

DEPRESSION AND GRANDIOSITY AS RELATED FORMS OF NARCISSISTIC DISTURBANCES

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to present some ideas which have occurred to me over the years in the course of my analytic work. This work has included analyses, supervision and many interviews with people who have been looking for an analyst, and whom I have seen for one or two sessions. In these short encounters, the tragedy of each individual destiny can often be seen with moving clarity and intensity. What is described as depression, and experienced as emptiness, futility, fear of impoverishment and loneliness, is frequently recognizable as the tragedy of loss of the self, or alienation from the self, which is seen regularly in our generation and society. Thanks to years of reconstructive work with my analysands, I think I have come nearer to the child origins of this alienation from the self.

The observations of early mother-child interaction recorded by M. Mahler, R. Spitz, and J. Robertson, confirmed my suppositions. On reading Winnicott I felt on familiar ground and encouraged to continue along this path. Lastly, H. Kohut's studies on narcissism, especially his concept of *narcissistic cathexis*, helped me to conceptualize the relationships I had discovered.

In what follows I shall dispense with the meta-psychological language of structure theory and try to develop the connections I want to show on the basis of the mother-child relationship. Obviously a large part of the events here described take place intrapsychically, but an object relationship precedes every internalization and its language seems to me to be emotionally truer, and, for many analysts, more understandable.

A. THE VICISSITUDES OF NARCISSISTIC NEEDS

According to H. Kohut (1971), an object is narcissistically cathected when we experience it not as the centre of its own activity but as a part of ourselves. If the object does not behave in the way in which we expect or wish, we may at times be immeasurably disappointed or offended, almost as if an arm ceased to obey us, or a function that we take for granted (such as memory) lets us down. This sudden loss of control can also lead to intense narcissistic rage.

This sort of attitude is met far more frequently in adults than one might imagine, however much we like to regard it as pathological, unrealistic or egocentric. At the beginning of life, however, it is the only attitude possible. Not only during the phase of primary narcissism (the symbiotic phase) but also after the gradual separation between self- and object-representations, does the mother normally remain a narcissistically cathected object, a function of the developing individual.

Every child has a legitimate narcissistic need to be noticed, understood, taken seriously, and respected by its mother. In the first weeks and months of life it has to have the mother at its disposal, must be able to use her and to be mirrored by her. This is beautifully illustrated in one of Winnicott's images: the mother gazes at the baby in her arms, and the baby gazes at its mother's face and finds itself therein . . . provided that the mother is really looking at the unique, small, helpless being and not projecting her own introjects on to the child, nor her own expectations, fears and plans for the child. In that case, the child would not find itself in its

