

Narcissism,
Puberty,
Ominpotence

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Narcissism, Puberty, and Omnipotence

Prominent among the factors that retard the advance of object relations in the pursuit of real love objects is the increase in narcissism that accompanies early adolescence. As currently used, the word *narcissism* has two definitions: The first, which is the usage in this chapter (see also S. Freud 1914) consists of the concept of libidinal energies directed, turned, or drawn toward the self. Object-seeking that conforms to fantasies, and the cathexis of personal fantasies at the expense of reality are manifestations of narcissism. The more that one's fantasies, self, and ideas are held in esteem by oneself and the more that acceptance is reinforced by recognition from the world, the more positive is one's affect. Loss of such support results in depression, feelings of emptiness, and a sense of low self-worth. A narcissistic digression into fantasy in one's search for a model after which to pattern the sought for loved one will result in the finding—or imbuing—of new love objects with characteristics derived either from the image of the self or from past experiences or wishes. Thus does the welling-up and intrusion of narcissism during pubescent adolescence halt progress toward relating to an object in reality.

The second definition of narcissism denotes a defensive and reactive heightening of self-esteem to cope with inner feelings of low self-worth, depressive mood, and empty feelings. These defensive maneuvers are mobilized when there is a loss of self-enhancing libidinal (i.e., narcissistic) supplies. This loss can occur with parting from a loved one, academic or business failure, and humiliating situations or insults. Grandiose ideas, plans, and views of self are manifestations of narcissism conceived of in this way. In this chapter the term *omnipotence* (see Ferenczi 1913b), and occasionally *grandiosity*, will be used for this concept of reactive narcissism. Thus the frequent confusion between the two concepts will be obviated.

Maturation: A Two-Edged Sword

Each move toward mature living in a reality context strengthens the adaptive potential of the person. The price for this gain is a loss of infantile narcissistic gratification. The all-powerful child, carrier of infantile omnipotence, succumbs to reality and becomes one of the crowd. With each strengthening of

reality testing in late latency, there must be a concomitant surrender of implied power. The lost power can be identified with that experienced when the child used the defenses that dominate adjustment during the latency years. These defenses create fantasies, use magic, and field power-plays in dealing with the resolution of complexes and handling problems. In placing fantasies above reality, they become an exercise in narcissism. Moves toward reality entail a loss of this manifestation of narcissism.

Even puberty brings synchronic progression and regression. The changes in the body that surround puberty, especially menarche and the first ejaculation, propel the child toward the object world and diminish narcissism. Since pubertal events call attention to the self, the pubertal process itself entails an increase in narcissism. The children dress up, pose before mirrors, flex muscles, and strut. This interferes with the move toward the object world. There is a darker side, too: It would not be undesirable if the child were propelled toward reality with a heightened self-esteem. What is unfortunate is the loss of narcissistic pride in the face of the unknown elements of puberty. Body changes, fear of adult expectations, and unexplained and unexpected new experiences are potentially belittling events that humiliate the child and shatter the self-image and self-confidence that make up the child's armor against fear of a newly dawning world.

Passivity

Each surrender to the outside world cuts into narcissistic enhancement of the self and causes feelings of low self-worth. The negative and forceful reaction of young adolescents to positions of passivity may be explained on the basis of the humiliation felt by the loss of control to powerful authorities. Strivings for independence become more intense as a result of awareness of impending physical maturity and social expectations. As a result, the children often reach beyond their social skills and the limits set by their parents. Battles between early adolescents and their parents ensue. The children defend their dawning independence. The parents watch for the safety of their children. Unaware that they are not at cross purposes, children and parents fight. Demonstration of the presence of shared goals can be a helpful intervention by the therapist.

Two complications of parental over involvement are (1) fathers whose erotic interest in the child produces projections of advanced levels of sexuality into the activities of the child, and (2) mothers

whose desire to infantilize the child impairs the acquisition of the skills for evaluating danger in new situations. The first may actually suggest or stimulate interest in sex in the child and result in the very activities that were feared. The second guarantees that there is something to fear if the child tries independent planning and action.

Expectations and intimations of independence are a frequent source of depression and confusion in early adolescence. There is an area of human adjustment in which independence and loneliness overlap. "It's lonely at the top" and "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown" are sayings that reflect this. Young adolescents detect this connection, while they still strongly need their parents. Striving for independence and expectations of the future then become at once stirring and frightening. This insight is often suppressed, so that it hovers in the shadows of awareness. It is possible to help the child with this problem through the therapeutic intervention of explaining that independent people are less apt to be taken advantage of and, if joined with other independent ones in a relationship of mutual respect, can shape their world and defend their turf more effectively. In this way their needs will be met more efficiently than if they surrender independence out of a fear of loneliness. Often these fears are experienced as narcissistic wounds. Defensive mobilization of grandiose ideation and feelings gives rise to haughtiness, criticism of others, disdain, fantasies of expensive cars, and bragging about parent's holdings. It is well when such behavior appears in sessions to seek out concerns about the awesome demands of adult life as they are experienced by the child in late latency-early adolescence.

During the normal resolution of narcissism, bursts of rage may also appear. These are the by-product of the adolescent acquisition of sharing skills. There is sacrifice of narcissistic supplies involved in the acquisition of the capacity to fall in love. Deep depressive mood swings relate to the sacrifice of self and narcissistic supplies inherent in developing the capacity to share. Another early adolescent phenomenon in which developmental progress is accompanied by narcissistic loss is the shift in symbol use to those which emphasize the communicative mode at a sacrifice of self-expression. Evocative symbols give way to communicative symbols at a cost in the child's self-esteem comparable to that of a star who must share the limelight.

In people who fail to resolve the heightened narcissism of pubertal adolescence there are found residua in later life. These may be manifested in a view of the world seen through lenses distorted by

past fantasy masquerading as life experience, or there may be invocations of past persecutors to explain current failures.

Even the necessity of sharing may give rise to rage in reaction to the implied need to give of oneself (i.e., give up narcissism). For early adolescents who can express themselves directly, the problem can be resolved through discussion and insight derived from confrontations. However, trouble lies ahead for those who are conflicted about feeling or expressing their rage. They are prone to use generalized disdain and hypochondria to take the focus away from any anger that may occur in response to the deflation of narcissism. They lose narcissistic supplies even as a result of an unacceptable rage within. The ventilation of such feelings is an important psychotherapeutic goal.

Those who transform their rage to disdain and then act out aggressive fantasies have no difficulty with expressing aggression. They are troubled by their inability to admit that they do not wish to share and thereby are inhibited from acting so that they would have to admit to being ungracious losers. They mobilize disdain and act out grandiose aggressive fantasies, which serve as a defense. They are able to express hostility through acting out their grandiosity and disdain for others by criminal acts and psychopathy.

Hypochondriacs and criminals have in common a reactive self-conceit, which is a manifestation of grandiosity. Both groups consider themselves to be special. The former group only *thinks* this. They set up hierarchies in the mind's eye, in which they occupy the positions of kings or, withdrawing from struggle with their image of reality, they draw into themselves and place primary importance on the implications of their body functions and sensations, and let the world go by.

The latter group acts out the sense of grandiosity. They show through action their unawareness of the human needs, life history, and existence within a family context of their targets. Victims and injured bystanders serve only as one-dimensional entities in the population of their fantasies—they are merely set pieces to be “rubbed out” of the imagery if they fail to play the game.

A 15-year-old high school student was arrested on the complaint of a neighbor from whom the boy had stolen large amounts of sound equipment, which was found set up in the boy's bedroom. The youngster told of lunch-hour forays into the local hardware store, where he stole such items as hammers and screwdrivers from “under the noses of those peasants” (his words). When the neighbor insisted on pressing charges of breaking and entering and burglary, the boy complained bitterly about the “brutality of those people.” His mother was

known to tease and bewilder his friends, and to laugh behind her hands at the sight of the befuddlement of the children.

There is here an element of the encouragement of narcissistic behavior by parental example, thereby enhancing adolescent narcissism. The following case incorporates hypochondriacal body hypercathexis with criminal devaluation and disdain for the victim.

Bill, who was in his early forties, was seen in the prison ward of a city hospital. He had recently been released from a prison in western New York state after serving a sentence for murder. At the age of 14, he had shot a friend with a target pistol. He was released from police custody because of his youth. A year later he shot a man with whom he had been involved in an argument. He had shot at some distance, and the spent bullet lodged itself in the man's clothes. A relative in local government managed to get the case dismissed because "no harm had been done." Within two years, and after many scrapes, he killed someone with a blunt instrument. As a result, he was sent to prison. He was a model inmate, and had no physical complaints. After he was released from prison, he took a train to New York City. During the trip he developed a severe headache, which persisted. Once in the city, he went to a bar. There he was picked up by a man, who invited him to share some wine at his apartment. On the way to the apartment they picked up some bottles of wine. Once inside the man's home, the wine was drunk and the man kissed him. "I knew what he was doing, but I just let him do it," said Bill. Interaction proceeded to the point at which the man began to perform fellatio on Bill. At that moment, Bill picked up one of the wine bottles and with one swing smashed the skull of his host.

"What were your thoughts and feelings?" he was asked.

His swift reply was, "I was glad my headache was gone."

The Enhancement of Narcissism by Puberty

Of all the two-edged maturational swords that cut across adolescent development, puberty is uniquely cryptic. By its very nature, puberty is in the vanguard of progress; yet within the processes of puberty, there are forces that strengthen narcissism. Puberty readies the biology, while psychological development brings up the rear and struggles to catch up. Menarche and first ejaculation, which are facets of puberty, open portals to the object world. On the surface, children swept towards object relations seem hurried to their destinies by pubertal changes and the implied obligations of nubility. Only starvation can halt the flow of pubertal maturation. Failing this, puberty brooks no stay and marches on.

Hidden within the process of puberty, though, there lies a source of pressure that tends to impair the development of a psychology to support the kind of object relations needed to propel the psychological products of puberty toward fair couplings and parenthood. And that— working unsuspected within the process of puberty—is the capacity of physical change to draw narcissistic

energies inward toward the changing self. In the process, the development of a cognitive set of modalities (symbols used in a communicative mode) that would be prerequisite for the ability to share, and to fall in love, is drained of the force needed to motivate its completion. Although puberty propels, there is a narcissistic enhancement that occurs with puberty that interferes with the giving up of a preexisting remnant of latency. The use of symbols and fantasy as an organ for the discharge of drive during the latency years (i.e., the structure of latency) implies that drives can be discharged without objects. This is an example of narcissism, or the absence of object relations *sui generis*. Any experience that supports a continuation of this latency style of symbol use (e.g., evocative pole emphasis) will interfere with the development of object relations. Any interference with the primacy of symbols and fantasy over reality during late latency-early adolescence will also diminish the supports of narcissism. Such an undermining of narcissism will in turn be responded to by a mobilization of omnipotentiality and grandiosity.

Terms such as *borderline or narcissistic* personality disorders have been applied in recent years to the adult outcomes of a persistence of this reactive omnipotence. The origins of these “disorders” (called narcissism, though they would be better understood as *omnipotentiality*) are usually relegated to moments in early childhood. I consider the appearance of these features in adults to be examples of “narcissistic traits”—in conformance with current usage—but I emphasize the implication of the defensive nature of the omnipotential symptoms at play here. The origin of these adult traits can be found in failures to resolve conflicts about continuation of preadolescent narcissism during the time period from late latency through early adolescence.

The Early Roots of Adolescent Narcissism

There is a developmental trend in the extent to which narcissism dominates the interchange between drives, masturbatory core fantasy, and reality during latency through early adolescence. This can be used in evaluating and treating states of narcissistically tinged libidinal cathexis and reactive omnipotence during early adolescence.

In the latency years, there is discharge of drive energies through fantasy and whole-body play. The masturbatory component in this is not readily apparent. The substitution of symbols for objects in reality

indicates the degree to which this process in latency is an expression of narcissism.

With puberty there is marked augmentation of the residua of latency-stage narcissistic libido, which is a gradually developed effect of one's awareness of bodily changes. The discharge of drives becomes involved with the stimulation of the genitals, whose gradual enlargement and increasing orgasm readiness provide the body and self with an ever more effective organ for discharge. This calls attention away from symbols and objects. Early in the process of transition, the symbols contained in the masturbatory core fantasies require less distortion for their information. This is an aspect of ludic demise. States of sexual excitement occur which display elements of both latency play and masturbation in their manifestations. In these states, youngsters act out incestuous masturbatory fantasies with little distortion. The evocative pole dominates in the poorly displaced symbolic representations chosen. For instance, boys may dance about excitedly in their mothers' clothes and jewels; wrestling and self-mutilation replace the vastly more distorted fantasies of the latency years. Sexual objects in reality are not yet in clear focus.

Further progress finds the child seeking masturbatory behavioral states in which people and things outside the mind no longer need be present. The child remains in one place; movement is limited, and the body is withdrawn from participation in fantasy. Action is limited, so that fantasy is experienced only mentally. Fantasy content comprises symbols drawn from reality, which function within the mind. There is marked narcissism here. The reality objects which are incorporated as symbols in fantasies are primarily used in the evocative mode, and serve the narcissistic self. At the phase here described, they serve as a nidus around which develops a configuration of the reality image to which the child will eventually relate. In the meantime, ejaculation and orgasm, rather than the acting out or implementation of fantasy, is the means of gratification. This union of fantasy and masturbation gives way in the normal course of events to preoccupations with, approaches to, and application of fantasy in the pursuit of sexual intercourse.

When biological maturation provides the possibility of sexual intercourse with real objects, the cognition and the psychology of the child are far from ready to bring maturity to the process. The child can only conceive of participation within contexts derived from fantasy. This is an example of the hypercathexis of fantasy at the expense of reality objects and their needs. It is a very practical example of narcissism retarding progress in object relations while at the same time contributing slightly to its

success. Fantasies that are familiar and have been mastered in the past can be used as bridges to new and unknown objects of the object world. Once the real objects are recruited to play a role in these fantasies, their own characteristics can be impressed upon the memory and their wishes can become new experiences that alter the expectations and planning of the child. Such a gradual replacement of fantasy with reality is possible for those whose narcissistic upsurge has been sufficiently light to set aside the cathexis of fantasy. In those whose narcissistic investment in fantasy and self does not permit this, removal of the drive discharge wishes from incestuous objects and fantasy is not accomplished spontaneously. The psychotherapist who works with children in late latency-early adolescence should be aware that a phase-specific upsurge in narcissism can delay, or cause to fail, the achievement of reality-oriented object relations, leaving the child prone to narcissistic traits in adult life. To evaluate this, one should determine the extent to which symbol use has shifted to a communicative mode; whether adequate removal (shift of object from parent to peer) has been accomplished, and the resolution of narcissism has been negotiated. The treatment of these developmental lags depends upon a number of psychotherapeutic techniques, among which are

1. Confrontation and discussion of the evocative use of symbols.
2. Detecting the child's recruitment of the therapist into a part played in a fantasy, after which reality and the origin of the fantasy can be interpreted (this is a form of transference).
3. Demonstration of the internal origins of fantasy through the detection of other manifestations of the fantasy throughout the experience of the child, which will devalue the fantasy and demonstrate the origin of the contents of the child's projections. Analysis of the masturbation fantasy through free association puts too much emphasis on the fantasy at this developmental period. Because this will heighten narcissism, it is better left for a time when maturation and consolidation of the personality will be proof against regression.
4. Support and clarification of mythologies and misconceptions in regard to the world's expectations.

The Psychological Experience of Puberty

In the preceding chapter and here, we have discussed the open door to object ties that results from menarche and the first ejaculation. They form one of the bridges to the object world, and facilitate reality-

oriented object relations. A prime feature of puberty, then, is the “enablement” of adult sexuality. There are, though, other aspects of puberty that inhibit the development of reality-oriented object relations. The role of the therapist in working with these puts great emphasis on correcting misconceptions and providing reassurance. The following discussion will emphasize the ways in which the enablement of sexuality paradoxically enhances narcissism and may be instrumental in inhibiting the move toward reality-bound object relations.

The Advent of Pubertal Adolescence

Two of the factors that influence the advent of adolescence are biologically based; they are the maturational increase in reality testing at age 8 that undermines the structure of latency, and the intensification of drives that occurs with biological puberty.

A definition of puberty was presented in Chapter 1. Briefly, puberty is the onset of the development of intensified primary sexual characteristics and the first development of secondary sexual characteristics.

Pubertal development depends on, and is concomitant with, an increase in the secretion of the sexual hormone. In addition to producing physical changes, sexual hormones produce psychological changes, which are manifested in intensification of sexual drives. Fantasies as a result are more intensely cathected. There appears an increased pressure for reality expression of fantasies with origins in prelatency that have been held in check by the structure of latency. Improved reality testing skills and the concomitant breakdown in the structure of latency as the result of ludic demise combine with intensified cathexes to push for the expression and gratification of drives with an object. Psychologically, puberty adds to the intensity with which objects are sought. Because pubertal changes tend to intensify narcissism, puberty does not guarantee that the search for an object will be free of the influence of fantasy.

Girls. In girls, puberty is at first an exciting thing in which an undeclared contest among peers develops. They vie to be the first to develop breasts. To others, changes in body contour become a source of concern, especially those who fear growing up and are afraid of mature responsibility.

Menses may intensify the psychological trauma of puberty. It is one of the final steps in the feminine body identification. As such, any penis envy or unconscious wish to be a boy that may have been present is now shattered by the periodic reminder of the presence of the female sexual apparatus. As one child who had completed her analysis reported, "It's a good thing I no longer want to be a boy, with this [menarche] coming on, I'd sure be depressed if I were the other way."

Often, the menses are seen unconsciously as lost babies by the girl. In the child who has not fully resolved the penis envy, menstruation may be accompanied by reactions of anger and resentment. Then there are physical complaints in the form of incapacitating illness, menstrual pain, and discomfort. Is it any wonder that puberty heightens narcissistic concern for self? Remarkably, this comes just at the time that pubertal maturation and improved reality testing are propelling the child toward reality objects for sexual gratification and discharge.

From the maturational standpoint, menstruation is solely an indicator of the presence of a maturational intensification of cyclical hormonal secretion. There is no obligatory developmental event associated with it. Therefore, the regressing, narcissism-enhancing portion of its impact is all the more impressive. It does not indicate readiness for conception—that is related to the appearance of ovulation (egg production) during the cycle. It does not indicate the presence of the capacity for orgasm, which is independent, usually becoming available from a maturational standpoint a few years before menstruation begins. Children have reported genital sensitivity and orgasm at 8 to 12 years of age. Puberty does not introduce orgasmic capacity; however, the secretion of hormones does increase the urge toward utilization of orgasmic potential. Typically, in the absence of neurosis, or religious or other cultural restrictions, first intercourse begins about two years after menarche.

Boys. In boys, pubertal changes are more limited in scope. During the beginning stages of puberty, erections become more frequent and there occurs the capacity for ejaculation with orgasm. Although there is evidence (Levine 1951) that some infants practice masturbation, with ejaculation and orgasm, in the nursery, for the most part ejaculation and orgasm first occur at puberty. Ejaculation is experienced more privately than most of the physiological events of puberty. As already described, its primary psychological effect is to open the awareness to love objects in the sphere of reality.

Body change is not as dramatic as it is in girls until well into the adolescent years. On the surface, increase in body weight, deepening of the voice, increase in physical strength, and beard growth are watched with care, compared, and worried about at the expense of heterosexual object seeking. Increase in the size of the genitals is sometimes a source of interest and concern while undressing in locker rooms. These pubertal changes enhance narcissism. The presence of pubic hair becomes of great importance, and a measure of competition builds up around it, as well as comparison of sizes of penises both flaccid and erect. Implied contest with others puts one in jeopardy of negative comparison. This is the milieu in which narcissism can be undercut and omnipotentiality mobilized defensively in the service of self-enhancement. Puberty may then become a time of strutting, as well as fear and genuine pride. Bragging about sexual conquests, criticism of the therapist's car ("How come you don't have a Porsche?"), belittlement of peers for poverty, and embarrassment about the slightest variation in one's parents from the commonplace in speech, taste, or manner are evidences of self-enhancement in the face of narcissistic mortifications. Extraordinary degrees of hostility and disdain and withdrawal from contact with peers, out of fear of unfavorable comparisons or rejection, are prognostic indicators: They warn that the reactive omnipotence of late latency-early adolescence may color the adjustments of later life. The products will be feelings of emptiness, a high degree of vulnerability, and castle walls of grandiosity to keep at bay the precipitants of wounded narcissism.

Factors in Puberty That Create Wounded Narcissism

Throughout the foregoing material, there is presented evidence that puberty draws attention to oneself, enhancing narcissism. Parallel to this is a potential for undermining the pride that is an inherent concomitant of narcissism. For instance, the girl who was grateful that she no longer wanted to be a boy with the approach of menarche would have been an example of this. For her, menarche would have been a blow to her self-image. An unexpected and unexplained burst of seminal fluid can bewilder a child. Failure to grow, or a total absence of knowledge about changes in the body, can terrorize.

A girl of 12, who was seclusive and lived with a prudish foster parent, suddenly lost her usual sweet and compliant demeanor and became disruptive in the classroom. She had breast development but had not yet reached menarche. One element in the presentation of the case by a therapist alerted the supervisor to the fact that this was not a disruptive response to depression or a rage reaction to a current event: the child had tried to bind down her breasts. When this symptom was pursued, it was found that she thought that something was wrong with her and she tried to hide it. Educational lectures given by the therapist resulted in an immediate remission of behavior to her former style.

The bewilderment that comes from plunging unprepared into an uninspected life experience, such as puberty, can make life seem not worth living. Even with later education to set matters right, a permanent skewing of defenses can place a mark upon adult character. Typically, youngsters in such conditions develop skills in dealing with reality, but suffer from a tendency to escape into fantasy, which often reaches such proportions that the fantasies in turn influence life decisions. Such turning to fantasy becomes a part of their characterological defenses. In essence, the fantasy style of latency is perpetuated to be used selectively as a defense. Both fantasy and the contents of fantasy themselves are introduced to provide an omnipotent defense against injuries to narcissism. This pattern, which is strongest in the first years of life and intensifies in the latency years, should be resolved for the most part during late latency-early adolescence. Resolution is part of the strengthening of reality testing that marks this period. Failure to achieve this at the time of early adolescence leaves the child with the potential for narcissistic character traits in adult life, seen clinically as reactive omnipotence.

The Dynamics of Omnipotence

In early adolescence, omnipotence (reactive defense against loss of narcissistic supplies) becomes an important available defense in dealing with narcissistic mortifications. Drive-expressive behavior, with an emphasis on fantasies that enhance self-esteem and provide self-gratification, buffers the child's activities in relation to the great denizens of the powerful world. Fantasy dominates the actions and the interpretations of the world of those whose adjustment emphasizes omnipotence.

With the weakening of the structure of latency, the child is left with little in the way of defense in dealing with overwhelming affects and narcissistic mortifications. Omnipotence and grandiosity are mobilized as defensive techniques in adolescence. They take over the chores of the structure of latency in dealing with withdrawal or loss of narcissistic supplies until the child grows old enough and experienced enough to handle reality and the articulation of drives and wishes with gratifying objects in the object world. In those who cannot effectively deal with these tasks, omnipotence (narcissistic character traits) persists in adult life. This will provide character traits such as a high degree of vulnerability to insult, depressive episodes, a marked tendency to disdain, periods of deep loneliness, and a recurring sense of "an empty place inside." The feeling of emptiness, or a "hole," is rarely reported by patients in early adolescence; those few I have seen have been relatively mature physically. Where

these feelings would usually appear in adult therapy sessions, one finds a parallel relationship to feelings of loneliness and humiliation, to which the child relates as to a love object. These feelings increase as the child grows older, and the affect comes to be represented by the symbolic hole or emptiness, which is then related to as a thing.

All is not negative for these people. The person who says "I'm special—I won't do any ordinary job" is spurred to seek fame and riches in order to support the actualization of his fantasies. However, their footfalls are not sure, and mood swings and false pride cause breaks and lurches on their road to success.

The increase in narcissism and narcissistic sensitivity during early adolescence has three sources: heightened self-cathexes related to the physical changes of puberty (as discussed before); residual narcissistic cathexis of one's own fantasies that dominated psychological adjustment during the latency years (the cathexis of fantasy was so great then that fantasy vied with and exceeded reality as an arena for the discharge of drives), and heightened reflective self-awareness, which places the person on guard against potential humiliations and narcissistic injury.

The state of heightened narcissism in late latency-early adolescence thus produced is normally manifested in evocative symbol use and self-concern. (The resolution of this normal state—the development of altruism—will be traced in the next chapter.) Heightened narcissism is the Achilles' heel of adolescence. Any challenge to the child (e.g., anger out of control, small size, separation and loss, induction of a low self-image) can produce a loss of narcissistic supplies. This in turn is responded to by grandiose defenses.

During late latency-early adolescence, the child can no longer use the discharge and defensive powers of the structure of latency. Other outlets take its place. Primacy of the genitals develops, and symbols assume the role of intermediaries between fantasy and reality. As a result, there is a reversal of the process that initiated the development of the structure of latency and the latency states that ensued. The pressures of the Oedipus complex resurface and sensitize the boy to oedipal interpretations of parental activity. The father is seen as threatening and the mother's behavior is interpreted as seductive by the boy. The opposite situation enhances the predicament for the girl. To avoid the implied conflict, a defensive cognitive regression to prelatency, intuitive symbolic cognitive functioning occurs. Persistence

of the hypercathexis of fantasy that fueled the structure of latency potentiates the importance of this regression. In the process, the child lets slip reality. Libidinal regression accompanies this cognitive regression. As a result, in the fantasies borne by the intuitive symbolic mode, oedipal themes give way to struggles for power.

The more the parent attacks, the more regression is required. The child shifts into a defensive sense of omnipotence in which there is little reality-oriented activity. Clinically a child can regress to a state in which self and object differentiation are minimized.

How often do we hear a youngster say, "Why do I have to learn this, I'm not interested in it" in referring to a school subject, whether it be science, math, or foreign languages. What the child is saying is that he cathects the world so little that those things which the world values have no value for him as an object of learning. He will learn the names of movie stars and of singers, and even songs, but not what he must learn that he cannot identify as evocative of himself.

This is one of the areas to be watched as a prognostic sign by the child therapist. If left untended and the role of knowledge uninterpreted, a chronic form of learning disorder will ensue.

This omnipotence has anal-stage roots. The refusal to cathect the value of what is outside finds a paradigm in the denial that one sees when a child is scolded for a break in toilet training.

A youngster of 14 could see study as a means for gaining prestige and a good job. He could see no value in the things to be learned. He would try memorization. More often, he was involved in postponing work. First, there were telephone calls to be made to girls. Then there was television to be watched. His father would berate him. This made things worse. He could work even less then, for he was forced by his inner rage into greater regression. He found that he could read anything in his school books with understanding, except that which was assigned. He said that pleasure was more important than work. I pointed out to him that he could only do what he was supposed to do at the wrong time. For the first two years of his treatment, he had spent at least fifteen minutes of each session defecating—he saved up the stool for the session. He could make the connection that he produced what he wanted to, when he wanted to, as an expression of his power, albeit regressive, in the face of his father's demands that he produce at his father's speed. He had done the same thing in the transference in using the bathroom rather than the therapy session he had traveled quite far to attend.

We can see in this case adolescent omnipotence as a regression to the anal stage as a defense against oedipal feelings. The characteristics of the omnipotence are of importance, for they explain the loss of value of the world to the child, as well as a type of learning disorder seen in adolescence.

The Resolution of Omnipotence

The predominant developmental events of early adolescence involve resolution of problems presented by maturational moves in the area of reality testing, sexual capacities, and reactive omnipotence. The resolution of omnipotence is primarily identifiable with early adolescence, although, as Pumpian-Mindlin (1965) has pointed out, such activity is to be found in middle and late adolescence. He described the "*resolution of omnipotentiality* . . . as [resulting from] . . . 'acting out' of the omnipotential fantasies in reality, thereby submitting them to testing. Gradually, as they are tested against reality, the diffuse omnipotential energies are channelized to modify omnipotential fantasies in accord with the demands of reality" (p. 9). This mechanism is effective throughout adolescence. Running parallel to it during early adolescence is the shift to communicative use of symbols, speech, and stories.

Reality testing is the converse of reactive omnipotentiality; its strengthening undermines omnipotence. There are for this purpose maturational influences that counter reactive mobilization of omnipotence. First among the maturational elements involved is the step from concrete to abstract thinking. Essentially this produces a setting aside of interpretation and memory of events through slogan, substituting in its place observation and recall involving the intrinsic nature of things. This occurs at about age 12. Of primary interest to us is the reorganization of the functions of observation and memory function as it relates to orientation of self in the world of percepts. Piaget (1945) set the timing of the phenomenon in his description of the transition from concrete operational thinking to abstract operational thinking. It is useful to add to his concepts, which are related primarily to interpretation of perceptions, the concomitant maturation of the memory function, which includes the transition from affectomotor through verbal-conceptual to abstract conceptual memory.

Verbal conceptual memory replaces with words the slogans and word concepts the recall of which during the first years of life was dependent on memory for total experience of affect perception and movement.

Concrete operational thinking implies that a person can deduce a cause-and-effect relationship in the action of a force on an object if the activity is taking place in a concrete situation within the sight, sound, and feel of the individual.

Abstract conceptual memory is the ability to codify in memory the intrinsic nature of events, processes, speech, and objects. Magical thinking and superficial similarities are filtered out by this process and therefore cannot be added to the body of memory that is used to interpret new experiences. Through scanning of the contents of this area of memory, newly arrived events and experiences come more and more to be understood realistically.

Abstract operational thinking denotes a person's ability to deduce cause-and-effect relationships and apply principles previously learned to new situations, and especially to forces and objects which are conceptualized through word symbols. Briefly, this means that a person with abstract operational thinking can work with ideas.

The abstract conceptual memory organization contributes to the development and maintenance of abstract operational thinking. When operating together, reality testing is enhanced by the addition of the intrinsic abstract to the interpretation of perceptions, events, and concepts. Enhanced reality testing in turn undermines the narcissistically cathected misperceptions from which the reactive omnipotence of early adolescence draws its enhanced and false images of the self.

Psychotherapists must be alert to this maturational step in the development of abstract thinking, for it allows the introduction of adultiform interpretations in psychotherapy. Teachers especially know of it, since they introduce a new form of study at this time (ages 12 to 14). Before, when reports were assigned, the child was told to look something up and to report on it. The child went to the library, copied down what was written, and then reported what he copied. With the coming of abstract concept memory organization and abstract operational thinking, the child can gather data and assimilate it to form a concept or a point of view. He can recognize what disparate abstract verbal concepts have in common and draw conclusions. He can perceive illogicality and recognize the inapplicability of fantasy derived from early life experiences as a guide to responses to the problems and experiences of people living now, in reality. Whereas the improvement in reality testing that arose with the development of concrete operational thinking led to the recognition that displaced fantasy could not be used to resolve problems with parents, although it could be used to discharge drives, the improvement in reality testing that comes with the development and application of abstract memory and operational thinking results in de-emphasis of the use of fantasy to explain the actions of others, or to plan and execute the life goals and

experiences in one's real world. This is a technical way to describe some of the inner workings of the shift from primary to secondary process thinking. There is now the potential to base the interpretation of the world more on reality than on interpretation through regression and fantasy-dominated memories and recollections of past experiences. One of the keys to the resolution of adolescent omnipotence is this strengthening of reality testing.

Not all youngsters gain from this increase in the maturational potential for reality testing. Individuals who are strongly drive-discharge-oriented and have a pervasive ego disorganization will have less improvement in function with the passing of latency than those who are drive-dominated in few areas, in whom this new maturational factor appears to promote improved reality testing. It is not unusual for individuals to spend their adult lives with entire areas of functioning still dominated by fantasy. The most immutable of the omnipotent early adolescents is the one who has no object ties to the world at large, or is limited to fantasy objects. Omnipotence may then continue into late adolescence, and often tints adult character with traits of reactive omnipotence.

Frequently there occurs in adolescents brilliance of mind without the capacity for sustained work or a reality-oriented goal for the use of the mind. Children write for the sake of writing, have sex for the sake of sex, or invent in the service of their own self-aggrandizement and to prove that they can do almost anything. In essence, they exercise their minds for the sake of the exercise, with scarcely another object in view.

One very bright youngster was in the habit of saying that anything that man's mind could conceive, man could do. He meant himself.

Another young man planned his life and career (medicine) on the basis of the theory that such a career would solve all his problems. He ignored the fact that he did not have the grades to get into medical school. In spite of this, he put aside all other realistic opportunities in pursuit of that which he believed would cure his troubles.

A late adolescent (reported by Pumpian-Mindlin 1965) invented a machine which did what no one believed possible. He lost interest when it came to the patenting and marketing of the device, which his teachers testified would be a boon to all mankind. He was not interested in its relation to the world and its needs. He was interested only in his own self-gratification and the aggrandizement of his self-image, which derived from the act of invention. He was more interested in enhancing his sense of omnipotence than in directing his talents to serving others.

On leaving early adolescence, the adolescent himself and his needs become less important and the

world of objects and people and external forces and needs become more important in shaping plans and actions. All this occurs because the child gains the capacity, which he may not necessarily use, to recognize that the fantasies he would like to force on reality do not fit. He can now test the validity of abstract concepts and fantasies, and their application to the world in which he lives. The fantasy that places him in the center of the world at high school graduation must be set aside if he is to take his place realistically in society.

Should maturation fail, it is likely that the person will develop depressions in the late 20s and early 30s. This occurs in people who realize too late that they have chosen the path that leads to disappointment and failure on the basis of an overvaluation of themselves that was required in support of a reactive mobilization of omnipotence.

Summary

There is a relationship between the omnipotence of adolescence and “narcissistic” traits in adulthood. Puberty is accompanied by an intensification of narcissism, and the counter process of a move toward object ties. Injury to narcissism, including the impact of reality, can trigger reactive omnipotence. The resolution of narcissism and of reactive omnipotence enhances reality testing and object relations. The factors involved are many, and they are in a ramifying relationship, which is elaborated in the following chart.

- I. Factors Enhancing Object Relations (drives turned from self to objects)
 - A. Improved reality testing
 - B. Ludic demise
 - C. Weakening of the structure of latency
 - D. Social pressures
 - E. The shift from evocative to communicative mode in symbols, speech, storytelling, reporting, and loving
- II. Factors that Enhance Narcissism (drives directed toward the self)

- A. Persistence of latency-style fantasy. (This decaethects reality and elevates self-esteem.)
 - B. Pubertal changes drawing attention to self
 - C. Physical changes creating a situation reminiscent of early development. These enhance vulnerability.
- III. Factors that Undermine Narcissism (These create uncomfortable moods and a sense of humiliation against which reactive omnipotence is mobilized.)
- A. Awe of the future
 - sexual requirements
 - adult burdens of responsibility
 - impending separation from parents
 - B. Inability to deal with misunderstood pubertal physical changes
 - C. Passivity (independence urges confronted by social ignorance and authority)
 - D. School experiences
 - teasing
 - new topic challenges
 - academic discipline required for excellence
- IV. Responses to Injured Narcissism (When narcissism is undermined, omnipotential defenses add a controlled, narcissistically charged coloration to self-esteem and to attempts at relatedness.)
- A. Disdain
 - B. Fantasies of power
 - C. Hypochondriacal hypercathexis of body functions and malfunctions
 - D. “Elitist” definitions of the signs of success

In this chapter we have dealt with the origins of early adolescent narcissism, the vulnerability of adolescent narcissism, the mobilization of omnipotence that salves injured narcissism, and the passing of omnipotence, with emphasis on the dynamic aspects of the process. A shift in the purposive mode in symbol formation is an important consideration here. One of the signs of improved reality testing is the selection of symbols to be used for fantasy and planning from the object world and reality. This does not guarantee the stifling of reactive omnipotence. Omnipotence can still be supported if the reality-derived symbols are dominated by evocative overtones. Future planning and self-image enhancements can be reality-oriented and still serve omnipotence if the meaning of the symbol and the need it represents are personalized and used in an evocative mode. Expensive cars and elitist settings are real, and can be used in the service of reactive omnipotence because of the superficial message they can be arranged to give. The resolution of omnipotence requires a shift of symbolic forms to those that are dominated by a communicative polarity. The shift from an evocative, self-oriented pattern to a communicative object-oriented pattern of thought strengthens the testing of reality at the expense of the sense of reality. From this there results a dimming of the potential for the development of reactive omnipotence. An adjustment to reality is forced. If this is unsuccessful, and there is loss of the capacity to regress to evocative modes, reactive depressions may result.