

How Narcissists Conduct Psychological Warfare

The narcissist's most lethal weapon—and why it creates chemistry with someone who shows Empathy.

Narcissists often lack a [conscience](#), so climbing in the ring with one is sometimes like bringing a knife to a gun fight. Wielding cruelty and abuse like it's their right, the [narcissist](#) easily wounds a person with a conscience who often feels [guilty](#) for firing back. The guilt perpetuates feelings of responsibility and self-doubt, frequently causing the person with a conscience to surrender. So how does a person create a fair fight? The most effective way is to fully understand the narcissist's most lethal weapon, [projective identification](#), and to disarm it.

It's truly amazing how unfair, underhanded and malicious a narcissist can be, but rarely do they feel true remorse for their deeds. Readily deflecting, distorting, and projecting, they alter their perception of reality, freeing themselves from accountability while simultaneously projecting blame onto another. Their line of [unconscious](#) defense mechanisms operates like a force field around their ego, excusing them from deep and sincere feelings of remorse, insight, introspection, and accountability. Thus, they feel like they are never wrong.

Occasionally, when their back is against the wall, the narcissist may act as though they feel sincere remorse. However, this may be a trick to regain the trust of the person whom they are manipulating. Also, operating from a victim stance assists him or her in controlling others through guilt.

Projective identification is the most powerful psychological mechanism in a narcissist's arsenal. It is what creates the toxic chemistry that psychologically chains an empath to a narcissist. [Projection](#), which is the first component of projective identification, is a psychoanalytic term used to describe the unconscious process of expelling one's own intolerable qualities and attributing them to someone else. For example, an individual who routinely acts rude may call someone else rude. This person does not see the quality in himself or herself but perceives it in others. Narcissists utilize this defense mechanism routinely. In couples counseling, for example, I often hear the narcissist in the relationship “diagnose” their partner as the narcissist.

[Identification](#) is the second component and is the empath's role. An empath's access to deeper emotions such as insight, introspection, deep remorse, accountability, and [empathy](#), automatically qualifies them as less rigidly defended. Most of the deeper capabilities cause the ego to experience a tinge of pain, so a person who has access to the deeper emotions

has a stronger ego. It requires fewer defensive structures be activated. As a result of this “open heart,” the empath unknowingly absorbs the projections from the narcissist and unconsciously identifies them as their own. As the narcissist projects his or her shameful qualities onto the empath, the empath instantly feels, [shame](#), insignificance and incompetence.

These feelings cause a tremendous amount of self-doubt in the empath. Suddenly, he or she is vulnerable to believing the distortions communicated by the narcissist. Eventually, they are convinced they are the root of the problems in the relationship, so they begin to cater and appease, giving the narcissist control. The narcissist takes advantage of their power and intensifies their tactics to isolate and cause conflict with the empath’s [friends](#), family, and work [relationships](#). The empath’s sense of self slowly erodes, and their support system wanes, so they begin to feel dependent on the narcissist, ensnared in the lethal cycle of projective identification.

Breaking the chain of projective identification requires the empath to become consciously aware of this unconscious dynamic. Once the insidious psychological mechanism is illuminated, the empath’s knowledge protects them from believing the narcissist’s distortions about who they are. After recovering elements of their sense-of-self that were lost, an empath regains the strength to strive for space and independence from the narcissist. Once the empath has succeeded in creating distance in the relationship, he or she is safe from the narcissist’s projections.

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