

## Narcissistic Pathology of Everyday Life: The Denial of Remorse and Gratitude

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This essay attempts a phenomenological study of ordinary, day-to-day manifestations of narcissistic dynamics. Despite the importance to psychoanalysis of Freud's careful explication of everyday-life evidence of unconscious defensive processes (1901), analysts have naturally tended to give greater attention to more obvious and serious psychopathologies, the kinds for which people come to them for help. We propose in this article to revive the Freudian tradition of scrutinizing what is ostensibly mundane and commonplace, addressing those aspects of narcissistic pathology in ourselves and others that invade daily life, in both the personal and professional spheres, often rendering it less gratifying, more bewildering, and lonelier than it might be.

We assume that the reader brings to this essay some basic familiarity with psychoanalytic ideas about the narcissistic conditions. We do not intend to take a position on the etiology of narcissistic disorders, or to offer a particular technical stance for their treatment, or to lament, in the tradition of Lasch's work (e.g., 1978), the seeming increase in narcissistic phenomena in our culture as a whole. Instead, we shall start with the premise that the organizing task of the various narcissistic defenses is the preservation of what has usually been called the grandiose self (after Kohut, 1971), and then go on to portray in concrete terms what kinds of activities that preservation effort entails. In particular, we shall focus on the apparent inability of the person who needs to protect an internal sense of grandiosity either to apologize (i.e., to express genuine remorse) or to thank (i.e., to express genuine gratitude). We shall then depict a number of defensive maneuvers that a narcissistically motivated person may use in lieu of expressing remorse or gratitude, and comment on the typical effects that these operations have on the objects in such a person's world. In the spirit of Levinson's (1987) pursuit of the particular," we shall try to attend to the specific and the observable.

It is interesting how little psychoanalytic writing exists concerning commonplace emotional processes like thanking and apologizing. In researching the literature for this paper, we could find only one article, respectively (Heilbrun, 1972; Kubie

& Israel, 1955), on each of these topics. Few analysts seem to have enjoyed explicating the unconscious sources of everyday phenomena like humor or forgetting in the disciplined but readable way that Freud did (a notable exception is Theodor Reik, e.g., 1963, on love and its familiar vicissitudes), probably because the case for the ubiquitous influence of unconscious processes on everyday transactions has been made to the satisfaction of most of us, and our overriding interest is the application of our concepts to patients. Humorists have probably exposed the narcissistic origins of most human interactions far better than analytic theorists have.

Two comments may orient the reader to the perspective of this paper. While we believe that some of our observations may have implications for psychotherapy technique, this is not an article about working therapeutically with patients who have narcissistic pathology. To the extent that our ideas have relevance to clinical work, they will probably be more pertinent to the treatment of people emotionally involved with others who rely regularly on narcissistic defenses ñ the "gaslighted" rather than the "gaslighters" (Calef & Weinshel, 1981). Although it will not be a central focus here, we believe a convincing case can be made that the objects of narcissistic processes can increase their own autonomy, and increase the genuineness and thus the realistic self-esteem of narcissistic others, by refusing to play the pathological reciprocal role that narcissistic behavior typically induces. To step out of that role, they must be able to conceptualize what is "coming at" them.

Second, we are departing somewhat from the tone of much of the current literature on narcissism, which, because it is about treating patients with pathological self-structures, observes narcissistic processes from a position of sympathetic identification with the person who manifests them. Our exploration of the nuances of narcissistic operations will be conducted primarily from a position of identification with the objects of these subtle and often malignant processes. In explicating what might be considered the typical dilemmas of "victims" of narcissistic operations, we do not want to be misunderstood as minimizing the suffering of the "perpetrators" of narcissistically motivated acts.

### The Grandiose Self in Everyday Life

The earliest psychoanalytic depiction of a grandiose self-representation is probably Ernest Jones' 1913 paper on "The God Complex," describing what would now be considered a narcissistic disorder. The same year, Ferenczi published a seminal paper on the child's gradual shift from fantasies of omnipotence to the acceptance of reality, thereby implying the normality and universality of a developmental stage characterized by grandiose fantasies.

Freud's famous essay on narcissism, published a year later (1914), integrated both perspectives: that of narcissism as structured character pathology and that of narcissistic preoccupation as a universal adult residue of a normal phase of development.

Considered as character pathology, narcissism is rather easily delineated. Reich's (1933) "phallic narcissistic character" is overtly or subtly arrogant, exhibitionistic, vain, manipulative, and greedy for admiration. The description of the narcissistic personality in the latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual is largely compatible with this picture. It is increasingly well known however, that such observably self-aggrandizing narcissists represent only one manifestation of a syndrome that can take many forms, all of which have in common the effort to support a grandiose self-representation. Tartadoff (1966), for example, has described much more subtle forms of narcissistic pathology in ostensibly healthy people. Bursten (1973) has delineated four common types of narcissistic characters: the classic phallic narcissist, the craving type, the paranoid type, and the manipulative type.

Recently, there has been considerable psychoanalytic attention to more depressive manifestations of underlying narcissistic preoccupations. In the tradition of A. Reich (1960), who detailed self-esteem disturbances deriving from a failure to attain grandiose ambitions, Miller (1979) has demonstrated how people with preponderantly depressive features should be understood as narcissistically troubled if the source of their depression is a sense of failure to live up to impossibly ambitious goals. Stolorow (1979a) and Cooper (1978) have related certain kinds of masochism to unconscious omnipotent fantasies. Meissner (1979) has noted the propinquity of narcissism and paranoia.

Among analysts, the enthusiasm with which Kohut's work (1971, 1977, 1984) has been received, and the extent to which Miller's (1981) *Prisoners of Childhood* quickly became almost a cult book among therapists, suggest the ubiquity of our concern for narcissistic issues in ourselves as well as in our patients. In this paper, we assume not only that narcissistic personality organization can appear in many different clinical manifestations, but also that narcissistic defensive operations are common in people whose basic personalities cannot reasonably be construed as narcissistic.

Modell's (1975) depiction of the grandiose self as functioning under the "illusion of self-sufficiency" is appealing in this context. There seems to be in all of us a disposition not to acknowledge how much we need others. Similarly, we all seem to have some fundamental discomfort admitting to mistakes and failures. The ancient Greek notion of hubris refers to these human propensities, as does the Christian concept of the sin of pride. For the purpose of this essay, the aspects of

the grandiose self that we wish to emphasize includes its being without need and without sin. A transaction will be considered as essentially narcissistic insofar as its main goal seems to be the shoring up of a sinless, needless self-concept. There follow some examples of everyday behavior suggesting the unconscious operation of a grandiose self-representation, followed by a discussion of everyday-life pathology around apologizing and thanking.

### Reluctance to Choose

Narcissistically defended people frequently find tacit ways to get others to resolve ambiguities, to protect themselves from the possibility of turning out to be wrong. For example, when a married couple in which the husband operates narcissistically reaches a fork in the road on a trip to a new destination, and is unsure which way to go, the husband will find a way to let his wife pick which road to take. If she turns out to be right, his superior position is protected because he can take credit for letting her choose the way; if she is wrong, he can resent her choice and imply (often nonverbally) that he, had he exercised his own preference, would have gone the other route.

Similarly, a narcissistically vulnerable woman may defensively insist that her husband pick the restaurant when the couple goes out to dinner. The position of not being responsible for any possible mistake in judgment in such a case takes precedence over her preference in cuisine. While she may verbalize indifference about where to eat, she may later, if disappointed in the food, imply that she would have picked a different restaurant, or sulk and pick at the meal with unmistakable disappointment.

### Criticism

Analysts working with narcissistic patients frequently bemoan, among themselves, the judgmental, devaluing attitudes to which they may be chronically subjected during treatment. The disapproving behavior of narcissistically motivated people is by no means confined to the consulting room, however, and those who live with them are often much more effectively wounded by their tendency to judge and criticize than is the analyst, who is protected by the limits of the professional relationship, the understanding of the devaluation in the context of the person's history, and the consolations of psychoanalytic explanations of such defenses.

There seem to be at least two bases for the criticism that narcissistically defended people repeatedly direct toward those with whom they live. The object

may be seen as a narcissistic extension; hence, any imperfection in the object reflects in an unseemly way upon the self. Or the object disappoints by not being the counterpart to the grandiose self; i.e., the omniscient, all-empathic Other, who effortlessly divines one's needs and meets them, without the narcissistic person having to ask for anything, thereby admitting to an insufficiency in the self. Bursten (1973) has given us an unforgettable example of this second dynamic, in a patient who took his disappointments out on his long-suffering lover:

Increasingly, he expected his girl-friend to anticipate his needs in some empathic way. For example, he would lie on his bed hoping the girl would perform fellatio. Seeing his unhappiness, she would ask what she could do for him. This made him furious. He felt she should know without him having to tell her.

The tendency of a person in the grip of narcissistic defense to levy criticism, in preference to admitting other feelings and needs, can be observed in numerous circumstances. A mother who is busy and inattentive to her child, for example, if she is protecting a grandiose vision of herself as an exemplary mother, will meet a child's demands not with the explanation that she is busy and unwilling or unable to give attention at the moment, but with attributions that the child is selfish, immature, too demanding, or whatever. The child is made the flawed object in the service of avoiding realistic limitations and imperfections in the mother's self.

The repeated experience of being pathologized is typical not only for the children but also for the spouses and other intimates of narcissistic people. A woman who, for instance, expresses hurt when her husband defensively criticizes her, may be glibly accused of "oversensitivity." An employee who tries to convey his distress to a hypercritical boss may be told he is "overreacting." People generally feel quite helpless in the face of such defensive operations, which shift the focus of attention from the defects (as unconsciously perceived) of the narcissistic party to the alleged neuroses of the target person. Narcissistically motivated people who possess psychoanalytic insight are particularly skilled at this tactic.

Naïve objects of such processes frequently don't know what has hit them. They tend to get distracted by the grains of truth in their accusers' version of their contribution to a problem, and they can easily buy into the characterization of an issue as embodying their own difficulties to the exclusion of those of the other. A woman in treatment with one of us reports that when she broaches a marital problem to her spouse, a psychiatrist, she is labeled a masochist and told to work on her "martyr problem." She came to therapy convinced of her severe character pathology, and she is not without masochism, but she is hardly the picture of pathology her husband has painted. This propensity for fault-finding, or critically

"interpreting" to deflect attention from felt imperfections in the self, seems to us a process very close to projective identification, in that the object of the narcissistic attack ends up affectively owning a sense of badness that originated unconsciously in a person whose grandiose faultlessness was somehow challenged (cf. Calef & Weinshel, 1981). It is thus destructive to both the object and the initiator of the criticizing defense, since anyone except possibly the most sociopathic of narcissists would accumulate unconscious guilt, and defenses against it, over misusing another person.

### Avoidance of Bragging

Paradoxically, for all that the textbook narcissistic character is reputed to manifest exhibitionism, we have noticed that most narcissistically motivated people rarely boast. Rather, they "drop" information in the form of a matter-of-fact report, ostensibly ordinary to the conveyer, that appears to be intended to elicit admiration without asking for it. A person not narcissistically defended might say, "I was so pleased to meet Erik Erikson," while the narcissistically impelled one causally alludes to his "lunch with Erik." A nondefensive friend might confide, "I was really proud of myself in that situation," but a narcissistically preoccupied one describes the circumstances in such a way as to evoke from the other the assertion that pride is in order.

Straightforward bragging admits implicitly to a need for something, or to a prior doubt about one's self that has been surmounted. Narcissistically driven people because of the need to preserve a sense of needlessness and faultlessness, and perhaps also because they fear the (projected) envy of others, deprive themselves of the pleasures of frank exhibitionism, and deprive their objects of the opportunity for closeness. Note that in these examples, the former statements invite the other to join in the subject's happiness, while the later induce a sense of distance and inferiority in the recipient of the information.

### The Inability to Apologize

Ever since the pioneering work of Klein (e.g., 1937), analysts have been interested in the process of reparation, with both internal and external objects. In a loving relationship perceived as temporarily damaged by one party's hunger or aggression, the (actual or fantasied) injuring party ordinarily seeks to restore the loving tone of the relationship. In adults, the usual vehicle is the apology.

What intrigues us about the reparation process when a narcissistic defense is operating is that what is repaired is not the damage to the relationship, but the

subject's illusion of perfection. Narcissistically impelled people may be at least temporarily incapable of genuine expressions of remorse, because inherent in an apology is the admission that one is not needless and faultless. In characterological narcissism, this defect is sometimes embraced as a virtue, as in Woody Hayes's boast that he never apologized to anybody, or in the peculiar belief of Erich Segal's heroine that "Love is never having to say you're sorry." In less gross manifestations of narcissism, the avoidance of apology is much more subtle, much less visible to those who might legitimately expect some expression of sincere contrition. What a narcissistically defended person seems to do instead of apologizing is to attempt a repair of the grandiose self in the guise of making reparation with the object. We have identified several different ways that narcissistically motivated people tend to substitute some other kind of interpersonal transaction for an apology. For the party on the receiving end of such a transaction, it also becomes a problem to restore intimacy, since it is difficult to forgive in the absence of the other person's genuine remorse.

## 1. Undoing

When a narcissistically defended woman has inflicted some emotional injury upon her husband, instead of apologizing, she is likely to go out of her way later to be especially solicitous of him (initiating sex, making a special dinner, etc.). A father who has unfeelingly criticized a child may similarly avoid admitting his insensitivity but instead offer some attractive treat subsequent to his transgression. The object of the undoing can be expected to remain hurt, in the absence of an emotional expression of regret, and will suffer a natural reaction to the undoing that will lie somewhere between cold rejection and grudging acquiescence. If neither party can articulate the difference between making real emotional reparation to the object and engaging in the defense of undoing, they will both be further estranged by these operations. The undoing party will feel affronted and resentful that his or her ministrations are not appreciated, while the injured person may suffer attacks of self-criticism for an inability to forgive, forget, and warm up to the partner. Both people wind up lonelier than they were previously.

## 2. Appealing to Good Intentions

People who are engaged in defending their internal grandiosity may become adept at giving ostensible apologies that really amount to self-justifications. Narcissistically driven people do not seem to understand that saying one is sorry represents an expression of empathy with the injured party irrespective of whether the hurt was intentional or avoidable. The woman who is kept waiting and worrying when her husband is late coming home will feel immediately forgiving if he expresses genuine sorrow that she has suffered on his account. In

narcissistically defensive states, however, people seem to go by the general rule that such expressions of sympathy and regret are called for only if they were "at fault" in some way. Thus, the tardy husband meets his wife's anxious greeting with, "It wasn't my fault; there was a traffic jam," communicating not remorse but resentment of her distress and rejection of its validity.

The organizing, overriding issue for people with narcissistic preoccupations is the preservation of their internal sense of self-cohesiveness or self-approval, not the quality of their relations with other people. As a result, when they feel their imperfections have been exposed, the pressing question for them is the repair of their inner self-concept, not the mending of the feelings of those in their external world (cf. Stolorow's [1979b] definitions of narcissism). They are consequently likely, in a state of defensiveness about exposed faults, to protest that they meant to do the right thing, as if the purity of their inner state is the pertinent issue - to others as well as to themselves.

One of our patients described how her close friend had failed to send her a wedding present. When she admitted her disappointment, the friend replied, "Gee, I meant to get you something - I even had a gift in mind, and I don't know why I didn't get to it." This was offered as if it were an exonerating explanation; interestingly, the woman never did buy a gift, even (or perhaps especially) in light of the explicit expression of its significance to her friend. This seemingly odd perseverance in a breach of etiquette might be explained by the observation that the rectification of an error is an admission that an error has in fact occurred. If one displaces the issue to the area of intention an error has in fact occurred. If one displaces the issue to the area of intention, an error has not occurred, since one's intentions were faultless.

### 3. Explaining

A related substitute for apologizing is the practice of explaining. Unless the listener is particularly sensitive, an explanation can sound remarkably like an apology. In fact, a relationship between two people is apt to go on a considerable length of time before the party on the receiving end of explanations begins to feel a bothersome absence of genuine contrition in the other. The advantage of the explanation to the person protecting a grandiose self is that it avoids both asking for something (forgiveness) and admitting to a sphere of personal responsibility that includes the risk of inevitable shortcoming. Hence, the illusion of personal needlessness and guiltlessness is maintained. "I would have visited you in the hospital but my schedule got really crazy," or "I must've forgotten your birthday because it came right on the heels of my vacation this year," or "Your dog just ran in front of my car and I couldn't stop fast enough" are the kinds of apology-



substitutes that may appear to connote remorse, but actually stop short of expressing sorrow and making emotional reparation.

A special case of the explanation sans apology is that of the person who has become adroit in offering his or her psychodynamics as explanatory, exculpating principles behind behavior that is remiss. "Maybe I was acting out my envy," or "I wonder if I did that because I'm going through an anniversary reaction to my sister's death," or "I must have been feeling unconsciously hostile toward you because you remind me of my father" are the kinds of nonapologies typically offered by the psychoanalytically sophisticated when protecting a grandiose self-concept. Evidence that a genuine apology has not been made can be found in the state of mind of the recipient of such commentaries: explanations without apology produce either pained confusion, or understanding without warmth. Because the explainer is defending his or her action to an internal critic who expects perfection, the listener often ends up, because of being the target of a projective-identification process, feeling inarticulately critical.

#### 4. Recriminating

We have noticed the tendency for narcissistically vulnerable people to engage in a kind of ritual self-castigation in the wake of an undeniable or unrationalizable failing toward someone. This is a process even more elusive than explaining, and harder to distinguish from true apologizing. This recrimination is expressed to witnesses and objects of the transgression with the implicit invitation that the transgressor should be reassured that despite the lapse, he or she is really fine (i.e., perfect or perfectable), after all. In the case of a person with a narcissistic character disorder, recrimination is probably as close as he or she ever comes to apologizing, and is doubtless believed to constitute sorrow and reparation.

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Self-castigating statements, mild ones such as "I can't understand why I did that!" and severe ones such as "I must be a terrible person," appear to manifest remorse, and may on that basis elicit sympathy and a wish to relieve the offender's apparent guilt and pain. A close look at the transaction, however, reveals that the subject is suffering self-condemnation mainly for a lack of perfection, and that the injured object has been switched into the position of comforting the person who inflicted the hurt. The party who is legitimately entitled to an apology goes without it, while the transgressor achieves reinforcement for a pathological belief about the self.

We have found that a good way to discriminate between narcissistic recrimination and object-related remorse is to ask the allegedly regretful person whether, under identical circumstances, he or she would do the same thing again. A truly repentant sinner will unhesitatingly and believably say no, while a person protecting the grandiose self will tend to launch into a series of hedges, rationalizations, or less than credible denials.

#### 5. Deflecting Blame

The readiness of narcissistically vulnerable people to convey criticism is equaled only by their resistance to assimilating it. Frequently, they seem to have mastered the art of deflecting blame. As an example of this dynamic, let us consider the familiar situation of supervising a narcissistically preoccupied trainee in psychotherapy. If narcissistic patients are hard to treat (as is their reputation), narcissistic supervisees seem even harder to supervise. Except in certain phases of idealization of the supervisor, they react to honest feedback about their shortcomings and limits not just with defensiveness - a natural and universal response - but with a particular kind of defense: the effort to share their "badness" with the supervisor.

When the mentor has failed to support the grandiose self of a narcissistically impelled student, he or she can count on paying for it. A response to the effect of "I'll confess that I acted that out, but I think you have your part in this, too," is typical. And the supervisee is often right, or has a piece of the truth at least, but in such cases, the content of the criticism of the supervisor is usually not the point. The process boils down to: "I feel mortified that you saw a limitation in me because I aspire to perfection. You probably aspire to perfection, too, or should, so I'll point out that you haven't yet reached it, either." The supervisee thus perpetuates the false premise that perfect self-sufficiency is a legitimate goal. It seems not to occur to a narcissistically motivated person that comfort with imperfection might be both the supervisor's attitude toward his or her own work, and the attitude the supervisor wishes to instill in the trainee.

Several years ago, one of us worked with a brilliant, attractive, talented, and quite grandiose analyst-in-training. For about a year, the atmosphere of the supervision was delightful, as both parties engaged in what amounted to a folie à deux of mutual idealization. The supervisor, out of her own narcissistic pathology, joined this man believing that reported problems with previous supervisors derived from his having been insufficiently appreciated by, or even having been felt as threatening to, these therapists. Then he sought her collusion in overreporting his hours of control analysis to the institute. (He believed that he had had so much equivalent training that his background fulfilled the "spirit" if not the letter of the training provisions, and that the particulars of the program requirements were needlessly stringent.) She refused. He abruptly devalued her, as he had his previous instructors, but since it was in his interest to maintain the relationship until he had passed a Case Presentation requirement, he stayed in supervision. When she tried to make ego-alien his narcissistic entitlement, he accused her of acting out all kinds of unpleasant dynamics, including having contributed to his expectation of special favors by her prior warmth and support, which he now labeled seductive and transferenceal. He was, of course, right to a considerable extent, as narcissistically defensive people, with their hypervigilant sensitivity to others, often are.

He somehow structured the psychological situation as follows: "If you deny your part in the dynamic, you are self-deluded and therefore not worth listening to; if you admit it, you and I can lament your shortcomings together, construe my actions as responsive to your mistakes, and avoid looking at my own problems." It is very difficult to turn this bind into a learning situation for the trainee. We have seen examples of narcissistically preoccupied analysts-in-training who, by structuring their experience of supervision this way, develop a set of quite prescient beliefs about each of their teachers' dynamics, with no observable growth in their comprehension of their own.

## The Inability to Thank

Gratitude seems to us to be an integral expression of our dependency on one another. To thank someone acknowledges our need to have been helped or enriched in the first place, and, as Heilbrun noted (1972), establishes a dynamic and loving equilibrium between donor and receiver. Writers on pathological narcissism have occasionally commented on characterological ingratitude (e.g., Kernberg, 1970, 1974; Bromberg, 1983); we shall again focus on the less obvious, every day manifestations of the reluctance to thank. Although those of us with predominantly narcissistic concerns may go through the motions of thanking, we frequently resist expressing whole-hearted appreciation, since that would acknowledge a previous insufficiency of some sort, an insult to the grandiose self. What we then do instead of appreciating is discussed below.

### 1. Conferring Approval

A person protecting a grandiose self and the illusion of superiority will often shift an opportunity to thank into an occasion to give a pat on the head, as if from a position of greater authority than that of the person who has done some deed worthy of gratitude. For example, a narcissistically oriented parent might tell a teacher who has done exemplary work with his or her difficult child, "You did a good job," rather than "I'm very grateful for what you have done." A woman might say to her lover, "I'm pleased to see you're getting better at keeping your temper under control," rather than "I've appreciated your patience with me." A nice example of approval-conferring masquerading as gratitude occurred in the play *Dream girls*, when the lead singer turned during the applause to her back-up duo and gushed, "And I couldn't have done it without them!" The audience senses viscerally how by ostensibly complimenting her coperformers, she has managed to minimize completely their contribution to her popular triumph.

### 2. Reversing Roles

A typical organizing fantasy for overtly narcissistic people, especially the type labeled as "craving" by Bursten, is that a love object should simply know, in a kind of mystical, intuitive way, what they need, and offer it, unasked. The narcissistic image of a true love relationship amounts to omniscient emotional synchronicity between two ideal people. Often the intimate associates of people with narcissistic vulnerabilities try to enact the complementary role that those in a narcissistic state so deeply desire. A woman can exhaust herself trying to anticipate and meet the needs of a narcissistically preoccupied man, in the hope

of gaining some evidence of his gratitude (hence, his acknowledgement of her importance to him). What she is likely to get instead is a communication whose meaning translates into, "I am willing, because I'm so virtuous, to defer to your wishes." For instance, the husband is sulking around the kitchen looking hungry. The wife asks, "Would you like to eat early?" The husband replies, "Sure," or "Okay," or even "If that's what's convenient for you," rather than "Yes, I'm hungry," with the implication of "Thank you for noticing."

This tendency to respond to a solicitous inquiry with "Okay" or "Sure" or the posture of equivalent solicitude typifies a narcissistically protective interaction. The assumed position is, "You're the one with the needs here, not me; but I'm such a good person I'll humor you." The nuances of this transformation of subject and object are so delicate and elusive that it is no wonder that the spouses of characterologically narcissistic people can be frequently found in a state of complete bewilderment about what is wrong in the relationship and how they might be contributing to its disappointing aspects. If they can learn to act in ways that encourage the mate to make his or her needs explicit, instead of rushing to address the unspoken, they will be doing the partner the service of experiencing his or her sincerity as less dangerous than unconsciously believed - i.e., counteracting the narcissistic assumption that expressing a need is to tantamount to submitting oneself to humiliation. And they will be unburdening themselves of a doomed pursuit.

### 3. Protest

A particular instance of the inability to thank is the receipt of a compliment, a situation in which gratitude would seem a natural reaction. The least complicated way to receive admiration is, of course, with an appreciative expression of thanks. We have noticed that for people with narcissistic concerns, this response seems difficult. They commonly counterpoise a compliment with a protestation that they do not deserve it. Or they may dismiss a genuine accolade as insincere flattery, or even appear annoyed that the complimenter appears to think they would appreciate an admiring remark (i.e., they convey that their impressiveness is so ordinary to them that a compliment is excessive, even insulting.) Such behavior suggests an effort to hide one's grandiosity, an attitude of protesting too much.

Horner (1979) has discussed how the grandiose self is often a secret self-representation, not always deeply unconscious, but deliberately kept out of full awareness. Perhaps one reason that a narcissistically preoccupied person receives compliments awkwardly is that frank expressions of admiration run the risk of exposing one's grandiosity to the self and the other. To accept a compliment with a sincere "Thank you" conveys acknowledgment that one may

deserve recognition. Awkwardness may also protect against the envy that those in narcissistic states assume will poison relationships if some area of superiority is mutually admitted. Many writers have noted how a grandiose person may take pains to appear modest, diffident, and indifferent to admiration. It has not been observed, as far as we know, that the message to the person giving the compliment is rejection of his or her natural warmth.

#### 4. A Comment on Converse Manifestations

The inability to thank is not the only way in which narcissistic pathology and the issue of gratitude - or remorse, for the matter - can be manifested. As in all things psychodynamic, the opposite behavior may indicate a problem in accepting dependency or vulnerability. Some people compulsively over thank, or over apologize, in a manner that suggests as much underlying discomfort with the inner state of indebtedness to others as we are postulating in those who resist thanking and apologizing. As with our previous illustrations of every day narcissism, the vague discomfort of the recipient with the effusively appreciative or apologetic person is a clue to the operation of an underlying grandiose attitude.

#### Concluding Remarks

In this essay we have tried to talk about the obvious and the invisible. Our discussion has been founded on an assumption about the enriching roles of gratitude and reparation in human relations. We have tried to suggest the interpersonal implications of the resistance in people with narcissistic concerns to both apologizing and thanking. These seem to us to be opposite sides of the same defensive coin, the denial of normal inadequacies in the self that predictably both injure others and require their generosity. Recurrent failures to express genuine remorse or to convey sincere gratitude constitute terrible handicaps to a narcissistically vulnerable person, and impose an oppressive burden on those who care about him or her.

We have put particular emphasis on the psychological encumbrance borne by the objects of essentially narcissistic transactions, whose usual response to the prolonged substitution of other behaviors for expressions of sorrow and thanks includes confusion, self-criticism, loneliness, and diffuse irritation - an overall sense of having been, as one of our patients put it, "mind-fucked." The state of confusion induced by narcissistic defenses may say something about why it took so many years for psychoanalysts to develop a rich and specific literature about narcissism, comparable to that on the more "classical" psychopathologies.

Psychoanalytic therapists not only treat narcissistic characters, they also analyze their spouses, their employers and employees, supervisors and supervisees, lovers and friends, parents and offspring. They try to help those who have been idealized and adored and then devalued and discarded. They work with students whose narcissistic issues get in the way of their learning. They encounter countless obstacles presented by their own grandiosity, and find in the nature of their existence as therapists that, perhaps even more than other people, they both inflict unavoidable injury on, and suffer a need for care from, their love objects.

We feel that analysts have a privileged role in understanding and appreciating the impact of narcissistic phenomena in a culture in which they are arguably rampant; they are consequently in a special position to assist themselves and others who face the depletion of emotional energy and destruction of joy that narcissistic defenses so often produce. Gratitude and remorse seem to us to be among those attitudes that act as "glue" between people trying to make a life together. In addition to providing the grateful or contrite party an honest expression of feeling, a victory over the false self, these attitudes enrich the person at whom they are directed. Appreciation nurtures self-esteem, and genuine regret elicits genuine forgiveness. If one is defensively unable to connect in these ways, life is essentially loveless.

A basic premise of psychoanalytic wisdom is that we all have aggression and dependency (and sexuality, which contains both) and must learn to understand, accept, and channel them. We all inevitably inflict hurt and need care. Moreover, we are always subject to influence from unconscious sources, no matter how well analyzed we are; unavoidably, our unconscious agendas will collide with and impinge on those of others. The person protecting a grandiose self-concept tries to deny these fundamental conditions of our humanness and impoverishes his or her own life and the lives of others in the process. When narcissistically absorbed, people tend to approach analysis - or supervision or intimate communication - with the corrupt premise that the point of attaining insight is to perfect the self rather than to learn about it, accept it, and direct it. As in the case of all such distortions, it is the responsibility of the psychoanalyst to stand for what is true rather than for what is narcissistically attractive, even in the seemingly petty transactions of everyday life, and with respect to the operations detailed here, the healing potential of that basic analytic position is substantial.

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Although Kohut abandoned the term "grandiose self" in his later writings, we have found it the simplest concept to employ here because of its widespread informal use and general meaningfulness to a psychoanalytic audience. Cf. Rosenfeld's (1964) "omnipotent mad" self, or Kernberg's (1975) "pathological self structure." For those who prefer to avoid reification in psychoanalytic metapsychology, these structural terms seem to us roughly equivalent to the processes implied by Rothstein's (1980) phrase, "the narcissistic pursuit of perfection," or Modell's (1975) "illusion of self-sufficiency."

It is not our intention to plunge into the murky waters of metapsychology on the nature of narcissism. We should point out, however, that we use the term more or less equivalently with the accepted meaning of "pathological narcissism." Given the confusing nature of debates on healthy vs. pathological narcissism, we also have a terminological preference. We use the term narcissism to refer to the cathexis of the grandiose (false)self in its defensive role, and the term "self-esteem" (rather than "healthy narcissism") for the cathexis of one's genuine nondefensive sense of self (true self). Normal exhibitionism, seen for example in the year-old child having what Mahler called a love affair with the world, would be the prototype for self-esteem, whereas exhibitionistic efforts to counteract unconscious shame would constitute a narcissistic process. Thus defined, narcissism inevitably interferes with gratifying object relations, while self-

esteem does not. We find this usage more consistent with the ancient myth from which the term narcissism derives, and less contributory to semantic and theoretical squabbles.

Many of our vignettes are stated as hypothetical or archetypal situations, but the reader may be assured that they are based on actual incidents. Any of these anecdotes we are using illustratively might, of course, have a different meaning, depending on the context and the particular psychologies of the participants. For example, the reluctance to choose a restaurant may reflect a wish to defer to the partner's preference, motivated by love, or fear of criticism, or genuine indifference about where to eat, or other non-narcissistic dynamics. No specific vignette in this essay should be construed as pathognomonic of a narcissistic issue.

In a similar vein of disclaimer, we should also like to note that our emphasis on the subtler nuances of everyday narcissism is not intended to replace our understanding of more gross, overtly narcissistic pathology. Some grandiose characters, for instance, will predictably insist on choosing a restaurant at every opportunity, out of the ego-syntonic conviction that their judgment is simply better than that of other people.

In this connection, consider the moving article by Kubie and Isreal (1955), describing how a profoundly disturbed child began moving toward recovery at the point when her psychiatrist, discerning that she was mumbling "Say you're sorry," not only told her that he was sorry, but initiated a process in which each of a group of observers apologized to her in turn.

Cf. The Lennon & McCartney lyrics: She's the kind of girl who puts you down when friends are there; you feel a fool.

When you say she's looking good, she acts as if it's understood she's cool.