

## CAT Practitioner Training March 2026

### Narcissism



### NARCISSUS BY CARAVAGGIO



### NARCISSISM - TIMELINE

- *Havelock Ellis (1898) introduced the word 'narcissus-like'*
- *Paul Nacke (1899) treating own body as sexual object*
- *Jones (1913) 'The God complex'*
- *Fenichel (1945) 'Don Juan of Achievement'*
- *Freud (1914)*
- *Kohut (1971) The Analysis of the Self*
- *Kernberg (1975) Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism.*
- *1980 – American Psychiatric Association introduced the category Narcissistic Personality Disorder.*

### DSM-V – DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

- Significant impairments in either:
  - Identity -excessive reference to others for self-esteem
  - Self direction – unrealistic expectations based on gaining approval
- Significant impairments in interpersonal functioning in either:
  - Empathy – impaired ability to recognise or identify with the feelings of others
  - Intimacy – rels largely superficial and exist to serve self esteem regulation.

## DSM-V CONTINUED

- Consistent traits in the following domains:
  - Grandiosity
  - Attention seeking
  - Along with these, the DSM describe 9 different features that assessors should look out for:
    - Inflated self esteem/superiority
    - Craving admiration
    - Exploitative relationships
    - Little to no empathy
    - Identity is easily disturbed (i.e. fragile, criticism is hard to hear)
    - Lack of intimacy
    - Empty, depressed feelings when not validated
    - Entitlement
    - Envy (enviable and envious)

## KOHUT AND KERNBERG

- Narcissism: From Kohut to CAT Pollard, C., 1997. Narcissism: From Kohut to CAT. Reformulation, ACAT News Winter.
- In the 1960s, Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg started to use psychoanalysis with clients presenting with NPD type difficulties.
- Kohut's theory of narcissism as set out in his "The Analysis of the Self" (1971) established a revolutionary and radical concept of the self and in so doing challenged the whole psychoanalytic establishment.

## KOHUT

- Normal development – from the ‘gleam in the mother’s eye’, gradual modification through nontraumatic contact with reality and natural shortcomings in maternal care – child becomes aware of being ordinary and vulnerable.
- Pathological narcissism - mother/infant relationships either – cold/rejecting/unable to mirror role, or destructive, or infant used by narcissistic parents as an object, mirroring mother’s grandiosity thus missing out on own mirroring.
- Resulting in a dependence on psychological functions provided by others.
- Admiring - admired

## KERNBERG

- Sometime between the ages of 3 and 5 years, there is a fusion of ideal self, ideal object and actual self images. This is in response to "intolerable reality in the interpersonal realm" and the aim is to deny normal dependency on external objects.
- The grandiose self is built up to protect against feelings of worthlessness, rage and envy.
- Unacceptable aspects of the self are projected onto others who are devalued.
- This combination of inflation of self on one hand and devaluation of others on the other hand enables a denial of feeling dependent upon anyone.
- Contemptuous – contemptible rejecting – rejected

- From Kernberg: “These patients present an unusual degree of self-reference in their interactions with other people, a great need to be loved and admired by others, and a curious apparent contradiction between a very inflated concept of themselves and an inordinate need for tribute from others. Their emotional life is shallow. They experience little empathy for the feelings of others, they obtain very little enjoyment from life other than from the tributes they receive from others or from their own grandiose fantasies, and they feel restless and bored when external glitter wears off and no new sources feed their self regard. They envy others, tend to idealize some people from whom they expect narcissistic supplies, and to depreciate and treat with contempt those from whom they do not expect anything (often their former idols). In general, their relationships with other people are clearly exploitative and sometimes parasitic. It is as if they feel they have the right to control and possess others and to exploit them without guilt feelings – and behind a surface which very often is charming and engaging, one senses coldness and ruthlessness. (p. 17)

Kernberg, O. (1975). Borderline conditions and pathological narcissism. Jason Aronson, Inc.: New York.

## POP CULTURE/SOCIAL MEDIA

‘The’ narcissist

*10 ways to spot if your partner is a narcissist*

- Damaging, reductionist views.
- Adds to vilification of people already suffering.
- This view doesn’t hold onto empathy, or the relational nature of the difficulties.
- CAT’s viewpoint – we all have narcissist wounds and needs and at different points in our lifetimes they may be more or less evident – i.e. retirement, the end of a relationship.

## CAT AND NARCISSISM

- CAT brings in theoretical aspects of both Kohut and Kernberg – top and bottom of split egg. But with an emphasis on connection to the core pain at the heart of the difficulties.
- Need to think about both admiring and devaluing aspects (RRs) – without becoming captured by admiration, or puncturing of grandiosity
- Prime therapeutic task is describe sequences accurately, without colluding.
- Essential to find ways into the core pain – the grandiosity is only there because the vulnerability feels so intolerable. RRP.
- Finding ways to welcome vulnerability into the room, admiring ordinary achievements and moments of genuine connection to pain