

WEBINAR



PROJECT AIR
A PERSONALITY DISORDERS STRATEGY



COLLABORATIVE MENTAL HEALTH CARE
AND THE NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY

Vignette

Garry (40-years-old) lives in the outer suburbs of a major city and has been married to Jessie (31-years old) for three years. They have one child, a daughter, Grace (18 months old).

Although well dressed and groomed Garry appears slightly deflated, yet he engages with you, a GP working at his local clinic, readily and eagerly. He kick starts the consultation by stating *“I’m not sure how long I’ll keep coming back to this clinic. I’m not that impressed with your colleagues who I’ve seen previously, and then this morning your reception staff were very rude and kept me waiting”*.

Garry explains that the reason he is here is to get a referral for a psychologist - *“a good one mind you, one that is going to understand me”*. He explains that he is currently on unpaid leave from work and that his boss has demanded that he *“get therapy”* prior to his return to the work place. Garry states he does not want to see the work sourced psychologist and he’d rather engage with one *“worth his time”*.

Further questioning reveals that his work problems have been longstanding and severe. He has worked for the same medium sized business for 10 years and all that time has been *“stuck at the bottom of the hierarchy”*. He has been moved to different, but always, entry level roles. He has had frequent periods of sick leave and in fact has no sick leave left. He was recently passed over again for promotion. He acknowledges that he generally takes sick leave to recover from a big drinking session, that he drinks an average of 7-10 standard drinks 5-6 days a week in the evenings and that drinking helps him cope with the stressors of the day and to sleep at night. He describes his boss as a *“dickhead. In fact he’s a dickhead surrounded by dickheads”*.

He believes he is performing well above this pay level and has been doing so for some time now, and that the boss is *“threatened by his abilities”* and judges him for not having a university degree. He has recently been accused of bullying in the workplace but the claim was retracted *“as they always are. Little people just don’t know what to do with people that outshine them”*.

For many years, and more so since the birth of his daughter, he has felt dissatisfied and frequently feels like things in his life should be better than they are. He reports dissatisfaction in his relationship, as his wife, Jessie, is always preoccupied with the baby and doesn’t appreciate him, even when he *“babysits the child”*. He speculates that she may be having an affair.

You ask Garry about his upbringing. He shares he is the youngest of three boys and grew up in a regional city. His mother was a stay-at-home parent and his father was a successful businessman who was frequently absent from home. Garry describes himself as the *“charming baby”* of the family and reports that his brothers were always jealous of him, and teased him relentlessly. Garry reports that he and his brothers were expected to excel in sports and school work. The family was tight knit and feeling sad or angry was not tolerated.



Like his brothers, he performed well academically at school, but unlike his brothers he wasn't nominated for school captaincy. He did follow their pathway to university but dropped out after failing several subjects "...my assignments were a bit beyond the understanding of the lecturers, to be frank, and anyway I've always believed, having read many biographies of successful people, that all successful people make their fortune on their own".

After dropping out of Uni he decided to move to the "the big smoke because my brothers had claimed all Mum and Dad's attention by having children before me. And you know what? It felt good. So good I decided to make a clean break. I still have no contact with them. The distance made me realise they were ungrateful and holding me back". He concedes that he feels angry with his family as they celebrated the success of his father and now his brothers but not his. In contrast, he reports that Jesse's parents are supportive and frequently help with childminding. Garry states he is very social and well liked, but has no close friends.

At the end of the appointment Garry says he feels much better and no longer requires a referral. He feels so good in fact "that next time I need to talk to somebody to get things off my chest I'm going to come back to see you". He adds that he might encourage Jessie to see you so she can "deal with her issues".

The next day you are surprised to see that Jessie has requested a long appointment with you. Jessie too is well dressed and groomed, and states that she is here because Garry told her "the GP wanted to see me". After some gentle probing you learn that Jessie is worried about her husband and his capacity to provide for her and Grace. She shares that at the start of their relationship she found him to be charming, confident and romantic. However, after they married he became increasingly controlling, jealous and emotionally unavailable. She reports that he requires a lot of praise, has a quick temper and is very sensitive to others' judgements. She says "he is a boy who loves his toys", referring to his expensive sports car and smart suits, despite the family being in heavy debt. He expects her to be his "glamour wife", so she feels under relentless pressure to keep thin and look her best at all times. Since Grace's birth she has noticed an increase in his anger, periods of low mood and alcohol consumption, although she further states "he's always been like that, a bit of a big kid that likes to play, but just not this bad". She reports feeling depressed and isolated because he has not helped care for their daughter Grace since her birth. She notes that she has tried to confront him about this; however he gets enraged, "says hurtful things and accuses me of cheating on him". She is worried about his position at work. He has told her that he has been getting others to do his job and assigns work to others without the authority to do so. He is critical of others, and boasts he is the "dark horse running the company" because his boss is "too stupid to know how to manage people". She is increasingly scared of his rageful thoughts. Jessie indicates that she has a strong circle of girlfriends, many of whom she met in the local mothers group and that she feels close to and supported by both her parents, but that she doesn't feel like she can confide in either for fear that Garry may somehow find out.

Jessie is delighted to accept your referral for a psychologist, but you just can't help but reflect that Garry too would benefit from the same.

