

National Organization for Women Admonishes Media for Giving Alec Baldwin a Platform for Misinformed Theories

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NOW is not surprised by the media giving Alec Baldwin a platform to defend his outrageous behavior toward his 11-year-old daughter, but we are concerned that he is being allowed to promote, without challenge, a discredited legal theory that could harm many women and children. The public deserves to know the truth about so-called Parental Alienation Syndrome, and responsible journalism dictates that celebrity opinion offered in self-defense be balanced by actual data and professional expert opinion.

The truth is that Parental Alienation really is a dangerous and cleverly marketed legal strategy that has caused much harm to victims of abuse, especially women and children during and post divorce. This strategy, promoted actively by several “father’s rights” groups, has convinced many people, including some in the judicial system and the media, that the actions of a protective parent (usually the mother) are more harmful than the actual mistreatment inflicted by an abusive parent. The end result is public support (and an excuse) for the teary-eyed abusive parent, plus a willingness to believe that so-called parental alienation, and not the parent’s own behavior, led to the child’s anger toward that parent.

Parental Alienation Syndrome (sometimes called simply Parental Alienation) is not recognized by any professional body. It is simply a legal defense (disguised as psychological phenomenon) designed by Dr. Richard Gardner in the late 1980s to protect fathers from consequences of their abuse. Gardner has since committed suicide, but the legacy of his creation – which was self-published and never peer reviewed – lives on. Often actual abuse is ignored and the protective parent is punished because a lawyer or an evaluator has believed and adopted the rhetoric of parental alienation and presented it to a judge as legitimate. PAS has been discredited by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and also debunked in a recent article in the American Bar Associations’ Children’s Legal Rights Journal, “The Evidentiary Admissibility of Parental Alienation syndrome: Science, Law and Policy” (2006).

According to an article by Dr. Paul J. Fink, past president of the American Psychiatric Association, and Hon. Sol Gothard, retired judge and former faculty member for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, “Parental Alienation Syndrome has been used nationwide by batterers as a courtroom tactic to silence abused children by attempting to discredit their disclosures of abuse. This theory is not recognized as valid by the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, or the American Medical Association. Parental Alienation Syndrome is not accepted as a

psychiatric diagnosis, and has been rejected by the mainstream psychological community. Parental Alienation Syndrome is junk science; there is no valid research or empirical data to support this unproven theory.”

The media, particularly ABC’s The View, have irresponsibly allowed Baldwin a platform to use his anger and hostility toward his ex-wife to advance dangerous propaganda. In fact, Baldwin announced that he has a book on divorce litigation coming out in the fall, and wants to take time off from acting to devote himself to promoting the theory of Parental Alienation. And on the ABC News website, 20/20’s John Stossel claims that “liberal reporters” and “angry ex-wives” help stack courts against dads.

NOW calls on all media outlets that feel the need to give credence to Baldwin and the discredited theory of Parental Alienation, to make sure they do their homework by first finding out the facts and then including real experts in the discussion.

Take action through our ally, StopFamilyViolence.org.

More information:

NOW resolution on Parental Alienation Syndrome

<http://www.now.org/organization/conference/resolutions/2006.html#pas>

NOW Family Law Advisory Committee Resources

<http://www.nowfoundation.org/issues/family/>

California National Organization for Women

<http://canow.org/issues/family.php>

Stop Family Violence: The Truth about Parental Alienation

<http://www.stopfamilyviolence.org/ocean/host.php?page=442>

The Leadership Council on Child Abuse and Interpersonal Violence: Abuse and Custody Disputes: Scientific and Legal Issues – The Parental Alienation Syndrome: Is It Scientific?

<http://www.leadershipcouncil.org/1/res/dallam/3.html>

Small Justice

<http://www.smalljustice.com/>

Justice for Children

<http://www.jfcadvocacy.org/pas.asp>

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