

**Living Under the Shorts, T-shirt, Thongs and Skin of my Narcissistic Kin:**  
**Narcissistic Victim Syndrome**

**Abstract:** This paper explores the ramifications of growing up as an extension of the narcissist's persona, being forced to live under their shorts, t-shirt thong and skin. Narcissistic Victim Syndrome (NVS) is a new epidemic, rapidly rising. It is suffered by those kin of narcissists who have been exposed to extreme narcissistic personality disorders for an extended period of time. How do we recognise or counsel it and what is has gaslighting, hoovering and extensions got to do with it? How can you as a counsellor be prepared when a victim of a narcissist ends up in your therapy room? This paper deals with the phenomenon of a new syndrome, NVS, fast on the rise and being called into recognition by psychotherapists partitioning for it to be recognised in the next DSM-V for 2013. This paper explores the effects of narcissistic behaviour on the family living with the narcissist/s and also on adult children of narcissists (ACON). It merges into a thorough exploration of recognising Narcissistic Victim Syndrome in the counselling room and the four phases involved when counselling it. This challenging revolutionary exploration extends into which therapies work well when counselling NVS and what pitfalls to avoid.

**Key words** include: gaslighting, narcissistic personality disorder, adult children of narcissists (ACON), therapeutic relationship, attachment theory, differentiation, active imagination, expressive therapies, Jungian active imagination, gestalt, development of self, abuse, narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), narcissistic games, narcissistic behaviour, narcissistic victim syndrome (NVS), manipulation, rage, brainwashing, symptoms, psyche, boundaries, splitting, brain plasticity and mindfulness.

**Author:** Ms Tania Cusack M.Couns. Hands Full of Hope Counselling Service.  
Logan/Brisbane, Qld. Aust.

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25 minute oral presentation plus 5 mins questions or  
Workshop presentation 90 minute including audience participation

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## **Living under the shorts, T-shirt, thong and skin of my narcissistic kin:**

### **Narcissistic Victim Syndrome**

Just imagine for a minute what it would be like if you were forced to live under someone else's t-shirt, shorts and thongs with them, or even under their skin. Imagine if you weren't allowed to develop your own personality and beliefs and not even allowed to think for yourself or express yourself. Imagine you are trained to subtly feel things from the position of being inside their skin. If this person was not anything but self centred what would the mental health ramification of this be for you?

Those growing up under the same roof as malignant narcissistic kin, who aren't narcissists themselves often are forced to live like this in subtle, yet overbearing ways which are difficult to pin point. They often don't get to individuate or differentiate in the same way as those not growing up under malignant narcissists. These people are statistically more likely to have the mental health issues and seek help but often the underlying issues are not addressed correctly or adequately by counsellors and in a lot of cases not understood or recognised by counsellors.

Now imagine for a second that you are at the movies and someone comes up to you and meets your dream time perfect partner requirements. They are charismatic, energetic, love all the things you love, are slightly smarter than you but don't show off, except to you. They light your heart on fire and make you feel amazing. What you don't know is they are going to gaslight you. You probably don't know what this is or even that they are going to do it to you. They are trained better than the CIA in brainwashing, interrogation and torture. The problem is you just can't see it at all, but you will end up going to therapy with the vague reason that you just aren't coping with your life. You may even be secretly doubting reality and think you are going insane. Your functionality will be low but you don't understand why and most counsellors won't understand why either, and you're probably high ability. You may go to several counsellors who just don't understand any more than you do, and offer short term solutions which just don't seem to work. Eventually you may find a counsellor that twigs to the fact that the love of your life is a gaslighter because they have a narcissistic personality disorder, which is undiagnosed.

First I will outline the statistics relating to ‘Narcissistic Victim Syndrome’ and how prevalent it is for us as counsellors to be up to date with this growing phenomenon. I will then look into what a narcissistic personality is and how to recognise one because it’s difficult to understand Narcissistic Victim Syndrome (NVS) without understanding the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) behaviour. I will then discuss the impact on their spouses and their offspring, who are high risk candidates for Narcissistic Victim Syndrome. Finally I will discuss how to more effectively counsel people with NVS.

1% of the entire population is diagnosed as Narcissistic Personality Disorders. Narcissists make up between 2-16 % of the clinical setting. 25 – 30% of narcissistic personality disorder diagnosed are women which leaves 70-75% diagnosed who are men. In the U.S 2.2% of the population are diagnosed NPD using the SCID11 (Crawford et al 2005) and no comorbidity statistics exist, yet other research discusses comorbidity between narcissism and psychopathy and narcissism and borderline. These are all cluster B in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and have shared traits. Psychologist Jean M Twenge, Phd studied trends in America and proved that there had been a 67% increase in Narcissism over past two decades. She estimates 10% of the overall population suffers from narcissism as a personality disorder. All of this seems like an insignificant minority, however I am not writing about treating narcissists but those damaged by them, which is a much greater number. Narcissists affect their kin, which is usually more than one person per diagnosed narcissist, plus their work peers and subordinates and unsuspecting friends. This significantly raises the statistics of those damaged by narcissists that we are dealing with in our counselling rooms.

Additionally these statistics are only dealing with those diagnosed, which rarely occurs unless in penitentiary or dire circumstances. There are far more narcissists out there than are in these statistics. Narcissism does not solely refer to diagnosable NPD, but is on a spectrum moving from healthy ego to narcissistic traits to narcissistic personality to narcissistic personality disorder and through to psychopathy. The reality of these statistics is that people with narcissistic personality disorders rarely have the capacity for introspection and can not admit their faults so few actually end up in counselling, psychologists or psychiatrists offices and fewer

again get diagnosed. Therefore these statistics are not a true representation of the amount of damage out there done to children of narcissists or kin of narcissists or even co-workers of. A large percentage of these people may be suffering Narcissistic Victim Syndrome in varying degrees.

According to pressman there are covert narcissistic families and overt narcissistic families. Overt ones are easier to identify because you will see physical abuse, drugs, alcohol, sexual abuse and even neglect, which is overt enough to be noticed by authorities. However with covert narcissistic families it may be that the family members don't even know they are in a dysfunctional damaging family as it all appears perfect on the surface. Although people may hear many negative things about those with NPD, they have many skills, combined with charming and very charismatic qualities, which are brought to the forefront when they meet you if you are their target. If you are not their target you will most likely be ignored and find them rude and arrogant. The underlying mantra of a male narcissist tends to be "I will need no one." Whereas a female narcissist is more likely to have a mantra of "You owe me" (Behary, 2008).

**Malignant Narcissists or NPD are recognised by:**

- Sense of entitlement
- Grandiosity
- Arrogant and domineering
- Preoccupation with success and power
- Lack of empathy and remorse
- Belief of being unique
- Requiring excessive admiration
- Exploitative
- Envious of others (McNeal, 2003; American Psychiatric Association, 2000)

5 or more of these traits displayed at same time are used to diagnose NPD. For a set of questions for counsellors to ask a client to help ascertain if their problems derive from someone with NPD in their lives refer to Appendix A.

People with NPD will always strive to gain narcissistic supply. Their motivation is that narcissistic supply to them is like a drug. It keeps away the pain of their original wound of rejection, shame and/or abandonment. It effectively preserves their ego. Narcissistic supply comes in two forms, primary and secondary narcissistic supply. The primary supply is the one that give them all the attention and power they crave. This can be public such as notoriety, fame, success, or private attention or power such as flattery, admiration, fear, repulsion, acclaim. A secondary narcissistic

source refers to the things or people, which give that narcissistic supply on a regular basis such as spouse, children, friends, colleagues, status symbols such as fancy cars, club memberships. As narcissists are essentially unable to feel empathy and are addicted to narcissistic supply their main aim is to gain maintain and control those supplies at any cost (Louis De Cannonville, 2011).

A narcissist takes on this narcissistic false self or persona, which is often a huge discrepancy between their persona and their real Self (which is narcissistic). This persona is divided into many categories of narcissists however the two main ones are Grandiose and depressive. The grandiose narcissist will usually exhibit grandiose qualities aiming at or lying about being world's best. Alternatively a depressive narcissist tends to take on a persona that makes people have great sympathy for them as they are the world's hardest done by, and the world's best martyrs. In each narcissist the real self is the part that holds the damage of the original wound, not the persona.

A narcissist changes their persona when the old one fails. They change who they are like we change a job. They simply are not that person any more. They are now someone different with different behaviours a different look or projection for others to assimilate. The underlying narcissism and the underlying control doesn't change, just the method used to portray it as acceptable.

Any time a narcissist's persona or lies are challenged and a narcissist begins to feel the original wound, they will fly into a rage which tends to last a few days, or until the narcissist eliminates the threat. This doesn't necessarily mean they will be violent, some narcissists are not physically violent but calculatingly manipulative instead.

### **The outer workings of a narcissist.**

The Narcissistic Victim Syndrome (NVS) affects all those close enough to the narcissist to live under their shorts t-shirts thongs and skin. It can also affect work colleagues and subordinates.

The narcissist's plethora of manipulative behaviours form patterns called Game Plans. One of these game plans, which is universal in narcissists is called gaslighting. It is essential for counsellors to understand gaslighting in order for them to be effective in helping clients through NVS.

Gaslighting is a form of abuse used by narcissists to deliberately and progressively, psychologically brainwash the target into total submission and mental instability.

Narcissists do not see people as we do. Their disorder does not allow them to feel and attach the same way as us. A narcissist chooses an object or target, which we would call a person, who he sees as something to conquer. Because of his/her jealousy of the targets persona or achievements he/she then sets out to prove to him/herself that he/she is better than the target. They then turn on the charming persona and do anything to set up acceptance and narcissistic supply from their target. Christine Louis De Cannville gave gaslighting three stages from conception to ending. The **first stage** she called the **idealisation stage** (Louis De Cannonville, 2011). In this stage the narcissist acts ideal, fakes lies and falsifies everything to win his victim to fall in love with him or her. At this point the narcissist idealises his or her victim also. For example Brian Jaquel Junior in 2004, in the U.K. chose a young lady as his target, broke into his trust fund to set up a false rouse of him being a professional tennis player who was very wealthy. He falsified contractual documents from Nike and Asics, which he showed his target and he asked her to be his secretary, complaining how annoying it was organising things while he should be practicing tennis. He drew up false documents again to make her sign and payed her a wage out of his trust fund, making up false phone calls and contracts for her to negotiate as a secretary. All of this was to impress her and to make her think he was a world class tennis player in great demand. In actual fact he was a reasonable tennis player with grandiose ideals and a narcissistic personality disorder with all nine traits.

A more common example is a narcissist who went to youth group to convince his target he was a good christian gentleman and popular. He set up false facebook and twitter accounts as friends of his and falsified his entire past, just to convince her he was a world class hairdresser and very popular Christian. He then went about wooing her with roses and other exorbitant articles, telling her they cost far more than he really paid, constantly declaring his undying love for her.

The **second stage** of gaslighting is the **devaluation stage** (Louis De Cannonville, 2011). When the narcissist turns cold overnight and suddenly the victim can't do anything right and the narcissist is never wrong. The true narcissistic tendencies are not always hidden anymore. During this phase the victim tends to wish

so strongly to return to the idealisation stage that they may eventually split their narcissist into good and bad. This is a coping mechanism they adopt in lieu of differentiation or emotional separation, so they can stay and cope with the abuse in hope of return to the idealisation stage. During this second phase of gaslighting the narcissist turns on all their manipulative controlling behaviours and make life hell for the victim in order to gain their narcissistic supply (Louis De Cannonville, 2011).

Although in 2004 Brian Jacquel Junior did not make it into the second phase with his secretary girlfriend, he certainly made his parents life difficult, booking two tickets to America for him and his girlfriend on his parents credit card. He had no way and no intention of paying it back, because he believed he was special and did not need to. Alternatively most narcissistic personality cases I have come across in this phase tend to constantly put down their spouse, blame them for everything, and are especially adept at making them think they have done the wrong thing when indeed it was the narcissist. For example I knew one narcissist who drugged his spouse and gave her a Mohawk. He insisted she did it herself she was drunk and crazy. She only remembered drinking one glass of wine. His story was a very believable fabrication of facts woven with falsery. He knew her aunty was mentally ill and used that to his advantage to describe similar behaviours she supposedly exhibited when she was drunk or in an altered state, which she couldn't possibly remember.

Additionally she also used to wake up with bruises over her body and not know where they came from. He told her she had another crazy episode and was punching herself. With tears in his eyes he looked directly into hers and said "I am so worried about you but I don't want them to lock you up. We can't tell anyone. I will just have to suffer quietly and pray for you." What he did not tell was he was drugging her and punching her, venting his rage on her. Over a period of ten years, several times she went to hospital to discover broken bones but never knew how they got there. She thought she was losing her mind. She eventually stopped talking to friends in fear they would find out she was crazy. She also lost all her confidence and stopped going out. Resultantly her functionality decreased. Her narcissist persisted in telling her she was useless and undermining anything she did do right until well after the third phase was over. Another narcissist I know hypnotised his entire family so he could have sexual encounters with them without boundaries. Most narcissists just use lies and falsification but ruffies are becoming more popular.

The **third phase** is the **discarding phase** (Louis De Cannonville, 2011). Once the fun of gaslighting is over and the victim is totally dependent on the narcissist they become tired of this game, disliking the neediness of the victim. Narcissists can't feel empathy so tend to discard their victim or completely ignore them and their relationship. Once the narcissist finds another source of narcissistic supply which excites them more they will move out of the relationship with the now disposed of gaslighting victim who is burnt, confused and in a fragile psychological state of mind (Louis De Cannonville, 2011).

In 2004 Brian Jacquel Junior did not get to move to second or third phase with his new target because moved into the discarding stage with his parents by murdering his parents with a screwdriver after hitting rage when they confronted him about the airline tickets on their visa. He stepped over the bodies, went out for the night, came back two days later, packed his bags and went to America with his girlfriend/secretary for two weeks, pretending to do the tennis circuit and charming her with his persona which now appeared plausible. Of course he couldn't possibly have her watch him play in the tournament so he used the excuse it put him off his game having people he knew watch him. he sent her shopping while he watched the tennis.

Six weeks later the bodies were found and he went to jail for the murder. His girlfriend is the luckiest lady, because she didn't get to be hoovered, sucked in again and again and didn't get discarded.

The wife of the narcissist who gave her a Mohawk and used other horrible behaviours became completely dependent on her narcissist husband because she believed she could not function any more. He then found another woman and funnelled all their savings into overseas bank accounts, quit his job, sold the boat and holiday house and mortgaged the house they lived in before he told her he was leaving because she was useless. He walked out the door, but returned any time he had a fight with his new target. All she got in settlement was a house with a huge mortgage she couldn't pay. He absconded with the rest. She had to sell the house and move somewhere cheaper.

The church girlfriend managed to get to a counsellor when he started getting violent, after she had moved in with him and was helped to realise after four months of careful weekly therapy that he was a narcissist and she didn't need him anymore.

Gaslighting may take twenty years for some games or only a few months for others. Generally speaking even after a narcissist discards one of his/her victims he/she will return to that narcissistic source of supply when they are down and out of narcissistic supply. (Louis de Cannonville)

If the victim tries to leave during the first stage of the relationship the narcissist will relentlessly stalk them, lie to and sabotage anyone who says antagonistic things to the victim about the narcissist and add them into the gaslighting system to be subdued or eliminated.

If the victim tries to leave during the second stage of the gaslighting, the NPD quickly returns to the first stage of the gaslighting, forcing enmeshment and positive regard for the NPD once again, instilling hope and dependency. Of course once this is achieved the NPD returns to the second stage of nasty behaviours to control the victim.

If the victim does manage to leave, the NPD returns to the first phase of gaslighting to win them back into this insidious game. This game of winning back can include begging, stalking and using others to destabilise the victim. I have had narcissists of my clients turn up to counselling with a false name, to involve me in the gaslighting game to get me as the counsellor to doubt the victims story, hoping I would then destabilise my clients and tell them to return to the ever so charming narcissist. Be warned simmering just under the together perfect surface of the NPD at this point is rage of rejection, which can escalate at anytime into violence, cruelty and revengeful behaviour or in some cases murder. However like any continuum it is the extremes that are fewer and the normative narcissist is more likely to undermine you or your client in manipulative but subtle ways which are difficult to prove. I have had narcissists sit in front of me and earn the best EMI awards by making tears stream down their faces as they tell me how much it hurts them not to have their girlfriend or spouse and how much it hurts that their girlfriend would lie about them in such hurtful ways. I have also had narcissists sit in front of me crying and telling me I made them so sad by what I was doing unfairly because I had not listened to their side. One thing I can tell about a narcissist is they nearly always look you straight in the eye while they cry, where as my other clients look away from me when they cry. Narcissists don't feel the shame because it's either a justified way of getting narcissistic supply or its false.

I have implied the victim is the spouse through my gaslighting examples and used men as narcissists because of the statistics but please be aware female narcissists also play these gaslighting games. Furthermore it's not just spouses, but work colleagues and children of narcissists who also get gaslit. The difference is colleagues can get out by choice however children are gaslit over and over and over in their life time from birth. They are picked up and discarded frequently and any time they try to remove themselves from the narcissist, even if they were being ignored, the gaslighting game is triggered back to stage one. It is all a game to control the narcissistic supply. The carnage does not matter to the NPD because they can't feel empathy they can only fake it. Their behaviours are outrageous and shockingly boundaryless.

There are subtle differences when counselling a spouse or an adult child of a narcissist. For a counsellor to understand them they first need to understand how the narcissist views the children and how this effects a child's development. Note that the spouse will possibly have already developed a sense of Self, and lessen or destabilise it however a narcissists child from birth has to struggle to develop a sense of Self under gaslighting and other horrific controlling programs.

### **The Narcissistic Parent's Behaviour Towards their children.**

Malignant identification with a parent often leads to compliance and resultantly sacrifice of self (Gardner, 2004; Gershelis, 2011; Somerstein, 2008).

Sommerstein (2008), referring to narcissist's children, writes,

the child holds the tragic illusion that he is part of a mutually loving relationship but there is no mutual relationship because only the father is allowed subjectivity. The child is motivated to maintain the illusion of mutuality because facing his fathers indifference or hostility is simply too painful. Children fabricate parents they need through the use of fantasy (Ferenczi, 1929, 1949 cited Somerstein, 2008 p 14)

The narcissistic personality is destructive in all social arenas especially in the family. Symmington (1993 p 10, 18 cited Gardner, 2004) indicates that one of the ways narcissism operates is to destroy separateness (Somerstein, 2008). Clinical evidence (Cooper and Maxwell cited Gardner, 2004 (Bowlby, 1988; Winnicott, 1987; Somerstein, 2008; Kradin, 2009) show that Narcissistic Personality Disordered (NPD)

parents can't foster the process of separate development. A narcissistic parent does not appropriately mirror to a child therefore the child of a narcissist is at a higher risk of not receiving essential mirroring for their development of the brain pertaining to the area of self development (Grandy, 2012; Glickauf-Haughes, 1997). When the child of a narcissist tries to leave they often struggle with feeling as though their narcissistic parent/s who could never appropriately be joined can then never be left (Ross, 1982, cited Somerstein, 2008 p16)

Narcissists can breed narcissists but most often they don't breed true narcissists but more children who model narcissistic behaviour without the internal structure of a true narcissistic personality. The narcissist does not recognise the emerging self of the child. The child is not allowed to separate from the parents. The child can but does not always then learn to create a false self and use it to collect narcissistic supply to overcome extreme controlling parents. Most often the NPD parent stops or retards the child's personality from developing (Winnicott, 1987; Bowlby, A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development, 1988; Gardner, 2004; Vaknin, 1999).

Usually the narcissist sees his or her own child as an extension of their narcissistic persona and a narcissistic supply (Gardner, 2004; Vaknin, 1999). Narcissistic supply is like a drug made of admiration to the narcissist. Keeping in mind the narcissist like any drug addicted person is constantly living with the threat that their delicate internal balance of narcissistic supply which is gained using their external persona, may be extinguished. The narcissist uses the child who they see as an extension of their own persona, to become their vicarious bi-proxy. This vicarious bi-proxy occurs in two ways, which can oscillate.

1. **Merge** with the child: this is seeing the child as an extension of their persona and not allowing the child to individuate or differentiate or separate (Bowlby, A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development, 1988; Schnarch, 2009; Schnarch, 1997; Vaknin, 1999; Winnicott, 1987; Briere J. &, 2006; Love, 2009) ie stuck living under the shorts t-shirt and thongs of a narcissist.
2. To become **ambivalent** towards the child. This is when the narcissist reacts to the child's attempt to differentiate. The differentiation forces the breaking of the narcissists unreality of mergence with the child,

into an ambivalent state. When in an ambivalent state the child is viewed by the narcissist as ‘needs to be destroyed or returned to emergence’ (Gershelis, 2011; Vaknin, 1999). This ambivalence is exacerbated by the desire to control and own the child, which clashes with the pathological jealousy the narcissist feels of the child’s accomplishments. This results in desire to ameliorate any conflict and source of conflict (Vaknin, 1999).

When a narcissist switches to ambivalence they can micro manage using some of the following techniques

- **Guilt driven manipulation** eg I sacrificed my life for you. How could you say such things, how could you be so cruel and wound me like that, you hurt me. It’s your fault I am sick, sad, jobless etc.
- **Dependence techniques** eg I need you, I can’t live without you, I will kill myself or I am too ill to live without you, all of which is often feigned.
- **Goal driven devices** ie we set this business up together we need to work together. You can’t get rid of me. You can’t achieve this without me.
- **Explicit mechanisms** eg if you do not adhere to my ethics, religion or any other set of values and if you do not obey my commands orders and edicts and answer my questions correctly, I will impose sanctions on you that you won’t like, such as cutting you out of the will, not talking to you, punishing you, raging at you, projecting all my self hatred at you and making you think it is yours, putting you down to the core or manipulating you back under my control (Vaknin, 1999).

**Living under a Narcissist you may be exposed to explicit behaviour mechanisms such as:**

- **Rage** for three days or so is common amongst NPD. It can manifest as controlled calculated callous punishment such as in the case of Mary whose favourite toy was accidentally on purpose broken, or in the case of Bill who received twenty page emails reciting how wrong Bill was and how useless Bill was and how right the NPD was. In the case of Brian Jaquel Junior who had all nine of the NPD traits the rage turned physical. He violently murdered his

parents in 2004. Often Narcissists are mistaken as psychopathic or vice versa but all psychopaths are narcissistic but not all narcissists are psychopathic.

- **Sleep deprivation** take the case of Jodi who was woken up two or three times a week when her NPD parent hit rage, The NPD would wake her up around midnight and sit her on a chair for several hours while the NPD raged and made her repeat the values and/or ethics in first person that the NPD monologued about in rage. This often involved assaulting Jodi's sense of self to maintain dependency and worked on ensuring she remained an extension of the narcissist.
- **Brainwashing** the narcissist is highly skilled finding and exploiting a person's weaknesses and manipulating it to get them to think and agree with the NPD. Brainwashing is usually about ethics, values, commands and beliefs but not solely contained to these. In the case of Heather, despite her religious upbringing, she was told and made to believe that only some of the bible is true psalms are not and Jesus did die on the cross but sex is ok before marriage and so is sodomy. In several cult cases the NPD leader has re-written the bible adding sexual elements to it in order to allow them to manipulate and brainwash the entire congregation into uninhibited sexual conduct including with the children. Some leaders even go as far as brainwashing they only can hear God or are God.
- **Reality Adjustment**, A NPD is skilled in adjusting reality through lying and manipulating. If a child or spouse sees the NPD do something opposite to their persona but true to their real narcissistic self such as a vindictive action and when the child or spouse comments on it, then their NPD will state an alternate reality such as "no I did that because you asked me to or I did that because it will be best for you to learn now not make a fool of yourself later. You know I love you. I'd never do anything to hurt you. All I ever do is things to teach you." Reality adjustments always paint the narcissist as a wonderful persona, not reality and leave the victim feeling confused and wrong or bad.
- **Hypnosis** – the ultimate mind control. In the case of Dan and his siblings, when Dan, the youngest separated from his father as is normal development at age nine, this evoked extreme rage in the NPD. After his usual array of micro controlling devices did not work he resorted to learning hypnosis to gain

ultimate control of Dan and his older siblings. He then subjected them to serious hypnosis and control, erasing their memories and reinstating his reality into their psyche, plus implanting false memories.

- **Drugging** – another ultimate control but only of the body –In the case of Heather, her NPD in the early phase of their relationship hid his rage and when it hit he would slip ruffies into her drinks then when she woke all her head was be shaved and she was covered in bruises and had no memory. Her NPD always concocted an elaborate story to cover this up, explaining unbelievable things in a believable way, even fabricating other witnesses who could be interviewed on facebook, but were actually him. the amount of three vodkas doesn't coincide with blackouts because she has not drunk much before.
- **Over powered** where a normal person would stop an argument before it is at the expense of the relationships a narcissist stops at nothing to overpower another person, especially if it is about gaining a sense of their persona being real.
- **Normalisation** - Keeping of the secret is imperative this is a narcissit's family code. Our family is normal every other family is not normal. To an ACON normalisation is enforced by the NPD so that NPD rage is normal and to hide it is also normal.
- **Always wrong** – damned if you do damned if you don't. A narcissist will never admit themselves at fault and never admit their faults. It is always someone else's fault. Nor will they admit to responsibility for hurting someone. It is always the other persons fault.
- **Imposing Alternate realities and False Memories** – narcissists favourite thing is to re-story reality to match their persona and make them look good and you look bad. They not only re-story their internalisations but other peoples as well.
- **Lying and Projection** that no matter how much an ACON collects evidence and keep tabs they still are never totally sure of the truth and they become exhausted trying to keep track of truth. For example the narcissist will lie about their behaviour constantly so as to project and sell their persona for narcissistic supply. Usually the narcissist lies by using their own projections

and reversing them about themselves. In the case of Amelia, her NPD told all relatives she was a lesbian and that she had a Borderline PD and Bipolar. This was a reaction to her telling one relative she was abused and worked out he was a narcissist. Most often what the narcissist lies about indicates what is going on internally for them, for example this narcissist was struggling with sexuality and gay tendencies and was afraid others would believe he had a narcissistic personality disorder, so this is what he projected onto the extension of himself, his ACON. What the narcissist hates about him/herself they will most often project onto others, especially to control them. In Heathers case her NPD projected laziness, which is quite common.

- **Demands of Loyalty** An NPD demands loyalty from their family especially ACONS and Spouses. This is done through demands, rage and rewards for loyalty. ACON's are trained to want to be liked and admired by the NPD. One thing they are given credence for is loyalty. The Narcissist upholds this by demonstrating constantly to family how disloyal other people are, while really being the disloyal one. In the case of Bridget and Heather they were both subjected to their NPD spending an hour degrading visitors after they left, which usually had a large element of how inferior the visitors were and how disloyal they were.
- **Over controlling** – such as in the case of Bridget her NPD parent locked away the kettle and toaster and put a lock on the pantry and phone. He also cut the chord off the television and controlled all that was eaten, when it was eaten, that was said, thought and done by each child and spouse and what the children thought. In a few cases the NPD has even been known to bathe their children and control when and how long bathing rituals take, even at the age of the child being eighteen or older.
- **Sexual exploitations** – As a narcissist is in love with themselves they tend to use sex as a masturbatory method rather than an intimacy and a bearing and sharing of the soul. As narcissists are boundary busters by nature it is not uncommon for them to use the extension of themselves, be it spouse or offspring as a masturbatory tool (Vaknin, 1999). Due to their addictive nature and their addiction to narcissistic supply they tend to see themselves as fantastic lovers however once they have what they want they can become

selfish and cruel. For this reason it is also not uncommon for them to request and manipulate their way into sexual deviations, some of which may even be abhorrent to their partners (Paxton, 1995).

- **Triangulating/Sabotage-** Along with the nature of enmeshment comes triangulation where the narcissist uses others to directly tell their messages to the ACON or spouse thus in effect ganging up on the ACON or spouse. Eg the narcissistic mother will befriend the ACON daughters boyfriend and enmesh then lever that by telling the boyfriend lies and playing poor me to get the boyfriend to chastise the ACON for the way she treats the narcissistic mother, effectively sabotaging the new couples relationship. Triangulating is used most effectively amongst family. Eg after Elissa left her NPD husband, he managed to triangulate and manipulate Elissa's brother and his wife to the point that Elissa could no longer remain in contact with them, effectively cutting her off from all remaining family. The NPD then set out to try and sabotage her relationships with her children the same way.
- **Changing persona's** - When an NPD's persona fails their justification is it was my persona that failed not me, so they take on a new persona. This is usually done only when the persona failed in a way that is public and undeniable such as jail, fired from a job or public criticism. In the case of Jodi, her NPD father moved locations each time he tried to change a persona. He also completely changed jobs and looks. This disrupted her constance in life. In Bill's case he found it destabilising in a different way. His NPD went from an academic to a gnostic overnight, expecting Bill to keep up with the change and remain the supplier. Bill was atheist so found this extremely difficult and confusing. The persona change was so extreme the transition for Bill was fraught with mistakes, not knowing how the NPD wanted to be treated now. Bill of course was blamed and blamed himself, thinking he was truly the horrible person he was told he was, for doubting such a God as the NPD. Bill moved from the golden child to the scape goat overnight with this transition.
- **Gameplans** – narcissists tend to combine these behaviours into patterns called game plans.

- Some of their favourite games are **Gottcha** – a game about deceiving people into believing they are something opposite to what they are then later revealing the truth after the person trusts them and **Gaslighting** – a malicious way a narcissist sets up people to become their narcissistic supply caught in a web of lie and deceit. **Hoovering** is another game which is also part of their gaslighting game. The idea is to see how many times they can suck a person back into loving them after they discard them. This sense of power gives tremendous narcissistic supply, whilst at the same time they find the person repugnant for being so weak. To see more games and definitions related to their behaviour see appendix D .

### **The real mind of a Narcissist?**

San Vaknin a self professed narcissist who took on the persona of becoming the grandiose world expert on Narcissistic Personality Disorder poignantly states that-Narcissists resent weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

“They have an in-bred aversion towards the sick, children, elderly, sick people weak vulnerable which provokes in the narcissist a sadistic impulse to inflict further pain, to exploit the vulnerability and enhance the weakness.

According to Sam Vaknin (utube) people with narcissistic personality disorders hate children because

they are an embodiment of the narcissistic traits but at the same time are everything the narcissist wants to have. For example a child gets attention when they enter the room so the narcissist feels jealousy because they want that attention. A child is adored for their immature silly behaviour, which is the adoration a narcissist wants. Similarly a child loves freely and feels emotions, which the narcissist is devoid of, but may want to feel. A child is usually nurtured which is often the healthy nurturing the narcissist never had but desperately wants. This makes the narcissist jealous of the child because their needs are met and despise the child because the child is a mirror of the narcissist’s real self, thus threatening their personas believability.

Despite Sam Vaknin’s lack of substantiated academic credentials, his personality and writings demonstrate clearly and ruthlessly how a narcissist thinks.

An NPD needs to be in absolute control so challenges authority all the time. When he or she is unsuccessful then he or she rages. If his/her persona is threatened and the real self is exposed then the narcissist also rages.

Vaknin, on a U-tube dvd stated

“When I feel insulted or injured I feel annihilated to the core and negated. It feels like I am dissolving into molecules. I need to immediately restore it by rage and try to kill the source of frustration . Even a hint of criticism or disagreement threatens the precarious balance that I have created over many years, the balance that constitutes my personality. You are out to destroy and kill me so I am out to kill and destroy you.”

This statement embodies the real reason children are at risk and why ACONS are often so damaged by Narcissists. This statement is the real motivator of narcissists.

### **Recognising the possibility of your client having Narcissistic Victim Syndrome.**

As you now have an idea of the behaviours people living with narcissists may be subjected to continuously you may now have some idea of how Narcissistic Victim Syndrome is caused. People with NVS may appear perfectly normal but have low functionality and/or high anxiety. They may have shattered psyche's but not know why or complain there is no reason for their brokenness (Gardner, 2004, p. 60). Victims are likely to present themselves in counselling or psychotherapy not because they know they are suffering NVS but because they are not coping with their lives (Louis De Cannonville, 2011). Alternatively they may exhibit a long list of mental problems or diagnosis but still not really know why they are so broken. NVS clients tend to have difficulties with ability to work, form stable adult relationships and create a separate nuclear family (Kradin, 2009; Grant R. P., 2000; Grant R. , 1996; Briere J. &, 2006). In a study conducted by Teicher et al (2006), emotional abuse, compared to physical or sexual abuse measure a larger influence on dissociation, which becomes apparent when working with NVS's. This finding was similar in several other studies (Sau, Tukun, Alyanak, Bakim & Baral, 2000, cited Love, 2008) Narcissists can use all forms of abuse however it is the mental abuse that is often more substantial and covert. For example: Both Narcissists spouses and children have usually undergone a favourite narcissistic game called gaslighting and been exposed to a milieu of abusive behaviour.

CON's or children of narcissists are much harder to pick in the counselling room, although they too are victims of gaslighting over and over again. In a family of three there appears to be a trend of the narcissist giving each child a role in order to

control them and play them off against one another (Barkhow, 2012). Usually there is a golden child, an ignored child and a scape goat, however when the offspring numbers more than three the roles become more ambiguous. A single child tends to play all three roles (Gershelis, 2011). I believe essentially these roles they assign to their children, who they see as extensions of themselves are projections of different parts of themselves onto the children.

In our counselling roles we are more likely to receive adult children of narcissists (ACON's) or children no longer living under the same roof as the narcissist, perhaps escaped from the abuse. Some children however may present with more specific symptoms such as the case of Trevor, and Katie who presented with night terrors (Smolen, 2006). Trevor's psyche was trying to work out how to deal with his lack of freedom to develop his own Self. Trevor was still living under the roof, t-shirt shorts and skin of the narcissist. Katie suffered the same thing but was removed from living under the roof of the narcissist and instead imbibed NPD as a secondary disorder to PTSD, modelling her NPD parents. Her night terrors were a combination of struggling to develop a separate Self and of trauma.

An ACON or adult child of a narcissist tends to present ill adapted psychological defence mechanisms (Vaknin, 1999). They will tend to display the same behaviour in the relationship no matter how much others change. Spouses of NPD's present similar behaviour although it may or may not be entrenched from birth. This is because if a narcissist rages or loves, an ACON and spouse have been trained to give the same narcissistic supply for survival. They have also learnt to hide all their vulnerabilities and weaknesses so they can't be exploited, or to display false ones for manipulation. Often ACON's exhibit a fear of abandonment (Somerstein, 2008; Guise, 2011). They may despise their needs and try to hide and deny them completely and remain aloof and self sufficient, or may present the exact opposite (Somerstein, 2008).

Some ACONS become narcissists, emulating their NPD's behaviour for survival and experiencing the same wounding from similar parenting, and developing the same way of viewing the world and the same defence mechanisms (Smolen, 2006; Vaknin, 1999).

ACON's May have been parented with extremes such as lack of affection, neglect, abuse or expected to out perform peers and be grandiosity plus. They are

often pushed to fulfil the narcissistic parents unfulfilled dreams of grandiosity as the child is seen as an extension of the NPD by the NPD (Barkow, 2012; Ettinsohn, 2011; Famiglietti, 1996).

ACON's and spouses most often exhibit symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress but when asked if they were exposed to trauma may answer no. Nearly all ACON's suffer anxiety from childhood right through but it can be well disguised, remembering weaknesses were exploited by the NPD so defence mechanisms to hide or disown weaknesses are most likely (Louis De Cannonville, 2011).

Some ACON's and spouses suffer a severely lowered capacity to experience joy, happiness and sometimes even success. This comes from rage projected at them, which is incited, out of narcissistic jealousy from their joy and success (Vaknin, 1999; Behary, 2008; Ettinsohn, 2011).

Spouses and ACON's and often report agoraphobia symptoms but upon further investigation it is not fear of open spaces but of interacting with people thus actually social anxiety disguised as agoraphobia, caused from an overloaded psyche (Bion's containment), high anxiety and many triggers (Louis De Cannonville, 2011).

Additionally narcissists spouses and ACON's tend to display a diminished ability to trust themselves and others and may exhibit a disintegrated self esteem and self belief, but it may or may not be covered with the modelling of narcissistic grandiosity or perfectionism (Louis De Cannonville, 2011; Gershelis, 2011; Love, 2009; Martinez-Lewi, 2008; Somerstein, 2008).

ACON's will have often had difficult goals set for them in order to receive parental admiration, only to find the bar for reaching the goal raised when they achieved their set task, thus they never receive the admiration from the narcissist but clearly are imprinted with the belief they are not good enough and never will be (Louis De Cannonville, 2011).

You as a therapist will find yourself working with an array of emotions including shock, anger, fear, and guilt. Often the victim will be suffering from Post Traumatic-Stress Disorder (PTSD), or Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; Symptoms of PTSD are often grouped into three main categories: Re-living (flashbacks, hallucinations, nightmares etc), Avoiding (people, places, thoughts, loss of interest etc), and Increased Arousal (excessive emotions, problems relating, difficulty in sleeping and concentration, outbursts of anger, anxiousness, panic attacks etc). You

may also notice that your client is inclined to “dissociate” while you are talking to them. That is, it seems as if the client is tending to “compartmentalize their experience.” In so doing, they may appear to be detached from their emotions, body, or immediate surroundings, this experience is called derealization (Louis De Cannonville, 2011). This may also be experienced by the therapist through transference (Halewood, 2003; Farmer, 1989; Clarkson, 2003). Lots of grounding exercises for both client and therapist help.

**All of this therapeutically effects:**

- **how NVS sufferers attach to people and the world,**
- **The state of the NVS sufferer’s psyche**
- **whether the NVS sufferer experiences Stockholm Syndrome**
- **An NVS expectations of people not to be consistent.**
- **How the ACON’s sense of self developed**
- **how the ACON does or doesn’t use boundaries.**
- **Whether the ACON Splits.**
- **how ACON’s differentiate**

**COUNSELLING THE NVS CLIENT – 4 stages.**

Gardner writes

*Often the NVS client’s narcissist is their beloved, their persecutor and their role model all at the same time. It is only after a certain state of mature separation and psyche detachment has been achieved ie they have left home or reached adulthood that the ACON has an understanding of the terribly deprived inner world that they are ready to work through the painful psyche trauma*

Talking with a truly insightful colleague of mine who is far to modest to have her name mentioned in this paper, she noted that there appear to be four stages of counselling people with NVS.

**First stage, calling it –**

Grandy, (2012) recommends that presenting one’s self as curious, interested in connecting without agenda and without intrusion is a great way to approach every client which will help if they are NVS sufferers.

Louis De Cannonville (2011) writes that the first thing she notices when working with clients showing symptoms of NVS is that they feel so torn because they don't know what's happened to them. She states that it is vital that the therapist, through the therapeutic work, must educate the individuals in the area of NPD, so the client can begin to make sense of what has really happened to them as their story unfolds (Louis De Cannonville, 2011). It is recommended that where possible empower the client throughout this process. If as a therapist you are calling the abuse for what it is eg "you are a victim this is not your fault, it's not your stuff, it's not about you but is what was done to you" and at the same time empowering them to take some control for their own healing: for example "There seem to be some trait similarities I have noticed. I wonder if you could try for homework a Google search on the following phrases and just see what you think after you read it - narcissistic personality disorder and adult children of narcissists and malignant narcissist. They are learning in this process to take control of their own healing with counsellor's support.

Both empowering them in this phase and educating them about narcissistic personalities and how they are affected by them is crucial. Their early exploration of finding their own values and beliefs needs to be about empowerment in the healing process eg they need to find the realisation and belief "I can do this". The combination of this self-empowerment and the realisation and knowledge of what just happened to them because the other party had NPD all combines to lessen the chances of them returning or getting re-victimised by another narcissistic personality. It can however be a slow process as you hold and contain them in a therapeutic safe place while they grapple with accepting reality or hiding in denial.

Once a client is in the throngs of investigating narcissism I often take the list of explicit micro management examples given in this paper and go through it with clients asking them for examples out of their lives. Their energy can become quite exhilarated as they express and feel understood. As they unfold their story through this process another example of this phase of 'calling it' unfolds; ie the therapist needs to watch for things the client accepts as normal that you as a therapist know are not. For example when questioning a client "Tell me about your childhood" Rebecca told me she was tied to a clothesline and laughed. She also told of her mouth being taped shut regularly and laughed. 'Calling it' requires a response from me as the

therapist such as sombrely telling her I feel really sad for the little child within who had her mouth taped and was tied up, then adding very quietly, that's not really funny it's horrific. It's certainly not normal. This led Rebecca to be able to drop from her learnt defence of laughter, into the emotional expression of the trauma so we could work through and evacuate the real emotional charge. She later reported that hearing it was not normal gave her a healthy reality check which jolted her enough to go home and re-think all that she had been told was normal. She discovered many lies in her life. To her it was the beginning of freedom.

Victims of narcissists, especially ACON's behaviours can exhibit extreme ways of saying "here I am. I am here". This behaviour can be toned down by validating and saying "yes I heard you, I hear you I am here listening to you" in a variety of ways over and over. Meanwhile during this early therapy there is the delicate balance of holding boundaries and modelling them lovingly. For example when the clients tries to feel for you or state what you feel, it needs to be addressed. Another example is when they apologise for going over time when it was the therapists choice – they are owning too much and need firm but loving guidance to bring this into perspective by modelling differentiation (see differentiation section) right from the initial stages. It is usually very difficult for the client to differentiate at this stage because they have never learnt to self-sooth, but vital they learn the concept of it cognitively. As narcissists tend to severely punish those around them who project most NVS clients will exhibit or even hide a lot of destructive behaviour, which is usually implosive. For this reason all movements of boundaries need to involve loving and soothing ways and clear definitions and explanations (Somerstein, 2008). At times the ACON needs to be confronted lovingly and firmly. One goal of therapeutic intervention is to help each ACON understand and use affect regulation. NB Aggression is often a by-product of undigested aggression from the narcissistic parent. (Somerstein, 2008) Sometimes this aggression implodes into forms of self mutilation or sabotage, which needs to be worked through much like trauma.

In extremes such as where both parents were Narcissistic or if one parent was emotionally absent and the other was narcissistic, extreme responses are generally exhibited. In males, masochistic depression, which exhibits itself as a person too frozen and apathetic to be able to rescue themselves, possibly self mutilation or violent aggressives, who do not know how to manage their aggression tend to be the

responses (Somerstein, 2008). Female ACON's have similar implosive and explosive responses, which tend to exhibit through door-matting behaviours, learnt helplessness or in total independence at any cost. Again implosion may be a significant therapeutic hurdle.

During this first stage it is also important to lay the foundations for future therapy, thus helping the client find a safe space within, and teaching them self soothing techniques plus grounding and relaxation techniques.

In most cases 'I' statements and expression of emotions may take time to first bring it into the therapeutic room and then to move it from the therapeutic safety to the outside world and may even get hindered by trauma around this issue or by splitting but it is essential for the client to learn in order to prevent future narcissistic relationships.

Few NVS sufferers have self-soothing skills and fewer have healthy differentiation. People with healthy differentiation tend not to be involved with narcissists because whatever differentiation level you are at when you start a relationship, is the same as the person you attract. Narcissists have extremely poor differentiation levels as is exhibited by their perception of ACON's and spouses as an extension of themselves. (Schnarch, 2009; Schnarch, 1997) (See differentiation section below).

It is important to start teaching your NVS client the psycho-education of differentiation. Anyone can say the word no, but few ACON's and narcissists spouses choose to because of the emotional ramifications of guilt, painful negative emotions and fear. Therefore clients can know how to use boundaries but choose not to if they are enmeshed. This is why differentiation is so important. At this first stage of therapy the NVS will learn differentiation cognitively but most likely will grapple with the paradigm shift of learning something so foreign and healthy. At this stage, especially for ACON's their only model of boundaries may be to say no in a way that annihilates someone else's personality.

Recapping, psycho-education and holding a therapeutic space and safe containment for the client, is what this stage entails. Mostly the psycho-education will involve teaching and exploring NPD, boundaries, and differentiation. Adding to the complexity of this first stage of counselling NVS, trauma also needs to be dealt with

using evacuation techniques staying within the therapeutic window (Briere J. &, 2006; Briere J. , 1992; Grant R. P., 2000).

Briere (1992) talks of a therapeutic window that is containment of working within anxiety levels acceptable for clients which don't overshoot the mark and re-traumatise but also don't under stimulate so as to avoid the real trauma work. NVS clients tend to have a very small therapeutic window initially so can only do small or short amounts of trauma work. One of the most effective ways of working through the trauma and evacuating the pain is to use Jungian active imagination (see Jungian Active Imagination Section) with a mindfulness of surrender through the cruciform pattern or re-parenting the inner child using the client's own adult self (Not the therapists adult). Once the client reaches the point of surrender the trauma is often evacuated of emotive charge and integration occurs naturally.

Furthermore during this first stage Sommerstein (2008), reports that the ACON client often challenged the holding of the psychoanalytic frame, trying to make the therapist complicit eg "He was trying to get me to break my standards and boundaries and so prove I was as unethical and unreliable as everybody else." Somewhere in this process the client is testing and learning that words are not the same as deeds (Sommerstein, 2008). Narcissists use words as their most powerful tool. As the client moves from the first to the second phase of work they are coming to terms with how much damage there is to work through. This is summarised well by Grant (1996, p19), who writes of trauma from abuse:

The experience of nothingness at the base of both self and reality deconstructs any attempt at establishing certitude. Victims are forced to acknowledge their limitations and impoverishments, along with growing awareness that they can not live without others or the spirit..... Life truths that were previously denied now demand acknowledgement. The taken for granted is usually not examined until it breaks down. Breakdowns generate considerable anxiety.

## **Phase 2 clean up**

In the second phase of counselling NVS this trauma evacuation work continues, as does the differentiation modelling and exploration. This phase is where the clients begin to enter the dark night of the ego, where they have time in hell, encounter the denied evil in their lives and begin to sift through the ashes (Grant R. , 1996)

Through further use of a positive benign therapeutic relationship the relationship can begin to replace what was held onto and enmeshed into with the narcissist slowly, while nurturing healthy attachment and differentiation with appropriate boundaries (Gardner, 2004).

During the second stage the victims tend to begin to assess their friendships and notice they are around a lot of bullying people. This may include systems abuse such as churches or work places, in which case psycho-education of systems will also need to be brought into therapy. During this stage the counsellor or therapist needs to hold the client safely like a supplementary support system, while they move away from everything narcissistic in their lives. They tend to make friendships after a time, only to have them fall apart in later stages of the therapy because they don't yet fully know who they are and will continue growing.

The area that the ACON needs most work in is the psyche. Any time a psyche is forced it is at risk of shattering or fracturing. In part the NVS, client may have high dissociation, derealisation or depersonalization (Louis De Cannonville, 2011). This can be full fracture in the core of the psyche, as in Dissociative Identity Disorder, but most often is partial fracture as in partially broken off and tucked away from the core to keep the core of the client's personality safe. This can be helped a few ways using combinations of psychodynamics, using Jungian active imagination, MDMR and expressive therapies (Sommerstein, 2008). I am sure there are other therapies I have not yet encountered that can work directly with the psyche.

**Phase 3 re-attachment.** This stage is beyond psycho-education. This stage gets messy. Trauma still continues to be worked through. Early childhood stuff starts to play out in the therapeutic relationship. It is common at this stage for counsellors to pass the client on because it gets messy. Although boundaries have been clear, early childhood stuff starts to get played out eg client either loves or hates the therapist and tries to enmesh. Additionally the counsellor unwittingly becomes the narcissistic parent. Love and sexuality, love and compliance or what ever hook was used on the client originally, will be played out in the therapeutic relationship.

Gardner (2004, p. 55) writes the roots of compliance and sacrifice are found in the struggle of the infant to avoid too drastic a retreat into a feared but desperately needed infantile dependence, which is needed as the precursor of integration and growth. Originally the infant, and then the NVS client, under the anxiety of loss and fear of

disintegration cling all the more to the internal bad objects. Therefore the nature of the relationship is heavily restrained and brings with it the threat of collapse.

Parts played by the other parent, may also need exploration, however keep in mind it is best to only work through one parent at a time to lessen the clients vulnerability and feelings of being an orphan.

A counsellor needs really good supervision, lots of self reflection and lots of self growth. This is the only way to get through it without becoming part of the enmeshment, especially in this stage.

Some clients need to re-do attachment over and over. Once they have reattached, differentiation is likely to move from their head to their heart as they move into stage four.

In this stage splitting will also be an issue. Sometimes splitting can stop differentiation progress and can be mistaken for differentiation issues. Forcing a client to directly be disloyal to their NPD and coercing them to say no and to differentiate may damage them or the therapeutic relationship. It is often better to use imagery and symbolism such as Jungian Active imagination, Sandtray and gentle Gestalt with active imagination, or externalisation and metaphor to aid the clients healing rather than get stuck trying to get them to tell all and be disloyal to the NPD. Once the psyche is evacuated to a large degree, and integrated then there is room for the client to bring stories up when they are ready to say disloyal things about their NPD.

Another way of working with splitting is to hold the energy and pain of one side of the paradox and help the client move into that, then switch and do the same to the opposing side of the paradox. Repeating this, switching from one to the other teaches the client it is ok to hold both sides. They do not always need to come together, but they do not always need to be split. This is holding a paradox. The definition of maturity is being able to hold a paradox. For people who split this is a very difficult exercise, which they may not be able to do on their own if they are genuinely moving into the emotions of each side of the paradox. Similarly dissociation can get in the way of growing beyond splitting which is a whole different paper.

In the third or fourth stage, once the majority of the trauma is evacuated of emotional charge and processed, mindfulness is a great practice to introduce for the client to use at home to aid affect regulation. If mindfulness is introduced too early to

the client I have found that clients are triggered by using mindfulness and may re-traumatise themselves. I have found mindfulness very useful after they have worked through trauma so there is nothing much to trigger (See mindfulness section)

#### **Fourth phase - taking stock**

During this phase the NVS client starts to assess their friendships and systems as they fall apart again or become uncomfortable. This roughly equates with part of Grants later section of spiritual recovery stage 3 which he refers to as the further surrendering of the ego and discarding more illusions, which then moves into profound transformations followed by the most prominent part of this phase involving dark night of the self.

Again the counsellor needs to hold the client while they move away from everything narcissistic in their lives. They now tend to move towards healthier more differentiated people and often make new friendships cautiously.

As the client enters into the dark night of the self (Grant R. , 1996), they come to realise there are parts of them that are narcissistic and they have injured others through these narcissistic behaviours also. Usually the narcissistic damage they have done is not to the same degree but in a similar capacity because they modelled this behaviour to survive. To them it feels big, huge overwhelming and shameful. Grace and self-acceptance is needed and needs to be modelled heavily by counsellor during this stage.

During this stage it is important for the client to anchor into something, which will help them weather future storms. For many this is a lived spiritual belief and reassessed philosophy accompanying it, from which they gain a sense of stability. Mindfulness is an example that can be used for the non-religious client to connect with a spiritual aspect of themselves and other. This stage is about anchoring safely, then transitioning back into the world and slowly detaching from the therapist at their own pace.

#### **Additional points for working with NVS sufferers**

- If a Client is brought up by an NPD chances are they have been told all their life that their thinking is wrong, any time it was not in line with the NPD's desires. For this reason CBT and REBT are not advised for use on sufferers of NVS as it may unwittingly add to the damage, subtly

overpowering the client in this damaged area and once again correcting their thinking or behaviour. Similarly schemas may be great labels but don't touch the underlying trauma and responses. Instead they can add to the burden of changing the outside like the narcissist demanded.

- If a Client is brought up by an NPD or lived with one for a long time period they will most likely have had their reality re-storied every time they challenged the NPD and any time they tried to separate plus any time the narcissist did something, which did not match his/her persona. Furthermore re-storying reaches cognitive but not subconscious levels for healing. For these reasons it is not advised to use anything with re-storying with an NVS clients. The restorying can cause dissonance between their cognitive and subconscious thus re-traumatising them. The alternative is that the client chooses the symbols from their subconscious to avoid such dissonance (See Jungian Active Imagination section)
- Similarly positive asset searches and affirmations have their place and need to be used authentically, because an NVS client has usually been taught not to believe words because words were what the NPD usually used to adjust reality. The NVS client will generally follow and believe actions far more than words. Actions showing caring, love and safety for the client are better if subtly spoken and louder in action, as are validations. They can be extremely useful for the therapeutic relationship to be enhanced but never use coercion of stated reality. Eg “you are safe with me” or “trust me” may be triggers excessively used by the NPD. It is more effective to use questions such as “Has this couch ever let you down before? Or Have I ever done anything like this?” These questions deal directly with facts and behaviour, which feel more tangible to an NVS client. Trust is a big issue for an ACON as with any abused people, but the element of having reality adjusted adds to the mistrust of everything, not just people.
- Hypnosis is a method that again is open to unwittingly triggering powerlessness or abuse while trying to help the client, despite the client often asking for what is familiar to them. Hypnosis is a technique where the client gives all their power to the therapist therefore this is

counterintuitive to their real needs of learning their own empowerment. Having said that however some practitioners have found hypnosis extremely useful for working with ACON's trauma, and are assuredly careful with the power differential.

- Most ACON suffer well hidden but extreme anxiety, which may or may not need chemical treatment because it may be sustained from childhood mal-development. Be prepared to refer them to doctors.
- When ACON's and spouses leave the NPD they may find they feel worse not better and may exhibit more trauma symptoms of NVS. This is often because they are moving out of survival mode in which all affect is numbed. Once they are safe to feel, trauma, which has been avoided, it will come to the forefront. This is a time which heightens the statistical chance of them returning to the NPD and believing they can't live without them. Education before and during this time can help, along with subconscious work and extra support. Setting up solid foundations in stage one aid their ability to face reality and stay no contact with the NPD.
- Dissociation can be caused as a direct result of trauma, often experienced in multiple forms during narcissistic childhood traumas (i.e. physical, psychological and sexual abuse). The dissociation is an automatic and effective defense mechanism to overwhelming acute stress the child is being subjected to; it is as if the child "jumps out" of their body in order to disconnect from the intolerable reality of the abuse while it is happening; by dissociating, the child is able to endure the highly traumatic experience without having to fully experience it (Grant R. P., 2000; Bray, 1997; Guise, 2011; Kluft, 1990). Therapists may suffer transference in the form of derealisation, depersonalization or dissociation. Practicing grounding techniques together such as name three things you can see, feel and hear right now, before continuing in therapy.

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