

On Being an IoPT Practitioner
with
Vivian Broughton

Absorbed or Attacked

The Child of the Narcissistically
Traumatised Mother

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1

Why do I think this presentation important?

1. To help IoPT practitioners understand some situations they may encounter in their work.
2. Perhaps through understanding we can avoid getting caught in the P-V dynamic's that go along with narcissism.

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2

PART 1: WHAT IS NARCISSISM?

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3

DSM V – Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a mental disorder characterized by a life-long pattern of:

- Exaggerated feelings of self-importance;
- An excessive need for admiration;
- A diminished ability to empathize with others' feelings.

These are the primary symptoms of Narcissism

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4

“Narcissism... encompasses a hunger for appreciation or admiration, a desire to be the center of attention, and an expectation of special treatment reflecting [their] perceived higher status.”

Donald Trump: “I alone can fix it”; “I will be the greatest president God ever created”; “I have the best health”

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5

The reality of the NPD person is a deep sense of nothingness, an emptiness within.

- A deep fear of this inadequacy that cannot be admitted to or allowed
- Depression
- Feelings that must be suppressed (shame, fear of humiliation)
- Constant fear of discovery

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6

All of the previous applies to the usual understanding of narcissism.

This is the 'grandiose' form of narcissism.

There is also what I have called the 'humble' or 'self-deprecating' narcissistic form.

This seems not commonly discussed or theorised.

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7

The Two forms of Narcissism

'Grandiose' Form:

- "I am super important"
- Exaggerated self-importance
- Arrogant/aggressive
- Excessive need for admiration
- Extremely easily offended
- Easily feels victimised
- Lacks empathy for others
- Expects everyone to do their bidding
- Is very manipulative
- Talks all the time about how badly others are treating them
- Uses everyone to fill their inner vacuum
- Primary functioning is through P-V dynamics (perpetrator behaviour)

'Humble' Form:

- "I am of no importance"
- Exaggerated humility
- Submissive/passive
- Ingratiating
- Says "thank you" to everything
- Always apologising
- May be over empathic to others
- Constantly feels at fault
- Always puts others needs before theirs
- Is servile/submissive/slavish
- Terrified of hurting others
- Feels terrifyingly helpless
- Their own sense of vacuum keeps them connected to their mother
- Invites negative reactions by submissive (victim) behaviour (P-V dynamics)

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8

PART 2: WHAT CAUSES NARCISSISM?

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9

What causes Narcissism?

The 'conventional' view (grandiose form):

Social Learning Theory: Narcissism is caused by 'parental over-valuation' of the child

OR:

Psychoanalytic theory: Narcissism is caused by 'lack of parental warmth'

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10

Narcissism and Therapy...

"The [grandiose] narcissist will not come willingly for therapy because they cannot admit they need help and will find it difficult to believe that there is anything about them that needs change."

M1Psychology.com

The 'humble narcissist' *will* go to therapy because they *know* something is wrong, but they think it is their fault, and they have a great difficulty seeing their mother as she really is, as a narcissistic perpetrator.

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11

PART 3: NARCISSISM & IOPT

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12

In reality what is generally thought of as narcissism is based on the symptomatology of grandiosity.

As IoPT practitioners, however, we would see this symptomatology as the survival construct of a massive **trauma of identity** and **trauma of love**.

The real issue of narcissism is the deep sense of nothingness and emptiness within that is the result of these traumas.

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13

The Trauma of Identity: what it means to be unwanted by one's mother.

Each person's *experience* of being unwanted by their mother is individual, specific and unique. My experience is different from yours.

"She takes all the air"

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14

The 'Unwantedness Continuum'

OUTRIGHT REJECTION
Mother definitely doesn't want the child and may consider aborting the child. Wishes child did not exist at all

AMBIVALENCE UNCOMMITTED
Mother is ambivalent about her child and her attention is unreliable and variable

MOTHER WANTS CHILD FOR HER OWN REASONS
Mother wants child for reasons that are not to do with the child. The child is objectified for the mother's needs/wants.

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15

Within this category

Mother wants child for various reasons that are nothing to do with the child

For example:

- To replace a previous child that died
- To save her from her trauma
- To protect her from the father
- To take revenge for her own hurt
- Etc.

Mother wants child for confused reasons that are to do with her own narcissistic needs.

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16

What causes Narcissism, an IoPT view

- Grandiose form:** Mother uses her child by '**over-valuation**', as a positive reflection of her, in order to enhance her own narcissistic needs. In this form the mother uses the child as a 'glittering accessory', and the child becomes like the mother, with an over-inflated view of themselves.
- Humble form:** Mother uses her child as a slave – so as **not** to outshine her. Mother sees the child as a potential **competitive threat** to her own grandiose self-perception, and the child lives in the shadow of the narcissistic mother thereby creating a 'humble narcissist' in her child.

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17

What causes the 'humble' form?

A mother who is a 'grandiose' form of Narcissist.

- Mother may fear **competition** from the child and...
- Is likely to force the child to be her slave - **enslavement**
- Constantly **humiliates** and **undermines** the child
- Sees the child as a source of energy and liveliness that she doesn't feel herself
- The mother **consumes and absorbs** the life, energy, sense of 'I' of the child to compensate for her own lack
- The child must **serve** to fill the vacuum for the mother
- The child cannot hold onto any real sense of self or 'I' or will...
- All is '**stolen**' by the mother.

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18

If the mother functions as a 'humble' narcissist

- She is likely to reverse the issue, regarding her girl child as a substitute for her own mother, **over-enhancing** her, thereby making her into a grandiose form of narcissist, **or...**
- She will act as her own mother did, forcing her child into slavery and non-existence.

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19

PART 4: THE ENSLAVED CHILD

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20

The Enslaved child 1

At its most extreme, the mother absorbs the child's energy, vitality, life force, identity and 'I' in order to fill her own desperate emptiness and despair, and her lack of any sense of her own energy, life force, identity and 'I'.

The child is forced to see the mother with a kind of adulation that is constant and determined; the mother can do no wrong.

"My mother was wonderful... my father and I looked after her. She was so beautiful and everybody loved her and we took care of her."

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21

The Enslaved child 2

- The child cannot develop any sense of an 'I';
- Her **will** is distorted towards serving the mother, and not posing any challenge to her
- The mother's reaction to any kind of autonomy in the child is to **attack** and **humiliate** the child.
- The child's experience is that she has no existence without the mother; she and the mother are one.

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22

The Enslaved child 3

The result of this, as the child grows up, is the absolute impossibility of seeing themselves as having any kind of existence without the mother. The sense of merging is complete.

They are often, even as an adult, financially and practically dependent.

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23

PART 5: THE IOPT SESSION

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24

The IoPT Session...

- There is a minimal sense of self, of an 'I', or of any 'want'.
- Intentions in the beginning tend to focus on external issues: "I want good finances and a secure job", and are frequently complicated and confusing
- ... rather than on inner issues: eg "I want to connect with myself".
- Therapeutic work of any kind is slow and...
- ... repeatedly disappointing for practitioner and client.
- The establishment of any kind of real 'I' takes considerable time...
- ... because to establish an 'I' is deeply threatening to the 'mother within the client's psyche'
- Most life endeavours and relationships fail. To succeed would be a challenge to the mother.

(After 2 years of IoPT work):
"I know I should write my intention with 'I want', but I can't... I can't say I want anything."

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25

Symptoms of the Enslaved child

- Using the phrase: 'thank you' frequently
- Apologising frequently
- Is excessively grateful to the practitioner
- Will constantly attempt to make the practitioner feel good (they are the one who is at fault)
- When resonating for themselves (individual session) they will frequently refer to themselves in the third person: "This resonance is...", "it doesn't..."
- 'Transference' is often strong (client behaves towards practitioner as if the mother, wanting to please)
- Finds it hard to say anything negative about the mother
- Frequently takes any 'wrong-doing' back to themselves
- Even if a sessions seems successful to the practitioner, there is a deep resistance to change and the practitioner will frequently find themselves back at the beginning, as if nothing had been gained from previous work.
- The practitioner is likely to feel irritation, frustration and helplessness, and may find themselves wishing the client would go away.

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26

The underlying issue for this person is that their very existence is so closely tied to their mother that they find it almost impossible to separate and dare to be a separate person.

"I am frightened that when my mother dies, I will die too; I cannot have a life without her. It terrifies me."
The client had never had a serious relationship, and her mother was old and frail at the time .

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27

Client represented her own 'I'

"I'm hanging as if suspended, and underneath me there is a slot in the ground... which is my 'I' slot. I am supposed to be in that slot, in my 'I', but I can't go into it... I notice that there are two other people, one behind each shoulder... and they want the 'I' slot, my slot, and that's why I can't get into my 'I' place."

Of course the two people behind turned out to be her mother and her mother's mother. I understood this to represent the competition for an 'I' by both mother and grandmother. Everybody lacks a sense of having their own 'I' and they both predate on the child.

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28

Insight!

Practitioner to client: "Take your time."
Client: ... "that's just me!"

This expression, 'take your time', had been said by me frequently over the time we had been working together, but this time, for the first time, it really struck home. 'Take **your** time'. For the first time a sense of ownership of her own time, and a brief sense of separation from the experience of being merged with the mother.

These are the micro-steps of this kind of work.

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29

Summary

- The Individual session is best, and usually they will opt for that. Groups are often far too challenging and potentially humiliating for them.
- If you are fortunate enough, and a serious enough practitioner, the person may persist in coming to see you over a long period of time.
- The work will be challenging for you, but if you persist you will learn an enormous amount from your client.
- Work with the 'open door' and get interested in what happens.
- Trust your client and they will teach you how to work with them successfully.
- Be creative. Do not feel that you always have to do a process, or that even the process always has to be done in the usual way.
- Use your knowledge of IoPT theory as a support in your explanations.
- As much as you can, be compassionate and understanding...

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30

Summary

I have learnt so much from these few clients over the years, and in the end, when things really do start to change and shift, there is such a sense of mutual understanding, satisfaction and love.

"I woke up this morning feeling my age for the first time ever. I have always felt like the little girl aged 4 or 12. It's a great feeling. I never thought I would grow up but it seems that I made it!"

This client is in her early 80s, and came to me with a diagnosis of 'multiple personality disorder with over 35 personalities'.

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31

Summary

Every mistake you make as a practitioner is the journey to getting it right.

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32

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33