

NARCISSISTIC LOVE

ABSTRACT

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The mythological figure of Narcissus, who fell in love with the reflection of his own image, laid the ground for the emergence of the concept of narcissism. While at first the term was used to describe a sexual perversion, it quickly acquired a deeper psychoanalytic meaning. In Freud, narcissism becomes a fundamental concept of metapsychology—decisive and multidimensional—particularly for the distinction between neurotic and non-neurotic psychic organizations. It is a central core of the drives and of the Ego's organization. It is the fragile foundation of human subjectivity, where love of the Self and the bond with the Other meet in a continuous emotional dialectic of pleasure and dissatisfaction.

Primary identification constitutes the earliest form of emotional attachment—a fused, undifferentiated unity with the maternal object—from which primary narcissism emerges. This is the first form of narcissistic love, prior to the recognition and choice of an object, which then becomes the basis for future secondary identifications. Maternal psychosomatic care interweaves bodily satisfactions with representations and emotions, paving the way for the gradual structuring of the Ego. The relationship through the sensory organ of sight acquires central importance for narcissistic structuring: in Lacan as the "mirror stage," where the child recognizes its image and constructs the image of the Ego; in Winnicott as the "mirroring role" of the mother, who reflects the infant and helps it acquire a sense of being.

After the experience of satisfaction, the subsequent absence of satisfaction from the primary object leads to internalization and auto-eroticism, grounding an initial autonomy of the Ego. Primary narcissism is the result of the integrative unification of partial autoeroticisms and their transformation into psychic material—that is, their psychical elaboration—regardless of whether this process takes place to a normal or pathological degree. Narcissistic investment is a central concept for the unity of body and psyche, for the transition from sensory-motor activity to representational capacity. Significant narcissistic deficiency is indicated by deficits in fantasy life, elementary depression, and the dominance of mechanical thinking.

The value of the maternal function is stated in Winnicott's "good enough mother" and in Fain's "censorship of the lover." The mother functions through her dual role—both as the tender one who satisfies and protects the infant, and as the father's lover, who withdraws and permits the organization of the primal scene for the introduction of the "third" and the development of the superego. This dual "censorship" (mother and lover) constitutes

the ground of the auto-erotic zones and of primary erotogenic masochism. Failures in the structuring of primary narcissism trap the individual in the endless search for primary satisfaction and the early defensive formations of the Ego.

Green proposes narcissistic structuring through the processes of fusion and de-fusion of the life and death drives. The "narcissism of life" contributes to the unification of the Ego, while the "narcissism of death" leads to massive disinvestment, anaesthesia, and ultimately to disobjectalisation. Somatization arises when large-scale drive de-fusion leads to deadly narcissistic disinvestments, which constitute insurmountable obstacles to psychic processing. The concept of the "dead mother" focuses on the depressive presence around which the Ego is organized following loss.

In Freudian clinical practice, a pivotal point is "transference love": the sudden flare of erotic feelings of the patient toward the analyst. This is a search for primary erotic satisfaction within the analytic setting, due to the reactivation of early narcissistic traumas. Freud emphasized that such experiences should not be silenced but interpreted. They highlight the quality of transference and countertransference movements to avoid the repetition of trauma. It is a great challenge for the analyst to maintain benevolent neutrality and not violate boundaries.

Narcissism is the matrix for the creation of ideals. The departure from primary narcissism leads to the displacement of libido toward ideals that embody the desire for perfection. Essential is the distinction between the Ideal Ego, the early heir of primary narcissism, and the Ego-Ideal, a transformation of the former through secondary identifications and the Oedipal superego. The Ideal Ego is linked to the fantasy of narcissistic omnipotence, while the Ego-Ideal is tied to repression and the representational process of thought.

Freud's analysis of masses reveals the cohesion of the crowd through identification with the leader, who embodies the Ideal Ego. The charisma and perversion of the leader become tools for seducing the crowd and rejecting otherness. Subjectivity is absorbed into the mass, and differentiation is strictly punished. The fanatical crowd thirsts for submission and hatred toward the Other. The fetishism of the ideal, a product of phallic fixation, provides the illusion of wholeness and a defence against depression. The extreme need for collective survival leads to hetero-destruction and self-destruction, as in the case of "absolute evil"—Nazism.

Even institutions such as psychoanalysis can be transformed into narcissistic objects, acquire fanatical value, and obstruct dialogue. Acute group conflicts are based on the blunting of personal pain through mutual narcissistic identification with the leader and the denial of difference. The fear of loss of love and the risk of exclusion make the subject vulnerable to seduction and manipulation.

In conclusion, narcissistic love—from primary maternal care and its deficits, to fetishism, perversion, and fanatical idealization—runs through the entire spectrum of

human experiences, revealing how excessive love of the Self simultaneously expresses the destructive rejection of the Other.