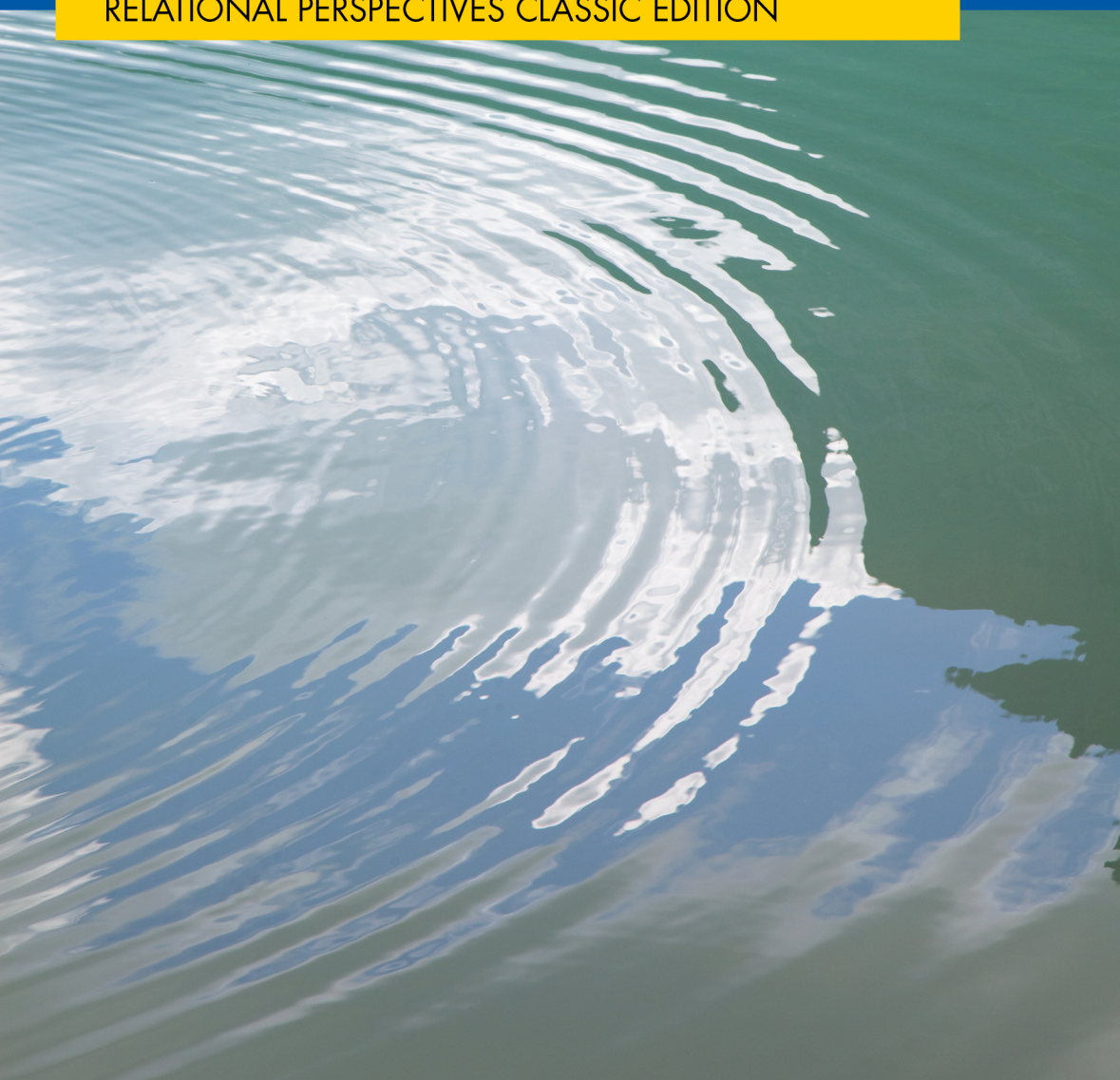
TRAUMATIC NARCISSISM

Relational Systems of Subjugation

With a new introduction by the author

Daniel Shaw

RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVES CLASSIC EDITION



‘Daniel Shaw’s exploration of the dynamics inherent in psychological abuse related to highly narcissistic parenting is thoroughly psychoanalytic, but it also is so trauma treatment savvy as to be breathtaking in its scope.’

Richard Chefetz, *author of* Intensive Psychotherapy For Persistent Dissociative Processes: The Fear of Feeling Real

‘Daniel Shaw’s *Traumatic Narcissism* is a must read as a cutting edge relational approach to helping patients free themselves from the destructive impact of the relationships they have with traumatic narcissists.’

Lawrence Josephs, *Adelphi University, American Psychological Association*

‘This book belongs on my shelf between Leonard Shengold’s Soul Murder (Shengold, 1989) and Bernard Brandchaft’s pathological accommodation work (Brandchaft, Doctors, & Sorter, 2010). To these irreplaceable resources, Shaw adds not only his extensive studies of the precise mechanisms of soul destruction in cults and cult-like groups (such as allegedly therapeutic cults and the large group awareness trainings—LGATs), as well as his own description of cult-like families ruled by traumatizing narcissists.’

Donna Orange, International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology

‘This is a serious, clearly written, clinically informed book written from an insider’s perspective. Shaw inhabits the experiential worlds he depicts, and he knows his subject deeply. Weaving together disparate threads, Shaw works toward a position that places our willingness to acknowledge vulnerability and need, and our ability to withstand shame, as the cornerstones of transformational therapy work. Shaw’s writing seeks and inspires partnership. His efforts to grapple with his subject invite our participation as readers. He demonstrates expertise, but his voice is not that of the expert. He writes in an egalitarian spirit… I highly recommend Shaw’s instructive and evocative work and have, on more than a few occasions, recommended it to friends, students, and patients whose responses confirm my sense that this is a book with much to teach us. Shaw’s book should and, I suspect, will

inspire considerable interest in our field and will facilitate a useful critical analysis of our clinical approaches to working with the narcissistic dimension of experience.'

Eric Mendelsohn, *Division|Review*

'Readers will be compelled by Daniel Shaw's differentiated and lucid account of relational trauma and non-recognition in the shaping of what has been called narcissism. The book's intelligent and compassionate portrayal of clinical dilemmas involved in working with those who have suffered in abusive subjugating relationships is ideal for students and advanced practitioners. *Traumatic Narcissism* offers an original and captivating analysis of the relational configurations and painful emotions that lead to and so often prevent emergence from submission. While his thinking is informed by a broad theoretical knowledge, equally impressive is Shaw's exemplary dedication to exploring how we can use our own experience and personal honesty in order to transcend shame and confront the pitfalls of being an analyst while still maintaining our focus on recognizing the patient.'

Jessica Benjamin, *author of* Shadow of the Other

'Daniel Shaw has written a fascinating book that places his personal psychological journey in the well-researched context of his larger compelling theory of traumatic narcissism. Inspired by his own experience in a cult with a guru whom he eventually came to see as a traumatizing narcissist, and enlivened with numerous clinical case examples, this absorbing and far-ranging book traces the history of traumatic narcissism from ancient times to the vagaries of the current political scene.'

Sheldon Bach, *PhD, adjunct clinical professor of psychology, NYU Post Doctorial Program in Psychoanalysis*

'This book is a must-read for any of us who have worked with victims of traumatizing narcissists or been their victims ourselves. Whether drawing on his personal experience in the clinic and in cults, or analyzing literary productions and the inner worlds of their creators, Dan Shaw brings vividly to life the relational world of those bent on subjugating others – and of those who have been subjugated by them. Not since Benjamin's The Bonds of Love has there been such a powerful analysis of the psychic life

of domination and submission, complemented by a moving account of the effect of analytic love. Perhaps only someone like Shaw, who has known firsthand the psychic effects and needs fulfilled by living in a world of traumatizing narcissists, could have provided such a compassionate and helpful guide for clinicians engaged in the painful work of helping those who have been drawn into the traumatizing narcissist's relational system.'

Lynne Layton, *Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts Institute for Psychoanalysis*

'Daniel Shaw has written an astute, dramatic portrayal of the traumatizing narcissist's subjugation and destruction of another's subjectivity as it emerges in families, cult-like groups and even in the psychoanalytic profession itself. He boldly offers "analytic love" as the avenue of restoration of subjectivity. Professionals of all levels will be riveted as they expand their understanding of these phenomena.'

James L. Fosshage, *Ph.D., clinical professor of Psychology, New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis*

'Dan Shaw's fine study of what he calls "traumatic narcissism" explores the toxic forms of self-involvement in areas as diverse as the life of Eugene O'Neill, a number of his patients, and in his own experience with a guru. Shaw is at his best, however, exploring some of the dark corners of the cultic world of psychoanalysis itself. He holds a mirror up to those who claim the authority of self-understanding. Not all reflect well. Wisely, for all the anger and despair in this book, Shaw ends in hope that is cautious but authentic.'

Charles B. Strozier, *an historian at the City University of New York and a practicing psychoanalyst*

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Traumatic Narcissism

In the 2014 edition of *Traumatic Narcissism: Relational Systems of Subjugation*, Daniel Shaw introduced a new way of understanding how victims become trapped and subjugated by the abuser Shaw calls "the traumatizing narcissist." In the many clinical vignettes throughout the book, Shaw illustrates the traumatizing narcissist's controlling, subjugating behavior, and the shattering impact the traumatizing narcissist has on the people he draws in and holds captive. Shaw explains how therapists can use the traumatic narcissism theory to help victims recognize the specific ways they have been manipulated and controlled.

In the new Introduction to this Classic Edition, Shaw offers insights from his extensive work with these victims and elaborates on the traumatizing narcissist's "delusion of omnipotence," a crucial key to understanding his behavior and what drives it. Additionally, Shaw presents a list of eight characteristic controlling behaviors that support and defend this delusion of omnipotence. Learning to recognize these behaviors will help therapists and patients identify the traumatizing narcissist, and understand how each behavior serves to further deepen his victims' submission and subjugation.

Traumatic Narcissism presents therapeutic clinical opportunities for all mental health professionals. Therapy patients and lay readers will also find this book highly readable and illuminating.

Daniel Shaw, LCSW is a psychoanalytically oriented, trauma informed psychotherapist practicing in New York City. He is the author of *Traumatic Narcissism and Recovery: Leaving the Prison of Shame and Fear*, and he is preparing an upcoming publication titled *The Traumatic Narcissism Theory: A Contemporary Introduction*. He lectures on topics related to narcissistic abuse internationally, leads consultation groups online, and is faculty and clinical supervisor at The National Institute for the Psychotherapies, in New York City.

Relational Perspectives Book Series

Adrienne Harris & Eyal Rozmarin
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The Relational Perspectives Book Series (RPBS) publishes books that grow out of or contribute to the relational tradition in contemporary psychoanalysis. The term *relational psychoanalysis* was first used by Greenberg and Mitchell[1] to bridge the traditions of interpersonal relations, as developed within interpersonal psychoanalysis and object relations, as developed within contemporary British theory. But, under the seminal work of the late Stephen A. Mitchell, the term *relational psychoanalysis* grew and began to accrue to itself many other influences and developments. Various tributaries—interpersonal psychoanalysis, object relations theory, self psychology, empirical infancy research, feminism, queer theory, sociocultural studies and elements of contemporary Freudian and Kleinian thought—flow into this tradition, which understands relational configurations between self and others, both real and fantasied, as the primary subject of psychoanalytic investigation.

We refer to the relational tradition, rather than to a relational school, to highlight that we are identifying a trend, a tendency within contemporary psychoanalysis, not a more formally organized or coherent school or system of beliefs. Our use of the term *relational* signifies a dimension of theory and practice that has become salient across the wide spectrum of contemporary psychoanalysis. Now under the editorial supervision of Adrienne Harris and Eyal Rozmarin, the Relational Perspectives Book Series originated in 1990 under the editorial eye of the late Stephen A. Mitchell. Mitchell was the most prolific and influential of the originators of the relational tradition. Committed to dialogue among psychoanalysts, he abhorred the authoritarianism that dictated adherence to a rigid set of beliefs or technical restrictions. He championed open discussion, comparative and integrative approaches, and promoted new voices across the generations. Mitchell was later joined by the late Lewis Aron, also a visionary and influential writer, teacher and leading thinker in relational psychoanalysis.

Included in the Relational Perspectives Book Series are authors and works that come from within the relational tradition, those that extend and develop that tradition, and works that critique relational approaches or compare and contrast them with alternative points of view. The series includes our most distinguished senior psychoanalysts, along with younger contributors who bring fresh vision. Our aim is to enable a deepening of relational thinking while reaching across disciplinary and social boundaries in order to foster an inclusive and international literature.

A full list of titles in this series is available at https://www.routledge.com/Relational-Perspectives-Book-Series/book-series/LEARPBS.

1 Greenberg, J. & Mitchell, S. (1983). *Object relations in psychoanalytic theory.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Traumatic Narcissism

Relational Systems of Subjugation

Classic Edition

Daniel Shaw

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For Noah and Lila, who inspire me with joy and love, always.

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Contents

Preface

One day, more than a decade ago, I answered the phone at my office and a woman introduced herself to me. Victoria had read an essay I had written, published in the *Cultic Studies Review* and online, entitled "Traumatic Abuse in Cults" (Shaw, 2003b). She wanted me to know that she had studied narcissism for many years, though she was not a mental health professional. I learned that she is the daughter of a traumatizing narcissist mother, with an equally traumatizing narcissist stepfather, who had wealth and position and were extraordinarily neglectful and abusive to their children. Additionally, as a young woman she had been abused by and testified in court against a notorious guru—one of the very small number of victims of sexual abuses in religious groups other than the Catholic Church to speak out. She told me that I had explained something in my paper about narcissism that she had never really come across. She was referring to how I had used the example of a narcissist guru as someone who needed to believe that he was completely free, dependent on no one—the kind of narcissist who exploits and controls others, inflating himself by deflating those he surrounds himself with. I was arguing in this paper that he needs others desperately, but that he disavows dependency, which he views as weak and shameful. He needs to lure others into becoming dependent on him, which then allows him to persist in his delusion that only others are needy, not himself. As a result of his developmental trauma connected to dependency, he externalizes dependency, and with it, shame. Dependency and shame are repugnant weaknesses in his eyes, problems for his inferior followers, not for superior him. My new friend on the phone, Victoria, surprised me with her impressive grasp of the vast psychoanalytic literature, and I was very pleased to hear that she had found something new and meaningful in what I had written.

I had already received recognition for this particular paper—aside from its publication in a journal specifically geared to the ex-cult community, it

was available on the internet and had been averaging 300 "hits" monthly for several years, had been translated into five languages, and had been used for a number of different college classes. However, what Victoria said led me to begin thinking about how I could present my ideas to my colleagues in the psychoanalytic community.

In "Traumatic Abuse in Cults" I defined a cult as a group that is led by a traumatizing narcissist, in which members are subjugated by the leader in various ways, mainly through the destruction of their subjectivity—their objectification. Only the leader's subjectivity is given validity in a cult; members are allowed validation only at the guru's whim, and only to the extent that they comply and submit as specified by the guru. My ideas about cults developed throughout my social work and psychoanalytic training, in the years following my own involvement with a religious group led by a guru for whom I had worked full-time for more than ten years. It was out of the literally hundreds of conversations I had with people who identified as former cult members in the first five years after I severed my ties with this guru that I began to develop the concept I present here—the relational system of the traumatizing narcissist.

I knew from the beginning of my effort to construct a psychoanalytic perspective on cults that this relational dynamic was not unique to cults—that in fact, it could be recognized in any relationship between significant others. My first analytic supervisor, the late Valerie Oltarsh, had suggested at the very beginning of my training that I read *Prisoners of Childhood* by Alice Miller (1981)—the classic book about narcissist parents and how their children are traumatized. Much of what I read there confirmed what I had come to understand about my relationship with my ex-guru; what I had witnessed and experienced as a follower of this guru fell at the extreme end of abusiveness. By contrast, my family of origin, for all our difficulties, had been a far more benign environment.

As my analytic training progressed, I read voraciously—first Kohut, then Winnicott, Fairbairn, Balint, and eventually Ferenczi and Fromm—among many others of the analytic forebears. Soon the contemporary relational theorists beckoned to me, and Mitchell, Aron, Benjamin, Ghent, Harris, Hoffman, Bromberg, Davies—and many others—influenced me deeply. The common theme of all the authors I was drawn to was, in a word, relationality. The more I sought to make use of the relational sensibility in my work and in my life, the more I became acutely aware of the narcissistic bubble my prior so-called spiritual life had occupied.

So the study of relationality led me to the study of narcissism. What I read spoke mostly of narcissism as either healthy or pathological, with the pathological aspects viewed as innate, arising from genetic disposition more than environment. In Kohut's work (1984) I found more understanding of how environment played a role in narcissism, but I still wondered: What about the kind of narcissism that led a person to believe they were omnipotent, and thereby entitled to dictate the terms of other people's lives? What of those people (such as I had been) who submit themselves to such dictatorial contol? Most psychoanalytic case reports that spoke of a patient's narcissism seemed to me to be talking about people who had been traumatized by a narcissist; their trust in others and in themselves had been battered, often from within their families. These patients often showed narcissistic features—unstable self-esteem in two modes, either grandiose superiority or self-loathing—but once their family of origin histories were elaborated, a parent or parents, grandparents or siblings were invariably discovered who were overinflated narcissists (Bach, 1985, 1994, 2006). It made sense to me to think of this kind of abusing other as pathologically narcissistic—but was the tormented, depressed patient in my office who told me of these traumatic abuses also supposed to be thought of as pathologically narcissistic?

I take this theme up in Chapter 1, in which I argue that the clinical phenomena typically thought of as constituting "pathological narcissism" are quite varied, and that dividing narcissists up into overt or inverted categories does not capture what to me is the most important thing to know about narcissism: how deeply rooted narcissism is in relational trauma. I encountered little theorization about how predominantly over-inflated narcissistic people traumatize significant others—by attacking the other's subjectivity. I wanted to know why some adult children of narcissists become traumatizers themselves, while others live in the painful grip of relational post-traumatic stress. I was most helped in my thinking about this by the work of Jessica Benjamin (1988, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2004, 2009a, 2009b), whose theory of intersubjectivity, understood as the process of developing the capacity for mutual recognition, immediately spoke to me. Benjamin's use of the term "complementarity" to stand for the breakdown of intersubjective relatedness into domination/submission strategies for control was exactly the link I was looking for in thinking about traumatic narcissism. These narcissists seek hegemonic subjectivity, the opposite of intersubjectivity. The victim of the traumatizing narcissist, I argue, is often mistakenly

identified as the deflated pathological narcissist, when she would be more usefully understood as a victim of cumulative relational trauma. What is developmentally traumatic is the narcissist caregiver's rejection of the child's subjectivity, and the caregiver's refusal to allow intersubjective recognition to be mutual. The traumatizing narcissist seeks to abolish intersubjectivity, and to freeze a complementary dynamic in the relationship, allowing recognition in one direction only—toward himself.[1]

In Chapter 2, the traumatizing narcissist concept is further elaborated, and the concept of the "complementary moral defense," a relational elaboration of Fairbairn's "moral defense" concept, is introduced. The chapter begins with a study of the life of the playwright Eugene O'Neill, whose play *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (2002) is, from a psychological perspective, an extraordinarily insightful portrayal of the devastating effects of narcissism in a family—in this case, O'Neill's own family. I go on to present my clinical work with an adult child of traumatizing narcissist parents with whom I worked for many years. Aside from demonstrating the enactments and impasses that often arise with these patients, I also want to give life to the horribly traumatic damage done when the subjectivity of the other, and especially of the developing child, is the target of the traumatizing narcissist's destructive need for dominance. The first two chapters taken together serve to define specifically what I am calling traumatic narcissism; the nature of the traumatizing narcissist's relational system; and the destructive impact the traumatizing narcissist has on his or her significant others. I am making a case for an expansion of the psychoanalytic understanding of narcissism that would bring traumatic narcissism more fully into the relational realms of developmental theory, attachment theory, trauma theory, intersubjective theory, and clinical theory.

Chapters 3 and 4 bring the concept of the traumatizing narcissist's relational system, beyond the family and the clinic, into the area of authoritarian groups and institutions. Over the years, I have read a few too many commentaries on how the new social media phenomenon, and reality television, were making narcissists of us all. By way of example, a Google search for "social media and narcissists" brings up hundreds of links to essays on that subject. This way of thinking about narcissism has become pervasive, and, unfortunately, it trivializes the concept. The last several decades in the U.S. of nationalistic jingoism and war-mongering; of fundamentalist theocratic rhetoric and activism; of the corporate sponsored denial of the dangers of climate change; of the unregulation of duplicity and greed on Wall Street;

and of the power of corporate money to buy and own politicians are trends of narcissistic self-interest and abuse of power of far more concern than any harmless showing off on Facebook about children's accomplishments, dates, parties, and family vacations.

While I touch on some of these graver concerns in Chapter 3, I do not attempt a full-scale cultural/political analysis of the destructive impact of traumatic narcissism at these broader levels. I must leave that to the historians, economists, and journalists who are far better equipped than I to tell that story.[2] Instead, I have chosen to view religious and therapeutic cultic groups through the lens of the traumatizing narcissist's relational system, focusing on the story of a notorious psychotherapy group that has been described by many former members as a cult. The Sullivan Institute led originally by Jane Pearce and Saul Newton was an experiment in creating a psychoanalytic ideology and applying it in a communal setting. The Sullivanians, as they were known, drew many patients over the last decades of the 20th Century. Headquartered in New York's Upper West Side and summering in the Hamptons, Sullivanian therapists were often former patients of the inner circle around Newton, who were personally "trained" by him, many of them unlicensed and with no qualifying degree. Newton and his group of therapists were reported to have flouted professional ethics and controlled, exploited, and violated patients, until the community finally dissolved upon Newton's death. Ideological, authoritarian, highly controlling, and demanding groups, sometimes referred to as cults (or in Canada and Europe as sects), illustrate the traumatizing narcissist's relational system as it functions beyond the dyad, in groups that can become as large as nations and coalitions of nations. I begin this chapter by describing my own experience of following and working for an Indian guru for more than a decade, prior to entering the mental health field. I end the chapter reflecting on how traumatizing narcissism takes its most potentially dangerous form in ideologies of nationalistic exceptionalism.

Chapter 4 explores ways in which lingering traces of authoritarianism in psychoanalysis can be found in the process of psychoanalytic supervision. As with Chapter 3, this chapter explores the ways that traumatic narcissism and authoritarianism are linked. I use some of my experiences as a candidate in psychoanalytic training, particularly instances in which I felt called upon to over-idealize and submit to a supervisor, or belittled or shamed by a supervisor, to reflect on ways of being watchful for the legacy of narcissistic authoritarianism of previous generations of analysts. I speak about

the importance for analytic supervisors to support the development of the candidate's unique, personal idiom (Bollas) as an analyst.

In chapters 5 and 6, I return to the exploration of traumatic narcissism in the clinical setting. Chapter 5 examines clinical work with couples, or with individuals focusing on problems in relationships, looking specifically at the destructive impact of traumatic narcissism on intimate relationships. Chapter 6 addresses the phase of analytic work with the adult children of the traumatizing narcissist, in which analyst and patient have together achieved powerfully meaningful insights about the nature of the trauma and its impact. For many patients, the initial reaction to these insights is panic—understanding what happened does not immediately translate into what will happen next. I explore what this crucial struggle looks like clinically, and how the process of starting fresh unfolds—discovering what it means to live from a subjective orientation when one has lived one's life powerfully and adhesively identified as the object of others.

The final two chapters, 7 and 8, explore the meaning of the term "analytic love." Chapter 7 traces the history of the concept, beginning with tensions and disagreements between Freud and Ferenczi around the analyst's attitude toward the patient. Among those qualities of being an analyst thought of as making up the experience of analytic love, what is always implicit, if not explicit, in any description is the effort on the analyst's part to be aware of and able to regulate her narcissistic vulnerabilities. I expand on this theme in Chapter 8, in which I describe how my work with adult children of traumatizing narcissist parents has led to a deeper appreciation of the possibilities of analytic love. The concept of analytic love has been articulated beautifully by many psychoanalytic authors; most notably by Loewald (1960), who wrote of the pivotal phase in analytic work in which the patient has worked through the old to the point of being ready for the new. "The newness consists," wrote Loewald,

> in the patient's rediscovery of the early paths of development of objectrelations leading to *a new way of relating to objects and of being oneself*. Through all the transference distortions, the patient reveals rudiments at least of that core (of himself and 'objects') which has been distorted. It is this core, rudimentary and vague as it may be, to which the analyst has reference when he interprets transferences and defences, and not some abstract concept of reality or normality, if he is to reach the patient. If the analyst keeps his central focus on this emerging core

> he avoids moulding the patient in the analyst's own image or imposing on the patient his own concept of what the patient should become. It requires an objectivity and neutrality, the essence of which is love and respect for the individual and for individual development. This love and respect represent that counterpart in 'reality,' in interaction with which the organization and reorganization of ego and psychic apparatus take place.
>
> (p. 20, italics mine)

Stephen Mitchell explained why much of his book *Relationality* (2000a) was devoted to exegesis of Loewald's work, when he wrote that Loewald's way of understanding analytic process contained within it "some of the most important facets of relationality developed in the analytic literature of recent decades" (p. xvi). What is particularly moving for me in the passage by Loewald is his implicit assertion that human love—parental, analytic, any and all—is most nurturing, most supportive of growth and the unfolding of our own unique human potentials, when the lover strives to be free of the narcissistic need to mold the beloved in one's own image; free of the need to impose on the other one's own definition of who the other should be. I understand Loewald to be speaking of the developmental trauma of objectification, the essence of the traumatizing narcissist's destructiveness. He links the healing of this trauma to the kind of analytic love he describes, which encourages the renaissance of the patient's subjectivity.

My hope in presenting my work on traumatic narcissism is that by exposing the profound instability at the core of the traumatizing narcissist's psyche, clinicians working with his or her victims, and victims themselves, can use their understanding of the traumatizing narcissist's relational system to find a pathway toward freedom, toward the restoration of their subjectivity, and toward the development of the capacity for intersubjective relatedness.

Notes

1 . . . or toward herself: gender pronouns when not speaking of a specific person are used interchangeably throughout the book.
2 These concerns have been extensively addressed by Hollander (2010) who is both an historian and a psychoanalyst; and in the work of Layton (2009, 2010, 2011, in press)

Acknowledgements

Let me begin by thanking the many patients I have been privileged to work with; you have taught me so much. In my clinical vignettes and processes included in this volume, I have in every case carefully disguised the identity of the patients (and of the supervisors in Chapter 4), and created a composite identity. What I describe in the vignettes happened, but material is combined and reorganized to protect privacy.

To those who read various chapters in various states of readiness, including some material that was published previously, my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation: Victoria Barlow, Philip Bromberg, Carolyn Clement, James Fosshage, Lorna and Bill Goldberg, Ruth Imber, Linda Jacobs, Peter Kaufman, Michael Langone, Peter Lessem, Tamsin Looker, Juliet Musso, Susan Obrecht, the late Valerie Oltarsh, Jill Salberg, Caryn Sherman-Meyer, Donnel Stern, Annie Stopford, Melanie Suchet, and the late Elisabeth Young-Bruehel. I needed much encouragement, and each of you gave it so generously, along with many helpful suggestions.

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About the Author

Daniel Shaw LCSW is a psychoanalytically oriented, trauma informed psychotherapist practicing in New York City. He is the author *of Traumatic Narcissism and Recovery: Leaving the Prison of Shame and Fear*, and he is preparing an upcoming publication titled *The Traumatic Narcissism Theory: A Contemporary Introduction*. He lectures on topics related to narcissistic abuse internationally, leads consultation groups online, and is faculty and clinical supervisor at The National Institute for the Psychotherapies, in New York City.

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Introduction to the Classic Edition, *Traumatic Narcissism: Relational Systems of Subjugation*

Introduction

As of this writing, ten years have passed since the original publication of *Traumatic Narcissism: Relational Systems of Subjugation*. I will be forever grateful to the late Lewis Aron, one of the founders of the Relational Psychoanalysis school, for his casual suggestion, in an email exchange about a paper I was working on, that I write a book. My initial response was something along the lines of, "Not a chance, no thanks!" A few minutes after I hit "Send," it dawned on me that Lew was the co-Editor, with Adrienne Harris, of the Relational Perspectives Series at Routledge. There was no "Unsend" feature at the time, so I quickly composed another email, apologizing for my initial response, agreeing to submit a proposal, and expressing my gratitude. I am still thanking Lew, on a daily basis—for forgiving that first email—and most of all for the gift of his faith and trust in me, for the encouragement and support that he offered so generously not just to me, but to the hundreds of students and colleagues he taught, all over the world. Lew's suggestion to write, and his co-editing of this book with Adrienne Harris, allowed me to articulate ideas that I had been using effectively with my patients, but which I had not yet shared with a wider audience of mental health professionals. Ten years later, this book has indeed reached a wide professional audience. It has been translated into Spanish and recorded as an audiobook. It has also reached a great many individuals who identify, in their correspondence with me, as having been harmed by the kind of person I have described—*the traumatizing narcissist.*[1] I am deeply moved by the many letters and emails I have received from people around the world, wanting to let me know that my book had been illuminating and liberating for them.

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To all those readers, I am very grateful for your responses, and so happy to know that these ideas have been helpful.

I began describing the traumatizing aspects of certain narcissistic behaviors in 1994, when two things happened simultaneously in my life: I started graduate school to become a psychotherapist; and I left a religious group in which I had lived and worked for the previous 13 years, finally realizing that I had been in an abusive cult. I won't repeat here the more detailed story I tell in Chapter 3, but I will say that realizing that I had been so blind and so wrong, about what I had spent all of my 30s believing in, was like waking up out of anesthesia. How had I let this happen? How had I not seen what was going on for all those years? With my mind back online—in other words, coming out of dissociation—I could see very clearly the dishonesty, the cruelty and the selfishness of the group's leader, and the dysfunction and delusion of the leader's organization. But what had taken me so long to wake up? My questions then are very similar to the questions I have heard so often in the years since I left the cult—from psychotherapy clients who were coming out of an abusive relationship, or feeling defeated by a repetitive pattern of relational disasters, or enduring another visit back home that ends in rage, tears and estrangement. They berate themselves with their questions—"what is wrong with me?"—as I had done, initially. Fortunately, I was helped in therapy and through peer support to take my questions more seriously. I was helped to be curious and to try to make sense of my experience, rather than shut myself down with shame and self-reproach.

I was also fortunate that leaving the cult coincided with starting a graduate school internship, where my clinical work was supervised by a psychoanalyst on the faculty of The National Institute for the Psychotherapies in New York City. I was new to psychoanalysis, and I asked my supervisor, the late Valerie Oltarsh, where to begin reading. She suggested two books: Alice Miller's *Prisoners of Childhood* (Miller, 1981) and Kohut's *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Kohut, 1984). From Kohut, I learned about healthy narcissism, and how parents' chronic empathic failures could create chronic dysregulation and unstable self-esteem in the developing child. From Alice Miller, and later especially from the work of Winnicott (1965) and Jessica Benjamin (2017), I learned how a child could be trained to meet parents' needs at the expense of the development of their own subjectivity. The themes were resonant. I had just ended a relationship with a pathologically