

(2009g) Tate de Stanley, C., Alvarez, L., Britti, A. M., Neves, N., Roitman, C., Malkdovsky, D. (2009) "Narcissistic contract in a couple. A research with the David Liberman Algorithm (DLA)", *40th Annual Meeting of the Society for Psychotherapy Research, Santiago, Chile, 2009.*

Narcissistic contract in a couple. A research with the David Liberman Algorithm (DLA)

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1. Goal: To research the narcissistic contract and the denegative pact (conceived as an intersubjective combination of successful functional and pathological defenses) in a couple's relationship.

2. Sample: First interview with a five years married couple.

Francisca and Jim arrived at this first interview with the slogan given by Francisca's therapist to have a diagnostic session of the couple and the possibility to take in individual analysis the other member of the couple.

Francisca extensively refers that initially both members of the couple began their very competitive academic careers, and that they had great difficulties to find a job in the city where they lived. She added that her husband had more experience than Francisca in writing and publishing his papers and that he helped her to make her own development. She said that she liked to speak and to communicate and Jim did not. She added that when they began to date and they talked, she noticed things such as he did not answer, or received by answer a different conversation; she thought that it was rude and strange, but other things compensated for this. After marriage he began to be severely depressed and to have anxiety. Before that they had sex twice a year, but at that time he began to reject her and argued that the uncertainty of his job produced a lot of anguish to him.

Jim's entrance in the narration of the session was promoted by the therapist, who did a direct question to him. However, Jim's narration was continuously interrupted by his wife, adding information, correcting a data, etc. In those occasions he remained shut up and like submerged in his own thoughts, or spoke so low that the tape recorder did not register his words. Jim narrated that when they got married he began to feel very badly, could not concentrate his

mind in anything, nor have a normal conversation. He unsuccessfully took medicine because he could not feel nor interact with people, his sensation was that he did not have much to contribute and felt ashamed. He also said that there was a great distance between his family and Francisca's, who had the family whom he had liked to have: they had supper together on the same table, chatted, laughed and were warm people. Meanwhile in his family, although they had supper together, it was difficult to speak. There was a higher level of reserve. He added that he was ashamed to speak of certain personal things, as he was ashamed when he received a prize at school and his mother told the whole family about it. Francisca said that his mother felt very proud of him due to his intellectual brightness. Jim said that when Francisca and he were known and decided to marry, his priority was to organize their lives and to do as possible to be based in Toronto. It was very difficult to orient both careers in the same place. In this period she was making her research work, he responded to her in whatever he could and that was very exhausting. As far as his own research work he had to show professional profits permanently to be successful. Francisca added that she needed more interaction and greater privacy, since she felt lonely, angered and with much rage. Although they had a pretty house and a dog, he did not share with her the home life, and she did not like the fact that she felt as not being welcome in this time when they planned to have children. She did not want a family if they were not all right about these subjects.

In the end of the session, Jim began to speak about the distance between him and his father. She interrupted again saying that his father really admired him. Jim responded that he felt ashamed. Francisca narrated that when they went to Jim's parents' home, she was the one that talked and he disappeared for a while. Francisca extended long on this point accompanied by the silence of Jim. The therapist asked Jim about what he did in that time he disappeared from the meeting, he requested the therapist to repeat the question, since he was distracted in this long monologue of Francisca. Soon Jim answered the therapist's question saying that he was always thinking about work. She was interested in a more intimate bond, but for him the most important thing was to reach a high intellectual level in his papers. She reinitiated the monologue with more anecdotes related to the marriage's vacations, anniversaries, trips, etc.,

moments in which Jim was also concentrated in his work, Jim remained in silence until the closing of the session. When the therapist closed the session saying “Well...Jim and Francisca”, while smiling Jim completed the unfinished phrase, saying (as he imitated the therapist): “your couple is hopeless”. The therapist and Francisca laughed smoothly and responded that they considered that there was hope.

3. Method: The David Liberman algorithm which allows to detect drives and defenses, as well as their state, in the narrated and enacted episodes. The narcissistic contract corresponds to an intersubjective alliance with the aim of maintaining or increasing the narcissistic equilibrium of the participants, while the denegative pact implies the rejection of wishes, realities, statements, etc., opposites to this equilibrium. The concept of defense (either functional or pathogenic) implies the combination of two complementary tendencies: to maintain the narcissistic equilibrium and to reject some wishes, statements, etc., conceived as a menace to it. In consequence, the concept of defense, and especially the combination of the defenses in the intersubjective terrain, can be considered as a way to operationalize the concepts of narcissistic contract and denegative pact.

4. Procedure: 1) to research the narrated episodes aiming at detecting the origin of the couple, the beginning of the problem and the present state of the link, 2) to research the enacted episodes (verbal and paraverbal manifestations and movements) aiming at detecting the exchanges between the members of the couple and their modifications during the interview, 3) to combine the outcomes of both researches.

5. Analysis

5. 1. Analysis of narrations

Initial narcissistic contract: the origin of the couple

Jim emphasized about Francisca

1. There is a great contrast between his family and hers

2. In her family they have supper together, they chat, and they laugh and are warm.
3. She has the family he had liked to have.

Francisca emphasized about Jim

1. Both are academics with very competitive careers.
2. Jim had begun before her to publish his papers.
3. He helped her with her research work

Conclusion

In a beginning, the narcissistic contract was relatively successful. Francisca contributed with a family model cheering and communicative (GPH and successful defense in accordance with the goal) whereas Jim helped her to grow in her academic labor development (O1 and successful creativity). Their defenses were functional, successful and complementary. In addition both agreed in the effort to obtain a labor and social insertion (A2 and successful defense in accordance with the goal).

	Drive	Defense	State
Francisca	GPH	in accordance with the goal	successful
Jim	O1	creativity	successful
Both	A2	in accordance with the goal	successful

Threat of the initial narcissistic contract: origin of the present problem

For Jim

1. Soon after marrying he suffered and abrupt change
2. He could not concentrate, neither to feel, nor interact with people
3. He began to take medication without success

For Francisca

1. At the beginning of the couple they have sex twice a year
2. When he suffered this change in his conduct, they stop having sex.

Conclusion

The threat of the initial narcissistic contract arises soon after marrying. Jim undergoes an intellectual fall (O1 and A2 and failed defense in accordance with the goals) and resorts to the medication (IL and successful - failed defense in accordance with the goal). Francisca, as well, suffered about not having intimacy (GPH and failed defense in accordance with the goal).

	Drive	Defense	State
Francisca	GPH	in accordance with the goal	failed
Jim	O1 and A2	in accordance with the goals	failed
	IL	in accordance with the goals	failed

Failure of the initial narcissistic contract: present state of the problem

For Jim

1. For her to have an intimate relation is the most important
2. For him the most important is to have a high mental level.

For Francisca

1. Although they have a pretty house and even a dog, he does not share with her the home life.
2. She feels lonely, angered and with much range.
3. In these conditions she does not want to have children and to raise a family.

Conclusion

Whereas Jim continues fighting to recover himself without success (and therefore he intends to re-establish the defenses and its state of the first period of the bond). Francisca has happened to experience rage and she refuses to advance in the project to have children and therefore a family. For her the

previous defense also are conserved, but it has appeared in addition the anger (A1 and failed defense in accordance with the goal).

	Drive	Defense	State
Francisca	GPH	in accordance with the goal	failed
	A1	in accordance with the goal	failed
Jim	O1 and A2	in accordance with the goals	failed
	IL	in accordance with the goals	failed

5. 2 Analysis of the enacted scenes

During the interview, of insistent way when Jim speaks, Francisca interrupts him and he remains silent or speaks in so low voice that the recorder does not register it (IL and successful -failed foreclosure of the affect), while he is sunk in his own thoughts (O1 and A2 and successful defense in accordance with the goal). As a complement, Francisca gratifies herself in front of the therapist speaking and showing herself, to the time that contributes useful information for the clinical work (A2 and GPH and successful defense in accordance with the goal).

	Drive	Defense	State
Francisca	A2 and GPH	in accordance with the goal	successful
Jim	IL	foreclosure of the affect	successful -failed
	O1 and A2	in accordance with the goal	successful

At the end of the interview, Jim develops a scene in which he begins finishing an unfinished phrase of the therapist, which is an expression of GPH and defense according with the goal. The scene reveals the tendency of Jim to infer

the thoughts of the other, which corresponds to O1 and successful defense in accordance with the goal. The reference to the lack of hope corresponds to A2 and a failed defense in accordance with the goal, but the smile transforms the group into a humor characteristic, which corresponds to A2 and GPH and successful creativity. This end of the interview seems to express a beginning of Jim's recovery as far as the development of his successful functional mechanism, that combines successful creativity and defenses in accordance with the goal. Then his wife as much as the therapist are unified in a tuning answer with the joke.

	Drive	Defense	State
Jim	GPH	in accordance with the goal	successful
	O1	in accordance with the goal	successful
	A2 and GPH	creativity	successful

6. Discussion and conclusions

The enacted scene in which Francisca speaks during the session while Jim remains silent and thinking about his job is equivalent of the narrated episodes about what happened when the couple went to the house of Jim's parents: she spoke and exhibited herself and he disappeared of the meeting and went to work. As well, the end of the hour with Jim's characteristic of humor, seems to indicate an equivalent of the intellectual brightness that Francisca emphasized in him. Also this enacted scene seems to have its equivalent in narrated episodes referred to the relations of the couple with Francisca's family.

It can be appraised that the study of the scenes displayed in the links between the members of the couple throws results that are compatible with the results of the analysis of some of the narrated scenes, which allows increasing so much the reliability as the validity of the method.

We may notice, in addition, the utility of the approach of the defenses and its state in both members of the couple to research the narcissistic alliance and the denegative pact in the couple's tie.