

CHAPTER 2

DROWNING IN YOUR OWN BLOOD!

Narcissists enjoy going to battle. In fact, they will intentionally instigate conflict to remind others of their superiority and entitlement within a relationship. A method used to create outright domination and a feeling of desperation in their victim is called Offensive Fighting. The strategy is used to, “Beat you to the punch.” It begins as a passive form of verbal manipulation in which the narcissist questions and twists your words into lies. He or she may say things like, “Are you sure you said that?” or “You just don’t remember.” He will also tell you how you “really” feel and think. This is a stall tactic used so you will get caught up in defending yourself while they reposition to verbally assault, belittle, or make you feel as though you are losing your mind. The mode of operation unfolds like this: “You are so stupid,” “Your career is a joke,” “You just don’t remember what you said – I think you might be losing your memory.” At this point, you feel as if they are doing brain surgery on you while you are awake, watching, and drowning in your own blood.

EMOTIONAL PARALYSIS

Feeling helpless, traumatized, and unable to move forward with life is how one feels after escaping the emotional abuse of a narcissist. It is difficult to explain how the wounds destroy esteem, self-confidence, and the ability to move through life. The narcissist treats those close as if it is their responsibility to make them happy and appear special to others. They are only as good as others can make them look good and add to their self-view of superiority. If those around the narcissist fail to do this, they are overlooked and discarded.

EPISODIC ERRUPTIONS

Mood swings are a common characteristic in the narcissist’s personality. Their inability to regulate their emotions in appropriate ways or take criticism can trigger rage or shift of mood in an instant. Dr. Hollman, Ph.D. (2020, pg. 11) states, “They have difficulty when things do not go their way, and they will be hard-pressed to ever admit fault when they are wrong, which makes it hard for them to take any kind of criticism, even if it is constructive.” She goes on to say, “They may react to criticism with outbursts of disparaging others ruthlessly,

yelling, crying, and denigrating others who are close to them and care about them.” These fits are often unpredictable and dangerous if you happen to be in their way. You may be in the middle of what seems to be a pleasant conversation but, caught off guard by a sudden change in their emotional response. Or you may find you are defending yourself from one of their random outbursts while trying to make sense of it, as it is occurring. An example follows:

Blake and Gabriella

Blake and Gabriella were married for five years when Gabriella noticed occasional mood shifts during simple disagreements. Blake was triggered by things that never seemed to be issues in the beginning of their relationship. His anger would escalate and without resolution afterwards, he would act as though nothing occurred. It was as if the anger never occurred. This was confusing and emotionally exhausting for Gabriella. Because there was no grounded emotion within the moment, it was difficult to understand who she was talking to. “He was yelling at me because the dishes were still in the sink and saying my career was interfering with my responsibilities as a wife.” He left the room only to come back and ask me what I wanted for dinner and if I wanted to go to the Home and Garden show this weekend.” Nothing is more important to the narcissist than what their current thoughts are within the moment, and it is your fault if you do not understand their intentions. Blake felt justified in his attack on Gabbi because he saw Gabbi as someone who owed him acts of service in exchange for the material things he provided for her. Leaving the room after the attack was normal, as was returning five minutes later as if the interaction never happened. The narcissist’s reality operates on its own only to receive input which accommodates their emotion and motive at the time needed.

COVERT VS OVERT NARCISSISTS

Both covert and overt narcissists crave attention, control, and use others around them to make themselves feel better about themselves. Covert narcissists tend to be very sensitive and take things personal which are not intended to hurt them or directed to them. They may dismiss others by leaving the room during a conversation, roll their eyes or avoid making eye contact while someone is talking to them, or completely withdraw socially where participation is needed. Covert narcissists show disrespect and apathy towards others because they do not see a need to interact unless there is something in it for them. People are interesting and have a purpose if there is something to gain. They often surround themselves with “Yes” people and anyone who will listen to their ideas. They are, “Quick to rescue and eager to find solutions to all your problems,” (Behary, 2013, pg. 28). This strokes their ego,

(providing them with a feeling of importance), and gives them an avenue to control in a furtive or unseen way. They are also strategic, cunning, lack empathy, and emotionally and psychologically abusive. People only exist for the covert narcissist to create the image they see themselves to be. They are very intuitive, calculating, and will stop at nothing to get what they want and hurt you if you get in their way. Perhaps the most disturbing thing about a covert narcissist is they have a following who believes them to be savior like, honest, loving, and mentally sound.

Overt narcissists are like coverts in their need for others when it best suits their need or agenda. The overt narcissist is more outward in their efforts to achieve their agenda. If they do not get what they want, the overt narcissists can become aggressive in their tone, attitude, and behaviors. Achieving their agenda is more, “Hands on” and more visible. They seek approval by outwardly appearing to be successful, wealthy, likable, and powerful. This plays into their feelings of entitlement and superiority above others. Overt narcissists also find power in exploiting others. This can be a vehicle to control others through an eventual breakdown of self-esteem and self-confidence. Lastly, where a covert plays upon others sympathy to gain attention and control others, an overt narcissist takes an active approach to control by outward measures of control. They are also keen at emotional manipulation to control. They can calculate how to get up into your business slowly by using both covert and overt manipulation. This book is mostly about the narcissist who is skilled to use both forms in unison and independent of the other. This is the most dangerous form of manipulation, and the impact of control comes from all directions.

I will again state it is unlikely and perhaps impossible to reform a narcissist. They do not change. Healthy living is contingent upon one’s ability to dodge narcissistic people or get obliterated by their recklessness and agendas. However, one must recognize this in order to take cover. One day when my (at the time) 8-year-old son and I were on a walk, he said he, “Wanted to see the oncoming cars” as we walked. I asked, “Why?” His response was, “Because if I’m going to die, I want to see it coming.” I thought, well of course you would want to see it comingso you might have a chance to live. I laughed and thought this was clever. He was thinking on a much higher level for an 8-year-old. It was so true though. You should do your best in any circumstance to protect yourself in the moment to maximize your safety in the future. My son is still brilliant.

Justine’s Story

One Saturday morning, I was at the gym on the treadmill and looked down at my phone to discover I had 10 missed calls from the same number. There were no voice mail messages,

but there was one text from this unidentified number. The text read, “Please call me as soon as possible. If you are taking new clients, I need to schedule an appointment with you.” “I am sorry to bother you on a weekend, but I am desperate for help. Thank you.” I reached out to Justine later but was unable to make the connection. I later learned this was because Justine’s boyfriend learned she was seeking help for issues she was having with their relationship. He found her journal which she wrote in daily to help her collect her thoughts and manage her anxiety. Justine had drawn pictures of broken hearts and eyes on the back cover of the journal. She had written, “My heart hurts and I cannot see a future with the one I am with.” “God please help me.” When I heard her voice, I knew she was suffering at the time she left her message.

I HATE YOU DON’T LEAVE ME!

If you know you are living with a narcissist, you are aware of the different methods of emotional manipulation and the confusion it brings to your life. One day you may feel as if you are loved, safe, and with the right person. They are attentive, respectful, engaged in your feelings, and appear to be actively working on things to promote positive outcomes within your relationship. This provides hope which motivates and inspires us to stay in a relationship because hope indicates a “Chance” things will get better. The truth of the matter is, your relationship with the narcissist may seem to be headed towards a brighter and healthier reality, but most of the time this is an unhealthy cycle which never gets farther than one’s hope. The possibility the narcissist will change gets lost within a co-dependent relationship. Both people justify staying in the relationship and enable the other to do those things which keep the toxic elements sustaining their interactions. The longer this continues feelings of desperation guide the overall trajectory of the relationship. No one likes to feel without options or as if they are trapped. This creates resentment, fear, and frustration; especially if there is still hope. Because of the confusion, cognitive dissonance may occur, and incongruent feelings collide creating an overwhelming sense of anxiety. “I hate you, don’t leave me” says it best.

YOU SAY THAT YOU LOVE ME BUT DO NOT SHOW IT

Narcissists try hard to make you feel you are not showing them enough love or working hard enough in the relationship to make them happy. Enough is never enough and the affirmations you offer do not satisfy their narcissist supply. They measure a successful relationship by how much time you spend with them and away from others. Your allegiance to fulfilling their toxic love ideal is exhausting and impossible because in either case, your

fulltime job is to convince them your purpose is to validate their identity through their distorted ideas of commitment and their self-perception. They will shame you into spending time with them and guilt you into believing you are the cause of any relationship issue.

Narcissists are not comfortable with your independence because there is always a fear you will become interested in someone or something outside of them. They get jealous easily and take it personal if you have close relationships. Any time spent with someone else is time taken away from the attention you could be giving them.

THINGS A NARCISSIST FEARS MOST

- A. Other's emotional expectations – Narcissists fear being asked to reciprocate what would naturally be expected within their inner psyche. It explains why they push back when others ask for their love. There is fear in a healthy committed relationship. Trust, honesty, integrity, love, and shared intimacy are all values the narcissist lacks but are good at pretending to have. Eventually, their apathy is discovered through their disinterest in reciprocity and/or deceitful actions of different forms of betrayal. One of the most obvious reasons they are fearful of emotional expectations is it represents a loss of power and control.
- B. Themselves – The underlying theme of a narcissist is a feeling of self-loathing and not feeling good enough. Therefore, they work hard to appear as someone they are not. Insecurity is masked through a projected image of someone who is confident, kind, successful, and someone who others want to be like. A lifetime of living inside of this false reality becomes their reality. They fear looking into themselves to see the person for who they truly are. The real person is weak, fears abandonment, and lies to get others to like or want to be with them.
- C. Abandonment – Many narcissists have suffered great wounds during childhood symptomatic of abuse and abandonment from a primary attachment figure. Therefore, it makes sense their massive fear of desertion is also an impetus to control things and people around them. Control allows them to feel in charge of the emotional direction of the relationship, and if there is trouble in paradise, it is better to be the one who leaves, than be the one who is left behind.
- D. Being alone – Being alone is different from abandonment, but similar in that they intuit rejection. The narcissist fears both, but the two are vastly different in nature; being able to sit with yourself and being alone to measure psychological fitness and mental stability. It also gives you a measuring stick for who and what you will allow

in your life. Being alone can provide you with personal insight, embrace your value, help you heal from pain, and learn from mistakes. Moreover, sitting with yourself can provide healthy directional change through spiritual awareness. Unless you are a narcissist, surrendering to a form of spirituality is significant to emotional and psychological wellbeing. It is a valuable tool with which to gauge your emotional availability and comfort level in being alone in silence. Ideally, we would all push forward to find more internal peace and be closer to feelings of tranquility. The good thing is most people do want to try and become better versions of themselves. However, the narcissist thinks he is the best version of himself factoring in his own criteria and leaving out his own reality.

I am not denying these things can be intimidating, nor am I implying that if you cannot sit alone with yourself you are a narcissist. There is a difference between being open to personal growth and building a world in which control and manipulation are used to avoid self-scrutiny. The narcissist does the latter because they are terrified of being authentic for fear others will leave them. Therefore, they manipulate others to avoid being alone.

- E. Rejection – Rejection can bring a narcissist to their knees, trigger rage, or cause them to seek revenge on the person who has rejected them. The different reactions are contingent upon the person(s) involved and the situation. For instance, if rejection is experienced with a spouse, the reaction can spin into emotional manipulation channeled through verbal abuse or subtle behaviors which leave bad feelings lingering around the spouse. Better to be the rejecter than the one who suffers rejection.
- F. Loss of power and control – Dr. Lowen, MD, (1997, pg. 84) states, “Power is a way to protect oneself against humiliation. It is a means of overcoming a feeling of inferiority.” I believe this is taken to the extreme with the narcissist. Having a superior position over others, (be it personal or professional), is at the essence of a narcissist’s insecurities and their ability to survive. Without it, they will panic and do everything they can to recover a position of control. This is because they fear their own vulnerability and do not have the confidence to share a collaborative relationship with anyone. Therefore, the narcissist’s relationships exist solely on a hierarchy of control. I will call this for what it is: Dominance. They are always seeking a life of dominance to gain power and avoid loss of control.
- G. Criticism – It never feels good to learn someone has criticized you. However, most people can recover from criticism without suffering lifelong effects. Furthermore,

most have the capacity to “consider the source” through some form of deductive reasoning and move on down the road. This is not the case for the narcissist. It is not possible for them to process the difference between constructive vs destructive criticism, much less hang in there when someone doesn’t think before they speak. The narcissist feels criticized when people disagree, challenge, or question his decisions. Therefore, he becomes offended, acts entitled, and feels rejected. This may sound like the behaviors a child might exhibit; this is because you are dealing with an adult child. Upon feeling judged, the narcissist reverts to a wounded child’s psyche where attachment and safety issues ensued as a result of perceived environmental threats. This is known as the “Narcissist’s Narcissistic Injury” which can be viewed as over identifying with fear and mistrust. Simply put, the injured narcissist is reacting as the child he was when wounded or neglected by their primary caregiver.

- H. Being ignored – Being ignored is cutting off a narcissist’s supply; as far as he is concerned, others are supposed to adore, worship, and reaffirm his superiority, through affirmations. For the narcissist, being overlooked or discounted feels like neglect and rejection. This is because, when he looks outside, he sees a world which owes him attention in return for his perceived greatness. Ignoring him is the equivalent to leaving him to be alone. What is more, being ignored could lead to being forgotten, and even worse, becoming invisible. This would be the death of his perceived, self-endowed image and accordingly, he would have no purpose without the adoration and approval of others. It is never about the intrinsic value of people and relationships.
- I. Being forgotten – Being forgotten is like being ignored, only worse. Being ignored feels temporary because the things and people who take the place of the narcissist are only viewed as substitutions. According to the narcissist, there is still hope, to regain attention and once more, become the focus. Being forgotten means others have moved on to other things and people. Therefore, he has been replaced. This is the ultimate form of rejection because others should see his value and put him first. After all, when he is REPLACED, a narcissist feels they are no longer important.
- J. Being Invisible – There are some people who prefer to melt into the woodwork and others who are content making an occasional appearance to the surface. Most of us fall into one of these two categories. There are elements which differentiate us from one another such as personality, flare, identity and so on. For the most part though, our attention seeking monitors are dialed down on a day-to-day basis. And then..... there is the narcissist who needs to be viewed or thought of as being special, out of

the ordinary, or unique in some way. These are the people you see out dining in a restaurant dominating the conversation, laughing unusually loud, or making a scene because their food was cold. To put another spin on it, this could be the well-groomed individual who uses posturing to get his way, a kind of silent intimidation. Instead of yelling and screaming his food was cold, he will ask for the restaurant owner's name and want to know when he/she will be at their restaurant. Either way, you are supposed to look, watch, and listen to their production. This is the point in either example. The latter case is a passive way of asking for attention and the former case is a direct demand for attention and perhaps even gets a "I wonder who HE is?" as if the narcissist is someone special.

- K. Being exposed for who they are – The narcissist is terrified others will discover the true nature of his wounded, and fragile ego. That underneath the many masks of success and adoration, he is helplessly dependent upon others to create his false identity of independence and stability in order to survive. In short, his projected self-presentation is a lie. Everything and everyone are an opportunity used to craft his perceived self-image and fulfill a desperate need for adoration. Furthermore, it is likely his relationships and successes were built on the backs of those he wounded, bullied, cheated, and pretended to like. Depending upon the skill level of his ability to manipulate, these individuals probably never felt a thing. Hence, they may not know they were victims of his evil and hidden agendas. His thought on this is, "You don't know what you don't know." Exposure is devastating to the narcissist; not because he feels remorse. He is upset at himself because he "messed up" somewhere along the way, risking exposure, rejection, and embarrassment.
- L. Embarrassment – Although embarrassment makes us want to run and hide at times and can cause temporary physiological changes, (such as increased heart rate or blushing), the feeling usually subsides and gets properly processed in our brains. However, embarrassment to the narcissist feels like exploitation and humiliation. They do not digest the feelings of embarrassment in the same ways most of us do, because their wounded self is always working to protect itself from being seen as anything but secure. Narcissists hate being viewed as anything but perfect and righteous.
- M. Strength and courage in others – Narcissists gravitate to people they can manipulate and control. Therefore, they choose those who are situationally down on themselves, or likely to let someone swoop in and rescue them. Ultimately, they choose those who are vulnerable and easy to control.

N. Successful people – The narcissist views your successes as a threat. Accomplishments, degrees, awards, and recognition all factor into the insecurities which challenge their overall perception of greatness. Although the narcissist may be successful by virtue of their own accomplishments, they are still intimidated by your achievements. This is because the narcissist is always looking to be the best and most admired person in the room.

They are also likely to be nervous around those who are of similar status and highly achievement oriented. This is complicated because they have a deep need for approval, affirmation, and acceptance, but are terrified of rejection amongst their peers. This is conflicting to their ego because they have a deep need for approval, acceptance, and desire to belong. Your success threatens their self-made views of interpersonal dominance and superiority. A very simple example of this is someone needing to reschedule a lunch meeting or date night. Instead of understanding the person's conflict in scheduling, the narcissist feels angered and entitled. In their mind, their time is more important than yours and adjusting their schedule to meet the needs of yours is imposing on their time and inconvenient.

O. Your family and friends – They are threatened by any support system and afraid those close will see them for who and what they are. Additionally, you are competition to the narcissist's obsessive desire for undivided attention. The saying, "Blood is thicker than water," has true meaning for most of us. The narcissist views family support systems as a threat, unless alliances have already strategically been put into place, in the event conflict might expose them, threaten their reputation, or cost them relationships. Additionally, family and friends are competition for the narcissist's desire to have your undivided attention.

P. Emotionally intelligent people – Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, process, and understand one's emotions, independent of external stimuli or other's agenda. These people are highly intuitive, socially aware, have healthy boundaries, and embrace a high self-esteem. They also possess a high degree of self-awareness and hone natural instincts. Hence, it is much harder for the narcissist to manipulate these individuals because they are high functioning and can intuit inauthenticity. Meaning, they can read between the lines. The narcissist can quickly assess who he can or cannot fool. Therefore, you are unlikely to see a narcissist in therapy unless they stand to lose something such as a spouse or job. Otherwise, they may act indignant and say things like: "This is your problem, not mine," "I don't need therapy, you do," "I don't trust therapists," or "Only weak people go to therapy." Therapy

challenges their ability to be accountable for their behavior and more importantly, be self-reflective; this is extremely hard, as they do not have the capacity, (or desire) to explore self-awareness.

A MASS OF SELF-DOUBT

The narcissist is a master at projecting self-confidence and success. However, these behaviors are an over exaggeration of emotional security and self-assuredness. In fact, turned inside-out, the façade is a reaction to the mass of self-doubt and insecurities they keep hidden from others. Their day-to-day reality is centered around two extraordinarily strong forces in which opposing elements of ego strength compete for a position of power. For example, when a narcissist's childlike needs are threatened by feelings of fear, insecurities, or low self-confidence, his alter personality shows up with a vengeance to rescue the child within from influences like rejection, judgment, and perceptions of failure. Narcissists despise what they know to be weaknesses within themselves. Therefore, instead of owning those weaknesses, they deny the weaknesses and attribute it to others. This is called "Projection," in which the ego defends itself against unconscious impulses, thoughts, or feelings by denying the weaknesses existence and transferring them onto others. "The narcissist's fears or actions become projected onto their victims and altered into the victim's wrongdoing rather than the Narcissist's," (Shahida, 2019, pg. 164). An example of this is Tory and Breanna's relationship.

Tory and Breanna met while working at a restaurant on the West Coast. Breanna moved from a small town just outside of Tulsa, Oklahoma to see if she could live on her own and attend college in a place far from Oklahoma. She would be the first to move away from her family and the only person who would have an education greater than a high school degree. She knew it would be difficult to not have her mother and father close, but she had a vision to experience life as she saw it in her dreams. Tory was a local and had worked at the restaurant from the time of turning 16 years old. She quickly noticed Breanna and they soon became friends. They shared time together outside of work and eventually learned they were physically and emotionally attracted to one another. Tory had an apartment not far from the restaurant, and Breanna was staying at a friend's until she could afford to live on her own. As time passed and they became committed to one another, Tory invited Breanna to move into her place. They would save money, share a car, and have more time with one another. It seemed to make sense. Breanna moved in, felt good about the decision, and was able to save her own money to go to college. She was excited and, on a journey to make her parents proud. After a hectic process of applying to three schools, she was accepted to two of the

schools and offered a scholarship in which, her only expense would be the cost of her books if she maintained a 3.5 grade average. This was exciting and beyond what she imagined could happen to a poor girl from Oklahoma. Breanna called Tory after learning of the good news. It did not seem Tory was happy about Breanna's opportunity to attend college. It almost seemed as if Tory was angry. Breanna did not give this a second thought, as she was excited about going to school. As the semester began, Tory made comments to Breanna which made her wonder if she was misunderstanding the meaning behind what Tory was saying. This continued until Tory lost her temper with Breanna and began to make Breanna feel guilty about taking the scholarship. She would make hurtful comments which made Breanna doubt herself. Comments such as, "Are you sure that you want to pursue those classes next year?" "Do you really think a degree will make a difference in your future?" "Will you be able to support yourself if we ended our relationship right now?" These questions were used to destabilize Breanna's decision to pursue her academic goals. Tory was also projecting her own insecurities onto Breanna by attempting to make her feel as if she was not good enough, obligated to stay with Breanna, and question the value of her educational goals.

THE RAGE AND MASSACRE

Narcissistic rage is a psychological construct which describes a reaction to narcissistic injury, which is conceptualized as a perceived threat to his or her self-esteem or perceived self-identity. Narcissistic injury is a cause of distress and can lead to dysregulation of behaviors, (e.g., rage). Once triggered, there is nothing you can do to stop the force. The narcissist feels as if they have been victimized, so their natural reaction is to take hostages and make them victims. This is where rage is inflicted upon another person. The wreckage left behind after an episodic rage is disastrous and emotionally crippling. The recovery is painful and may be a lifelong journey depending upon the length of time you have been with the narcissist wounds as a result of trauma caused by verbal assaults and emotional abuse. If you have lived through a narcissist's attack, you understand what it is like to be taken to the "Dark Side" of their psyche.

Although you cannot stop the rage from occurring, you can prevent a massacre from happening. Think of this as taming a beast by subduing its force. Because the narcissist's rage is triggered by irrational fears and a threat to their self-worth, you must work within their construct in a non-threatening way. Ideally, you want to avoid injury to their self-view and self-esteem to prevent the rage episode from occurring at all. However, this is impossible because: a) you cannot always be the source of his narcissistic supply; b) walking on

eggshells all the time is mentally and emotionally exhausting; c) it is not always possible to predict what will trigger their ego-injury. Therefore, your initiative is to de-escalate their distress before it turns into weaponry used on you during their fit of rage. Self-preservation is your goal. Here are some tools you can use to diffuse a narcissist's rage:

- Don't buy a ticket to the fight.
- Don't argue.
- Use non-threatening language such as, "I understand," "That makes sense," "What do you think we should do?"
- Ask them questions about themselves.
- Never blame.
- Communicate using the words, "We," "Us," and "Our," instead of "You" or "I."
- Compliment them.
- Use a non-threatening tone of voice. This has a significant calming effect.
- Show empathy and concern in the moment and recognize it will not be reciprocated.
- Be the adult. This goes without saying.
- Forgive them, but do not say, "I forgive you." The narcissist will interpret this as a passive-aggressive statement placing blame onto them. You will not succeed at explaining the meaning behind your forgiveness.

If you are living with a narcissist or leaving one, these tools will help you see how you can navigate and survive a narcissist's rage. Part of knowing how to maneuver your way out of a relationship with a narcissist is leaning how they manipulate you. One way is to triangulate relationships.

TRIANGULATION

This is a form of manipulation in which a narcissist will bring a third person into the relationship and use them as a decoy to subversively control the interpersonal situation for their own benefit. For example, the narcissist might try to make their spouse feel jealous by giving their child a gift their spouse asked for. This tactic is used to pit the two family members against one another and cause them to compete for the narcissist's attention or love. The two people become conditioned to seek out the narcissist's love while disliking the other for any perceived attention given from the narcissist. The goal is accomplished if the triangulation has evolved into the narcissist receiving attention from both people. This is through the unfolding of endless fighting for the narcissist's love and the eventual destruction

of the other's relationship. The two people being manipulated may or may not know what the narcissist is doing. Most of the time, they are unaware of the manipulation because the narcissist is controlling the relationship dynamics of the two people from behind a curtain.

James, Brook, and Candy

An example of triangulation is a narcissist who used his wife to punish his lover whom he had hidden for many years. James promised his lover, Candy, a life in matrimony after he divorced his wife, Brook. James knew he would not leave his wife. He was happy using Candy for sex and going home to his wife who knew nothing about his affair. James often subdued Candy's anxiety over the mounting uncertainty of his promise to leave his wife by giving her expensive jewelry, trips, and a car for her and her kids. As far as Brook was concerned, she and James were happy and thriving in a healthy 15-year marriage. James never gave Brook any indication he could not be trusted. He seemed to be proud of the marriage, talked about Brook in an adoring way, and liked posting pictures of him and Brook on social media. James was using social media as a tool to triangulate his situation with Candy and his wife. By posting pictures of his wife, James was making his lover jealous, and reinforcing her insecurity that he may not leave his wife to be with her. At the same time, he was maintaining status quo in his wife's mind. She continued to think James was a good man who was happily married. James used the situation of both women to serve an agenda of maintaining two separate lives. He was happy at home and comfortable with the circumstances if his wife did not know about his affair and if his lover was kept yearning for his attention. James continued to live separate lives, partially because he could triangulate the relationships in a way which kept Candy broken down, and doubting herself by comparing her to his wife, but, hopeful. Massaging Candy's hope for a future with him, yet instilling doubt she may be discarded out of love for his wife kept James in control of the relationships by using emotional manipulation and triangulation. Using someone to evoke feelings, fears, or emotions in another person in pursuit of an agenda is immoral.

DISTRACTIONS

Narcissists are good at diverting attention away from them while at the same time, being the center of attention and perceived as a savior or good guy. For example, a parent who is trying to alienate a child from the other parent will create his own landscape or scenario which may confuse or dilute reality. This may or may not sever the child's relationship with their parent, but in most cases it does. Once the narcissist parent has captured the child and formed a strong alliance, distractions are used to maintain a stronghold on the child. Money,

trips, material items, and promises are used to keep the child's attachment to the narcissist parent. The goal is to keep the child's attention focused on the narcissist's actions and eagerly waiting for the next show, gift, diluted act of generosity, and surprises to come. This method used by the narcissist parent serves two purposes: 1) creates a perception of generosity and love, thus distracting others and the child from his real intentions to alienate the child from the other parent; 2) heightening the child's sense of happiness with surprises and fostering anticipation for what may lie ahead.

GUILT AND SHAME

Two of the most crippling methods of control are guilt and shame. They have two different meanings but serve the same purpose for the narcissist – control. This occurs over time in which the narcissist slowly gains trust by making others feel safe, unconditionally accepted, sincere, and interested in their wellbeing. This creates a bond in which self-disclosure occurs and trust is established. The victim then bonds with the narcissist in a way which allows the narcissist to control by supplying masked empathy rooted in a fake display of unconditional regard. Your secrets, vulnerabilities, and love are never safe with a narcissist. Emotional exposure is a narcissist's landscape to use and abuse you by distorting reality, circumvent blame when they have done something wrong, and make you feel shameful or sorry for them when they should be apologizing to you. Realize “Narcissists cannot feel empathy and will do nothing which does not further their self-interest,” (Jamieson, 2021, pg. 117).

COLLECTING PEOPLE

When I use the term, “Collecting people,” the general reaction is a look of confusion – because it is confusing. This is one of the most obvious things a narcissist does to feel and look important. Think of this as a group which is loyal, loving, and idolizes a leader – a harem. The group of people are often mesmerized by the narcissist. What they do not know is they are being controlled by the narcissist. Each person is individually chosen to serve the narcissist's needs. There is a strong commitment to the narcissist because there are usually strings attached. They unknowingly protect and serve the narcissist's ego. The narcissist has a built-in backup person or plan to serve as an emotional blanket to secure their fear of abandonment. If someone leaves the group of followers, there are still many who are available to be lead. This is rarely seen from the inside of the harem. Each person is made to feel important and secure. It is easy for the narcissist to gain adoration and control by exaggerating successes and lying about their life and trauma to gain empathy, and idolatry.