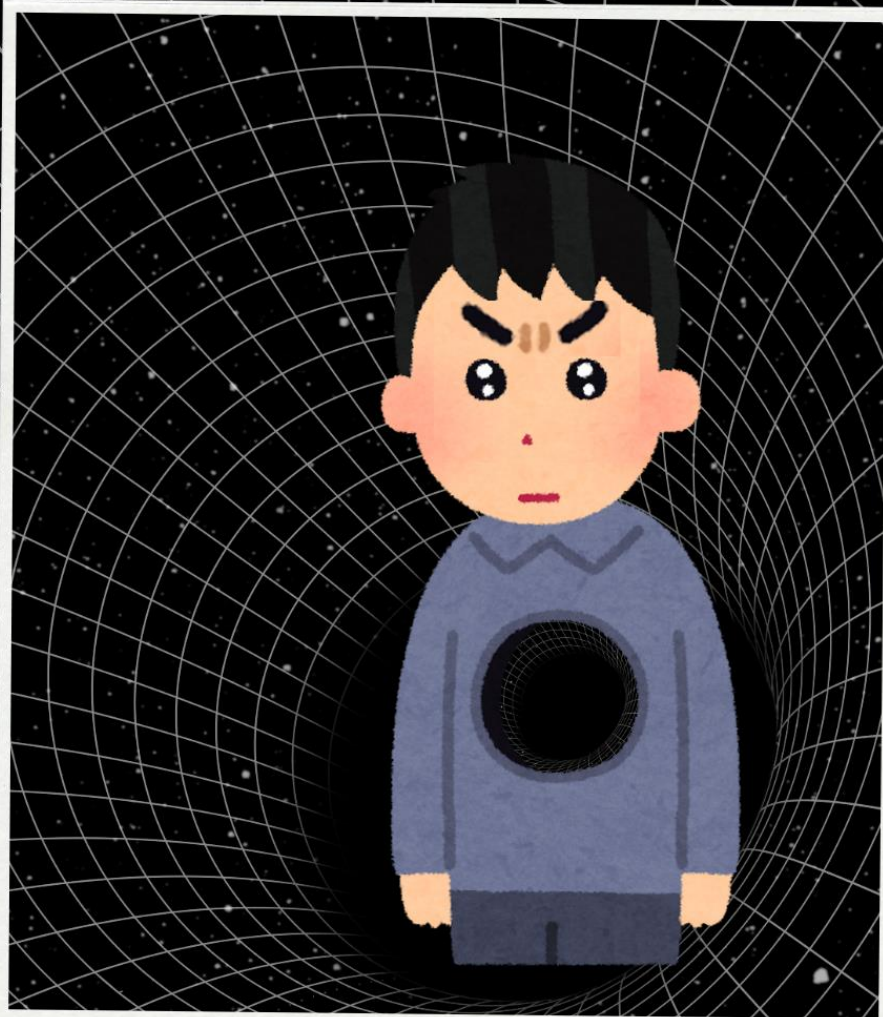


Márcia Maia & Adam Kain



Snapshotting Sam Vaknin

Narcissism illustrated and commented: guide for beginners

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5D Theory Project

*One with nature
One with the universe.
As above, so below.
A house and a ladder
Hands to reception and growth.
As above, so below.*

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To Daniel, my beloved son, because we were born together, he to the world and I to motherhood. And the only one I really loved, Gabriel.

Foreword

This book is a kaleidoscope. But rather than tilt it this way and that – it tilts you. You begin to see things the way you have never contemplated them before. The acid trip of incisive text and drawings in the naïve style is indelible.

Ostensibly, the book is a commentary on my tome, “Malignant Self-love: Narcissism Revisited”. But it is far more than that. It brings together insights from psychology, biology, and even immunology – the author’s academic fields – to throw new light on Cluster B Personality Disorders. But it is also an indictment of dysfunctional parenting (mainly motherhood). It is equally an introduction to what makes us human. Like all great works in psychology, it is actually a profoundly philosophical treaty.

Yet, the book is also a pragmatic vade mecum. A “how-to” self-help manual. An autobiographical memoir. A snapshot of our contemporary increasingly more barbaric civilization. And an art treasury.

You can agree or disagree with the theses presented in the book. But you cannot remain indifferent – or the same having read it.

Prof. Sam Vaknin, author of “Malignant Self-love: Narcissism Revisited”

Prologue

When I started watching Professor Sam Vaknin's videos on YouTube I had lost my identity – it was lost, because I had one, it's different from never having had one.

I was lost to myself, the result of decades of living with my mother's pathological narcissism and when she left, she also took the black hole she shared with me.

For years I had been physically and emotionally exhausted, working in Burnout mode I didn't even know how.

But I needed to recognize what I didn't want and couldn't live anymore, and I needed to get out of what led me to exhaustion.

It was one of the most frightening and liberating experiences to leave the job that made me sick, to leave the city that did not welcome me, to move to a country whose language I did not know.

I also had to change my view of narcissism. I've been on the other side. There was a time when it seemed like I knew a lot about the subject, until I discovered that I knew a lot about ONE narcissism, only one side of the story – and it doesn't have just two sides.

Notice, I am not defending pathology, and I would never defend abusive relationships; I defend mental health, I am defending the child behind the disease and who has taken refuge in the obscurity of his non-being; and I am inviting you to defend it along with me, and defend other children, so that they can BE. A child needs to grow – his body will grow whether he wants it or not, because biology is ruthless, it doesn't ask your permission to happen; Affective stagnation causes a distortion of self-perception and generates suffering.

If you knew that there was a way to stop this suffering, what would you do? If you could see what early intervention is and what harm reduction is, which one would you choose?

Don't say that well-structured families with psychologically healthy parents, especially the mother, are crucial to the development of a healthy childhood, and then claim that childhood trauma has little impact on the origin of personality disorders. That's a double standard of thought and sounds a lot like gaslighting.

On my journey I had someone to support me, to understand me.

Adam has been with me through this process, we share the 5D – Theory Project, he is my friend and co-author of this book, and he is the reviewer of my illustrations in the art of communicating ideas and emotions.

I saw many people leave the abusive relationship with their mother, but only change cells and remain in the same prison.

I start this book with the same insight as before I got to know Professor Sam's work in 2024: pathological narcissism is one of the worst things that can happen to a child – for an adult, the damage can be reversed. There are many things that we deny and because narcissism is denial, perhaps more important than knowing what narcissism is, is knowing what narcissism is not.

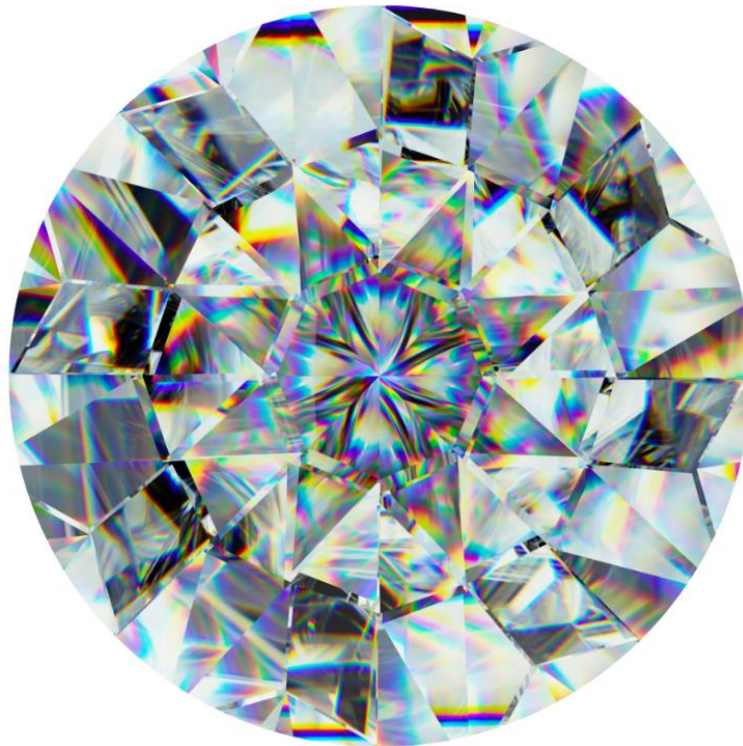
The story of this work began on my Instagram profile previously called @_kalleidoscope – it was how I felt: nameless, faceless, in pieces. What was once my journal and is definitely a journey, becomes the book that tells what I needed to understand to find myself again.

There's a quote attributed to Ernest Hemingway, one of my favorite authors, that says, "There's nothing to write about. All you do is sit in front of a typewriter and bleed." That's what I did.

Chapter 1 - Kaleidoscopically

Kaleidoscope.

An optical instrument composed of a cardboard or metal tube inside which shards of glass of varying colors and some inclined mirrors rest. With each rotation movement of the tube, the light that reflects off the mirrors and fragments, creates symmetrical images colored in a diverse combination and enchanting patterns.



Professor Sam Vaknin, author of the book *Malignant Self-Love, Narcissism Revisited*, uses the term kaleidoscope to explain the way of being in the world of people with Cluster B personality disorder, (according to the DSM-5, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5, used by psychologists and psychiatrists in many countries), especially those diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD) and those diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

It is a metaphor he uses to describe borderlines and narcissists, as his fragmented nature resembles a collection of shards.

In the words of Professor Sam Vaknin:

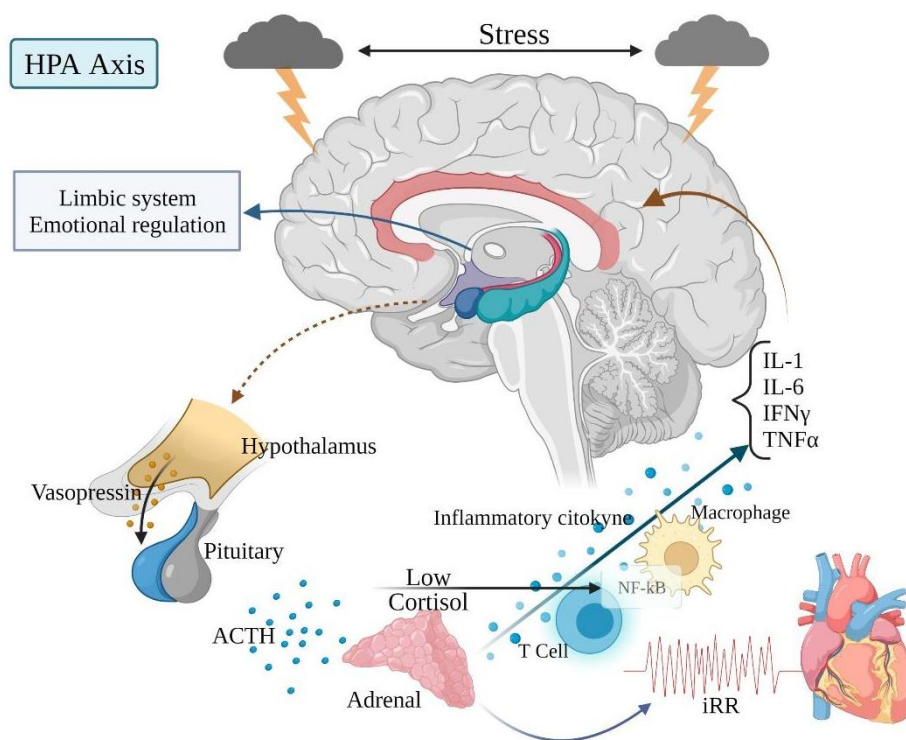
When your memory is not continuous you feel disjointed. When a lot of information about your past is missing, it would be very difficult for you to develop a core identity that is stable across time and space. So, Narcissists feel fragmented, it's like a collection of shards, or my favorite metaphor – a Kaleidoscope, that is ever revolving (Sam Vaknin – Narcissists Hyperflexible, Not Rigid: Self-supply, Psychopathy, Toxic).

Thus, narcissists (and borderlines) present what Psychology – which is one of my areas of academic training in addition to Biology – classifies as disturbance of the *self*. Several scholars have elaborated concepts of *the self*, among them Jung and Winnicott.

In a very simple way, we can understand the *self* as a person's property to perceive and recognize themselves in the environment in which they live as an authentic being, who is part of the world and interacts with it, but who, at the same time, must be positively separated from this world and from other beings that relate to each other and to the world.

Id, *Ego* and *Superego*, are the psychic instances described by Psychoanalysis and that, according to this Psychological School, constitute a floor for the emotional functioning of a person or the psychic apparatus of the person. They are immaterial structures, but they give body and support to the individual; they are to the person what the foundation is to a house: they are the foundation. Because the *Ego* of a person with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) was fragmented very early in their childhood, they have a rupture in the *self* – the person in this condition will also not have a superego that can regulate what their ego should be. Then, your unconscious starts to defend an ideal *Ego* and, thus, a false self is born.

As an Immunologist, I learned that what affects our emotions has consequences for our physiology, that is, there is an intimate relationship between body and mind, which was already recognized by Aristotle, contrary to what Descartes said with his idea of separation between mind and body.

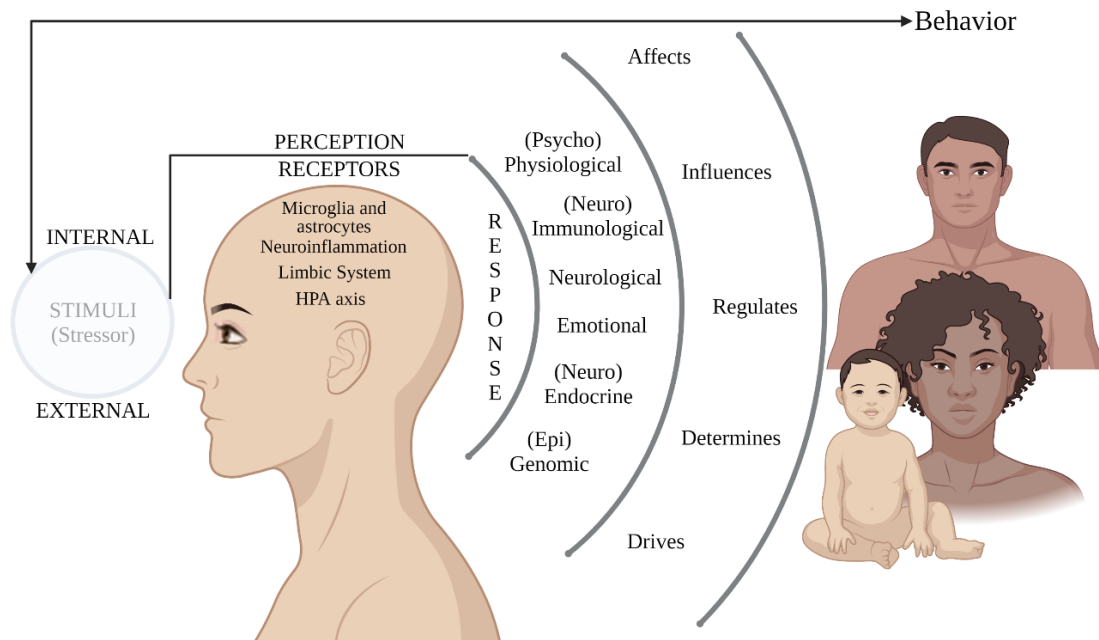


This figure above, taken from an article I published a while ago, illustrates the hypothalamus, pituitary, adrenal (HPA) axis, which acts in emotional regulation in the limbic system and shows how the constant release of the hormone cortisol when the person is under chronic stress leads to immunosuppression and a physiological response with the release into the bloodstream of pro-inflammatory substances called cytokines (Source: Created in BioRender by Serra Maia et al., 2023).

Therefore, an emotion/immune system axis is present in all the situations we go through that influence our positive emotions (love, joy, gratitude, compassion) and negative emotions (anger, resentment, fear, feeling of revenge), because our body and mind process and respond simultaneously to each situation and life experience to which we are subjected.

Each stimulus we receive from the environment, which if not we can call stressors, will trigger responses that will be perceived at the various levels of human organization, from the smallest molecules, through cells and systems, causing a cascade of release of substances that alter the functioning of the organs and triggering symptoms, most of the

time expressed externally and detectable by the difference in behavior perceived by the people in the community.



The inability or inability to establish lasting and healthy affective bonds, memory lapses, emotional dysregulation that someone faces due to traumas and development sadly corrupted by adverse childhood experiences (ACE's), produces a deep and distressing existential emptiness, because identity can never be formed. Nor would it be appropriate to attribute to this person the quality of an individual, because this stage of his development, individuation, has been interrupted, shattered into fragments that cannot be reconnected.

When the foundation was poorly made or used low quality materials, the construction does not withstand shocks, it gives way, deforms, becomes uninhabitable and all it is able to contain is an immense void.

To demonstrate the devastating power of this void, Sam Vaknin makes recurrent use in his lectures of another metaphor: black hole – like those cosmic instances that often arouse curiosity in science fiction movies and that are objects of study in quantum mechanics – by the way, in addition to being a Professor of Psychology at several universities, Sam Vaknin has a PhD in Physics and his doctoral thesis (published in 1982)

is nothing less than his own theory in the field of quantum physics: Chronon Field Theory – And we will return to it in the next book of our particular psychophysical odyssey.

I felt like a kaleidoscope when I started this journey in search of understanding and overcoming so many traumas; looking for a way to recover from a life crossed by the sexual abuse I suffered in childhood and that was practiced by my own father; and mainly, because I need, almost hopelessly, to heal the emotional wounds opened by the narcissistic abuse perpetrated by my mother, which inevitably invaded my friendships, my personal relationships, my work relationships.

This book is dedicated to what I consider the most relevant, suffering, impactful and disconcerting part of Professor Sam Vaknin's brilliant work on narcissistic abuse, but which has been left aside for many years – perhaps because in this narcissistic society in which we currently live, the most used defense mechanism is precisely denial – we start to ignore everything in an attempt to stifle the discomfort of the question that silently echoes and embarrasses us in the Maximum volume: when did people start hating children?

It is not a matter of tarnishing the image of mothers, quite the contrary. The intention is that, at the end of this work, or even before, you will be able to visualize as I did, reading Professor Sam's book, how important the mother is to the child. If as a society we do not make the decision to change, if our will, both individual and collective, is not capable of choosing to think, speak, act, love in a different, healthy way, the future will be the same as the past.

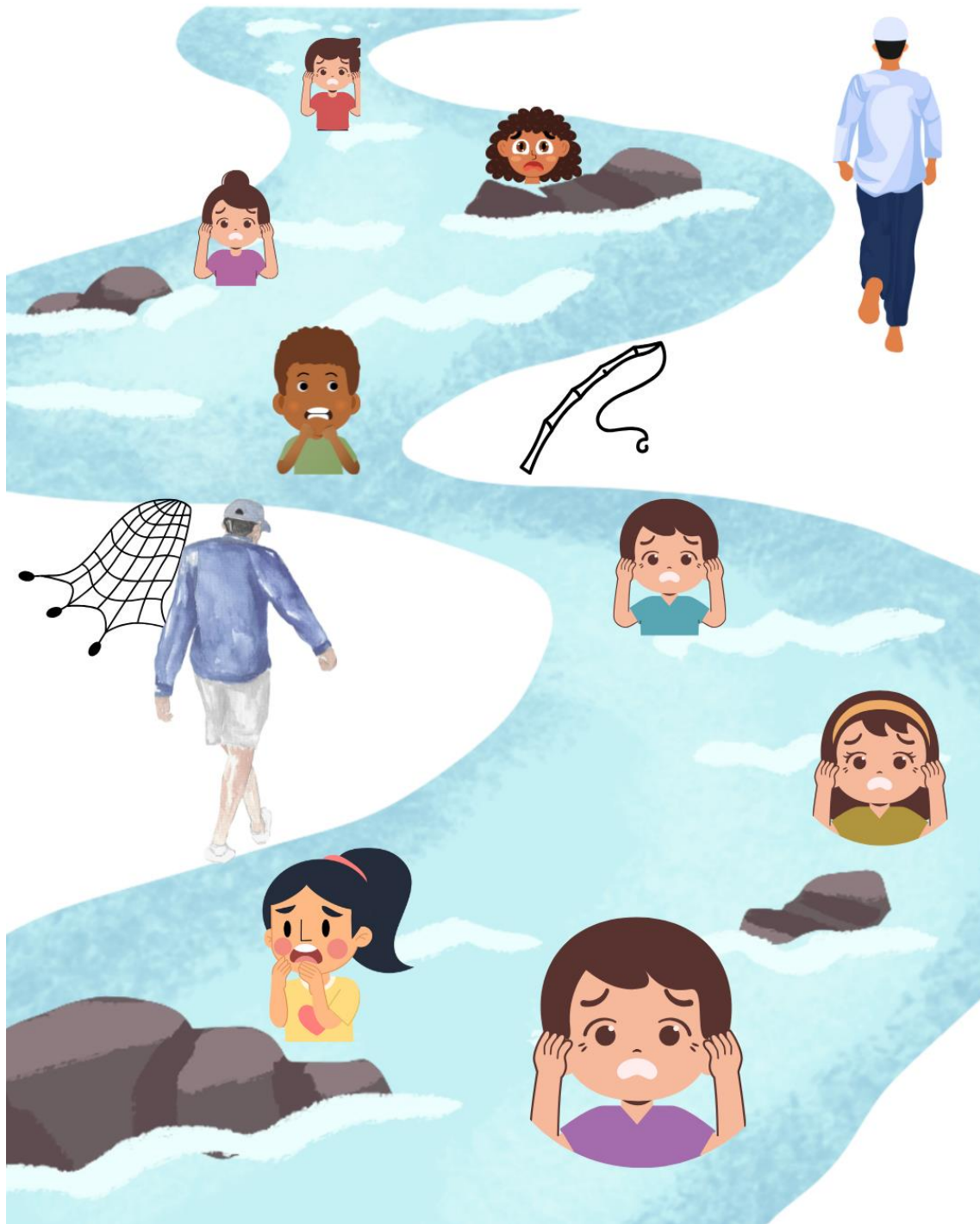
This reminds me of an old story, told by Father Antônio Queiroz, a Redemptorist missionary, and which I met quoted by a teacher, when I was still a psychology student:

Who's throwing the kids in the river

Once, two fishermen were sitting by a river, fishing. Suddenly, they hear loud screams. Looking at the top of the river, they see two children descending through the waters and asking for help. More than quickly, they throw themselves into the water and save the children.

They can barely save them; they hear more screams. Now there are four children who come, struggling in the running waters. They jump into the river and manage to save two of them.

Stunned, the fishermen hear even louder screams for the third time. This time there are 8 children coming in.



One of the fishermen turns his back on the river and starts to leave. The friend exclaims:

— Are you crazy! Won't you help me? Without stopping his steps, the other answers:

— Do what you can. I'm going to try to find out who's throwing the kids into the river.

In the previous image, it is obvious that children are in danger, that they can drown. The fisherman's attitude makes a lot of sense: go to the cause and prevent the children from being thrown into the river.

That's the point. The mere possibility that adverse childhood experiences are the preponderant, decisive factor, and primary cause of the emergence of personality disorders, should be enough to promote a change in attitude and the search for ways to better guide people before the formation of their families. That would be early intervention – whatever is done after that, after the trauma, is just harm reduction.

This book is also my form of show gratitude, and recognition; it is my particular means of giving credit to whom credit is due. It was through Professor Sam Vaknin's YouTube channel, and his personal Instagram profile, watching his daily lectures, that I was able to achieve the enlightenment I was looking for.

It was by carefully and respectfully studying his book, whose title I make a point of quoting in full on almost every page, that I deeply understood, in all layers and dimensions, the damage that a narcissistic mother, like mine was and like his was too, can cause in the lives of her children, and then I finally had what I wanted: answers.

I'm not a narcissist. But I was objectified so much, I could have been one. I had to survive so much, I could have become one.

I didn't become what hurt me and I have no other explanation for that than the fact that I didn't want to be like my mother. In the following pages we will reflect on some particularly important aspects of the meticulous and unprecedented work of Professor Sam Vaknin, illustrated by me, kaleidoscopically.

Effect of pollution

Pollution is everything that alters and negatively impacts the landscape, it is what degrades the environment, that makes the place unpleasant or uninhabitable and that leads us to perceive this environment as hostile, harmful and dangerous.

It does not have to be a radioactive material to have a corrosive effect on the people who are exposed to it.

When talking about pollution, we consider what is capable of causing damage, even if it is difficult to recognize the polluting agent. We are often so used to receiving huge amounts of pollution on a daily basis that we don't realize that we are being poisoned. This is what happens when we are bombarded with fallacious news, information coming from dubious sources.

An example of how pollution can direct our interpretation of the environment around us is the classic illustration of industrial melanism, used in evolutionary biology models to explain the supposed appearance of certain species and the disappearance of other species that share the same habitat.

The next figure illustrates the effect of pollution on two populations of moths (one light and one dark) during the Industrial Revolution. The smoke released by the chimneys of the industries began to cover an area of vegetation with dark soot, as well as the roofs of houses in the neighborhood.

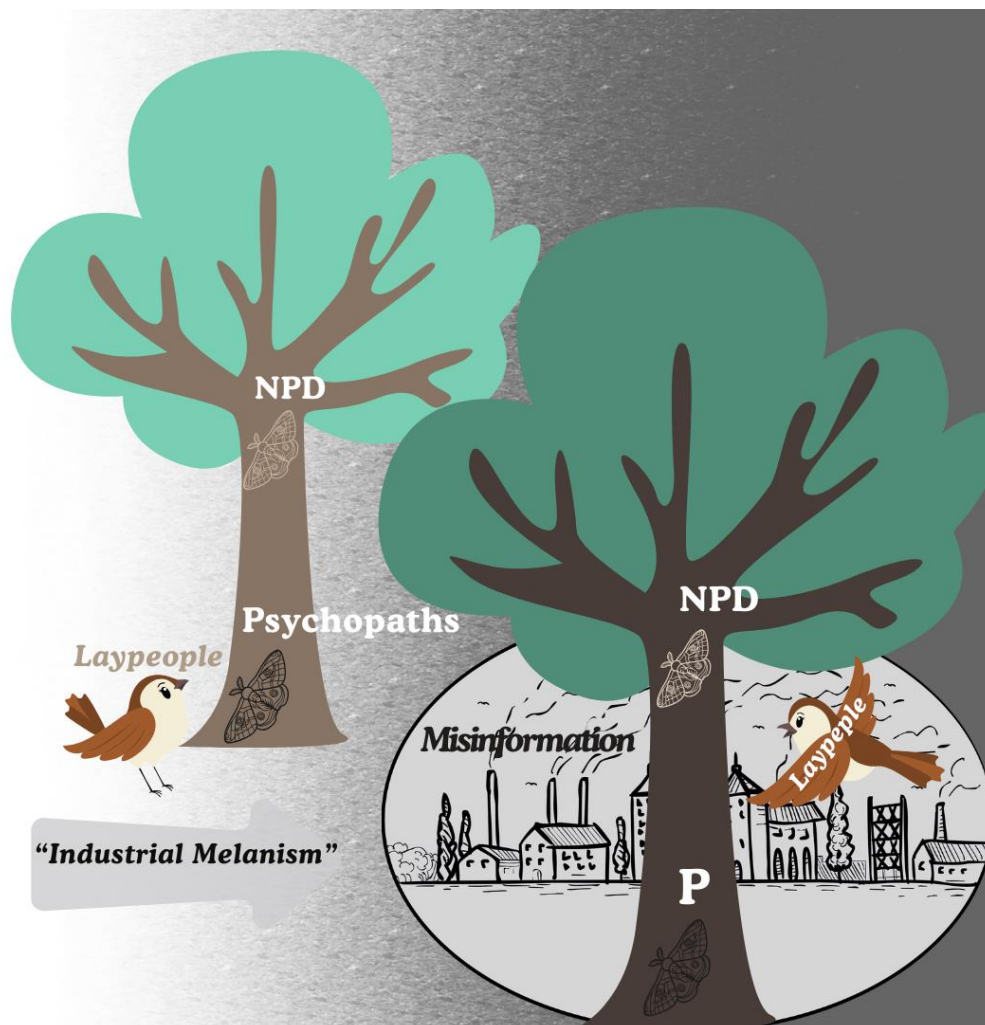
With the darkening of the tree trunks, the light moths began to become more and more in evidence becoming targets of predators, which led to a drastic reduction in this population. The dark moths, on the other hand, could be hidden, camouflaged. Becoming less apparent to predators, the population of dark moths then began to increase.

Population, in Ecology, refers to the set of organisms belonging to the same species and living in a given area. In statistics, population is a cut, or a collection of elements (values, people, events) to be studied.

In the fragment: "In the digital era, misinformation spread about personality disorders works as pollution. It darkens judgment by pointing to mixed traits and superficial behaviors. This contributes to the fabrication of a pandemic of narcissism that

easily camouflages psychopaths" – obtained as a conclusion after attending several lectures by Professor Sam Vaknin – using the illustration of industrial melanism as a metaphor, we understand how the population of Narcissists seems to suffer a kind of demographic explosion due to the volume of inaccurate information that is spread online every day.

Of course, we will not and could not belittle the experience of each one, because it is from it that we build strategies to better deal with the adverse situations of life. But there are rigorous means to do this and the personal account itself is not the official scientific communication.



Here it is worth clarifying the rules of service and protection of intellectual property. A characteristic that I have in common with Professor Sam – the care with referencing. Usually, when I can't find the source of a certain quote, it remains in quotation marks as an indication that I know that creation is not mine, I just don't know who to attribute the authorship to.

So, below are some guidelines that can help you understand what Professor Sam Vaknin constantly draws attention to and that, unfortunately, in the digital era is so difficult to combat:

You need to reference every time you use other people's work. This can include: ideas, words, data, designs, images, music, computer code. Whatever the source of information: website, textbook, newspaper article, magazine, newspaper, YouTube video, or social media site, if you've quoted, paraphrased, or summarized someone else's work, you need to reference. (<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/academic-skills-kit/good-academic-practice/referencing/> Accessed November 27, 2024)

You must reference any words, ideas, or information you obtain from another source, including: Books and articles from periodicals, newspapers and magazines, pamphlets or brochures, films, documentaries, television programs or advertisements, websites or electronic resources, letters, emails, online discussion forums, personal interviews, speakers, or tutors (<https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/why-referencing-important> Accessed November 27, 2024)

You should reference the information when: Copying words from an exact source (quote), using an idea or fact from an outside source even if you did not use your exact words (paraphrasing and summarizing (<https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/why-referencing-important> Accessed November 27, 2024)

You should avoid referencing your own lived experiences, observations, insights, thoughts, and conclusions about a subject. You also need to reference when reprinting diagrams, illustrations, charts, or images. (<https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/why-referencing-important> Accessed November 27, 2024)

The only source of material you can use in an essay without attribution is material that is considered common knowledge and is therefore not attributable to a source.

Common knowledge is information generally known to an educated reader, such as widely known facts and dates and, more rarely, ideas or language. <https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/exception-common-knowledge> Accessed November 27, 2024).

To successfully reference, it is essential that you naturally systematically write down all the author details, date, title, and publication details of any material you use at the time you use it. For web pages, e-journals, and e-books, make a note of the access URL and the date you accessed the source. (<https://www.thestudyspace.com/page/referencing-and-avoiding-plagiarism/> Accessed November 27, 2024).

According to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO, (2020), intellectual property (IP) refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; projects; and symbols, names and images used in commerce.

Intellectual Property (IP) is protected by law, for example, by patents, copyrights, and trademarks, which allow people to gain recognition or financial benefit from what they invent or create. By striking the right balance between the interests of innovators and the broader public interest, the IP system aims to foster an environment in which creativity and innovation can flourish

Psychopaths and narcissists would have a profile consistent with those who would most likely be inclined to disregard intellectual property. Narcissists because they easily convince themselves that the idea is or could be theirs; Psychopaths, much more serious, can see potential in the idea and simply steal it to achieve a goal – it is an example, it cannot be taken as a rule.

With the ever-increasing volume of unreliable information – yes, because it is often spread motivated by strong negative emotion: resentment, hatred, a feeling of revenge, aggressiveness and destruction – and these feelings notably prevent people from interpreting events with a minimum of impartiality necessary for them not to perpetuate the same behavior that caused them suffering – one of the consequences is the difficulty in recognizing borderlines, narcissists and psychopaths and differentiate them from other everyday people, who, although they may have character flaws and be unpleasant from time to time, do not have a diagnosable personality disorder.

Another consequence that the metaphor of industrial melanism presents is the camouflage of psychopaths. While the world with a partial view takes notice of narcissistic personality disorder, psychopathy falls by the wayside. Literally, psychopaths have gone unnoticed, often even considered a step forward in evolution, they get confused with the other people in the crowd, they could be anyone.

Misinformation has been turning a serious mental health problem into a witch hunt like the one in the medieval period. I do not intend here to exonerate people who practice any type of abuse, but as a mental health professional I have an ethical commitment and I need to treat the matter with impartiality, responsibility, care and respect, even though it is also a subject that affects me particularly.

It is important to remember that the narcissist was once a child. And a child who did not have the chance to be a child fully. Physically the child has become an adult for all the practical purposes that society demands, but internally he is as dysfunctional as his family of origin.

Information transmitted without criteria or scientific rigor has the power to promote collective hysteria and, thus, disseminating messages of hatred, encouraging violence.

The WHO (World Health Organization) in its slogan "There is no health without mental health" conveys the message clearly: people with mental disorders are not healthy people in various aspects of their lives and they need treatment, not prejudice and segregation.

This is also the message conveyed by Sam Vaknin in his lectures. If you pay attention, you will understand this.

As a health professional, not only in mental health, the greatest commitment must be to adopt a posture that does not generate more suffering.

Sanism or psychophobia is given to the aversion that "normal" people feel towards those who are either neurodivergent, or who have any condition of mental illness alone or in comorbidity with other psychiatric illnesses or not.

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that allows people to cope with life's stresses, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our

individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships, and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial for personal, community, and socio-economic development (WHO, 2022).

Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to another, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes.

Mental health conditions include mental disorders and psychosocial impairments, as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impaired functioning, or risk of self-harm. People with mental health problems are more likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being, but this is not always or necessarily the case (WHO, 2022).

According to the DSM-5, a mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior. This disorder reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. It should also cause significant distress or disability and not just be an expected reaction to common stressors or losses.

Mental illnesses are health conditions that involve changes in emotion, thinking, or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses can be associated with distress and/or functioning problems in social, professional or family activities.

Mental illness refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders – health conditions that involve:

1. Significant changes in thinking, emotion, and/or behavior.
2. Distress and/or functioning problems in social, professional or family activities.

Mental illness does not discriminate, it can affect anyone, regardless of their age, gender, geography, income, social status, race, ethnicity, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation, origin, or other aspect of cultural identity. Although mental illness can occur at any age, three-quarters of all mental illnesses begin at age 24 (American Psychiatric Association, 2025).

Mental illnesses take many forms. Some are mild and interfere only in a limited way with daily life, such as some phobias (abnormal fears). Other mental health conditions are so severe that a person may need care in a hospital. Similar to other medical illnesses, the optimal ways to deliver care depend on the illness and the severity of its impact (American Psychiatric Association, 2025)

Personality is the way of thinking, feeling, and behaving that makes a person different from other people. Personality refers to an individual's pattern of behavior and traits that are long-standing and present since adolescence or early adulthood. Aspects of personality include the way people tend to think about themselves (e.g., self-confident or unconfident), how they relate to people (e.g., shy versus friendly), how they interpret and deal with events in the environment, and how they react emotionally to all of this.

Some people are easygoing, while others are controlling and demanding. Some people are good at telling jokes, others don't like to be the center of attention, but they like to laugh at others by telling jokes. Some people are carefree and fun, but they may not be very responsible when it comes to being on time for an appointment. Others may be less emotional, but they can be counted on when they say they will do something. Having a bad temper. Be withdrawn. Have a good sense of humor. Be generous. Being a perfectionist or careless. Be reserved. Be a lover of fun. These are all descriptions of personality traits. When personality traits become extreme, when they are rigid and inflexible and make it difficult to deal with people and deal with life's problems, the person may have a personality disorder.

An individual's personality is influenced by experiences, environment, life situations, and inherited characteristics, and usually, it remains the same over time.

It's not easy to define a "healthy personality," but in general, it allows you to cope with the normal stresses of life and develop and maintain satisfying friendships and close relationships. Of course, everyone has a bad day and behaves unusually at times. However, when long-standing patterns of thinking, behavior, and emotional response are rigid, inflexible, and cause significant distress or impairment in functioning, a personality disorder is diagnosed.

To be classified as a personality disorder, the way of thinking, feeling, and behaving deviates from the expectations of the culture, causes distress or functioning

problems, and endures over time. The pattern of experience and behavior usually begins in late adolescence or early adulthood and causes distress or functioning problems. Without treatment, personality disorders can be long-lasting.

A diagnosis of personality disorder requires a mental health professional to assess long-term patterns of functioning and symptoms. People under the age of 18 are typically not diagnosed with personality disorders because their personalities are still developing. Some people with personality disorders may not recognize a problem. In addition, a person may have more than one personality disorder.

Personality disorders (PDs) are defined as "an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, begins in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress or disability." It is categorized into three groups (A, B, and C), personality changes due to another medical condition, other specific personality disorders, and unspecified personality disorders. Cluster B or dramatic cluster consists of 4 subtypes, which are antisocial, borderline, histrionic, and narcissistic PD (Arlington et al., 2013).

They are overly demanding, manipulative, emotionally unstable, interpersonally inappropriate, and may attempt to create relationships that cross professional boundaries that put physicians in difficult or compromising positions (Randy & Ward, 2004). Cluster B PDs are the most common personality disorders in clinical settings and are characterized by severe functional impairments, substantial treatment utilization, and a high suicide mortality rate, which is 50 times higher than the rate in the general population (Gunderson et al, 2002; Oldham et al., 2005).

People with these disorders have psychosocial functioning problems, suicidal behaviors, and more psychiatric comorbidities, especially with other personality disorders, substance misuse, and other axis I conditions (Health et al., 2009; Hasin et al., 2007; Lenzenweger et al., 2008). Patients with comorbidity of axis I and cluster B PD had early onset, more severe suicide attempts, hospitalizations, self-harm behaviors, and more impairment of functioning than patients with axis I disorders alone (Gunderson et al, 2002, Apfelbaum, et al., 2013; Jemal et al., 2022).

Axis I is composed of clinical disorders that include conditions such as anxiety disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia.

Cluster B personality disorders are the most frequent among outpatients (Zimmerman et al., 2005; Shea et al., 2004); have the highest prevalence of any co-occurrence with other mental illnesses (83.8%) with a predominance of mood disorders (48.8%) (Shea et al., 2004). Globally, the overall estimate of the prevalence of group B personality disorders among outpatients with mental illness was 23% (Bezerra-Filho et al., 2015), ranging from 9.8% (Zhang et al., 2012) to 66.7% (Zheng et al., 2019). It influences the prognosis, costs, and treatment response of many clinical syndromes; increases patient morbidity and mortality and is significantly associated with global, cognitive, and social interaction impairments (Zheng et al., 2019; Sadock et al., 2015;). In addition, personality disorders are a predisposing factor for many other psychiatric disorders, including substance use disorders, suicide, mood disorders, impulse control disorders, eating disorders, and anxiety disorders (Sadock et al., 2015; Santana et al., 2018; Jemal et al., 2022).

A society that wants to eradicate a disease or unwanted behavior, but is not interested in solving the issue that is the most likely cause of the condition, is nothing more than a hygienist society, accustomed to sweeping its most complex issues under the rug.

Dealing with a person's mental health is not as simple as it seems. Even professionals in psychology and psychiatry, if they do not have the proper training specifically focused on Group B personality disorders, and on the methodologies of coping after abuse and trauma, are subject to applying an approach that can further impair the person's quality of life.

Any information passed on without commitment to the truth and that primarily aims at profit, is only a tool that can ultimately be recognized as quackery, especially if it impacts less enlightened people and those who have been emotionally fragile for long periods of time.

This is what Professor Sam Vaknin has been talking about in numerous of his online lectures: how the proliferation of profiles of *coaches* who call themselves experts in Narcissism has been impacting people's lives, not exclusively those who have been in abusive relationships, whether in romantic relationships or in the relationship with members of the family of origin.

Sam Vaknin draws attention to the strategy used by these profiles to attract clients, mostly vulnerable or suggestible people, who assumed the identity of perpetual victims; who, refusing to, according to psychoanalysis, recognize their own participation in the disorder that their personal life has become, are easily attracted to new abusive relationships, since the strategy is part of the psychodynamics of people with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD): *Lovebombing*:

When they excessively, daily, massively validate your suffering, in order to sell you a 5 hundred steps healing journey. They trauma bond you, and hold you in a brand-new shared fantasy where you are flawless. And then, dear Alice, you will never leave Wonderland (Conclusion from Sam Vaknin's lectures – in reference to one of his favorite books "Alice in Wonderland):



The trap is the same one used in the narcissistic abuse they say they'll cure you of and that they swear they're against: selling an overvalued (and temporary) idea of yourself to the potential buyer. The idealized image is only attractive to those who are living in a bubble, for whom escaping reality has become a routine and this is the easiest way not to take responsibility when things go wrong, it is a defense mechanism called alloplastic defense, widely used by patients with NPD and psychopaths, where no matter what happens, It's always someone else's fault.

As Professor Sam Vaknin says, "mentally healthy people usually do not enter into abusive relationships, it can even happen, but it is rarer"; Because people don't stay in toxic relationships because they like it, they stay because it's family and they don't know how to function outside of this type of relationship.

Chapter 2 – Echo and Narcissus: Revisited



Book III of the work *Metamorphoses*, by the Roman poet Ovid, brings the myth originally written in Latin, telling in the form of poetry, the stories of Narcissus and the nymph Echo.

In the story, the river-God Cephissus forcibly took the nymph Liriope into his own waters. Liriope gave birth to a baby with whom everyone could fall in love instantly, even at this age, such was his beauty, and she named him Narcissus.

When he asked the local seer if Narcissus would reach maturity and adulthood, the prophet replied: "if he does not know himself."

enixa est utero pulcherrima pleno infantem nymphe,
iam tunc qui posset amari, Narcissumque vocat. "de
quo consultus, an esset tempora maturae visurus
longa senectae, fatidicus vates 'si se non noverit'
inquit."

she gave birth to a nymph with a womb full of
beauty, a child, who could then be loved, and
named Narcissus. About him, having been
consulted whether he would see his old age as long,
the fateful oracle said: "if he does not know

At sixteen, Narciso was beautiful, happy and very popular. He was desired by many young men and many nymphs, and not corresponding to any of those who were enchanted by him, he caused irritation to all.

Echo was a nymph skilled with words, "had a rumbling tongue" and could entertain anyone for hours. At the request of Jupiter (Zeus, in Greek mythology), who descended in search of another nymph, she would delay Juno (Hera, in Greek mythology), Jupiter's wife, so that he could escape his wife's fury, if she discovered the betrayal. Juno, realizing the plan, turned her wrath against Echo, who was cursed by the goddess never to utter her own words again, being condemned to repeat the final words of the speeches

of others. Echo began to live hidden in caves, surrounded by the forest, wherever anyone passed by and something spoke, she would resound her final words.

Echo loved Narcissus the moment she laid eyes on him – she still had a body when she saw him for the first time, she followed him through the fields, watched him, wanted to get closer, but she could not speak to him because she no longer had a voice.

Alone, she imagined a scenario and a script where Narcissus would have approached, but the interaction does not work out and in her delirium, in a completely imaginary and unsuccessful dialogue, Echo suffers a devastating rejection.

Echo isolated himself even more and languished until only his bones were left abandoned in the cave, and his voice remained repeating the last words of whoever spoke among his trees and caves.

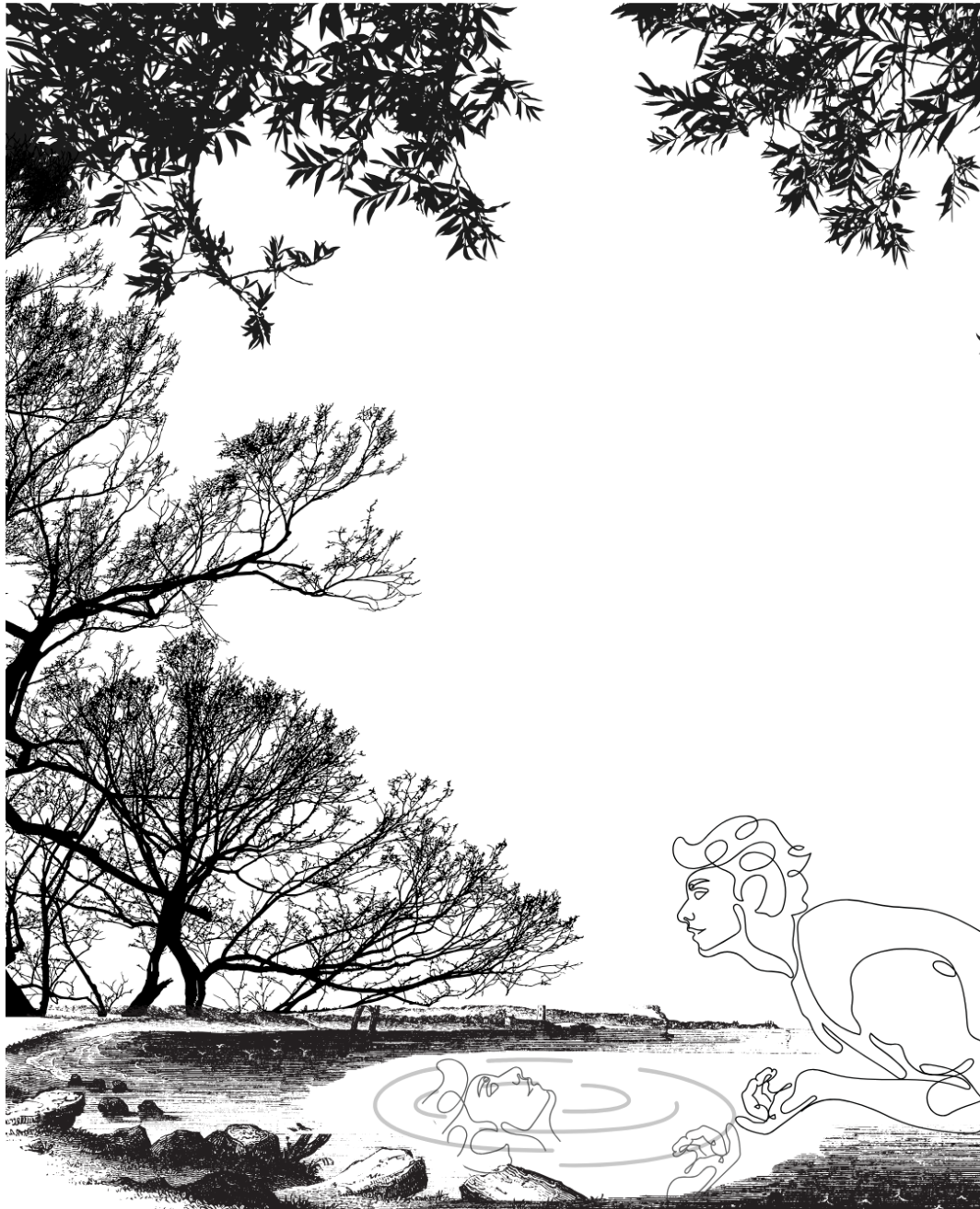
The other nymphs and the young men revolted because of the disdain of Narcissus who was not interested in any of them, and someone among them said a "prayer":

sic coetus ante viriles; inde manus aliquis despectus
ad aethera tollens 'sic amet ipse licet, sic non potiatur
amato!'dixerat: adsensit precibus Rhamnusia iustis.

So, this so other nymphs born of the waves or
mountains played here, so the group before men;
from there some hand, despised, rising in the air. 'So,
he may love himself, so he may not possess the
beloved!' said: Rhamnusia agreed with the righteous
prayers.

Tired of hunting in the forest, Narcissus approached a small lake in search of relieving his thirst.

hic puer et studio venandi lassus et aestu
procubuit faciemque loci fontemque secutus, dumque sitim
sedare cupit, sitis altera crevit, dumque bibit, visae correptus
immagine formae spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse, quod
umbra est. adstupet ipse sibi vultuque inmotus eodem haeret, ut e
Pario formatum marmore signum;



This child, tired of hunting and the heat, has prostrated himself, following the face of the place and the fountain, and while he wants to quench his thirst, another thirst grows, while he drinks, taken by the image of the form he has seen, he loves hope without a body, he thinks that the body is what is shadow. He himself is astonished, and with an impassive face he clings to her, as to a sign made of Paros

Seeing his image reflected in the sheet of water, he was impressed, lay down on the grass and loved that image.

cunctaque miratur, quibus est mirabilis ipse:
se cupit inprudens et, qui probat, ipse probatur, dumque
petit, petitur, pariterque accendit et ardet.

and he marvels at all that makes him wonderful: he desires himself unwisely, and he who approves is approved, and since he asks, he is asked, and he inflames and burns alike.

Narcissus dived into the water in search of the image, and realizing his mistake, returned disappointed to the edge of the lake. He could never leave the lake, his body weakened and just like Echo, he languished and his life ended.

quae simul adspexit liquefacta rursus in unda, non tulit ulterius, sed
ut intabescere flavae igne levi cerae matutinaeque pruinae sole
tepente solent, sic attenuatus amore liquitur et tecto paulatim carpitur
igni; et neque iam color est mixto candore rubori, nec vigor et vires
et quae modo visa placebant, nec corpus remanet, quondam quod
amaverat Echo.

which he saw melted again in the water, he went no further, but just as yellow wax and morning frost are wont to melt in the light fire of the morning sun, so, weakened by love, he melts, and is gradually torn from his roof by the fire; and there is no longer any color mixed with the whiteness of his blush, nor any vigor and strength that pleased him now, nor is there left the body that Echo once loved.

quae tamen ut vidit, quamvis irata memorque,
indoluit, quotiensque puer miserabilis 'eheu'
dixerat, haec resonis iterabat vocibus 'eheu';
cumque suos manibus percusserat ille lacertos,
haec quoque reddebat sonitum plangoris eundem.
ultima vox solitam fuit haec spectantis in undam:
'heu frustra dilecte puer!' totidemque remisit
verba locus, dictoque vale 'vale' inquit et Echo.

ille caput viridi fessum submisit in herba,
lumina mors clausit domini mirantia formam:
tum quoque se, postquam est inferna sede receptus,
in Stygia spectabat aqua. planxere sorores
naides et sectos fratri posuere capillos,
planxerunt dryades; plangentibus adsonat Echo.
iamque rogum quassasque faces feretrumque parabant:

His sisters and brothers mourned his loss and Echo repeated and resounded through the surrounding forest all the groans and wails of sorrow that Narcissus was gone forever.

Narcissus' sisters, when they returned with a pyre to the place where they thought they had left him, did not find him again. In the place where Narcissus' body had previously rested inert, there was only a yellow flower, with white leaves around it.

But when she saw, though angry and conscious, she felt pain, and whenever the unfortunate boy said, "Woe is me!" she repeated in echoes, "Woe is me!" and when he struck his own arms with his hands, they also emitted the same sound of lamentation. The last voice was the usual one, his looking at the wave: "Woe is me, beloved child, in vain!" and the place answered with the same number of words, and having said goodbye, "Farewell!" also said Echo.

He lowered his green and weary head on the grass, the light death closed the form of the lord in admiration: so also, after he was received on the throne of hell, the water beheld him in the Styx. The sisters wept and put their hair in their brother's hair, the dryads wept; Eco echoed in his lamentation. And now they have prepared a pyre, torches, and a bier: there was no body anywhere; Instead of a body, they found a yellow flower, with white leaves around the center.



The Narcissus flower belongs to the Amaryllidaceae family and its scientific name is *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*. It is one of the first plants to bloom in late winter, being native to Europe and heralding the beginning of spring. The Narcissus flower was once commonly used in folk medicine and traditional medicine. However, part of its use is due to the presence of phenanthridine alkaloids, calcium oxalate crystals and lycorine, compounds that are toxic to humans and some animals. These substances were used to induce vomiting in sick people.

In addition to these properties, Narcissus extract can cause numbness, hallucinations, seizures, and have cardiac effects. The extract has also been used in the treatment of wounds and burns. However, its use is not recommended. Its consumption is dangerous and can lead to fatalities, while its handling can generate skin problems such as allergies and hives.

Although the bulb is the most dangerous part of the plant, the entire structure of the flower can be toxic and requires care when handling, such as wearing gloves and potentially goggles. It is recommended that gloves be discarded afterwards or washed to avoid exposure to the toxic substances released by the plant.

When talking about the myth of Narcissus, usually the part that suggests that there could or should be a relationship between him and the nymph Echo is omitted.

Echo was a girl prodigy, quick-witted, confident, but naïve. Jupiter, unscrupulously, entrusted an innocent girl with covering up his betrayals and even made her a shield against a wife whose jealousy was unhealthy, but not unfounded, and an extremely vengeful woman (a goddess). Juno, for her part, didn't think twice about shifting the blame for her husband's disloyalty to a girl who only did his bidding, a god!

Echo suffered abuse twice: first when she was parentified by Jupiter, who did not take responsibility for her own actions and refused to behave properly as a married "man", and then when she was silenced by Juno.

Yes, Juno stole Echo's voice. Juno made an unfortunate and cruel choice, and one that shows exactly what was most important to her: no matter the circumstances or who would suffer the consequences of her arbitrariness, at any cost, she would keep her husband by her side – even if, in fact, he wasn't there.

Without a voice of his own, Echo would not be able to communicate properly with Narcissus or anyone else. Echo's seclusion and the fact that she was only allowed to repeat what she heard illustrate loneliness and the obligation to keep secret, never revealing what she knows, because there will be punishment. Alone, Echo is delirious in an imaginary world where there is the possibility of being happy, but she is frustrated.

Narcissus was only 16 years old and was coveted, disputed, persecuted, and as if it were normal, at birth he was already eroticized and reduced to an object; mere object of desire of acquaintances and strangers, adults, experienced people, who should take care of him, love him and respect him.

It is no coincidence that Narcissus loses his lucidity in front of a watercourse. It was in the waters of the river Cephissus that his mother, the nymph Liriope, was raped by the father of Narcissus, after whom the river is named, and he, Narcissus, was then conceived.

My interpretation is that the sheet of water was Narcissus' mirror, but a mirror shows an inverted image of the outer world, and symbolizes the truth about the inner world – both the emotions held and the secrets held. The outward image, beautiful, was consistent with what others saw, but the story of its origin was the opposite. Narcissus does not see himself, he knows himself – as the prophecy recommended him not to do. What Narcissus feels when he looks at himself in the lake is not love or vanity, it is despair and disorientation. Narcissus wants to be the same as what others see, but he can't anymore.

He repeatedly tries to win over the boy in the reflecting pool that seems to correspond to the interest; Narcissus needs to reconcile his inner and outer selves, but he can't and is taken by the illusion that the one who ripples in the lake is real.

The visualization of oneself means the loss of innocence and its introduction to suffering. The obsession with the reflected image means the denial of your true self, of your origin that was tainted by the violence suffered by your mother. The water reveals to Narcissus something that he, who was not yet an adult, could not bear. He doesn't want that history, he doesn't want to be the result of that horror – it's painful, it's ugly, it's unacceptable, it's unbearable.

Narcissus stood there, prostrate, not by the lake, but motionless, on the edge of madness, as if trying to ensure that things are always the same as what he sees. It doesn't happen, and it wouldn't happen, because after certain events we will never be the same or achieve what we could have been.

The death of Narcissus represents what must die in us in order for us to flourish. Narcissus does not simply die, he transmutes and goes from human to flower – it is a metaphor for his metamorphosis – his main petals are the color of the sun that is reborn every day, and shows how thin the line that separates resilience from compulsive repetition is. And now reinstated, Narcissus admits the good and evil inherent in the human condition, symbolized by a yellow flower, so beautiful, but which has a poisonous base, and you can get close and even touch it if you are well equipped, but if you have already experienced its toxicity, it may be best not to keep in touch.

The name is Narcissism

We are all narcissists to some degree. But healthy narcissism is adaptive, flexible, empathic, causes elation and joy (happiness), and helps us to function. Pathological narcissism is maladaptive, rigid, persisting, and causes significant distress, and functional impairment.

(Malignant Self-love – Narcissism Revisited, Pg. 40)

We are living in a time when the existence of pathological narcissism is globally recognized, as Professor Sam Vaknin says, we are living through a pandemic of Narcissism, but it is ignored that in order to have the indicative nomenclature of an illness, a corresponding state of health is necessary.

This means that a certain narcissism is indispensable to all human beings. It is this healthy narcissism that we must cultivate and that is linked to our authentic being, to our identity.

Healthy narcissism is what allows human beings to correctly assess the environment in which they are inserted and make decisions so as not to put themselves in unnecessary risk situations. This is because this is the narcissism that Freud called primary, which underlies self-love and allows the then individual to develop the appropriate sense of preservation of life.

According to what I have been able to notice in several of Professor Sam Vaknin's online lectures, pathological narcissism can be identified in institutions, modes of production, organizations, political relations of the state with the people, and other social structures.

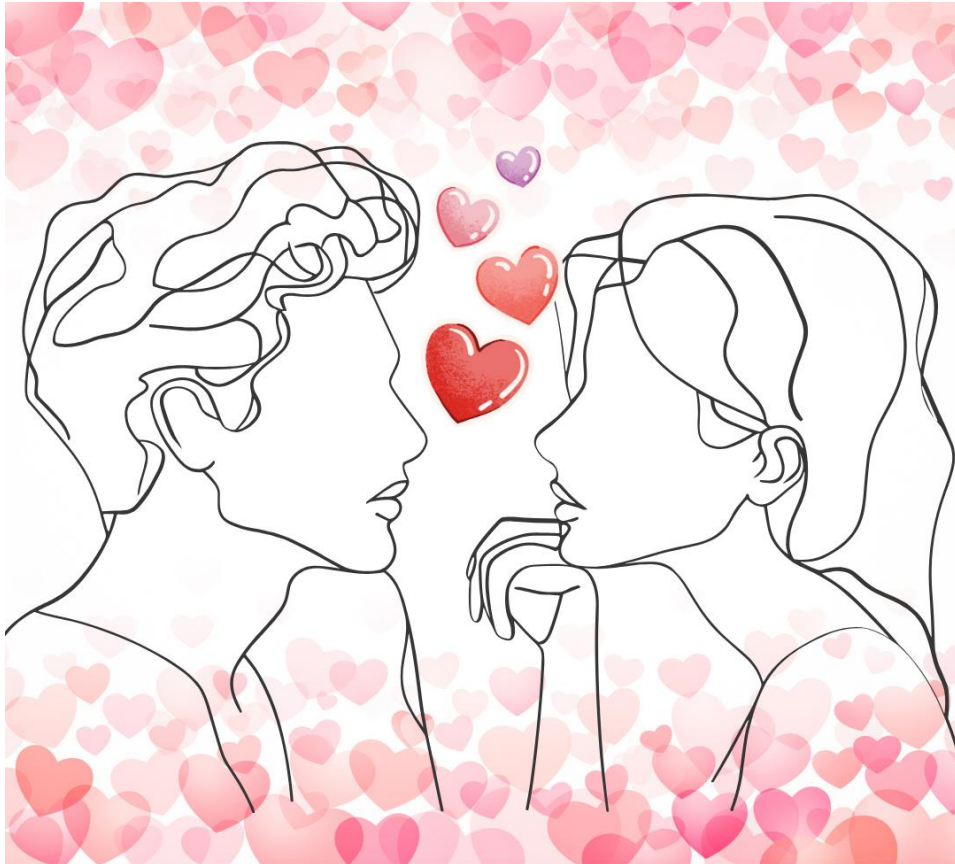
But in this context, nothing is as devastating as pathological narcissism in affective relationships, especially with regard to its desolate appearance in the family of origin and, consequently, spreading throughout adult life, preventing the person from establishing healthy relationships with a life partner.

The myth of Narcissus described by Greek Mythology presents us with a scenario that over the years has undergone changes in its meaning and that need to be rescued from time to time, as Professor Sam did, as we can see in the two excerpts in sequence below:

Narcissists are said to be in love with themselves. But this is a fallacy. Narcissus is not in love with himself. He is in love with his reflection. (Malignant Self-love – Narcissism Revisited Pg. 67)



The popular misconception is that narcissists love themselves. In reality, they direct their love at other people's impressions of them. He who loves only impressions is incapable of loving people, himself included. (Sam Vaknin. Malignant Self-love –



An idealized image remains only an image: inert, static, inanimate. An image does not speak, does not feel, does not love. Why would anyone be enchanted by a statue? It is possibly a metaphor for a state of torpor to which the child, in the face of the torment of an abusive "home", has to submit himself, but also because the immutable does not pose a risk, does not question, does not abdo.

This is one of the most prominent aspects of this disorder, Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), according to Sam Vaknin, *a systemic and ubiquitous condition, (...) an inseparable part of the personality, a recurrent, intractable, and deeply ingrained set of behavior patterns.* (Malignant Self-love – Narcissism Revisited Pg. 320)

In narcissism, among other characteristics, the affected person takes on an image that is offered to those who approach him as if this image were authentic, and when the other believes, the Narcissist immediately begins to suspect that the narcissist of the newly formed pair is, in fact, the other.

The ideal of perfection is based on oppression, silencing, invisibility, and the denial of oneself for a satisfaction that is as utopian as it is ephemeral. Perfection is an illusion that enslaves and exhausts emotionally.



On his YouTube channel, Sam Vaknin has numerous lectures dedicated to shedding light on the psychological dynamics that drive the behaviors of people with NPD. Although many of the striking patterns and traits can be recognized, they still present high complexity. In chapter 5, some of the main psychodynamics are presented in the form of an infographic, a resource to illustrate what is happening internally, but

which, in general, can be perceived externally, especially by people in the Narcissist's direct contact. In one of his speeches, Sam Vaknin draws attention to the fact that:

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is a disease. It is defined only by and in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). All other "definitions" and compilations of "criteria" are irrelevant and very misleading. People go around putting together lists of traits and behaviors (usually based on their experience with one person who was never officially diagnosed as a narcissist) and deciding that these lists constitute the essence or definition of narcissism. People are erroneously using the term "narcissist" to describe every type of abuser, or obnoxious and uncouth person. That is wrong. Not all abusers are narcissists. (Malignant Self-love – Narcissism Revisited Pg. 37)



The indiscriminate use of diagnostic criteria to label someone with any disorder is increasingly frequent, as if appropriate professional training and clinical practice were not necessary for the management of psychological assessment instruments.

É assustador o número crescente de perfis on-line de pessoas que se tornam especialistas em transtorno de personalidade narcisista em função de uma suposta experiência pessoal traumatizante.

In some places in the world, it is necessary to complete a long 6 years of a psychology course at the University (as mine was in Brazil), between internships in a clinic-school, participation in congresses, publication of articles in scientific journals and periodicals and other activities that are part of the theoretical-practical framework, such as Lato Sensu Graduate and Stricto Sensu Graduate Studies, For example – not to mention the courses to learn how to use psychological assessment instruments restricted to use by psychology professionals.

To date, there is no control by educational institutions or competent bodies in mental health that can monitor the content of information disseminated on social networks, nor even by a regulatory body that is in charge of protecting intellectual property online.

It is worth mentioning Professor Sam Vaknin's explanation where he points out that:

“Only a qualified mental health diagnostician can determine whether someone suffers from Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) and this, following lengthy tests and personal interviews. It is true enough that narcissists can mislead even the most experienced professional, let alone a layman. The same signs and symptoms may apply with equal force to several psychological problems. Differentiating between them takes years of learning, specialized training, qualifications, and experience. (Malignant Self-love – Narcissism Revisited Pg. 37)



Five or more of the nine DSM diagnostic criteria must be met in order for a diagnosis of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) to be made. (Sam Vaknin, Malignant Self-love – Narcissism Revisited Pg. 38)

Vaknin also highlights in his lectures that the criteria found in official evaluations of people who are in regular psychotherapeutic follow-up are not always the same for different subjects evaluated, which makes it even more difficult to achieve uniformity among diagnosed patients, and opens space for mismatched reports that favor diagnostic errors.

The dark sides

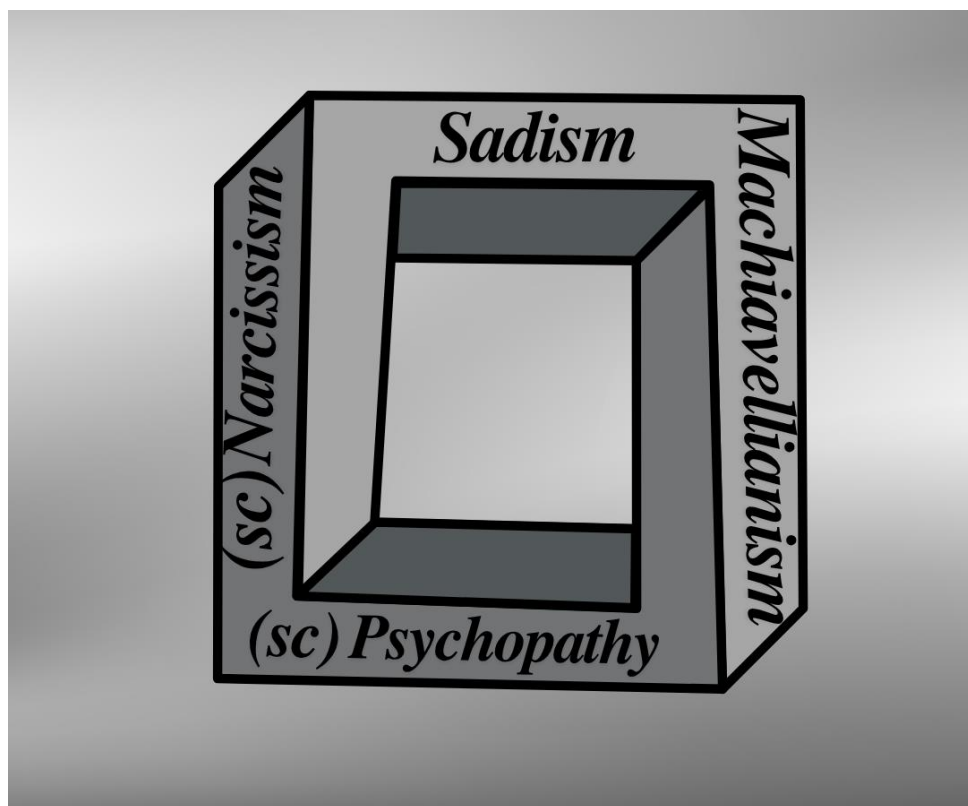
Narcissism is like pregnancy: either you have it, or you don't!

Sam Vaknin

From this classic phrase by Sam Vaknin, we can get some important interpretations, starting with the fact that just like in the generation of a living being, there is a period in which it is not possible to notice externally that it is there, but there are ways to confirm, so he continues "Either you can be diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder or not. There is no middle ground. There are no variants, species and levels of pathological narcissism." Just as it is not possible to say that a woman is "half pregnant". Some physiological, emotional and behavioral responses are only presented by, in this case, women, during pregnancy – this is the meaning of the psychological dynamics in narcissistic personality disorder, without them there is no narcissism.

It is in this sense that he lists some characteristics that present themselves as confounding factors for most people. In this case, Sam Vaknin is talking about people who manifest or present a narcissistic style, that is, who can be, in his words, unpleasant, abrasive, bullies, arrogant, somewhat exploitative. They may exhibit a pattern of diminished empathy, but they are not narcissistic. These undesirable characteristics, which cause discomfort in those who are exposed to them, are not the official criteria taken into account for a clinical diagnosis that confirms the personality disorder.

In this talk (Hey, Millon, I Suddenly See Narcissists Everywhere! (Book: Personality Disorders in Modern Life), Sam Vaknin explains that there are subclinical conditions, such as dark personalities, Dark Triad, or Dark Tetrad Personality. These are people who cannot be diagnosed because they do not have the necessary amalgam of traits, behaviors and internal psychodynamics, internal psychological processes. They are not narcissists and they are not psychopaths.



We can notice a detail by observing the two previous figures and the next figure: in all types of dark personalities two factors are conserved: subclinical psychopathy and Machiavellianism.

These two conditions together bring together important aspects: they are insensitive, cold, irresponsible, focused on short or long-term goals, they are manipulative and impulsive, with great abilities to create schemes or scams, an activity that they enjoy very much.

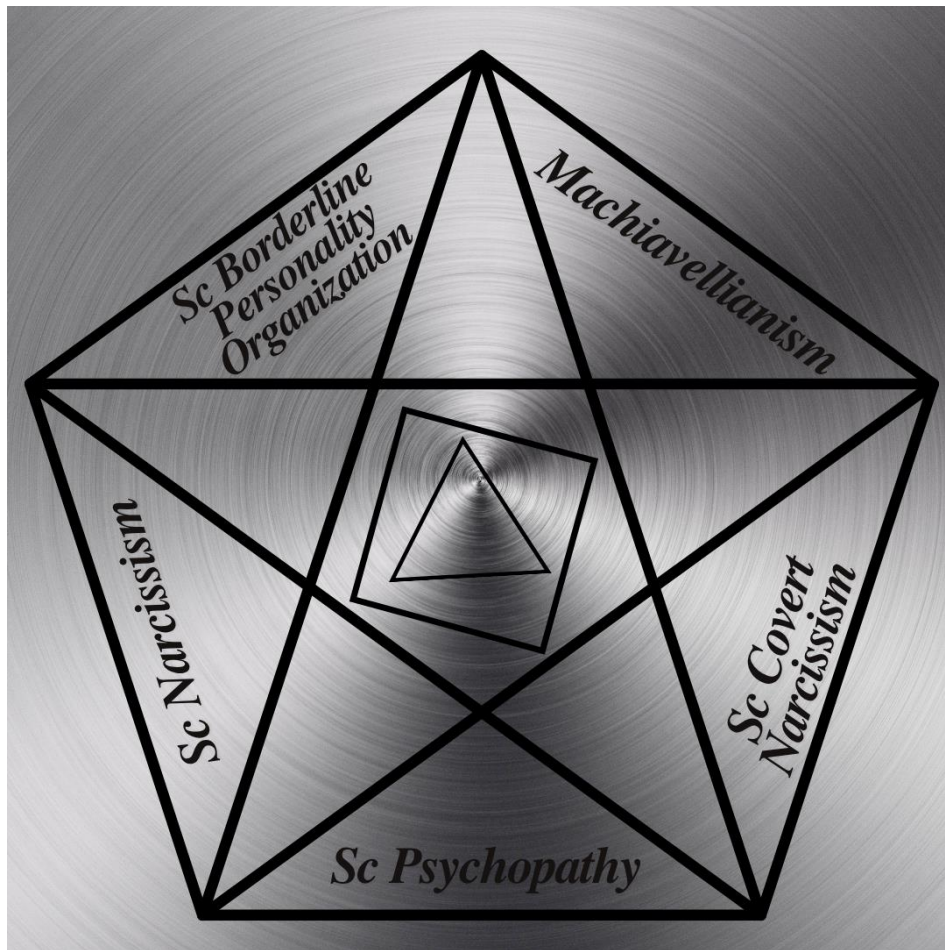
In his lecture (Subclinical Narcissism, Psychopathy: Spectrum or Different Disorders? (Dark Personalities), Sam Vaknin clarifies about subclinical conditions 5 factors of high relevance:

- 1) subclinical conditions are those behaviors and traits that, even when placed side by side, are not valid as a mental health diagnosis;
- 2) they do not reach the cut-off point in clinical trials;
- 3) do not adhere to standards;
- 4) are not detectable by ordinary clinical tests and
- 5) they are not an attenuated version of the clinical condition.

Professor Sam Vaknin proposes a new dark personality construct, a dark pentagram.

He considers it important to insert the subclinical condition organization of the borderline personality, it is not the disorder, as well as for other conditions, he also emphasizes that subclinical conditions are taken into account.

And besides, since psychopathy usually includes the sadism component, it would be like a redundancy for it (sadism) to remain part of the proposed dark set.



Clinical diagnosis takes into account specific exams and laboratory tests in order to rule out numerous conditions that cause physical symptoms and that would not be detectable through psychological assessment instruments.

Psychodiagnosis is the diagnosis made by professional psychologists, making use of batteries of tests that usually have validated versions according to specific data from the population of the country of origin.

The goal is not to help diagnose the neighbor, the partner or the dog, nor would it be a diagnosis. If you are not an expert on the subject, you should not and are not authorized to proceed with the attempt – not least because it has a name: it is quackery or illegal practice of the profession of psychiatrist or clinical psychologist.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (DSM-5)
A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy that emerges in early adulthood and is present in various contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:
Diagnostic criteria
1. Has a grandiose sense of one's own importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without having the corresponding achievements).
2. It is concerned with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
3. Believes that he/she is "special" and unique and that he/she can only be understood by, or associated with, other special or high-status people (or institutions).
4. Demands excessive admiration.
5. Presents a feeling of having rights (i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or that are automatically in line with one's own expectations).
6. He is exploitative in interpersonal relationships (i.e., he takes advantage of others to achieve his own ends).
7. Lacks empathy: Reluctant to acknowledge or identify with the feelings and needs of others.
8. Is often envious of others or believes that others envy him.
9. Demonstrates arrogant and insolent behaviors or attitudes.

Vulnerability in self-esteem makes individuals with narcissistic personality disorder very sensitive to "wounds" resulting from criticism or defeat (DSM-5).

ICD 10 - F60 Specific personality disorder
These are serious disorders of the characterological constitution and behavioral tendencies of the individual, not directly attributable to a disease, injury or other brain affection or to another psychiatric disorder. These disorders usually comprise various elements of the personality, are generally accompanied by personal anguish and social disorganization; They usually appear during childhood or adolescence and persist for a long time into adulthood
F60.8 Other personality-specific disorders
Personality
● Eccentric
● Immature
● Narcissistic
● Passive-aggressive
● Psychoneurotic
● Type "unstable"

Both the DSM and the ICD call narcissists the individual. Well, it's true that he has a body. But the body is nothing more than a limited portion of matter. The body is a barrier so that your internal organs are protected from mechanical shocks.

Biologically it is clear that it is a human (or a humanoid?), but psychologically it is a non-being; it is a socially isolated organism, that is, individualized – it does not become collective with just one – but its psyche has not completed the process of separation, individuation and integration, therefore, he is disintegrated, as if he were hanging in the air, as if it were a fog, a mist.

I will always call him a subject. He doesn't know that he's not an individual, and I don't want to call him an object because that's the biggest trauma, which unfortunately continues to be perpetuated. A subject is the one who practices and suffers the action – and this he does, for sure.

Chapter 3 – Lost Childhood



Have you ever wondered what a healthy childhood should look like?

If someone asked you, would you know how to answer?

Professor Sam Vaknin's book (*Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited*) led me to answer this question to myself in one short sentence – a healthy childhood is one that is free from abuse.

Strangely, it seems that this is a very difficult sentence to understand.

So, here's another question: what do you mean by abuse?

There are perhaps hundreds of videos in which Prof. Sam Vaknin explains "two sides of the same coin" of what is abusive behavior within the family, or in other words, parental abuse of children, which constitutes a type of adverse childhood experience (ACE).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines child maltreatment as "any recent act or omission on the part of a parent or caregiver that results in death, severe physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act, which presents an imminent risk of serious harm" (Goldman et al., 2003). Child maltreatment is a type of adverse childhood experience. This involves exposures to maltreatment or domestic dysfunction during crucial periods of development that can have profound impacts on physical, neurological and intellectual development (Felitti et al., 1998; Ravi, 2017; Kairys & Johnson, 2002). These impacts can result in negative and long-lasting effects on health and behavior in a compounding manner (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2019). Risk factors and protective elements for victimization and perpetration of child maltreatment can be framed in terms of the child, the caregiver or aggressor, and the environment (Suniega et al., 2022).

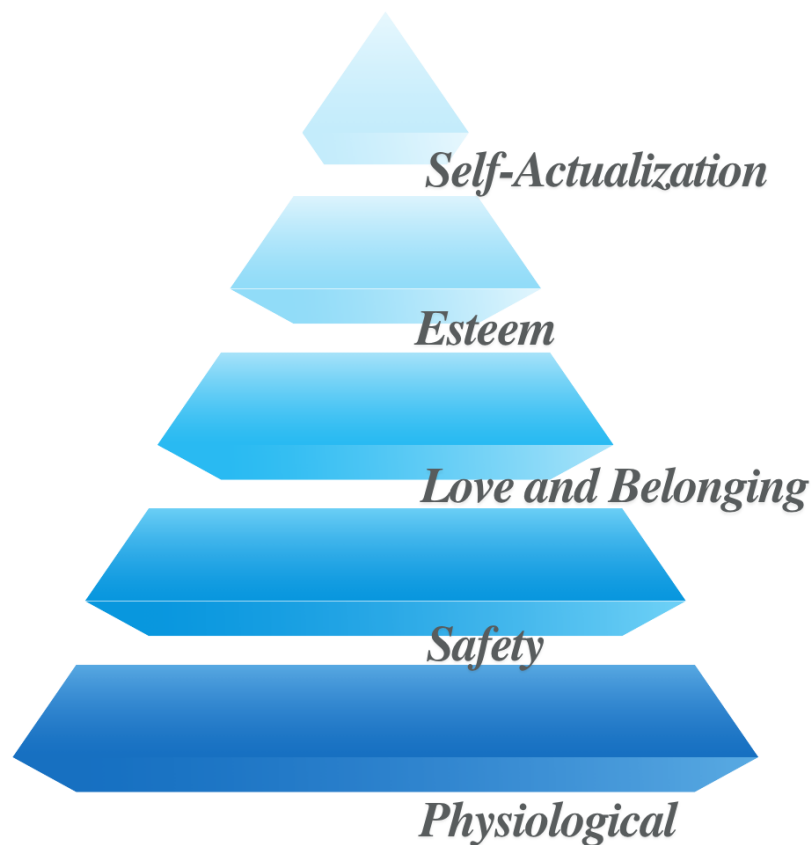
Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a well-known theory of motivation that classifies the needs of individuals according to their perceived importance. It is visualized as a pyramid, with the most indispensable needs at the base and the least essential at the peak. Maslow theorized that humans are typically motivated to achieve lower basic needs before satisfying their higher human needs, although he later stated that, based on external factors or individual differences, there may be exceptions (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). He also argued that failure to meet needs at various stages of the pyramidal model can lead to physical and mental illness (Shoib et al, 2022).

All the needs of an adult human being, pointed out by Maslow, conform to an application to child development, because the child has needs that must be met in ascending order to reach his maximum potential.

Maslow considered 5 levels of human needs:

1. physiological needs (access to adequate food, regular sleep, hygiene, and a safe and comfortable environment)
2. need for safety (stable and safe environment, where the child feels protected from physical and emotional dangers)

3. social needs (need to belong to a group, have friends, receive affection and develop bonds of trust with their caregivers)
4. esteem needs (the child needs to feel valued, respected, recognized for their achievements, and welcomed in their frustrated attempts, which contributes to the construction of their self-esteem and self-confidence) and
5. need for self-realization (once the other needs are met, the child can develop his maximum potential, explore his interests, learn and grow in various areas, reaching a full and healthy development).



Neglecting a child's needs is abuse. And abuse has many forms besides the family: financial, sexual, verbal, emotional, psychological and physical (beating and aggression) (Sam Vaknin, Malignant Self-love – Narcissism Revisited PG 102)



The other type of abuse is perhaps the most difficult to understand.

The abuse that is disguised as care, that imitates love, abuse that passes itself off as an authentic perception of acceptance, that seems to be a concern, but is control, that resembles protection, but is immobilization; who chooses clothes, friends, college course, career; that idealizes and thus dehumanizes the child, that imposes responsibilities and makes rights difficult for the child to recognize.

Beneath the robes of a prince or princess, we will find a child from whom perfection has been demanded.

It is important to remember that suffocating, pampering, overvaluing and idolizing the child are forms of parental abuse (Sam Vaknin, Malignant Self-love – Narcissism Revisited PG 156).



Abuse makes the child feel invisible in many ways. Both types of abuse communicate the same message to the child: You can be anything but yourself.

All living beings – between autotrophs (producers of the energy necessary for the maintenance of their life, such as some algae and plants) and heterotrophs (consumers of other living beings), from the simplest, unicellular, to the multicellular, from microorganisms to plants and animals, with high levels of complexity and organization in micro and macro structures, have in their machinery, defense mechanisms against external and internal threats.

Over thousands of years of evolution and (coevolution) living beings have been improving and adapting to this, which in many ways is a hostile world, full of dangers. Compared to other living beings, called large organisms, our body is very fragile.

The planet we live on is covered in about 70% of its extension by water, but we are terrestrial and we breathe oxygen, which is not even the most abundant gas (it is nitrogen) and, even so, we are considered (by ourselves!) a successful species, the top of our food chain.

From the point of view of Biology, taxonomically, we human beings belong to the Animal Kingdom, we are vertebrate animals, mammals because in our first months of life outside the womb, we must be fed exclusively on breast milk; among the anatomical structures that separate us from our primate relatives (phylogenetically speaking) are the opposable thumb that gives us the motor ability to pinch with our fingers and hold objects with precision, the ability to move with an upright spine, eyes that seek the horizon, but that have peripheral vision, the articulation of speech and the development of the ability to communicate, through speech, our thoughts and express our feelings; we are hominids and we are the only surviving subspecies of the genus *Homo*, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, so these are all characteristics that have contributed to the success of our species.

Our intelligence and cognitive capacity, the development of the limbic system that plays a key role in regulating our emotions, and the cortical structures in our brain are crucial for us to perform tasks that other groups of animals do not perform.

But you might be wondering what it is that all this talk about biology has to do with parental abuse and childhood trauma and the answer is that it has everything to do with it.

Our species has been biologically programmed to depend on another human in the early stages of our life outside the womb and for several years during our growth and development. This is also known as the maternal function: technically, it is to keep the baby alive and lead the child out of the mother-child dyad, transforming dependence into autonomy.

In the human species, the mother figure is indispensable, without it the baby would die in a few days. For human beings, mother is the body that shelters and becomes small and must expel its "tenant" so that both can survive the pregnancy: mother is the breast that nourishes and cannot be an eternal source of food, it is the gaze that understands and reprimands, it is the affection that builds and whose absence has the power of annihilation of an atomic bomb.

To paraphrase Sam Vaknin, while not everyone exposed to abuse in early childhood becomes a narcissist, every narcissist has been exposed to abuse in early childhood.

This phrase makes me think that people seem to want to leave children alone at night in a forest hoping that they will be able to get out of there. Maybe some can, but there are no guarantees.



Although this information has been doubted, some even claim that narcissism has a biological cause, and that, like psychopathy, narcissism has a strong genetic or epigenetic component and is therefore hereditary, however, no clinical trials and evidence-based results have been presented.

In science we say that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" and this observation serves both sides of this issue, but so far, the truth is that few efforts have

been made in scientific studies and randomized clinical trials that can provide the necessary evidence according to the scientific method.

In the following fragment, on the other hand, Sam Vaknin shows that there is a window, a critical period that cannot be ignored, and that it can be the difference between the success and failure of the child in the formation of his personality and identity – it is like deciding between life and death. In the world we live in, in the situations we face, with the people we meet and share experiences, we are subject to trauma, but as adults and if we have intact our psychological equipment necessary to act in this world, we will recover, life goes on and we will face again more situations that push us to the limit, but we will be prepared:

Traumas are inevitable. They are an integral and important part of life. But in early childhood, especially in the formative years of infancy (ages 0 to 4 years), they acquire an ominous aura and are interpreted as evidence of a hostile, malicious, and evil universe. No matter how innocuous the events and the surrounding circumstances, the child's vivid imagination is likely to embed them in the framework of a highly idiosyncratic horror story. (Sam Vaknin, Maligant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited Pg. 358)

Approximately 70% of individuals worldwide have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime (Benjet et al., 2016). In addition, approximately 31% of the general population has experienced four or more traumatic events (Benjet et al., 2016). Traumatic events, according to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), are defined as experiencing or witnessing an exceptionally threatening or catastrophic stressful event (ICD-10, World Health Organization (WHO), 2019). The most common traumatic experiences are the unexpected death of a loved one, theft, car accidents, and illness, injury, or death (Benjet et al., 2016; Beckord et al., 2024).

Frustrations are part of a child's daily life. And adult life too. There is a popular saying that "love does not allow everything; where everything is allowed, I suspect that there is no love."

Teaching is an act of love, so when you teach limits (in a non-violent way!) it is the expression of love in the form of respect for oneself, for the other being and for the shared environment. Frustrations are important, because they establish limits with which the child learns to place himself in the world recognizing rights and duties both for himself and for others, he understands what is allowed, what is forbidden – because we live in society, we coexist with others of our species, our peers, and although different, we must follow the same rules so that there is harmony in the environment in which we live.

It is the result of the healthy management of what is experienced that allows the individual child and then as an adult, to develop his strategies for coping with what is denied to him instead of remaining a prisoner of the ego's defense mechanisms, denying himself and others as well.

Frustrating is different from traumatizing. Frustration is temporary and constructive; it serves the formation of a person's character.

Trauma, in most cases, is permanent and destructive, meaning the deterioration of what would effectively sustain the subject. Both go through the learning process, and are perceived and applied in interpersonal relationships in different ways.



If you've ever watched a horror or thriller movie, or movies that tell the story of the holocaust, then you might be able to imagine the state of tension a person is in when it's impossible to predict what might happen in the next "scene" – the next day, at lunchtime, when they go to sleep, when they come home from school, when your parents are back from work.

A movie can be about 3 hours long causing some anxiety, apprehension and discomfort, but you only watch it if you want to.

A child within a dysfunctional, abusive, violent family has no choice – he is inside the horror movie 24 hours a day, every day; She doesn't rest, she has no leisure, she has

no perspective. She doesn't live; she fights for survival. This is not fair. That shouldn't happen.

A dysfunctional and abusive family, a narcissistic mother figure – who can be a caregiver, grandmother, aunt, older sister – do not offer a home. Sam Vaknin describes the sensation as if the person lives walking on eggshells. To me, it was as if the house was a battlefield, full of traps like a minefield. When you have no idea where a mine might be buried, which direction do you take the first step? A child who has been subjected to this kind of traumatic experience becomes, quite literally, a war veteran.

It is in this context that Professor Sam Vaknin suggests that narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a type of response to trauma, which could classify it as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – PTSD is among the anxiety disorders with the highest incidence and has been called traumatic war neurosis.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common mental health disorder resulting from exposure to traumatic events and characterized by three main groups of symptoms: recurrent intrusive thoughts or images of the traumatic event, avoidance of anything associated with the traumatic event, and a state of hyperarousal (ICD-10, WHO, 2019).

Other symptoms commonly associated with PTSD are symptoms of insomnia (Short et al., 2022; Werner et al., 2021), depression and anxiety (Choi et al., 2023), contemplation of suicidal thoughts and intentions (Shannonhouse et al., 2022), and reduced quality of life (QoL) (Balayan et al., 2014; Pagotto et al., 2015).

Also, NPD could potentially be framed as complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (cPTSD).

cPTSD includes three groups of symptoms in addition to those of PTSD, namely dysregulation of affect, negative self-concept (i.e., beliefs about oneself as diminished, defeated, or worthless), and difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships (ICD-11, WHO, 2022; Maercker et al., 2022). Generally, cPTSD has been associated with more severe functional impairment, greater comorbidity, and lower QoL than PTSD (Cloitre et al., 2020).

Both the diagnosis of PTSD and PTSD depend on the presence of a traumatic event (ICD-11, WHO, 2022). However, cPTSD is thought to result from multiple or

prolonged exposures to traumatic events from which escape is difficult or impossible (polytrauma; ICD-11, WHO, 2022), particularly interpersonal trauma, such as repeated childhood sexual or physical abuse, prolonged domestic violence, or war violence (Ford, 2017; ICD-11, WHO, 2022), rather than natural disasters or accidents (Brewin, 2020).

However, the type of trauma is a risk factor rather than a requirement for the diagnosis of PTSD (Maercker et al., 2022).

When the child is subjected to abuse as often as in complex trauma, he or she goes so far as to internalize this behavior as something natural, and normal, and this is exactly the statistical concept of normality: what happens more frequently in a given environment compared to other events. which must necessarily occur in fewer numbers.

According to Sam Vaknin, where even a child can tell the difference between misfortune and deliberate mistreatment is with physical and sexual abuse. These are marked by a cooperative effort (offending parent and abused child) of concealment and strong emotions of shame and guilt, repressed to the point of producing anxiety and "neurosis". The child realizes the injustice of the situation, although he rarely dares to express his opinions so as not to be severely punished or abandoned by his aggressors (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited - Pg. 358).



In this case, it is as if a pact of silence was sealed between an innocent, defenseless child, without sufficient discernment and an adult on whom he depends and who should love and protect him. I know of no more cruel crime than this.

Official data that can be found online on the pages of the federal government in Brazil or on the United Nations website, find that about 80% of sexual abuse in childhood (including girls and boys) happens at home, and is committed by people in the family itself: siblings, cousins, uncles, parents, grandfathers.

As a personal account, I find it difficult, sometimes, to believe the brutality of what happened to me. I don't know if it is more cruel that my father was able to do this to me, or that I came to the conclusion that my mother knew what he had done.

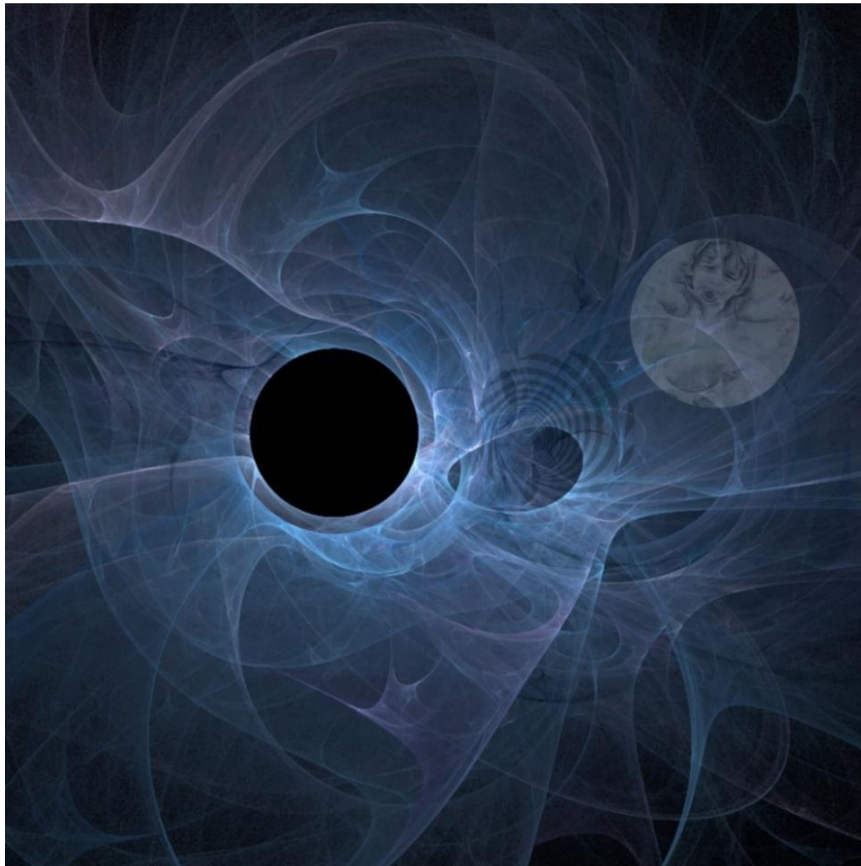
Both, at different times, tried to blame me for the abuse – he even told me that if I told her, my mother would be very angry with me; and my mother told me calmly, that she had no way of knowing, questioning why I hadn't told her before, but she also couldn't explain to me why she took me to her own gynecologist when I was 8 years old.

Sounds strange to you? Helplessness is indigestible. Abandoned children do not necessarily roam the streets.

In another fragment, Sam Vaknin adds:

This type of trauma, which involves the child actively or passively, is bound to yield long-term effects such as dissociation or severe personality disorders. These are violent, premeditated traumas, not traumas by default, and the child's reaction to them is violent and active. The child becomes a reflection of its dysfunctional family: it represses emotions, denies reality, resorts to violence and escapism, or disintegrates (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited - Pg. 359).

From this excerpt, it is evident that the loss of contact with reality, that is, dissociative states and personality disorders, are established as a defense in view of the magnitude of the violence suffered by the child, which makes reality unbearable. Self-disorders, says Sam Vaknin, are the result of childhood traumas (...) These are the traumas of a child who is not being "seen" (not being affirmed by objects, especially the Primary Objects, their parents) or is being regarded only as an instrument of gratification, or the target of abuse. (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited - Pg. 344)



In his analysis, Sam Vaknin clarifies the impact of this type of violence on the self-perception of the child, who as an adult is more susceptible to developing some type of psychiatric disorder, or even several disorders in comorbidity with the personality disorder:

Such children grow up to become adults who are not sure that they exist (lack a sense of self-continuity) or that they are worth anything (labile sense of self-worth and fluctuating, or bipolar self-esteem). They suffer from depressions, as neurotics do. But the source of these dysphorias is existential (a gnawing sensation of emptiness) as opposed to the "guilty conscience" depressions of neurotics. (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited - Pg. 345)

The child in the white sphere on the right in the illustration above is me, at the age of three, in the backyard of my mother's house; arms stretched out in the air, I don't remember who took the picture, I don't know who else was with me in that backyard.

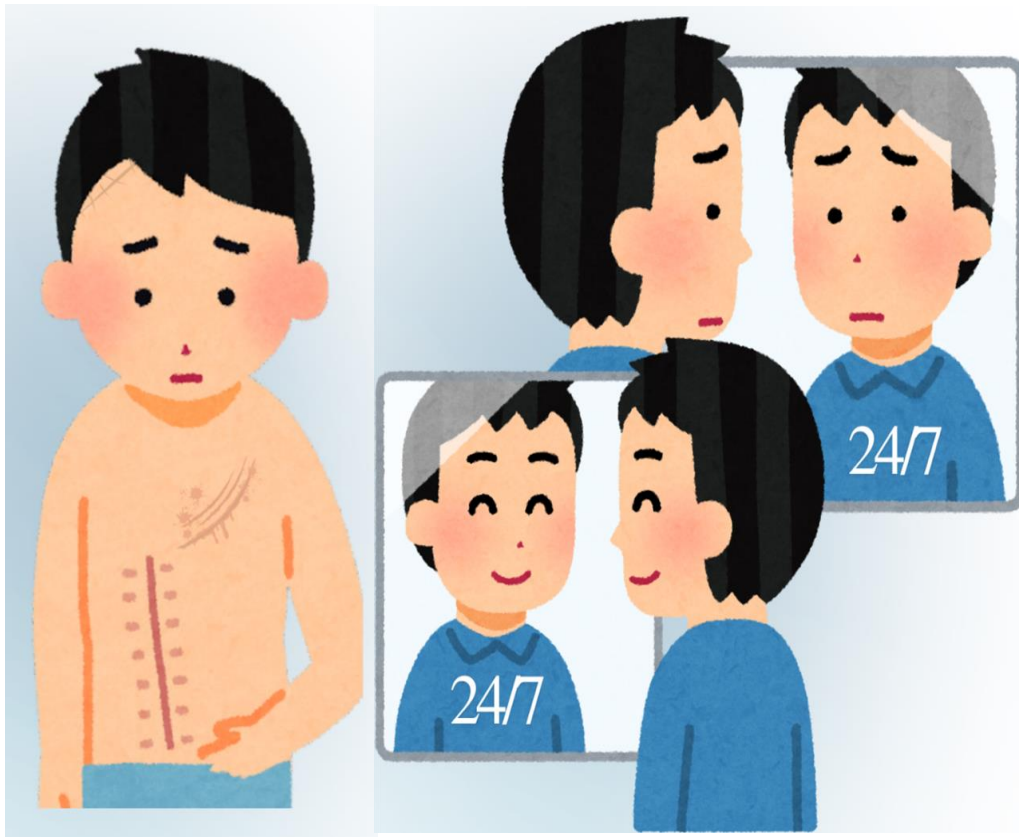
I know what I feel when I look at this picture: I feel as if that child is not me, and I feel compassion for seeing her alone.

Exactly as described in the previous excerpt, before I got to know the work of Professor Sam Vaknin, existential questions accompanied me for a long time of my (survival)life, in the appearance, for example, of anxiety and depression and in the strong suspicion of a diagnosis of schizophrenia that, although not yet confirmed by another mental health professional, it's what makes the most sense to me as a clinical psychologist and having studied numerous of Professor Sam's online lectures and the official psychodiagnostic sources.

As an adult, I understood that in my childhood, invisibility alternated between an uncomfortable state and a desired state of relief, because it depended on how much I felt at risk in a certain environment or situation. At risk of further abuse. Maybe that's why I can feel empathy today, not for the image of incidental victim that the narcissist displays to captivate a person, and which is part of his internal psychological dynamics, but for the child he once was, as unprotected and wronged as I was.

When we then return the focus to narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), we can, through the following illustration, visualize what Sam Vaknin describes when he draws attention to the fact that:

Such children grow up to become adults who are not sure that they exist (lack a sense of self-continuity) or that they are worth anything (labile sense of self-worth and fluctuating, or bipolar self-esteem). They suffer from depressions, as neurotics do. But the source of these dysphorias is existential (a gnawing sensation of emptiness) as opposed to the "guilty conscience" depressions of neurotics. (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited - Pg. 345)



For a child in healthy development, being able to trust himself means a healthy future adult life, it means not depending on the approval or validation of other people, whether they are family life or any type of interpersonal relationship that he may establish when he reaches adulthood.

For the narcissist, trusting only in oneself does not seem to me to be a libertarian act or a demonstration of empowerment or self-control; It's like clothing solitude with a security that is strategic, strangely comfortable to be known.

In his fundamental experience of affection as a child, the narcissist was reduced to an object and established this type of relationship as a parameter. Sam Vaknin argues about this by saying that "narcissists are created by other narcissists. To treat others as objects, one must first be treated as such. To become a narcissist, one must feel that one is nothing more than an instrument used to satisfy the needs of a significant figure (perhaps the most significant) in one's life. You have to feel that the only source of

reliable, unconditional, and total love is him. One must therefore lose faith in the existence or availability of other sources of emotional gratification." (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited - Pg 105).

Professor Sam also says that narcissism can be systemic, that is, it can be detected as what moves the gears and the functioning or malfunction in a given environment or institution.

Any resemblance to what they now call intergenerational trauma is not a mere coincidence. More than 30 years ago, Sam Vaknin was the pioneer, even coining the term narcissistic abuse; And as he himself likes to say, he was a lone voice on the internet for almost 10 years warning about the consequences of mistreatment within families and its consequences throughout life and other affective relationships.

Intergenerational trauma seems to be just another nomenclature for something that had already been named and very well described.

However, the concept of Narcissism is as confusing as it sounds, and the more complex the closer you get and are willing to look into this abyss. As Nietzsche said when he said that when you look too long into the abyss, the abyss looks back at you, Sam Vaknin states in several ways that Narcissism is contagious – to live with a person with NPD is to coexist with abuse and trauma and to become familiar with it until there is nothing left of you but that, it is to start acting within the same molds and not recognizing abusive situations as unacceptable, perpetuating the same behavior.

Brainstorming

Márcia — It is the mother, the healthy, generous mother, who builds his identity together with her son

Adam — Mothers who appropriately push the child out into a big, wide world

Márcia — Because she is the adult and she is mature and has discernment and has the ability to conclude and say to him "hey, look what you did is so beautiful, this is you!". And then the child understands what he sees, and apprehends and recognizes his identity

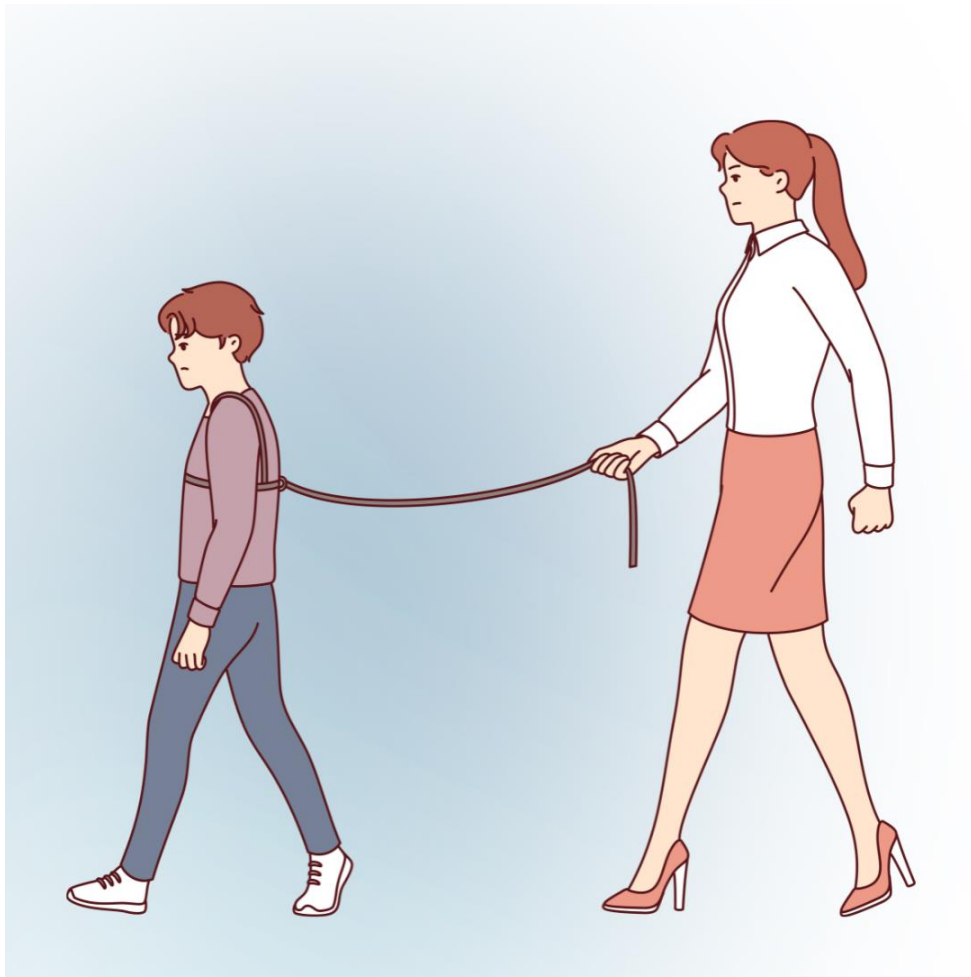
Adam — Positive reinforcement with a purpose for growth is the key

Márcia — People used to ask me what they should do with their lives

Beauty is the Beast

*Can't you see that you're smothering me?
Holding too tightly afraid to lose control*

Numb, Linkin Park



When the mother is immature, narcissistic, or suffers from mental problems, she withholds from the child what he needs: approval, admiration, and reassurance. She feels threatened by his independence. She feels that she is losing him. She does not let go sufficiently. She smothers him with over-protection and indulgence. She offers him overpowering emotional incentives to remain "mother-bound", dependent, undeveloped, a part of a mother-child symbiotic dyad. (Sam Vaknin, Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited - Pg. 290)

The reference to a fairy tale story in the title, one of those that have the intention of being eternalized as something positive and desirable, is deliberate. There is a prevalent aspect in most of these stories of princesses and princes charming, there is something very dark about the mother figure of many of these films that people insist on classifying as suitable for children, and that is so disconcerting that it needs to come disguised in an equivalent version and this, yes, is admitted to be evil and perverse – because her, the stepmother is not the biological mother; because it is very difficult to accept that a mother would do or wish bad things for her daughters and sons – so one projects what would be bad in the mother onto a substitute figure for the mother.

It is an inconvenient truth and, generally, people are resistant to the topic. This resistance may already be an indication that something is not quite as it seems in the "enchanted kingdom of the happy family". It may be an indication of *splitting*, that the thinking of these people is extremist.

This segment is contextualized with my personal accounts, notes that were made by me when I was a psychology student, about my mother's behaviors towards me, at least ten years before I got to know Professor Sam's work. And what was my surprise when I realized that my self-report looked like an interview – it was as if he had interviewed me, only I had no idea how this would be possible.

My reports inserted here are of events at different ages. Many have been experienced in adulthood, but this is an essential point, no matter what age you are, it is a key characteristic of narcissism to make someone feel like a child. Because there is excessive control, constant disqualification and other attitudes of domination, which take away autonomy, infantilize and make the person feel incapable.

I hope that my impressions over so many years, shared here by the daughter, but analyzed, under the telepathic supervision of Professor Sam Vaknin, by the clinical psychologist that I am, will be of some help to someone who feels the discomfort of the treatment received, but cannot describe it or no longer has the courage to be indignant, because the retaliation is severe and extends for several days, and it is so tiring that it leads to emotional and physical exhaustion.

It was thanks to Professor Sam's lectures and his book *Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited*, that I confirmed my suspicion about my mother's mental health

condition as Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) and that I was able to recover from over forty years of narcissistic abuse she subjected me to.

Professor Sam Vaknin's mother was a narcissist. My mother was too. He's a narcissist, I'm not.

We have in common the trauma of having suffered narcissistic abuse, but not the outcome of it. Two sides of the coin. Two childhoods full of Adverse Experiences.

He left his mother's house at a very young age.

In my case, it was on my shoulders that my mother's lifeless body weighed on the morning she had gone.

When I started writing this book, it had been a little over a month since my mother had passed away. And you may even think that it is an injustice to talk about those who cannot defend themselves, but I guarantee that it is better this way, for her and for me. She would not bear to face what she did, it would be mortification, and besides, if the situation were different and she witnessed the publication of this book, she would not defend herself, she would attack me, disqualify me morally and professionally and cast doubt on my sanity, as she always did when she was contradicted, when she had her whims frustrated.

A narcissistic mother is not a real mother. But she acts as if she were and deceives well every time she has a minimal audience. It's hard to accept this statement, but believe me, it's harder to have a narcissist as a mother.

Outside the home she is perfect, in the neighborhood, at work, in church groups. It is an example of dedication, selflessness and something like love, but it is absolutely conditional – you have to give something in return. Always. And children learn this very quickly, they reproduce this behavior without the same intention as the mother, but with the perception that all people relate to each other in this way, because the mother is the main model, she is like a divinity, holder of all knowledge. Or as that mother figure who trapped the girl she kidnapped in a tower would say: "your mother knows better".

According to the Psychological School of Object Relations, the most important "object" in the first years of a child's life is the mother or caregiver or who plays the role of mother figure. The mother, therefore, is the primary object.

The mother-baby relationship, or mother-child dyad, is then called primary, as it represents the first relational experience that the child establishes with another human being soon after birth. Many authors even classify the relationship as a symbiosis, due to the high dependence that the baby feels for his mother.

This concept of object, very useful in psychology, is fundamental when it comes to the treatment employed through narcissistic abuse – this narcissistic objectification means reification, it *discourages* the person who is the target of the abusive treatment, that is, instead of being considered as someone, the child is transformed into "something" without a soul (inanimate), without movement (static), that cannot deviate from the image captured and stored on the corrupted hard drive that is the mind of the narcissist – the child is transformed, sometimes into a toy, sometimes into a tool, as a way of obtaining immediate preference gratification, and in both cases, it is a means to an end, a way to increase the reach, It's like expanding a territory or stretching out an arm as if it were made of elastic material.

As already mentioned, without the care of a healthy and stable maternal figure, the child would have little chance of continuing its development properly, and its physical and mental integrity would be compromised, as in the case of pathological narcissism, in an apparently irreversible way.

It is possible to recognize several indications that a mother is or can be harmful to her son or daughter – my reports should clarify some points about this. And it's worth noting that even if some characteristics are more evident than others, just because sometimes the abuse is subtle doesn't mean it's not there.

For example, mothers who show that they are very needy in the presence of their children and exaggerate physical contact; authoritarian mothers, who use the premise that children owe obedience to their parents, to exercise dominance and impose their will, usually aggressively; Moms who seem to be best friends with their daughters or sons – have you ever found yourself in a situation where you and your mom seem to read each other's thoughts, you're tuned in, you're in sync, she knows you so well, doesn't she? This is a bad sign.

Often, even people in daily life, relatives and close friends, cannot perceive the abusive treatment; or treatment can still be recognized as a common, natural, culturally accepted behavior in a country or region, but certainly, possessiveness, jealousy,

competition, are not among the feelings and behaviors of a mother who prioritizes the well-being of her children; They are nothing more than the demonstration of this mother's intention to keep her children on a tight leash, guiding their steps and governing their lives, and denying them the necessary validation to move away from her, as well as to respond assertively to environmental stimuli.

Living with my mother caused a feeling of oppression so great that I lacked air. Have you ever felt that? When is a person's presence so damaging that you can't even breathe properly? The narcissistic mother suffocates. She stifles dreams, silences your words, belittles your aspirations, invalidates your feelings, ridicules your ideas, forbids your personal experiences, blames you for the failure of her life.

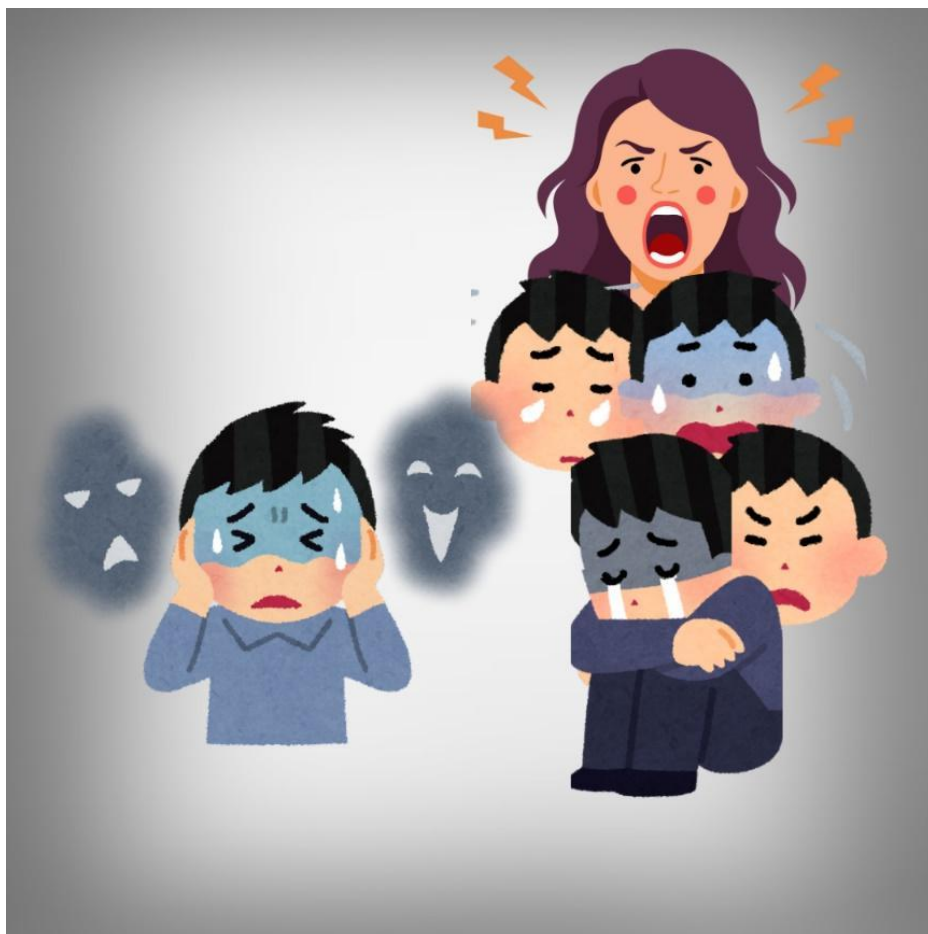
In my teenage years (and this extended into adulthood) when my mother left, I experienced a frightening sense of freedom because I didn't quite know what to do with that free time either. Being able to breathe without the tightness in my chest was a relief, even if temporary, but I was still under tension, because I didn't know what time she would return home – the mystery was calculated, to get home and catch me in the act of a crime that she confabulated in her head and that became absolute truth (for her).

Have you ever been in a situation where you are startled all the time, alert? As if at any moment something bad is going to happen, but you have no clue what can trigger a reaction from the person, it can be anything... You get overwhelmed. This happened a lot when I was at home almost all day, so you already know that weekends, holidays and my vacations were critical periods. I never rested. The sound I heard most on weekends, early in the morning, was that of the pots against the countertop in the kitchen and the violent slamming of my bedroom door that I hadn't left open. She wouldn't even let me study, although she had plans for when I graduated from the profession she chose for me. I should always be doing something else that was for her and not for me, I couldn't sit down, unless it was to keep her company. In fact, that's how I felt countless times: the company to watch TV, the company at meals because she didn't like to eat alone – and when she called, I had to go, right away!

At all times she warned what was missing, what was over, what needs to be done, a list of problems to solve, all urgent, all hers. She was always the priority, she had to be taken care of, nothing could be missing. They weren't reminders, it wasn't a matter of organization. They were demands, whims of a sovereign. Claims full of discontent and in

an accusatory tone, leaving in the air that I was not attentive to the needs of royalty... I wasn't paying attention and she ran the risk of being left without something – for as little time as possible it would be absurd. At this pace I didn't have time to do much for myself... She took up all my time, she was my agenda (by her imposition).

Professor Sam Vaknin has described that the entire structure of Narcissistic Disorder reflects a relationship with problematic and dysfunctional Primary Objects (usually, the mother or the primary caregiver). The narcissist's mother is typically inconsistent and frustrating. Thus, it thwarts the narcissist's ability to trust others and feel secure. (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited Pg. 359-360).



Screams, endless demands, judgments directed at any internal or external aspect, unpredictability in speech and attitudes were day to day in the conviviality with the narcissist who was my mother.

I lost count of how many times she complained about my laughter, the way I dressed, the food I made, the profession I chose, the people I met, the music I wanted to listen to, my hair.

My mother was a smoker for some time. She said that on one occasion she would be sewing some pieces of clothing and I approached her. She always got excited telling this story, described the situation as if she knew my thoughts at the time of the event, and always repeated the same words: "she saw me put the cigarette in my mouth and as it disappeared, she thought it was some kind of food, so she took a cigarette and ate it" – this was funny to my mother; there was always a fun laugh from her at the end of this story.

She said that when I started walking, I walked on tiptoe; But she thought it was funny too, and instead of taking me to the neurologist and investigating autism, she would say that the sole of my foot was flattened and made me wear orthopedic sandals, and she would say that I wanted to be a ballerina.

I remember that one afternoon, I don't know why my parents were at home. Someone was clapping at the gate and I went to call her to answer, I was very small, I entered the room, she was lying with my father, her arm around him. I touched her on the back and said "mommy, there's someone calling outside" – there was only time to say that, she turned around so fast, so furious, I felt the slap burn on my face and her face distorted before my eyes as she said "don't disturb me, I'm resting with my husband". I don't remember my age, but the memory of that afternoon plays like a movie in my head.

As an adult, every time there was friction, a fight, an argument, it didn't just involve the emotional fatigue of that moment – and this moment of explosion already happened when it was no longer bearable to keep silent so much hostility that she directed at me. I was there during the fight and after it, in tears, bewildered, destroyed. But she didn't. She rarely changed her voice.

Fighting back against a narcissist's aggression is what Professor Sam calls reactive abuse; For me, telling this part is called telling both sides of the story, which usually victims of narcissistic abuse don't do. I respectfully disagree with the term. And I disagree with how it is disseminated. A person has the right to defend her/himself – and using a few legal knowledge I have, I will give myself the right to call this reaction self-defense of the psyche (SDP), because that's how I felt: the attack didn't come from me, anyone

who has ever practiced a sport understands well the difference between defense and attack.

The expression on my mother's face was, most of the time, one of aggression, but not of instability because of the disagreement she herself had caused. It was real. It was very real: she had no regrets. She waited, she just waited for the guilt I would feel, which she always put on me.

My mother didn't like anyone around me. No one was good enough for me; neither friend, nor boyfriend, college classmates, no one was "worthy" of me, they were all self-interested people who just wanted to exploit me. But it wasn't that, no. This was a projection of herself on the people who "dared" to try to enter my life. And there came a time when she convinced me that I was not worth the effort.

The pain of feeling insufficient in any kind of relationship is devastating. The truth is that in addition to acting as if I didn't deserve to be happy, because it was noticeable that she felt that the happiness of the entire Earth belonged to her, she made me think that the only person who accepted me "the way I am", was her. Especially because, in her view, she still saw herself as the perfect mother and a perfect mother welcome; Even though I'm like that... This ensured that she was not alone, since everyone ended up moving away from her because there came a time when it was evident how she only used everyone. But I was alone. Each attempt to go out and have a life off her radar was too exhausting: there were endless interrogations, satisfactions, surveillance, control, pressure. If I said I was going to one place, but went to another, I was accused of being a liar, that I couldn't be trusted, that I didn't deserve everything she did for me... And there was no way out, I didn't know what else to do: if I told the truth, acting normally armed with my right to come and go, it sabotaged me, hindered me. If I hid my plans until the last minute trying to increase the chance of it working, then she said I was dishonest, because I didn't report all my steps, I didn't ask for permission to live (permission that would be denied).

In any case, I would be disapproved of, criticized, demoted, punished. There was no peace. Then there came a time when I had no one else. Because when someone approached me, she received it, because only up close would she be able to end my chances. She was charming when she wanted to and then no one ever believed me.

Suddenly I was a horrible daughter and she was a poor devoted mother who never received recognition. "She was so mistreated." And I, an ungrateful daughter.

According to Sam Vaknin, by being emotionally absent, the mother implants in the narcissist fears of abandonment and the feeling that the world is a place, dangerous, hostile and unpredictable. It becomes a negative and devaluing voice, which is later incorporated into the narcissist's superego. (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited Pg. 359-360)



Remembering that I'm not a narcissist, I'm the daughter of the narcissist who didn't become a narcissist either. I have rare positive memories of my childhood with her, I remember more of the people she paid to take care of me and the house while she worked and who were often as abusive as she was. People to whom she paid more attention, who she cared about more, because they were people who were submissive to negotiation,

they received a salary. I don't remember her playing with me – my mother worked morning, afternoon and night. Most of the time, when I remember her in my childhood, they are memories that I preferred to forget, like a day when it rained very hard and I ran to the street, barefoot, stayed in front of the house for a short time and went in to stay in the backyard enjoying the rain. When I entered the house, the joy gave way to the panic of seeing my mother sitting on the edge of the bed, several bags and purses full of her clothes, drawers ajar, one or another piece of clothing left behind. Desperate, I asked what was happening. She, first calmly and then angry, said she would leave; She would leave because she was disobeyed, she would leave because if no one needed her guidance then she could be on her own – "she was tired of being mistreated and deserved to rebuild her life and be happy" (at that time my father had already left home, they were already getting divorced).

This tactic was used by my mother so many times and worked so well that she continued to use it through my adolescence and even into adulthood. The slightest annoyance was enough for her to look furious and threaten to leave.

Threatening to abandon is as harmful as abandonment itself, it causes anguish and anxiety, fear and feelings of rejection, guilt and feelings of worthlessness.

Even as a psychologist, I still find it difficult to understand how a child or pre-adolescent can survive this without going crazy, without completely giving up reality. Or maybe they can't.

The cost of not going crazy is high, it's like balancing on a slackline tape that stretches with the weight of the body and returns to the initial state when the pressure decreases – in order not to fall you need to make strange movements; It's like moving between two worlds, between sanity and insanity, one foot here and the other there. Which is how I felt for a long time. And it also makes me think of the kids who couldn't help but become narcissists.

The narcissist, according to Sam Vaknin, is unable to separate himself from his mother, because his dependence on her means that he can regard her only as totally good. (...) There is no central identity that can assume this process of separation, individuation and integration of the bad aspects and the good aspects of the mother. (Lecture: How a Narcissist Fails to Integrate Two Mothers).



Professor Sam says that narcissists merge with the other signifier giving rise to a creature with "one body and two heads" – to me it seems that it is a head that commands two bodies. Because the narcissist usurps the autonomy, inserts the person into the fantasy, infantilizes the person and infantilized people do not express their own decisions much – it is just a remote-controlled body.

During development, infants face conflicts between their needs for dependence and independence through individuation, reaching a point where both are adequately satisfied. Unresolved internal conflicts can be reactivated at each stage of life development. Thus, separation-individuation (SI) – a process by which individuals alter their identity and achieve independent living at each stage of development – is crucial for adaptation in adolescence and adulthood (Mahler et al., 1975; Moon & Bahn, 2022)

The bond between mothers and daughters has been characterized as the most intimate and robust within families (Bojczyk et al., 2011; Sutor et al., 2017). According to Chodorow, 2023, when the mother identified her daughter as her expanded self, the mother saw a double identification between her daughter and her mother. Due to this double relationship of identification, psychological separation is not achieved. Research has shown that the mother-daughter relationship significantly influences women's mental well-being throughout their lives. (Besser & Priel, 2005; Birditt, & Fingerman, 2013; Jeon, 2023).

It is necessary to make this integration described by Professor Sam Vaknin, because in the final analysis, it means the removal of the mother from a place of perfection, her consequent re-humanization and the possibility of the children to become authentic individuals.

Seeing my mother through another lens was important to me. To understand that she wasn't divided for me, but I was divided for her. I had financial difficulty leaving her house, not separating FROM HER. My mother was also once a child. My grandmother was not abusive, but my mother's childhood was not easy, due to circumstances in her life history, she had to grow up fast. You have to know people's history. But that doesn't erase what she did. The memory of how you were treated by someone needs to exist.

We cannot erase the past, we need to understand what happened in the past that makes the present meaningless and that threatens the existence of the future.

Professor Sam Vaknin says that the children of narcissists can be classified into two types: sensitized and desensitized (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited – PG 364)

They become adults who are experts in reading between the lines, in recognizing signs and subtle changes in behavior, they feel when the atmosphere changes, their body reacts, their body is able to respond to variations imperceptible to other people.



From the point of view of biology, immune sensitization is the name given to the process where the immune system becomes more sensitive to a certain antigen, which may be its own or foreign, after previous exposure, which can lead to stronger and faster reactions in subsequent and frequent exposures, which may result in the appearance of allergies or autoimmune diseases. depending on the nature of the antigen and the immune response of the organism.

Our immune system has structures called Pattern Recognition Receptors (PRR's), they are proteins present in immune system cells that identify Pathogen-Associated Molecular Patterns (PAMP's) and damage-associated molecular patterns (DAMP's) – these receptors are crucial for initiating the innate immune response, triggering cell activation and the production of immune mediators, pro-inflammatory cytokines.

So, it would be quite reasonable to conclude that those people who suffered narcissistic abuse during childhood and who became sensitized, developed some kind of molecular signaling, some kind of similar immune response by molecular pathways capable of releasing inflammatory substances into the body as soon as they notice the first signs of rigid, standardized, narcissistic behavior. As if they had developed specific affective pattern recognition receptors (aPRR's), taking into account the emotion-immune system axis.

I also see on the other hand, while the first type, the sensitized one, still responds to the abuse as if they had an allergy, the second type is no longer impacted, as if they developed a tolerance to that substance that could cause an allergic reaction.

The first expresses indignation when insulted, humiliated or wronged, rebels, the second, in addition to not being moved, perceives the abuse as "love", naturalized and internalized the abusive treatment.

With my mother there was always a moment that I identified as an anticipation of affliction: as a calm. The infinite loop I learned to recognize, I wish I had learned earlier also to defend myself from it, not to delude myself with the hope that things would finally get better, even though she never apologized, even though it was obvious that she was not disturbed by the disagreement.

According to Sam Vaknin, both types of children of narcissists—the sensitized and the insensitive—conduct a lifelong dialogue with the inner representations and introjections of the Good Mother and the Evil Mother. It consists of the Evil Mother (narcissistic) belittling the qualities of a Good Mother (mentally healthy) and forcing her Good Son/Daughter to justify and defend their destructive bad behavior and pernicious and insidious traits (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited Pg. 364).

My narcissistic mother always listened behind the door, she was always going through my room, my things, purse, backpack, notebooks, drawers, clothes pockets, always investigating, always asking, playing the friend to gather information, then distort everything and use it against me.

She didn't give me privacy and tried to convince me that it was for my good. Which is a good example of infantilization and withdrawal of autonomy. This type of behavior wins by fatigue; you are exhausted from fighting against the domination of a

person who uses the condition of mother as a position of authority and power to make the other incapable. When there is no one else around who can interfere or help put situations in another perspective, when your narcissistic mother becomes the only reliable source of information, you begin to doubt yourself and start to agree with her.



My mother was able to say the most brutally cruel words and then deny everything, and say that I was in need of treatment for being unbalanced and the next day act as if nothing had happened, as if the monstrosity had not come from her.

The day I told my mother that I was pregnant, we were in the kitchen, she was already teasing me, to destabilize me, cause an incident and call me unbalanced – I could always recognize the pattern, but I usually couldn't prevent her from continuing and reaching the end of the cycle where she mercilessly devalued me and violently discarded

me in a few minutes. When I told her, she instantly exploded saying that I wasn't going to have a baby – "you're going to give birth to a monster!" she told me – while putting a knife to my belly screaming for me to get out of her way before she burst my belly.

I had nowhere to go, and it was this same woman who later started to accompany me to prenatal consultations.

In the moments when she seemed a little more in reality, I tried to talk to her about it, I wanted to know how she dealt with it, but she always told me that I was making it up, that it had never happened and that I should dedicate myself to being a writer, because my imagination was fertile and I was very creative.

Being a survivor is not enough



In a lecture called Bad trip down Mind of Narcissist, Narcissistic Abuse: into darkness and back - Kasarna Hub, Orhid, The Professor says that we must remember that the narcissist is a child and that the minute we recognize the narcissist as a child, everything falls into place.

I don't think we can forget that the narcissist **WAS** a child. But he was also a child in name only, he didn't live his childhood, his childhood was stolen.

As an adult, he is immature, with little or no emotional intelligence, who can perform mechanical and motor tasks well, who performs the processes of apprehension of academic knowledge and the practical issues of daily life, is able to complete activities that do not involve positive emotions, because he is not familiar with them. It was wrought in inconsistency, endless waiting, calamity, rejection, lying, helplessness, and disappointment. In adulthood, he doesn't know how to function outside of it and will compulsively drag anyone who gets involved with him into the same kind of sick dynamics.

But this phrase from Professor Sam served me once again to try to understand my mother too, despite everything. The childish responses she gave, sticking out her tongue when she was frustrated or confronted, because the surprise was so great that she didn't have time to craft an appropriately aggressive and humiliating response; Sometimes there was no time for her to project her childishness onto me and switch places with me.

Children are hedonistic. They do not know what hedonism means, but they live by what is defined as the pleasure principle. Not erotic pleasure, this should be reserved for relationships between adults; But I mean the pleasure of discovering things, of understanding how they work, as if the world had just been created exclusively for them. And this world is to be explored by children, who need to go to it on periodic expeditions supervised by the mother figure, with the freedom to exercise the creativity that is typical of children, with the certainty that they can make choices based on what they are experiencing and that their experiences will be valued.

I remember that when I was a child I always wanted to go to school, I always liked to study, although I was not in the group of the best students, but today I understand that institutional evaluation systems sometimes serve some and, most of the time, do not reach everyone. I wanted to go to school, but many, countless times, school was not good for me. I didn't socialize well. The reason for this, of course, was the unconscious trying to protect me – children who suffer some kind of abuse seek security in isolation.

In early childhood education, where I had a brief stint as a teacher, the pedagogical direction for the early years is called interactions and games. It makes sense.

It may seem strange coming from a former teacher, with two academic backgrounds, specialization, master's degree, etc., but there are more urgent things than

applauding a child under 10 years old entering college to study in a classroom where all the other students are adults.

Children should preferably share the environment with other children, with those at the same stage of development or as close as possible.

There is a commotion around giftedness and high abilities in younger and younger children. This overvaluation of the intellect exacts a very high price. The pressure for results, very high expectations, comparisons, competitions, self-demand, perfectionism, isolation, are linked to many deprivations. Who is this achievement for?

If an adult has difficulty dealing with the responsibility of personal and professional fulfillment, with the pressure for results, then it is quite reasonable to admit the negative impact that this can have on the mental health of a child who does not yet have a balanced emotional repertoire to deal with adult life issues – he is not an adult!

It is up to parents to minimize this impact instead of enhancing it. It is up to parents to preserve the child, to accommodate him in his appropriate stage of development with the appropriate experiences, without skipping steps, without having to mature too quickly – being a child who demonstrates maturity above his age is often not merit, but an indication that the child may have been exposed to situations and contexts for which he was not prepared, adverse experiences, dysfunctional families.

Sam Vaknin was one of those prodigious children who arouse curious looks and whispered comments in the corridors of a college where 9-year-olds were not exactly the most common type of attendees and describes in the fragment below the feeling, calling attention to disturbing aspects, from the perspective of a child forced to act in the world of adults:

Forcing a child into adult pursuits is one of the subtlest varieties of soul murder. Very often we find that the narcissist was deprived of his childhood. Consider the gifted child, the Wunderkind: the answer to his mother's prayers and the salve to her frustrations; a human computing machine; a walking-talking encyclopedia; a curiosity; a circus freak; the proverbial lab rat of developmental psychologists. Frequently interviewed by the media, he endures the envy of his peers and their pushy mothers. (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited - Pg. 102)



Playing is an important activity in every child's life. The child learns by playing, develops cognitive and motor skills, establishes affective bonds. Children who play are happier, become self-confident and develop creativity. Children miss playing with other children as much as adults miss communicating with their coworkers. During play, children learn psychosocial skills that they will take with them for life (Dag et al., 2021).



The lack of physical activity brings several diseases. Effortless movements such as walking, running, swinging, rolling, jumping, and crawling on the floor during a game strengthen muscles and improve hand-eye coordination. For the development of fine motor coordination, carrying, grasping, writing, drawing geometric figures with pencils, cutting paper with scissors, playing with sand, tying beads and eating with the fork, will help. Outdoor activities have an impact on reducing obesity levels and the need for vitamin D is met thanks to sunlight. Physical activity is associated with a reduction in depressive and anxiety symptoms and increases sleep quality (Dag et al., 2021).

Sam Vaknin points out that healthy children internalize the presence of their mother and children who are not healthy internalize the absence of their mother (Psychosis is Your Second Chance: GO NUTS NOW!).



A mother (or mother figure) translates her presence in affection, in availability, acceptance, compassionate listening, correction that does not violate or humiliate, in the open space for dialogue.

The presence of the mother figure is perceived in the attitude of the child, the adolescent, the adult in feeling comfortable enough not to keep secrets, in the demonstration of pride in their origins, in the perception that the child has that the mother's or parents' house is the place where he wants or can return and not the place from which he tries to escape, that the stories of her childhood are good memories and not episodes that she would love to be able to forget.



Absence does not have to be physical, although this is more easily perceived and feared, but most of the time it is not this absence that causes the most damage. The greatest damage is the feeling that the presence of the mother figure makes no difference, or worse, that this presence introduces the child to the concept of indifference in practice.

Emotional fluctuation, insensitivity, lack of empathy, lack of physical contact, are impregnated in the child's memory, as if it were a photo album with no photograph to see.

In other contexts, the child may not recognize himself in family photos, as if looking at his childhood photograph, he was looking at a stranger.

Even the act of playing can be negatively instrumentalized by a disinterested maternal figure, for example through neglect and permissiveness, using the child's play as an escape valve from living with the child and abandoning him in a world of unlimited play.

What can the overexposure of a child, a developing brain, highly neuroplastic, to so many images with ambivalent messages, malicious suggestions, daily, almost uninterruptedly, provoke in sensory processing and in the child's apprehension of information?

In the digital era, this is most evident by the indiscriminate use of electronic devices by children at an increasingly early age, without adequate supervision or parental assistance, putting children at risk, leaving them exposed and vulnerable, favoring social isolation and weakening subjective interactions with other children or family members.

According to Professor Sam, in the narcissist's early childhood, the other signifiers were inconsistent in their acceptance of him. They paid attention to the narcissist only when they wanted to satisfy some of their needs. They tended to ignore it or actively abuse it when those needs were no longer present (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited Pg. 74).



A child thus learns to be used and to use people. She learns that being disposable herself, so are other people. In the environment where there is, especially, a narcissistic mother, the child, adolescent or adult seems to live in a stock market, as if suddenly, his shares plummeted for no apparent or understandable reason and the child lost value; The child learns that relationships are always one of exchange, that he must always offer something first in order to receive the minimum within his own home. But therein lies a paradox – it's not her house and this message is clearly conveyed, as my mother did with me as an adult, on occasions when I couldn't give her what she wanted (usually money) even paying most of the bills, I even heard several times from my mother, that I was wanting to live for free (yes, You read that correctly, in the house where I paid the bills).

Unconditional love is what the child feels for his parents for many years in his development, on the one hand it is the nature of the child, on the other hand it is a necessity, it is a matter of survival; The unconditional love of the child also means believing that he is loved unconditionally. As Professor Sam says, if the child thinks that he is not loved by the most important person in his childhood universe, this thought is terrifying and the feeling of helplessness is unbearable. In the fragment below, it refers to the narcissist's parents, but it can be applied to any type of relationship between parents and children where there is no freedom, where the child is charged with specific behaviors making him feel inappropriate if he does not show the expected behavior:

Parents of narcissists teach their tender offspring to expect only conditional or transactional love: the child is supposed to render a service or fulfil the parent's wishes in return for affection and compassion, attention and emotion. Ineluctably, the hurt child reacts with rage to this injustice and mistreatment. (Sam Vaknin. Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited PG 140)

Love, in all its forms, is not a negotiation, but especially in the early stages of a child's life, to insert the child in an environment where service is a bargaining chip to get attention is to reduce the child's value to what it can provide, it is to send silent messages affirming that it has utility just like an object.

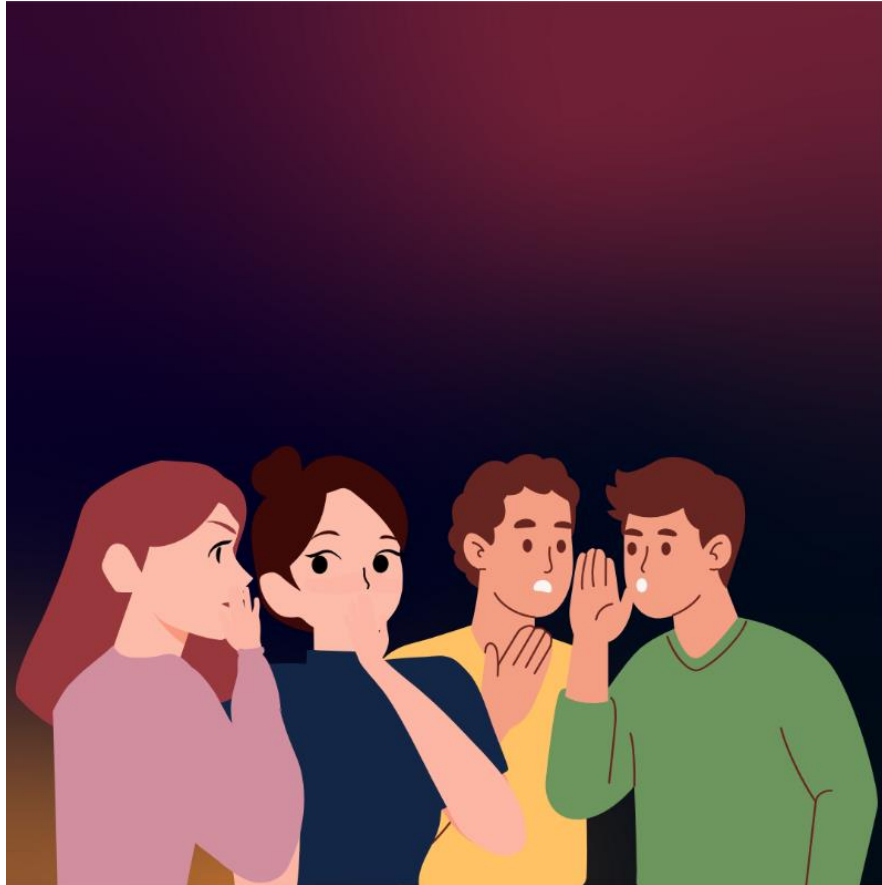
The feeling that emerges in the child is that of invisibility, it is the feeling that no matter what he does if he cannot meet a specific demand of the other, he will not be seen, will not be perceived, will not be needed.

If the child always has to offer something that the mother figure has established as acceptable, is that child allowed to fail? Where error is not admitted, a space is opened for lies, for disguise. Where it is not possible to elaborate failure as a learning process, what will be the alternatives to failure? Is it admissible? This is a precondition for perfectionism, which contrary to what many people think is not a quality nor should it be a desirable trait.

Will adults who could not have their experiences validated in childhood be able to raise other children?



The narcissist is bullied at home. Professor Sam says that as a child, the narcissist often suffers abuse by parents, siblings, and even peers: he functions as the "currency" with which they negotiate to create coalitions. He is to blame for everything that goes wrong in the family dynamic and serves as a topic of gossip, worry, and negative emotions (*Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited* Pg. 359)



A child is not mature enough to be negatively in the spotlight, and the unpleasant subject, the target of mean and intimidating looks – this causes discomfort even in an adult.

In this type of dysfunctional family, a dynamic happens that I call "divide and conquer", like the war strategy itself. Incomplete information, "accidental revelations" are passed; They openly say that someone spoke ill of you. Discord is literally sown. The members of the family nucleus fall out and weaken, but the narcissistic mother keeps the allies for a while longer.

Narcissistic mothers are agents of chaos, or most of the time, they are chaos itself.



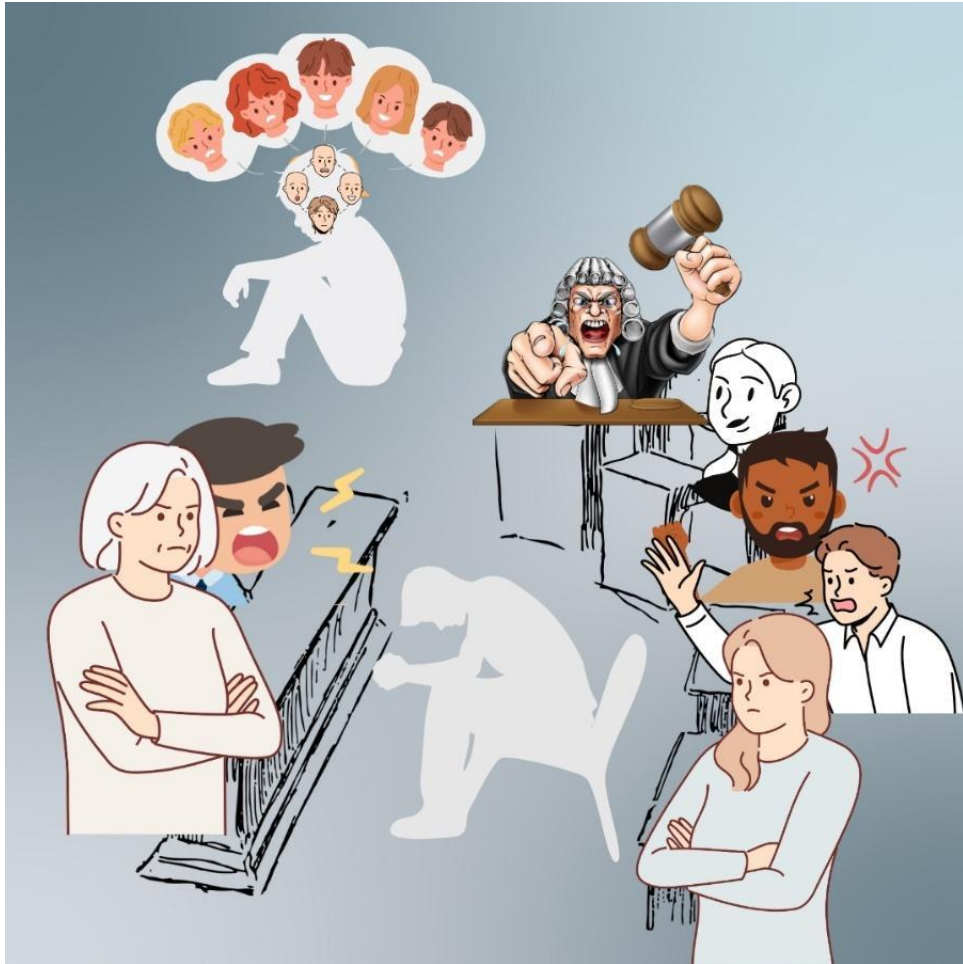
If the child receives harsh criticism, is constantly called to attention, if he realizes that, as Professor Sam says, that he is the topic of conversations often and usually the conversations end badly for him, is it not possible that he will start to develop paranoia and the feeling of being persecuted by family members?

If the child has been blamed, if he has been placed in the position in which the success of the family depends on him, would not the logical thought of the child be that he is a central element and that all things exist or cease to exist, solely and exclusively, because of him?

Wouldn't that constitute a floor for what later in adulthood we identify as grandiosity and an inflated sense of self-importance and God complex? For the child, the judgment that the parents make about him is correct and incontestable. So, the idea of power is implicit in the abusive attitude of parents. It is not verbalized, but the child receives the suggestion and starts to act as if this thought were theirs.

According to Sam Vaknin, the narcissist always feels a little guilty. It can be an old guilt from early childhood, a feeling of guilt (...). In their childhood, the narcissist

internalized and introjected the voices of significant others, relatives, role models, peers, and authority figures—who consistently and convincingly judged them as not being a good person, the scapegoat, someone who deserves punishment or retaliation, or corrupt (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited Pg. 138).



It is possible that the internalized guilt, implanted by the abuse suffered in the family, becomes a defense mechanism, of course, an alloplastic mechanism, a projection of guilt. But it is because he actually feels guilt that he needs to project it onto someone else. Because guilt means a set of memories of abuse suffered in the family, memories of other faults that were not theirs and that he had to assume under the promise of exemplary punishment or retaliation through the treatment of silence that is a way of isolating the child from contact with reality; And somehow, he needs to get it out of his system, he needs to get rid of the feeling of childhood, the feeling of powerlessness, he needs to get rid of his own fragility in front of those who didn't care about what he felt, until he started to think it was better not to feel it anymore.

From a certain point of view, judgment is something we can get used to, perhaps without so much emotional damage, after all, we all judge things, situations and people at all times. I dare say that judgment would be even less of a problem, if we take into account a mentally healthy adult, who does not need the other's gaze to tell him how he should feel.

The main issue is the conviction. After the sentence, what is left to do? And successive trials and convictions on a child? Doesn't it seem like an emotional overload that's hard to manage?

This is the process of implantation of negative introjects in the mind of the narcissist, so these judgments accumulate like a list of open precedents, and a guilt is triggered, as if on *standby*, to be activated at the slightest sign of a similar previous situation, which is almost automatically recognized by the child who has been sensitized, as Professor Sam says.

This way it is faster to realize that escaping from reality is the option that seems most viable for a child who has never had his feelings taken into account, who has not been seen, has not been heard, has not been perceived – but has been used.

One of the abused and traumatized child's coping strategies is to withdraw inwards, to seek gratification from a secure, reliable and permanently-available source: from his self. The child, fearful of further rejection and abuse, refrains from further interaction with others. Instead, it builds its own kingdom of grandiose fantasies where it is always loved, respected, and self-sufficient. This is the narcissistic strategy which leads to the development of a narcissistic personality. (Pg 359)



It is normal to create some scenarios in mind, plan the next steps – it is even recommended. Psychotherapists, organizational psychologists, and other professionals recognize the importance of career planning, for example, setting healthy goals that do not exploit or harm other people. These attitudes guide and prepare a person for the "storms" of life, so that they can follow alternative routes if necessary and know that the decision is always theirs.

Some people are dreamier than others, this is also quite acceptable. But depending on the content and magnitude of this dream, it can be a worrying factor.

The limit of sanity is the achievable dream.

For the child, planning teaches responsibility and the notion of time distribution, teaches the existence of a universal calendar and that it is allowed to adopt diversified

calendars according to need; It teaches the importance of a routine and respect for other people's routine and time and that we all have external limitations and internal limitations.

In narcissistic personality disorder, plans are oversized, expected outcomes are overvalued, projects have so many elements that they are not executable – in the past, the disorder was also referred to as megalomania.

Fantasy serves the purpose of calming the narcissist, of regulating anxiety, because it provides him with the opposite message to the one he received in childhood, that message that he had no value.

The fantasy of grandiosity does not concern only the subject or patient with the disorder. Professor Sam says that saying he has the largest collection of anything can be an indication of greatness – saying that he is the most hated of all time is definitely a sign of greatness. The greatness extends to other people, including allies and enemies, all perceived as characters who must act according to a script they did not receive, but for which they will be charged in the future.

And they will disappoint, invariably, because contrary to what the narcissist expects, people are not the characters in his inner play. So, as uncomfortable as it is to receive this guidance at first, it is up to the "recruited participant" to know himself as replaceable, and to resist the imposed role instead of trying to fit in. Because as an adult it is possible to do this, the child does not have that chance, he needs to stay. Where would she go? Where would she flee? Exactly: you, as an adult, would escape outwards, into reality; the child will flee inside, he will flee FROM reality.

Sam Vaknin points out that the narcissist has precious little experience of himself. Instead, he lives in a made-up world, designed by him, where he is a fictional figure, the main and heroic protagonist in a grandiose script. He, therefore, does not have tools that enable him to deal with other human beings, share his emotions, put himself in the shoes of others (feel empathy) and love them: the most demanding of tasks in interpersonal relationships (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited Pg. 135).

You must have seen the movie Superman – the movie makes a lot more sense to me now, after knowing such deep aspects of Professor Sam's work.



In the film we see Clark Kent, a shy, gentle, subservient, embarrassed, clumsy man, everyone passes in front of him. Although he is a tall and strong man, he does not impose himself by force, he does not change his voice, he does not offend, he does not attack, he does not ask for anything.

How much repression is contained in measured behavior?

Clark left his adoptive parents' farm and went to work as a journalist in a big city, where he fell in love with his co-worker, Lois Lane. Superman, the hero under the impeccable suit and glasses that, mysteriously, are enough for him not to be recognized as a superhero, does not seem to me to be his true identity, it seems to me more like his false *self*. Superman does what Clark can't do (Kent = Can't). For Superman there is always someone to be rescued, a girl in danger, a whole world to be saved and he is there

precisely for that and only he has all the necessary qualities to complete this task, his life mission.

Do you think the planet Krypton exists? Or could it be a metaphor for a chaotic environment he lived in as a child before thankfully being adopted by a couple who had no children but who had a lot of affection to offer and who gave him all the good examples and positive teachings they could? Did his biological parents save him by sending him on a ship to another planet? Or this could be the representation of abandonment and subsequent escape to an alternative reality where his parents from another planet were good, yes, they were so good that they put a baby of about a year old in a flying capsule that they had no idea where it would arrive or in what condition it would arrive or how long it would take for the child to be found by who knows what form of life? (it's ironic). What is kryptonite if not the memory of your trauma of abandonment and the source of everything that weakens him? Something that is so disturbing and powerful that in order for him not to be annihilated it must be kept in a lead box, preferably well away from him.

Superman has all the attributes of a false *self*: He has almost unlimited powers, he is handsome, charismatic, he draws the attention of women, he is confident, he is intelligent, he is insightful, he is funny, he can fly, he is like a god, since, among other things, he can move with such speed that it is as if he can be everywhere at once; he has an x-ray vision (cold empathy), he is brave, he does not give satisfactions of his life, he is the defender of the weak and the hope of the forgotten – He is perfect!

But he often seems to be bothered by something. The film shows Clark in love with his co-worker, who takes an interest in the Superman she doesn't know is Clark. He seems tired of not being loved for who he really is. But who is he?

Professor Sam Vaknin, sheds light on this aspect, bringing to our awareness the dissociative character of narcissistic personality disorder.

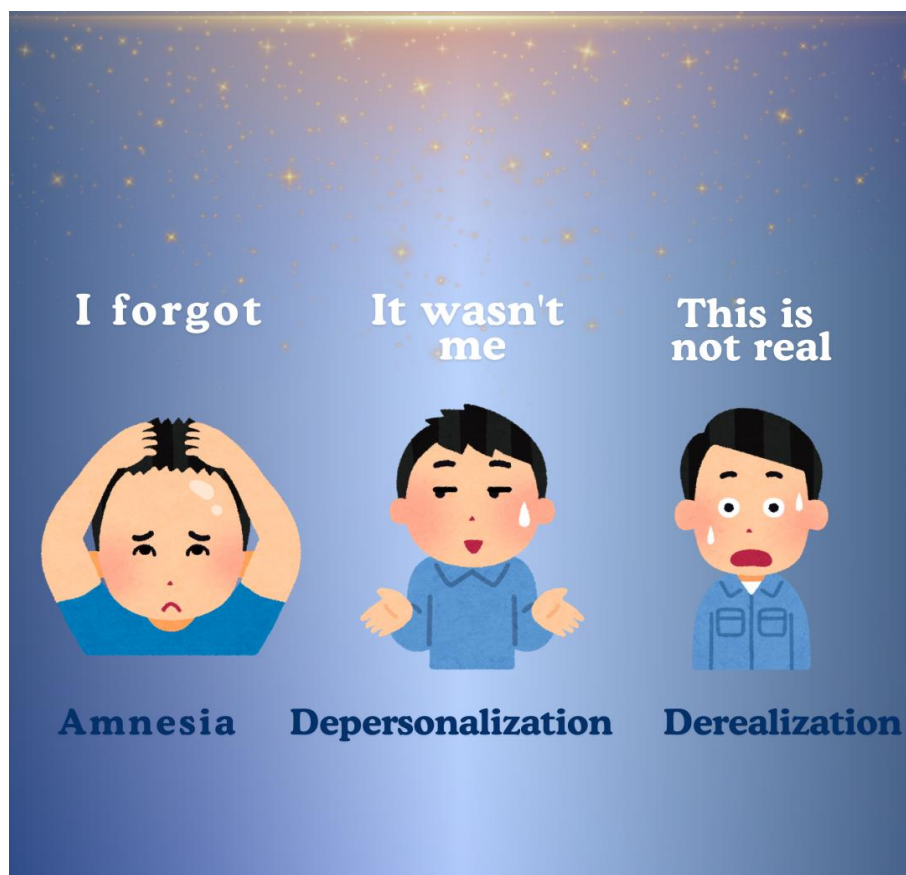
Because the child, says Sam Vaknin, turned into a narcissist, has been disabled from interacting with reality on an ongoing basis, we have a phenomenon known as dissociation. Dissociation is a way of rejecting reality (Lecture: Bad trip down Mind of Narcissist, Narcissistic Abuse: into darkness and back - Kasarna Hub, Orhid).

Dissociative disorders are characterized by the interruption and/or discontinuation in the normal integration of consciousness, memory, identity, emotion, perception, body representation, motor control, and behavior. Dissociative symptoms can disrupt all areas of psychological functioning and are commonly divided into two types: unsolicited intrusions into consciousness and behavior, accompanied by deficits in the continuity of subjective experience labeled as a "positive" dissociative symptom, e.g., fragmentation of identity, depersonalization, derealization; and inability to access information or control mental functions, called a "negative" dissociative symptom, e.g., amnesia, aphonia, paralysis (Spiegel et al., 2013).



Dissociative experiences are multifaceted psychological constructs prevalent across a broad spectrum of psychiatric conditions (Lyssenko, et al, 2018; Roydeva & Reinders 2021). Frequently reported by individuals with a history of adverse childhood experiences (ACE), particularly abuse (Kate, 2020; Vonderlin et al., 2018; Chalavi et al.,

2015; Chalavi et al., 2015; Dorahy et al., 2015; Lynn et al., 2018; Rafiq et al., 2018), contextually dependent coping strategies involving adaptations in emotion and memory regulation can be considered (Lynn et al., 2018; Reinders et al., 2014; Vissia et al., 2022; Fenster et al., 2018., Lanius et al., 2018; Schimmenti, 2016) that offer protection when physical escape is not possible (Putnam, 1996; Kluf, 1985; Nijenhuis et al., 1998; Spiegel, 1984; Vermetten et al., 2007). These adaptations primarily affect the top-down inhibitory mechanisms of the prefrontal cortex and may therefore counteract the signals related to bottom-up fear stemming from the limbic system Roydeva & Reinders 2021; Fenster et al., 2018; Lanius et al., 2018; Spiegel, 1984; Reinders et al., 2012; Sierra & Berrios, 1998; Lanius et al, 2010; Lebois et al., 2022). Despite substantial progress in examining the neurofunctional underpinnings of dissociation, previous research has largely focused on trauma-related dissociative experiences that occur in the context of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Lanius et al., 2018), borderline personality disorder (BPD) (Krause-Utz et al, 2017), and dissociative identity disorder (DID) (Reinders & Veltman, 2021; von Schröder et al., 2025).



Dissociative symptoms, including depersonalization/derealization, are thought to be the result of a vestigial reaction to events perceived as fatal. It has been shown that there is an especially strong relationship between early interpersonal trauma and dissociative disorders. In one study, 198 psychiatric patients, ages 11 to 19, were given the Adolescent Dissociative Experience Scale to determine whether the degree of dissociative experience correlated with childhood trauma, which was measured through a checklist of various types of traumatic events. The study revealed that children who experienced a history of neglect, abuse (both physical and sexual), and stressful life events had a much higher degree of dissociative experiences than those who did not do so emotionally (Murphy, 2023).

Emotional neglect was determined to be the most substantial pathogenic risk factor. It has been suggested that these highly stressful encounters do not fit into the subject's cognitive schema in relation to himself, others, and the world; therefore, they separate themselves from consciousness. When viewed in this way, dissociation is part of the brain's effort to eliminate the salience of painful memories, with the unintended consequence of causing intrusive thoughts and emotional blunting (Murphy, 2023).

Depersonalization/derealization may emerge as a secondary symptom of other psychiatric conditions, such as borderline personality disorder (BPD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), major depressive disorder (MDD), or as a dissociative qualifier of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD+DS – Dissociative Scale); (Murphy, 2023).

Dissociative amnesia is characterized by blocking the retrieval of episodic autobiographical memories that arise in the context of psychological trauma (known or not), with no evidence of brain damage on structural imaging. Patients experience a disruption of themselves. (Thomas-Antérion, 2017).



Simply put, the common feature of all these conditions – regardless of the cause or mechanism – is that they are clinical disorders that involve disproportionate retrograde amnesia. The definition of dissociative amnesia is given in the 2017 French International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (CIM10) as "a disorder characterized by a retrospective gap in the memory of important personal information, usually of a traumatic or stressful nature; Memory loss far exceeds ordinary forgetfulness and is not the result of substance use or the consequence of a medical condition." The term 'psychogenic amnesia' is considered an approximate synonym (Thomas-Antérion, 2017).

Chapter 4 – Getting Started

The content contextualized here refers mainly to the material to which I had access through Professor Sam's digital platforms and to those sent to me by e-mail by himself. It is worth remembering that this is a guide to the path I took back to myself, it does not pretend to be a universal recipe – from the first page of this book, here are the images that formed in my mind in the moments when I read, saw and listened to Professor Sam Vaknin's lectures.

One of the reasons, perhaps the strongest reason I studied psychology, was because it was the cheapest way to have access to something that was similar to therapy, since I completed the course at a public university in Brazil. Because studying has always been my only resource available to deal with all the traumatic situations I went through, and I believe that many people do this, I think it is necessary to list some particularities that were decisive for my understanding of some of the personality disorders of Cluster B and essential in my recovery from the abuses I suffered in my family of origin.

In this section, the focus is on the punctual comparison between BPD, NPD and APD, taking into account the aspects that can be more easily identified outside the office, in life, in daily life, establishing a parameter as simple as possible, where the difference is evident, sufficient to identify and recognize abusive situations.

Professor Sam Vaknin says it's only a small step from hypervigilance to paranoia. One of the characteristics shared between NPD and BPD is separation insecurity, also known as abandonment anxiety. Narcissists catastrophize, that is, they tend to interpret environmental signals in order to create tragic scenarios with negative outcomes frequently, and even more often, they anticipate a betrayal, just as borderlines even wanting the presence of their partner, push him away, and fearing being abandoned, abandon first.



According to Professor Sam Vaknin, NPD and BPD can be considered narcissistic self-disorder, they are like specular images. If you stand in front of the mirror and touch your right hand to the mirror, your perception will be that your image touches your hand on the other side of the mirror with your left hand.

Paranoia is associated with the persecutory illusion; it is contained in this construct. Both are characterized by an increased sense of self-importance, both are causes of great stress, as they involve the perception that other people have an interest in causing damage or impairment to the material, physical or mental integrity of the supposedly persecuted person, although the persecutory illusion is often a component of psychosis.

Psychosis is a mental health condition that causes the loss of contact with reality. The person finds it difficult to distinguish what is real and what is not. It can be a symptom

of a mental illness, such as schizophrenia. However, the person may have an episode of psychosis, a psychotic break, and never receive a diagnosis of schizophrenia or any other mental disorder.

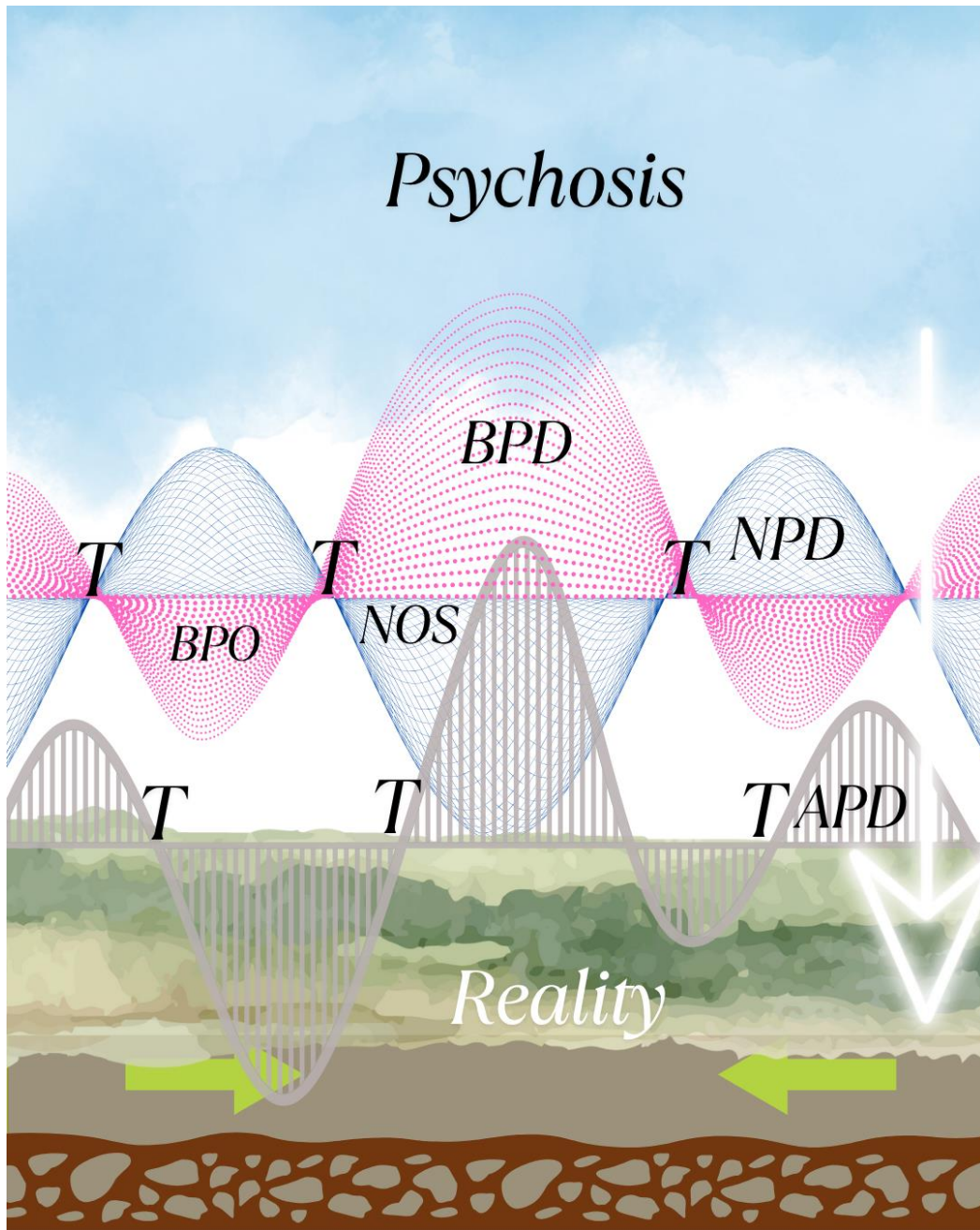
A psychotic state is the natural state of the child in early childhood because, according to Sam Vaknin (Lecture: Psychosis is your second chance: Go nuts now!), the child having not separated from the mother and has not become an individual, still remains in oneness with the world, making no distinction between what is internal and what is external until he is allowed to have his own experiences supervised by the mother and progress from psychosis to a state of healthy mental health that we know as normality.

What happens during this path, capable of interfering in the child's psychic development, will be decisive for the emergence of borderline personality disorders, narcissism and psychopathy, that is, we can understand the emergence of disorders related to the type of trauma, continuity and intensification of traumatic events.

In the illustration we see the propagation of mechanical waves, such as waves originating from seismic shocks.

Seismic waves come from the release of energy accumulated in the rocks of the earth's crust, in most cases, due to the movement of tectonic plates, which when they collide, slide or separate, the accumulated energy is released causing vibrations and movements in the ground, earthquakes. Mechanical waves need a material medium to propagate, which can be solid, liquid, or gaseous.

This is a metaphor to illustrate that the occurrence of traumatic events (T), the persistence of events and their intensity are related to a progression among personality disorders, considering that the child must go through a path of experiences that move him away from the psychotic state and bring him closer and closer to the reality where he should be healthy (Lecture: Psychosis is your second chance: Go nuts now!).

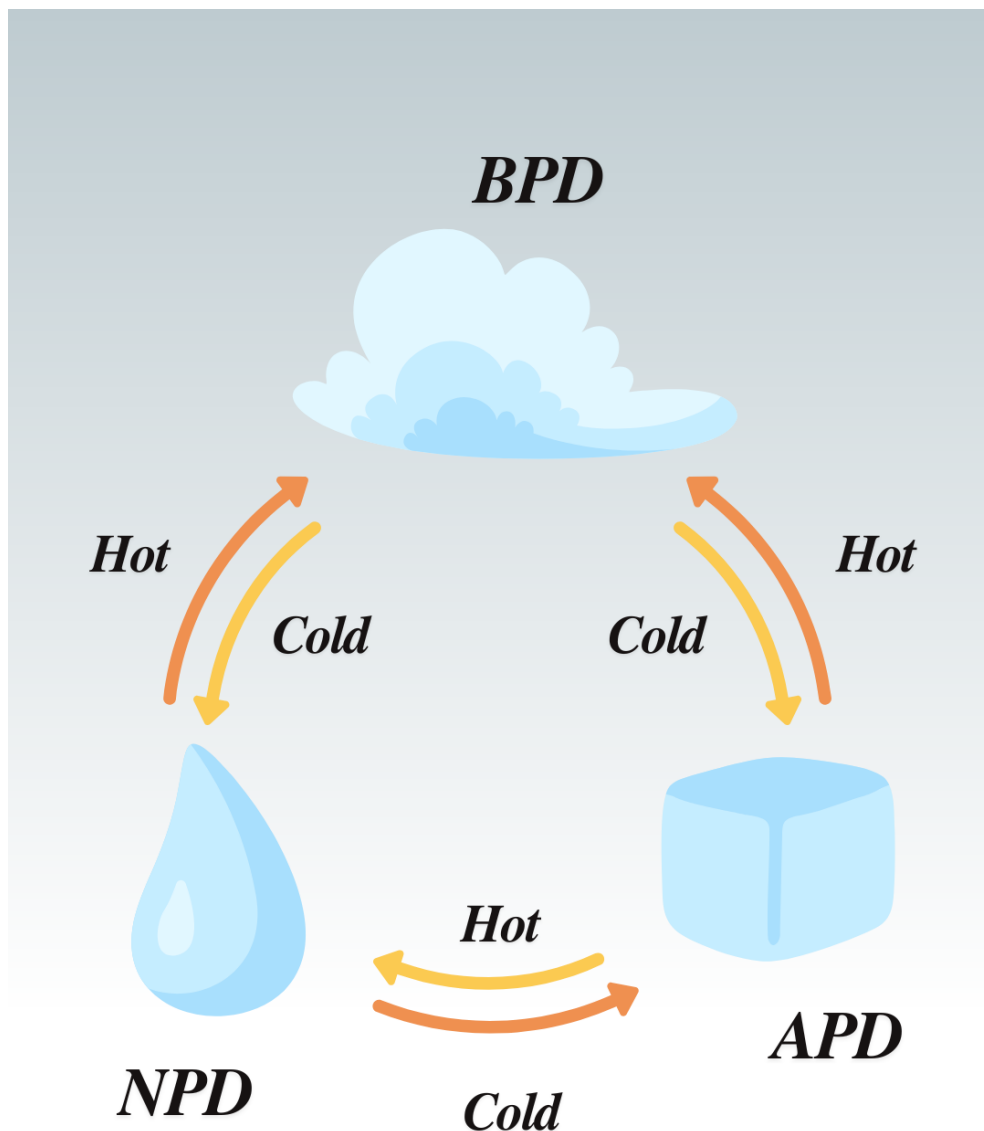


In the first phase, the trauma leads to the organization of the borderline personality (OPB) and if the trauma persists, borderline personality disorder (BPD) originates, indicated in the propagation of pink waves, and indicating how borderlines are on the verge of psychosis. When BPD is not established, a narcissistic organization of the self (ONS) is formed, and with the persistence of trauma, narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) originates, as indicated in blue wave propagation. We can observe that borderlines and narcissists are specular images, they mirror each other. When NPD fails to establish itself and traumas intensify, antisocial personality disorder (APD) is formed, psychopathy in a generalized way, represented by the propagation of gray waves, where we can also

observe that psychopaths are sedimented in reality, represented by the soil and the earth's crust – it means that psychopaths can function as seismic shocks, brutally destabilizing a person.

This may be the reason why Professor Sam Vaknin compares psychopaths to natural disasters, since an earthquake is capable of cracking the walls of a building, opening craters in the ground and depending on the magnitude and epicenter, for example if tectonic plates collide in oceanic regions, they can displace large volumes of water quickly causing giant waves, known as tsunamis, and cause even more destruction.

Sam Vaknin proposes a theory about the states of the self, considering personality disorders based on the disorder of primary narcissism, since a healthy narcissism is essential to our emotional functioning and perception of ourselves.



In the study of science, we use the term normal conditions of temperature and pressure (NCTP) when dealing with closed systems. To explain the phenomenon of change in the physical state of water, we consider 25°C as the ambient temperature

There are essentially two ways for water to transition from liquid to gaseous status, a slower way, when the sun heats surfaces that contain water – puddles of water on the ground, rivers, lakes, oceans, clothes on the clothesline, your hair after you get out of the shower, droplets on plant leaves, and a faster way, when a heat source is applied raising the temperature of the water to 100°C, the boiling point of water – in both the same phenomenon occurs, the agitation of the molecules and the disorganization of the oxygen and hydrogen atoms and the unfolding into water vapor, which rises into the atmosphere and is concentrated in the form of clouds.

The more water vapor, the heavier and heavier the clouds become, and at this altitude, with lower temperatures, it condenses, the molecules regroup, return to a liquid state and precipitate in the form of rain – if there is a sudden drop in temperature below 0°C (melting point or solidification of water) – the molecules are extremely united, Water quickly passes from a liquid to a solid state, forming crystals or blocks of ice that precipitate in the form of hail. The ice blocks begin to melt at zero degrees, and the water returns to a liquid state. Under very specific conditions, water can pass directly from the solid state to the gaseous state.

We all have some level of healthy narcissism, so we can say that it is a component of our state of normality and, by analogy, liquid water under normal conditions. One of the characteristics of liquid water is that it takes the form of the container that contains it, like the narcissist who molds himself to the new partner in the initial phase when he is applying *lovebombing*.

Temperature changes are analogies for emotional dysregulation and impulsivity in borderline personality disorder, and coldness, which also represents affective detachment, as much as the ability to act only with a focus on goals, without caring about people, is an analogy for psychopathy. The physical states of water are intertransposable, influenced by external factors. So, the suggestion is that depending on the situation, the severity of the event, the emotional dysregulation, narcissists can change their state of "self" to both borderline and psychopathy, borderlines can change both to psychopaths

(secondary, according to Professor Sam) and to narcissists; and psychopaths would also undergo these changes, alternating between narcissistic or borderline states.

Being in a relationship with narcissists can be comparable to drowning, or the endless feeling of being swept away by the current, is being in a boat adrift; with borderline it is like being in clouds that easily dissipate with the wind, but when loaded promise a storm from which you will have to protect yourself; And with psychopaths, cold as ice, it may seem like a dazzling event in winter when the snow falls, but when a large volume moves at speed, the avalanche destroys everything in its path.

The real and the ideal



The preference for the use of the female gender for borderline personality disorder (BPD) and the male gender for narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) and antisocial personality disorder (APD), is purely didactic, as Professor Sam does in the lectures, taking into account the official scientific language, always remembering that "half of all narcissists are women" and this also applies to borderline, equalizing the incidence between women and men.

Vaknin says that borderline is "drop dead gorgeous: she is gorgeous and you're dead". Even though it is small, this sentence denotes two fundamental aspects of borderline personality disorder: a mental model and external behavior, which affects people in direct contact with people with the disorder and makes their interpersonal relationships quite complex.

In psychology we say that the internalization of positive experiences, that is, the mental representation of something or someone that has been perceived as a source of security, pleasure and satisfaction, and that influences expectations and future interactions, constitutes a good (internal) object (according to the theory of object relations). This representation or mental model may be accompanied by an internal monologue, which Sam refers to as a set or a constellation of voices.

According to Professor Sam, (Lecture: Borderline's Good Object, Bad Behavior) the borderline defines itself as a good object, but its reprehensible external behavior and its frequent emotional dysregulation contradict this self-perception, causing a confusion, a dissonance that is uncomfortable and unpleasant.

The borderline has suicidal ideation; she presents self-destructive behaviors and emotional instability; She's dramatic and has other questionable behaviors that can hurt the people around her — and she feels inadequate and guilty for being that way.

So, according to Sam, the inner workings of borderlines (and narcissists, too) are governed by compensatory mechanisms in the quest to reframe themselves so that they can recognize themselves as someone they don't have to be ashamed of.

They (the borderline and the narcissist) are mirror images of each other, that is, they mirror each other, and since it has an interruption or a compromise of the self and it does not have a self (as it could be), they replace the self they should have with a good internal object (with a bad external object), and a bad internal object (with a good external object) respectively, one the reverse of the other.

The dissonance is so uncomfortable, causing symptoms of stress and anxiety, that borderline has numerous moments of escape from reality or frequent dissociative episodes.

But dissociation is a short-term solution or remedy. Dissociative episodes with high occurrence can lead to permanent psychotic states, so Sam points out that the good

object is the only thing that stands between the borderline and a total disintegration until, probably, psychosis.

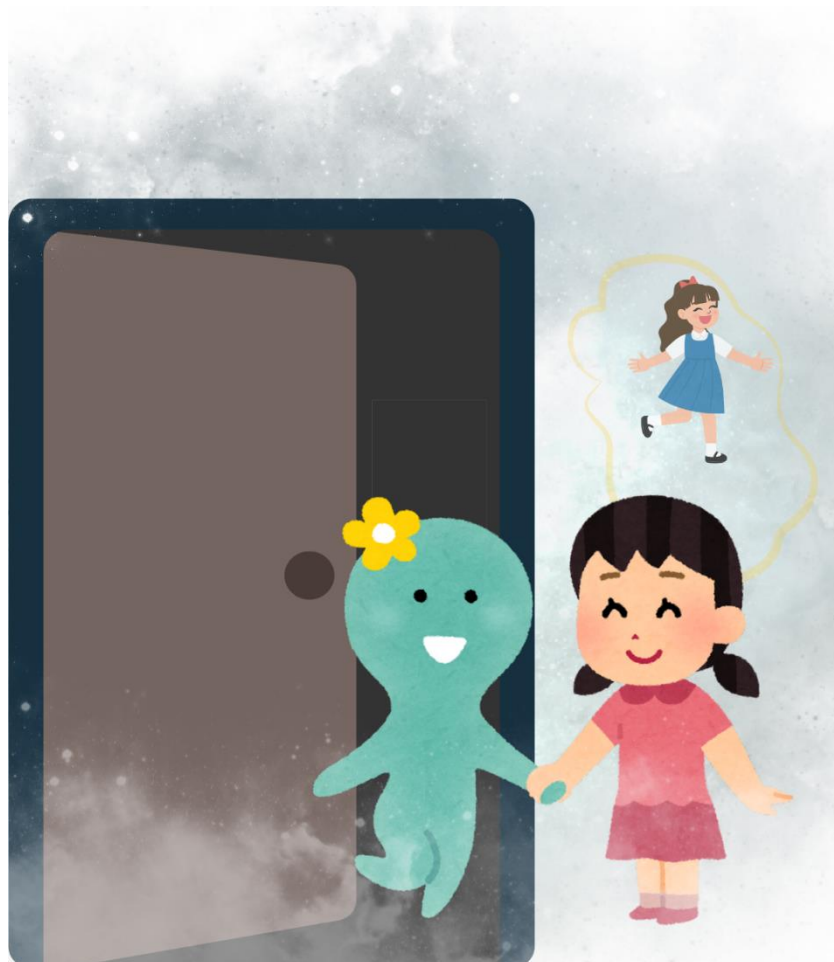


In this way, Sam turns to Otto Kernberg (one of the greatest theorists in the study of the organization of borderline personality) emphasizing that when in childhood, the separation-individuation process has been interrupted, the child's development is stagnant between psychosis and reality, as if he remained on the border or on the margin, on the edge, justifying the term borderline used to name the disorder – because it is on the border between psychosis and neurosis.

The relationship with the Limbic System becomes more evident even in the nomenclature, since the term "limbic" comes from the Latin *limbus* and means edge, with the limbic system being between the cerebral cortex and deeper structures of the brainstem, considered the epicenter of the expression and regulation of emotions and behavior, involved in functions such as hunger and satiety, sexual arousal and

reproduction, maternal instincts, anxiety, fear, aggressiveness, and memory creation, retention, and maintenance.

As a child, prevented from interacting with the real world and stagnant in the psychotic stage, the borderline initiates the compensatory mechanism through the creation of an imaginary world where she interacts with an imaginary friend and, thus, her false-self emerges, which will be the mediator of her pathological process of separation from the outside world, because the borderline's false-self is an external object (even if it is imaginary, but is external) internalized later.



Because the false *self* is her only connection to reality, Sam says, as an adult, the borderline becomes dependent on the partner or the people she chooses as special in her life, as they become an extension of the false self, performing the function of external regulators of her emotions, like an outsourcing. as an ego on the outside and managed by someone else.

But this, at the same time, causes anxiety, two anxieties specifically: an anxiety that originates in the fear of abandonment and another anxiety caused by the feeling of being swallowed up by the relationship, as if it were going to disappear. Hence the contradictory behavior – for fear of being abandoned it suffocates, for fear of being phagocytosed it repels, approaches and moves away, irrationally, anticipates an imaginarily imminent abandonment; Because she has empathy and knows that for her partner this is an exhausting dynamic and if it were the other way around, she wouldn't be able to stand it, she abandons it before being abandoned.



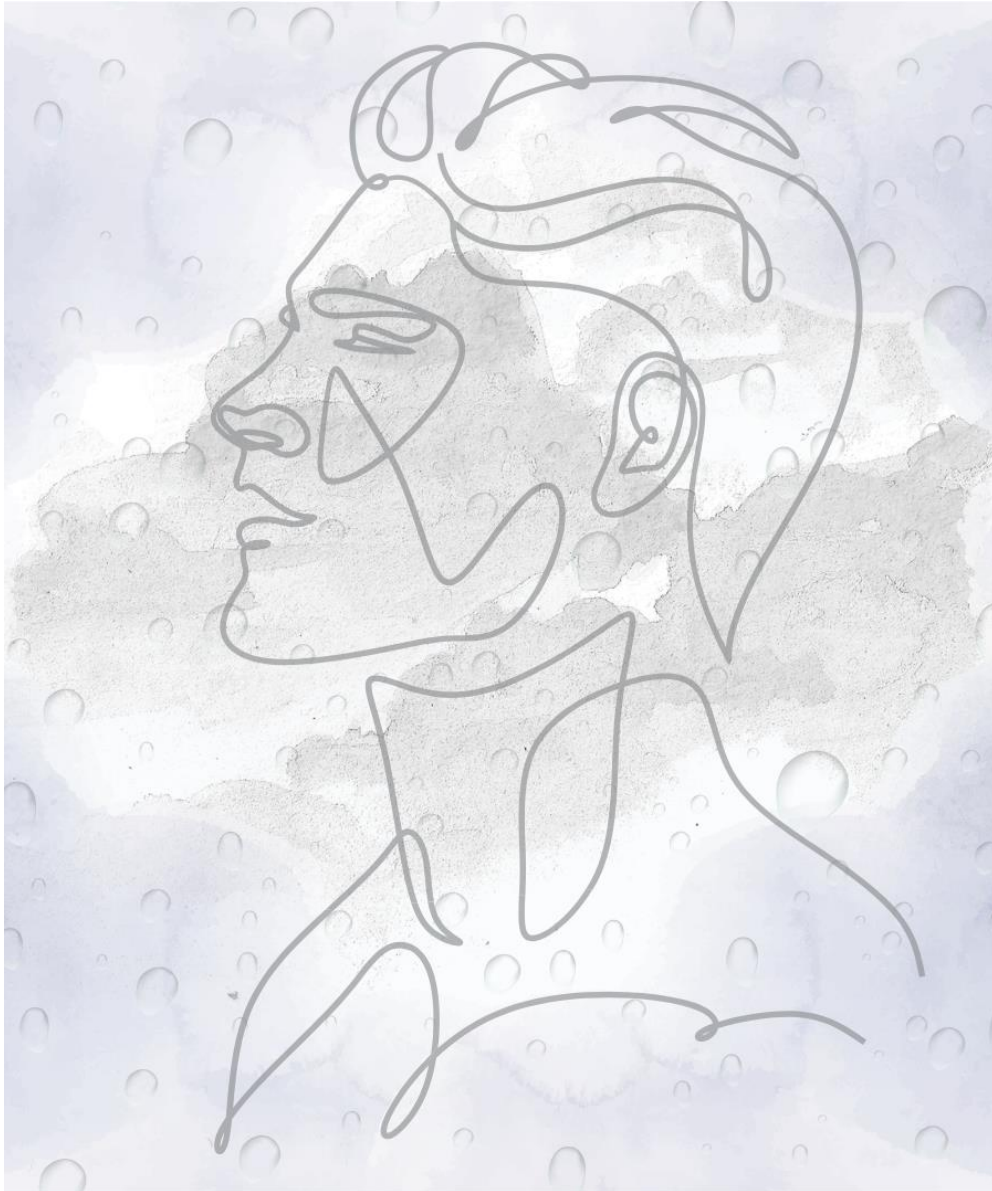
But she doesn't rule out her partner internally, only apparently. Then she comes back. And try again – because the partner or special friend, or the trusted person, has been idealized, and this is an unconscious and uncontrollable process, it generates satisfaction, it is like a tranquilizer reducing stress and anxiety for the borderline and it is like a drug, addictive for the partner.

Sam lists fundamental points in the set of idealizations of borderline, listed below and which can be found in his lecture *Lovebombing: Not Grooming, Not Idealization*:

1. She idealizes with purpose
2. She's terrified of being abandoned
3. creates a parental figure
4. She desires the partner
5. she idealizes admiring and becoming dependent
6. She wants the partner in her life
7. it outsources the functions of the ego to the partner
8. She wants her partner's presence
9. Your mood is stabilized by your partner
10. it provides narcissistic supply
11. idealization prevents her from seeing her partner as imperfect
12. Partner gets addicted
13. she acquires the desired object
14. She idealizes because she can't face reality
15. it exercises control from the base

Idealization is an essential part of the psychodynamics of borderline, related to the fear of rejection and the feeling of being insufficient for another person, thus, it creates in the other a responsible figure, who cares about it and makes that person the center of its universe – by depending on the other it keeps the other under its domination and if it presents any abrupt change in behavior, For whatever reason, she doesn't react well.

The idealization phase seems to be an aspect that generates great doubt, causing people to confuse the three disorders (BPD, NPD, and APD), but always with the greatest degree of confusion between psychopaths and narcissists.

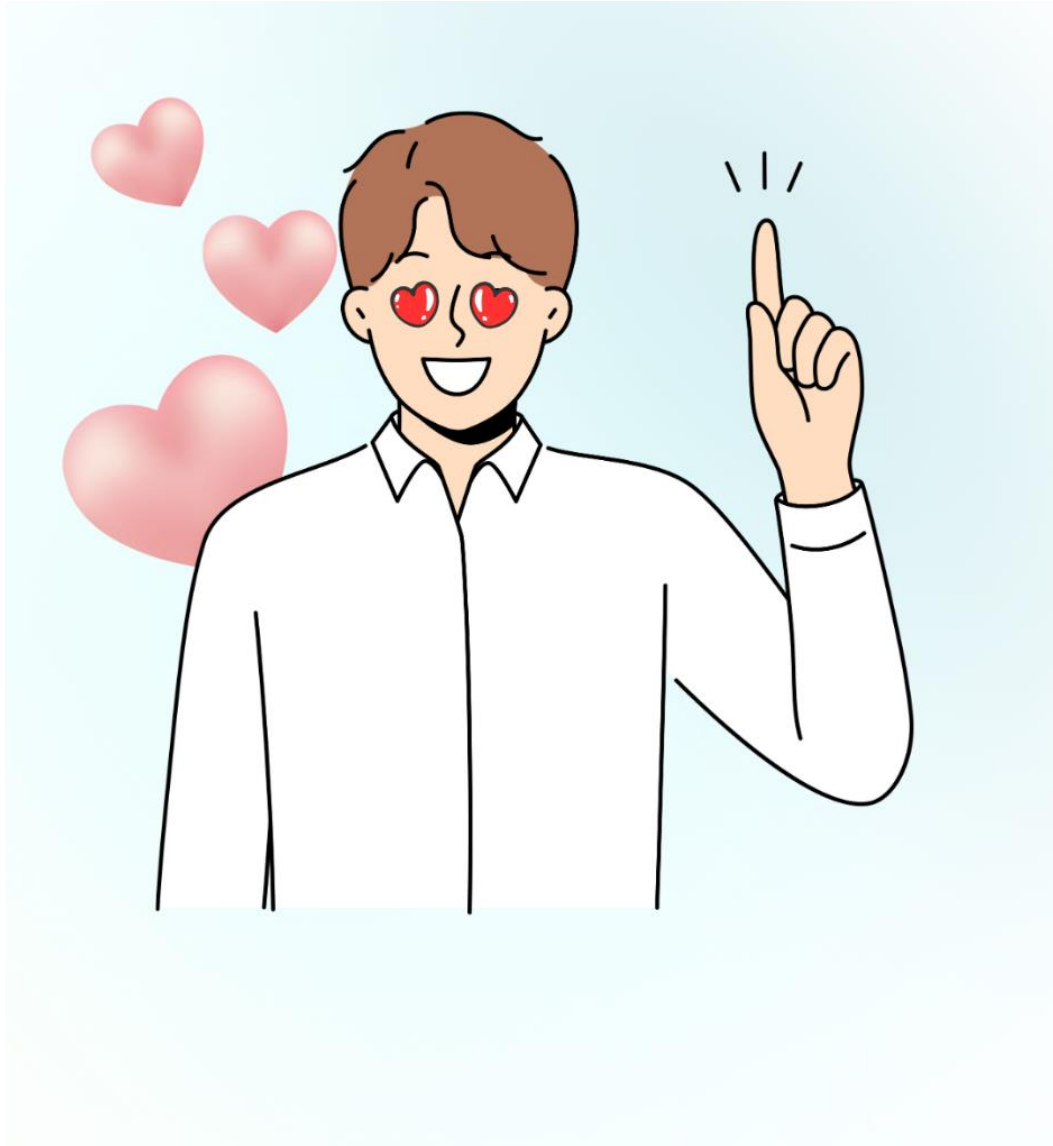


In NPD, idealization serves the purpose of making the partner develop an addiction to the idealized image of himself, and to the narcissist's fantasy, so that the person can never abandon him. The narcissist has a bad internal object in contrast to a good external object, so the other's opinion, external validation is essential for him.

Once idealized, the person must reflect back the idealization to the narcissist. Like a mirror, by looking at the object elevated to the category of perfect, the narcissist becomes perfect too – like a baby who has no defects in the eyes of a loving mother.

In pathological narcissism, idealization happens right after *lovebombing*, says Professor Sam Vaknin (Lecture: Lovebombing: Not Grooming, Not Idealization). This is

because, as for borderline, narcissistic idealization is a form of acquisition of the newly objectified person. An ideal object can be loved and makes the narcissist a kind of God – and the creator "loves" his creature. At the same time, being idealized exposes the person to a perfect version of themselves, obtained only through the narcissist's gaze.



According to Sam Vaknin, the narcissist is the totality of other people's reflections, comparing the narcissist's mind to a hive of bees with millions of hexagons, and each of the hexagons receives his reflection in the eyes of other people. When he is not surrounded by gazes that reflect him, he feels as if he does not exist.



Well, let's see, bees live in society. The hive has a queen bee that commands all the worker bees, which collect nectar from flowers for honey production. The honeycombs of the hives are like niches; they have the function of storing honey. The word "niche" originates from the French "niche" which means "to make your nest".

Niche also means a recess in the wall or wall to place images or statues, in addition to being used in Ecology to define a restricted portion of a habitat where the conditions are necessary for the existence of an organism or species – ecological niche is related (but does not refer exclusively) to the type of food, the supply (!) that a certain species consumes for its survival.

So, following this line of thought, isn't idealization the true supply of the narcissist? Or could we call it primary supply? Ideal, for the narcissist, is the perception, the idea that someone makes of him and the confirmation that this represents, the validation that he is on the inside what he sees on the outside.

The narcissist does not possess a true self. This is the central concept of Winnicott's ideas, which considers the true self from a position of spontaneity, of personhood, which is achieved during development and involves a sense of feeling

creative and real, which can only emerge if the child has developed the physiological and cognitive capacities that provide the foundation for the organization of the mind. It can be understood as the feeling of being alive.

According to Sam Vaknin, the true self of the person with narcissistic personality disorder is long gone.

It is as if it is now a haunted house, and the false-self that haunts its house. The narcissist is the interruption, the denial of an "I" that was rejected even before completing the formation of its identity, it is a non-being and the eagerness to be everything at the same time.



Because it is a disturbance of the Self, the true self has never been formed, so the narcissist is the false-self itself. Pathological narcissism presents a failure to recognize the other as a separate being – in the same way that it was not possible to complete the separation from the primary object (the mother). The proper object is equal to the external

object, which becomes the same internal object. (Lecture: Why Narcissists can't see you: False self as self-object – Conference Presentation).

Relating to a person with NPD is like signing a contract and, invariably, being led to enter the fantasy space of your mind where it is several and none at the same time, where it is not possible to distinguish between the real and the fantastic, between the outside and the inside, it is as if it were everywhere.

No relationship escapes your most basic questions: what's here for me? In what ways can this person be useful to me? (Lecture: Why Narcissists can't see you: False self as self-object – Conference Presentation)

And without exception, those who enter this universe will suffer from the suspicion of being the narcissist of the story and being discarded when they are no longer able to idealize it.

Therefore, according to Sam Vaknin (Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited pg. 229) it is the false self that interacts with the world. It is the false self that suffers and has fun, that clings and detaches, that unites and separates, has likes and dislikes, preferences and prejudices, loves and hates. Whatever happens (...) happens to a removed self, the false self.

When you don't have a self, says Sam Vaknin, you have no idea where you end and the other begins and where the other person ends and you begin (Lecture: WHY Narcissist ALWAYS NEEDS YOU, Even After Snapshotting (and Borderline?))



Some time ago I noticed that, generally, when people aired their complaints about having suffered in a relationship with a narcissistic partner, they described personality traits and behaviors of psychopaths. Studying the disambiguation, I asked Professor Sam if the real target of psychopaths would be narcissists and he said that "no, psychopaths 'target' anyone who can serve their goals", but he also made it clear that narcissists are easy targets – and I understood that they are, because they will get out of reality without much effort and psychopaths are rooted in reality. This brings yet another revelation, there are many easy targets: autistic, schizophrenics, children, adolescents in conflict with the family, mothers with small children, lonely people. It is the psychopath who chooses a target, it is he who has a defined profile for a victim.

A quote attributed to Charles Baudelaire says that the greatest trick the devil ever played was to convince the world that he didn't exist. It is said that the second greatest trick the devil has ever pulled is to convince the world that he is the "good guy."

It is not uncommon to hear testimonies of people who claim that they were seduced by someone charming, charming, more than perfect, and with the ability to change overnight, like a chameleon. This is a typical mode of operation of psychopaths, those with Don Juan's style.

A psychopath will know his target deeply, with interest, attention (and will keep notes) and will offer exactly what the target wants, will say exactly what the person wants to hear.

Many of the online profiles I've researched, which claim to be experts in relationships and post-abusive relationship recovery, are categorical in saying that the victim of a toxic/abusive relationship doesn't need to know if their partner is narcissistic or psychopathic or borderline, etc. I can't completely disagree, but recognizing certain fundamental characteristics of the first two disorders, especially, can be the difference between life and death for someone – it's not for you to diagnose anyone, it's for you to seriously realize that you need to step away.

And in addition, and no less important, understanding the cause of suffering is essential in the search for treatment – if it were not, there would be no need for so many medical specialties and areas of concentration of teaching and research.

I also noticed that more and more profiles that teach infallible techniques and strategies to win over a person are multiplying on digital platforms. But what they teach, in reality, is how to establish a traumatic bond with a person and how to make the person become addicted and emotionally dependent.

The strategies of hot and cold, approach and avoidance, mirroring, among others, are all used in abusive relationships by narcissists and psychopaths, with a brutal difference: rigid psychodynamics is what drives this pattern of behavior in narcissistic personality disorder and it is not present in antisocial personality disorder; Psychopaths do not enter this cycle as a compulsive repetition, in fact, they do not even enter the cycle at all, they put the person inside the fantasy, but they do not share it, it is purely a tool for them. A key point of this is that people without personality disorders who use these techniques accelerate the dissemination of the collective perception that there are many more people with NPD than official agencies estimate and, therefore, there would be an exorbitant number of underreporting, that is, of undiagnosed people circulating around

and, in the lay view of these people, hunting for a new victim. People who use these "techniques" are behaving like psychopaths, but have they noticed this?

There are certain things you need to be aware of, this is not to cause panic, most psychopaths are not *serial killers* as TV series would have you believe, but you need to be aware that, in fact, many are sadists – they won't need to get their hands dirty in your blood if they can induce you to suicide. Only malignant narcissists are sadistic and malignant narcissist is just another way of saying psychopath.

So, when something seems strange, believe your instincts, probably your distrust is right – too good to be true, it's usually not true.

Professor Sam Vaknin often cites a roboticist named Masahiro Mori and the *uncanny valley* phenomenon to describe the discomfort people often feel when being around narcissists and psychopaths, and he emphasizes the importance of trusting one's intuition. We always know, but we don't always believe what we feel without seeing or touching it, even if the feeling of discomfort is unmistakable – and that can be costly.

In the DSM-5, psychopathy is not described as a formal or separate diagnosis, the official nomenclature, as we have already seen, is antisocial personality disorder (APD), characterized by a widespread pattern of disregard for the social norm and violation of other people's rights, among other criteria that I will not mention here because this is not a psychodiagnostic manual.

Psychopathy can be considered the most severe and extreme form of antisocial disorder, due to coldness, absence of remorse or guilt, the use of cold empathy, as Sam Vaknin says, because it does not make use of the affective aspect of empathy, and because of its ability to cause physical, mental, and emotional harm to other people if they are seen as obstacles to achieving a goal.

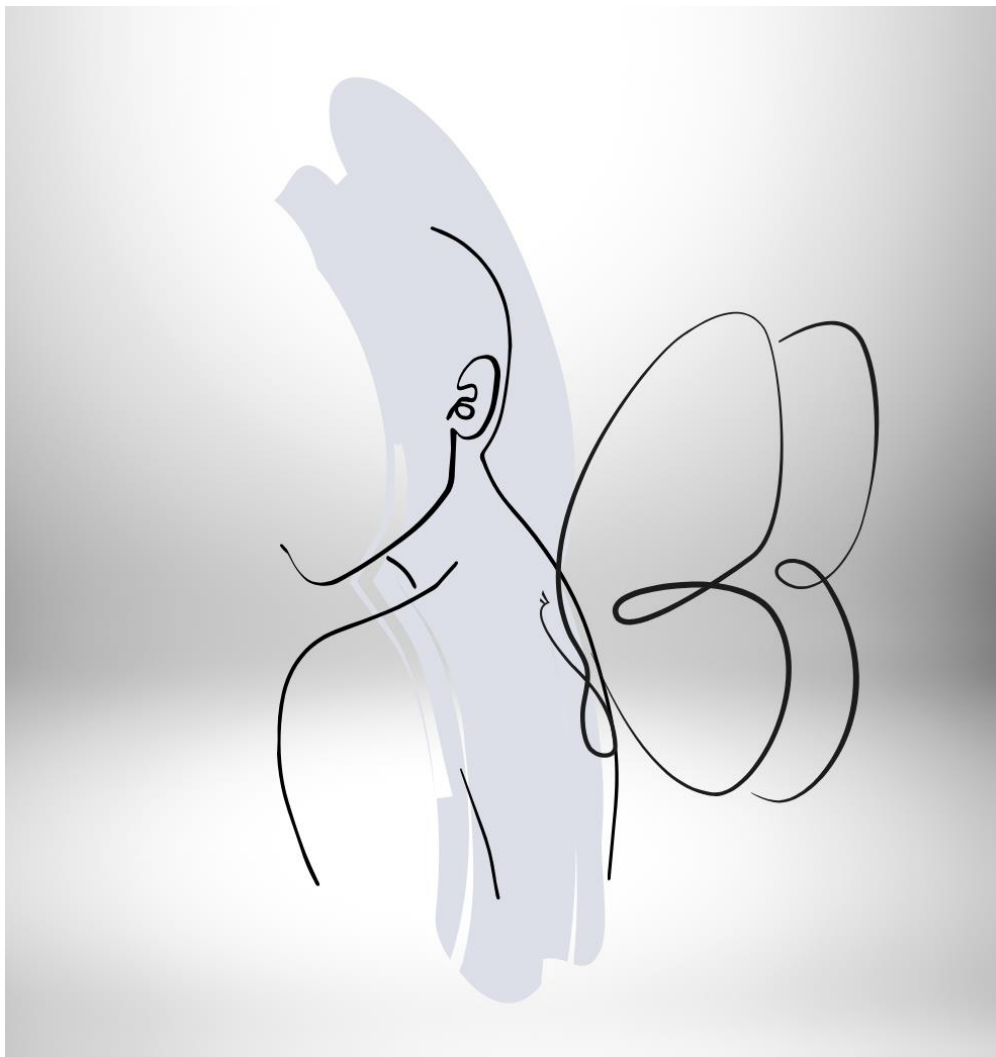
There is no link between cognitive impairment and antisocial personality disorder or between intellectual disability and psychopathy, which means that psychopaths fully understand what they do and the consequences of their actions, and perhaps for this reason, Sam Vaknin has suggested that the position of APD in the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders deserves to be rethought and revised. with a caveat that it is not simply a deviant behavior, but a very serious and incorrigible character flaw, the absence of moral sense and personal ethics, from the point of view of sociology and psychology; and

a worldview completely contrary to that of most people who coexist in the same environment, representing a potential risk, yes, since their thinking is oriented towards the specific goal, along the lines of Machiavellianism where the ends justify the means.

Etymologically, the word "antisocial" means against the social, or opposed to social life – that is why many disorders that have the antisocial trait have a preference for isolation, for the preservation of one's own space. In turn, the word social derives from the Latin term "socius" which means "companion" or "ally".

The idea of "association" is intrinsically linked to the concept of "social" which refers to the interaction between individuals and the organization of life in larger groups, communities or societies and the feeling of belonging. So, just by analyzing the origin of the word can we have a well-defined initial view of what APD means.

Psyche (psykhé) is a Greek word that originates from the myth of Eros (also known as Cupid) and Psyche, – a young princess with butterfly wings, so beautiful that even Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and mother of Eros, was jealous of her. The term "psyche" is often used to denote soul or spirit. Is it a coincidence that many people see a butterfly on the boards of the Rorschach test (inkblot test), widely used to evaluate people with a suspected diagnosis of APD, including in the forensic context?



Psychology, then, from the Greek psyche (soul) + logos (study), is the field or area of knowledge, initially conceived as the study of the soul (anima, which animates, which gives life), which researches and discusses the unconscious, conscious and subconscious processes that govern our behaviors and our relationships, healthy or not, with people and the environment in which we live.

The suffix "patia", also of Greek origin, expresses the notion of illness or suffering. For example, cardiopathy refers to a heart disease and consequently, cardiopath is the person who carries this condition. Thus, when we strictly analyze the word "Psychopathy" we can interpret it literally as a pathology of the soul, and the term derived from it, "psychopath", as one who carries a pathological soul.

But it is much more complex than that. Psychopathy is transgression, it is the crossing of what we know as a human being – it is a human type, almost human... it only

lacks "humanity"! – and represents another type of functioning of the entire psychic apparatus, not as illness, (and for this reason they are not unimputable, they cannot be exempt from legal sanctions) but as if they were another species, if we could attribute to it an ontological sense, that is, of the being itself in itself and of this (unknown) being in the world; or from the perspective of evolutionary biology, in which they should necessarily present reproductive isolation, but we also know that psychopathy has a strong hereditary factor and, in this case, evolutionary theory does not make a moral judgment (I wish it did), evolution deals with the survival of the most adapted.

Adaptations are a consequence of mutations, and mutations happen by chance (or they can be induced by mutagenic factors like gamma rays, but that's beside the point now). The mutations that occur in the genetic material in the germ cells are transmitted to the descendants, and so the most adapted is the one that has the greatest chance of "success" – this is an advantage for him. But it can be a disadvantage for other species. This is how we study evolutionary theory, looking at both sides of the coin.

In antisocial personality disorder, only external objects are perceived, and there are no internal objects or introjects populating your mind. Psychopaths don't perceive others internally, because what they feel for other people, most of the time, is contempt and classify them as helpful or useless depending on the situation.

When Professor Sam says that the psychopath has no self, that he does not even have a false self, I understand how those questions are raised about what would be, for example, the conditions necessary for survival on another planet, with environmental conditions different from those we know.

There is nothing there, nothing that in our neuropsychological system serves as an equalizer, within what we know we have no parameters to measure. Their reality test is intact, they do not dissociate from reality as it happens with narcissists and borderlines, there is no aspiration, it is ambition, there is no dream, it is goal, he does not seek your love, but your submission.

Psychopaths know how to distinguish between right and wrong, they know what is punishable, they know when the behavior is inappropriate, the difference is that they don't care about it, because they live under particular sets of rules and if they make the rules, they can change them at any time, according to convenience.

The world is perceived by them as a hostile place and their main defense mechanism is the alloplastic defense, where the culprit is always the other (you, the government, the dog, the neighbor) – and of course, how can you feel remorse without feeling responsibility?



By the way, what does a psychopath feel? Does he feel it?

A psychopath wants it! That is why he looks like any other person, because we all want, desire, aspire, have ambitions. But it's different.

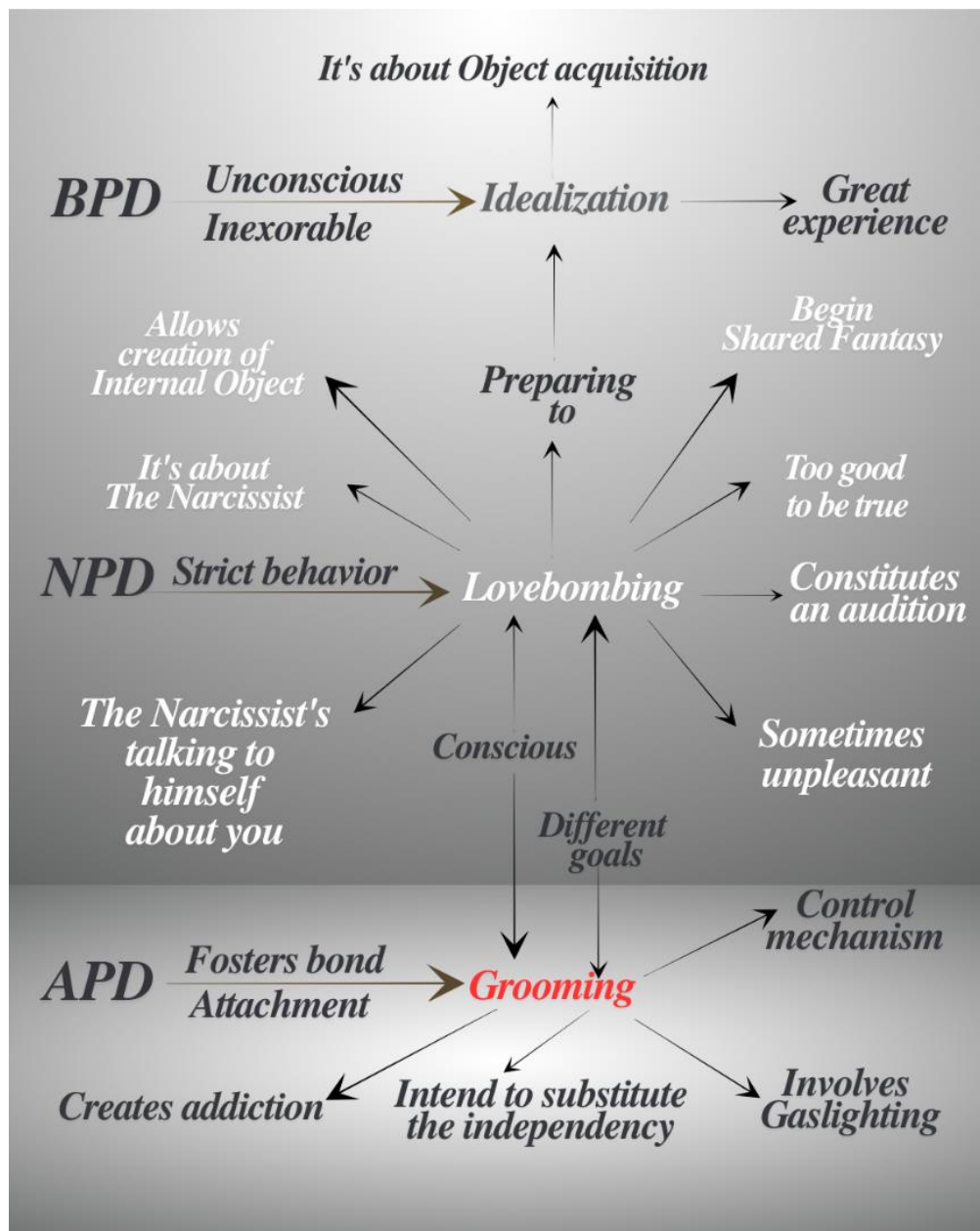
And according to Sam Vaknin, psychopaths want you to be suspicious of your own judgment, they want you to feel disoriented, out of place. They want to induce dissociative defenses in you, they aim to isolate you from the world, to distance you from

the universe, from your reality, from your environment, and therefore to exert total control over you – which would make it easier for them to meet all their goals. (Lecture: Psychopath, Narcissist Warp Your Mind Differently)

Idealization is a form of detachment from reality, and in this way, this is a process that psychopaths do not go through; Their reality check is not impaired like that of narcissists, and besides, object acquisition does not occur and is not necessary, because psychopaths interact only with external objects. Grooming for the psychopath is what is equivalent to *lovebombing* for the narcissist. Grooming is a ritual, it's like an engagement, it's a capture. And since it has physiological effects similar to those of drugs, it has the power to cause addiction.

The following diagram is a summary (it's a Sam Vaknin style, because he summarizes for you recalling), in which we see how a certain aspect (idealization or lack thereof) can be so comprehensive that only its unfolding is able to provide enough data to help correctly distinguish the three disorders, both in terms of internal functioning and as relational experience.

As a complement to the diagram (although it is self-explanatory), it is worth remembering that idealization (or lack thereof) is a central aspect, related to two fundamental principles: intention and intentionality, when the latter operates at an unconscious level, being linked to impulses, repressed desires or automatic behavior patterns.



Intention is a component of motivation and is directed towards achieving a specific well-defined goal.

In BPD, although idealization serves the purpose of acquiring the object, it is a process that does not start from a conscious decision, it is inevitable and once started it will not be consciously interrupted either. For the person who is idealized in the relationship, although it is a manifestation of emotional dependence, the feeling is one of validation and recognition, producing a pleasant feeling; Because it is something desirable by narcissists, it is perceived as narcissistic supply.

Idealization is preceded by *lovebombing* in NPD, which, although it is consciously implemented, is a rigid cognitive pattern resulting from the type of dynamics present in dysfunctional and abusive families, such as those of narcissistic origin, where intermittent reinforcement predominates, thus being a behavior restricted to NPD.

The narcissist is able to perceive the dynamic at work, but does not know why it happens and does not even know how to interrupt it. Then we notice an intentional, conscious initial phase, as is also conscious of the ritual applied by psychopaths, *grooming*, but which has different objectives from *lovebombing*, as observed in the diagram.

The fact is that it doesn't work the same way for the psychopath. Idealization involves some kind of valorization and for psychopaths, people have no value, they have a function.

Motivation. Pay attention to motivation.

— There is something wrong here, as if there is someone among us who does not belong to the environment. Cat among the pigeons – when we are the pigeons and the cat is among us, but we can't see the cat.

Cat among the pigeons (Agatha Christie)

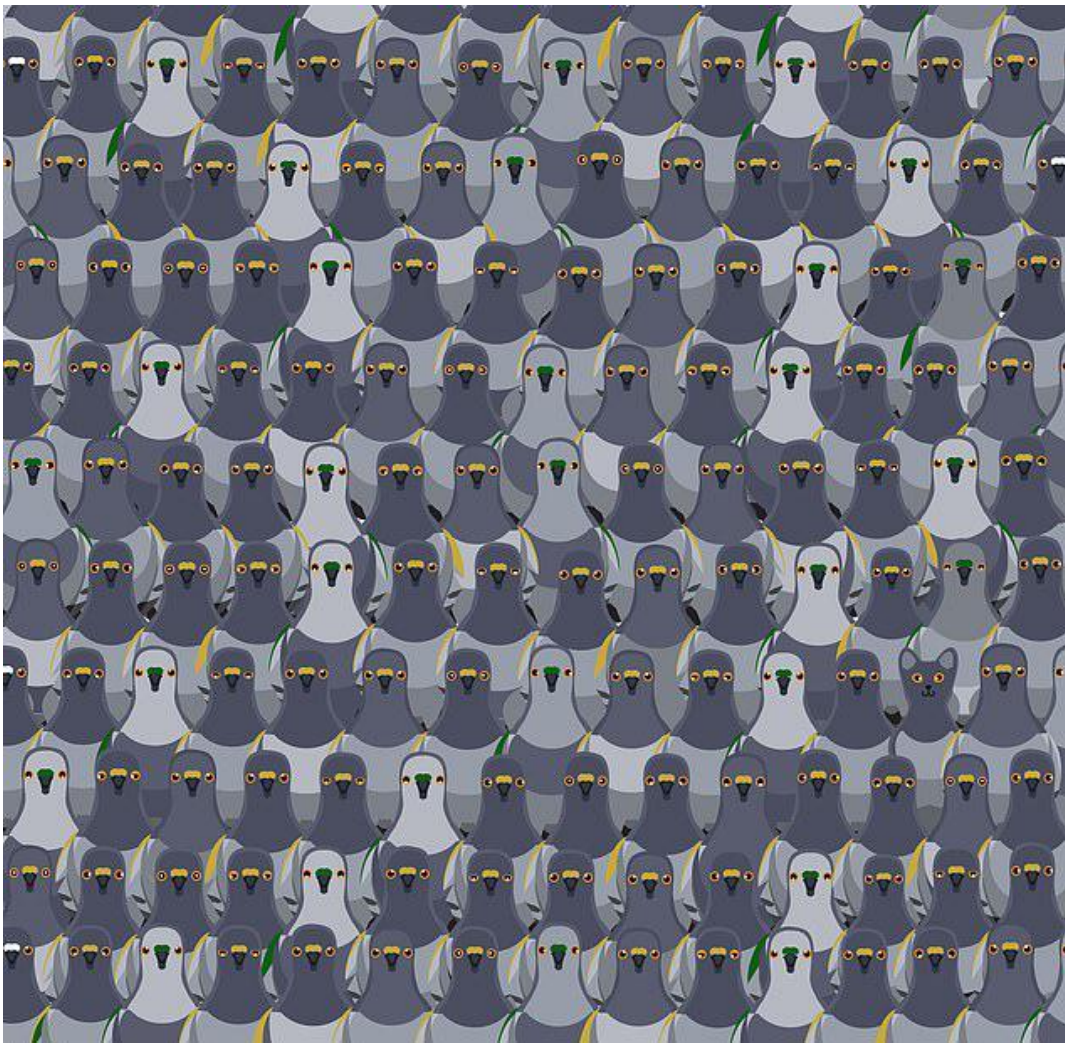


Foto: natures menu (The Sun journal)

Perhaps this is the biggest confusion. What I perceive more intensely is that there is a great difficulty in basic communication, in the meaning of words, in vocabulary, in the textual repertoire, in the interpretation of the text, in the interpretation of signs; There is a distance between what the other said and what he meant, between what he did and what he didn't do, between what he thought and what he let you understand.

Are you able to perceive the intentions? Remember what the environment was like where the interaction took place? Do you remember what you said and what you heard? Do you remember how you felt?

Narcissists and psychopaths have different motivations.



Motivation is an integral component of the human experience. It is present associated with the effort we put into performing tasks and also linked to personal fulfillment, such as being independent, but it is also part of the satisfaction of achieving a goal.

The motivation, for the narcissist, is related to a need: to protect the false self and the shared fantasy, which is their main defense mechanism – the narcissist wants to live in a dream. The narcissist feels the need to fill in the gaps in his memory, and in this process, he uses confabulation, which is unconscious and uncontrollable, but which in the end can be understood, felt, and experienced as manipulation.

Confabulation is a neuropsychiatric disorder in which a patient generates a false memory without the intention of deceiving. The patient believes that the statement is true, hence the descriptive term "honest lie". The hypothesis is that the patient generates information as a compensatory mechanism to fill in gaps in memories. It works for self-coherence, memory integration, and self-relevance.

Confabulations can include small details, such as birthdays, or they can be fantastic and broader. They can be believable or bizarre. Presenting patients with contradictory information can further perpetuate confabulation in an attempt to explain their report.

The most common reports of confabulation are in patients with Korsakoff's syndrome due to Wernicke's encephalopathy, where patients have anterograde amnesia in addition to confabulations.

It has been observed in several other disease processes such as Alzheimer's dementia, traumatic brain injury, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anterior communicating artery aneurysms, and cortical blindness with Anton's syndrome. However, it can also present in healthy patients.

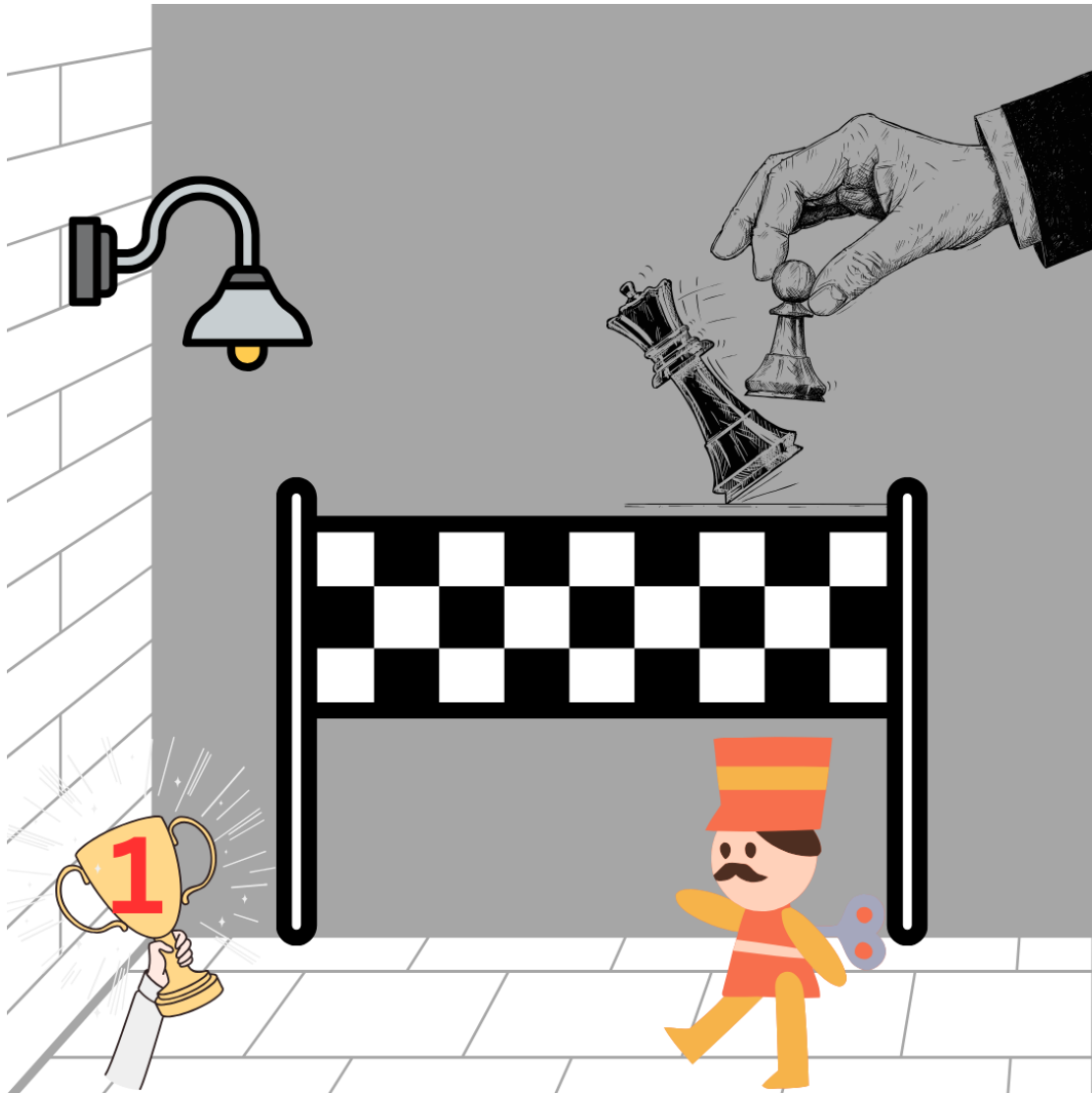
Motivation for psychopaths has nothing to do with any psychodynamic reason, it is guided exclusively by their goals of obtaining material gain, preferably as quickly as possible, and taking advantage of any person, situation or environment.

Psychopaths lie. About everything, all the time. They pretend. They'll pretend they're someone else, they're everywhere, they lead double lives, they have plans behind

the plans, obscure goals in perfect speeches. They will disguise themselves as one more in the crowd. They are in traffic in reckless and dangerous driving, in health services treating patients with contempt and belittling clinical complaints, they are in universities harassing and humiliating students, they are at the doors of schools enticing teenagers, they are inside homes sexually abusing children, they occupy political positions for personal gain with the excuse of defending the interests of the people, they corrupt justice systems. Psychopaths are corrupt. Psychopaths are murderers of their own parents; they are torturers of animals. Psychopaths plan and cause shootings in schools, cinemas, shopping malls. They will say they are victims. They will pretend that they are your best friend and will betray you. They pretend that they are good people only interested in your development; they will say that they have been misunderstood, that they have been wronged and incriminated; psychopaths have no scruples, they practice extortion, blackmail, intimidate, kidnap, coerce people to do the same as they do so that they cannot be reported without dragging all the victims along with them; they are embezzlers; when serial criminals, they are sexually repressed, they are sexual perverts, misogynists, tax evaders, they are the ones who create problems to sell a solution that only they have; Psychopaths lurk, wait, insist, persist, do not take "no" for an answer. It is the psychopaths who create a smokescreen by inventing a pandemic of narcissism so that they can move freely, camouflaged.

This cannot be the description of what the evolution of the human species represents. This description above cannot be seen as that of a human being.

The borderline with its emotions on the surface and its self-destructive pattern, the narcissist with its existential despair and self-sabotage offer as much risk to an adult with emotional intelligence and capable of defending himself psychologically as the abomination described above? Psychopathy should not be considered a mental health issue if reality does not pose any problems for a psychopath.



What do psychopaths want? They want what they want. They want everything and they want you not to have it, they want to take it from you, never the other way around, they want to take shortcuts. They want and think they have the right to everything. They want your respect, but they are not willing to offer the same.

Psychopaths want absolute control, dominance, fame, infinite power; they want unfettered access to places and people, they want to prove superiority, they want to challenge the authorities, they want to impose their will, they want to live according to their particular norms, they want to predict moves as in an evil game of chess; They want to defeat someone they have entered into competition with without warning, they want to "pull the rug out from under you" and laugh at your downfall, they want to break a person's sanity just to show that they can and think they are smart for it. Psychopaths turn

a person's life into a nightmare and think they were asking for it. Psychopaths gaslight for sport.

Gaslighting is the highest and most perverse level of manipulation, it is intentional, premeditated, conscious.

Gaslighting is a very particular type of abuse: manipulating someone psychologically, isolating a victim, controlling every aspect of their life down to the smallest detail of clothing or behavior, and undermining their sanity. Without people to support us, it's hard to fully trust ourselves. (Thomas, 2018).

In 2015, the British government amended the Serious Crime Act to recognize gaslighting, which is now defined as coercive control. Based on the research of Professor Evan Stark, British law now recognizes that abuse within relationships and families is not just physical and sexual. (Thomas, 2018).).

This is how psychopaths behave, transiting through sophisticated strategies of manipulation of other people's reality, never theirs, they never lose touch with reality.

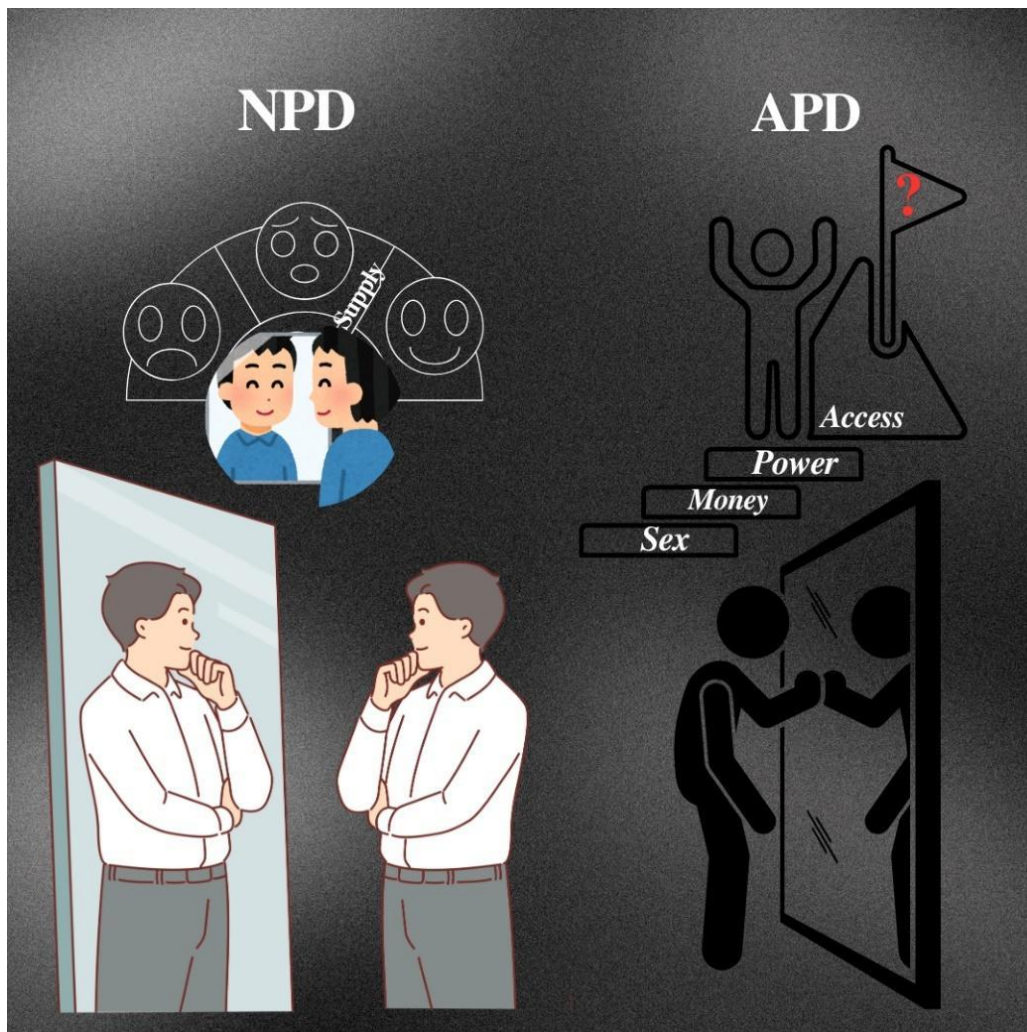
Practicing gaslighting requires deep, unwavering awareness and handling of reality. An ability that narcissists do not possess, because their world is a cyclical fantasy of grandiosity and existential search through the eyes of other people, it is a merry-go-round, with ups and downs, but which is always turning and alternating its components that are always the same and, therefore, exhibits recognizable and even predictable behavioral patterns. It's not that it's easy to deal with a person with narcissistic personality disorder, I don't recommend it at all, I'm just saying that narcissists and psychopaths don't play by the same rules – while the former will follow the "game plan" to the end in both behavioral and cognitive rigidity and compelled by unconscious processes and defense mechanisms, the second will change the plan during the game and maybe even change the name of the game if that is to their advantage.

Psychopaths gaslight. Malignant narcissists gaslight.

Malignant narcissists are psychopaths!

Narcissists have impairment in reality testing; they believe in shared fantasy and believe in their confabulations. According to Sam Vaknin, narcissists aim to break something in the person, to cause a certain type of damage enough to coercively lead the person to enter their fantasy.

On the other hand, Professor Sam emphatically points out that psychopaths do not have any impairment in the reality test, they never distance themselves from reality and their main goals in general or in relation to a person specifically are to isolate the person from all those who can constitute a support network for him, so that they can exert total control over him and achieve all his other goals.



According to Sam Vaknin, narcissists are able to distort a person's perception of internal reality, they do this commonly through infantilization, projecting their immaturity onto their partner, and psychopaths distort their perception of external reality, usually using gaslighting.

He compares the encounter with a psychopath to the equivalent of having been in a natural disaster, because the level of disorientation provoked is so devastating that the person cannot know what is true and what is not true, what is real and what is not real, (Lecture: Psychopath, Narcissist Warp Your Mind Differently), The person has difficulty remembering whether or not he said it, whether or not he did the things he was accused of, he may have circadian rhythm alterations that will further impair his perception.



Disorientation can be understood as a state of mental confusion where there is difficulty in situating oneself correctly in time, space and in relation to oneself and others – in this condition the person feels lost and insecure. Disorientation can be a symptom of dementia, depression, or psychotic conditions.

When the narcissist manipulates your external reality, for example by maintaining his public image of being responsible, educated, conscious, etc., this distorts your internal reality and makes you see yourself as a child in his care; When the psychopath

manipulates your internal reality, for example, by mocking you that you need to go to bed early, and you start to have doubts about it and go to sleep later, you are believing that his judgment is reliable and yours is not.

This is a characteristic as important as it is misinterpreted.

Irony is a relevant figure of speech, which by inversion of the meaning of the sentence works as criticism and should be used carefully, since it can be confused with sarcasm.

People tend to gratify and classify as a sign of insight and intelligence the fact that someone uses sarcasm to communicate, but it is a passive-aggressive way of expressing oneself, usually malicious, with the aim of diminishing, ridiculing and humiliating people.

Sarcasm is intentionally applied in a conversation or speech to hurt. Those who premeditated hurt demonstrate that they have no respect for the other. This is the easiest type of red flag to identify.

According to Sam Vaknin, narcissists and psychopaths have different relational trajectories and different goals: narcissists will manipulate their external reality and psychopaths will manipulate their internal reality (which is basically their judgment of themselves).

In both cases the person becomes confused, has delusions and may have hallucinations. But those who are most likely to use psychological torture techniques and induce dissociative states frequently, induce psychotic breaks, and induce a person to suicide are psychopaths, not narcissists. It can happen, but they're not aiming for it, they can't see you even if you fall on top of them – you're only visible until the ideation phase, after that no more, after that, at best, you can be a kind of folder, an external hard drive, but not a person.



Psychopaths will pull their triggers, because their reading of someone's behavior has the precision of advanced technology electronic devices, they will brainwash you, they will literally change your worldview and they will probably corrupt your ideals and your character, they will use internal psychological dynamics to destabilize you, In order to make you lose confidence in your own senses and readings of the surrounding environment, they take advantage of your vulnerabilities, make you doubt and question everything that happens around you, making you convince yourself that he is the only one you can trust, the only one you can count on.

Narcissists intrude into the person's mind and converse with the person from inside their mind. Professor Sam Vaknin says that the person who relates to a narcissist outsources his ego functions to him and a kind of symbiosis is established and that through this symbiosis, the narcissist makes the person regress, infantilizes the person, usurps the

capacity for personal agency, removes autonomy and drastically reduces the person's independence. But you see, it is not his ego that works in place of his ego because he cannot make what he does not have work.

The psychopath, when applying the cycle of narcissistic abuse, wants exclusively the physiological response of addiction. He knows that by this method the result is not love and he does not care about it, he is not interested in it.

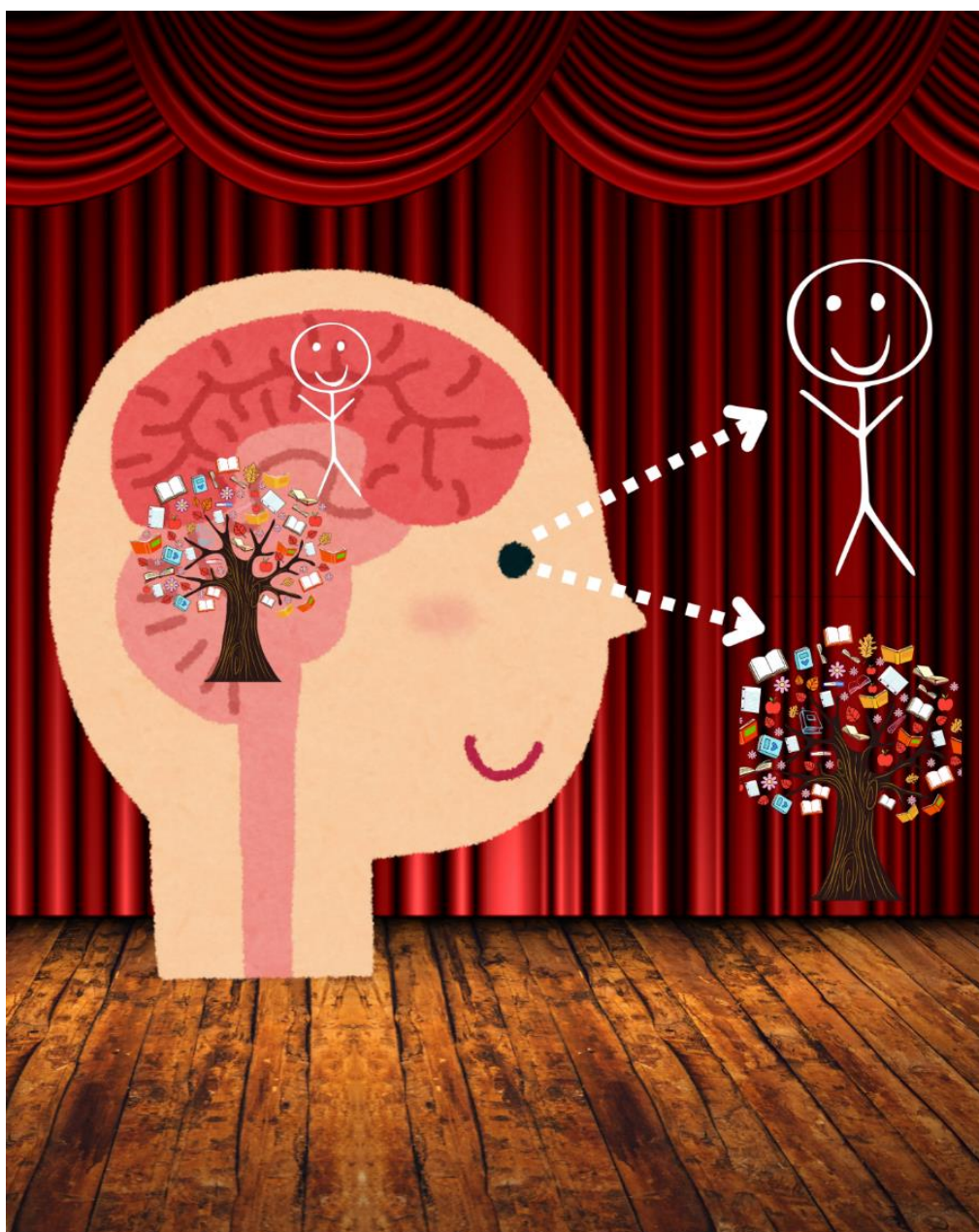
But the narcissist cares. Although they rarely manage to love someone, narcissists want love. They want to be seen through someone's loving gaze. If his partner tells him too early that she loves him, he will know that she is in the shared fantasy.

He knows it's not love because that was the bond his mother established with him. The traumatic bond is the result of classical conditioning and is the basis for trauma. Neither conditioning (or training) nor any kind of trauma are capable of generating love.

Chapter 5 – Behind the scenes

*O mundo só é dado à percepção como
representação*

Arthur Schopenhauer
O mundo como vontade
e representação



From the point of view of Astrophysics and Biology, the world as we know it is the result of a combination of millimetrically positioned factors.

Our planet is close enough to the Sun that the solar radiation that reaches the surface of the globe passes through the atmosphere and, thanks to the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect, a part of this radiation is retained in the biosphere, warming the Earth and the oceans, and being the natural energy source that allows chlorophyll organisms to carry out photosynthesis, producing oxygen and making life work to which we are accustomed. A little closer and we'd literally be fried – a little farther away and we'd freeze to death (disregarding the fact that we probably wouldn't even exist if our planet wasn't exactly where it is relative to the Sun). These are conditions that do not depend on our human capacities, but the example demonstrates Schopenhauer's statement, because for his philosophy, the components of knowledge result from the general arrangements of its possibilities, these being time, space and causality. Everything happens at a certain time, in a delimited environment and has a known or unknown cause.

This is happening right now, but you weren't trying to pay attention to it before reading here.

What happens behind the scenes, behind the curtains, what happens in the subject's internal environment, most of the time, we do not perceive in its totality; we only witness what affects us directly because the interaction between our senses and our ability to organize these sensations produces a representation, a construction in our mind.

In narcissistic personality disorder, says Sam Vaknin, in the lecture "Why Narcissists are fragile", the internal landscape is fragmented and is populated mainly by hostile internal objects, introjects from your parents and other people who played an important role in childhood, and who attack, assault and devalue you, in an uninterrupted internal dialogue.

The narcissist presents a fragility that is due to the inevitable conflict between the harsh, intrusive and imposing reality and the paracosm defined by Sam Vaknin as the mind of the Narcissist, with a functioning similar to a fantasy playground, an alternative reality.

By fantasy we mean something unlimited, with an infinity of details that can perfectly be contradictory to each other. In fantasy practically everything is allowed,

fantasy is an endless number of possibilities, it's like a cartoon in which a character dies in one episode and returns in the next episode as if nothing had happened, or with an explanation that doesn't need to make sense, because it's not reality – in the real world, if you die, You're still dead the next day. In fantasy, today you have value, tomorrow you don't, but the day after tomorrow you can have value again. The narcissist's affective memory is disconnected, has no continuity, which favors the resumption of previous relationships even after discarding.



The narcissist's mind, says Sam Vaknin, knows no borders, he has no superego that can bring him back from his delusion of grandiosity or that can mediate the signals coming from reality. In turn, these signals acquire an intimidating nature, especially when they conspire with a primitive superego in a childish moral defense to avoid guilt and shame in situations that require greater commitment to other people's feelings.

This is a reference to the existence of a primitive superego – primitive, previous yes, which is not the definitive psychic structure, and could not be because the age of development of the superego is from the age of five, and continues throughout life, unless it is unable to advance by some external force. by some event capable of suspending its formation, such as adverse experiences in childhood, precisely in the first 3 years of the child's life.

But in the disorder, fantasy is a defense mechanism and defense mechanisms are strategies used by the unconscious to reduce anxiety caused by intrusive thoughts, feelings of worthlessness, discomfort with reality.

In fantasy, the narcissist convinces "himself" that everything around him is subject to control by him, and control is purely the attempt to avoid suffering, even if it costs the suffering of others.



Narcissists desperately want to control themselves using someone else's psychic apparatus of self-control, so the manipulation of that person is an inevitable consequence of the relationship established with them.

The narcissist needs to control your gaze, the way you see him. As if he himself were a hologram, a mirage in the desert, he needs to have the same importance that water has for your thirst. It's a childish game, but it hurts mercilessly, it's a harsh reality, but not as cruel as the impression that society is scandalized by mental illness and minimizes the dangers that psychopaths pose – it's the psychopath who aims to control a person just to have control over them.

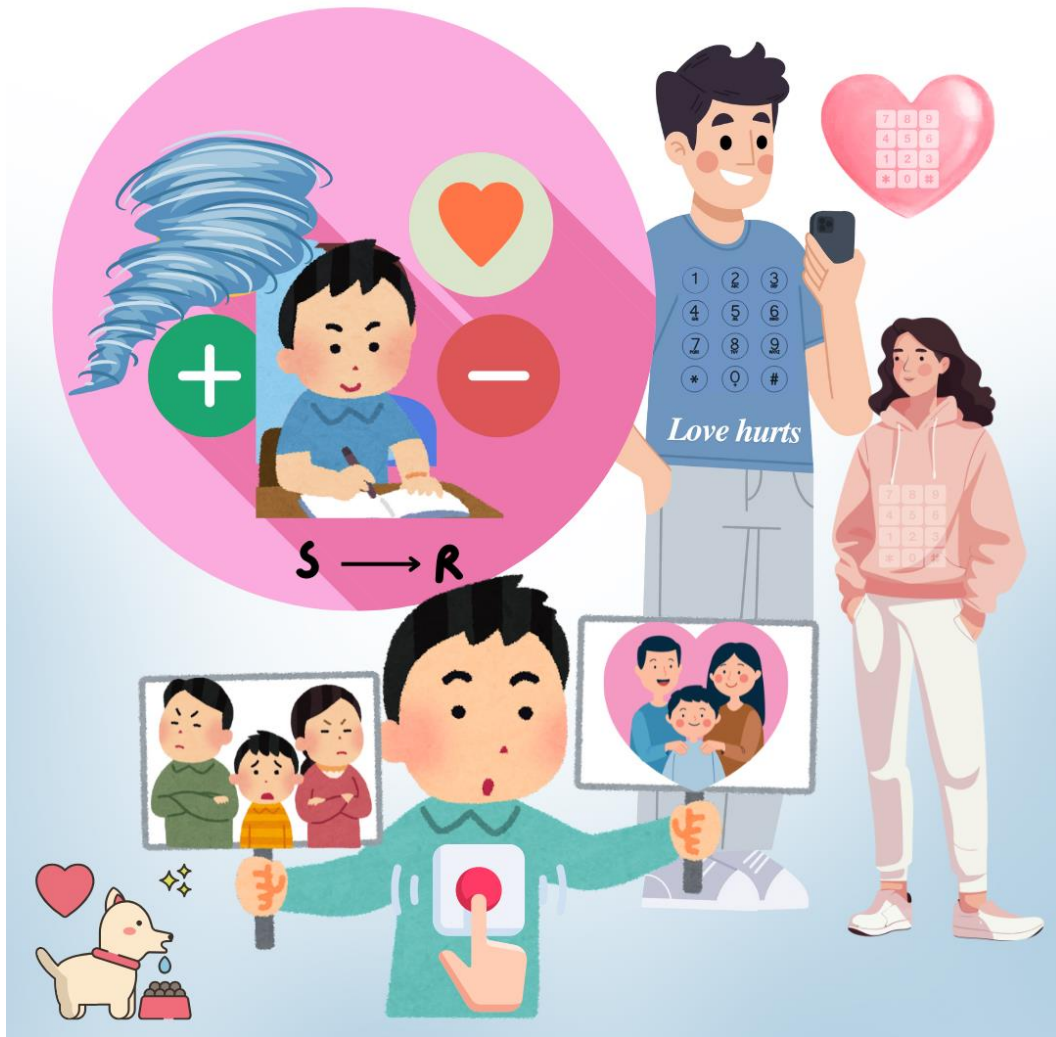
The fear of losing control is perhaps the most frequent in several mental health conditions. Contrary to common sense, mentally healthy people usually do not have this concern, or perhaps just disguise it better (Lecture: Control, Reality in Mental Illness). But it is the fear of losing control of oneself, not control over others.

We call neuroplasticity the set of functional and structural changes that give our brain the ability to adapt to the environment and new information, participating directly in the processes of learning, memorization, motor skills (movement), language, etc.

Because of neuroplasticity, the brain is able to reorganize and reconstruct neural networks and synaptic activity responsible for transmitting the electrical impulse, which is converted into specific information for each area of the body that receives this signal. This means that our brain learns by repetition, and it doesn't matter if the message is good or bad, if it is repeated many times and along with it comes some kind of reward, learning will be effective.

Stimulus and response is the method by which we learn most things. Stimulus is any signal emitted by the environment, which reaches our senses and provokes a reaction, a response that can be reinforced in a positive or negative way, that is, behaviors are highly conditionable.

In this sense, pathological narcissism is the result of conditioning, since this conditioning happens at a stage in life when the brain is very neuroplastic (Sam Vaknin. Lecture: The drooling Narcissist (reinforcement and Conditioning)).



The most famous experiment that demonstrates this classical conditioning was carried out by a Russian physiologist named Ivan Pavlov.

In this experiment, every time Pavlov went to feed a dog, he first played a beep. After some time repeating these same actions, he started to ring the signal, but without leaving the plate with food for the dog. Pavlov noticed that after ringing the bell, the dog salivated, anxiously waiting for the food that no longer arrived.

The most evident conclusion is that the dog has learned to associate the sound signal with receiving the food. Just as we human beings acquire certain habits, through repetition, association and anticipation of rewards.

In a closed system, one where all conditions are controlled, there is a good chance of predicting an outcome, if you know all the elements of the system, how they work,

how they react. That's why narcissists test other people's limits, to know their answers, more than to know what the limit is, the test is to know if there is any limit.

That is why intermittent reinforcement works and its result is the creation of a traumatic bond that is difficult to break, because this type of bond is based on training and waiting; in the hope that even if it takes time, the reward will come if the behavior is repeated, that there will be no penalty or punishment if you are obedient, and that perhaps if the effort is increased, the reward will come faster.

Repetition leads to standardization and thus arises a behavioral rigidity associated most of the time with pathological conditions, with flexibility being precisely its opposite. What unfolds into rigidity is the inability or inability to deal with the unpredictable and fallibility, that is, with open systems, with real people who have their own will, decisions, mood swings, changes of plans, in short, who are alive interacting in the outside world.

Snapshotting it's more than a photo

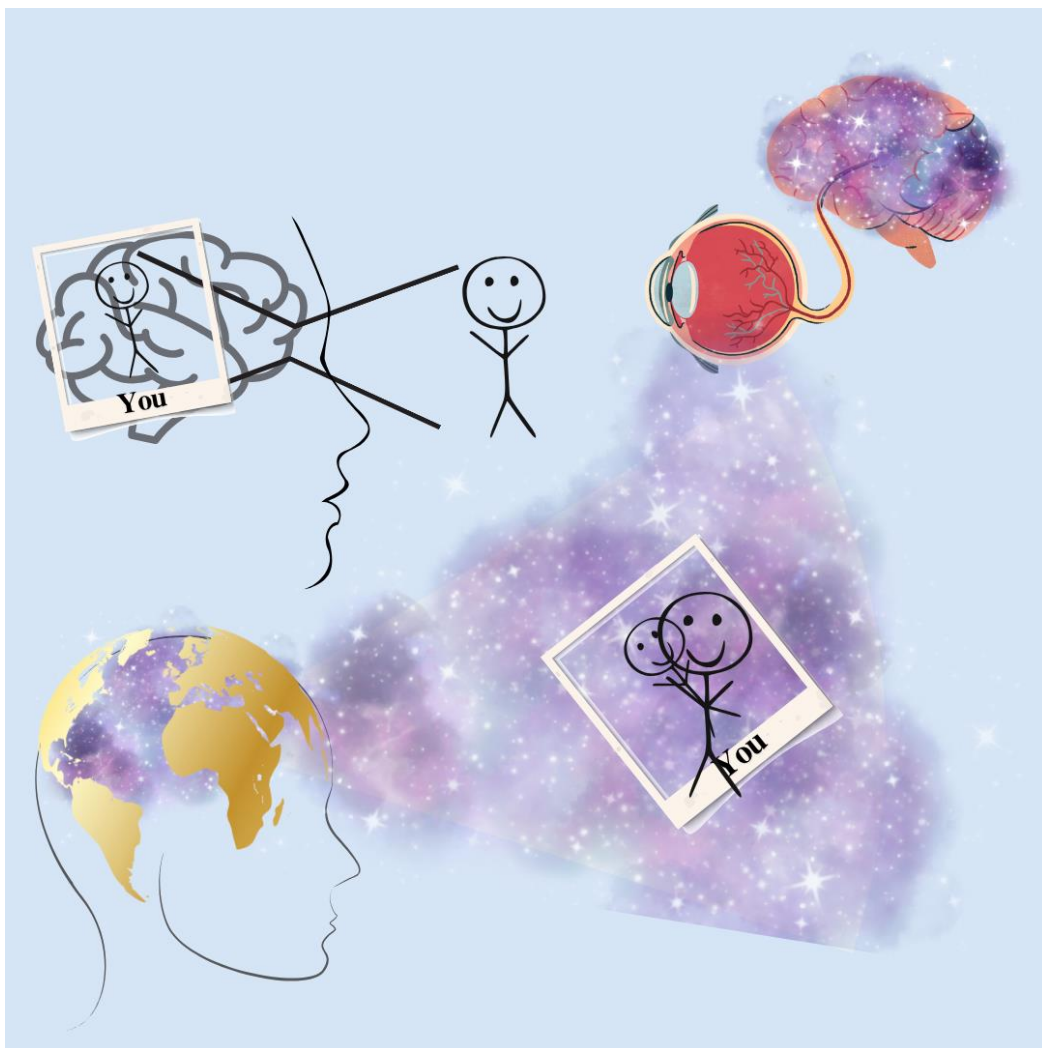
Snapshotting, in the work of Professor Sam Vaknin replaces the term introjection, but also encompasses the concepts of projection and projective identification.

Kernberg (1976) defines introjection as a reproduction and fixation of an interaction with the environment, meaning an organized group of memory traces implying at least three components: the image of an object, the image of the self-interacting with that object, and the affective coloration of both the object-image and the self-image – remembering that affectivity can be both positive and negative (Malancharuil (2004).

Malancharuil (2004) proposed a reformulation of the concept of projection, considering it no longer as a defense mechanism. Projection can be defined as the perceptual process that tests and evaluates the object in terms of its acceptability to oneself. Think of an insect with its antennae exploring the environment primarily to find what is nutritious, but also to avoid what can be toxic. The observer "comes into contact" with the object (thus eventually generating the processes of the ego), so that it becomes perceptible.

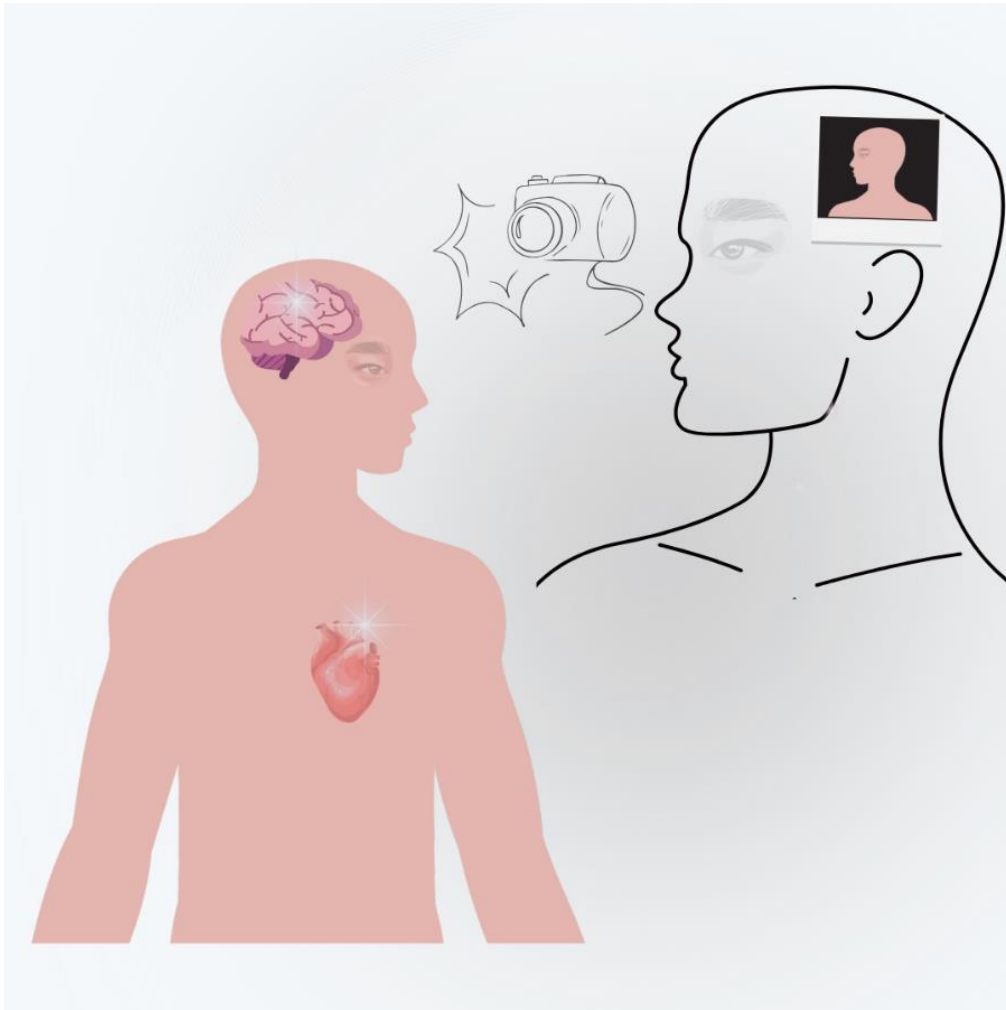
The perceptual process is necessarily a process of combining the object with the "unconscious fantasies" (Klein, 1946) and cognitive and experiential schemas. One does not perceive an object without inserting part of oneself into the object and, finally, into perception. It is a scientific fact that observation is not possible without affecting the observed, and therefore perception is the resultant dynamic of the observer and the observed. In psychological terms, this process of "inserting oneself" so that one can know (experience) the object is projection. Without the ability to project, the person remains a monad, isolated and malnourished and out of touch with the world, as an autistic person would. The greater the penetration of the object by the subject, the greater the understanding of the object, as well as of oneself. Projection, therefore, is the insertion of the self into the object with the immediate and mainly unconscious purpose of evaluating the object as nutritive or toxic. Projective identification is an aggressive object relation in which the person inserts hated parts of themselves into the other (identification of an object with the hated parts of the self) in order to harm or control the object. The object is then perceived as the "pursuer" Malancharuil (2004).

Snapshotting, is a successful term, it makes immediate the apprehension of the need for the visual element, fundamental in narcissism, in the very meaning of the word: it is an instant photo, like that of Polaroid cameras, being related to the process of image formation through the interaction of light with objects. The reflected light is captured and focused by the lens in the retina and converted into electrical impulses sent through the optic nerve to the brain which interprets them as images, or representations of the object reflecting the light.



The narcissist, says Professor Sam Vaknin, has no boundaries between reality and fantasy and when you don't have a self, you are diffuse as a mist. Lecture: WHY Narcissist ALWAYS NEEDS YOU, Even After Snapshotting (and Borderline?). Still, the narcissist

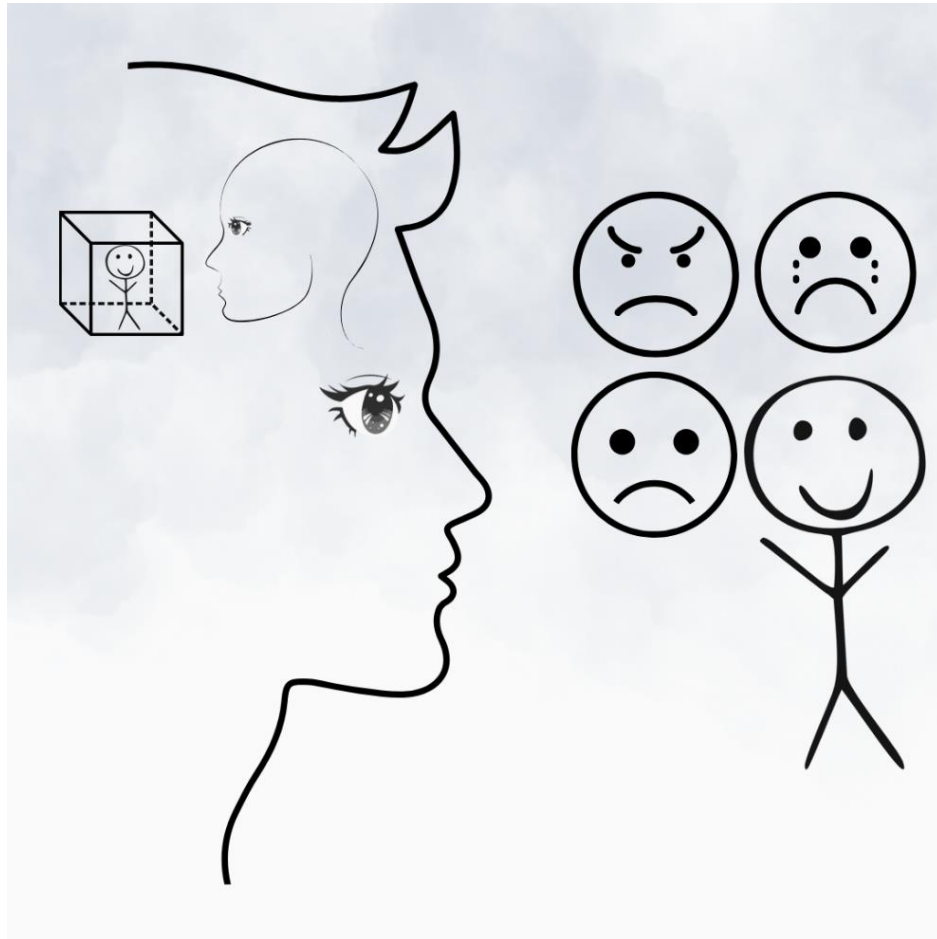
himself is a snapshot... of a human being who could have been, who could have become... and it would never be, and it would never become... "It's not a work in progress, it's an interrupted work" (WHY Narcissist ALWAYS NEEDS YOU, Even After Snapshotting (and Borderline?))



Since projection is the condition for introjection, and the narcissist is diffused like a cloud, this process makes the self-object, which is the narcissist, inseparable from the external object when it is inserted, producing a snapshot of the external object and the narcissist at the same time (as if quantumly entangled), constituting a set of mental actions automatically implemented as an indispensable part of narcissistic psychodynamics.

In the lecture "*WHY Narcissist ALWAYS NEEDS YOU, Even After Snapshotting (and Borderline?)*", Professor Sam Vaknin asks, "the narcissist seems to interact with

you, doesn't he?" and replies that he interacts with the internal object convinced that it is the external object and that the fact that you react proves that he is right and that he is not crazy.



Snapshotting is not simply a concept, it is a vivid experience of synchronizing neural oscillations, it is the capture and instrumentalization of another person's psyche for lack of one's own.

The shared fantasy is not a physical space in the material sense, but is interpreted by the brain as reality, therefore, it can be inferred that a magnetic field is thus created in which the interaction between internal and narcissistic objects is able to remotely modulate the brain activity of both previously synchronized.

Neural oscillations, or brain waves, can be defined as rhythmic patterns of electrical activity in the brain, produced from synaptic transmission. Theta waves of frequency 4 to 8 Hz are present in states of meditation and deep relaxation, in the

visualization of mental images, in teaching and learning processes, and in creative expressions. It is possible, then, that the narcissist and his inner object (you) are operating at the same frequency, and when you react to the narcissist, your neural oscillations alter his brain activity. This means that both have the ability to provoke neuromodulation in each other, which, in turn, is translated into behaviors that are externally witnessed by the external object and internally perceived by the narcissist.

Snapshotting seems to be the closest thing to affective empathy for the narcissist, but it is also a painful and distressing experience for the other party who "makes available" their psychic equipment. The acquisition of the internal object functions as the appropriation of the functions of the ego of the significant other. It is as if he said to the other "feel what someone must feel in this situation and tell them how it is; How do you feel? How did I feel when I didn't even know what the feeling was?

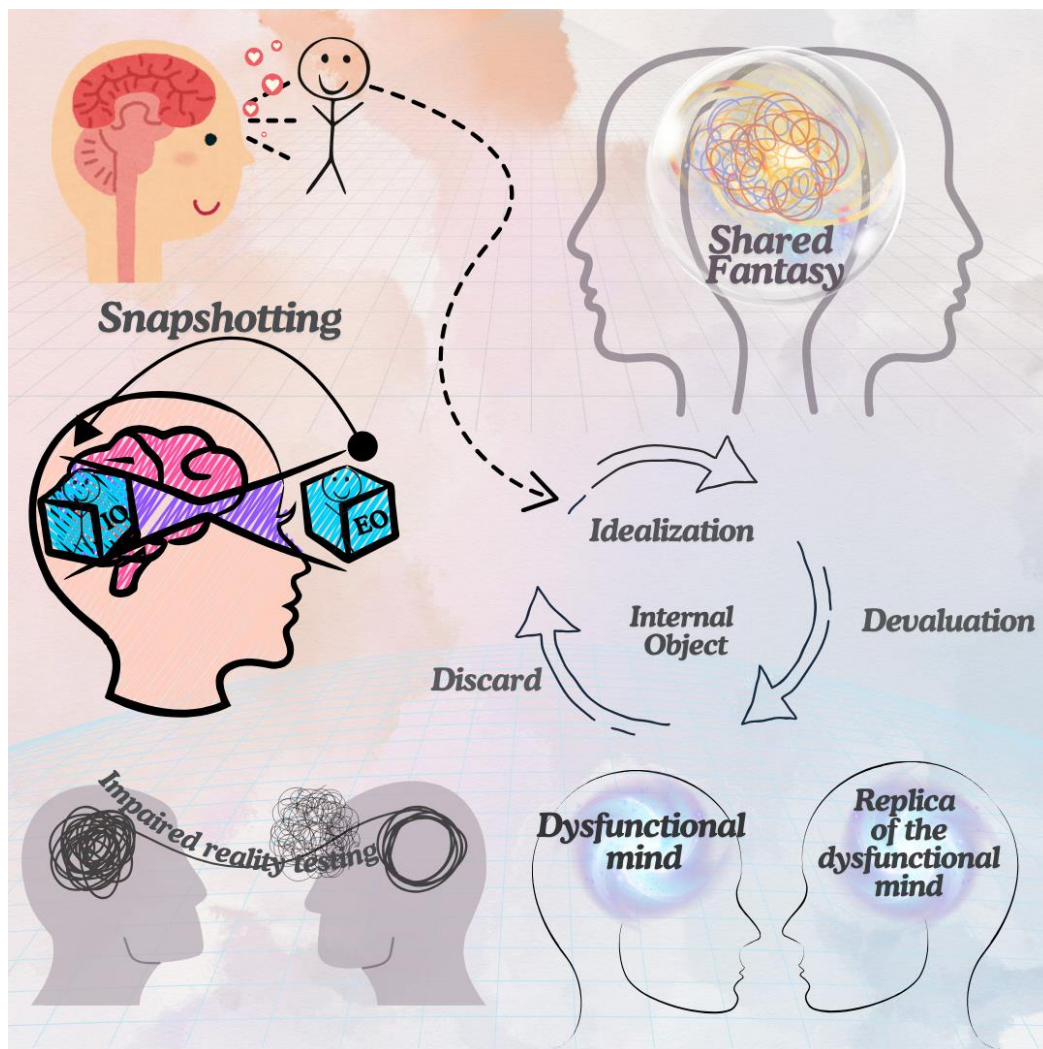
Since narcissists cannot feel affective empathy, because they do not have access to positive emotions, it seems correct to conclude that the result of narcissistic abuse for the other person, at least at first, would be the transformation of him into his borderline version – so, the hypothesis of the existence of dark empathy is also admissible, but as an illness of the empathy construct, that is, dark empathy would be pathological empathy, which would place this term within the personality disorders linked to both BPD and NPD, because it would be typical of borderline to endure spending long periods of time with the narcissist and the opposite is also true. As the narcissist appropriates the functions of the other's ego, it is evident then that the narcissist would start to feel special with this type of empathy, leading to the conclusion that the "movement of dark empath and empath" would be, in fact, a strand of pathological narcissism, thus supporting this other hypothesis raised by Professor Sam. Subsequently, with the continuation of the cycle until discard, the identification of narcissistic traits and behaviors in the other that was once significant proves another theory: if the partner is infantilized, suffers narcissistic abuse and loses his identity, he will become narcissistic, providing evidence that adverse childhood experiences are the cause of pathological narcissism.

At the same time, snapshotting seems to support the idea of entraining since it is based on the synchronization of neural waves.

We already know that in the narcissistic universe, the people he meets will be categorized as significant or insignificant. According to Professor Sam, the narcissist

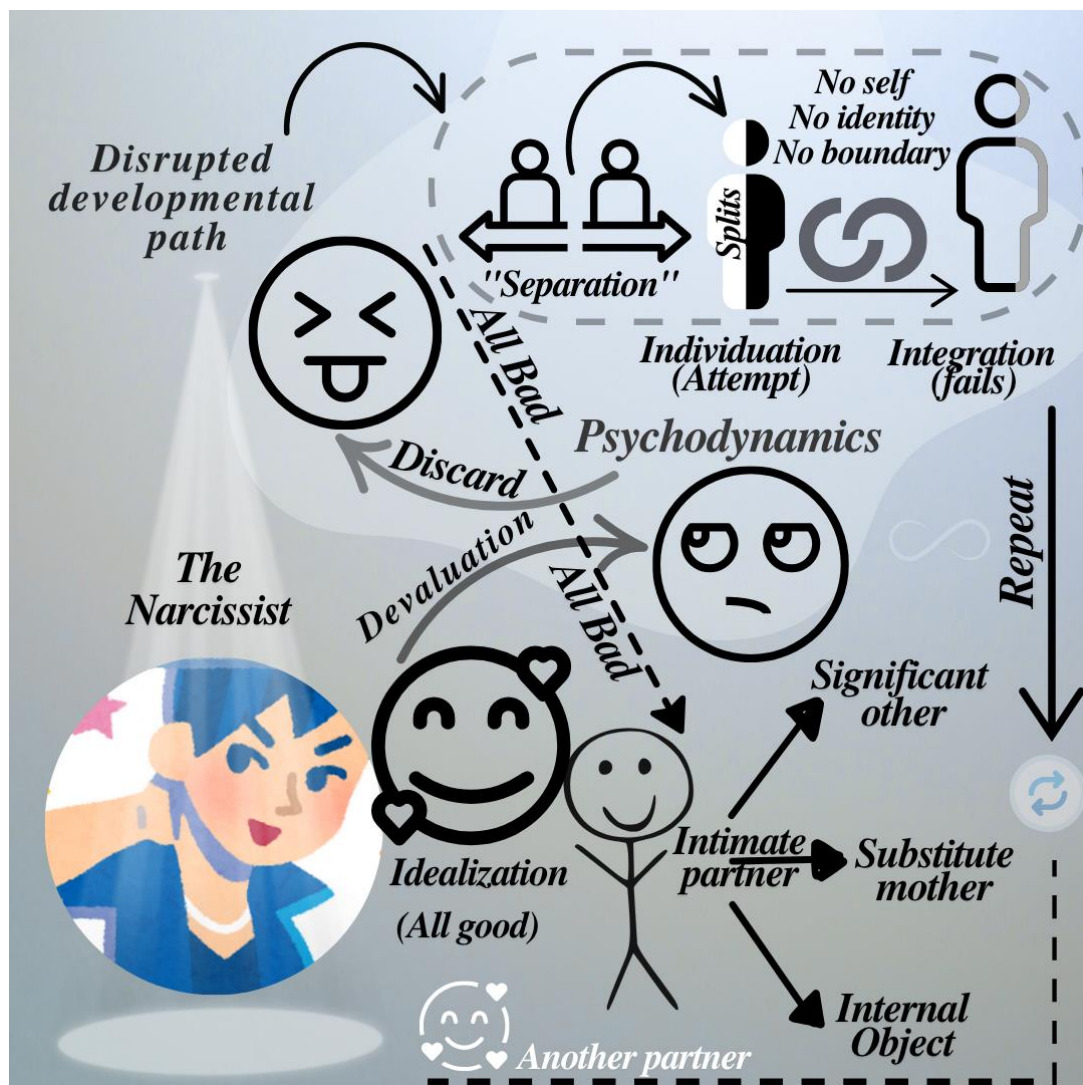
converts significant people who go from an external object to an internal object, remembering that an internal object is a representation of the significant people in the narcissist's mind and he interacts only with the internal objects.

Among the concepts and central aspects of psychic functioning and processing in narcissistic personality disorder, Professor Sam Vaknin in the lecture "***How Narcissist Distorts Your Mind: Contagious Snapshotting, Infectious Introjection***", emphasizes that the narcissist has a loss in reality testing, which leads him not to efficiently separate reality from fantasy as we have seen before, It is as if you have become a replica of his dysfunctional mind, as we can see in the illustration below.



In the narcissist's view, initially, he realizes his externality, one day you were an external object. But from the moment you as an external object are categorized as another signifier, you become a representation in the mind of the narcissist (Sam Vaknin – Lecture: How Narcissist Distorts Your Mind: Contagious Snapping, Infectious Introjection), you become part of the internal collective.

Once you have been converted to an internal object, you, like the narcissist, lose the ability to differentiate an external object from an internal object, you are now in a shared fantasy. Internal dynamics are witnessed, can be observed and followed, and are perceived as external dynamics.



The diagram above (*Lecture: How Narcissist Fails to Integrate Two Mothers*) brings the main points of the psychodynamics of narcissistic disorder, starting with the interruption of development, where there should be separation and it was prevented by disintegrating the self, with the consequent impossibility of identity formation, favoring that it naturally merges with others in its closest life, because he cannot establish limits and does not accept the limits imposed by the other, being himself a dependent subject and always creating relationships of codependence.

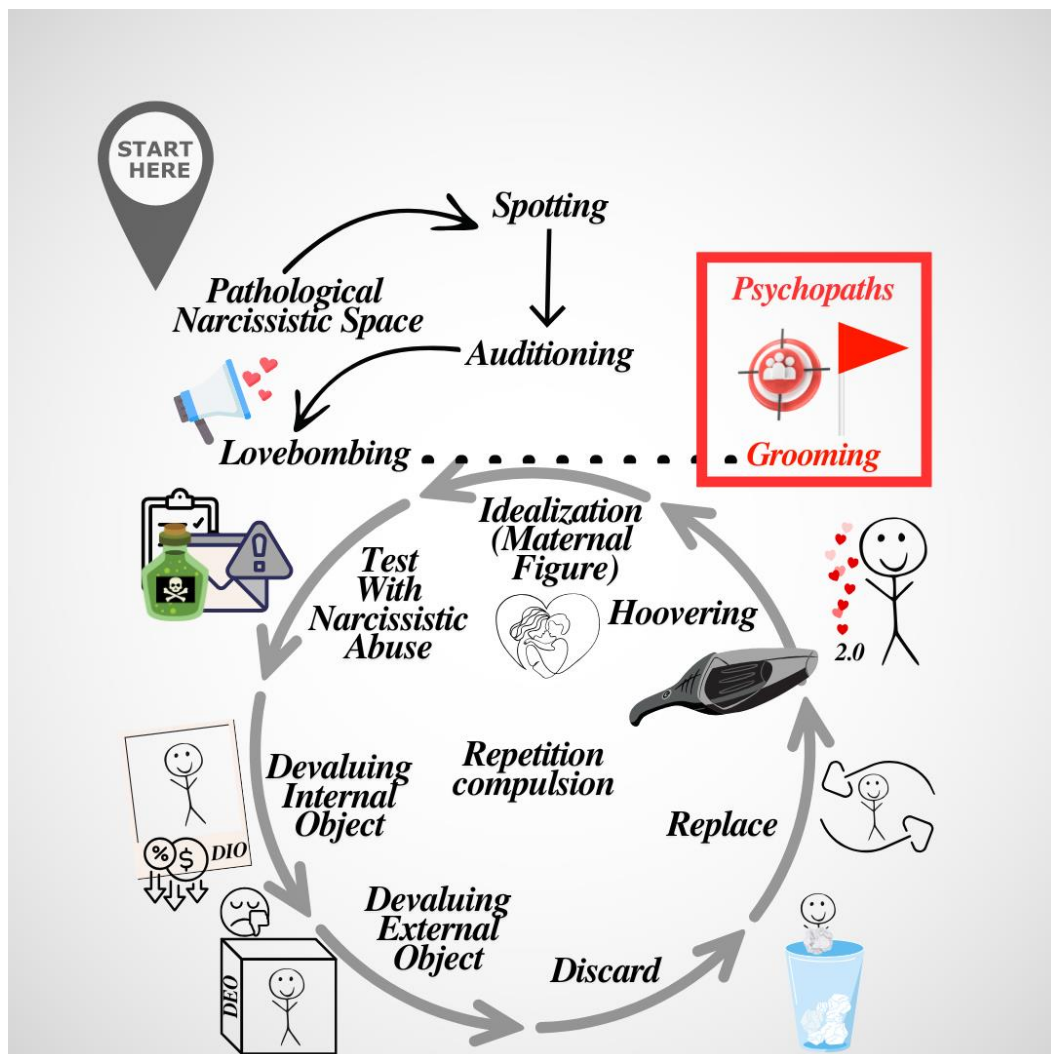
The attempt at individuation is unsuccessful and he remains with a dichotomous thought called *splitting*, a normally unconscious defense mechanism, which leads to both the idealization and the devaluation of people, things and situations where everything and everyone is interpreted as an eternal struggle between good and evil, extremist thoughts where it is always all or nothing, also causing rapid changes in the evaluation he makes of other people, favors superficial relationships and impulsiveness in decision-making, the presentation of erratic behaviors, nebulous and confused judgments, low self-esteem and fluctuating self-concept; Because they are unable to integrate these two properties inherent to human beings, they face instability in the face of stressful situations.

This way of interpreting the environment is projected onto all people seen as a significant other. This other signifier is converted into an internal object in the process of *snapshotting* that we saw earlier; the internal object is, in most cases, a partner, who will fulfill the role of surrogate mother in the narcissist's quest to complete his or her process of separation and individuation and finally have an identity, but it can be anyone.

You, at some point in your childhood, with your identity formed, would probably easily answer the question "what do you want to be when you grow up" with a rotating list of professions – I think the narcissist, if he could consciously answer this question, would say "when I grow up, I want to be".

In the diagram below, (*Lecture: Secrets of the Narcissist's Shared Fantasy+Hidden Phases of the Narcissist's Shared Fantasy*) we observe that the fantasy has a pre-implementation phase, it begins to take shape in what Professor Sam Vaknin calls the Narcissist's Pathological Space, physical places, bars, social events where he can place some people as potential participants in the shared fantasy, He spots (spotting), applies the interview, auditioning, collects some relevant information using cold empathy,

literally scanning the person and then goes on to *lovebombing* (which is equivalent to the grooming of psychopaths).



The next step is idealization, the person is being led to participate in the fantasy, assuming the role of a mother figure, the one who provides unconditional love. The narcissist then emotionally abuses this person, tests this unconditional love based on his childhood experience that love endures everything (but he was the one who endured everything, not the mother); Precisely because the person endures the abuse, he becomes devalued, and becomes a persecuting object, reflecting everything that the narcissist does not admit in him, because he still thinks that in childhood he should have done something to avoid the abuse he suffered. First the person is devalued as an internal object and then this is reflected externally, in the devaluation of the external object and its inevitable

discarding, followed by replacement by a new signifier. But the internal object is not discarded and is a reminder to the narcissist that the discarding may have been a mistake, which causes dissonance, because he (the false self) does not make a mistake – at that moment he can go back to idealizing the partner he or she has just discarded and this step is called *hoovering*, a term coined by Sam Vaknin and named after the Hoover vacuum cleaner, and it literally means to suck or suck back. Then the cycle starts again.

This characteristic of the narcissist's internal dynamics is described as compulsive repetition: the unconscious repetition of behavioral patterns or the reenactment of situations involving unresolved conflicts and traumas

Psychodynamic theories propose that desires, thoughts, memories inaccessible in our conscious states, are stored, blocked in some way and still exert a primary, unconscious influence on human behavior and Freud believed that the unconscious is what directs compulsive repetition, being therefore a fundamental aspect of behavior.

I continue to believe that the biggest concern about narcissism has to be to recognize these cyclical patterns outside of romantic relationships, or whatever they call it today. In particular, it is necessary to recognize the behavioral patterns in one's own family and understand that no one should have to endure emotional or physical abuse or abuse of any kind.

The patterns are also recognizable in work environments, in institutions, in friendship relationships, referring to what Professor Sam refers to when he says that people seek or rather, they remain in abusive relationships not because they want to, but because it is familiar, because they already know – and this is a good illustration of compulsive repetition.

According to Sam Vaknin, (Lecture: How narcissists test you 3 times: will you pass?), a narcissist will always test three times the other potential participant in their fantasy, as described in the box below.

1. Are you capable of being idealized?

Active traits and minimal behaviors.

2. Are you able to provide 2 of the 4 Ss?

the. Sex: finding it irresistible, enthusiastic, consensual-submissive, prone to sexual fantasies, eccentric without limits, self-destructive, promiscuous.

b. Services: (which he needs and lacks).

c. Supply: (narcissistic or sadistic): adoring, uncritical, submissive, masochistic, self-loathing.

d. Security: addictive personality, maternal, loyal, inertial bond.

3. Are you vulnerable to shared fantasy?

Damaged, broken, dreamy, abhors reality, romantic (even as a friend), grandiose, self-love deficit.

If you are not able to be idealized it is a big green flag for any potential partner.

A person who resists idealization knows his identity, is aware of his limits, his vulnerabilities, recognizes his own humanity, and has both feet in reality. It may even be that she is coerced and inserted into a shared fantasy at some point, perhaps if she is surprised by a tragedy, if she has suffered a recent sentimental disappointment, but it will probably take work before she is converted to the *cult*, as Professor Sam Vaknin says.

If you pay close attention to the chart above, what the narcissist wants to know even with this testing is if you are a narcissist; how disoriented you are about yourself. Or if you are aware of what narcissism is, of your narcissism, of the evident traits, of what you signal. What is this image that you sport? What do you intend with this?

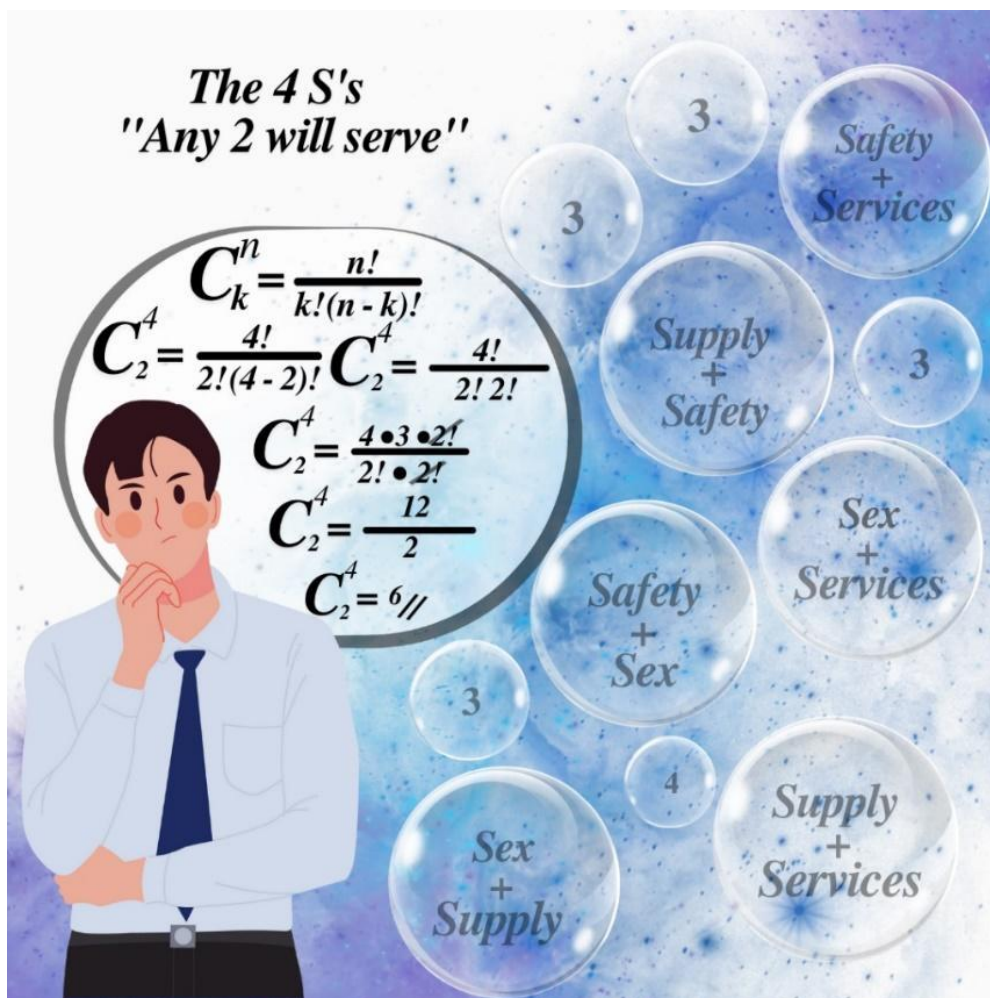
Item three is extremely revealing, there, in a few key words, there is a narcissist.

The 4 S's in the illustration below, at first glance may seem like a sophisticated mathematical calculation and, although it is not easy to absorb, this is nothing more than a need that originated in childhood that is never fulfilled.

The child has in his mother the first libidinal object – this is because it meets the basic needs of the child and this causes a feeling of satisfaction and pleasure, but it is not an eroticized object, the child does not think that, what he feels is the protective presence and the security of nesting in the mother's breast, and that yes, it's pleasurable.

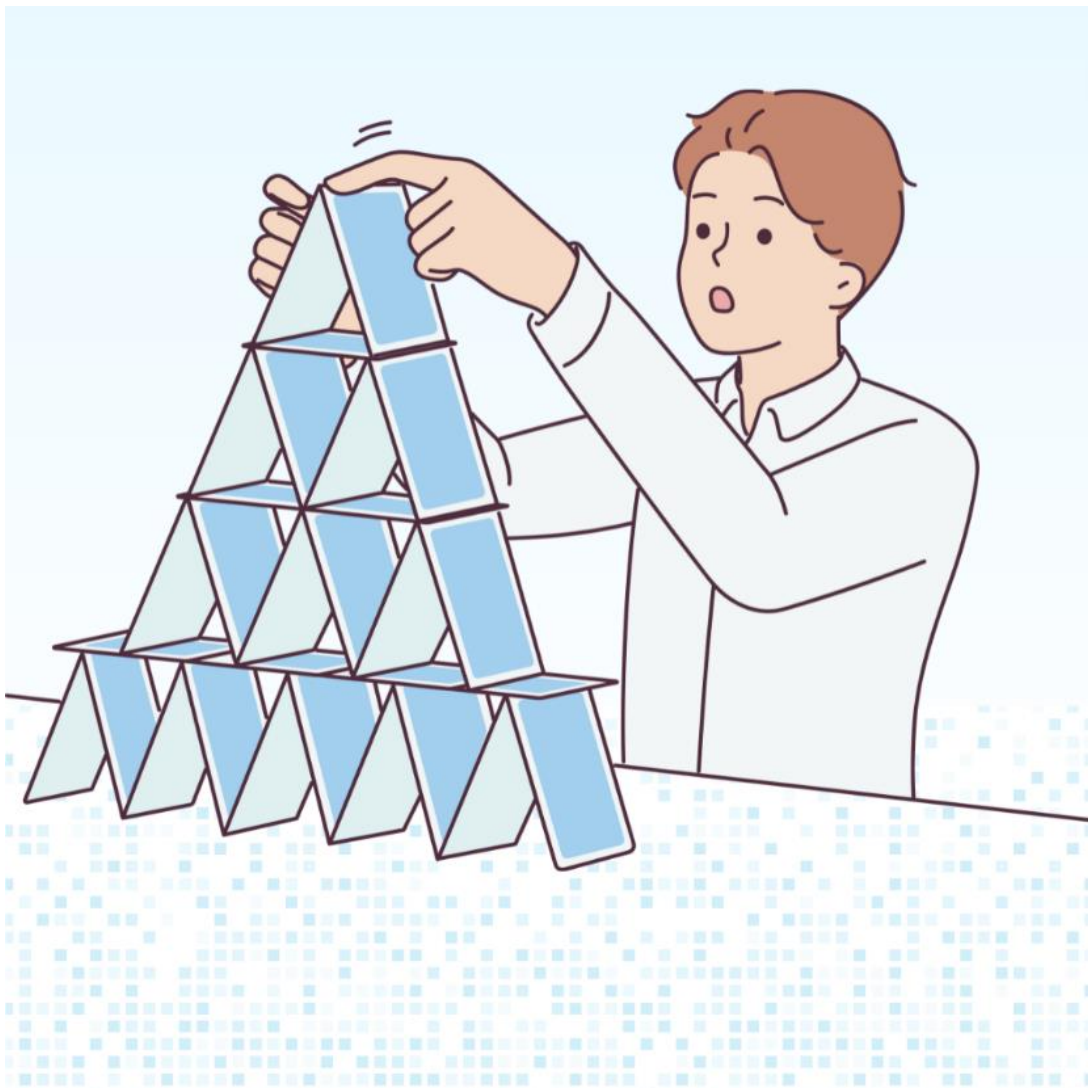
Narcissistic supply, feedback loop, input, affirmation, attention, "you name it" call it what you want. The narcissist needs external validation. It is the other who defines him, it is the other's view of him that gives meaning to his limited repertoire of behaviors.

The other's response determines the next step and without external validation only the existential conflict that he tries to avoid at all costs remains.



When the current fantasy collapses by the will of the other, when the relationship ends out of mold, when it is the partner who discards instead of being discarded, when he is confronted with the shame and guilt of having acted badly with someone, when something goes wrong, when someone changes the lines in the script, when everything deviates from the original plan, These events are termed injury or mortification and the narcissist collapses.

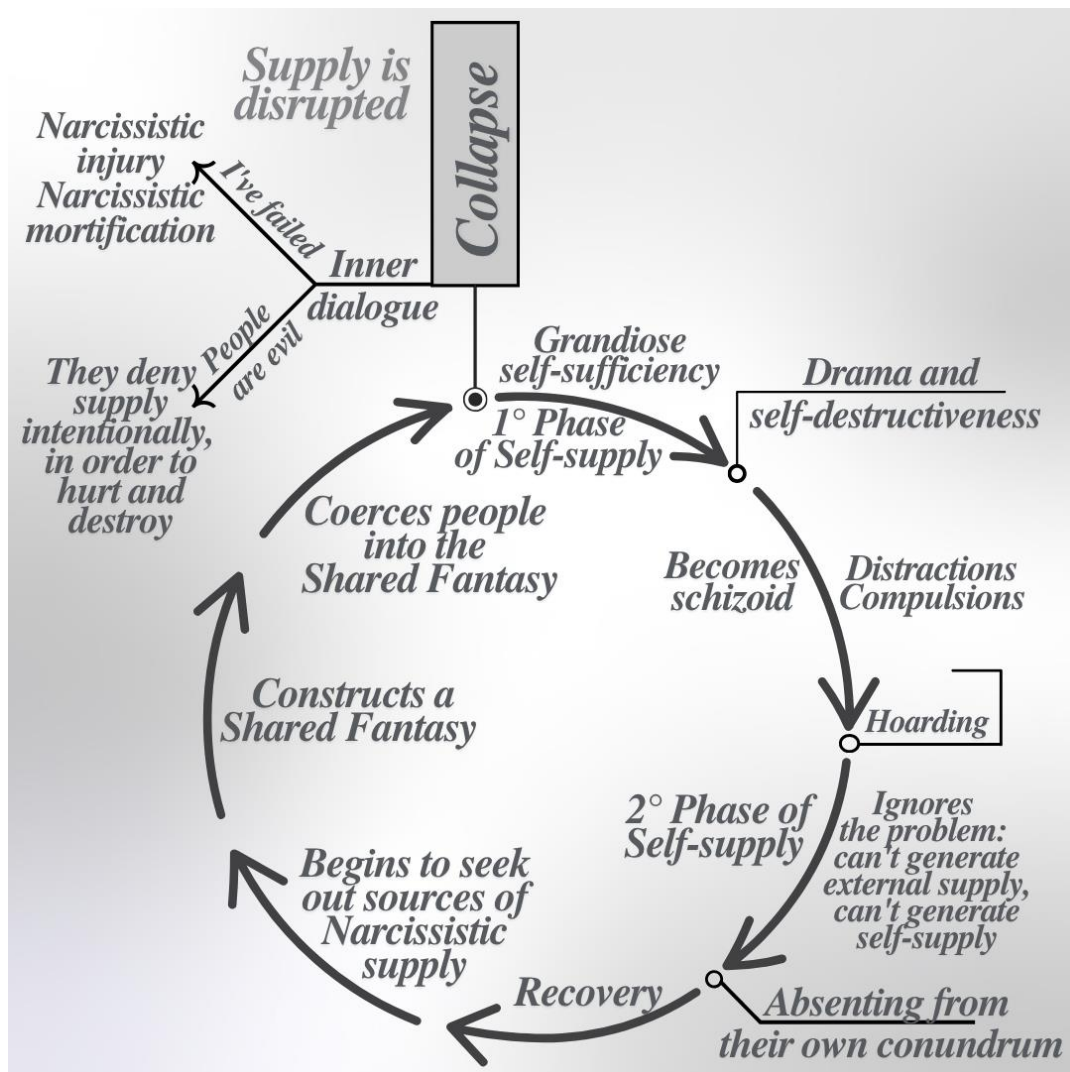
In a reaction to the failure to obtain narcissistic supply (...) The Narcissist would withdraw, isolate himself from the world to avoid further damage to fragile structures, to the house of cards, to the precarious balance that passes for Personality Shared Fantasy with Narcissistic Canines and Other Narcissists (with Raquel Petersen Gesteira).



The lack of the other's gaze, which gives them a sense of reality, is unbearable, so it is more common for narcissists to change relationships quickly – not least because they catastrophize, anticipate the end mentally.

It's not an internal monologue, it's a dialogue, the narcissist doesn't listen to the voice of conscience, he exchanges ideas with his own snapshotting.

Shared fantasy, among other functions, is a mechanism of self-preservation, it has the ability to ward off anxiety.



In each mortification it is as if the false *self* dies and the suppressed child in the dungeon of the narcissist's mind needs another false self because it is the only way to survive in the world – and the cycle of self-supply resembles a self-intervention, the entry

into a period of latency as happens in several species of microorganisms when the environment is unfavorable and there is no availability of basic elements for maintenance of his vital functions – he isolates himself, seeks distractions, accumulates things (accumulation is a form of fulfillment); and just as the microorganism that is placed in a culture medium with the appropriate nutrients is reactivated and seems to resurrect, after a while he, the narcissist, can already begin to deny himself again, in the search for new sources of supply the new character emerges based on the potential significant other; The false self is ready, reborn, as a god: beginning and end in itself.

The Self-supplying Narcissist is a universe unto himself. He is both, God and a worshipper. He is creation reified and embodied. (Narcissists Hyperflexible, Not Rigid: Self-supply Psychopathy, Toxic Nostalgia).



3, 2, 1 Action!

The narcissist survives in this warped reality, divorced from his own emotions, constantly feeling that he is an actor in a film about his own life.

(Sam Vaknin. Malignant Self-love, Narcissism Revisited Pg. 229)



Shortly before the 1950s and for a long time, cinemas operated in a continuous section – in the city where I was born, this type of film exhibition was still common until the beginning of the 1990s.

A continuous session is when the film is played without intermission, in a loop, in compulsive repetition, if you prefer, allowing viewers to come and go at any time during the film's screening. It was possible to go to theaters and watch a movie from wherever it was playing at the time people arrived, even if they missed the beginning, or arrived halfway through the movie.

The people in the life of someone with narcissistic personality disorder are in a continuous section, in an imaginary cinema, where the movie of his life is played, with some small adaptations from time to time. Many of them don't know they're there, but they find out; Some will never know and, therefore, will never be able to leave the cinema. Some are spectators, others are active characters.

Acting, as artistic interpretation, is the representation of a character that comes to life through the dedication and talent of the actor. Actors need to strip themselves of themselves, understand the character, their motivations and stories, and translate them into attitudes that express emotions that will (or will not) be perceived as genuine by the audience.

Narcissists do not have a "self" of which they can strip themselves.

Sam Vaknin says that Narcissists are not good actors – they are the best actors! And the reason is: they don't know they're acting. They believe in their own confabulations. Continuing this analysis, Professor Sam observes that during the performance, narcissists simultaneously meet the preferences, needs, desires, and expectations of an external audience. "But it also enters something I call an internal audience: an imaginary audience within the narcissist." (Lecture: Narcissists are Best Actors, Thespians)

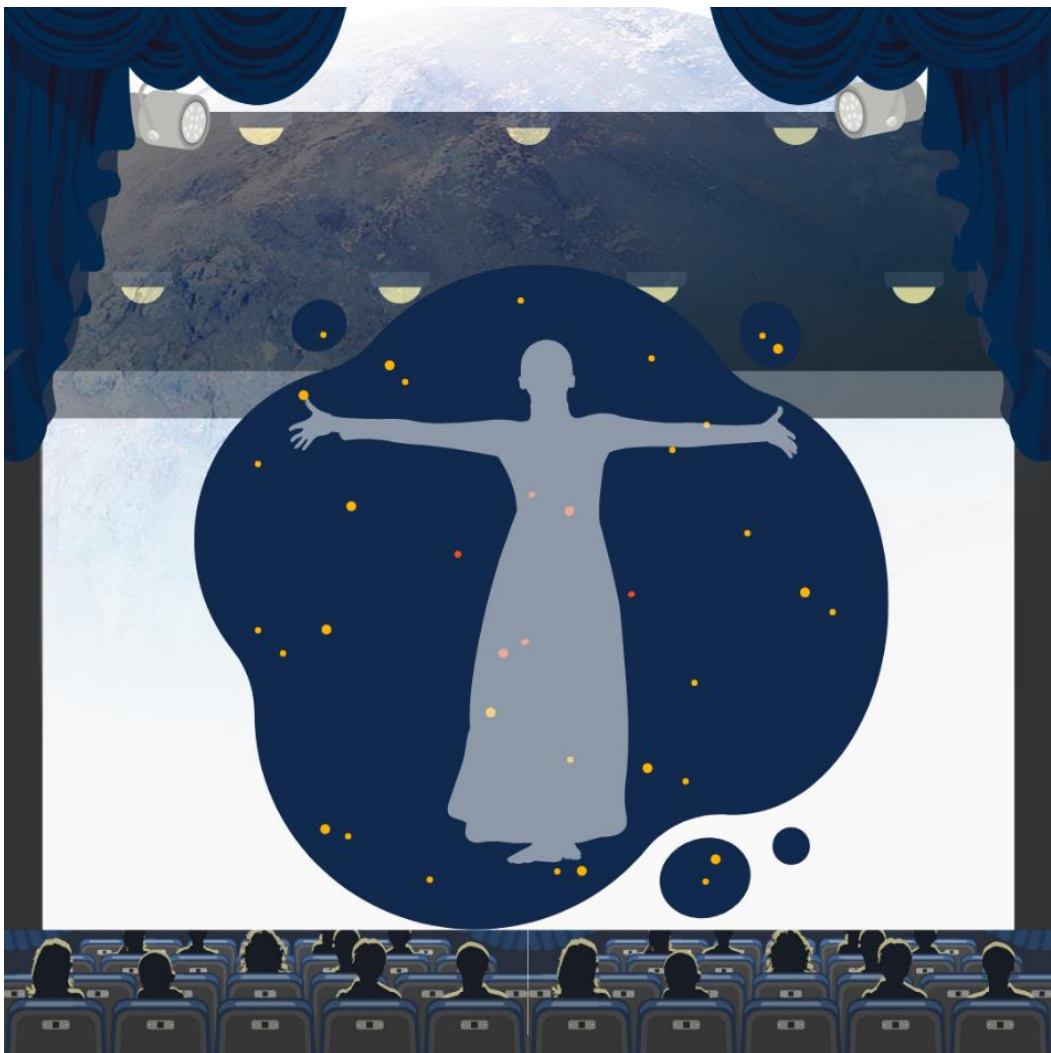
Professor Sam's observation about a permanent audience reveals the increased sense of importance that is also in line with the states of paranoia and persecutory illusion that are also understood as exaggerated self-importance, since to think that others persecute you, you need to be noticed at all times and not just noticed, but have something so special that it makes other people feel threatened and create plans to eliminate it.



I can visualize what Professor Sam Vaknin is referring to in terms of the (permanent) internal audience, as if endless rehearsals were going on in the imaginary theater or cinema inside the narcissist's head. There are always some people, members of the support team or castmates in the rehearsals of the plays, films, in the passage of lines, in the marking of positions on stage and in the locations, in the photo rehearsals to promote the work. But in his case, he is the author, screenwriter, producer, director and sometimes the viewer too!

He rehearses with you, he teaches you your role (idealization), he knows all your lines, if you make a mistake (devaluation) he cuts (discards) and starts again (compulsive repetition) – with (hoovering) or without you (another partner).

It's in acting that The Narcissist feels most ego sytonic. It is in acting that The Narcissist can pretend that he is not (or she is not). It is in acting that The Narcissist can conjure up a paracosm, an alternative reality, and then inhabit this new ecosystem, this new habitat - so acting is the natural state of The Narcissist. Sam Vaknin. Lecture: Narcissists are Best Actors, Thespians



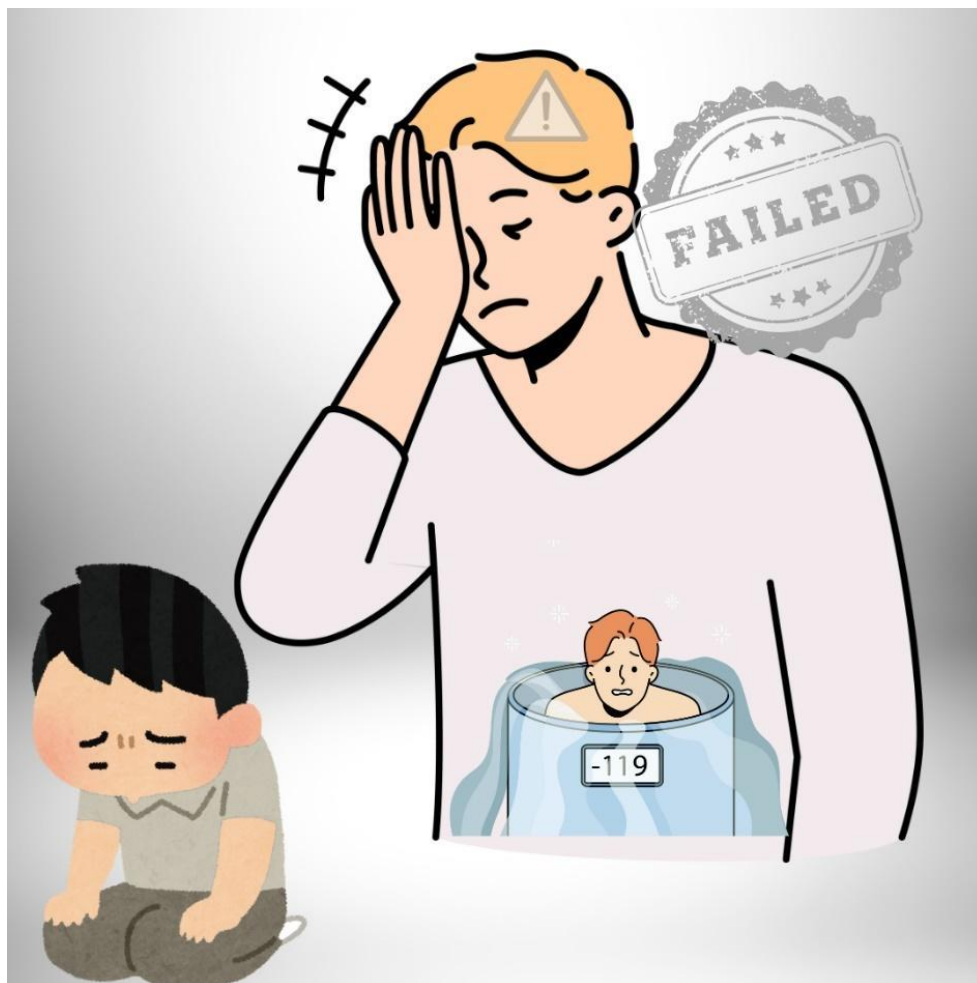
"That he can pretend he's not." It is an intricate thought – as if no longer being, yet pretending not to be? But that's it.

Representing him can pretend that his life is not a farce, that he can refrain from the constant feeling of emptiness and can pretend that he knows who he is, that he is not lost in a cosmic abyss.

The acting makes the parallel reality in which he lives realistic – characters are immortal, they are unforgettable each in their own way, villains can be as acclaimed as the good guys, age does not exist, the costumes are beautiful: it's like a cartoon, it's a real fantasy!

Acting is just another legal drug, another way to numb and deceive yourself for a while longer that your life has some meaning.

The narcissist does not know how to elaborate failure, he needs to transfer, project – here in this case, projection as a defense mechanism in which he displaces to the other what he cannot bear in him.



When acting fails, with regular actors they learn to pick up the pieces, learn the lessons, and bounce back. The narcissist cannot afford such a failure – it is life-threatening. Failure presents the narcissist, puts him in contact, with the deep reservoir of shame that he has harbored since childhood. Sam Vaknin. Lecture: Narcissists are Best Actors, Thespians

Failure means injury or mortification, and in contact with an event that causes mortification, the narcissist would collapse and would need to withdraw, isolate himself and start over from the top of his rubble, a new illusion of identity.

Chapter 6 – It's a Matter of Time

*Time is never time at all
We can never ever leave
Without leaving a piece of youth
And our lives are forever changed
We will never be the same
The more you change, the less you feel*

Tonight, tonight – Smashing Pumpkins



Imagine that a message can go through a process in which readable texts are transformed into secret codes. To crack this code, you need the same key that generated this code.

Think of the hypothesis of a time traveler who gets stuck between two dimensions.

In one dimension, a traumatized child, in the other the adult who propagates the same trauma experienced.

The child in it cannot talk about what happened to him because he was silenced so long ago. Then he sends messages in riddles.

The narcissist has trained you to speak for him. You are the spokesperson, to tell the world what, as a child, it could not. The stages of his own trauma are recreated as a psychodrama and reveal his helpless condition: being treated as if he should be available because his parents rule his life, what he has is emotional and financial dependence, and a lot of loneliness – but no one notices.

This is just a metaphor that shows the power of experience. It also shows that being a victim of violence is lonely, many do not believe it, even official institutions represent a repetition of the trauma when they adopt an indifferent posture in the face of the suffering of those who report situations of abuse. They don't believe when it's adults counting, and they believe even less in a child, who doesn't know how to express himself correctly.

But children give signs, all the time. They withdraw, become shy, stop interacting with other children, stop playing, have other symptoms such as migraines and eating disorders. They are afraid to be in a room with the lights off, they express discomfort in the presence of those who do not like them.

Being a child is a sufficient condition for him to be vulnerable. And there is an infinity of situations capable of making reality so unbearable that he prefers to live forever in a chaotic, illusory dimension where he or she can never, ever find an ideal partner or himself.

Every time we go through an experience of separation, whether as a result of death or for any other reason that causes the interruption of contact with a close relative, family member or friend, we elaborate the loss, we process the grief for no longer having that

person around. We also process the grief for the loss of our pets, a toy, a photo, an outfit that no longer fits, a relationship that we hoped would last a lifetime.

The narcissist could not separate from his mother. But how many griefs did he not process?

Professor Sam Vaknin hypothesizes that Narcissism is also a form of pathological grief.

Normal grief evolves through all its phases — denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance — over the course of 12 months, according to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. From this period on, we may be facing persistent grief, which is an indication for psychiatric or psychological evaluation.



In the case of normal grief or acute grief, the symptoms tend to gradually fade as the bereaved individual adapts to a new reality, of which the loved one is not part

There are griefs that can be more traumatic than others. For example, when we confront death in a violent way. A murder of someone in the family, death due to a plane crash or having a family member a victim of a fire.

Think about the following situation in which a child is (in fact) born. And instead of love, she receives indifference. Instead of being cared for, people are ashamed of her. Instead of acceptance, she receives blame. Instead of patience, he receives hatred. It feels more like an abortion, some kind of non-birth, a non-being. It is mourning for having been born.

According to Martin Heidegger, being-with (Mitsein) is an existential determination of being-there. This means that this relationship between beings is the only possibility, since the way to be in the world of presence is to be surrounded by beings and co-presents.

Unable to be in the world and to be in the world with others, the subject feels that he cannot be.

The child who suffered several abuses and who could not separate from his mother figure needs to elaborate the mourning for the loss of himself, in addition to the mourning for the dead mother by whom he was raised.

If we do not live the grief to the end, if it is not elaborated, the grieving process does not end. Most of the time, we understand grief as a process triggered by the death of someone close, but it is experienced in any type of loss.

Grief is considered prolonged and, therefore, a disorder, when it exceeds what fits the social, cultural or religious norms expected in the context of each individual. Another indicator of the disorder is when the disturbance starts to cause significant damage to the routine of personal, family, social, educational and occupational life

As of 2002, according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), prolonged grief, making it impossible for the person to resume their activities of full daily life, was recognized as a mental disorder.

Prolonged grief disorder (PGD) is a condition in which the emotional pain and symptoms associated with the loss of a loved one persist for a longer period than expected, causing significant impairments in the individual's daily life; It is characterized by intense and persistent grief related to the loss of someone.

Characterized by feelings of emptiness and hopelessness, the person may feel that life has lost its meaning, or that a part of it has died with the loved one; the person may withdraw from friends and family, avoiding social contact and activities that were previously pleasurable, may present physical symptoms such as headache, fatigue, gastrointestinal problems and sleep changes; The person has difficulty resuming their daily activities and relationships.

Individuals may present an interruption of identity, disbelief in death, avoidance of remembering the loss, intense emotional pain, difficulty in reintegrating into life, emotional torpor, loneliness, and a sense of having no meaning.

It is difficult for a child to reach adulthood without sequelae because he has been abused.

And for the narcissist, the trauma happened too soon, the grief went on for too long. He never had a chance – and maybe it's too late.

Diagnosis is important. Perhaps much more so for someone with narcissistic personality disorder than for those who suffer from his behavior. It's a chance to have an identity, even if it's through the counterflow. In many other health conditions, it is the confirmation of the diagnosis that can bring a little hope to the person who suffers, because he can understand what causes the suffering. Of course, no one has to be the diagnosis, but for those who still don't "are", can't it be a good start?

Growing up in a narcissistic family is being asked to give what you didn't receive, to take care of someone the way they should have taken care of you – how can someone give love without having been loved? For a narcissist who becomes a mother, the children serve the purpose of loving her, and while she does not love herself or her children, can they ever love someone and themselves? Even if it happens that children do not become narcissistic, there is a great chance that they will develop emotional dependence and that their perception of affection and healthy relationships will be impaired.

How much does it cost not to be a narcissist in the midst of so many of them? It costs your sanity as much as theirs. It costs everything you have; it costs everything you want and everything you are.

Perhaps the disorder makes the person wait for the other to truly love him so that he can learn to love himself and maybe later he will be able to love someone. But isn't that really the route?

A mother loves her child and by loving teaches what love is. If the mother does not love her child, he will not know what it is to love.

The amount of content and tasks, information and behaviors, emotions and behaviors, rights and wrongs that a child must learn is very large in a very short period. Childhood is a very short period to learn all the things that he will not use in childhood and that will impact his long adult life. The world of the child has been divided between good and evil and nothing more than that.

In the past, parents, needing to work, made the school a deposit for their children. Currently they are deposited at the school, then they are taken "home" where the smartphone will take care of them. There's no way this can work.

The ability to filter the material to which we are exposed in the environments that serve as the stage for our interactions, so that we can be ourselves, so that we can be-with other people exactly as we are when we are not, is only acquired much later in our journey.

This ability is necessarily the result of the good experiences we have had, how we have been guided, and the welcome we receive from our parents or caregivers or from the people we admire and respect and who are our role models. Yes, models, examples to be followed or not. An indication of integrity of character, identity and authenticity is the ability to maintain firm moral and ethical values in the face of the violation of the rights of others and our own rights, in the face of what wants to corrupt our soul. Some models are essential because they are the antagonistic parameter, they are or should have the role of showing how it is not to do, they are the choice you refuse.

We are all patchwork quilts, mosaics. But some of us, like narcissists, have frayed fabric, there is no grout between the tiles of the mosaic that is the life story of the subject with narcissistic personality disorder, and their memory is shredded.

We are the sum of interactions, encounters and disagreements, we all have characteristics of other people with whom we have already lived. What makes our patchwork quilt different from the chimera that is a narcissist?

Trauma, example, trial and error, experience, investigation. What Professor Sam Vaknin has been showing is that there are many ways to teach and learn – which one do you choose for you and your children?

Not all emotionally unavailable people are narcissists. Some are psychopaths. Others have mood disorders, such as bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, or dysthymia. There is also the group of developmental disorders, such as autism, and those people who suffer from neurodegenerative diseases. An emotionally available person is open to dialogue, negotiates the terms of a relationship. Cognitive rigidity and destructive patterns of behavior are characteristics of unavailable people, because it is through them that they can exert control. A healthy relationship is not a contest for control and domination.

Society demands that women get married and have children, that they have aspirations and ambitions like men, that they pursue careers and be successful professionally, that they get their food ready before they leave, that they come home after work and clean up all the mess, that they fix what has not been broken by them, who are willing to give their bodies to husbands who treat them as if they had done them a favor by marrying them. Society demands that women say yes even after they have already said no.

At what point will a woman who works 12 hours a day and still has to keep the house clean and make food take care of a child? What time does she go to sleep? Women are asked who they will leave their children with to go to work, but they ask the same question of men? Why doesn't anyone say that an interval of 1 or 2 years between one pregnancy and another can be harmful to the development of the two children, who will not receive full attention in the crucial period of their lives? Why don't women receive the same salaries as men when they perform the same functions? Why isn't maternity leave at least 2 years everywhere in the world? Of course, there are many political-social issues involved, it is not something so simple to answer.

But as always, biology is ruthless with women and so is the job market. It is up to the woman to continue the species; however unpleasant it may be for some people. It

won't make much difference to the millions of sperm you are able to produce per day, the ratio is one uterus for each pregnancy. The womb is hers; the breast is hers; the generation of life is hers.

I think that when Professor Sam talks about the "dead mother" and mentions the occurrence of various mental disorders, we need to reflect on women's mental health, we need to know women's life history, we need to take care of those who care. The research was there all along: depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, eating disorders, dysthymia, bipolar disorder, autoimmune diseases, post-traumatic stress disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, dissociative identity disorders, obesity, all have some connection with adverse childhood experiences, this is not exclusive to personality disorders.

Among those mentioned above are the future fathers and mothers of potential narcissists, psychopaths and borderlines.

What will be the child's chances?

Narcissism is a serious condition – it's as if the narcissist said: if you feel what I feel, can you recover? If you go into a black hole, can you get back from there? If you can do it, show me how it's done?

Some people choose not to become fathers and mothers and perhaps this is the greatest attitude of love they will be able to have in life!

There is no doubt that we are living in a narcissistic model of society and this is extremely dangerous.

Adults who experience narcissistic abuse can temporarily become narcissists, as if it were a Narcissism by regression, they remain narcissistic until they heal and regain their autonomy and independence.

Who is interested in a Pandemic of Narcissism? Who would benefit from the precariousness of mental health? Who would plan a proliferation of mental disorders in a society that still segregates the difference, that is scandalized by those who have critical thinking, but that does not revolt against those who take advantage of the most vulnerable?

A society made up of narcissists is easily ruled by psychopaths.

1, 2, 3 Wake up!

It's part of the cure

The desire to be healed

(Seneca)



When you decide to heal yourself, it will be so obvious. That's why when you refuse to heal it's obvious too. When you heal yourself, you change, it's noticeable. And when you change, the way you approach certain subjects, even those that once hurt, also changes. This happens when you have the capacity for self-reflection, when you dedicate yourself to unraveling your own puzzle, and principles such as transmitting only the truth

and showing gratitude are non-negotiable. Do you have healthy psychological mechanisms to recover? Don't stay on the surface, don't refuse to heal.

You can call it inner strength; neuropsychology will call it volition. We are talking about the same thing: will – the ability to get out of the state of inertia and take action. What Viktor Frankel could call the "will to meaning", everything that mobilizes us to let go of what paralyzes and makes us sick, move on and stay in the real world.

Reality, even if it is often not quite the way we would like it to be, is where we should be. Otherwise, it would be like living in that moment of sleep that we usually are in when we can remember the dream (REM sleep) – in a state of semi-consciousness, a nebulous, enigmatic place, where it seems that everything is possible and at the same time nothing seems to make sense. Dreaming without realizing it is an escape.

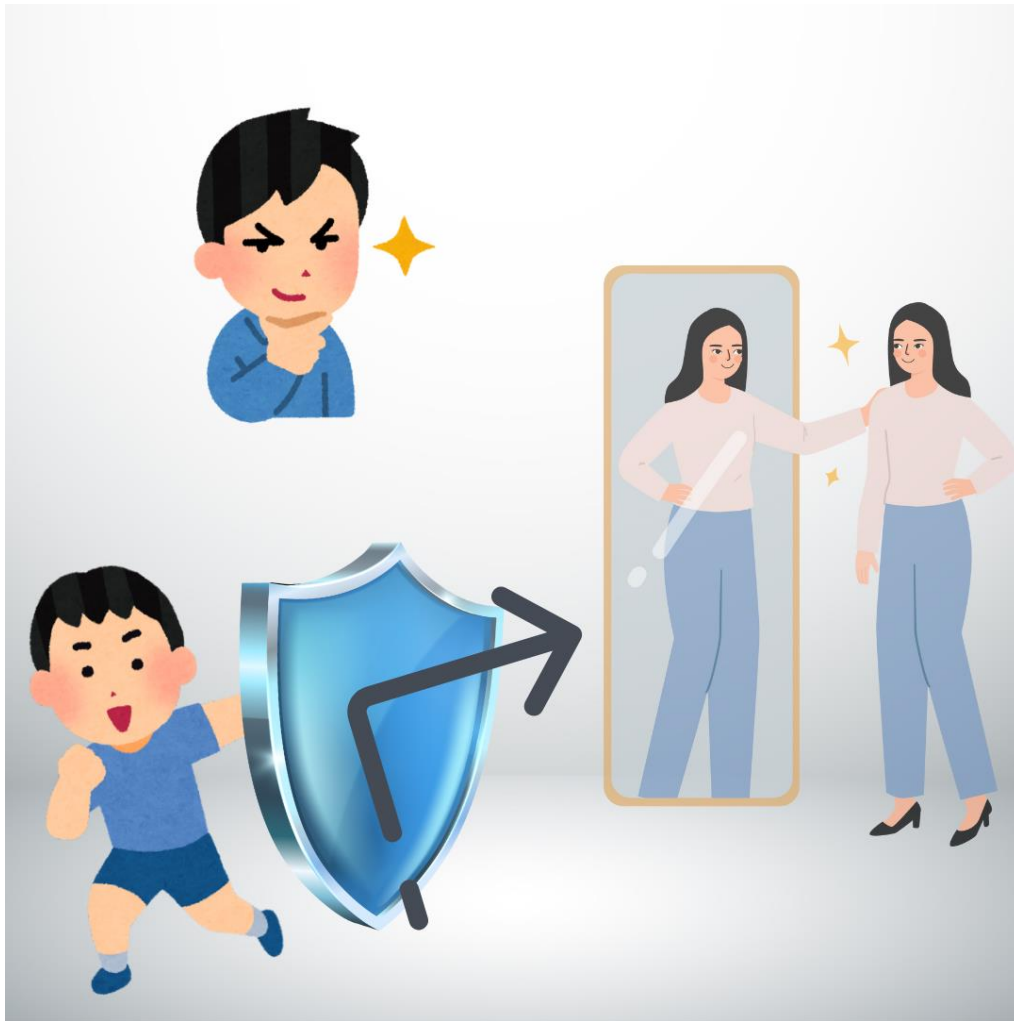
Be that as it may, creating one's own reality is not the privilege or exclusivity of narcissists.

The issue is always deeper than it seems, curing yourself of narcissistic abuse means above all refusing to be one of them.

A victim of abuse does not want to be a victim. She wanted everything to be different and that nothing that happened had ever happened – this goes for the victim of narcissistic abuse and the narcissist who was once a victim.

A victim of abuse wanted to be able to go back in time, she wanted there to be a way to stop it, she wanted not to be a victim. Sometimes I wish someone could put themselves in her shoes, in an attempt to share the weight of this burden that is so heavy. No one should be blamed for the abuse suffered. We don't need to define our identity from the perspective of an eternal victim. At least try not to do that. Don't go there. One day at a time, don't force yourself to stay in that place for too long. Claiming the title of victim will not do as much good as they say out there.

People don't seem to like this part very much, but you need to understand what self-reflection really means: it's showing who you are, it's being you. When you relate to guys who have narcissistic personality disorder, if you fight back then you've been infected. The narcissist's internal dynamic consumes him, corrupts him, and is corrupting. The math here is pretty simple, if you pay in kind, it means you've been corrupted.



Narcissistic supply is part of the niche. If you are in the same habitat (Pathological Narcissistic Space) and you provide the look on it that it needs, then you are the niche. That is why Professor Sam Vaknin categorically states that you were not chosen. Supply is a source of energy, it means life, not in the sense of the metaphorical aberration of vampirism that many use to talk about narcissism. I interpret this analogy in another way: the vampire stops in front of the mirror and has nothing there, those who have no ego do not self-reflect, and if they have no ego, they have no superego, they have no coping strategy, they cannot look inside because it hurts to look into the void.

I never restricted myself to a single psychotherapeutic approach with my patients, I used all the information I had learned in college and in other courses to try to help that person. But I also needed help for a long time.

Anyone who has ever been in an abusive relationship must have felt at least once like this Jimmy Durante song (Did you ever have the feeling; Movie: The man who came

to dinner, 1942), wanting to leave and coming back, trying to get out again and failing.
And giving up.

Did you ever have the feeling that you wanted to go,
But still had the feeling that you wanted to stay
You knew it was right, wasn't wrong
Still you knew you wouldn't be very long

It's hard to have the feeling that you wanted to go,
But still have the feeling that you wanted to stay

Started to go
Changed your mind
Started to go again
But changed your mind again

It's hard to have the feeling that you wanted to go,
But still have the feeling that you wanted to stay

Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Si, Do

I'll go

What is more important? What did they do to you or what do you do with what they did to you? Both are equally important. This is validation.

Your role is to set limits. If someone tests your limits and you slacken, the other will know that you don't believe much in the limits you display.

Recovery involves recognizing one's humanity, one's failure – not public humiliation because this is traumatic – but knowing oneself small in the face of the diversity of being, it is understanding that we are different, we feel different, we react differently, but we must respect ourselves equally.

All of us are offered choices. The question is whether we know what to do with them, whether we can see them clearly, whether we deem ourselves capable or worthy, whether we have the skills and abilities necessary to measure their impact on the lives of others; if we can perceive the direct and indirect consequences of our choices and then start making decisions, calibrating our expectations, aware that we are the main responsible for the results and that we must be accountable to some higher, social

instance, in addition to our moral judgment, if in case the outcome is unfavorable there is damage to third parties.

Narcissists find it difficult to implement this step-by-step if any of these parts cause injury and/or mortification.

Psychopaths won't care about any of this.

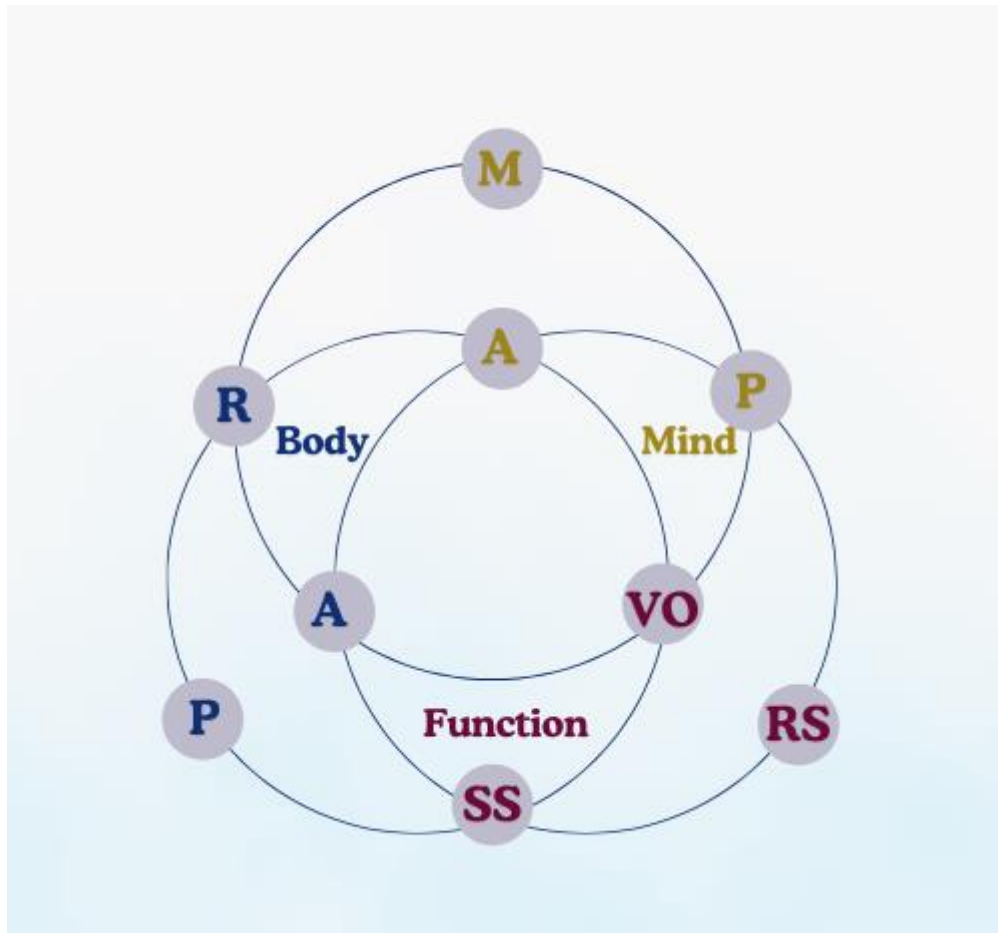
In psychotherapy, the anguish that the patient feels when remembering the trauma experienced is evident, but the psychotherapist is present and this transmits security. There are many activities that support psychotherapy, they are therapeutic, healthy, recommended, they just do not replace the follow-up that the trained and qualified psychotherapist is able to provide and that the patient needs.

It takes some time. Professor Sam always says that the prognosis is excellent, that although the suffering often seems endless, the chances of recovery are actually very good.

This is because if you are not a narcissist you have an authentic ego, you have an identity prior to this temporary identity of the role of victim, you are an individual and as such, you can recognize yourself as a separate being, autonomous, independent, capable not only of finding your place in the world, but of building your place or rebuilding yourself in another place.

The videos about recovery and healing on Professor Sam's channel were essential in another sense also for me, they brought parental guidance that I did not receive. The following illustration is based on the lecture Self-help after the Narcissist: Regaining yourself. Professor Sam explains that it is necessary to perceive oneself as a set that brings together the mind, the body and related functions.

The body needs homeostasis, it needs balance, it has to be regulated, balanced, it is necessary to pay attention to the body and protect it, but it does not work separately from the mind. And the mind must have authenticity, needs full attention and positivity, so that functions are not impaired; The three pillars combine to emerge as a vigilant observer, who possesses an armor sensor and is a sentinel of reality.



I reinterpreted these directions and many others from her vast repertoire of how to live life, asking questions to myself. The questions always seemed more interesting to me. They are the questions that move us and that take us to other places in ourselves and in the world. We need to learn to ask the questions and interpret the answers and ask other questions. The questions are universal, but the answers are personal.

As you can see in the diagram below:



You have to know yourself.

Narcissus was a child and the horror of the truth about himself was unbearable to him. As adults, we need to face our horror stories before it's too late.

What are your songs? What's funny to you? Which book did you like to read the most?

You need to have friends. You don't need many, but you need a support network, you have to have that person who will notice if you take too long to respond, who will miss you if you go more than a day without showing up, who will find sudden changes in

your social network strange, who will answer your message at dawn because it can be an emergency instead of ignoring and pretending to be asleep.

You need to have that person who doesn't let go of your hand, who won't let you isolate yourself, who won't let you get lost; someone who will give you the advice you won't listen to, but who won't give up on you. You need to know who you would entrust your child to in case something happened to you.

There has to be someone in your life who would call the police to defend your life, who would skip the work to look for you in the city.

When you are not defined by the gaze of others, no one can destabilize you. Provocations have no effect, accusations do not sound like offense, you do not need to convince anyone, you do not need anyone to believe you – you believe, you know the truth and that is enough.

A person of integrity and honesty does not bother to raise suspicions about another person's character. Only an evil character plants doubts, well-intentioned people seek to undo them.

When you know your identity, your path, your tastes, your desires, your principles, your foundations, no one is able to reject you, because even if they try, you will know that you don't have to force anyone to stay.

And with the aim of offering a hand to those who need support, the 5D Theory (@5d_theory) Project was created by the co-author of this book, Adam Kain, in this year 2025, a gateway to Professor Sam's YouTube channel, to which both narcissists in recovery, as well as anyone in the process of recovery after narcissistic abuse, They will be able to watch it soon, without discrimination, without segregation, without hatred.

5D Theory is a humanitarian redefinition framework that seeks harmony and continuity, empowering individuals through metaphysics and relational quantum mechanics.

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Appendix

The Cat

