

Narcissism, Shame, Happiness

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Abstract

The narcissist is guilt-ridden and besieged by shame because reality is incommensurate with his grandiose fantasies, sense of entitlement and his sadistic superego and Ego Ideal: The introjected voices of parents, peers, and other adult role models in his abusive and traumatized early childhood.

The Grandiosity Gap is the difference between self-image - the way the narcissist perceives himself - and contravening cues from reality. The greater the conflict between grandiosity and reality, the bigger the gap and the greater the narcissist's feelings of shame and guilt.

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There are two varieties of shame:

Narcissistic Shame: Which is the narcissist's experience of the Grandiosity Gap (and its affective correlate). Subjectively it is experienced as a pervasive feeling of worthlessness (the dysfunctional regulation of self-worth is the crux of pathological narcissism), "invisibleness" and ridiculousness. The patient feels pathetic and foolish, deserving of mockery and humiliation.

Narcissists adopt all kinds of defences to counter narcissistic shame. They develop addictive, reckless, or impulsive behaviours. They deny, withdraw, rage, or engage in the compulsive pursuit of some kind of (unattainable, of course) perfection. They display haughtiness and exhibitionism and so on. All these defences are primitive and involve splitting, projection, projective identification, and intellectualization.

The second type of shame is *Self-Related*. It is a result of the gap between the narcissist's grandiose Ego Ideal and his Self or Ego. This is a well-known concept of shame and it has been explored widely in the works of Freud [1,2], Reich [1960], Jacobson [3], Kohut [4], Kingston [1983], Spero [1984] and Morrison [1989].

One must draw a clear distinction between *guilt* (or control)-related shame and *conformity*-related shame.

Guilt is an "objectively" determinable philosophical entity (given relevant knowledge regarding the society and culture in question). It is context-dependent. It is the derivative of an underlying assumption by *OTHERS* that a Moral Agent exerts control over certain aspects of the world. This assumed control by the agent imputes guilt to it, if it acts in a manner incommensurate with prevailing morals, or refrains from acting in a manner commensurate with them.

Shame, in this case, here is an outcome of the *ACTUAL* occurrence of *AVOIDABLE* outcomes - events which impute guilt to a Moral Agent who acted wrongly or refrained from acting.

We must distinguish *GUILT* from *GUILT FEELINGS*, though. Guilt follows events. Guilt feelings can precede them.

Guilt feelings (and the attaching shame) can be *ANTICIPATORY*. Moral Agents assume that they control certain aspects of the world. This makes them able to predict the outcomes of their *INTENTIONS* and feels guilt and shame as a result - even if nothing happened!

Guilt Feelings are composed of a component of Fear and a component of Anxiety. Fear is related to the external, objective, observable consequences of actions or inaction by the Moral Agent. Anxiety has to do with *INNER* consequences. It is ego-dystonic and threatens the identity of the Moral Agent because being Moral is an important part of it. The internalisation of guilt feelings leads to a shame reaction.

Thus, shame has to do with guilty feelings, not with *GUILT*, per se. To reiterate, guilt is determined by the reactions and anticipated reactions of others to external outcomes such as avoidable waste or preventable failure (the FEAR component). *Guilty feelings* are the reactions and anticipated reactions of the Moral Agent itself to internal outcomes (helplessness or loss of presumed control, narcissistic injuries - the ANXIETY component).

There is also *conformity-related shame*. It has to do with the narcissist's feeling of "otherness". It similarly involves a component of fear (of the reactions of others to one's otherness) and of anxiety (of the reactions of oneself to one's otherness).

Guilt-related shame is connected to self-related shame (perhaps through a psychic construct akin to the Superego). Conformity-related shame is more akin to narcissistic shame.

Lidija Rangelovska's View of Shame

Lidija Rangelovska advanced the idea that some children subjected to abuse in dysfunctional families - objectified, dehumanized, their boundaries breached, and their growth stunted - develop intense feelings of shame. They turn out to be codependents or narcissists owing to their genetic makeup and innate character. According to her, children who turned out to be codependents as adults are resilient, while the more fragile narcissists seek to evade shame by concocting and then deploying the False Self.

As Lidija Rangelovska observes, shame motivates "normal" people and those suffering from Cluster B personality disorders differently. It constitutes a threat to the former's True Self and to the latter's False Self. Owing to the disparate functionality and psychodynamics of the True and False selves, the ways shame affects behavior and manifests in both populations differ. Additionally, pervasive, constant shame fosters anxiety and even fears or phobias. These can have either an inhibitory effect - or, on the contrary, disinhibitory functions (motivate to action.) Both narcissists and codependents compensate for their shame, the former by developing a "need to be needed" and the latter by developing a "need to deny their neediness".

The True Self involves an accurate reality test with minimal and marginal cognitive deficits as well as the capacity to empathize on all levels, including and especially the emotional level. People whose True Self is intact, mature, and operational are capable of relating to others deeply (for example, by loving them). Their sense of self-worth is stable and grounded in a true and tested assessment of who they are. Maintaining a distinction between what we really are and what we dream of becoming, knowing our limits, our advantages and faults and having a sense of realistic accomplishments in our life are of paramount importance in the establishment and maintenance of our self-esteem, sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

Shame threatens the True Self by challenging the affected person's ego-syntony: by forcing her to "feel bad" about something she has said or done. The solution is usually facile and at hand: reverse the situation by apologizing or by making amends.

In contrast, the False Self leads to false assumptions and to a contorted personal narrative, to a fantastic worldview, and to a grandiose, inflated sense of being. The latter is rarely grounded in real achievements or merit. The narcissist's feeling of entitlement is all-pervasive, demanding and aggressive. It easily deteriorates into the open verbal, psychological and physical abuse of others.

When the patient with the False Self feels shame it is because his grandiosity, the fantastic narrative that underpins his False Self, is challenged, usually - but not necessarily - publicly. There is no easy solution to such a predicament. The situation cannot be reversed and the psychological damage is done. The patient urgently needs to reassert his grandiosity by devaluing or even destroying the frustrating, threatening object, the source of his misery. Another option is to reframe the situation by delusionally ignoring it or recasting it in new terms.

So, while shame motivates normal people to conduct themselves pro-socially and realistically, it pushes the disordered patient in the exact opposite direction: to antisocial or delusional reactions.

Shame is founded on empathy. The normal person empathizes with others. The disordered patient empathizes with himself. But, empathy and shame have little to do with the person with whom we empathize (the empathetic). They may simply be the result of conditioning and socialization. In other words, when we hurt someone, we don't experience his or her pain. We experience *our* pain. Hurting somebody - hurts US. The reaction of pain is provoked in *us* by *our* own actions. We have been taught a learned response: to feel pain when we hurt someone.

We attribute feelings, sensations and experiences to the object of our actions. It is the psychological defence mechanism of projection. Unable to conceive of inflicting pain upon ourselves - we displace the source. It is the other's pain that we are feeling, we keep telling ourselves, not our own.

Additionally, we have been taught to feel responsible for our fellow beings and to develop guilt and shame when we fail to do so. So, we also experience pain whenever another person claims to be anguished. We feel guilty owing to his or her condition, we feel somehow accountable even if we had nothing to do with the whole affair. We feel ashamed that we haven't been able to end the other's agony [5-25].

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