



THE LANGUAGE OF DECEIT, DIVISION AND DOMINANCE

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ABSTRACT

In the UK, fathers often face great difficulties maintaining a meaningful involvement in their children's lives after parental separation. Men who are victims of partner abuse face almost universal disbelief and a dearth of provision to help them. The reality of male victims of partner abuse is kept submerged, whilst that of female victims is sometimes amplified in order to undermine fathers' attempts to obtain court orders for child contact. Feminists dominate the academic research in these areas and hence control the narrative which shapes Governmental and judicial policy, and this maintains the status quo. By concentrating upon the recent works of one individual as an exemplar, and by deconstructing the language used and its poststructural trappings, the mechanisms which continue to propagate this institutionalised deceit are exposed.

Keywords: parental alienation, domestic abuse, poststructuralism, family court

23 **INTRODUCTION**

24 The language in question is that of Adrienne Barnett. Dr Barnett is a Senior Lecturer in
25 Law at Brunel University London. She formerly practised for many years as a family law barrister.
26 I shall focus particular attention on two of her works. Firstly, “A genealogy of hostility: parental
27 alienation in England and Wales”, (Barnett, 2020). This paper discusses the role of parental
28 alienation (PA) within the English and Welsh family courts. I shall refer to it as “the PA paper”.
29 Secondly, Adrienne Barnett’s PhD thesis from Brunel Law School, UK, “Contact at All Costs?
30 Domestic Violence, Child Contact and the Practices of the Family Courts and Professionals”,
31 (Barnett, 2014), henceforth “the thesis”.

32 I hold no animus towards Dr Barnett. I use her works as exemplars of a kind because she
33 has been particularly active in these matters this year (2020), as will become apparent from this
34 article. If the issues raised here were merely the foibles of one individual, they would merit scant
35 attention. The subtext, therefore, is a widespread prevalence of views, arguments and language
36 essentially the same as those exemplified by Barnett. It would be too long a digression to
37 demonstrate this claim thoroughly, but I shall allude in passing to evidence for it from
38 contemporary events within the UK Government and Parliament. If said views, arguments and
39 language were labelled simply as *feminism*; then the claim that it is widespread, and influential,
40 would hardly need defending.

41 I shall begin gently with a critique of the PA paper. Here I shall use empirical evidence and
42 elementary logic. That may seem an unnecessary statement. Regrettably, no longer. The terms of
43 engagement have changed. As we will see, there is no longer a mutual agreement that the
44 purpose of argument (or *discourse*) is to seek the truth about some objective empirical reality.
45 Words are no longer the servants of reason but instead are the instruments by which the world is
46 created, we are being told.

47 The deconstruction of the PA paper will lead us naturally to the epistemological issues
48 which underlie this peculiar shift. Hence it is useful to look at Barnett’s thesis in which these
49 matters are explicitly discussed. The thesis is informed from the start by the poststructuralist
50 perspective, and in particular the role of *construction* which I shall examine in some detail.

51

52 I finish by looking at events this year (2020) in the UK Government and its legislative
53 activities which serve to illustrate the impact, and dominance, in practice of the perspectives
54 exemplified by Barnett's work in the context of domestic abuse and the operation of the family
55 courts in the UK.

56 The burden of this article shall be that, whatever the intellectual merits of
57 poststructuralism might be in principle, it is being deployed to lend spurious legitimacy to deceit
58 in the service of promoting dominance of a divisive narrative which eschews balance. Thus,
59 whilst the academic language of poststructuralism may seem arcane and a long way from
60 everyday affairs, in fact it is having a catastrophic effect on our society.

61 **THE PARENTAL ALIENATION PAPER**

62 Defending the psychological validity of parental alienation is not part of this article, and
63 my argument here does not depend upon the validity of PA. However, I must state what parental
64 alienation is, or is claimed to be. Parental alienation is a process by which a child's natural
65 attachment to a parent is disrupted and replaced by an irrational, and often extreme, dislike for
66 that parent. The condition is induced in the child by persistent negative portrayal of one parent
67 by the other. It is an induced psychological pathology in the child. The alienating parent
68 effectively uses the child as a weapon against the target parent. It is primarily a form of child
69 abuse, but may also be considered a form of domestic abuse of the alienated parent (though it is
70 not recognised as such in English law).

71 The striking thing about the PA paper is that Adrienne Barnett neglects almost entirely the
72 alienated children – until the last sentence, when she seems to remember what she should have
73 been addressing. The entirety of the paper is presented from a sex war perspective. Claims of
74 parental alienation are portrayed in this paper as a weapon being deployed by abusive fathers
75 against mothers and their children, and—Barnett claims—credulous courts are falling for it.

76 Barnett appears to have little interest in PA. Her paper is actually about *claims* of PA,
77 rather than PA itself, and about the effectiveness of such claims in influencing the outcomes of
78 adversarial contests in the family courts. Any discussion relating to PA as principally a form of
79 child abuse is notable for its absence. Instead her perspective revolves around *claims* of PA being
80 a weapon deployed by men against women in a sex war: the child disappears from the picture.

81 There is much to say here. Let me unpack it in parts. The principle parts are these,

82 (i) The status of PA, specifically the existence of a credible body of evidence that PA is a
83 diagnosable form of induced psychological pathology in the child, and hence a form
84 of child abuse;

85 (ii) The claim that PA is asserted as a counter-attack to allegations of domestic abuse
86 perpetrated by the father;

87 (iii) The language used in the paper and what it reveals.

88 Let's take these in turn. Firstly, people of Barnett's persuasion do not believe that PA is
89 real. They regard it as a ruse. Specifically, Barnett's position is that claims of PA are a cunning
90 stratagem by abusive fathers to deflect attention away from their abuse of the mother and/or
91 child. She writes in her Conclusion, "PA is a concept that is proving more powerful than any
92 other in silencing the voices of women and children resisting contact with abusive men. PA is
93 not an 'equal' counterpart to domestic abuse, it is a means of obscuring domestic abuse, and
94 should be recognised as such."

95 Over and over again throughout the paper this perspective is reiterated. A couple of quotes
96 will suffice,

97 *"It is no coincidence, it is suggested, that PA, in its initial form of parental alienation*
98 *syndrome (PAS), emerged when the courts recognised domestic violence as a factor*
99 *militating against contact."*

100 *"The emergence and development of PA in England and Wales shows a clear pattern of*
101 *(initially PAS) and PA being raised in family proceedings in response to concerns about and*
102 *measures to address domestic abuse. This, it is suggested, cogently reveals PA's intended*
103 *purpose – to shut down domestic abuse in private family law."*

104 To "shut down domestic abuse"? She means, of course, "to shut down the effectiveness of
105 allegations of domestic abuse".

106 Note how the language betrays that PA itself, i.e., the child abuse, is ignored. The phrase
107 "PA's intended purpose" makes no sense unless we interpret it as the author clearly does in her
108 own mind as "the intended purpose of *allegations of PA*". It is not the child abuse which interests
109 her, and this is why reading the paper is so disturbing. She is only interested in the effect of

110 *claims of PA*, interpreted as a tactic to manipulate judicial rulings and score a hit in a sex war
111 between parents.

112 This is the language of division. It is the opposite of what we should learn from the reality
113 of parental separation (whether one accepts PA as a valid condition or not), namely that parental
114 conflict should be overcome for the sake of the child. But Barnett does not want conciliation. She
115 wants mothers to *win* and is willing to subordinate the best interests of the child to do so. If this
116 seems a rather harsh interpretation of her position, we will see shortly how Dr Barnett views “the
117 welfare of the child”.

118 Adrienne Barnett also has an article in the house magazine of the UK Association of
119 Magistrates (Barnett, 2020B), “Parental alienation and the family courts”. In it she states simply,
120 “There is little, if any, credible scientific support for the theory of PA”. This is a statement which
121 is readily proved to be false. I should emphasise that whether or not PA is a valid phenomenon is
122 not my concern. An assertion that it is would require a thorough examination of the whole body
123 of literature on the topic, with a view to discerning if a consensus has arisen. That is unnecessary
124 here. All that is required to refute Barnett’s contention is to establish the existence of a
125 substantial body of evidence in the literature, and that this evidence has been provided by
126 workers with credible credentials. Consequently, the following observations will suffice.

127 By 2016, parental alienation and alienating behaviours in separated or divorced families
128 had been well documented in over 500 references drawn from the professional literature across
129 30 countries, (Harman et al, 2016).

130 By 2018 there were more than one thousand research and clinical studies reported in
131 scientific and professional journals, books, and book chapters, (Kruk, 2018). That reference
132 summarises the position as, “Research evidence of the many facets of parental alienation is much
133 more robust than is often assumed”.

134 According to chartered psychologist and PA expert Dr Sue Whitcombe (2017), the
135 prevalence of alienation within the general community of separating parents has been estimated
136 from random sampling to be up to about 15%, but in samples of the most intractable cases the
137 prevalence can be up to 40%. She quotes Sarah Parsons, Principal Social Worker and Assistant
138 Director of the UK’s Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) as

139 stating in July 2016 that “parental alienation is responsible for around 80% of the most
140 intransigent cases that come before the family courts”. Whitcombe has estimated that this
141 implies that parental alienation is likely to be a feature in a minimum of 9,000 family
142 proceedings applications per annum in England and Wales, involving more than 18,000 children.

143 (Lorandos, 2020) has performed a search for PA cases in US courts between 1985 and 2018.
144 His search terms are defined in detail in the paper. Searching on the basis of relevant text alone
145 produced 3,555 case reports. This will be only a small fraction of cases in which PA was
146 mentioned as most trials will not be reported. Lorandos and his co-workers then filtered those
147 3,555 cases by requiring either, (a) that an independent expert testified on the subject of PA, or,
148 (b) the court found on any basis that there was PA. These criteria were rigorous, e.g., in (a) a
149 recognised PA expert was required, not a general therapist, mediator, etc. As regards (b), mere
150 speculation by the court on the subject of PA was not sufficient. 1,181 cases made it through this
151 filter. The incidence of PA cases recognised by the US courts (i.e., within this filtered dataset)
152 was found to have increased steeply in the last three decades. 25% of the alienators were fathers,
153 75% mothers. On the basis of his extensive dataset, Lorandos concluded,

154 In the thirty-four years since the term PAS was first introduced and then later
155 reformulated, trial and appellate courts across the United States have found the construct PA to
156 be material, probative, relevant to their tasks, admissible, and worthy of discussion, as they have
157 grappled with emotionally abusive parents and damaged children. Review of the thousands of
158 opinions located by the query reveals that courts understand that there is a distinction between
159 ‘when one parent says negative and disparaging things about the other parent to the child’ and
160 when an aggressor parent ‘engages in behavior designed to sabotage the child’s relationship with
161 the victim parent.’ Hundreds of opinions illustrating courts confronting ‘unreasonable negative
162 feelings and beliefs (such as anger, hatred, rejection, and/or fear) toward a parent that are
163 significantly disproportionate to the child’s actual experience with that parent’ were located.

164 Barnett’s dismissal of PA on the grounds that “there is little, if any, credible scientific
165 support for the theory of PA” is thus established to be false. Whilst PA does have its detractors,
166 that is not the same as denying the existence of the credible body of academic work alluded to
167 above. Moreover, it is not just widespread academic support, but a vast tranche of judicial
168 opinion over decades. The disturbing thing about Barnett’s claim is that it was made in the

169 house journal of the UK Magistrates' Association, suggesting an attempt to seriously misdirect
170 an influential judicial body.

171 We shall see below that Barnett has had an even more recent opportunity to influence the
172 UK Ministry of Justice directly.

173 Let us turn now to the claim that PA arises as a counter by fathers when they are accused
174 of abuse in the courts. Barnett draws upon 40 cases of PA in courts in England or Wales in the
175 period 2000 to March 2019, nearly 20 years. Hence just 2 cases per year on average. It is not clear
176 if these were all the cases that could be found, or if they were selected. She writes, "A total of 40
177 cases (comprised in 54 judgments) were reviewed in which PA/PAS was raised or referred to.
178 These were identified in Family Law Reports and on BAILII, and a few unreported judgments
179 were identified in Casemine." She adds, "The reported cases cannot provide a representative
180 sample of all such cases." Indeed, they cannot. One is thus left wondering what one is supposed
181 to make of the observations which follow.

182 Of these 40 cases involving PA, in 35 cases the father claimed to have been alienated, and
183 in 5 cases the mother claimed to have been alienated. Abuse was alleged in 27 cases (and I
184 assume this means alleged abuse by the father in all cases, though that is not made clear).
185 Hence, in 27 out of 35 cases a father who was alleged to be an abuser claimed there was
186 alienation (77%). This appears to be a strong association, albeit from a tiny dataset with
187 uncertain provenance.

188 However, an association tells us nothing regarding whether the allegations of abuse were
189 causal in bringing about an assertion of alienation. One might alternatively argue that, where PA
190 is genuinely present, a false allegation of abuse is also likely. Barnett concludes that, "The
191 emergence and development of PA in England and Wales shows a clear pattern of (initially PAS)
192 and PA being raised in family proceedings in response to concerns about and measures to
193 address domestic abuse. This, it is suggested, cogently reveals PA's intended purpose – to shut
194 down domestic abuse in private family law (see Meier 2020)."

195 Let us leave aside the statistical weakness of making such a sweeping claim based on 40
196 cases which Barnett admits cannot be representative. The conclusion would be invalid even if
197 there were one thousand cases because the connective "in response to" asserts a causal

198 connection about which no evidence at all has been presented. One might assert with equal logic
199 (or lack thereof) that allegations of domestic abuse are raised in response to allegations of
200 parental alienation. Barnett’s paper provides no evidence of the direction of causality, or even
201 that there is a causal connection.

202 However, she advises that we look at (Meier, 2020). Let’s do so then. Joan Meier identified
203 669 cases in the USA in which one parent made an alienation claim against the other, but, of
204 these, only 222 involved mothers accusing fathers of abuse and fathers accusing mothers of
205 alienation. The data used by Meier is strongly skewed as they originate overwhelmingly from
206 appeal courts. Nevertheless, from that sample, two-thirds of alienation claims could not have
207 arisen as *tactical counters* by fathers in response to them being accused of abuse – because they
208 were not accused of abuse. Consequently, Barnett’s claim that “allegations of fathers’ alienation
209 arise in response to accusations of abuse by fathers” gets little support from this source either.
210 This is particularly noteworthy as the skewed nature of the sample of cases identified by Meier
211 would tend to enhance both factors (i.e., allegations of abuse and of PA).

212 Nor does Barnett’s claim have anything to say about the 25% of allegations of alienation
213 made by mothers in Lorandos’s far more extensive dataset.

214 One might have expected a researcher to be disconcerted about having drawn a conclusion
215 in a published work which is so easily discredited. But this is to misunderstand the mindset
216 involved, which has scant interest in consistency of reasoning or statistical significance. This is
217 betrayed by the language used, and by the poststructural position on *truth* which underlies it, as
218 we shall see.

219 **THE LANGUAGE OF THE PA PAPER**

220 Turning now to the language used in the PA paper, and what it reveals. Let us unpack the
221 following sentence, “PA is underpinned by, and premised on, a particular dominant construction
222 of children’s welfare, that constitutes the involvement of fathers in post-separation families as
223 overwhelmingly important for children’s emotional, psychological and developmental welfare.”

224 This is not the language of true empirical enquiry, but the language of sly insinuation.
225 Note the corrosive role of the word “construction” in that sentence. It betrays the author’s
226 poststructuralist mindset: there is no objective truth, only *narratives* vying for dominance. The

227 idea that fathers are important in child development is one such constructed narrative, the
228 author implicitly claims. I shall examine more closely in the next section the poststructural usage
229 of *construction*.

230 The word can have a benign meaning, especially in theoretical psychology where it may be
231 understood as a collection of correlated behaviours which it is useful to give a name. Thus, the
232 big five personality traits, such as extroversion or openness, are constructs. But this is not how
233 Barnett is using the word. There is an analogy here with the way the word *theory* is correctly
234 used in science, in contrast with the everyday expression “that’s just a theory”. Barnett’s usage of
235 *construction* is closer to the latter, with its intended connotation of being unsubstantiated,
236 arbitrary and optional. At this point it is helpful to reproduce a quote from (Gill, 1996) taken
237 from Barnett’s thesis, (Barnett, 2014), “The notion of ‘construction’ is important in discourse
238 analysis because it ‘emphasizes the fact that, in a very real sense, texts of various kinds construct
239 our world’.” I shall have more to say shortly about this conception of the world being
240 “constructed” by “texts”, rather than having an objective existence. My position will be that it is
241 being used as a device to provide spurious academic legitimacy to deceit and prejudice.

242 Fathers’ importance to child development is not a “construction”, in Barnett’s sense of
243 being something that can be magicked away by appropriate discourse: it is a well-documented
244 empirical reality. But this is the origin of the dispute in which we are engaged. The main goal of
245 the feminist movement has, from its inception, been to make women independent of men, and
246 this includes making the family independent of men, (de Beauvoir, 1949), (Greer, 1970), (Lyndon,
247 1992). The feminist credo is precisely *families don’t need fathers*. It is the most staggering
248 arrogance, as well as being false.

249 Even the most hardened adherent of the view that men bring nothing of social, emotional
250 or psychological value to a child (or a partner) will not be able to sustain the claim that families
251 don’t need fathers unless they are also willing to forego both the child maintenance and also all
252 welfare benefits, which are 73% financed by men’s taxes. Barnett opines that “PA is underpinned
253 by, and premised on” the “construction” that fathers are significant in their children’s
254 development. She is telling us that PA is an invalid concept because it is predicated upon the
255 significance of fathers to their children’s development – which she also regards as an invalid
256 concept.

257 Here we reach the nub of the issue as far as the PA paper is concerned. Barnett refers to
258 the “FRM” (Fathers’ Rights Movement), exemplified by such organisations as Families Need
259 Fathers. Am I being overly imaginative, or can one sense the curling of the lip into a sneer?
260 Between the lines we read that fathers deserve no rights; the very thought is obnoxious.

261 But it isn’t about father’s rights. The assertion explicit in the appellation *Families Need*
262 *Fathers* is entirely different, but one which the prejudiced movement represented by Barnett
263 equally oppose: that families have any need for fathers. There would have been no impetus to
264 create organisations with such a name unless there were a belief within some parts of society
265 that fathers were, in fact, superfluous to requirements. The feminist position which has gained
266 dominance in academe and in politics is that fathers are not necessary.


267 Yet it is not so. Indeed, if one broadens the claim from fathers to men in general, it
268 becomes the height of silliness for women to imagine they do not need men, but that does not
269 stop it being asserted, (Rosin, 2013). What such women really mean is that things have now been
270 so arranged that men’s contributions to society in general, and to women in particular, need
271 never be acknowledged, and so all respect and appreciation can be foregone and replaced with
272 denigration instead. Yet any job which predominantly involves interaction with inanimate
273 matter is overwhelmingly dominated by male effort. Whether it be the production of food, the
274 creation and maintenance of built infrastructure, both commercial and domestic, the provision
275 of fuel, energy, water and disposal of waste, and the transportation of goods, men do almost all
276 of it. Men do it because women do not want to (or they undoubtedly would).

277 In the UK, men put very nearly three times the taxation revenue into the Exchequer as
278 women, which then pays for the welfare state from which women benefit far more than men. For
279 the unemployed, or working poor, single parents (overwhelmingly mothers) receive far more in
280 direct benefit payments than a single person, e.g., a non-resident father, (Collins, 2020). The
281 public sector is funded entirely from taxation, and twice as many public sector employees are
282 women as men, though men are paying three times as much to support it. Overall, the UK
283 taxation and benefit systems constitute a process to syphon money from men to women, and so
284 long as this prevails it is mere conceit and self-delusion for women to pretend that men in
285 general, and fathers in particular, are now redundant. It would be more accurate to note that this
286 transfer of money from men to women has now been rendered almost entirely anonymous and

287 impersonal, and so it passes unrecognised and increasingly unappreciated.

288 However, I digress. It is not financial matters that are the immediate issue. Barnett's
289 contention is that the "construction" that fathers are important to their children's emotional and
290 psychological development is invalid, i.e., it is merely a construction. Actually, there is a huge
291 literature on the role of parents in their children's psychological development, and this includes
292 literature specific to the significance of fathers. A tiny fraction of it has been reviewed by
293 (Collins, 2019). Nor are the roles of mother and father identical and mere strength in depth, but
294 distinct in some aspects. I shall not rehearse the case again here. The deleterious effects of
295 fatherlessness have become increasingly well documented since the classic polemic "Families
296 Without Fatherhood", (Dennis and Erdos, 1992, 3rd ed 2000). Both authors professed to be
297 socialists of some complexion, so dismissing their work as the rantings of antediluvian
298 conservatives will not do. What we have now in our culture is not the outmoded conflict of left
299 and right, but the perennial power play of divide and conquer, and this time the division is
300 between the sexes.

301 There are rich pickings in Barnett's PA paper when it comes to language. I'll just list a few
302 and leave the reader to deconstruct them at leisure,

- 303 • "political fathers" (nothing political about Barnett herself, of course).
- 304 • "discursive" as in referring to PA as "part of the discursive repertoire of current family
305 law", noting that "discursive" implies digressing from the subject. In what way are the
306 courts digressing from the subject in considering a potential harm to a child when
307 their statutory duty is to make the child's best interests paramount?
- 308 • "unimpeachable" as in "the myth of the unimpeachable father on which PA is
309 premised". This is a lovely straw man argument. No one has claimed that every
310 allegation of PA is valid, and no one has claimed that every instance of PA involves a
311 saintly father. But more disconcertingly this is another instance of Barnett's blindness
312 to PA as a harm to the child and her insistence that it is only a strategy in battle 
313 between the parents;
- 314 • And one of my favourites, "abuse perpetrated by 'normal' fathers" – oh, so sly.

315 That the axis which insisted "the personal is political", the original axe blow which aimed

316 to divide the sexes, should now be a bit stuffy at fathers being “political” is rather rich. The sex
317 war has been inflamed by this axis for fifty years, with ever increasing intensity.

318 **THE THESIS, POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND POWER**

319 I now turn to the thesis, (Barnett, 2014), which is most helpful in making explicit the
320 theoretical position which underlies Barnett’s other work. Recall that the thesis is about how
321 domestic abuse is addressed by UK family courts in the context of fathers’ contact with their
322 children. As promised, I will concentrate on the role of *construction*. Barnett tells us that her
323 PhD study will, “provide a productive framework for exploring the world constructed in and by
324 current family law, how meanings are represented and produced, and the consequences of those
325 representations and meanings for judicial and professional practice and consequently for the
326 women and children who are subjected to those practices.” Fathers, it seems, are not subject to
327 those practices, and it is made amply clear that they (or the patriarchy on their behalf) are the
328 ones doing the “constructing” to ensure that it is women and children alone who are “subjected
329 to those practices”. But let us apply discourse analysis to that quote. It is itself the enunciation of
330 a construction, namely that it is men who are actors (agentic) while women are acted-upon
331 (hypoagentic). This is a familiar construction: it is the construction of the traditional gender
332 roles. Thus, at least in this case, Barnett’s perspective itself emanates from the construction of
333 traditional gender.

334 This may seem paradoxical to readers who understand feminism to be smashing
335 traditional gender roles. But feminism opposes traditional gender roles only when it suits. The
336 narrative of oppression, or victimhood, is the engine in the feminist machine, and it is powered
337 by the traditional view of the vulnerable female in need of protection. Developing this theme
338 further would take us too far from our present objective, but see (Collins, 2019). It is important
339 to draw attention to it, however, because Barnett’s own discourse is presenting us with a
340 construct of how the courts operate, and we are predisposed to accept this construct precisely
341 because it aligns with the ancient constructions of gender.

342 Consider this quote, from the Abstract of the thesis: “This study concludes that in order to
343 regain a valid and authoritative voice for women in current family law we need to expose and
344 disrupt law’s construction of the ‘scientific truth’ about children’s welfare”. Are you happy with
345 “disrupting scientific truth”, i.e., radically changing or destroying scientific truth? Especially

346 where it impacts children's welfare? No? And yet you are being inveigled to go along with it on
347 the grounds that scientific truth is actually merely a construct called "scientific truth". Do you
348 see how cunning this is? It cuts the ground away from any counterargument based on empirical
349 evidence, however crushing a case it might appear to present, because actually it is all just a tale
350 that one may spin, a mere construct.

351 You think I may be overstating? Then digest this quote: "These perspectives recognise that
352 data, like meaning, are constructed, not 'discovered', and reject the purely positivist notion of
353 scientific objectivity, including the privileging of 'scientific' research, which has been criticised
354 for perpetuating patriarchal power relations, and the silencing of women's voices." [Barnett here
355 cites (May, 1993), (May, 2001), (Judd, Smith and Kidder, 6th ed 1991)]. Clear now? Data are
356 constructed. Reject scientific objectivity. Do not "privilege" "scientific" research.

357 And in case there is still any ambiguity, "What post-structural feminist and 'systems'
358 theories share is a rejection of modernist, interpretive principles, where individuals are seen as
359 the primary sources of social meanings, and where 'true' and certain knowledge is considered
360 possible. At the core of feminist post-structuralist ideas and, it is suggested, Luhmannian
361 thought, "is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective
362 method which leads to the production of pure knowledge." We can thus see the phenomenal
363 world – the world that has meaning for us – as wholly constructed...". [Barnett cites (Banakar and
364 Travers, 2005), (Reinharz, 1991), and (King, 2006)].

365 It was inevitable that historic power differentials would feature: "The founding insight of
366 post-structuralism is that language constitutes, rather than reflects, social 'reality', so that
367 meaning and therefore knowledge is not absolute, fixed and certain, but is "always bound up
368 with historically specific regimes of power and, therefore, every society produces its own truths
369 which have a normalising and regulatory function." [Barnett cites (McNay, 1992)].

370 If you struggle with some of these quotes, it helps to remove extraneous verbiage to leave
371 the core meaning exposed. For example, from this, "Deploying gender as an analytical tool
372 enables us to disrupt and displace the hierarchical bipolar oppositions, such as the binary
373 divisions of male/female and public/private that structure gendered power relations, as well as
374 the moral validity of objectivity and neutrality, thereby creating the space for other ways of

375 knowing”, we can extract the more cogent but deeply disturbing “deploying gender enables us to
376 disrupt the moral validity of objectivity and neutrality”. Clearer?

377 In the next section when we see that Dr Barnett has been commissioned by the Ministry of
378 Justice this year (2020) to produce a major literature review of the operation of the family courts,
379 do remember her commitment to “disrupting” objectivity and neutrality and her determination
380 not to privilege scientific research. Then ask yourself what chance the unemployed, under-
381 educated young father has when, his partner tiring of him, he is thrust, all unknowing, into the
382 steam press that has been prepared to crush him by a generation of Adrienne Barnetts. Then
383 tremble for his son.

384 Let’s look at how these poststructuralist ideas play out when explicitly applied in the
385 family court context. We are told that “implacably hostile mothers” are...yes, you guessed,
386 another “construct”. So are “safe family men”, of course. So, there’s no such thing as either (or so
387 it is slyly implied). Here is an extract which explains that “the welfare of the child” is also just
388 another construct, so we really don’t need to fuss about it: “concepts such as ‘the welfare of the
389 child’ have been selectively constructed by the reductive operations of law. By deconstructing
390 the notion of ‘the welfare of the child’ and locating it within its historical, social, political and
391 ideological context, it can be seen to operate as a mechanism of power that serves particular
392 interests.” Barnett is presenting “the welfare of the child” as just another ruse used by wicked
393 fathers against the mothers of their children. So, it’s nothing to do with the risk of a child being
394 beaten, neglected or otherwise mistreated – perhaps by the mother? Ah, but “the welfare of the
395 child” does revert to being literally the welfare of the child when the father is the abuser. That is
396 what Barnett means by “the welfare of the child” is a “contingent and unstable familial
397 construct”. Yes, it is contingent upon who the abuser is as to whether she sees it as abuse.

398 Let us pause a while to reprise what we have learnt. The world, we are to believe, is
399 constructed, and hence contingent, not objective. There is no world as it really is. There are only
400 various possible views of the world, established and upheld by discourses. We must concede that
401 there is a limited sense in which this perspective is undoubtedly valid. But this limited sense
402 insists that we interpret the world as consisting only of the beliefs and behaviours which can be
403 successfully instilled in the public at large, and those in authority especially. Thus, the limited
404 sense in which the poststructuralist epistemology is valid is so limited as to degenerate into

405 tautology. If all one means by *the world* is the set of beliefs and behaviours which people can be
406 inveigled to adopt, then clearly the ability to influence those beliefs and behaviours through
407 persuasive discourse constitutes changing the world in that limited sense. But that leaves the
408 matter of truth and objective reality all untouched – not discredited but axiomatically ignored.
409 Thus, the entire edifice of poststructural epistemology stands exposed as vacuous: a smoke
410 screen whose purpose is to misdirect.

411 There is an objection to poststructuralist views which will immediately occur to those of us
412 so antediluvian as to believe in objective reality and absolute truth: if there is no truth, why do
413 poststructuralists bother writing anything at all? But this is easily answered. The puzzlement
414 only arises if one sticks stubbornly to the notion that argument is for the purpose of establishing
415 truth, or our best approximation to it. To those of us who still adhere to this laughably archaic
416 idea, all purpose of discussion, argument and writing disappears if there is no truth to discover.
417 There is no point in firing an arrow if there is no target to hit. But it does, in fact, make perfect
418 sense within the poststructuralist purview. One only has to divest oneself of stubborn notions of
419 empirical reality, neutrality, fairness, truth, etc., and instead to embrace the idea that the
420 purpose of all discourse is to impose one's will upon others. All writing is an exercise in power.
421 This is the ultimate cynicism, and one can only guess at the depths of moral and spiritual
422 bankruptcy from which it springs.

423 When Dr Barnett writes, she does not – according to her own lights and words – seek to
424 expose a pre-existing objective truth, rather she seeks to impose her will upon you. The *truth* for
425 her has been redefined to be whatever she can successfully induce you to believe. It is all an
426 exercise in power, and that's all it is.

427 There is a small problem here, so very obvious that I am almost embarrassed to mention it;
428 but mention it I must. Given that all Dr Barnett and her ilk are attempting to do is to impose
429 their will upon us, why should we not simply tell them (in the invective of your choice) to go
430 away?

431 **UK GOVERNMENT AND LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES IN 2020**

432 This article has concentrated upon the work of one individual, but I want to close by
433 illustrating how this is embedded within, and characteristic of, the operation of Government and

434 legislation in the UK. For this reason, the intellectual impostures of poststructuralism cannot be
435 dismissed as harmless academic gobbledegook because they adversely affect the lives of millions.
436 The reader will be patient while I lay out the UK legislative background before returning to
437 Adrienne Barnett's part in these very recent proceedings.

438 As I write, the House of Commons in the UK is about to take the third reading of a new
439 domestic abuse Bill, now well over two years in the gestation. No doubt by the time this article is
440 published the Bill will have received Royal Assent and have entered the legislation. Addressing
441 the content of the Bill would be too long a digression. Suffice it to say that it is draconian in
442 many respects, not least in respect of the appointment of a Commissioner for Domestic Abuse
443 whose supra-governmental powers, in the hands of an unelected person, are worrying.


444 The progress of a Bill through Parliament includes a Committee stage in which a
445 Committee of around 16 MPs debate the amendments proposed and return an amended Bill for
446 its third and final reading in the House of Commons. The Committee therefore has considerable
447 power over which proposed amendments will be included in, and which excluded from, the
448 near-final version of the Bill. Anyone can submit written evidence or opinion to the Committee
449 via Parliament's Scrutiny Unit. However, it is at the Committee's discretion whether they invite
450 individuals or organisations to be interviewed in person by the Committee. The Committee is
451 under no obligation to give credence to any of this written or presented evidence; they have
452 complete discretion. In practice, the Committee's sympathies or concerns are indicated by whom
453 it is they invite to be witnesses in person. In contrast, unsolicited written evidence is likely to be
454 given scant attention, and much will not be looked at by the Committee at all.

455 Between 4th and 17th June 2020 the Committee for the Domestic Abuse Bill received 95
456 written submissions, (House of Commons, 4-17 June 2020). A number of these (at least 8 and
457 perhaps 10 or 12) were from individuals or organisations sympathetic to male victims and
458 concerned that the Bill did not reflect their position (one being from a charity of which I am a
459 Trustee). Most of these supported certain proposed amendments to the Bill, such as including
460 parental alienation and false allegations as recognised forms of domestic abuse. However, the 15
461 individuals or organisations who were interviewed in person by the Committee were all strongly
462 feminist, or female victims of abuse, and excluded all representatives of fathers or male victims
463 of domestic abuse. The amendments proposed to reflect men's experience of abuse were not

464 taken up in the revised Bill put forward by the Committee.

465 All these outcomes were entirely predictable, and I doubt that anyone sympathetic to male
466 concerns were in the least surprised. The reason, as was clearly reflected in the witnesses called
467 by the Committee, is that only one voice is heard in the corridors of power on matters related to
468 domestic abuse and it is the feminist voice, typified by Adrienne Barnett.

469 To cement this claim here is further evidence. In parallel with the progress of the Domestic
470 Abuse Bill through parliament, the UK Ministry of Justice (MOJ) saw fit to instigate, in May 2019,
471 a review of family justice to address “how the family courts protect children and parents in cases
472 of domestic abuse”. They convened a panel to conduct the review, claiming that, “The panel
473 members represent key organisations from across family justice including the Judiciary,
474 academia, social care, policy officials and third sector organisations which represent and
475 advocate for victims of domestic abuse”, (Ministry of Justice, 2019). With the possible exception
476 of the MOJ chair and Justices (though even that is in serious doubt), the academic, social care
477 and third sector advisors were unambiguously of strong feminist sympathies. Complaints were
478 levied at the MOJ from organisations representing male victims, but the response was to draft
479 further feminist representatives onto the panel.

480 The MOJ reported the outcome of the panel’s deliberations on 25th June 2020, (Ministry of
481 Justice, 2020): interesting timing given that the Domestic Abuse Bill is  posed for its third and
482 final reading in the Commons. The MOJ announced a major overhaul of family courts to protect
483 domestic abuse victims. Of greatest concern to fathers is this statement in the press release,
484 “Ministers will launch a review into the presumption of ‘parental involvement’ that often
485 encourages a child’s relationship with both parents, unless the involvement of that parent would
486 put the child at risk. It will examine whether the right balance is being struck between the risk of
487 harm to children and victims, and the right of the child to have a relationship with both
488 parents.”

489 This threatens to be a further wedge which will be driven between separated fathers and
490 their children. 92% of non-resident parents in the UK are fathers. Exact figures are not available,
491 but about half of separated fathers fail to obtain sufficient time with their children to maintain a
492 meaningful parental involvement. Even for the luckier half, the *de facto* standard has become

493 three days per fortnight with just one or two overnight stays. Nearly one-in-three separated
494 fathers ultimately fail to have any contact, or only extremely infrequent contact, with their
495 children as striving Dads morph into McDads and finally achieve deadbeat status in popular
496 parlance, driven there by forces beyond their ability to counter.

497 In the family courts of England and Wales, 50% of cases addressing child contact involve
498 allegations of domestic abuse, a frequency of allegation which is beyond credibility. This
499 suggests that more than half the allegations are fraudulent and made for the advantage such
500 allegations provide to the accuser in court.

501 The output from the MOJ's family justice review consisted of three documents: a 216 page
502 final report, a 19 page implementation plan, and a 171 page literature review by Adrienne Barnett,
503 (Ministry of Justice, 2020B). One cannot accuse Dr Barnett of being lazy; she has had a
504 productive year, her latest being (Domestic abuse and private law children cases A literature
505 review, 2020). I will not attempt a critique of this lengthy document lest I strain the readers'
506 patience overmuch. It suffices to observe that the MOJ has seen fit to commission such an
507 influential piece of research from a person with known partisan sympathies and a
508 poststructuralist perspective on truth.

509 Allow me to regale you with some final quotes from Barnett's thesis which make clear how
510 she views research.

511 *"The task of research, according to a poststructuralist perspective, is to examine historically*
512 *how knowledge (and in this context, dominant patriarchal knowledge) and truth in society*
513 *is produced, to deconstruct the processes by which that knowledge is formed, and make*
514 *visible the relations of power that give rise to discursive claims to truth."* [Barnett here cites
515 (May, 1993), (May, 2001)]

516 *"Hesse-Biber and Leavy note that "many feminists openly question the viability and*
517 *utility of neutral, value-free research methods and the positive concept of objectivity itself",*
518 *in particular because quantitative research is based on and validates the 'masculinist' values*
519 *of neutrality and 'objective detachment'."* [Barnett here cites (Leavy, 2007)]

520 *"...feminists question and render problematic the concepts of rationality, impartiality*
521 *and objectivity by showing that these are historically specific and contingent generalisations*
522 *embodying dominant values which, in the process, devalue those attributes associated with*
523 *'the feminine' such as 'unacceptable' emotions and desires."* [Barnett cites (McNay, 1992)].

524 We can conclude, then, that Barnett is opposed to impartiality and objectivity, and rejects
525 the utility of neutral research methods and quantitative research as being “masculinist”. This
526 compounds Barnett’s other poststructuralist opinions exposed in the preceding section. Why, I
527 am compelled to ask, would the MOJ commission empirical research from someone with such
528 views on the nature of research? By doing so they have become complicit in the complete
529 erasure from judicial policy of two major features of domestic abuse: the abuse of men by
530 women, and the abuse of children by women, both of which are comparably frequent as the
531 abuse perpetrated by men. This is the actual, real, empirical truth which is rendered invisible by
532 Barnett’s poststructural discourses, which we may call, with less pretension, simply bias and
533 prejudice.

534 **CONCLUSION**

535 Under Dr Barnett’s tutelage we have learnt that the world is constructed by whatever
536 discourses are dominant. It is not as epistemologically deep as it appears. Actually, it exposes
537 how restricted is the scope of the world in the minds of those who adopt this philosophy. Their
538 world has shrunk to whatever they can persuade sufficient people to believe; their world has
539 shrunk entirely to the exercise of power. Bias and misdirection cease to be bias and misdirection
540 according to this outlook if no one that matters knows. Truth is what you get away with. It is
541 convenient to espouse the poststructuralist edifice of verbiage only because it lends spurious
542 legitimacy to deceit.

543 Who would wish to legitimise deceit? Would that be those who are genuinely
544 disadvantaged, or those who are not but wish to appear so?

545 And who would be best placed to make use of suitable discourse to mould apparent
546 reality? Would that be those who dominate the narrative by being the only voice within policy
547 and legislative decision making – or those who are excluded from it?

548

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614 **AUTHOR PROFILE**



622 Back in the mists of time **Rick Bradford** obtained his degree in theoretical physics from Cambridge University and a PhD from University College London. He worked as a professional mechanical engineer in the power generation industry for nearly 40 years and is now semi-retired. Since retiring he has been a Visiting Professor and an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, Engineering Department, teaching at MSc level and supervising PhD students. He has been married since the world was a very different

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 624 published a book on quantum mechanics in 2020 (*The Unweirding*). In 2019 he published a
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