

The Narcissist in Custody Battles

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Abstract

Some offenders - mainly in patriarchal and misogynist societies - co-opt their children into aiding and abetting their abusive conduct. The couple's children are used as bargaining chips or leverage. They are instructed and encouraged by the abuser to shun the victim, criticize, and disagree with her, withhold their love or affection, and inflict on her various forms of ambient abuse.

1. Introduction

The narcissist regards his children in 6 ways:

1. As extensions of himself ---> Possessiveness ----> Breach of BOUNDARIES ---> abuse (incl. SEXUAL)
2. Mere avatars of his inner constructs
3. Pawns in the grand chess game that is his Life.
4. Props in the theatre of his False Self (sources of narcissistic supply) ---> Idealization-Devaluation and Approach-Avoidance ---> Trauma
5. Potential competitors ---> Rage, pathological (destructive) ENVY
6. Bargaining chips in the inevitable showdown with a hostile world as reified by his renegeing, traitorous spouse.

In a custody battle, all these figments of his psychodynamics need to be adroitly addressed to achieve a favorable outcome as far as the children involved are concerned [1-5].

Reckless behaviour, substance abuse, immunity, and sexual deviance ---> DANGER to welfare and life of child.

2. Manipulative Narcissistic Parents

Conflict between ENVY and MERGING (owing to DEPENDENCE on source of SUPPLY)

2.1 Control mechanisms

1. Guilt-driven ("I sacrificed my life for you")
2. Codependent ("I need you, I cannot cope without you")
3. Goal-driven ("We have a common goal which we can and must achieve")
4. Shared psychosis or emotional incest ("You and I are united against the whole world, or at least against your monstrous, no-good father ...", "You are my one and only true love and passion")
5. Explicit ("If you do not adhere to my principles, beliefs, ideology, religion, values, if you do not obey my instructions, I will punish you").

3. In Custody Battles

PROXY WARS ---> Uses them to tempt, convince, communicate, threaten, and otherwise manipulate.

Abuse by Proxy.

3.1 Co-opting

Some offenders - mainly in patriarchal and misogynist societies - co-opt their children into aiding and abetting their abusive conduct. The couple's children are used as bargaining chips or leverage. They are instructed and encouraged by the abuser to shun the victim, criticize, and disagree with her, withhold their love or affection, and inflict on her various forms of ambient abuse [6-12].

4. Coping

4.1 The children

Most victims attempt to present to their children a "balanced" picture of the relationship and of the abusive spouse. In a vain attempt to avoid the notorious (and controversial) Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS), they do not besmirch the abusive parent and, on the contrary, encourage the semblance of a normal, functional, liaison. This is the wrong approach. Not only is it counterproductive – it sometimes proves outright dangerous.

Children have a right to know the overall state of affairs between their parents. They have a right not to be cheated and deluded into thinking that "everything is basically OK" - or that the separation is reversible. Both parents are under a moral obligation to tell their offspring the truth: the relationship is over for good.

Younger kids tend to believe that they are somehow responsible or guilty for the breakdown of the marriage. They must be disabused of this notion. Both parents would do best to explain to them, in straightforward terms, what led to the dissolution of the bond. If spousal abuse is wholly or partly to blame – it should be brought out to the open and discussed honestly [13-18].

In such conversations it is best not to allocate blame. But this does not mean that wrong behaviors should be condoned or whitewashed. The victimized parent should tell the child that abusive conduct is wrong and must be avoided. The child should be taught how to identify the warning signs of impending abuse - sexual, verbal, psychological, and physical.

Moreover, a responsible parent should teach the child how to resist inappropriate and hurtful actions. The child should be brought up to insist on being respected by the other parent, on having him or her observe the child's boundaries and accept the child's needs and emotions, choices, and preferences.

The child should learn to say "no" and to walk away from potentially compromising situations with the abusive parent. The child should be brought up not to feel guilty for protecting himself or herself and for demanding his or her rights [19-22].

4.2 The erotomaniac

This kind of stalker believes that he is in love with you and that, regardless of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the feeling is reciprocal (you are in love with him). He interprets everything you do (or refrain from doing) as coded messages confessing your eternal devotion to him and to your "relationship". Erotomaniacs are lonely, socially-inapt people. They may also be people with whom you have been involved romantically (e.g., your former spouse, a former boyfriend, a one-night stand) - or otherwise (for instance, colleagues or co-workers).

Best coping strategy: Ignore the erotomaniac. Do not communicate with him or even acknowledge his existence. The erotomaniac clutches at straws and often suffers from ideas of reference. He tends to blow out of proportion every comment or gesture of his "loved one". Avoid contact – do not talk to him, return his gifts unopened, refuse to discuss him with others, delete his correspondence [23,24].

4.3 The narcissist

Feels entitled to your time, attention, admiration, and resources. Interprets every rejection as an act of aggression which leads to a narcissistic injury. Reacts with sustained rage and vindictiveness. Can turn violent because he feels omnipotent and immune to the consequences of his actions.

Best coping strategy: Make clear that you want no further contact with him and that this decision is not personal. Be firm. Do not hesitate to inform him that you hold him responsible for his stalking, bullying, and harassment and that you will take all necessary steps to protect yourself. Narcissists are cowards and easily intimidated. Luckily, they never get emotionally attached to their prey and so can move on with ease [25].

4.4 The paranoid

By far the most dangerous the lot. Lives in an inaccessible world of his own making. Cannot be reasoned with or cajoled. Thrives on threats, anxiety, and fear. Distorts every communication to feed his persecutory delusions.

"The paranoid's conduct is unpredictable and there is no 'typical scenario'. But experience shows that you can minimise the danger to yourself and to your household by taking some basic steps.

If at all possible, put as much physical distance as you can between yourself and the stalker. Change address, phone number, email accounts, cell phone number, enlist the kids in a new school, find a new job, get a new credit card, open a new bank account. Do not inform your paranoid ex about your whereabouts and your new life. You may have to make painful sacrifices, such as minimise contact with your family and friends.

Even with all these precautions, your abusive ex is likely to find you, furious that you have fled and evaded him, raging at your newfound existence, suspicious and resentful of your freedom and personal autonomy. Violence is more than likely. Unless deterred, paranoid former spouses tend to be harmful, even lethal.

Be prepared: alert your local law enforcement officers, check out your neighbourhood domestic violence shelter, consider owning a gun for self-defence (or, at the very least, a stun gun or mustard spray). Carry these with you at all times. Keep them close by and accessible even when you are asleep or in the bathroom.

Erotomaniac stalking can last many years. Do not let down your guard even if you haven't heard from him. Stalkers leave traces. They tend, for instance, to 'scout' the territory before they make their move. A typical stalker invades his or her victim's privacy a few times long before the crucial and injurious encounter.

Is your computer being tampered with? Is someone downloading your e-mail? Has anyone been to your house while you were away? Any signs of breaking and entering, missing things, atypical disorder (or too much order)? Is your post being delivered erratically, some of the envelopes opened and then sealed? Mysterious phone calls abruptly disconnected when you pick up? Your stalker must have dropped by and is monitoring you.

Notice any unusual pattern, any strange event, any weird occurrence. Someone is driving by your house morning and evening? A new 'gardener' or maintenance man came by in your absence? Someone is making enquiries about you and your family? Maybe it's time to move on.

Teach your children to avoid your paranoid ex and to report to you immediately any contact he has made with them. Abusive bullies often strike where it hurts most - at one's kids. Explain the danger without being unduly alarming. Make a distinction between adults they can trust - and your abusive former spouse, whom they should avoid.

Ignore your gut reactions and impulses. Sometimes, the stress is so onerous and so infuriating that you feel like striking back at the stalker. Don't do it. Don't play his game. He is better at it than you are and is likely to defeat you. Instead, unleash the full force of the law whenever you get the chance to do so: restraining orders, spells in jail, and frequent visits from the police tend to check the abuser's violent and intrusive conduct.

The other behavioural extreme is equally futile and counterproductive. Do not try to buy peace by appeasing your abuser. Submissiveness and attempts to reason with him only whet the stalker's appetite. He regards both as contemptible weaknesses,

vulnerabilities he can exploit. You cannot communicate with a paranoid because he is likely to distort everything you say to support his persecutory delusions, sense of entitlement, and grandiose fantasies. You cannot appeal to his emotions – he has none, at least not positive ones.

Remember: your abusive and paranoid former partner blames it all on you. As far as he is concerned, you recklessly and unscrupulously wrecked a wonderful thing you both had going. He is vengeful, seething, and prone to bouts of uncontrolled and extreme aggression. Don't listen to those who tell you to 'take it easy'. Hundreds of thousands of women paid with their lives for heeding this advice. Your paranoid stalker is inordinately dangerous – and, more likely than not, he is with you for a long time to come [26].

4.5 The antisocial (Psychopath)

Though ruthless and, typically, violent, the psychopath is a calculating machine, out to maximise his gratification and personal profit. Psychopaths lack empathy and may even be sadistic – but understand well and instantly the language of carrots and sticks.

Best coping strategy: Convince your psychopath that messing with your life or with your nearest is going to cost him dearly. Do not threaten him. Simply, be unequivocal about your desire to be left in peace and your intentions to involve the Law should he stalk, harass, or threaten you. Give him a choice between being left alone and becoming the target of multiple arrests, restraining orders, and worse. Take extreme precautions at all times and meet him only in public places [27].

5. In Court

It is very easy to "break" a narcissist in court by revealing facts that contradict his inflated perception of his grandiose (false) self; by criticising and disagreeing with him; by exposing his fake achievements, belittling his self-imputed and fantasized "talents and skills"; by hinting that he is subordinated, subjugated, controlled, owned or dependent upon a third party; by describing the narcissist as average, common, indistinguishable from others; by implying that the narcissist is weak, needy, dependent, deficient, slow, not intelligent, naive, gullible, susceptible, not in the know, manipulated, a victim, an average person of mediocre accomplishments [28,29].

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