

Narcissism in court and mediation

Challenges and opportunities

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Introduction

Narcissist culture is not new in today's modern societies. Psychological and sociological studies have established causal links between the propensity of the narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) and the individual-oriented nature of the society in which one lives.¹ This mental disorder is characterised by excessive self-importance, entitlement and superiority as well as a lack of empathy for and exploitativeness of others.² NPD does not only exist in Western nations where individualism reigns as opposed to collectivist-oriented societies. To the contrary, due to social media and the export of Western culture, narcissism has been on the rise globally.³ Recent statistics argue that up to 6% of a Western country's population may have NPD.⁴ Not only the cultural and sociological context but also the socio-economic status of individuals can explain its uneven distribution.⁵ Despite its omnipresence in modern societies, only more recent conduct of famous American corporate and political executives, respectively by Harvey Weinstein⁶ and Donald Trump,⁷ have raised popular consciousness about the nefarious consequences of narcissistic abuse on the workplace and for democratic societies at large. Such greater awareness, however, has yet to be accompanied with new knowledge which legal professionals, i.e. judges, mediators and lawyers, can act upon. Although they are not health professionals who can diagnose NPD, they are

- 1 S. Freud, *Zur Einführung des Narzißmus*, Zürich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag 1924; C. Lasch, *The culture of narcissism: American life in an age of diminishing expectations*, New York: Norton 1979; J. Twenge and K. Campbell, *The narcissism epidemic: living in the age of entitlement*, New York: Simon & Schuster 2009; Z. Li & A.J. Benson, *Culture and narcissism: the roles of fundamental social motives*, *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences* 2022/3, p. 100072.
- 2 Mayo Clinic, *Narcissistic personality disorder: symptoms and causes*, <https://mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20366662>.
- 3 J. Stein, *Millennials: the me me me generation*, *Time*, 20 May 2013, <https://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>; A. Vater, S. Moritz & S. Roepke, *Does a narcissism epidemic exist in modern Western societies? Comparing narcissism and self-esteem in East and West Germany*, *PLoS ONE* 2018/13, p. e0188287.
- 4 Cleveland Clinic, *Narcissistic personality disorder*, 8 March 2023, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9742-narcissistic-personality-disorder>; De Narcist Ontmaskerd, *Feiten en cijfers*, <https://denarcist.nl/feiten-en-cijfers>.
- 5 P. Piff, *Wealth and the inflated self: class, entitlement, and narcissism*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 2014/40, p. 34-43.
- 6 C.M. Elsig, *How #MeToo exposed the hidden world of narcissistic abuse*, 5 november 2021, <https://caldaclinic.com/how-metoo-exposed-the-hidden-world-of-narcissistic-abuse/>.
- 7 I. Hughes, *Disordered minds: a compelling account of the dangers posed by narcissistic leaders, and why their rise to power has become the hallmark of our Age*, New York: Zero Books 2018.

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inevitably confronted with malignant narcissists in court and in mediation proceedings involving family, commercial or labour disputes. Their lack of knowledge becomes a professional liability when the narcissist instrumentalises those proceedings to punish his or her opponent or victim and win him- or herself.⁸ To rationalise the narcissist's conduct in these contexts is insufficient to solve and mediate in conflict situations. Legal professionals need to recognise patterns of narcissistic abuse for the sake of protecting the victims⁹ and to preserve the rules-based order characterised by legal certainty, transparency and predictability¹⁰ which is diametrically opposed to the sense of impunity and lawlessness of the malignant narcissist.¹¹

Following this brief introduction, the next section analyses, from a psychological point of view, the patterns of behaviour of individuals with a NPD in general and of the malignant narcissist in particular; the latter being the most serious threat to their environment. Based on those earlier psychological insights, the latter's narcissistic abuse manifested in court and mediation settings is consecutively investigated, providing useful elements for legal professionals to raise their knowledge when confronted with them. Following the recognition of narcissistic abuse in those former settings, potential avenues to cope with narcissistic abuse are explored, drawing from psychological insights and the practice of certain jurisdictions. Finally, this article concludes with some final remarks to advance a new research agenda on the intersection between narcissism and conflict management.

Narcissistic personality disorder

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V (DSM-V) – an authoritative reference guide describing the symptoms and criteria to diagnose various mental disorders used by American health professionals and worldwide¹²– NPD is defined by an impairment of the self and of interpersonal relationships, on the one hand, combined with pathological personality traits, on the other hand. The impairment of the self is manifested in excessive self-appraisal – either inflated or deflated – or unconscious goal-setting seeking the admiration of others for

8 As with each profession, it is possible that (malignant) narcissists are also present amongst legal professionals. The consequences of their conduct upon court and mediation proceedings can be the object of another study.

9 Mental Health Matters COFE, Can a judge see through a narcissist, 28 September 2022, <https://mentalhealthmatters-cofe.org/can-a-judge-see-through-a-narcissist/>

10 I. Thurston, Everything is permitted, restrictions still apply: a psychoanalytic perspective on social dislocation, narcissism, and post truth, London: Routledge 2018, p. 59; Bishop & Sewell LLP, 'Narcissists in the family courts', <https://www.bishopandsewell.co.uk/2022/06/21/narcissists-in-the-family-courts/#:~:text=Some>.

11 Mental Health Matters COFE, The dark side of narcissism: why narcissists keep breaking the law, 20 December 2022, <https://mentalhealthmatters-cofe.org/the-dark-side-of-narcissism-why-narcissists-keep-breaking-the-law/>.

12 American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR), <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm>.

being exceptional or entitled. The impairment of interpersonal relationships is characterised by the lack of empathy regarding the needs and feelings of others and effects of the narcissist's conduct on others or the lack of intimacy between narcissists and other persons.

The pathological aspects of NPD show proof of antagonistic conduct where a sense of self-centredness (given the inability of mutuality in establishing profound interpersonal relationships) drives entitlement and superiority vis-à-vis others who are or become the source for admiration, attention seeking and/or of condescension and dismissiveness.¹³ Since others are exploited for the personal advantage of the narcissist, relationships are and remain predominantly superficial in nature, thus alienating the very persons which the narcissist needs to sustain his or her self-image, defeating his or her own self-regulatory strategies.¹⁴ Such paradox and perpetual emptiness of the self characterises the narcissist's (search for) antagonism throughout his or her lifetime.¹⁵ Such vulnerability of the self is not only present in overt – grandiose – types of NPD but also in covert – introvert – types.¹⁶

Besides the impact of the sociological context of a society upon the development of such vulnerable selves, various other factors, including temperamental, motivational and social elements, have contributed to a NPD.¹⁷ In the absence of frustrating experiences due to (the lack of) parenting, including boundary-setting in the early years of a child, it is challenging to independently correct the self-image. Therefore, narcissists have recourse to defensive strategies to uphold their unrealistic self-image and are regulating self-esteem through others.¹⁸ The underdeveloped self from childhood onwards (re)produces self-devaluation for the vulnerable narcissist and superiority for the grandiose type through a dysfunctional regulation of the self.¹⁹

- 13 C. Sedikides, E.A. Rudich, A.P. Gregg, M. Kumashiro & C. Rusbult, Are normal narcissists psychologically healthy? Self-esteem matters, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2004/87, p. 401.
- 14 S. Vazire & D.C. Funder, Impulsivity and the self-defeating behavior of narcissists, *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 2006/10, p. 160.
- 15 C. Morf & F. Rhodewalt, Unraveling the paradoxes of narcissism: a dynamic self-regulatory processing model, *Psychological Inquiry* 2001/177, p. 179; M. Singer, The experience of emptiness in narcissistic and borderline states: II. The struggle for a sense of self and the potential for suicide, *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 1977/4, p. 471.
- 16 J.O. Røvik, Overt and covert narcissism: turning points and mutative elements in two psychotherapies, *British Journal of Psychology* 2001/17, p. 436-437.
- 17 S. Thomas, B.J. Bushman, B. Orobio de Castre & H. Stegge, What makes narcissists bloom? A framework for research on the etiology and development of narcissism, *Development and Psychopathology* 2009/21, p. 1237; E. Huxley & B. Bizumic, Parental invalidation and the development of narcissism, *Journal of Psychology* 2017/151, p. 131.
- 18 R.S. Horton, G. Bleau & B. Drwecki, Parenting narcissus: what are the links between parenting and narcissism?, *Journal of Personality* 2006/74, p. 352.
- 19 E. Ronningstam, Psychoanalytic theories on narcissism and narcissistic personality, in: W.K. Campbell & J.D. Miller, *The handbook of narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder: theoretical approaches, empirical findings, and treatments*, New York: John Wiley & Sons 2011, p. 45; D. Neuharth, 13 ways narcissists behave like children: how narcissists' tactics can be eerily similar to kids in their 'terrible twos', 21 June 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/narcissism-demystified/202006/13-ways-narcissists-behave-children>

As a result, ‘social interactions’, according to Morf and Rhodewalt, ‘are the settings for the enactment of social manipulations and self-presentations designed to engineer positive feedback or blunt negative feedback about the self’.²⁰ Thus, through social comparison, the pathological narcissist is seeking for narcissistic supply. He or she experiences less hostility when in a position of authority and more when in a lower level of leadership.²¹ As long as others confirm the delusional image of the self, the narcissist values them.²² If his or her image or entitlement is challenged, the narcissist will be hurt and ashamed, pushing the narcissist in the role of the victim and towards retribution vis-à-vis his or her challengers.²³ While healthy narcissism can have positive effects regarding self-esteem and confidence and may not prevent to normally function in society,²⁴ the pathological kind manifested in social interactions generates anti-social behaviour, impairing normal interpersonal relationships as seen in cases of ‘domestic violence, sexual coercion, aggression and general offending’.²⁵

Inevitably, the costs of conduct of such malignant type of the narcissist in the absence of self-restraint and empathy can be potentially disastrous and dangerous for the victim(s), i.e. partners, children, employees, colleagues, political opponents, etc. in different contexts where the malignant narcissist’s actions go unchecked. Self-regulatory strategies to cope with frustration regarding the idealised self-image and thus to protect the malignant narcissist’s self from further social exposure range from aggression and rage – physical and psychological²⁶ – towards those who constitute a threat to the narcissist’s image, to manipulation of the personal and professional circles of those opponents isolating the latter from their former family members, colleagues or friends, and to self-silencing whereby personal flaws are hidden from the public due the emotions of shame.²⁷ Those patterns of conduct of the malignant narcissist will be discussed in the next section as manifested within court and mediation proceedings following the emergence of a prior conflict within his or her environment as well as the consequences of his or her (protracted) narcissistic abuse upon the outcome of the resolution of such dispute.

20 Morf & Rhodewalt (2001), p. 181.

21 L.M. Bogart, E.G. Benotsch & J.D. Pavlovic, Feeling superior but threatened: the relation of narcissism to social comparison, *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 2004/26, p. 42.

22 W.K. Campbell, Narcissism and romantic attraction, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1999/77, p. 1254.

23 J.M. Twenge & W.K. Campbell, Isn’t it fun to get the respect that we’re going to deserve?, Narcissism, social rejection, and aggression, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 2003/29, p. 261; S. Thomas & B.J. Bushman, Trumping shame by blasts of noise: narcissism, self-esteem, shame, and aggression in young adolescents, *Child Development* 2008/79, p. 1794.

24 J. Paris, *Psychotherapy in an age of narcissism: modernity, science, and society*, Basingstoke: Palgrave 2013, p. 71.

25 V. Blinkhorn, M. Lyons & L. Almond, Drop the bad attitude! Narcissism predicts acceptance of violent behaviour, *Personality and Individual Differences* 2016/98, p. 157-161.

26 G. Rogier, A. Marzo & P. Velotti, Aggression among offenders: the complex interplay by grandiose narcissism, spitefulness, and impulsivity, *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 2019/46, p. 1478.

27 E. Ronningstam, Narcissistic personality disorder: the diagnostic process, in: T.A. Widiger, *The Oxford Handbook of Personality Disorders*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012, p. 542.

Narcissistic abuse in court and mediation

In the beginning of conflict situations, either within family or professional contexts, the malignant narcissist's self-regulating strategies always aim to preserve his or her own idealised image (of superiority) in the face of real or perceived threats to his or her self-image. Whether he or she has been the instigator of the conflict or has been challenged for his or her nefarious – out of the norm – conduct, the narcissist will first manipulate his or her opponent or victim in the personal and professional sphere and/or by extension in the presence of others when initiating court and/or mediation proceedings, on the one hand, or when 'being drawn' in the latter by others – opponents and victims alike – on the other hand. Once legal professionals come into the picture of a family, commercial or labour dispute involving a malignant narcissist, one can expect judges, mediators and lawyers to be instrumentalised by the latter for the sake of preserving his or her self-image and to undermine the image of his or her opponent or victim.²⁸ Furthermore, the malignant narcissist will interpret and exploit the legal system and/or mediation procedures in such way to exclusively advance his or her winning self-regulatory strategies. *Mutatis mutandis*, personal and professional support networks of his or her opponent or victim will also become the target of narcissist's manipulation.

The exploitativeness and vindictiveness of the malignant narcissist are manifested in different – yet similar – ways before court and mediation proceedings. As he or she starts a (frivolous) lawsuit to protect his or her self-image, the narcissist will seek to prolong the legal battle as long as possible given the narcissistic supply which the malignant narcissist gains from the protracted attention – whether positive or negative alike – that he or she receives during those judicial proceedings. A court mandated mediation plan and/or round further extends the opportunity for narcissistic abuse of his or her opponent or victim. The longer the conflict continues – whether before a judge or one or more mediators, the greater the chances for the malignant narcissist to get supply and to exhaust his or her opponent or victim – both emotionally and financially. Inevitably, during court and mediation proceedings, the malignant narcissist (and his or her legal team) will continue to submit motions, request additional hearings, exploit legal loopholes or perform silent treatment to drag the court and/or mediation proceedings and drain the energy of his or her opponent or victim. When the latter finds him- or herself in a weaker negotiating or financial position, such as the single parent, the smaller company or worker, the 'stronger' narcissist will take advantage of his or her personal or company resources and will pressurise his or her opponent or victim towards a(n earlier) settlement favouring the objectives and interests of the narcissist in order to make the latter stop.²⁹

28 Kingsley Napley, Divorce – how narcissists are tackled by the family courts in England and Dubai, 26 March 2018, <https://www.kingsleynapley.co.uk/insights/blogs/family-law-blog/divorce-how-narcissists-are-tackled-by-the-family-courts-in-england-and-dubai>.

29 C. Hammond, How narcissists use the courts to continue their abuse, PsychCentral, 22 March 2016, <https://psychcentral.com/pro/exhausted-woman/2016/03/how-narcissists-use-the-courts-to-continue-their-abuse#1>.

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Narcissistic abuse is not limited to those procedural steps in court or mediation proceedings frustrating the early conclusion of the conflict, which, paradoxically, the malignant narcissist wishes to avoid, otherwise he or she will be cut off short from his or her narcissistic supply. This particular strategy constitutes a narcissistic trap for his or her opponent or victim to step in. In this regard, the narcissist lures his or her opponent or victim into his or her trap by a proposition – usually a lie – against which his or her opponent or victim reacts defensively or emotionally, thus proving the claims of the narcissist that his or her opponent or victim is an unfit parent, business partner, colleague or (co-)worker.³⁰ Irrespective of who initiates the conflict or starts court or mediation proceedings, the narcissist's opponent or victim would be keen to expose the narcissist for who he or she really is. Yet, this makes the opponent or victim look both intolerant and obstructive towards the narcissist and the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Effectively, the trap allows the malignant narcissist to reverse the accusation or exposure of his or her pathological narcissism before the judges, mediators or even his or her own team of lawyers and rather projects his or her conduct of intransigence and obstructiveness upon his or her opponent or victim.³¹

Furthermore, not only the opponent or victim is the principal target of the malignant narcissist's manipulation and lies. Legal professionals in court and mediation proceedings are instrumentalised to frustrate the narcissist's opponent or victim.³² They too may fall for the charismatic persuasiveness of the malignant narcissist who is scapegoating and blaming his or her opponent or victim for being the root cause of their respective conflict. Besides these immediate audiences empowering the narcissist's self-regulatory strategies, the latter also aims to influence and undermine sources of support of his or her opponent or victims in his or her personal and professional circles. As the narcissist's opponent or victim may seek support in these frustrating conflicts depleting his or her courage and/or financial resources of his or her family, friends or colleagues, the narcissist will make sure to handle them too. Accordingly, the malignant narcissist will seek to isolate his or her opponent or victim by putting him or her in a bad light in order to advance sympathy for his or her own cause and antipathy for the unfit parent, (business) partner, colleague, (co-)worker, etc. Such obstruction and isolation may further damage the personal and financial well-being as well as the reputation of the narcissist's opponent or victim. Those third persons being dragged into the conflict with the narcissist are also caught in a cross-fire where the loyalty of the child, partner, colleague or (co-)worker towards the narcissist will be rewarded,

30 Weinberger, How to get a narcissist to reveal themselves: latest divorce child custody family law, 8 November 2017, <https://www.weinbergerlawgroup.com/blog/divorce-family-law/get-narcissist-reveal/>.

31 E. Rosenfeld, M. Oberman, J. Bernard & E. Lee, Confronting the challenge of the high-conflict personality in family court, *Family Law Quarterly* 2019/53, p. 83.

32 Kingsley Napley (2018).

whereas support to his or her opponent or victim will be punished.³³ Eventually, they risk falling in the trap of the narcissist's divide and control strategy.³⁴ Narcissistic abuse in court and mediation proceedings not only presents particular challenges on how to respond to the malignant narcissist's self-regulatory strategies – irrespective if the latter is the initiator of those proceedings or has been challenged by others before judges or mediators. It also questions the validity and utility of alternative disputes resolution avenues or measures (if ordered by the judges in prior court proceedings) to solve disputes with a narcissist in the family, commercial or labour realm with the help of a third party. In this regard, the judicial and mediation process and the legal professionals involved, judges, mediators and lawyers alike, are yet to consciously withstand the malignant narcissist's unscrupulous instrumentalisation and manipulation. Under those circumstances, frustration on behalf of the party facing the narcissist in a legal battle or in mediation proceedings undermines his or her belief and chances to find a middle ground.³⁵ Nonetheless, despite the intransigence of the malignant narcissist obsessed with the preservation of his or her self-image and the destruction of his or her opponent and/or victim, there are, as will be discussed in the next section, still a number of strategies to deal with the malignant narcissist in- and outside the court or mediation room.

Coping with narcissism in court and mediation

The way to go ahead in successfully dealing with a malignant narcissist in a conflict situation necessarily depends on the presence or absence of prior awareness of NPD in general and the character of the said narcissist in particular. Recognition of earlier patterns of narcissistic abuse prior to the conflict situation should inform the narcissist's opponent or victim to act cautiously and anticipate the consequences of challenging the malignant narcissist in court and/or mediation proceedings. Given the latter's insatiable need for narcissistic supply achieved through attention-seeking, vindictiveness and manipulation of the legal system, of legal professionals as well as of the personal and professional support networks of his or her opponent or victim, a legal battle or mediation avenue may not be the best

- 33 M.B. Donner, Tearing the child apart: the contribution of narcissism, envy, and perverse modes of thought to child custody wars, *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 2006/23, p. 546.
- 34 C. Corelli, Divide and conquer: a strategic way of isolating victims, 15 May 2023, <https://www.carlacorelli.com/narcissism-glossary/divide-and-conquer-strategic-way-of-isolating-victims/#:~:text=By%20creating%20an%20environment%20of,and%20manipulate%20them%20more%20easily.>
- 35 The narcissist's opponent or victim may also suffer from the legal abuse syndrome which is a psychiatric injury resulting from protracted litigation and/or mediation proceedings whereby he or she has lost faith in the legal professionals involved to safeguard a just and fair solution in the resolution of his or her conflict with a malignant narcissist. See K. Huffer, *Legal abuse syndrome: a preventable public health problem*, Colorado Springs: Equal Access Advocates 2018.

option to solve a dispute with the malignant narcissist.³⁶ If, however, it is impossible to show restraint or avoid the malignant narcissist – especially so in the family context – and/or the narcissist initiates the conflict before a court or through mediation avenues him- or herself first, the consciousness of the narcissist's opponent or victim about (prior) narcissistic abuse continues to be essential in determining the substantive and procedural steps to be taken in order to regain control over the court or mediation proceedings and, thus, to protect the interests of the narcissist's opponent or victim and those of his or her environment, including family members and especially children.

To (re)gain control over the narrative and expose the narcissist, it is mandatory for the narcissist's opponent or victim to show restraint in his or her argumentations before the judges or mediators. Accordingly, he or she must remain calm and factual in the exposition of his or her case and avoid getting emotional. Otherwise, the malignant narcissist may exploit the emotional instability of his or her opponent or victim to his or her advantage. Therefore, objectivity and neutrality in the exposition of facts on narcissistic abuse must be demonstrated with compelling and clear evidence – documents or testimonies – on the malignant narcissist's actual rather than perceived unacceptable conduct vis-à-vis the opponent or victim, his or her children, (business) partners, colleagues, (co-)workers, etc.³⁷ Such emotional detachment – or rather maturity – aimed at establishing the truth will inevitably contrast with the inconsistent narrative of the narcissist's web of lies where the latter's words do not match his or her deeds. Frustrating and revolting as they are, the narcissist's opponent or victim must avoid engaging with the narcissist's propositions and lies uttered during the court and/or mediation proceedings. Otherwise one risks stepping in the narcissistic trap and one may get entangled in the web of lies.

Such reservation on behalf of the narcissist's opponent or victim not only aims at gaining and maintaining control over the narrative against expected obstructions, traps and obstacles planned by the narcissist. It can also contribute to the malignant narcissist losing control in the presence of the different legal professionals. The exposure of the narcissist before these audiences remains a subtle exercise, playing on the characteristics of the NPD in general and the character of the malignant narcissist in particular. Unresponsiveness to the narcissist's lies and emotional detachment to the latter and in respect of the opponent's or victim's own arguments will put the narcissist at unease. Ignoring the malignant narcissist in court and mediation proceedings (even physically, through avoidance of eye contact) frustrates the narcissist who thrives on antagonism. Being cut off from such attention and narcissistic supply, it is possible to lure the narcissist into a

36 C.A. O'Reilly, B. Doerr & J.A. Chatman, 'See you in court': how CEO narcissism increases firms' vulnerability to lawsuits, *The Leadership Quarterly* 2018/29, p. 365; Mediation First, Can mediation with a narcissist work?, <https://www.mediationfirst.co.uk/blog/mediation-with-a-narcissist.html>.

37 E. Labatut, The effects of parental narcissistic personality disorder on families and how to defend 'invisible victims' of abuse in family court, *Southern University Law Review* 2021/48, p. 253; Modern Law, Proving the harmful effects of narcissistic parents in family court: evidence and strategies, 18 February 2023, <https://mymodernlaw.com/proving-the-harmful-effects-of-narcissistic-parents-in-family-court-evidence-and-strategies/>.

narcissistic rage. Conflated in his or her idealised image in front of the legal professionals, it is possible to throw the malignant narcissist off guard. By proving the resulting changes of personality before this audience in court or mediation proceedings, one pierces the veil of the illusory self-image and, consecutively, the narcissist will lose control.³⁸

While using the label of a narcissist is insufficient to convince legal professionals, a psychiatric diagnosis may be necessary to demonstrate the existence of NPD, especially in cases of divorce and custody proceedings in order to protect the interests of the child.³⁹ In this regard, Australian and Canadian family courts can order mental health assessments of a (narcissistic) parent to inform their decisions about the potential measures and/or (parental) arrangements to be taken to serve the interests of the child and those of the family in the best possible way. Given the detrimental effects of narcissism upon the development of a child,⁴⁰ the narcissist parent may, as in the United States, be requested to attend counselling or therapy sessions on effective co-parenting. In the United Kingdom, a parenting coordinator can be appointed by the family court whose responsibility consists in facilitating co-parenting arrangements regarding decision-making and communication.⁴¹ A formal psychiatric diagnosis of NPD not only aims to serve the interests of the narcissist's opponent or victim, it also raises awareness amongst legal professionals and potentially prevents them from being instrumentalised when dealing with malignant narcissists in court and mediation proceedings.

Conclusion

The self-regulatory strategies of narcissists to sustain their illusionary self-image through interpersonal relationships have damaged the well-being and lives of many. Popular awareness about the disastrous consequences of narcissistic abuse, especially of the malignant type, has yet to trickle down in the realm of conflict management. Malignant narcissists hijack the court and mediation proceedings to sustain their narcissistic supply and to gratify their feelings of revenge towards their opponents or victims. The resulting protracted nature of conflict with a malignant narcissist and instrumentalisation of legal professionals cannot be avoided through legal measures. Changing the law may appear to be ineffective since (legal) boundaries are inherently disregarded by the malignant narcissist. Psychological insights already offer such avenues to raise awareness about toxic narcissistic abuse in- and outside the court and mediation room. Instead, more

38 Weinberger (2017).

39 Harrogate Family Law, How are narcissists tackled by the family courts in England and Wales?, 17 January 2023, <https://harrogatefamilylaw.co.uk/how-are-narcissists-tackled-by-the-family-courts-in-england-and-wales/>.

40 M. Vignando & B. Bizumic, Parental narcissism leads to anxiety and depression in children via scapegoating, *Journal of Psychology* 2023/157, p. 133.

41 Loukas Law, The narcissism series: mental health assessments in the family court of Australia, 6 July 2023, <https://www.loukaslaw.com.au/blog/mental-health-assessments-family-court/>.

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research is needed to empower the narcissist's opponent or victim and legal professionals alike.