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Brainwashing the kids to spite the ex

Barbara Kay, National Post
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-Even the judge noted that the father's unrelenting determination to see this battle through was unique, and only possible to someone with an unusually high income (A. L. is a vascular surgeon): How are ordinary people without resources supposed to fight on their children's behalf?

Sadly, what this case tells me is that only Herculean efforts by a well-heeled non-custodial parent can break through the Kafkaesque family law system. But at least it shines some light on Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS), a term describing the often-irreversible damage done to children brainwashed by an alienating parent into groundless hatred of the other parent.

An alienator can be a mother or a father. But, since high-conflict court battles are almost always resolved with the mother having sole custody -- mothers are better placed to indulge this pathology without binding intervention.

Indeed, in a long-term 2007 study published by developmental psychologist and PAS expert Amy Baker on adult survivors of PAS, the mother was the alienator in 36 of 40 cases. Baker's subjects reported that "their alienating parents behaved like cult leaders ... withdrawing love and affection when the child showed any positive feelings for the targeted parent."

PAS is as real a form of child abuse as any other, and one that witnesses should report. The obvious sign is routine flouting of rightful access to the non-custodial parent -- a clear sign of contempt for the other parent's role in the children's lives.

It is a moral scandal that such visitation rights are virtually never enforced, the violators never punished. Unless custodial parents who deny rightful access start going to jail, this exceptional victory will likely be remembered as a one-off before a return to the default "snooze" mode we are accustomed to in Canadian family courts.

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