to other populations. It rather intends to be a guide for future research. According to Baxter and Jack (2008) the researcher provides in-depth description of research findings that allow future comparison of the issue addressed.

In this study, variability among results was expected since the research aimed to explore a range of subjective PAS experiences rather than an average experience. Consistency in this study was thus defined by the dependability and accurate traceability of variation in the results. The dependability of this study was enhanced by the code-recode procedure followed during the analysis of the data. Furthermore detailed description of research methods and peer examination was done improve the dependability of findings.

In this study, engagement between the researcher and participants was vital. The conformability (neutrality) of the data was insured by reflexive analysis. The researcher's own background perceptions and interests were monitored throughout the research process.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the nature of empirical investigation used in this study was discussed. It examined the goals of the research as well as the design utilised throughout the study. A description of the participants, participant selection, data gathering and methods of analysis was discussed along with the ethical considerations applicable to the study. The results and interpretations thereof are discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study was to explore individuals' experiences of their parents' divorce, specifically those who had most likely been alienated as a child. Furthermore, it set out to explore the possible effect that PAS had on them. This chapter focuses on the reporting of several meaningful themes that emerged from the data. These include a discussion about the difficulties participants had in recalling their parents' divorce, the experience of parental separation marked by high conflict, infidelity, and intense loyalty conflicts within the child.

In addition, the role that each party played in the alienation process will be discussed along with participant's emotional experiences at the time, as well as the characteristics of the parenting they experienced as a child. Several meaningful themes regarding participants' perceived effects of PAS will also be discussed. These include the compromised self-esteem of individuals exposed to this syndrome; lowered levels of self-sufficient and autonomous behaviour; exposure to several risk factors associated with the development of depression; the experience of relational difficulties due to a fear of trust; participants' occupational functioning, as well as the experience and the effect of the "backfire effect" of PAS.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The biographical information regarding the participants in this study is as follows:

- *Participants*

During the onset of this study, 45 young adults were identified who were willing to participate in the study. These individuals were contacted to procure suitable appointments for individual interviews. By means of participant availability, willingness and response, 13 participants were identified and interviewed. Participants were interviewed with the objective of exploring their experiences of their parents' divorce and the effect they believed this had on them. Based on the criteria discussed previously these interviews were then examined to establish whether PAS was involved. Based on the potential presence of PAS, nine participants were included in the final sample for this study. Table 4 sets out a basic description of the participants³.

Table 4: Participant description

Participant	Age	Age at separation	PAS	Custodial parent	Alienating parent	Gender
1	20	6	Severe	Mother	Mother	Female
2	20	2	Moderate	Mother	Mother	Female
12	20	9	Moderate	Mother	Mother	Female
13	20	8	Moderate	Mother	Both Parents	Female
21	21	7	Moderate	Mother	Mother	Male
24	20	12	Severe	Mother	Mother	Female
26	27	8	Moderate	Mother	Mother	Female
33	19	15	Moderate	Mother	Mother	Female
38	25	9	Severe	Mother	Mother	Female

- *Age*

As previously stated, all participants ranged between the ages of 19 and 27 years of age.

³ Initially 45 participants were identified who were willing to participate in the study. This was narrowed down to 13 participants based on participant availability. From these 13 interviews, nine cases (where PAS was involved) were included in the final sample of this study. The participant numbers used in Table 4 reflect the number given to participants during the initial stages of participant recruitment and selection.

- *Gender*

Of the nine participants included in the study, only one participant were male, all other eight participants were female.

- *Age of child during parents' divorce*

The ages of participants at the time of their parents' divorce ranged between two and 15 years of age.

- *Socio-economic status*

All interviewed individuals hailed from middle class, white families. All participants had matriculated and involved in tertiary education.

- *Marital status*

Concerning the relational status of participants, only one of the individuals included in the sample was married, two were dating and the remaining six participants were not in a relationship of any kind.

- *Custodial parent*

In all nine cases included in this study, the custodial parent was the mother. Furthermore, the mother was also found to be the alienating parent in all of the cases.

The applicability and generalisation of the results found in this study is limited due to the purposive selection of cases. Participant variation with regards to age, race, language and gender is limited. However, the explorative and descriptive nature and design of this study allowed the researcher to describe and explore the dynamics of PAS without generalizing these results to other populations.

4.3 RESULTS

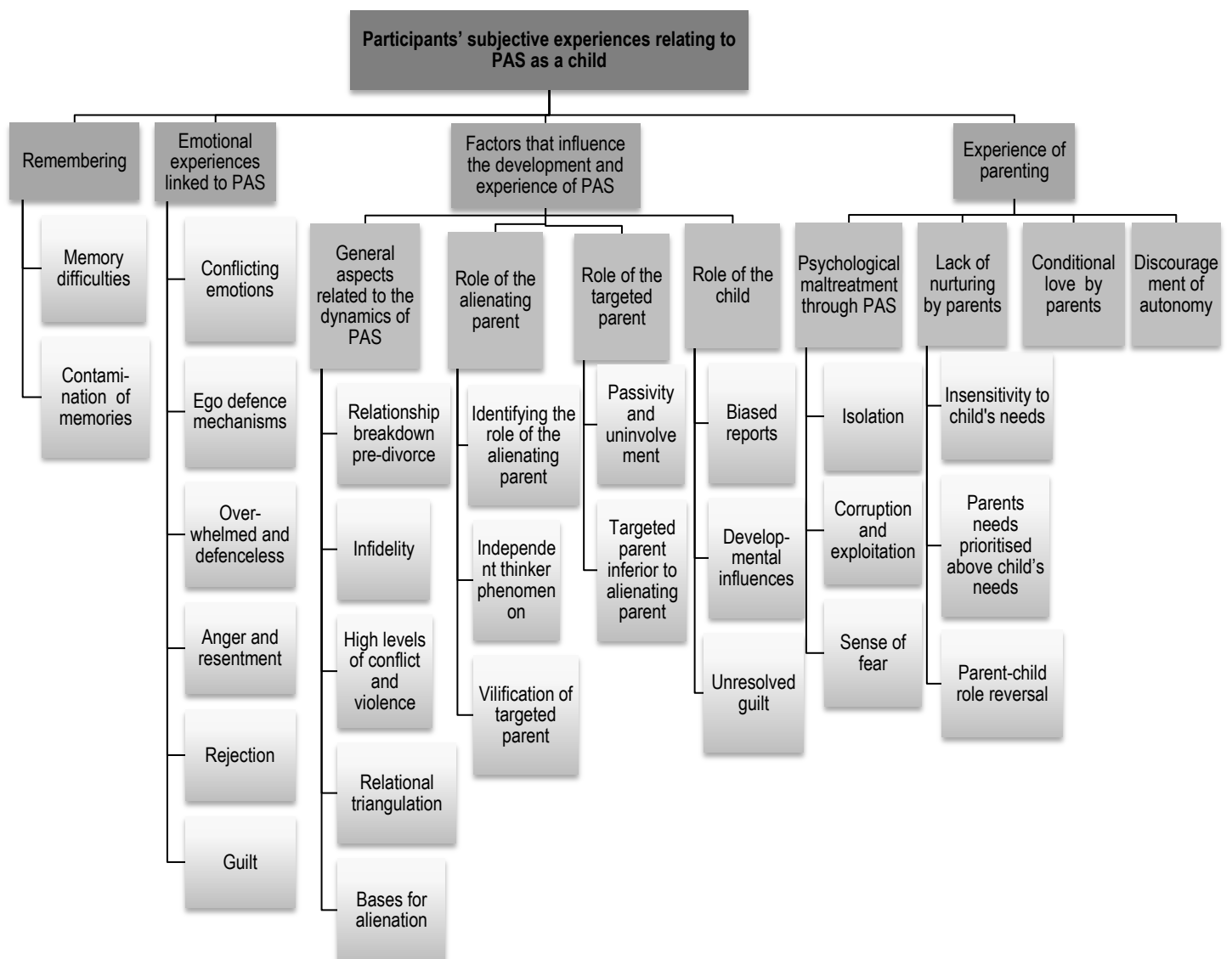
Thematic content analysis produced to the following themes relevant to the subjective experiences of young adults who have exposed to childhood PAS. Once all the data had been analysed in accordance with the research goals, two main categories emerged: (i) information concerning the participants' experience of PAS as a child, and (ii) the subjective reports of the effects of PAS on their current lives. Even though it is extremely difficult to separate the experience and effect of PAS objectively from those of divorce cases where PAS is not present, the results presented in this study are intended to guide future research by isolating and identifying the dynamics and effects of PAS.

The interviews generated considerable information about the presentation, characteristic behaviour of parents and children, and symptoms of PAS. This information was analysed and diagnostically used during the participant identification and selection phase of this study. In accordance with the research goals of this study, this information will not be included and discussed in the results section of the study.

4.3.1 PARTICIPANTS' SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES RELATING TO PAS AS A CHILD

The following subthemes were found regarding participant's experiences relating to PAS as a child.

Table 5: Thematic summary of participants' subjective experiences relating to PAS as a child



4.3.1.1 Remembering

The following sub-themes emerged regarding the way in which participants remembered and reported on their subjective experiences and memories of divorce.

- *Memory difficulties*

Throughout the interviews most participants reported a “difficulty remembering” (Participant 1) the time of their parents’ divorce. Throughout their individual experiences, most participants reported as sense of “confusion” (Participant 38) regarding the events that took place during their childhood. Participant 2 supported this by stating, “you feel like you remember everything, but you remember nothing.” Confusion and difficulties in recalling the events, details and subjective feelings could be linked to “age at which they were experienced” (Participant 24). According to Participant 13, “A lot of the time you don’t understand, you are so small, so you can’t remember things that well. You remember what you are told by your parents.”

- *Contamination of memories*

The results may suggest that PAS affect the autobiographic memory in two ways: Firstly, it appears that alienating parents expose children to an array of denigrating information about the targeted parent, for example, “My mother told me stuff about my dad that made me see him in a certain way” (Participant 2). Participant 24 similarly gave a detailed account of her parents’ relationship from even before she was born, for example, she reported “My mom had seven miscarriages before she had me, and two of them were due to my father’s abuse and stuff like that.”

It is clear from the examples given above that several participants struggled to recall episodic detail about a certain time earlier in their lives. Episodic details become abstracted and formalised within the self-memory system and inform the beliefs that participants hold about their childhood. These memories, whether suggested or highlighted later on by the alienating parent, form the basis for the child's animosity towards with targeted parent. It is important to note that because the episodic details and memories that inform the child's beliefs are not the child's own, they are able to report in detail on them, thus causing memory difficulties. Their memories become contaminated and biased, favouring the alienating parent, without being able to produce episodic details that support their feelings or memories. This is evident in the statement of Participant 1, "I can't remember everything, but I know my dad was much uninvolved when we were little." Participant 2 similarly reported on a memory where she "was very angry with her father, but without knowing why." Participant 1 remembered feeling the same way about her father, "not wanting him near me, I didn't want him to come and pick me up from school or to come into my room, I can't remember why, but I remember feeling that way. It was maybe due to all the wrong things he was doing to my mother."

Secondly, the data suggest that children exposed to PAS introject the alienating parent's beliefs and attitudes toward the targeted parent as a means of gaining the alienating parent's acceptance and love. According to Participant 38, "My mom gave this picture of my dad, that I believed, but it was based on her reality not my reality." Individuals were able to report on these introjected beliefs and attitudes towards their parents and their childhood without the need for them to be grounded in reality by supporting episodic details. As evident in this statement by Participant 1, "I can't remember everything, but I know my dad was uninvolved when we were little."

As a result, participants are unconsciously biased towards the information they share. Participant 24 reported that “the good times that we had together with my father does not exist anymore” because she can’t remember them. Positive memories with the targeted parents are omitted in the accounts individuals gave about their experiences. Participant 1 stated, “I don’t think I have one good memory of my dad, it’s bad to say it like that but really there is not one.” Similarly, participants are also biased in reporting memories that may implicate the alienating parent in their choice to reject the targeted parent. Participant 26 protected her mother when asked about the role her mother played in the marital conflict by saying, “My mother never said a negative word about my father; it was my decision not to see him anymore.” These results support the idea that PAS contaminate a child’s reality by altering their autobiographic memories about their childhood, their parents’ divorce and the experiences they had earlier in their lives.

4.3.1.2 Emotional experiences linked to PAS

According to Baker and Verrocchio (2013, p. 610) exposure to parental alienation behaviour can result in children feeling “worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only having value in meeting another’s needs of others.” Several participants reported on feelings similar to those mentioned above (Participant 1, 2, 12, 21, 33 and 38). It is not suggested that these feelings are only felt because of PAS exposure; rather the reported feelings aim to shed some light on the subjective experiences and thought process related to possible PAS exposure.

- *Conflicting emotions*

Several participants indicated that the experience was “confusing” (Participant 26) and that they “did not know what was going on” (Participant 2). In addition to confusion,

Participant 26 mentioned “feeling torn into two.” The finding suggests that participants often experience conflicting emotions because of trying to manage the loyalty conflicts involved in divorce as well as PAS cases. Participant 2 recalled, “I knew I wanted to stay with my dad, but I just could not tell my mother that so I stayed with her.”

- *Ego defence mechanisms*

The majority of participants had trouble in reporting on their subjective emotional experiences during the time of their parents’ divorce. This was interpreted as ego defence mechanisms that were present and the influence of ongoing PAS dynamics and loyalty conflicts. When asked about how participants experienced the breakdown in their relationships with one parent, several participants reported “feeling nothing” (Participant 26), as if it “didn’t really affect me” (Participant 33). Participant 12 explained that her father leaving did not have a real effect on her because of her “independent nature”, she “just went on as normal” (Participant 12). Participant 21 responded in the following way when asked about his feelings when his father left, “I didn’t’ really have any emotions. I was not happy, I was not sad, I just accepted it.” According to Baker and Verrocchio (2013) these responses may indicate the presence of ego defence mechanisms like denial, distortion, splitting, projection and reaction formation in an attempt to cope with the anxiety they experience during parental separation.

- *Overwhelmed and defenceless*

The degree of conflict within some PAS cases became so bad that individuals “struggled to cope” (Participant 13) and manage the conflict. Children become “overwhelmed” (Participant 38) and feel “vulnerable” (Participant 2) and “defenceless” (Participant 13) against their environment. Participant 13 for example tried to cope by

escaping into a “fantasy world to get away from all the fighting” (Participant 13). Participant 33 amongst others reported, “feeling depressed and overwhelmed by all these emotions” (Participant 33). Participants’ feelings of being overwhelmed further appeared to be linked to a sense of isolation they experience and feelings of and “being alone” (Participant 2). In cases of high-conflict divorces, children commonly feel that they are alone and that their emotional needs are not important, as explained by Participant 13, “I was confused, I was lost. I didn’t have any help or guidance from others. I had to find my own way” (Participant 13). It is for this reason that children exposed to high levels of conflict like the conflict associated with PAS, chose to align with the alienating parent as a means to empower them and escape from these conflicting emotions caused by loyalty conflicts. Participant 21 explained, “It was just easier that way.”

- *Anger and resentment*

During the course of the interviews, several participants reported severe feelings of “anger” (Participant 1) and “resentment” (Participant 38). The results suggest that the source of participant’s anger differs as well as how it is expressed. Individuals who have been exposed to alienating behaviour as a child appear to introject the anger and resentment originally felt by the alienating parent. Participant 1 explained, “I feel bad, because my mother feels bad.” Participant 24 similarly reported that even up to date, “I have this rage. I am still angry with my dad for cheating on us” (Participant 24). These feelings of anger and resentment fuel their discontent and justify their rejection of the targeted parent.

Other participants were able to recall “feeling angry but without knowing the reason” (Participant 1). As discussed earlier, this is due to the lack of episodic memories and details that support the child has introjected beliefs about the targeted parent or a life event.

Participants, who experienced neglect, rendering them vulnerable to the world, expressed other feelings of anger. This is evident in the statement of Participant 12, “I was angry at my mother, why wasn’t she better and stronger? I was a child; I didn’t know how to deal with this.” Participants explained that their parents’ divorce and the negative effect thereof seemed “unfair” (Participant 38) to them because they were “innocent” (Participant 26), and “did not ask to be here” (Participant 13). The results suggest that parental preoccupation with their own hurt and feelings cause children to feel helpless and vulnerable. These feelings may later lead to feelings of anger and resent towards parental figures.

- *Rejection*

The majority of participants reported feeling “rejected” in some way (Participant 1, 2, 12, 26, 33 and 38). Children of divorce often feel that one parent left the marriage because they “were not good enough” (Participant 24). The result suggests that children, who have been alienated, internalise the feelings of rejection that is felt by the alienating parent, especially in cases where infidelity is involved. Often the language that individuals use is an indication of their inability to separate their own feeling from the feeling of the alienating parent. As seen in the statement by Participant 1 “I have this rage. I am still angry with my dad for cheating on us.” The results suggest that the initial introjected feelings of rejection and worthlessness reaffirmed itself in situations where the individuals feel neglected or abandoned in a way.

Participants further reported that the involvement and withdrawal by the targeted parent reaffirmed their feelings of rejection and worthlessness (Participants 2, 12, 24 and 38). Participant 12 explained, “I wished I meant more to him, I wished he made more of an effort with me.” The results may suggest that this primary sense of rejection is internalised within

the internal working model of an individual exposed to alienating behaviour, which influences how they view the world. It causes individuals to be “sensitive to the rejection by other people” (Participant 12). Participant 24 explained it in the following way “Because I was not good enough for my dad, I feel not good enough for anybody” (Participant 24). The results suggest that this fear of rejection and low feelings of self-worth may have a marked influence on the relationships of individuals.

- *Guilt*

According to Baker (2006), alienating parents install a sense of guilt within the alienated child as a means to align the child with them. The child feels responsible for the alienating parent who is seen as a victim. Several participants reported a continuous feeling of guilt (Participant 2, 12, 16 24 and 38) throughout the process of their parents’ divorce that is “still with them today” (Participant 38). Participant 33 explained, “I still feel responsible for my mother, all the things she had to go through.” In cases where the child does not immediately accept the alienating parent’s role of a victim, children are made to feel guilty about initially supporting the alienating parent. Participant 24 gave the following example “My father cheated on my mother, but I did not understand. I did not even know about sex and stuff. Therefore, I consoled my father because he was sad. I think even up to today my mother is hurt by that because I did not understand.”

These feelings of guilt appear to fuel their loyalty to the alienating parent as a means to compensate for whatever they feel guilty about. Participants revealed feeling guilty and “feeling like a burden” (Participant 13) to already stressed parents. They reported feeling guilty over “financial stress” (Participant 38) and the “difficulty of being a single parent” (Participant 21) and even “being the cause for the divorce” (Participant 13) are some of the

reasons why participants felt guilty. As mentioned earlier, these results do not suggest that the specific feelings of participants are only felt in reaction to PAS exposure but may also relate to the divorce itself. It does however shed some light on the subjective experiences and thought process related to PAS that may be used to guide future research.

4.3.1.3 Factors that influence the development and experience of PAS

Even though the specific symptomatic presentation of PAS was not the focus of this study, several meaningful themes emerged about factors that played a role in the development and experience of PAS. The following subthemes emerged:

4.3.1.3.1 General aspects related to the dynamics of PAS

- *Relationship breakdown pre-divorce*

The majority of participants described their parents' relationships as fragile and distant even before the separation. There was a "lack of love" (Participant 16) and "little interaction" (Participant 21) between parents. Participant 1 shared that, "I have no memory of when they had happy times together." Several participants added that they expected their parents' divorce (Participant 2, 12, 24 and 38) and that "wasn't a surprise that they got divorced" (Participant 26). In cases where PAS is involved prior to divorce parental relationships are frequently characterised by "alcohol problems" (Participant 12), "lots of fighting" (Participant 13) and "violence between my parents" (Participant 24). The results suggest that in several cases the breakdown in parental relationships, contact and intimacy prior to divorce contributed to higher levels of conflict post-divorce.

- *Infidelity*

All nine participants mentioned that infidelity played a major part in their parents' divorce. Five of the participants believed the infidelity of one parent was instrumental in the intensification of the conflict and feelings of resentment between their parents. In several cases, alienated children use the targeted parent's infidelity as motivation for their animosity, as reflected in the statement of Participant 1, "My father had several affairs. My mother was very angry with my father, but I understand that after all the things he did to her". This conviction contributes to feelings of resentment and anger among former spouses that contributes to parental conflict.

- *High levels of conflict and violence*

Several participants reported that there was a breakdown in their parents' relationship and a "stage of separation before their divorce" (Participant 12). High levels of conflict and relational breakdown lead to children expecting their parents to divorce. Participant 21 stated that his parents' divorce "came as no surprise. They split up when I was six, so they separated a year before the divorce. So really it was like a year's build up towards the divorce." The process of separation was described by participants as "overwhelming" (Participant 13), characterised by high levels and frequency of conflict and "physical violence" (Participant 16), as well as "threatening remarks" (Participant 13) between parents. Participant 24 mentioned, "My dad was a psychopath. He tried to abduct us because my mother wanted to leave him." Participant 1 recalls coming home and seeing her mother with "torn clothes and a bruised face. I was small but I knew what my dad had done to her." The results suggest that the conflict and violence between parents later fuel the behaviour of alienating parents as well as the child's animosity toward the targeted parent. It did however become apparent that several participants were very vague concerning the

details and pertaining to the alleged physical violence. This supports the presence of PAS rather than PA where the child's animosity towards the targeted parent is justified.

- *Relational triangulation*

For six of the respondents, parental alienation was preceded by experiences of triangulation. According to Johnston (2003), triangulation is a family systems theory concept where parents that engage in conflict use the child as a pawn to deflect or channel the conflict between them. Participant 33 stated, "Sometimes he tried to make it look like my sister was the reason for why they were fighting." As a result, the child is entangled in loyalty conflicts and adult issues. Participant responses indicate that a sense of alliance and loyalty is installed in the children by favouritism and biased information given to the child. Participant 24 stated, "My Dad always told me I was his child and my brother was my mother's child. We were very close. I was his favourite." This relationship is then "manipulated" (Participant 38) to gain the child's loyalty. Participant 13 recalls, "My dad would take me along to this other woman he was seeing. When we drove home, he told me that if I loved him, I would not to say anything to my mother." Respondents indicated that they felt "stuck in the middle" (Participant 2) or torn between their parents and often had to play a messenger role. Participant 13 reiterated, "He would always be like, tell your mother this and tell your mother that."

- *Basis for alienation*

The results further suggest that the turbulent experience of separation between parents marked by high levels of conflict, form the basis of the relational break between the child and the alienated parent. It appears that children's disappointment in a parent (whom they had previously idealised) contribute to their feeling of resentment and animosity. Participant 12

expressed this disappointment in the following statement, “My dad was always my hero, but then I realised all the things he had actually done are wrong.”

Additionally the results suggested that there might be a link between the degree of isolation from the extended family and friends, the estrangement between the alienated parent and child, and rate of alignment with the alienating parent. Participant 21 reported that, “Ever since my dad left, it has only been us three. We have very little contact with the family. Especially since they thought my mother was turning us against my father. We didn’t even feel it when he left.” It appears that the alienating parent may use any form of indifference the child feels toward the targeted parent and their extended family as fuel for their campaign of denigration towards the targeted parent, even if that indifference is considered normal within the context of the situation.

4.3.1.3.2 Role of the alienating parent

- *Identifying the role of the alienating parent*

According to Baker (2010), the majority of PAS research has focused on the behaviour and tactics the alienating parent used during the process of alienation. During the analysis of participant responses, it was difficult to identify clearly the role alienating parents play. Two reasons emerged: Firstly, it is difficult to separate the role alienating parents play in the alienation process from other environmental factors that may influence children’s behaviour. Secondly, ongoing PAS dynamics and ongoing loyalty conflicts within adult children of PAS result in biased information about the alienating parent. When asked about the role their parents played in the divorce process, several participants advocated the alienating parent’s innocence. Participant 33 stated that she “cannot say anything bad” about

the alienating parent resulting in a biased view description of the behaviour alienating parents engage in.

- *Independent thinker phenomenon*

Participant 1 stated, “My mother never said a bad word about my father. The fact that we don’t have a relationship is based upon my own choice.” This is what Gardner (1998) referred to as the “independent-thinker” phenomenon. Only two participants recognised the role the alienating parent played in the vilification of the targeted parent. Participant 38 reported, “I had this wrong picture of my dad that my mother gave to me. Now that I am grown up, I realized that he was never that way. It was my mom’s reality but my mom’s reality became my reality. She said things and made him out in a way where she was the victim and he was the enemy. She gave me this cold picture of him, so automatically I was closer to her as a child.” When questioned indirectly about the behaviour of the alienating parent during the divorce several participants reported a vague sense of confusion or “not knowing exactly what my mother wants. She would say that she supports us going to my dad. But I don’t know, something just made me think otherwise” (Participant 2). Even though it was objectively difficult to isolate the exact role of each individual and how they contribute to the PAS dynamics, the results suggest that participants are biased in their report of the alienating parent’s behaviour.

- *Vilification of targeted parent*

Although the vilification of the alienated parents is commonly based on “lies” (Participant 38) or distortions of reality, the results suggest that there were some negative attributes regarding the targeted parents, that are in part based on the truth, that get blown out of proportion by the alienating parent. These attributes contribute to the relational breakdown

between the targeted parent and children. Participant 38 supported this, “My mother formed me a picture of my dad that was not the truth, but he was not innocent. He was uninvolved and compensated with money and he did cheat on my mom.”

These results suggest that the campaign of denigration towards the targeted parent is not always an overt process. In addition to denigrating language, the attitude and body language of alienating parents form part of the alienation process. Participant 21 reported, “My mother never spoke badly about my father. She would tell me that I could decide if I want to see him or not. But I knew she had lots of anger and feelings towards him.” These unspoken attitudes of alienating parents further appear to be linked to the reversal of parent-child relationships, in a way that the alienated parent is seen as a “victim” (Participant 38) that “needs to be taken care of” (Participant 33).

In this way the child becomes a parental confidant and the “main source of support” (Participant 24) for the parent. This leads to relational enmeshment between parents and children. Participant 21 reported, “My mother and I are very close, we share everything, and we have the unspoken bond.” This role reversal leads to the children “feeling responsible” (Participant 33) for their parents, like, they “won’t be able to cope without me” (Participant 38). This dynamic appears to feed the child’s loyalty to the alienating parent.

4.3.1.3.3 Role of targeted parent

Even though it was difficult to separate the reported characteristics about the role of the alienated parent from false beliefs induced by the alienated parents objectively, the following factors seem to play an irrevocable role in the alienation of the child.

- *Passivity and uninvolvement*

As mentioned earlier, the results suggest the alienated parent is “not innocent” (Participant 33) in the alienation process. Parental “uninvolvement” (Participant 12) and “passivity” (Participant 38) concerning parental functions contribute to the child’s indifference towards the targeted parent. Participant 1 described, “My dad was just never there, he never came to watch our sport matches, in fact we never did fun things together” (Participant 1). Passivity and parental uninvolvement may fuel the alienating parent’s attacks and predispose targeted parents to rejection. The child forms an opinion about his reality based on the opinions of the alienating parent, because the targeted parents omit their opinion by withdrawal.

- *Targeted parent inferior to alienating parent*

The information shared by participants about the targeted parent suggest that participants consciously or unconsciously wanted the targeted parent to appear weak or inept in comparison to the alienating parent who is seen as warm and caring. Participants further reported an array of parental characteristic that reflected the incapability of the targeted parent across several spheres in life. Participant 24 stated, “My father is a very fragile person. He comes from an uncultured family. He is not able to keep a job. He is unsuccessful in relationships. He can’t work with money. I think that is why my mother divorced him” (Participant 24).

Thus, even if factors like “alcoholism” (Participant 12), “a rigid personality” (Participant 38), “homosexuality” (Participant 33), “depression” (Participant 24) and being “poor” (Participant 21) seem unrelated to the role targeted parents play in the alienation process, the relation becomes meaningful when compared to the characteristics of the

alienated parent. Compared to the targeted parent the alienating parent is seen as warm and caring (Participant 1, 12 and 24) and “supportive” (Participant 1, 21, 26 and 33). Sometimes these differences appear to become exaggerated by personality conflicts or a lack of understanding between the child and the targeted parent.

In seven of the nine cases the father, in due course, disengaged completely from his relationship with the alienated child. Due to the egocentric thought patterns of children this disengagement is experienced as an immense personal “rejection” (Participant 2, 12, 21, 24, 26 and 33) of the child, which in turn fuels the child’s campaign of denigration against the targeted parent.

4.3.1.3.4 Role of the child

Little information about the role of the child in the alienation process could be collected without inferring or suggesting PAS itself. Nevertheless, the following aspects relating to participants experiencing PAS as a child emerged from the data.

- *Biased report*

Examining the role that children play in the alienation process is a complex task. In seven of the nine cases, participants were unable to report objectively on behaviour of their own that may have contributed to alienation process. This was most likely due to the effects of ongoing alienation dynamics in their lives. Children with PAS believe that their behaviour is justified and that their rejection of the targeted parent is just. The information that individuals produce about their own contributions to PAS is thus biased. Participant 13 explained, “I was still very young and I didn’t really understand what was going on.” Participant 21 elaborated further by stating, “You know, you are so young, you kind of only

remember what you are told.” This confirms that ongoing PAS dynamics may have an impact on individuals’ ability to report objectively on their experiences, because memories contaminate the child’s personal perception about what reality is.

- *Developmental influences*

The collected data does not suggest a specific age at which children are more susceptible to alienation. Age, and more important, the developmental stage of children does however seem to play a role in the experience of PAS. The majority of participants experienced their parents’ divorce during the ages of seven and eleven years. According to Sigelman and Rider (2006) children in this phase of cognitive development are in the early stages of developing problem-solving and abstract thoughts. However, hypothetical thinking and meta-cognition have not yet developed. Children in this age group logically solve problems by using concrete events and objects.

The results suggest that, as children, the majority of participants were unable to fully understand, grasp and navigate the complex dynamics of PAS and the loyalty conflicts involved. Participant 2 reported that she “was too young to question adult opinions.” Participant 38 similarly reported, “I think my child brain did not understand. It was only when I became a teenager that I could fully grasp what was going on. It is as if I had a certain reality as a child but now looking back with my adult brain I see a completely different picture.”

On the other hand, adolescent thought is characterised by a more advanced cognitive development that render adolescents more opinionated and concerned about justice (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). Several participants rejected targeted parents for differing with them on a

moral ground. Participant 26 reported that her feelings toward her father changed, “Things started to change when I grew up, I realised that what my dad did was wrong, after all the things he did to my mom.” Adolescents are also very sensitive to the judgements of others, and they can be quite self-aware (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). Participant 24 reported saying to her father that he was “a failure”, and, “I did not want to be associated with him and the things that he has done.” Several other participants also reported feeling ashamed of the targeted parent. The results suggest that because some adolescents are more self-aware, judgemental and morally aware, and they are more susceptible to the behaviour of alienating parents in the alienation process.

- *Unresolved guilt*

As mentioned earlier, only two respondents were aware of the alienating dynamics involved in their parents’ divorce. These two respondents felt that they contributed to their parents’ alienation by “not considering the father’s perspective” (Participant 38). Participant 2 explained, “I was angry at my father without knowing why. I should have given him a chance.”

The results suggest that children may end up feeling “confused about the truth” (Participant 2) relating to their parents’ divorce and uncertain about the role they played in the relational breakdown between them and the targeted parent. As a result, they may develop unresolved feeling of guilt and anger towards themselves due to their rejection of the targeted parent for instance, Participant 38 stated, “I feel guilty for just believing what my mother told me.” In cases where the child becomes completely aware of the PAS dynamics, these feelings clarify and the child is able to understand how they contributed to the alienation process.

4.3.1.4 Experience of parenting

The following sub-themes were found with regard to the young adults' experience of their parents parenting styles and behaviour where PAS was present:

4.3.1.4.1 Psychological maltreatment through PAS

The link between PAS and the psychological maltreatment of children have long been debated. Support seems to be growing among litigators and clinicians for the classification of PAS as a form of maltreatment and even child abuse (Mc Kelvey, 2011). Colman (2001) defines child maltreatment as any acts, series of actions of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child. According to Baker and Verrocchio (2013), some of the parental behaviour evident in PAS cases may fall under specific subtypes of psychological maltreatment, including spurning, terrorising, isolating, exploiting or corrupting, and denying emotional responsiveness.

- *Isolation*

The results seem to support the literature; six participants reported on similar experiences of parental behaviour that could be classified as psychological maltreatment. The results suggest that children exposed to alienating behaviour are “isolated” (Participant 21) from family and friends and from outside influences. Participant 13 reported, “We never went to visit friends. We never had sleep over’s. So to me it was all I knew. All the fighting and stuff, I thought it was supposed to be that way.” The results suggest that their perceived isolation made participants more vulnerable to the manipulating behaviour of the alienating parent.

- *Sense of fear*

Several participants described the alienating parent as “over-protective” (Participant 2). The results suggest that the over-protectiveness of an alienating parent installs a sense of “fear” (Participant 38) within the child toward the targeted parent. Children believing that the alienating parent is justly concerned, reject the targeted parent out of fear as seen in the statement of Participant 13, “My mom was very protective. She did not want us to go there, because my dad could do something to us. I mean small children are very easily manipulated. So we never really visited friends, we didn’t see what was going on in other houses. So I thought what was going on was normal.”

- *Corruption and exploitation*

Other psychological maltreating behaviour reported included the use of severe exploitation and corruption of children. Participant 13 reported feeling severely conflicted because of her father’s manipulation, “He took me along to see the woman he was cheating on my mother with. When we drove home, he said to me, “You should not tell your mother otherwise it will be your fault if we get divorced. So you may not tell your mother. I will give you money if you don’t tell her.”

Furthermore, the results suggest that the alienating parents confide in their children, exposing them to adult matters as a form of exploitation and corruption. Participant 1 reported, “Me and my mom, we talked about everything. I know everything about their relationship even from before they were married.” The sharing of inappropriate information with children can lead to distress, en feeling of overwhelming guilt and resentment as explained by Participant 13, “My dad told me thing about my mom I did not want to know, like adult stuff. I was only a child” (Participant 13). These findings further suggest that

children are not always aware of the corruption and behaviour applied by alienating parents. Participant 13 explained, “I did not know what was going on, I just accepted it.” The results suggest that the experience of internal distress and loyalty conflicts is exacerbated by the exploiting behaviour that alienating parents may resort to.

4.3.1.4.2 Lack of nurturing by parents

According to Amato and Previti (2003) poor adjustment during divorce has been linked to cases of separation where high levels of conflict are involved. According to Baker (2006) parents who engage in parental alienation strategies are likely to lack nurturance towards their children.

- *Insensitivity to the child needs*

The results suggest five respondents felt their mother was “absent” (Participant 12) and “preoccupied with her own pain” (Participant 38) and conflicts surrounding the divorce. Participant 38 further explained, “It was like my mother was not there. She was cold.” Alienating parents appears to be insensitive to the needs of the child to be loved and nurtured by the targeted parent. The following statement of Participant 24 supports this need, “My mom went through a bit of depression during the divorce, so she wasn’t really involved in my life. Plus all of a sudden I did not see my dad anymore; this person for whom I had all this respect is gone.”

- *Parents’ needs prioritized above child’s needs*

The results also suggest that the parental preoccupation during divorce (and especially in PAS cases) gives the child a message that the parent’s need for love, approval, and

obedience from the child is more important than the child's own needs. Participant 13 explained that she felt as if, "All of a sudden everything was just about them and how bad the divorce is." Several participants reported that parental care, responsiveness and warmth were lacking. When asked about the parenting she experienced as a child Participant 26 said, "My mom never said 'I love you'." The participant's response implies that a message of prioritising parental needs at the expense of the needs of the child transfigures itself into the internal working model of a child.

- *Parent-child role reversal*

The results indicate that when children internalise the idea that parental needs are more important than their own it may cause parent-child role reversal. The child takes "responsibility for my mother" (Participant 2) and thus becomes responsible for the parent's happiness. Participant 12 explained, "I started to feel like a teenager mom." Participant 13 explained, "All the fighting, I had to grow up very quickly. I had to look after my sister as well. The circumstances forced me to grow up faster." Participants reported being conflicted between their own need and the needs of their parents.

4.3.1.4.3 Conditional love by parents

As mentioned earlier, most participants experienced a deep "sense of rejection" (Participant 1, 2, 12, 26, 33 and 38) as a child. One source of children's feelings of rejection is their unmet needs due to unresponsive behaviour shown by the alienating parent. In addition, feelings of rejection were also linked to participants false belief that targeted parents "don't care" (Participant 26) and "don't love me" (Participant 13). Participant 38 explained that in her childhood "I had this bitterness towards my dad. Because of the picture my mother

painted off him. Because I was walking around with this bitterness I experienced feelings of rejection.”

The alienating behaviour of the parent shows the child that the parent’s need for love, approval and obedience from the child are superior to their needs. The awareness of conditional parental love combined with the experience of parental rejection lead the child to believe that acceptance and love are not based on intrinsic factors but rather on the need fulfilment of the alienating parent. Participant 38 confirmed this belief in the following statement, “My mother painted this picture of how my dad is and that you needed to do this and this to be accepted.” The results indicate that the alienating behaviour of parents coach children into believing and experiencing that love is conditional.

4.3.1.4.4 Discouragement of autonomy

Children with immature reasoning and problem-solving skills exposed to PAS experience intense conflict trying to manage feelings of conditional love as well as handling and fulfilling the needs of the alienating parent. According to De Jager (2008) the alliance with one of the parents might be a means for the child to break free of the intense and unbearable loyalty conflicts. The child support the alienating parent without questioning their motives or behaviour as seen in this example of Participant 21, “I am very close to my mother. I always chose her side; that is just the way it is.”

Even though alliance causes less anxiety for a child, the results seem to indicate that it is detrimental to the development of autonomous behaviour in the child. According to Ben-Ami and Baker (2012) nurturing parental behaviour and the experience of being valued and supported by a caregiver allows children to depend progressively less on others as they

internalise a sense of agency and autonomy. The results suggest that participants exposed to PAS are more likely to experience feelings of “rejection” Participant 38, “not being good enough” (Participant 24) feeling “alone” (Participant 26) and “helpless” (Participant 13).

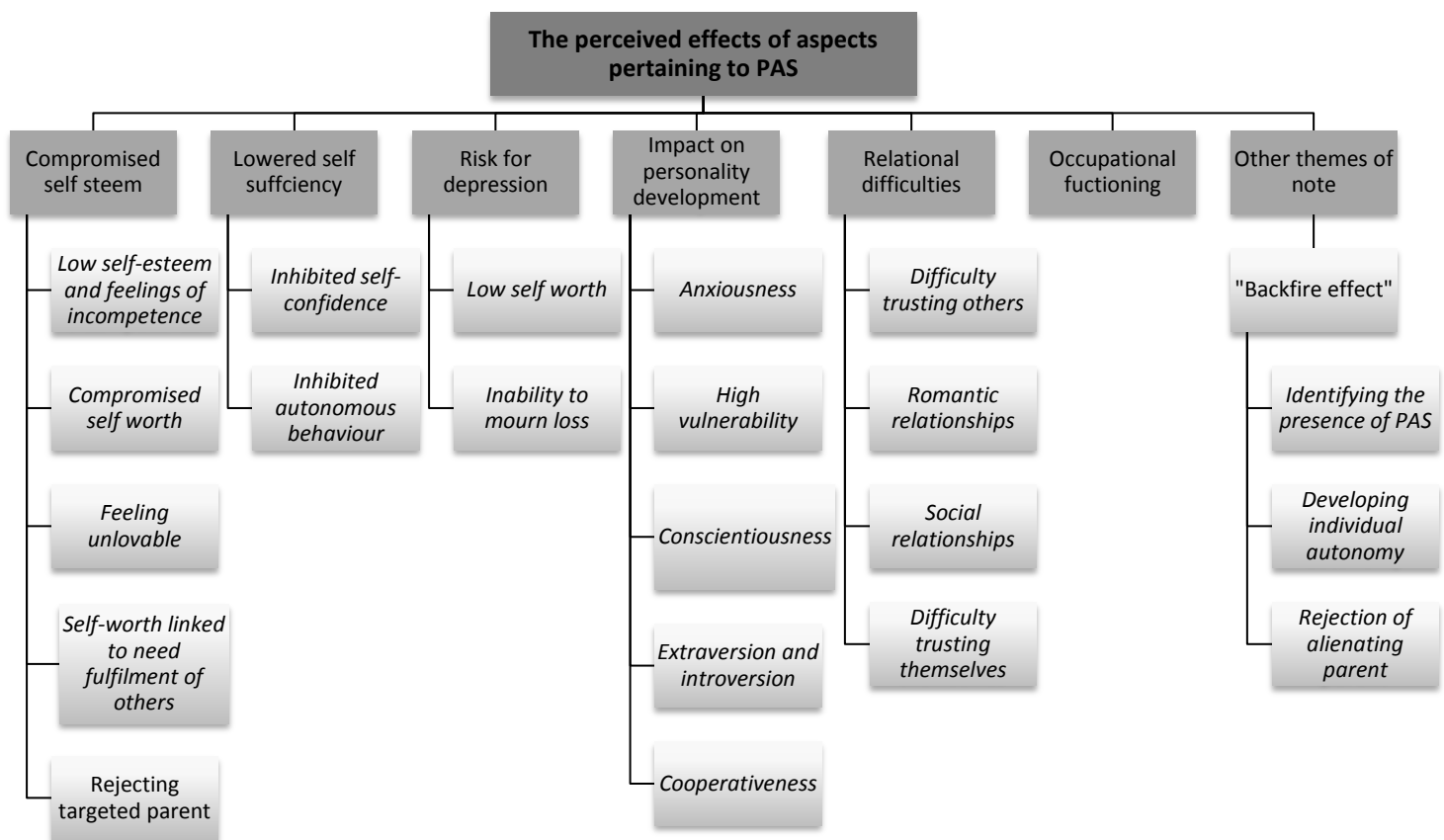
The results may suggest a link between a lack of nurturing by parental figures, participants learning that love is conditional and the discouragement of autonomous behaviour. Participants were exposed to an array of alienating behaviour that prevented autonomous growth. They were made to believe that it is wrong for them not to support the alienating parent’s vilification of the targeted parent. For example, Participant 26 mentioned, “My mom was angry at me for consoling my father” (Participant 26).

Furthermore, emotional dependence on the alienating parent is positively reinforced and portrayed as a “special bond” (Participant 21). This reinforcement further exacerbates the role reversal between parent and child and encourages an enmeshed relationship where the child is easily influenced. Participant 1 explained this relationship, “I was very close to my mom. She is more like a friend and a sister than a mother.” Other independent behaviour like “going to friends” (Participant 38) or “having a boyfriend” (Participant 13) is also discouraged by over-protective behaviour from the alienating parent. Several participants reported that this “over-protective” (Participant 24) behaviour caused them to feel “incapable of handling things” (Participant 2). These findings may suggest that children give up their autonomy to meet the alienating parent’s need for revenge, control, or enmeshment. This is detrimental to the needs of the child and their development.

4.3.2 THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF ASPECTS PERTAINING TO PAS

The following subthemes were identified as portraying the effects that participants believed PAS had on them.

Table 6: Thematic summary of the perceived effects of aspects pertaining to PAS



4.3.2.1 Compromised self-esteem

Across all nine interviews, exposure to alienating behaviour appeared to have played a negative role in the self-esteem of participants. "Self-esteem" is a term used to reflect a person's overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth (Baron & Byrne, 2000). It encompasses the beliefs and emotions individuals hold towards them. Several participants

reported feeling “worthless” (Participant 13), “self-critical” (Participant 24) and having “low self-esteem” (Participant 33) linked low self-esteem to the “rejection” (Participant 38) he felt as a child. Participant 2 stated, “I don’t think I have a very good self-esteem, with all the things that happened I don’t trust myself.”

- *Low self-esteem and feelings of incompetence*

According to Baker and Verrocchio (2013) parental support, encouragement, and responsiveness are factors related to a positive self-esteem. It enhances the establishment of a child’s autonomy and competence within the self, in relationships and in the work place. These elements in turn contribute to a positive self-esteem.

The results suggest that participants attribute feelings of “incompetence” (Participant 38) in some areas of their lives to their lack of self-esteem. Feelings of incompetence across several spheres in the participants’ lives were linked to the experience of a lack of nurturing and inadequate encouragement for autonomous behaviour received by alienating parents. Participant 13 explained, “The effect is that you are not always sure, you don’t always trust your own abilities or that you can do things.” The results suggest that the alienating behaviour of parents plays a role in poor self-esteem in the following ways:

- *Compromised self-worth*

Firstly, the alienating behaviour participants were subjected to encourage them to believe that the targeted parent is an “unworthy person” (Participant 38). Alienated children come to believe that the targeted parent is unworthy of their love as seen in this statement by Participant 24, “We did not even feel it when my dad was not home. He does not deserve to have us in his life.” Based on these negative false beliefs the child rejects the targeted parent.

Participant 38 justified her decision by stating that she had rejected her father based on the false belief she had about him, “My mother painted a picture of my dad that was not true”; it was based upon her reality not mine.” The results suggest that these negative attributes about the targeted parent may inadvertently become internalised into the child’s feelings about her own worth. Participant 24 explained, “My dad cheated on my mom and everything, he is not a very strong person, but you know, all the things he did what does that say about me? You feel ashamed.” Several participants came to believe that they are no good because the targeted parent is no good, compromising their self-esteem.

- *Feeling unlovable*

Secondly, the alienating behaviour of a parent may lead to participants falsely believing that the targeted parent has rejected them or will harm them. Participant 38 recalls the way in which she was told about her parents’ divorce caused her to feel rejected “My mother put the phone down and said to us ‘your dad does not want us anymore’. This causes me to feel rejected.” According to Baker (2007) when young children are confronted with statements like this, their egocentric thought processes lead them to think they are unlovable or unworthy of love. Participant 24 stated, “I wasn’t good enough for my father. Why would I be good enough for other people?” Participant 38 similarly explained, “Because my dad did not show any interest. I thought why would a boy be interested in me. I didn’t want to, it’s just my self-esteem.”

- *Self-worth linked to need fulfilment of others*

As mentioned earlier, alienating behaviour causes children to substitute their own needs and views for those of the alienating parent. The resulting loyalty conflicts guide the child into believing and accepting that love is conditional; and acceptance and love are not based

on intrinsic factors. Thirdly, participants believed that they are only valuable if they are fulfilling someone else's needs. Participant 24 explained, "I have the fear that my mother won't need me anymore." This fear is rooted in the conviction that being unneeded renders one worthless. Intrinsic thought patterns like these compromises individual self-talk and self-esteem. As a result, they prioritise the needs of other above their own. The following statement by Participant 33 is a good example, "I am always trying to make sure everybody else is OK; I don't think of myself. But I like other people being happy."

- *Rejecting targeted parent*

Two participants reported severe feelings of "guilt" (Participant 2) after the passing of their father (the targeted parent). Participant 38 explained, "I feel I should have given him a chance." This suggests that participants may inevitably feel guilty or "a bad person" (Participant 2) for their antagonistic behaviour towards the targeted parent. This guilt caused them to feel that they are undeserving of happiness because they rejected the targeted parent. These internal beliefs may be detrimental to individual self-worth.

4.3.2.2 Self-sufficiency

As summarised above, alienating behaviour play a negative part in the development of an individual's self-esteem. Individual self-esteem is closely related to individuals' feelings of competency, self-mastery and self-sufficiency. It appears PAS has a negative influence on self-confidence and autonomous behaviour.

- *Inhibited self-confidence*

Participants reported several situations where they struggled to believe in their own abilities. These included “relationships” (Participant 13); “work” (Participant 12); “handling conflict” (Participant 1), and “understanding themselves” (Participant 24). Participant 24 further explained, “The effect is that you are not always sure, you don’t always trust your own abilities or that you can do things.” The results suggest that lower levels of self-confidence in individuals may be linked to exposure to alienating behaviour.

- *Inhibited autonomous behaviour*

According to Ammaniti and Trentini (2009), an individual’s sense of competence and self-sufficiency is based on his autonomy, sense of individuation and the development of psychological self-reliance. Several respondents confirmed that the intrusive and controlling behaviour of alienating parents inhibits the development of autonomy. Participant 38 mentioned, “Up to this day, I am still scared to get into a relationship because of what will my mother say.” The results suggest that alienating parents may pressurise their children to “think and behave in certain ways” (Participant 33). This, in turn, may possibly inhibit autonomous and independent development. Participant 38 explained, “My mother made me feel that if you do certain things and behave in certain ways you will be accepted.”

The aforementioned results may suggest that children exposed to PAS are less self-sufficient; prone to be reliant on others as seen in the statement of Participant 13, “I hate being alone. I need people around me. When I get upset I need one of my friends to calm me down. Sometimes my friends get fed up with me.” Children with lower levels of self-sufficient behaviour tend to rely on others for emotional regulation and motivation. They are

more likely to be hesitant to make autonomous decisions and may be fearful of situations where they feel uncertain.

4.3.2.3 Depression

Five of the participants reported having difficulties with low mood, negative self-talk and diminished interest in social interaction because of their parents' divorce. Three participants have been formally diagnosed with a mood disorder in their adult life.

Participant 33 stated, "that you get depressed because of all the feelings", which, by her own admission, contributed to a suicide attempt during adolescence. The results did not yield any specific period in which participants were more sensitive to the development of depression.

The results however revealed several ways in which the behaviour of alienating parents may be linked to risk factors contributing to the development of depression.

- *Low self-worth*

As indicated in 4.3.2.1 the alienating behaviour participants were subjected to encourage them to believe that the targeted parent is unworthy. Based on these negative false beliefs the child rejects the targeted parent. The results suggest that these negative attributes about the targeted parent may inadvertently become internalised into the child's feelings about self-worth, compromising the child's self-esteem.

Furthermore, alienating behaviour coaches participants to believe that the needs of their parents are superior to theirs. This causes them to display high levels of approval-seeking behaviour (Participant 2, 12, 21, 33 and 38), and leave them with a fear of rejection (Participant 2, 12, 13 and 24). Approval-seeking behaviour compromises self-worth, and rejection sensitivity has been linked to the development of depression.

- *Inability to mourn loss*

Alienating behaviour falsely led children to believe that the targeted parent is unworthy of love. Participant 12 reported she was unable to express the loss of “a father figure and someone who loved you.” Participant 26 reported remembering her mother making her feel guilty by showing “hurt and betrayal” when she expressed sadness about her dad leaving. The majority of participants were unwilling to admit the loss of their targeted parent due to the ongoing loyalty they have towards the alienating parent. The results suggested that inability to mourn the loss of the targeted parent might create a predisposition to depression in children exposed to PAS.

4.3.2.4 Possible impact on personality

The concept of personality is used to describe the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviour and underlie an individual’s lifestyle, coping and adapting abilities and social experiences (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). The results suggested several ways in which the experience of alienating behaviour relates to several personality characteristics expressed by participants.

- *Anxiousness*

Several participants reported being anxious individuals (Participant 2, 13, 21, 33 and 38). They “struggle to handle more than one big situation” (Participant 13) and become easily stressed (Participant 1, 2, 13 and 24). Participant 13 reported becoming “irrational and blowing this out of proportion.” Responses suggest that the absence of nurturing involvement from the alienating parent may predispose participants to anxiety and uncertainty about the environment and their ability to cope. Several participants described

themselves as pessimistic (Participant 21, 26 and 33) as a way “not to be disappointed” (Participant 24). These responses that the inability of alienating parents to provide attentive and responsive parenting may result insecure attachment styles and negative mental representations that manifested in participants reported anxiety and severe lack of trust.

- *High vulnerability*

Participants reported being “sensitive” (Participant 2) and “insecure” (Participant 12) for several reasons, including “being scared of judgment” (Participant 12); “scared of not living up to people’s expectations” (Participant 21); “scared of people not liking me” (Participant 1), and a “fear of not performing well” (Participant 24) as reasons for their sensitivity.

These responses suggest that the conditional love and false sense of rejection and worthlessness experienced by participants render them sensitive to rejection in adulthood. Participant 13 explained, “I have a very small heart. If people say something to me I usually take it in the wrong way” (Participant 13).

- *Conscientiousness*

Several participants also reported being very disciplined and hardworking (Participant 2, 21, 24, 33, and 38). Most participants reported being “well organized” (Participant 12), and at times even “over prepared” (Participant 21) and “having high standards” for themselves (Participant 21 and 24). These responses may suggest that the participants exposed to possible PAS have high conscientiousness as a means to gain acceptance and love from others. Participant 33 explained, “From a small age I tried to win my dad’s favour through performing well.”

- *Extraversion and introversion*

Several participants reported that they believed themselves to be an “introvert” (Participant 2, 21, 24, 33). These responses do not suggest that all children exposed to PAS are introverted. It does however reflect the tendency for children exposed to possible PAS to “isolate” (Participant 2) themselves. This is evident in the following statement of Participant 21, “I like being alone. People don’t always understand me. I only have a few good friends and that is that. In fact I prefer to be work orientated.” Isolating behaviour may possibly be linked to insecure attachment styles, low levels of autonomous behaviour and social incompetence.

- *Cooperativeness*

Several participants struggle to get along with people in general. Participant 26 reported, “struggling to get along with people who are not like me.” This lack of tolerance and cooperativeness with others may be associated with the alienating parent’s poor tolerance for weakness of the target parent. The outcome is poor levels of acceptance and empathy within children exposed to alienating behaviour. The responses do not imply a similarity in the personality development of individuals exposed to PAS, but rather aim to shed light on how the dynamics of PAS may influence personality development.

4.3.2.5 Relational difficulties

According to Ainsworth’s theory of attachment the early relationship between a parent and a child and early relational patterns create the blueprint for later styles of interpersonal interactions (Garber, 2004). Three areas of compromised trust were identified.

- *Difficulty trusting others*

All nine participants conveyed that they have difficulty trusting others. The results seem to suggest that individuals exposed to alienating behaviour are more susceptible to the development of anxious or avoidant attachment styles. Participant 13 explained, “I struggle with trust. You know they say they you should expect anything from anybody because the devil was also an angel first.”

- *Romantic relationships*

When it came to romantic relationships, participants reported that their fear of trust is rooted in the rejection they experienced by the targeted parent as verbalised by Participant 1, “I don’t let people close to me because I am scared they will hurt me.” Participant 12 explained that she is scared “that others will hurt me in the same way my father did.” All nine participants expressed the fear that “my relationship will end up like my parents’ relationship did.” Participant 21 stated, “I don’t believe in relationships. I don’t believe they last.” The majority of participants admitted that they cope with this lack of trust by avoiding relationships completely. Participant 21 explained, “I am a very independent person, so it doesn’t really bother me. I prefer to be professionally driven. I think I will focus on my occupation for the most of my future.” In most cases, participants gave their independent nature a reason for not being in a relationship suggesting that they are not fully aware how their lack of trust may influence their social interaction with others.

- *Social relationships*

When considering the social interactions with people, eight of the nine participants reported having a small group of friends. Several participants reported being suspicious

about people's intentions (Participant 2, 12, 13, 24 and 33), making it difficult for them to trust others. Participants' lack of trust appears to be linked to the feelings of betrayal and disappointment they experienced in their parental relationships. Participant 13 explained, "My dad always said stuff, but he always had alternative motives." Participant 12 attributed her lack of trust to the fact that "If I could not trust my dad, why should I trust a stranger." Participants reported coping with this lack of trust by being less social (Participant 2, 21 and 24), and avoiding relying on others (Participant 13 and 26).

- *Difficulty trusting themselves*

Furthermore, three of the participants reported a sense of "not being able to trust my own judgement" (Participant 2, 13 and 38). Participant 24 explained, "I don't know if I will be able to do the right thing, I don't know myself that well." Several others were uncertain about whether they were able to make a relationships work. This self-doubt appears to be rooted in the fact that participants rejected the targeted parent in spite of initial positive feelings. This conflict between their own perception and what they were told to believe results in a lack of trust in people in general and in their own ability to make decisions and judgments.

These individuals' expectations, behaviour, and beliefs about relationships are testimony to their mental representations about people that model their relationships with their parents. As reported earlier in the discussion of the results under 4.3.1.4, participants' experiences suggest that the inability of caregivers to provide contingent and sensitive responses to the child's needs, effect/cause insecure attachment between participants and their parents. Over time, the response style of parent shapes the child's mental representation of relationships. The results suggest that the alienating behaviour the child is exposed to play

a role in the child's understanding of themselves. They see themselves as unlovable and others as unable to provide love and care.

4.3.2.6 Occupational functioning

According to Baker and Verrocchio (2013), parents who encourage self-reliant behaviour aid their children to develop an autonomous sense of self and self-competence. Caregivers who discourage their children from performing tasks independently or who ridicule their attempts at self-direction may install shame and doubt in their children. As mentioned earlier, the controlling nature of alienating behaviour and the lack of responsiveness to the child's needs could inhibit autonomous behaviour and the development of internal motivation.

Several participants reported being very driven and hardworking (Participant 2, 21, 24, 33, and 38) and "successful" (Participant 12) in their occupation and studies. A challenge concerning their professional functioning was regarding balancing their "personal, family and social life" (Participant 38). Three participants reported changing their major during their studies. Only one participant reported having academic difficulty. This may suggest that alienating behaviour does not necessarily directly influence the professional success of the individual but rather that it influences others' sphere of individual well-being. Alienating behaviour affects issues like self-esteem and self-regulation, which in literature has been linked to the occupational success of an individual.

4.3.2.7 Other themes to note

The following additional subthemes emerged during the assessment of aspects pertaining to PAS:

4.3.2.7.1 Backfire effect

The results suggest that some participants become aware of the fact that “they had been turned against” (Participant 38) the targeted parent. Only two participants were fully aware of the dynamics of PAS present. Baker (2010) coined this phenomenon the “backfire effect”. Participant 38 stated, “Mother gave me a picture of my father that was not true. I was based on her reality not mine. Now that I am older, I realised that my father was never like that. It is something I recently had a lot of guilt over and cried a lot over, the fact that I never gave my father a chance. It was like my childhood had been stolen from me.”

- *Identifying the presence of PAS*

The results suggest that the realisation of the presence PAS is not linked to one specific transformative event. For the two relevant participants the reflective thoughts, reminiscing and self-inspection after their fathers’ (the targeted parent) death became the catalyst for a “painful process” (Participant 38) in which they realised that they had been alienated. Participant 2 reported experiencing “severe guilt” for the way in which she treated her father. Participant 38 stated, “I should have given him a chance.” The results may suggest that death of the targeted parents may interrupt the dynamics involved in PAS. Because the source of the mother’s anger and hurt is no longer present, it may allow children to express different emotions and resolve internal conflicts independently.

- *Developing individual autonomy*

Additionally, the results suggest that the maturing of the PAS children allowed them to process the events and memories about the parents’ separation differently. Participant 2 explained, “It is like I had this reality and now that I look back at it with my adult brain I see a completely different picture.” Both participants mentioned that therapeutic intervention,

especially mediation that focused on psycho-education regarding familial dynamics, intra-psychic functioning and more adaptive coping mechanisms, empowered them to start questioning their previous beliefs. This may suggest that intervention aimed at strengthening the self-esteem, autonomy and self-reliance of individuals who have experienced PAS, rather than trying to eliminate the false beliefs installed by the alienation, may be more successful (Whitcombe, 2014). This will empower children to challenge their own beliefs rather than aggravating the dynamic of PAS that is already involved (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013).

- *Rejection of alienating parent*

The results further suggest that the negative side of identifying PAS within their own lives led to a secondary alienation of the alienating parent. Participants came to realise that their mother was “selfish” (Participant 2) and “manipulating” (Participant 38). Participant 38 further explained, “The way I see it now is that my mom was the enemy, not my dad. I feel angry with my mother. I am still trying to cope with this.” Participant 38 added that even after this realisation she is still prone to experiencing guilt and feeling responsible for her mother. This suggests that even after the identification of PAS, the dynamics supporting the alienation took time to disappear.

4.4 INTEGRATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study focused on the exploration of the subjective experiences of individuals who were possibly exposed to PAS as children, as well as exploring the perceived role this has played in their lives. Throughout the study, most participants reported a sense of confusion and difficulty remembering the time of their parents’ divorce. The results suggest that the confusion and difficulty recalling events during the divorce, and the feelings they experienced, were linked to the participant’s age. Furthermore, their memory difficulties

appear to be related to the presence of defence mechanisms and the dynamics of PAS designed to keep the alienation intact.

These results suggest that PAS may play a dichotomous role in autobiographic memory. Mostly, it appears that alienating parents expose children to an array of denigrating information about the targeted parent. Relevant episodic details subsequently become abstracted and formalised within the self-memory system and shape the beliefs that participants hold about their childhood and the targeted parent. If asked about these beliefs and attitudes they hold towards their parents or childhood, they are unable to elaborate because the episodic details and memories that inform these beliefs are not the child's own. These "selective memories" are suggested to the child by the alienating parent and inform the child's reasons for rejecting the targeted parent (Baker, Burkhard, & Albertson- Kelly, 2012; Bernet & Baker, 2013)

Secondly, children exposed to PAS introject specific beliefs and attitudes toward the targeted parent as a means to gain the alienating parents' acceptance and love (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). They are able to report on these introjected beliefs about and attitudes toward their parents and their childhood without any structured episodic detail or a firm reality foundation. This causes the biased report of their experiences as a child.

Similarly, children are also biased in reporting memories that may implicate the alienating parent. They maintain that the choice of rejecting the targeted parent is their own. Gardner (2001) referred to this as the "independent thinker phenomenon". These results confirm the notion that PAS contaminate a children's reality by altering their autobiographic memories.

The subsequent self-generating “brainwashing” process proves resistant to outside influence and to reality testing (Baker & Sauber, 2013)

This study took into consideration the family dynamics and relationships between family members prior to participants’ parents being separated. The interviews highlighted certain distinctive characteristics in this area. The majority of participants described their parents’ relationships as fragile and distant even before the separation, characterised by a lack of interaction and love between partners, and high levels of conflict.

The findings correspond with the results of Johnston and Roseby (1997) who established that high-conflict divorces are characterised by a) high degrees of mistrust, b) incidents of verbal abuse, c) intermittent physical aggression, and d) ongoing difficulty in communicating about and co-operating in the care of their children.

All nine participants reported that infidelity played a major part in their parents’ divorce causing alienating parents to manifest anger and resentment toward the targeted parent. Additionally the presence of infidelity appeared to fuel an array of alienating behaviour that contributed to high levels of conflict. The data corroborate the findings of a number of authors on the subject of narcissistic injuries resultant from separations where the alienating parents was left feeling humiliated (Baker, 2006; Baker & Sauber, 2013; Sigelman & Rider, 2006; Waldron & Joanis, 1996; Warshack, 2000). This possibly contributes to the experience of violence and verbal abuse during parental conflict. Some responses indicated the presence of physical abuse during the time of separation. In most cases the loyalty conflict and process of separation is overwhelming to children. As a result, children align

with one parent as a means to lessen their anxiety and gain a sense of authority over their surroundings (De Jager, 2008; Kopetski, 1998).

For six of the respondents parental alienation was preceded by experiences of triangulation. According to Johnston (2003), triangulation is a family systems theory concept where parents that engage in conflict use the child as a pawn to deflect or channel the conflict between them. A sense of alliance and loyalty is installed in the children by favouritism and biased information given to the child (Baker, 2006). Children are often caught in the middle of these loyalty conflicts, are torn between their parents, and are often playing the roles of the messenger (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). The turbulent experience of separation between parents marked by high levels of conflict form the base of the break between the child and the alienated parent. The results further suggest isolation from extended family and friends that may aggravate this rupture between the alienated parent and child (Godbout & Parent, 2012).

Another important aspect that emerged from the interviews is the role of the alienating and targeted parent and parenting practices that contribute to alienation. According to Baker (2010), the majority of PAS research has focused on the behaviour and tactics of the alienating parent used during the process of alienation. During the analysis of participant responses, it was difficult to identify clearly the role alienating parents play. Three reasons became apparent: Firstly, it is difficult to separate the role alienating parents play in the alienation process from other environmental factors that may influence children's behaviour (Godbout & Parent, 2012). Secondly, ongoing PAS dynamics and ongoing loyalty conflicts within adult children of PAS result in biased information about the alienating parent and children being unable to recognise the role the alienating parent plays in the vilification of the

child (De Jager, 2008; Turkat, 2002). Lastly it is, objectively spoken, difficult to separate the role alienating parents play in the alienation process since most of their behaviour overlaps with behaviour found in regular divorcing couples.

These results suggest that the campaign of denigration towards the targeted parent is not always an overt process. In addition to denigrating language, the attitude and body language of alienating parents also form part of the alienation process. This supports the findings of Baker and Darnall (2007) that the unconscious process of programming in PAS includes attributing negative aspects of the targeted parent without actually verbalising them, sabotaging visitation, guilt inducement and passive discouragement of contact between the child and the targeted parent. It was difficult to separate the reported characteristics about the role of the alienated parent from false beliefs induced by the alienated parents in an objective manner. Nevertheless, results indicate that passivity and uninvolved of targeted parents predispose them to the attacks of alienating parents and rejection by their children (Baker, 2006; Rand, 2011).

Additionally, there appears to be a link between participants' experience of PAS and the developmental stage of the child at the time of alienation. According to Sigelman and Rider (2006) between the age of two and ten are in the early phases of developing problem-solving strategies. Abstract thoughts, hypothetical thinking and meta-cognition have not yet completely developed. These children logically solve problems by using concrete events and objects. The results suggest that the majority of participants were as children unable to fully understand, grasp and navigate the complex dynamics of PAS and the loyalty conflicts involved. On the other hand, adolescents exposed to PAS are cognitively more advanced

than preadolescents, which render them more opinionated and concerned about justice (Sigelman & Rider, 2006).

The link between PAS and psychological maltreatment of children has long been debated. Support seems to be growing among litigators and clinicians for the classifying of PAS as a form of maltreatment and even child abuse (McKelvey, 2011). Child maltreatment is defined as any acts, series of actions of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child (Colman, 2001).

According to Baker and Verrocchio (2013), some parental behaviour evident in PAS cases may fall under specific subtypes of psychological maltreatment, including spurning, terrorising, isolating, exploiting or corrupting, and denying emotional responsiveness. The results seem to support this. Six participants reported similar experiences of parental behaviour that could be classified as psychological maltreatment.

Furthermore, results suggest that some alienating parents may isolate their children from family members and extended family. This isolation renders them more vulnerable to the manipulation of alienating parents (De Jager, 2008; Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Additionally, the over-protectiveness by the alienating parent is used to portray the targeted parent as dangerous and installs a sense of fear within the child. Other psychological maltreating behaviour that was reported included the use of severe exploitation and corruption of children (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013). In addition, the results of this research indicate that some children are subjected to parentification by the alienating parent, who treats the child as a confidant or relies on the child for emotional support ensuing role reversal of the parent-child relationship (Johnston & Roseby, 1997; Kopetski, 1998).

Parents who engage in parental alienation strategies may be more likely to lack nurturance and emotional responsiveness (Baker, 2006). The results suggest respondents experienced their mother was “absent” and “preoccupied” and seemed unresponsive to their emotional needs. Moreover, the results demonstrate that alienating parents may be insensitive to the needs of the child to be loved and nurtured by the targeted parent (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Whitcombe, 2014). The parental preoccupation during divorce and especially in PAS cases gives the child a message that the parent’s need for love, approval, and obedience from the child are more important to those of the child (Baker & Sauber, 2013; Baker & Verrocchio, 2013).

The participants’ response imply that a message of prioritising parental needs at the expense of the needs of the child transfigures/internalises itself into the internal working model of a child. Coupled with the experience of parental rejection the child believes that acceptance and love is not based on intrinsic factors but rather on the need fulfilment of the alienating parent (Baker, 2010; Toren, Bregman, Zohar-Reich, Ben-Amitay, Wolmer, & Laor, 2013). The results indicate that the alienating behaviour of parents coach children into believing and experiencing that love is conditional, which heightens their risk for anxiety and depression.

Children exposed to PAS experience intense conflict trying to manage feelings of conditional love as well as handling and fulfilling the needs of the alienating parent. Immature reasoning and problem-solving skills exacerbate their dilemma. According to De Jager (2008), the alliance with one of the parents might serve as a means for the child to break free of the intense and unbearable loyalty conflicts. Even though an alliance causes

less anxiety for a child, the results seem to indicate that it is detrimental to the development of autonomous behaviour in the child.

According to Ben-Ami and Baker (2012) nurturing parental behaviour and experience of being valued and supported by a caregiver allow children to depend progressively less on others as they internalise a sense of agency and autonomy. The results may suggest that there is a link between a lack of nurturing by parental figures, participants learning that love is conditional and the discouragement of autonomous behaviour.

Baker and Verrocchio (2013) holds that exposure to parental alienation behaviour can result in children feeling worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only having value in meeting the needs of others. According to these authors parental support, encouragement and responsiveness are factors related to a positive self-esteem, and assist to solidify a child's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These factors are important elements that contribute to a positive self-esteem.

The results suggest that participants attribute feelings of incompetence to their poor self-esteem. Feelings of incompetence across several spheres in the participants' lives were noticeably linked to the lack of nurturing and absence of encouragement for autonomous behaviour they experienced as a child. The results suggest that the alienating behaviour of parents bring about a reduced self-esteem in the following ways:

Firstly, the alienating behaviour participants were subjected to encourage them to believe that the targeted parent is an unworthy parent. Based on these untrue beliefs the child rejects the targeted parent. Negative attributes about that targeted parent may inadvertently

become internalised into the child's feelings about self-worth. Children believe that they are no good because the targeted parent is no good, compromising their self-esteem.

Secondly, the alienating behaviour of parents may lead children to believe that the targeted parent has rejected them or will harm them. Due to the egocentric thought processes of young children, this lead participants to think they are unloved or unworthy of love (Baker, 2007).

Thirdly, as mentioned earlier, the alienating behaviour parents exhibit cause children to substitute their own needs and views for the needs of the alienating parent. Loyalty conflicts guide the child into believing and accepting that love is conditional, consequently participants believed that they are only valuable if they are fulfilling someone else's needs.

As a result, they prioritise the needs of other above those of their own. The results further suggest that participants might feel guilty and like a "bad person" for their behaviour towards the targeted parent. This guilt caused them to feel that they are undeserving of happiness because they rejected the targeted parents.

According to Ammaniti and Trentini (2009), an individual's sense of competence and self-sufficiency is based on autonomy, sense of individuation and the development of psychological self-reliance. Participants reported several situations where they struggle to believe in their own abilities. These included their relationships, work, handling of conflict and being able to understand themselves and their emotions. The results confirmed that the intrusive and controlling behaviour of alienating parents inhibits the development of autonomy.

Parents who engage in parental alienation behaviour require children to relinquish their autonomy and substitute their needs for those of the parent (Baker & Darnall, 2007) creating a heightened sensitivity toward disapproval and fear of rejection. That parent might also induce fear of abandonment by threatening to withdraw love if the child fails to reject the other parent (Baker, 2006). In a bid for approval and attachment with that parent, children learn to meet the needs of the parent before their own. The results suggest that these children might be vulnerable to resentfulness, approval seeking, and dependency as seen in parentified children, which in turn are risk factors for depression

In Ainsworth's theory of attachment the early relationship between a parent and a child and early relational patterns create the blueprint for later styles of interpersonal interactions (Garber, 2004). All nine participants expressed a fear or trusting people. The parent's ability to provide attentive and sensitive responsiveness to the infant and child's needs creates a secure attachment, whereas inconsistent or negligent parenting can result in an insecure attachment (Garber, 2004). Over time, early relationships with parents shape the child's mental representation of relationships. Additionally, it influences the way individual's approach adult relationships and how they understand their worthiness of love and the trustworthiness of others (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012).

Respondents reported having trust difficulties in three areas: First, when it came to romantic relationships participants reported that their fear of trust is rooted in the rejection they felt by the targeted parent (Baker, 2006). Children of PAS fear that others will hurt them in the same way the targeted parent did. Furthermore, they avoid relationships and

express fear of failure and a lack of social competence when it comes to relationships (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012).

Secondly, when it came the social interactions with other people several participants reported being suspicious about other people's intentions. This lack of trust appear to be linked to the feeling of betrayal and disappointment experienced in their parental relationships that were generalised to interactions with all people (Andre & Baker, 2008; Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Several participants reported only having a small circle of friends.

Lastly, three of the participants reported a sense of not being able to trust their own judgements. This self-doubt appears to be rooted in the fact that participants rejected the targeted parent for whom they initially had positive feelings (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013). From this conflict between their own perception and what they were told to believe, they developed a lack of trust in people in general and in their own ability to make decisions (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Moné & Biringen, 2006).

Research indicate that parents who encourage self-reliant behaviour help their children to develop a sense of autonomy and a sense of being able to handle problems (Baker & Sauber, 2013). Caregivers who discourage their children from performing tasks they are capable of, or ridicule attempts at self-direction, instil shame and doubt in them (Baker, 2006). As mentioned earlier the controlling nature of alienating behaviour and the lack of responsiveness to the child's needs could inhibit autonomy and the management of intrinsic motivation (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Alienating behaviour does not necessarily directly influence the professional success of the individual. The results suggest that alienating

behaviour rather influences spheres of individual well-being like self-esteem and self-regulation, which literature links to the occupational success of an individual.

Lastly, during the exploration of the effects of alienation and the experience of the “backfire effect” as coined by Baker (2013) several dynamics of note were observed. The results suggest that some participants become aware of the fact that they had been turned against the targeted parent. The realisation of the presence PAS is not linked one specific transformative event. For two participants the reflective thoughts, reminiscing and self-inspection (that is typical after the loss of a loved one) was the catalyst for a painful process in which they realized that they had been alienated.

The results further suggest that the death of targeted parents may interrupt the dynamics involved in PAS, since the source of the alienating parent’s anger and hurt is no longer present. This in turn may allow children to express their feeling and emotions and allow them to resolve internal conflicts independently. The maturing of the PAS child allowed them to process the events and memories they have about their parent’s separation differently. Participants come to realise that the alienating parent’s behaviour is selfish and manipulating. This led to a secondary alienation and rejection of the alienating parent.

The therapeutic intervention (especially those that focus on psycho-education on familial dynamic and intra-psychic functioning and more adaptive coping mechanisms), empowered participants to started questioning their previous beliefs. The findings may suggest that intervention aimed at building the self-esteem, autonomy and self-reliance of individuals who have experienced PAS, rather than trying to eliminate the false beliefs installed by the alienation may be more successful. An improved self-esteem will empower

children to challenge their own beliefs rather than aggravating the dynamic of PAS already involved.

The results further suggest that even after the identifications of PAS, the breaking of the dynamics that supported the alienation is persistent and difficult to break. Participants still reported having difficulties with over-involvement and dependence on the alienating parent. Proper training and awareness of alienation dynamics is an essential element in helping individuals exposed to PAS and other young adults achieve long-term well-being.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of individuals who had possibly been alienated as a child. Furthermore, it set out to explore the perceived effect that this alienation had on the lives of victims. It is important to note that the data produced is rooted in subjective memories of events participants experienced in their childhood. Caution had to be taken during the interpretation of responses. The explorative nature of this study hold out the prospect that results will best serve as a guide for future research and add to empiric confirmation of current hypotheses about PAS.

Nevertheless, the results suggest that the experience of the parenting styles associated with alienating behaviour has a marked effect on the mental representations, beliefs and feelings participants carry into adulthood. The results may suggest representations and beliefs about self-worth. In several ways, self-efficiency appears to be linked to individuals' self-esteem, emotional regulation, social interactions and occupational functioning. These results may contribute to a bigger awareness and understanding of alienation dynamics as an essential element in assisting individuals exposed to PAS achieve long-term well-being.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter a critical reflection and implications of results are given. This discussion is followed by a brief overview about the limitations of the study as well as some suggestions for future research.

5.2 CRITICAL REFLECTION

Divorce or partner separation can be an exceptionally emotional occurrence in the lives of both parents and children (Amato, 1993; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Research shows that divorce has strong and enduring detrimental effects on the development of children and society at large (Whitcombe, 2014). Divorce and changes in family roles, relationships and circumstances expose children to several risk factors associated with adjustment problems (Roth, Harkins, & Eng, 2014). Children often become depressed, anxious, angry, demanding and non-compliant because of all the environmental changes and exposure to familial conflict (Amato, 1995; Baker & Brassard, 2013; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Kelly, 1993).

The phenomenon of parental alienation and its related characteristics have been described in literature for more than twenty years. Various clinicians independently researched, identified and described the pathological alignment and triangulation of a child within the context of divorce (Bricklin, 1995; Clawar & Rivlin, 1991; Gardner, 1985; Kopetski, 1998; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). In some divorce cases, they found that

conflicted parents attempted to win the support of the child, probing the child to become pathologically aligned with them. In other words, the child is recruited by one parent as an ally in their struggle against the other parent. This results in the refusal of contact, verbal and behavioural preference of one parent and the denigration and rejection of the other. During the past two decades, the formal concept of PA and PAS as phenomena present in high-conflict divorce cases and even in conflicted marriages received growing attention from academic researchers.

The research aim of this study was to provide an in-depth exploration and description of how several aspects relating to the perceived experience of PAS informed individuals' perceptions about their reality. From the perspective of young adults who, as children, have been exposed to this alienation process, the spotlight was turned on the complexities of this phenomenon. Issues profiled were current knowledge about the syndrome, the emotional, practical, domestic and legal complexities rooted in the alienating events and the inevitable repercussions of such a traumatic experience on the lives of the victims.

The results confirm the idea that PAS contaminates a child's reality by altering their autobiographic memories. This causes a self-generating "brainwashing" process, which is resistant to outside influence and to reality testing (Baker, 2006; Rand, 1997). Confusion and difficulties in recalling their subjective experience and details of their parents' divorce have been linked to two factors: firstly to participants' age during the time of their parents' divorce and secondly, the presence of defence mechanisms and ongoing dynamics of PAS designed to keep the alienation process intact.

The majority of participants described their parents' relationships as fragile and distant even before the separation, characterised by a lack of interaction and love between partners' high levels of conflict. Infidelity was identified as a major contributing factor to divorce resulting in anger and resentment between partners. Furthermore, parental infidelity appeared to be a catalyst for high levels of conflict and alienating behaviour. During this process, children are exposed to severe conflict, violence and threatening remarks between parents (Mc Kelvey, 2011). As a means to lessen their anxiety to gain a sense of authority over their surroundings, the children align with one parent. Furthermore, a sense of alliance and loyalty is installed in the child by favouritism and biased information given to the child (Baker, 2006). As a result, children are often caught in the middle of these loyalty conflicts, torn between their parents.

The results further suggested that some of the parental behaviour evident in PAS cases might fall under specific subtypes of psychological maltreatment; these include spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting or corrupting, and denying emotional responsiveness (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013). Alienating parents may further isolate their children from family members and extended family, leaving them defenceless against manipulation. Furthermore, the behaviour of alienating parents has a lasting effect on a child and has been linked to children feeling worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, and/or endangered (Baker & Brassard, 2013; Gardner, 2001). Support appears to be growing among litigators and clinicians to classify PAS as a form of maltreatment and child abuse (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Whitcombe, 2014).

According to Baker (2006) parents who engage in parental alienation strategies are likely to lack nurturance and emotional responsiveness. The results suggest respondents

experienced their mother as “absent” and/or “preoccupied.” Parental preoccupation during divorce and especially in PAS cases convinces the child that the parent’s needs for love, approval, and obedience from the child are more important than the child’s own (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013). This teaches the child that acceptance and love is not based on intrinsic factors but rather on the need fulfilment of the alienating parent (Baker, 2010). The alienating behaviour of parents coach children into believing and experiencing that love is conditional. The results may suggest that there is a link between a lack of nurturing by parental figures, participants learning that love is conditional, the discouragement of autonomous behaviour and the possible exposure to PAS.

According to Baker and Verrocchio (2013) parental support, encouragement, and responsiveness are factors related to a positive self-esteem. It aids solidification of a child’s sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness; important elements that contribute to a positive self-esteem. The results further indicate that feelings of incompetence across several spheres in the participants’ lives may be linked to the experience of a lack of nurturing and a lack of encouragement for autonomous behaviour by alienating parents, thereby compromising the child’s self-esteem.

Furthermore, the estranging behaviour of alienating parents encouraged children to believe that the targeted parent is an unworthy. Negative attributes associated with the targeted parent may inadvertently become aligned with the child’s feelings about his or her own worth. In the same way, alienating behaviour results in the child who now falsely believes that the targeted parent has rejected them, deeming themselves as unlovable or unworthy of love. Children inadvertently substitute their own needs and views for those of the alienating parent, thereby boosting their self-worth (Baker & Brassard, 2013; Ben-Ami &

Baker, 2012; Clawar & Rivlin, 1991). As a result, these children show a heightened sensitivity toward disapproval and fear of rejection.

In addition, it appears that the intrusive and controlling behaviour of alienating parents inhibit the development of autonomy in their children. According to Ammaniti and Trentini (2009), an individual's sense of competence and self-sufficiency is based on his sense of autonomy and individuation, and the development of psychological self-reliance. Individuals exposed to PAS struggle to believe in their own ability in several spheres of their functioning. These included their relationships, work, handling of conflict and being able to understand themselves and their emotions.

The parents' capability to provide attentive and sensitive fulfilment in the needs of the infant and child creates a secure attachment to the child, whereas inconsistent or negligent parenting can result in an insecure attachment (Garber, 2004; Toren, Bregman, Zohar-Reich, Ben-Amitay, Wolmer, & Laor, 2013). The parent's response style to a child shapes the child's mental representation of relationships and organises an individual's expectations, behaviour, and beliefs about relationships across the lifespan (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). These expectations are brought forward from the early relationship into adulthood in ways that create coherence in individuals' understanding of their worthiness of love and the trustworthiness of others.

The results from this study add to the knowledge base about the ways in which PAS may play a role in adult adjustment. Participants reported difficulties with trust, intimacy and social skills and linked these difficulties to their experiences in their childhood. Children of PAS fear that others will hurt them in the same way the targeted parent did. As a result, they

avoid intimacy and relationships, substituting these needs with over-achievement and success in their professional life. Moreover, they may avoid relationships and may lack in social competence when it comes to relationships.

This lack of trust in and suspicion of others' intentions appear related to the feelings of betrayal and disappointment experienced in their parental relationships generalised to interactions with all people (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Furthermore, the results suggest that individuals exposed to PAS may struggle to trust their own judgement. This self-doubt appears to be rooted in the fact that participants rejected the targeted parent for whom they initially had positive feelings. From this conflict between their own perception and what they were told to believe, they developed a lack of trust in people in general and in their own ability to make decisions (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Moné & Biringen, 2006; Toren, Bregman, Zohar-Reich, Ben-Amitay, Wolmer, & Laor, 2013)

Therapists working with adults who experienced PAS as children should be mindful of these findings, especially with respect to adult self-sufficiency. Furthermore, it is important to note that intervention with PAS cases may be complicated when it is no longer possible to prevent or intervene in the child's family unit. As noted by Baker and Darnall (2007), children of parental alienation may need professional therapeutic assistance and support as adults to understand the alienation dynamics they have been subjected to. Only thus can they begin to analyse some of the false beliefs about their own worth and abilities. Examination of the shame, guilt, sadness, and loss that can accompany exposure to parental alienation could also assist the individual to find relief from the emotional burdens that constrain adult functioning and prevent successful self-sufficiency (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012).

Intervention with PAS is a process and for most individuals the realisation of the presence of PAS is not linked to one specific transformative event. For some individuals the reflective thoughts, reminiscing and self-inspection after the targeted parent's death become the catalyst for a painful process in which they recognise their alienation. Successful therapeutic intervention with PAS usually includes psycho-education on familial dynamics and intra-psychic functioning, and acquiring more adaptive coping skills and mechanisms. This empowers individuals exposed PAS to start questioning their previous beliefs about themselves and their parents. Baker (2005) noted that understanding involvement of the self in the alienation dynamic could be a painful realisation that needs to be addressed with therapeutic care.

The psychological maturing of the PAS children allow them to process the events and memories they have about their parent's separation differently. Inevitably, they come to realise that the alienating parent's behaviour is selfish and manipulating. This leads to a secondary alienation and rejection of the alienating parent, called the "backfire effect" (Baker, 2006). This study suggests that it is possible for alienated children to free themselves from the undue influence of their alienating parent. However, without therapeutic intervention the tactics used by alienating parents may have a long-term effect on the individuation process in childhood and young adulthood.

This may suggest that intervention aimed to empower PAS children by reinforcing their self-esteem, autonomy and self-reliance may be more successful than trying to eliminate the false beliefs installed by the alienation. This will empower children to challenge their own beliefs rather than aggravating the dynamic of PAS already involved. It appears desirable for clinicians to recognise the emotional pain experienced by alienating parents to

assist transcending the matter without unnecessarily involving the children in the parents' suffering (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013)

5.3 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

The results of this study can be applied to promote the awareness of PAS amongst clinicians and academics. It may shed some light on the types of parental alienation strategies parents can engage in, as well as explicate the possible affect thereof throughout individuals' lives.

Furthermore, the results may aid clinicians in identifying individuals who were alienated as children. In this way, mental health professionals are empowered to mitigate the possible effects and dynamics involved in PAS and apply this knowledge in therapeutic intervention with PAS cases. Proper training and awareness of alienation dynamics are essential to help individuals exposed to PAS to achieve long-term well-being. Other young adults exposed to difficulties relating to PAS and relevant phenomena may benefit as well. Lastly, it is envisaged that this research will support future research on the long-term effect of PAS on children and advocate greater awareness of this phenomenon amongst clinicians.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Few empirical studies have examined the experience and effects of parental alienation syndrome as a phenomenon. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain whether the design of this study was optimal to describe the studied phenomenon. It should also be noted that the attempt to address the ethical concern of not diagnosing a system when objective evaluation and observation of the family system was not possible, necessitated certain adjustments

regarding participant selection and data analysis. These difficulties compromised the interviewing process to the extent that first-hand information about the tactics and role of the alienating parent in alienation was limited.

Due to the limited demographic variation of this qualitative research study, the results will at best be a guide for future comprehensive research about PAS. It therefore cannot be generalised and applied to all individuals who have been exposed to PAS. The ethnicities, age and gender of participants were not representative of the population and could lack in the viewpoint of individuals of other races and genders exposed to PAS.

However, the interpretation of results was aimed to portray the subjective experience of participants and shed some light on the dynamics involved in PAS, not to form experiential generalisations about PAS. This was done to aid the development of future supportive and proactive intervention with PAS individuals guided by information about PAS produced from their own experiences.

Although it appeared that data saturation took place, a larger sample may have further advanced the frequency of themes. It is also possible that, due to the small number of respondents, the sample lacked diversity and did not represent a sufficient number of variations of the parental alienation phenomenon. This shortcoming may reduce the external validity of the study.

Finally, because the collected data were drawn from the experiences and memories of the respondents, responses and the subsequent deducements is limited to the point of view of a single actor within each family. Furthermore, because PAS contaminates the

autobiographical memory of an individual, it is very difficult to distinguish an objective report on the experiences of these individuals. Overall, it is difficult to separate the effect of divorce and the effects of PAS. The study here presented was exploratory by design and is intended as a starting point for ensuing research of a wider scope.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is recommended that future research focus on the following:

- Empirically establishing and confirming the long-term effects of PAS on individual functioning.
- Researching the effect of behavioural tactics used specifically in PAS individually. In other words, future research should aim to specify some of the causal mechanisms from reported exposure to parental alienation. For example, is lowered self-esteem in participants due to the internalised characteristics of the targeted parent or due to the perceived rejection of the individual's experience?
- Examining the difference outcomes in divorce, and determining whether individuals exposed to PAS find it more difficult to function than those who did not become alienated.
- Researching the effects of PAS on the parenting skills of individuals who were exposed to PAS as children.
- Investigating the exact role of a child's age and development concerning their experience and the related long-term effect of PAS.
- The development of standardised assessment tools and criteria for the presentation and identification of the different degrees of PAS as a means to get PAS formally recognised amongst academics and clinicians.

The above-mentioned topics will assist clinicians in understanding the exact dynamics of PAS as well as assist them in adopting relevant therapeutic intervention strategies that are most effective. Ultimately, it could aid in the formal recognition and acceptance of PAS as a concept essential for future research and intervention in both legal and clinical fields.

5.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study was a theoretical yet objective attempt to explore the experiences of adults who had possibly been exposed to PAS as children. The conclusions revealed a number of concepts and insights into the dynamics of PAS and the experience of compromised children, as well as the possible effect it may have on their functioning in adulthood. In both clinical and legal spheres, the exposed outcomes need to be taken into consideration when assisting children of divorce and individuals exposed to PAS. The research has also emphasised a number of limitations, which necessitate further research in this highly significant and contemporary field.

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