

# Finding Self, Forming Virtue: The Treatment of Narcissistic Defenses in Marriage Therapy.

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### **Abstract:**

Marriage therapy is fraught with therapeutic challenges. In the noise of conflict and damaged relational bonds, couples often resort to defensive strategies and conflict styles. While preventing personal collapse, these defensive positions often exacerbate relational problems the person is attempting to resolve. The strategies may vary in each couple but narcissistic defenses such as projection, blame, withdrawal, and rage are common, and significantly interfere with effective communication and conflict resolution. Drawing on self psychology and intersubjective theories, this article specifically addresses the management and reduction of narcissistic defensive tactics. Developing empathic attunement, affective tolerance and regulation, and supportive structures allows couples to establish sufficient ground for trust in the relationship. Therapeutic movement also draws on Christian virtues which are explicitly and implicitly required as one confronts the dread of self-disintegration and the unconstrained hope of a secure and loving attachment.

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