

# *Abuse, Torture, And Trauma and Their Consequences and Effects*

*1st EDITION*

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## *A Profile of the Narcissistic Abuser*

### **Pathological Narcissism – An Overview**

#### **A Primer on Narcissism**

#### **And the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)**

#### **What is Pathological Narcissism?**

Pathological narcissism is a life-long pattern of traits and behaviours which signify infatuation and obsession with one's self to the exclusion of all others and the egotistic and ruthless pursuit of one's gratification, dominance and ambition.

As distinct from healthy narcissism which we all possess, pathological narcissism is maladaptive, rigid, persisting, and causes significant distress, and functional impairment.

Pathological narcissism was first described in detail by Freud in his essay "On Narcissism" [1915]. Other major contributors to the study of narcissism are: Melanie Klein, Karen Horney, Franz Kohut, Otto Kernberg, Theodore Millon, Elsa Roningstam, Gunderson, and Robert Hare.

#### **What is Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)?**

The Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) (formerly known as megalomania or, colloquially, as egotism) is a form of pathological narcissism. It is a Cluster B (dramatic, emotional, or erratic) Personality Disorder. Other Cluster B personality disorders are the Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), the Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD), and the Histrionic Personality Disorder

(HPD). The Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) first appeared as a mental health diagnosis in the DSM-III-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) in 1980.

### ***Diagnostic Criteria***

The ICD-10, the International Classification of Diseases, published by the World Health Organisation in Geneva [1992] regards the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) as "*a personality disorder that fits none of the specific rubrics*". It relegates it to the category "Other Specific Personality Disorders" together with the eccentric, "haltlose", immature, passive-aggressive, and psychoneurotic personality disorders and types.

The American Psychiatric Association, based in Washington D.C., USA, publishes the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) [2000] where it provides the diagnostic criteria for the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (301.81, p. 717).

The DSM-IV-TR defines Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) as "*an all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy, usually beginning by early adulthood and present in various contexts*", such as family life and work.

The DSM specifies nine diagnostic criteria. Five (or more) of these criteria must be met for a diagnosis of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) to be rendered.

[In the text below, I have proposed modifications to the language of these criteria to incorporate current knowledge about this disorder. My modifications appear in *italics*.]

[My amendments do not constitute a part of the text of the DSM-IV-TR, nor is the American Psychiatric Association (APA) associated with them in any way.]

[Click here to download a bibliography of the studies and research regarding the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) on which I based my proposed revisions.]

### ***Proposed Amended Criteria for the Narcissistic Personality Disorder***

- Feels grandiose and self-important (e.g., exaggerates accomplishments, talents, *skills, contacts, and personality traits to the point of lying, demands to be recognised as superior without commensurate achievements*);
- Is *obsessed* with fantasies of unlimited success,

*fame, fearsome power or omnipotence, unequalled brilliance (the cerebral narcissist), bodily beauty or sexual performance (the somatic narcissist), or ideal, everlasting, all-conquering love or passion;*

- Firmly convinced that he or she is unique and, being special, can only be understood by, *should only be treated by*, or associate with, other special or unique, or high-status people (or institutions);
- Requires excessive admiration, *adulation, attention and affirmation – or, failing that, wishes to be feared and to be notorious (Narcissistic Supply)*;
- Feels entitled. *Demands automatic and full compliance* with his or her unreasonable expectations for special and *favourable priority* treatment;
- Is "interpersonally exploitative", i.e., *uses* others to achieve his or her own ends;
- Devoid* of empathy. Is *unable* or unwilling to identify with, *acknowledge, or accept* the feelings, needs, preferences, priorities, and choices of others;
- Constantly envious of others *and seeks to hurt or destroy the objects of his or her frustration. Suffers from persecutory (paranoid) delusions as he or she believes that they feel the same about him or her and are likely to act similarly*;
- Behaves arrogantly and haughtily. *Feels superior, omnipotent, omniscient, invincible, immune, "above the law", and omnipresent (magical thinking). Rages when frustrated, contradicted, or confronted* by people he or she considers inferior to him or her and unworthy.

### **Prevalence and Age and Gender Features**

According to the DSM-IV-TR, between 2% and 16% of the population in clinical settings (between 0.5-1% of the general population) are diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). Most narcissists (50-75%, according to the DSM-IV-TR) are men.

We must carefully distinguish between the narcissistic traits of adolescents – narcissism is an integral part of their healthy personal development – and the full-fledge disorder. Adolescence is about self-definition, differentiation, separation from one's parents, and individuation. These inevitably involve narcissistic assertiveness which is not to be conflated or confused with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD).

*"The lifetime prevalence rate of NPD is approximately*

*0.5-1 percent; however, the estimated prevalence in clinical settings is approximately 2-16 percent. Almost 75 percent of individuals diagnosed with NPD are male (APA, DSM-IV-TR 2000)."*

[From the Abstract of Psychotherapeutic Assessment and Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorder By Robert C. Schwartz, Ph.D., DAPA and Shannon D. Smith, Ph.D., DAPA (American Psychotherapy Association, Article #3004 Annals July/August 2002)]

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is exacerbated by the onset of aging and the physical, mental, and occupational restrictions it imposes.

In certain situations, such as under constant public scrutiny and exposure, a transient and reactive form of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) has been observed by Robert Milman and labelled "Acquired Situational Narcissism".

There is only scant research regarding the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), but studies have not demonstrated any ethnic, social, cultural, economic, genetic, or professional predilection to it.

#### **Co-Morbidity and Differential Diagnoses**

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is often diagnosed with other mental health disorders ("co-morbidity"), such as mood disorders, eating disorders, and substance-related disorders. Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) are frequently abusive and prone to impulsive and reckless behaviours ("dual diagnosis").

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is commonly diagnosed with other personality disorders, such as the Histrionic, Borderline, Paranoid, and Antisocial Personality Disorders.

The personal style of those suffering from the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) should be distinguished from the personal styles of patients with other Cluster B personality disorders. The narcissist is grandiose, the histrionic coquettish, the antisocial (psychopath) callous, and the borderline needy.

As opposed to patients with the Borderline Personality Disorder, the self-image of the narcissist is stable, he or she are less impulsive and less self-defeating or self-destructive and less concerned with abandonment issues (not as clinging).

Contrary to the histrionic patient, the narcissist is achievements-orientated and proud of his or her

possessions and accomplishments. Narcissists also rarely display their emotions as histrionics do and they hold the sensitivities and needs of others in contempt. According to the DSM-IV-TR, both narcissists and psychopaths are "tough-minded, glib, superficial, exploitative, and un-empathic". But narcissists are less impulsive, less aggressive, and less deceitful. Psychopaths rarely seek Narcissistic Supply. As opposed to psychopaths, few narcissists are criminals. Patients suffering from the range of obsessive-compulsive disorders are committed to perfection and believe that only they are capable of attaining it. But, as opposed to narcissists, they are self-critical and far more aware of their own deficiencies, flaws, and shortcomings.

### **Clinical Features of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder**

The onset of pathological narcissism is in infancy, childhood and early adolescence. It is commonly attributed to childhood abuse and trauma inflicted by parents, authority figures, or even peers. Pathological narcissism is a defence mechanism intended to deflect hurt and trauma from the victim's "True Self" into a "False Self" which is omnipotent, invulnerable, and omniscient. The narcissist uses the False Self to regulate his or her labile sense of self-worth by extracting from his environment Narcissistic Supply (any form of attention, both positive and negative).

There is a whole range of narcissistic reactions, styles, and personalities – from the mild, reactive and transient to the permanent personality disorder.

Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) feel injured, humiliated and empty when criticised. They often react with disdain (devaluation), rage, and defiance to any slight, real or imagined. To avoid such situations, some patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) socially withdraw and feign false modesty and humility to mask their underlying grandiosity. Dysthymic and depressive disorders are common reactions to isolation and feelings of shame and inadequacy.

The interpersonal relationships of patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) are typically impaired due to their lack of empathy, disregard for others, exploitativeness, sense of entitlement, and constant need for attention (Narcissistic Supply).

Though often ambitious and capable, inability to tolerate setbacks, disagreement, and criticism make it difficult for patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) to work in a team or to maintain long-term professional achievements. The narcissist's fantastic grandiosity, frequently coupled with a hypomanic mood, is typically incommensurate with his or her real accomplishments (the "Grandiosity Gap"). Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) are either "cerebral" (derive their Narcissistic Supply from their intelligence or academic achievements) or "somatic" (derive their Narcissistic Supply from their physique, exercise, physical or sexual prowess and romantic or physical "conquests").

Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) are either "classic" (meet five of the nine diagnostic criteria included in the DSM), or they are "compensatory" (their narcissism compensates for deep-set feelings of inferiority and lack of self-worth). Some narcissists are covert, or inverted narcissists. As co-dependents, they derive their Narcissistic Supply from their relationships with classic narcissists.

### **Treatment and Prognosis**

The common treatment for patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is talk therapy (mainly psychodynamic psychotherapy or cognitive-behavioural treatment modalities). Talk therapy is used to modify the narcissist's antisocial, interpersonally exploitative, and dysfunctional behaviours, often with some success. Medication is prescribed to control and ameliorate attendant conditions such as mood disorders or obsessive-compulsive disorders.

The prognosis for an adult suffering from the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is poor, though his adaptation to life and to others can improve with treatment.

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Return

### **The Narcissist's Entitlement of Routine**

I hate routine. When I find myself doing the same things over and over again, I get depressed. I oversleep, over-eat, over-drink and, in general, engage in addictive, impulsive and compulsive behaviours. This is my way of re-introducing risk and excitement into what I (emotionally) perceive to be a barren life.

The problem is that even the most exciting and varied existence becomes routine after a while. Living in the same country or apartment, meeting the same people, doing essentially the same things (though with changing content) – all "qualify" as stultifying rote.

I feel entitled to more. I feel it is my right – due to my intellectual superiority – to lead a thrilling, rewarding, kaleidoscopic life. I feel entitled to force life itself, or, at least, people around me – to yield to my wishes and needs, supreme among them the need for stimulating variety.

This rejection of habit is part of a larger pattern of aggressive entitlement. I feel that the very existence of a sublime intellect (such as myself) warrants concessions and allowances. Standing in line is a waste of time best spent pursuing knowledge, inventing and creating. I should avail myself of the best medical treatment proffered by the most prominent medical authorities – lest the asset that is I be lost to Mankind. I should not be bothered with proofreading my articles (or even re-reading them) – these lowly jobs best be assigned to the less gifted. The devil is in paying precious attention to details.

Entitlement is sometimes justified in a Picasso or an Einstein. But I am neither. My achievements are grotesquely incommensurate with my overwhelming sense of entitlement. I am but a mediocre and forgettable scribbler who, at the age of 39, is a colossal under-achiever, if anything.

Of course, the feeling of supremacy often serves to mask a cancerous complex of inferiority. Moreover, I infect others with my projected grandiosity and their feedback constitutes the edifice upon which I construct my self-esteem. I regulate my sense of self-worth by rigidly insisting that I am above the madding crowd while deriving my Narcissistic Supply from this very thus despised source.

But there is a second angle to this abhorrence of the predictable. As a narcissist, I employ a host of Emotional Involvement Prevention Mechanisms (EIPM). Despising routine and avoiding it is one of these mechanisms. Their function is to prevent me from getting emotionally involved and, subsequently, hurt. Their application results in an "approach-avoidance repetition complex". The narcissist, fearing and loathing intimacy, stability and security – yet craving them – approaches and then avoids significant others or important tasks in a rapid succession of apparently inconsistent and disconnected behaviours.

Return

## **Pathological Narcissism**

### **A Dysfunction or a Blessing?**

*Comments on recent research by Roy Baumeister.*

Is pathological narcissism a blessing or a malediction?

The answer is: it depends. Healthy narcissism is a mature, balanced love of oneself coupled with a stable sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Healthy narcissism implies knowledge of one's boundaries and a proportionate and realistic appraisal of one's achievements and traits.

Pathological narcissism is wrongly described as too much healthy narcissism (or too much self-esteem). These are two absolutely unrelated phenomena which, regrettably, came to bear the same title. Confusing pathological narcissism with self-esteem betrays a fundamental ignorance of both.

Pathological narcissism involves an impaired, dysfunctional, immature (True) Self coupled with a compensatory fiction (the False Self). The sick narcissist's sense of self-worth and self-esteem derive entirely from audience feedback. The narcissist has no self-esteem or self-worth of his own (no such ego functions). In the absence of observers, the narcissist shrivels to non-existence and feels dead. Hence the narcissist's preying habits in his constant pursuit of Narcissistic Supply. Pathological narcissism is an addictive behavior.

Still, dysfunctions are reactions to abnormal environments and situations (e.g., abuse, trauma, smothering, etc.).

Paradoxically, his dysfunction allows the narcissist to function. It compensates for lacks and deficiencies by exaggerating tendencies and traits. It is like the tactile



sense of a blind person. In short: pathological narcissism is a result of over-sensitivity, the repression of overwhelming memories and experiences, and the suppression of inordinately strong negative feelings (e.g., hurt, envy, anger, or humiliation).

That the narcissist functions at all - is because of his pathology and thanks to it. The alternative is complete decompensation and integration.

In time, the narcissist learns how to leverage his pathology, how to use it to his advantage, how to deploy it in order to maximize benefits and utilities - in other words, how to transform his curse into a blessing.

Narcissists are obsessed by delusions of fantastic grandeur and superiority. As a result they are very competitive. They are strongly compelled - where others are merely motivated. They are driven, relentless, tireless, and ruthless. They often make it to the top. But even when they do not - they strive and fight and learn and climb and create and think and devise and design and conspire. Faced with a challenge - they are likely to do better than non-narcissists.

Yet, we often find that narcissists abandon their efforts in mid-stream, give up, vanish, lose interest, devalue former pursuits, fail, or slump. Why is that?

Narcissists are prone to self-defeating and self-destructive behaviors.

### **The Self-Punishing, Guilt-Purging Behaviors**

These are intended to inflict punishment on the narcissist and thus instantly relieve him of his overwhelming anxiety.

This is very reminiscent of a compulsive-ritualistic behavior. The narcissist feels guilty. It could be an "ancient" guilt, a "sexual" guilt (Freud), or a "social" guilt. In early life, the narcissist internalized and introjected the voices of meaningful and authoritative others - parents, role models, peers - that consistently and convincingly judged him to be no good, blameworthy, deserving of punishment or retaliation, or corrupt.

The narcissist's life is thus transformed into an on-going trial. The constancy of this trial, the never adjourning tribunal *is* the punishment. It is a Kafkaesque "trial": meaningless, undecipherable, never-ending, leading to no verdict, subject to mysterious and fluid laws and presided over by capricious judges.

Such a narcissist masochistically frustrates his deepest

desires and drives, obstructs his own efforts, alienates his friends and sponsors, provokes figures in authority to punish, demote, or ignore him, actively seeks and solicits disappointment, failure, or mistreatment and relishes them, incites anger or rejection, bypasses or rejects opportunities, or engages in excessive self-sacrifice.

In their book "Personality Disorders in Modern Life", Theodore Millon and Roger Davis, describe the diagnosis of "Masochistic or Self-Defeating Personality Disorder", found in the appendix of the DSM III-R but excluded from the DSM IV. While the narcissist is rarely a full-fledged masochist, many a narcissist exhibit some of the traits of this personality disorder.

### **The Extracting Behaviors**

People with Personality Disorders (PDs) are very afraid of real, mature, intimacy. Intimacy is formed not only within a couple, but also in a workplace, in a neighborhood, with friends, while collaborating on a project. Intimacy is another word for emotional involvement, which is the result of interactions in constant and predictable (safe) propinquity.

PDs interpret intimacy as counter-dependence, emotional strangulation, the snuffing of freedom, a kind of death in installments. They are terrorized by it. To avoid it, their self-destructive and self-defeating acts are intended to dismantle the very foundation of a successful relationship, a career, a project, or a friendship. Narcissists feel elated and relieved after they unshackle these "chains". They feel they broke a siege, that they are liberated, free at last.

Read this:

### ***The Relief of Being Abandoned***

#### **The Default Behaviors**

We are all, to some degree, inertial, afraid of new situations, new opportunities, new challenges, new circumstances and new demands. Being healthy, being successful, getting married, becoming a mother, or someone's boss – often entail abrupt breaks with the past. Some self-defeating behaviors are intended to preserve the past, to restore it, to protect it from the winds of change, to self-deceptively skirt promising opportunities while seeming to embrace them.

Moreover, to the narcissist, a challenge, or even a guaranteed eventual triumph, are meaningless in the absence of onlookers. The narcissist needs an audience

to applaud, affirm, recoil, approve, admire, adore, fear, or even detest him. He craves the attention and depends on the Narcissistic Supply only others can provide. The narcissist derives sustenance only from the outside - his emotional innards are hollow and moribund.

The narcissist's enhanced performance is predicated on the existence of a challenge (real or imaginary) and of an audience. Baumeister usefully re-affirmed this linkage, known to theoreticians since Freud.

### ***The Narcissist as a Failure and a Loser***

Three traits conspire to render the narcissist a failure and a loser: his sense of entitlement, his haughtiness and innate conviction of his own superiority, and his aversion to routine.

The narcissist's sense of entitlement encourages his indolence. He firmly believes that he should be spoon-fed and that accomplishments and honors should be handed to him on a silver platter, without any commensurate effort on his part. His mere existence justifies such exceptional treatment. Many narcissists are under-qualified and lack skills because they can't be bothered with the minutia of obtaining an academic degree, professional training, or exams.

The narcissist's arrogance and belief that he is superior to others, whom he typically holds in contempt - in other words: the narcissist's grandiose fantasies - hamper his ability to function in society. The cumulative outcomes of this social dysfunction gradually transform him into a recluse and an outcast. He is shunned by colleagues, employers, neighbors, erstwhile friends, and, finally, even by long-suffering family members who tire of his tirades and rants.

Unable to work in a team, to compromise, to give credit where due, and to strive towards long-term goals, the narcissist - skilled and gifted as he may be - finds himself unemployed and unemployable, his bad reputation preceding him.

Even when offered a job or a business opportunity, the narcissist recoils, bolts, and obstructs each and every stage of the negotiations or the transaction.

But this passive-aggressive (negativistic and masochistic) conduct has nothing to do with the narcissist's aforementioned indolence. The narcissist is not afraid of some forms of hard work. He invests inordinate amounts of energy, forethought, planning, zest, and sweat in securing narcissistic supply, for

instance.

The narcissist's sabotage of new employment or business prospects is owing to his abhorrence of routine. Narcissists feel trapped, shackled, and enslaved by the quotidian, by the repetitive tasks that are inevitably involved in fulfilling one's assignments. They hate the methodical, step-by-step, long-term, approach. Possessed of magical thinking, they'd rather wait for miracles to happen. Jobs, business deals, and teamwork require perseverance and tolerance of boredom which the narcissist sorely lacks.

Life forces most narcissists into the hard slog of a steady job (or succession of jobs). Such "unfortunate" narcissists, coerced into a framework they resent, are likely to act out and erupt in a series of self-destructive and self-defeating acts (see above).

But there are other narcissists, the "luckier" ones, those who can afford not to work. They laze about, indulge themselves in a variety of idle and trivial pursuits, seek entertainment and thrills wherever and whenever they can, and while their lives away, at once content and bitter: content with their lifestyle and the minimum demands it imposes on them and bitter because they haven't achieved more, they haven't reached the pinnacle of their profession, they haven't become as rich or famous or powerful as they deserve to be.

Return

### **The Narcissist's Confabulated Life**

Confabulations are an important part of life. They serve to heal emotional wounds or to prevent ones from being inflicted in the first place. They prop-up the confabulator's self-esteem, regulate his (or her) sense of self-worth, and buttress his (or her) self-image. They serve as organising principles in social interactions.

Father's wartime heroism, mother's youthful good looks, one's oft-recounted exploits, erstwhile alleged brilliance, and past purported sexual irresistibility – are typical examples of white, fuzzy, heart-warming lies wrapped around a shrivelled kernel of truth.

But the distinction between reality and fantasy is rarely completely lost. Deep inside, the healthy confabulator knows where facts end and wishful thinking takes over. Father acknowledges he was no war hero, though he did his share of fighting. Mother understands she was no ravishing beauty, though she may have been attractive. The confabulator realises that

his recounted exploits are overblown, his brilliance exaggerated, and his sexual irresistibility a myth. Such distinctions never rise to the surface because everyone – the confabulator and his audience alike – have a common interest to maintain the confabulation. To challenge the integrity of the confabulator or the veracity of his confabulations is to threaten the very fabric of family and society. Human intercourse is built around such entertaining deviations from the truth. This is where the narcissist differs from others (from "normal" people).

His very self is a piece of fiction concocted to fend off hurt and to nurture the narcissist's grandiosity. He fails in his "reality test" – the ability to distinguish the actual from the imagined. The narcissist fervently believes in his own infallibility, brilliance, omnipotence, heroism, and perfection. He doesn't dare confront the truth and admit it even to himself.

Moreover, he imposes his personal mythology on his nearest and dearest. Spouse, children, colleagues, friends, neighbours – sometimes even perfect strangers – must abide by the narcissist's narrative or face his wrath. The narcissist countenances no disagreement, alternative points of view, or criticism. To him, confabulation IS reality.

The coherence of the narcissist's dysfunctional and precariously-balanced personality depends on the plausibility of his stories and on their acceptance by his Sources of Narcissistic Supply. The narcissist invests an inordinate time in substantiating his tales, collecting "evidence", defending his version of events, and in re-interpreting reality to fit his scenario. As a result, most narcissists are self-delusional, obstinate, opinionated, and argumentative.

The narcissist's lies are not goal-orientated. This is what makes his constant dishonesty both disconcerting and incomprehensible. The narcissist lies at the drop of a hat, needlessly, and almost ceaselessly. He lies in order to avoid the Grandiosity Gap – when the abyss between fact and (narcissistic) fiction becomes too gaping to ignore.

The narcissist lies in order to preserve appearances, uphold fantasies, support the tall (and impossible) tales of his False Self and extract Narcissistic Supply from unsuspecting sources, who are not yet on to him. To the narcissist, confabulation is not merely a way of life –

but life itself.

We are all conditioned to let other indulge in pet delusions and get away with white, not too egregious, lies. The narcissist makes use of our socialisation. We dare not confront or expose him, despite the outlandishness of his claims, the improbability of his stories, the implausibility of his alleged accomplishments and conquests. We simply turn the other cheek, or meekly avert our eyes, often embarrassed.

Moreover, the narcissist makes clear, from the very beginning, that it is his way or the highway. His aggression – even violent streak – are close to the surface. He may be charming in a first encounter – but even then there are telltale signs of pent-up abuse. His interlocutors sense this impending threat and avoid conflict by acquiescing with the narcissist's fairy tales. Thus he imposes his private universe and virtual reality on his milieu – sometimes with disastrous consequences.

Return

### **The Cult of the Narcissist**

The narcissist is the guru at the centre of a cult. Like other gurus, he demands complete obedience from his flock: his spouse, his offspring, other family members, friends, and colleagues. He feels entitled to adulation and special treatment by his followers. He punishes the wayward and the straying lambs. He enforces discipline, adherence to his teachings, and common goals. The less accomplished he is in reality – the more stringent his mastery and the more pervasive the brainwashing.

The – often involuntary – members of the narcissist's mini-cult inhabit a twilight zone of his own construction. He imposes on them a shared psychosis, replete with persecutory delusions, "enemies", mythical narratives, and apocalyptic scenarios if he is flouted.

The narcissist's control is based on ambiguity, unpredictability, fuzziness, and ambient abuse. His ever-shifting whims exclusively define right versus wrong, desirable and unwanted, what is to be pursued and what to be avoided. He alone determines the rights and obligations of his disciples and alters them at will.

The narcissist is a micro-manager. He exerts control over the minutest details and behaviours. He punishes severely and abuses withholders of information and those who fail to conform to his wishes and goals.

The narcissist does not respect the boundaries and privacy of his reluctant adherents. He ignores their wishes and treats them as objects or instruments of gratification. He seeks to control both situations and people compulsively.

He strongly disapproves of others' personal autonomy and independence. Even innocuous activities, such as meeting a friend or visiting one's family require his permission. Gradually, he isolates his nearest and dearest until they are fully dependent on him emotionally, sexually, financially, and socially.

He acts in a patronising and condescending manner and criticises often. He alternates between emphasising the minutest faults (devalues) and exaggerating the talents, traits, and skills (idealises) of the members of his cult. He is wildly unrealistic in his expectations – which legitimises his subsequent abusive conduct.

The narcissist claims to be infallible, superior, talented, skilful, omnipotent, and omniscient. He often lies and confabulates to support these unfounded claims. Within his cult, he expects awe, admiration, adulation, and constant attention commensurate with his outlandish stories and assertions. He reinterprets reality to fit his fantasies.

His thinking is dogmatic, rigid, and doctrinaire. He does not countenance free thought, pluralism, or free speech and doesn't brook criticism and disagreement. He demands – and often gets – complete trust and the relegation to his capable hands of all decision-making. He forces the participants in his cult to be hostile to critics, the authorities, institutions, his personal enemies, or the media – if they try to uncover his actions and reveal the truth. He closely monitors and censors information from the outside, exposing his captive audience only to selective data and analyses.

The narcissist's cult is "missionary" and "imperialistic". He is always on the lookout for new recruits – his spouse's friends, his daughter's girlfriends, his neighbours, new colleagues at work. He immediately attempts to "convert" them to his "creed" – to convince them how wonderful and admirable he is. In other words, he tries to render them Sources of Narcissistic Supply.

Often, his behaviour on these "recruiting missions" is different to his conduct within the "cult". In the first phases of wooing new admirers and proselytising to

potential "conscripts" – the narcissist is attentive, compassionate, empathic, flexible, self-effacing, and helpful. At home, among the "veterans" he is tyrannical, demanding, wilful, opinionated, aggressive, and exploitative.

As the leader of his congregation, the narcissist feels entitled to special amenities and benefits not accorded the "rank and file". He expects to be waited on hand and foot, to make free use of everyone's money and dispose of their assets liberally, and to be cynically exempt from the rules that he himself established (if such violation is pleasurable or gainful).

In extreme cases, the narcissist feels above the law – any kind of law. This grandiose and haughty conviction leads to criminal acts, incestuous or polygamous relationships, and recurrent friction with the authorities. Hence the narcissist's panicky and sometimes violent reactions to "dropouts" from his cult. There's a lot going on that the narcissist wants kept under wraps. Moreover, the narcissist stabilises his fluctuating sense of self-worth by deriving Narcissistic Supply from his victims. Abandonment threatens the narcissist's precariously balanced personality.

Add to that the narcissist's paranoid and schizoid tendencies, his lack of introspective self-awareness, and his stunted sense of humour (lack of self-deprecation) and the risks to the grudging members of his cult are clear.

The narcissist sees enemies and conspiracies everywhere. He often casts himself as the heroic victim (martyr) of dark and stupendous forces. In every deviation from his tenets he espies malevolent and ominous subversion. He, therefore, is bent on disempowering his devotees. By any and all means. The narcissist is dangerous.

Return

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**Pathological Narcissism, Narcissistic Personality disorder and Psychopathy**

**Does the Narcissist Have a Multiple Personality (Dissociative Identity Disorder)?**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4950>

**Narcissists as Drama Queens**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4948>

**The Narcissist as Know-it-all**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4945>

**The Narcissist as VAMPIRE or MACHINE**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4944>

**Narcissists and Psychopaths Devalue Their Psychotherapists**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4939>

**Violent, Vindictive, Sadistic, and Psychopathic Narcissists**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4938>

**Portrait of the Narcissist as a Young Man**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/5048>

**Grandiosity, Fantasies, and Narcissism**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4923>

**Narcissists and Emotions**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/5248>

**Narcissists and Mood Disorders**

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/5067>

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# *Narcissists And Psychopaths*

In the Workplace

## **The Narcissist in the Workplace**

### ***Question:***

The narcissist turns the workplace into a duplicitous hell. What to do?

***Answer:***

To a narcissistic employer, the members of his "staff" are Secondary Sources of Narcissistic Supply. Their role is to accumulate the supply (remember events that support the grandiose self-image of the narcissist) and to regulate the Narcissistic Supply of the narcissist during dry spells - to adulate, adore, admire, agree, provide attention and approval, and, generally, serve as an audience to him.

The staff (or should we say "stuff"?) is supposed to remain passive. The narcissist is not interested in anything but the simplest function of mirroring. When the mirror acquires a personality and a life of its own, the narcissist is incensed. When independent minded, an employee might be in danger of being sacked by his narcissistic employer (an act which demonstrates the employer's omnipotence).

The employee's presumption to be the employer's equal by trying to befriend him (friendship is possible only among equals) injures the employer narcissistically. He is willing to accept his employees as underlings, whose very position serves to support his grandiose fantasies. But his grandiosity is so tenuous and rests on such fragile foundations, that any hint of equality, disagreement or need (any intimation that the narcissist "needs" friends, for instance) threatens the narcissist profoundly. The narcissist is exceedingly insecure. It is easy to destabilise his impromptu "personality". His reactions are merely in self-defence.

Classic narcissistic behaviour is when idealisation is followed by devaluation. The devaluing attitude develops as a result of disagreements or simply because time has eroded the employee's capacity to serve as a ***FRESH*** Source of Supply.

The veteran employee, now taken for granted by his narcissistic employer, becomes uninspiring as a source of adulation, admiration and attention. The narcissist always seeks new thrills and stimuli.

The narcissist is notorious for his low threshold of resistance to boredom. His behaviour is impulsive and his biography tumultuous precisely because of his need to introduce uncertainty and risk to what he regards as "stagnation" or "slow death" (i.e., routine). Most interactions in the workplace are part of the rut – and thus constitute a reminder of this routine – deflating the narcissist's grandiose fantasies.

Narcissists do many unnecessary, wrong and even dangerous things in pursuit of the stabilisation of their inflated self-image.

Narcissists feel suffocated by intimacy, or by the constant reminders of the **REAL**, nitty-gritty world out there. It reduces them, makes them realise the Grandiosity Gap between their fantasies and reality. It is a threat to the precarious balance of their personality structures ("false" and invented) and treated by them as a menace.

Narcissists forever shift the blame, pass the buck, and engage in cognitive dissonance. They "pathologize" the other, foster feelings of guilt and shame in her, demean, debase and humiliate in order to preserve their sense of superiority.

Narcissists are pathological liars. They think nothing of it because their very self is false, their own confabulation.

Here are a few useful guidelines:

- Never disagree with the narcissist or contradict him;
- Never offer him any intimacy;
- Look awed by whatever attribute matters to him (for instance: by his professional achievements or by his good looks, or by his success with women and so on);
- Never remind him of life out there and if you do, connect it somehow to his sense of grandiosity. You can aggrandize even your office supplies, the most mundane thing conceivable by saying: "These are the **BEST** art materials **ANY** workplace is going to have", "We get them **EXCLUSIVELY**", etc.;
- Do not make any comment, which might directly or indirectly impinge on the narcissist's self-image, omnipotence, superior judgement, omniscience, skills, capabilities, professional record, or even omnipresence. Bad sentences start with: "I think you overlooked ... made a mistake here ... you don't know ... do you know ... you were not here yesterday so ... you cannot ... you should ... (interpreted as rude imposition, narcissists react very badly to perceived restrictions placed on their freedom) ... I (never mention the fact that you are a separate, independent entity, narcissists regard

others as extensions of their selves)... " You get the gist of it.

Manage your narcissistic boss. Notice patterns in his bullying. Is he more aggressive on Monday mornings - and more open to suggestions on Friday afternoon? Is he amenable to flattery? Can you modify his conduct by appealing to his morality, superior knowledge, good manners, cosmopolitanism, or upbringing?

Manipulating the narcissist is the only way to survive in such a tainted workplace.

Can the narcissist be harnessed? Can his energies be channeled productively?

This would be a deeply flawed – and even dangerous – "advice". Various management gurus purport to teach us how to harness this force of nature known as malignant or pathological narcissism. Narcissists are driven, visionary, ambitious, exciting and productive, says Michael Maccoby, for instance. To ignore such a resource is a criminal waste. All we need to do is learn how to "handle" them.

Yet, this prescription is either naive or disingenuous. Narcissists cannot be "handled", or "managed", or "contained", or "channeled". They are, by definition, incapable of team work. They lack empathy, are exploitative, envious, haughty and feel entitled, even if such a feeling is commensurate only with their grandiose fantasies and when their accomplishments are meager.

Narcissists dissemble, conspire, destroy and self-destruct. Their drive is compulsive, their vision rarely grounded in reality, their human relations a calamity. In the long run, there is no enduring benefit to dancing with narcissists – only ephemeral and, often, fallacious, "achievements".

Return

### **Narcissism in the Boardroom**

The perpetrators of the recent spate of financial frauds in the USA acted with callous disregard for both their employees and shareholders – not to mention other stakeholders. Psychologists have often remote-diagnosed them as "malignant, pathological narcissists". Narcissists are driven by the need to uphold and maintain a False Self – a concocted, grandiose, and demanding psychological construct typical of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder. The False Self is projected to the world in order to garner Narcissistic

Supply – adulation, admiration, or even notoriety and infamy. Any kind of attention is usually deemed by narcissists to be preferable to obscurity.

The False Self is suffused with fantasies of perfection, grandeur, brilliance, infallibility, immunity, significance, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. To be a narcissist is to be convinced of a great, inevitable personal destiny. The narcissist is preoccupied with ideal love, the construction of brilliant, revolutionary scientific theories, the composition or authoring or painting of the greatest work of art, the founding of a new school of thought, the attainment of fabulous wealth, the reshaping of a nation or a conglomerate, and so on. The narcissist never sets realistic goals to himself. He is forever preoccupied with fantasies of uniqueness, record breaking, or breathtaking achievements. His verbosity reflects this propensity.

Reality is, naturally, quite different and this gives rise to a Grandiosity Gap. The demands of the False Self are never satisfied by the narcissist's accomplishments, standing, wealth, clout, sexual prowess, or knowledge.

The narcissist's grandiosity and sense of entitlement are equally incommensurate with his achievements.

To bridge the Grandiosity Gap, the malignant (pathological) narcissist resorts to shortcuts. These very often lead to fraud.

The narcissist cares only about appearances. What matters to him are the facade of wealth and its attendant social status and Narcissistic Supply. Witness the travestied extravagance of Tyco's Denis Kozlowski. Media attention only exacerbates the narcissist's addiction and makes it incumbent on him to go to ever-wilder extremes to secure uninterrupted supply from this source.

The narcissist lacks empathy – the ability to put himself in other people's shoes. He does not recognise boundaries – personal, corporate, or legal. Everything and everyone are to him mere instruments, extensions, objects unconditionally and uncomplainingly available in his pursuit of narcissistic gratification.

This makes the narcissist perniciously exploitative. He uses, abuses, devalues, and discards even his nearest and dearest in the most chilling manner. The narcissist is utility – driven, obsessed with his overwhelming need to reduce his anxiety and regulate his labile sense of self-worth by securing a constant supply of his drug –

attention. American executives acted without compunction when they raided their employees' pension funds – as did Robert Maxwell a generation earlier in Britain.

The narcissist is convinced of his superiority – cerebral or physical. To his mind, he is a Gulliver hamstrung by a horde of narrow-minded and envious Lilliputians. The dotcom "new economy" was infested with "visionaries" with a contemptuous attitude towards the mundane: profits, business cycles, conservative economists, doubtful journalists, and cautious analysts. Yet, deep inside, the narcissist is painfully aware of his addiction to others – their attention, admiration, applause, and affirmation. He despises himself for being thus dependent. He hates people the same way a drug addict hates his pusher. He wishes to "put them in their place", humiliate them, demonstrate to them how inadequate and imperfect they are in comparison to his regal self and how little he craves or needs them.

The narcissist regards himself as one would an expensive present, a gift to his company, to his family, to his neighbours, to his colleagues, to his country. This firm conviction of his inflated importance makes him feel entitled to special treatment, special favours, special outcomes, concessions, subservience, immediate gratification, obsequiousness, and lenience. It also makes him feel immune to mortal laws and somehow divinely protected and insulated from the inevitable consequences of his deeds and misdeeds.

The self-destructive narcissist plays the role of the "bad guy" (or "bad girl"). But even this is within the traditional social roles cartoonishly exaggerated by the narcissist to attract attention. Men are likely to emphasise intellect, power, aggression, money, or social status. Narcissistic women are likely to emphasise body, looks, charm, sexuality, feminine "traits", homemaking, children and childrearing.

Punishing the wayward narcissist is a veritable catch-22.

A jail term is useless as a deterrent if it only serves to focus attention on the narcissist. Being infamous is second best to being famous – and far preferable to being ignored. The only way to effectively punish a narcissist is to withhold Narcissistic Supply from him and thus to prevent him from becoming a notorious celebrity.



Given a sufficient amount of media exposure, book contracts, talk shows, lectures, and public attention – the narcissist may even consider the whole grisly affair to be emotionally rewarding. To the narcissist, freedom, wealth, social status, family, vocation – are all means to an end. And the end is attention. If he can secure attention by being the big bad wolf – the narcissist unhesitatingly transforms himself into one. Lord Archer, for instance, seems to be positively basking in the media circus provoked by his prison diaries.

The narcissist does not victimise, plunder, terrorise and abuse others in a cold, calculating manner. He does so offhandedly, as a manifestation of his genuine character. To be truly "guilty" one needs to intend, to deliberate, to contemplate one's choices and then to choose one's acts. The narcissist does none of these. Thus, punishment breeds in him surprise, hurt and seething anger. The narcissist is stunned by society's insistence that he should be held accountable for his deeds and penalised accordingly. He feels wronged, baffled, injured, the victim of bias, discrimination and injustice. He rebels and rages.

Depending upon the pervasiveness of his magical thinking, the narcissist may feel besieged by overwhelming powers, forces cosmic and intrinsically ominous. He may develop compulsive rites to fend off this "bad", unwarranted, persecutory influences.

The narcissist, very much the infantile outcome of stunted personal development, engages in magical thinking. He feels omnipotent, that there is nothing he couldn't do or achieve if only he sets his mind to it. He feels omniscient – he rarely admits to ignorance and regards his intuitions and intellect as founts of objective data.

Thus, narcissists are haughtily convinced that introspection is a more important and more efficient (not to mention easier to accomplish) method of obtaining knowledge than the systematic study of outside sources of information in accordance with strict and tedious curricula. Narcissists are "inspired" and they despise hamstrung technocrats.

To some extent, they feel omnipresent because they are either famous or about to become famous or because their product is selling or is being manufactured globally. Deeply immersed in their delusions of grandeur, they firmly believe that their acts have – or

will have – a great influence not only on their firm, but on their country, or even on Mankind. Having mastered the manipulation of their human environment – they are convinced that they will always "get away with it". They develop hubris and a false sense of immunity.

Narcissistic immunity is the (erroneous) feeling, harboured by the narcissist, that he is impervious to the consequences of his actions, that he will never be effected by the results of his own decisions, opinions, beliefs, deeds and misdeeds, acts, inaction, or membership of certain groups, that he is above reproach and punishment, that, magically, he is protected and will miraculously be saved at the last moment. Hence the audacity, simplicity, and transparency of some of the fraud and corporate looting in the 1990's. Narcissists rarely bother to cover their traces, so great is their disdain and conviction that they are above mortal laws and wherewithal.

What are the sources of this unrealistic appraisal of situations and events?

The False Self is a childish response to abuse and trauma. Abuse is not limited to sexual molestation or beatings. Smothering, doting, pampering, over-indulgence, treating the child as an extension of the parent, not respecting the child's boundaries, and burdening the child with excessive expectations are also forms of abuse.

The child reacts by constructing False Self that is possessed of everything it needs in order to prevail: unlimited and instantaneously available Harry Potter-like powers and wisdom. The False Self, this Superman, is indifferent to abuse and punishment. This way, the child's True Self is shielded from the toddler's harsh reality.

This artificial, maladaptive separation between a vulnerable (but not punishable) True Self and a punishable (but invulnerable) False Self is an effective mechanism. It isolates the child from the unjust, capricious, emotionally dangerous world that he occupies. But, at the same time, it fosters in him a false sense of "nothing can happen to me, because I am not here, I am not available to be punished, hence I am immune to punishment".

The comfort of false immunity is also yielded by the narcissist's sense of entitlement. In his grandiose delusions, the narcissist is sui generis, a gift to

humanity, a precious, fragile, object. Moreover, the narcissist is convinced both that this uniqueness is immediately discernible – and that it gives him special rights. The narcissist feels that he is protected by some cosmological law pertaining to "endangered species". He is convinced that his future contribution to others – his firm, his country, humanity – should and does exempt him from the mundane: daily chores, boring jobs, recurrent tasks, personal exertion, orderly investment of resources and efforts, laws and regulations, social conventions, and so on.

The narcissist is entitled to a "special treatment": high living standards, constant and immediate catering to his needs, the eradication of any friction with the humdrum and the routine, an all-engulfing absolution of his sins, fast track privileges (to higher education, or in his encounters with bureaucracies, for instance).

Punishment, trusts the narcissist, is for ordinary people, where no great loss to humanity is involved.

Narcissists are possessed of inordinate abilities to charm, to convince, to seduce, and to persuade. Many of them are gifted orators and intellectually endowed. Many of them work in politics, the media, fashion, show business, the arts, medicine, or business, and serve as religious leaders.

By virtue of their standing in the community, their charisma, or their ability to find the willing scapegoats, they do get exempted many times. Having recurrently "got away with it" – they develop a theory of personal immunity, founded upon some kind of societal and even cosmic "order" in which certain people are above punishment.

But there is a fourth, simpler, explanation. The narcissist lacks self-awareness. Divorced from his True Self, unable to empathise (to understand what it is like to be someone else), unwilling to constrain his actions to cater to the feelings and needs of others – the narcissist is in a constant dreamlike state.

To the narcissist, his life is unreal, like watching an autonomously unfolding movie. The narcissist is a mere spectator, mildly interested, greatly entertained at times. He does not "own" his actions. He, therefore, cannot understand why he should be punished and when he is, he feels grossly wronged.

So convinced is the narcissist that he is destined to great things – that he refuses to accept setbacks, failures

and punishments. He regards them as temporary, as the outcomes of someone else's errors, as part of the future mythology of his rise to power/brilliance/wealth/ideal love, etc. Being punished is a diversion of his precious energy and resources from the all-important task of fulfilling his mission in life.

The narcissist is pathologically envious of people and believes that they are equally envious of him. He is paranoid, on guard, ready to fend off an imminent attack. A punishment to the narcissist is a major surprise and a nuisance but it also validates his suspicion that he is being persecuted. It proves to him that strong forces are arrayed against him.

He tells himself that people, envious of his achievements and humiliated by them, are out to get him. He constitutes a threat to the accepted order. When required to pay for his misdeeds, the narcissist is always disdainful and bitter and feels misunderstood by his inferiors.

Cooked books, corporate fraud, bending the (GAAP or other) rules, sweeping problems under the carpet, over-promising, making grandiose claims (the "vision thing") – are hallmarks of a narcissist in action. When social cues and norms encourage such behaviour rather than inhibit it – in other words, when such behaviour elicits abundant Narcissistic Supply – the pattern is reinforced and become entrenched and rigid. Even when circumstances change, the narcissist finds it difficult to adapt, shed his routines, and replace them with new ones. He is trapped in his past success. He becomes a swindler.

But pathological narcissism is not an isolated phenomenon. It is embedded in our contemporary culture. The West's is a narcissistic civilization. It upholds narcissistic values and penalises alternative value-systems. From an early age, children are taught to avoid self-criticism, to deceive themselves regarding their capacities and attainments, to feel entitled, and to exploit others.

As Lilian Katz observed in her important paper, "Distinctions between Self-Esteem and Narcissism: Implications for Practice", published by the Educational Resources Information Centre, the line between enhancing self-esteem and fostering narcissism is often blurred by educators and parents.

Both Christopher Lasch in "The Culture of

Narcissism" and Theodore Millon in his books about personality disorders, singled out American society as narcissistic. Litigiousness may be the flip side of an inane sense of entitlement. Consumerism is built on this common and communal lie of "I can do anything I want and possess everything I desire if I only apply myself to it" and on the pathological envy it fosters.

Not surprisingly, narcissistic disorders are more common among men than among women. This may be because narcissism conforms to masculine social mores and to the prevailing ethos of capitalism. Ambition, achievements, hierarchy, ruthlessness, drive – are both social values and narcissistic male traits. Social thinkers like the aforementioned Lasch speculated that modern American culture – a self-centred one – increases the rate of incidence of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

Otto Kernberg, a notable scholar of personality disorders, confirmed Lasch's intuition: *"Society can make serious psychological abnormalities, which already exist in some percentage of the population, seem to be at least superficially appropriate."*

In their book "Personality Disorders in Modern Life", Theodore Millon and Roger Davis state, as a matter of fact, that pathological narcissism was once the preserve of "the royal and the wealthy" and that it "seems to have gained prominence only in the late twentieth century".

Narcissism, according to them, may be associated with *"higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs ... Individuals in less advantaged nations ... are too busy trying (to survive) ... to be arrogant and grandiose"*.

They – like Lasch before them – attribute pathological narcissism to *"a society that stresses individualism and self-gratification at the expense of community, namely the United States"*. They assert that the disorder is more prevalent among certain professions with "star power" or respect. *"In an individualistic culture, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the world'. In a collectivist society, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the collective'."*

Millon quotes Warren and Caponi's "The Role of Culture in the Development of Narcissistic Personality Disorders in America, Japan and Denmark":

*"Individualistic narcissistic structures of self-regard (in individualistic societies) ... are rather self-contained and independent ... (In collectivist cultures) narcissistic configurations of the we-self ... denote self-esteem"*

*derived from strong identification with the reputation and honour of the family, groups, and others in hierarchical relationships."*

Still, there are malignant narcissists among subsistence farmers in Africa, nomads in the Sinai desert, day labourers in East Europe, and intellectuals and socialites in Manhattan. Malignant narcissism is all-pervasive and independent of culture and society. It is true, though, that the way pathological narcissism manifests and is experienced is dependent on the particulars of societies and cultures.

In some cultures, it is encouraged, in others suppressed. In some societies it is channelled against minorities – in others it is tainted with paranoia. In collectivist societies, it may be projected onto the collective, in individualistic societies, it is an individual's trait.

Yet, can families, organisations, ethnic groups, churches, and even whole nations be safely described as "narcissistic" or "pathologically self-absorbed"? Can we talk about a "corporate culture of narcissism"?

Human collectives – states, firms, households, institutions, political parties, cliques, bands – acquire a life and a character all their own. The longer the association or affiliation of the members, the more cohesive and conformist the inner dynamics of the group, the more persecutory or numerous its enemies, competitors, or adversaries, the more intensive the physical and emotional experiences of the individuals it is comprised of, the stronger the bonds of locale, language, and history – the more rigorous might an assertion of a common pathology be.

Such an all-pervasive and extensive pathology manifests itself in the behaviour of each and every member. It is a defining – though often implicit or underlying – mental structure. It has explanatory and predictive powers. It is recurrent and invariable – a pattern of conduct melding distorted cognition and stunted emotions. And it is often vehemently denied.

Return

### **The Professions of the Narcissist**

The narcissist naturally gravitates towards those professions which guarantee the abundant and uninterrupted provision of Narcissistic Supply. He seeks to interact with people from a position of authority, advantage, or superiority. He thus elicits their automatic

admiration, adulation, and affirmation – or, failing that, their fear and obedience.

Several vocations meet these requirements: teaching, the clergy, show business, corporate management, the medical professions, the military, law enforcement agencies, politics, and sports. It is safe to predict that narcissists would be over-represented in these occupations.

The cerebral narcissist is likely to emphasize his intellectual prowess and accomplishments (real and imaginary) in an attempt to solicit supply from awe-struck students, devoted parishioners, admiring voters, obsequious subordinates, or dependent patients. His somatic counterpart derives his sense of self-worth from body building, athletic achievements, tests of resilience or endurance, and sexual conquests.

The narcissistic medical doctor or mental health professional and his patients, the narcissistic guide, teacher, or mentor and his students, the narcissistic leader, guru, pundit, or psychic and his followers or admirers, and the narcissistic business tycoon, boss, or employer and his underlings – all are instances of Pathological Narcissistic Spaces.

This is a worrisome state of affairs. Narcissists are liars. They misrepresent their credentials, knowledge, talents, skills, and achievements. A narcissist medical doctor would rather let patients die than expose his ignorance. A narcissistic therapist often traumatizes his clients with his acting out, rage, exploitativeness, and lack of empathy. Narcissistic businessmen bring ruin on their firms and employees.

Moreover, even when all is "well", the narcissist's relationship with his sycophants is abusive. He perceives others as objects, mere instruments of gratification, dispensable and interchangeable. An addict, the narcissist tends to pursue an ever-larger dose of adoration, and an ever-bigger fix of attention, while gradually losing what's left of his moral constraints.

When his sources become weary, rebellious, tired, bored, disgusted, repelled, or plainly amused by the narcissist's incessant dependence, his childish craving for attention, his exaggerated or even paranoid fears which lead to obsessive-compulsive behaviours, and his "drama queen" temper tantrums - he resorts to emotional extortion, straight blackmail, abuse, or misuse of his authority, and criminal or antisocial

conduct. If these fail, the narcissist devalues and discards the very people he so idealized and cherished only a short while before.

As opposed to their "normal" colleagues or peers, narcissists in authority lack empathy and ethical standards. Thus, they are prone to immorally, cynically, callously and consistently abuse their position. Their socialisation process – usually the product of problematic early relationships with Primary Objects (parents, or caregivers) – is often perturbed and results in social dysfunctioning.

Nor is the narcissist deterred by possible punishment or regards himself subject to Man-made laws. His sense of entitlement coupled with the conviction of his own superiority lead him to believe in his invincibility, invulnerability, immunity, and divinity. The narcissist holds human edicts, rules, and regulations in disdain and human penalties in disdain. He regards human needs and emotions as weaknesses to be predatorily exploited.

Return

# *Trauma*

# *Abuse*

# *Torture*

## **An Overview**

### **What is Abuse?**

Violence in the family often follows other forms of more subtle and long-term abuse: verbal, emotional, psychological sexual, or financial.

It is closely correlated with alcoholism, drug consumption, intimate-partner homicide, teen pregnancy, infant and child mortality, spontaneous abortion, reckless behaviours, suicide, and the onset of mental health disorders.

Most abusers and batterers are males – but a significant minority are women. This being a "Women's Issue", the problem was swept under the carpet for generations and only recently has it come to public awareness. Yet, even today, society – for instance, through the court and the mental health systems – largely ignores domestic violence and abuse in the family. This induces feelings of shame and guilt in the victims and "legitimizes" the



role of the abuser.

Violence in the family is mostly spousal – one spouse beating, raping, or otherwise physically harming and torturing the other. But children are also and often victims – either directly, or indirectly. Other vulnerable familial groups include the elderly and the disabled. Abuse and violence cross geographical and cultural boundaries and social and economic strata. It is common among the rich and the poor, the well-educated and the less so, the young and the middle-aged, city dwellers and rural folk. It is a universal phenomenon. Abusers exploit, lie, insult, demean, ignore (the "silent treatment"), manipulate, and control.

There are many ways to abuse. To love too much is to abuse. It is tantamount to treating someone as an extension, an object, or an instrument of gratification. To be over-protective, not to respect privacy, to be brutally honest, with a sadistic sense of humour, or consistently tactless – is to abuse.

To expect too much, to denigrate, to ignore – are all modes of abuse. There is physical abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse. The list is long. Most abusers abuse surreptitiously. They are "stealth abusers". You have to actually live with one in order to witness the abuse.

There are four important categories of abuse:

### **I. Overt Abuse**

The open and explicit abuse of another person. Threatening, coercing, beating, lying, berating, demeaning, chastising, insulting, humiliating, exploiting, ignoring ("silent treatment"), devaluing, unceremoniously discarding, verbal abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse are all forms of overt abuse.

### **II. Covert or Controlling Abuse**

Abuse is almost entirely about control. It is often a primitive and immature reaction to life circumstances in which the abuser (usually in his childhood) was rendered helpless. It is about re-exerting one's identity, re-establishing predictability, mastering the environment – human and physical.

The bulk of abusive behaviours can be traced to this panicky reaction to the remote potential for loss of control. Many abusers are hypochondriacs (and difficult patients) because they are afraid to lose control over their body, its looks and its proper functioning. They are obsessive-compulsive in an effort to subdue their

physical habitat and render it foreseeable. They stalk people and harass them as a means of "being in touch" – another form of control.

To the abuser, nothing exists outside himself.

Meaningful others are extensions, internal, assimilated, objects – not external ones. Thus, losing control over a significant other – is equivalent to losing control of a limb, or of one's brain. It is terrifying.

Independent or disobedient people evoke in the abuser the realization that something is wrong with his worldview, that he is not the centre of the world or its cause and that he cannot control what, to him, are internal representations.

To the abuser, losing control means going insane.

Because other people are mere elements in the abuser's mind – being unable to manipulate them literally means losing it (his mind). Imagine, if you suddenly were to find out that you cannot manipulate your memories or control your thoughts... Nightmarish!

In his frantic efforts to maintain control or re-assert it, the abuser resorts to a myriad of fiendishly inventive stratagems and mechanisms. Here is a partial list:

### ***Unpredictability and Uncertainty***

The abuser acts unpredictably, capriciously, inconsistently and irrationally. This serves to render others dependent upon the next twist and turn of the abuser, his next inexplicable whim, upon his next outburst, denial, or smile.

The abuser makes sure that **HE** is the only reliable element in the lives of his nearest and dearest – by shattering the rest of their world through his seemingly insane behaviour. He perpetuates his stable presence in their lives – by destabilizing their own.

### ***TIP***

Refuse to accept such behaviour. Demand reasonably predictable and rational actions and reactions. Insist on respect for your boundaries, predilections, preferences, and priorities.

### ***Disproportional Reactions***

One of the favourite tools of manipulation in the abuser's arsenal is the disproportionality of his reactions. He reacts with supreme rage to the slightest slight. Or, he would punish severely for what he perceives to be an offence against him, no matter how minor. Or, he would throw a temper tantrum over any discord or disagreement, however gently and considerately

expressed. Or, he would act inordinately attentive, charming and tempting (even over-sexed, if need be). This ever-shifting code of conduct and the unusually harsh and arbitrarily applied penalties are premeditated. The victims are kept in the dark. Neediness and dependence on the source of "justice" meted and judgment passed – on the abuser – are thus guaranteed.

***TIP***

Demand a just and proportional treatment. Reject or ignore unjust and capricious behaviour.

If you are up to the inevitable confrontation, react in kind. Let him taste some of his own medicine.

***Dehumanization and Objectification (Abuse)***

People have a need to believe in the empathic skills and basic good-heartedness of others. By dehumanizing and objectifying people – the abuser attacks the very foundations of human interaction. This is the "alien" aspect of abusers – they may be excellent imitations of fully formed adults but they are emotionally absent and immature.

Abuse is so horrid, so repulsive, so phantasmagoric – that people recoil in terror. It is then, with their defences absolutely down, that they are the most susceptible and vulnerable to the abuser's control. Physical, psychological, verbal and sexual abuse are all forms of dehumanization and objectification.

***TIP***

Never show your abuser that you are afraid of him. Do not negotiate with bullies. They are insatiable. Do not succumb to blackmail.

If things get rough – disengage, involve law enforcement officers, friends and colleagues, or threaten him (legally).

Do not keep your abuse a secret. Secrecy is the abuser's weapon.

Never give him a second chance. React with your full arsenal to the first transgression.

***Abuse of Information***

From the first moments of an encounter with another person, the abuser is on the prowl. He collects information. The more he knows about his potential victim – the better able he is to coerce, manipulate, charm, extort or convert it "to the cause". The abuser does not hesitate to misuse the information he gleaned, regardless of its intimate nature or the circumstances in which he obtained it. This is a powerful tool in his

armory.

**TIP**

Be guarded. Don't be too forthcoming in a first or casual meeting. Gather intelligence.

Be yourself. Don't misrepresent your wishes, boundaries, preferences, priorities, and red lines.

Do not behave inconsistently. Do not go back on your word. Be firm and resolute.

***Impossible Situations***

The abuser engineers impossible, dangerous, unpredictable, unprecedented, or highly specific situations in which he is sorely needed. The abuser makes sure that his knowledge, his skills, his connections, or his traits are the only ones applicable and the most useful in the situations that he, himself, wrought. The abuser generates his own indispensability.

**TIP**

Stay away from such quagmires. Scrutinize every offer and suggestion, no matter how innocuous.

Prepare backup plans. Keep others informed of your whereabouts and appraised of your situation.

Be vigilant and doubting. Do not be gullible and suggestible. Better safe than sorry.

**III. Control and Abuse by Proxy**

If all else fails, the abuser recruits friends, colleagues, mates, family members, the authorities, institutions, neighbours, the media, teachers – in short, third parties – to do his bidding. He uses them to cajole, coerce, threaten, stalk, offer, retreat, tempt, convince, harass, communicate and otherwise manipulate his target. He controls these unaware instruments exactly as he plans to control his ultimate prey. He employs the same mechanisms and devices. And he dumps his props unceremoniously when the job is done.

Another form of control by proxy is to engineer situations in which abuse is inflicted upon another person. Such carefully crafted scenarios of embarrassment and humiliation provoke social sanctions (condemnation, opprobrium, or even physical punishment) against the victim. Society, or a social group become the instruments of the abuser.

**TIP**

Often the abuser's proxies are unaware of their role.

Expose him. Inform them. Demonstrate to them how they are being abused, misused, and plain used by the abuser.

Trap your abuser. Treat him as he treats you. Involve others. Bring it into the open. Nothing like sunshine to disinfest abuse.

#### **IV. Ambient Abuse**

The fostering, propagation and enhancement of an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, instability, unpredictability and irritation. There are no acts of traceable explicit abuse, nor any manipulative settings of control. Yet, the irksome feeling remains, a disagreeable foreboding, a premonition, a bad omen. This is sometimes called "gaslighting".

In the long term, such an environment erodes the victim's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Self-confidence is shaken badly. Often, the victim adopts a paranoid or schizoid stance and thus renders himself or herself exposed even more to criticism and judgment. The roles are thus reversed: the victim is considered mentally deranged and the abuser – the suffering soul.

#### ***TIP***

Run! Get away! Ambient abuse often develops to overt and violent abuse.

You don't owe anyone an explanation - but you owe yourself a life. Bail out.

#### ***Articles Menu***

***<http://www.narcissistica-abuse.com/abuse.html>***

***<http://www.narcissistica-abuse.com/abusefamily.html>***

- 1. The Gradations of Abuse***
- 2. The Guilt of the Abused - Pathologizing the Victim***
- 3. Coping with Your Abuser***
- 4. The Abuser in Denial***
- 5. Avoiding Your Abuser - The Submissive Posture***
- 6. Avoiding Your Abuser - The Conflictive Posture***
- 7. The Tocsins of Abuse - How to Spot an Abuser on Your First Date***
- 8. The Tocsins of Abuse - The Abuser's Body Language***
- 9. The Path to Abuse***
- 10. Ambient Abuse and Gaslighting***
- 11. Abuse by Proxy***
- 12. Leveraging the Children***
- 13. Tell Your Children the Truth***
- 14. The Relief of Being Abandoned***
- 15. How to Cope with Your Paranoid Ex***
- 16. Avoiding Your Paranoid Ex***
- 17. The Three Forms of Closure***

- 18. Coping with Stalking and Stalkers*
- 19. Getting Help*
- 20. Domestic Violence Shelters*
- 21. Planning and Executing Your Getaway*
- 21a. Should You Get the Police Involved?*
- 21b. Restraining Orders and Peace Bonds*
- 22. The Dynamics of*

*Spousal Abuse*

- 23. The Mind of the Abuser*
  - 24. Condoning Abuse*
  - 25. The Anomaly of Abuse*
  - 26. Reconditioning the Abuser*
  - 27. Reforming the Abuser*
  - 28. Contracting with Your Abuser*
  - 29. Your Abuser in Therapy*
  - 30. Testing the Abuser*
  - 31. Conning the System*
  - 32. Befriending the System*
  - 33. Working with Professionals*
  - 34. Interacting with Your Abuser*
  - 35. Coping with Your Stalker*
  - 36. Statistics of Abuse and Stalking*
  - 37. The Stalker as Antisocial Bully*
  
  - 38. Coping with Various Types of Stalkers*
  
  - 39. The Erotomaniac Stalker*
  
  - 40. The Narcissistic Stalker*
  
  - 41. The Psychopathic (Antisocial) Stalker*
  
  - 42. How Victims are Affected by Abuse*
  
  - 43. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*
  
  - 44. Recovery and Healing from Trauma and Abuse*
  
  - 45. The Conflicts of Therapy*
- Toxic Relationships*  
*with Malignant Narcissists and Psychopaths*  
*How to Recognize a Narcissist Before It is Too Late?*  
<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4976>

*Narcissists and Personality disordered Mates, Spouses, and Partners*

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/5013>

*Narcissists, psychopaths, sex, and marital fidelity*

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4920>

*Narcissistic and Psychopathic Parents and Their Children*

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4727>

*Projection and Projective Identification - Abuser in Denial*

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/5002>

*Approach-Avoidance Repetition Complex and Fear of Intimacy*

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/5000>

*The Narcissist or Psychopath Hates your Independence and Personal Autonomy*

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4959>

*I miss him so much - I want him back!*

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4934>

*Guilt? What guilt?*

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/4931>

*How Victims are Pathologized and re-abused by the System*

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/narcissisticabuse/message/5068>

Return

### **Traumas as Social Interactions**

("He" in this text - to mean "He" or "She").

We react to serious mishaps, life altering setbacks, disasters, abuse, and death by going through the phases of grieving. Traumas are the complex outcomes of psychodynamic and biochemical processes. But the particulars of traumas depend heavily on the interaction between the victim and his social milieu.

It would seem that while the victim progresses from denial to helplessness, rage, depression and thence to acceptance of the traumatizing events - society demonstrates a diametrically opposed progression. This

incompatibility, this mismatch of psychological phases is what leads to the formation and crystallization of trauma.

### ***PHASE I***

#### **Victim phase I - DENIAL**

The magnitude of such unfortunate events is often so overwhelming, their nature so alien, and their message so menacing - that denial sets in as a defence mechanism aimed at self preservation. The victim denies that the event occurred, that he or she is being abused, that a loved one passed away.

#### **Society phase I - ACCEPTANCE, MOVING ON**

The victim's nearest ("Society") - his colleagues, his employees, his clients, even his spouse, children, and friends - rarely experience the events with the same shattering intensity. They are likely to accept the bad news and move on. Even at their most considerate and empathic, they are likely to lose patience with the victim's state of mind. They tend to ignore the victim, or chastise him, to mock, or to deride his feelings or behaviour, to collude to repress the painful memories, or to trivialize them.

#### **Summary Phase I**

The mismatch between the victim's reactive patterns and emotional needs and society's matter-of-fact attitude hinders growth and healing. The victim requires society's help in avoiding a head-on confrontation with a reality he cannot digest. Instead, society serves as a constant and mentally destabilizing reminder of the root of the victim's unbearable agony (the Job syndrome).

### ***PHASE II***

#### **Victim phase II - HELPLESSNESS**

Denial gradually gives way to a sense of all-pervasive and humiliating helplessness, often accompanied by debilitating fatigue and mental disintegration. These are among the classic symptoms of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). These are the bitter results of the internalization and integration of the harsh realization that there is nothing one can do to alter the outcomes of a natural, or man-made, catastrophe. The horror in confronting one's finiteness, meaninglessness, negligibility, and powerlessness - is overpowering.

#### **Society phase II - DEPRESSION**

The more the members of society come to grips with the magnitude of the loss, or evil, or threat represented by the grief inducing events - the sadder they become.



Depression is often little more than suppressed or self-directed anger. The anger, in this case, is belatedly induced by an identified or diffuse source of threat, or of evil, or loss. It is a higher level variant of the "fight or flight" reaction, tampered by the rational understanding that the "source" is often too abstract to tackle directly.

### **Summary Phase II**

Thus, when the victim is most in need, terrified by his helplessness and adrift - society is immersed in depression and unable to provide a holding and supporting environment. Growth and healing is again retarded by social interaction. The victim's innate sense of annulment is enhanced by the self-addressed anger (=depression) of those around him.

### **PHASE III**

Both the victim and society react with RAGE to their predicaments. In an effort to narcissistically reassert himself, the victim develops a grandiose sense of anger directed at paranoidly selected, unreal, diffuse, and abstract targets (=frustration sources). By expressing aggression, the victim re-acquires mastery of the world and of himself.

Members of society use rage to re-direct the root cause of their depression (which is, as we said, self directed anger) and to channel it safely. To ensure that this expressed aggression alleviates their depression - real targets must be selected and real punishments meted out. In this respect, "social rage" differs from the victim's. The former is intended to sublimate aggression and channel it in a socially acceptable manner - the latter to reassert narcissistic self-love as an antidote to an all-devouring sense of helplessness.

In other words, society, by itself being in a state of rage, positively enforces the narcissistic rage reactions of the grieving victim. This, in the long run, is counter-productive, inhibits personal growth, and prevents healing. It also erodes the reality test of the victim and encourages self-delusions, paranoid ideation, and ideas of reference.

### **PHASE IV**

#### **Victim Phase IV - DEPRESSION**

As the consequences of narcissistic rage - both social and personal - grow more unacceptable, depression sets in. The victim internalizes his aggressive impulses. Self directed rage is safer but is the cause of great sadness and even suicidal ideation. The victim's depression is a

way of conforming to social norms. It is also instrumental in ridding the victim of the unhealthy residues of narcissistic regression. It is when the victim acknowledges the malignancy of his rage (and its anti-social nature) that he adopts a depressive stance.

#### **Society Phase IV - HELPLESSNESS**

People around the victim ("society") also emerge from their phase of rage transformed. As they realize the futility of their rage, they feel more and more helpless and devoid of options. They grasp their limitations and the irrelevance of their good intentions. They accept the inevitability of loss and evil and Kafkaesquely agree to live under an ominous cloud of arbitrary judgement, meted out by impersonal powers.

#### **Summary Phase IV**

Again, the members of society are unable to help the victim to emerge from a self-destructive phase. His depression is enhanced by their apparent helplessness. Their introversion and inefficacy induce in the victim a feeling of nightmarish isolation and alienation. Healing and growth are once again retarded or even inhibited.

#### **PHASE V**

#### **Victim Phase V - ACCEPTANCE AND MOVING ON**

Depression - if pathologically protracted and in conjunction with other mental health problems - sometimes leads to suicide. But more often, it allows the victim to process mentally hurtful and potentially harmful material and paves the way to acceptance. Depression is a laboratory of the psyche. Withdrawal from social pressures enables the direct transformation of anger into other emotions, some of them otherwise socially unacceptable. The honest encounter between the victim and his own (possible) death often becomes a cathartic and self-empowering inner dynamic. The victim emerges ready to move on.

#### **Society Phase V - DENIAL**

Society, on the other hand, having exhausted its reactive arsenal - resorts to denial. As memories fade and as the victim recovers and abandons his obsessive-compulsive dwelling on his pain - society feels morally justified to forget and forgive. This mood of historical revisionism, of moral leniency, of effusive forgiveness, of re-interpretation, and of a refusal to remember in detail - leads to a repression and denial of the painful events by society.

## **Summary Phase V**

This final mismatch between the victim's emotional needs and society's reactions is less damaging to the victim. He is now more resilient, stronger, more flexible, and more willing to forgive and forget. Society's denial is really a denial of the victim. But, having ridden himself of more primitive narcissistic defences - the victim can do without society's acceptance, approval, or look. Having endured the purgatory of grieving, he has now re-acquired his self, independent of society's acknowledgement.

*Also read:*

*Psychology of Torture*

*Back to La-la Land*

*Mourning the Narcissist*

*Surviving the Narcissist*

*The Three Forms of Closure*

*How Victims are Affected by Abuse*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

*The Malignant Optimism of the Abused*

*Spousal (Domestic) Abuse and Violence*

*Verbal and Emotional Abuse - Articles Menu*

Return

## **The Psychology of Torture**

There is one place in which one's privacy, intimacy, integrity and inviolability are guaranteed – one's body, a unique temple and a familiar territory of sense and personal history. The torturer invades, defiles and desecrates this shrine. He does so publicly, deliberately, repeatedly and, often, sadistically and sexually, with undisguised pleasure. Hence the all-pervasive, long-lasting, and, frequently, irreversible effects and outcomes of torture.

In a way, the torture victim's own body is rendered his worse enemy. It is corporeal agony that compels the sufferer to mutate, his identity to fragment, his ideals and principles to crumble. The body becomes an accomplice of the tormentor, an uninterrupted channel of communication, a treasonous, poisoned territory. It fosters a humiliating dependency of the abused on the perpetrator. Bodily needs denied – sleep, toilet, food, water – are wrongly perceived by the victim as the direct causes of his degradation and dehumanization. As he sees it, he is rendered bestial not by the sadistic bullies around him but by his own flesh.

The concept of "body" can easily be extended to

"family", or "home". Torture is often applied to kin and kith, compatriots, or colleagues. This intends to disrupt the continuity of "surroundings, habits, appearance, relations with others", as the CIA put it in one of its manuals. A sense of cohesive self-identity depends crucially on the familiar and the continuous. By attacking both one's biological body and one's "social body", the victim's psyche is strained to the point of dissociation.

Beatrice Patsalides describes this transmogrification thus in "Ethics of the Unspeakable: Torture Survivors in Psychoanalytic Treatment":

"As the gap between the 'I' and the 'me' deepens, dissociation and alienation increase. The subject that, under torture, was forced into the position of pure object has lost his or her sense of interiority, intimacy, and privacy. Time is experienced now, in the present only, and perspective – that which allows for a sense of relativity – is foreclosed. Thoughts and dreams attack the mind and invade the body as if the protective skin that normally contains our thoughts, gives us space to breathe in between the thought and the thing being thought about, and separates between inside and outside, past and present, me and you, was lost."

Torture robs the victim of the most basic modes of relating to reality and, thus, is the equivalent of cognitive death. Space and time are warped by sleep deprivation. The self ("I") is shattered. The tortured have nothing familiar to hold on to: family, home, personal belongings, loved ones, language, name. Gradually, they lose their mental resilience and sense of freedom. They feel alien – unable to communicate, relate, attach, or empathize with others.

Torture splinters early childhood grandiose narcissistic fantasies of uniqueness, omnipotence, invulnerability, and impenetrability. But it enhances the fantasy of merger with an idealized and omnipotent (though not benign) other – the inflicter of agony. The twin processes of individuation and separation are reversed. Torture is the ultimate act of perverted intimacy. The torturer invades the victim's body, pervades his psyche, and possesses his mind. Deprived of contact with others and starved for human interactions, the prey bonds with the predator. "Traumatic bonding", akin to the Stockholm Syndrome, is about hope and the search for meaning in the brutal and indifferent and nightmarish

universe of the torture cell.

The abuser becomes the black hole at the center of the victim's surrealistic galaxy, sucking in the sufferer's universal need for solace. The victim tries to "control" his tormentor by becoming one with him (introjecting him) and by appealing to the monster's presumably dormant humanity and empathy.

This bonding is especially strong when the torturer and the tortured form a dyad and "collaborate" in the rituals and acts of torture (for instance, when the victim is coerced into selecting the torture implements and the types of torment to be inflicted, or to choose between two evils).

The psychologist Shirley Spitz offers this powerful overview of the contradictory nature of torture in a seminar titled "The Psychology of Torture" (1989): "Torture is an obscenity in that it joins what is most private with what is most public. Torture entails all the isolation and extreme solitude of privacy with none of the usual security embodied therein... Torture entails at the same time all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibilities for camaraderie or shared experience. (The presence of an all powerful other with whom to merge, without the security of the other's benign intentions.)

A further obscenity of torture is the inversion it makes of intimate human relationships. The interrogation is a form of social encounter in which the normal rules of communicating, of relating, of intimacy are manipulated. Dependency needs are elicited by the interrogator, but not so they may be met as in close relationships, but to weaken and confuse. Independence that is offered in return for 'betrayal' is a lie. Silence is intentionally misinterpreted either as confirmation of information or as guilt for 'complicity'.

Torture combines complete humiliating exposure with utter devastating isolation. The final products and outcome of torture are a scarred and often shattered victim and an empty display of the fiction of power." Obsessed by endless ruminations, demented by pain and a continuum of sleeplessness – the victim regresses, shedding all but the most primitive defense mechanisms: splitting, narcissism, dissociation, Projective Identification, introjection, and cognitive dissonance. The victim constructs an alternative world, often suffering from depersonalization and

derealization, hallucinations, ideas of reference, delusions, and psychotic episodes.

Sometimes the victim comes to crave pain – very much as self-mutilators do – because it is a proof and a reminder of his individuated existence otherwise blurred by the incessant torture. Pain shields the sufferer from disintegration and capitulation. It preserves the veracity of his unthinkable and unspeakable experiences.

This dual process of the victim's alienation and addiction to anguish complements the perpetrator's view of his quarry as "inhuman", or "subhuman". The torturer assumes the position of the sole authority, the exclusive fount of meaning and interpretation, the source of both evil and good.

Torture is about reprogramming the victim to succumb to an alternative exegesis of the world, proffered by the abuser. It is an act of deep, indelible, traumatic indoctrination. The abused also swallows whole and assimilates the torturer's negative view of him and often, as a result, is rendered suicidal, self-destructive, or self-defeating.

Thus, torture has no cut-off date. The sounds, the voices, the smells, the sensations reverberate long after the episode has ended – both in nightmares and in waking moments. The victim's ability to trust other people – i.e., to assume that their motives are at least rational, if not necessarily benign – has been irrevocably undermined. Social institutions are perceived as precariously poised on the verge of an ominous, Kafkaesque mutation. Nothing is either safe, or credible anymore.

Victims typically react by undulating between emotional numbing and increased arousal: insomnia, irritability, restlessness, and attention deficits. Recollections of the traumatic events intrude in the form of dreams, night terrors, flashbacks, and distressing associations.

The tortured develop compulsive rituals to fend off obsessive thoughts. Other psychological sequelae reported include cognitive impairment, reduced capacity to learn, memory disorders, sexual dysfunction, social withdrawal, inability to maintain long-term relationships, or even mere intimacy, phobias, ideas of reference and superstitions, delusions, hallucinations, psychotic microepisodes, and emotional flatness.

Depression and anxiety are very common. These are forms and manifestations of self-directed aggression.

The sufferer rages at his own victimhood and resulting multiple dysfunction. He feels shamed by his new disabilities and responsible, or even guilty, somehow, for his predicament and the dire consequences borne by his nearest and dearest. His sense of self-worth and self-esteem are crippled.

In a nutshell, torture victims suffer from a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Their strong feelings of anxiety, guilt, and shame are also typical of victims of childhood abuse, domestic violence, and rape. They feel anxious because the perpetrator's behavior is seemingly arbitrary and unpredictable – or mechanically and inhumanly regular.

They feel guilty and disgraced because, to restore a semblance of order to their shattered world and a modicum of dominion over their chaotic life, they need to transform themselves into the cause of their own degradation and the accomplices of their tormentors.

The CIA, in its "Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual – 1983" (reprinted in the April 1997 issue of Harper's Magazine), summed up the theory of coercion thus:

"The purpose of all coercive techniques is to induce psychological regression in the subject by bringing a superior outside force to bear on his will to resist. Regression is basically a loss of autonomy, a reversion to an earlier behavioral level. As the subject regresses, his learned personality traits fall away in reverse chronological order. He begins to lose the capacity to carry out the highest creative activities, to deal with complex situations, or to cope with stressful interpersonal relationships or repeated frustrations." Inevitably, in the aftermath of torture, its victims feel helpless and powerless. This loss of control over one's life and body is manifested physically in impotence, attention deficits, and insomnia. This is often exacerbated by the disbelief many torture victims encounter, especially if they are unable to produce scars, or other "objective" proof of their ordeal. Language cannot communicate such an intensely private experience as pain.

Spitz makes the following observation:

"Pain is also unsharable in that it is resistant to language... All our interior states of consciousness: emotional, perceptual, cognitive and somatic can be described as having an object in the external world..."

This affirms our capacity to move beyond the boundaries of our body into the external, sharable world. This is the space in which we interact and communicate with our environment. But when we explore the interior state of physical pain we find that there is no object 'out there' – no external, referential content. Pain is not of, or for, anything. Pain is. And it draws us away from the space of interaction, the sharable world, inwards. It draws us into the boundaries of our body."

Bystanders resent the tortured because they make them feel guilty and ashamed for having done nothing to prevent the atrocity. The victims threaten their sense of security and their much-needed belief in predictability, justice, and rule of law. The victims, on their part, do not believe that it is possible to effectively communicate to "outsiders" what they have been through. The torture chambers are "another galaxy". This is how Auschwitz was described by the author K. Zetnik in his testimony in the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961.

Kenneth Pope in "Torture", a chapter he wrote for the "Encyclopedia of Women and Gender: Sex Similarities and Differences and the Impact of Society on Gender", quotes Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman:

"It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering."

But, more often, continued attempts to repress fearful memories result in psychosomatic illnesses (conversion). The victim wishes to forget the torture, to avoid re-experiencing the often life threatening abuse and to shield his human environment from the horrors. In conjunction with the victim's pervasive distrust, this is frequently interpreted as hypervigilance, or even paranoia. It seems that the victims can't win. Torture is forever.

#### ***Note – Why Do People Torture?***

We should distinguish functional torture from the sadistic variety. The former is calculated to extract information from the tortured or to punish them. It is measured, impersonal, efficient, and disinterested. The latter – the sadistic variety – fulfils the emotional needs of the perpetrator.



People who find themselves caught up in anomic states – for instance, soldiers in war or incarcerated inmates – tend to feel helpless and alienated. They experience a partial or total loss of control. They have been rendered vulnerable, powerless, and defenseless by events and circumstances beyond their influence.

Torture amounts to exerting an absolute and all-pervasive domination of the victim's existence. It is a coping strategy employed by torturers who wish to reassert control over their lives and, thus, to re-establish their mastery and superiority. By subjugating the tortured – they regain their self-confidence and regulate their sense of self-worth.

Other tormentors channel their negative emotions – pent up aggression, humiliation, rage, envy, diffuse hatred – and displace them. The victim becomes a symbol of everything that's wrong in the torturer's life and the situation he finds himself caught in. The act of torture amounts to misplaced and violent venting.

Many perpetrate heinous acts out of a wish to conform. Torturing others is their way of demonstrating obsequious obeisance to authority, group affiliation, collegiality, and adherence to the same ethical code of conduct and common values. They bask in the praise that is heaped on them by their superiors, fellow workers, associates, team mates, or collaborators. Their need to belong is so strong that it overpowers ethical, moral, or legal considerations.

Many offenders derive pleasure and satisfaction from sadistic acts of humiliation. To these, inflicting pain is fun. They lack empathy and so their victim's agonized reactions are merely cause for much hilarity.

Moreover, sadism is rooted in deviant sexuality. The torture inflicted by sadists is bound to involve perverted sex (rape, homosexual rape, voyeurism, exhibitionism, pedophilia, fetishism, and other paraphilias). Aberrant sex, unlimited power, excruciating pain – these are the intoxicating ingredients of the sadistic variant of torture.

Still, torture rarely occurs where it does not have the sanction and blessing of the authorities, whether local or national. A permissive environment is *sine qua non*. The more abnormal the circumstances, the less normative the milieu, the further the scene of the crime is from public scrutiny – the more is egregious torture likely to occur. This is especially true in totalitarian societies where the use of physical force to discipline or

eliminate dissent is an acceptable practice.

**Also Read:**

*The Business of Torture*

*The Argument for Torture*

*How Victims are Affected by Abuse*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

Return

# Trauma

# Torture

# Abuse

## **Effects and Consequences**

### **How Victims are Affected by Abuse**

Repeated abuse has long lasting pernicious and traumatic effects such as panic attacks, hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, flashbacks (intrusive memories), suicidal ideation, and psychosomatic symptoms. The victims experience shame, depression, anxiety, embarrassment, guilt, humiliation, abandonment, and an enhanced sense of vulnerability.

C-PTSD (Complex PTSD) has been proposed as a new mental health diagnosis by Dr. Judith Herman of Harvard University to account for the impact of extended periods of trauma and abuse.

In "*Stalking – An Overview of the Problem*" [Can J Psychiatry 1998;43:473–476], authors Karen M Abrams and Gail Erlick Robinson write:

*"Initially, there is often much denial by the victim.*

*Over time, however, the stress begins to erode the victim's life and psychological brutalisation results.*

*Sometimes the victim develops an almost fatal resolve that, inevitably, one day she will be murdered. Victims,*

*unable to live a normal life, describe feeling stripped of self-worth and dignity. Personal control and*

*resources, psychosocial development, social support, premorbid personality traits, and the severity of the*

*stress may all influence how the victim experiences and responds to it... Victims stalked by ex-lovers may*

*experience additional guilt and lowered self-esteem for perceived poor judgement in their relationship*

*choices. Many victims become isolated and deprived of support when employers or friends withdraw after also*

***being subjected to harassment or are cut off by the victim in order to protect them. Other tangible consequences include financial losses from quitting jobs, moving, and buying expensive security equipment in an attempt to gain privacy. Changing homes and jobs results in both material losses and loss of self-respect."***

Surprisingly, verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse have the same effects as the physical variety [Psychology Today, September/October 2000 issue, p.24]. Abuse of all kinds also interferes with the victim's ability to work. Abrams and Robinson wrote this [in "Occupational Effects of Stalking", Can J Psychiatry 2002;47:468–472]:

***"... (B)eing stalked by a former partner may affect a victim's ability to work in 3 ways. First, the stalking behaviours often interfere directly with the ability to get to work (for example, flattening tires or other methods of preventing leaving the home). Second, the workplace may become an unsafe location if the offender decides to appear. Third, the mental health effects of such trauma may result in forgetfulness, fatigue, lowered concentration, and disorganisation. These factors may lead to the loss of employment, with accompanying loss of income, security, and status."***

Still, it is hard to generalise. Victims are not a uniform lot. In some cultures, abuse is commonplace and accepted as a legitimate mode of communication, a sign of love and caring, and a boost to the abuser's self-image. In such circumstances, the victim is likely to adopt the norms of society and avoid serious trauma. Deliberate, cold-blooded, and premeditated torture has worse and longer-lasting effects than abuse meted out by the abuser in rage and loss of self-control. The existence of a loving and accepting social support network is another mitigating factor. Finally, the ability to express negative emotions safely and to cope with them constructively is crucial to healing.

Typically, by the time the abuse reaches critical and all-pervasive proportions, the abuser had already, spider-like, isolated his victim from family, friends, and colleagues. She is catapulted into a nether land, cult-like setting where reality itself dissolves into a continuing nightmare.

When she emerges on the other end of this wormhole, the abused woman (or, more rarely, man) feels helpless,

self-doubting, worthless, stupid, and a guilty failure for having botched her relationship and "abandoned" her "family". In an effort to regain perspective and avoid embarrassment, the victim denies the abuse or minimises it.

No wonder that survivors of abuse tend to be clinically depressed, neglect their health and personal appearance, and succumb to boredom, rage, and impatience. Many end up abusing prescription drugs or drinking or otherwise behaving recklessly.

Some victims even develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

***(I use "she" throughout this article but it applies to male victims as well)***

Contrary to popular misconceptions, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Acute Stress Disorder (or Reaction) are not typical responses to prolonged abuse. They are the outcomes of sudden exposure to severe or extreme stressors (stressful events). Yet, some victims whose life or body have been directly and unequivocally threatened by an abuser react by developing these syndromes. PTSD is, therefore, typically associated with the aftermath of physical and sexual abuse in both children and adults.

This is why another mental health diagnosis, C-PTSD (Complex PTSD) has been proposed by Dr. Judith Herman of Harvard

University to account for the impact of extended periods of trauma and abuse. It is described here:

***How Victims are Affected by Abuse***

One's (or someone else's) looming death, violation, personal injury, or powerful pain are sufficient to provoke the behaviours, cognitions, and emotions that together are known as PTSD. Even learning about such mishaps may be enough to trigger massive anxiety responses.

The first phase of PTSD involves incapacitating and overwhelming fear. The victim feels like she has been thrust into a nightmare or a horror movie. She is rendered helpless by her own terror. She keeps re-living the experience through recurrent and intrusive visual and auditory hallucinations ("flashbacks") or dreams. In some flashbacks, the victim completely lapses into a dissociative state and physically re-enacts the event while being thoroughly oblivious to her whereabouts. In an attempt to suppress this constant playback and the

attendant exaggerated startle response (jumpiness), the victim tries to avoid all stimuli associated, however indirectly, with the traumatic event. Many develop full-scale phobias (agoraphobia, claustrophobia, fear of heights, aversion to specific animals, objects, modes of transportation, neighbourhoods, buildings, occupations, weather, and so on).

Most PTSD victims are especially vulnerable on the anniversaries of their abuse. They try to avoid thoughts, feelings, conversations, activities, situations, or people who remind them of the traumatic occurrence ("triggers").

This constant hypervigilance and arousal, sleep disorders (mainly insomnia), the irritability ("short fuse"), and the inability to concentrate and complete even relatively simple tasks erode the victim's resilience. Utterly fatigued, most patients manifest protracted periods of numbness, automatism, and, in radical cases, near-catatonic posture. Response times to verbal cues increase dramatically. Awareness of the environment decreases, sometimes dangerously so. The victims are described by their nearest and dearest as "zombies", "machines", or "automata".

The victims appear to be sleepwalking, depressed, dysphoric, anhedonic (not interested in anything and find pleasure in nothing). They report feeling detached, emotionally absent, estranged, and alienated. Many victims say that their "life is over" and expect to have no career, family, or otherwise meaningful future.

The victim's family and friends complain that she is no longer capable of showing intimacy, tenderness, compassion, empathy, and of having sex (due to her post-traumatic "frigidity"). Many victims become paranoid, impulsive, reckless, and self-destructive.

Others somatise their mental problems and complain of numerous physical ailments. They all feel guilty, shameful, humiliated, desperate, hopeless, and hostile.

PTSD need not appear immediately after the harrowing experience. It can – and often is – delayed by days or even months. It lasts more than one month (usually much longer). Sufferers of PTSD report subjective distress (the manifestations of PTSD are ego-dystonic).

Their functioning in various settings – job performance, grades at school, sociability – deteriorates markedly.

The DSM-IV-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) criteria for diagnosing PTSD are far too restrictive.

PTSD seems to also develop in the wake of verbal and emotional abuse and in the aftermath of drawn out traumatic situations (such a nasty divorce). Hopefully, the text will be adapted to reflect this sad reality.

Victims of abuse in all its forms – verbal, emotional, financial, physical, and sexual – are often disorientated. They require not only therapy to heal their emotional wounds, but also practical guidance and topical education. At first, the victim is, naturally, distrustful and even hostile. The therapist or case worker must establish confidence and rapport painstakingly and patiently.

The therapeutic alliance requires constant reassurance that the environment and treatment modalities chosen are safe and supportive. This is not easy to do, partly because of objective factors such as the fact that the records and notes of the therapist are not confidential. The offender can force their disclosure in a court of law simply by filing a civil lawsuit against the survivor!

The first task is to legitimise and validate the victim's fears. This is done by making clear to her that she is not responsible for her abuse or guilty for what happened. Victimisation is the abuser's fault – it is not the victim's choice. Victims do not seek abuse – although, admittedly some of them keep finding abusive partners and forming relationships of co-dependence. Facing, reconstructing, and reframing the traumatic experiences is a crucial and indispensable first phase.

The therapist should present the victim with her own ambivalence and the ambiguity of her messages – but this ought to be done gently, non-judgementally, and without condemnation. The more willing and able the abuse survivor is to confront the reality of her mistreatment (and the offender), the stronger she would feel and the less guilty.

Typically, the patient's helplessness decreases together with her self-denial. Her self-esteem as well as her sense of self-worth stabilise. The therapist should emphasise the survivor's strengths and demonstrate how they can save her from a recurrence of the abuse or help her cope with it and with her abuser.

Education is an important tool in this process of recovery. The patient should be made aware of the prevalence and nature of violence against women and stalking, their emotional and physical effects, warning signs and red flags, legal redresses, coping strategies,

and safety precautions.

The therapist or social worker should provide the victim with lists of contacts – help organisations, law enforcement agencies, other women in her condition, domestic violence shelters, and victims' support groups both online and in her neighbourhood or city.

Knowledge empowers and reduces the victim's sense of isolation and worthlessness.

Helping the survivor regain control of her life is the over-riding goal of the entire therapeutic process. With this aim in mind, she should be encouraged to re-establish contact with family, friends, colleagues, and the community at large. The importance of a tightly-knit social support network cannot be exaggerated.

Ideally, after a period of combined tutoring, talk therapy, and (anti-anxiety or antidepressant) medications, the survivor will self-mobilise and emerge from the experience more resilient and assertive and less gullible and self-deprecating.

Return

## **Victim reaction to Abuse**

### **By Narcissists and Psychopaths**

Personality disorders are not only all-pervasive, but also diffuse and shape-shifting. It is taxing and emotionally harrowing to watch how a loved one is consumed by these pernicious and largely incurable conditions.

Victims adopt varying stances and react in different ways to the inevitable abuse involved in relationships with personality disordered patients.

#### ***1. Malignant Optimism***

A form of self-delusion, refusing to believe that some diseases are untreatable. Malignant optimists see signs of hope in every fluctuation, read meanings and patterns into every random occurrence, utterance, or slip. These Pollyanna defences are varieties of magical thinking.

"If only he tried hard enough", "If he only really wanted to heal", "If only we find the right therapy", "If only his defences were down", "There must be something good and worthwhile under the hideous facade", "No one can be that evil and destructive", "He must have meant it differently" "God, or a higher being, or the spirit, or the soul is the solution and the answer to my prayers".

From my book, "***Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited***":

*"The narcissist and psychopath hold such thinking in barely undisguised contempt. To them, it is a sign of weakness, the scent of prey, a gaping vulnerability. They use and abuse this human need for order, good, and meaning - as they use and abuse all other human needs. Gullibility, selective blindness, malignant optimism - these are the weapons of the beast. And the abused are hard at work to provide it with its arsenal."*

*Read "Is Your Cup Half-full or is it Half Empty?"*

## **2. Rescue Fantasies**

"It is true that he is chauvinistic and that his behaviour is unacceptable and repulsive. But all he needs is a little love and he will be straightened out. I will rescue him from his misery and misfortune. I will give him the love that he lacked as a child. Then his (narcissism, psychopathy, paranoia, reclusiveness) will vanish and we will live happily ever after."

## **3. Self-flagellation**

Constant feelings of guilt, self-reproach, self-recrimination and, thus, self-punishment.

The victim of sadists, paranoids, narcissists, borderlines, passive-aggressives, and psychopaths internalises the endless hectoring and humiliating criticism and makes them her own. She begins to self-punish, to withhold, to request approval prior to any action, to forgo her preferences and priorities, to erase her own identity – hoping to thus avoid the excruciating pains of her partner's destructive analyses.

The partner is often a willing participant in this shared psychosis. Such folie a deux can never take place without the full collaboration of a voluntarily subordinated victim. Such partners have a wish to be punished, to be eroded through constant, biting criticisms, unfavourable comparisons, veiled and not so veiled threats, acting out, betrayals and humiliations. It makes them feel cleansed, "holy", whole, and sacrificial. Many of these partners, when they realise their situation (it is very difficult to discern it from the inside), abandon the personality disordered partner and dismantle the relationship. Others prefer to believe in the healing power of love. But here love is wasted on a human shell, incapable of feeling anything but negative emotions.

## **4. Emulation**

The psychiatric profession uses the word:



"epidemiology" when it describes the prevalence of personality disorders. Are personality disorders communicable diseases? In a way, they are.

From my book, *"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"*:

*"Some people adopt the role of a professional victim. Their existence and very identity rests solely and entirely on their victimhood. They become self-centred, devoid of empathy, abusive, and exploitative. These victim "pros" are often more cruel, vengeful, vitriolic, lacking in compassion and violent than their abusers. They make a career of it. The affected entertain the (false) notion that they can compartmentalize their abusive (e.g., narcissistic, or psychopathic) behavior and direct it only at their victimizers. In other words, they trust in their ability to segregate their conduct and to be verbally abusive towards the abuser while civil and compassionate with others, to act with malice where their mentally-ill partner is concerned and with Christian charity towards all others. They believe that they can turn on and off their negative feelings, their abusive outbursts, their vindictiveness and vengefulness, their blind rage, their non-discriminating judgment. This, of course, is untrue. These behaviors spill over into daily transactions with innocent neighbors, colleagues, family members, co-workers, or customers. One cannot be partly or temporarily vindictive and judgmental any more than one can be partly or temporarily pregnant. To their horror, these victims discover that they have been transmuted and transformed into their worst nightmare: into their abusers - malevolent, vicious, lacking empathy, egotistical, exploitative, violent and abusive."*

Return

### **The Three Forms of Closure**

For her traumatic wounds to heal, the victim of abuse requires closure - one final interaction with her tormentor in which he, hopefully, acknowledges his misbehaviour and even tenders an apology. Fat chance. Few abusers - especially if they are narcissistic - are amenable to such weakling pleasantries. More often, the abused are left to wallow in a poisonous stew of misery, self-pity, and self-recrimination.

Depending on the severity, duration, and nature of the abuse, there are three forms of effective closure.

### ***Conceptual Closure***

This most common variant involves a frank dissection of the abusive relationship. The parties meet to analyze what went wrong, to allocate blame and guilt, to derive lessons, and to part ways cathartically cleansed. In such an exchange, a compassionate offender (quite the oxymoron, admittedly) offers his prey the chance to rid herself of cumulating resentment.

He also disabuses her of the notion that she, in any way, was guilty or responsible for her maltreatment, that it was all her fault, that she deserved to be punished, and that she could have saved the relationship (malignant optimism). With this burden gone, the victim is ready to resume her life and to seek companionship and love elsewhere.

### ***Retributive Closure***

When the abuse has been "gratuitous" (sadistic), repeated, and protracted, conceptual closure is not enough. Retribution is called for, an element of vengeance, of restorative justice and a restored balance. Recuperation hinges on punishing the delinquent and merciless party. The penal intervention of the Law is often therapeutic to the abused.

Some victims delude themselves into believing that their abuser is experiencing guilt and conscience pangs (which is rarely the case). They revel in his ostensible self-inflicted torment. His sleepless nights become their sweet revenge.

Regrettably, the victim's understandable emotions often lead to abusive (and illegal) acts. Many of the tormented stalk their erstwhile abusers and take the law into their own hands. Abuse tends to breed abuse all around, in both prey and predator.

### ***Dissociative Closure***

Absent the other two forms of closure, victims of egregious and prolonged mistreatment tend to repress their painful memories. In extremis, they dissociate. The Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) - formerly known as "Multiple Personality Disorder" - is thought to be such a reaction. The harrowing experiences are "sliced off", tucked away, and attributed to "another personality".

Sometimes, the victim "assimilates" his or her tormentor, and even openly and consciously identifies with him. This is the narcissistic defence. In his own anguished mind, the victim becomes omnipotent and,

therefore, invulnerable. He or she develops a False Self. The True Self is, thus, shielded from further harm and injury.

According to psychodynamic theories of psychopathology, repressed content rendered unconscious is the cause of all manner of mental health disorders. The victim thus pays a hefty price for avoiding and evading his or her predicament.

***Also Read***

***Narcissism By Proxy***

***Mourning the Narcissist***

***Surviving the Narcissist***

***The Vindictive Narcissist***

***The Narcissist as a Sadist***

***The Victims of the Narcissist***

***Narcissism and Other People's Guilt***

***Narcissists, Narcissistic Supply and Sources of Supply***

***Other People's Pain (Narcissism, Sadism, and Masochism)***

***The Malignant Optimism of the Abused (Victims of Narcissists)***

***How to Spot an Abuser on Your First Date***

***The Toxic Relationships Study List***

***"Trauma Bonding" and the Psychology of Torture***

***Coping with Your Abuser***

***Traumas as Social Interactions***

***Spousal (Domestic) Abuse and Violence***

***Verbal and Emotional Abuse - Articles Menu***

***HealthyPlace Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)***

***Community***

***Case Studies on the Psychopath and Narcissist***

***Survivors Support Group***

***Ask Sam on the Psychopath and Narcissist Survivors Support Group***

***Ask Sam on the Narcissistic Abuse Recovery Forum***

***Domestic Violence and Abuse statistics - Click here***

***RESOURCES***

***Verbal and Emotional Abuse on Suite101***

***Spousal (Domestic) Abuse and Violence on Suite101***

***Surviving the Narcissist***

***Question:***

Is there a point in waiting for the narcissist to heal? Can he ever get better?

**Answer:**

The victims of the narcissist's abusive conduct resort to fantasies and self-delusions to salve their pain.

**Rescue Fantasies**

"It is true that he is a chauvinistic narcissist and that his behaviour is unacceptable and repulsive. But all he needs is a little love and he will be straightened out. I will rescue him from his misery and misfortune. I will give him the love that he lacked as a child. Then his narcissism will vanish and we will live happily ever after."

**Loving a Narcissist**

I believe in the possibility of loving narcissists if one accepts them unconditionally, in a disillusioned and expectation-free manner.

Narcissists are narcissists. Take them or leave them. Some of them are lovable. Most of them are highly charming and intelligent. The source of the misery of the victims of the narcissist is their disappointment, their disillusionment, their abrupt and tearing and tearful realisation that they fell in love with an ideal of their own making, a phantasm, an illusion, a fata morgana. This "waking up" is traumatic. The narcissist always remains the same. It is the victim who changes.

It is true that narcissists present a luring facade in order to captivate Sources of Narcissistic Supply. But this facade is easy to penetrate because it is inconsistent and too perfect. The cracks are evident from day one but often ignored. Then there are those who **KNOWINGLY** and **WILLINGLY** commit their emotional wings to the burning narcissistic candle.

This is the catch-22. To try to communicate emotions to a narcissist is like discussing atheism with a religious fundamentalist.

Narcissists have emotions, very strong ones, so terrifyingly overpowering and negative that they hide them, repress, block and transmute them. They employ a myriad of defence mechanisms to cope with their repressed emotions: projective identification, splitting, projection, intellectualisation, rationalisation.

Any effort to relate to the narcissist emotionally is doomed to failure, alienation and rage. Any attempt to "understand" (in retrospect or prospectively) narcissistic behaviour patterns, reactions, or his inner world in emotional terms – is equally hopeless. Narcissists should be regarded as a force of nature or an accident

waiting to happen.

The Universe has no master-plot or mega-plan to deprive anyone of happiness. Being born to narcissistic parents, for instance, is not the result of a conspiracy. It is a tragic event, for sure. But it cannot be dealt with emotionally, without professional help, or haphazardly. Stay away from narcissists, or face them aided by your own self-discovery through therapy. It can be done.

Narcissists have no interest in emotional or even intellectual stimulation by significant others. Such feedback is perceived as a threat. Significant others in the narcissist's life have very clear roles: the accumulation and dispensation of past Primary Narcissistic Supply in order to regulate current Narcissistic Supply. Nothing less but definitely nothing more. Proximity and intimacy breed contempt. A process of devaluation is in full operation throughout the life of the relationship.

A passive witness to the narcissist's past accomplishments, a dispenser of accumulated Narcissistic Supply, a punching bag for his rages, a co-dependent, a possession (though not prized but taken for granted) and nothing much more. This is the ungrateful, **FULL TIME**, draining job of being the narcissist's significant other.

But humans are not instruments. To regard them as such is to devalue them, to reduce them, to restrict them, to prevent them from realising their potential. Inevitably, narcissists lose interest in their instruments, these truncated versions of full-fledged humans, once they cease to serve them in their pursuit of glory and fame. Consider "friendship" with a narcissist as an example of such thwarted relationships. One cannot really get to know a narcissist "friend". One cannot be friends with a narcissist and one cannot love a narcissist. Narcissists are addicts. They are no different to drug addicts. They are in pursuit of gratification through the drug known as Narcissistic Supply. Everything and **EVERYONE** around them is an object, a potential source (to be idealised) or not (and, then to be cruelly discarded). Narcissists home in on potential suppliers like cruise missiles. They are excellent at imitating emotions, at exhibiting the right behaviours on cue, and at manipulating.

All generalisations are false, of course, and there are bound to be some happy relationships with narcissists. I

discuss the narcissistic couple in one of my FAQs. One example of a happy marriage is when a somatic narcissist teams up with a cerebral one or vice versa. Narcissists can be happily married to submissive, subservient, self-deprecating, echoing, mirroring and indiscriminately supportive spouses. They also do well with masochists. But it is difficult to imagine that a healthy, normal person would be happy in such a folie a deux ("madness in twosome" or shared psychosis). It is also difficult to imagine a benign and sustained influence on the narcissist of a stable, healthy mate/spouse/partner. One of my FAQs is dedicated to this issue ("The Narcissist's Spouse / Mate / Partner"). BUT many a spouse/friend/mate/partner like to **BELIEVE** that – given sufficient time and patience – they will be the ones to rid the narcissist of his inner demons. They think that they can "rescue" the narcissist, shield him from his (distorted) self, as it were.

The narcissist makes use of this naiveté and exploits it to his benefit. The natural protective mechanisms, which are provoked in normal people by love – are cold bloodedly used by the narcissist to extract yet more Narcissistic Supply from his writhing victim.

The narcissist affects his victims by infiltrating their psyches, by penetrating their defences. Like a virus, it establishes a new genetic strain within his/her victims. It echoes through them, it talks through them, it walks through them. It is like the invasion of the body snatchers.

You should be careful to separate your self from the narcissist's seed inside you, this alien growth, this spiritual cancer that is the result of living with a narcissist. You should be able to tell apart the real you and the parts assigned to you by the narcissist. To cope with him/her, the narcissist forces you to "walk on eggshells" and develop a False Self of your own. It is nothing as elaborate as his False Self – but it is there, in you, as a result of the trauma and abuse inflicted upon you by the narcissist.

Thus, perhaps we should talk about VoNPD, another mental health diagnostic category – Victims of NPD. They experience shame and anger for their past helplessness and submissiveness. They are hurt and sensitised by the harrowing experience of sharing a simulated existence with a simulated person, the narcissist. They are scarred and often suffer from Post

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Some of them lash out at others, offsetting their frustration with bitter aggression.

Like his disorder, the narcissist is all-pervasive. Being the victim of a narcissist is a condition no less pernicious than being a narcissist. Great mental efforts are required to abandon a narcissist and physical separation is only the first (and least important) step.

One can abandon a narcissist – but the narcissist is slow to abandon his victims. He is there, lurking, rendering existence unreal, twisting and distorting with no respite, an inner, remorseless voice, lacking in compassion and empathy for its victim.

The narcissist is there in spirit long after it had vanished in the flesh. This is the real danger that the victims of the narcissist face: that they become like him, bitter, self-centred, lacking in empathy. This is the last bow of the narcissist, his curtain call, by proxy as it were.

### **Narcissistic Tactics**

The narcissist tends to surround himself with his inferiors (in some respect: intellectually, financially, physically). He limits his interactions with them to the plane of his superiority. This is the safest and fastest way to sustain his grandiose fantasies of omnipotence and omniscience, brilliance, ideal traits, perfection and so on.

Humans are interchangeable and the narcissist does not distinguish one individual from another. To him they are all inanimate elements of "his audience" whose job is to reflect his False Self. This generates a perpetual and permanent cognitive dissonance:

The narcissist despises the very people who sustain his Ego boundaries and functions. He cannot respect people so expressly and clearly inferior to him – yet he can never associate with people evidently on his level or superior to him, the risk of narcissistic injury in such associations being too great. Equipped with a fragile Ego, precariously teetering on the brink of narcissistic injury – the narcissist prefers the safe route. But he feels contempt for himself and for others for having preferred it.

Some narcissist are also psychopaths (suffer from the Antisocial PD) and/or sadists. Antisocials don't really enjoy hurting others – they simply don't care one way or the other. But sadists do enjoy it.

Classical narcissists do not enjoy wounding others – but

they do enjoy the sensation of unlimited power and the validation of their grandiose fantasies when they do harm others or are in the position to do so. It is more the **POTENTIAL** to hurt others than the actual act that turns them on.

### **The Neverending Story**

Even the official termination of a relationship with a narcissist is not the end of the affair. The Ex "belongs" to the narcissist. She is an inseparable part of his Pathological Narcissistic Space. This possessive streak survives the physical separation.

Thus, the narcissist is likely to respond with rage, seething envy, a sense of humiliation and invasion and violent-aggressive urges to an ex's new boyfriend, or new job (to her new life without him). Especially since it implies a "failure" on his part and, thus negates his grandiosity.

But there is a second scenario:

If the narcissist firmly believes (which is very rare) that the ex does not and will never represent any amount, however marginal and residual, of any kind (primary or secondary) of Narcissistic Supply – he remains utterly unmoved by anything she does and anyone she may choose to be with.

Narcissists do feel bad about hurting others and about the unsavoury course their lives tend to assume. Their underlying (and subconscious) ego-dystony (=feeling bad about themselves) was only recently discovered and described. But the narcissist feels bad only when his Supply Sources are threatened because of his behaviour or following a narcissistic injury in the course of a major life crisis.

The narcissist equates emotions with weakness. He regards the sentimental and the emotional with contempt. He looks down on the sensitive and the vulnerable. He derides and despises the dependent and the loving. He mocks expressions of compassion and passion. He is devoid of empathy. He is so afraid of his True Self that he would rather disparage it than admit to his own faults and "soft spots".

He likes to talk about himself in mechanical terms ("machine", "efficient", "punctual", "output", "computer"). He suppresses his human side diligently and with dedication. To him being human and survival are mutually exclusive propositions. He must choose and his choice is clear. The narcissist never looks back,



unless and until forced to by life's circumstances. All narcissists fear intimacy. But the cerebral narcissist deploys strong defences against it: "scientific detachment" (the narcissist as the eternal observer), intellectualising and rationalising his emotions away, intellectual cruelty (see my FAQ regarding inappropriate affect), intellectual "annexation" (he regards others as his extension, property, or turf), objectifying the other and so on. Even emotions that he does express (pathological envy, rage) have the not wholly unintended effect of alienating rather than creating intimacy.

### **Abandoning the Narcissist**

The narcissist initiates his own abandonment because of his fear of it. He is so terrified of losing his sources of Narcissistic Supply (and of being emotionally hurt) that he would rather "control", "master", or "direct" the potentially destabilising situation. Remember: the personality of the narcissist has a low level of organization. It is precariously balanced.

Being abandoned could cause a narcissistic injury so grave that the whole edifice can come crumbling down. Narcissists usually entertain suicidal ideation in such cases. But, if the narcissist had initiated and directed his own abandonment, if it is perceived as a goal he set to himself – he can and does avoid all these untoward consequences. (See the section about Emotional Involvement Prevention Mechanisms in the Essay.)

### **The Dynamics of the Relationship**

The narcissist lives in a fantasised world of ideal beauty, incomparable (imaginary) achievements, wealth, brilliance and unmitigated success. The narcissist denies his reality constantly. This is what I call the Grandiosity Gap – the abyss between his sense of entitlement grounded in his inflated grandiose fantasies – and his incommensurate reality and meagre accomplishments. The narcissist's partner is perceived by him to be merely a Source of Narcissistic Supply, an instrument, an extension of himself. It is inconceivable that – blessed by the constant presence of the narcissist – such a tool would malfunction. The needs and grievances of the partner are perceived by the narcissist as threats and slights.

The narcissist considers his very presence in the relationship as nourishing and sustaining. He feels entitled to the best others can offer without investing in

maintaining his relationships or in catering to the well-being of his "suppliers". To rid himself of deep-set feelings of (rather justified) guilt and shame – he pathologizes the partner.

He projects his own mental illness unto her. Through the intricate mechanism of projective identification he forces her to play an emergent role of "the sick" or "the weak" or "the naive" or "the dumb" or "the no good".

What he denies in himself, what he is loath to face in his own personality – he attributes to others and moulds them to conform to his prejudices against himself.

The narcissist must have the best, the most glamorous, stunning, talented, head turning, mind-boggling spouse in the entire world. Nothing short of this fantasy will do. To compensate for the shortcomings of his real life spouse – he invents an idealised figure and relates to it instead.

Then, when reality conflicts too often and too evidently with this figment – he reverts to devaluation. His behaviour turns on a dime and becomes threatening, demeaning, contemptuous, berating, reprimanding, destructively critical and sadistic – or cold, unloving, detached, and "clinical". He punishes his real life spouse for not living up to his fantasy, for "refusing" to be his Galathea, his Pygmalion, his ideal creation. The narcissist plays a wrathful and demanding God.

### **Moving On**

To preserve one's mental health – one must abandon the narcissist. One must move on.

Moving on is a process, not a decision or an event. First, one has to acknowledge and accept painful reality. Such acceptance is a volcanic, shattering, agonising series of nibbling thoughts and strong resistances. Once the battle is won, and harsh and agonizing realities are assimilated, one can move on to the learning phase.

### **Learning**

We label. We educate ourselves. We compare experiences. We digest. We have insights.

Then we decide and we act. This is "to move on".

Having gathered sufficient emotional sustenance, knowledge, support and confidence, we face the battlefields of our relationships, fortified and nurtured.

This stage characterises those who do not mourn – but fight; do not grieve – but replenish their self-esteem; do not hide – but seek; do not freeze – but move on.

### **Grieving**

Having been betrayed and abused – we grieve. We grieve for the image we had of the traitor and abuser – the image that was so fleeting and so wrong. We mourn the damage he did to us. We experience the fear of never being able to love or to trust again – and we grieve this loss. In one stroke, we lost someone we trusted and even loved, we lost our trusting and loving selves and we lost the trust and love that we felt. Can anything be worse?

The emotional process of grieving has many phases. At first, we are dumbfounded, shocked, inert, immobile. We play dead to avoid our inner monsters. We are ossified in our pain, cast in the mould of our reticence and fears. Then we feel enraged, indignant, rebellious and hateful. Then we accept. Then we cry. And then – some of us – learn to forgive and to pity. And this is called healing.

All stages are absolutely necessary and good for you. It is bad not to rage back, not to shame those who shamed us, to deny, to pretend, to evade. But it is equally bad to get fixated on our rage. Permanent grieving is the perpetuation of our abuse by other means.

By endlessly recreating our harrowing experiences, we unwillingly collaborate with our abuser to perpetuate his or her evil deeds. It is by moving on that we defeat our abuser, minimising him and his importance in our lives. It is by loving and by trusting anew that we annul that which was done to us. To forgive is never to forget. But to remember is not necessarily to re-experience.

### **Forgiving and Forgetting**

Forgiving is an important capability. It does more for the forgiver than for the forgiven. But it should not be a universal, indiscriminate behaviour. It is legitimate not to forgive sometimes. It depends, of course, on the severity or duration of what was done to you.

In general, it is unwise and counter-productive to apply to life "universal" and "immutable" principles. Life is too chaotic to succumb to rigid edicts. Sentences which start with "I never" or "I always" are not very credible and often lead to self-defeating, self-restricting and self-destructive behaviours.

Conflicts are an important and integral part of life. One should never seek them out, but when confronted with a conflict, one should not avoid it. It is through conflicts and adversity as much as through care and love that we grow.

Human relationships are dynamic. We must assess our

friendships, partnerships, even our marriages periodically. In and by itself, a common past is insufficient to sustain a healthy, nourishing, supportive, caring and compassionate relationship. Common memories are a necessary but not a sufficient condition. We must gain and regain our friendships on a daily basis. Human relationships are a constant test of allegiance and empathy.

### **Remaining Friends with the Narcissist**

Can't we act civilised and remain on friendly terms with our narcissist ex?

Never forget that narcissists (full fledged ones) are nice and friendly only when:

- a. They want something from you – Narcissistic Supply, help, support, votes, money... They prepare the ground, manipulate you and then come out with the "small favour" they need or ask you blatantly or surreptitiously for Narcissistic Supply ("What did you think about my performance...", "Do you think that I really deserve the Nobel Prize?").
- b. They feel threatened and they want to neuter the threat by smothering it with oozing pleasantries.
- c. They have just been infused with an overdose of Narcissistic Supply and they feel magnanimous and magnificent and ideal and perfect. To show magnanimity is a way of flaunting one's impeccable divine credentials. It is an act of grandiosity. You are an irrelevant prop in this spectacle, a mere receptacle of the narcissist's overflowing, self-contented infatuation with his False Self.

This beneficence is transient. Perpetual victims often tend to thank the narcissist for "little graces". This is the Stockholm syndrome: hostages tend to emotionally identify with their captors rather than with the police. We are grateful to our abusers and tormentors for ceasing their hideous activities and allowing us to catch our breath.

Some people say that they prefer to live with narcissists, to cater to their needs and to succumb to their whims because this is the way they have been conditioned in early childhood. It is only with narcissists that they feel alive, stimulated and excited. The world glows in Technicolor in the presence of a narcissist and decays to sepia colours in his absence.

I see nothing inherently "wrong" with that. The test is this: if someone were to constantly humiliate and abuse you verbally using Archaic Chinese – would you have felt humiliated and abused? Probably not. Some people have been conditioned by the narcissistic Primary Objects in their lives (parents or caregivers) to treat narcissistic abuse as Archaic Chinese, to turn a deaf ear. This technique is effective in that it allows the inverted narcissist (the narcissist's willing mate) to experience only the good aspects of living with a narcissist: his sparkling intelligence, the constant drama and excitement, the lack of intimacy and emotional attachment (some people prefer this). Every now and then the narcissist breaks into abuse in Archaic Chinese. So what, who understands Archaic Chinese anyway, says the Inverted Narcissist to herself.

I have only one nagging doubt, though:

If the relationship with a narcissist is so rewarding, why are inverted narcissists so unhappy, so ego-dystonic, so in need of help (professional or otherwise)? Aren't they victims who simply experience the Stockholm syndrome (=identifying with the kidnapper rather than with the Police) and who deny their own torment?

### **Narcissists and Abandonment**

Narcissists are terrified of being abandoned exactly as are codependents and Borderlines.

But their solution is different.

Codependents cling. Borderlines are emotionally labile and react disastrously to the faintest hint of being abandoned.

Narcissists facilitate their own abandonment. They make sure that they are abandoned.

This way they achieve two goals:

1. Getting it over with – The narcissist has a very low threshold of tolerance to uncertainty and inconvenience, emotional or material.

Narcissists are very impatient and "spoiled".

They cannot delay gratification or impending doom. They must have it all now, good or bad.

2. By bringing the feared abandonment about, the narcissist can lie to himself persuasively. "She didn't abandon me, it is I who abandoned her. I controlled the situation. It was all my doing, so I was really not abandoned, was I now?" In time, the narcissist adopts this "official version" as the truth. He might say: "I abandoned her

emotionally and sexually long before she left."

This is one of the important Emotional Involvement Prevention Mechanisms (EIPM) that I write about in the Essay.

### **Why the Failing Relationships?**

Narcissists hate happiness and joy and ebullience and vivaciousness – in short, they hate life itself.

The roots of this bizarre propensity can be traced to a few psychological dynamics, which operate concurrently (it is very confusing to be a narcissist).

First, there is pathological envy.

The narcissist is constantly envious of other people: their successes, their property, their character, their education, their children, their ideas, the fact that they can feel, their good moods, their past, their future, their present, their spouses, their mistresses or lovers, their location...

Almost anything can be the trigger of a bout of biting, acidulous envy. But there is nothing, which reminds the narcissist more of the totality of his envious experiences than happiness. Narcissists lash out at happy people out of their own nagging sense of deprivation.

Then there is narcissistic hurt.

The narcissist regards himself as the centre of the world and the epicentre of the lives of his closest, nearest and dearest. He is the source of all emotions, responsible for all developments, positive and negative alike, the axis, the prime cause, the only cause, the mover, the shaker, the broker, the pillar, forever indispensable.

It is therefore a bitter and sharp rebuke to this grandiose fantasy to see someone else happy for reasons that have nothing to do with the narcissist. It painfully serves to illustrate to him that he is but one of many causes, phenomena, triggers and catalysts in other people's lives. That there are things happening outside the orbit of his control or initiative. That he is not privileged or unique.

The narcissist uses projective identification. He channels his negative emotions through other people, his proxies. He induces unhappiness and gloom in others to enable him to experience his own misery. Inevitably, he attributes the source of such sadness either to himself, as its cause – or to the "pathology" of the sad person.

"You are constantly depressed, you should really see a therapist" is a common sentence.

The narcissist – in an effort to maintain the depressive state until it serves some cathartic purpose – strives to perpetuate it by constantly reminding of its existence. "You look sad/bad/pale today. Is anything wrong? Can I help you? Things haven't been going so well lately?" Last but not least is the exaggerated fear of losing control.

The narcissist feels that he controls his human environment mostly by manipulation and mainly by emotional extortion and distortion. This is not far from reality. The narcissist suppresses any sign of emotional autonomy. He feels threatened and belittled by an emotion not directly or indirectly fostered by him or by his actions. Counteracting someone else's happiness is the narcissist's way of reminding everyone: I am here, I am omnipotent, you are at my mercy and you will feel happy only when I tell you to.

### **Living with a Narcissist**

You cannot change people, not in the real, profound, deep sense. You can only adapt to them and adapt them to you. If you do find your narcissist rewarding at times – you should consider doing these:

1. Determine your limits and boundaries. How much and in which ways can you adapt to him (i.e., accept him **AS HE IS**) and to which extent and in which ways would you like him to adapt to you (i.e., accept you as you are). Act accordingly. Accept what you have decided to accept and reject the rest. Change in you what you are willing and able to change – and ignore the rest. Conclude an unwritten contract of co-existence (could be written if you are more formally inclined).

2. Try to maximise the number of times that "...his walls are down", that you "...find him totally fascinating and everything I desire". What makes him be and behave this way? Is it something that you say or do? Is it preceded by events of a specific nature? Is there anything you can do to make him behave this way more often?

Remember, though:

Sometimes we mistake guilt and self-assumed blame for love.

Committing suicide for someone else's sake is not love.

Sacrificing yourself for someone else is not love.

It is domination, codependence, and counter-dependence.

You control your narcissist by giving, as much as he controls you through his pathology.

Your unconditional generosity sometimes prevents him from facing his True Self and thus healing.

It is impossible to have a relationship with a narcissist that is meaningful to the narcissist.

It is, of course, possible to have a relationship with a narcissist that is meaningful to you (see FAQ 66).

You modify your behaviour in order to secure the narcissist's continuing love, not in order to be abandoned.

This is the root of the perniciousness of this phenomenon:

The narcissist is a meaningful, crucially significant figure ("object") in the inverted narcissist's life.

This is the narcissist's leverage over the inverted narcissist. And since the inverted narcissist is usually very young when making the adaptation to the narcissist – it all boils down to fear of abandonment and death in the absence of care and sustenance.

The inverted narcissist's accommodation of the narcissist is as much a wish to gratify one's narcissist (parent) as the sheer terror of forever withholding gratification from one's self.

### **The Need to be Hopeful**

I understand the need to be hopeful.

There are gradations of narcissism. In my writings I am referring to the extreme and ultimate form of narcissism, the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). The prognosis for those merely with narcissistic traits or a narcissistic style is far better than the healing prospects of a full-fledged narcissist.

We often confuse shame with guilt.

Narcissists feel shameful when confronted with a failure. They feel (narcissistically) injured. Their omnipotence is threatened, their sense of perfection and uniqueness is questioned. They are enraged, engulfed by self-reprimand, self-loathing and internalised violent urges.

The narcissist punishes himself for failing to be God – not for mistreating others.

The narcissist makes an effort to communicate his pain and shame in order to elicit the Narcissistic Supply he needs to restore and regulate his failing sense of self-



worth. In doing so, the narcissist resorts to the human vocabulary of empathy. The narcissist will say anything to obtain Narcissistic Supply. It is a manipulative ploy – not a confession of real emotions or an authentic description of internal dynamics.

Yes, the narcissist is a child – but a very young one.

Yes, he can tell right from wrong – but is indifferent to both.

Yes, a process of "re-parenting" (what Kohut called a "self-object") is required to foster growth and maturation. In the best of cases, it takes years and the prognosis is dismal.

Yes, some narcissists make it. And their mates or spouses or children or colleagues or lovers rejoice.

But is the fact that people survive tornadoes – a reason to go out and seek one?

The narcissist is very much attracted to vulnerability, to unstable or disordered personalities or to his inferiors.

Such people constitute secure Sources of Narcissistic Supply. The inferior offer adulation. The mentally disturbed, the traumatised, the abused become dependent and addicted to him. The vulnerable can be easily and economically manipulated without fear of repercussions.

I think that "a healed narcissist" is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron (though there may be exceptions, of course).

Still, healing (not only of narcissists) is dependent upon and derived from a sense of security in a relationship.

The narcissist is not particularly interested in healing.

He tries to optimise his returns, taking into consideration the scarcity and finiteness of his resources. Healing, to him, is simply a bad business proposition.

In the narcissist's world being accepted or cared for (not to mention loved) is a foreign language. It is meaningless.

One might recite the most delicate haiku in Japanese and it would still remain meaningless to a non-Japanese.

That non-Japanese are not adept at Japanese does not diminish the value of the haiku or of the Japanese language, needless to say.

Narcissists damage and hurt but they do so offhandedly and naturally, as an after-thought and reflexively.

They are aware of what they are doing to others – but they do not care.

Sometimes, they sadistically taunt and torment people – but they do not perceive this to be evil – merely amusing.

They feel that they are entitled to their pleasure and gratification (Narcissistic Supply is often obtained by subjugating and subsuming others).

They feel that others are less than human, mere extensions of the narcissist, or instruments to fulfil the narcissist's wishes and obey his often capricious commands.

The narcissist feels that no evil can be inflicted on machines, instruments, or extensions. He feels that his needs justify his actions.

***Also Read***

***Codependence, Counterdependence and Dependent Personality Disorder***

***The Dependent***

***Back to La-la Land***

***Other People's Pain***

***A Letter about Trust***

***The Guilt of Others***

***Narcissism By Proxy***

***The Inverted Narcissist***

***The Narcissistic Couple***

***The Narcissist as a Sadist***

***Mourning the Narcissist***

***Abusing the Narcissist***

***How to Cope with a Narcissist***

***The Extramarital Narcissist***

***The Spouse / Mate / Partner***

***Exploitation by a Narcissist***

***The Narcissist and His Family***

***Narcissists, Sex and Fidelity***

***The Victims of the Narcissist***

***Narcissism, Love and Healing***

***The Vindictive Narcissist***

***Narcissists and Women***

***The Two Loves of the Narcissist***

***The Malignant Optimism of the Abused***

***Grandiosity and Intimacy - The Roots of Paranoia***

***Narcissists, Narcissistic Supply and Sources of Supply***

***How Victims are Affected by Abuse***

***Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)***

***Recovery and Healing from Trauma and Abuse***

## *The Conflicts of Therapy*

Return

### **Mourning the Narcissist**

#### ***Question:***

If the narcissist is as abusive as you say – why do we react so badly when he leaves?

#### ***Answer:***

At the commencement of the relationship, the Narcissist is a dream-come-true. He is often intelligent, witty, charming, good looking, an achiever, empathetic, in need of love, loving, caring, attentive and much more. He is the perfect bundled answer to the nagging questions of life: finding meaning, companionship, compatibility and happiness. He is, in other words, ideal.

It is difficult to let go of this idealized figure.

Relationships with narcissists inevitably and invariably end with the dawn of a double realisation. The first is that one has been (ab)used by the narcissist and the second is that one was regarded by the narcissist as a disposable, dispensable and interchangeable instrument (object).

The assimilation of this new gained knowledge is an excruciating process, often unsuccessfully completed. People get fixated at different stages. They fail to come to terms with their rejection as human beings – the most total form of rejection there is.

We all react to loss. Loss makes us feel helpless and objectified. When our loved ones die – we feel that Nature or God or Life treated us as playthings. When we divorce (especially if we did not initiate the break-up), we often feel that we have been exploited and abused in the relationship, that we are being "dumped", that our needs and emotions are ignored. In short, we again feel objectified.

Losing the narcissist is no different to any other major loss in life. It provokes a cycle of bereavement and grief (as well as some kind of mild post traumatic stress syndrome in cases of severe abuse). This cycle has four phases: denial, rage, sadness and acceptance.

Denial can assume many forms. Some go on pretending that the narcissist is still a part of their life, even going to the extreme of "interacting" with the narcissist by pretending to "communicate" with him or to "meet" him (through others, for instance).

Others develop persecutory delusions, thus incorporating the imaginary narcissist into their lives as an ominous and dark presence. This ensures "his" continued "interest" in them – however malevolent and threatening that "interest" is perceived to be. These are radical denial mechanisms, which border on the psychotic and often dissolve into brief psychotic micro-episodes.

More benign and transient forms of denial include the development of ideas of reference. The narcissist's every move or utterance is interpreted to be directed at the suffering person, his ex, and to carry a hidden message which can be "decoded" only by the recipient.

Others deny the very narcissistic nature of the narcissist. They attribute his abusive conduct to ignorance, mischief, lack of self-control (due to childhood abuse or trauma), or benign intentions. This denial mechanism leads them to believe that the narcissist is really not a narcissist but someone who is not aware of his "true" being, or someone who merely and innocently enjoys mind games and toying with people's lives, or an unwitting part of a dark conspiracy to defraud and abuse gullible victims.

Often the narcissist is depicted as obsessed or possessed – imprisoned by his "invented" condition and, really, deep inside, a nice and gentle and lovable person. At the healthier end of the spectrum of denial reactions we find the classical denial of loss – the disbelief, the hope that the narcissist may return, the suspension and repression of all information to the contrary.

Denial in mentally healthy people quickly evolves into rage. There are a few types of rage. Rage can be focussed and directed at the narcissist, at other facilitators of the loss, such as the narcissist's lover, or at specific circumstances. It can be directed at oneself – which often leads to depression, suicidal ideation, self-mutilation and, in some cases, suicide. Or, it can be diffuse, all-pervasive, all-encompassing and engulfing. Such loss-related rage can be intense and in bursts or osmotic and permeate the whole emotional landscape. Rage gives place to sadness. It is the sadness of the trapped animal, an existential angst mixed with acute depression. It involves dysphoria (inability to rejoice, to be optimistic, or expectant) and anhedonia (inability to experience pleasure or to find meaning in life). It is a paralysing sensation, which slows one down and

enshronds everything in the grey veil of randomness. It all looks meaningless and empty.

This, in turn, gives place to gradual acceptance, renewed energy, and bouts of activity. The narcissist is gone both physically and mentally. The void left in his wake still hurts and pangs of regret and hope still exist. But, on the whole, the narcissist is transformed into a narrative, a symbol, another life experience, or a (tedious) cliché. He is no longer omni-present and his former victim entertains no delusions as to the one-sided and abusive nature of the relationship or as to the possibility and desirability of its renewal.

*Also Read*

*The Inverted Narcissist*

*Ideas of Reference*

*Back to La-la Land*

*The Psychology of Torture*

*The Three Forms of Closure*

*Traumas as Social Interactions*

*The Malignant Optimism of the Abused*

*How Victims are Affected by Abuse*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

*Recovery and Healing from Trauma and Abuse*

*The Conflicts of Therapy*

Return

**The Inverted Narcissist**

**The Clinical Picture and Developmental Roots -**

**Opening Remarks**

**Terminology**

***Codependents***

People who depend on other people for their emotional gratification and the performance of Ego or daily functions. They are needy, demanding, and submissive. They fear abandonment, cling and display immature behaviours in their effort to maintain the "relationship" with their companion or mate upon whom they depend. No matter what abuse is inflicted upon them – they remain in the relationship. By eagerly becoming victims, codependents seek to control their abusers. See also a description of the Dependent Personality Disorder - or its definition in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR, 2000).

***Inverted Narcissist***

Also called "covert narcissist", this is a co-dependent who depends exclusively on narcissists (narcissist-co-dependent). If you are living with a narcissist, have a relationship with one, if you are married to one, if you are working with a narcissist, etc. – it does **NOT** mean that you are an inverted narcissist.

To "qualify" as an inverted narcissist, you must **CRAVE** to be in a relationship with a narcissist, regardless of any abuse inflicted on you by him/her. You must **ACTIVELY** seek relationships with narcissists and **ONLY** with narcissists, no matter what your (bitter and traumatic) past experience has been. You must feel **EMPTY** and **UNHAPPY** in relationships with **ANY OTHER** kind of person. Only then, and if you satisfy the other diagnostic criteria of a Dependent Personality Disorder, can you be safely labelled an "inverted narcissist".

### ***Counterdependents***

Most "classical" (overt) narcissists are counterdependent. Their emotions and needs are buried under "scar tissue" which had formed, coalesced, and hardened during years of one form of abuse or another. Grandiosity, a sense of entitlement, a lack of empathy, and overweening haughtiness usually hide gnawing insecurity and a fluctuating sense of self-worth. Counterdependents are contumacious (reject and despise authority), fiercely independent, controlling, self-centered, and aggressive. They fear intimacy and are locked into cycles of hesitant approach followed by avoidance of commitment. They are "lone wolves" and bad team players.

Counterdependence is a reaction formation. The counterdependent dreads his own weaknesses. He seeks to overcome them by projecting an image of omnipotence, omniscience, success, self-sufficiency, and superiority.

### ***Introduction***

Codependence is an important and integral part of narcissism. Narcissists are either counterdependent or codependent (Inverted).

The DSM-IV-TR uses 9 criteria to define the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). It is sufficient to show signs of 5 of them to be diagnosed as a narcissist. Thus, theoretically, it is possible to have NPD without being grandiose.

Many researchers (Alexander Lowen, Jeffrey Satinover,

Theodore Millon and others) suggested a "taxonomy" of pathological narcissism. They divided narcissists to sub-groups (very much as I did with my somatic versus cerebral narcissist dichotomy).

Lowen, for instance, talks about the "phallic" narcissist versus others. Satinover and Millon make a very important distinction between narcissists who were raised by "classically" abusive parents – and those who were raised by doting and smothering or domineering mothers.

Glenn O. Gabbard in "Psychodynamic Psychiatry in Clinical Practice" [The DSM-IV-TR Edition. Comments on Cluster B Personality Disorders – Narcissistic.

American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 2000] we find this:

***"...what definitive criteria can be used to differentiate healthy from pathological narcissism? The time honoured criteria of psychological health – to love and to work – are only partly useful in answering this question."***

***"An individual's work history may provide little help in making the distinction. Highly disturbed narcissistic individuals may find extraordinary success in certain professions, such as big business, the arts, politics, the entertainment industry, athletics and televangelism field. In some cases, however, narcissistic pathology may be reflected in a superficial quality to one's professional interests, as though achievement in and acclaim are more important than mastery of the field itself.***

***Pathological forms of narcissism are more easily identified by the quality of the individual's relationships.***

***One tragedy affecting these people is their inability to love. Healthy interpersonal relationships can be recognised by qualities such as empathy and concern for the feelings of others, a genuine interest in the ideas of others, the ability to tolerate ambivalence in long-term relationships without giving up, and a capacity to acknowledge one's own contribution to interpersonal conflicts. People who are characterised by these qualities may at times use others to gratify their own needs, but the tendency occurs in the broader context of sensitive interpersonal relatedness rather than as a pervasive style of dealing with other people. On the other hand, the person with a Narcissistic Personality Disorder approaches people as***

*objects to be used up and discarded according to his or her needs, without regard for their feelings.*

*People are not viewed as having a separate existence or as having needs of their own. The individual with a Narcissistic Personality Disorder frequently ends a relationship after a short time, usually when the other person begins to make demands stemming from for his or her own needs. Most importantly, such relationships clearly do not 'work' in terms of the narcissist's ability to maintain his or her own sense of self-esteem."*

*"...These criteria [the DSM-IV-TR's] identify a certain kind of narcissistic patient – specifically, the arrogant, boastful, 'noisy' individual who demands to be in the spotlight. However, they fail to characterise the shy, quietly grandiose, narcissistic individual whose extreme sensitivity to slights leads to an assiduous avoidance of the spotlight."*

The DSM-III-R alluded to at least two types of narcissists, but the DSM-IV-TR committee chose to delete this:

*"...included criterion, 'reacts to criticism with feelings of rage, shame, or humiliation (even not if expressed)' due to lack of 'specificity'."*

Other theoreticians, clinicians and researchers similarly suggested a division between "the oblivious narcissist" (a.k.a. overt) and "the hypervigilant narcissist" (a.k.a. covert).

### **The Compensatory versus the Classic Narcissist**

Another interesting distinction, suggested by Dave Kelly in his excellent PYPES Web site (<http://www.ptypes.com>) is between the Compensatory Type NPD and the Classic NPD (described in the DSM-IV-TR).

Here are the Compensatory NPD criteria according to Dave Kelly:

*"Personality Types proposes Compensatory Narcissistic Personality Disorder as a pervasive pattern of unstable, covert narcissistic behaviours that derive from an underlying sense of insecurity and weakness rather than from genuine feelings of self-confidence and high self-esteem, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by six (or more) of the criteria below.*

*The basic trait of the Compensatory Narcissistic Personality Type is a pattern of overtly narcissistic*



*behaviours (that) derive from an underlying sense of insecurity and weakness, rather than from genuine feelings of self-confidence and high self-esteem."*

*The Compensatory Narcissistic Personality Type:*

- *Seeks to create an illusion of superiority and to build up an image of high self-worth [Millon];*
- *Strives for recognition and prestige to compensate for the lack of a feeling of self-worth;*
- *May "acquire a deprecatory attitude in which the achievements of others are ridiculed and degraded" [Millon];*
- *Has persistent aspirations for glory and status [Millon];*
- *Has a tendency to exaggerate and boast [Millon];*
- *Is sensitive to how others react to him, watches and listens carefully for critical judgement, and feels slighted by disapproval [Millon];*
- *"Is prone to feel shamed and humiliated and especially (anxious) and vulnerable to the judgements of others" [Millon];*
- *Covers up a sense of inadequacy and deficiency with pseudo-arrogance and pseudo-grandiosity [Millon];*
- *Has a tendency to periodic hypochondria [Forman];*
- *Alternates between feelings of emptiness and deadness and states of excitement and excess energy [Forman];*
- *Entertains fantasies of greatness, constantly striving for perfection, genius, or stardom [Forman];*
- *Has a history of searching for an idealised partner and has an intense need for affirmation and confirmation in relationships [Forman];*
- *Frequently entertains a wishful, exaggerated and unrealistic concept of himself, which he can't possibly measure up to [Reich];*
- *Produces (too quickly) work not up to the level of his abilities because of an overwhelmingly strong need for the immediate gratification of success [Reich];*
- *Is touchy, quick to take offence at the slightest provocation, continually anticipating attack*

*and danger, reacting with anger and fantasies of revenge when he feels himself frustrated in his need for constant admiration [Reich];*

- *Is self-conscious, due to a dependence on approval from others [Reich];*
- *Suffers regularly from repetitive oscillations of self-esteem [Reich];*
- *Seeks to undo feelings of inadequacy by forcing everyone's attention and admiration upon himself [Reich];*
- *May react with self-contempt and depression to the lack of fulfilment of his grandiose expectations [Riso].*

**Sources:**

*Forman, Max. Narcissistic Disorders and the Oedipal Fixations. In Feldstein, J.J. (Ed.), The Annual of Psychoanalysis. Volume IV. New York: International Universities [1976] pp. 65-92.*

*Millon, Theodore, and Roger D. Davis. Disorders of Personality: DSM-IV and Beyond. 2nd Ed. New York: Wiley, [1996] pp. 411-12.*

*Reich, Annie, [1986]. Pathological Forms of Self-Esteem Regulation. In Morrison, A. P., (Ed.), Essential Papers on Narcissism. pp. 44-60. Reprint from 1960. Psychoanalytic Study of the Child. Volume 15, pp. 205-32.*

*Riso, Don Richard. Personality Types: Using the Enneagram for Self-Discovery. Boston: Houghton Mifflin [1987] pp. 102-3.*

*Speculative Diagnostic Criteria for Compensatory Narcissistic Personality Disorder*

*A pervasive pattern of self-inflation, pseudo-confidence, exhibitionism, and strivings for prestige, that compensates for feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, as indicated by the following:*

- *Pseudo-confidence compensating for an underlying condition of insecurity and feelings of helplessness;*
- *Pretentiousness, self-inflation;*
- *Exhibitionism in the pursuit of attention, recognition, and glory;*
- *Strivings for prestige to enhance self-esteem;*
- *Deceitfulness and manipulateness in the service of maintaining feelings of superiority;*
- *Idealisation in relationships;*
- *Fragmentation of the self: feelings of*

*emptiness and deadness;*

- *A proud, hubristic disposition;*
- *Hypochondriasis;*
- *Substance abuse;*
- *Self-destructiveness.*

*Compensatory Narcissistic Personality Disorder corresponds to Ernest Jones' narcissistic "God Complex", Annie Reich's "Compensatory Narcissism", Heinz Kohut's "Narcissistic Personality Disorder", and Theodore Millon's "Compensatory Narcissist".*

*Millon, Theodore, and Roger D. Davis. Disorders of Personality: DSM-IV and Beyond. 2nd ed. New York: Wiley, 1996. 411-12.*

Compare this to the classic type:

### **Narcissistic Personality Type**

The basic trait of the Narcissistic Personality Type is a pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy.

The Narcissistic Personality Type:

- Reacts to criticism with feelings of rage, shame, or humiliation;
- Is interpersonally exploitive: takes advantage of others to achieve his own ends;
- Has a grandiose sense of self-importance;
- Believes that his problems are unique and can be understood only by other special people;
- Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love;
- Has a sense of entitlement: an unreasonable expectation of especially favourable treatment;
- Requires much attention and admiration of others;
- Lacks empathy: fails to recognise and experience how others feel;
- Is preoccupied with feelings of envy.

This is mainly the DSM-III-R view. Pay attention to the not so subtle changes in the DSM-IV-TR – [click here to view them](#) and [here for more about pathological narcissism](#).

### **The Inverted Narcissist**

It is clear that there is, indeed, an hitherto neglected type of narcissist. It is the "self-effacing" or "introverted" narcissist. We call it the Inverted Narcissist (hereinafter: IN). Others call it "narcissist-codependent" or "N-magnet" (which erroneously implies passivity and

victimhood). Alan Rappaport suggested the name (and diagnosis) "co-narcissist".

This is a narcissist who, in many respects, is the mirror image of the "classical" narcissist. The psychodynamics of the Inverted Narcissist are not clear, nor are its developmental roots. Perhaps it is the product of an overweening Primary Object or caregiver. Perhaps excessive abuse leads to the repression of even the narcissistic and other defence mechanisms. Perhaps the parents suppress every manifestation of grandiosity (very common in early childhood) and of narcissism – so that the narcissistic defence mechanism is "inverted" and internalised in this unusual form.

These narcissists are self-effacing, sensitive, emotionally fragile, sometimes socially phobic. They derive all their self-esteem and sense of self-worth from the outside (others), are pathologically envious (a transformation of aggression), are likely to intermittently engage in aggressive/violent behaviours, are more emotionally labile than the classic narcissist, etc.

There are, therefore, three "basic" types of narcissists:

1. ***The offspring of neglecting parents*** – They default to narcissism as the predominant object relation (with themselves as the exclusive love object).
2. ***The offspring of doting or domineering parents (often narcissists themselves)*** – They internalise their parents' voices in the form of a sadistic, ideal, immature Superego and spend their lives trying to be perfect, omnipotent, omniscient and to be judged "a success" by these parent-images and their later representations and substitutes (authority figures).
3. ***The offspring of abusive parents*** – They internalise the abusing, demeaning and contemptuous voices and spend their lives in an effort to elicit "counter-voices" from other people and thus to regulate their labile self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

All three types experience recurrent and Sisyphean failures. Shielded by their defence mechanisms, they constantly gauge reality wrongly, their actions and reactions become more and more rigid and the damage inflicted by them on themselves and on others is ever greater.

The narcissistic parent seems to employ a myriad primitive defences in his dealings with his children: ***Splitting*** – Idealising the child and devaluing him in cycles, which reflect the internal dynamics of the parent rather than anything the child does.

***Projective Identification*** – Forcing the child to behave in a way which vindicates the parent's fears regarding himself or herself, his or her self-image and his or her self-worth. This is a particularly powerful and pernicious mechanism. If the narcissist parent fears his own deficiencies ("defects"), vulnerability, perceived weaknesses, susceptibility, gullibility, or emotions – he is likely to force the child to "feel" these rejected and (to him) repulsive emotions, to behave in ways strongly abhorred by the parent, to exhibit character traits the parent strongly rejects in himself.

***Projection*** - The child, in a way, becomes the "trash bin" of the parents' inhibitions, fears, self-loathing, self-contempt, perceived lack of self-worth, sense of inadequacy, rejected traits, repressed emotions, failures and emotional reticence.

Coupled with the parent's treatment of the child as the parent's extension, these psychological defenses totally inhibit the psychological growth and emotional maturation of the child. The child becomes a reflection of the parent, a conduit through which the parent experiences and realises himself for better (hopes, aspirations, ambition, life goals) and for worse (weaknesses, "undesirable" emotions, "negative" traits). Relationships between such parents and their progeny easily deteriorate to sexual or other modes of abuse because there are no functioning boundaries between them.

It seems that the child's reaction to a narcissistic parent can be either accommodation and assimilation or rejection.

#### ***Accommodation and Assimilation***

The child accommodates, idealises and internalises (introjects) the narcissistic and abusive Primary Object successfully. This means that the child's "internal voice" is also narcissistic and abusive. The child tries to comply with its directives and with its explicit and perceived wishes.

The child becomes a masterful provider of Narcissistic Supply, a perfect match to the parent's personality, an ideal source, an accommodating, understanding and

caring caterer to all the needs, whims, mood swings and cycles of the narcissist. The child learns to endure devaluation and idealisation with equanimity and adapt to the narcissist's world view. The child, in short, becomes the ultimate extension. This is what we call an "inverted narcissist".

We must not neglect the abusive aspect of such a relationship. The narcissistic parent always alternates between idealisation and devaluation of his offspring. The child is likely to internalise the devaluing, abusive, critical, demeaning, berating, diminishing, minimising, upbraiding, chastising voices.

The parent (or caregiver) goes on to survive inside the child-turned-adult (as part of a sadistic and ideal Superego and an unrealistic Ego Ideal). These voices are so powerful that they inhibit even the development of reactive narcissism, the child's typical defence mechanism.

The child-turned-adult keeps looking for narcissists in order to feel whole, alive and wanted. He craves to be treated by a narcissist narcissistically. What others call abuse is, to him or her, familiar territory and constitutes Narcissistic Supply. To the Inverted Narcissist, the classic narcissist is a Source of Supply (primary or secondary) and his narcissistic behaviours constitute Narcissistic Supply. The IN feels dissatisfied, empty and unwanted when not "loved" by a narcissist.

The roles of Primary Source of Narcissistic Supply (PSNS) and Secondary Source of Narcissistic Supply (SSNS) are reversed. To the inverted narcissist, her narcissistic spouse is a Source of **PRIMARY** Narcissistic Supply.

The child can also reject the narcissistic parent rather than accommodate her or him.

### ***Rejection***

The child may react to the narcissism of the Primary Object with a peculiar type of rejection. He develops his own narcissistic personality, replete with grandiosity and lack of empathy – but his personality is antithetical to that of the narcissistic parent.

If the parent were a somatic narcissist, the child is likely to grow up to be a cerebral one. If his father prided himself being virtuous, the son turns out sinful. If his narcissistic mother bragged about her frugality, he is bound to profligately flaunt his wealth.

### **An Attempted DSM Style List of Criteria**

It is possible to compose a DSM-IV-TR-like set of criteria for the Inverted Narcissist, using the classic narcissists' as a template. The two are, in many ways, two sides of the same coin, or "the mould and the moulded" - hence the neologisms "mirror narcissist" or "inverted narcissist".

The narcissist tries to merge with an idealised but badly internalised object. He does so by "digesting" the meaningful others in his life and transforming them into extensions of his self. He uses various techniques to achieve this. To the "digested", this is the crux of the harrowing experience called "life with a narcissist".

The "inverted narcissist" (IN), on the other hand, does not attempt, except in fantasy or in dangerous, masochistic sexual practice, to merge with an idealised external object. This is because he so successfully internalised the narcissistic Primary Object to the exclusion of all else. The IN feels ill at ease in his relationships with non-narcissists because it is unconsciously perceived by him to constitute "betrayal", "cheating", an abrogation of the exclusivity clause he has with the narcissistic Primary Object.

This is the big difference between narcissists and their inverted version.

Classic narcissists of all stripes reject the Primary Object in particular (and object relations in general) in favour of a handy substitute: themselves.

Inverted Narcissists accept the (narcissist) Primary Object and internalise it – to the exclusion of all others (unless they are perceived to be faithful renditions, replicas of the narcissistic Primary Object).

### **Criterion ONE**

#### ***Possesses a rigid sense of lack of self-worth.***

The classic narcissist has a badly regulated sense of self-worth. However this is not conscious. He goes through cycles of self-devaluation (and experiences them as dysphorias).

The IN's sense of self-worth does not fluctuate. It is rather stable – but it is very low. Whereas the narcissist devalues others – the IN devalues himself as an offering, a sacrifice to the narcissist. The IN pre-empts the narcissist by devaluing himself, by actively berating his own achievements, or talents. The IN is exceedingly distressed when singled out because of actual accomplishments or a demonstration of superior skills. The inverted narcissist is compelled to filter all of her

narcissistic needs through the primary narcissist in her life. Independence or personal autonomy are not permitted. The IN feels amplified by the narcissist's running commentary (because nothing can be accomplished by the invert without the approval of a primary narcissist in their lives).

### **Criterion TWO**

***Pre-occupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance and beauty or of an ideal of love.***

This is the same as the DSM-IV-TR criterion for Narcissistic Personality Disorder but, with the IN, it manifests absolutely differently, i.e. the cognitive dissonance is sharper here because the IN is so absolutely and completely convinced of their worthlessness that these fantasies of grandeur are extremely painful "dissonances".

With the narcissist, the dissonance exists on two levels: Between the unconscious feeling of lack of stable self-worth and the grandiose fantasies

**AND** between the grandiose fantasies and reality (the Grandiosity Gap).

In comparison, the Inverted Narcissist can only vacillate between lack of self-worth and reality. No grandiosity is permitted, except in dangerous, forbidden fantasy. This shows that the Invert is psychologically incapable of fully realising her inherent potentials without a primary narcissist to filter the praise, adulation or accomplishments through. She must have someone to whom praise can be redirected. The dissonance between the IN's certainty of self-worthlessness and genuine praise that cannot be deflected is likely to emotionally derail the Inverted Narcissist every time.

### **Criterion THREE**

***Believes that she is absolutely un-unique and un-special (i.e., worthless and not worthy of merger with the fantasised ideal) and that no one at all could understand her because she is innately unworthy of being understood. The IN becomes very agitated the more one tries to understand her because that also offends against her righteous sense of being properly excluded from the human race.***

A sense of worthlessness is typical of many other PDs (as well as the feeling that no one could ever understand them). The narcissist himself endures prolonged periods of self-devaluation, self-deprecation and self-effacement. This is part of the Narcissistic Cycle. In this



sense, the inverted narcissist is a partial narcissist. She is permanently fixated in a part of the narcissistic cycle, never to experience its complementary half: the narcissistic grandiosity and sense of entitlement. The "righteous sense of being properly excluded" comes from the sadistic Superego in concert with the "overbearing, externally reinforced, conscience".

**Criterion FOUR**

***Demands anonymity (in the sense of seeking to remain excluded at all costs) and is intensely irritated and uncomfortable with any attention being paid to her – similar to the Schizoid PD.***

**Criterion FIVE**

***Feels that she is undeserving and not entitled.***

Feels that she is inferior to others, lacking, insubstantial, unworthy, unlikable, unappealing, unlovable, someone to scorn and dismiss, or to ignore.

**Criterion SIX**

***Is extinguishingly selfless, sacrificial, even unctuous in her interpersonal relationships and avoids the assistance of others at all costs. Can only interact with others when she can be seen to be giving, supportive, and expending an unusual effort to assist.***

Some narcissists behave the same way but only as a means to obtain Narcissistic Supply (praise, adulation, affirmation, attention). This must not be confused with the behaviour of the IN.

**Criterion SEVEN**

***Lacks empathy. Is intensely attuned to others' needs, but only in so far as it relates to her own need to perform the required self-sacrifice, which in turn is necessary in order for the IN to obtain her Narcissistic Supply from the primary narcissist.***

By contrast, narcissists are never empathic. They are intermittently attuned to others only in order to optimise the extraction of Narcissistic Supply from them.

**Criterion EIGHT**

***Envy others. Cannot conceive of being envied and becomes extremely agitated and uncomfortable if even brought into a situation where comparison might occur. Loathes competition and avoids competition at all costs, if there is any chance of actually winning the competition, or being singled out.***

**Criterion NINE**

***Displays extreme shyness, lack of any real relational connections, is publicly self-effacing in the extreme, is***

*internally highly moralistic and critical of others; is a perfectionist and engages in lengthy ritualistic behaviours, which can never be perfectly performed (obsessive-compulsive, though not necessarily to the full extent exhibited in Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder). Notions of being individualistic are anathema.*

### **The Reactive Patterns of the Inverted Narcissist (IN)**

The Inverted Narcissist does not suffer from a "milder" form of narcissism. Like the "classic" narcissists, it has degrees and shades. But it is much more rare and the DSM-IV-TR variety is the more prevalent.

The Inverted Narcissist is liable to react with rage whenever threatened, or...

...When envious of other people's achievements, their ability to feel wholeness, happiness, rewards and successes, when her sense of self-worthlessness is diminished by a behaviour, a comment, an event, when her lack of self-worth and voided self-esteem is threatened. Thus, this type of narcissist might surprisingly react violently or wrathfully to **GOOD** things: a kind remark, a mission accomplished, a reward, a compliment, a proposition, or a sexual advance.

...When thinking about the past, when emotions and memories are evoked (usually negative ones) by certain music, a given smell, or sight.

...When her pathological envy leads to an all-pervasive sense of injustice and being discriminated against or deprived by a spiteful world.

...When she comes across stupidity, avarice, dishonesty, bigotry – it is these qualities in herself that all types of narcissists really fear and reject so vehemently in others.

...When she believes that she failed (and she always entertains this belief), that she is imperfect and useless and worthless, a good for nothing half-baked creature.

...When she realises to what extent her inner demons possess her, constrain her life, torment her, deform her and the hopelessness of it all.

When the Inverted Narcissist rages, she becomes verbally and emotionally abusive. She uncannily spots and attacks the vulnerabilities of her target, and mercilessly drives home the poisoned dagger of despair and self-loathing until it infects her adversary.

The calm after such a storm is even eerier, a thundering silence. The Inverted Narcissist regrets her behaviour

and admits her feelings while apologising profusely. The Inverted Narcissist nurtures her negative emotions as yet another weapon of self-destruction and self-defeat. It is from this repressed self-contempt and sadistic self-judgement that the narcissistic rage springs forth.

One important difference between Inverted Narcissists and non-narcissists is that the former are less likely to react with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) following the breakup of their relationships with a their narcissists. They seem to be "desensitised" to narcissists by their early upbringing.

Whereas the reactions of normal people to narcissistic behaviour patterns (and especially to the splitting and projective identification defence mechanisms and to the idealisation devaluation cycles) is shock, profound hurt and disorientation – inverted narcissists show none of the above.

### **The Life of the Inverted Narcissist**

The IN is, usually, exceedingly and painfully shy as a child. Despite this social phobia, his grandiosity (absorbed from the parent) might direct him to seek "limelight" professions and occupations, which involve exposure, competition, "stage fright" and social friction. The setting can vary from the limited (family) to the expansive (national media) – but, whatever it is, the result is constant conflict and feelings of discomfort, even terror and extreme excitement and thrill ("adrenaline rush"). This is because the IN's grandiosity is "imported" and not fully integrated. It is, therefore, not supportive of his "grandiose" pursuits (as is the case with the narcissist). On the contrary, the IN feels awkward, pitted on the edge of a precipice, contrived, false and misleading, not to say deceitful.

The Inverted Narcissist grows up in a stifling environment, whether it is an orthodox, hyper-religious, collectivist, or traditionalist culture, a monovalent, "black and white", doctrinarian and indoctrinating society – or a family which manifests all the above in a microcosm all its own.

The Inverted Narcissist is cast in a negative (emergent) role within his family. His "negativity" is attributed to her gender, the order of her birth, religious, social, or cultural dictates and commandments, her "character flaws", her relation to a specific person or event, her acts or inaction and so on.

In the words of one such IN:

***"In the religious culture I grew up in, women are SO suppressed, their roles are so carefully restricted. They are the representation, in the flesh, of all that is sinful, degrading, of all that is wrong with the world.***

***These are the negative gender/cultural images that were force fed to us the negative 'otherness' of women, as defined by men, was fed to me. I was so shy, withdrawn, unable to really relate to people at all from as early as I can remember."***

***The IN is subjected and exposed either to an overbearing, overvalued parent, or to an aloof, detached, emotionally unavailable one – or to both – at an early stage of his life.***

***"I grew up in the shadow of my father who adored me, put me on a pedestal, told me I could do or be anything I wanted because I was incredibly bright, BUT, he ate me alive, I was his property and an extension of him. I also grew up with the mounting hatred of my narcissist brother who got none of this attention from our father and got no attention from our mother either. My function was to make my father look wonderful in the eyes of all outsiders, the wonderful parent with a genius Wunderkind as his last child, and the only child of the six that he was physically present to raise from the get go. The overvaluation combined with being abjectly ignored or raged at by him when I stepped out of line even the tiniest bit, was enough to warp my personality."***

The Invert is prevented from developing full-blown secondary narcissism. The Invert is so heavily preoccupied in his or her pre-school years with satisfying the narcissistic parent, that the traits of grandiosity and self-love, even the need for Narcissistic Supply, remain dormant or repressed.

The Invert simply "knows" that only the narcissistic parent can provide the requisite amount of Narcissistic Supply. The narcissistic parent is so controlling that any attempt to garner praise or adulation from any other source (without the approval of the parent) is severely punished by swift devaluation and even the occasional spanking or abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual).

This is a vital part of the conditioning that gives rise to inverted narcissism. Where the narcissist exhibits grandiosity, the Invert is intensely uncomfortable with personal praise, and wishes to always divert praise away

from himself onto his narcissist. This is why the IN can only truly feel anything when she is in a relationship with another narcissist. The IN is conditioned and programmed from the very beginning to be the perfect companion to the narcissist. To feed his Ego, to be purely his extension, to seek only praise and adulation if it brings greater praise and adulation to her narcissist.

### **The Inverted Narcissist's Survival Guide**

- Listen attentively to everything the narcissist says and agree with it all.

Don't believe a word of it but let it slide as if everything is just fine, business as usual.

- Offer something absolutely unique to the narcissist which they cannot obtain anywhere else.

Also be prepared to line up future Sources of Primary NS for your narcissist because you will not be **IT** for very long, if at all. If you take over the procuring function for the narcissist, they become that much more dependent on you which makes it a bit tougher for them to pull their haughty stuff – an inevitability, in any case.

- Be endlessly patient and go way out of your way to be accommodating, thus keeping the Narcissistic Supply flowing liberally, and keeping the peace (relatively speaking).

- Get tremendous personal satisfaction out of endlessly giving. This one may not be attractive to you, but it is a take it or leave it proposition.

- Be absolutely emotionally and financially independent of the narcissist. Take what you need: the excitement and engulfment (i.e., NS) and refuse to get upset or hurt when the narcissist does or says something dumb. Yelling back works really well but should be reserved for special occasions when you fear your narcissist may be on the verge of leaving you; the silent treatment is better as an ordinary response, but it must be devoid of emotional content, more with the air of boredom and "I'll talk to you later, when I am good and ready, and when you are behaving in a more reasonable fashion."

- If your narcissist is cerebral and not interested in having much sex, give yourself ample permission to have sex with other people. Your

cerebral narcissist is not indifferent to infidelity so discretion and secrecy is of paramount importance.

□ If your narcissist is somatic and you don't mind, join in on group sex encounters but make sure that you choose properly for your narcissist. They are heedless and very indiscriminating in respect of sexual partners and that can get very problematic (sexually Transmitted Diseases blackmail come to mind).

□ If you are a "fixer" which most Inverted Narcissists are, focus on fixing situations, preferably before they become "situations". Don't for one moment delude yourself that you can actually fix the narcissist – it simply will not happen. Not because they are being stubborn – they just simply can't be fixed.

□ If there is any fixing that can be done, it is to help your narcissist become aware of their condition, and (this is very important) with no negative implications or accusations in the process at all.

It is like living with a physically handicapped person and being able to discuss, calmly, unemotionally, what the limitations and benefits of the handicap are and how the two of you can work with these factors, rather than trying to change them.

□ Finally, and most important of all for the Inverted Narcissist: get to know yourself. What are you getting from the relationship? Are you actually a masochist?

Why is this relationship attractive and interesting?

Define for yourself what good and beneficial things you believe you are receiving in this relationship. Define the things that you find harmful to you. Develop strategies to minimise the harm to yourself.

Don't expect that you will cognitively be able to reason with the narcissist to change who they are. You may have some limited success in getting your narcissist to tone down on the really harmful behaviours that affect you, which emanate from the unchangeable essence of the narcissist. This can only be accomplished in a

very trusting, frank and open relationship.

The Inverted Narcissist can have a reasonably good, long lasting relationship with the narcissist. You must be prepared to give your narcissist a lot of space and leeway.

You don't really exist for them as a fully realised person – no one does. They are not fully realised people so they cannot possibly have the skills, no matter how smart or sexy, to be a complete person in the sense that most adults are complete.

### **Somatic versus Cerebral Inverted Narcissists (IN)**

The Inverted Narcissist is really an erstwhile narcissist internalised by the IN. Inevitably, we are likely to find among the Inverted the same propensities, predilections, preferences and inclinations that we do among proper narcissists.

The cerebral IN is an IN whose source of vicarious Primary Narcissistic Supply lies – through the medium and mediation of a narcissist – in the exercise of his intellectual faculties. A somatic IN would tend to make use of his body, sex, shape or health in trying to secure NS for "her" narcissist.

The Inverted Narcissist feeds on the primary narcissist and this is his Narcissistic Supply. So these two typologies can essentially become a self-supporting, symbiotic system.

In reality though, both the narcissist and the Inverted Narcissist need to be quite well aware of the dynamics of this relationship in order to make it work as a successful long-term arrangement. It might well be that this symbiosis would only work between a cerebral narcissist and a cerebral Invert. The somatic narcissist's incessant sexual dalliances would be far too threatening to the equanimity of the cerebral Invert for there to be much chance of this succeeding, even for a short time.

It would seem that only opposing types of narcissist can get along when two classic narcissists are involved in a couple. It follows, syllogistically, that only identical types of narcissist and inverted narcissist can survive in a couple. In other words: the best, most enduring couples of narcissist and his inverted narcissist mate would involve a somatic narcissist and a somatic IN – or a cerebral narcissist and a cerebral IN.

### **Coping with Narcissists and Non-Narcissists**

The Inverted Narcissist is a person who grew up enthralled by the narcissistic parent. This parent

engulfed and subsumed the child's being to such an extent that the child's personality was irrevocably shaped by this immersion, damaged beyond hope of repair. The child was not even able to develop defence mechanisms such as narcissism.

The end result is an Inverted Narcissistic personality.

The traits of this personality are primarily evident in the context of romantic relationships. The child was conditioned by the narcissistic parent to only be entitled to feel whole, useful, happy, and productive when the child augmented or mirrored to the parent the parent's False Self. As a result the child is shaped by this engulfment and cannot feel complete in any significant adult relationship unless they are with a narcissist.

### ***The Inverted Narcissist in Relationship with the Narcissist***

The Inverted Narcissist is drawn to significant relationships with other narcissists in her adulthood.

These relationships are usually spousal primary relationships but can also be friendships with narcissists outside of the primary love relationship.

In a primary relationship, the Inverted Narcissist attempts to re-create the parent-child relationship. The Invert thrives on mirroring to the narcissist his own grandiosity and in so doing the Invert obtains her own Narcissistic Supply (which is the dependence of the narcissist upon the Invert for their Secondary Narcissistic Supply).

The Invert must have this form of relationship with a narcissist in order to feel whole. The Invert goes as far as needed to ensure that the narcissist is happy, cared for, properly adored, as she feels is the narcissist's right. The Invert glorifies and lionizes her narcissist, places him on a pedestal, endures any and all narcissistic devaluation with calm equanimity, impervious to the overt slights of the narcissist.

Narcissistic rage is handled deftly by the Inverted Narcissist. The Invert is exceedingly adept at managing every aspect of her life, tightly controlling all situations, so as to minimise the potential for the inevitable narcissistic rages of his narcissist.

The Invert wishes to be subsumed by the narcissist. The Invert only feels truly loved and alive in this kind of relationship. The invert is loath to abandon her relationships with narcissists. The relationship only ends when the narcissist withdraws completely from the



symbiosis. Once the narcissist has determined that the Invert is of no further use, and withholds all Narcissistic Supply from the Invert, only then does the Invert reluctantly move on to another relationship.

The Invert is most likely to equate sexual intimacy with engulfment. This can be easily misread to mean that the Invert is himself or herself a somatic narcissist, but it would be incorrect. The Invert can endure years of minimal sexual contact with their narcissist and still be able to maintain the self-delusion of intimacy and engulfment. The Invert finds a myriad of other ways to "merge" with the narcissist, becoming intimately, though only in support roles, involved with the narcissist's business, career, or any other activity where the Invert can feel that they are needed by the narcissist and indispensable.

The Invert is an expert at doling out Narcissistic Supply and even goes as far as procuring Primary Narcissistic Supply for their narcissist (even where this means finding another lover for the narcissist, or participating in group sex with the narcissist).

Usually though, the Invert seems most attracted to the cerebral narcissist and finds him easier to manage than the somatic narcissist. The cerebral narcissist is disinterested in sex and this makes life considerably easier for the Invert, i.e., the Invert is less likely to "lose" their cerebral narcissist to another primary partner. A somatic narcissist may be prone to changing partners with greater frequency or wish to have no partner, preferring to have multiple, casual sexual relationships of no apparent depth which never last very long.

The Invert regards relationships with narcissists as the only true and legitimate form of primary relationship. The Invert is capable of having primary relationships with non-narcissists. But without the engulfment and the drama, the Invert feels unneeded, unwanted and emotionally uninvolved.

### ***When Can a Classic Narcissist Become an Inverted Narcissist?***

A classic narcissist can become an inverted narcissist in one (or more) of the following (typically cumulative) circumstances:

- a. Immediately following a life crisis and a narcissistic injury (divorce, devastating financial loss, death of a parent, or a child, imprisonment,

loss of social status and, in general, any other narcissistic injury).

b. When the injured narcissist then meets another - classic - narcissist who restores a sense of meaning and superiority (uniqueness) to his life. The injured narcissist derives Narcissistic Supply vicariously, by proxy, through the "dominant" narcissist.

c. As part of an effort to secure a particularly desired Source of Narcissistic Supply. The conversion from classic to inverted narcissism serves to foster an attachment (bonding) between the narcissist and his source. When the narcissist judges that the source is his and can be taken for granted, he reverts to his former, classically narcissistic self.

Such a "conversion" is always temporary. It does not last and the narcissist reverts to his "default" or dominant state.

#### ***When Can an Inverted Narcissist become a Classic Narcissist?***

The inverted narcissist can become a classic narcissist in one (or more) of the following (typically cumulative) circumstances:

a. Immediately following a life crisis that involves the incapacitation or dysfunction of the inverted narcissist's partner (sickness, accident, demotion, divorce, devastating financial loss, death of a parent, or a child, imprisonment, loss of social status and, in general, any other narcissistic injury).

b. When the inverted narcissist, injured and disillusioned, then meets another - inverted - narcissist who restores a sense of meaning and superiority (uniqueness) to his life. The injured narcissist derives Narcissistic Supply from the inverted narcissist.

c. As part of an effort to secure a particularly desired Source of Narcissistic Supply. The conversion from inverted to classic narcissism serves to foster an attachment (bonding) between the narcissist and his source. When the narcissist judges that the source is his and can be taken for granted, he reverts to his former, inverted narcissistic self.

Such a "conversion" is always temporary. It does

not last and the narcissist reverts to his "default" or dominant state.

### ***Relationships between the Inverted Narcissist and Non-Narcissists***

The Inverted Narcissist can maintain relationships outside of the symbiotic primary relationship with a narcissist. But the Invert does not "feel" loved because she finds the non-narcissist not "engulfing" or not "exciting". Thus, the Invert tends to devalue their non-narcissistic primary partner as less worthy of the Inverts' love and attention.

The Invert may be able to sustain a relationship with a non-narcissist by finding other narcissistic symbiotic relationships outside of this primary relationship. The Invert may, for instance, have a narcissistic friend or lover, to whom he pays extraordinary attention, ignoring the real needs of the non-narcissistic partner.

Consequently, the only semi-stable primary relationship between the Invert and the non-narcissist occurs where the non-narcissist is very easy going, emotionally secure and not needing much from the Invert at all by way of time, energy or commitment to activities requiring the involvement of both parties. In a relationship with this kind of non-narcissist, the Invert may become a workaholic or very involved in outside activities that exclude the non-narcissist spouse.

It appears that the Inverted Narcissist in a relationship with a non-narcissist is behaviourally indistinguishable from a true narcissist. The only important exception is that the Invert does not rage at his non-narcissist partner – she instead withdraws from the relationship even further. This passive-aggressive reaction has been noted, though, with narcissists as well.

### **Inverted and Other Atypical / Partial (NOS) Narcissists**

#### ***Inverted Narcissists Talk about Themselves***

#### **Competition and (Pathological) Envy**

"I have a dynamic that comes up with every single person I get close to, where I feel extremely competitive toward and envious of the other person. But I don't ACT competitive, because at the very outset, I see myself as the loser in the competition. I would never dream of trying to beat the other person, because I know deep in my heart that they would win and I would be utterly humiliated. There are fewer things on earth that feel worse to me than losing a contest and having the other

person gloat over me, especially if they know how much I cared about not losing. This is one thing that I actually feel violent about. I guess I tend to project the grandiosity part of the NPD package onto the other person rather than on a False Ego of my own. So most of the time I'm stuck in a state of deep resentment and envy toward her. To me, she's always far more intelligent, likable, popular, talented, self-confident, emotionally developed, morally good, and attractive than I am. And I really hate her for that, and feel humiliated by it. So it's incredibly hard for me to feel happy for this person when she has a success, because I'm overcome with humiliation about myself. This has ruined many a close relationship. I tend to get this way about one person at a time, usually the person who is playing the role of 'my better half', best friends or lovers/partners. So it's not like I'm unable to be happy for anyone, ever, or that I envy every person I meet. I don't get obsessed with how rich or beautiful movie stars are or anything like that. It only gets projected onto this partner-person, the person I'm depending on the most in terms of supplies (attention, reassurance, security, building up my self-esteem, etc.)...

...The really destructive thing that happens is, I see her grandiose traits as giving her the power to have anything and anyone she wants. So I feel a basic insecurity, because why should she stay with a loser like me, when she's obviously so out of my league? So really, what I'm envious of is the power that all that talent, social ability, beauty, etc., gives her to have CHOICES – the choice to stay or leave me. Whereas I am utterly dependent on her. It's this emotional inequality that I find so humiliating."

"I agree with the inverted narcissist designation – sometimes I've called myself a 'closet narcissist'. That is, I've internalised the value system of grandiosity, but have not applied the grandiose identity to myself. I believe I SHOULD BE those grandiose things, but at the same time, I know I'm not and I'm miserable about it. So people don't think of me as having an inflated Ego – and indeed I don't – but scratch the surface, and you'll find all these inflated expectations. I mean to say that perhaps the parents suppressed every manifestation of grandiosity (very common in early childhood) and of narcissism – so that the defence mechanism that narcissism is was 'inverted' and internalised in this

unusual form."

"Maybe there aren't two discrete states (NPD vs. 'regular' low self-esteem) – maybe it's more of a continuum. And maybe it's just the degree and depth of the problem that distinguishes one from the other.

My therapist describes NPD as 'the inability to love oneself'. As she defines it, the 'narcissistic wound' is a deep wounding of the sense of self, the image of oneself. That doesn't mean that other disorders – or for that matter, other life stressors – can't also cause low self-esteem. But I think NPD IS low self-esteem...

That's what the disorder is really about – an image of yourself that is profoundly negative, and the inability to attain a normal and healthy self-image..."

"Yes, I'm a survivor of child abuse. But remember that not all abuse is alike. There are different kinds of abuse, and different effects. My XXX's style of abuse had to do with trying to annihilate me as a separate person. It also had to do with the need to put all his negative self-image onto me – to see in me what he hated in himself. So I got to play the role of the loser that he secretly feared he was. I was flipped back and forth in those roles – sometimes I'd be a Source of NS for him, and other times I was the receptacle of all his pain and rage. Sometimes my successes were used to reflect back on him, to show off to the rest of the family. Other times, my successes were threatening to my father, who suddenly feared that I was superior to him and had to be squelched. I experience emotions that most people I know don't feel. Or maybe they do feel them, but to far less extreme intensity. For example, the envy and comparison/competition I feel toward others. I guess most of us have experienced rivalry, jealousy, being compared to others. Most of us have felt envy at another's success. Yet most people I know seem able to overcome those feelings to some extent, to be able to function normally. In a competition, for example, they may be driven to do their best so they can win. For me, the fear of losing and being humiliated is so intense that I avoid competition completely. I am terrified of showing people that I care about doing well, because it's so shaming for me if I lose. So I underachieve and pretend I don't care. Most people I know may envy another person's good luck or success, but it doesn't prevent them from also being happy for them and supporting them. But for me, when I'm in a competitive

dynamic with someone, I can't hear about any of their successes, or compliments they've received, etc. I don't even like to see the person doing good things, like bringing Thanksgiving leftovers to the sick old guy next door, because those things make me feel inferior for not thinking of doing that myself (and not having anyone in my life that I'd do that for). It's just so incredibly painful for me to see evidence of the other person's good qualities, because it immediately brings up my feeling of inferiority. I can't even stand to date someone, who looks really good, because I'm jealous of their good looks! So this deep and obsessive envy has destroyed my joy in other people. All the things about other people that I love and take pleasure in is a double-edged sword because I also hate them for it, for having those good qualities (while, presumably, I don't). I don't know – do you think this is garden-variety low self-esteem? I know plenty of people who suffer from lack of confidence, from timidity, social awkwardness, hatred of their body, feeling unlovable, etc. But they don't have this kind of hostile, corrosive resentment of another person for being all the wonderful things that they can't be, or aren't allowed to be, etc. And one thing I hate is when people are judgemental of me about how I feel, as though I can help it. It's like, 'You shouldn't be so selfish, you should feel happy for her that she's successful', etc. They don't understand that I would love to feel those things, but I can't. I can't stop the incredible pain that explodes in me when these feelings get triggered, and I often can't even HIDE the feelings. It's just so overwhelming. I feel so damaged sometimes. There's more, but that's the crux of it for me, anyway."

### **Getting Compliments**

"I love getting compliments and rewards, and do not react negatively to them. In some moods, when my self-hate has gotten triggered, I can sometimes get to places where I'm inconsolable, because I get stuck in bitterness and self-pity, and so I doubt the sincerity or the reliability of the good thing that someone is saying to me (to try to cheer me up or whatever). But, if I'm in a reasonable mood and someone offers me something good, I'm all too happy to accept it! I don't have a stake in staying miserable."

### **The Partiality of the Condition**

"I do agree that it's (atypical or inverted narcissism) not MILDER. But how I see it is that it's PARTIAL. The

part that's there is just as destructive as it is in the typical narcissist. But there are parts missing from that total, full-blown disorder – and I see that as healthy, actually. I see it as parts of myself that WEREN'T infected by the pathology, that are still intact.

In my case, I did not develop the overweening Ego part of the disorder. So in a sense, what you have with me is the naked pathology, with no covering: no suaveness, no charm, no charisma, no confidence, no persuasiveness, but also no excuses, no lies, no justifications for my feelings. Just the ugly self-hate, for all to see. And the self-hate part is just as bad as it is with a full-blown narcissist, so again, it's not milder.

But because I don't have the denial part of the disorder, I have a lot more insight, a lot more motivation to do something about my problems (i.e., I 'self-refer' to therapy), and therefore, I think, a lot more hope of getting better than people whose defence involves totally denying they even have a problem."

"When my full-blown XXX's pathological envy would get triggered, he would respond by putting down the person he was envious of – or by putting down the accomplishment itself, or whatever good stuff the other person had. He'd trivialise it, or outright contradict it, or find some way to convince the other person (often me) that the thing they're feeling good about isn't real, or isn't worthwhile, or is somehow bad, etc. He could do this because the inflated Ego defence was fully formed and operating with him.

When MY pathological envy gets triggered, I will be bluntly honest about it. I'll say something self-pitying, such as: 'You always get the good stuff, and I get nothing'; 'You're so much better than I'; 'People like you better – you have good social skills and I'm a jerk'; and so on. Or I might even get hostile and sarcastic: 'Well, it must be nice to have so many people worshipping you, isn't it?' I don't try to convince myself that the other person's success isn't real or worthwhile, etc. Instead, I'm totally flooded with the pain of feeling utterly inferior and worthless – and there's no way for me to convince myself or anyone else otherwise. I'm not saying that the things I say are pleasant to hear – and it is still manipulative of me to say them, because the other person's attention is drawn away from their joy and onto my pain and hostility. And instead of doubting their success's worth or reality, they feel guilty about it,

or about talking about it, because it hurts me so much. So from the other person's point of view, maybe it's not any easier to live with a partial narcissist than with a full-blown, in that their joys and successes lead to pain in both cases. It's certainly not easier for me, being flooded with rage and pain instead of being able to hide behind a delusion of grandeur. But from my therapist's point of view, I'm much better off because I know I'm unhappy – it's in my face all the time. So I'm motivated to work on it and change it. And time has borne her words out. Over the past several years that I've worked on this issue, I have changed a great deal in how I deal with it. Now when the envy gets triggered, I don't feel so entwined with the other person – I recognise that it's my OWN pain getting triggered, not something they are doing to me. And so I can acknowledge the pain in a more responsible way, taking ownership of it by saying, 'The jealousy feelings are getting triggered again, and I'm feeling worthless and inferior. Can you reassure me that I'm not?' That's a lot better than making some snide, hostile, or self-pitying comment that puts the other person on the defensive or makes them feel guilty... I do prefer the term 'partial' because that's what it feels like to me. It's like a building that's partially built – the house of narcissism. For me, the structure is there, but not the outside, so you can see inside the skeleton to all the junk that's inside. It's the same junk that's inside a full-blown narcissist, but their building is completed, so you can't see inside. Their building is a fortress, and it's almost impossible to bring it down. My defences aren't as strong ... which makes my life more difficult in some ways because I REALLY feel my pain. But it also means that the house can be brought down more easily, and the junk inside cleaned out..."

### **Thinking about the Past and the World**

"I don't usually get rageful about the past. I feel sort of emotionally cut-off from the past, actually. I remember events very clearly, but usually can't remember the feelings. When I do remember the feelings, my reaction is usually one of sadness, and sometimes of relief that I can get back in touch with my past. But not rage. All my rage seems to get displaced on the current people in my life."

"...When I see someone being really socially awkward and geeky, passive-aggressive, indirect and victim-like, it does trigger anger in me because I identify with that



person and I don't want to. I try to put my negative feelings onto them, to see that person as the jerk, not me – that's what a narcissist does, after all. But for me it doesn't completely work because I know, consciously, what I'm trying to do. And ultimately, I'm not kidding anyone, least of all myself."

### **Self-Pity and Depression**

"More self-pity and depression here – not so much rage. One of the things that triggers my rage more than anything else is the inability to control another person, the inability to dominate them and force my reality on them. I feel impotent, humiliated, forced back on my empty self. Part of what I'm feeling here is envy: that person who can't be controlled clearly has a self and I don't, and I just hate them for it. But it's also a power struggle – I want to get Narcissistic Supply by being in control and on top and having the other person submissive and compliant..."

### **Regretting, Admitting Mistakes**

"I regret my behaviour horribly, and I DO admit my feelings. I am also able, in the aftermath, to have empathy for the feelings of the person I've hurt, and I'm horribly sad about it, and ashamed of myself. It's as though I'd been possessed by a demon, acted out all this abusive horrible stuff, and then, after the departure of the demon, I'm back in my right mind and it's like, 'What have I DONE???' I don't mean I'm not responsible for what I did (i.e., a demon made me do it). But when I'm triggered, I have no empathy – I can only see my projection onto that person, as a huge threat to me, someone who must be demolished. But when my head clears, I see that person's pain, hurt, fear – and I feel terrible. I want to make it up to them. And that feeling is totally sincere – it's not an act. I'm genuinely sorry for the pain I've caused the other person."

### **Rage**

"I wouldn't say that my rage comes from repressed self-contempt (mine is not repressed – I'm totally aware of it). And it's not missing atonement either, since I do atone. The rage comes from feeling humiliated, from feeling that the other person has somehow sadistically and gleefully made me feel inferior, that they're getting off on being superior, that they're mocking me and ridiculing me, that they have scorn and contempt for me and find it all very amusing. That – whether real or imagined (usually imagined) – is what causes my rage."

### **Pursuing Relationships with Narcissists**

"There are some very few of us who actually seek out relationships with narcissists. We do this with the full knowledge that we are not wanted, despised even. We persist and pursue no matter the consequences, no matter the cost.

I am an 'inverted narcissist'. It is because as a child I was 'imprinted/fixated' with a particular pattern involving relationships. I was engulfed so completely by my father's personality and repressed so severely by various other factors in my childhood that I simply didn't develop a recognisable personality. I existed purely as an extension of my father. I was his genius Wunderkind. He ignored my mother and poured all his energy and effort into me. I did not develop full-blown secondary narcissism... I developed into the perfect 'other half' of the narcissists moulding me. I became the perfect, eager co-dependent. And this is an imprint, a pattern in my psyche, a way of (not) relating to the world of relationships by only being able to truly relate to one person (my father) and then one kind of person – the narcissist.

He is my perfect lover, my perfect mate, a fit that is so slick and smooth, so comfortable and effortless, so filled with meaning and actual feelings – that's the other thing. I cannot feel on my own. I am incomplete. I can only feel when I am engulfed by another (first it was my father) and now – well now it has to be a narcissist. Not just any narcissist either. He must be exceedingly smart, good looking, have adequate reproductive equipment and some knowledge on how to use it and that's about it. When I am engulfed by someone like this I feel completed, I can actually FEEL. I am whole again. I function as a sibyl, an oracle, an extension of the narcissist. His fiercest protector, his purveyor/procurer of NS, the secretary, organiser, manager, etc. I think you get the picture and this gives me INTENSE PLEASURE.

So the answer to your question: 'Why would anyone want to be with someone who doesn't want them back?' The short answer is, 'Because there is no one else remotely worth looking at.'"

### **Making Amends**

"I mostly apologise, and I give the person space to talk about what hurt them so that (1) they get to express their anger or hurt to me, and (2) I can understand better and

know better how not to hurt them (if I can avoid it) the next time there's a conflict. Sometimes the hurt I cause is unintentional – maybe I've been insensitive or forgetful or something, in which case I feel more certain that I can avoid repeating the hurtful behaviour, since I didn't want to hurt them in the first place. If the hurt I caused has to do with my getting my trigger pulled and going into a rage, then that hurt was quite deliberate, although at the time I was unable to experience the other person as vulnerable or capable of being hurt by me. And I do realise that if that trigger is pulled again, it might happen again. But I also hope that there'll be a LITTLE TINY window where the memory of the conversation will come back to me while I'm in my rage, and I'll remember that the person really IS vulnerable. I hope that by hearing over and over that the person actually does feel hurt by what I say while in rages, that I might remember that when I am triggered and raging. So, mostly I apologise and try to communicate with the other person. I don't verbally self-flagellate, because that's manipulative. Not to say I never do that – in fact I've had a dynamic with people where I verbally put myself down and try to engage the other person into arguing me out of it.

But if I'm in the middle of apologising to the other person for hurting them, then I feel like this is their moment, and I don't want to turn the focus toward getting them to try to make me feel better. I will talk about myself, but only in an attempt to communicate, so that we can understand each other better. I might say, 'I got triggered about such-and-such, and you seemed so invulnerable that it enraged me', etc. – and the other person might react with, 'But I was feeling vulnerable, I just couldn't show it', etc. – and we'll go back and forth like that. So it's not like I don't think my feelings count, and I do want the other person to UNDERSTAND my feelings, but I don't want to put the other person in the role of taking care of my feelings in that moment, because they have just been hurt by me and I'm trying to make it up to them, not squeeze more stuff OUT of them..."

"So when I've been a real jerk to someone, I want them to feel like it's OK to be pissed off at me, and I want them to know that I am interested in and focused on how they feel, not just on how I feel. As for gifts – I used to do that, but eventually I came to feel that that

was manipulative, too, that it muddled things because then the other person would feel like they couldn't be angry anymore, since after all, I've just brought them this nice gift. I also feel that in general, gift-giving is a sweet and tender thing to do, and I don't want to sully that tenderness by associating it with the hurt that comes from abusive behaviour."

### **Why Narcissists?**

"I am BUILT this way. I may have overstated it by saying that I have 'no choice' because, in fact I do. The choice is – live in an emotionally deadened monochrome world where I can reasonably interact with normal people OR I can choose to be with a narcissist in which case my world is Technicolor, emotionally satisfying, alive and wondrous (also can be turbulent and a real roller coaster ride for the unprepared, not to mention incredibly damaging for people who are not inverted narcissists and who fall into relationships with narcissists). As I have walked on both sides of the street, and because I have developed coping mechanisms that protect me really quite well, I can reasonably safely engage in a primary, intimate relationship with a narcissist without getting hurt by it.

The real WHY of it all is that I learned, as a young child, that being 'eaten alive' by a narcissist parent, to the point where your existence is but an extension of his own, was how all relationships ought to work. It is a psychological imprint – my 'love map', it is what feels right to me intrinsically. A pattern of living – I don't know how else to describe it so you and others will understand how very natural and normal this is for me.

It is not the torturous existence that most of the survivors of narcissism are recounting on this list.

My experiences with narcissists, to me, ARE NORMAL for me. Comfortable like an old pair of slippers that fit perfectly. I don't expect many people to attempt to do this, to 'make themselves into' this kind of person. I don't think anyone could, if they tried.

It is my need to be engulfed and merged that drives me to these relationships and when I get those needs met I feel more normal, better about myself. I am the outer extension of the narcissist. In many ways I am a vanguard, a public two-way warning system, fiercely defending my narcissist from harm, and fiercely loyal to him, catering to his every need in order to protect his fragile existence. These are the dynamics of my

particular version of engulfment. I don't need anyone to take care of me. I need only to be needed in this very particular way, by a narcissist who inevitably possesses the ability to engulf in a way that normal, fully realised adults cannot. It is somewhat paradoxical – I feel freer and more independent with a narcissist than without one. I achieve more in my life when I am in this form of relationship. I try harder, work harder, am more creative, think better of myself, excel in most every aspect of my life."

"...I go ahead and cater to him and pretend that his words don't hurt, and later, I engage in an internal fight with myself for being so damned submissive. It's a constant battle and I can't seem to decide which voice in my head I should listen to... I feel like a fool, yet, I would rather be a fool with him than a lonely, well-rounded woman without him. I've often said that the only way that we can stay together is because we feed off of each other. I give him everything he needs and he takes it. Seeing him happy and pleased is what gives me pleasure. I feel very successful then."

### **Partial NPD**

"I do think it's uncommon for girls to develop these patterns, as they are usually trained to be self-effacing. I certainly was! However, I have a lot of the very same underlying patterns that full-blown, obnoxiously egotistical NP's have, but I am not egotistical because I didn't develop the pattern of inflated Ego and grandiosity. All the rest of it is there, though: fragile Ego, lack of a centre or self, super-sensitive to criticism and rejections, pathological, obsessive envy, comparisons and competitive attitudes toward others, a belief that everyone in the world is either superior or inferior to me, and so on.

Sometimes I kind of wish I had developed the inflated Ego of a complete NP, because then I would at least be able to hide from all the pain I feel. But at the same time, I'm glad I didn't, because those people have a much lower chance of recovery – how can they recover if they don't acknowledge anything is wrong? Whereas it's pretty clear to me I have problems, and I've spent my life working on them and trying to change myself and heal."

### **Narcissist-Non Narcissist and Narcissist-Inverted Narcissist Couples**

"Can a N and a non-N ever maintain a long lasting

marriage? It would seem that a non-N would have too much self-esteem to lend himself to a lifetime of catering and pandering to an N's unending need for unearned adoration and glory. I, as a non-N... got tired of these people and their unremitting attempts to drain my psyche within a relatively short period of time and abandoned them as soon as I realised what I was dealing with to preserve my own sanity."

"It depends on the non-narcissist, really. Narcissism is a RIGID, systemic pattern of responses. It is so all-pervasive and all-encompassing that it is a PERSONALITY disorder. If the non-narcissist is codependent, for instance, then the narcissist is a perfect match for him and the union will last..."

"You have to pimp for the narcissist, intellectually, and sexually. If your narcissist is somatic, you are much better off lining up the sex partners than leaving it to him. Intellectual pimping is more varied. You can think of wonderful things and then subtly string out the idea, in the most delicate of packages and watch the narcissist cogitate their way to 'their' brilliant discovery whilst you bask in the glow of their perfection and success... The point of this entire exercise is to assure YOUR supply, which is the narcissist himself, not to punish yourself by giving away a great idea or abase yourself because, of course, YOU are not worthy of having such a great idea on your own – but who knows, it may seem that way to the inverted narcissist. It really depends on how self-aware the inverted is."

"The only rejection you need to fear is the possibility of losing the narcissist and if one is doing everything else right, this is very unlikely to happen! So by 'emotionally independent' I am talking about being self-assured, doing your own thing, having a life, feeling strong and good about yourself, getting emotional sustenance from other people. I mean, let's face it, a drug is a drug is a habit. Habits just are, and what they ARE NOT are the be all and end all of love, commitment and serene symmetrical, balanced emotional perfection that is the ideal of the romanticised 'love-for-a-lifetime' all-American relationship dream."

"(I am) terribly turned on by narcissists. The most exciting moments of my life in every venue have been with narcissists. It is as if living and loving with normal people is a grey thing by comparison, not fuelled by sufficient adrenaline. I feel like a junkie, now, that I no

longer permit myself the giddy pleasure of the RUSH I used to know when I was deeply and hopelessly involved with an N. I am like a lotus-eater. And I always felt guilty about this and also sorry that I ever succumbed that first time to my first narcissist lover."

"I am exactly this way and I feel exactly as you do, that the world is a sepia motion picture but when I am intimately involved with a narcissist, it breaks out into three-dimensional Technicolor and I can see and feel in ways that are not available to me otherwise. In my case I developed this (inverted narcissism) as a result of being the favourite of my father who so completely absorbed me into his personality that I was not able to develop a sense of separation. So I am stuck in this personality matrix of needing to be engulfed, adored by and completely taken over by a narcissist in my life. In turn, I worship, defend, regulate and procure Narcissistic Supply for my narcissist. It is like the mould and the moulded."

"In my case, I realise that while I can't stop loving my current narcissist, it isn't necessary for me to avoid as long as I can understand. In my way of looking at it, he is deserving of love, and since I can give him love without it hurting me, then as long as he needs it, he shall have it."

"My personal theory is that dogmatic religious culture is a retarding influence on the growth and maturation of those heavily involved – more and more autonomy (and hence personal responsibility) seems to be blithely sacrificed to the group mind/spirit. It is as though the church members become one personality and that personality is narcissistic and the individual just folds under the weight of that kind of group pressure – particularly if you are a child."

"If I displayed behaviour that made my XXX look good to others, I was insipidly overvalued. When I dared be something other than who she wanted me to be, the sarcastic criticism and total devaluation was unbelievable. So, I learned to be all things to all people. I get a heavenly high from surrendering my power to a narcissist, to catering to them, in having them overvalue and need me, and it is the only time that I truly feel alive..."

"We have very little choice in all of this. We are as vacant and warped as the narcissist. XXX is wont to say, 'I don't HAVE a personality disorder, I AM a personality

disorder.' It defines who we are and how we will respond. You will always and ONLY have real feelings when you are with a narcissist. It is your love map, it is the programming within your psyche. Does it need to control your behaviour? Not necessarily. Knowing what you are can at least give you the opportunity to forecast the effect of an action before you take it. So, loveless black and white may be the very healthiest thing for you for the foreseeable future. I tend to think of these episodes with narcissists as being cyclic. You will likely need to cut loose for a while when your child is older. DO NOT feel ashamed please! Should a physically handicapped person feel ashamed of their handicap? No and neither should we. The trouble with us is that we are fooled into thinking that these relationships are 'guilty pleasures'. They feel so very good for a time but they are more akin to addiction satisfaction rather than being the 'right match' or an 'appropriate relationship'. I am still very conflicted myself about this. I wrote a few months ago that it was like having a caged very dangerous animal inside of me. When I get near narcissists, the animal smells its own kind and it wants out. I very carefully 'micro-manage' my life. This means that I daily do fairly regular reality checks and keep a very tight reign on my self and my behaviours. I am also obsessive-compulsive."

"I feel as though I'm constantly on an emotional roller coaster. I may wake up in a good mood, but if my N partner does or says something, which is hurtful to me, my mood changes immediately. I now feel sad, empty, afraid. All I want to do at this point is anything that will make him say something NICE to me.

Once he does, I'm back on top of the world. This pattern of mood changes, or whatever you may call them, can take place several times a day. Each and every day. I've gotten to the point where I'm not sure that I can trust myself to feel any one way, because I know that I have no control over myself. He has the control. It's scary, yet I've sort of come to depend on him determining how I am going to feel."

"When I was first involved with my cerebral narcissist I was like this but after awhile I just learned to become more emotionally distant (the ups and downs were just too much) and find emotional gratification with other people, mostly girl friends and one of two male friends. I make a point of saying ... that the invert must be or



become emotionally and financially independent (if you don't do this he will eat you up and when he has finished with you and you are nothing but a husk, you will be expelled from his life in one big vomit). It is really important for you to start to take responsibility for your own emotional wellness without regard to how he treats you. Remember that the narcissist has the emotional maturity of a two-year old! Don't expect much in the way of emotional depth or support in your relationship – he simply is not capable of anything that sophisticated."

***Also Read***

***Codependence, Counterdependence and Dependent Personality Disorder***

***Narcissistic Parents***

***Narcissists and Women***

***The Narcissist's Mother***

***The Narcissistic Couple***

***The Adrenaline Junkie***

***The Misanthropic Altruist***

***The Pathological Charmer***

***The Compulsive Giver***

***The Narcissistic Mini-Cycle***

***The Narcissist and His Family***

***Transformations of Aggression***

***Narcissism, Love and Healing***

***The Compulsive Acts of a Narcissist***

***Narcissistic Personality Disorder at a Glance***

***Narcissists, Inverted Narcissists and Schizoids***

***Self Defeating and Self Destructive Behaviours***

***Narcissists, Narcissistic Supply and Sources of Supply***

***Pathological Narcissism - A Dysfunction or a Blessing?***

Return

# *Torture*

# *Abuse*

# *Trauma*

**In Fiction and Poetry**

Nothing is Happening at Home

Mother tells me not to say anything at school about what is happening at home. Nothing is happening at home. Come morning, I wake up from my restless sleep

and either I wetted my bed or I didn't. If I did, mother silently packs off my soaked pajamas and the damp sheets, casting a harsh glance at the black stain that seeps into the bed's upholstery. The house already reeks and she opens the shutters and lays the linen on the window panes, half out and the dry half in.

I get dressed and brush my teeth. I stare at my feet that are the shape of irons and conceal them, standing on one naked foot and then another, enthralled by their curvaceous obesity. The white paste and my saliva swirl in my mouth and drip on my undershirt in odoriferous stripes. I have bad breath but I don't know it yet. Nir will tell me and then I will. I frown and pull the polluted garment away, as though I could undress horizontally instead of vertically, hands stretched upwards. It turns dark for a moment and scary so I scream. And this is how I earn today's first slap. Mother dumps the soiled underthings in the gaping laundry pale. Her eyes are desperate. I am not a successful kid. I am ugly and immature and I have an eggplant nose ("berengena" in Ladino). I rub my hurting cheek and put on the sky blue school uniform shirt and trousers. I don't know how to tie my shoelaces. Instead of slender butterflies I get knotted caterpillars, bound larva, repulsive insects with two plastic tipped antennas. My mother is taking care of my small sister. I wait patiently. She sighs and places the baby on the bed. She steps towards me and I recoil because I don't know how mad I made her. I am not sure what it's going to be this time. Sometimes she just groans and ties the laces with one incisive motion but at other times she pinches me real hard and we are both mum and my blood streams down to her nip until the place acquires shades of black, and blue and deep purple. She doesn't have to tell me to roll down my sleeves. I do it. The dirty laundry of this family stays at home. Our secrets are ours and no one else's. Sometimes I imagine us like a fortress and the enemy would kill to learn all kinds of things about us but we are not going to let it, no way. We will protect each other and we will hold them back.

On the days that mother washes the house, I withdraw to a corner and I imagine a mighty army, shooting arrows from all kinds of cracks and casements and I see a hero and he is fighting empty-handed in a variety of martial arts and he wins. Cooped up in an angle, the dirty water churning around me, rivulets of our

effluence, revolting strands of hair and nail clippings. Then she spreads a tattered blanket in the tiny balcony and turns on the radio and we listen to the Program for the Mother and Child, Listen now you lovely kids, our program is complete and she brings me a big bowl of fruits and I eat them and feed my sister, too.

When the shoelaces business is over, I turn my back to her and await the heft of my schoolbag and I exit without saying goodbye or so long or anything. She yells after me to be careful how I cross the street, there are cars, and to be wary of children, don't let them beat you. Once, a stranger lifted me on his shoulders and asked me to read aloud the names on the mailboxes. We went through many buildings, him and me. He told me that he was looking for some family. When I returned home, they shouted at me something awful and warned me not to associate with strangers because they are dangerous, this is a fortress and we are in it. Even our extended family don't visit. Mother and father don't like it when they do. They set a table with all kinds of alcoholic drinks and non-alcoholic beverages that we, the children are allowed to consume but mother's eyes follow everyone to see if they have touched anything and she doesn't like at all the mess they make, these guests.

I don't pee at school because the urinals are not clean or something. I don't remember why, I just know not to pee. Mother tells me not to hold back, it isn't healthy but I abstain on purpose. I want to pee at home. When I come back, mother doesn't let me visit the restroom to get sorted out. That's how we call it, "sorted out". It's a word the teacher Mina taught us, she said that it is not nice to pee, better to get sorted out. Mother adores this word and it became compulsory, because we are not allowed to use foul language. So I ask permission to get sorted out and mother takes a broom to me and beats me forcefully on the back and all the neighbors stand at the entrance door and watch and I pee on myself and on the floor is this large yellow puddle in which I stand.

Mummy's broom gets all wet and the neighbors laugh and mother sends me away to change my clothes, perhaps now I will learn not to hold back at school. She takes down my trousers and I am exposed to the jeering crowd, drenched and naked. It isn't a good day, this one. I read all evening and I read at night and I read during the morning. I read a lot throughout this not so good

day.

Mother could have been a famous author or an important actress but instead she had us and did not become one. She became a housewife. There is a lot of sadness and a lot of anger when she tells us that and also how once she appeared in a play as Pook the naughty dwarf and everyone complimented her and urged her to join a professional troupe. She couldn't do it because she was working in a shoe store on Mount Carmel to support her father and her mother who didn't love her at all because she was boyish. She wore her hair like a boy and dressed like a boy and was as daring as a boy and she gulped huge quantities of salty soup and three loaves of bread when she came back from work at the shop owned by the Yekkes (German-Jews) whom she admired. When I was born, the radio broadcast the proceedings of the Eichmann trial and she called me "My Little Eichmann" but that was only in jest. These Yekkes with their order and efficiency and table manners and how she studied German and they all admired her in return. And now this: a wailing baby and the dripping bed sheets of her first born (you are not a child anymore!) already six years old and must grow up and her fingernails gouging my veins on the inside of my arm and all my blood rushing towards her and staining and she stares down at her hand, a glimmer in her eyes wide open and I slowly extract my arm from her grasp and she does not resist it. She just sighs and brings some stinging violet iodine and smears it on the lacerations. After some time they scar and all that remain are pale and elongated mother traces.

So now I am reading and am in all my imaginary kingdoms and writing horror poems that mother finds and stashes on a towering cupboard to make me stop it because it's sick and she doesn't want to see it again. She tears the books I borrow from the public library and flings them out of the concrete bars that frame our laundry room where we also dine on a tiny wooden table. Through these bars she tears my realms apart and down to the shriveling grass and I leave everything and gallop downstairs because I am afraid that by the time I get to my shredded books someone will abscond with them or the wind will scatter them or the rain. I find them prostrate and wounded and I salve them with my spit to heal them like mother's purple iodine. I think that maybe my saliva will glue them back thick as it is but

they remain the same, only now their torn pages are also damp. Back at home father and I sellotape the ruptured leaves and when I go to the library, I say all kinds of lies or put on an innocent face so that the librarian Shula will not flip through it and see our shoddy handicraft, my father's and my own, even though he has golden hands and fixes everything at home. But I keep reading, sometimes five whole books a day. I am completely uninterested in their content. I don't read even one of them to its end, skip numerous paragraphs, don't even finish thrillers or mysteries. Just scan the pages, dimly aware of the words and father says to mother when she curses me under her breath, what do you want from him, you don't understand him at all and who can, he doesn't belong to us, he is from another planet. I weep when I hear these words, my silent tears, not the cries I give out when I am beaten and not the self-indulgent whimpering and see how ugly you are when you are like that. No, this is a true release between me and my pillow and I feel then how poor they are and how much I should pity them and not the other way around, because I am not from this world and I don't belong and they have to raise me all the same. Even though they are proud of me because I am a star pupil and give the keynote addresses in all the school and municipal events and declare open and closed all the ceremonies and from a tender age I had the voice of a radio announcer and am a prodigy with a bright future. Mother herself tells me that when we sit around the table and she looks my age she is so young and with a boyish haircut and pink, taut skin on her high cheekbones. She says that she is proud of me but not to let it go to my head, but there is a change in her attitude towards me, like a new fear, like I am out of the fortress now, unpredictable, from another world and don't belong.

She used to tell us about Gamliel the Sage and his adventures that always had an object lesson with his scrawny and miserable goat and his stupid neighbors that he always tricked and we would beg, mother mother, more and she graciously consented and those were afternoons of magic and I felt no need to read, only to listen to the stories of the Sage and his donkey and his son and his goat and to sip from that sweetened peach-flavored drink she made us.

But then she would say enough and ask who touched the refrigerator and we would say not we but she knew. She

always pointed at us and said that we had touched the refrigerator and we know we mustn't and how her life is being ruined by the need to clean after us and then the beatings, the beatings. All our body.

In the middle of the apartment we have a floor-to-ceiling metal divider. Father welded it together from metal leaves and metal vines and stuck a small aquarium full of teeny fish and water and a plastic diver that gives off bubbles and all kinds of shells and fine ground sand. Every morning, father gets up and spreads smelly aquarium food with callused fingers over the bubble-troubled water, rusty flakes that sink like feathers straight into the gaping jaws of the frenetic fishes. Every week one of them would remain stuck at the bottom or float and the others would snap at it and we know it is dead and it is bloated too. At night, I sleep across from this divider, on the side that mother forbids to enter during the day and the flickering light emitted by the electric all souls candle illuminates the diver and the inky water and his loneliness and the bubbles and everything and I watch it all until I fall asleep. Come morning, the room beyond the divider is off-limits, only mother is scrubbing and carefully dusting the nightly build-up off the expensive Formica furniture. I am the only one who sleeps there at night, facing the television set. Even guests are asked to watch this black-and-white wonder from the outside. Until my bedtime, I sit overlooking them all but don't take my socks off not to show my feet like irons and I hope not to wet the sheets in front of everyone, anything but that. Mother passes cookies to old Monsieur Yossef from Turkey who talks incessantly. And so I doze off amidst the sounds of the TV and of Monsieur Yossef. I have bad dreams and listen to mother and father arguing I will pack my suitcases and leave you all tomorrow, feel free, mother says, feel free to go. Tomorrow he doesn't. He gets up at the middle of the night to go to work and before he departs he straightens our blankets and I think that maybe he kisses my cheek or forehead somehow, otherwise how did his stubble scrape me it must have been a kiss.

The next day father brings me books from the library of the Union of Construction Workers in Haifa that I never visit. I do go with him to attend lectures at the Union and I ask the lecturers smart questions and everyone is amazed and so is dad. He inflates the way he always

does when he is proud of me. Now in the book he brought me there is a story about a king and clothes and a kid who has the guts to cry even though it is the monarch and everything: "The King is Naked". I read it a couple of times like I don't believe that some kid will shout such a thing about the king and what happened to him afterwards, surely he was scratched and pinched at least to death. I contemplate his iron-like feet, petite and rosy when he ascends to the gallows and how his head rolls sprinkling gore all over the crowd but everything is frozen and no one cheers like in the movies about the French revolution. Everyone gapes at this kid's lips through which he said that the King is Naked. There is something empowering and hopeful in this, as though a goodhearted old fellow with long hair bends over me because he notices that I am small and that I am bleeding profusely from my arms and he gives me this magic spell, this faith.

I open my eyes and I see that mother has a kerchief on her head, like she always wears when she is dusting. She notices my stare but she sings boisterously and I know that I am unnerving her by watching her do her chores. I know that soon she will mete out what a child like me deserves.

Return

## **Night Terror**

### **1. The Doctor**

He inserts the syringe into my jugular and draws blood, spurting into the cylindrical container. Securely seated on my chest, he then makes precise incisions around my eyelids and attempts to extract my eyeballs in one swift motion. I can see his round face, crooked teeth, and shiny black eyes, perched under bushy eyebrows. A tiny muscle flutters above his clenched jaw. His doctor's white robe flaps as he bestrides me and pins down my unthrashing arms.

There is only the stench of sweat and the muffled inhalations of tortured lungs. Mine. In my ears a drumbeat and a faraway shriek, like a seagull being butchered in mid-flight. My brain gives orders to phantom organs. I see them from the corners of my bloodshot eyes: my arms, my legs, like beached whales, bluish, gelatinous, and useless.

I scream.

I strike at him but he evades my thrust and recedes into the murky background. I won't give chase. The doors

and windows are locked, alarm systems everywhere. He stands no chance. He turns to vapor and materializes next to me in bed, clad in his robe, eyes shut, a contented smile on his face.

This is my only chance.

I turn to my side, relieved that motility is restored. I grab his slender neck. I feel his pulse: it's fast and irregular. I squeeze. He grunts. And harder. He clasps my forearms and mewls. Something's not right. The doctor never whimpers. Every night, as he peels the skin off my face with delicacy and care, he makes no sound, except belabored breathing. When he extracts tooth after nail, castrates me time and again, injects detergents into my crumbling veins, he does so inaudibly and expertly.

I hesitate.

"Max!"

Her voice.

"Max! Wake up!"

I can't wake up as I am not asleep. The doctor's there, in our bed, a danger to us both. I must exterminate him finally.

"Max! You are having another nightmare! Please, you are hurting me!"

The doctor's head turns around full circle and at the back of his flattened skull there is the face of Sarah, my lover and my friend.

I recoil. I let go. My heart threatens to break through rib and skin, its thrumming in my ears, my brain, my eye sockets, my violated jugular.

I sleep.

## **2. Sarah**

Her bags are packed, my scarlet fingerprints blemish the whiteness of her skin, she is crying. I reach for her but she retreats in horror, nostrils flared, eyes moist, a nervous tic above her clenched jaw.

"I am afraid of you." - She says, voice flat.

"I didn't mean to." - I feebly protest and she shrugs:

"Yesterday, I thought I'd die."

Her hand shoots to her neck involuntarily, caressing the sore bruises, where I attempted to strangle her at night.

"It's him, you know, the doctor."

She shudders.

"I saw him yesterday again; manicured, besuited, coiffed, as elegant as ever. He was injecting me with something that burned, it was not phenol, I would have died. It was something else."



"It's over." - Says Sarah, her eyes downcast, she sounds unconvinced.

"He's still alive." - I reason - "They haven't caught him, you know. They say he is in Argentina."

"Wherever he may be, there's nothing he can do to you."

She steps forward, palm extended towards my cheek, and then thinks better of it, picks up her tattered suitcase and leaves.

### **3. Again, the Doctor**

A rigid plastic pipe, through the large vein in my leg, towards my ovaries. I am a woman. I am to be sterilized. The doctor crouches at the foot of my bed, inspecting with mounting interest my private parts. There is a greenish liquid in a giant plunger connected to an IV stand. He nods with satisfaction. He brandishes a glinting surgical knife and slices my abdomen. He takes out a squarish organ mired in gory slime, my womb, and inspects it thoroughly.

There's blood everywhere. I can see my intestines curled in the cavity, wrapped tight in an opaque and pulsating sheet. Two ribs are visible and underneath them, my oversized heart. My breathing sears.

I chose tonight to be a woman. I want him to be at ease, not on the alert. I want him to be immersed in rearranging my organs, tearing them apart, sowing them back reversed. I want him to forget himself in the sandbox that is my body.

He leans over me, to study whether my left breast is lactating.

It is not.

I reach for the hypodermic and detach it in one swift motion.

I stick it in his jugular.

I press the plunger.

The doctor gurgles.

He whimpers and mewls.

He watches me intently as his senses dull and his body grows limp.

There is blood everywhere. The doctor drowns in it, my blood and his, a forbidden mixture.

### **4. The Police**

"Was he a medical doctor?"

"Not that I am aware of."

The burly policeman scrawled in his threadbare pad.

The psychiatrist shifted in her overstuffed armchair:

"Why are you asking?"

She was a scrawny, bleached blonde and wore high heels and a plate-sized pendant to work. The cop sighed and slid a crime scene photograph across the burrowed surface of the desk.

"It's tough viewing. I hope you didn't have breakfast." - He quipped.

She covered her mouth with a dainty, wrinkled hand as she absorbed the details.

"I can explain that." - She literally threw the photo back at her interlocutor.

He grimaced: "Go ahead, then."

"My patient is wearing the white doctor's robe because one of his alters was a Nazi camp doctor."

The policeman blinked:

"Beg your pardon?"

"My patient was a Polish Jew. He spent three years in various concentration camps, including Auschwitz."

"I heard of Auschwitz." - Said the policeman smugly.

"There, he and his young wife, Sarah, were subjected to medical experiments conducted by Nazi doctors in white robes."

"Medical experiments?"

"You don't want to know the details, believe me." - It was the psychiatrist's turn at one-upmanship.

But the officer was insistent.

"They sterilized his wife. At first, they injected some substance to her ovaries through a vein in her leg. Then they extracted her womb and what was left of her reproductive system. She was awake the entire time. They did not bother with antiseptics. She died of infection in excruciating pain."

The policeman coughed nervously.

"When my patient was liberated, at the beginning of 1945, he developed a host of mental health problems. One of them was Dissociative Identity Disorder, formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder."

The cop scribbled something and mumbled to himself.

"He had three alters. In other words, his original personality fractured to at least three parts: the original He, another part that assumed the identity of his dead wife, and a part that became the doctor that tortured them. In the last few years, every night, he enacted scenes from their incarceration. The doctor would come to him, an hour or so after he fell asleep, and conduct various procedures on his body."

"Jesus!" - Blurted the policeman and went visibly pale.

"This is called 'night terror'. The subject is asleep. You cannot wake him up. But he believes himself to be wide awake and experiences extremes of terror. Usually, he cannot even respond because he is momentarily paralyzed. We call it 'sleep paralysis'"

"But then, if he cannot move, how did he kill himself? It was clearly suicide. We found the syringe. Only his fingerprints are on it. We were able to trace down the pharmacy where he bought it. He injected himself with some kind of acidic home detergent."

"Yes, it was suicide." - Agreed the psychiatrist, shut her eyes, and rubbed her temples - "As he grew older, he also developed Rapid Eye Movement Behavioral Disorder. This meant that after he was paralyzed by the night terror, he was actually able to enact it at a later stage of his sleep. He played the doctor, he played himself resisting the doctor, he played his wife being mutilated by the doctor. He wielded knives, syringes, wounded himself numerous times. You can find all the hospital admission forms in his file. I gave him anti-depressants. We talked. Nothing helped. He was beyond help. Some patients are beyond help." - Her voice quivered.

## **5. Help**

"I killed him, Sarah, he's dead."

"I am glad."

"He will no longer bother us. We can be together again. I won't be having the dreams. I won't be attacking you anymore."

"That's good, Max."

"I peeled his face back, as he did to me. I injected him with the green liquid as he did to you. Revenge is sweet. I know it now."

"I love you, Max."

"And I never stopped loving you, Sarah. Not for a single moment."

Return

## **A Dream Come True**

They call it: 'sleep deprivation'. I call it: hell. I can't

remember the last time I have slept well, dreamlessly.

You may say that it is to be expected when one is

cooped up in a 4-by-4 cell, awaiting one's execution.

But, I found myself engulfed by insomnia long before that. Indeed, as I kept telling my incompetent lawyer, one thing led to another. I hacked my wife to tiny pieces because of my phantasmagoric visions, not the other way around

But, I am jumping the queue. Allow me to retrace

Ever since I was apprehended and detained, fourteen months ago, I have embarked on this prolonged nocturnal time travel. The minute I started to doze off, I was catapulted into the past: I relived the first encounter with my wife to be, the courtship, the trip to Europe, our marriage, the house we bought, the birth of our son - all seemingly in real time, as protracted episodes

Those were no ordinary hallucinations either. They were so vivid, so tangible, catering to my every sense, that, when I woke up, startled by the proximity of the damp walls, the rigidity of my bunk, and the coarseness of my uniform, I would lay awake for hours on end, disoriented and depleted by the experience

Gradually, I came to dread the night. It was as though my past rushed forth, aiming to converge with my

hideous and hopeless present. The dreams that hounded me viciously were excruciatingly detailed, self-consistent, and their narrative - my autobiography - was congruent and continuous: I could smell Mary, feel the humid warmth of her breath, play with her hair, listen to her halting sentences. These specters progressed in an inevitable chronology: her adulterous affair, my consuming jealousy, our confrontations. I could predict the content of each and every ephemeral chapter in this hypnopompic saga simply because I had experienced them all beforehand as my very life

.  
I found the dreams' meticulous omniscience unnerving. I could not accept the perfection and impeccability thus imputed to my recollections. It all felt so real: when I wiped Mary's tears, my hand went wet; when I attended to our oft-neglected newborn, his smile was captivating, not a microsecond longer than it would have been in vivo; I bumped into furniture and bled as a result. Come morning, I was bruised

.  
Sometimes, when I woke up from such a trance, my heart expanded with insane anticipation: the cell, the moldy paraphernalia of the penitentiary, the solid bars, the vulgar images etched into the walls by countless

predecessors - all these looked so ethereal compared to my nightly visitations! I would touch them disbelievingly until reality sank in and, heavyhearted, I would recline and stare at the murk that marked the ceiling, waiting for the sun to referee between my two existences

.  
Inexorably, my autolytic nightmares proceeded. When I confronted Mary with her infidelity, her dream-state wraith reacted exactly as its corporeal inspiration did in truth: contemning me, disparaging, mocking. I woke up perspiring and short of breath, cognizant of what would undoubtedly unfold next time I succumb to my overwhelming fatigue. I did not want to go through it again. I tortured my flesh into a full state of awakening, to no avail. Soon, I was aslumber and in the throes of yet another heinous segment

.  
This time, I found myself contemplating a kitchen knife embedded in a pool of darkening blood on the linoleum-covered floor. Mary was sprawled across the dining table in precarious acclivity, about to slip onto the abattoir. Her hair was matted, her eyes glazed, her skin a waxy tautness, and her finger pointed at me accusingly.

I felt surprisingly composed, dimly aware that this is but a dream, that it had already happened

Still, there was a sense of urgency and an inner dialog that prompted me to act. I picked up the gory implement and plunged it into Mary's neck. Dismemberment in the service of disposal occupied my mind in the next few hours as I separated limb from limb, sometimes sliding as I stepped onto the viscous muck. Finally, the work was done. Mary was no more

I then stirred, glaring with lachrymose eyes at the glimmerings of incipient sunshine across the hall. The wardens in their first rounds bellowed our names ominously during the morning call. I examined myself guiltily and apprehensively, but fourteen months of scrubbing had left no trace of Mary. My hands were clean

I realized that the only way to put an end to this tormenting playback of my crime was to sleep at once and to intentionally traverse the time between my display of butchery and my current incarceration.

Having barely digested the meager and rancid breakfast, I alternately cajoled and coerced myself into embracing

the horror that awaited me. Throughout the next few days, I nodded off fitfully, recreating in my visions my blood-splattered effort to hack Mary's lifeless corpse to pieces; my ill-conceived attempt to flee; my capture; my trial and the verdict

.

Finally, the night came that I feared most. I meditated, drawing deep breaths as I sought the arms of Morpheus. As I drifted away, I became vaguely aware of an odd convergence between my dream and my surroundings.

In my fantasy, I was leg-fettered and manacled. Two beefy policemen unloaded me from the ramp of a truck and handed me over to the prison guards who led me, in turn, to my cell

.

My dreams and reality having thus merged, I strove to wake up. In my nightmare, everything was in its place: the rusty bucket, the stone bunk, the fetid mattress, the infested blanket, the overhead naked bulb, way out of reach. I watched myself lying on the frigid slab. Startled and profoundly perturbed I asked myself: how could I occupy the same spot twice over? Wasn't I already recumbent there, dreaming this, dreaming that I am posing these questions? But, if this were a dream, where



is the real me? Why haven't I woken up, as I have done  
countless times before  
?

As the answers eluded me, I panicked. I shook the bars  
violently, banging my head against them. I was trapped  
in a delusion, but everyone around me seemed to think  
me real. The wardens rushed to restrain me, their faces  
contorted with disdain and rage. A block-mate yelled:  
"Hold on, buddy! It ain't so bad after a while!". A medic  
was summoned to look at my wounds

The dream dragged on with none of the signs that  
hitherto heralded the transition to wakefulness. I tried  
every trick I knew to emerge from this interminable  
nether-state: I shut and opened my eyes in rapid  
succession; I pinched my forearm blue; I splashed water  
from the crumbling sink on my face; I iterated the  
names of all the states of the Union ... In vain. I was  
unable to extricate myself  
!

In my overpowering anxiety, I came with this idea:  
ensnared as I was in my nightmare, if I were to go to  
sleep and dream again, surely I would find my way back  
to reality! For what a dream is to reality, surely reality is

to the dream? Reality, in other words, is merely a  
dreamer's reverie  
!

And so I did. Enmeshed in my nightmare, I went to  
sleep and dreamed of waking up to face this court. I  
want to believe with all my heart that you and I are real.  
But, it isn't easy. You see, your Honor, I have been here  
before and I know the outcome. Had I dreamt it? I shall  
soon find out, I daresay. Here I am, Your Honour,  
unable to tell one from the other. Do with me as you  
please  
".

My lawyer rose and called to the stand the medical  
doctor that attended to my lacerations after my latest  
bout of raging incoherence. As he creaked his way  
across the wooden floor, the good practitioner glanced  
at me and nodded. I ignored him, unsure whether he is  
factual, or just a figment of my overwrought and febrile  
constitution  
.

At the bailiff's prompt, he raised his hand, swore on a  
hefty Bible and took his seat. Having responded to some  
perfunctory enquiries about his qualifications and  
position, he settled down to reply to my questions, put  
to him via my lawyer

:

"

I wouldn't go as far as saying that your client is medically, or even legally insane. He suffers from a severe case of pseudoinsomnia, though, that much is

true

".

Prompted as expected, the doctor elaborated

:

"

Your client sleeps well and regularly. All the physiological indicators are as they ought to be during a satisfactory and healthy somnolence. Moreover, your client has dreams, exactly like the rest of us. The only difference is that he dreams that he is awake

".

Judge and jury jerked their heads in astounded incomprehension. The witness continued to enlighten the bench

:

"

Your honor, in his dreams, this patient fully believes that he is awake. People afflicted with this disorder complain of recurrent insomnia, even though our tests consistently fail to turn up a sleep disorder. In extremis, the very boundaries between wakefulness and napping get blurred. They find it difficult to tell if they are

merely dreaming that they are awake, or are truly not

asleep

".

He rummaged among his papers until he found the

transcripts of his interviews with me

:

"

In this patient's case, he developed pseudoinomnia

after he discovered his wife's liaison with another man."

- The young doctor blushed - "He then began to dream

that he is awake and that he is planning and executing

the gruesome assassination of his spouse. Of course,

throughout this time, he was sound asleep. The dreams

he was having were so vivid and have processed such

traumatic material that the patient remembered them in

detail. Moreover, fully believing himself to be awake,

he did not realize these were only dreams. He convinced

himself that the events he had dreamt of had actually

transpired

".

The judge bent forward

:

"

Doctor," - he droned, evidently annoyed - "I don't

understand: if the patient believes that he had already

murdered his wife, why is he a danger either to himself

or to her, let alone to society at large? Surely, he is not  
going to murder her a second time  
"?

The court erupted in laughter and the judge, smug on  
the podium, was particularly slow to use his gable to  
quell the hooting

The doctor removed his eyeglasses and rubbed the  
lenses carefully

:

"

The patient's sense of reality is impaired, Your Honor.

For instance, he believes that he is in prison, like in his  
dreams, although he has been told numerous times that  
he has been committed to a mental health facility for  
evaluation. As far as he is concerned, his existence has  
become one big blur. Every time his dreams are  
contradicted, he may turn unsettled and agitated. He  
may even lose control and become violent. Next time he  
comes across his estranged wife, he may truly kill her,  
as a re-enactment and affirmation of his nightmares and  
he is bound to consider such a deed a harmless dream  
".

"

So," - the judge interrupted him, impatiently - "it is  
your view that he should be committed

"?

"

I would definitely recommend it." - Concluded the

doctor

.

When all the formalities were over, the judge rose from

his chair and we all stood up. As he reached the entrance

door to his chambers, he turned around, puzzled

:

"

By the way, where is his wife? I haven't seen her even

once during these proceedings. Anyone has

communicated with her? Technically, she is his

guardian, you know

".

There was a long silence as everyone avoided everyone

else's gaze, shuffled feet, and ruffled papers

.

That was my last chance

:

"

I murdered her, Your Honor. I have been telling you for

months now!" - I shouted

.

The judge eyed me pityingly, sighed, shrugged his

shoulders and flung the door open, crossing into the

penumbral recesses beyond

Return

**Cutting to Existence**

**My little brother cuts himself into existence.  
With razor tongue I try to shave his pain,  
he wouldn't listen.**

**His ears are woolen screams, the wrath  
of heartbeats breaking to the surface.**

**His own Red Art.**

**When he cups his bleeding hands  
the sea of our childhood  
wells in my eyes  
wells in his veins  
like common salt.**

Return

**In the concentration camp called Home**

**In the concentration camp called Home,**

**we report in striped pajamas  
to the barefeet commandant,**

**Our Mother orchestrating  
our daily holocaust.**

**Burrowing her finger-  
-nails through my palms,**

**a scream frozen between us,  
a stalactite of terror**

**in the green caves of her eyes**

**there, sentenced to forced labour:**

**to mine her veins of hatred**

**to shovel her contempt**

**to pile scorn upon scorn**

**beating(s) a path.**

**At noon, Our Mother  
leads us to the chambers**

**naked, ripples of flesh**

**she turns on the gas**

**and watches our hunger**

**as her food devours us.**

Return

**Sally Ann**

**I wrote, Sally Ann, I wrote:**

**Shot from the cannon of abuse**

**as unwise missiles do.**

**Course set.**

**Explosive clouds that mark  
your video destination.**

**Experts interpret,**

**pricking with laser markers,**

**inflated dialects**

**of doom.**

**Hitting the target, you  
splinter, a spectacle  
of fire and of smoke.  
The molten ashes,  
the cold metallic remnants,  
the core...  
A peace accord  
between you and your self.**