



WORKING WITH NARCISSISTIC ISSUES IN CAT

NARCISSISTIC PROBLEMS

- Fundamental disturbance in the sense of self and regulation of self esteem
- Striving for ‘narcissistic supplies’, admiration, recognition
- Kohut: not only longed for but *needed* for self to function
- Grandiose, ‘special’ self split from shamed, collapsed self
- Narcissistic rage in response to perceived slights or failures of empathy
- Dilemma “Either contemptuous or contemptible”
- Arises from normal developmental process; healthy narcissism progresses
 - from age-appropriate grandiosity
 - alternating with awareness of own insignificance
 - Use of others as ‘self-objects’ to regulate our sense of self



TONY RYLE ON NARCISSISTIC SELF

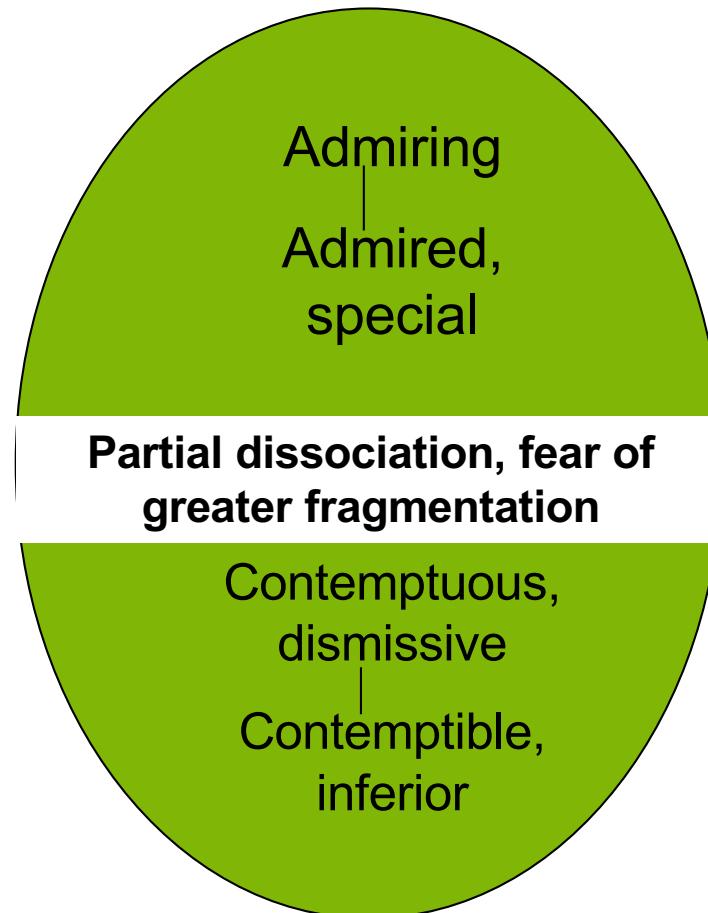
- core of unmanageable feelings, variably accessible to consciousness: shamed, humiliated, rubbished, powerless, abandoned, ignored.
- underlying division between idealised or grandiose part and shamed/abused/rageful part
- self referent & interpersonal behaviours reflect this division, by fantasies or actions seeking fusion with admired position and or admiration from others
- Or by pushing others into the devalued, shamed or humiliated position
- But both these procedures lessen the chance of empathy from the other & genuine self-esteem; ultimately self-defeating.



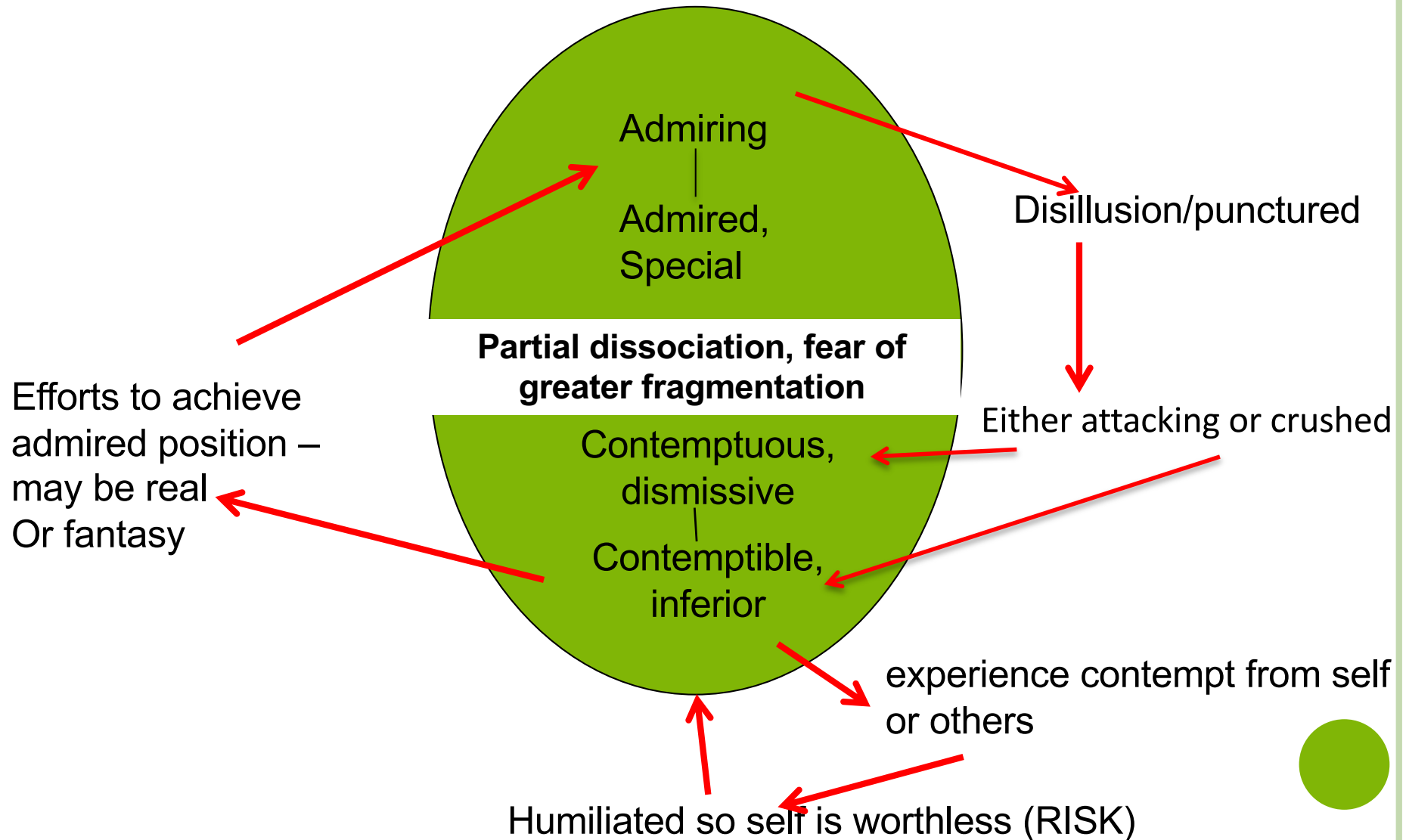
CAT UNDERSTANDING OF THE NARCISSISTIC SELF

- attempts to avoid or contain things falling apart by restrictive coping procedures
 - Real needs involve exposure to feelings and vulnerability so retreat to grandiose ambitions and goals
 - Achievement will bring protection and admiration
 - All or nothing
 - Others required to participate in the fantasy self or the real but limited identity
- capacity to feel coherently oneself aided by other enacting the polar alternative
 - e.g. eliciting admiration
 - e.g. engendering feelings of humiliation or shame in other

CAT'S SPLIT EGG FORMULATION OF NPD



EXAMPLE OF NARCISSISTIC SDR



DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

- For some there will be a history of abuse and/or neglect similar to that of those with BPD
- But will have found route to narcissistic solution.
Vulnerable to threats to this.
- Grandiose ideas may be confined to a sphere such as creativity, sport or sexuality.
- Others will have had narcissistic parents for whom their own specialness fuelled the parental need. Their inner world and needs overlooked.
- This deprivation can be less apparent to others (and to themselves).
- Threats will serve to bolster sense of superiority.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN WORKING WITH NARCISSISTIC PROBLEMS

- ⊙ Fighting to hold on to a sense of self through narrow roles and procedures
- ⊙ Others are not 'related to' but needed to keep self on top
- ⊙ Rage against feeling let down, disregarded, disrespected
- ⊙ RR challenges to therapy :
 - ⊙ Admiring-admired, magical
 - ⊙ pressure on therapist to deliver or to be special/charmed
 - ⊙ Contemptuous-contemptible
 - ⊙ Mocking-humiliated -- therapist fears being shamed (own narcissistic vulnerabilities).
 - ⊙ Or becomes subtly attacking/puncturing)



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- ⦿ Self observation may be difficult.
- ⦿ Shifts between grandiose and vulnerable states feeds a lack of relational continuity.
- ⦿ Narcissistic themes may be present in less extreme and more subtle ways – harder to identify
- ⦿ Rage in response to narcissistic injury is frequent, yet the person may disown aggressive behaviour that is flagrantly obvious to others.
- ⦿ CAT tools and tasks may be contemptuously dismissed
- ⦿ Or experienced as puncturing and exposing
- ⦿ Or therapist or therapy elevated to admired position
- ⦿ Or therapist charmed into admiring role
- ⦿ Our own narcissistic needs are highly relevant



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Depression common when accessing warded off role, and risk can be higher at these times.
- Can cycle between states rapidly – when closer to BPD – unstable sense of self and feelings
- Or more stable presentation where presentation is primarily in desired state/role, or depressed and crushed.
- Those with full NPD rarely present to therapy voluntarily – forensic population.
- However, narcissistic themes are common in therapy. These may be present in less extreme and more subtle ways – harder to identify



ANNIE NEHMAD – CAT

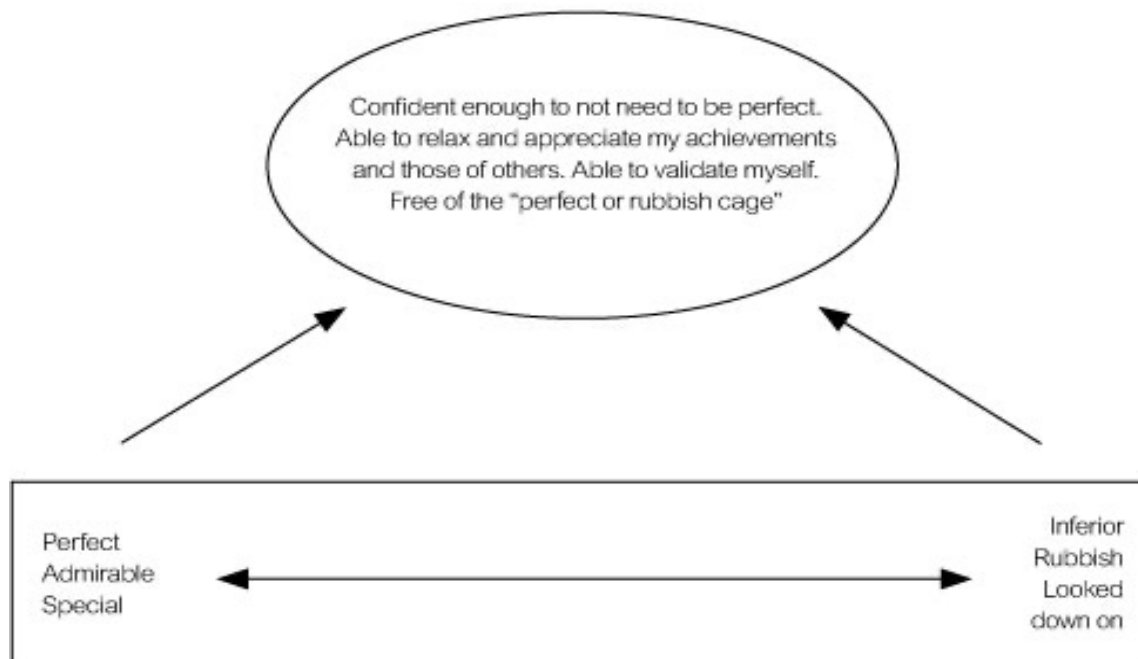
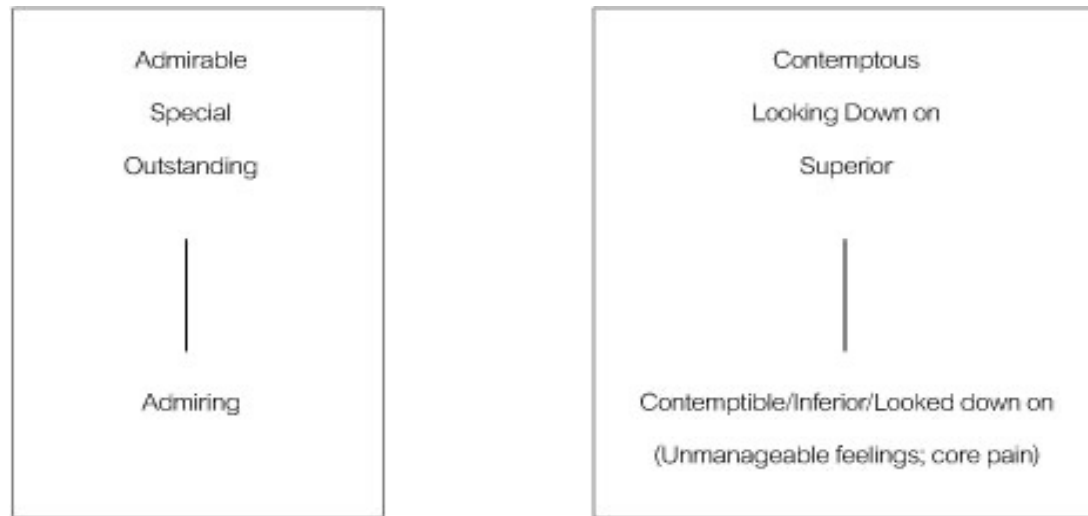
- ⊙ narcissistic and borderline personalities on a continuum, ‘stable narcissist’ very different from severely dissociated borderline client
- ⊙ therapists deny and disavow their own narcissistic strivings; unable to deal with pressure to enact ‘contemptible & worthless’ in relation to client, so tend to enact ‘contemptuous’ through trying to puncture client’s grandiosity
- ⊙ need for self state of ‘respectful of self & others, ordinariness, competent not special’
- ⊙ Risk of meta shifts



THERAPY AS NARCISSISTIC WOUND

- Key risk points for enactments in therapy? Discuss
- Nehmad suggests new diagram
- Split egg itself too wounding?





Note: All words – especially those in the "free" place above the Cage, must be tailor-made and meaningful to the client. I offer these words as examples, not prescriptions.

Annie
Nehmad
2010



ANNA JELLAMA

- Looked at access to emotions and risk that tool based focus of CAT lead to avoidance of key emotional struggle for these clients.
- BPD – sequential awareness, emotional regulation “feel too much”
- NPD – need to access emotions associated with disavowed role. Need to access warded off shamed role or risk of therapy as simply reinforcing high functioning narcissistic split “back on top”



WORKING WITH NARCISSISM

- ⦿ The strengthening of RR of realistic acceptance – ordinary good enough, “the sacred middle ground”
- ⦿ They can conflate ordinary needs, feelings with mediocrity and shamed self – need to differentiate needs/feelings from shamed/weak.
- ⦿ Don't neglect psycho-education - look for normal discussion of how we all want to succeed, feel appreciated, how we can all feel hurt; ‘normalise’ narcissism.
- ⦿ Risk of therapy being used to reinforce and re-establish admired roles.
- ⦿ Therapist needs to survive contemptuous attack, not be seduced by the admiring/admired and tolerate own vulnerability



WORKING WITH NARCISSISM

- Spend time slowly developing the diagram and letter – risk of puncturing or exposure –our own narcissistic needs can lead us to be too accurate
- Keep in mind the gap between actual (or feared) and ideal self is accentuated in narcissism
- Either painfully felt as too great – ‘Echo’, thin skinned person, or completely denied in the grandiose, thick skinned person
- Aim to narrow the gap and find good real things about self
- or increase the gap and come to terms with loss and disillusionment



WORKING WITH NARCISSISM

- ⊙ Need to hold onto underlying vulnerability and sense of intolerable shame or emptiness
- ⊙ Need to have “tact” – less harmful enactment
- ⊙ Mirroring and sense of acute awareness of ZPD
- ⊙ Accept temporary special relationship and the person’s need for narcissistic supplies
- ⊙ ... but avoid collusive mutual admiration (gifted therapist to special client)
- ⊙ Challenge denial by client of secretly rubbishing/dismissing of others’ feelings



WORKING WITH NARCISSISM

- ◉ Guard against professional retaliation, 'cutting down to size', or bullying client from position of power
- ◉ Helps to be aware of one's own narcissistic needs
- ◉ Gradual disillusionment - discuss and use ending from start.
- ◉ Creativity, humour, playfulness and use of dreams all positive signs of being outside main pathways of narcissistic procedures
- ◉ Beware someone trying to get under your skin by charming curiosity - this may switch to envious attack and cutting you down to size



SEVEN DO'S AND DON'TS

1. Establish positive alliance – feeling appreciated, heard, understood
2. Pay attention to varieties of response and feelings, life goals and especially shared moments with others of activity, achievement, distraction
3. Be prepared to work carefully through wounding or hurtful and unexpected responses. Narcissistic solutions of grandiosity and withdrawal mean self observation is limited.
4. Don't neglect psychoeducation re. narcissism: look for normal discussion of how we all want to succeed, feel appreciated but it is how we negotiate with ourselves and others; 'normalise' narcissism.



SEVEN DO'S AND DON'TS CONTINUED

5. Watch out for idealisation of you, of admiration of something/someone with whom self is identified, for which a more creative or adaptive thinking is sacrificed.
6. If attacked or devalued, don't retaliate, take as a cue to something in the process causing narcissistic injury; get alongside and gather information on puncturing moments, and the gap between actual interactions, actual thinking and idealised picture.
7. Spend time slowly developing the diagram: what we know about ambition and achievement and loss in life.

