

Narcissism and Kohut's Self-Psychology: Self Practices in Service of Self-Transcendence

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Abstract : The DSM has been plagued with conceptual issues since its inception, not least discriminant validity and comorbidity issues. An attempt to remain a-theoretical in the divide between the psycho-dynamicists and the behaviourists contributed to much of this, in particular relating to the Personality Disorders. With the DSM-5, although the criterion have remained unchanged, major conceptual and structural directions have been flagged and proposed in section III. The biggest changes concern the Personality Disorders. While Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) was initially tagged for removal, instead the addition of section III proposes a move away from a categorical approach to a more dimensional approach, with a measure of Global Function of Personality. This global measure is an assessment of impairment of self-other relations; a measure of trait narcissism. In the same way mainstream psychology has struggled in its diagnosis of narcissism, so too in its treatment. Kohut's self psychology represents the most significant inroad in theory and treatment for the narcissistic disorders. Kohut had moved away from a categorical system, towards disorders of the self. According to this theory, disorders of the self are the result of childhood trauma (impaired attunement) resulting in a developmental arrest. Self-psychological, Psychodynamic treatment of narcissism, however, is expensive, in time and money and outside the awareness or access of most people. There is more than a suggestion that narcissism is on the increase, created in trauma and worsened by a fearful world climate. A dimensional model of narcissism, from mild to severe, requires cut off points for diagnosis. But where do we draw the line? Mainstream psychology is inclined to set it high when there is some degree of impairment in functioning in daily life. Transpersonal Psychology is inclined to set it low, with the concept that we all have some degree of narcissism and that it is the point and the path of our life journey to transcend our focus on our selves. Mainstream psychology stops its focus on trait narcissism with a healthy level of self esteem, but it is at this point that Transpersonal Psychology can complement the discussion. From a Transpersonal point of view, failure to begin the process of self-transcendence will also create emotional symptoms of meaning or purpose, often later in our lives, and is also conceived of as a developmental arrest. The maps for this transcendence are hidden in plain sight; in the chakras of kundalini yoga, in the sacraments of the Catholic Church, in the Kabbalah tree of life of Judaism, in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, to name a few. This paper outlines some proposed research exploring the use of daily practices that can be incorporated into the therapy room; practices that utilise meditation, visualisation and imagination: that are informed by spiritual technology and guided by the psychodynamic theory of Self Psychology.

Keywords : narcissism, self-psychology, self-practice, self-transcendence

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