

# **Gender Narcissism and Its Manifestations**

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**Gerald Schoenewolf PhD**

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**By Gerald Schoenewolf Ph.D.**

ebook 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

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## Table of Contents

### [Gender Narcissism and Its Manifestations](#)

#### [Psychoanalytic Theories and Research](#)

#### [General Characteristics of Gender Narcissism](#)

#### [Female Narcissism](#)

#### [Male Narcissism](#)

#### [Case Histories](#)

#### [Concluding Remarks](#)

## ***About the Author***

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## Gender Narcissism and Its Manifestations

Narcissus was the name of a young man in Greek mythology who fell in love with his own reflection. Thus, falling in love with one's self has become a cornerstone in defining narcissism. I have taken this one step further to try to define and understand the phenomenon of gender narcissism, inferiority about one's gender or one's gender anatomy and compensation for that inferiority by erecting a bubble of gender pride. This pride and the underlying inferiority feelings and rage, leads to various manifestations.

The term narcissism was originally taken from the Greek myth about a beautiful young man who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, jumped in after it, and drowned. The term was used to denote the attitude of a person who takes his own body as an object of attraction and desire, and focuses primarily on the practice of masturbation. Since then psychoanalysis has broadened the definition of narcissism to mean an excessive self-love or concern for the self and lack of concern for others.

The first, narrower definition of narcissism might now more aptly be termed gender narcissism. Gender narcissism develops in reaction to feelings of inferiority about one's gender and might be defined as excessive love or concern for one's gender, one's genitals, or one's gender identity, and negative feeling about the opposite sex—generally involving fear, disgust, resentment or competitiveness. It leads to the formation of gender-narcissistic alliances rather than libidinal unions, and it is primarily rooted in the anal-rapprochement

phase, during which time an individual's sexual orientation and identity are shaped.

In psychoanalyzing a number of individuals over the years that had gender-narcissistic features, I began to get a first-hand understanding of how gender narcissism is formed and manifested. Recently I decided to conduct a more systematic study. A search of my files found 30 patients who had been in treatment for at least six months and possessed three or more gender-narcissistic features. Their cases were reviewed and contrasted with another group of 20 randomly selected patients. Personality types ranged from hysterics and obsessive-compulsives to borderlines and schizophrenics, and sexual types included heterosexuals, bisexuals, homosexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, pedophiles, and fetishists, as well as women who engaged in strip-teasing and prostitution. The study found that gender narcissism is fairly common, with all personality types showing degrees of it; however, gender-narcissistic features were less prevalent among heterosexuals than they were among other types. When gender narcissism is present to a high degree, it has a disturbing effect on relationships, sexuality, and sexual identity.

### Psychoanalytic Theories and Research

In his writings on narcissism, Freud (1914, 1916) postulated an early stage of primal narcissism during which time an infant is preoccupied with its

self and with its own pleasure while being oblivious of the needs of others. Various circumstances could result in fixations at that stage which could persist into adulthood. He noted that narcissism could be seen in various character types, and described how it involved the investment of libido in the ego, or in objects similar to the self (alteregos). Homosexuals fall into the category of those who invest their libido in persons who are like themselves. The hypochondriac withdraws both his interest and his libido from the objects of the external world and displaces them on the organs in his own body. Megalomaniacs, prone to the highest grandiosity, withdraw libido from frustrating objects and return it to their own ego.

Freud theorized that an ego ideal is formed by the ego (becoming part of the superego), its function being to compensate for the repression of primal narcissism. "This ego ideal is the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego" (1914, p. 94). Along with this ego ideal, a sexual ideal is also formed as an auxiliary to the ego ideal. The ego ideal and sexual ideal run parallel to one another.

Although Freud did not use the term gender narcissism, he pointed to the narcissism that was associated with both male and female sexual development. He saw homosexuality as being a prototype of narcissistic development, and he linked this narcissism with the male and female castration complexes. With regard to male homosexuals, he noted that until puberty they



were generally strongly fixated to their mothers, and hence identified with her instead of their with their fathers, and looked for love objects in whom they could rediscover and reclaim their masculinity, and toward whom they might relate as their mothers related to them. "The choice is towards a narcissistic object which is readier at hand and easier to put into effect than movement towards the opposite sex" (1923, p. 233). He observed that in taking a love object that is similar to himself, the homosexual can symbolically actualize his narcissistic fixation, and he added that the avoidance of sexual relations with the opposite sex was a way of not only of remaining loyal to their mothers, but also of avoiding the incestuous feelings that might be aroused in the transference.

Studying a case of female homosexuality, Freud (1920) observed that it grew out of the girl's castration complex (penis envy), which in turn led to the formation of a masculinity complex. Like male homosexuality, he linked female homosexuality to narcissism—in particular, to a narcissistic protest regarding femininity. "Psychoanalytic research has recognized the existence and importance of the masculine protest, but it has regarded it, in opposition to Adler, as narcissistic in nature and derived from the castration complex" (p. 92). Elsewhere he writes that the castration complex begins before the age of three and is "more closely allied to primal narcissism than to object-love" (1918, p. 204). Thus, the wellspring of female homosexuality (and consequently of gender narcissism) is the girl's discovery toward the end of the stage of primal

narcissism, that she lacks an organ that others have. This becomes a major narcissistic injury.

Males and females traverse separate routes on their way to developing gender narcissism, yet there are also certain similarities. For both, the crucial period for the development of gender narcissism, sexual orientation, and sexual identity, seems to be the anal-rapprochement phase. Mahler and colleagues (1975) note that during this phase, falling roughly between the ages of one-and-a-half to three, a fear of reengulfment can be observed in boys and girls, as the discovery of the difference in male and female anatomy exacerbates the anxiety of separation from Mother. These fears are often displaced onto the bathroom, where fantasies of being sucked into the toilet are common. This fear of reengulfment is related to a disillusionment with Mother's omnipotence and was believed by Mahler to lead, when left unresolved, to the formation of the castration complexes of both boys and girls. For girls, this disillusionment centers around disappointment that Mother doesn't have a penis, and a resentment of her (and corresponding fear of reengulfment); for boys, it centers around guilt about having a penis and subsequent fears of reengulfment. Both then translate, later, into fears of castration (for boys) or annihilation (for girls).

Winnicott (1964) also observed this fear, noting that every male and every female is born of "Woman" and that each retains a fear of Woman, a fear of

being lured back into a state of infantile dependency. He pointed out that both genders dealt with this fear through identification with Mother. He linked this fear to the development of feministic sentiments in women, and to the disparagement of women by men (since men cannot successfully identify and merge with Mother).

Mahler lists three stressful and possibly traumatic events that occur during this period: (1) the child must master toilet-training, which means giving up the complete freedom of infancy and submit to the demands of another person; (2) the child begins to walk, and hence becomes independent of mother, requiring the working through of separation anxiety; (3) the child discovers the difference in sexual anatomy, which for girls arouses envy and a feeling of having been cheated of some coveted "toy" and ultimately betrayed; and which for boys arouses a feeling of guilt and ongoing fears of castration.

Stoller (1968), Money and Ehrhardt (1972), and Socarides (1979) have also identified the anal-rapprochement phase as a critical period for the establishing of gender identity and sexual orientation. Stoller, for example, places the beginnings of feminine identification among transsexuals in this phase, explaining that mothers of such individuals have the common psychological feature of having treated their sons in a way that interrupts the formation of "core gender identity." Money and Ehrhardt designate the eighteenth month or so as the critical age beyond which successful "sex

reassignment" is not possible. Socarides, concludes that the nuclear conflicts of all sexual deviants derive from the preoedipal period, especially the years between one-and-a-half and three. This period falls roughly at the end of the stage to which Freud attributes primal narcissism.

The implication is that narcissism about one's gender and gender anatomy (gender narcissism) develops during this stage and is related to unresolved castration complexes. It seems to hinge on the extent to which both males and females can successfully separate from, and de-idealize the omnipotent and omniscient mother of the stage of primal narcissism. In those instances when a mother herself is narcissistic and therefore resists this normal progression of events (i.e., does not want to hear the little girl's complaints about not having a penis or the boy's boasts about having one), the child will develop a narcissistic fixation.

To the problems of this pregenital stage, Freud added the problems of the oedipal stage. In the oedipal stage, separation from mother and bonding with father is a key. A boy who is too closely attached to his mother and cannot bond to a father because the father is either too passive, hostile, or absent, will not be able to resolve his Oedipus or castration complexes; a girl who is too closely attached to her mother and fails to bond with her father for similar reasons will likewise fail to resolve her castration complex and often develops a negative Oedipus complex. The failure to resolve both the castration and

Oedipus complexes becomes further bedrock upon which gender narcissism is built.

Another difference in the routes traveled by boys and girls during the Oedipal phase, according to Freud, was that boys may develop an envy of the womb (corresponding to penis envy). In his case history of Little Hans (1909), Freud explained that "in phantasy he was a mother and wanted children with whom he could repeat the endearments that he had himself experienced" (p. 93). He saw this identification with Mother and her gender role as a normal phase in boys; however, like all phases, if it is not resolved it can interfere with development—i.e., impede male gender role identification—in which case we might say (although Freud did not use this term) that the boy develops a "femininity complex" and clings to the desire to be a woman. On the other hand, a girl who cannot resolve her castration or Oedipus complex may develop a masculinity complex during this phase and, according to Freud, cling obstinately to clitoral masturbation and to the hope of one day getting a penis; in which case "the fantasy of really being a man, in spite of everything, often dominates long periods of her life" (1931, p. 230).

With regard to boys, a number of psychoanalysts have cited the experience of urination with the father as crucial to the formation of a healthy masculine identity. Roiphe and Galenson (1981) note that urination while standing with the father represents a turning point, a "ceremony" that serves to

bolster the boy's healthy masculine pride and bond with the father. Tyson (1986) emphasizes that urination with the father is an important step toward the establishment of "core gender identity elaboration and consolidation" (p. 8).

For girls, separation from Mother and bonding with father seems to be a bit more difficult than for boys, according to many researchers, due to the fact that girls can more easily identify with Mother; this identification make them less able to truly separate and establish their own sense of self. Roiphe and Galenson (1981), in a long-term observation of the interactions of mothers and children, document a number of cases in which girls with hostile mothers and distant fathers clung even more tightly to their mothers. "In those girls with severe castration reactions the hostile ambivalence to the mother becomes very intense, the maternal attachment is heightened, and the turn to the father does not occur" (p. 275). Freud (1931) asserted that little girls have "the dread of being killed by the mother—a dread which on its side justifies the death-wish against her, if this enters consciousness" (p. 237). McDougall (1984) observes that while punishment for masturbation and sexual wishes is fantasized by boys as castration, the same punishment is fantasized by girls as death. Kernberg (1975) states that in borderlines with severe penis envy, who have been unable to separate from Mother, the consequent rage aroused by fear of the mother is displaced onto the father. All of these factors mitigate against the de-idealization of Mother and the resolution of castration and Oedipus complexes and therefore reinforce the development of gender narcissism.

Incidentally, narcissism of children has been demonstrated by Piaget's early studies (1923) of the decentering process of children and young adolescents. Based on studies in which children are interviewed at length about their ideas during various ages, Piaget's work documents that until the age of eight a child does not attempt to take another's point of view to make himself understood; in fact, the child is egocentric, behaving as if everyone shares the same view as himself. From the age of nine to eleven, that egocentricity gradually gives way to a form of verbal and conceptual syncretism, which serves to gain acceptance for his point of view. Only in adolescence does the normal individual truly consider other points of view. Hence, from Piaget's work one might deduce a broadened stage of early narcissism, perhaps divided into two parts: primal narcissism (up until two-and-a-half) and normal narcissism (up until eight). Both primal and normal narcissism would be convertible into gender narcissism in the event that a fixation occurred at either of those periods.

Horney (1950), was among the first to write of gender narcissism, using the term "male narcissism" to describe the phallic pride exhibited by some men, although she did not use the same term in describing the female pride that is exhibited by some females. Such masculine pride, according to Horney, is often linked to "phallic narcissism" and alludes to the phallic narcissistic stage. Perhaps, I would add, the term "clitoral narcissism" might be apt for girls with a fixation at the earlier stage of corresponding female sexual development.

## General Characteristics of Gender Narcissism

Although I had written previously about gender narcissism (1989, 1991), I had not systematically studied the topic. In reexamining the psychoanalytic literature and reviewing the histories and psychodynamics of a group of gender-narcissistic patients, I was able to corroborate the basic theories of classical psychoanalysis, including the much-debated theories of female development, as well as delineate the characteristics and manifestations of gender narcissism.

In selecting patients for the study, I looked for the following features:

- 1) Inferiority/superiority feelings about one's gender;
- 2) Excessive concern about one's genitals;
- 3) Envy of or disgust toward the genitals of opposite sex;
- 4) Resentment of one's gender role and envy of the role of the opposite sex;
- 5) Bitterness about feeling castrated or cheated (females), or rage about feeling psychologically castrated (males);
- 6) Fears of castration (males) or annihilation (females);
- 7) Oedipal guilt;
- 8) Idealization (grandiosity) about one's own gender and



devaluation of opposite gender;

9) Idealization of mothers and devaluation of fathers.

One of the first things I noticed, upon selecting 30 patients for the study—16 males and 14 females—was a link between gender narcissism and sexual psychopathology. All 30 reported severe problems in their sexual relationships. In contrast, those 20 patients selected at random for the control group (10 males and 10 females) reported fewer sexual problems and showed much less gender narcissism. Among this second group were cases whose narcissistic issues generally revolved not around gender but other issues such as intelligence, height, or basic self-worth.

### Female Narcissism

All of the 14 females in the study voiced resentments about being female, about the female role, or about their female reproductive organs, which I traced to castration and masculinity complexes. In contrast, the control group of females expressed considerably less resentment about gender issues. Typically, gender-narcissistic females would complain that their femininity was a "handicap," the role of wife and mother was "demeaning," and their reproductive organs were "disgusting" or "a monthly pain." One borderline stated angrily about her genitals: "I wish I could just have them cut out of me and be done with it."

These negative attitudes had apparently been introjected from their parents. If their mothers had harbored similar feelings of resentment about their femininity, these attitudes were passed along to the daughter through verbal and nonverbal messages (i.e., devaluing the daughter's looks, discouraging her sexual curiosity or masturbation, bemoaning femininity and the feminine role, or favoring a son over the daughter). The daughters then unconsciously devalued their own femininity but did not blame it on their mothers, with whom they were too attached, but on their fathers, who were often passive or distant. All maintained intense relationships with their mothers, more intense than with any other person.

They reported a generalized anger about what they saw as "men's attitudes toward them," which contrasted with the more positive reports about relations with men of women in the control group. Some of the former made no distinctions between "good" and "bad" men, while others, utilizing the defense mechanism of splitting, saw some men, generally heterosexual men, as all-bad (inherently sexist) and some men, generally homosexual men, as all-good (nonsexist). At the same time, they generally idealized women, citing their moral superiority. I interpreted this as their projecting negative judgments about their femininity onto men while erecting a narcissistic armor of female grandiosity. Many gender-narcissistic women made men the scapegoats for their inner conflicts about their femininity, vocalizing sentiments that have become common among militant feminist circles such as, "Men are the cause

of all the problems of women." Thus, they were competitive with men, rather than cooperative, wielding the attitude expressed in the song lyric, "I can do anything better than you can."

Five of the gender-narcissistic females were homosexual, three were bisexual, two were heterosexual, two were prostitutes, one was a strip-teaser, and one was abstinent. All maintained intense friendships with women. In contrast, all of the females in the control group were heterosexual. The former tended to have relationships of the narcissistic varieties described by Kohut (1971)—idealizing or twinship models. Either a younger woman would idealize an older one, particularly her aggressive femininity, and thus feel special by being close to her, and have the experience of being initiated by her into the realm of womanhood; or two women of equal age would idealize one another and feel as though they were two superior and special women (in particular, superior to men). There was often a vengefulness in their exclusion of men from their intimate lives (one noted that she had fantasies of her father jealously and angrily watching her make love to another woman), and a resentment of traditional women who were openly receptive to men and to the roles of wife and mother. I had the sense that since they were prevented by their mothers from bonding with their fathers and men, they did not want any other women to do so.

Those who had sexual relations with men often chose passive men whom

they could control, only to complain about their passivity. I interpreted this as a way of reversing roles and enacting resentments stemming from their castration and masculinity complexes. If they had lesbian relationships, each could likewise act out her masculinity complex, one by playing the masculine role and the other by identifying with the one who was playing it. Their sexuality, whether oral or manual, consisted primarily of mutual clitoral masturbation, which had the symbolic meaning of asserting their clitorises, and thereby gratifying their clitoral narcissism. This symbolism could be traced back to memories, fantasies, and dreams about discovering the differences in male and female anatomy and feeling deeply cheated and disappointed, without getting adequate soothing from either parent; of being discouraged from masturbating (hence becoming fixated in such masturbation); and of having their femininity disparaged by both parents (as when a father, feeling excluded by mother and daughter, reacted by constantly teasing the daughter about her body). There was an additional aspect of their relationships of wanting not only to exclude men but to make men feel jealous of them (left out) and show them that their penises and their masculinity were unneeded. This represented a reversal of the envy they felt toward men.

Some women could only relate to men in conditional ways. One used strip-teasing to elevate her low female self-esteem. She could show off her body while keeping men at a distance, thereby asserting her femininity and receiving affirmation from men while acting out rage by emotionally castrating

them. This vocation also represented an act of spite at her mother, who had called her a "slut" whenever, as a child, she had made infantile sexual overtures to her father. Prostitution served a similar purpose for two females, enabling them to make men pay for sexual services while emotionally rejecting them. Another woman, whose religious views prevented her from being lesbian, acted out her penis envy and female grandiosity by retreating from sexual relations entirely, rationalizing that it was a "dirty business" and she was above it all. A therapist by profession, she worked primarily with younger women, whose complaints about their husbands served to reinforce her rationalization for remaining abstinent. Invariably, she would encourage her patients to leave marriages rather than try to resolve them.

All female narcissists voiced sentiments of penis envy, while only three of 10 control cases did so. Penis envy could be deduced from a resentment of men, envy of their roles, and revulsion toward penises. Penises were seen not as attractive objects of pleasure and procreation, but as unattractive and frightening. One obsessive-compulsive had an obsessive fear of men's penises and of rape that took the form of agoraphobia. Along with this penis envy was an accompanying aversion to playing the traditional female role of giving birth to and nurturing children. This role was seen as making them subservient to a man, of forcing them to be penetrated by "his arrogant cock," to bear and nurture "his" children, which would symbolically mean submitting to their fathers and competing with their mothers. Any such thoughts aroused primitive fears of

maternal annihilation.

Gender-narcissistic females also generally had more painful menstruations. Twelve of 14 reported severe cramps and/or headaches accompanied by feelings of resentment about their femininity. The severe menstruations were related to their resentment about playing the female role of giving birth and nurturing “his” children. Only four of the ten control cases reported menstrual pain, and only occasionally. I interpreted severe menstrual problems as a somatization of gender narcissism.

Whatever their sexual orientations, all had histories that matched the profile described by Freud and others with regard to the development of castration and Oedipus complexes. Their mothers had bound them to themselves and prevented them from forming relationships with their fathers or other men. Sometimes these mothers were overly affectionate, so that there was an undertone of incest in their relationships with their daughters. Sometimes they were anxiously protective, masking an underlying animosity and competitiveness (the result, perhaps, of their own unresolved Oedipus complexes). Sometimes they were openly hostile or competitive. Invariably they were controlling of their husbands and their daughters.

When fathers were in the picture, they were generally passive men or hostile. When the girls turned to Father (or surrogate) during the oedipal phase,

Mother, through verbal or nonverbal cues, interrupted that turn. Mothers would draw the daughter to themselves and confide in them about problems with Father (“All men care about is using you for sex.”) Father would retreat passively or angrily from the field of competition, yielding to Mother. Hence, there was an unspoken barrier between Father and daughter. The daughters would end up despising the fathers for allowing this to happen, while repressing their anger at their mothers (sometimes developing reaction formations). I note here that a number of feminist psychologists have stressed that separation from mother is not necessary, even harmful (see Gilligan, 1982), a position with which I strongly disagree.

In a many cases siblings figured into the equation. An older or younger brother would be favored by one or the other parent. He would, of course, have an organ that the girl did not have, and he would be given favored treatment. If he was older and he was competitive and rejecting of her, she might then grow up hating him and displacing that hatred on men in general. If he was younger, she would feel resentful that he had taken her mother's attention away, and conclude that it was because he was a male and had an organ she did not have.

Nearly all of the gender-narcissistic females either had rejected entirely the role of motherhood and opted instead for a career, or had waited until after they had established a career to have children. Their resentment of the

motherhood role was transformed into an obsession with “equality” in their relationship with their husband, and a demand that he share in the childrearing. In the case of lesbians, one woman usually played the masculine role and the other the feminine role. The one who played the feminine role did not resent nurturing a child since she was not doing it for a man but for a woman (symbolic of Mother).

In their relationships with me, father, mother, and sometimes sibling transferences were prominent. The mother transference was evident in their fear of being controlled by me. The father transference was demonstrated in an extreme ambivalence toward me as a sexual object. One day they might be seductive, the next they would eye me in a fearful way. Upon analysis, they often admitted that they feared that I was going to use or rape them. Their ambivalence had to do with alternatively wanting to submit to the rape (and get it over with) or to repel it. It was difficult for them to conceive of a warm, trusting relationship with a man. This was related to a deep, infantile craving to bond with Father and equally deep fears of incest, maternal annihilation, and their own repressed animosity. When talking about their histories, it was much easier for them to talk of their anger at their fathers than at their mothers. They had a need to idealize their mothers (harking to fixations during the rapprochement stage), whom they felt they would be betraying by opening up to a male therapist. Many would struggle with all of this and be overwhelmed; then one day they would disappear.



Their female narcissism had the two components found in all narcissism—grandiosity and rage. In working with them, I had to be very careful to serve as a self object, mirroring and joining them with regard to their idealization of their own femininity and their feeling that they were victims of male oppression. If I said or did anything to the contrary, it would arouse the deepest wellsprings of rage and bitterness. I would suddenly find myself in the "enemy camp" and unable to dig my way out of it. In that case, the patient might quit therapy in a huff, castigate me, or threaten to report me for violation of ethics, sexism, harassment, etc. My few successful cases involved women with a lesser degree of gender-narcissism. Generally gender-narcissistic females avoid male therapists and instead look for female therapists who suffer from a similar gender narcissism to whom they can form collusions.

### Male Narcissism

Like their female counterparts, gender narcissistic males also voiced inferior feelings about their gender, and in specific, their penises (they were small or disgusting). In contrast, the 10 control cases reported lesser inferiority feelings about their penises or no concerns. The inferior feelings of the former came from negative judgments about their masculinity that had apparently been introjected from their parents. These introjections were the result of mothers who directly or indirectly disparaged their genitals or masculinity, or of fathers who had inferiority feelings about their own masculinity or were

competitive or rejecting toward their sons. At any rate, the sons learned to devalue their own masculinity and to develop a compensating narcissism.

Because of their identificational bonds with their mothers, some tended to identify with their mothers and possess strong feminist views. In some cases they incorporated their mother's defense mechanism of splitting, dividing men into two categories, viewing their fathers and all traditional, assertive, or heterosexual men as menacing, oppressing, and disgusting, while regarding nontraditional, passive, or homosexual men as sensitive and caring. In such cases their own impulses of male aggression were disowned and projected onto "masculine" (conventional or heterosexual) men. There was also an envy and resentment of such men, related again to the identification with Mother and with Mother's unresolved penis envy. In other cases, where phallic narcissism was high, there was a reaction against feminism, and an identification with "masculine men." In yet other cases, such as with the transvestites and transsexual, their male aggression was converted to female aggression.

Their relationships, like those of female narcissists, were also of the narcissistic kinds described by Kohut. There were six homosexuals, three fetishists, two heterosexuals, two transvestites, one bisexual, one transsexual, and one pedophile in the experimental group. In contrast, all of the control cases were heterosexual. Male narcissists, regardless of their sexual orientation, placed more emphasis on relationships with men. Younger

homosexual or bisexual men sought out older men who represented to them an ideal of masculinity. They would form an idealizing transference to such a man and submit to him anally, thereby hoping to be initiated into the world of men and masculinity. The older man could meanwhile play and identify with the aggressor—the "masculine" role as modeled by his father or some other man. This act would also serve to assuage their tremendous amount of Oedipal guilt (having symbolically knocked off their fathers). Men of the same age would form twinship transferences in which they could mirror each other as two superior men—imbued with all the positive traits valued by their mothers (sensitivity, artistic appreciation, refined tastes, respect for women) while lacking the negative traits their mothers despised (male pride and sexual assertiveness).

Three of the six homosexuals and one of the heterosexuals were prone to promiscuous sexuality, but none of the control cases. The promiscuous sexuality of gays consisted of a series of one-night rituals designed to maintain distance from the tabooed father while bolstering their masculinity through contact with an externalized masculine ego ideal and assuaging oedipal guilt. In these encounters they could each identify with the aggressor-father as they took turns playing the father-aggressor role. Meanwhile the sexuality was usually sadomasochistic and emotionally distant. Even homosexuals who had longer lasting relationships had problematic sexual relations due to narcissistic interferences such as self-consciousness about their penises, bodies, etc.

The sexuality of the homosexuals in my study was centered on anality and on the phallus. Three control cases showed anal or phallic-narcissistic features. This factor was traced back to their fixations in the anal-rapprochement phase, during which time anal-eroticism is at its highest and anal narcissism begins. Anal fixations were often brought about by a mother who pampered her son during toilet training and a father who wanted to impose discipline but was prevented from doing so by the mother, and hence felt frustrated. The boy then became beholden to his mother and guilty and afraid of his father, which in turn aroused a great deal of castration fear, covered over by more gender narcissism. Phallic and anal narcissism, related to such frustrations, was evident in the emphasis these men put on the size and beauty of their genitals and, by extension, their physiques; the size and beauty of their buttocks; and on the glories of anal penetration and mutual masturbation. This emphasis went beyond the normal idealism that accompanies sexual passion; it was an obsessive preoccupation permeating all relations, tied to fantasies, dreams, and early memories of anal masturbation, and conquering or being conquered by their fathers.

Of the heterosexual gender narcissists in my study there was one whose sexuality combined both gender and anal narcissism, who could only have emotionally distant relationships with women in which rough anal sex was the primary mode of sexual expression. His gender narcissism was evident in his contemptuous attitude toward women (defending against a fear of reengulfment

and womb envy) and his male chauvinism. The gender narcissism of a foot fetishist manifested itself in a feeling that he had a feminist (reverent) attitude toward women which was therefore superior to the attitude of straight men. A bisexual who enjoyed phallic voyeurism and exhibitionism, was fixated in the phallic-narcissistic stage, when his infantile masturbation was harshly attacked by his mother and his older brother. His sexual relations were with women but his fantasies were mostly about muscular, dominating men with huge penises or about witches who permitted him to masturbate all he wanted but warned him that the consequence of masturbation was that his penis would grow to several feet in length. Peeping and showing off his phallus to other males was a way of affirming his masculinity and feeding his gender narcissism. Two transvestites and a transsexual in the study harbored a gender narcissism in which not their masculinity, but their femininity was idealized; they had strong femininity complexes, viewing themselves as more feminine than most women, and proud of it, while denigrating masculinity as menacing and disgusting.

The male narcissists, like the females in my study, had histories that confirmed the observations of classical psychoanalysts. Their mothers had bound them to themselves and prevented them from becoming pals with their fathers, often even preventing them from playing with other boys and later from taking part in athletics. Sometimes an undertone, and sometimes an overtone, of emotional or actual physical incest permeated their relationships. Sometimes the mothers were hostile but close-binding. The fathers, when they were

present, were passive or hostile. There was often a barrier between gender narcissists and their fathers, and the sons would end up resenting the fathers and displacing all their anger, both at their mothers and at their fathers, onto their fathers. Mother, to whose allegiance they were sworn, had to be protected from their anger. This anger at fathers was then further displaced and transferred onto conventional or heterosexual men in general.

As with female narcissism, siblings also figured into the equation. An older or younger sister might be favored by one of the parents. She would have an organ that the son did not have, and she would be given special treatment. If she was an older sister and was competitive and rejecting of her younger brother, he might then grow up hating her and displacing that hatred on women in general. If she was younger, he would feel resentful that she had taken his mother's attention away, and conclude that it was because she was female and had the same organ as her mother. This reinforced masculine inferiority and womb envy.

Fourteen of 16 reported severe castration fear, particularly those with hostile fathers. In contrast, only three of ten control cases voiced castration fears. Castration complexes of gender narcissists were manifested in a fear of competing with traditional (or heterosexual) men for the favor of women or in attitudes of appeasement or disparagement toward women. One man had a compulsive need to dominate both men and women. Since most male

narcissists are Oedipal conquerors, they feel they have already won their mothers (in fact, have gotten more familiar than they wanted) and do not wish to compete for other women. Such competition arouses oedipal castration fears. At the same time, they display an attitude of bitterness related to memories of having already been psychologically castrated; the source of this bitterness is repressed while the bitterness itself is converted into womb-envy, resentment of the male role, envy of the female role, and an aversion to female sexuality.

In their treatment, the father transference had to be worked through first, then the mother and sibling transferences. The father transference was apparent in an ambivalence comprised of alternately idealizing and distancing behavior. Either they would try to please me—if homosexual, seduce me—or they would keep me at a distance as their fathers had done to them. "You're straight (or, you're conventional) so you won't understand me." Underneath this pose was a frightening unconscious desire to be initiated by me into the world of masculinity, often by being taken anally. When they flipped into their mother transferences, they became submissive and idealizing and our relationship took on the quality of the idealizing, idealized, or twinship dyad they once enjoyed with their mothers.

A number of both female and male homosexuals had politicized their feelings about homosexuality. Not only their gender was idealized, but also

homosexuality as well. Homosexuals, they held, were more sensitive, more humane, more refined, and more moral than heterosexuals. "If straights were as peace-loving as gays, the world would be a better place," was an often expressed sentiment. Underpinning this grandiosity was the narcissistic rage, which viewed the world in terms of a gender war between straight males and victimized gays. If I did not mirror their idealization or their view of the world, I would quickly experience this rage in the form of character assassination, threats, or hasty terminations. I also had to mirror their idealization of mothers or face similar consequences.

Incidentally, it is this idealization of mothers and the almost complete and unquestioning identification with them—traceable to the inability to de-idealize mothers and separate from them during the anal-rapprochement phase—that lies behind the intractability of most forms of gender narcissism. The success of the therapy with them seems to hinge on the degree to which we can resolve this mother fixation. I had very limited success with my group. Most left therapy after a short time, often after getting in touch with repressed material about their mothers. De-idealization of the mother represents maternal castration, the threat of their own castration, and the extinction of their own grandiose selves. Still stuck in a primitive narcissistic, symbiotic merger with her, their fate is inexorably bound with hers, as when one identical twin follows another to the same sickness. Those in the control group, in contrast, were usually able to overcome such fixations.



## Case Histories

*Case #1.* Nancy's parents filed divorce papers when she was not yet two years old. At the time, she was in the midst of the anal-rapprochement stage. Separation from her father was difficult, but since he continued to see her every weekend, the trauma of separation was at first apparently not so severe. However, her mother was bitter about the divorce, and this bitterness had both immediate and long-term effects on Nancy's developing femininity. The immediate effect was that it caused her mother to cling to her all the more, which interrupted the separation from her.

For the mother, the loss of her husband represented a narcissistic injury and aroused her rage. Resentful of her ex-husband and jealous of her daughter's blossoming Oedipal relationship with him, she began to interfere. Quite frequently she would promise her ex-husband he could visit on a certain day, then cancel at the last minute. When the husband became angry about this, she would lambaste him, telling him he was getting what he deserved. A year after the divorce she met another man, a widower with a daughter a year older than Nancy, and quickly married him. She then began demanding that her ex-husband allow her new husband to legally adopt Nancy, contending that it was destructive for him to stay in her life. "We have a new family now," she would say. After he refused, she stepped up the pattern of promising and then renegeing on visitation rights. Much pressure was put on Nancy not only by her

mother but also by her stepfather and stepsister; all were denigrating her real father and discouraging her from seeing him.

When Nancy was five an event happened that was of central importance in shaping her personality and her sexual development. Until then her father had not taken her for a vacation, even though he had been granted a month's vacation each summer as part of his visitation agreement. That summer he informed Nancy's mother that he was going to take her to visit his family in a nearby state. At first the mother agreed. Plans were made and airline tickets were purchased. At the last minute she changed her mind and would not let Nancy go, protesting that Nancy was too young to be away from her mother for that long a period. The father, enraged, pretended to give in to the mother but then, upon picking Nancy up for what was to be a weekend visit, whisked her away to the airport, whereupon he called the mother and told her that he and Nancy were flying to his family after all, "because I have a legal right to do so!" They were on an airplane within half an hour and stayed for two weeks with Nancy's grandparents. When they returned, Nancy's mother and stepfather were waiting with vengeful arms.

For many days Nancy's mother and stepfather interrogated, lectured, and chastised her for having gone away without their permission. They drilled it into her that they and only they had custody of her, and that it was wrong of her to do what she had done and that her father had committed a criminal act. They

made her feel ashamed of her formerly loving and idealistic Oedipal feelings toward her father. In addition, her stepfather's daughter used the occasion to act out feelings of sibling rivalry by ridiculing Nancy's trip and her father. "If he loves you so much, why did he leave you?" she kept saying. The result of this assault was that Nancy refused to see her father for a few months. Each time he called for his weekly visit, her mother informed him that Nancy did not want to talk with him.

Caught in this battle between her parents, she had become a sacrificial pawn. All the mother's rage at the father was taken out on her. She was given the message that her father was bad and that positive feelings for him were misguided and a betrayal of Mother and Family. She was made to understand that if she wanted to stay in her mother's good graces she was expected to have complete allegiance to her. Her new stepsister and stepfather backed her mother up completely, lecturing her about being loyal to her "real family." She was surrounded and overwhelmed.

Her mother was herself gender-narcissistic. The mother's childhood, in which an older sister had been favored by her father over her, had left her insecure about her own femininity and sexuality; she had erected a narcissistic bubble of feminine pride that reflected her mother's token idealization of her and defended against her father's ridicule. When she married Nancy's father, he was expected to overvalue her the way her mother had, not devalue her as

her father had. Instead, he devalued and left her, and she had flown into a narcissistic rage. Before the forbidden vacation, she had pampered Nancy as her mother had pampered her. This pampering fed into Nancy's primal narcissism and served to foster dependency on her mother. After the vacation, the mother began ridiculing Nancy as her father had ridiculed her. She discouraged her infantile masturbation with statements such as, "That's dirty," and focused in an obsessive way on every aspect of her physical appearance. Under this severe scrutiny, Nancy developed asthma and later, during adolescence, anorexia. The aim of this assault by her mother was to keep Nancy's blooming sexuality under her control and prevent her from forming an alliance with her father.

Her father, meanwhile, compounded the problem by trying to convince Nancy that her mother was "sick" and that she should move out and live with him. The father had gone into therapy and, like many people in the early stages of therapy, tended to brandish interpretations like weapons. Hence he would analyze Nancy's mother and Nancy herself and advise them both to go into therapy. Although this advice may have been well-founded, it only served to make matters worse, since it was ego-dystonic and was viewed by Nancy as an attack. The father also exacerbated Nancy's Oedipus complex by parading an array of new girlfriends in front of Nancy and holding each forth as an example of what a healthy woman was like—in contrast to her mother. Many nights she recalled sleeping over at her father's apartment and hearing the

sounds of sexual intercourse in the other room. As a result Nancy developed fixations in both the anal-rapprochement and Oedipal phases. The main fixation was during the Oedipal stage when she had returned from the forbidden vacation with her father and had been, through no fault of hers, severely punished. This punishment had reinforced her castration and Oedipus complexes so that she developed unconscious conflict about her vagina and her attraction to her father. There were also fixations in the oral and anal stages, due to the mother's narcissistic indulging of and then spiteful clinging to her daughter; the indulging consisted of making her into a narcissistic extension of herself (the externalized representative of her mother's ego-ideal): she was the princess who would someday stand in her mother's stead. Upon her parents' separation, Nancy had gone from princess to pauper in her mother's eyes, and she had introjected both these judgments into a harsh superego.

Her ego-ideal reflected the overvaluation of her pregenital mother, but there was also an "ego-reject," if you will, that reflected the devaluation of the Oedipal mother. The ego-ideal and ego-reject were opposing parts of her superego. One set up an ideal image toward which she must strive; the other a rejected image that she should deny and project. Her personality showed signs of this battle, vacillating between periods in which she assumed a stance of pride in her femininity and saw herself as the princess who could outdo any man and would tolerate no criticism, to periods in which she sank into a pit of

self-consciousness and insecurity about her femininity, devaluing her genitalia, and avowing, in an identification with her mother, that men had it better. During these times she was prone to somatizing these feelings through bouts of asthma and anorexia. The relationship with her mother was repeated by her relationship with her stepsister. The stepsister formed a twinship alliance with her mother and her attitude toward Nancy was similar to the mother's. She too harped on Nancy's deficiencies of character and femininity. Hence, Nancy could get nothing supportive from any mother or mother-surrogate.

In her twenties she had several relationships with men that rekindled her bitterness. On a transference level she saw all men as forbidden objects who (1) threatened to arouse forbidden incestuous Oedipal feelings that would (2) represent a betrayal of her mother and hence might result in her annihilation. In addition (3) there was a fear that men would abandon her as her father had done and (4) a concomitant fear of the accumulated rage she had repressed that was now directed almost entirely at her father and at men in the form of projections onto them of the judgments about her inferiority as a female. In her relations with men, she would attempt to defend against all these inner fears by idealizing herself and devaluing the men. By her late twenties, she had given up dating. She had a strained relationship with her father—who constantly gave her the message that she needed therapy and was becoming disturbed like her mother—while maintaining an intense relationship with her mother. Although her relationship with her mother had contributed greatly to her problems, she

needed to continue to protect and idealize her mother, since she had become dependent on her positive mirroring and terrified of her hostility and spite. Having given up men, she retreated into a coterie of women friends. Some were lesbians, others had simply retreated from the sexual arena, sublimating their libido by concentrating on their studies or careers. In her relationships with women she sought out older or more confident women with whom she could form a narcissistic bond, hoping to bask in their radiance. She hoped also that such a woman could initiate and accept her into the world of womanhood (as her mother and older sister had refused to do), and affirm her femininity. Inevitably, she formed alliances with women who were as narcissistic as her mother, demanded the same kind of allegiance, and could be just as vindictive if that allegiance was violated. Hence the relationships did not turn out to be reparative, but rather served to reinforce Nancy's fixations.

Within this milieu her defensive posture of feminine grandiosity was built-up even further, along with her tendency to disparage her father and men. This defensive trend found an outlet in militant feminism, which was rife in that coterie. Stuck in this mode, no man could possibly relate to her; her gender-narcissistic shell prevented it. Hence, she had come to fulfill her mother's unconscious aim of keeping her dependent on her by undermining her confidence in her femininity and preventing her from relating to her father and to all men, as well as her father's aim of making her feel bad and sick like her mother. She felt inferior to her mother, her sister, and most other women; felt

women had it worse than men; felt that she had been cheated; felt that she was bad and disgusting; and felt that was emotionally ill. On top of it all, she could not endure therapy for therapy represented the ultimate betrayal of her mother. She had fulfilled her role as the sacrificial pawn.

*Case #2.* From the beginning of his life Norbert served as a self-object for his mother. He was designated as the child who would mirror her the way she wanted to be mirrored. She wanted to believe that she was a wise and good mother and wife who did everything for her husband and children and got little credit for it. She wanted to believe that she was a superior woman who had married beneath her. She was Irish, her husband was Italian. She liked the finer things—books, art, theater, music—while he was content to sit in front of the television set and watch football games, drink beer, and demand sex whenever he wanted it. She would "work her fingers to the bone," in order to see that the children had a cooked, nutritious meal every night, clean and ironed clothes, and were caught up on their homework. She was the martyr, her husband the slob. This was her vision of things.

Only her second-oldest son, Norbert, understood her the way she wanted to be understood. He stood by her completely. He was an almost exact mirror of her ego-ideal. He had to be. If he ever slipped and did not mirror her correctly—if he, for instance, questioned something, blurted out, "But Mother, maybe it's not necessary for you to cook three separate meals tonight to fit the



schedules of everybody, especially since you have a headache and are feeling rundown," he was doomed. "Yes, it is necessary!" she snapped back. "If I don't do it, who will? Do you think your father would ever lift a finger around here? Don't tell me what to do! You sound just like you father when you talk like that. Just help me set the table or shut up and get out of my way!"

Devastated, he would strive even harder to be the perfect self object, resolving to keep his mouth shut. Even on her death bed—she died of cancer in middle-age—he continued to be the dutiful son, swallowing all his own hurt, rage, guilt, and jealousy, suppressing his real self in order to tell her once again that she had been the perfect mother and whose nobility had been tragically unappreciated. "Take care of things," she uttered as she died. "I will," he responded. Norbert's grandmother, like his mother, had been a martyr; his grandfather, like his father, was cold and distant. Hence his mother could not get what she needed from either of them and remained attached to them. Norbert's father, meanwhile, was reluctantly dependent on his own mother, visiting her once or twice a week until the day she died. Hence, from the start of their marriage, Norbert's parents were in conflict. They had not separated from their own families of origin. She had married a man much like her father and he a woman much like his mother. Both needed the other to be self objects, neither could do so. Their conflicts became displaced onto their children.

When her first child was born, she was disappointed to find that he was a

boy. She had wanted a girl. Unconsciously, through identification with her mother's martyrdom and in reaction to her father's passive-aggression, she saw females as noble victims hopelessly at the mercy of male aggression. Thus she hated her son from the start, negatively transferring her cold father onto him and projectively identifying him (through identification with Mother) as a male aggressor who would add torment to her life. Naturally, her prediction came true; he became a noisy and aggressive child who would not mind her. Had she been able to hate him objectively (Winnicott, 1947), perhaps things might have turned out a bit better. Instead she denied her hate and did her duty, even going beyond duty in order to compensate for her disgust at her son's maleness. In fact, it appears she may have developed a reaction-formation, being overly nice, catering to his every demand. When he turned out to be a problem—when he turned out to hate her—she was terribly wounded. How could he hate her when she had been so nice to him? She would turn to her husband and exclaim, "I don't know what to do with him. You take over. Maybe you can understand him; you're both males." "The problem is, you've spoiled him," the father would say. "Sure, blame it on me," the mother would say. Eventually, they both decided that the problem was the son, thereby avoiding their conflict with one another and, of course, their own deeper feelings of rage. Instead of experiencing this rage themselves, their oldest son contained it and acted it out for them and they could then preoccupy themselves with him and his rage and forget their own. They saw him as a "bad

seed." They could not figure out how he had gotten that way and why he persisted in his demonic behavior. Often she might bellow out during her evening prayers, "Why God, why me?"

It was into this environment that Norbert was born. Seeing that his older brother was a problem because of his rebellion against his parents, especially his mother, Norbert resolved early on to be the exact opposite of her brother, and to please his mother in every way. This meant that he must never assert himself at all, since even the mildest form of self-assertion seemed like rebellion.

His mother had seven children in all. About every year-and-a-half she had another child. Thus she had her third child, a girl, at a time when Norbert was amid the anal-rapprochement phase, and Norbert was enlisted as her helper. He noted how differently she treated this girl child, how much she valued her, as compared with her attitude toward himself and his older brother. Hence, he began devaluing his masculinity and forming a passive-feminine character. He helped his mother cook, clean, and when he was old enough, change diapers. When she complained about her sacrifices, he listened. When she showed off her knowledge of literature, painting, or music, he properly admired her. When she complained of her husband and her oldest son, he agreed with her, even though the message she was conveying was that masculinity was everything that was bad: it was menacing, indulgent, hateful, and vile. Somehow women

put up with men, despite it all. Somehow she put up with his father at night, when he came to bed smelling of beer. But she was glad Norbert was not like that. She was glad Norbert was different than other men. Thank God for Norbert.

Norbert nodded and strived not to be a man, not to be anything really, but just to be his mother's reflection. If there was anything real about him, any edges that stuck out, she would have a target on which to direct her rage. By being her reflection, he could at least get a bit of approval now and then. Meanwhile, he was developing inferiority feelings about his masculinity and a compensatory attitude of superiority that would form the nucleus of his gender narcissism.

His father, meanwhile, was distant. He recalled that when he was four years old his father and older brother went to the World's Fair together. He wanted to go but his father told him he was too young. He felt excluded from the world of men. At the same time he learned how to manipulate his father as his mother did. He recalled that once, when his father came after him to spank him, he began to shriek hysterically (as he had seen his mother do), and his father laughed and said, "How can I spank you when you shriek like that?" His exclusion from the world of men and his narcissistic bond with his mother prevented his resolving either his castration or Oedipus complexes. As he grew older, he found himself admiring his father's chest, and wanting to touch his

father while he was sleeping.

At the same time, his older brother picked on him mercilessly. Calling Norbert a "goody-two-shoes" and a "fairy" and a "queen" he would pounce on him, pin him to the ground, and force him to say "Uncle" or sometimes "Aunt" or sometimes "You're a wonderful person." These episodes were experienced as rapes. Hence, his relationship with his brother also reinforced the development of feelings of masculine inferiority and gender narcissism. Later in his treatment he would have nightmares of being attacked by a monster and of being unable to scream.

His castration and Oedipus complexes were severe; he was afraid of castration by everybody-his father, his older brother, and his mother. From adolescence on, his life was full of tension. His ego-ideal demanded that he always be in tune with others, as he had been with his mother, and if he was not completely in tune, anticipating every move, he would feel castrated. If he said one thing that somebody else laughed or frowned at, he would sink into a depression and castigate himself about it for days. There was not a moment in his life when he was not self-conscious.

In his early twenties he had a relationship with a woman. She was the one who took all the initiative in the relationship, and he went along with it. For a while he thought maybe he could be heterosexual, even though he was

primarily attracted to men. In his relationship with his girlfriend he had to be the perfect self object for her, as he had been for his mother. Sexually, he had to please her and forget about himself. There could never be any negative thoughts or feelings between them. Everything had to be perfect. When it could no longer be that way—when he began having an almost constant undercurrent of negative thoughts about her and sexual impulses towards men, he broke off from her rather than share the negative feelings and thoughts or his homosexual yearnings.

His relationships with men were not much better. He was either super critical of himself or of the men he met. They had to be just right. They had to have a certain kind of chin, certain kind of eyes, certain kind of brows, certain kind of lips, certain kind of muscles on their chest, arms and legs, and most especially a certain kind of buttocks. He lusted after a "hunk" who represented to him his ideal of masculinity. This ideal was much like his father as a younger man, about whom he continued to dream. By bonding with such a man, he might dwell in the vitality of his masculinity and become alive and more manly himself. By being taken anally by such a man he might assuage his Oedipal guilt and be initiated into the world of men.

His gender narcissism manifested itself in a number of ways. First there was his preoccupation with his masculinity, which centered on his body and the bodies of his sexual objects. He revered the male body, saw it as infinitely

more attractive, more magical, more powerful, than the female body. He revered the male genital. At the same time, he was constantly worrying about his hair thinning, about his skin blemishing, about his posture, about his tan, and particularly about his genitals and their functioning. This dichotomy represented his ambivalence—at one pole the masculine grandiosity, at the other the feelings of inadequacy.

His gender narcissism was also manifested-through identification with his mother and her disparaging of masculinity-in an idealization of the kind of man of which she approved: the feminine, sensitive man who was interested in the arts, supported women and women's causes, and would never ever assert himself with (i.e., oppress) a woman. He became a feminist male, more zealous about feminism than many women, in order to prove what a sensitive, moral man he was. This narcissism, which defended against his feelings of masculine inferiority and his rage at his mother, kept him in a state of constant tension and self-consciousness and prevented him from resolving that tension and forming a genuine relationship with himself (his true self) or with anybody else.

### Concluding Remarks

My aim has been to extend the concept of narcissism as developed by Freud and others. I do not believe there is much that is new here; rather it

represents a reiteration of classical theories of male and female sexual development with an emphasis on the gender narcissism that is formed during such development. As such, it constitutes a new angle from which to view sexual development and the use of a new label, gender narcissism, for the particular kind of narcissism that Freud and others have previously described and I have tried to elaborate. I must add that I do not distinguish, as others have done (Kohut, 1971), between normal and pathological narcissism. What Kohut calls normal narcissism I call healthy self-esteem. Therefore I distinguish between self-esteem (health positive regard for one's self) and narcissism (an obsession with self).

Male and female narcissism manifest themselves in an idealization of gender, gender identity, and gender sexual characteristics and a disparagement of the opposite sex. These factors lead to an inability to form genuine emotional bonds with members of the opposite sex or with members of one's own sex. The bond that is formed is of a narcissistic kind—that is, an alliance designed to feed gender narcissistic needs (affirm one's masculinity or femininity) but leaves deeper emotional needs unmet. Since they are primarily geared to obtain narcissistic needs, the relationships of gender narcissists tend to be shallow and to deny reality.

Gender narcissism, being closely related to castration and Oedipus complexes, also interferes with sexual expression. For male narcissists, fear of



castration, Oedipal guilt, and feelings of inferiority about gender combine to make sexual activity a self-conscious, compulsive experience. A similar compulsive self-consciousness inflicts female narcissists, for whom penis envy, Oedipal conflicts (about separating from mother and getting too close to father), and feelings of inferiority about gender combine as a disturbing force.

Classical theories about the etiology of gender narcissism have been borne out by this study. Close-binding, emotionally incestuous, or hostile-controlling mothers and passive, passive-aggressive, hostile, or absent fathers seem to predominate in the backgrounds of gender-narcissistic patients. Sometimes siblings also contribute to the problem. This does not mean however, that gender narcissism cannot be generated through another circumstance, such as when a father is close-binding with a daughter and a mother is absent. In contrast, the control group of random cases showed more of a separation from Mother, more of a bond with Father, and fewer complaints about sexuality.

Gender narcissism is resistant to psychodynamic therapy due to the intractability of gender grandiosity and to strong identificational bonds with idealized mothers. The anal-rapprochement stage seems to be a critical stage for the formation of sexual identity; hence, severe cases of gender narcissism cannot be reversed without great difficulty.

It seems evident, moreover, that gender narcissism not only contributes to individual sexual psychopathology, but also, because of the politicizing of feelings, to social pathology. Female narcissists with masculinity complexes are often militant feminists, as are male narcissists with femininity complexes. Both are also militant about homosexual rights. Indeed, militant feminism and militant homosexual rights have been closely linked; I dare say there is not a militant feminist who does not champion homosexual rights, nor a militant homosexual who does not actively support feminism. This may be seen as a societal manifestation of gender narcissism—a mass transference alliance of Mother and her idealizing sons and daughters against the Father on the cultural level.

I am well aware that much of my writing, including this last statement, is controversial. I am reminded of Freud's comment in a footnote to one his descriptions of female sexuality (1925), in which he observed that female psychoanalysts and male psychoanalysts with feminist sympathies would probably contend that his notions about female sexuality stemmed from his own masculinity complex. Like Freud, I know that what I have written is going to be disturbing to some and will be viewed as an expression of my own sexism, my own homophobia, my own bigotry. However, notwithstanding any complexes I may have, I maintain that the observations I have made here are still valid. I present them not out of maliciousness, but because our society, and Western society in general, has become inundated with social problems that I

believe are to some extent connected with gender narcissism. Unless we are willing admit and confront a problem, we cannot solve it. The strife caused by militant feminism—with its attack on family values and disruption of conventional heterosexual relations—is the chief social pathology brought about by societal gender narcissism. In our culture, gender narcissism and other forms of cultural narcissism may be epidemic, and their mass rage may constitute our biggest agent of oppression.

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