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JUNG, FREUD AND OBJECT RELATIONS: INTER-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON NARCISSISM

Ishaan Deepak Joshi¹

ABSTRACT

An intersubjective view refers to a standpoint in which multiple people reach a consensus on a certain matter. The psychoanalytic system of thinking has shown significant interest in and conducted extensive research on narcissism. Nevertheless, there is a remarkable consensus regarding the expressions, sources, progression, and therapy of narcissism. Interconnected perspectives in a domain can be demonstrated by highlighting the consensus among experts from diverse systems of thought regarding distinct elements of the issue. This paper will examine the intersubjective perspective on narcissism by contrasting the theories of object relations scholars, Freudian or ego scholars, self-psychology scholars, Jungian scholars, and personality experts.

KEYWORDS

Narcissism, Psychoanalysis, Self, Object Relations, Jung, Freud, Psychotherapy

I. A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONCEPT AND EXPRESSION OF NARCISSISM

Psychologists widely concur that an individual diagnosed with narcissistic behaviour disorder demonstrates narcissistic conduct as a result of underlying emotions of inadequate self-worth. They frequently employ arrogance as a facade to mask their deficiencies. The DSM IV parameters demonstrate intersubjective consensus for the syndrome. Millon, the personality theorist, acknowledged that these behaviours are

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not rooted in genuine confidence and self-assurance. On the other hand, Forman, a psychodynamic thinker, recognises that these persons frequently have a sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction.² Reich, a follower of ego psychology, agrees with the aforementioned statement by asserting that individuals with narcissistic traits possess an idealised perception of themselves that does not align with reality. This leads them to consistently strive for elevated social standing.

Masterson, an expert in object relations theory, posits that narcissists are excessively self-centred and distinguished by their displays of grandiosity. Forman asserts that the majority of these individuals have a strong desire for perfection, although having limited prospects of attaining it. The majority of experts hold an intersubjective perspective about the narcissist's interactions with others. Reich elucidates that these individuals lack a robust social connection with others. They rely on them for approval instead.³ Forman asserts that individuals frequently seek validation and admiration from others in order to enhance their self-worth and earn admiration.

According to Millon & Davis, narcissists frequently belittle the accomplishments of others as a means of boosting their own self-esteem. Masterson asserts that it is commonplace to observe profound feelings of envy among individuals due to their sense of emptiness. Reich further states that their deficiencies prompt individuals to crave attention from other people. When in the midst of other people, individuals will gloat and inflate their successes. They frequently observe and monitor the responses of others towards them, and are excessively responsive to negative feedback.

² Millon, T. and Davis, R. (1996). *Disorders of Personality: DSM-IV and Beyond*. New York: Wiley.

³ Reich, A. (1986). Pathological forms of self-esteem regulation. In A. P. Morrison (Ed.), *Essential papers on narcissism* (pp. 4460). NY: McMillan.

Indeed, the opinions of others frequently lead these folks to endure profound shame and heightened sensitivity. Forman emphasises that individuals with the condition may actively pursue a spouse who embodies their idealised qualities in order to receive validation and confirmation.⁴ Masterson asserts that individuals of this nature will actively seek out flawless companions as a means to reflect the narcissist's idealised attributes. Academics also concur on several observable expressions of this phenomenon. The narcissistic individual will exhibit intense anger even in trivial encounters. An individual of this nature will feel offended when their desire for validation is hindered. Moreover, the individual is very self-aware, as his self-worth is derived from the validation of others.

Indeed, individuals experiencing this phenomenon will have intermittent episodes of elevated self-regard and enthusiasm, followed by times of despondency. Masterson provides insightful explanations for the manifestation of such behaviour in patients. According to him, the majority of patients experience difficulties with intimacy and relationships because being near to others would expose their exaggerated self-image and reveal their imperfections. Such an occurrence would elicit emotions of desertion and profoundly distress the individual. Hence, the abundance of narcissistic relationships is substantial.

Occasionally, the sufferer may assert a deficiency of companionship or seek out others who are not accessible. In alternative situations, the narcissistic individual may claim to experience a sense of detachment in their relationships. These many displays illustrate the necessity of safeguarding the vulnerable self from being revealed or vulnerable. In addition, Masterson elucidates that individuals with this disease may

⁴ Forman, M. (1976). Narcissistic disorders and the oedipal fixations. In J. Feldstein (Ed.), *The Annual of Psychoanalysis* (pp. 6592). New York: International Universities.

encounter episodes of intense anger due to their strong belief in their entitlement, which is seldom recognised. However, it is possible that other individuals may be unaware of that entitlement, which is why they are unable to recognize or appreciate it.

According to Reich, the desire for approval arises from a person's limited comprehension of their authentic identity. Attempting to create high self-esteem is pointless, as one cannot achieve this confidence by introspection. According to Wurmser, a psychologist who follows Freud's theories, individuals may exhibit tendencies of exhibitionism because they desire to dominate or overpower the person or item, they are focused on. They hold the belief that their statements or acts have the power to captivate, attract, and ultimately dominate the other individual.⁵

II. THE GENESIS OF NARCISSISM IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

The majority of psychodynamic research attributes the development of narcissism to an individual's early childhood. Sigmund Freud, the originator of psychodynamic theory, employed his ego theory to elucidate the development of narcissism. The author begins by introducing the concept of libido, which denotes the inherent energy in humans resulting from sexual and survival instincts. The libido is a fundamental component of the id, serving as a primary motivator of human behaviour. During the early stage of development, all human beings possess an inherent affection for themselves, which Freud referred to as fundamental narcissism. Typically, the baby's sexual desire is focused on themselves. However, as an individual matures, they must acquire the ability to channel their sexual energy towards a specific target.

Freud contended that the objective of treatment should be to supplant narcissism with object attachment. Several scholars hold intersubjective perspectives on infancy. Heinz Kohut, the advocate of self-psychology,

⁵ Wurmser, L. (1981). *The Mask of Shame*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP

also concurred with Freud on this issue. He had the belief that individuals possess an inherent affection for themselves, and if not properly regulated, it could manifest as a narcissistic disposition in later life. Thus, the child perceives the universe as centred solely on his own existence. However, Kohut held a different perspective from Freud about the therapeutic approach to narcissism.⁶ He asserted that therapists are unable and should not endeavour to completely supplant narcissism with object love, as these two can coexist together. The two scientists held contrasting treatment methodologies, although they shared a fundamental agreement regarding the inherent presence of self-love in infants and its transformation in maturity through the advent of object attachment.

III. THE IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NARCISSISTIC TRAITS

Kohut posited that an individual's formative years exert a detrimental influence on their comprehension of the self. As children mature, they display behaviour that is crucial for effective functioning in adulthood. For example, certain individuals may exhibit competitive inclinations. However, as their self-perceptions have not yet fully formed, their capacity to nurture this innate activity will rely on the response of others. If a child's family members react unfavourably to constructive competitive activity, it can have a detrimental impact on the child's self-perception. Certain families may disapprove or shame the young individual due to their display of such behaviour.

Over time, the child will inhibit that behaviour, but it will reappear in a distorted form during their maturity. An example of this is the display of narcissistic behaviour. Almas reinforces these feelings by asserting that kids are seldom perceived in their true essence. They rely on external

⁶ Kohut, H. (1966). Forms and Transformations of Narcissism. In C. Strozier (Ed.), *self-psychology and the humanities* (pp. 97-123). New York: Norton.

mirrors to enhance their perception. The narcissistic desire is an essential requirement for all kids as it validates their perception and enables them to understand it. Johnson further exemplifies intersubjectivity in relation to Kohut by asserting the importance of reconciling a child's vulnerabilities with their inherent greatness. The familial context significantly influences the support of these two polarities. Subsequently, it enables the self to express itself without constraint. However, if the family imposes expectations on the child that contradict his true nature, it is likely that narcissistic harm will emerge.⁷

Thus, Johnson, a psychoanalyst, exhibits cross-subjectivity with Kohut, the self-psychologist, about the underlying origins of narcissism during childhood. The helplessness of a child's condition can contribute to the development of narcissism based on their experiences. The majority of the denigration, unjust treatment, or abandonment that occurs during childhood is beyond one's control. A youngster experiences a sense of helplessness in the face of a distressing scenario. Consequently, an individual may develop a defensive mechanism throughout their adult years as a means of coping with the sensation of powerlessness.⁸ This individual with narcissistic tendencies will possess a delicate and vulnerable sense of self when feeling powerless, leading them to experience a strong urge to act in order to protect and maintain their self-image.

Conversely, circumstances where authority or exceptional qualities are excessively rewarded might instil a feeling of susceptibility in the child. Parents might also inflict narcissistic injury on their children by transferring caretaking responsibilities to them. A child who assumes responsibility for the care of their family may develop challenges related to authority and trust. In addition, a youngster whose accomplishments

⁷ Almaas, A. (1996). *The point of existence*. Boston: Shambhala Press.

⁸ Johnson, S. (1987). *Humanizing the narcissistic style*. New York: Norton

provoke jealous responses from parents will also encounter this phenomenon. The converse can also hold true when parents derive their own sense of fulfilment from their child's achievements, which can also harm the child's self-esteem. Childhood memories of events that trigger intense anger and self-centeredness persist indefinitely. Indeed, whenever an individual eradicates the item that triggered their momentary powerlessness or embarrassment, another replacement will reignite same emotions once more.

These childhood traumas will therefore make an adult more likely to develop a pathological condition of paranoia. Thus, Kohut proposes that therapists should strive to identify the origin of such narcissistic dissatisfaction. Tracing one's childhood experiences is crucial for treating narcissistic behaviour disorders, as stated by the self-psychology theorist. Object relations scholars also share cross-subjective consensus on the latter reality. Masterson asserts that the extent to which parents support and respect a child's authentic identity has a significant impact. According to the author, the true self is a synthesis of positive and negative attributes, as well as being characterised by spontaneity and autonomy.

According to Almaas, a thinker who focuses on the whole picture, misinterpreting the nature of a child can lead to feelings of betrayal and emotional pain. As a result, this causes ambiguity regarding one's own identity. In essence, the individual will develop narcissistic traits. Youngsters experience a decline in their self-esteem due to becoming too focused on evaluating their self-object. Masterson also expresses agreement with the previously mentioned opinions of parenting. According to him, individuals with narcissistic illnesses often originate from homes that lack support. A significant number of their parents endeavour to shape them into flawless individuals without considering

their emotional requirements.⁹ Consequently, a child will strive for perfection in order to fulfil a parent's ideal expectations.

During maturity, individuals may develop an exaggerated and self-important perception of themselves as a defence mechanism against the fear of being abandoned or experiencing parental disappointment. Moreover, if any or all of the parents exhibit narcissistic problems, it is likely that the child's authentic self will not receive adequate support, resulting in the development of narcissistic tendencies in the child. Freud and Kohut agree on the need of idealisation.¹⁰ Children acquire knowledge about the significance of empathy and compassion towards others by imitating their parents, which leads to the idealisation of their parents. This enables people to calm themselves in instances that require it.

Consequently, in the absence of suitable role models, children may not have anyone to emulate in terms of understanding their own value or the significance of showing empathy towards others. Hence, the absence of human identification in these individuals is evident in their narcissistic state, characterised by a lack of empathy, identification, and concern for others.

IV. ASPIRATIONS AND DESIRES IN A NARCISSISTIC CHARACTER

There is consensus among experts about the significance of values and objectives in the development of narcissism. Kohut elucidates that the narcissist might exhibit diverse manifestations of damaged pride and feelings of inadequacy. Failure to align an individual's own aspirations with their own identity can result in profound feelings of shame. Typically, an individual's perception of the perfect or ideal originates from

⁹ Wolf, E. (1988). *Treating the Self: Elements of Clinical Self Psychology*. New York: The Guilford Press.

¹⁰ Blanck, Gertrude, & Blanck, Rubin. (1974). *Ego psychology: Theory and practice*. New York: Columbia University Press.

their parents particularly specifically their mother. If there is a significant disparity between their image of the ideal and their self, it will give rise to narcissistic conflict.¹¹ Masterson also exhibits consensus among individuals about the same topic. He illustrates the concept of authority by explaining that a person's perception of the ideal authority is influenced by how their parents embody it.

If a parent exhibits excessive authoritarianism or displays excessive permissiveness, chronic issues around the concept of ideal authority will emerge. The individual may lack confidence in their own expertise. Freud recognised that every human being possesses innate impulses. He additionally claimed that drive can be oriented towards either mortality or vitality. Although other prospective psychologists dismissed the concept of the *Todstrieb*, or death drive, they nevertheless agreed with Freud regarding the significance of aspiration in life. In the context of narcissism, persons who are unable to properly utilise the life urge often encounter feelings of inadequacy.

Similarly, Kohut also elucidates the significance of motivation and desire in the condition. He displays a clear distinction between beneficial ambition and perilous determination. According to Kohut, individuals can exhibit either competitive aggression or egotistical fury. When obstacles obstruct one's objectives, it might lead to the emergence of competitive aggression. The psychological ramifications of this form of fury are nearly negligible, as there will be no lingering psychological effects once the objective has been achieved. An individual in good health can effortlessly navigate from one competitive scenario to another without resurfacing old concerns.

If self-objects pose a danger to one's self-image, it can lead to the emergence of narcissistic wrath. The narcissistic individual views others

¹¹ Lee, R. and Martin, C. (1991). *Psychotherapy After Kohut: A Textbook of Self Psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.

solely as a way to maintain their own well-being. If these others fail to fulfil this role and instead act in opposition, they must be eliminated. Narcissistic fury occurs when an individual experiences a sense of powerlessness in response to others causing harm to their circumstances.

V. THE PURPOSE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Multiple researchers concur with the responses exhibited by narcissists during therapy. Numerous proponents of the self-psychology hypothesis concur that limitations in time and resources can impede the efficacy of therapy. This is particularly problematic since it can create irritation in the person undergoing analysis. Moreover, due to the narcissistic individual's constant self-centeredness, certain actions may be interpreted as a potential danger to the client. For example, the individual may see extended periods of quiet as a personal assault. Moreover, if a therapist displays excessive inflexibility and impartiality, it can potentially trigger narcissistic wrath.

Typically, the seriousness of the problem is assessed based on how closely it resembles previous instances of narcissism. During these instances, the therapist who is attentive and involved can intervene by elucidating and analysing the scenario for the client. Healing can occur through the process of self-restoration. Conversely, these annoyances in treatment might be so unsettling that they have the potential to undermine the therapist's legitimacy with the patient. Under such scenarios, the patient may choose to end his therapy sessions due to an inability to reconcile the harm done to oneself with the therapeutic intervention.

Failure typically arises when the therapeutic scenario is excessively intense or serves as a significant catalyst for narcissistic wrath. Narcissistic anger treatment may extend beyond those diagnosed with

narcissistic behaviour disorders in some situations. Occasionally, individuals with borderline personality disorder may also exhibit the illness. In such situations, interpretations can have a greater harmful impact on treatment rather than being beneficial. The client may perceive intervention as a potential danger to their own identity or well-being. During such circumstances, the counsellor must exhibit empathy and show considerable patience before tangible outcomes can be observed. Masterson further exemplifies the object relations approach by asserting that the majority of narcissists struggle to embrace therapeutic assistance due to the requirement of surrender. During their childhood, many of them had to adopt a state of helplessness and powerlessness in order to attract their family's attention. Therefore, it is understandable that they are reluctant to place themselves in such a vulnerable position again.

Narcissism diminishes the significance of surrender and leads numerous persons to react unfavourably to psychological help. Hence, one of the objectives of treatment should be to elucidate the efficacy of surrender. Counsellors should recognise occurrences of love, kindness, and caring, which are contingent upon surrender as a fundamental concept. Masterson agrees with Kohut in regards to recognising and elucidating occurrences of misconstrued emotions. In addition to surrender, Masterson also emphasises that establishing a therapeutic relationship with narcissistic individuals is delicate. He clarifies that it originates from the developmental preoccupation that transpired in the patient's life.¹² Consequently, an individual of this nature may exhibit a negative reaction towards specific aspects of therapy.

The narcissist struggles with maintaining boundaries and encounters obstacles when it comes to managing frustration. Consequently,

¹² Masterson, J. (n.d.). *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy of the Narcissistic Personality-Disorder (Closet): A Developmental Self and Object Relations Approach*. Web.

therapists must exercise caution with these issues and anticipate intermittent instances of failure. Success in managing the disease is achieved by the efficient handling of these breakdowns. Freud also showed that there was mutual agreement among individuals about the objective of treatment. He had the belief that it is necessary to investigate the origin of the patient's triggers. The dynamics of the Oedipus complex are relevant in this situation.

A therapist should determine the specific stage of the patient's development in which the desire became fixed. Occasionally, these memories can be suppressed, and the individual may be unaware that the root cause of their narcissistic behaviour originates from a specific stage. The therapist must collaborate with the patient to discern and pinpoint those particular facets. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to identify the factors that contribute to the patient's heightened sensitivity. For example, the individual might express dissatisfaction with a business associate who failed to meet expectations or a partner who similarly disappointed them. The interventions may give rise to a motif of betrayal.

Therefore, it is necessary to identify the occurrences of betrayal throughout the patient's early years that could have contributed to their heightened sensitivity or fear of betrayal. According to Freud & other ego psychologists, counsellors must systematically rebuild the calculations performed by the ego. Given that the ego suppresses or executes its acts covertly, it is necessary to identify the absent components in one's psychology and address them comprehensively. Freud and other researchers, like as Kohut, also concurred on the concept of reparenting positions in psychotherapy. Both psychologists contend that transference can occur amongst the patient and the clinician. Essentially, the patient begins to regard the psychotherapist as

a father figure that is idealised. The expert can then provide them with some of the aspects they believe were overlooked.

Masterson also discusses the significance of transference in the context of therapy. The psychologist clarifies that transference should not be understood as an object relationship. Instead, treatment should be seen as a temporary platform where the patient can express and address their difficulties. Nevertheless, he asserts that successful transference occurs only when the patient perceives the therapist in a pragmatic manner, namely, as a fallible individual. According to Jungian theory, experts also express the same opinions regarding the objective of therapy. These proponents argue that psychologists should attempt to explore the concept of the self, which is one of several archetypes in Jungian psychology. Jung posited that the self, constitutes the fundamental essence of an individual's personality. If an individual is able to integrate all the facets of their being, they can achieve a state of wholeness once more. Therapists treating individuals with narcissistic traits should aim for the integration of their personality.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is consensus among individuals on the characteristics & expression of narcissism. Freudian, object relations as well as self-psychologist theories concur that narcissistic individuals possess a delusional sense of self-assurance and a perception of being superior. Nevertheless, these portrayals conceal sentiments of insufficiency. Furthermore, there are intersubjective accords regarding the genesis of narcissism throughout infancy. Both self-psychology researchers and the Freudian scholars concur that narcissistic illnesses originate during infancy, when a child's self-love manifests as narcissism.

The evolution of narcissism in adolescence is influenced by intersubjective perspectives, which emphasise the need of family support

and the search for one's authentic self. Psychologists from different psychodynamic theories argue that when parents project their own desires and expectations onto their children, it can hinder the development of their authentic self and result in narcissistic harm. Object relations theories focus on the attachment to the self-object, whereas Freudians concentrate on fixation related to the Oedipus complex. Self-psychologists discuss the experience of a degraded sense of self.¹³ These theories unanimously concur on the occurrence of psychological harm during one's upbringing. Furthermore, there is consensus among different psychodynamic theorists regarding the objective of treatment.

Central to their theories is the necessity to pinpoint the origin of inadequacy inside oneself. Self-psychologists advocate for the utilisation of empathy and transference, while Freudians also discuss transference. Object relations theorists, on the other hand, place emphasis on the reconciliation between the self and the self-object. Furthermore, it is universally acknowledged among experts that the therapeutic environment is particularly delicate when dealing with individuals of this nature.¹⁴

This study examines narcissistic personality disorder, arguing that individuals with this disorder exhibit narcissistic behavior due to low self-esteem and arrogance. The DSM IV criteria support this theory, but it is not based on authentic self-assurance. Narcissistic traits are often linked to early childhood experiences and a distorted self-perception.¹⁵ Therapists should focus on identifying the source of narcissistic discontent and examining early experiences to effectively treat

¹³ Masterson, J. (1981). *The narcissistic and borderline disorders*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

¹⁴ Joshi, I. (2022) 'Psychological Complexity Through The Lens Of Jungian Psycho-Philosophical Theory & Psychopathology', *Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research*, IV(V).

¹⁵ Ishaan Deepak Joshi, 'Psychoanalysing Delinquency: Object Relations, Aggression and the Unconscious Mind' (2023) 2 *IJHRLR* 187-201.

narcissistic behavior disorders.¹⁶ Therapy is essential for addressing narcissistic individuals, but its effectiveness may be limited by time and finances.

¹⁶ Joshi, I. (2023) 'Comparative Study Between The Freudian Psychoanalytical & Behaviourism Perspectives On Ethical Development', Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research, V(II).