



What Can We Do about Human Narcissism for the Common Good?

Jan Fawcett, MD

This is the second edition of *Psychiatric Annals*, guest edited by Otto F. Kernberg, MD, which is dedicated to the narcissistic personality. This series of articles spells out the history of the concept and its scientific limitations as a diagnostic category. These articles affirm the importance for understanding the limitations of humanity, ranging from criminality, including excesses of unbounded greed, pitiless violence, and gross violations of human decency that are evident in our present life, as well as a history of narcissism, emerging from our capacity for narcissism and self-justification.

Kohut has pointed out that “normal” narcissism can motivate some of the greatest accomplishments of humanity, while pathological narcissism can lead to tremendous suffering and damage. Does this

mean that narcissism is required for achievement, ambition, curiosity, and human industry? Or could we do without this trait in our next evolution? Do changing social conditions increase the manifestations of pathological narcissism? If so, what changes could be made to modulate if? Is narcissism a Darwinian sur-

of normal self-esteem. So maybe by promoting the development of normal self-esteem we can enhance normal rather than pathological narcissism, and thereby increase generosity and compassion.

When I see someone parading around with a “big ego,” I try to overcome my irritation with the under-

By promoting the development of normal self-esteem we can enhance normal rather than pathological narcissism, and thereby increase generosity and compassion.

vival trait? Is humanity saddled and cursed with it? Is there any way it can be directed toward achievement and away from cruelty? It seems that narcissism is the opposite of compassion. How can the best balance be achieved? Generosity and compassion seem to spring from a sense

standing that they are motivated by wounded self-esteem, which is ultimately painful. Although I don't want to be “pushed around,” I try to respond with compassion and generosity. This “puffed-up” person is unhappily unaware of his own “spark of divinity.”

Happy spring!