

Narcissism

Well lets be open about it blogging is a narcissistic pursuit. One is always, if not very regularly talking(writing) about self. And I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong with that, far from it, I would see it as being most positive in many ways.

Well I own up at least.

Ok I have a narcissistic personality

So what shall we talk about now. Oh lets have the myth of narcissus!!. There are many different versions of this but they all have the same general theme.

The myth of Narcissus

Leiriope, a water nymph, was ensnared by the river-god Cephisus and violated. Narcissus was the product of their union. Of exceptional beauty from the beginning, her son became "as proud and unapproachable as his mother was". According to the legend, Narcissus goes on to become a callous individual, dismissive of suitors of either sex. He dispenses of a male admirer by sending him a sword to kill himself with, which he proceeds to do.

Narcissus meets Echo, a nymph condemned to solely repeating words spoken in his presence. Portraying a pure introject, she simply parrots what is said. After initially enticing him with reflecting his own words, her longing for a mate is requited by Narcissus' customary dismissal, leading to a chase in the woods, during which he ends up at a pond with a surface so calm, it does not show anything other than his own beauty when he kneels down. Upon seeing his reflection, Narcissus is taken with "another" for the first time, and only comes to realise that it is he himself when he bends down to drink. Bereft of an object of love extraneous to himself, and "having got to know himself" as Teiresias prophesised, he remains transfixed and, unable to prise himself away, eventually starves.

here endeth the myth.

So the narcissistic life position is:

What a wondrous feeling to be the only true love of oneself. The perfect partner - self. At last I have found the true meaning of life - me.

Narcissism again

Me, myself and I



Me and my perfect image.

From a relational TA discussion forum. My response to Helena Hargaden.

Hello Helena

HH: First of all you bring us back to relational thinking which **MUST** include the therapist's narcissism so for example the question always persists as to how do we bring about what happens with our clients? Whether that be a political issue as raised by Heather or a pathological issue as raised by Tony? The inevitable and uncomfortable questions that we must ask are: what about the therapist's narcissism? How did the therapist contribute to the dynamic which we then, as therapists, can either, easily disown, or frown upon, or think that somehow we are above such 'dreadful' enactment's, thoughts or attitudes?

TW: My rejoinder to Birgitta rejoinder in the next TA Times is rapidly becoming old news as I am doing the rejoinding here. However I would like to comment about your point about those uncomfortable questions about the therapist's own narcissism.

I made the statement about Bigitta's article that those therapists who use or become part of the therapeutic alliance are using a narcissistic style of treatment. They are putting themselves into a position with clients where they become the centre of the clients world (to varying degrees of course). The relational TA therapist assumes great importance in each clients life who develops a strong transference. This is precisely what the narcissist wants, to be the centre of others lives, thoughts and feelings. I am sure you have had clients who will say that you are everything to them - about how important you are too them and their survival. Then perhaps at a training event or some sort of residential treatment weekend the clients in a strong transference watch your every move, particularly how you relate to the other clients when the competitiveness, jealousies and sibling transference's are running strong. If you show one individual a bit more attention than others think you should then you are chastised severely for doing so. Such a situation is narcissistic heaven. You are the centre of this intense focus and attention and everybody wants you. In such situations it seems that one needs to be cautious indeed as this can very easily get out of hand.

So one can assume that a relational or transferential type of treatment will attract therapists to it who have some narcissistic traits. It attracts me and I have some of them.

One would expect the 'fully blown narcissist' would not make a good therapist because of the lack of empathy and lack of interest in others thoughts and feelings. I agree and disagree with this. Some strongly narcissistic people, can be good leaders. The politicians that I have counselled particularly tend to be like this. Very big egos, quite self centred and there is always a lot of attention on them. They always seem to know where the cameras are(!). So if as a therapist (or trainer) your clients (or trainees) tend to become followers and not remain so much like clients (or trainees), then you may have some significant narcissistic traits. This is the therapist who becomes like a cult leader who often in the early stages (of the cult) is therapeutic to many of the members.

Another response to Paul

I disagree with Tony's assertion that the Other is irrelevant to those labelled as narcissistic. Narcissus cannot exist without his Echo. It is the desire for admiration and the desire of the Other that Narcissus craves. His

whole performance is directed at evoking the desire of the Other; the Other in turn performs the function of forming a mirror of a self that is desirable.

TW: Some more good points! I agree with your contention that narcissus cannot exist with out his echo. So in this sense echo is very relevant for him.

What I am meaning by irrelevant is in a pragmatic sense. Looking at the purely behavioural and emotive aspects of the narcissist. What better way to do that than refer to the trusty old DSM-IV. As I understand it one of the principle features of the narcissist is the shallowness of their relationships. They have,

"a lack of empathy and have difficulty recognising the desires and subjective experiences, and feelings of others. They may assume that others are totally concerned about their welfare..... they fail to recognise that others have feelings and needs..... Those who relate to individuals with Narcissistic Personality Disorder typically find an emotional coldness and lack of reciprocal interest" (P659).

This quotation shows what i am referring to as relevance. To me it highlights that others are of little interest unless it serves the interest of the narcissist (such as an echo or two). So perhaps I should rename the narcissistic life position: I'm OK, You're irrelevant unless you serve some function for me.

How can a therapist who uses the therapeutic relationship, get on with someone who spends very little of their time and energy thinking about or even noticing the therapist? How can the therapist have an impact on the therapeutic relationship (and thus the client) if in the client's psyche there is none (relationship).? This is one of the central challenges of treating the narcissistic individual.

Me, me, me

This is part of a posting that i did on the Relational TA discussion list.

Hello

Ray Little & Helena Hargaden state;

"Firstly, one of the features of narcissism is a defence against the recognition of separateness between self and other. This symbiotic relatedness removes the need for love, hate, aggression and envy. The symbiotic relatedness creates a sense of oneness, or fusion with the other. In effect, a blissful 'narcissistic bubble'. " (end quote)

My study of narcissism probably ends up in the same place as the two others above but I get there by a different path. My understanding of the "fully blown narcissist" as Birgitta originally put it, is that they do not even get to the fusion in the first place. They do not feel oneness with another person and thus there is no separateness to defend against.

To use life positions I would define such an individual as I+ U? - (I'm OK, You're irrelevant). The other person is not recognised or the being is not understood. Obviously the Adult of such a narcissistic individual does recognise the other or they would be psychotic, but the Child ego state does not comprehend the other and his existence. So one could rightly say that they exist in a bubble and I assume that is what the term 'narcissistic bubble' is referring to. Anything (or person) outside the bubble is not seen as relevant to the individual and it is only 'acknowledged' when it can be used to serve their purpose.

So a transference or relational style of treatment is difficult with such people because they never get to the relationship in the first place. How can you use the therapeutic relationship style of treatment when the client does not even comprehend the relationship in the first place. You (the therapist) are seen as irrelevant unless you can serve their purpose in some way.

I am particularly reminded of one male client whom I saw a number of years ago. I saw him briefly for treatment, he then ended contact only to return a few years later. He had been caught for shoplifting. This successful and highly paid man had been caught stealing a single roll of film from a supermarket. When I asked him why his response was - "Why should I have to pay for it".

We battled with the therapeutic relationship. He asked what it was all about and I used to say about contact and attachment and intimacy and his reply would be - "You are telling me that there is this really good

tasting ice cream that I have never tasted. If I have never tasted it, how do I know what I am missing out on". And he was right.

Another interesting fact about him was that he had been a best man at a wedding a total of 6 times. Most men would be a best man at a wedding once or twice in their lives, if ever.

I did get to meet his new (4th) wife during my contact with him, and I must say I did not envy her.