

NARCISSISM, EGO, AND SELF: KOHUT – A KEY FIGURE IN TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Timothy Schipke, LMFT, Ph.D. Candidate
San Francisco, CA

ABSTRACT: Heinz Kohut is a key figure for transpersonal psychology. Learning from the treatment of patients who suffered from pathological narcissism in his psychotherapy practice, Kohut developed a theoretical model of the self in which the development of a bi-polar self supplants drive conflict as the basis of psychoanalytic theory and practice. Like Freud, Kohut believed that measured narcissism is inherently healthy and basic to human psychology. Like Jung, Kohut believed that the self, rather than the ego, is primary to human psychology and that egoistic narcissism can be transcended later in life during the normal developmental process, through what he called “cosmic narcissism.” Although he does not consider Kohut directly, Ferrer believes that spirituality can take on a pathological narcissistic form. Kohut’s ideas have the potential to bridge psychoanalytic, analytical and transpersonal theories and may assist in bringing about a more complete understanding of the ego, the self and narcissism.

KEYWORDS: Kohut, narcissism, spiritual narcissism, narcissistic personality disorder, self, self-psychology, cosmic narcissism, transpersonal psychology, the participatory approach

Pathological narcissism is endemic to our times. Whether preoccupation with the self is a cause or effect of narcissism, narcissistic character traits have become culturally and individually widespread. This fact is confirmed by recent psychological meta-studies (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). Despite the potentially toxic effects of unrestrained narcissism, balanced, healthy narcissism is necessary to psychological health, according to both Freud and Kohut (Freud, 1914/2012; Kohut, 1966). Narcissism seems to be biologically inherent to life itself. In his own practice, Kohut (1977) specialized in the most severely pathological forms of narcissism, and his extensive experience in treating narcissistic disorders led to his views on the centrality of the self, which at the time were heterodox to psychoanalytic theory. Kohut ultimately embraced ideas that were very similar to the ideas of Jung regarding the self and its unknowable, transpersonal nature (Jacoby, 1981).

Although I address theoretical views on narcissism from psychoanalytic, analytical, and transpersonal schools, the central focus is Kohutian self-psychology. The central tenets of Kohutian self-psychology affirm both the suprapersonal nature of

tim.schipke@gmail.com

The author would like to acknowledge and thank the anonymous (blind) key reviewer of this manuscript who saw potential and very generously and graciously gave time and energy to help craft and improve the quality of this article for publication. The author would also like to express gratitude to the editor and editorial staff for their time and efforts in the editorial process. As my first experience of the editorial process for a peer-reviewed psychological journal, the experience was both a transformational exploration of the origins and depths of my own self, a process which will continue to unfold well past the publication of this article, and gave me a great appreciation for the work and effort involved in the pursuit of excellence in the art and craft of scholarly writing and publishing.

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the self and the possibility that narcissism can be transcended through a developmental process that results in what Kohut referred to as “cosmic narcissism.” With his novel, ground-breaking theories regarding the innermost genesis and structure of the self, Kohut successfully extended psychoanalytic thought to the boundaries of transpersonal psychology. Kohut bridged psychoanalytic, analytical, and transpersonal psychology. Although the underlying theoretical differences separating these schools are pronounced, Kohut’s views provide integrating themes that can potentially help bring together psychoanalytic theories of ego development and transpersonal accounts of the transcendent aspects of the self.

Narcissism

Individual and Collective Aspects of Narcissism

Since Freud’s time, narcissism and increasing preoccupation with the self have gradually become prominent as a Western and particularly as an American cultural phenomenon. Narcissism became a byword in the 1970s for cultural critics of American affluence and consumerism and was extended, perhaps erroneously, as an overly reductionist critique of complex societal ills (Lunbeck, 2014). In any case, the narcissification of both the individual and society, with accompanying negative consequences, seems to be increasing apace. Clinical tests designed to measure narcissistic personality traits, such as the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), show that emphasis on self-esteem in child-rearing and in school systems has contributed to a marked increase in the self-esteem of eleven- to thirteen-year-olds, which is currently 93% higher than it was in 1980 (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). These tests indicate the potential for a continued increase in social and cultural problems stemming from excessive and unhealthy forms of narcissism.

Narcissism manifests simultaneously in the realms of the individual and the collective (Lasch, 1979). As Twenge & Campbell note,

Every culture is shaped by its fundamental core beliefs, and in America today there are few values more fiercely held than the importance of self-admiration. Most of us don’t tattoo it on our bodies, but it is tattooed on the flesh of cultural beliefs. (2009, p. 26)

Individual and collective expressions of narcissism are interrelated and interdependent. As Lasch (1979, p. 34) observed, “Every society reproduces its culture—its norms, its underlying assumptions, its modes of organizing experience—in the individual, in the form of personality.” Much the same point was made by Durkheim (2005), who held that personality is the individual socialized.

Inner subjective manifestations of unhealthy narcissism, as observed through a psychoanalytic lens, can provide a deeper understanding of the social aspects of narcissism. Lasch said that “. . .psychoanalysis tells us something about the inner workings of society itself, in the very act of turning its back on society and

immersing itself in the individual unconscious” (1979, p. 33). Narcissistic character disorders express in an exaggerated form society’s own underlying character structure and character flaws. As the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) recently affirmed, psychopathologies change over time in response to culture and provide insights into the character of the societies in which they appear (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Because of their contextual nature, psychopathologies are constantly evolving, with different psychopathologies emerging at different times. For example, narcissistic character disorders are as much a sign of our time as hysteria was of Freud’s time, the dancing plague was of the late 15th and early 16th centuries in renaissance Europe, and the witch hysteria was of 17th century New England (Waller, 2009).

Lasch (1979) suggested that the culture of competitive individualism, which is taken to its extreme in our society, has “in its decadence . . .carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with self” (p. xv). There is such an idolization of the individual that relational aspects of our person become debased and diminished. The social aspects of narcissism are essential to an understanding of the inner psychological aspects of narcissism. Ultimately, pathological narcissism is a relational malady, with damaged intrapsychic relations that emerge from and further reinforce damaged social relationships. The focus on hyper-individuality in modern American culture and resultant narcissistic preoccupation has led to the neglect of essential relationships, for example, the relationship to the planet and environment, to other species, and to intrapsychic aspects of the self. At its core, narcissism is the inability to relate to the inner self appropriately, which in turn is an inability to relate to others appropriately.

Narcissism as Pathology

Pathological narcissism has its own diagnosis in the DSM-5: namely, Narcissistic Personality Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Kohut initially formulated this psychiatric diagnosis in the 1960s (Ornstein, 1978). Based on his extensive work with patients with this disorder, Kohut reshaped psychoanalytic theory. He proposed that the self, rather than drive conflict, is primary to human psychology and that the self should be at least a co-equal principle to drive conflict in psychoanalytic theory and practice (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). This view was a radical departure from the classic psychoanalytic tradition. Freud said nothing regarding the self and focused instead on the ego, an entirely different theoretical construct than Kohut’s notion of the self. In his experience treating pathological narcissism, Kohut came to understand the nature of the self and discerned its genesis and structure. He identified a holistic psychic structure that evolves over the course of human development from its initial emergence sometime in early infancy. Kohut also came to understand that narcissism is a universal phenomenon and fundamental to the development of a healthy and coherent sense of self, an observation that Freud had intimated much earlier (Freud, 1914/2012; Kohut, 1977).

Freudian Theoretical Framework for Narcissism

Freud's Empirical Methodology

Kohut's views on the self, although a sweeping departure from classic psychoanalytic theory, are nevertheless firmly grounded in the Freudian tradition. By building on Näcke's¹ earlier work (1899), Freud was the first theorist to address narcissism from the perspective of the then-nascent science of psychology (Freud, 1914/2012). In formulating a theoretical conception of narcissism, Freud relied on what he believed to be an empirical methodology. Freud's approach to psychology as an empirical science was to discover and elucidate the mechanisms that underlie a given psychological experience by fitting the experience into a general psychological model or theory. Freud, however, distinguished psychoanalytic empiricism from the empiricism of the natural sciences (Meissner, 1971). Psychology has an unavoidable subjective element in its observation of psychic states. Critics of psychoanalysis have asserted that psychoanalytic theory is based on speculative imagination, which has more in common with philosophical discourse than with genuine science. Freud countered that his theoretical formulations were firmly based on the empirical observational data of his patients, on rigorous case studies, and on his own experience.

Freud was of the position that psychoanalysis disadvantageously fell somewhere in the middle ground between the more strictly scientific approaches of the biological and medical sciences and the more speculative approaches of philosophy. Freud understood that psychoanalytic generalizations cannot be tested by the same verification methods that are available to the natural sciences. There are indisputable problems with the verification of psychoanalytic theories, primarily because the analyst her- or himself is an active constituent of the data selection process. Individual case studies selected and interpreted by analysts are the bases on which psychoanalysis rests. This fact, as Meissner (1971) noted, is both the strength of psychoanalysis and its weakness.

Freud (1921/1975) also understood that psychoanalytic methodology was at odds with quantitative, statistical methodology. He noted that there is an urge to resort to statistical methodology, which bases the confirmation of a theory only on the number of cases surveyed. However, he believed that psychoanalysts should resist this urge because the qualitative, subjective aspects of the psyche are not well suited to statistical methodology. Psychoanalysis is more concerned with meaning, specifically the consistencies and patterns of meaning rather than the repeatability of data. The analyst's own subjectivity plays a necessary and critical role in the collection, appraisal, selection and reporting of the data. Meissner (1971) maintained that the subjective aspects of psychoanalysis, although potentially disruptive contaminants, are nonetheless essential to the psychoanalytic approach.

The methodology of transpersonal psychology has much in common with Freudian psychoanalytic methodology. For data sources, this methodology also relies primarily on individual case studies, such as spiritual biographies and autobiographies, and on first-person phenomenological reports. These studies and reports most often are not based on an ongoing psychoanalytic relationship in which one

party is observing and analyzing. However, they are frequently based on a past relationship with a spiritual teacher or guru, who plays a role similar to that of the analyst. Furthermore, transpersonal psychology, like psychoanalysis, is concerned with interpreting patterns of meaning that arise in studying individual experiences; and for this reason, it, like psychoanalysis, is ill-suited to statistical methodology. Like psychoanalytic methodology, transpersonal psychology also treads the middle ground between more naturalistic sciences and speculative philosophical discourse.

Primary Narcissism

Freud conceptualized narcissism in terms of libido, the primal psychosexual energy that originates in the id. Primary narcissism is the complete investment of libidinal energy in the ego, a state of total self-absorption. For Freud, primary narcissism is a fundamental aspect of the inner experience of an infant in the earliest stages of her or his psychological development (Pulver, 1986). Primary narcissism is a natural developmental stage when an infant does not yet have ego boundaries and cannot differentiate her- or himself from the environment. The healthy course of ego development involves growing out of primary narcissism with an eventual cathexis of libido to outer objects. “The development of ego,” Freud observed, “consists in a departure from primary narcissism, and gives rise to vigorous attempts to recover ... [this state]” (Freud, 1914/2012, p. 68). Ego development is hard work and a challenging process. Throughout the course of ego development, an incessant psychic undertow pulls us back to the state of primary narcissism, which Freud associated with the unitive “oceanic state” of mystics.

Freud borrowed the term narcissism from Näcke (1899), and in his early thinking he believed, like Näcke, that narcissism is inherently pathological. Especially in his earlier writings, Freud associated the more pathological aspects of narcissism with sexual perversion. Freud situated narcissism on the developmental spectrum between primitive autoeroticism on the one hand and the mature ego’s redirection of libidinal energy onto objects on the other hand (Pulver, 1986). However, as his thinking evolved, Freud began to see that narcissism is not inherently pathological and is, rather, “the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may be justifiably attributed to every living creature” (Freud, 1914/2012, p. 57). Freud concluded that narcissism is intrinsic and fundamental to the biological make-up of all living creatures, not something inherently pathological. In a person with a fully developed and mature ego, narcissism signifies a psychologically healthy self-regard.

Kohut’s Understanding of the Self

Methodology

Kohut, like Freud, used case studies, but he differed from Freud by using his own methodology, which was grounded on the twin cornerstones of empathy and introspection (Kohut, 1959/1978a). Kohut reformulated psychoanalytic methodology because he was convinced that Freud’s methodology was faulty. Kohut divided

empirical observations into two distinct categories. “We speak of physical phenomena,” Kohut said, “when the essential ingredient of our observational method includes our senses, [and] we speak of psychological phenomena when the essential ingredient of our observation is introspection and empathy” (Kohut, 1959/1978a, p. 39). Furthermore, he said, “Only a phenomenon that we can attempt to observe by introspection or by empathy [vicarious observation] with another’s introspection may be called psychological” (Kohut, 1959/1978a, p. 61). Kohut consequently redefined long-standing psychoanalytic methodology, which even up to his own time used free association the primary technique for psychological observation. Although Freud also considered empathy and introspection as valuable tools, they were considered secondary to free association.

The Genesis of the Self

Kohut found that patients who suffered from narcissistic disorders could not be easily included in the then-current framework of psychoanalytic theory, primarily because this framework was based on drive conflict. Until Kohut, the self, from a psychoanalytic perspective, was another mental content, a self-*imago*, and another object among many objects and drives. Moreover, psychoanalytic theory viewed psychological neurosis as always being the result of conflicting drives, with the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain as primary psychological motivating factors. Kohut, however, came to believe that a psychological model that consisted only of drive conflicts provided an inadequate explanation for what he had observed in his clinical practice. He introduced a far-reaching new idea, proposing that “it is possible to discern a self which, although it includes drives (and/or defenses) in its organization, has become a supraordinated configuration whose significance transcends the sum of its parts” (Kohut, 1977, p. 97). The key word is *supraordinate*, a word that denotes the holistic and all-encompassing nature of the self, over and above the ego. Jung also used this term to describe the self’s relation to the ego (Jung, 1966). Jacoby, presenting Kohut’s view, said, “While an individual may seem to be a battlefield of mutually hostile drives and impulses, essentially he experiences himself as a whole person” (Jacoby, 1990, p. 65). With this holistic view of the self, Kohut pointed to the limits of classic psychoanalysis and presaged the end of ego psychology.

Moreover, Kohut, like Fordham and other contemporary Jungians, suggested the “existence of a rudimentary self [even] in earliest infancy” because “the human environment reacts [empathically] to even the smallest baby as if it had already formed such a self” (1973, p. 98). With this empathic reaction from the very outset of life, the rudimentary self forms “when within the matrix of mutual empathy between the infant and the self-object [anything, like the caregiver, that reflects and facilitates the emergence of the self], the baby’s innate potentialities and the self-object’s expectations with regard to the baby converge” (Kohut, 1977, p. 99). Thus, the self, in Kohut’s view, has its genesis when infant and mother are fused in mutual empathy in an environment that already experiences the baby as having a self. As Jacoby remarked, in Kohut’s model “the newborn baby’s self is a virtual self, corresponding in reverse to that geometric point in infinity where two parallel lines meet” (1990, p. 100).

The Bi-Polar Self

Proceeding from this empathic relationship between a mother and a virtual self, the self begins a developmental process that is conceptualized by Kohut (1977) as being bi-polar in nature. The self comes into existence and evolves based on the tension and balance between two poles. The two poles of the self that Kohut identified are based on two fundamental principles of the development of a healthy sense of self, namely, mirroring and idealization (Kohut, 1977). Mirroring is a process by which a self-object reflects and responds to a child's self-assertive presence. The mother figure is the first to perform this mirroring function as self-object, and in doing so is experienced as a part of the infant's own self. Because of the absence of ego boundaries, the infant experiences itself as vast and omnipotent. Jacoby commented, "In order for a coherent sense of self to develop, the infant's quasi-magical omnipotence and its spontaneous exhibitionist activities [must] be received by the mother (as self-object) with pleasure and empathic mirroring" (1990, p. 66). Eventually, this mother figure is internalized and becomes the basis of a healthy self-esteem.

The need for empathic mirroring is narcissistic in character. It is a need for self-confirmation that continues unabated throughout the human lifespan. When the need for self-confirmation becomes excessive, one enters the realm of potentially unhealthy or even seriously pathological narcissism. Kohut called such excessive need for confirmation the "grandiose self" (Kohut, 1968/1978b, p. 67). The grandiose self forms one pole of the bi-polar self, and this fundamental or "archaic" narcissism is the kernel that under the right conditions grows into a mature, coherent self. When maternal responses to a child's mirroring needs are absent or inadequate, the grandiose self becomes a fixation and the source of a wounded self, which results in narcissistic character disorders.

Idealization, the central process of the other pole of the self, is the means by which a child internalizes an omnipotent self-object and attempts to merge with its power. The infant experiences the mother or father as perfect and all-powerful; and because of its lack of ego boundaries, the infant internalizes these perfect, idealized self-objects. Gradual disappointment with real-life parents ensues when these internalized imagoes are recognized as incompatible with real parents. However, this disappointment catalyzes further healthy self-development. The child now transforms these perfect objects into ideals or higher values. These ideals, which motivate the individual, are the inner source of meaning and purpose and thus the inspiration for legitimate ambitions. The pursuit of these ideals does not occur in the service of narrow individual self-esteem but rather in the service of something higher, as is expressed in scientific, artistic, political, or social endeavors that are above merely personal ambitions (Kohut, 1977). These ideals have their origins in idealized self-objects and are sometimes projected onto admired individuals or leaders.

Over the course of the developmental process, a core self is eventually established. Kohut called this core self the "nuclear self" (Kohut, 1977). Through the process of mirroring and idealization, archaic narcissism transforms into the nascent nuclear

self and organizes itself around the ambitions and ideals that are acquired in the idealization process that initially occurs with an infant's parents. Kohut noted,

This structure is the basis of our sense of being an independent center of initiative and perception, integrated with most central ambitions and ideals and with the experience that our body and mind form a unit in space and a continuum in time. (1977, p. 177)

Ambitions correspond to our inherent healthy narcissistic need for self-recognition. Ideals correspond to the suprapersonal goals that emerge from idealized self-objects, which initially are the parents but later include other figures as well.

The nuclear self, once firmly established, consists of two oppositely charged poles, individual self-assertion and internalized values and ideals. These poles create a tension that initiates the flow of psychic energy. Values and ideals regulate the flow of energy, which fuels the ambitions of the nuclear self (Kohut, 1977). When modulated by idealized values and ideals, action proceeding from abilities lead to what Kohut calls "narcissistic balance," a type of equilibrium between the two poles (Kohut 1968/1978b, p. 487). The two poles work in harmony to propel the individual towards his or her goals. Powerful narcissistic ambitions are held in check within realistic bounds, and ambitions are directed towards goals that are both meaningful and worthwhile. However, if either of the poles of the bi-polar self is somehow traumatically damaged, then narcissistic defects occur that arrest the development of a coherent self and manifest in various sorts of psychopathology, including substance addictions, sexual perversions, criminal behavior, and unhealthy yearning for a mystical union with idealized, omnipotent religious or political figures.

Cosmic Narcissism

Even a fully mature self can never really become entirely autonomous. We all need empathic resonance throughout the course of our lives. Our archaic fusion with the original self-object evolves into an empathic relationship with more mature self-objects. By expanding the psychoanalytic concept of self-object to include suprapersonal or transpersonal objects, transpersonal phenomena can become mature targets of libido cathexes.

Kohut calls 'self-object' anything that has a meaning for our life and which fulfills or inspires us, be it people, ideas, works of art, religious beliefs, etc. What is more, self-objects are neither 'inside' nor 'outside,' they are people, things or symbols which may be experienced simultaneously in both worlds: in a world that is organized 'objective-introspectively' and in one with a 'subjective-introspective' organization. (Jacoby, 1990, p. 147)

Thus, Kohut expands the limits of psychoanalytic theory by recognizing that our internalized self-objects can be abstract ideologies, artwork, religious symbols, or rituals. He in this way begins to bridge psychoanalytic theory and transpersonal psychology. He also echoes Jung's emphasis on the preeminence of the self over ego, although he came to his realization quite independently of Jung.

In Kohut's view, man's greatest psychological achievement is the ability to "acknowledge the finiteness of his existence and to act in accordance with that painful discovery" in the acceptance of mature and realistic values (Kohut 1968/1978b, p. 465). This achievement is not the denial, repression or rejection of narcissism but rather the creation of a "higher form" of narcissism that transcends ego-bound narcissism (Kohut 1968/1978b, p. 466). This higher, transcendent narcissism, Kohut (1968/1978a) said, is evident in

... a quiet pride and a mild disdain of the rabble which, without being able to delight in the variety of experiences life has to offer, is yet afraid of death and trembles at its approach. ... I have little doubt that those who are able to achieve this ultimate attitude toward life do so on the strength of a new, expanded, transformed narcissism: a cosmic narcissism which has transcended the bounds of the individual. (p. 466)

In discussing cosmic narcissism, Kohut referred to the primordial experience of the mother that is remembered through the oceanic feeling that Freud claimed was the true basis of all mystical experience. Kohut associated this experience with the realization of the certainty of death.

Kohut, however, clearly distinguished cosmic narcissism from the oceanic feeling, which he felt was experienced only passively and fleetingly, whereas "the genuine shift of the cathexes toward a cosmic narcissism is the enduring, creative result of the steadfast activities of an autonomous ego, and only very few are able to attain it" (Kohut 1968/1978b, p. 467). For Kohut, the achievement of cosmic narcissism resonates with religious soteriological goals that few people ever attain. Critical to the transformation of narcissism into cosmic narcissism are certain traits of personality that reflect the mature self, including humor, wisdom, empathy, and creativity. These traits have greater importance in Kohut's view than the redirection of narcissism to object love. Kohut seemed to imply that transpersonal aims had more worth and a higher reach than object love, especially later in life. His view is in agreement with Jung on the goal of individuation. Remarkably, although he arrived at his theories regarding the development of the self through his own path, uninfluenced by Jung, Kohut came to similar transpersonal conclusions regarding the self.

Jungian Viewpoints on the Self and Narcissism

Jung's Empirical Approach

Jung came to his theoretical formulation of the self through both introspective self-observation and observation of his patients in clinical practice. His methodology was different from the methodology of Freud and Kohut, especially in its reliance on his own years-long experience, after his split from Freud, of encountering and working with the unconscious. However, Jung, like Freud and Kohut, characterized his approach to psychology as empirical and viewed himself as a hybrid blend of empiricist and phenomenologist (Papadopoulos, 2006). "The primary concern of empirical psychology," Jung observed, "is to supply factual documentation supporting the theories of rational psychology" (1897/1983, para. 174). Like Freud,

Jung emphasized a three-way dialectic among patient observation, introspection, and theory, which constantly co-inform each other and co-evolve in a heuristic manner. Jung (1969) always claimed, “to proceed from facts, which everyone is at liberty to verify” (para. 461). Nevertheless, as Papadopoulos (2006) rightly notes, one of the primary weaknesses of Jung’s methodology (which is perhaps also somewhat extendable to Freud’s methodology) is that it established and served to maintain a closed theoretical system. Sometimes, Jung’s ideas became dogmas rather than insights arising from a fluid dialectic between clinical practice and theory. Jung, like Freud and Kohut, was challenged by the hybrid and subjective nature of the science of psychology, which is part observation, part introspection, and part philosophy.

The Jungian Self

As in Kohut’s theoretical framework, the self is a central construct for Jung. Jung (1966) came to see the self as the totality of the psyche, which consists of both the conscious and the personal and collective unconscious. The self is supraordinate to the ego, which is the center of consciousness, and is the central organizing principle of the psyche. Jung observed, “The self has as much to do with the ego as the sun with the earth. They are not interchangeable” (1966, p. 238). In the process of individuation – a process of “coming into selfhood” or “self-realization” – the ego, “the only content of the self that we do know,” comes into a full relationship with and awareness of the self (Jung, 1966, p. 240). In coming into this relationship, the ego comes to “[sense] the self as something irrational, as an indefinable existent, to which the ego is neither opposed nor subjected, but merely attached, and about which it revolves very much as the earth revolves around the sun – thus we come to the goal of individuation” (Jung, 1966, p. 240).

Jung specifically chose the word “sensing” “to indicate the apperceptive character of the relation between ego and self” (Jung, 1966, p. 240) because he believed that the self is ultimately imperceptible and unknowable. For Jung, “Intellectually, the self is no more than a psychological concept, a construct that serves to express an unknowable essence which we cannot grasp as such, since by definition it transcends our powers of comprehension” (1966, p. 238). Ultimately, the self is only perceivable as an image that is expressed in symbols and that is “powerfully alive” and “in which we are contained” (Jung, 1966, p. 240). The process of individuation is a pathway along the liminal boundaries of the ego and self, a sovereign transpersonal center that allows no scientific proof.

Jung’s followers and analytical psychology in general have had little interest in the topic of narcissism, although Kohut later sparked some scholarly discussion of the topic among contemporary Jungians. Kohut’s conception of narcissism and the development of the self are rooted in the view that infancy is the basis of human development. In contrast, Jung had little to say regarding early human development or the early development of the ego and the self, which is one of the major weaknesses of his theoretical model. Jung focused primarily on midlife neurotic crises in his understanding of the individuation process, when the ego must reorient itself from ego- to self-centeredness.

Jung and Transpersonal Psychology

Transpersonal psychology has a close affinity with Jung and analytical psychology. Jung could fairly be considered the founder of transpersonal psychology. In 1917, in the German edition of *Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology*, which appeared in English in an authorized translation edited by Constance E. Long, Jung (1917) used the term transpersonal (*überpersönlich*) in reference to the collective unconscious. Washburn (1994) remarked that the Jungian developmental model is one of the two primary paradigms that have guided transpersonal psychology. (The second is the structural-hierarchical model of Ken Wilber.) From a Jungian perspective, the ego, the center of consciousness, emerges from the self underlying consciousness in the first half of life. In this period, the ego is predominant; then, in midlife, the ego reorients to the self and reintegrates with the deep sources of the psyche. Jung was the first person to use this model as the basis of a transpersonal theory of development. He conceived of the unconscious as the source of spiritual life; and his analytic psychology focuses on the potential, later in life, for ego transcendence, a realignment of the ego with the supraordinate, transpersonal self.

In contrast, classical psychoanalytic theory, which originally formulated the theory of ego development, is focused primarily on the ego, holding that a fully mature ego is the telos of human development. Transpersonal psychology, in contrast, is primarily interested in trans-egoic states, and, as Washburn has argued, “is without an adequate theory of ego development” (1994, p. 3). Washburn critiqued both analytical and transpersonal psychology for a lack of understanding of what he called the “ego’s bases in being,” arguing that both schools of psychology have an inadequate understanding of the underpinnings of ego transcendence (Washburn, 1994, p. 3). Of the many differences between the psychoanalytic and analytical/transpersonal schools, the primary one is the difference in their views on whether the ego or a holistic, transpersonal self is primary to human psychological development. In this regard, Kohut’s later focus on the holistic self rather than the ego moved psychoanalysis toward ideas that have long been central to analytical and transpersonal psychology.

Developmental Approaches to the Self

In noting that Jung’s theoretical model lacks an account of the early developmental underpinnings of the self, later followers of Jung examined the self from a developmental perspective. Fordham (1971) introduced the concept of the primary self (in contradistinction to primary narcissism) as the psychosomatic totality of the infant. Fordham viewed “the self as a totality present at birth, that increasingly differentiates into separate archetypal configurations in the unconscious, and a centre of consciousness, the ego” (Jacoby, 1990, p. 57). For Fordham, the self is the whole of the psyche, merely potential at first, and then progressively more actual as it interacts with the world. Interaction with the world causes the original unity of the self to “de-integrate,” undergo conscious, ego-centered differentiation, which in normal development is followed by an integration of what was thus de-integrated back into the totality of the self. With each phase of this process of de-integration followed by re-integration, both the self and its conscious center, the ego, become

increasingly developed, increasingly articulated in actualized potential. The self is a priori and present at birth as a set of archetypal potentials yet to be actualized. Individuation occurs through a lifetime process of de-integration and re-integration, during which the ego is gradually differentiated from and then brought into more developed unity with the self.

Both Neumann (1954/1995) and Edinger (1972) offered explanations of how the ego evolves out of the self. From Neumann's viewpoint, the ego, as the center of human consciousness, emerges out of the primordial self, which is symbolized by the *uroborus*, the mythical tail-eating snake and undergoes a challenging differentiation process that is filled with conflict and is mythologized in the archetypal hero's journey. Edinger explained the emergence of the ego as occurring on an ego-self axis, which has some similarities to Kohut's bi-polar self and is relevant to narcissism from a Jungian perspective. For Edinger, the ego undergoes a cyclical process of separation from and reunion with the transpersonal self, a process that is marked by alternating stages of identification with the self, in which the ego senses that it is the center of existence and is unlimited in power, alienation from self, in which the ego encounters its separateness and limitations, and reunion with self, in which the ego reestablishes its connection with the self to ensure the integrity of the ego-self axis. Development occurs over the course of life as this process of identification, alienation, and reunion unfolds, with differentiation of the ego from the self predominating in the first half of life, and integration of the ego with the self predominating in the second half of life.

Narcissism from a Jungian Perspective

According to the Jungian model, narcissism is a form of ego inflation in which the ego identifies with the transpersonal qualities of the self. Such inflation occurs when we forget our limits as finite, limited beings. Ego inflation from a Jungian perspective is developmentally normal, not inherently pathological. Ego inflation is an ordinary part of human psychospiritual development. The ego-self axis becomes restored through a connection and proper alignment with the self, the other pole of the axis. In this way, the ego becomes aware that there is a supraordinate, autonomous nexus, the self, which is the center and balance point of the totality of our being. Edinger (1972) referred to such growing awareness as "centroversion," whereby the ego has an ongoing active connection with the self and becomes centered in an awareness of its relation to the self.

In addressing narcissism, contemporary Jungians have focused on love or its absence as the affective aspect of the relationship of the ego to the self. Specifically, Ronningstam (2006), Gordon (1980), and Edinger (1972) referenced the myth of Narcissus by speaking of an inherent lack of self-love and the resulting alienation from the self as a defining characteristic of more negative forms of narcissism. Ronningstam rightly noted, "Paradoxically, the Narcissus myth... which in our time has come to represent self-love or self-reflection, actually described the tragic inability to love at all" (2006, p. 3). For Edinger, self-love is a union with "the image in the depths" and requires a symbolic death of the ego, which is represented by the Narcissus flower, the flower Persephone picked before

her descent into Hades, which is the mythic depiction of a descent into the unconscious (1972, p. 161). Gordon (1980) emphasized the image of the mirror in the pool into which Narcissus gazed as a symbol of the soul and the longing for the inner self that Narcissus ultimately seeks. Gordon (1980) noted that the love of self has been described in ancient wisdom and is central to both eastern and western spiritual traditions. The general point made by these and other authors is that self-love increases our ability to love others and engage in the world relationally. Thus, narcissism, from a modern Jungian perspective, could be identified as a unique form of self-alienation that is characterized by a lack of self-love or a lack of an authentic connection to the self. Narcissism may be considered an attempt to make this connection in unhealthy or even pathological ways by feeding and focusing exclusively on the ego, which unconsciously nurtures the condition that it seeks to alleviate.

Transpersonal Views on Narcissism

Ferrer and the Participatory Approach

Among contemporary transpersonal scholars, Ferrer has been central to the discussion of narcissism, particularly the spiritual aspects of narcissism. Ferrer's central thesis is that transpersonal psychology mistakenly conceptualizes spiritual phenomena in purely experiential terms. Transpersonal psychology is preoccupied with transpersonal experiences of various types, whether they are induced by psychedelics or entheogens or by traditional spiritual practices. Because of this preoccupation, Ferrer says, "Transpersonal theorists have uncritically [and mistakenly] accepted the modern conception of spirituality as mere inner experience" (2002, p. 38). In fact, the notion of spiritual experiences as solely inner occurrences is a relatively recent construction of modernism, which has relegated spiritual phenomena to the private, inner world. This relegation has far-reaching ramifications for modern spirituality, which, Ferrer believes, has devolved into an endless quest for inner peak experiences.

Ultimately, this marginalization of spirituality to the realm of the purely subjective is rooted in Descartes' division of the world into two separate realms, one realm of mind or thinking substance (subject) and one realm of body or material substance (object). Gleig notes that Ferrer, in his deconstruction of the modernist underpinnings of transpersonal psychology, concludes that "[transpersonal psychology's] humanistic foundations have led to an over-emphasis on the intrinsic ontological and epistemological value of the individual" (2010, p. 86). Cartesian dualism has subtly formed the intrapsychic framework and epistemological core of transpersonal psychology. Cartesian dualism and its epistemology ensconce spiritual events firmly in the boundaries of subjective phenomenological experience, an error that Ferrer referred to as *intrasubjective reductionism* (Ferrer, 2002; Gleig, 2010).

Cartesian epistemology is responsible for many difficulties in understanding spiritual phenomena. Ferrer observed that one of the primary difficulties is the problem of spiritual materialism, which he associated with spiritual narcissism. Ferrer considered

spiritual narcissism through the hermeneutic lens of the participatory approach. Ferrer believed that transpersonal events are not individual, subjective phenomenological experiences but are, rather, multi-local participatory events. Participatory events are “emergences of transpersonal being that can occur not only in the locus of an individual, but also in a relationship, a community, a collective identity, or a place” (Ferrer, 2002 p. 136). Thus, individual consciousness does not access and experience a transpersonal event; rather, from the participatory perspective it is the transpersonal event that precipitates the transpersonal experience in the individual. The transpersonal event acquires ontological status, which both precedes and underlies the phenomenological experience in individual consciousness.

Spiritual Narcissism

When relegated to the realm of inner experiences, participatory spiritual events devolve into aspects solely of the ego or self. As a form of consumeristic spiritual materialism, spiritual experiences can be collected and amassed to enhance a self-absorbed way of being in the world. When transformative spiritual phenomena are reduced to intra-psyche experiences, the consequence is spiritual narcissism. According to Almaas (2001), whose own views on spiritual narcissism are heavily based on Kohut’s views, some symptoms of spiritual narcissism include a fragile sense of empowerment and self-importance, a preoccupation with one’s comparative spiritual status, a strong need for being positively reinforced and praised, a preoccupation with the sense of being special, serious difficulties in working with authority figures, and an exaggerated susceptibility and defensiveness towards criticism. These symptoms would aptly describe any sort of unhealthy narcissism. Spiritual narcissism closely resembles and seems to be a peculiar expression of narcissistic character disorder. It very likely has its genesis in early childhood development, as a malady of the self, and, in its most severe manifestations, it is probably similar to the disorders that Kohut treated in his patients.

Kohut and Spiritual Narcissism

From a Kohutian perspective, any type of narcissism, including spiritual narcissism, is caused by a splitting of the grandiose self from the nuclear self. When a caregiver’s response to an infant is absent or deficient, the child fails to internalize the archaic grandiosity and exhibitionism that is necessary for the pursuit of ego-syntonic goals. The result is a diminished capacity to enjoy activities, and, most importantly, to attain a realistic, balanced self-esteem. A person who has had some traumatic lack of mirroring feels in the place of these healthy feelings a sort of vague inner emptiness. The feeling of emptiness is characteristic of people who suffer from narcissistic personality disorder and indicates problems with the early mirroring process. Because of the lack of a coherent self, the personality remains fixated on the grandiose self in its more developmentally archaic or primitive forms. Kohut noted that this fixation manifests as a lesser degree of differentiation of the self from self-objects, stemming from fragmentation and lack of cohesiveness of the self. In treatment,

Kohut observed that the mirror transference of his patients was not a duplication of phase-appropriate childhood narcissism. Of these patients, Kohut said:

They . . . are regressively altered editions of a child's demands for attention, approval, and for the confirmatory echoing of its presence, and they always contain an admixture of the tyranny and over-possessiveness which betrays a heightening of oral-sadistic and anal-sadistic drive elements produced by intense frustrations and disappointments. (Kohut, 1971, pp. 124-125)

In the therapeutic relationship mirror, transference evolves into something that approximates the normal developmental phase when mirroring occurs. Sadistic elements diminish and the "demands for affection and response take on vigor, and approximate giving the pleasure, which is encountered in the corresponding phase-appropriate interactions between parent and child." (Kohut, 1971, p. 125)

Psychoanalytic theorists, including Kohut, do not often use the word "love." Nonetheless, love presumably underlies the affect and response patterns that are necessary for the development of the coherent self that Kohut described. Viewed in this light, contemporary psychoanalytic and analytical schools of psychology seem to agree that love, or, rather, its deficiency, is at the root of unhealthy narcissism. This lack of love leads to atrophied relatedness, both outwardly, with other selves, and inwardly, with intra-psychic aspects of the self, which both Jung and Kohut eventually agreed is an ultimately unknowable, transpersonal entity.

Ferrer's ideas concerning spiritual narcissism and spiritual individuation are congruent with Kohut's premise that the grandiose self underlies all forms of unhealthy narcissism. The spiritual narcissist is in his or her essence no different from any other type of unhealthy narcissist. Unhealthy narcissists must prop up their inherent lack of self-relatedness and self-esteem, the lack of a coherent nuclear self, by using self-objects from the spiritual realm. The spiritual narcissist, like any narcissist, did not receive appropriate mirroring and idealization from a caregiver and uses spirituality to fill in the developmental gaps. However, using spiritual props (teachers, paraphernalia, or rituals) to fill these gaps does no more good than using material props. In either case, the narcissist is trying to fill a bottomless, empty hole. Only appropriate responses from idealized figures, including authentic spiritual teachers, can fill this hole.

Conclusion

Narcissism as Pandemic

Narcissism is a central and fundamental problem for the psychological sciences. As Kohut demonstrated, it goes to the very core of the structure of the psyche and self and is biologically rooted in everyone. Kirschner makes reference to the often-mentioned view that mental health professionals currently encounter many more narcissistically disordered patients than the "higher-level, better individuated neurotics . . . who consulted Freud and about whom he wrote his theories" (1996, p. 41). Moreover, she says,

Further weight has been lent to this argument in the writings of Kohut and social historian Christopher Lasch, both of whom argued that changed social and childrearing conditions have given rise to a different (and perhaps more developmentally primitive) modal abnormal personality structure. In other words, pre-oedipal [i.e., as psychoanalytically defined, early developmental issues before the age of 3] pathology is pandemic to our contemporary situation. A greater proportion of personalities exhibit disorders of self at this point in history than during Freud's era. (Kirschner, 1996, p.41)

Pathological narcissism and other personality disorders have become a mental health epidemic of our time. They are manifestations of the psychopathology of our hyper-individualistic culture.

Even non-pathological narcissism is a fertile loam out of which many cultural and individual problems arise when narcissism is uncontained. For most of humankind's brief cultural history, religion and wisdom traditions played key roles in addressing the shadow aspects of narcissism. However, there seems to be an ongoing cultural shift that is marked by a rampant rise in individualism that is accompanied by, and perhaps somehow connected to, the concomitant decline in both family structures and religion and wisdom traditions, which have long served psychological and social regulatory functions. Humankind's biologically inherent narcissistic traits no longer have a counter-balance at a time when Promethean ambitions create a very real potential for man-made global calamity. As current studies strongly suggest, narcissism is increasing and, with it, so also are related social and psychological ills.

Need for Cross-Engagement on Issues of the Ego, the Self and Narcissism

Transpersonal psychology, which is closely associated with Jung and the analytical school of psychology, has only marginally engaged psychoanalytic thought, primarily because it is based on the primacy of the ego in human development. Similarly, the psychoanalytic tradition, which is non-theistic and scientific in outlook, largely views transpersonal scholarship as specious and validly criticizes it for lacking an adequate understanding of the ego and ego development. There is a sharp divide between psychoanalytic and transpersonal approaches to the ego and self and, indeed, to human psychology generally.

However, with Kohut, psychoanalysis seemed to cross into the transpersonal realm as he confronted the limits of psychoanalytic theory and methodology. Kohut provides an exemplar of a psychoanalytic theorist who deserves more attention from transpersonal thinkers, particularly around issues of the ego, the self, and narcissism. Kohut's self psychology is an important connecting link between the psychoanalytic school, modern psychodynamic theory, analytical psychology, and transpersonal psychology. Kohut's model of the bi-polar self sheds light on developmental aspects of the ego and self and on the diverse aspects of spiritual narcissism, in particular as it finds expression in teacher-disciple relationships, transcendent aspects of the self, and individual spiritual development.

Ferrer has made important observations on the Cartesian assumptions underlying much of transpersonal psychology and has recommended revisions to transpersonal theory that free it from these assumptions. His participatory perspective is truly an innovative approach to transpersonal and spiritual phenomena. The participatory lens views spiritual experiences as having their basis in transpersonal events with a contextual locus in larger communities or systems and gives these transpersonal events their own ontological status. This approach has been successfully applied across diverse religious and spiritual traditions (Ferrer, 2008). It may be successfully applied as well across psychological schools, psychoanalysis and transpersonal psychology in particular. For example, psychological events may also be approached as co-created events, similar to the approach of systems theory, which conceives of psychological states as experiences occurring in contexts, such as families, communities, and larger societies.

Although somewhat limited, there has been work by a few transpersonal theorists to integrate psychoanalytic and transpersonal views on the development of the ego and self, most notably by Washburn. However, more cross-communication may be fostered, especially with neo-Freudians and object-relations theorists (e.g., Klein, Horney, Erikson, Mahler, and Kernberg), all of whom made important contributions to developmental theory, and with other contemporary psychoanalytic and psychodynamic thinkers with whom little or no integrative work has been conducted. Transpersonal psychology may thus gain a firmer foundation and better perspective on the aspects of ego development. The participatory perspective helps us to understand the relatedness, connection, and shared legitimacy of diverse spiritual traditions. The challenge is to develop credible transpersonal approaches, such as the participatory approach, that may encourage the integration of ideas of more mainstream psychology within transpersonal theory.

Greater integral dialogue and a cross-pollination of ideas is timely and needed, given the ever-increasing maladies of the self that are prevalent in our times. Transpersonal psychology has much to offer mainstream psychology in understanding the self insofar as it transcends the ego. Although the approach of some psychological schools may be foreign and perhaps even hostile to transpersonal views, a bridging of perspectives, where possible, will encourage greater, more holistic understanding of the self and human psyche. It may be time for both psychoanalytic and transpersonal thinkers more actively to explore complementary areas of discourse, in this way initiating what could be fruitful dialogues concerning narcissism, the ego, and the self.

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Note

¹ Freud's interest and initial ideas on narcissism were wholly borrowed from Näcke and not his own. Initially he felt, like Näcke, that sexual perversions, particularly homosexuality, were due to pathological narcissism. Over the years though he moved away from that position, that is, that narcissism is purely sexual libido turned back to the ego. He came eventually to believe that the energetic psychological source of narcissism is libido as the survival instinct, rather than sexual instinct.

The Author

Timothy Schipke is a Marriage and Family Therapist with an M.A. in Counseling Psychology from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (now Sofia University) in Palo Alto, California. He is currently a Ph.D. Candidate at The California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco.